

FROM WINCHESTER TO WESTMINSTER: URBAN COMMUNITIES AND
ROYAL GOVERNMENT IN TWELFTH CENTURY ENGLAND

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1. Introduction

One of the characteristics of medieval England is said to be the strong kingship and the centralized government. This feature is usually applied to urban history and often used to explain some characters of English medieval towns. For example, compared with the Italian and Flemish ones, the population of English towns was very small and most of them did not exceed 5,000. According to Susan Reynolds, this is because the royal government kept peace and order effectively in the kingdom and it did not make it necessary for English merchants and craftsmen to concentrate in the walled town. Moreover, the strong government, at the same time, only allow a peaceful rivalry between towns and did not let some conquer and absorb others. Thus, the strong kingship limited the development of great towns in England.¹

English towns were in many ways under the strong influence of the royal government, but it was not

1. S.Reynolds, An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns (Oxford, 1977), pp.62-5.

necessarily negative and the development of some towns were heavily depended on it. In this sense, two urban communities in medieval England, Westminster and Winchester, were placed in a very unique situation. One has been called, and the other used to be called, the capital of England.

Since King Alfred's fortification in the ninth century, Winchester had been regarded as the centre of royal government. Even after the Norman Conquest, William I continued to use Winchester as the basis of his government, and the town reached its zenith in the mid-twelfth century with the population of more than 8,000. In the second half of the century, however, the gravity of royal government gradually moved to Westminster, and Winchester began to decline relatively joining the rank of provincial towns.¹

In the later twelfth century, Westminster established itself as the centre of royal government, and it has been so since. We now consider London as the capital of England and Westminster as a part of it. In

1. For Winchester in this period, see M.Biddle (ed.), Winchester in the Middle Ages (Oxford, 1976) (pp.440-1, 493 for the population); do., 'Early Norman Winchester', in J.C.Holt (ed.), Domesday Studies (Woodbridge, 1987), pp.311-31. For the map around 1100, see p.19 below (from ibid., p.319). See also M.Tanaka, Ingurando Chusei Toshi no Tenkai (Tokyo, 1987).

the middle ages, however, they were totally different urban communities.¹ The area around the abbey and the palace at Westminster was legally the abbot's manor distinct from the city of London. With the settlement of royal government, an urban community developed there from the late twelfth century, and at the end of the middle ages its population amounted to some 3,000.² This figure is not very great indeed, but surprising if we remember the fact that the abbey and the palace were isolated in a bleak marshland in the eleventh century.³ It was no other than the governmental activities there that initiated and encouraged its development.

On the medieval development of Westminster and Winchester, extensive work has been done by Gervase Rosser and Martin Biddle respectively,⁴ and therefore it is no use dealing with their urban aspects here. I would rather like to consider in this paper how and why

1. See the map on p.19 below (from C.N.L.Brooke and G.Keir, London 800-1216 (London, 1975), pp.106-7).

2. For the population, see G.Rosser, Medieval Westminster 1200-1540 (Oxford, 1989), pp.167-82.

3. See the illustration on p.18 below (W.T. Ball's reconstruction from R.D.H.Gem, 'The Romanesque Rebuilding of Westminster Abbey', Proceedings of the Battle Conference, iii (1981 for 1980), pp.48-9). Compare with the map of Westminster around 1300 on p.19 below (from Rosser, Medieval Westminster, p.19).

4. See p.2, n.1 and p.3, n.2 above.

the centre of royal government shifted from Winchester to Westminster. I think it is important because it was not merely a movement of government from one place to another but also the establishment of the basis of the English medieval regime.

Before moving to the main argument, I would like to give some words to the implications of Rosser's work as it represents a new trend of English urban studies. Despite the fact that materials for medieval Westminster are very abundant and systematically preserved in the abbey archives, its urban history was never written until Rosser. It is because Westminster was not regarded as town by modern historians who, in part under the influence of Henri Pirenne, concentrated their attention upon the 'borough' with an independent communal government. In fact, Westminster remained the abbot's manor and had no liberty, no communal government, no guilds, and no city walls at all. Economically and socially, however, its character was nothing but urban with communal feelings nourished among the inhabitants through the manorial court and parish guilds there. Rosser does not consider urban history in constitutional terms as often did the previous generations, and he insists that we would otherwise miss important aspects of urban history. This attitude accords with the general trends of the recent urban

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studies in England.

