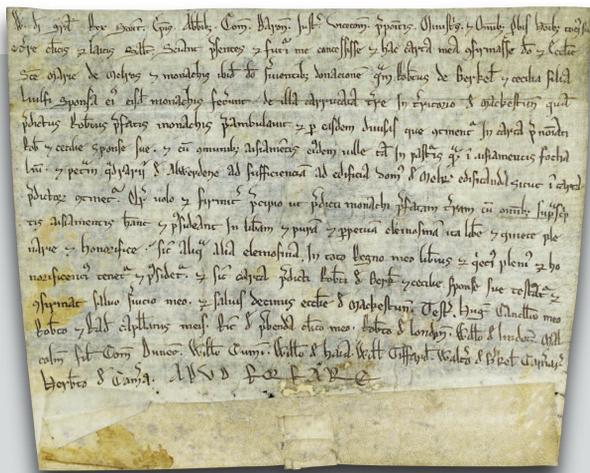


The creativity of royal scribes

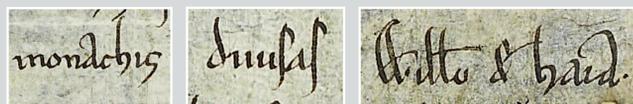
From the late 1180s, **royal scribes** became increasingly creative in embellishing their handwriting. Like the monastic scribes, they had complete freedom to do so. Some of the new elements were derived from cursive writing, in which scribes wrote in a more fluid way.



Charter of King William to Melrose Abbey (between 1189 and 1194)



Charter of King William to Holyrood Abbey (4 November 1203)



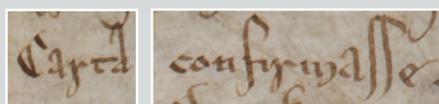
In these specific examples of cursive writing, the scribe has kept the pen on or close to the parchment as he wrote, rather than frequently lifting the quill.



There are a couple of features that this royal scribe was particularly keen on. The squiggle (or 'rushing') at the end of these words was a stylistic addition, derived ultimately from papal documents.

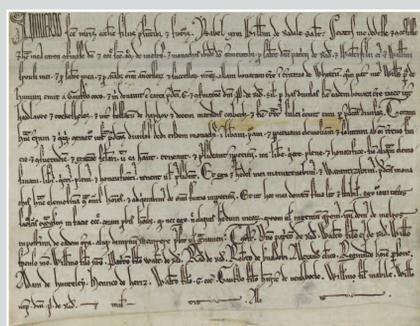


Normally in cursive writing, the straight strokes are curved or looped allowing the scribe to write more swiftly.

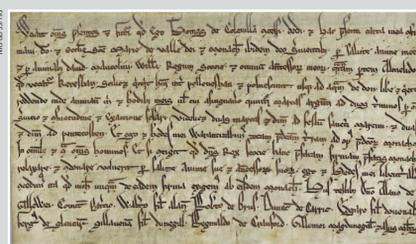


He also wrote the **r** in a single stroke with a loop at the bottom (e.g. in *Carta* and *confirmasse*). The consistency with which he did this suggests that, for him, it was not only a means of writing quickly but also a self-conscious feature of style.

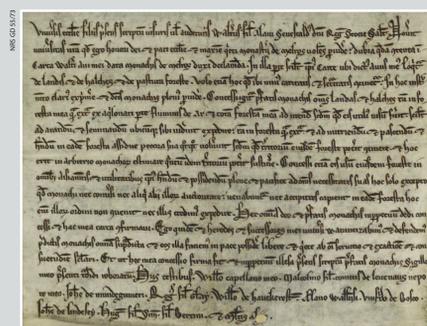
From the 1190s, **monastic scribes** began to use some of these features, and also embellished the handwriting of their charters in other ways, too. From this point onwards, all scribes used some creativity in their handwriting for charters. The examples below from Melrose Abbey show that within the same community in the same period there was flexibility in how elaborately scribes could write charters.



Charter of Isabel, wife of William of Ryedale (late twelfth or early thirteenth century)



Charter of Thomas de Coleville (between 1214 and 1219)



Charter of Walter son of Alan, Steward of Scotland (between 1208 and 1241)

It is clear that, when writing charters, monastic scribes could adapt their normal handwriting in ways that were limited only by their own skill, creativity and ambition. When they did so, they often showed an awareness of documents written by royal scribes.

This has the potential to offer a new perspective on the growth of royal authority. We can begin to see this not simply in terms of institutional developments, but in how non-royal scribes looked to the king in an abstract way when thinking about property rights as they wrote charters.

