

Durham Liber Vitae: First page (as shown on the project website) with the name of King Athelstan, supposed donor of the *liber* to Durham, at the top.

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# THE DURHAM *LIBER VITAE*: SOME REFLECTIONS ON ITS SIGNIFICANCE AS A GENEALOGICAL RESOURCE

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## ABSTRACT

The Durham *Liber Vitae* holds great potential for the extraction of unmined genealogical information held within its pages, but the quality of information obtained will depend on our understanding of the document itself. This article explores briefly what a *liber vitae* was and gives examples of the type of information that can be extracted from the Durham *liber* with special reference to Countess Ida, mother of William Longespee.

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The Durham *Liber Vitae* (Book of Life), which contains over 11,000 medieval names on 83 folios, recorded over a period from the ninth to the sixteenth century, is receiving some well-deserved study<sup>2</sup>. The names in the *Liber Vitae* are of benefactors to St Cuthbert's, Durham, and included kings and earls, as well as other landowning laity. Also appearing in large numbers are the names of those belonging to the religious community itself over that period. From the late 1000s Breton and Norman-French names feature, intermingling with those belonging to Anglo-Saxon, Scottish and Scandinavian families, witness to intermarriage between, and eventual cultural dominance over, racial groups and land in northern England.

The *liber vitae* appears to have been widespread throughout Europe, with surviving examples existing from Austria, Switzerland, Germany, France and Italy. Although major English religious houses such as Glastonbury, Abingdon, Peterborough and Ely are known have kept some form of *liber vitae*, these have been lost. The only three English examples known to exist are those of New Minster/Hyde Abbey (Hampshire), Thorney Abbey (Cambridgeshire) and Durham priory - the latter being by far the oldest. While traditionally ascribed to the monks of Lindisfarne, one recent theory is that it was created at the monastery at Wearmouth and passed to St Cuthbert's when King Athelstan gave them the vill of Wearmouth in about 934 (Gerchow, 2004).

The purpose of the *liber vitae* was to act as a kind of passport to salvation by ensuring that the name of the individual entered into it, owing to their support of a particular religious house, would appear in the celestial Book of Life which had existed since the Creation and which would be opened on Judgement Day. There are various references to the Book of Life in the Bible:

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<sup>2</sup> The Durham *Liber Vitae* Project is a collaborative project between the AHRB Centre for North-East England History and Centre for Computing in the Humanities, King's College, London, aimed at promoting study of the *liber* and performing the difficult task of digitising the pages to make them available online <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/humanities/cch/dlv>

*And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.* Revelation 20: 12

*He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.* Revelation 3:5

*The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.* Revelation 17: 23

A prayer reflecting the intent of the book was recited as names were entered into the Durham *liber*, "We pray you, O Lord and Holy Father, through your son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, that their names may be written in the Book of Life" (Moore, 1997, p.168).

Likewise, Bishop Aethelwold's wish was expressed in the New Minster foundation charter that, "by the writing of their names, as is proper, in the Book of Life, may these persons have a share with Christ in the heavenly dwellings who shall have honoured his monks – whom he possesses – either in words or in deeds, by the work of holiness" (Keynes, 1996).

After the reforms of its religious community in 1083 the Durham *Liber Vitae* seems to have also functioned as a *liber obituum* (book of the dead or necrology) a register in which religious communities entered the names of the dead, notably their own deceased members, associates, and principal benefactors with a view to the offering of prayers for their souls on the anniversary of their death. It had its origin in the old 'diptychs', or tablets, upon which were formerly entered the names which were read out by the priest at the Commemoration of the Living and the Commemoration of the Dead in the Canon of the Mass particularly on the anniversary of their death (Thurston, 1911). Not surprisingly the exclusive entry of one's name in the register of a religious house, and commendation of the subject in the prayers through the good works of all its members, was highly prized (Moore, 1997). Mutual inclusion of the names of deceased brethren into each other's necrologies were continually negotiated between different abbeys and it became the custom for monasteries to send messengers with mortuary rolls requesting the promise of prayers which were to be entered on the roll and engaging the senders to pray for the deceased brethren of the monasteries who rendered them this service. The monks of Durham set up a network of this kind with their counterparts at Westminster, Gloucester, Winchester, Coventry, Fécamp, Caen, Canterbury, Glastonbury and other places. It is possibly for this reason that Roger Bigod and Alice de Tosny appear in the Durham *liber*, for Roger is also included in that of Thorney as he was present at the abbey in 1098 when the saints' relics were translated to the new church at its re-dedication (Moore, 1997, p.174).