2. Winchester and the Anglo-Norman Governance

1066-1154

When William I began the conquest of England in 1066, the place of Winchester as the capital of the kingdom had long been established. King William who regarded himself as the lawful heir of Edward the Confessor did not hesitate to follow the Anglo-Saxon tradition and accepted Winchester as the centre of his government. When we mention this, however, we should not give the word a strict meaning because the basis of the Anglo-Norman governance was still the peripatetic royal court and its household departments such as the Chamber and the Chancery. But, however incessantly the king was traveling, his court sojourned at Winchester for important occasions like the crown-wearing at Easter.² Above all, the Treasury, the first sedentary department of royal government, was situated in the castle in the

1. Rosser's view is summarised in 'The Essence of Medieval Urban Communities: The Vill of Westminster', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 5th ser., 34 (1984), pp.91-112.

2. M.Biddle, 'Seasonal Festivals and Residence: Winchester, Westminster and Gloucester in the Tenth to Twelfth Centuries', Anglo-Norman Studies, viii (1986 for 1985), pp.51-72.

city.¹ By the end of the eleventh century, the Treasury had clearly become more than a storehouse and had already been established as one of the centres of royal finance. There were two chamberlains connected with the city.² The sheriffs were probably accounting for their dues there.³ With other administrative documents, Domesday Book was deposited in the castle and some financial businesses were done there consulting with it.⁴ Taking these facts into account, we may duly call Winchester the capital of Anglo-Norman England.

Despite the fact that the Easter crown-wearing was not held regularly at Winchester in the reign of Henry I, its status as the centre of government was rather reinforced by his administrative reform.⁵ The purpose

1. Cf. Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub anno 1087.

2. C.W.Hollister, 'The Origins of the English Treasury', English Historical Review, lxxxviii (1973), pp.315-34.

3. Cf. Domesday Book, i, fos.154, 172, 219, 230, 238.

4. H.W.C.Davis et al. (eds.), Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum, (4 vols., Oxford, 1913-69), ii, no. 1000; J.Stevenson (ed.), Chronicon Monasterii de Abingdon, (2 vols., London, 1858), ii, pp.116-7.

5. For the reform in general, see C.W.Hollister and J.W.Baldwin, 'The Rise of Administrative Kingship: Henry I and Philip Augustus', American Historical Review, 83 (1978), pp.867-905; J.A.Green, The Government of England under Henry I (Cambridge, 1986).

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of the reform was centralization. The Anglo-Saxon kings basically did not intervene in the affairs of the county communities which had strong autonomy. But Henry I was trying to control the local communities more directly by appointing the local justices in the shires and by making more regular the itinerant justices who had been sent occasionally to the provinces by the previous Norman kings. It was from and to the royal court or Winchester that they were despatched and returned.

The most important of Henry I's reforms was the making of the Exchequer which meant the rationalization and centralization of financial administration. The word 'Exchequer' first appeared in c.1110,² and it implies that something of the Exchequer as we find in the later period had already been established by then. The Exchequer sessions seem to have been held at the

1. An incentive might have been given by the unification of England and Normandy in 1106: H.G. Richardson and G.O. Sayles, The Governance of Mediaeval England from the Conquest to Magna Carta (Edinburgh, 1963), pp.156-72. Their view is stimulating but often hardly acceptable: cf. J. Le Patourel, Normandy and England 1066-1144 (Reading, 1970), p.13, n.30.

2. 'baronibus de Scaccario': C.W. Foster (ed.), The Registrum Antiquissimum of the Cathedral Church of Lincoln, i (Lincoln Record Society, 1931), no.32; Regesta, ii, no.963. Cf. ibid., nos.1538 (1108-27), 1514 (c.1127), 1879 (1130-3), 1741 (1132); for the Norman Exchquer, no.1584 (c.1129).

Treasury at Winchester.

