

*Plympton Priory:
A House of Augustinian Canons
in South-Western England
in the Late Middle Ages*



Allison D. Fizzard

Series Editor: Wim Janse

Plympton Priory

Brill's Series in Church History

(Formerly Known as *Kerkhistorische Bijdragen*)

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VOLUME 30

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South-Western England in the Late Middle Ages

By

Allison D. Fizzard



BRILL

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2008



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On the cover: The Seal of the Priory of SS. Peter and Paul, Plympton, Devon.

Source: George Oliver. *Monasticon Dioecesis Exoniensis*. Exeter: P.A. Hannaford; London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1846.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A C.I.P. record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISSN 1572-4107

ISBN 978 90 04 16301 0

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TO VERA AND ROBERT JONES
AND
TO THE MEMORY OF JEAN COLLINS
(1952–2003)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the product of a decade of interest in—one might say fascination with—the history of a house of Augustinian canons located in Plympton, Devon, in the Middle Ages. I wrote my doctoral dissertation on this topic at the University of Toronto, and my first debt is to those at the university who oversaw my doctoral research from the beginnings of the project. My great thanks go to my supervisor, Michael Gervers, whose patience and unfailing good humour were invaluable during the writing of the dissertation; to Joseph Goering, who helped me understand the religious context in which the Augustinian canons functioned and who stepped in as acting supervisor at the doctoral defence when Dr. Gervers was overseas; and to A. George Rigg, who read over my Latin transcriptions and translations with a keen eye. I would also like to express my gratitude to Janet Burton, who served as the external examiner for the dissertation; her comments were extremely useful in helping to make the final version of the text a much better work. My thanks are also due to Karen Jankulak, who was a doctoral student at the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto during my time there and was a fount of information on the religious history of Devon and Cornwall. It was Karen who first introduced me to the Rev. George Oliver and the *Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis*, a book which provided texts important for this study. Ann M. Geddes, who was working on a dissertation on the Augustinian canons of Lanthony by Gloucester while I was studying those of Plympton, was generous, too, in sharing her thoughts on the history of this order. I would like to express my boundless appreciation as well to Nicholas Orme of the University of Exeter, whose advice on matters pertaining to the ecclesiastical history of the diocese of Exeter has always been very welcome. Dr. Orme also gave me a tour of Exeter Cathedral in 1999 which helped bring alive the history of that most magnificent building. I would also like to thank Frank Barlow and Oliver Padel for responding to queries by mail during the writing of the doctoral dissertation.

I have also been extremely fortunate to have met people in Plymouth and Plympton whose interest in the project served as additional motivation for its completion. I would like to thank John Boulden of the Plympton St. Mary Civic Society, who kindly showed me around

Plympton during my first visit to the area in 1996 and shared me with his knowledge of the history of Plympton. Graham Carne and Joseph Clarke of Plymouth have also offered me warm hospitality during visits to Plymouth; I have enjoyed hearing their memories of volunteering on excavations at the priory site.

My thanks must also go to F. Donald Logan for his wise counsel and encouragement in the years since the dissertation was completed. The task of revising the dissertation and expanding upon it in order to turn it into a book was aided immeasurably by comments from Donald, who read the whole manuscript. Any errors or omissions in the final text must, of course, remain the author's responsibility.

I would like to recognize as well the assistance I have received from the staff of the following institutions: the Bodleian Library at Oxford, the British Library, the National Archives at Kew, the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, the Devon Record Office at Exeter, the West Country Studies Library in Exeter, and the Archives of the Dean and Chapter at Exeter Cathedral. I would like to thank in particular John Draisey, County Archivist at the Devon Record Office. My gratitude must also go to the Inter-Library Loan staff at the University of Regina, especially Susan Robertson-Krezel and Margaret Steffensen, without whose superhuman efforts to find obscure and ancient sources this work could not have been completed. I do not know what magic they worked to convince an institution to loan out an original copy of Pole's *Collections Towards a Description of the County of Devon*—a book printed in the late eighteenth century!—but I am thankful that they have done their best to obtain everything I have requested.

I would also like to thank the Earl of Devon for permission to publish transcriptions of documents from the Courtenay Cartulary (Devon Record Office TD 51).

I would also like to express my gratitude to Wim Janse and Boris van Gool at Brill for their patience and their interest in this project. They answered all my queries with great forbearance, and for that I am very appreciative.

On a more personal level, I would like to thank my family for the constant love and support which has been instrumental in helping me make progress with my academic work. My parents, Garfield and Elva Fizzard, have been understanding and encouraging from the inception of this project. I owe particular debts to my father for his assistance in the creation of the maps which illustrate this book and to my mother for mailing jars of home-made partridgeberry jam from Newfoundland

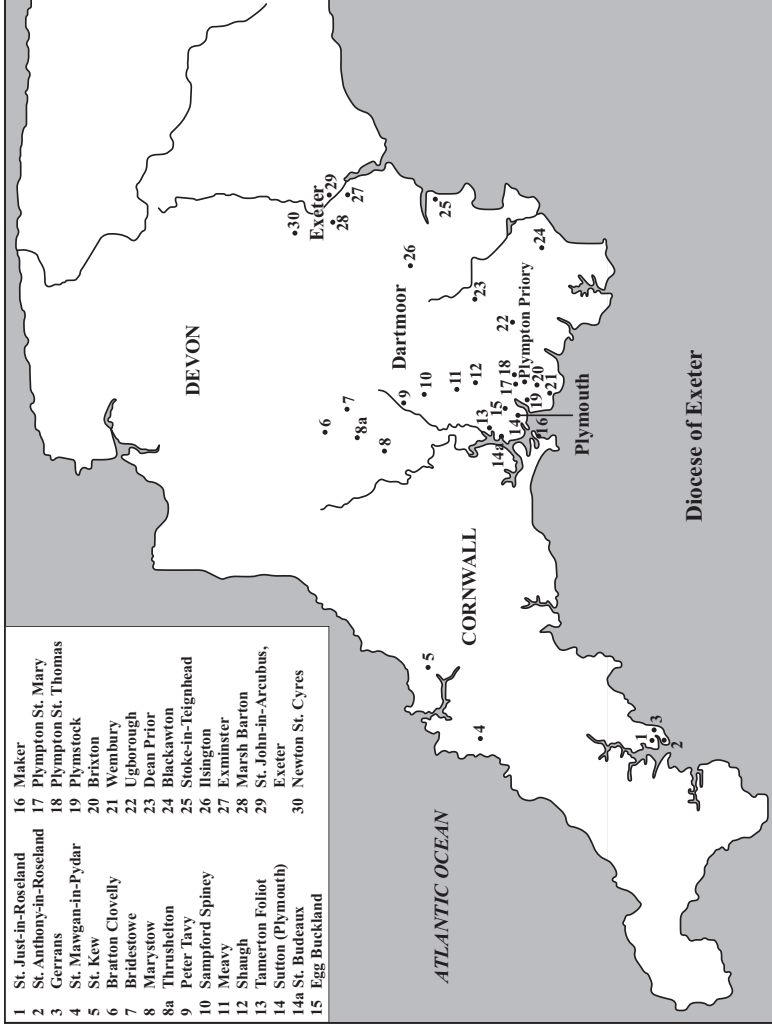
at opportune moments. My thanks also go to Anne, Blake, and Cindy for being wonderful listeners, and especially to Molly, John, and Max—*pueris carissimis*—for being the constant delights that they are. And to my friends in Saskatchewan, Ontario, Newfoundland, and the United States: thank you, all of you, for your generosity of spirit and many kindnesses over the years.

I would like to conclude these acknowledgements by elaborating on the dedication of this book. When I was nineteen and a summer student working in London, Jean Collins extended the hand of friendship to me, welcoming me into her home in Kent that year and during subsequent visits to the United Kingdom. Through Jean I came to know her mother, Vera, and her stepfather, Robert Jones, who have invited me to stay with them at their home in Devon on many occasions. Bob and Vera have driven me to the four corners of Devon and have instilled in me a love of that county that has borne fruit in this work. I owe them, and Jean—who passed away in 2003—so much; it is to be hoped that this book, in some small way, will be a testament to all that they have given me.

ABBREVIATIONS

- Bearman Bearman, R. "Introduction," *Charters of the Redvers Family and the Earldom of Devon 1090–1217*. Devon and Cornwall Record Society, New Series, vol. 37. 1994.
- BF *The Book of Fees, commonly called the Testa de Nevill, reformed from the Earliest MSS. by the Keeper of the Records, 1198–1293*. 1920–31.
- BR A.B. Emden. *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*. 1957–59.
- CCR *Calendar of Close Rolls*. 1900–63.
- CFR *Calendar of Fine Rolls*. 1911–62
- CIM *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*. 1916–37.
- CIPM *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*.
- CPL *Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters*. 1893–in progress.
- CPMR Worth, R.N. *Calendar of the Plymouth Municipal Records*. 1893.
- CPP *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Petitions to the Pope*, vol. 1, A.D. 1342–1419. 1896.
- CPR *Calendar of Patent Rolls*. 1891–1916.
- CRR *Curia Regis Rolls*. 1922–in progress.
- CS I *Councils and Synods, with other Documents relating to the English Church, I 871–1204*. Eds. Dorothy Whitelock, Martin Brett, C.N.L. Brooke. 1981.
- CS II *Councils and Synods, with other Documents relating to the English Church, II 1205–1313*. Eds. F.M. Powicke and C.R. Cheney. 1964
- DB: C *Domesday Book: Cornwall*. Eds. Caroline and Frank Thorn. 1979.
- DB: D *Domesday Book: Devon*. Eds. Caroline and Frank Thorn. 1985.
- DFE *Devon Feet of Fines, vol. 1: 1196–1272*. Ed. O. Reichel. 1912.
- DRO Devon Record Office, Exeter
- EEAE *English Episcopal Acta XI: Exeter 1046–1184 and XII: Exeter 1186–1257*. Ed. Frank Barlow. 1996.
- FA *Inquisitions and Assessments relating to Feudal Aids, with other Analogous Documents... 1284–1431*. 1899–1921.

- MA* Dugdale, Sir William. *Monasticon Anglicanum*. Eds. J. Caley, H. Ellis, and B. Bandinel. 1817–30.
- MDE* Oliver, George. *Monasticon Dioecesis Exoniensis*. 1846.
- MRH* Knowles, Dom David and R.N. Hadcock. *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales*. 2nd edition. 1971.
- PND* Gover, J.E.B., A. Mawer, F.M. Stenton eds. *Place-Names of Devon*. 1931–32. Rpt. 1969, 1973.
- PRS* *Pipe Roll Society Publications*. London, 1884-in progress.
- RBE* *Red Book of the Exchequer*. Rolls Series, vols. 99–101. 1896.
- RC* *Charters of the Redvers Family and the Earldom of Devon 1090–1217*. Ed. R. Bearman. Devon and Cornwall Record Society. 1994.
- Reg. Brantyngham* *Register of Thomas Brantyngham, Bishop of Exeter (1370–1394)*. Ed. F.C. Hingeston-Randolph. 1901–06.
- Reg. Bronescombe* *The Register of Bishop Walter Bronescombe*. Ed. O.F. Robinson. Canterbury and York Society, 1995, 1999, 2003.
- Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil* *The Registers of Bishop Walter Bronescombe (A.D. 1257–1280), and Peter Quivil (A.D. 1280–1291), Bishops of Exeter, with some Records of the Episcopate of Bishop Thomas de Bytton (A.D. 1292–1307) also the Taxation of Pope Nicholas IV A.D. 1291 (Diocese of Exeter)*. Ed. F.C. Hingeston-Randolph. 1889.
- Reg. Grandisson* *Register of John de Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter (1327–65)*. Ed. F.C. Hingeston-Randolph, 1894–99.
- Reg. Lacy* *Register of Edmund Lacy, Bishop of Exeter, 1420–55: Registrum Commune*. Ed. G.R. Dunstan. Canterbury and York Society, vols. 60–3, 66. 1963–72.
- Reg. Stapeldon* *Register of Walter de Stapeldon, Bishop of Exeter (1395–1419)*. Ed. F.C. Hingeston-Randolph. 1892.
- Sanders I. Sanders. *English Baronies: A Study of their Origins and Descent 1086–1327*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960.
- TDA* *Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature, and Art*.
- TNA The National Archives (incorporating the Public Record Office), Kew, United Kingdom.



Map 1. The Churches, Chapels, and Cells of Plympton Priory.



Map 2. Plympton and its Environs.



Fig. 1. The Seal of the Priory of SS. Peter and Paul, Plympton, Devon.

Source: George Oliver. *Monasticon Dioecesis Exoniensis*. Exeter: P.A. Hannaford; London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1846.

INTRODUCTION

[The priory] was happy at least in this respect of having no history until it was overwhelmed in the wholesale dissolution and destruction of religious houses in the reign of Henry VIII.

J. Mercer Cox, *Plympton St. Mary: The Priory, the Church, and the Parish*

I beg to differ with the late Reverend Cox, whose statement I hope this book will disprove. The Augustinian priory of Saints Peter and Paul in Plympton, Devon, England, did indeed have a history, the study of which reveals a great deal about the characteristics of this religious order and its place in medieval religion and society. From the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, Plympton Priory was an integral part of the social fabric of the counties of Devon and Cornwall, attracting benefactions, holding extensive lands, possessing the rights of presentation to numerous churches, receiving tithes, and exercising considerable control over economic activity in the town of Plymouth. The Augustinian canons who resided at the priory over the centuries, whether they always desired to be or not, were intimately connected with a range of groups in the medieval West Country. An exploration of the foundation, endowment, and administration of Plympton Priory increases our knowledge of the links between institutions and society in the diocese of Exeter in this period. Such an analysis also contributes to current scholarly discussions about the roles, obligations, and spiritual goals of the Augustinian canons.

The Augustinian canons were a religious order that came into being in the eleventh century when groups of priests known as canons began to express an interest in practicing the “full common life.”¹ In this mode of living, private property was forbidden and the possessions of the community were held in common. The canons also shared

¹ A very helpful survey of the development of the canonical order up to the thirteenth century is Charles Dereine’s ‘Chanoines: Des origines au XIIIe s.,’ in *Dictionnaire d’histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, t. XII (1953), cols. 353–405. The first two chapters of J.C. Dickinson’s *The Origins of the Austin Canons and their Introduction into England* (London, 1950) discuss the early history of the regular canons on the Continent, as well.

dormitories and refectories and committed themselves to celibacy. The aim of pursuing this “full common life” was to emulate the way of life of the apostles, the *vita apostolica*, which has long served as an ideal for those seeking perfection in their earthly existence.² The main scriptural authority for the view that the apostles lived communally and shared their goods were the passages in Acts, chapter 4, verses 32–7. For a fuller guide to the practice of this life, many groups of canons eventually adopted several documents attributed to St. Augustine for guidance on the proper mode of pursuing the *vita apostolica*.³ These documents, collectively known as the Rule of St. Augustine, grew in popularity with canons all over Europe, who generally became known as Augustinian canons.⁴

From the second half of the eleventh century onwards, communities of regular canons began to appear all over Europe, after having originally been concentrated in southern France and Italy. These early Continental houses might be either new foundations or collegiate churches or cathedral chapters which had been regularized. The history of these houses of Augustinian canons has long attracted attention from French, German, and Italian scholars, although still rather less than other religious orders such as the Benedictines and the Cistercians. An important collection of the contributions of predominantly Continental scholars to this field is the two-volume publication of conference proceedings from 1959 entitled *La vita comune del clero nei secoli XI e XII*.⁵ Particular congregations of Augustinian canons—such as those of

² For a discussion of the interpretation of this ideal by monks, canons, and friars, see M.-H. Vicaire, *L'Imitation des apôtres: moines, chanoines, mendiants (IV–XIII^e siècles)* (Paris, 1963).

³ George Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule* (Oxford, 1987) provides an edition and translation of the Rule of St. Augustine, as well as a survey on the opinions of scholars on the complex textual history and authorship of these documents. The many works of Luc Verheijen, especially *La Règle de saint Augustin I: Tradition manuscrite; II: Recherches historiques* (Paris, 1967), are also invaluable for a clearer understanding of these very muddy waters.

⁴ However, some groups of regular canons—such as the Premonstratensians, who adapted the Rule of St. Augustine to reflect the spirit of the Cistercians—came to form their own congregations, and consequently are not usually referred to as Augustinian canons but rather by their own names. English scholars often use the term “Austin” rather than “Augustinian.”

⁵ Atti della settimana di studio: Mendola, 1959. Pubblicazioni dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore 3.2 and 3, Miscellanea del Centro di Studi Medioevali 3 (Milan, 1962).

Arrouaise⁶ and St. Victor⁷—have been the subjects of a number of studies, as have canons in particular regions such as Limousin⁸ and Languedoc.⁹ The German scholar Stefan Weinfurter has also published research into the involvement of the regular canons in the cure of souls and the patronage of the regular canons by Archbishop Conrad I of Salzburg.¹⁰

Some scholars have also sought to address the contributions of the Augustinian canons to the realm of medieval spirituality.¹¹ Caroline Walker Bynum investigated canonical spirituality in her doctoral dissertation, later published as *Docere Verbo et Exemplo: An Aspect of Twelfth-Century Spirituality*, as well as in an essay in her book *Jesus as Mother*.¹² Bynum concluded that the lives of monks and canons differed little in terms of the activities they engaged in, but that the regular canons did display in their writings of spiritual instruction a commitment to the “edification” by word and example (*docere verbo et exemplo*) of other human beings.¹³ While this view has not won full approval,¹⁴ Bynum’s

⁶ See Ludovicus Milis, *L’Ordre des chanoines réguliers d’Arrouaise: son histoire et son organisation, de la fondation de l’abbaye-mère (vers 1090) à la fin des chapitres annuels (1471)* (Bruges, 1969). For a discussion of the small number of houses of the Arrouaisian and Victorine congregations in England, see J.C. Dickinson, ‘English Regular Canons and the Continent in the Twelfth Century,’ *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 1 (1951), 71–89.

⁷ See Fourier Bonnard, *Histoire de l’abbaye royale et de l’ordre des chanoines réguliers de St. Victor de Paris...* (Paris, 1904–08); Jean-Pierre Willesme, ‘Saint-Victor et la famille victorine (XII^e–XIII^e siècles),’ in *Naissance et fonctionnement des réseaux monastiques et canoniaux: Actes du premier colloque international du CERCOR (Saint-Étienne, 1991)* and ‘Saint-Victor au temps d’Abélard,’ in *Abélard en son temps: Actes du colloque international organisés du 9e centenaire de la naissance de Pierre Abélard, 14–19 mai 1979* (Paris, 1981).

⁸ The articles of Jean Becquet on the canons of the Limousin have been collected into one volume, *Vie canoniale en France aux X^e–XII^e siècles* (London, 1985).

⁹ *Le Monde des chanoines (XI^e–XIV^e siècles)*, ed. M.-H. Vicaire (Toulouse, 1989).

¹⁰ Stefan Weinfurter, *Salzburger Bistumsreform und Bischofspolitik im 12. Jahrhundert: Der Erzbischof Konrad I. von Salzburg (1106–1147) und die Regularkanoniker* (Cologne, 1975).

¹¹ For a brief overview of this subject, with particular emphasis on the writings of Hugh and Richard of St. Victor, see Grover A. Zinn, ‘The Regular Canons’ in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, eds. B. McGinn and J. Meyendorff (New York, 1985), pp. 218–28; see also J. Leclercq, ‘La spiritualité des chanoines réguliers,’ in *La vita comune del clero*, pp. 117–41.

¹² *Docere Verbo et Exemplo: An Aspect of Twelfth-Century Spirituality*, Harvard Theological Studies 31 (Missoula, Montana, 1979); ‘The Spirituality of the Regular Canons in the Twelfth Century,’ in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982).

¹³ ‘Spirituality of Regular Canons,’ in *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 36–58.

¹⁴ See, for example, the remarks of Christopher N.L. Brooke, ‘Monk and Canon: Some Patterns in the Religious Life of the Twelfth Century,’ in *Monks, Hermits, and the Ascetic Tradition*, vol. 22 of *Studies in Church History* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 127–9.

work has helped bring attention to the body of spiritual writings produced by regular canons in the twelfth century.

Despite the interest of certain scholars in the Continental Augustinian canons and in the spirituality of the canons, the order has been relatively neglected by scholars of English monasticism, at least in comparison to other religious orders. This is surprising, given that there were over two hundred houses of this order in England during the Middle Ages. Indeed, the magisterial works of David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* and *The Religious Orders in England*,¹⁵ contain fairly brief treatments of the Augustinian canons. Lack of scholarly interest in this order may have been due to the ambiguity over the status of the canons: if they were priestly in character rather than monastic, ought they really to be studied by historians of English monasticism? The existence of twelfth-century controversialist writings written by monks and canons regarding the status and nature of the canonical order demonstrates that even at the time of their expansion, the regular canons suffered from uncertainty as to their religious identity.¹⁶

Another factor resulting in scholarly neglect may be the fact that most Augustinian houses in England were small, poor, and undistinguished, even though the order boasted some wealthy and prominent houses such as Cirencester Abbey, Waltham Abbey, and Walsingham Priory. As well, relative to the Cistercians and the Benedictines, the Augustinian canons in England did not produce a great number of shining lights in the realms of literature, theology, and philosophy, although there are some notable exceptions such as Alexander Neckham, Peter of Cornwall, Alexander of Canons Ashby, and Andrew of Wigmore in the twelfth century and Walter Hilton, author of the *Scale of Perfection*, in the fourteenth.¹⁷

¹⁵ *The Monastic Order in England*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 139–42; *The Religious Orders in England* (Cambridge, 1948–59), vol. 1, pp. 28–31, 316–7; vol. 2, pp. 289, 292–3, 361.

¹⁶ For discussion of these polemical writings, see chapter five of J.C. Dickinson, *The Origins of the Austin Canons*; Caroline W. Bynum, 'Spirituality of Regular Canons,' in *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 22–58; Christopher N.L. Brooke, 'Monk and Canon,' pp. 109–29.

¹⁷ For the works of the two Alexanders and Peter of Cornwall, see A. George Rigg, *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature, 1066–1422* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 117–22, 127–8, 131–3; see also R.W. Hunt, 'English Learning in the Late Twelfth Century,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fourth series, 29 (1936), 19–35; Beryl Smalley, 'Andrew of St. Victor, Abbot of Wigmore,' *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, t. X (1938), 358–73.

The most important contributions to our knowledge of the English Augustinians were made by J.C. Dickinson. In addition to his many articles on the canons, Dickinson published in 1950 *The Origins of the Austin Canons and their Introduction into England*. This book is invaluable for its insights into the varied facets of the early history of this order in England. Dickinson's balanced and sound approach, based on a thorough familiarity with published and unpublished sources, remains the standard against which all other studies of the English Augustinian canons must be measured. Unfortunately, this book covers the history of the order only up to the year 1215, and as a consequence the story of the English canons in the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries remains relatively neglected.¹⁸ The only other substantial book that has been published on the canons in England to date is David Robinson's *The Geography of Augustinian Settlement in Medieval England and Wales*.¹⁹ The title of this work belies the range of its contents: Robinson's book is an extensive analysis of the growth, endowment, and economies of Augustinian houses. Robinson's careful and critical approach to the assessments of the income of religious houses—such as the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* and the *Taxatio* of Pope Nicholas IV—and his attention to archaeological evidence are particularly instructive.

In recent years, other scholars have considered the English canons in discussions of ecclesiastical or monastic history. Janet Burton, for example, devoted a chapter of her survey of the history of the religious orders in Britain in the High Middle Ages to the canons.²⁰ One question raised by historians is whether the canons, unlike cloistered monks, were involved in attending to the spiritual needs of the people. As priests, it would have made sense, some contend, for the canons to have been responsible for the cure of souls of those who attended the churches over which the canons had rights.²¹ The fact that there is little hard evidence to support this contention, at least for the early

¹⁸ This situation is ameliorated somewhat by the publication of the surviving records of the general chapters of the English Augustinian canons which began in the thirteenth century and survived into the sixteenth (*Chapters of the Augustinian Canons*, ed. H.E. Salter, vol 29 of the Canterbury and York Society Publications [London, 1922]).

¹⁹ David Robinson, *The Geography of Augustinian Settlement in Medieval England and Wales* (Oxford, 1980), 2 vols.

²⁰ *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain, 1000–1300* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 43–62.

²¹ Conversely, Caroline Walker Bynum noted that “clerical status in the twelfth century did not necessarily involve pastoral care or preaching” (*Spirituality of Regular Canons*, p. 54).

years of the order, has not hindered its popularity.²² There have been characterizations of the regular canons as dutiful parish priests who just happened to live in priories and abbeys.²³ Some writers have maintained that the Augustinian canons in England were missionaries to the people,²⁴ and even a preaching order.²⁵ One writer claimed not only that the Augustinian canons acted as ministers to the people, but that they were responsible for the diocesan and parochial organization of England.²⁶ The warnings expressed by Dickinson and Dereine²⁷ about being careful not to over-exaggerate the participation of the canons in the cure of souls ought not to be forgotten.

Indeed, those who wish to assert that the regular canons and the monks fulfilled quite different roles in medieval religion must confront the substantial evidence of similarities of functions and lifestyles of the two. The main original distinction between the canons and their

²² For example, Peter Heath admitted in regard to the renewed interest of the Augustinian canons in obtaining benefices in the later Middle Ages that “evidence of their residence [in their benefices] is hard to find, but that they commonly served the livings they acquired seems probable from the nature of their order” (*The English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation* [Toronto, 1969], p. 178).

²³ For example, L.E. Elliott-Binns, while describing the Augustinian canons as “semi-monastic” by nature, claims that they “regularly undertook parochial duties”; he did not offer evidence which would support this assertion (*Medieval Cornwall* [London, 1955], p. 328n).

²⁴ David Postles, ‘The Austin Canons in English Towns, c. 1100–1350,’ *Historical Research* 66 (1993), 1–20.

²⁵ Crispin Gill, *Plymouth: A New History*, vol. 1 (Newton Abbot, 1971), p. 60. Regarding Plympton Priory, this author states that “the Augustinians were a preaching order of canons who ministered to the people in the parishes round the priory, and whose churches came under priory control.” He goes on to say that the canons either “lived in parishes as normal priests” or appointed vicars.

²⁶ T. Scott Holmes, ‘The Austin Canons in England in the Twelfth Century,’ *Journal of Theological Studies* 5 (1904), 343–56. A critique of the thesis of this article—the sources of which are mysterious, as there are no footnotes—was published in 1923: Egerton Beck, ‘Regulars and the Parochial System in Mediaeval England,’ *Dublin Review* 172 (1923), 235–51. Both of these articles were addressed in depth by J.C. Dickinson in chapter six of *The Origins of the Austin Canons*. Dickinson agreed with Beck that the assumption that donors gave parish churches to the canons hoping that they would serve in them personally is “somewhat anachronistic” (p. 227). However, Dickinson felt that Beck went rather too far in rejecting the possibility that the canons served in any more than a “minute fraction” of their churches (p. 225). Dickinson did conclude “that, so far as the vast majority of houses at least were concerned, there was never any intention that the early inmates should undertake the care of most or all of the parishes given to them” (p. 239).

²⁷ ‘Chanoines,’ *Dictionnaire d’histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, cols. 391–5. Dereine found that although in certain instances regular canons had the opportunity to engage in the cure of souls at parish churches, it was not an essential characteristic of the order.

monastic brethren—the clerical status of the canons—began to break down over the course of the twelfth century as more and more monks were ordained. As Caroline Walker Bynum has said, “despite repeated assertions by scholars that regular canons combined monastic practice with a new orientation towards the cure of souls, no evidence has as yet been presented to demonstrate that the actual life lived in most canonical houses in the twelfth century differed generally from the life in most monastic cloisters.”²⁸ This view is supported by the findings of those who have studied the architectural remains of Augustinian priories and abbeys. They have found that there were no substantial differences in the plans of Augustinian and Benedictine houses.²⁹ It is to be hoped that greater appreciation of the largely monastic nature of most Augustinian houses will lead to a better understanding of their role in English religious history.

Certain scholarly assumptions have also existed about the motivations of those who founded and made gifts to Augustinian houses. Because many patrons (the actual founders or their heirs) and benefactors gave parish churches to the new Augustinian houses of the twelfth century, some scholars have contended that these people made these gifts thinking that the canons would personally serve them. However, benefactors and patrons may possibly have had other motives. This book will place the growth of the Augustinian order in England within the context of the program of the Gregorian Reform and will address the reasons for the popularity of the regular canons amongst reform-minded laypeople and bishops.

In the last few decades, scholarly interest has increased in the relationships between patrons and benefactors and the religious houses they founded, assisted, or endowed. Scholars have paid particular attention to the familial and social networks which existed around religious houses as support mechanisms.³⁰ Such studies have shed a great deal

²⁸ Caroline W. Bynum, ‘Spirituality of Regular Canons,’ in *Jesus as Mother*, p. 28.

²⁹ J.C. Dickinson, ‘Les constructions des premiers chanoines réguliers en Angleterre,’ *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 10 (1967), 184; G.H. Cook, *English Monasteries in the Middle Ages* (London, 1961), p. 180.

³⁰ Some notable studies have been Susan Wood, *English Monasteries and their Patrons in the Thirteenth Century* (London, 1955); J.C. Ward, ‘Foundations in Monastic Endowment: The Foundations of the Clare Family, 1066–1314,’ *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 32 (1981), 427–51; Christopher N.L. Brooke, ‘Princes and Kings as Patrons of Monasteries, Normandy and England,’ in *Il monachesimo e la riforma ecclesiastica (1049–1122)*, *Miscelanea del centro di studi medioevali* 6 (1971), 125–52; Elizabeth Hallam’s ‘Henry II as a Founder of Monasteries,’ *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 28 (1977), 113–32; Emma

of light on lay piety and on the involvement of the royal family, the episcopacy, and the magnates in the patronage of houses of the various orders. However, not a great deal of research has been published on the “networks of patronage” which surrounded Augustinian priories and abbeys. It is evident that more information is needed on who was founding and making gifts to Augustinian houses, how they were connected to each other, why they supported particular houses, what they expected from the canons, and the extent to which their support affected the material success of the Augustinian foundations.

Another field which has been expanding lately is the study of late medieval religion and society, with a particular focus on religion and the laity. Notable surveys of these subjects have been published by R.N. Swanson,³¹ who has addressed the workings of the medieval Church in the lives of ordinary people. Of particular interest have been his analyses of the tensions which flared up from time to time in the later medieval period between parishioners and the parochial clergy. As a consequence of their rights to many parish churches, the Augustinian canons were in a position to be more involved in such disputes than other orders, but to date there has been relatively little investigation into this topic.

A fuller, more accurate view of the activities of the Augustinian canons in medieval English society could be developed through the aid of a greater number of case studies of individual priories and abbeys. Relatively few scholarly studies have been undertaken of English Augustinian houses, however. Generally, the most helpful extended discussions of individual Augustinian houses can be found in the introductions of editions of cartularies of Augustinian houses.³² An important contribution to this field is the doctoral dissertation of Ann

Cownie, ‘Gloucester Abbey, 1066–1135: An Illustration of Religious Patronage in Anglo-Norman England,’ in D. Bates and A. Curry, *England and Normandy in the Middle Ages* (1994); Christopher Holdsworth, *The Piper and the Tune: Medieval Patrons and Monks* (Reading, 1991).

³¹ See especially *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215–c. 1515* (Cambridge, 1995); *Church and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1989). For surveys which emphasize Church-State relations and the clergy, see two books by Peter Heath, *Church and Realm, 1272–1461* (London, 1988) and *The English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation* (Toronto, 1969). For the end of the period under review, see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, 2005).

³² Such as those of Waltham Abbey, Cirencester Abbey, Holy Trinity Aldgate Priory, and Launceston Priory.

M. Geddes, “The Priory of Lanthony by Gloucester: An Augustinian House in an English Town, 1136–1401.”³³ Geddes, working with the richest surviving collection of documents of any Augustinian house in England, examined a variety of aspects of the existence of the priory, with the *foci* being on the economic history of the house and its relations with the townspeople of Gloucester.

