the Salem Village First Church admitted that within their ranks there might exist a “Judas” or “Judases.” It was clear to the foundation members that there most likely did.

As Weir so ably points out, the theme of covenant is evident throughout both the Old and New Testaments. The early settlers of New England took with them to their new home across the sea an existing covenant rooted in the Bible and Reformed Protestant theology. Once arrived, they formed new communities, or societies, which required covenants as mechanisms of formation, rather than as agents of reform. It was soon realised that the covenants they had formed were not adequate to cover incidents of dissent or discontent, and, in time, they became instruments of reformation. Weir notes that, as time passed, the language of the covenants became less religious in nature.

Self-sufficiency moved into a new phase of interdependency with the formation of the Confederation of New England. The reason for Confederation did not stop with the original idea of furtherance of the Kingdom of God; it became necessary as a united strategy of defence against indigenous raiders. The wording of the covenants went beyond defence to a mutual agreement, where necessary, of being coalesced in offence. The Confederation also included such things as a defence budget and spoils of war, concerns far removed from the ideals of most of the first European settlers in the New World. It must be noted that not all settlers were Puritan idealists.

Weir’s monumental contribution to the history of the early religious and civil polities of the founding communities, together with his fine bibliographic essay, chronology and documentary details, provides students of the history of early American religion and/or civil society with a solid foundation upon which to build their research. Best viewed as a work of reference, he has opened the way to vast avenues waiting to be explored.

Hazel Burgess
Independent Scholar


This welcome book brings together eight of Patrick Wormald’s classic articles on Anglo-Saxon society. It is divided into two parts: four essays on the ideals and social environments which surrounded the Venerable Bede (d. 735), and four “sequels” examining the development of these areas up to the end of the first millennium. Despite being written over nearly thirty years (1976–2004) for a variety of publications, the essays hang together superbly to present a coherent vision a world shaped by the complex interaction between “Germanic” aristocratic culture and Christian — particularly monastic — values. One of Wormald’s favourite hooks was Bede’s Epistola ad Ecgberhti (see chapters 2, 4, 6, and 8), in which an aging Bede lamented the intrusion of secular lords and lax Christians into church and monastic life. It provided a critique of society against which non-historical sources such as Beowulf or charters could be shown to be important reflections of other (not entirely opposed) ideals.

The first chapter focuses on Bede’s portrayal of Benedict Biscop, the aristocratic founder of Wearmouth-Jarrow whose extensive travels and learning shaped the horizons of Bede’s imagination. Like its “sequel,” a systematic comparison of Benedictine reforms in England and on the continent (chapter 5), Wormald sought to give the Anglo-Saxons a European context. This is a great strength of many of the essays and
an approach Anglo-Saxonists have too often been accused of neglecting (although Wormald himself admits in a note that it is difficult always to stay on top of continental scholarship as well). Sometimes, as in his study of early charter forms (chapter 4), such work helped to bring much needed clarity to what was unique about England, as well as what experiences it shared. Two important essays (chapters 3 and 6) argue that the “origins of England” are to be found in the ideas of Gregory the Great’s nascent Anglo-Saxon Church and thence through Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica*, not through inherited ethnicities or overlordships (especially the debunked “Bretwalda-ship”). The very idea of seeking England’s origins may seem a little Whiggish now but, in taking a cue (if little more) from the work of Wenskus and Wolfram on ethnogenesis, Wormald helped to move forward our understanding of what “Anglo-Saxon” meant. His Deerhurst and Brixworth public lectures complete the main part of the book, using the two sites to reassess the problems of sparse evidence when analysing landholdings and the role of the secular world in the Church. A short appendix on St Hilda follows, originally published for the centenary of St Hilda’s, Oxford, but included here to remind us of the role women played in at least the early stages of the Anglo-Saxon Church.

For most of the essays, particularly the older ones, Wormald provided updated references and discussions on what aspects of his work needed revision in the light of subsequent research. This sets the book apart from many “greatest hits” collections because we get a sense of academic discourse, with the author engaging his critics and looking for new ways to take his ideas forwards. A new appendix to his famous 1978 article on *Beowulf* is a case in point, providing new statistical evidence on the frequency of names in different periods to support an early dating of the epic’s core. Alas Wormald’s early death prevented him from writing the new introduction to the collection he planned. It also means that the book takes on added significance as a work of reflection, providing testimony to how Anglo-Saxon studies has developed thanks to Patrick’s work. The volume will readily find an important place in reading lists on Anglo-Saxon England and the early Middle Ages in general.

James T. Palmer

University of Nottingham
Written by the late Patrick Wormald, one of the leading authorities on Bede’s life and work over a 30-year period, this book is a collection of studies on Bede and early English Christian society. A collection of studies on Bede, the greatest historian of the English Middle Ages, and the early English church.

Integrates the religious, intellectual, political and social history.