The origins and essence of the Exchequer have long been argued,² but comparing the financial systems before Henry I and after Henry II, the following factors appear as its distinctive features: (1) systematic collection of the county farm, (2) rational audits by the chequered cloth, the assaying and the keeping of the Pipe Roll, (3) consequent appointment of the Treasurer over the two Chamberlains. It is quite possible that even before 1100 royal revenues in the shire were collected by the sheriff who accounted for them as the 'county farm' regularly at the Treasury at Winchester. But the county farm was never systematic, nor did the sheriff monopolize the collection of royal dues. It was in the reign of Henry I that the county farm was reorganized systematically. From his reign, the audits at the Treasury at Easter and Michaelmas was also

1. Regesta, ii, nos.1000 (Michaelmas 1111), 1211 (Michaelmas 1119); Stevenson, op.cit., pp.116-7, 160-1.

2. J.H.Round, 'The Origin of the Exchequer', in The Commune of London (London, 1899), pp.62-96; R.L. Poole, The Exchequer in the Twelfth Century (Oxford, 1912); T.F.Tout, Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England (6 vols., Manchester, 1920-33), i, pp.72-99; Richardson and Sayles, op. cit., pp. 156-250; Green, op. cit., pp.38-94; I.Sato, 'Ingurando ni okeru Zaimufu no Seiritsu ni tsuite', in Hou to Kenryoku no Shiteki Kousatsu (Tokyo, 1977), pp.327-355; A.Tsuzuki, '12 Seiki Ingurando no Oukasei to Zaimufu', Hitotsu-bashi Ronso, 95 (1986), pp.359-74.

rationalized by the introduction of a new calculation system on a chequered cloth (scaccarium), after which the audits came to be called ad scaccarium (at the Exchequer). At the Exchequer, all the money paid in, such as the county farm, began to be assayed systematically to evade the loss by the deficiency of silver in the penny, and at the same time sophisticated records called the Pipe Rolls began to be kept.¹ From the beginning of the reign, the financial reform was carried out under the direction of Roger Bishop of Salisbury who never assumed any official title. But, with the development of a government more complicated and in need of supervision over the financial administration as a whole, the office of Treasurer was newly created in the 1120s over the two chamberlains at Winchester² who were no more than the curators of treasure.

With the birth of the Exchequer and the Treasurer, the basic structure of the English financial administration was established. Yet, there is one crucial point left to be argued. When we talk about the

1. Richard Fitz Nigel, Dialogus de Scaccario, ed. C.Johnson, F.E.L.Carter and D.E.Greenway (new ed., Oxford, 1983). For the earliest surviving Pipe Roll, see J.Hunter (ed.), Magnum Rotulum Scaccarii vel Magnum Rotulum Pipae de Anno Tricesimo-Primo Regni Henrici Primi (Pipe Roll, 31 Henry I, 1129-30) (London, 1833).

2. Hollister, 'The Origins of the Treasury'.

Exchequer under Henry I, we tend to imagine a governmental 'department' as we find after the thirteenth century. But it is surely an anachronism because the Exchequer under Henry I was not a department but just an occasion: a half-yearly audit-meeting at the Treasury which lasted merely several days. At this stage the Exchequer was completely subject to the Treasury, and its officials and facilities were of the Treasury.¹

In the reign of Henry I, We find the embryos of the English government after the thirteenth century. In spite of his centralization policy, however, Henry I's government still retained many of Anglo-Saxon Characteristics. His intervention in the shire affairs was neither systematic nor lasting, and England was still an amalgamation of the county communities. It was after the second half of the twelfth century that the centralized government was established. And it was not at Winchester but at Westminster.

3. Westminster and the Angevin Governance

1154-1215

The making of the centralized government in England was the process by which the gravity of royal government shifted from Winchester to Westminster. The first

1. Ibid., p.273; Hollister and Baldwin, op. cit., pp.232-4.

section of government which settled at Westminster was the Exchequer. During the civil war of King Stephen, we have very little evidence for its working,¹ but when the civil war was over, we find the Exchequer building and the usher of the Treasury at Westminster.² From this early period the Exchequer³ seems to have been held regularly at Westminster, though the Treasury was still at Winchester and therefore, financial records, tallies and money chests were brought from Winchester for each session and sent back there after with the revenues collected.⁴ In the late

1. For the Exchequer in Stephen's reign, see K.Yoshitake, 'The Exchequer in the Reign of Stephen', English Historical Review, ciii (1988), pp.950-9.

2. 'domorum scaccarii': J.Hunter (ed.), The Great Rolls of the Pipe for the Second, Third and Fourth Years of the Reign of King Henry II (Pipe Roll, 2-4 Henry II) (London, 1844), p.4 (1155). For the usher, see loc. cit.; Pipe Roll, 11 Henry II, p.31; 13 Henry II, p.3; 15 Henry II, pp.169-70; this became regular after 28 Henry II (1182), p.159. See also R.A.Brown, 'The Treasury' of the Later Twelfth Century', in J.C.Davies (ed.), Studies Presented to Sir Hilary Jenkinson (London, 1957), pp.35-49.