The subject of this present work is the Augustinian Priory of Saints Peter and Paul at Plympton, in the county of Devon, England. This priory was founded in 1121 by William Warelwast, Bishop of Exeter and became one of the richest Augustinian houses in England.³⁴ Plympton Priory was extraordinary, too, for the proportion of its income which it derived from the parish churches and chapels it controlled: the income from its *spiritualia* was £454 in 1535,³⁵ slightly more than its income from lands and rents, £443. In 1535, Plympton Priory received its spiritual income from appropriated churches (in addition to its conventual church and cells) and chapels, pensions, and half the tithes of a church in Cornwall. The priory also held the right to present clerics (a right known as the advowson) to a number of churches. The possession of such a large spiritual income obviously would have a significant impact on the history of the priory, and raised a host of questions: what were the implications of having rights to so many parish churches and of being the mother-church to so many chapels? How did the *spiritualia* link the canons with the secular clergy and the laity? How did the priory exploit the income from its spiritual sources, and how did it defend its entitlement to them when challenged? Was there any evidence that the canons of Plympton Priory ever exercised the cure of souls in the benefices over which they held the right of presentation?

An analysis of the benefactions of *spiritualia*, as well as *temporalia*, also reveals a great deal about the identities of the benefactors of Plympton Priory and their motivations in making gifts to this house. The search for “networks of patronage” surrounding this Augustinian house has

³³ Submitted to the Johns Hopkins University in 1997.

³⁴ The valuation of the total income of Plympton Priory in 1535 came to just over £898 (not, as in *MRH*, £912; Knowles and Hadcock missed an error in calculation in the printed edition of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*). By comparison, Cirencester Abbey had an income in 1535 of £1071, Merton Priory £960, Leicester Abbey £951, and Waltham Abbey £900.

³⁵ This was the date of valuation of ecclesiastical wealth in England known as the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*. This was a precursor to the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536 and 1539–40.

borne fruit, and groupings of patrons and benefactors, such as the bishops of Exeter and their circles and the magnates of Devon and their vassals, have been identified. Examination of the surviving records of donation has also served to highlight the importance of generosity and support on the part of donors in the early years after the foundation of a house. The later experiences of Plympton Priory paralleled those of so many other religious houses founded in the twelfth century: connections with descendants of the original benefactors tended to weaken over time as the initial enthusiasm surrounding the foundation of a new house diminished. The exception to this scenario in the case of Plympton Priory is its relations with its patrons, the bishops of Exeter, which continued to be of great importance to the house throughout its history.

Despite the wealth of Plympton Priory and its status as an important religious house in the south-west of England, surprisingly little research has been done into its history. Some local antiquarians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries expressed an interest in the town of Plympton: the aforementioned Reverend Cox, who concluded there was little to be known or said of the history of the Priory; John Stevens, who took notes on a variety of documents relating to the priory;³⁶ and J. Brooking Rowe, author of a history of the borough of Plympton Erle.³⁷ Other writers have discussed Plympton Priory to varying degrees in studies with larger canvasses: J.C. Dickinson related the events of the house's founding in *The Origins of the Austin Canons*; R.N. Worth, in his history of Plymouth, recounted the tensions between the citizens of the town and Plympton Priory, which exercised considerable rights there;³⁸ R.J.E. Boggis mentioned the priory a number of times in his history of the diocese of Exeter,³⁹ as did Christopher Holdsworth and Nicholas Orme in their chapters in a book on the ecclesiastical history of Devon and

³⁶ These are now located in the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office in Plymouth and the Local Studies Room of the Plymouth Central Library.

³⁷ *A History of the Borough of Plympton Erle, the Castle and Manor of Plympton, and of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Plympton St. Thomas* (Exeter, 1906). Plympton Priory was situated in the neighbouring town and parish of Plympton St. Mary, and consequently appears infrequently in Brooking Rowe's study.

³⁸ *A History of Plymouth from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Plymouth, 1890). See also the same author's article 'Some Notes on the Earlier Municipal History of Plymouth,' *TDA* 16 (1884), 723–48.

³⁹ *A History of the Diocese of Exeter* (Exeter, 1922).

Cornwall;⁴⁰ Oswald Reichel, in his section on the hundred of Plympton in the *Hundreds of Devon*, translated Henry II's confirmation charter for the priory and commented upon it.⁴¹ However, no study has explored in depth the place and significance of Plympton Priory in the ecclesiastical and social contexts of the region.

A variety of primary sources were consulted for this study. Some charters and other documents from Plympton Priory exist at the Devon Record Office in Exeter and the British Library. The cartulary of the priory has unfortunately been lost, but extracts from this "Registrum de Plympton" (Oxford, Bodleian MS James 23, pp. 151–70) were copied by Richard James in the early seventeenth century.⁴² Further selections from the cartulary were copied later in the century by Thomas Tanner (Oxford, Bodleian MS Tanner 342, ff. 177r–178v, and London, British Library, Harley 6974, ff. 28r–30r).

Another reason for the choice of Plympton Priory as a subject of study was its location in the richly-documented diocese of Exeter. The registers of the bishops of Exeter survive from the mid-thirteenth century onwards and contain a treasure trove of information on the religious houses of the diocese and their relations with the bishops. The registers of the bishops of Exeter from 1257 to 1455 have been published. Recently the records of the bishops of Exeter from the earliest times to the mid-thirteenth century have been edited by Frank Barlow and appear in the series *English Episcopal Acta*.⁴³

Other published sources which have proven invaluable are the extensive series of English chancery and judicial documents. The calendars of Patent Rolls, Close Rolls, Fine Rolls, and the Curia Regis Rolls have provided a great deal of information on Plympton Priory's measures to protect its endowments and assert its rights. The editions of papal letters

⁴⁰ These were published in *Unity and Variety: A History of the Church in Devon and Cornwall*, ed. Nicholas Orme (Exeter, 1991). Nicholas Orme contributed 'From the Beginnings to 1050' and 'The Later Middle Ages and the Reformation.' Christopher Holdsworth wrote 'From 1050 to 1307.'

⁴¹ 'The Hundreds of Plympton and Ermington in Early Times,' *TDA: Special Supplement, The Hundreds of Devon*, vol. 6, 1933. Reichel's observations must be treated with some caution, however, as a number of errors have been detected among them. For the dating of Henry II's confirmation charter to 1158, see Robert W. Eyton, *Court, Household, and Itinerary of Henry II* (Hildesheim, 1974), p. 34.

⁴² Portions of the 'Registrum' have been printed in *Charters of the Redvers Family, English Episcopal Acta: Exeter*, and elsewhere.

⁴³ *English Episcopal Acta XI: Exeter 1046–1184 and XII: Exeter 1186–1257*, ed. Frank Barlow (Oxford, 1996).

and petitions pertaining to England have also shed a great deal of light on the priory's relations with the secular clergy, the episcopate, and the parishioners of its chapels. Charters and other documents relating to the Redvers family, earls of Devon and benefactors of Plympton Priory, were published several years ago by the Devon and Cornwall Record Society.⁴⁴ Most importantly, a great number of documents from a variety of repositories have been made conveniently accessible to scholars of Devon monastic and religious history by the nineteenth-century antiquarian, Reverend George Oliver, in his *Monasticon Dioecesis Exoniensis*.⁴⁵ Another helpful publication is R.N. Worth's *Calendar of the Plymouth Municipal Records*, which provides information on the Plymouth documents which survived fifteenth-century Breton raiders and sixteenth-century rioters. The twelfth-century "Annals" of Plympton, appended to the priory's copy of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* which is kept in the British Library, have also been published.⁴⁶

It is unfortunate that our knowledge of the history of the priory gained from the documentary sources has been supplemented to only a limited extent by evidence derived from archaeological excavations. Soon after its dissolution, virtually the whole structure of the priory was demolished for building materials.⁴⁷ Inhabitants of the town of Plympton St. Mary constructed houses over the priory site in the ensuing centuries, with the result that very little open space in the area has been available to archaeologists. Excavations of the nave of the conventual church, undertaken by Valerie Ledger in 1958 and 1959, provide some insight into phases of building, building materials, and types of decoration employed at the priory.⁴⁸ In 1988, seventeen trenches were

⁴⁴ *Charters of the Redvers Family and the Earldom of Devon 1090–1217*, ed. R. Bearman. Devon and Cornwall Record Society, New Series, vol. 37 (Exeter, 1994).

⁴⁵ The main text was published in 1846 and an additional supplement in 1854.

⁴⁶ 'Annales Plymptonienses,' in *Ungedruckte Anglo-Normannische Geschichtsquellen*, ed. F. Liebermann (Strassburg, 1879).

⁴⁷ A fragment of a wall, which was located at the junction of the west range and the nave of the conventual church, still stands above ground and was consolidated by the Plympton St. Mary Civic Society in 1986; another wall fragment also stands nearby (Paul Gibbons, 'Plympton Priory: The Monument Re-assessed,' in *Archaeological Investigations and Research in Plymouth Vol. 2, 1994–95*, eds. Keith Ray, Sarah Noble, and Sophia Sharif, Plymouth Archaeology Occasional Publications no. 4 [Plymouth, 1998], pp. 102–3). An archway from the priory has also been incorporated into a nearby structure, the Tower House. Fragments of architectural sculpture from the priory also decorate many gardens in the town of Plympton St. Mary.

⁴⁸ Valerie B. Ledger, "[Notes] on Plympton St. Mary Priory," *Medieval Archaeology* 2 (1958): 190; 3 (1959), 303–4; 4 (1960), 139. For example, Ledger found an altar-

dug in the Priory Mill area for an archaeological evaluation before the construction of a housing development on the site.⁴⁹ The most significant medieval finds from the examination of these trenches were evidence of a twelfth-century sunken track, later medieval drains, and a late medieval aqueduct made of stone which probably served as a mill leat. There is, alas, little remaining today at the site of the Priory in Plympton to summon to mind the eventful history of this wealthy and important religious house.

This study enhances our knowledge of a too-long-neglected order which was an important presence on the social and religious landscapes of England in the High and Late Middle Ages. Through an examination of the successes and tribulations of one particular Augustinian house, this book investigates issues of patronage and benefaction, popular piety, and lay-religious relations. It also brings to light a number of unexplored aspects of the religious history of the south-west of England. Of course, given the fact that Plympton Priory existed as an institution for over four hundred years, it has not been possible to explore every dimension of its history in as much depth as one might wish. For example, there will be little examination here of the management of the manors of Plympton Priory or of events at its manor courts, although a few records which illuminate these matters have survived.⁵⁰ The focus of this book, then, will be on the interactions between the canons of Plympton Priory and the laity of Devon and Cornwall, as well as its connections with and place within the ecclesiastical and political spheres of medieval England.

table of Purbeck marble, walls of local limestone covered with patterned wall-plaster, tiled pavement, and fifteenth-century gilded mouldings. There was also evidence of rebuilding in the thirteenth century and a fire in the area of the south transept after the fifteenth century.

⁴⁹ Stewart W. Brown, 'Plympton Priory Mill Site. Excavations, 1988,' City of Plymouth Museum, 1989.

⁵⁰ An early fifteenth-century rental of the priory's lands has survived and is now in the British Library (BL Harley 4766). Notes taken by J. Brooking Rowe from a now lost late fifteenth-century rental are preserved in the West Country Studies Library in Exeter (S333.5/PLY/PLY). For a few fourteenth- and sixteenth-century court rolls of the priory's manors of Maristow and Tamerton, and Shaugh Waterfall, see Plymouth and West Devon Record Office Roborough records 70/30, 31, 80.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FOUNDING OF PLYMPTON PRIORY: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

A crucial time in the lifespan of any religious community was the period surrounding its foundation. In the twelfth century, as the “new orders” flourished across Europe, members of the Church hierarchy and lay society who possessed sufficient means established religious houses of their favoured orders. This chapter will explore the circumstances surrounding the foundation of Plympton Priory in 1121 as well as the larger context in which foundations of English Augustinian houses occurred.

The priory of Saints Peter and Paul at Plympton took the place of an Anglo-Saxon collegiate church which had been located on the same site. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the transformation from collegiate church to priory, we will begin with a survey of what is known about the history of the church at Plympton before its refoundation as a house of Augustinian canons. Although the evidence, sadly, is not as complete as one might wish, from the documents which do survive we can gain some insight into the size of the college’s endowment and its status at the time of the refoundation in 1121. This chapter will also examine the first step in the conversion of college to priory: the royal gift of Plympton minster, along with several other churches, to the bishop of Exeter in the early twelfth century. As the authenticity of the charters concerning this gift has been questioned, some attention will be given to the difficulties surrounding these documents.

The second step in the transformation was the decision of William Warelwast, bishop of Exeter, to disband the collegiate church and to institute Augustinian canons in the place of the secular canons. Bishop William Warelwast was one of several bishops who founded Augustinian priories in this period and consequently this chapter will consider the popularity of the regular canons among episcopal—as well as royal and curial—patrons. We will also examine the connections between the Gregorian Reform, in particular the campaign for clerical celibacy, and the spread of the Augustinian canons in England in the twelfth century. The oft-accepted explanation for the growth of the

canonical order in twelfth-century England is that founders expected the regular canons to undertake the cure of souls in their districts or in the parishes of churches given to them. It will be suggested that this theory is problematic, due to the lack of supporting evidence, and that another possible explanation for the favour given to the regular canons might have been the widespread admiration for their pursuit of the *vita apostolica* and their avowal of celibacy. Of course, if we are to discern contemporary expectations of the Augustinian canons, we must look at the statements made about the canons by founders and other supporters in the twelfth century. While the documentary evidence does not tell us the whole story for the popularity of the canons, it reveals that the reasons for the numerous foundations of houses of this order may have been more complex than has been heretofore thought.

The Pre-conquest Minster at Plympton

A minster, or college,¹ existed at Plympton by the first half of the tenth century. Leland reported that the college was a “free chapel of the foundation of Saxon kings” and that the college consisted of a dean or provost with four prebendaries.² The earliest documentary reference to Plympton minster is in a charter of King Edward the Elder dated between 889 and 909.³ This document records a gift of the king to Asser, bishop of Sherborne, 23 hides of land in Wellington, Bishops Lydeard, and West Buckland in Somerset in return for the minster of “Plymentum.” This would seem to imply that a bishop of Sherborne had been either the original founder of the minster, or had received it as a gift at an earlier time. However, there has been some suggestion

¹ Jeffrey H. Denton (*Royal Free Chapels 1100–1300* [Manchester, 1970], p. 2) distinguished between minsters (Anglo-Saxon foundations where clerics lived communally) and colleges (post-Conquest houses where the clerics had their own prebends). Others, however, use the terms more generally: John Blair states that in the eleventh century “*mynster* and *monasterium* could be used for any kind of religious establishment with a church” (“Introduction: from Minster to Parish Church,” in *Minsters and Parish Churches: the Local Church in Transition, 950–1200*, ed. John Blair [Oxford, 1988], p. 1). Other authors of the essays in *Minsters and Parish Churches* use the terms “minsters” and “colleges” interchangeably. The present writer will do so also for the words “minster,” “college,” and “collegiate church.”

² John Leland, *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535–1543*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith (London, 1907), vol. 1, pt. III, p. 215. Leland is, of course, a late source whose information must be treated with some caution.

³ *DB: D*, vol. 2, notes to #1, 17.

that this charter may not be authentic.⁴ Another early reference can be found in a text in the “Registrum de Plympton” which provides evidence of a line of priests holding the church of St. Andrew, Sutton, in hereditary succession. The first of these, Alfegh, was “one of the priests of Plympton” in the time of King Harold I (1037–40) and he held the church of St. Andrew “in his prebend and in his commons.”⁵ The next documentary evidence for the existence of a minster at Plympton is Domesday Book.⁶

Little is known of the activities of the collegiate church at Plympton, or indeed of many of the minsters in England in the eleventh or early twelfth centuries. Recently there has been some debate as to the development of minsters and their relationship to pastoral care during the Anglo-Saxon period.⁷ There does seem to be agreement, however, that there was great diversity in the status and wealth of these minsters. Evidence from Domesday indicates that some were well-endowed and staffed by a full complement of thirteen canons, some had only a few priests supported by three or four hides of land, and some were in a very decayed state.⁸ In the eleventh century a number of these collegiate churches (as well as cathedral chapters) were developing prebendal systems in which each canon had his own prebend and his own residence; on the other hand, there are a number of instances of colleges and cathedrals moving towards a more communal way of life—using common refectories, living in dormitories, holding property in common, and practising celibacy.⁹ Those communities which

⁴ See *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography*, ed. Peter H. Sawyer (London, 1968), #380, p. 164, for scholarly opinions regarding this charter which range from “authentic” to “possibly genuine” to “doubtful or spurious.” John Blair has deemed the charter “dubious”; see *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), p. 303.

⁵ Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 520–1.

⁶ *DB: D*, #1, 17.

⁷ Eric Cambridge and David Rollason in “Debate: The pastoral organization of the Anglo-Saxon Church: a review of the ‘Minster Hypothesis’,” *Early Medieval Europe* 4 (1995), 87–104, argue against the “minster hypothesis” (as formulated by John Blair and others). The core of this hypothesis is that early Anglo-Saxon minsters were responsible for the pastoral care of territorial districts until c. 950 when the growth of private manorial churches led to their decay. Cambridge and Rollason feel that the role of the minsters in pastoral care was less prominent. Blair’s response can be found in ‘Debate: Ecclesiastical organization and pastoral care in Anglo-Saxon England,’ *Early Medieval Europe* 4 (1995), 193–212. See also Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 153–60.

⁸ John Blair, ‘Secular minster churches in Domesday Book,’ in *Domesday Book: A Reassessment*, ed. Peter Sawyer (London, 1985), p. 114.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 123–4. The canons at the minster at Waltham (later to become an Augustinian abbey) possessed their own residences and prebends, yet their food and

did undertake a more restrictive existence often used or adapted the *Regula canonicorum* of St. Chrodegang of Metz (742–66) or the *Institutio canonicorum* of Amalarius of Metz which prescribed moderate versions of the apostolic “full common life” for clerics.¹⁰ The eleventh century also saw support from the Crown for a stricter mode of living at collegiate churches and cathedrals: in 1008 King Aethelred II issued a decree (later renewed by Cnut) that canons with common refectories and dormitories were to live regularly and chastely.¹¹

Devon and Cornwall seem to have had an unusually high number of minsters by the eleventh century. There were at least twenty-six in the two counties between the sixth and eleventh centuries.¹² The situation in Devon differs from that of Cornwall in that ten of the fourteen “probable minsters” were located on or near royal manors, and the remaining four are known to have been “founded or endowed by kings.”¹³ Indeed, the Saxon kings of Wessex seem to have been very involved in the establishment of minsters:¹⁴ “well-endowed [collegiate]

clothes were paid for from a common fund. The Waltham canons were also free to marry. P.H. Hase describes the situation at Christchurch as “semi-communal”: the canons celebrated the day and night hours communally, may have been celibate, and received most of their income from one fund; yet, they lived in separate houses, likely did not dine together at a refectory, and possessed “embryonic prebends.” See ‘The Mother Churches of Hampshire,’ in *Minsters and Parish Churches*, pp. 52–4, 60.

¹⁰ John C. Dickinson, *The Origins of the Austin Canons and their Introduction into England* (London, 1950), pp. 16–20, 95–6. Chrodegang’s Rule stated that canons were to give their property to the Church, but they could enjoy its “usufruct”; some canons could live extra-claustrally in the town, but others had to share a common “fund, refectory, and dormitory.” Amalarius’ *Institutio*, a product of the Synod of Aachen in 816–17, did not require the renunciation of private property, but did set down regulations for common living, eating, and worship. Bishop Leofric instituted a refectory and dormitory for the cathedral canons at Exeter and had them follow Chrodegang’s Rule, but this arrangement did not long survive Leofric’s death. See David Blake, ‘Bishop Leofric’ *TDA* 106 (1974), 47–57.

¹¹ Dickinson, *Origins*, p. 95.

¹² Nicholas Orme, ‘From the Beginnings to 1050,’ in *Unity and Variety: A History of the Church in Devon and Cornwall*, ed. Nicholas Orme (Exeter, 1991), p. 9.

¹³ *Ibid.* Orme believes that the Devon minsters were likely founded from the eighth century onwards as part of a “royal initiative...to provide a major church in every district.” He points out that most of the Devon minsters were situated at the “centres of hundreds, the districts of local government which first appear in the tenth century.” If the plan was to establish one church for every hundred, it was erratically realized: some hundreds shared a minster, and the hundred of Plympton had two—the one at Plympton, and a collegiate church at Yealmpton. The two hides belonging to Plympton minster were located within the royal manor of Plympton (*DB: D*, #1, 17).

¹⁴ John Blair, ‘Introduction,’ in *Minsters and Parish Churches*, pp. 1–3.

churches were thickest on the ground where late Saxon kings had their main estates and conducted their main activities.”¹⁵

Plympton Minster’s endowment of two hides of land may seem small, but was not unusually so for the region.¹⁶ Of course, the exchange of 23 hides for Plympton suggests that it likely did have more extensive holdings originally but, like many other religious communities in Devon and Cornwall of the tenth and eleventh centuries, may have lost much of what it once had during the Danish and Norman invasions.¹⁷ Orme notes that a holding of one or two hides was typical amongst the Devon minsters, and while this was small, it would have been supplemented by tithes and other dues.¹⁸

Possessions of the College of Plympton before 1121

In cases of the refoundation of secular colleges as Augustinian priories, the endowment of the college was typically transferred to that of the new house. It would be useful to know the exact extent of the *spiritualia* and *temporalia* belonging to the minster at Plympton so as to be able to distinguish them from donations made to the priory after its foundation in 1121. Unfortunately, little is known of the possessions of the college of secular canons at Plympton. It is very probable that the church of St. Andrew at Sutton,¹⁹ with some dependent chapels, belonged to the church at Plympton before the Norman Conquest.²⁰ It seems likely that Plympton Minster possessed a number of other chapels before 1121. In 1124, Bishop William Warelwast granted Plympton Priory “and all its chapels, especially Plymstock” exemption from various payments

¹⁵ Blair, ‘Secular Minster Churches,’ p. 114.

¹⁶ According to Domesday Book, the minster at Axminster had only half a hide; the Geld Inquest recorded that Crediton collegiate church held three hides. See Susan Pearce, *The Kingdom of Dumnonia: Studies in History and Tradition in South-Western Britain A.D. 350–1150* (Padstow, 1978), p. 102.

¹⁷ Orme, ‘From the Beginnings,’ p. 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ “Sutton” or “Sutton Prior” was the original name of the community which, by the later Middle Ages, had come to be known as “Plymouth.”

²⁰ *EEAE XI*, #23, p. 23. In the dispute of 1137 between Reginald de Valletort and Plympton Priory regarding the ownership of the church of St. Andrew at Sutton, two elderly local men testified that Plympton Minster had owned St. Andrew “cum capellis et omnibus pertinentiis suis” until Henry I granted the manor of Sutton to Reginald. The judgement was given in favour of the priory.

due the bishops of Exeter.²¹ Unless the Augustinian canons had been especially zealous in setting up several chapels within three years of their foundation, these chapels were almost certainly originally established by or given to the secular canons of Plympton sometime between the foundation of the minster and 1121.²² Indeed, it would be surprising if a collegiate church founded in the Anglo-Saxon period had not presided over several chapels. As P.H. Hase has stated, “Those Anglo-Saxon royal laws of the tenth and eleventh centuries which discuss parochial rights assume, without exception, that the normal parochial system in England was the mother church with its dependent chapels.”²³ Such chapels might have been founded by the priests of the minster or by manorial lords, and in the twelfth century might have been served either by resident curates or by the minster priests.²⁴

There is some evidence, albeit of a rather confusing nature, that in late Anglo-Saxon times the college at Plympton may have had some connection with the church of St. Kew.²⁵ In 1302, a group of Cornishmen complained in court that the prior of Plympton had not been fulfilling his duties to the church of St. Kew. They based their case—of which more will be said in Chapter Six—on the assertion that King Edgar had given the church to the canons of Plympton Minster with two carucates of land and a hundred shillings’ rent so as to support two canons who would reside at the church.²⁶ The prior denied this contention, countering that the priory had received St. Kew as a gift from William Warelwast, bishop of Exeter. He produced William’s

²¹ *EEAE* XI, #20, pp. 19–20.

²² Oswald J. Reichel (‘The Hundred of Plympton in Early Times,’ *TDA, Special Supplement, The Hundreds of Devon: The Hundreds of Plympton and Ermington in Early Times*, 1933, p. 246) stated that at the time of the Domesday Book, Plympton Minster had chapels at Brixton, Plymstock, Wembury, Shaugh, and Sampford Spiney, but did not cite his source for this information. The fact that none of these chapels is mentioned as gifts to the priory in Henry II’s confirmation charter of 1158 or in Bishop John’s confirmation charter of 1186 × 1191, and that no donation charters survive for them, suggests that they were part of the college’s original endowment which was transferred to the priory.

²³ Hase, ‘The Mother Churches of Hampshire,’ p. 51.

²⁴ Blair, ‘Introduction,’ *Minsters and Parish Churches*, pp. 11–2.

²⁵ This church was also known variously as Lannow, Lannowseynt, Landeho, Landoho, and the like. See W.M.M. Picken, ‘The Manor of Tremaruustel and the Honour of St. Keus,’ *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall* n.s. 7 (1975–76), 220–30.

²⁶ W.M.M. Picken, ‘The ‘Landochou’ Charter,’ in *The Westward Expansion of Wessex and Supplement to the Early Charters of Devon and Cornwall*, eds. William G. Hoskins and H.P.R. Finberg (Leicester, 1960), p. 36. The charter is located in the National Archives.

charter (now lost) and Henry II's confirmation charter as proof that King Edgar had not been the donor of this church and land.

Despite this seemingly straightforward evidence of the origins of Plympton Priory's rights over St. Kew, a document does survive which one scholar, W.M.M. Picken, believed indicates that there was some truth to the account of the Cornishmen. This is the "Landochou charter," which was offered in evidence in the court case and seems to have come from the muniments of Plympton Priory.²⁷ It is dated to 961 × 963 and states that King Edgar granted land to the *monasterium* of St. Kew in Cornwall.²⁸ This possible link between the priory and the church is not sufficient to establish the minster's ownership of St. Kew in the Anglo-Saxon period, however, especially since neither the church of Plympton nor its canons are mentioned in the charter. By the time of Domesday Book, St. Kew was definitely no longer in the possession of the secular college at Plympton.²⁹

In terms of land, Domesday Book states that the king owned the manor at Plympton except for two hides (Colebrook/Boringdon and Wembury) owned by the canons of St. Peter of Plympton.³⁰ Henry I

²⁷ Picken suggested that the charter remained at Plympton Minster even after the canons had lost St. Kew, and that the regular canons who took over the church in the 1120s kept it—even though the episcopal charter established their true title to St. Kew ('Landochou charter,' pp. 43–4). Picken also thought that the regular canons may have doctored the Landochou charter to remove conditions of service from it. Lynette Olson, however, felt that the charter is authentic as it stands. Picken's alternate suggestion was that the Landochou charter records a gift to the Landochou/St. Kew clerics, and that the charter was kept at St. Kew until the regular canons took possession of the church, at which time they seized the church's muniments; the Cornishmen simply confused King Edgar's donation with Bishop William's. Picken felt this theory to be less convincing than the former, but the present writer would tend to disagree.

²⁸ Lynette Olson, *Early Monasteries of Cornwall* (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 81–2. Olson, unlike Picken, equated the church of St. Kew (also known as Landochou) with the early Celtic monastery of Docco; she stated that by the tenth century it is not known whether it was still a monastery or a "group of endowed clerics." Susan Pearce also maintained that St. Kew and Docco were one foundation (*Kingdom of Dumnonia*, p. 120), and believed that the charter may have been a confirmation of the existing possessions of St. Kew/Landoho. She also suggested that Edgar may have specified that the St. Kew/Landoho community were "to maintain two regular canons for the service of the church" in return for the confirmation. If this had been so, the canons of Plympton Priory might have excised this condition from the text when the lawsuit was imminent. However, given the fact that regular canons did not exist as such in tenth-century England, Edgar could hardly have imposed this condition.

²⁹ *DB: C*, #1, 4. In 1086, the king held the manor of St. Kew, which had previously been held by Earl Harold.

³⁰ *DB: D*, #1, 17.

confirmed that these two hides were not amongst his lands at Plympton,³¹ as did Henry II in his confirmation charter of 1158.³² The only other mention of the college in Domesday Book pertains to Robert Bastard: he is recorded as having “two villagers on the land of St. Peter’s of Plympton,” for which they pay 5s.³³ This reference does not make clear whether the land is part of the two hides at Plympton or close to Robert Bastard’s lands at Mewy.³⁴ Given that these are the only possessions of the church at Plympton mentioned in Domesday Book, one has the impression that the secular canons, unlike those of the nearby Celtic monastery of St. Petroc at Bodmin,³⁵ did not own extensive estates.

The secular canons of Plympton might also have owned land in Sutton: according to Leland, two of the four prebends at the college of Plympton were named after Plympton and Sutton.³⁶ A nineteenth-century local antiquarian, the Rev. R.N. Worth, condemned Leland’s information concerning land-holding in Plymouth as groundless and likely derived from “monkish legends [or] forgeries.”³⁷ It may be possible, however, that there was land attached to the church of St. Andrew’s at

³¹ Oxford, Bodl. MS. James 23, p. 152. Some local antiquarians, such as Oswald Reichel, believed that William I gave these two hides to Plympton, but the charters of Henry I and II do not allude to this fact. The charter of Henry I in Bodl. MS. James 23 simply acknowledged that these hides were “quietas de omnibus placitis et querelis et Geldis et Danegeldis et auxiliis omnibus quae per hydas assidebuntur sicut quietores inde fuerunt tempore patris mei et fratris et meo tempore” (p. 152). Henry I also notified the sheriffs of Devon in a charter of c. 1128 of the fact that Plympton’s two hides were free of all dues (*MDE* #2, p. 134).

³² *MDE* #3, p. 135.

³³ *DB: D*, vol. 1, #29, 10. Domesday also states that before 1066 Ailwin held them.

³⁴ The editors of *Domesday Book: Devon*, Caroline and Frank Thorn, believe that these lands were in Plympton Hundred, presumably part of the college’s two hides (vol. 1, #29, 10).

³⁵ In Domesday Book the church of St. Petroc at Bodmin is listed as having eighteen manors plus nine which had been usurped, making it the “largest ecclesiastical landholder in Cornwall” in 1086: see Karen Jankulak, *The Medieval Cult of St. Petroc* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 124–5. It subsequently lost some of these and by the time of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* was much less wealthy than its fellow Augustinian house, Plympton. Another pre-conquest minster and later Augustinian priory, St. Stephen’s at Launceston, possessed only four hides of land in 1086 (although a 1076 confirmation charter indicated somewhat less than seven hides). See *The Cartulary of Launceston Priory, Lambeth Palace MS 719: A Calendar*, ed. P.L. Hull (Torquay: Devonshire Press for the Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1987), pp. xii–xiii.

³⁶ Leland, *Itinerary*, vol. 1, pt. III, 215.

³⁷ Richard N. Worth, *History of Plymouth from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Plymouth, 1890), pp. 20, 27.

Sutton—included in the phrase “*omnibus pertinentiis suis*” in the episcopal document of 1137³⁸—which may have been later construed as having constituted a prebend.

By the early twelfth century, the minster at Plympton had profited from the arrival of new benefactors in its neighbourhood. The Redvers family of Devon made grants to the college within a few years of their arrival in England. Richard de Redvers, a Norman noble and loyal supporter of Prince Henry, followed Henry to England in 1100 when he succeeded to the throne.³⁹ Richard further demonstrated his loyalty during Robert, Duke of Normandy’s invasion in 1101, and in return received from Henry I the Honour of Plympton in Devon, as well as other lands in Dorset and Hampshire.⁴⁰ At some point between 1100 and his death in 1107, Richard de Redvers granted to Plympton Minster, with the consent of his son Baldwin I (later earl of Devon), the land of Ridgeway in Plympton, the land between the road that led to Plympton and the sea, and an aqueduct.⁴¹ R. Bearman, the editor of the Redvers family charters, believed that a number of the gifts to the priory confirmed by Henry I were merely existing possessions of the collegiate church.⁴² However, if one checks the section of Henry II’s confirmation charter of 1158 in which the gifts confirmed by his grandfather, Henry I, are listed, it is clear that many, if not all of these must have been given to Plympton after its refoundation as an Augustinian Priory.⁴³ Robert Fitz Martin, Guy de Nunant, and Baldwin

³⁸ See above, n. 20.

