

Who are the scribes?

MEDIEVAL LITERACY

Writing on parchment using a quill and ink was a specialist skill. To begin with, writing was limited to texts that were intended to be read within churches or by poets and lawmen. These texts were written in books, booklets or on scrolls. When charters were first produced it was by scribes who were familiar with this context of writing.

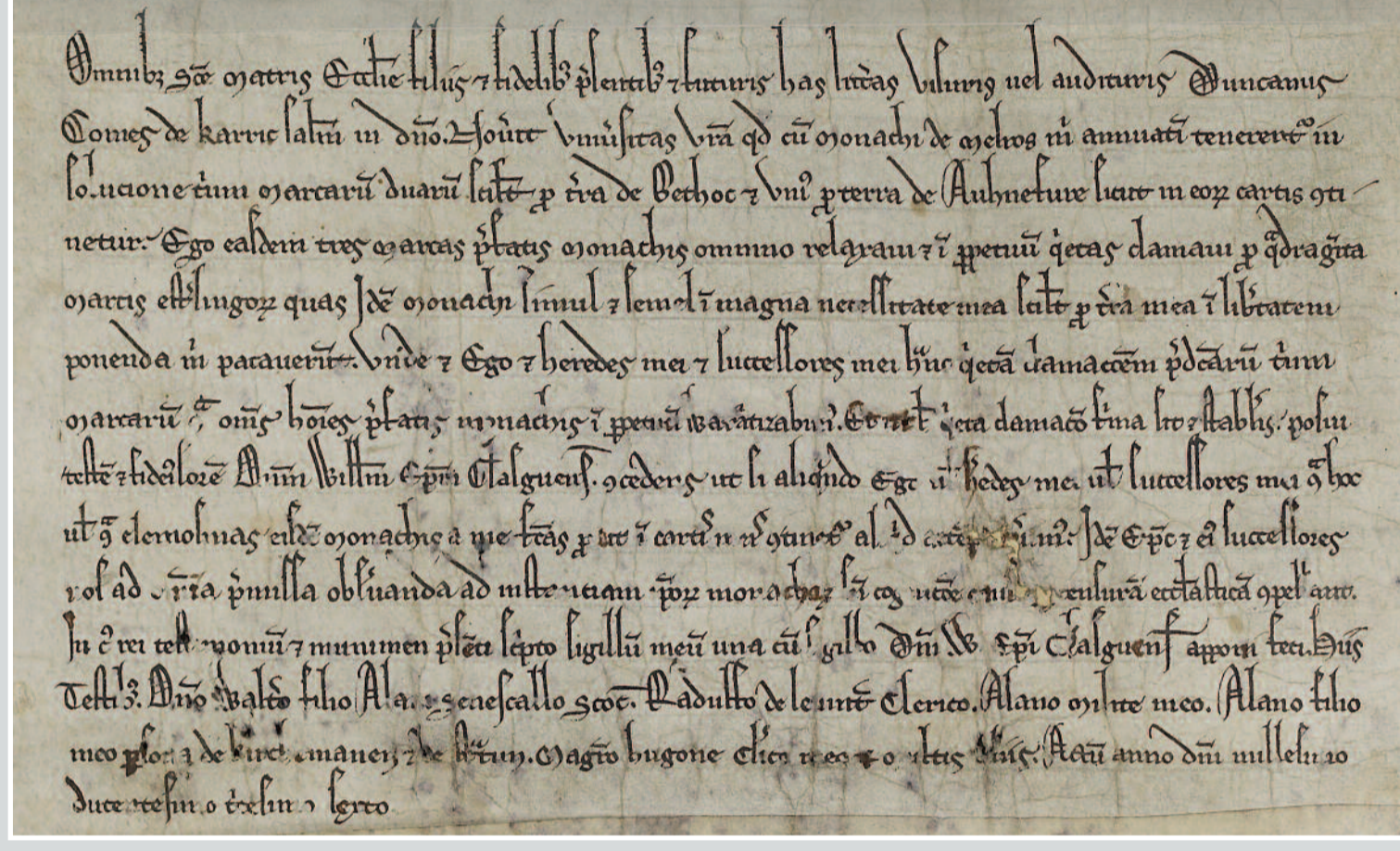
WHO ARE THE SCRIBES?

Monasteries often produced their own charters when they were the beneficiary. A draft charter would be presented to the donor who would then, once they were happy with it, attach their seal to it. Occasionally, however, the charter would be produced by a scribe in the donor's household, particularly if the donor was the king.