3. The Exchequer was still sometimes held at Winchester: Pipe Roll, 14 Henry II, p.188.

4. 'Et ad conducendum archam thesauri ad Pascha de Wint' ad Lond' v s. et viij d.': Pipe Roll, 10 Henry II, p.25; 'Et pro locandis carretis ad portandum thesaurum de termino sancti Michaelis ad Wint' xj s.': 21 Henry II, p.16; 'Et pro j jugia thesauri cum rotulis et taleis ducenda a Wintonia Lond' xix d.': 26 Henry II, p.136. See also 27 Henry II, p.129.

1170s the sacristan of Westminster Abbey was by custom receiving allowances for the ink to keep records at the Exchequer.¹ From 1182 there appeared regularly the allowances for the linen for the blind of the private chamber of the barons of the Exchequer at Westminster.² At Michaelmas 1183, we find the Curia domini Regis apud Westmonasterium ad scaccarium.³ By this time Westminster had been established as the ordinary place for the Exchequer which was then more like a department.⁴

As the Exchequer settled at Westminster, the status of the Treasury at Winchester was affected gradually by the emergence of the treasuries around London. As early as 1155 we meet the first mention of the Treasury at 'London' (Westminster),⁵ but Winchester still remained the central Treasury in the early years of the reign. After the rebellion of 1173-4, however, the number of reference to the 'London' Treasury

1. Dialogus de Scaccario, p.12; G.J.Turner, 'The Exchequer at Westminster', English Historical Review, xix (1904), pp.286-8.

2. Pipe Roll, 28 Henry II, pp.xxiv, 159; 29 Henry II, p.161 etc.

3. T.Madox, The History and Antiquities of the Exchequer (2 vols., London, 1769), i, p.213, n.(p).

4. Even after this period the Exchequer could be held at another place: Pipe Roll, Richard I, p.99.

5. Pipe Roll, 2-4 Henry II, p.3. Cf. 13 Henry II, pp. 2, 62, 14, 103, 193.

increased, and in 1181 there appeared an explicit reference to the Treasury in the Tower of London, to which treasures were sent for deposit after the Exchequer session at Westminster. After 1181 the treasuries around London (Westminster and the Tower) became the main Treasury, whereas Winchester had by this time been degraded to a treasury, something like a storehouse.¹

Simultaneously with the shift of gravity, the Winchester Treasury was losing its character as a 'department' and being subjected to the Exchequer at Westminster. Its gradual transition is vividly illustrated by the vicissitude of Henry I's grant to the Abbey of Tiron. In 1114/20, the abbey was granted to receive 15 marks every year 'at Michaelmas from my Treasury at Winchester'.² In 1141 and 1152/4, it was still from the Treasury at Winchester,³ but in 1156/9 it was paid

1. Brown, op. cit., pp.40-3; Pipe Roll, 27 Henry II, pp.51, 157: 'pro ducendo thesauro a Lond' usque Turrim' and 'ad reponendum ibi in thesauro'. Cf. Pipe Roll, 32 Henry II, p.49. From this time onwards, tallies, rolls and treasure chests were deposited in London: Pipe Roll, 33 Henry II, p.45; Pipe Roll, 3 Richard I, p.90. Between 1182-9 there was also a treasury at Salisbury: Brown, op. cit., pp.44-7.

2. Round, Commune of London, pp.80-1; Regesta, ii, no.1236; J.H.Round (ed.), Calendar of Documents Preserved in France (London, 1899), no.998: 'de thesauro meo, in festo Sancti Michaelis, Wintonie.'

3. Regesta, iii, nos.899 and 900; Round, Calendar, nos.999 and 1000: 'de thesauro Wintoniensi'.

from 'my Treasury at my Exchequer yearly at Michael-
mas',¹ and finally in 1189 'at Michaelmas from my
Exchequer of London'.²

The same process is also seen in the personnel. In the reign of Henry I, there were the treasurer and the two chamberlains of the Treasury at Winchester as the main financial officials. In the 1170s, however, Richard FitzNigel was implying that the treasurer and the chamberlains were of the Exchequer which had by then subordinated the Treasury.³ In 1212 these officials were called by the king 'Our Treasurer and Cham-
berlains of the Exchequer'.⁴

By the legal reforms of Henry II, an incentive was also given for the settlement of the law court. The centre of justice of the period was still the peripatetic royal court, but from 1166 Henry sent itinerant

1. Round, Calendar, no.1001; L.Delisle and E.Berger (eds.), Recueil des actes de Henri II, (4 vols., Paris, 1909-27), i, p.214.