³⁹ Bearman, pp. 2–3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3. See also Bodl. MS James p. 165: Richard de Redvers “eum [Henry I] multum juverit in regno Anglorum et ducatu Normannie adversus fratrem suum Robertum Curthuse priorem natu quem apud Tenechebrai bello devicit in carcere quoad vixit tenuit.” This fragment has also recently been printed and translated in Blair’s *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 520–1.

⁴¹ Bodl. MS James, pp. 156–7.

⁴² *RC*, p. 157.

⁴³ *MDE* #3, p. 135 (also printed in *MA* VI/I, pp. 53–4). The information from Henry I’s confirmation charter for the regular canons of Plympton Priory constitutes the second portion of Henry II’s confirmation charter, itself preserved in an inseximus charter of Edward III dated 1328 (see *Calendar of Charter Rolls*, vol. IV, 1327–41 [London, 1912], pp. 86–8). It comes after Henry II’s confirmation of his grandfather’s acknowledgement that the land of the canons at Colebrook and Wembury was free of gelds and levies (a copy of Henry I’s acknowledgement can be found in the extracts from the lost Plympton cartulary, Bodl. MS. James 23, p. 152; it is calendared in *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum, Vol. II 1100–1135*, eds. Charles Johnson and H.A. Cronne [Oxford, 1956], #1515, p. 211). The information from Henry I’s confirmation charter concludes halfway down page 135 in the *Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis* with the

I de Redvers, to name a few donors, were all alive during the 1120s and 1130s, the period right after the refoundation. It is surely more logical to assume that these benefactions were made in the first flush of support for the new priory, a pattern recognizable at many other Augustinian houses, than to surmise that they were made in the dying days of the minster. All evidence, then, suggests that the minster at Plympton did not possess substantial landholdings and churches before the establishment of the regular canons there in 1121.

The Royal Donation of Churches to the See of Exeter

The secular college of Plympton remained under the patronage of the crown until the reign of Henry I (1100–35). The royal patronage of the college must have derived from King Edward’s exchange of land for it with Bishop Asser in the tenth century. This matter was later central to the fourteenth-century dispute between the Crown and the bishop of Exeter.⁴⁴ During the court case, the jury found that before the establishment of the Augustinian priory at Plympton there had existed a chapel and lands appurtenant, founded by the “progenitors” of King Edward III.⁴⁵ In a judgement deemed “curious” by Oliver, the court then ignored legal precedent and concluded that the Crown’s gift of the church of Plympton to the bishop of Exeter did not convey the patronage of the priory.⁴⁶ In the twelfth century, however, the bishops of Exeter gave every indication of assuming that the right of patronage of Plympton and other churches had been legitimately transferred to them by the Crown.

The date of the royal gift of the church of Plympton to the see of Exeter is by no means certain. Indeed, there is some confusion as to

statement “sicut carta regis H. avi mei testatur.” A partial copy of Henry I’s confirmation charter also exists in Bodl. MS. James 23 on p. 152 and was calendared in *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, vol. II, p. 299 as #1958 (the full text being printed on p. 387 of the same volume); it was also printed in Bearman’s edition of the *Charters of the Redvers Family* (p. 156).

⁴⁴ Oliver, *MDE*, p. 129. The case was reported in the *Liber Assisarum* 38 Edward III (1679), pp. 227–8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* There is some evidence that in the twelfth century the Redvers family also claimed that Henry I had given Richard de Redvers the patronage of the church at Plympton, but their case was rejected in court: see Bodl. MS James 23, p. 165, printed and translated in Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 520–1.

the authenticity of the charters purporting to record this donation, as well as to the dates of the different versions. The charter—called here “A” for the sake of clarity—dated c. 1123 in Oliver’s *Monasticon* is reproduced from the *Coram Rege* Rolls and states that Henry I “gave and restored” (*reddo et restituo*) various churches to the see of Exeter.⁴⁷ In the mid-twelfth century the word *reddo* appears in royal charters as a means of signifying a regrant; *restituo* seems to have been rarer,⁴⁸ but perhaps was used here to reinforce *reddo*. Among those churches named in the charter are the churches of St. Petroc at Bodmin and of St. Stephen at Launceston as well as the church of Plympton. The king restored the two former churches (or minsters) “free and quit in every way” as they were given by his royal predecessors in the original charters.⁴⁹

The church of Plympton, however, was in a different category: the charter stated that William I gave it and two other churches, Braunton and St. Stephen-Exeter, in Devon to William Warelwast “while he was still his chaplain”;⁵⁰ Henry I conceded and gave (*concedo et dono*) these churches, with all their tithes, lands, and appurtenances, free and quit of all “*consuetudinibus et querelis*” to the see of Exeter “to be held by hereditary right in perpetuity” (*hereditario jure imperpetuum optinendas*). The choice of the phrase *concedo et dono* seems to have been an unusual one: *dono* is not mentioned at all in Hudson’s treatment of twelfth-century granting terminology, although *reddo* and *concedo*, and occasionally *concedo* on its own, were used in royal charters to signify regrants.⁵¹ Also, the appearance of inheritance language in this charter is remarkable: Hudson found that after the reign of William I, “the use of inheritance language in royal charters for churches is very rare, and confined to

⁴⁷ *MDE*, #1, p. 134. The charter appears within a petition of Thomas Brantingham, bishop of Exeter (1370–94), to the Crown (*Coram Rege* Rolls, Hil. 2 Ric. II rot. 20). The petition is most likely related to the fourteenth-century patronage dispute; Bishop Thomas was active in seeking the return of the patronage to the bishopric of Exeter. Another copy of this charter is calendared in *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, Vol. II, #1391, p. 185.

⁴⁸ John Hudson, *Land, Law, and Lordship in Anglo-Norman England* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 75–7.

⁴⁹ *MDE* #1, p. 134. The other churches mentioned are Probus and St. Peran in Cornwall.

⁵⁰ David W. Blake, ‘Bishop William Warelwast,’ *TDA* 104 (1972), 15–6, found this clause to be unconvincing: William Warelwast was first recorded at court in 1087 or 1088, and given that he lived another fifty-one years after that time, a gift from William I for service before his death in 1087 “is to suppose outstanding service at a very young age.”

⁵¹ Hudson, *Land, Law, and Lordship*, pp. 75–6.

diplomas or mixed-style documents, generally beneficiary-drafted and often dubious.”⁵² Could this charter of Henry I be spurious? The fact that it appeared as evidence offered by the bishop of Exeter in the late fourteenth-century court case concerning the patronage of Plympton Priory raises certain suspicions. However, the fact that Innocent III confirmed the royal donation in 1202 would suggest that a charter like this did exist; possibly in the fourteenth century it was “improved” before it was offered as evidence.⁵³

Indeed, despite its unusual language, charter A seems the most authentic of the three charters which claim to record this grant. D. W. Blake contended that although it is derived from the later Charter Rolls, the witness list of the charter is “full and satisfactory” and helps to provide a date of 1123.⁵⁴ There is another copy, designated charter “B” here, in the Launceston Cartulary⁵⁵ with identical wording, but it is traditionally assigned an earlier date—c. 1107—and its witness list is much more confused.⁵⁶ The editor of the Launceston Cartulary, P.L. Hull, pointed out that charter B is the only one containing mention of the church of Dohou (also Landoho or St. Kew) as among those Henry I vows to *reddere et restituere*—an interesting addition given Plympton Priory’s later troubles over this church. Blake’s theory is that charter B is either a forgery (although an inexplicable one, as “it adds nothing new to an existing genuine grant”) or an “unskilful second copy of the original act.”⁵⁷ The editors of the *Regesta regum Anglo-Normannorum*, while accepting charter A without comment, find the style of the nearly identical charter B to be “very unlikely.”⁵⁸

As well, a third copy, charter “C,” exists and is printed in the *Regesta*: this one dates from the reign of Stephen (1136) and seems to be his

⁵² Ibid., pp. 89–90. Hudson believes that the decline in the usage of the inheritance terminology in charters of this date is related to the reform movement in the Church and the desire of reformers to move away from classifying ecclesiastical lands as heritable.

⁵³ Innocent III confirmed to Bishop Henry Marshal of Exeter the donation of the churches, as well as their lands, tithes, and appurtenances, in April 1202. See *Letters of Pope Innocent III (1198–1216) concerning England and Wales*, eds. Christopher R. and Mary G. Cheney (Oxford, 1967), #405, p. 66. Interestingly, included in this list of churches is the chapelry (*capellania*) of Bosham, Sussex, which is not mentioned in the various charters.

⁵⁴ Blake, ‘Warelwast,’ 25.

⁵⁵ *Launceston Cartulary*, pp. 1–2.

⁵⁶ Blake, ‘Warelwast,’ 25.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Blake thought it improbable that Henry I would have made two identical grants to the see of Exeter.

⁵⁸ *Regesta*, Vol. II, #841, p. 72.

confirmation while at Exeter of the grant of Henry I.⁵⁹ The witness list has a number of errors in it, their “cumulative effect” being to cast doubt on the authenticity of the document.⁶⁰ Overall, Hull agreed with Blake that charter A, even though it appears in later sources, is more likely to have been the original and that charter B may be a forgery; in general, though, he finds that “none of the texts of the three charters are entirely satisfactory.”⁶¹ It is rather hard to imagine that a bishop of Exeter, as the only obvious beneficiary, would attempt to acquire rights to so many churches through forgery and think that they would not be missed. Given the emergence of charter A in the context of the Crown’s legal challenge to the episcopal patronage of Plympton Priory, the possibility remains that someone belonging to the episcopal curia in the fourteenth century was tempted to “improve” or re-invent a lost or damaged charter which was of such importance if the bishops were to successfully establish their claim. Regardless of the mystery concerning these charters and the misgivings about their validity, there is no doubt that these churches did pass into the hands of the bishops of Exeter in the twelfth century, as later evidence—such as the confirmation of Innocent III and records from episcopal registers—indicates. Even the justice of the fourteenth-century patronage case did not find that there had been no gift of the church at Plympton from the Crown to the bishops of Exeter; he merely re-interpreted what the act of giving the right of patronage to a church entailed.

*The Foundation of Plympton Priory by Bishop William Warelwast
and Episcopal Patronage of the Augustinian Canons*

Augustinian canons were introduced at Plympton in 1121. The twelfth-century “Annals” of the priory record that they arrived in February of that year and were formally instituted that August.⁶² Bishop William Warelwast had sought regular canons from the royal foundation of

⁵⁹ *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum, Vol. III: 1135–1154*, eds. H.A. Cronne and R.H.C. Davis (Oxford, 1968) #284, pp. 106–7.

⁶⁰ *Regesta, Vol. III*, p. 107. Blake also urged that this version be used with “caution,” and pointed out that the fact that Stephen merely confirmed the grant without adding to it was unusual. See ‘Warelwast,’ 25–6.

⁶¹ *Launceston Cartulary*, pp. 1–2n.

⁶² “1121 9 Kal. Sept. Willelmus Dei gratia Exoniensis episcopus constituit canonicos regulares in ecclesia Sancti Petri Plimtonie. Qui tamen antea eodem anno iiii nonas Febru. ceperunt cohabitare.” The annals are printed in *Ungedruckte Anglo-Normannische Geschichtsquellen*, ed. F. Liebermann (Strassburg, 1879), p. 27.

Holy Trinity-Aldgate in London, which was also a mother-house to the priories of Dunstable, Launceston, St. Frideswide's-Oxford, and St. Osyth.⁶³ Henry I confirmed the bishop's institution of regular canons at the college.⁶⁴ Warelwast also re-founded the college of secular canons at Launceston in Cornwall as a house of Augustinian canons, and, with Algar (later Bishop of Coutances), re-founded the monastery at Bodmin in Cornwall as an Augustinian priory.⁶⁵

William Warelwast early distinguished himself as a servant of the Crown rather than as a son of the Church. Warelwast was probably born in the Veraval region of Normandy, and first appeared at court in 1087 or 1088, as has been mentioned above.⁶⁶ Warelwast came to national prominence during the dispute between Archbishop Anselm and William II and Henry I concerning investiture. Between 1095 and 1106 he made five journeys to Rome as the representative of the kings, and skilfully used his diplomatic talents and knowledge of law and theology to plead the royal case at the papal curia.⁶⁷ Henry I rewarded Warelwast with the bishopric of Exeter, which had been vacant for four years. For the first dozen years of his episcopate, Warelwast continued to be very active in his service to the king: he bore messages, served as a judge, and acted as his legate at Rome during the tensions between the Provinces of York and Canterbury of 1114–20.⁶⁸ During the 1120s

⁶³ *Cartulary of Holy Trinity Aldgate*, ed. Gerald A.J. Hodgett (Leicester, 1971), #10, p. 2. The chronicle printed along with the cartulary lists the daughter-houses but says nothing else about Aldgate's connections with them. Filiations between Augustinian houses tended to be weak connections, certainly unlike those of the Cistercians. There is no evidence in the surviving records of Plympton of any subsequent contacts with Aldgate, but Hull believes that Aldgate and Launceston continued to share links (*Launceston Cartulary*, p. xv) Aldgate was founded by Queen Maud, wife of Henry I (Dickinson, *Origins*, p. 111).

⁶⁴ Bodl., MS James 23, p. 152: "Sciatis me concessisse canonicos regulares esse apud Sanctum Petrum de Plimton quos Episcopus Exoniensis ibidem ponit." Another slightly different version of this charter, Bodl. MS. Eng. Hist., c. 241 f. 53r, was printed by Dickinson in *Origins*, p. 283. The 'Registrum' of Plympton also makes reference to a confirmation by Henry I; see Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 520–2.

⁶⁵ *MRH*, pp. 162–3, 148.

⁶⁶ Blake, 'Warelwast,' 15. Blake also rejected the assertion of William of Worcester that Warelwast was the nephew of William I on the basis of lack of evidence.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 22. George Oliver, in *Lives of the Bishops of Exeter* (Exeter, 1861) took a critical view of Warelwast's service to the Crown, and declared that during an encounter with Anselm at Dover in 1095 he treated the primate with "vexatious, even rude indignity" (p. 15). Blake pointed out that the main source for Warelwast's activities on these missions was Eadmer, who is "generally an unsympathetic reporter" (p. 22).

⁶⁸ Blake, 'Warelwast,' 23–4. It is during his mission of 1120 to Rome that the first reference is made to Warelwast's blindness; supposedly he was taunted for it at the

and 1130s, Warelwast attended Henry I at court in Normandy and England, and was present at various Church councils in England until 1132.⁶⁹ Sometime before his death in 1137 the bishop had retired and become a canon at Plympton Priory; the “Annals” record that he was buried in its chapter house.⁷⁰

At Exeter, Warelwast began the rebuilding of the cathedral in the Norman style. Today the magnificent transept towers are largely all that remains of this cathedral, as it was rebuilt again in the Gothic style in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Construction began in 1112 or 1114 and the cathedral was consecrated in 1133.⁷¹ He may also have instituted four territorial archdiaconates and overseen the development of the chapter as a “corporate and independent body.”⁷² It is interesting that Warelwast presided over the diminishing adherence of the cathedral chapter to the Rule of St. Chrodegang, yet at the same time was clearly concerned with regularizing the colleges of secular canons at Plympton and Launceston and with instituting regular canons at the monastery at Bodmin.

Warelwast was one of a group of bishops who had obtained their bishoprics as rewards for service to the king. Indeed, he and Roger, bishop of Salisbury, Henry I’s chief justiciar, were consecrated as bishops

papal curia. William of Malmesbury reported that Warelwast had been intolerant of the “frailty” of his predecessor at Exeter, Osbern, “saying that a blind man ought not to be a bishop.”

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 24–5.

⁷⁰ ‘Annales Plymptonienses,’ p. 27: “1137. Obiit Willelmus episcopus Exoniensis VI Kal. Oct. Qui in infirmitate extrema positus et anulum et baculum episcopo Wintoniensi Henrico reddidit, sicque ab episcopo Roberto Bathonie crismatus, canonicorum habitum petiit et accepit a Gaufrido priore Plimtoniensi. Cuius etiam corpus in capitulo nostro Plimtonie quiescit sepultum.”

⁷¹ Malcolm Thurlby, ‘The Romanesque Cathedral of St. Mary and St. Peter at Exeter,’ *Medieval Art and Architecture at Exeter Cathedral: Conference Transactions of the British Archaeological Association for the year 1985, XI*, ed. Francis Kelly (London, 1991), p. 19. The fabric of the Romanesque cathedral was actually completed in the episcopate of Bishop Henry Marshal (1194–1206). Thurlby noted that the influence of the Romanesque cathedral can be seen in one of the few remaining fragments of Plympton Priory: polychromy in the form of green sandstone and limestone in the priory’s gateway arch may be derived from the juxtaposition of coloured sandstone and limestone of the cathedral nave aisle responds (p. 29).

⁷² Blake, 26. In a later article, though, David Blake stated that territorial archdiaconates most probably came into being in the diocese before Warelwast’s episcopate. See ‘The Development of the Chapter of the Diocese of Exeter 1050–1161,’ *Journal of Medieval History* 8 (1982), 3. Barlow, however, contended that Bishop William did indeed institute the territorial archdiaconates (*EEAE* XI, p. xxxiii).

by Anselm on the same day in 1107.⁷³ Although in this period relations between the episcopate and the monasteries were often troubled,⁷⁴ the bishops were significant founders and benefactors of houses of the new orders. Archbishop Thurstan of York founded Fountains Abbey for the Cistercians and was generous to Hexham Priory, a secular college refounded as an Augustinian priory by his predecessor.⁷⁵ Two archbishops of Canterbury fostered the growth of the Augustinian order in the early twelfth century: Anselm was involved in the founding of Dunmow Priory, Holy Trinity-Aldgate Priory, and possibly Llanthony Priory, while William of Corbeil (a regular canon himself) converted the hospital of St. Gregory's, Canterbury, into a house of Augustinian canons.⁷⁶ Bishop William Giffard of Winchester founded the first Cistercian house in England, Waverley, as well as the Augustinian house at Taunton.⁷⁷

Bishop Alexander of Lincoln holds the record for most monastic foundations in the twelfth century by a bishop: he was responsible for the Cistercian houses of Thame and Louth Park, the Augustinian (Arrouaisian) house of Dorchester, and the Gilbertine house of Haverholme.⁷⁸ Dorchester had been a secular college, and amongst the endowments transferred to the regular canons were five chapels.⁷⁹ Interestingly, Bishop Alexander seems not to have added anything to these endowments himself, although the Empress Matilda, whom he supported before 1141, did give land and two more chapels.⁸⁰

⁷³ Sally Vaughn, *Anselm of Bec and Robert of Meulan* (Berkeley, 1987), pp. 309–10.

⁷⁴ Martin Brett, *The English Church under Henry I* (Oxford, 1975), p. 136.

⁷⁵ Dickinson, *Origins*, p. 127. Thurstan also offered “encouragement” to the Augustinian houses of Guisborough, Drax, and Thurgarton. See also David Nicholl, *Thurstan, Archbishop of York, 1114–1140* (York, 1964), pp. 127–39 and Janet Burton, *The Monastic Order in Yorkshire, 1069–1215* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 92–3.

⁷⁶ Dickinson, *Origins*, pp. 127, 104–5. St. Gregory's, Canterbury, had been originally founded by Archbishop Lanfranc as a college of canons with pastoral duties. These first canons seem to have led a “full common life,” but did not adopt the Rule of St. Augustine until William of Corbeil's time. For more details of Lanfranc's involvement with St. Gregory's, see Margaret Gibson, *Lanfranc of Bec* (Oxford, 1978).

⁷⁷ Brett, *English Church*, pp. 137–8. Taunton was also a secular college refounded for regular canons. Giffard may have also founded the Augustinian house of St. Mary Overie at Southwark. See Dickinson, *Origins*, p. 120 n. 2.

⁷⁸ A.G. Dyson, ‘The Monastic Patronage of Bishop Alexander of Lincoln,’ *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 26 (1975), 1–24. Bishop Alexander's success in promoting these new orders in his diocese was partly dependent on co-operation with lay magnates, some of whom were hostile to his family for their influence at court, and some of whom were on the opposite side during the conflict between Stephen and Matilda.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 10–1.

Alexander's uncle, Bishop Roger of Salisbury, a well-known "leader of the anti-monastic movements of 1114 and 1123," was nonetheless generous to the Augustinian canons: he seems to have helped found St. Frideswide's at Oxford,⁸¹ and he was a benefactor of Merton, Cirencester, and Bradenstoke.⁸² Gerald of Wales, writing at the end of the twelfth century, said that Bishop Roger had visited Llanthony Priory, a house famed for its strictness and its origins as a hermitage, and upon his return he "urged the court to support it."⁸³

It may well have been the case that these bishops were following the trend amongst Henry I's courtiers towards patronizing the new orders. Indeed, four of the seven episcopal founders—Warewast, Giffard, Roger of Salisbury, Richard de Beaumes—were courtiers; other curial officials, such as the sheriffs Gilbert, Richard Bassett, Robert d'Oilly, and William Pont de l'Arche, also founded important houses of Augustinian canons.⁸⁴ Henry I founded five houses himself and played some role in the founding of a number of others, while Queen Maud founded Holy Trinity-Aldgate and helped Merton Priory.⁸⁵ In all, Dickinson calculated that at least 33 of the 43 houses likely founded in the reign of Henry I owed their existence either entirely or partially to members of the court.⁸⁶ Consequently, the bishops' interest in establishing houses of regular canons must not be seen solely in an ecclesiastical context when so many curial figures were involved, as well.

Brett believed that these bishops may have been attracted to the Augustinian canons because of the relatively low cost of their foundations, or because they hoped that the regular canons would undertake pastoral care, which, in his view, had traditionally been the concern of bishops and minsters.⁸⁷ Brett's discussion of the canons' involvement in

⁸¹ Dickinson, *Origins*, p. 114 n. 1.

⁸² Dyson, 'Monastic Patronage,' 12.

⁸³ Edward Kealey, *Roger of Salisbury: Viceroy of England* (Berkeley, 1972), p. 119.

⁸⁴ Dickinson, *Origins*, pp. 128, 126. Dickinson was quick to point out, however, that many of these court figures were involved in founding houses of other orders as well.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 126. Amongst these five foundations were Carlisle, the only cathedral priory in England to follow the Rule of St. Augustine, as well as Cirencester, which became one of the wealthiest Augustinian houses in England.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128. Dickinson attributes the rapid growth of the order in this period to the "ascendancy" of Aldgate and Merton Priors, both of which were founded by well-loved figures at court (the former by Queen Maud, the latter by Gilbert the Sheriff). Aldgate and Merton together established about ten daughter-houses.

⁸⁷ Brett, *English Church*, p. 139. Richard W. Southern suggested that lay founders, as well, might have chosen to found Augustinian houses because in comparison to

pastoral care was based on an interpretation of the eleventh-century evidence cited in Dickinson which actually differs from Dickinson's own view of the same evidence, so one must proceed with caution here.⁸⁸ The view that episcopal and lay founders established Augustinian houses so that the canons could engage in pastoral care has been repeated frequently,⁸⁹ but there is very little definite proof that this was the case. Burton, while acknowledging that "[c]lear evidence from the twelfth century is not easy to obtain," has suggested that the flow of donations of churches to houses of Augustinian canons in this period indicated episcopal expectations that the canons would fulfill a pastoral role, or at least "act as wise stewards [of parish churches] to aid in the work of reform."⁹⁰ Scholars of the history of the Augustinian canons such as Dickinson and Dereine have been careful to point out the ambivalent attitudes amongst churchmen of the late eleventh and twelfth century concerning the involvement of the canons in the cure of souls.⁹¹ Hampered as we are by the erratic survival rate of twelfth-century foundation charters for Augustinian priories and episcopal *acta*, we must keep such *lacunae* in mind when making generalizations about the motives of the bishops for supporting the Augustinians.

For Bishop William Warelwast, however, we do have two indications of his possible motives for refounding colleges of secular canons

the Benedictines, the regular canons pursued a "humbler yet respectable way of life" that required a smaller endowment. See *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth, 1970), pp. 246–7. Janet Burton has questioned Southern's analysis, at least as it pertains to lay founders in Yorkshire (*Monastic Order in Yorkshire*, p. 94).

⁸⁸ Brett claimed that Hildebrand sought papal approval for the canons' undertaking of pastoral care; he based this on Dickinson's discussion of Hildebrand's speech at the Lateran Council of 1059 (*Origins*, pp. 30–1). However, according to Dickinson, Hildebrand's aim was to attack the retention of private property amongst certain groups of canons. Hildebrand wished to promote the true *vita apostolica*; the issue of pastoral care does not seem to have come up. Dickinson's source for Hildebrand's speech was the manuscript published by Jean Mabillon in *Annales Ordinis S. Benedicti*, vol. iv, 686 ff. Dickinson also cited Giovanni Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova, et amplissima collectio* (1774; repr. Paris, 1902), vol. 19, c. 898, p. 1025.

⁸⁹ For example, by Janet Burton in *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain, 1000–1300* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 48–9 and by David Postles in 'The Austin Canons in English Towns,' *Historical Research* 66 (1993), 1–20. Postles interpreted Dickinson's discussion of the events of 1059 and 1063 to mean that at these gatherings "the order was directed...specifically to be a proselytizing order" (p. 2).

⁹⁰ Burton, *Monastic Order in Yorkshire*, pp. 92–3.

⁹¹ Dereine, 'Chanoines,' col. 393 and Dickinson, *Origins*, pp. 26–9. Dickinson provided numerous examples of eleventh-century bishops on the Continent instituting regular canons at collegiate churches because of their frustrations with the low standards of worship at such places.

as Augustinian priories. Leland stated in his *Itinerary* that William Warelwast was “displeasid with the chanons or prebendaries [of Plympton] . . . because they would not give up their concubines” and so dissolved their college, re-establishing them at a college in Bosham, Sussex.⁹² He may have decided that it was less trouble to move the canons than to try to convince them to adopt a Rule. Reformers of the time were keenly aware of the likelihood of resistance by those unwilling to be reformed: Abbot Suger, making reference to the reforms at Ste. Geneviève, said that, “Irregular [canons] will never consent to [be] regular canons except by force.”⁹³ Further light is shed on Warelwast’s reasons for replacing the canons at Plympton in a passage from the “Registrum de Plympton”:

Therefore when William saw that many outrages and scandals abounded in the life and behaviour of his subjects, and especially of his clerics—for all laboured in incontinence, the priests just as the people—with the inspiration of God he endeavoured to correct this vice firstly in the greater churches. For there was then an intolerable evil when priests publicly took wives, and, having neglected the preparation and care of churches, thought only about the succession of their heirs, and indulged in the adornment of women and not of altars. Therefore William began just as a good shepherd to bring back chastity and decency, with the word of holy exhortation and by the example of canonical religion, for he instituted the order of canons in Devon and Cornwall with men of respectable life and placed them in the churches of Plympton, Bodmin, and Launceston, and persuaded King Henry I to confirm this.⁹⁴

This passage may be an excerpt from a lost Plympton chronicle. The writer claims that the bishop was so appalled by the scandals incurred by the clerics of the major churches that he turned to “men of respectable life” (*viros spectabilis vitae*) to replace them. This passage captures perfectly the appeal of the regular canons for reform-minded bishops: as priests

⁹² Leland, *Itinerary*, vol. 1, pt. III, p. 215. The college of Holy Trinity at Bosham existed until 1550. A Saxon minster had existed on the site in the time of Edward the Confessor, who gave it to his chaplain, the Norman Osbern. Osbern became bishop of Exeter, and so the patronage of the college continued to belong to the bishops of Exeter. There were to be six prebendaries and six vicars. Although “well-endowed” in the time of Edward the Confessor, it had an income of only £47 in 1535 (*MRH*, pp. 413, 421).

⁹³ Cited in Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 112.

⁹⁴ Bodl. MS. James 23, p. 165; for the Latin text and Blair’s translation, see *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 520–2.

freed from the distractions of women and the need to provide for heirs, the regular canons, unlike the married seculars, were able to devote themselves entirely to the worship of God and the *vita apostolica*.

A somewhat different emphasis can be seen in William Warelwast's own foundation charter for Launceston Priory in 1127.⁹⁵ Here, it is not clear that the taking of wives was a problem amongst the secular canons. It may only be implied in the bishop's horror at the evils in the world and his reproaches against the secular canons for the disgraceful and indecent performance of their duties:

Since many evils have multiplied on the earth, the wicked sons of Belial have everywhere been watchful that by the vilest of contrivances they might disturb or ruin the Bride of Christ, the holy and immaculate church. Taking care for the future, and providing for the peace of the church and for the health of the Lord's flock, we made sure to command to written memory those things which we feared might be destroyed in a future time... I, William... lamenting that in my time the praises of God are repeated and extolled more tepidly and disgracefully than is usual or just by certain clerics in certain churches committed to my governance, decided to substitute men suitable and established in religion in them, so that they might give thanks to God there and intercede without ceasing for the sake of their transgressions and those of the people... it was done, so that, relying upon the advice and help of the king, the archbishop, my fellow bishops, and the lords of my province, I have established and confirmed for the remission of my sins, canons living according to the Rule of St. Augustine in the church of St. Stephen at Launceston.⁹⁶

This text reveals Bishop William's perception of the primary functions of the Augustinian canons: firstly, they were to take the place of those who were negligent of their responsibilities. Secular canons who praised God "tepidly and disgracefully (*tepidius et indecentius*)" had to go, and the clerics who were "suitable and established in religion (*viros ydoneos et religiose conditos*)" would serve in their stead. Secondly, the regular canons were to pray constantly for the souls of the people and

⁹⁵ At Launceston, unlike at Plympton, the secular canons were allowed to remain at the priory until their deaths, at which point their prebends reverted to the house (*Launceston Cartulary*, p. 5). This was a not uncommon solution to the problem of how to introduce regular canons while not dispossessing secular canons unwilling to accept a new way of life: in France during this period there are a number of examples of two parallel communities existing side by side until the seculars died out. See Constable, *Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, pp. 114-5. This approach did not always succeed, however: Constable mentions the example of St. Quiriace in Provins, where the two communities eventually separated.

⁹⁶ The Latin text is printed in *Launceston Cartulary*, p. 5.

for their own sins. The roles of monks and canons in society seem to overlap here: both were to engage in unceasing intercessory prayer for the people. Indeed, it must be kept in mind that from an early period prayer and the recitation of the divine office were important obligations on the part of regular canons as well as monks.⁹⁷ The perception that many communities of secular canons in Europe were failing to meet their liturgical and spiritual obligations and leading immoral lives was central to the drive of reformers to regularize such institutions.⁹⁸ For Warelwast, the answer was to replace the personnel altogether and establish new communities.

Clerical Celibacy and the Popularity of the Regular Canons

The regular canons impressed Bishop Warelwast as men capable of renewing the Church in Devon and Cornwall by maintaining a high standard of worship and prayer and practising celibacy. Of course, opposition to clerical marriage was not an unusual sentiment amongst the episcopacy of the period: clerical celibacy was an ideal preached with great vigour by the Gregorian reformers. The reformers had two main objections to married clergy; these will be examined in turn.

One serious concern was that married clergy led to the inheritance of churches by sons of priests. One method of countering this problem was to forbid the ordination of priests' sons, which was eventually done by Pope Urban II at the Synod of Rome in 1099.⁹⁹ The "Registrum" provides a perfect example of hereditary succession by priests of the church of St. Andrew at Sutton (owned by Plympton Priory): it contains a list of clerical fathers passing the church to sons from the time of Harold Harefoot to the reign of Henry II.¹⁰⁰ The first priest in the line was Alfegh, a canon at Plympton Minster who "held the

⁹⁷ A set of customs for regular canons drawn up by Hildebrand, seemingly after he became pope, delineates the Psalms, lessons, and responses he expected the canons to chant. See Gustave Bardy, 'Saint Grégoire VII et la réforme canoniale au XI^e siècle,' *Studi Gregoriani* 1 (1947), 52–3. See also Charles Dereine, 'Chanoines,' cols. 365 and 370 for the obligations of canons to engage in public prayer and the recitation of the divine office in the Carolingian period.

⁹⁸ Dereine, 'Chanoines,' cols. 375–8.