Geoffrey Barrow once described the *liber vitae* as a 'visitor's book' but there is no indication that the people whose names were recorded in the *liber* - unless members of the religious community - actually visited Durham in person. Nor can it be assumed that the entries were made in strict chronological order as the analogy of a visitor's book suggests (Moore, 2004).

After the individuals entered in the *liber vitae* died, they would benefit from the prayers of the community when, as at Durham, it was placed on the high altar during mass - though the sheer volume of numbers might make the recitation of all the

names impractical. A similar practice occurred at Hyde abbey as shown by the preface of its *liber vitae*.

*Behold, in the name of God Almighty and of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His most Holy Mother, the ever-stainless Virgin Mary, and also of the twelve holy Apostles by whose teaching the world is rendered glorious in the faith, to whose honour this Minster in distinction to the old monastery hard by, there are set down here in due order the names of brethren and monks, of members of the household or of benefactors living and dead, that by the perishable memorial of this writing they may be written in the page of the heavenly book, by the virtue of whose alms deeds this same family, through Christ's bounty, is fed. And let also the names of all those who have commended themselves to its prayers and its fellowship be recorded here in general, in order that remembrance may be made of them daily in the sacred celebration of the Mass or in the harmonious chanting of psalms. And let the names themselves be presented daily by the subdeacon before the altar at the early or principal Mass, and as far as time shall allow let them be recited by him in the sight of the Most High. And after the oblation has been offered to God by the right hand of the cardinal priest who celebrates the Mass, let the names be laid upon the holy altar during the very mysteries of the sacred Mass and be commended most humbly to God Almighty so that as remembrance is made of them upon earth, so in the life to come, by His indulgence who alone knows how they stand or are hereafter to stand in His sight, the glory of those who are of greater merit may be augmented in Heaven and the account of those who are less worthy may be lightened in His secret judgments. Be ye glad and rejoice that your names are written in Heaven, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with God the Eternal Father and the Holy Ghost, there remains all honour power, and glory for ever and ever. Amen.* (Thurston, 1911).

According to Moore (1997, p.171) the sex ratio in the Durham *liber* is 151 males to 100 females, which reflects an initial desire to include all members of the family. This makes the *liber* a valuable genealogical resource for the period immediately following the conquest, and offers many challenges in the identification of family groupings or individuals. In a sense, a family group listed in the *liber* is the closest we might ever get to a medieval family snapshot.

One such grouping predominantly consisting of female names is the family of Rannulf de Glanville, famous justiciar of Henry II, listed with his wife and four daughters - *Rannulf' de Glanuile uxor ei' Berta, Matillis Amabilis Helewisa Mabilia filie eor' et Berc* (Thompson, 1923, fol.23).

Berc<sup>3</sup> may have been foster daughter of Rannulf and his wife, Berta de Valoines, perhaps daughter of their daughter Helewise, wife of Robert fitz Ralph, lord of Middleham. The latter's family is also included in the Durham *liber* but unusually the eldest son, Waleran fitz Robert, is named separately from the rest of the family – *Rob's fil' Radulf's, Heluwisa uxor ei', Rad' fil' et Ranlf' et Berta* (Thompson, fol.58). This might imply that Waleran was not son of Helewise at all - something that would be of no surprise considering Waleran is not a name occurring in the Glanville or fitz Ralph family<sup>4</sup>. Their daughter Berta may well be the Berta named at the end of Rannulf de

<sup>3</sup> The writing is indistinct but this is a name seen variously in the *liber* as Berta/Berca/Bercta

<sup>4</sup> The *Historia Foundationis* of Coverham (formerly Swainby) abbey refers to Waleran as the son and heir of Helewise but no charters have survived to show this. *Monasticon Anglicanum*. 6(2):920.