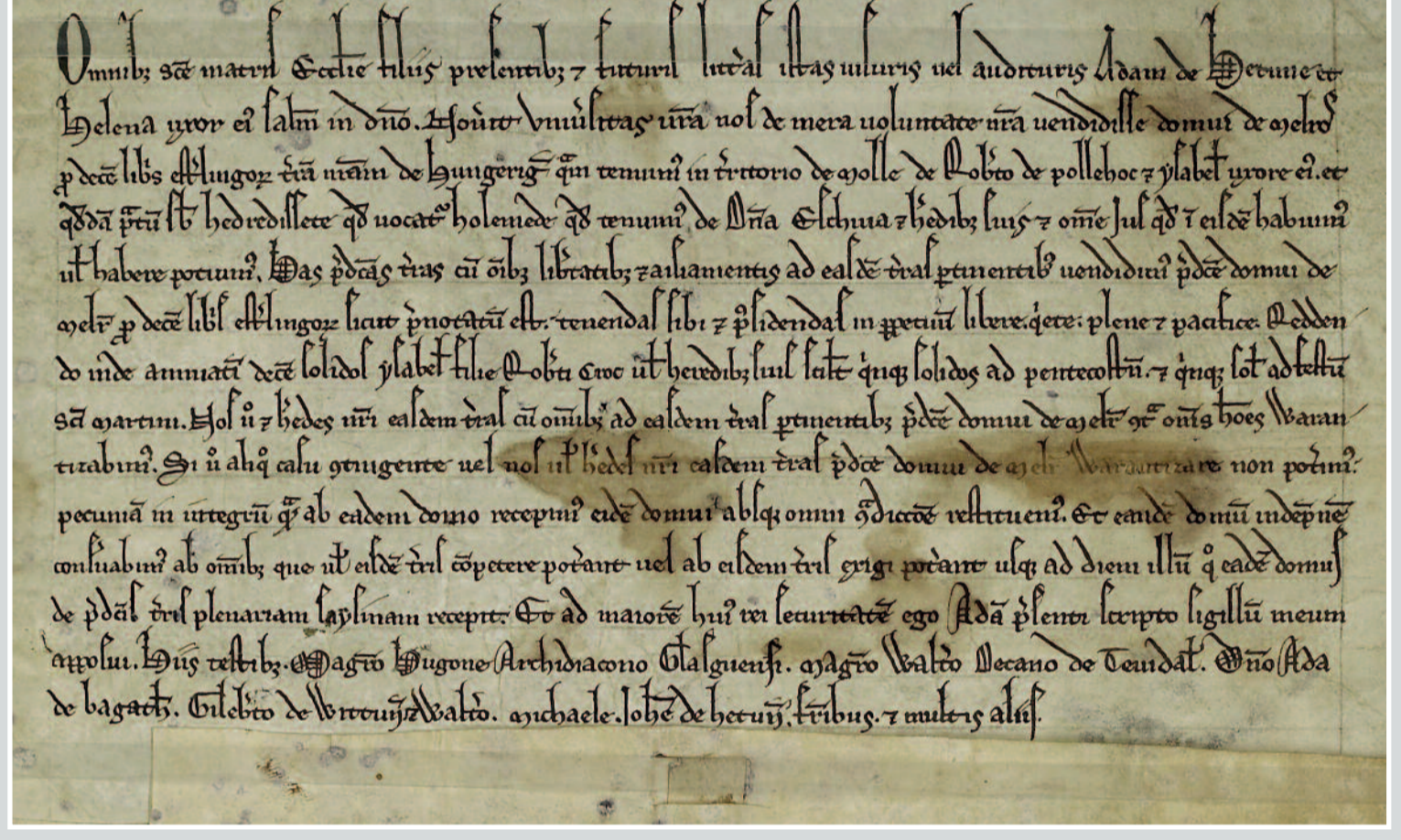
Only two charter scribes give us their names. How, therefore, can we tell whether a scribe is working for the donor or the beneficiary? The key is to find charters with the same handwriting.

EXAMPLE OF A BENEFICIARY SCRIBE

Here are two charters to Melrose Abbey. They are from different donors but have been written by the same scribe. This shows he was a Melrose scribe.