⁹⁹ Mansi, vol. 20, c. 961–70.

¹⁰⁰ This portion of the 'Registrum de Plympton' has been published and translated in the appendix to Blair's *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 519–22.

chapel and parish of Sutton as part of his prebend.”¹⁰¹ The last priest in the line of succession, Thomas, was the bastard son of the lord of Sutton, Reginald de Valletort, and the daughter of a previous priest, Dunprust.¹⁰² Reginald had requested that Geoffrey, prior of Plympton, present Thomas to Bishop William for institution to the vicarage of Sutton.¹⁰³ This succession came to an end when Thomas, after the deaths of Bishop William Warelwast and his father and being on his own deathbed, handed over the key of the church to Prior Johel and the canons of Plympton Priory. It seems ironic that for some decades after their establishment at Plympton, the regular canons were seemingly tolerant of the inheritance of one of their churches by the sons of priests, and that Bishop William allowed the practice to continue. Indeed, Martin Brett found the hereditary succession at Sutton a “striking fact” given Warelwast’s desire to rid Plympton of married canons.¹⁰⁴

It was not only the complications inherent in hereditary churches that bothered the reformers. The sin of “nicholaism,” as they termed clerical marriage, was increasingly viewed with revulsion. Peter Damian linked clerical purity with reverence for the Eucharist by maintaining that “just as Jesus was born of a chaste Virgin, so his re-birth in the blessed sacrament must be solemnized by a priest sworn to chastity.”¹⁰⁵ Anselm shared a similar viewpoint: he condemned those priests who “reeking of open and shameful licentiousness and contempt for the prohibitions of God and the saints, tenaciously serve at holy altars,” which they “pollute by their very presence.”¹⁰⁶ By the mid-eleventh century, the Church had forbidden marriage to any cleric above the rank of subdeacon and required a profession of chastity for those taking higher orders; nevertheless, it allowed the ordination of married men, who could keep their wives as long as they refrained from physical relations.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ *EEAE* XI, #23, pp. 23–24n.

¹⁰² Dunprust was the great-grandson of Alfegh (*EEAE* XI, #23, pp. 23–24n.). Dunprust’s son, William Bacini, had succeeded him, and then Thomas succeeded his uncle.

¹⁰³ Bodl. MS. James 23, p. 164; Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 519–21.

¹⁰⁴ Brett, *The English Church under Henry I*, p. 220.

¹⁰⁵ Christopher N.L. Brooke, ‘Gregorian Reform in Action: Clerical Marriage in England,’ *Cambridge Historical Journal* 12 (1956), 3.

¹⁰⁶ *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury*, ed. and trans. by Walter Frohlich (Kalamazoo, 1990), vol. 1, #65, p. 183.

¹⁰⁷ Brooke, ‘Gregorian Reform,’ 4.

The celibacy of canons as well as of parish priests occupied the minds of the reformers. The Council of Winchester, held by Archbishop Lanfranc in 1076, had declared that canons must not have wives, that priests or deacons could not henceforth be ordained without a profession of chastity, and that no priest could marry after the council.¹⁰⁸ Priests already married, however, were allowed to keep their wives. In Dickinson's view, Lanfranc's moderate approach may have derived from a combination of factors: a deliberate indulgence of a deeply-entrenched custom, Norman toleration of clerical marriage, and the archbishop's own sense of diplomacy.¹⁰⁹ Lanfranc emphasized his commitment to enforcing celibacy for canons in a letter to John II, Archbishop of Rouen, in the same year: he wrote that any canon who was a deacon or priest would henceforth lose his prebend if he had a wife.¹¹⁰

As Lanfranc's attempts to promote clerical celibacy seem not to have produced the hoped-for results, the council held by Anselm in 1102 decreed that no clerics could take wives and that married clerics had to renounce their wives; as well, the profession of chastity at ordination was extended to subdeacons.¹¹¹ Canons found ways around these strictures, however: Gerard, archbishop of York complained in a letter to Anselm written shortly after the Council that canons were keeping their wives at the homes of neighbours, and they were visiting them there—technically complying with the letter of the law, but certainly not with its spirit.¹¹² Around the same time, Anselm wrote to William, archdeacon of Canterbury, about archdeacons and canons who had moved their wives to houses on their manors: Anselm was willing to

¹⁰⁸ *CS*, Winchester 1076, can. 2.

¹⁰⁹ See John C. Dickinson, 'I canonici regolari e la riforma ecclesiastica in Inghilterra nei secoli XI e XII,' in *La vita comune del clero nei secoli XI e XII: Atti della Settimana di studio, 1959*, eds. C. Violante and C. Fonseca (Milan, 1962), p. 285.

¹¹⁰ *The Letters of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury*, eds. Helen Clover and Margaret Gibson (Oxford, 1979), pp. 134–5. The Archbishop of Rouen had tried "to impose clerical celibacy on all clergy above the rank of subdeacon" at a council in Rouen in 1072; this had triggered a riot.

¹¹¹ *CS*, I, pt. 2, p. 675, canon 5. At the same council the inheritance of churches by sons of priests was forbidden (canon 8). The attitude of Henry I seemed to be one of tolerance mixed with greed: at various points he granted married clerics licences to remain married, for a fee. See Brett, *The English Church*, pp. 77, 79, 81–2 and *Letters of Anselm*, vol. 3, #391–4, pp. 151–4.

¹¹² *Letters of Anselm*, vol. 2, #255, pp. 244–5. Gerard also complained that priests and deacons were refusing to make professions of chastity: "they repeatedly go back and forth, publicly, from the beds of their concubines to the altar, and then from the altar to the beds of wickedness."

tolerate visits between spouses, as long as no physical relations occurred and there were “legitimate witnesses” acting as chaperones.¹¹³

That the flouting of these decrees continued is demonstrated by the fact that Anselm held another council in 1108 exclusively to deal with this matter.¹¹⁴ The council’s canons laid out precisely the circumstances under which formerly-married priests might consort with the wives they had put away, and the punishments due them should they create further scandal.¹¹⁵ The First Lateran Council in 1123 took an even stronger line by declaring that any marriage entered into by a cleric in higher orders was to be dissolved.¹¹⁶ Legatine councils at Westminster in 1125, 1127, and 1129 reiterated the prohibitions against priestly incontinence; in 1127, an especially harsh canon was passed that required the expulsion of priests’ concubines (except legitimate wives) from the priests’ parishes.¹¹⁷ Despite these measures taken by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, clerical marriages continued to occur: Gerald of Wales complained (likely exaggerating) at the end of the twelfth century that “nearly all” English priests were married.¹¹⁸ The extent to which this continued to be a problem at secular colleges by Gerald’s time is not clear. Certainly in English conciliar decrees on this issue in the thirteenth century the secular canons cease to be mentioned specifically,¹¹⁹ as they had been in the decrees of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Of course, their numbers had declined drastically: Dickinson pointed out that after the time of Henry I there were “comparatively few” collegiate churches in twelfth-century England.¹²⁰ The wave of foundations of houses of regular canons which had swept over England in Henry’s reign had had a profound effect on the old collegiate churches.¹²¹

¹¹³ *Letters of Anselm*, vol. 2, #257, p. 249.

¹¹⁴ Brooke, ‘Gregorian Reform,’ 15 n. 47.

¹¹⁵ *CS* I pt. 2, pp. 700–3. An interesting aspect of this issue is the importance placed on the role of the archdeacon in the enforcement of these canons: canon 6 declares that archdeacons must swear not to accept money in return for toleration of infractions.

¹¹⁶ Brooke, ‘Gregorian Reform,’ 5.

¹¹⁷ *CS*, I, pt. 2, pp. 740, 747–8.

¹¹⁸ John R.H. Moorman, *Church Life in England in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1945), pp. 64–6. In the thirteenth century bishops continued to penalize married priests or those living in concubinage, but with limited results.

¹¹⁹ *CS*, II, *passim*.

¹²⁰ Dickinson, *Origins*, p. 144.

¹²¹ Of course, some collegiate churches were founded in the twelfth century, some Anglo-Saxon foundations such as Crediton and Wimborne continued to exist until the 1540s, and in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the founding of colleges became popular once more. An examination of the list of secular colleges in Knowles’s and

Is it possible, then, that the bishops favoured the conversion of houses of secular canons into those of regular canons partly, or even largely, because of a desire to eliminate clerical marriage amongst these communities? Were Bishop Warelwast and his fellow bishops influenced by the spirit of the age, as well as by the memories of Archbishops Lanfranc and Anselm, to continue the campaign for canonical celibacy by converting secular colleges into regular ones, and by founding houses of Augustinians themselves? Warelwast was probably present at the Councils of 1108 and 1125 and may have participated in the discussion of this issue. While Warelwast had certainly been strongly in the royal camp during the disputes of William II and Henry I with Anselm, this does not mean that he was implacably hostile to all of Anselm's aims.¹²² Indeed, Warelwast's record of reforming secular colleges in the diocese of Exeter suggests that he and Anselm were in agreement on the value of this enterprise.

Is it not significant that Anselm fought so hard against clerical marriage and at the same time supported the earliest efforts to found Augustinian houses in England? Both Brooke in his early article¹²³ and Dickinson¹²⁴ make the connection between the reformers' drive to abolish clerical marriage and the popularity of the Augustinian order of canons whose ideal was to live communally and chastely. C.H. Lawrence has also stressed this connection.¹²⁵ Dickinson maintained that the idea of converting secular colleges into Augustinian priories was likely appealing because "better safeguards were thereby secured for the maintenance of regular worship and clerical morals" without the need to make substantial additional endowments.¹²⁶ And yet, this explanation for the rapid increase in the number of Augustinian houses has found less favour with scholars—such as Brooke himself in a later

Hadcock's *Medieval Religious Houses*, however, reveals that of the thirty-eight Anglo-Saxon colleges which probably survived the Conquest, five had been dissolved outright by c. 1350, three had been granted to cathedrals or other colleges, eight had been granted or made subject to monasteries, and twenty-two had been converted into houses of regular canons or monks.

¹²² See Blake, 'Bishop William Warelwast,' 22: "There is very little evidence for personal animosity between Anselm and Warelwast. Warelwast devoted himself as wholeheartedly to the task of reconciliation as he had to opposition."

¹²³ Brooke, 'Gregorian Reform,' 8.

¹²⁴ Dickinson, *Origins*, pp. 241–4.

¹²⁵ Clifford H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, 2001), pp. 160–1.

¹²⁶ Dickinson, *Origins*, p. 144.

essay¹²⁷—who prefer the theory that the dominant characteristic of the Augustinian canons was their involvement in pastoral care. The author of one doctoral dissertation has explicitly rejected the notion that there were links between the Gregorian Reform movement of the Continent and the growth in the number of Augustinian houses in England in the early twelfth century.¹²⁸ Of course, it would be equally erroneous to dismiss altogether the possibility that some founders of Augustinian communities did hope or expect that the canons would undertake the cure of souls or be particularly active in the care of the sick, travellers, and pilgrims. When so many of the surviving documents express other expectations of the canons, it would be unwise to contend that such motives were general amongst those who patronized the Augustinian canons without corroborating evidence, however.

Indeed, an examination of a variety of foundation charters from Augustinian houses reveals that when the motives of the founders were mentioned, they differed little from the sentiments expressed by those who established houses of other orders: the standard phrase was usually “I found this house for the remission of my sins, for the souls of my ancestors and descendants . . .” Very rarely—if ever—did founders specify that they were establishing a house of Augustinian canons in order to foster pastoral care in their communities. Indeed, gifts of churches were listed in the same manner as temporal benefactions, and were not followed by conditions that the canons serve them personally. Some light can be shed on this matter by examining documents from Augustinian houses similar to Plympton Priory: that is, houses that were either founded by bishops, or were converted from secular colleges. Cirencester Abbey, for example, had been a secular college

¹²⁷ Christopher N.L. Brooke, ‘Monk and Canon: Some Patterns in the Religious Life of the Twelfth Century,’ in *Monks, Hermits, and the Ascetic Tradition: Papers of the 1984 and 1985 Ecclesiastical History Society, Studies in Church History*, vol. 22 (Oxford, 1985), p. 125. Brooke did acknowledge in this essay the variety of types of foundations of the order, from the isolated Llanthony Priory with its origins as a hermitage to the urban hospital of St. Bartholomew’s-Smithfield. However, he also felt that “it stands to reason that [gifts of] tithes and pastoral responsibility were intimately linked in early days.” He conceived of the canons as “folk nearer to the city centres, to the ordinary lives of the community, to pastoral care, at least in origin and principle.”

¹²⁸ Christine Butterill, ‘The Foundations of Augustinian Priors in England during the Reign of Henry I, 1100–1135,’ Ph.D. Diss., Birkbeck College, University of London, 1999, pp. 8–10, 16–7. Butterill analyzed the location of the early Augustinian houses along the Roman road system in England and suggested that one of the motives of patrons in founding such houses might have been to create “courier way stations” for officials (pp. 18–9).

which seemed to have first attracted the attention of Bishop Roger of Salisbury, who made some gifts in which he retained the life interests.¹²⁹ Henry I made further donations and was recognized as founder. In his charter of 1133 he declared that he, the “unworthy builder” of the abbey, had made his gifts “for the souls of my fathers and ancestors and for the remission of my sins and for the state and safety of my realm to Abbot Serlo, all his successors, and the regular canons serving God there.”¹³⁰ The secular canons were allowed to maintain their prebends, which were excluded from the transferral of endowments; presumably the prebends reverted to the abbey as the canons died.¹³¹

Gervase of Canterbury recorded in his *Chronica* that in 1130 Henry I gave to Archbishop William of Canterbury the church of St. Martin’s, Dover, which had, “from ancient times,” been occupied by secular canons. Gervase alleged in his chronicle that these canons had bound themselves to the sins of gluttony and lechery, had immersed themselves in secular affairs, and had neglected the recitation of the Divine Office.¹³² Another contemporary source reiterated the incontinence of the secular canons’ lives, and blamed the temptations of women of the town and surrounding area.¹³³ Archbishop William decided that the site of the college, in the midst of a town, was not suited for a religious way of life, and so he decided to build the refounded house outside the town. Being a regular canon himself, the archbishop was predisposed, Gervase believed, towards instituting regular canons in his new foundation. This plan was ultimately aborted, however, by the objection of the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury, who asserted their rights over the church and forced the introduction of Benedictine monks at Dover instead.¹³⁴

In the reign of Henry II, Simon de Beauchamp founded Newnham Priory, to which he transferred the endowments of the college of St. Paul’s, Bedford. In his charter of 1166, which he said was approved by Henry II, Pope Alexander III, and Thomas Becket, archbishop of

¹²⁹ *Cartulary of Cirencester Abbey*, ed. Charles D. Ross (London, 1964), vol. 1, p. xxii.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22: “pro animabus patrum et antecessorum meorum remissione peccatorum et pro statu et incolunitate regni mei abbati Serloni primo et omnibus successoribus eius et canonicis regularibus ibidem Deo servientibus.”

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹³² Gervase of Canterbury, ‘Chronica,’ in *The Historical Works of Gervase of Canterbury*, ed. W.H. Stubbs, Rolls Series, vol. 73, pt. 1. (London, 1879–80), pp. 96–7.

¹³³ Quoted in Charles R. Haines, *Dover Priory* (Cambridge, 1930), p. 60.

¹³⁴ Gervase of Canterbury, ‘Chronica,’ pp. 97–9.

Canterbury, Simon stated that he was counseled by wise and pious men to convert the prebends of the college which his ancestors had founded to the use of the new priory “ad uberiorem divini cultus reverenciam et pure religionis honestatem...”¹³⁵

Similar sentiments were echoed in the 1178 foundation charter of Henry II for Waltham Abbey. He stated that on the advice of “great men both religious and lay” he had decided to remove the secular canons “on account of the scandal caused by [their] irreligious and worldly life.”¹³⁶ He had consulted with Pope Alexander III, and had arranged for suitable provision for the secular canons elsewhere. The Augustinian canons had taken possession of Waltham in 1177, “introduced by bishops appointed by the king.”¹³⁷ Henry granted numerous gifts to them for the salvation of himself and his descendants, as well as for the “redemption of his predecessors the kings and queens of England.”¹³⁸

These charters reveal a respect for the Augustinian canons as practitioners of divine worship and holy living. They indicate that bishops and lay founders alike were concerned about the standard of worship and moral behaviour of the canons at ancient Anglo-Saxon secular colleges. The circumstances surrounding the refoundation of Plympton Minster exemplify the different forces at work behind such a transformation: royal support of the spread of the Augustinian order in England and the regularization of secular colleges, a court circle active in the foundation of Augustinian houses, a climate of hostility in the Church towards clerical marriage, and episcopal initiative in the promotion of the Augustinian canons. Of course, it is important to keep in mind that the Augustinian canons may have been the recipients of patronage and benefactions for a variety of reasons. As a “new order” in the first decades of the twelfth century, they appealed to those who wished to support monastic and clerical reform. As well, the Augustinian canons were the first of the new orders to appear in England, and consequently lacked competition for benefactions for several decades until the arrival of the Cistercians in 1128.¹³⁹ One must not underestimate the appeal

¹³⁵ *Cartulary of Newnham Priory*, ed. Joyce Godber (Bedford, 1963–64) pt. 1, p. 10.

¹³⁶ *Early Charters of the Augustinian Canons of Waltham Abbey, Essex* ed. Rosalind Ransford (Woodbridge, 1989) #26, pp. 14–6.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders*, p. 55.

of whatever might be perceived as new, untainted, and pure to those who were seeking to obtain the spiritual benefits inherent in founding and endowing religious communities.

Once a house of Augustinian canons was established, its later fate had much to do with the extent of the gifts granted at its foundation. The next two chapters will deal with the provision of a generous endowment for Plympton Priory by its episcopal patrons and by lay and clerical benefactors.

CHAPTER TWO

EPISCOPAL SUPPORT FOR THE NEW FOUNDATION: DONATIONS TO PLYMPTON PRIORY FROM THE BISHOPS OF EXETER AND THEIR CIRCLE

The material success of a religious house in the Middle Ages was largely dependent on the generosity of its patrons and benefactors in the early years of its existence, when enthusiasm for the establishment of a new foundation was most likely to result in significant donations. After the foundation of Plympton Priory in 1121 by Bishop William Warelwast, the canons witnessed widespread interest in this new Augustinian house amongst the lay elite of Devon and members of the diocesan hierarchy. The bishops of Exeter continued to show their support to Plympton Priory in the twelfth century by granting the canons substantial gifts of land, churches, and money. Bishop William Warelwast, the founder and first patron, was especially conscientious in attending to his duty to provide for the economic well-being of his foundation. Although we have the texts of only two episcopal donation charters for Plympton, from these and from other episcopal *acta* and confirmation charters we can obtain some impression of the relations between the canons of Plympton and the bishops, deans, and canons of Exeter in the twelfth century.

Shortly after the foundation of the priory, in 1124, William Warelwast, “burning with the zeal of charity and following in the footsteps of the holy fathers,” absolved Plympton and all its chapels, especially Plymstock, from the payment of synodal and paschal dues and all other episcopal exactions in perpetuity.¹ These dues were the standard payments bishops were entitled to seek from clerics and monasteries

¹ “. . . [Z]elo caritatis accensus et sanctorum patrum vestigia sequens, pro amore Dei et peccatorum meorum remissione atque pro salute totius capituli mei, ecclesiam sancti Petri apostolorum principis de Plimton’ omnesque capellas sibi pertinentes, nominatim de Plimestoke ab omni censu synodali, et paschali consuetudine et ab omni exactione episcopali” (*EEAE* XI, #20, p. 19). Why Plymstock should be singled out for particular mention is not clear, unless Bishop William foresaw the later troubles Plympton would have with Tavistock Abbey, which owned the manor of Plymstock, over this chapel. Abbot Walter of Tavistock recognized Plympton’s rights to the chapel c. 1164 (*MA* II, p. 500), but a final resolution of this disagreement occurred only in 1429 (*Reg. Lacy*

in their dioceses. The synodal fee was exacted from each person a bishop requested to attend a synod; the amount seems to have varied according to the size of the church or monastery, ranging from a few pence to several shillings.² The paschal due likely refers to the fee paid by the clergy on Maundy Thursday for chrism to be used at Easter.³ Another type of episcopal exaction was the *cathedraticum*; this was a sum owed to the bishop as he travelled around his diocese inquiring after offenses which would be corrected at the synod.⁴ Addleshaw pointed out that twelfth-century bishops remitted such dues and exactions in recognition of the Gregorian Reform's new conception of the relationship between priest and bishop: the bishop was no longer to require a priest to pay fees for "spiritual things," as a lord would require services or dues from a vassal.⁵ John of Oxford, bishop of Norwich, displayed this attitude between 1198 and 1200 when he absolved all the churches in his diocese from payment of the paschal due (but not the synodal): he anathematized anyone exacting any other due, especially for such things as institutions to benefices, dedications of churches, and the like.⁶ Bishop William Warelwast was cautious, however, to ensure that his rights and those of the archdeacon were protected.⁷

This bishop also granted to Plympton Priory the sum of sixty shillings from the prebend of each canon of Exeter Cathedral who died or entered the religious life.⁸ Warelwast stipulated that the canons of

IV, pp. 267–8). See Chapter Four for a fuller discussion of Plympton Priory and the chapel at Plymstock.

² Moorman, *Church Life in England*, p. 120.

³ Brett, *English Church*, p. 164. The amount may have been 7d.

⁴ The *cathedraticum* seems to have been similar in conception to the procuration, a sum owed to the bishop when visitations became common (Brett, *English Church*, pp. 166–7). The procuration was an annual payment offered in lieu of the provision of hospitality to the bishop during his visitation.

⁵ George W.O. Addleshaw, *Rectors, Vicars, and Patrons in Twelfth and early Thirteenth Century Canon Law* (London, 1956), pp. 4–5.

⁶ John of Oxford did allow "due and moderate procurations for burials, vigils, and celebrations of marriages." See *English Episcopal Acta VI: Norwich*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill (Oxford: Oxford University Press for The British Academy, 1990), #262, pp. 209–10. Bishop Robert Chesney of Lincoln also exempted (c. 1150 × 1161) an Augustinian house, Owston Priory, from payment of synodals and all other episcopal customs, except the Peter's Pence. See *English Episcopal Acta I: Lincoln*, ed. David Smith (London, 1980), #216.

⁷ The bishop conceded that "any financial penalties incurred by the priory's domestic servants are to go to the canons, although jurisdiction and penitential discipline over them are reserved to the bishop and archdeacon" (*EEAE XI*, #20, p. 19).

⁸ *EEAE XI*, #22, pp. 20–2, 22n. The grant was made on the occasion of the dedication of the new cathedral church in Exeter.

Plympton were to say the same number and sort of services for each cathedral canon as for one of their own brethren. They were also to pray for William and his sins, as he took care to support them in their need.⁹ After his death they were to pray for him and his successors just as they would for one of their own, or even more, if they were feeling charitable.¹⁰ In the same charter he gave Plympton a tenement in Exeter, which had previously belonged to Ranulfus de Haga and, after him, to Clarembald.¹¹

These gifts were confirmed by the chapter of the cathedral on the same day, July 2, 1133.¹² The chapter's charter sheds an interesting light on the relations between bishop and chapter at Exeter in the 1120s: the cathedral canons spoke in glowing terms of the bishop's thoughtfulness. The cathedral canons said that previously the custom at Exeter had been that after the death of a canon, his prebend was simply handed over to another at the will of the bishop, although the chapter could offer advice. Now the bishop had come up with a way to improve this situation, with their approval: upon the death of each canon, his prebend would be paid out to help the poor for a year after his death, for the good of his soul. The Plympton canons were to receive sixty shillings from the prebend, for the salvation of the living and the rest of the dead and for the soul of the dead canon expressly.¹³ Several subsequent bishops—Robert Warelwast (Bishop William Warelwast's nephew), Robert of Chichester, Bartholomew, and John the Chanter—and Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury issued confirmations of this gift, most probably at the solicitation of the priors of Plympton.¹⁴ Robert Warelwast added

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21: "Quo sicut eorum indigencie nostra suffragari curat abundancia, ita et pro nostris et nostrorum offensis precare Deum non desistat religionis eorum cultus et perseverencia."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: "Nolo autem vos latere quia et pro me ipso et pro meis successoribus post mortem ecclesia Plimtone annuatim tale obsequium facere suscepit et concessit, quale et ipsa faciet post obitum sui prelati proprii iuxta morem sue institutionis, nisi forte caritas eorum gratiam pro gracia quantumlibet adauxeret."

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 20–2. In Bishop John's confirmation (*EEAE* XII, #168, pp. 150–2) this property is referred to as "domum quandam et terram que fuit Clarembaldi in vico australi." Clarembald was a doctor, royal chaplain, canon of Exeter cathedral, and friend of William Warelwast. See Frances Rose-Troup, 'Clarembald and the Miracles of Exeter,' in *Exeter Vignettes* (Manchester, 1942), p. 9.

¹² *MDE* #8, p. 136; translated by Barlow, *EEAE* XI, #22, p. 22n.

¹³ *Ibid.*: "pro salute vivorum et requie defunctorum et nominatim pro nostri canonici defuncti anima."

¹⁴ *EEAE* XI, #120, pp. 109–10 and *EEAE* XII, #166, p. 149.

twenty more shillings to the gift so that the total amount that went to Plympton at the death of each canon was four pounds.¹⁵

It is interesting that both William, the founder of the priory, and the chapter expressed the desire that the canons of Plympton pray for them and for the souls of their dead brethren. What these men expected of the Plympton canons seems to have been little different from what these men might have expected of monks: prayers for the souls of the living and the dead. Bishop William himself stated the belief that the worship in which the canons were engaged would assist in God's forgiveness of his sins.¹⁶ The bishop and the chapter seem to have felt that by their gift and confirmation they were entering into a sort of spiritual confraternity with the Plympton canons, an expectation often stated explicitly in other monastic charters of the period.¹⁷ Once again, the evidence suggests that early patrons and benefactors valued the Augustinian canons for their fulfillment of the normal duties of members of the religious orders: ceaseless divine worship and intercessory prayer.

Warelwast also gave Plympton a house and gardens belonging to Ascelin the archdeacon which he granted in free alms, and he consented to Hugh de Saucei's benefaction of land in Lusacombe.¹⁸ He and the chapter were also present when Aluric Fitz Wischi donated land at "Madworthy," near the leper hospital in Exeter.¹⁹ In addition, the bishop gave his permission to his nephew, namesake, and steward to grant land at Stokeley and Ashridge to the priory; this gift was later confirmed by the bishop's successor, his nephew Robert Warelwast.²⁰

¹⁵ *EEAE* XII, #166, p. 149. Orme says that this was the basic annual income for a prebend at Exeter Cathedral: Nicholas Orme, *Exeter Cathedral as It Was* (Exeter, 1986), p. 34. The canons of Exeter Cathedral fell into arrears in their payments in the early fifteenth century, but this was resolved in an agreement with the prior and canons of Plympton in 1406 (Exeter Cathedral Archives, D&C 1362). A few receipts from the prior of Plympton for moneys received from the dean and chapter have survived (e.g. Exeter Cathedral Archives, D&C 1371 and 1372).

¹⁶ *EEAE* XI, #22, p. 21: "pro nostris et nostrorum offensis pacare deum non desistat religionis eorum cultus et perseverencia."

¹⁷ Janet Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain, 1000–1300* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 216.

¹⁸ *EEAE* XII, #168, pp. 150–2. Hugh de Saucei was a vassal of the earl of Devon. Lusacombe is in present-day Bickington, Teignbridge hundred.

¹⁹ *EEAE* XI, #43, p. 41. Barlow points out that the priory granted this land, 1176x1184, to the Hospital of St. John the Baptist in Exeter at the petition of Robert Fitz Gille, archdeacon of Totnes, for an annual rent of half a mark.

²⁰ *EEAE* XI, #42, p. 40. The original owner of the land is not clear: Bishop Robert's confirmation of 1138 x 1141 states that Robert Bevin quit-claimed the land which

Difficulties arose, however, when William Warelwast (the nephew) gave the land of Stokeley to his wife Aliz, daughter of William de Buz, as dower. Aliz subsequently ran away from her husband with Richard of Flanders and sold Stokeley.²¹ The prior of Plympton was able to get back the land, nevertheless, in a settlement: he gave Aliz and her new husband four silver marks to renounce their hold of the land forever, an offer which they accepted. At the same time Robert Bevin quit-claimed all right to the land and, after placing the knife of Robert the Hermit on the altar of the chapel of Saint Faith, swore to this on the Gospels; Prior Geoffrey gave him three silver marks.²² This time the land remained in the hands of the priory, and at the time of the Dissolution the manor of Stokeley/Prioriton was valued at £8 13s 5d.²³

Bishop William Warelwast was also involved in the donation of land in Cornwall to Plympton Priory, albeit in a roundabout way. The “Registrum” tells us that he gave William of Rouen, for his service, land at Trevilla from the demesne of his manor of Tregear.²⁴ William of Rouen gave to his brother, Robert de Rouen, three Cornish acres plus three virgates of land—Loe, Lamfioc, and Harcourt²⁵—from the manor. After Bishop William’s death in 1137, Robert of Rouen, following the example of the bishop, decided to become a canon at Plympton; he persuaded Bishop Robert Warelwast of Exeter and his nephew John of Rouen to concede this land, which he wished to bring with him to

William Warelwast (the nephew) bought from his father, Ralph (“eam a patre suo Radulfo emerat”) with the consent of his uncle the bishop, and gave to the priory. An account in the “Registrum” notes, however, that Bishop Robert confirmed the gift to the priory of land at Stokeley from William Warelwast II, Bishop Robert’s relative; William had bought this land from Robert Bevin and given it to the church when he became a canon at the priory (“predictae ecclesiae secum fieret canonicus dedit”). William II also gave the land of Ashridge with Bishop William’s consent; the bishop had given it to his nephew for his service as steward. See *EEAE XI*, #42, p. 40n.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.* Perhaps the knife of Robert the Hermit was considered a holy relic? Placing a knife on the altar to signify the offering of a gift was not uncommon in the twelfth century. See Vivian H. Galbraith, ‘Monastic Foundation Charters of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries,’ *Cambridge Historical Journal* 4 (1934), 211–2 and Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066–1307* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), pp. 205–7.

²³ *MDE* #28, pp. 145–9. Bishop John the Chanter confirmed Bishop Robert I’s charter, 1188 × 1191 (*EEAE XII*, #167, p. 150). Ashridge and Stokeley (also known as Prioriton) are in Sandford, Crediton hundred.

²⁴ *EEAE XI*, #44, pp. 42–3.

²⁵ *Ibid.* Barlow notes that Trevella manor, with the church of St. Feock (Lamfioc), was part of the episcopal manor of Tregear, and that Loe and Harcourt are in the same parish.

the priory.²⁶ John of Rouen returned the land into the hands of the bishop and quit his claim to the land; in return, the bishop released him and his heirs from the payment of a third part of a knight's fee, and Prior Geoffrey gave him six silver marks and the hauberk of his uncle Robert.

One of the most significant gifts from Bishop William Warelwast to the priory was the church of St. Kew in Cornwall. As was mentioned in Chapter One, according to "Cornish tradition," this church belonged to Plympton in Anglo-Saxon times; by the time of the Domesday Book, however, it was in royal hands.²⁷ It was one of the churches given to Bishop William Warelwast by Henry I in the controversial documents discussed above. The church at St. Kew was evidently some kind of small minster whose prebends were to revert to Plympton Priory as the secular canons died. A confirmation charter of Bishop John the Chanter of Exeter states that the episcopal donation consisted of the church of Landeho (St. Kew) together with its lands, tithes, liberties, and all appurtenances, so that with the death of the clerics their prebends would fall to the canons of Plympton.²⁸ While there is no surviving charter regarding William Warelwast's granting of St. Kew to Plympton, the canons of Plympton did possess such a document in the 1260s when Bishop Bronescombe challenged Plympton Priory's right to the church.²⁹ Bronescombe also noted at that time that the dean and chapter of Exeter had confirmed the donation, as had subsequent bishops of Exeter.³⁰ Given the later troubles Plympton was to have in asserting its right to this church, Bishop William's gift was something of a mixed blessing.³¹

²⁶ Ibid. A fragment of the confirmation charter from the "Registrum de Plympton" is printed in *EEAE* XI, #44, p. 42. It states that the donation was made at St. Germans in Cornwall "per cu[l]tellum super altare sancti Michaelis."