Glanville's grouping, and the same as his 'neptis'<sup>5</sup> - wife of William de Stuteville (d.1203), whose marriage he had arranged after her father had died<sup>6</sup>.

Often only the head of the family and the heir might be recorded such as the example of the family of Roger Bigod I and Adelisa de Tosny<sup>7</sup> - *Rodger' Bigod' Atheles uxor ei' Willelm' filii eor'* (Thompson, fol.43). The absence of any additional children, in particular Hugh who succeeded his elder brother, William, who drowned in the White Ship disaster of 1120, would reflect the general tendency for only the head of a family and patron of a religious house to be entered. Such was often the way in charters of gift to religious houses that only the head of the family and the heir would be mentioned by name. The siblings of John de Vaus, son and heir of William de Vaus and his wife Maud, for example, receive only casual reference in the group of *William de Vaus, Matildis uxor ei', Joh's filii ei' et IIII fr'es ei' et IIII sorores ei'*. (Thompson, 1923, fol.66).

Similarly the selection of names of the family group of Ranulph of Bayeux (afterwards earl of Chester following the death of his nephew in the White Ship disaster in 1120), omits the younger sons, *Rannulf' Mahald uxor ei' Ricard' Rannulf' de Mesc' filii eor' Lucia uxor Rann'* (Thompson, 1923, fol.51) indicating the entries are most likely to have been made after the death of a first son, Richard, but before the earldom passed into their hands as none of them are accorded comital status. If all the other individuals were living when recorded in the *liber* it could only have been accomplished within a four year period between the marriage of Ranulph and Lucy (later Earl and Countess of Chester), about 1097, and the death of Maud d'Avranches in 1101.

Sometimes it is possible to gain insight into the high rate of mortality in medieval times. In the fourteenth century one scribe erased a portion of twelfth century names from a folio to add the large family of John and Christiana Gategang - *Johannes Gategang, Xiana uxor eius, Johannes, Gilbertus, Adam, Nicholaus, Thomas, Walterus, Ricardus, Henricus, Alexander, Jacobus, Issota, [illegible], Alice, Agnes, Sibota, filii et filiae dictorum Johannis et Xianae* (Thompson, fol.66). The Gategang family were tenants of the bishop of Durham at Old Park and prominent residents of Gateshead (Surtees, 1816-1840). John Gategang died in 1340 and was succeeded by his son John, who died without issue, leaving his brother Henry, Rector of Belton, his heir. Clearly the six brothers between them had all died without issue. Surtees' pedigree of the family implies that Henry left no heir other than the issue of his uncle Gilbert. If this is the case then all fifteen children of John and Christiana died without legitimate issue.

From about the mid 1300s female names do not appear as regularly as previously, perhaps reflecting the cultural emphasis on the importance of the male as head of the

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<sup>5</sup> Although the term is commonly translated as niece, it could also mean grand daughter

<sup>6</sup> Berta, the wife of William de Stuteville (d.1203) lord of the Stuteville fee in Yorkshire was shown to be a 'neptis' of Ranulph de Glanville (EYC, 1952, 9:11). The evidence given was that in 1205/6 Ranulph fitz Robert on his coming of age paid 200 marks relief as his hereditary right in a third of William Stuteville's land in Bramham and Leyburn in the honour of Richmond, which William had received in marriage with Berta his wife who had died without an heir. Thomas de Arden had also paid relief for having his share of the land, which Ranulf de Glanville gave in marriage to William de Stuteville with Berta his 'neptis'. Ranulf also sued both Thomas de Arden and Hugh de Auberville for his fair share of the free tenement of Ranulf de Glanville.