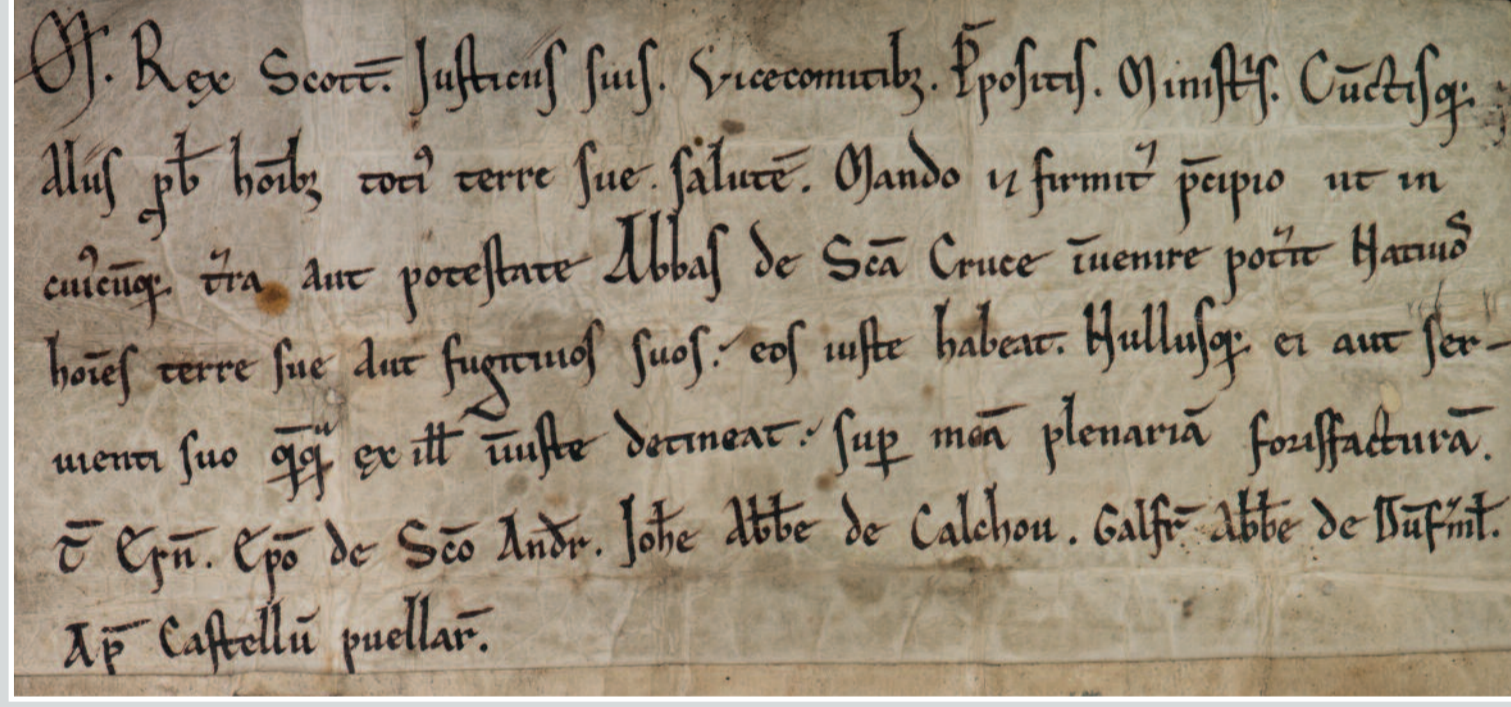
Charter of Duncan, Earl of Carrick (1236)



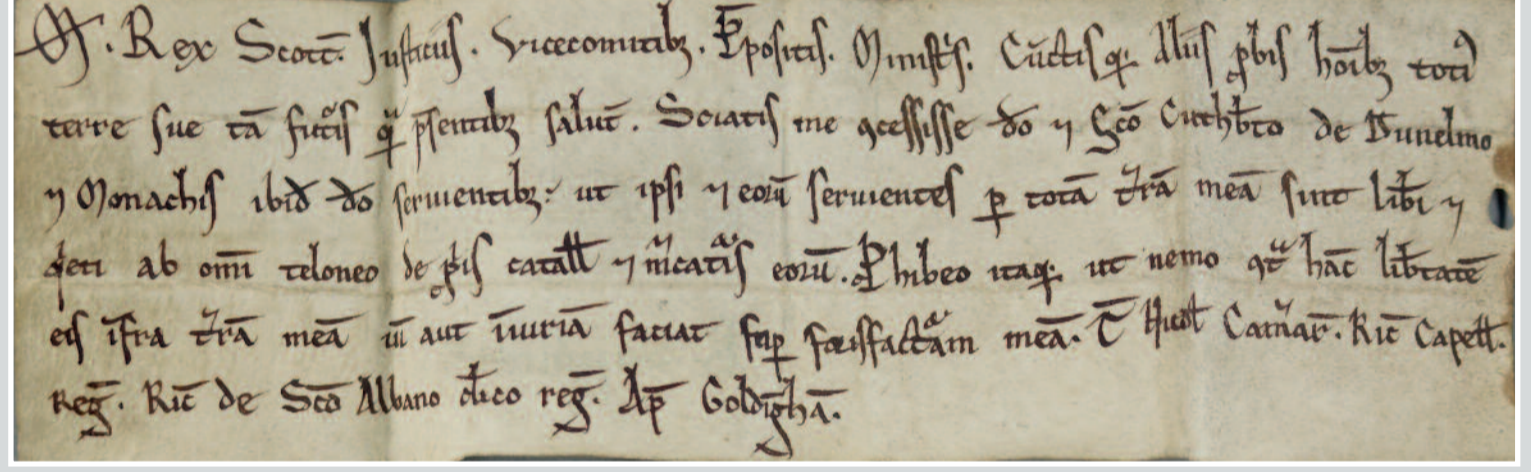
Charter of Adam of Heiton and his wife Helen (between 1227 and 1238)

EXAMPLE OF A DONOR SCRIBE

In these examples, the same scribe has written charters of King Malcolm IV (1153–1165) for two different beneficiaries. This shows that he was a royal scribe.



Charter to Holyrood Abbey



Charter to Coldingham Priory