²⁷ Picken, 'The 'Landochou' Charter,' pp. 36–7, 43.

²⁸ *EEAE* XII, #168, p. 151: "...ecclesiam de Landeho cum terris, decimis, libertatibus, et omnibus pertinenciis, ita ut decedentibus eiusdem ecclesie clericis prebende eorum in ecclesie vestre usus et vestros cedant." The lands attached to St. Kew were known as the manor of Lanowe Seynt by 1535, when it was valued at £11 9s 3d (*MDE* #28, p. 147).

²⁹ *Reg. Bronescombe* I, #389, p. 131.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ This matter will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five. The value of the church of St. Kew was £20 in 1535, according to the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (*MDE* #28, p. 149).

Episcopal generosity to Plympton Priory may also have inspired other members of the diocesan administration to make benefactions to the canons. Ascelin, the archdeacon whose house and gardens in Exeter were bought by William Warelwast and given to Plympton, also granted the priory land in his own right, a half virgate and half ferling of land in Sampford Spiney, of the fee lands of the earl of Devon.³² Another archdeacon was a good friend to Plympton some decades later: Robert Fitz Gille, archdeacon of Totnes (c. 1170–Jan. 1186), brother of John of Salisbury and seemingly a physician.³³ The “*Registrum de Plympton*” contains an obituary notice and account of the gifts of Robert: while he lived, he rebuilt the refectory and the infirmary and gave a golden chalice with gems, a chasuble, and a cope decorated with gold thread, a missal, two lectionaries, the Pentateuch, and, to Prior Martin, a collection of Decretal letters.³⁴ Like William Warelwast I, William Warelwast II, and Robert of Rouen, Robert Fitz Gille retired to the priory and became a canon. When he was *in extremis*, he bequeathed all his books to the priory, including the Epistles of St. Paul, a Psalter, and Gratian’s *Decretum*, except his medical texts.³⁵ He was buried in the conventual church, having left the priory ten silver marks and his palfrey in addition to the other treasures this “ever most tender lover” bequeathed to the canons.³⁶ As well, on the day before he died, Robert had asked the canons of Plympton to provide on the anniversary of his death six shillings’ worth of wine, food, and other comforts for the poor, for the salvation of himself and the canons.³⁷ They complied with this request: the writer of the obituary urged future brothers to attend to the wishes of one from whose generosity they benefitted.³⁸

³² *MDE* #3, p. 135 (For the identification of “Sandford” as Sampford Spiney, see *PND*, pt. 1, p. 238). Barlow notes that Ascelin may have been one of the first territorial archdeacons in the Diocese of Exeter; he seems to have died either in 1122 or 1132. See *EEAE* XII, appendix 2, p. 306n.

³³ Frank Barlow, ‘John of Salisbury and His Brothers,’ *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46 (1995), 99–100.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 99, 109. The “*Registrum*” states that the names of the books were recorded in their catalogue, now sadly lost.

³⁶ His other bequests included ten silver spoons “*desiderans eos semper talibus velle et posse uti*,” a silver cup and silver bowl “*appendentes tres marcas et dimidiam et eo amplius*,” his mazer cup, a silver bowl to be used in the conventual church.

³⁷ Barlow, ‘John of Salisbury,’ 100, 109.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 109: “...*eius tam benignae liberalitatis participes, idem exaudire et pro suo tempore exsolvere.*”

Bishop John the Chanter also confirmed, 1188 × 1191, to Plympton Priory its long-standing right to present to the archdeacon of Totnes a priest to be instituted to the rural deanery of Plympton.³⁹ Gilbert Basset, archdeacon of Totnes (1190–1207), recognized this right as well.⁴⁰ The main role of the rural dean was to “supervise... a group of parochial clergy”: the dean was meant to oversee the moral behaviour of the clergy, visit sick vicars and curates, and preside over monthly rural dean meetings.⁴¹ In England the rural deans were usually appointed by the bishop, but in the diocese of Exeter the practice was for the incumbents of the benefices in a deanery to elect the rural deans each year.⁴² Plympton Priory’s right to appoint the rural deans for its district is an example of the interconnectedness between the canons and the diocesan hierarchy in Devon.

The close ties between Plympton Priory and the episcopal circle continued throughout the twelfth century. William Warelwast was not the only bishop of Exeter who was generous and helpful to the priory in the first eight decades after its foundation. Bishop John’s confirmation charter of 1186 × 1188 lists the priory’s spiritualities and temporalities which were gifts of the bishops or were confirmed by them.⁴³ For example, Bishop Bartholomew gave his consent when Ancatillus, priest of Exeter Cathedral bought land belonging to the episcopal fee in South Street, Exeter from the heirs of Algarus Bula and donated it

³⁹ The episcopal confirmation was acknowledged in a privilege from Pope Celestine III (*EEAE* XII, #169, p. 152).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; *MDE* #15, pp. 138–9.

⁴¹ Alexander Hamilton Thompson, ‘Diocesan Organization in the Middle Ages: Archdeacons and Rural Deans,’ *Proceedings of the British Academy* 29 (1943), 185–6. While these were the duties of the rural deans in theory, Hamilton Thompson found little evidence of such activities in the episcopal registers, where for the most part the rural deans appeared as recipients of standard commissions of inquiry.

⁴² *Reg. Grandisson* II, p. 713n. That the incumbents were not always conscientious about fulfilling this responsibility is shown by an entry in Bishop Thomas Brantingham’s register for 1390: he sent out a tersely-worded mandate ordering the incumbents of the Archdeaconry of Cornwall to hurry up and elect their rural deans (*Reg. Brantyngham* II, p. 706). In 1333, an aggrieved Bishop Grandisson complained that some rural deans in the diocese had placed others “minus ydoneos, viles pauperes, levis opinionis” in their offices (presumably for a fee) and that they had handed them their seals of office. Bishop Grandisson declared that in the future rural deans had to exercise their duties themselves, unless they were incapacitated, and keep the seals in their possession. Offenders had to pay 100s towards the re-building of the cathedral (*Reg. Grandisson* II, pp. 712–3).

⁴³ *EEAE* XII, #168, pp. 150–2. Bishop Bartholomew also confirmed the priory’s possessions (*EEAE* XI, #118, pp. 107–8).

to Plympton Priory.⁴⁴ There are no surviving records of benefactions to Plympton Priory by Bishop Bartholomew, but he seems to have had a close relationship with it: during a court case in the 1160s concerning some married clergy in the archdeaconry of Barnstaple, Bartholomew sent a canon of Plympton to the Curia in Rome to represent him.⁴⁵

The most important gifts from bishops of Exeter were undoubtedly the spiritualities: the confirmation charter lists fourteen churches given to the priory either by the bishops or with their approval. Indeed, it is only possible to identify definitely three churches which came directly from the bishops of Exeter: St. Kew, St. Anthony-in-Roseland,⁴⁶ and St. Just-in-Roseland,⁴⁷ all in Cornwall. Bishop Robert I of Exeter (1138–55) gave the latter two to the priory “with all lands, tithes, liberties, and belongings.”⁴⁸ Unfortunately, we do not know the identities of donors of two churches, Bridestowe in Devon⁴⁹ and Maker in Cornwall,⁵⁰ of

⁴⁴ Ibid. The land in South Street also included a house which Algarus had built on it. In return, the canons of Plympton had to pay 2s to the bishop of Exeter at each of the four terms of the year. The bishops were similarly businesslike about land which the canons bought from Wimundus the goldsmith and his heirs with the consent of Bishop Bartholomew: the canons were to give the bishop four pence a year for it.

⁴⁵ Adrian Morey, *Bartholomew of Exeter: Bishop and Canonist* (Cambridge, 1937), p. 93. Another indication of this relationship—and of the status of Plympton Priory in the diocese—was that during the negotiations that resulted in Bartholomew’s elevation to the see of Exeter, John of Salisbury wrote Bartholomew that he should come to Canterbury, accompanied by the abbot of Tavistock and the prior of Plympton (ibid., p. 13).

⁴⁶ This church became a cell of Plympton. Leland said in his *Itinerary* that two canons had resided there (*MDE*, p. 134). St. Anthony’s also had a dependent chapel, St. Gerrans. The manor of St. Anthony, also known as Burdohowe, was valued at £9 in the *Valor*; the total in the Ministers’ Accounts is £11 3s 10d (*MDE* #28, p. 147 and #30, p. 150). Little is known of this cell, other than what appears in two mentions in the episcopal registers: on October 3, 1259, Bishop Bronescombe dedicated the church, and in 1338 the French burnt down the cell during a raid on Cornwall (*Reg Bronescombe* I, #144, p. 44, and *Reg Grandisson* II, p. 872).

⁴⁷ A dispute arose between the prior of Plympton and John le Sor over the patronage of the church of St. Just in the 1180s; this dispute is discussed in detail in Chapter Four. A memorandum in the “Registrum” states that Bishop Leofric (1046 × 1072) had appointed his brother Odmer to oversee his lands in Cornwall, including the episcopal manor of Tregar, of which St. Just-in-Roseland was part; Odmer’s son was Osbert Sor, who was father of a John Sor (*EEAE* XI, #1, pp. 1–2n).

⁴⁸ *MDE* #3, p. 135.

⁴⁹ In 1086 the manor of Bridestowe was held by Ralph of Pomeroy from Baldwin the Sheriff (*DB: D* #16, 7). In 1242–43, Bridestowe appeared in the Book of Fees as belonging to the Honour of Okehampton (*BF*, p. 756). Baldwin the Sheriff was lord of the Honour of Okehampton; it is possible that one of his d’Avranches or Avenel descendants made the gift of the church of Bridestowe. See Chapter Three for other gifts of this family to Plympton Priory.

⁵⁰ In 1086, the manor of Maker was held by Robert, Count of Mortain (*DB: C*, #5, 2, 14). After the confiscation of these estates in the time of Count William, Maker

which Plympton came into possession between the times of Henry II's confirmation charter (1158) and Bishop John's charter (1186 × 1191).

Another church mentioned in Bishop John's confirmation charter of 1186 × 1191 was that of St. Mawgan-in-Pydar in Cornwall. In 1086 the bishops of Exeter held the manor of Lanherne, on which the church of St. Mawgan-in-Pydar was located.⁵¹ Possibly, then, this was another episcopal gift to the priory. By c. 1265 the manor of Lanherne had passed by marriage into the hands of the Arundell family.⁵² The lords of Lanherne also obtained the advowson of the church of St. Mawgan-in-Pydar some time in the early fourteenth century, although the priory continued to receive a pension of two marks.⁵³ A peculiar wrinkle in this transferral is the fact that in 1279 the prior of Plympton and Guy de Nunant made a joint presentation to the church of St. Mawgan-in-Pydar.⁵⁴ As the main branch of the Nunants had died out by 1206, this Guy must have been a descendant of a cadet line; he was also involved in a presentation to a church belonging to the Lanherne estates, Phillack, around the same time.⁵⁵ It may be possible that the priory was originally entitled only to a moiety of the advowson of St. Mawgan, and members of the Nunant family owned the other half. Whatever the original arrangement may have been, the canons ceased to play any role in the selection of a priest for this parish once the Arundells acquired the advowson of St. Mawgan-in-Pydar.

The flow of churches from bishops to the Augustinian canons has often been interpreted to mean that the bishops expected them to undertake pastoral duties. This contention has been considered to be especially true of those priories which had been refounded from secular colleges. For example, Janet Burton in her recent survey of English monasticism stated: "It may be assumed that bishops who placed regular canons in the ancient minster churches intended them to fulfil the same pastoral

passed to the Valletorts. In 1346 Ralph de Vautort—seemingly a member of a cadet branch of the family—held one fee in chief in Sutton, Maker and Kings Tamerton of the Honour of Trematon (*EA* I, p. 404).

⁵¹ *DB: C*, #2, 7.

⁵² The manor had previously been held by the Lanherne family of Devon of the bishops of Exeter. They also held two other episcopal manors in Devon. (Personal communication from Dr. Oliver Padel, September 16, 1997.)

⁵³ *Reg. Grandisson* I, p. 373. The last presentation made by the priory to this benefice was in 1309 (*Reg. Stapledon*, p. 255). Their choice as rector was Benedict Arundell.

⁵⁴ *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #1333, p. 127.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, #689, p. 26. This presentation was brought to my attention by Dr. Oliver Padel.

and parochial functions as their predecessors . . .” and “churchmen seem actively to have promoted the establishment of regular canons in their dioceses in order to place the care of parishes in their hands.”⁵⁶ Since we unfortunately do not have a surviving example of an episcopal charter granting a church to the Plympton canons in this period, we cannot state with certainty the intentions or motivations of the bishops of Exeter in this case. However, from Warelwast’s comments in his two grants to Plympton and from the remarks of the cathedral canons in their confirmation charter of 1133, the characteristics of the canons on which these men focus pertain to the traditional monastic responsibilities of prayer and intercession. The spiritual benefits that the canons of Plympton could provide for their benefactors were emphasized in these documents, not the pastoral benefits to the community.

Whatever the motivations of the donors might have been, the result of their interest in the new Augustinian house at Plympton was a significant contribution to the financial well-being of the priory. The founder, Bishop William Warelwast, understood the need of a generous endowment for a new monastic house, and subsequent twelfth-century bishops of Exeter displayed, to varying degrees, an interest in assisting his foundation. The involvement of the bishops of Exeter influenced other clerics in the diocese, such as Robert Fitz Gille, to make benefactions; the dean and chapter of Exeter Cathedral also demonstrated a willingness to confirm the episcopal donations. However, as will be seen in the next chapter, the support of the bishops of Exeter and the ecclesiastical elite of the diocese was only partially responsible for the creation of a sizeable endowment for Plympton Priory; just as important, if not more so, were the benefactions granted to the canons of Plympton by the members of the barony of Devon and their tenants.

⁵⁶ Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders*, pp. 47–8. Burton does note, however, that the nature of the sources for this period makes it impossible to tell whether the canons did indeed serve the churches they were given.

CHAPTER THREE

BUILDING THE ENDOWMENT: LAY BENEFACTORS, THEIR MOTIVES, AND THEIR GIFTS

In recent years, scholars have begun to look more closely at medieval patrons and benefactors and their relationships with the monasteries they founded or assisted. Such research can reveal a great deal about the reasons for a monastery's economic success or lack thereof, and about the trends in monastic patronage in a given period. We can also detect whether "networks of patronage" existed around a monastery, that is, whether a group of barons and their families and tenants cooperated in order to support a new foundation. As well, it is useful in considering the history of a religious house to ask whether benefaction patterns changed over time, and whether families who played an early role in supporting a house continued to do so. The ability or inability of a religious house to attract benefactors from outside the county in which it was situated also indicates something of the regional or national importance of the house. This chapter will explore these issues through an examination of the identities of the major lay benefactors of Plympton Priory in the twelfth century and the contributions they made to the support of this institution.

As has been seen in the previous chapter, Bishop William Warelwast's new house of Augustinian canons at Plympton received substantial support from Warelwast himself, subsequent bishops of Exeter, and those surrounding them in the decades following its foundation in 1121. The bishops of Exeter and their circle were not alone in their generosity towards Plympton Priory, however; the lay elite of Devon also took note of this new religious house in their county. Charters transcribed from the lost Plympton cartulary and other documents which survive from the twelfth century indicate that the magnates of Devon and their tenants made a significant contribution to the establishment of an sizeable endowment for Plympton Priory in the decades immediately after its foundation. By 1535, when the survey of monastic wealth known as the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* was conducted, Plympton Priory was assessed as having a total income of £898 0s 8 1/8d.¹ Of the religious houses

¹ J.C. Dickinson and H.P.R. Finberg both noted that the total of £912 12s 8 1/8d

in the Diocese of Exeter, only the old English Benedictine foundation, Tavistock Abbey, had a greater income in 1535: £902 5s 7 1/8d.² It seems unlikely that Plympton Priory would have attained this level of wealth without the support from lay donors which complemented the landholdings transferred from the secular college and the donations from the bishops of Exeter and their associates.

The lay elite of Devon participated in the establishment of a substantial endowment for Plympton Priory through the donation of a wide range of lands and secular privileges. In addition to these sources of income, which were known as *temporalia*, the priory also received from the laity rights to a number of parish churches in Devon. These rights—such as the prerogative of choosing the incumbent of a parish church—and the income attached to them (either in the form of a pension or a share of the tithes) were known as the *spiritualia* of a religious house. In 1535, Plympton Priory's *spiritualia* were reckoned to be worth £454 7s and 2 1/2d, a figure which far surpassed the spiritual income of any other religious house in the Diocese of Exeter.³ A significant portion of this amount can be traced to the churches given to the priory by the bishops of Exeter and to chapels which may have been attached to the college at Plympton before its conversion into an Augustinian priory. However, the contributions of lay donors to the spiritual wealth of Plympton Priory should not be underestimated. Such benefactors were likely influenced by the church reform movement which had originated in the eleventh century and had attacked the lay ownership of churches. Although the precise extent of the generosity of lay benefactors to Plympton Priory is somewhat elusive due to the lack of a complete extant cartulary, the survival of extracts from a lost Plympton Priory cartulary and of a confirmation charter from Henry II strongly suggest that the lay elite of Devon in the twelfth century made significant contributions to the growth of Plympton Priory's temporal and spiritual wealth.⁴

given in the nineteenth-century printed edition of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* is an error (Dickinson, *Origins of the Austin Canons*, p. 296; H.P.R. Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey: A Study in the Social and Economic History of Devon*, 2nd ed. [New York/Newton Abbot, 1969], p. 28).

² Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, p. 28.

³ *MDE* #28, p. 149; *Valor Ecclesiasticus: temp Henry VIII auctoritate instituta*, eds. J. Caley, J. Hunter (London, 1810–25), vol. 2, pp. 299–405.

⁴ An earlier version of these findings was published as 'Lay Benefactors of Plympton Priory in the Twelfth Century,' *TDA* 134 (2002), 33–56.

Gifts from Magnates and their Tenants: Spiritualia

The Augustinian canons as an order appeared at the right time to profit from a development linked to the reform movement of the eleventh century: the pressure on secular lords to surrender their ownership of their churches. In addition to the churches and pensions which Plympton Priory received from the bishops of Exeter, a number of local landowners granted the priory the churches on their estates. When considering the donations by laymen of churches and pensions, it is important to keep in mind the special context which surrounded gifts of *spiritualia*.⁵ In the eleventh century, the reform movement challenged the right of secular lords to grant their churches freely to whomever they pleased, and to institute their priests of choice to these benefices. The reformers wished to “define and assert the sacred character of spiritual revenues and to forbid their possession by laymen or sale in any form.”⁶ They asserted that the lords did not truly own their churches, nor could they “presume to grant spiritual office,” which was the prerogative of the bishop; instead, according to the *ius patronatus*, the lords functioned as advocates or protectors of the churches where they retained the right of advowson.⁷ In 1102, Anselm’s Council at London declared that monks could not accept churches from the laity without the approval of the bishop.⁸ This was reiterated at the First Lateran Council in 1123⁹ and at councils at Westminster in 1125 and 1127.¹⁰ As a consequence of this development, a new procedure arose by which a cleric received a benefice: the patron now had to present a cleric to the bishop, who instituted him as rector or vicar, after which the bishop would order the archdeacon to induct the cleric.¹¹

⁵ *Spiritualia* can be defined as any income that derived from ecclesiastical sources: for example, tithes, offerings or alms (such as mass-pennies and the like), pensions from rectories or vicarages, dues (such as the mortuary payment or burial dues), the rectorial message, and the yield from the glebe land.

⁶ Giles Constable, ‘Monastic Possession of Churches and ‘*Spiritualia*’ in the Age of Reform,’ in *Il monachesimo e la riforma ecclesiastica* (1049–1122), Atti della quarta Settimana internazionale di studio, 1968 (Milan, 1971), p. 318.

⁷ Brett, *English Church*, pp. 141–2. The right of advowson is the right to present a cleric to a benefice. It is also known as the right of patronage.

⁸ *CS I*, pt. 2, c. 22, p. 677.

⁹ Addleshaw, *Rectors*, p. 17.

¹⁰ *CS I*, pt. 2, c. 4 (1125), p. 739; c. 10 (1127), p. 749.

¹¹ Addleshaw, *Rectors*, pp. 18–9.

Given this climate of hostility towards lay ownership of churches and tithes, it is no surprise that the early twelfth century witnessed an extensive transfer of these *spiritualia* to monastic and collegiate foundations. Knowles estimated that perhaps a quarter of the parish churches in England belonged to monasteries by the year 1200.¹² Brett maintains that the Benedictines along with the Augustinian canons benefited from this trend and that “it seems unreasonable to look for special explanations [i.e. the canons’ supposed involvement in pastoral care] for a general phenomenon.”¹³ Janet Burton found that in twelfth-century Yorkshire gifts of parish churches contributed significantly to endowments of the monasteries, “most conspicuously those of the Augustinian canons.”¹⁴ However, it was by no means uncommon for alien Benedictine houses, and, more surprisingly, Cistercian houses, to be the recipients of parish churches.¹⁵ From the viewpoint of the incumbent of the benefice, the main effect of the conveyance of ownership into the hands of the religious was that the monastery was likely to expect a far higher pension than the lay lord had, and might eventually appropriate the church’s revenues.¹⁶ From the viewpoint of the secular donor, he or she was able to reap “very desirable spiritual rewards” by giving a church, “of considerable actual or potential value to a monastery [but] now of diminished value to a layman.”¹⁷ For a monastic house such as Plympton Priory, these donations of churches and pensions ultimately became a windfall.

Henry II’s confirmation charter and the “Registrum de Plympton” provide information on the identity of some of these donors of rights to churches: Fulk Fitz Ansgar and Fulk’s wife, Adeliza, gave the church of St. Mary of Sidenham, later known as Marystow, with the consent

¹² David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England: A History of its Development from the Time of St. Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1963), p. 597.

¹³ Brett, *English Church*, p. 230.

¹⁴ Janet Burton, ‘Monasteries and Parish Churches in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Yorkshire,’ *Northern History* 23 (1987), 40.

¹⁵ Burton, ‘Monasteries,’ 40. Burton mentions as examples William Paynel granting seven churches to Drax Priory (Augustinian), Robert de Brus granting eight churches to Guisborough Priory (Augustinian), and the endowment of Holy Trinity-York (Benedictine) with twelve churches plus a moiety of a thirteenth.

¹⁶ Addleshaw, *Rectors*, p. 8.

¹⁷ B.R. Kemp, ‘Monastic Possession of Parish Churches in England in the Twelfth Century,’ *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31 (1980), 135.

of their lord Roger de Nunant;¹⁸ Roger, son of Stephen de Mandeville, confirmed the gift of the church of “Avetona” (Blackawton);¹⁹ William Fitz Stephen may have given the church of Dean;²⁰ Pagan Fitz Serlo gave land at Tamerton Foliot along with the chapel of St. Martin which was dependent on the church of Tamerton Foliot,²¹ and Guy, a tenant of Roger de Nunant, donated the church of Egg Buckland (“Buckland Guidonis”).²²

The priory also received a pension, valued at 40 shillings in 1291, from the church of Stokeinteignhead; this may have been granted them by Nicholas de la Pole or by a member of his family, as the location is called Stokes Nicholai de Pola in Bishop John’s confirmation charter.²³ By the end of the century the priory also owned the church of Ilington; it seems that either an earl of Devon or one of his tenants was the donor, as William de Vernon, earl of Devon, confirmed the gift c. 1193 × 1208.²⁴ Earl William also either gave or confirmed to Plympton the chapel of St. Mary in the earl’s castle at Plympton, saving to the

¹⁸ *MDE* #3, p. 135. For the identification of “ecclesiam Sancte Marie de Sidenham” with Marystow, see Nicholas Orme, *English Church Dedications with a Survey of Cornwall and Devon* (Exeter, 1996), p. 182.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* For the identification of “Avetona” with Blackawton, see *PND*, pt. 1, p. 315.

²⁰ Kirby’s *Quest* lists the prior of Plympton as holding the vill of Dean for a knight’s fee from the heirs of William Fitz Stephen (*EA* I, p. 323). William Fitz Stephen made other gifts to the priory as well. The “Registrum” contains a fragment of a foot of a fine concerning a Radulphus de Hampton and his wife Orreis and their claim to the church of Dean; this is printed in *English Lawsuits from William I to Richard I*, ed. R.C. Van Caenegem, Selden Society vol. 107 (London, 1991), vol. 2, #564, pp. 612–3.

²¹ *MDE* #3, p. 135. The text reads that Pagan donated land at “Blakeстана” as well as the “capellam S. Martini de Blakeстана”; “Blakeстана” is modern-day Blaxton in Tamerton Foliot. The chapel was later called “Martinstow” or “Martynstowe,” which became corrupted into “Maristow,” the modern name; it should not be confused with Marystow, also known as Sidenham or Stowe St. Mary (See Orme, *English Church Dedications*, pp. 134, 182). Plympton Priory also had a manor at Martinstow (*MDE* #28, p. 147).

²² Bodl MS. James 23, p. 159.

²³ *MDE* #14, p. 138. Other members of the Pole family were generous to the priory in the twelfth century: Roger de la Pole and his brother Pomeray gave land at “Cadewurda” (Cadover in Meavy) in the time of Henry I (*MDE* #3, p. 135; *PND*, pt. 1, p. 229). Maurice de la Pola granted them land at “Scagas” (probably Shaugh) and seemingly at “Eadwirdi” (Oxford, Bodl. MS. James 23, pp. 160, 161). The Poles were tenants of the Nunants of Totnes. However, William de Vernon, earl of Devon (c. 1193 × 1208) confirmed the gift of the church of “Stokes” (Stokeinteignhead), with appurtenances, to Plympton Priory in his general confirmation of the priory’s possessions. See *RC* #23, p. 168. Perhaps the Poles also held some land of the Redvers family.

²⁴ *RC* #23, p. 168. The *Taxatio* of 1291–92 records that Plympton Priory received a pension of 100 shillings a year from Ilington in 1291 (*Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, p. 459).

earl and his countess and heirs the income from the chaplaincy when they were in residence as well as the service from the chapel on Sundays and feast days.²⁵

Plympton Priory lost its rights to other churches granted to it in the twelfth century. Between 1142 and 1154/55, William Avenel notified Bishop Robert Warelwast, the earl of Devon, and his son Richard that he was confirming his father Ranulph's and his great-aunt Adeliz's gifts to Plympton Priory, namely, the churches of Alphington, Kenn, and the chapel of St. Mary, with its four prebends, in Exeter Castle.²⁶ The "Annals of Plympton" specifically gave Adeliz credit not only for the foundation of Plympton Priory's cell at Marsh Barton, but also for the grant of the castle chapel to Plympton Priory.²⁷ Adeliz was a daughter of Baldwin the Sheriff, who had been granted land at Kenn and Alphington by William I.²⁸ Baldwin the Sheriff had also been castellan

²⁵ *RC* #83, p. 123. This is all we ever hear of the priory's possession of the castle chapel at Plympton, except for Earl Baldwin I's charter which grants the canons the right to appoint a priest "in capella burgi et castelli" (*RC* #22, pp. 73–4).

²⁶ *RC*, pp. 182–3n. The family relationships amongst the lords of Okehampton in the mid-twelfth century are complicated and not at all clear. Bearman believes that Ranulph may have been the son of another Ranulph, second husband of an otherwise unknown sister of Adeliz. Another view is that this unknown sister married William d'Avranches, had a son Robert d'Avranches, who in turn was father of Maud (G.E. Cokayne and Vicary Gibbs, *Complete Peerage*, vol. 4 [London, 1910–59], pp. 308–9). Sanders stated that Adeliz's daughter Alice married Ranulph Avenel, and their daughter Maud/Matilda married firstly either Robert d'Avranches or William de Curci and secondly Robert Fitz Roy, natural son of King Henry I (Sanders, p. 69). According to a document describing the history of the foundation of Forde Abbey, however, Adeliz's granddaughter Matilda married firstly Robert d'Avranches and then Robert Fitz Roy (*MDE*, p. 342). Adding to the confusion is the record of a charter of Robert Fitz Roy in the Cartulary of St. Nicholas Priory. This is a concession by Matilda, daughter of Robert d'Avranches and heir of Richard Fitz Baldwin, of a vineyard given the priory by Richard and his brother Robert Fitz Baldwin ('Charters in the Cartulary of St. Nicholas Priory at Exeter,' in *Collectanea topographica et genealogica*, vol. 1 [London, 1834], p. 188). See also *MA* vol. 5, p. 378 and *Victoria County History: Devon* I, p. 554 for records of this family.

²⁷ The "Annales Plymptonienses" record for 1142: "Obiit Adelis Balduini vicecomitis filia IX kl. Septemb. Hoc eodem anno obitus sui dedit ecclesie de Plimtone capellam de castello Exoniensi et fecit eam fundare extra muros civitatis in loco qui dicitur ad Mareis. Confirmata est hec donatio et cimiterium consecratum 14 k. Junii, concedente et testante comite Baldwin cum aliis compluribus, episcopo quoque [Ro]berto presente et testante cum clero non minimo" ("Annales Plymptonienses," p. 29). Baldwin's and Bishop Robert's confirmations have not survived.

²⁸ *RC*, pp. 182–3n. Baldwin and his family were also responsible for founding Cowick Priory, a cell of the abbey of Bec, by 1144 (J.C. Ward, 'Fashions in Monastic Endowment: The Foundations of the Clare Family, 1066–1314,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 32 [1981], 430).

of Exeter castle, as had his son Richard, “which could explain why Richard’s sister had been in the position to make this unusual gift.”²⁹

All of these churches seem to have been reclaimed by the Avenel family within a few decades, however: none are mentioned in Bishop John’s confirmation charter of 1186 × 1188. A charter from the Courtenay Cartulary provides some insight into these events: in 1219 × 1227, Robert de Courtenay, son-in-law of Earl William of Devon and heir of the Honour of Okehampton, gave Plympton Priory and the priory’s cell at Marsh Barton fifty-six acres and a water-conduit from his lands at Alphington.³⁰ He explained in the charter that he made these gifts in return for the quittance of the priory’s claim to the churches of Kenn and Alphington and the castle chapel in Exeter,³¹ for which they had taken him to court.³² The priory displayed a keen willingness to defend its entitlement to its churches, as will be seen in further examples from the thirteenth century to be discussed in the next chapter.

Of course, one of the main areas of controversy surrounding the Augustinian canons is the question of why this order in particular received so many *spiritualia*. As with the bishops, it has been assumed that lay patrons and benefactors endowed the canons with parish churches in the hope that the canons might undertake pastoral care in these parishes. Unfortunately, there is no original charter surviving in which a layman grants a church to Plympton Priory which might specify the donor’s motives. The best we have is Roger de Nunant’s confirmation of Guy de Buckland’s gift in which Roger states that Guy made his gift in alms for the salvation of his soul and those of his family and his lord Roger, a standard formula in monastic charters.³³ However, an examination of a map of Devon will show that some of the churches were so far away from the priory that personal service

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Devon Record Office, TD 51 (Courtenay Cartulary), pp. 266–7.

³¹ The castle chapel remained in the hands of the earls of Devon, even though the castle had become subject to direct royal control in 1154; the bishops of Exeter attained the right of institution to the four prebends (Denton, *Royal Free Chapels*, p. 128).

³² Courtenay Cartulary, pp. 266–7. Robert de Courtenay was son of Hawise and Reginald de Courtenay; Hawise was the daughter of Maud d’Avranches and William de Curci, and inherited the Honour of Okehampton (Sanders, pp. 69–70). Robert married Marie, second daughter of Earl William de Vernon of Devon; when the male line of the Redvers failed in the late thirteenth century, the Honour of Plympton and the Earldom of Devon passed to Robert de Courtenay’s great-grandson, Hugh II de Courtenay. For Hugh II’s dealings with Plympton Priory, see Chapter Four.

³³ Bodl. MS James 23, p. 159.

by the canons would have been extremely difficult; nor is there any evidence that any of these churches—except for St. Kew, St. Anthony-in-Roseland, and Marsh Barton—were ever cells with resident canons. For example, the church of Marystow was over twenty-five kilometres from Plympton. The lack of definite evidence in this period regarding lay expectations of the canons of Plympton should, consequently, lead one to be extremely cautious about assuming large-scale involvement on the part of the canons in the cure of souls in such parishes in the twelfth century.