<sup>7</sup> CP 9:577 implies that Roger Bigod had two wives named Adeldis and Adelia and that William and Hugh were half brothers, but K Keats-Rohan in *Domesday People*, p.396 observed that these are forms of the same name, along with the version given in the Durham *Liber Vitae*.

family. As an example of this trend, the family of Henry Percy heads a page of names written at the end of the fourteenth century,

*Henr's Pcy comes Northub'.*  
*Hen's Thoms Radulph' filii ei'.*  
*Gilbt's vmfrauylle comes D'angus.*  
*Dns Iohnes Neuyll*  
*Dns Rad's filius ei' (Thompson, 1923, fol.68)*

The subject of the entry is Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland (d.1408) with his three sons Henry, Thomas and Ralph. Their unrecorded mother was Margaret Neville (d.1372), which is why Henry's father-in-law, Lord John Neville, and brother-in-law, Lord Ralph Neville, are included in the grouping. Of particular note is the fact that Gilbert d'Umfraville, Earl of Angus appears before the Nevilles. *The Complete Peerage*<sup>8</sup> notes that it has been said that Henry married firstly Elizabeth, daughter and heir of Earl Gilbert, who had died young but no confirmation of this has been found. The evidence from the *liber* would seem to add weight to the existence of the first marriage, notwithstanding Henry later married Gilbert's widow, Maud, Baroness Lucy, who settled her estate, the honour of Cockermouth, on the Percy family.

Wealthy independent ladies of the house could rectify the gender imbalance, and so from the Neville household we see Joan Beaufort, countess of Westmorland, second wife of Ralph de Neville, Earl of Westmorland, her eldest son, Richard, Earl of Salisbury, and his wife Alice Montagu, and the wife of her step grandson, Elizabeth Percy, having their names entered into the *liber* at the same time – "*Dna Johanna de Newylye, comitissa de Westmherland, Dns Ric de Newyly comes de Salesbery, et dna Alesia comitissa de Salesbery uxor eius, Domina Elizabeth comitissa de Westmorland*" (Thompson, fol.73). Although her husband had an impressive altar tomb erected at Staindrop on which are effigies of himself and his two wives, Joan chose to be buried in Lincoln near her mother, Katharine Roet.

Because they do not occur elsewhere, we are fortunate to have the names of the entire family of Roger Bigod and Countess Ida listed in the Durham *Liber Vitae*. Their grouping has been disguised by the chaotic arrangement of names on the page by the cleric truncating the lines two thirds of the way across and by the insertion of unrelated individuals between the first and second lines in a later hand<sup>9</sup>. We are given.

*Comes Rogu's Bigot. Ida uxor ei'*  
*Hugo Will's Rogu's Johs Radulph*  
*Maria Margared Ida pueri ei' (Thompson, 1923, fol.65)*

From an onomastic point of view the arrangement may offer clues about the identity of the enigmatic Countess Ida<sup>10</sup>. It can be safely said that the accuracy with which the

<sup>8</sup> CP 9:712, note (e). In November 1340 earl Gilbert had three sons on whom he settled family estates but they all predeceased him, perhaps casualties the Black Death. If a daughter had survived she could only have been heir presumptive. See G W Watson 'The Umfravilles, Earls of Angus and Lords of Kyme in *The Genealogist* 26:199.

<sup>9</sup> See post by Rosie Bevan to soc.genealogy.medieval in July 2002 "*Liber Vitae and the family of Roger and Ida Bigod*".

<sup>10</sup> See Paul Reed (2002) for a full discussion of various theories concerning the identity of Ida. None of the families match the onomastics particularly well and the evidence for the tenuous

cleric meticulously recorded the order of birth of the sons and daughters can be trusted if other *liber* entries are any indication. Although the legend of Rosamund Clifford as mother of William Longespee, illegitimate son of Henry II had been debunked in the nineteenth century<sup>11</sup> it was not until 1979 that specific knowledge about her identity was advanced by Vera London's discovery that she was referred to as 'Countess Ida' in the Bradenstoke charters of William Longespee (London, 1979, p.9)<sup>12</sup>. In 2002 Ray Phair made the important discovery that William Longespee and Ralph Bigod were brothers<sup>13</sup>, which can only mean that Earl Roger Bigod's countess was the mother of William Longespee.

