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Writing Medieval Biography

750–1250

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF
PROFESSOR FRANK BARLOW

EDITED BY
David Bates, Julia Crick and Sarah Hamilton



Frank Barlow

Painting by Michael Noakes 1976

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Preface

The genesis of this volume was an evening telephone conversation between the late Timothy Reuter and myself which concluded that a conference must be organised in Frank Barlow's honour. The subject of the conference chose itself instantly. Frank has published a vast amount during his career, including numerous editions of texts and a textbook still in print fifty years after it was first published. But the writing of biography has been such a significant and influential part of his work that simply no other topic was appropriate. If memory serves me right, it was Tim who was the driving force at the start. His tragic death so soon after the conference started to be planned deprived it of all that his imagination and energy would have brought to it. It also took from him the opportunity to pay tribute to a historian whom he had long admired deeply – I well remember the first conversation we ever had, on a Paddington-bound train in the early 1970s, after the interviews for a lectureship at Exeter in which Tim was successful and I was not, in which he expressed to me this admiration warmly and fulsomely. He and Frank thus became colleagues until Frank's retirement in 1976 and remained friends thereafter. While this volume is dedicated to Frank Barlow, it must also be dedicated to the memory of Tim Reuter.

The organisation of the conference, entitled 'The Limits of Medieval Biography' and held at the University of Exeter between 10 and 12 July in 2003, was taken forward with exemplary efficiency by Julia Crick and Sarah Hamilton. Invitations to take part elicited an extraordinarily enthusiastic response and in all eighteen talks were given. All of us were delighted that Frank attended the conference.

It was clear to all involved that the talks had sufficient thematic cohesion and originality to merit publication in a volume. Enthusiasm to publish was therefore unanimous. Only two of the speakers, Robert Bartlett and Judith Green, were (for good reasons) unable to contribute; they and Nicholas Orme, who presented a warm and entertaining tribute to Frank, are, however, every bit as much full participants in this project as the editors and the sixteen contributors. An Introduction to the essays, largely written by Julia Crick and Sarah Hamilton, has been added in order to reflect on the general issues of the writing of biography in the Middle Ages and of medieval people by modern authors.

The British Academy and the University of Exeter provided necessary and immensely helpful financial support for the conference. The editors are also grateful to Boydell and Brewer for accepting the volume, to Caroline Palmer for her support, and to Samantha Jordan for all her hard work in preparing the text for publication.

The three books *Edward the Confessor*, *William Rufus* and *Thomas Becket*, first published in 1970, 1983 and 1986 respectively, stand in the forefront of Frank's biographical contribution, but an interest in character and personality inform many others of his publications and also the way in which he taught his