The responsiveness of the laity to the Church's disapproval of secular control of churches and tithes was only one of a number of reasons for the support given to twelfth-century monastic and canonical orders. The phrases that one comes across so frequently in charters of donation, such as "I give for the salvation of my soul and those of my ancestors and successors," may seem like stock ingredients inserted as a matter of course by scribes. However, there is no reason to doubt that these statements very often did indeed reflect the donor's expectations: monks and monasteries existed to pray collectively for the souls of sinners, and what better way to ensure that one would be included in their prayers, and hence improve one's chances of salvation, than to make a donation to the monastery? That this was not a purely selfish concern is demonstrated by the common inclusion of requests for the prayers of the souls of one's parents, children, ancestors, and successors.³⁴ Sometimes the donor requested that the monks or canons pray for the souls of his lord and the lord's family as well. The act of giving to a monastic community was a gesture of faith in the usefulness of intercessory prayer and an expression of collective anxiety over the fate of the unredeemed soul.

Some carried these pious impulses to their logical conclusion and adopted the habit themselves. As we have seen, Bishop William Warelwast, Archdeacon Robert Fitz Gille, and Robert de Rouen all decided to become canons at Plympton Priory. In the cases of the bishop and

³⁴ Emma Cownie, in an analysis of 185 non-royal charters recording grants to forty-eight English and Welsh religious houses in the post-Conquest period, found that after requests for prayers for the donor's own souls, the most common requests were for prayers for the souls of the donor's father and mother. Concern with the fate of the souls of the dead was clearly one factor in the prevalence of requests for prayers for parents; appreciation of the people through whom one inherited property might have been another. See Emma Cownie, *Religious Patronage in Anglo-Norman England, 1066–1135* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 153–6.

the archdeacon, it is known that they retired to the priory at the end of their careers; the bishop died soon afterwards. To become a monk, nun, or canon at the end of one's life was referred to as entry *ad succurrendum*: one was able to live one's life in the world but, when one's end seemed near, one could reap the spiritual benefits of being a professed religious. Another way of securing an affiliation with a monastery was for a benefactor to enter into a spiritual confraternity with the house: as a confrater, he could expect prayers for himself and his family, obits and alms on the anniversary of his death (as for Robert Fitz Gille), and possibly burial in the conventual church.

An example of the combination of confraternity and entry *ad succurrendum* can be seen in the "Registrum de Plympton." In return for a concession regarding land held by the priory by gift of the donor's father,³⁵ Jordan Fitz William Fitz Stephen and his wife were to receive the benefit of the canons' prayers—whatever was normally done for brothers received *ad succurrendum*—at the memorial services to be held on the anniversaries of their deaths.³⁶ Jordan specified, however, that if he should at some point be free of his wife, he wished to be accepted as a canon, *in extremis* if that should be necessary.³⁷ Jordan was thus able to leave his options open, according to whether he became a widower or merely sought entry when death was imminent.

The full text of the charter is not copied in the "Registrum," but in the portion which is extant, Jordan stated that the canons gave him, on the day of his father's burial, one good horse, and that afterwards they gave his wife one penny and him three marks. Jordan and his wife then conceded to the canons the gift which the canons had held in his father's lifetime for more than thirty years.³⁸ This concession may have been in reality a commercial transaction, as were so many other grants at this time. Harper-Bill offers two examples of knights

³⁵ William Fitz Stephen also gave Plympton a virgate of land in Maidencombe before 1168, the year a composition was made between the priory and Forde Abbey to settle a dispute between them over this land (*MDE* #9, p. 137). William may also have given Plympton Dean church (see above). As well, he appeared as a witness at a court judgement regarding Plympton Priory in 1168–69 (*English Lawsuits from William I to Richard I*, vol. 1, #452, pp. 487–8). He also witnessed the Avenel charter (1142 × 1154/55) regarding the churches of Kenn, Alphington, and the Exeter castle chapel (*RC*, pp. 182–3). William Fitz Stephen held a knight's fee from Robert Fitz Roy and half a fee from William de Tracy in 1166 (*RBE*, p. 252).

³⁶ Bodl. Ms James 23, p. 161.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

making donations to Norman abbeys and receiving money, horses, and the offer of entry *ad succurrendum* in return.³⁹ Similarly, in the case of Stokeley, Prior Geoffrey of Plympton gave Robert Bevin three silver marks to quit his claim to the land, and he received him “in fratrem,” as a confrater of the house. Another interesting case from Plympton’s “Registrum” concerning entry into the convent is that of the Weston family. In 1171 × 1173, William de Weston, in the presence of Bishop Bartholomew, confirmed the gift of four ferlings of land, free of all service, which his father had granted to the priory.⁴⁰ William’s father had made this gift when he and another son, Gilbert, had become canons at the priory. At the same time, it was agreed that William’s wife was to be maintained honourably by the church of Plympton while she lived. This charter, like that of Jordan Fitz William Fitz Stephen, exemplifies the close connections between the priory and local benefactors and their families and the willingness of the canons to offer a range of spiritual and material benefits in exchange for the donations.

Others made donations to monasteries as penance for misdeeds. As Harper-Bill states, “[c]onsciousness of guilt in specific matters was a frequent motivation for grants.”⁴¹ A rather spectacular example of this can be found in Plympton’s “Registrum”: Albreda, daughter of Robert de Aurivalles gave three ferlings of land at Wrangaton in Ugborough for the salvation of the souls of her parents, ancestors, and successors.⁴² So far, this is quite conventional: however, she added that she was also making the gift “for the absolution of my husband Robert de Lestre, deceased, in reparation for the injury which he did to the church by burning and plundering, for which he was excommunicated”!⁴³ The damage may possibly explain structural changes made to the nave of the

³⁹ Christopher Harper-Bill, ‘The Piety of the Anglo-Norman Knightly Class,’ in *Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1979*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Woodbridge, 1980), pp. 67, 71. Guidard de Farcis, c. 1128, gave land to Jumièges; the abbey in return “granted him the benefits of confraternity, with the promise of reception if he so wished,” as well as sixty *solidi*, a palfrey, and a tunic worth seven *solidi* for his son. As well, Serlo de Lingèvres gave the church of Bucéels to St. Etienne-Caen, which gave him money, a palfrey, and a promise of entry whenever he wished.

⁴⁰ *EEAE*, XI, #142A, p. 132. This gift seems to correspond to the mention made in Henry II’s confirmation charter of the land of Ham given by Godfrey de Weston with the consent of his lord, Robert Bulzun (seemingly a tenant of the Nunants of Totnes). In 1346, the prior of Plympton held a quarter of half a fee in Kenterbury and Westonsham (*FA* I, p. 404).

⁴¹ Harper-Bill, ‘Piety,’ p. 64.

⁴² Bodl MS. James 23, p. 157.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

priory church made in the late twelfth century.⁴⁴ No other reference to the episode exists, so Robert de Lestre's motives in attacking the priory must remain obscure.⁴⁵ Given that the reign of Henry I is referred to in the past tense, the date of Albreda's charter might fall during the reign of Stephen, in which case Robert's actions may have been related to the violence of the civil war. Whatever the circumstances, Albreda was clearly distressed enough over her dead husband's mistreatment of the priory and his subsequent excommunication that she felt the need to make reparation. Sadly, knightly intrusions onto monastic estates were not at all rare in the twelfth century. Launceston Priory similarly received grants from Reginald, earl of Cornwall, in recompense for destroying the priory's tower and for other damages.⁴⁶

Gifts from Magnates and their Tenants: Temporalia

While the spiritual possessions constituted a significant portion of the wealth of the priory, the temporal possessions—that is, lands, rents, rights to mills, services, and the like—contributed nearly as much. In the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* the total net value of the *spiritualia* was reckoned at £454 7s 2.5d, while the *temporalia* were reckoned at £443 23s 5 and 5/8d. Among houses of the Augustinian canons, the proportion of *temporalia* to *spiritualia* varied greatly: Robinson found that many houses, such as Bodmin Priory and Keynsham Abbey, received more than 70% of their income from their *temporalia*, while others, such as the Welsh houses, received less than 30% of their total income from

⁴⁴ Paul Gibbons, 'Plympton Priory: The Monument Re-assessed,' in *Archaeological Investigations and Research in Plymouth Vol. 2, 1994–95*, eds. K. Ray, S. Noble, and S. Sharif, Plymouth Archaeology Occasional Publications no. 4 (Plymouth: Plymouth Archaeology, 1998), p. 101.

⁴⁵ Roger and Richard de Lestre were tenants of Richard I de Redvers who accompanied him to England in 1100 (Bearman, p. 38). Robert de Lestre, likely a son of Roger or Richard, may be the same person who appears in the Red Book of the Exchequer for 1201–02 as having held a fee in Langeforde in Devon which by that time was included in William Brewer's Honour of Bampton (*RBE*, p. 302). A William de Orvalle paid 5 marks scutage for two and a half knights' fees in Devon in 1160–61 (*RBE*, p. 25). In 1166, a Robert de Oreweie—which the editors of the Red Book of the Exchequer equate with Aurivalle/Aureavalle/Orvalle—held a half fee in Somerset (*RBE*, p. 231).

⁴⁶ The author of the *Gesta Stephani* stated that Reginald was a plunderer of church property and had been excommunicated by Bishop Robert I of Exeter for his crimes. (*Launceston Cartulary*, pp. xvii–xix).

these sources.⁴⁷ Of the 121 Augustinian houses listed in the *Valor* with their incomes divided into *temporalia* and *spiritualia*, 90 had temporal incomes that exceeded the spiritual, leaving 31 for which the opposite was true.⁴⁸ Plympton Priory, then, belonged to the minority of Augustinian houses that had been more successful (albeit slightly) in gaining churches and pensions than lands and rents.⁴⁹ In the cases of both Bodmin Priory and Launceston Priory, the other Augustinian houses founded or co-founded by Bishop William Warelwast, their *temporalia* were more valuable than their *spiritualia*.⁵⁰

Most of the temporal gifts granted to Plympton Priory in the twelfth century were parcels of land. It is difficult to assess what proportion of the priory's eventual endowment these twelfth-century gifts represent: the erratic survival rate of Plympton's charters and the vagueness of some of those which do survive interfere with definite conclusions on this matter. However, a comparison of the *Valor* and the twelfth-century material does reveal that by the end of the twelfth century, Plympton Priory owned property in all the areas which would later be listed as manors in the 1535 survey. Like so many other houses of the "new orders" of the twelfth century, the bulk of the donations to the

⁴⁷ Robinson, *Geography*, p. 275. The *temporalia* of Keynsham actually constituted 90% of its income.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* There were 33 houses for which spiritual/temporal incomes could not be determined.

⁴⁹ The limitations of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* should be kept in mind, however: only whole manors are listed for Plympton, whereas charter evidence and later documentation indicates that Plympton had numerous extra-manorial pieces of land, urban properties in Plymouth, and fishing rights which were not reckoned in the *Valor* accounting. For the purposes of the *Valor*, a "manor" consisted of demesne, tenements, and a court which yielded income through fines; the manors of some areas, such as the South-West, consisted almost entirely of tenements with very little demesne. See Alexander Savine, *English Monasteries on the Eve of the Dissolution*, Oxford Studies in Social and Legal History, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1909), pp. 150–1 and Robinson, *Geography*, pp. 312–3. As well, in regard to *spiritualia*, R.N. Swanson has expressed concern that the figures given for parochial incomes in the *Valor* do not adequately reflect the costs of the benefices to the incumbents (Robert N. Swanson, 'Standards of Livings: Parochial Revenues in Pre-Reformation England,' in *Religious Belief and Ecclesiastical Careers in Late Medieval England*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill [Woodbridge, 1991], pp. 154–5).

⁵⁰ For Bodmin the value of *temporalia* in 1535 was £217 9s 11d and the *spiritualia* £72 2s; for Launceston, £229 2s 6.5d and £159 8s 8d, respectively. The only other monastic houses in the Diocese of Exeter which had higher incomes from *spiritualia* than from *temporalia* were the Augustinian St. Germans Priory and Hartland Abbey, as well as the poor alien Benedictine cell, St. Mary at Totnes. The Cistercian monasteries in the diocese had, of course, very small incomes from *spiritualia*; the wealthiest house in the diocese, the Anglo-Saxon Benedictine foundation, Tavistock Abbey, earned £669 12s 8.5d from its *temporalia* and only £172 6s 5d from its *spiritualia*. See *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, eds. Caley and Hunter, vol. 2, pp. 299–405.

priory seems to have occurred during the century of their introduction into England.⁵¹ Later gifts, while no doubt gratefully received by the monasteries, were rarely as substantial as those given at or near the foundation of the monastery.

Generally, the lands granted to Plympton Priory were given in free, pure and perpetual alms (*“in liberam, puram et perpetuam elemosinam”*); this means that the canons held these lands by frankalmoign tenure and did not have to render secular service to the donor or his or her heirs. However, the priory frequently owed forinsec service—or, to use the term common in the South-West, *utibannum*—to the king on these lands.⁵² A number of times in the “Registrum” the benefactor states that their gift is quit of all service except the *“utibannis”* of Danegeld and murder dues,⁵³ although at least in one case the priory received land quit of these dues as well as of geld and other aids.⁵⁴ However, as has been mentioned, the donor typically requested that in exchange for the gift, prayers be said by the canons for him or her, their family, and their ancestors and descendants. Consequently, the canons owed “spiritual services” for these lands; indeed, “the unique quality of frankalmoin tenure was that spiritual services were expected from the recipient.”⁵⁵

In only one of the surviving twelfth-century charters is the word “manor” used in relation to a gift of land to the priory.⁵⁶ Usually the donor would give either “all the land of X” or, for example, “three

⁵¹ Cirencester Abbey, one of the wealthiest Augustinian houses in England, derived its income almost entirely from the endowments made in 1133 at its foundation (*Cartulary of Cirencester Abbey*, pp. xxi–xxii).

⁵² This was not unusual: according to a ruling of 1219, forinsec (foreign) service was considered to be owed for land held by frankalmoign tenure unless stated otherwise in the charter of donation (Toby Burrows, ‘Monastic Benefactors in Medieval Yorkshire,’ *Journal of Religious History* 12 [1982], 4).

⁵³ Examples can be found in Guy de Briteville’s charter and in the grants of Mabilia de Nunant and Maurice de Pola (Bodl MS. James 23, pp. 159–60). Henry I, who had confirmed Plympton’s ownership of two hides of land quit of all dues, made further decrees instructing his men not to claim these dues from the priory (Bodl MS. James 23, p. 152). Matilda de Pomerey, in her grant concerning the rent paid by the canons for “Halgawilla,” specified that if Danegeld, murder dues, or any other foreign service was levied on the land, it would be deducted from the rent of 4s per year. (Bodl MS James 23, p. 157).

⁵⁴ Bodl. MS James 23, p. 158. Robert Fitz Martin confirmed his tenant Nicholas de Busey’s grant of land in “Wixtaneswordi” to the priory “quieta et absoluta ab omnibus geldis Danegeldis murdris auxiliis servitiis tam ad regem quam ad me.”

⁵⁵ Burrows, ‘Monastic Benefactors,’ 4.

⁵⁶ Bishop Robert’s letter to Roger II de Mandeville refers to the Strete property Roger had seized as a “manor” (*EEAE XI*, #46, pp. 43–4).

ferlings of land at X.” Robinson states that Augustinian manors were of two groups: those that were given in their entirety to a monastery, and those that were artificial creations of the canons, who built up such estates in a “piecemeal” fashion “over many years through gift and purchase,” renting and exchange.⁵⁷ This latter category does seem to apply to the estates built up by Plympton Priory: parcels given in the twelfth century were scattered around Devon and Cornwall, with a concentration in Plympton and Roborough Hundreds. The manor of Plympton Grange, for example, seems to have been created from the donations of a number of different benefactors in the twelfth century. A rental made in 1408/9 revealed the extent of this scattered mode of land acquisition: the free tenants alone of Plympton Grange manor rented thirty-three holdings in more than fourteen parishes in Devon.⁵⁸ The *Valor Ecclesiasticus* shows that Plympton Priory had seventeen manors (including Plympton Grange) and one farm; this is certainly exceptional for an Augustinian house in the diocese of Exeter, where, on average, Augustinian priories held between 5 and 7.5 manors.⁵⁹

The early charters of Plympton rarely specify the type of land that is being given; that is, we cannot tell from the documents whether the land was to be used for crop cultivation or for pastoral husbandry. In most cases charters state that the donor is giving the priory the land (*terra*) of a particular place. Without any other qualifying adjectives, this phrase might well indicate arable land. However, an examination of the location of these land grants on topographical maps of Devon and Cornwall does suggest that Plympton Priory most likely possessed both arable land—in the fertile South Hams district, the Tamar valley along the Cornish border, and the Exe, Creedy, and Yeo valleys—and pastoral land on the edges of Dartmoor. The two types of land may have been intermixed, however, as flocks of sheep and cattle may have

⁵⁷ Robinson, *Geography*, pp. 290–1, 310. Robinson also points out that the older Benedictine foundations already possessed a great number of manorial units by the time the Augustinians arrived; hence the smaller number of manors available for the canons. Remarking on the “vigorous land policy” of the Cistercians, the same author concludes that “[i]t is difficult to avoid the impression that the acquisition of lands was less important to the Augustinians than to the Benedictines or Cistercians” (Robinson, *Geography*, p. 331).

⁵⁸ J. Stevens, ‘Plympton Grange,’ unpublished transcript in the Plymouth Central Library, Local Studies Room, p. 5. This information is derived from BM Harley MS 4766. The parishes were generally concentrated in the South Hams district of Devon.

⁵⁹ Robinson, *Geography*, p. 327.

been kept on farms of the lower levels (and grazed on Dartmoor in the summer); also, farms at an elevation of nine hundred feet up the western slopes of Dartmoor were known to have cultivated grain in the Middle Ages.⁶⁰ In the High Middle Ages the Southwestern economy can be characterized as mixed agrarian, and perhaps as predominantly arable, especially in the more fertile areas.⁶¹

It is possible that Plympton Priory was also the beneficiary of a trend in Devon and Cornwall at this time towards waste clearances and colonization. In the eleventh century, these counties, as shown by the Domesday Book, were some of the poorest in England: the low population was concentrated in fertile areas like the coastal region of Torbay and the Vale of Exeter, while large sections of the counties were waste land and high moorland.⁶² In the twelfth century, however, extensive wood clearances, reclamations of moor slopes, and marsh draining occurred, encouraged by large landowners who granted “small estates on the margins of their manors” to “men who appear in the records subsequently as free tenants.”⁶³ The charters of Plympton contain the names of those who were tenants of the largest landowners in Devon; it does not seem too unreasonable to suspect that at least some of these tenants were recipients of these sorts of colonization grants, and, newly prosperous, were in the position to make gifts of land to the priory. This seems particularly likely for those lands given to the priory on the moor fringe at Dean, Shaugh, Meavy, Waterfall, Thrushelton, and Sampford Spiney. One such example may be Pagan Fitz Serlo who gave Plympton Priory eighty acres of land at Blaxton, in Tamerton Foliot. Serlo had been a sub-tenant of Godfrey de Valletort in 1084.⁶⁴ The land that Pagan gave was described as *inter boscum*

⁶⁰ John Hatcher, *The Agrarian History of England, vol. 2 1042–1350* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 239.

⁶¹ Hatcher, *Agrarian History*, p. 398.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 238–9. W.G. Hoskins calculated that in 1086 the waste land (moorland, woodland, marshes) and intermittently-cultivated land of Devon made up several hundreds of thousands of acres, not including the highest reaches of Dartmoor and Exmoor (‘The Making of the Agrarian Landscape,’ in *Devonshire Studies*, eds. William G. Hoskins and H.P.R. Finberg [London, 1952], p. 318).

⁶³ Hoskins, ‘Agrarian landscape,’ pp. 318–20.

⁶⁴ Oswald Reichel, ‘The Hundred of Plympton,’ p. 252. The Valletorts at that time held the Honour of Trematon of the Count of Mortain (Sanders, pp. 90–1). In the *cartae baronum* of 1166, Radulfus de Valletort appears holding fifty-nine knights’ fees of the earl of Cornwall and one knight’s fee in chief (*RBE*, pp. 259, 261).

et planum, between a wood and a clear space.⁶⁵ A number of grants to the priory specify that the land is given with a wood, *cum bosco*: Earl William of Devon's confirmation charter reveals that lands in Shortridge, Tamerton Foliot, Brixton, Woodmanswell, and Ermington were all granted to the priory with their woods, and that the Redvers family allowed the priory the right to gather as much dead wood as they needed for cooking their food.⁶⁶ Could it be, then, that Plympton played a role in the clearance and utilization of waste land and land on the moor fringe, and that benefactors gave them such land in the anticipation that they would do so?

Colonization is also indicated by the substantial number of rural churches in Devon originally built in the period c. 1150–1220.⁶⁷ In the Anglo-Saxon period, what churches there were, were probably built of wood or other, less durable materials.⁶⁸ As lands were newly cleared and settlements established, so the need for constructing churches grew. Local landowners often undertook this construction but made over their churches to the monasteries when the pressure against lay ownership began to develop. Another factor, then, in the many donations of *spiritualia* to Plympton was likely this increase in the number of churches in Devon in the twelfth century as a result of the clearance of waste and moor land.⁶⁹

The agrarian economy of Plympton Priory was similar to that of most religious houses in its diversity. The arable land given to Plympton Priory was probably used to grow oats, the most popular crop in the South-West due to the damp climate and poor soil, as well as wheat.⁷⁰ Tavistock Abbey, which owned lands close to some of Plympton's, grew wheat, rye, and oats,⁷¹ and the earls of Devon grew barley, oats,

⁶⁵ *MDE* #3, p. 135.

⁶⁶ "...de mortuo bosco quantum opus fuerit ad coquendum cibos ipsorum canonicorum et fratrum et hospitum..." *RC*, pp. 168–9.

⁶⁷ Hoskins, 'Agrarian landscape,' p. 321.

⁶⁸ Nikolaus Pevsner pointed out that "...there is hardly any visible record of the presence of the Saxons in Devon, other than a few decorated crosses and fragments of crosses...no building or part of a building remains" (*Buildings of England: South Devon* [Harmondsworth, 1952], p. 16).

⁶⁹ Three of Plympton Priory's churches—Dean Prior, Ilsington, and Meavy—and one chapel, Sampford Spiney, were on Dartmoor. Several others, such as Ugborough, Bridestowe, Bratton, Marystow, and Thrushelton, could be considered to be on the moor fringe.

⁷⁰ Hatcher, *Agrarian History*, pp. 392–5.

⁷¹ Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 86–128 *passim*.

wheat, peas, and beans on their manor at Plympton in the thirteenth century.⁷² The pasture land provided for large herds of sheep and cattle; the Devon sheep produced only a coarse, low-quality wool, however, and not much of it was sold to foreigners.⁷³ That Plympton Priory kept sheep is indicated by the confirmation charter of Henry II in which, under the section of gifts from Earl Richard I and his tenants, the grant of twigs from dead wood for the making of their sheepfolds (“*virgas de bosco ad faciendum caulas suas*”) is specified.⁷⁴ Plympton Priory also received from the earls of Devon the right of pannage, or grazing their pigs, in unspecified woodland.⁷⁵ As well, Leland claimed that St. Nicholas Island (now Drake’s Island) off Plymouth, had been given to the priory by Walter de Valletort and was the location of their rabbit warren.⁷⁶ Most English monasteries kept rabbits for the fur and meat, and the rabbit warrens might be extensive, surrounded with barriers or hedges to keep out predators;⁷⁷ hence, an island would have been an ideal location. The earls of Devon also granted the priory all the land next to their garden together with a marsh, a meadow, and water,⁷⁸ suggesting that mixed gardening for the priory’s consumption, growing of hay, and grazing of flocks occurred in or near the monastic precinct.

The “water” referred to in the confirmation seems to refer to that which flowed from a spring in Plympton to the priory via an aqueduct.

⁷² K. Ugawa, ‘The Economic Development of some Devon Manors in the Thirteenth Century,’ *TDA* 94 (1962), 635–7. Ugawa found in his study of the manors of the earls of Devon in the county that the sales of grain constituted 36% of the total manorial revenues at Plympton in the thirteenth century.

⁷³ Hatcher, *Agrarian History*, pp. 395–6. In 1315, the Cistercian houses of Newenham, Forde, and Buckfast, and the Premonstratensian house at Torre, were trading their wool to the Florentines.

⁷⁴ *MDE* #3, p. 135. In Earl William’s confirmation charter of c. 1193 × 1208 the twigs are granted “ad caulas pecorum suorum faciendum” (*RC*, p. 168).

⁷⁵ *MDE* #3, p. 135.

⁷⁶ John Leland, *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535–1543*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith (London, 1907), vol. 1, pt. iii, p. 215. “...He gave onto Plymtoun priorie the isle of S. Nicolas cum *cuniculis* conteyning two acres of ground, or more, and lying at the mouthes of the Tamar and Plym ryvers.” In 1461, Edward IV, “out of devotion to SS. Peter and Paul,” granted the priory the right of free warren in all their demesne lands and woods in Devon (*Calendar of Charter Rolls*, vol. 6, Henry VI–Henry VIII, p. 215).

⁷⁷ Stephen Moorhouse, ‘Monastic Estates: Their Composition and Development,’ in *The Archaeology of Rural Monasteries*, eds. Roberta Gilchrist and Harold Mytum, BAR British Series 203 (Oxford, 1989), pp. 65–6.

⁷⁸ *MDE* #3, p. 135: “...totam terram iuxta hortum suum cum mora et prato et aqua...”

Henry II's confirmation charter mentions a donation on the demesne of Earl Baldwin of a water conduit through the canons' gardens to their workshops; Earl Richard I confirmed the gift of a water conduit from Plympton castle to the priory,⁷⁹ a distance of about 800 metres. A fragmentary charter in the "Registrum" seems to be a copy of the original grant: the grantor, probably Earl Baldwin I, states that the gift was made so that the canons might have clean water in their house for the singing of masses and other necessities.⁸⁰ Such a source of pure water would have been very important for a monastery situated in a town, as the priory was; procuring clean drinking water was generally a problem for monasteries located in towns, which tended to rely on water brought long distances by conduits.⁸¹ Recent archaeological excavations at Plympton have revealed a stone aqueduct, or raised leat, running to the priory from the direction of the castle; this would not have been the conduit referred to in the charters, as it is dated at post-1300, but it may have replaced the earlier aqueduct.⁸² The archaeologists also discovered two medieval stone-lined drains which seem to have been part of a drainage system to "collect ground water and use it to flush away effluent and other waste."⁸³ Plympton Priory also had a water sluice (*exclusagium*) at Meavy; this may have been granted by a member of the de Meavy family, who had given land in the area to the priory as well.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ *MDE* #3, p. 135; *RC* #45, p. 91.

⁸⁰ *RC* #83, p. 123n. The fragment concludes by stating that lest anyone trouble the canons in the future about the springs and aqueduct, the donor gives them the meadow, too, "in perpetuum et omnino quietam elemosinam." Another charter extract in the same manuscript contains a confirmation by Earl William, c. 1193 × 1208, of various gifts by the Redvers family to the canons which includes a fuller description of the layout of the spring and conduit: "Preterea do et concedo eidem ecclesie conductum aque de fonte qui est sub cruce comitis Ricardi per pratum quod est inter eandem crucem et hortum canonicorum et per mediam viam que est iuxta eundem hortum, ut habeant in perpetuum in domo sua mundam ad missas suas cantandas etc." (*RC* #83, p. 123n.)

⁸¹ C.J. Bond, 'Water Management in the Rural Monastery,' in *The Archaeology of Rural Monasteries*, eds. Roberta Gilchrist and Harold Mytum, BAR British Series 203 (Oxford, 1989), p. 84.

⁸² Stewart Brown, 'Plympton Priory Mill Site: Excavations 1988,' Plymouth City Museum (1988), pp. 9–10. Brown believes that the aqueduct was most likely a mill leat, as the direction headed south of the cloisters, towards the supposed area of the mill; he bases this partly on the fact that the leat which replaced this one in the post-medieval period conveyed stream water, which would not have provided pure drinking water as wells or springs would have done.

⁸³ Brown, 'Plympton Priory Mill,' pp. 8–9.

⁸⁴ *MDE* #3, p. 135; also Reichel, 'Plympton Hundred,' p. 256 n. 2. A confirmation of Walter de Meavy's grants to the priory is printed in George Oliver's *Additional Supple-*

Plympton Priory also received several grants of rights of fisheries in the area. Monastic ownership of river fisheries was common in the Middle Ages: given the Benedictine prohibition against the consumption of meat—a prohibition generally adhered to until the later Middle Ages—fish was a major item of the monastic diet.⁸⁵ Charters granting rights to monasteries to fish in a river might refer to the right to fish a specified length of the river by netting or angling, or they might refer to the right to erect a weir (barrier) across the river to which were attached nets or basketwork traps.⁸⁶ In addition to weirs, monasteries often owned storage buildings on the shore, rights of access, and enclosures for pack animals.⁸⁷ In its foundation charter, the Premonstratensian house of Torre in Devon was given the right to fish and trawl in Torbay; in 1327–28 the monks were granted the right to spread and dry their nets below a cliff belonging to a neighbouring manor.⁸⁸

Perhaps the most generous fishery grant to Plympton Priory was from Reginald de Valletort.⁸⁹ Reginald gave the priory the right to fish in the Rivers Tamar and Lynher for the better provision of food for

ment to the *Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis* (Exeter, 1854), #2, p. 15. Walter also appears as a litigant against the priory over land at “Scobhill” (MS James 23, pp. 159–60). A fragment from the same manuscript suggests that an Elias de Meavy was another benefactor to the priory (MS James 23, p. 154).

⁸⁵ Fish could also be an important source of revenue for those who held fishing rights. For example, profits from fishing made up 22% to 28% of total manorial revenues at the earl of Devon’s manor of Topsham, on the Exe, in the late thirteenth century (Ugawa, 653).

⁸⁶ C.J. Bond, ‘Monastic Fisheries,’ in *Medieval Fish, Fisheries, and Fishponds in England* BAR British Series 182, ed. Michael Aston (Oxford, 1988), pp. 78, 84–7. Foreshore weirs, which were corrals of brushwood, were also built to trap fish in tidal waters. In the thirteenth century weirs on rivers became subject to legislation because of the depletion of the fish stocks and the taking of young fish, as well as the obstruction of navigation. In 1224–25 weirs, except those by the sea-coast, were ordered to be pulled down. This law, as well as ones punishing those who took young fish, was confirmed again throughout the 14th and 15th centuries (which would suggest they were being flouted). In the 1390s charges were laid against the abbots and priors of houses along the Severn for having weirs and taking young fish, but the charges were ultimately all dropped on technicalities.

⁸⁷ Moorhouse, ‘Monastic Estates,’ p. 64.

⁸⁸ Bond, ‘Monastic Fisheries,’ p. 77.

⁸⁹ There were several Valletorts of this name in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. One Reginald was a witness to a confirmation of Henry I in 1103–04 (*Regesta* II, #680, p. 39); another Reginald lived c. 1172–87 (Sanders, pp. 90–1). Sometime before 1140, Reginald I de Valletort and his brother Ralph founded a cell of the Norman Benedictine priory of St. Pierre sur Dives at Modbury in Devon (J.M. James, ‘The Norman Benedictine Priory of St. George, Modbury, AD c. 1135–1480,’ *TDA* 131 [1999]: 82).

the canons and their guests.⁹⁰ Reginald excepted from this grant a pool “*sub aula de Halton*” and the pool “*sub aula de Kallistoke*” and the length from that pool up to the fishery of the same town.⁹¹ These exceptions were likely made because of the Valletorts’ own fishing activities on the river; Calstock was in the southern part of the Valletorts’ Honour of Trematon, and at the end of the twelfth century Roger de Valletort made an agreement with the Abbot of Tavistock regarding the use of the salmon weirs which each party had built on the Tamar near Calstock.⁹² Reginald further conceded to Plympton Priory the right to fish hake anywhere in the specified waters, as long as they reserved for him and his heirs moieties of the catches of hake and the first hauling of the seines.⁹³

Earl Richard I of Devon gave or confirmed to the priory half the tithe of the fishery at Bickleigh on the River Plym.⁹⁴ Baldwin made a similar gift to Tavistock Abbey, granting the monks the tithe of all the fish caught at Buckland on the Tavy.⁹⁵ Plympton also received the rights of fishing in all the land of Johel de Stanhuse, whose name would suggest that his land was situated in Stonehouse, now a part of Plymouth.⁹⁶ This is probably the fishery referred to in another Valletort

⁹⁰ “... ad meliorationem victus eorum et ad hospitalitatem ibidem uberius conservandam, omnem piscationem tam in Tennbria quam in Lyner cum aquis concurrentibus in tractibus sagenae...” (Bodl. MS James 23, p. 167). This charter is also copied in the “Black Book of Plymouth” (f. 70v), West Devon Record Office W46. Early variant spellings of the River Tamar’s name were Tambra and Tanbre (*PND*, pt. 1, pp. 13–4).