It is puzzling that a personage such as a mistress of Henry II and the countess of Roger Bigod could have left so little recorded about her life and identity. Genealogists have looked far and wide speculating about various noble families in which the name Ida occurred. She does not seem to have taken anything to her marriage with Roger Bigod as we might expect of a noblewoman. As a countess there are no charters commemorating her family and even Roger Bigod's gifts to various religious houses that include the health of her soul appear among family job lots<sup>14</sup>. Likewise her son William Longespee made no specific reference to his mother's family in charters.

In the light of the recent discovery of a daughter of William Longespee named Mary whose marriage took place in 1226<sup>15</sup>, and the naming pattern adopted by the Bigod family as given in the Durham *Liber Vitae*, having Mary as the name of the eldest

theory that she was a Toeni is based on the fact that Roger Bigod gave a mill and a small amount of land in East Bergholt, where the Toenis also gave land, to Dodnash priory. However this property was given to Roger Bigod by Edward de Aunay (Alneto) as indicated by the charter of gift, apart from which had the land come to Roger Bigod via Ida, she would have been included in the charter, but she is not mentioned. Additionally Roger Bigod's grandfather Aubrey de Vere held land in East Bergholt in 1086 and Roger Bigod's other grandfather Roger Bigod held lands in the soke of East Bergholt. Roger Bigod, himself was lord of the fee which included lands in Dodnash that had belonged to Wimund. All in all, his gift to Dodnash cannot be described as remarkable.

- <sup>11</sup> In 1887 William Hunt debunked the notion that Rosamund Clifford was mother of William Longespee in his article on Rosamund Clifford in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, showing that the legend was invented in the early 1600s during a legal dispute over the Clifford family estates.
- <sup>12</sup> It was Charles Evans (1982) who first alerted the genealogical community of this discovery.
- <sup>13</sup> Ray Phair presented evidence that Ralph Bigod was termed brother of the Earl of Salisbury "*Rad[ulfus] Bigot, frater comitis Salesbir[ienensis]*" in a list of hostages captive after the battle of Bouvines in 1214, citing "*Les registres de Philippe Augustus*", Baldwin, J W (1992, editor), *Miscellanea* no.13, William Longespee, Ralph Bigod, and Countess Ida *The American Genealogist*, 77: 279-281. Ralph Bigod can be clearly identified as son of Countess Ida from the Durham *Liber Vitae*.
- <sup>14</sup> Roger Bigod gave a gift worth three marks to Reading abbey for the souls of Ida, himself and their children (Kemp, 1986). He also confirmed the gift of Roger de Glanville of Middleton church, as overlord, to Leiston abbey including his wife in the charter of confirmation, "*pro salute anime mee et Comitiss Hugonis patris mei et Comitisse Juliane matris mee, et Comitisse Ida uxoris mee, et omnium antecessorum et successorum meorum*" (Mortimer, 1979).
- <sup>15</sup> Evidence that William Longespee and Ela Countess of Salisbury had a daughter named Mary was given by Linda Jack, citing Thos Hardy (1844, editor), *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum in Turri Londinensi*, 2:200, in the thread "*Mary, daughter of the earl of Salisbury*" in the soc.genealogy.medieval newsgroup, January 2003.

daughter, it is not unreasonable to speculate that Ida's mother was named Mary<sup>16</sup>. William Longespee, himself, may have been named for his maternal grandfather, or perhaps in memory of Henry II's younger brother Guillaume Longue-Épée, count of Poitou, who died in 1164. William was a name already known in the Bigod family - as mentioned, Roger's uncle William Bigod, Lord of Framlingham, had died in the White Ship Disaster and Roger also had a half brother of that name. A name not associated previously with the Bigod family is John, which must offer a further clue in the search.