2. Round, Commune of London, p.81; do., Calendar, no.1003.

3. Dialogus de Scaccario; Tout, Chapters, i, pp.97-9; Richardson and Sayles, op. cit., pp.227-8. The Treasury at the Tower of London was also under the control of the Exchequer: Brown, op. cit., p.43.

4. T.D.Hardy (ed.), Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum 1204-1227 (2 vols., London, 1833-4), i, p.123 (28 Aug. 1212). Cf. ibid., p.5.

justices systematically to the shires to deal with disputed land claims by a series of possessory assizes. The success of his assizes drastically increased the number of law suits brought to the King's court, and it forced Henry to leave some of his justices at a fixed place when he was on tour. So we find in 1178 that he left some justices at Westminster. Around the same time Glanvill was frequently talking about the law court at Westminster.¹ During the absence of Richard I, Westminster secured its place as the Court of Common Pleas distinct from the itinerant royal court, the Court Coram Rege. Although King John incorporated the Common Pleas into the Coram Rege after the loss of Normandy in 1204, it was prescribed in Magna Carta that the Common Pleas should be separated and situated at a 'fixed place', probably at Westminster.² Because of the increasing number of writs issued after the legal reform, a greater part of the Chancery was also in the

1. W.L.Warren, Henry II (London, 1973), pp.295-8; W.Stubbs (ed.), Chronica Rogeri de Houedene (4 vols., London, 1868-71), i, pp.207-8; G.D.G.Hall (ed.), The Treatise on the Laws and Customs of the Realm of England Commonly Called Glanvill, (London, 1965), passim.

2. Magna Carta, c.17. For the legal development, see D.M.Stenton, English Justice between the Norman Conquest and the Great Charter 1066-1215 (London, 1965); R.C.van Caenegem (ed.), Royal Writs in England from the Conquest to Glanvill (London, 1959); do., The Birth of the English Common Law (Cambridge, 1973).

late 1190s separated from the royal household and settled at Westminster with the royal archives.¹

As the reasons for the shift of government to Westminster, we can point out several facts. Since 1066 Westminster had been the place of coronation and one of the king's favourite places because of the respect for King Edward the Confessor who rebuilt the abbey and himself rested there. Its proximity to London was no doubt a merit. During the civil war, King Stephen's territory was confined to south-eastern England around Westminster and London, and Winchester was no longer a secure place for government. In this situation it is no wonder that Stephen used Westminster most frequently for his government.² Henry II followed his predecessor's practice in the period when the Confessor's cult reached its peak by his canonization. King Edward was the source of legitimacy for the Anglo-Normans, and probably for the Angevins.³