⁹¹ Bodl. MS James 23, p. 167: “excepta pola sub aula de Kallistoke et ab ipsa pola usque ad piscariam eiusdem villae et excepta una pola sub aula de Haltona.” Calstock is on the furthest navigable stretch inland of the Tamar River, which divides Devon and Cornwall; Halton Quay is a couple of kilometres further downstream on the Tamar. Both Calstock and Halton are on the Cornwall side of the river. The “*aulae*” mentioned in this charter may refer to large buildings on the shore which served as landmarks.

⁹² Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 161–2.

⁹³ Bodl. MS James 23, p. 167. Other fish caught in the Tamar were salmon, lampreys, and trout (Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, p. 164).

⁹⁴ *MDE* #3, p. 135.

⁹⁵ Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 159–61. This gift was to cause difficulties later, after Amicia, Countess of Devon, founded a Cistercian abbey at Buckland in the thirteenth century. Buckland and Plympton also seem to have come into conflict over the Bickleigh fishery: in 1327–28 there was a dispute between the prior of Plympton and the Abbot of Buckland regarding a trespass at Bickleigh, and then a trespass at Plympton (*Index of Placita de Banco preserved in the Public Record Office 1327–28*, List and Index Society Publications, vol. 32, pp. 91, 94).

⁹⁶ West Devon Record Office W46, “Black Book of Plymouth,” f.70v (calendared in *CPMR*, pp. 38–9).

charter: Ralph, son and heir of Reginald de Valletort, gave a mill and three adjacent acres at Surepole—another area now subsumed into Plymouth, very near Stonehouse—to Plympton Priory, and at the same time granted the canons “a suitable way thereto by the corner of his garden of Sutton as anciently the fathers were accustomed to go to the fishery of the canons at Surepole.”⁹⁷ These gifts suggest that Plympton was also involved in ocean fishing. Some of the species flourishing in these waters in the sixteenth century were, according to John Hooker, haddock, cod, hake, plaice, whiting, sole, and pilchards.⁹⁸

Several other donations of note were made to the priory in the twelfth century. During the reign of Henry I, Goslen Bastard gave Plympton Priory a quarry in Efford, Egg Buckland.⁹⁹ This quarry no longer survives—Efford has been consumed by the suburbs of Plymouth—but historically this area has produced limestone, Roborough elvan (a granitic building stone), and slate.¹⁰⁰ This quarry may have been the source of the limestone used in the twelfth-century construction of the priory: V.B. Ledger found in her excavations at the priory site that the walls of the conventual church had been built mostly of local limestone.¹⁰¹

Another type of gift worthy of comment is that of the human variety. The evidence from the Plympton charters indicates that the granting of people in donation charters was not uncommon in the region in the twelfth century. Walter Giffard gave the priory a man named Edwin Blakeman along with his sons, and Walter and his mother also granted, in addition to land at Aveton Giffard, four men.¹⁰² William, earl of Devon, confirmed the grant of four men belonging to the earl’s Plympton Manor.¹⁰³ Robert Fitz Martin included the gift of Ailric son

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 68v (calendared in *CPMR*, pp. 37–8). Ralph de Valletort held 59 knights’ fees of the count of Mortain (Sanders, p. 91).

⁹⁸ Todd Gray, ‘Devon’s Fisheries and Early-Stuart Northern New England,’ in *The New Maritime History of Devon*, ed. M. Duffy et al. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press/Conway Maritime Press, 1992), pp. 139–40.

⁹⁹ *MDE* #3, p. 135. The original text reads “Ebford.” For its identification with Efford in Egg Buckland, see *PND*, pt. 1, p. 227.

¹⁰⁰ William G. Hoskins, *Devon* (1954; repr., Chichester, 2003), pp. 262–4. Limestone was especially common as a building material in the Plymouth area; slate was also used for building churches, farm buildings, and boundary walls in the South Hams district.

¹⁰¹ Valerie B. Ledger, ‘[Note on] Plympton St. Mary,’ *Medieval Archaeology* 2 (1958), 190 and *Medieval Archaeology* 3 (1959), 139.

¹⁰² *RC* #45, p. 92.

¹⁰³ *RC*, p. 168.

of Samer of Calstock in a grant to the priory.¹⁰⁴ In addition, Geoffrey de Furnell gave Ailwardus of Luvestona and his children to Plympton Priory.¹⁰⁵ Without further information in the charters, it is difficult to discern whether these people were unfree tenants, who possessed some rights, or slaves, who had none. At the time of Domesday, more than a quarter of the slaves in England could be found in the counties of Somerset, Devon, and Cornwall; within fifty years or so of Domesday the practise of slave-holding in England had virtually disappeared.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, while there is a possibility that some of these charters, especially those earlier in date, may have represented gifts of slaves, it is more likely that they indicate gifts of unfree tenants.

A significant source of revenue for Plympton Priory came from its urban properties in Plymouth and Exeter. Other than the aforementioned charter of Ralph de Valletort in which the mill at Surepole and the three acres of land are mentioned, there are no other surviving grants to the priory of land in Sutton Prior.¹⁰⁷ The priory did acquire various tenements in Sutton, however, possibly through purchase. In 1254 the prior received royal permission to hold a market in Sutton and an annual fair in the town,¹⁰⁸ and an inquisition into land-holdings in Sutton in 1281 revealed that the prior of Plympton, as well as having the assize of bread and ale, had £14 9s 6.5d in rents from the properties in the town.¹⁰⁹ There is more evidence that some of the priory's properties in Exeter were acquired through benefactions: as we have seen, the bishops of Exeter granted the priory several tenements

¹⁰⁴ *MDE* #3, p. 135.

¹⁰⁵ *EEAE* XI, #27A, p. 27: "...dedi et concessi...Ailwardum, meum hominem de Luvestona, liberum et absolutum cum toto suo catali [sic] et haeridibus suis pro amore dei et pro salute regis Henrici et Ricardi filii Baldewini et pro mea et meorum salute..." Geoffrey also promised that neither he nor his heirs would try to reclaim Ailward or his heirs.

¹⁰⁶ David Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1985), pp. 231, 236.

¹⁰⁷ In the twelfth to fourteenth centuries the area of modern-day Plymouth consisted of Sutton Prior (the portion that belonged to Plympton Priory as a monastic borough), Sutton Vautort (the manor of the Valletort family), and the tithing of Sutton Raf. Sutton Prior was centred around the church of St. Andrew and the area near the harbour now known as The Barbican (Crispin Gill, *Plymouth: A New History*, Vol. 1 [Newton Abbot, 1971], 95).

¹⁰⁸ *CPR*, Henry III vol. 4, 1247–58, p. 263.

¹⁰⁹ In 1439 the prior yielded his rights and properties in the town in return for an annual fee farm rent of £41 from the burgesses. In 1463–64, the priory and the town of Plymouth petitioned Parliament for permission to reduce the fee-farm rent to £29 6s 8d on account of the poverty of the borough (*CPMR*, pp. 10–2).

there in the twelfth century. As with Plymouth, it is possible that the priory bought further tenements: a reference to such a purchase might be found in Bishop John the Chanter's confirmation of episcopal gifts to the canons of Plympton. Bishop John noted that the priory had bought land, perhaps in Exeter, from Wimundus the goldsmith and his heirs, with the consent of Bishop Bartholomew in return for an annual payment of 4d.¹¹⁰ A rental of Plympton's cell of Marsh Barton, near Exeter, which was made in 1421 listed the canons' lands and tenements in the city; the total value of these properties was £23 12s 7d.¹¹¹ The properties were classed as tenements, shops, gardens, and open spaces; these were distributed throughout almost every parish of Exeter.¹¹² The cell at Marsh Barton may well have been established in order to administer the Exeter properties.

While a paucity of documents hampers our understanding of the extent of Plympton's land holdings and its management of them, the material surviving from the twelfth century does shed some light on the types of *temporalia* benefactors were giving the priory and their distribution in Devon and Cornwall. The donations—including as they do grants of fertile low-lying land, moor land, fisheries, and a quarry—provide a glimpse of the agrarian landscape of twelfth-century Devon and an insight into the diverse nature of the economic resources of Plympton Priory.

Patterns of Benefaction

Having considered the kinds of gifts, both temporal and spiritual, which Plympton Priory received in the twelfth century, it is time to examine in more detail the identities of the benefactors. In recent years, scholars

¹¹⁰ *MDE* #14, p. 138. A puzzling fragment referring to Wimundus exists in the "Registrum": "praeterea dedimus ecclesiae Plimton Wimundum fabrum et totam progeniem in liberam et quietam elemosinam. In carta Claritia de Vaus" (Bodl MS. James 23, p. 157). The status of Wimundus is consequently not clear. Hubert de Vaux was a tenant of the Redvers family who left England in 1149 (Bearman, p. 38).

¹¹¹ *MDE* #24, pp. 142–3. The *Valor* listed the value of the Exeter properties as £29 2s 5d in 1535; the Ministers' Account list the value of rents as £15 1s 5d, and the value of the site of Marsh Barton and its demesne land as £11 6s 2d (total: £26 7s 7d). The *Valor* lists only the Exeter rents for Marsh Barton; it is hard to reconcile the discrepancy between this figure and the one in the Ministers' Accounts. See *MDE*, #28, p. 146 and *MDE* #30, p. 150.

¹¹² *MDE* #24, pp. 142–3.

have begun to look more closely at the patrons and benefactors and their relationships with the monasteries they founded or assisted. Such research can reveal a great deal about the reasons for a monastery's economic success or lack thereof, as well as trends in monastic patronage in a given period. We can also detect whether "networks of patronage" existed around a monastery, that is, whether a group of barons and their families and tenants co-operated in order to support a new foundation. As Emilia Jamroziak has recently pointed out in her study of Rievaulx Abbey, a donation to a monastery was not simply an isolated, straightforward conveyance of property: it created a "continuum . . . a relationship which lasted for more than one generation" between the donor and the monastery, and between the donor and other benefactors.¹¹³ Through marital, familial, and tenurial ties, donors could be made aware of a new religious foundation and prompted to follow in the footsteps of their spouse, relatives, or lord in providing it with support.¹¹⁴ Of course, such networks were rarely limited to one religious house: benefactors frequently made grants to a number of different monasteries of different orders, and an examination of the range of their donations can provide a more complete view of their patronage priorities and interests. Another question worth asking is whether benefaction patterns changed over time, and whether families which played an early role in supporting a house continued to do so.

The Augustinian canons, as a "new order" of the early twelfth century, attracted a great deal of patronage from members of court and the episcopacy, as has been mentioned in Chapter One. R.W. Southern has, on the other hand, emphasized the humbler origins of some of the founders of Augustinian houses in England.¹¹⁵ While numerous patrons and benefactors did indeed come from less prominent families, the picture is somewhat more complicated. Dickinson pointed out that there was a chronological separation between types of benefactors: magnates were involved in founding many houses in the early twelfth

¹¹³ Emilia Jamroziak, *Rievaulx Abbey in its Social Context, 1132–1300: Memory, Locality, and Networks* (Turnhout, 2005), p. 25.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹¹⁵ R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 245. For Southern, the Augustinian canons were a modest order with requirements less costly than the Benedictines; hence they attracted a group of prosperous but not wealthy men and women who desired the spiritual benefits of patronage without having to pay for the expenses involved in founding a Benedictine house.

century, but by mid-century the founders of new houses and the benefactors of existing ones tended to come from lower social strata.¹¹⁶ An example of this is Cirencester Abbey, the wealthy Gloucestershire house of Augustinian canons. In contrast to the magnates who made gifts at the time of its foundation in 1133, most of its benefactors later in the twelfth century were local minor nobility with more limited resources; after the middle of the twelfth century, the Abbey had only a couple of benefactors of the magnate class, and these were not particularly generous.¹¹⁷ This trend is not limited to the Augustinian canons: Joan Wardrop in her study of Fountains Abbey found that by c. 1210 magnates had virtually ceased to make new grants to the abbey, while the period c. 1180–c. 1240 saw a surge in donations from knightly families.¹¹⁸ Wardrop also divided benefactors within families according to generations: a typical “first-generation benefactor” was generous to the monastery, while a typical “second-generation benefactor” did not make his or her own grants, but merely confirmed old ones. “Second-generation benefactors” might also witness the Abbey’s charters or act sometimes in the capacity of “protector” of the monastery, as long as such assistance did not infringe on his or her own rights.¹¹⁹ The stream of benefactions tended to dry up by the third and subsequent generations, as the amount of land to give away had diminished and newer orders appeared and attracted gifts.¹²⁰

The evidence from Plympton Priory would seem to support a similar scenario. While making allowances for the only partial survival of charters from the priory, those we do have suggest that the major grants

¹¹⁶ Dickinson, *Origins*, pp. 138–41.

¹¹⁷ *Cartulary of Cirencester Abbey*, pp. xxii–xxiii. This shift towards benefactions from knightly families was also evident after 1160 at the Augustinian priories of Nostell and Bridlington in Yorkshire (Burrows, ‘Monastic Benefactors,’ 6).

¹¹⁸ Joan Wardrop, *Fountains Abbey and its Benefactors, 1132–1300* (Kalamazoo, 1987), pp. 169–70, 211–2. Wardrop classifies benefactors into three main groups: magnates, knightly families, and peasants. The first group were barons, a group characterized by the fact that they were lay tenants in chief who held their lands *per baroniam*. Knightly families held their lands simply by knight service. According to Wardrop, what really defined a magnate—and set him apart from a baron with small estates and no influence at court—was the size of his estates, access to the king and “political power and authority,” as well as a sense of family lineage.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 146. Emilia Jamroziak has found a similar pattern amongst the Mowbray family, benefactors of Rievaulx Abbey (Jamroziak, *Rievaulx Abbey*, pp. 65–6).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 212. For challenges by heirs of benefactors who tried to reclaim lands granted by their ancestors to Plympton Priory, see Chapter Four.

to the priory occurred with a few decades of its foundation in 1121. The bishops of Exeter seem not to have made any more substantial contributions to the priory after 1155; indeed, Bishop William Warelwast, the founder, was by far the most generous of the twelfth-century bishops in his gifts to the priory, subsequent bishops generally being content to confirm the earlier gifts.¹²¹ Similarly, the first two earls of Devon, Baldwin I (d. 1155) and Richard I (d. 1162), displayed interest in the priory; the general confirmation of grants to the priory by the earls and their tenants, issued by Earl William c. 1193 × 1208, shows, however, that few new benefactions had been made by the Redvers family since the death of Earl Richard.¹²² Nor is there any record of members of the Nunant and Valletort families, holders of the Honours of Totnes and Trematon respectively, making benefactions to the priory after the mid-twelfth century.¹²³

Another issue to be kept in mind when considering the benefactors of Plympton Priory is that only a few of them lived outside Devon and Cornwall. Important twelfth-century benefactors from outside these counties were Robert Fitz Martin and his wife Matilda Peverel,¹²⁴ Emma, daughter of William de Pont de l'Arche, the Empress Matilda's chamberlain,¹²⁵ and the de Reigny family of Somerset. Emma was the betrothed of Earl Richard I of Devon, and c. 1150 gave Plympton

¹²¹ Bishop Bartholomew (1161–84) confirmed the gift of Bishop William of sixty shillings after the death of a cathedral canon; Bishop Robert II (1155–60) had done the same, whereas Bishop Robert I Warelwast (1138–55) had increased the original gift so that it totaled £4 (*EEAE* XI, #119, pp. 108–9; #67, p. 56; #45, p. 43). Bishop Bartholomew also confirmed the grants of lands from his three predecessors to the priory (*EEAE* XI, #118, pp. 107–8) without adding anything. Bishop John the Chanter (1186–1191) also confirmed this gift between (*EEAE* XI, #166, p. 149) and made a general confirmation (*EEAE* XI, #168, pp. 150–2) of all previous episcopal benefactions to Plympton Priory without seeming to add anything himself. Most of the gifts in the general confirmation were from Bishop William Warelwast.

¹²² *RC*, pp. 167–8. William de Vernon confirmed the churches of Ugborough and Ilsington with appurtenances, as well as land at “Evgicatona” with four men, and firewood for the cooking of the canons’ food. It is not clear whether these items, none of which were included in the confirmation charter of Henry II of 1158, were grants by William, other members of the Redvers family, or their tenants. One reason for the lack of donations from the Redvers family was likely the extended period of minority after Earl Richard’s death, and the early demise of both his sons; William de Vernon was his brother, and succeeded as an elderly man (Bearman, pp. 39–40).

¹²³ Sanders, pp. 90–1. The last Nunant lord of Totnes died in 1206; the last Valletort in 1275; Isabella de Fortibus, the heiress of the Redvers, died in 1293.

¹²⁴ *MDE* #3, p. 135.

¹²⁵ *RC*, p. 164n. William de Pont de l'Arche had been Stephen’s chamberlain, but had defected to Matilda; he was sheriff of Hampshire in 1141 (*Regesta*, III, pp. xix, xxiv).

Priory land at Newton St. Cyres; in 1179, her brother Robert Pont de l'Arche conceded this gift in exchange for five marks from the priory so that he might repay a debt to King Henry II.¹²⁶ Emma might have thought to make this donation to Plympton Priory because of the fact that her affianced was a member of the Redvers family, or because of her father's record of founding houses of Augustinian canons. William Pont de l'Arche had been involved in the founding of Southwark Priory in Surrey in 1106 and of Southwick Priory in Hampshire in 1133.¹²⁷

Emma, like Stephen de Mandeville, Robert Fitz Martin, and Matilda Peverel (all Plympton benefactors with lands in Somerset), made gifts to Plympton Priory from her Devon land-holdings. In only one case is it known that benefactors from outside Devon and Cornwall granted the priory land situated beyond the bounds of these two counties. This was the land of Postridge, Spaxton, in Somerset. The donors of the manor of East Postridge were Roger de Reigny, his wife Mabilla, and their sons William, Baldwin, and Richard; the gift was confirmed by their lord, William de Curci.¹²⁸ The original gift would have been made by the 1160s, as William de Curci died in about 1162.¹²⁹ An explanation for the interest of the de Reigny family in Plympton Priory can perhaps be found in the fact that William de Curci's wife was Maud d'Avranches, the heiress of the Honour of Okehampton. Maud d'Avranches was related to Adeliz, daughter of Baldwin the Sheriff,¹³⁰ who, as noted above, was generous to Plympton Priory until her death in 1142. Might the de Reignys, tenants of William de Curci, have been influenced in their choice of monastic house by their lord or his wife, who had family connections with other benefactors of Plympton Priory? Whatever the reason behind the gift of the de Reignys to Plympton Priory, it led to the involvement of another Somerset man with the canons of Plympton. In a charter from the early thirteenth century, Richard Pain of Enmore, Somerset, gave the land called "Paynneslond" in Postridge to Plympton Priory; the name Sir John de Regni appears in the witness

¹²⁶ Emma seems to have died before marrying the earl. The final concord is printed in *RC*, pp. 163–4; Henry II's confirmation of the agreement is *MDE* #4, p. 135.

¹²⁷ David Knowles and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales*, 2nd ed. (London, 1971), p. 174.

¹²⁸ *MDE* #5, pp. 135–6.

¹²⁹ Sanders, p. 69.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

list.¹³¹ This is not a straightforward donation, however, as the charter states that Richard had once held the land from the canons for a pound of pepper. The charter goes on to say that for this “donation”—which was perhaps more accurately a quit-claim—the canons of Plympton gave him two silver marks and five shillings.¹³² The canons seem not to have maintained an enduring interest in their land at Postridge, however, and eventually divested themselves of it by 1372.¹³³

There are a couple of other indications of connections between Plympton Priory and Somerset benefactors. A woman with lands in Devon who married into the Somerset nobility also concerned herself with Plympton Priory: this was Matilda de Pomerey, who was the wife of Robert I de Beauchamp, baron of Hatch Beauchamp, and mother of Robert II de Beauchamp.¹³⁴ The grant she made was from her own lands in Devon: “Halgawilla,” which was part of her patrimony and inheritance at Woodford.¹³⁵ She asked her son to concede this gift for the sake of her love and the love of God.¹³⁶ A somewhat more obscure

¹³¹ TNA E 210/3754 (Ancient Deeds): Richard donated “...totam terram meam que vocatur Paynneslond in terra de Postrigge cum pertinenciis quam de eisdem canonicis aliquando tenui pro una libra piperis...” The dating of the document to the early thirteenth century is based on the fact that a Richard Marchepais appears in the witness list. Marchepais acted as a legal representative of the prior of Plympton in the early thirteenth century (see *DFE* I, pp. 22, 366).

¹³² *Ibid.*: “...dederunt mei dicti canonici duas marcas argenti et quinque solidos.”

¹³³ In the thirteenth century the priory, having acquired more land in Postridge by this point, had decided to lease out its land there to a Walter de Kentisbeare and his heirs for an annual rent of 43s 6d, payable at the cell of Marsh Barton. Walter and his heirs were allowed to “assignare, vendere, vel dare [predictam terram] cuicumque voluerint, dummodo hoc nullo modo alicui domui religionis nec in Iudaismo pignori obligare presument.” Juliana, widow of William le Bret, confirmed this lease to Joan Trevit in 1279/80 (*MDE* #17, p. 139). For evidence of divestment, see the *Victoria County History: Somerset*, ed. Robert W. Dunning (London/Oxford, 1992), vol. 6, p. 69 and the *Hylle Cartulary*, ed. Robert W. Dunning, Somerset Record Society vol. 68 (Yeovil, 1968), p. 46.

¹³⁴ A Robert I de Beauchamp appears in records in the years 1103–13. A Robert II de Beauchamp flourished in the 1150s and was charged scutage on 17 knights’ fees in 1166 (Sanders, p. 51). See also John Batten, ‘The Barony of Beauchamp in Somerset,’ *Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 36 (1890), 20–59.

¹³⁵ The manor of Woodford was near Plympton. Matilda specified that four shillings were to be paid annually to her and her heirs for this land (Bodl MS. James 23, p. 157).

¹³⁶ Bodl. MS James 23, p. 157. There is a discrepancy between Matilda’s donation charter and this next one: in the former the land is a quarter ferling, in the latter it is four ferlings. It seems that this gift was later challenged: a fragment of court proceedings in the “Registrum” records that Robert Abbot, son of Roger Abbot, remitted the complaint against the priory regarding land at “Halgawilla” in front of the royal justiciars (Bodl. MS. James 23, p. 161).

donor was Richard Pincerna: he gave the canons of Plympton some land in “Langehiwis” in exchange for an annual payment of 5s.¹³⁷ Richard’s lord, who gave his consent, was Henry de Culture, a minor Somerset lord who held one knight’s fee there in chief in 1166.¹³⁸

Other wealthy Augustinian houses of England such as Waltham and Cirencester were successful at attracting benefactors from beyond the counties in which they were situated; these were prestigious royal foundations, however, and for that reason likely attracted donors from a variety of locales. A study of two prosperous Augustinian priories in Yorkshire revealed an interesting discrepancy in the geographical distribution of benefactors: most of the gifts to Bridlington Priory in its early years came from the founder, Walter de Gant, and his family and tenants, and from the tenants of the neighbouring Honour of Holderness; early grants to Nostell Priory came from benefactors in the Honour in which it was founded as well as from at least fifteen different baronies.¹³⁹ Bridlington Priory, then, “essentially represents the pattern of a baronial foundation, in which the early endowment was produced by a co-operative effort of the whole barony.”¹⁴⁰ Plympton, too, can be said to fall into the category of “baronial foundation”, for, even though it was an episcopal foundation, a sizeable portion of the early endowment of the priory seems to have been the work of the local honorial barons, their families, and their tenants.

The barons of most of the honours in twelfth-century Devon participated in varying degrees in contributing to the endowment of the priory: those of Okehampton, Dartington, Barnstaple, Trematon, Totnes, and Plympton all took part. Most of the benefactions made by the laity to Plympton were connected with the last-mentioned. The Honour of Plympton, along with the Honours of Christchurch (Dorset/Hampshire) and Carisbrooke (Isle of Wight), were granted to Richard de Redvers, a supporter of Henry I, after his demonstration of loyalty

¹³⁷ *MDE* #3, p. 135. For the identification of “Langehiwis” as Langage near Plympton, see *PND*, pt. 1, p. 253.

¹³⁸ *RBE* II, p. 230.

¹³⁹ Burrows, ‘Monastic Benefactors,’ 6. Burrows points out that Nostell “was close to a region where several fees were mixed, while Bridlington was at the boundary [of] . . . areas dominated by a single barony.” Nostell also had the advantage of having a famous and influential prior in this period, and was dedicated to St. Oswald, whose cult was popular in the twelfth century. Both these factors seem to have resulted in gifts to the priory.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

during Robert, Duke of Normandy's invasion of England in 1101.¹⁴¹ A "knight of considerable standing in Normandy," Richard de Redvers exemplified the "new men" of Henry I's reign, "promoted into the ranks of the major land-holding families in England as a reward for loyal service."¹⁴² As part of the Honour of Plympton, Richard de Redvers received the manors of Plympton and Tiverton; in both towns he built castles.¹⁴³ Richard and other members of his family were generous to the Benedictine Abbey of Montebourg in Normandy, which established a cell at Appuldurcombe on the Isle of Wight on land given to the Abbey by Richard de Redvers; Richard founded Lodors, in Dorset, as a cell of Montebourg.¹⁴⁴ As has been pointed out above, Richard is known to have made grants to the college of secular canons at Plympton; after his death in 1107, his son Baldwin, continued to make benefactions and concessions to what was by 1121 the Augustinian priory at Plympton.

Several charters of Baldwin de Redvers survive which establish his interest in the new foundation at Plympton: between 1121 and 1130, Baldwin restored to the priory the church scot from several parcels of land,¹⁴⁵ and declared that the priory should have all the tithes in the parish of Plympton, but especially the third part, of which the priory had been unjustly deprived.¹⁴⁶ In the same period, Baldwin also

¹⁴¹ Bearman, pp. 2–3. See also Bodl MS. James, p. 165.

¹⁴² Bearman, p. 3. The Redvers family owned land in Normandy in Néhou (in the Cotentin) and Vernon (in the Vexin).

¹⁴³ Frederick Hockey, 'The House of Redvers and its Monastic Foundations,' in *Anglo-Norman Studies V: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1982*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1983), p. 147. Little remains of the castle at Plympton now except the motte and the bailey. The manor of Plympton which belonged to the earls of Devon should not be confused with that of the priory, Plympton Grange. The comital manor was also referred to by the names Plympton Erle or Plympton St. Maurice.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 147–8.

¹⁴⁵ *RC* #13, p. 64: "...chirchsettas de Alwardestune et Brixstanestune et de aliis terris meis que in parrochia illa sunt et de illis terris nominatim que citra aquam Plime sunt" (Bearman suggests that "Alwardestune" may have been Yealmpstone, and identifies "Brixstanestune" as Brixton Barton in Shaugh). The nature of the church-scot is still not entirely clear; it seems to have a thrave (twenty-four sheaves) of wheat in some regions. It was payable at Martinmas. See John H. Round, 'Church-scot in Domesday,' *English Historical Review* 5 (1890), 101.

¹⁴⁶ *RC* #13, p. 64. The third part of the tithes is referred to as "that which the serfs used to have" ("quam servi habere solebant"). Reichel cites this clause as evidence that in the middle of the twelfth century the lord of the manor could "dispose of tithes as he saw fit" and that a portion was reserved for the use of the poor (Reichel, 'Hundred of Plympton,' p. 259). But can "the poor" be necessarily equated with these serfs?

released the priory from castle-work at Plympton,¹⁴⁷ and in 1133 he witnessed the charters of Bishop William and the Dean and Chapter of Exeter in which they granted a pension to the priory on the death of each canon.¹⁴⁸ His only other known grant to the canons of Plympton, 1141 × 1155, is of land at “Gerstona” and next to his demesne at “Doverdesdona,” as well as the tithes of his mill, and the right to present a priest to the chapel of the borough and castle.¹⁴⁹ In the same charter Baldwin affirmed that the burgesses of the town of Plympton granted to the priory, with his assent, a payment of 3d from each of them annually.¹⁵⁰

If Baldwin was not more generous to the priory, it ought to be kept in mind that he had other distractions: in 1136, he rebelled against King Stephen. Baldwin’s force held Exeter Castle during a long, gruelling siege, but the men who were holding Plympton Castle, “utter cowards and irresolute,” covertly surrendered to King Stephen.¹⁵¹ Two hundred of the king’s knights showed up suddenly at Plympton, to the shock of the inhabitants, razed the castle to the ground, and wreaked havoc on Baldwin’s lands.¹⁵² Exiled from England, Baldwin became a loyal follower of the Empress Matilda. He fought for her cause in Normandy and in England and, for his efforts, Matilda created him earl of Devon by 1142.¹⁵³ In 1147, Baldwin left England as part of a group of Anglo-Normans heading east to join the Second Crusade.¹⁵⁴

Baldwin was also involved in the patronage of a number of other monastic houses: he was considered the founder of Savigniac abbey of Quarr on the Isle of Wight and of the Cluniac priory of St. James,

¹⁴⁷ *RC* #14, p. 64. Baldwin made this grant and those of the previous chapter “for the sake of the soul of his father and for the remission of his sins.”

¹⁴⁸ *MDE* #7 and #8, pp. 136–7.

¹⁴⁹ *RC* #22, pp. 72–3. A house next to the chapel was also provided for the priest.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* “Burgenses etiam eiusdem ville de singulis domibus singulis annis tres denarios dederunt, me assentiente, manibus eorum mecum super altare missis, quos tres denarios, iusticia vestra simul cum mea reddi faciat.” This is the first mention of a borough at Plympton.

¹⁵¹ *Gesta Stephani*, ed. and trans. Kenneth R. Potter (Oxford, 1976), pp. 35–7.

¹⁵² “. . . [T]hey stripped bare, by frightful ravages, all Baldwin’s land, which in those districts is extensive and pleasant and rich in all good things, and returned to the king at Exeter with many thousands of sheep and cattle” (*Gesta Stephani*, pp. 35–7). One wonders how much Plympton Priory suffered from this devastation, considering that its lands and Baldwin’s were intermingled in Plympton and the surrounding area.

¹⁵³ Bearman, pp. 7–8. He seems not to have been an active supporter after 1142.

¹⁵⁴ David Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135–54* (Harlow, 2000), p. 219.

near Exeter;¹⁵⁵ he also founded the Augustinian priory at Breamore (Hampshire) with his uncle Hugh, and was involved in the re-foundation of the secular college at Christchurch, Twynham, as a house of Augustinian canons.¹⁵⁶ Baldwin's tenants made generous benefactions to Quarr, and the Redvers family continued to make grants to Breamore and Christchurch.¹⁵⁷ The canons of Plympton Priory thus had a number of rivals for the attention of Baldwin and other members of the Redvers family.

While Baldwin may not personally have made extensive gifts to Plympton Priory, his tenants certainly did. As Wardrop points out in regard to Fountains Abbey, even when the magnates' grants were smaller than the knights', the role of the magnates in "setting the example"—influencing their tenants and dependents to give as they had—and confirming their tenants' grants should not be underestimated.¹⁵⁸ Henry II's confirmation charter lists lands and donors named in a previous charter of Henry I.¹⁵⁹ From this document it is clear that those enfeoffed with lands from the Redvers' manor of Plympton played a significant role in the endowment of the priory. The status of these earliest benefactors is sometimes difficult to ascertain: Richard de Holeweia, for example, who gave a half-virgate of land in "Widie," and Nigel de Plympton, who gave the land of "Biri" in Plympton manor,¹⁶⁰ seem not to have been prominent landowners in the county. Assessing status purely on the basis of size of gift is risky, however: Robert Fitz Martin and his wife Matilda Peverel granted a half-virgate of land in "Buratona" and the land of "Swynestona" of the Redvers manorial lands in Ermington to the priory.¹⁶¹ These grants do not seem much

¹⁵⁵ Bearman points out that even though Earl Baldwin was asked to issue foundation charters to Quarr and St. James in the mid-1140s, both had actually been established some years earlier (Bearman, p. 9).