In a related vein, a late 12th century group of individuals who were associated with Bradenstoke priory, includes Richard de Heriet<sup>17</sup>, justiciar for Kings Henry II and Richard I, Ela his wife<sup>18</sup> and five of their children<sup>19</sup>, Richard de Candover, rector of Canford who died before 1186, and William fitz Patrick, Earl of Salisbury, whose grandfather had founded Bradenstoke priory - *Ricard de Heriet, Ela uxor ei', Rob' et Joh's filii eor' Amice et Matild' et Johanna filie eor', Ricard de Candover, Comes Will's de Salesbie'*, (Thompson, 1923, fol.58). The Earl William here is clearly William fitz Patrick, not William Longespee, given that Richard de Candover, who witnessed the earl's original charter giving the church of Canford to Bradenstoke, before 1179, predeceased him (London, p.99)<sup>20</sup>. A mysterious Countess Gundred - "*Gundre Comitissa*" - is recorded immediately after Earl William, leaving open the distinct possibility that he had a previous wife to Eleanor de Vitre. Considering that he was of age to receive the earldom and third penny for Wiltshire in 1168 on succeeding his father, and he did not marry Eleanor until after 1190<sup>21</sup> when in his forties, this should come as no surprise. The field is wide open for speculation who this Gundred might be, but supposing she were an unidentified daughter of Earl Hugh Bigod and his second wife, Gundred de Beaumont, it would make the reasons for the later alliance of William Longespee and Ela, Countess of Salisbury, perfectly understandable. Surprisingly there is a tiny scrap of evidence, in that the same charter of Richard de Heriard and his wife Ela was witnessed by Earl William fitz Patrick<sup>22</sup>, along with a William le Bigod, long before the marriage of Longespee and Ela. Chronologically, this William was more likely to have been the son of Gundred de Beaumont than Countess Ida. Could this William Bigod have had a sister named Gundred who was wife of Earl William fitz Patrick?

The above are just a few examples of how examination of the Durham *Liber Vitae* can bring new perspectives to bear on what we know about our medieval ancestors, and

<sup>16</sup> This is of course assuming the names did not appear as a result of Marian devotion. Mary was an important name to the Longespees - William Longespee was noted for his devotion to the Virgin Mary and had kept a candle burning before her altar since the day of his knighthood, and Ela's foundation, the abbey of Lacock, was dedicated to the Blessed Mary and St. Bernard, but she wished it to be called the 'place of Blessed Mary' in her foundation charter.

<sup>17</sup> Also appears as Heriard.

<sup>18</sup> Identified as daughter and coheir with her sister Alice, wife of John Maltravers, of Roger fitz Geoffrey who was holding two fees of Patrick, earl of Salisbury in 1166 - CRR 9:132, CRR 10:17. She appears to have had some connection to Geoffrey fitz Piers the justiciar, later Earl of Essex.

<sup>19</sup> Their son and heir, Richard, is omitted from the list even though it is clear that Ela was his mother by his inheritance of her lands in Wiltshire.

<sup>20</sup> Earl William fitz Patrick later issued another charter confirming the gift after his marriage to Eleanor de Vitre. This second one has been mistakenly given an earlier date by London who assumed it was the original grant.

<sup>21</sup> When Gilbert Crespin de Tillieres, her second husband, died.

<sup>22</sup> A distinction was invariably made in the Bradenstoke charters between William [fitz Patrick], Earl of Salisbury and William Longespee, Earl of Salisbury.