1. W.L.Warren, The Governance of Norman and Angevin England 1086-1272 (London, 1987), pp.125-6, 187ff.

2. Biddle, Winchester Studies, pp.18, 386; Richardson and Sayles, op. cit., p.192; Yoshitake, op. cit.

3. F.Barlow, Edward the Confessor (London, 1970), pp.256-85.

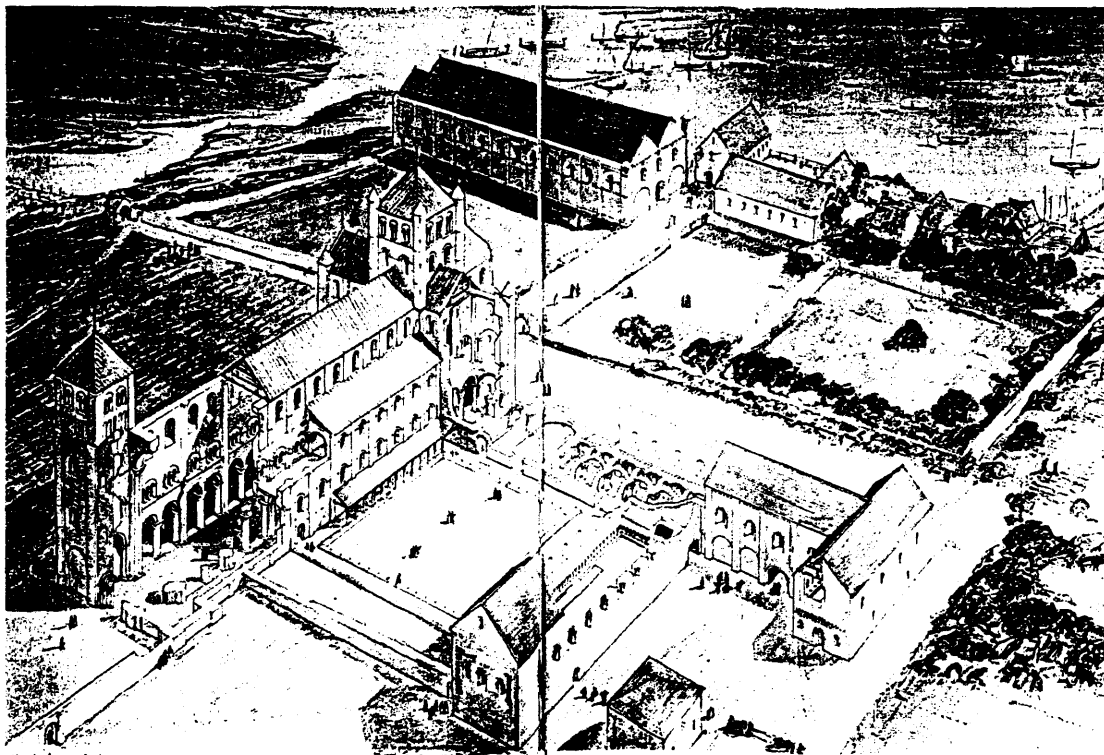
4. Conclusion

As Westminster was established as the centre of government in the late twelfth century, the foundation of its urban development was laid by the immigration of royal officials with their households. Although its economic basis was different from other towns, the urban community expanded through retail and service industries for those who frequented the government there.¹

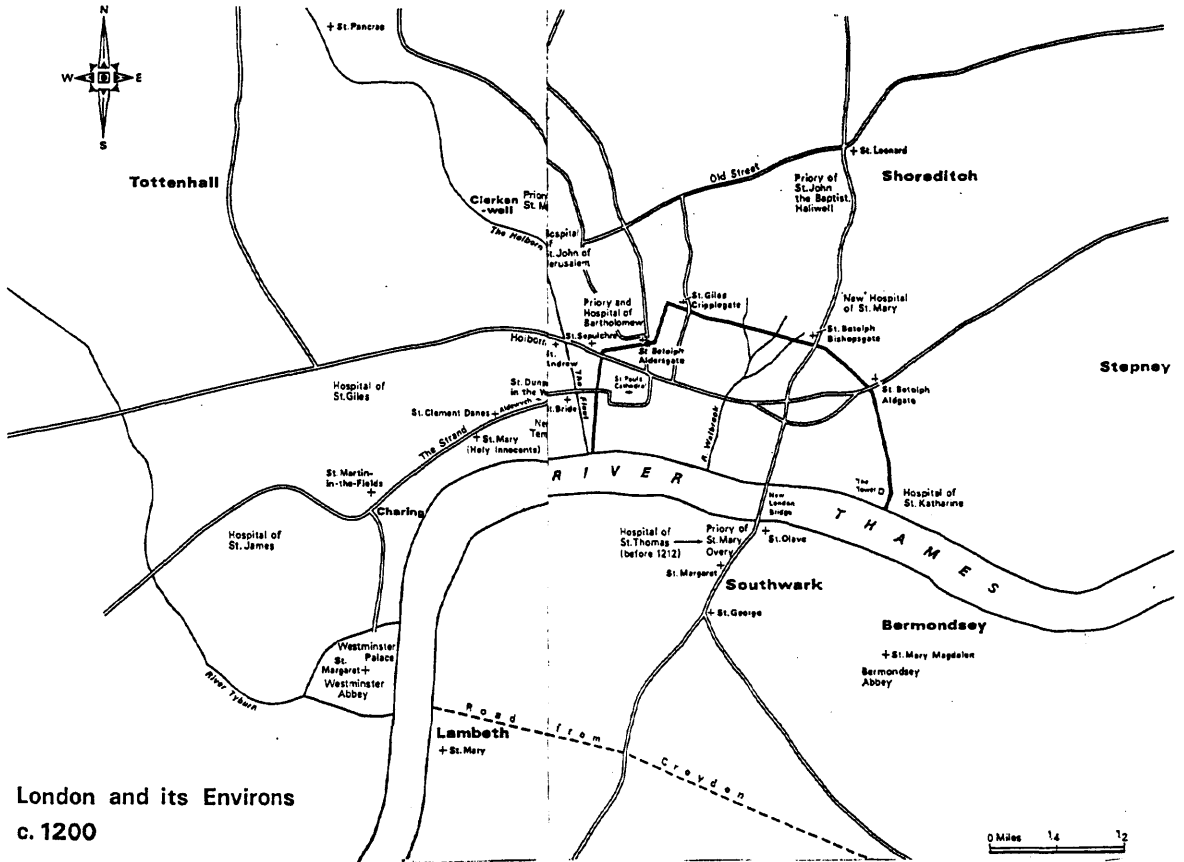
The settlement of government at Westminster was the establishment of the central or centralized government in medieval England. It was accompanied by the settlement of the Chancery and the law court from the peripatetic royal household, which greatly reduced its administrative importance. Through the centralized government thus established, the king came to intervene more directly and effectively in the county communities. The counties still retained their identity, but the shire-men were now more conscious of the royal government and forming an idea that people in the kingdom were ruled by one central government. Around the same time, the cross-Channel baronage disappeared by the loss of Normandy in 1204, and the barons who followed King John began to identify themselves with England. The English political community was thus