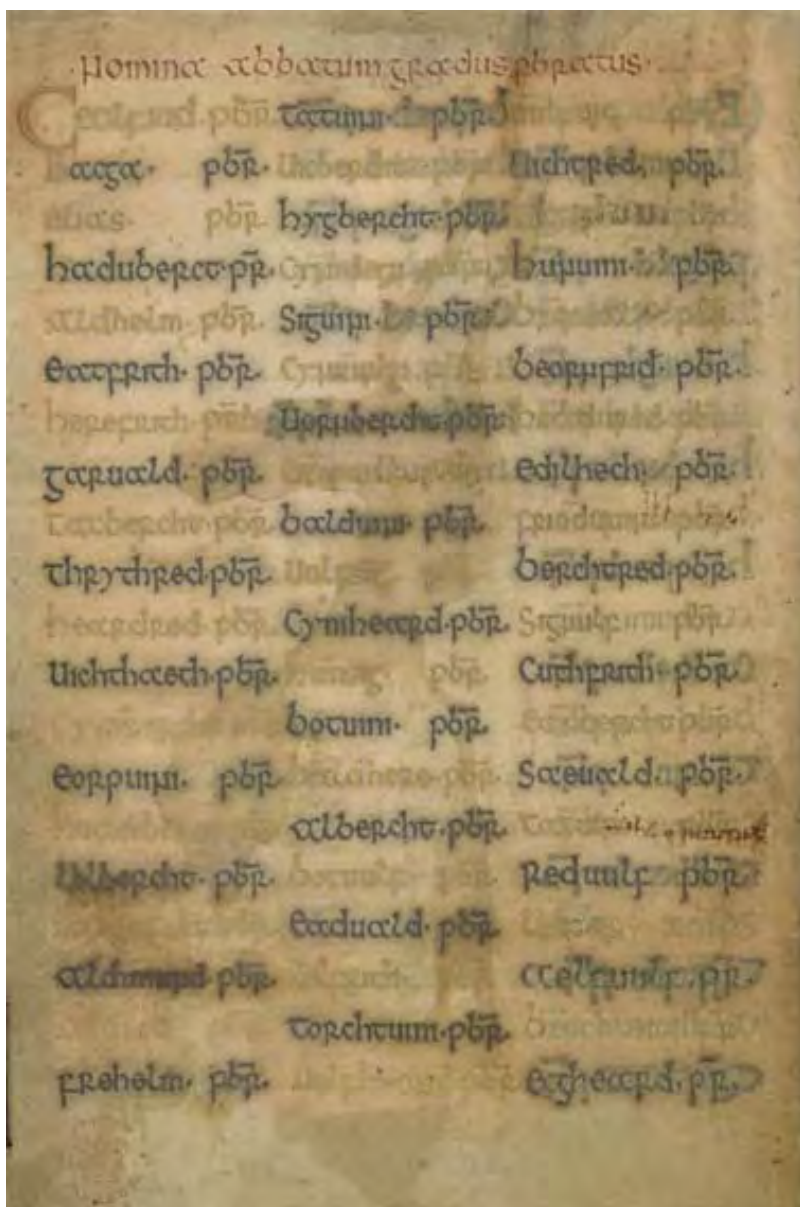
it is clear that genealogists can have as much a part to play as historians and prosopographers in the identification of, and discussion about, individuals recorded in the *liber*. We have much to look forward to as new developments unfold.

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<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10734b.htm>



**Durham Liber Vitae:** List of abbots, beginning with Ceolfrid of Monkswearmouth/Jarrow; from the list of benefactors of St Cuthbert's church, to be remembered at the altar. This manuscript lay on the high altar of Durham Cathedral before the Reformation.

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co	rum	28
cedhulc	edilbecc	Sebecc
hepebecc	edilbecc	Cymbald.
Cymbald	Beccard	Cuthulc
Beccmund	edilbecc	padulc
Cengil	Loging	Tilum
eanmund	baldmund	hyssi
eanmund	hadbecc	eda
eadeg	eanpach	edbecc
aldulc	Coombec	Tunbecc
Cynnund	aldulc	aldulc
beccann	Uulphecc	Cyn
Sudhelm	edbecc	sonna
edulc	Uildog	heccald
edbecc	baldum	heccpach
Uilmund	edbecc	becc
beornum	helppic	Tiducald
Siggard	edilulc	hyccald
Cuthulc	beccann	beornulc
hybecc	edbald	becc
hyppach	edilum	eanulc
Uilbecc	eanum	edilum

Another page from the Durham *Liber Vitae* as shown on the project website.

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