1. Rosser, Medieval Westminster, pp.16-41.

created both from below and above, and with this idea behind the barons were able to use the phrase, the 'commune of all the land' in 1215.¹ Westminster was to be the pivot or the symbol of this community of the realm to unite the shire communities. It was this special function in the kingdom that made possible the unique development of the urban community at Westminster.



1. Magna Carta, c.61: 'communa tocius terre'. Cf. c.12 and c.14: 'commune consilium regni'.



London and its Environs
c. 1200

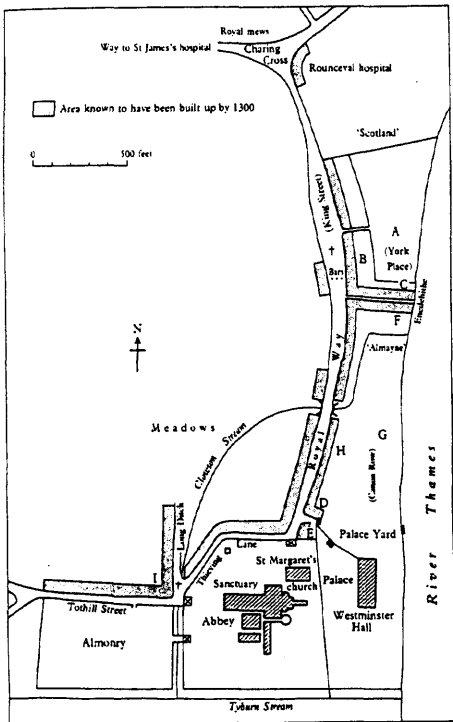


FIG. 4. Westminster. Area built up by 1300, and principal late medieval features

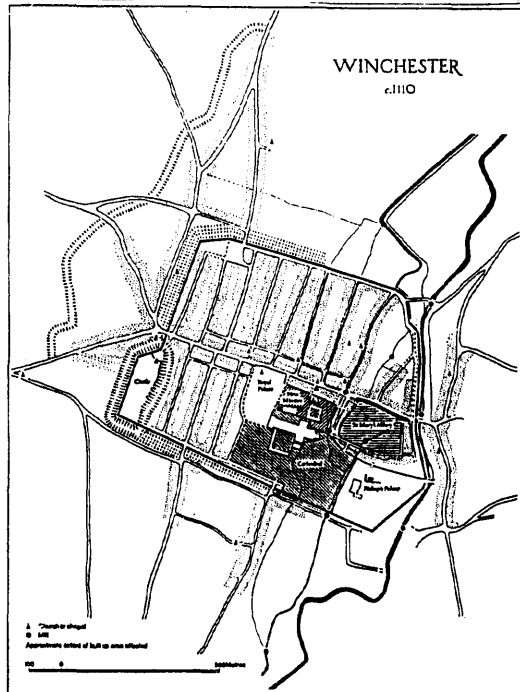


FIG. 2. Early Norman Winchester. Parish churches known to have been in existence by c. 1110 are shown. The castle chapel and the church of St. Laurence, which may have originated as the chapel of the extended Norman royal palace, are also shown.