¹⁵⁶ Hockey, 'House of Redvers,' pp. 148–9. Baldwin also confirmed the possessions of Carisbrooke Priory on the Isle of Wight. He and his wife Adeliza were buried at Quarr Abbey.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Wardrop, *Fountains Abbey*, pp. 168–9.

¹⁵⁹ The text of this charter does not survive in its entirety; a portion exists in the "Registrum" (*RC*, p. 156).

¹⁶⁰ *MDE* #3, p. 135; *RC*, p. 167 (Bearman identifies "Widie" as Widey in Egg Buckland). Richard de Holeweia appears in the Pipe Roll for 31 Henry I regarding a claim against a member of the Giffard family for a war-horse (*Pipe Roll of 31 Henry I, Michaelmas 1130* [London, 1929], p. 157).

¹⁶¹ *MDE*, #3, p. 135; *RC*, p. 167 (Bearman identifies "Buratona" as Burraton and "Swynestona" as Swainstone). Matilda Peverel also gave the priory the land of Wulward

more substantial than those given by the less-prominent Nigel and Richard, but we know that Robert Fitz Martin was an important baron: he held the barony of Blagdon in Somerset and made benefactions to the abbey of Holy Trinity, Savigny, the abbey of Tiron, and the abbey of Stanley in Wiltshire.¹⁶² Matilda Peverel also founded the Cluniac priory of Kerswell in Devon between 1119 and 1129 and made grants to St. Nicholas Priory in Exeter.¹⁶³ Pagan Fitz Serlo on the other hand, while seemingly only a tenant of the Valletort and Redvers families, made the substantial grants of eighty acres at Blaxton in Tamerton Foliot and the church of Maristow there.¹⁶⁴

After the time of Henry I, benefactions continued to flow to the canons of Plympton from the Redvers' estates. Most of these gifts appear in Henry II's confirmation charter and in subsequent confirmations of the Redvers family. The accession of Henry II in 1154 was shortly followed by the death of Baldwin de Redvers, who was succeeded by his son, and sometime sheriff of Devon, Earl Richard I.¹⁶⁵ Earl Richard I continued to involve himself in the priory's interests. For example, when Geoffrey, the second prior, approached him some time between 1155 and 1160 to assert that the men of the priory's lands should not have to pay market dues to the earl, Richard I agreed that the prior had established his case and confirmed the exemption.¹⁶⁶ The extent to which Earl Richard was personally generous in regards to benefactions is unclear, however, given that Henry II's confirmation charter does not

Black and his son, and the land of a certain widow, in Ermington, which she gave the canons in exchange for land at Kilbury. Richard de Redvers enfeoffed Matilda Peverel with the manor of Ermington between 1100 and 1107; the Peverels were lords of two manors in Devon, but tenants of the Redvers in Ermington, Kilbury, and Kingston (*RC* #3, p. 157n, and Bearman, p. 38).

¹⁶² Sanders, p. 15. In 1162 Robert had five knights' fees in Somerset and five in Devon. His family is also connected with the abbey of St. Dogmaels in Wales.

¹⁶³ Christopher Holdsworth, 'From 1050 to 1307,' in *Unity and Variety: A History of the Church in Devon and Cornwall*, ed. Nicholas Orme (Exeter, 1991), pp. 40–1; 'Charters in the Cartulary of St. Nicholas Priory, at Exeter,' in *Collectanea topographica et genealogica*, vol. 1 (London, 1834), p. 64.

¹⁶⁴ *MDE* #3, p. 135.

¹⁶⁵ Bearman, pp. 11–2. Richard lost his position as sheriff of Devon in 1157/58, and his confirmation as earl of Devon was not automatic. Bearman interprets these royal snubs as evidence of Henry II's desire to limit baronial autonomy in the county; certainly Earl Richard was not a nationally-prominent magnate as his father had been, nor did he receive much royal favour.

¹⁶⁶ *RC* #45, pp. 91–2. Bearman dates this document to between June, 1155, and April, 1162, but according to extracts from the lost Plympton cartulary, Geoffrey was succeeded as prior by Richard Pilatus in 1160 (Oxford, Bodl. Tanner MS. 342, f. 177r).

clearly distinguish between grants made by Earl Richard I himself or confirmations of grants made by his tenants. An examination of all of Earl Richard I's surviving charters concerning monasteries reveals that in general he made very few original gifts during the time he was earl; rather, most of his charters are confirmations of previous gifts from his family or of grants from tenants.¹⁶⁷ The importance of these confirmations should not be underestimated, however: any gift from a tenant was dependent on the earl's support and consent, and was theoretically rendered the more secure when the earl endorsed in a confirmation charter. An example of how this worked is the fragment from Earl Richard's general confirmation charter for Plympton from the "Registrum": two tenants, Walter Giffard and Eustace of "Alfemestona" petitioned the earl to allow them to grant the service of Alfemestona to Plympton Priory; the earl allowed this, but reserved for himself the service of one knight, which he was owed in scutage.¹⁶⁸ Earl Richard I promised that if anything were lacking from Walter Giffard's fee or Eustace's fee, he would not seize it from this service granted to the priory.¹⁶⁹ The Giffard and Alfemestona families made a number of other benefactions to Plympton Priory: Walter gave the canons Edwin Blakeman and his sons, and Walter and his mother jointly granted land in Aveton Giffard;¹⁷⁰ he also donated land at Lamerton between c. 1129 and 1141.¹⁷¹ Hugh of Alfemestona granted a half-ferling of

¹⁶⁷ *RC*, *passim*. Earl Richard I issued three confirmation charters to Montebourg Abbey, two to Savigny and its daughter-house Quarr Abbey, two to Christchurch Priory, one to Plympton Priory, one to the Hospitallers, and one to St. James Priory at Exeter. Of the charters which record his original grants, three were to Christchurch (one was at the request of a tenant, one was an exchange) and two were to Quarr.

¹⁶⁸ *RC*, #45, pp. 91–2: "...servicium de Alfemestona concessu et petitione Walteri Giffard et ipsius Eustachii, salvo meo servicio scilicet unius militis per denarios..." See also *MDE* #3, p. 135. "Alfemestona" could be either Yealmpstone near Plympton (*PND*, 254) or Train in Wembury (*DB: D*, ii, pp. 35, 27).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*: "...si aliquod servicium defecerit de feudo Walteri Giffard sive feudo predicti Eustachii, precipio et concedo quod nunquam namus capiatur pro nullo defectu in Alfemestona nisi pro defectu predictae Alfemestona..."

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* See also *MDE* #3, p. 135.

¹⁷¹ *RC*, pp. 178–9. These charter fragments concern the services owed by the priory for the land: they owed no geld or forinsec service "nisi quando milites de feudo domini Baldewini hoc faciunt," and they owed no service to Giffard or his heirs, although the prior conceded "annuatim unam parcariam aratorum [plough-service] in hieme et unam parcariam messorum [harvest-service] in autumpno de suis tenentibus ibi." Another charter fragment directly preceding this in the "Registrum" also pertains to services and dues at Lamerton (*Bodl. MS. James 23*, pp. 156–7). Lamerton is near Tavistock. The Giffard family also gave land in Lamerton to Tavistock Abbey and land to Launceston Priory (*RC*, App. 2, #12 and #13, pp. 184–5).

land in Alfemestona, and his son Eustace also gave land and a wood in the manor of Ermington.¹⁷²

Other benefactors made grants from their own lands as well as from the estates they held of the Redvers family: Geoffrey de Furnells, sheriff of Devon and Cornwall 1128–30,¹⁷³ held land in East Devon in chief from Henry I, but held other lands from the Honour of Plympton.¹⁷⁴ Earl William de Vernon confirmed Geoffrey and his son Alan's grant of "Lamora" in the Redvers manor of Cullompton to the priory;¹⁷⁵ Geoffrey also gave Prior Geoffrey his man Ailwardus with his goods and heirs,¹⁷⁶ while his son Alan granted his land at "Sideham" and "Worvagat."¹⁷⁷ Another baron who is known to have been associated with Earl Baldwin was Stephen de Mandeville, lord of the Honour of Erlstoke in Somerset and member of Baldwin's entourage when he was in exile in Normandy during the civil war of the twelfth century.¹⁷⁸ Stephen also held Blackawton and Stokenham in Devon of Earl Baldwin¹⁷⁹ and seems to have given Blackawton church to Plympton Priory.¹⁸⁰ Stephen's son, Roger II, turned out to be a thorn in Plympton Priory's side: Stephen had given Plympton Priory the manor of Strete

¹⁷² *MDE* #3, p. 135 and *RC*, pp. 167–9. Ermington is spelled "Ermin-tona" and "Ermyngtona" in the original texts.

¹⁷³ *Pipe Roll of 31 Henry I*, p. 152.

¹⁷⁴ Bearman, p. 38. Geoffrey seems to have been a regular member of Earl Baldwin's entourage; he acted as witness to ten of Baldwin's charters.

¹⁷⁵ *RC*, pp. 167–9.

¹⁷⁶ *EEAE* XI, #27A, p. 27.

¹⁷⁷ Bodl. MS James 23, p. 161. Alan also made a grant to St. Nicholas Priory in Exeter, for the sake of his soul and that of his lords, Baldwin and Richard (*RC*, pp. 188–9). The *cartae baronum* reveal that Alan held knights' fees from the bishop of Exeter, from Robert Fitz Roy (married to the heiress of Okehampton), and from William de Tracy (*RBE*, pp. 248, 253, 254).

¹⁷⁸ Bearman, p. 38. Stephen's father, Roger I, and Roger I's brother Geoffrey had been Norman tenants of Richard I de Redvers who accompanied him to England. Roger I was rewarded with the Honour of Erlstoke, but also held two manors in Devon; Geoffrey seems to have received the Honour of Marshwood in Dorset from Henry I (Sanders, pp. 42, 64). Stephen de Mandeville accompanied Earl Baldwin on the Second Crusade, from which he did not return (Crouch, *Reign of King Stephen*, p. 208n).

¹⁷⁹ Bearman, p. 38.

¹⁸⁰ In Henry II's confirmation charter, the church of Blackawton is listed as a benefaction to the priory, which Roger son of Stephen de Mandeville conceded and confirmed ("ecclesiam Avetona, quam Rogerus filius Stephani de Mandevilla concessit et confirmavit") (*MDE* #3, p. 135). This suggests that his father made the original donation. If Roger II had been the actual donor, one would have expected the verb *dedit* (he gave), since it is the verb most commonly used in Henry II's confirmation charter to denote an original gift, *concedo* and *confirmo* being used to express confirmation of a donation.

in the presence of Bishop William Warelwast, the chapter of Exeter, and Robert Warelwast (later bishop). Roger took back the manor, and incurred the wrath of Bishop Robert who, in a mandate of 1154 × 1155, advised him in no uncertain terms to return it.¹⁸¹ This was to no avail: Strete manor eventually found its way into the ownership of Torre Abbey.¹⁸²

It seems that after the deaths of Earl Baldwin, the baronial network of patronage began to loosen and fray as the heirs of the original benefactors started to show less commitment to, or interest in, Plympton Priory. Bearman notes that in Earl Richard I's time, 1155–62, West Country influence waned amongst the household of the earl of Devon as the Redvers family began to consider Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight its residence of choice.¹⁸³ As the orientation of the earldom came to centre around south-central England rather than Devon, it is no surprise that the houses in Devon formerly patronized by the Redvers family received less of the family's attention than those in Dorset and Hampshire. This change is reflected in the charters of Earl Baldwin II (1162–88) and Earl Richard II (1188–91): because of their short terms as heads of the family—Earl Baldwin succeeded as a minor and only came of age in 1179¹⁸⁴—it is not surprising that numerically their grants to monasteries should have been fewer. Earl Baldwin II did issue confirmation charters to Launceston Priory in Cornwall and St. James Priory at Exeter, but Christchurch Priory received two original grants as well as two confirmations from him.¹⁸⁵ Interestingly, all of Earl Richard II's surviving monastic charters recorded original gifts, and all were made for the sake of his brother's (Earl Baldwin II's) soul.¹⁸⁶ The uncle of Earl Richard II, William de Vernon, succeeded him and continued the pattern of patronage which had been evolving through the course of the century: the majority of his charters, both confirmations and original gifts, were made to Christchurch Priory and

¹⁸¹ *EEAE* XI, #46, pp. 43–4.

¹⁸² Deryck Seymour, *Torre Abbey* (Exeter, 1977), pp. 219–29.

¹⁸³ Bearman, p. 39.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12. Because Earl Baldwin II was a minor in 1166, no *carta baronum* was made listing the knights enfeoffed on his land during the survey ordered by Henry II; hence our knowledge of which tenants held which lands in the Honour of Plympton is somewhat limited for the mid-twelfth century (Bearman, p. 18).

¹⁸⁵ *RC*, *passim*. Earl Baldwin also made one original grant each to Launceston Priory and to St. James Priory.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* These grants were to Quarr, Breamore, Montebourg, and St. James.

Quarr Abbey, although he did issue a couple of confirmation charters to Plympton Priory.¹⁸⁷ Once the Earls of Devon had ceased to make gifts to the new Augustinian house in the Honour of Plympton, it seems that benefactions eventually slowed to a trickle from this circle, who instead focused their attentions on houses their family had founded.

While the earls of Devon, their tenants, and members of their household contributed a great deal to the establishment of Plympton Priory's wealth in the mid-twelfth century, the lords of the Honour of Totnes and their tenants also played a significant role in this process. By 1123, Guy (or Wido) de Nunant (or Nonant) had inherited this honour from his father, Roger I, who received it from William II.¹⁸⁸ The confirmation charter of Henry II implies that Guy de Nunant, in addition to his tenants, gave gifts of land to Plympton Priory in free alms, but there are no details provided as to any donations Guy personally made to the canons.¹⁸⁹ There is somewhat more information in the document as to the benefactions made by Guy's tenants, Hugh de Waleford, Fulk Fitz Ansgar and his wife Adeliza, and Roger de Pole and his brother Pomerey.¹⁹⁰ Fulk and his wife, who had also given the priory the church of Marystow, granted the land of East Sherford in Brixton by 1135, and between 1138 and 1141 granted the land of West Sherford, a deed which was confirmed by Guy—with his son Roger's consent—as well as by Bishop Robert I of Exeter, at the Nunants' request.¹⁹¹ Guy de Nunant's wife Mabilia also granted the priory a "little estate" (*terula*) at "Scobbahill."¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* The charters of William de Vernon also record gifts and confirmations to the houses of Montebourg, Carisbrooke, Breamore, and Lyre as well as to the Knights Templar. His sister, Hawise II, was a benefactor of Quarr, Christchurch, Hartland Abbey in Devon, and the Knights Hospitallers. Margery de Vernon, William de Vernon's first cousin once removed, issued two charters each to Lyre and to Christchurch.

¹⁸⁸ Sanders, p. 89. Roger I founded the small Benedictine priory at Totnes as a dependency of SS. Sergius and Bacchus Abbey in Angers.

¹⁸⁹ *MDE* #3, p. 135. The charter refers to "illas terras quas comes Baldewinus de Radveriis et Wido de Nunant...et vavosores eorum eis in elemosinam dederunt..."

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *EEAE* XI, #41, pp. 39–40. The manor of Sherford was worth £28 4s 1.25d in 1535. A Robert Fitz Fulk gave the priory, by 1158, "Hordruneland," which seems to have been a part of the Honour of Totnes. Reichel contends that "Hordruneland" must correspond to the priory's land later known as Canonbarn or Canbarn ('Hundred of Plympton,' p. 256).

¹⁹² *English Lawesuits from William I to Richard I*, #452, pp. 487–8. The account of her gift states that "...Mabilia hanc praefatam terulam totam tempore Henrici Regis senioris multis annis libere et quiete tenuit sicut propriam suam possessionem et eo anno toto quo idem Rex Henricus obiit et annis aliquot post eius obitum postea quando

It is not clear whether Roger II de Nunant, who succeeded his father as lord of Totnes by 1141 and died c. 1177,¹⁹³ made any gifts himself to Plympton Priory. However, his charters reveal a keen interest in protecting the priory's rights to lands granted by his tenants. For example, when Walter de Meavy challenged the priory's right to "Scobbahill" before the royal justiciars at the court in Totnes in 1168–69, Roger attested to the fact that he had confirmed his mother's gift.¹⁹⁴ Walter claimed that the land was his by hereditary right, but was not able to produce any evidence that he had ever had seisin. The canons' response was that the land had been given them by Mabilia, Roger's mother; Roger had confirmed this gift, and many witnesses were able to assert the truth of the canons' case. Roger even offered to prove by his body, or by the body of one of his knights, that Walter had no right to the land.¹⁹⁵ This was not necessary, as the justiciar William Bubrun found in favour of Plympton Priory; Roger's sons Guy II, Henry, and Baldwin conceded their grandmother's gift and their father's confirmation, and Roger sent a notification of the proceedings to Bishop Bartholomew of Exeter.¹⁹⁶

This was not the only instance when Roger de Nunant notified bishops of Exeter, the patrons of Plympton Priory, of his endorsement of gifts to the canons. The same Guy de Buckland who witnessed the previous notification also granted Plympton the church of St. Edward at Egg Buckland, and Roger dutifully notified Bartholomew and the chapter of Exeter Cathedral of his concession of his knight's gift.¹⁹⁷ Another notification demonstrates how the monastic house could be the initiator of this process: although Bishop Robert I and Guy de Nunant (with his heir Roger's consent) had both confirmed the gift

voluit pro salute animae suae et animarum ad se pertinentium hanc terram ecclesiae Plimtoniae in quietam elemosinam et liberam ab omni servitio terreno et consuetudine praeter danegeld et murthero pro Deo [donare]."

¹⁹³ Sanders, p. 89.

¹⁹⁴ *English Lawsuits from William I to Richard I*, #452, pp. 487–8.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*: "Et ego huic responsioni superaddidi quod paratus eram probare per corpus meum, vel per unum de militibus meis quod verum erat hoc responsum et quod Walterus in hac terra saepe nominata nihil unquam recti habuit vel habere debuit."

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* Witnesses to Roger's notifications were his steward, Richard Babran, William Fitz Stephen, Hugh de Caravilla, Guy de Buckland, and Guy's brother Stephen the priest. Hugh and Guy both held fees from Roger de Nunant (*RBE*, pp. 257–8).

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.* The charter fragment also implies in the phrase "et quicquid Wido ecclesie Plimton pro salute sua et suorum, et nostra, in elemosinam donavit in feudo quod de me tenet..." that Guy made other donations to the priory.

of Fulk and Adeliza of West Sherford, Prior Geoffrey requested that Roger, after he had succeeded his father, concede once again what he had previously conceded in the presence of the canons.¹⁹⁸ As Roger de Nunant later reported to Bishop Robert II, he did so and, at the same time, confirmed the priory's possession of whatever else they had from his fees. He and his mother Mabilia signified their consent by placing a bough of laurel on the altar, presumably of the conventual church, on the Feast of St. Cuthbert.¹⁹⁹ In another notification, to either Bishop Robert I or Bishop Robert II, Roger de Nunant stated that his tenant Maurice de Pola requested him to issue a confirmation of his gift of land at Shaugh to the priory.²⁰⁰ Roger also took the opportunity to advise Maurice and his heirs not to exact any of the services from the priory for this land from which it had been exempted, nor to disturb the canons in any way.²⁰¹

Another benefactor of note was Walter de Clavile, lord of Burlescombe in East Devon near the Devon-Somerset border. By 1158, he had granted the churches of Burlescombe in Devon and East Morden in Dorset, as well as the mill of Burlescombe and the lands of Farway and Northwood.²⁰² Although these gifts are included in the confirmation charter for Plympton, they were transferred to the Priory of Canonsleigh when it was founded c. 1160, and Walter de Clavile was considered that house's founder. The confirmation charter Walter obtained from

¹⁹⁸ *EEAE* XI #41, pp. 39–40n. The date of this document would seem to be 1155 × 1160.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* Two witnesses of this charter were Guy and Robert de Briteville. The “Registrum” also contains a fragmentary charter involving a grant of land to the priory from Guy de Briteville; it is addressed to Roger de Nunant and Bishop Bartholomew (Bodl. MS James 23, p. 160). The *cartae baronum* for Totnes mention a widow of Briteville as holding five knights' fees in 1166 (*RBE*, p. 258). Regarding the bough of laurel, Galbraith cites a charter in which a quit-claim of land is made “per unum ramum arboris” (‘Monastic Foundation Charters,’ 211).

²⁰⁰ Bodl. MS. James 23, p. 160: “Ego autem petitione praedicti Mauriti eandem terram cum eisdem libertatibus praenominatae ecclesiae concessi...” Maurice de Pola held six knights' fees from Roger in 1166 (*RBE*, p. 258).

²⁰¹ Bodl. MS. James 23, p. 160. Maurice de Pola seems to have also granted the priory land at “Eadwirdi”: “Ita quod nihil reddat nisi murdrum et denegeld et assisam si per Regem facta fuerit in comitatu. In carta Mauricii de Pola pro terra de Eadwirdi.” (Bodl. MS James 23, p. 161).

²⁰² *MDE* #3, p. 135. Walter also notified Bishop Bartholomew of Exeter of his gifts up to that point (1161 × 1177): see *Cartulary of Canonsleigh Abbey (Harleian MS no. 3660): A Calendar*, ed. Vera M.C. London (Torquay, 1965), #12. Walter de Clavile was also a benefactor of St. Nicholas Priory in Exeter (‘Charters in the Cartulary of St. Nicholas Priory,’ in *Collectanea topographica et genealogica*, p. 187).

his lord, William, earl of Gloucester, states that the recipients were “the church of Leghe...and the canons serving Christ there according to the rule of Plympton.”²⁰³ It would seem that Leigh was for a time either a cell of Plympton Priory or a daughter-house. The odd reference to the “rule of Plympton” suggests that the notion of the Augustinian canons as an order had not yet completely coalesced, and that mother house-daughter house filiation was seen to be significant and worthy of note. Vera London suggested that Leigh was established as a daughter-house to which could be sent canons who were involved in an election dispute at Plympton Priory in 1160–61.²⁰⁴ While it does seem that there was discontent over the choice of successor to Prior Geoffrey, who died in 1160, there is no substantial evidence to indicate that this was connected with the creation of Leigh.²⁰⁵

Early in the next century tensions arose between the two houses, resulting in an agreement being struck in 1216 between Leigh (by then known as Canonsleigh Priory) and Plympton regarding the rights of the latter regarding the former.²⁰⁶ Measures set out in the composition to ensure the proper discipline of the Canonsleigh canons seem to have

²⁰³ *Earldom of Gloucester Charters*, ed. Robert B. Patterson (Oxford, 1973) #44, p. 59. Henry II also issued a confirmation of Walter de Clavile’s gifts to Leigh (*Cartulary of Canonsleigh Abbey*, #14).

²⁰⁴ *Cartulary of Canonsleigh Abbey*, p. x, n. 5.

²⁰⁵ Morey, *Bartholomew of Exeter*, pp. 10–1. Morey cites a letter issued to an unnamed religious house in the diocese during the vacancy following Bishop Robert II’s death in 1160. The canons were told by Archbishop Theobald to obey one Richard as their superior until there was a new bishop at Exeter who could sanction an election at the priory: “[t]he last prior, when dying, had suggested Richard as his successor, but the archbishop had been informed by Richard de Redvers, earl of Devon, and Alan de Furnell, that dissensions had broken out in the community through the existence of an opposition party headed by a certain Peter of Taunton and his brother William.” The archbishop ordered the malcontents to be punished “according to the canonical sanctions” and the canons to obey Richard as their prior. Morey’s suggestion that the priory mentioned is Plympton accords with the timing of Prior Geoffrey’s death, the fact that he was succeeded by Richard Pilatus, and with the involvement of Earl Richard and Alan de Furnell, two known benefactors of the priory.

²⁰⁶ The prior of Plympton Priory was allowed to be present, along with the bishop of Exeter, at the election of the Prior of Canonsleigh; if the canons of the latter did not choose one of their own canons for the position, they were to turn next to Plympton Priory before seeking a prior from another Augustinian house. It was the responsibility of the prior of Canonsleigh to discipline the canons of his house and to “check their excesses”; however, if these excesses were on such a scale that the prior of Canonsleigh could not correct them, the responsibility fell to the prior of Plympton. Through this composition “all the lawsuits which earlier sprang up between them have been laid to rest, and all the charges & discords of this kind set aside” (*Reg. Bronescombe I*, #276, pp. 92–5).

been ineffectual, however: in the thirteenth century the priory slid into decline, and in 1284 the seven remaining canons were evicted. Canon-sleigh was refounded by Matilda, Countess of Gloucester and Hertford, as a house of Augustinian canonesses, and the lands and churches given by Walter de Claville were transferred to the new community.²⁰⁷

As this chapter has shown, Plympton Priory attracted the support of a cross-section of the landed groups in Devon society. Of course, the support from the founder, subsequent bishops of Exeter, and the episcopal circle was of crucial importance in the early decades of the existence of Plympton Priory. And yet, despite the fact that Plympton Priory was an episcopal foundation, the striking impression gained from the charter evidence is that the barony of Devon and the baronial tenants were active participants in the creation of a sizeable endowment for Plympton. Whether they were motivated by an interest in this new order, the bringing of new lands under cultivation, or the salvation of their souls and the souls of their loved ones, these lay benefactors indicated a commitment to the support of the priory in the first few decades after its foundation. Without their donations of churches, pensions, lands, and fisheries, Plympton Priory would never have become as wealthy as it did. The next chapter, however, will investigate the troubles the canons of Plympton had with the heirs of these benefactors, who were often less pleased with the fact of their ancestors' generosity.

²⁰⁷ *Cartulary of Canonsleigh Abbey*, pp. ix–xi.

CHAPTER FOUR

MANAGING THE INHERITANCE: GAINS, LOSSES, AND CHALLENGES IN THE TWELFTH, THIRTEENTH, AND FOURTEENTH CENTURIES

The previous chapter revealed that Plympton Priory, like many other religious houses founded in England in the twelfth century, was dependent on the goodwill and generosity of a network of patrons and benefactors in order to create a sizeable endowment. This chapter will investigate how, after the initial wave of donations in the decades after the foundation of the priory in 1121, these relationships endured or changed over time. For, while the majority of heirs of the original benefactors made no challenges to the gifts made by their predecessors, some did, and they engaged Plympton Priory in court cases to determine rightful ownership. We shall see how Plympton Priory reacted to such challenges and asserted its claims to its inheritance. Another crucial factor in the priory's management of these disputes was the support of its patrons, the bishops of Exeter. This chapter will explore the role of the bishops in defending the priory when members of the laity took the canons of Plympton to court, and will consider the bishops' continued interest in this episcopal foundation.

The canons of Plympton Priory were hardly alone in enduring challenges to their rights; indeed, property disputes and court cases were common occurrences at medieval religious houses. Very often, the lay disputants were heirs of the original donors or patrons. Brian Golding, in his study of the Gilbertine order, noted that “attempts to recover advowsons alienated in the twelfth century were particularly common in the following century as either the heirs of the donor or their lords tried to regain control of ‘their’ churches.”¹ An examination of the early charters of Waltham Abbey provides a perfect example of this tendency: in the thirteenth century, Waltham was involved in disputes with descendants of donors who made claims to the advowsons of

¹ Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order, c. 1130–c. 1300* (Oxford, 1995), p. 367.

Croxby, Caterham, and Lambourne churches.² In her study of Llanthony Secunda Priory (Lanthony by Gloucester), Ann Geddes found that “while disputes undoubtedly arose from strained relations, it is significant that they rarely emerge except among parties with close ties or coincident interests.”³ Occasionally religious houses had the misfortune of having their patronage fall into the hands of a descendant of their founder who was particularly litigious—as the Cistercian Quarr Abbey had reason to know in its dealings with its patroness, Isabella de Fortibus, Countess of Albemarle, during a lengthy dispute in the late thirteenth century.⁴

The documents available provide a limited picture of the history of Plympton Priory in this period. They record the disputes or conveyances that found their ways into the Curia Regis Rolls or the Feet of Fines, but they unfortunately do not tell us much about the positive and uneventful relationships between the priory and descendants of lay benefactors. Of necessity, this chapter will primarily discuss conflicts in which Plympton Priory was engaged, but one must keep in mind that calmness and peace may well have been just as characteristic of the relations of the priory with other individuals and groups at this time.

Disputed Advowsons and Rights to Spiritualia

Before beginning an examination of one of the most common types of disputes in which Plympton Priory was involved, it will be helpful to consider the development of the legal context of advowson cases. The judicial venue for the hearing of cases concerning advowsons was one of the areas of contention between Henry II and Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, in their dispute over the jurisdictions of church and state. Indeed, the first clause of the Constitutions of Clarendon of 1164 dealt with this matter. Henry II declared that it had been a custom of the realm for disputes concerning the advowsons of churches—even if these disputes involved members of the clergy—to

² *Early Charters of the Augustinian Canons of Waltham Abbey, Essex*, pp. xl, xli, xliii.

³ Ann M. Geddes, “The Priory of Lanthony by Gloucester: an Augustinian House in an English Town, 1136–1401” (Ph. D. Diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1997), p. 116.

⁴ Isabella de Fortibus was the last of the Redvers family: Stanley Frederick Hockey, *Quarr Abbey and its Lands, 1132–1631* (Leicester, 1970), pp. 103–13. Rievaulx Abbey similarly had difficulties with a “bad patron” in the thirteenth century. See Jamrozik, *Rievaulx Abbey and its Social Context*, pp. 123–30.

be settled in the royal court.⁵ The origins of the conflict over this issue were rooted in the Gregorian Reform: those advocating the elimination of lay influence over the Church encouraged lay owners of churches to renounce their possession of them. However, the Church continued to tolerate the retention of the right of presentation (the advowson) by lay patrons of churches. For Henry II the difficulty was not the increasing hostility towards lay control of churches, but rather the Church's claim that cases involving advowsons should be heard in ecclesiastical rather than royal courts.⁶ Henry's view was that suits regarding advowsons concerned "questions of real property," and should be tried in the Curia Regis, whereas the view of the Church was that such conflicts concerned the cure of souls, and hence ought to be tried in ecclesiastical courts.⁷ Pope Alexander III maintained this point of view in the decretal *Quanto te*, and this is the position to which the papacy continued to adhere. However, in 1261, the Council of Lambeth conceded that cases of advowson were still being held in lay courts and that the Church had had no success in altering this practice.⁸

The *Tractatus de legibus et consuetudinibus regni angliae* of "Glanvill," written probably between 1187 and 1189,⁹ recorded twelfth-century developments in the English common law, including new procedures for dealing with cases of disputed advowsons. "Glanvill" distinguished between two types of pleas concerning advowsons: those started when the church was vacant, and those started when the benefice was occupied.¹⁰ In the former case, when the plaintiff was, technically speaking, seeking the possession, or seisin, of the right of presentation, the hearing called to settle the matter was referred to as the "assize of darrein presentment." The plaintiff, if successful in proving at this assize that he or she was the last person to have made a presentation, would recover seisin and present an incumbent to the vacant church.¹¹ If the church were not vacant, a plaintiff would seek the writ *Precipe*;

⁵ "The Constitutions of Clarendon," *English Historical Documents, 1042–1189*, ed. David C. Douglas, George W. Greenaway (London, 1953) 1st ed., vol. 2, p. 719.

⁶ Wilfred L. Warren, *Henry II* (London, 1973), p. 543.

⁷ "Constitutions of Clarendon," p. 719n.

⁸ Christopher R. Cheney, *From Becket to Langton: English Church Government 1170–1213* (Manchester, 1956), pp. 109–10.

⁹ *The Treatise on the Laws and Customs of the Realm of England commonly called Glanvill*, ed. G.D.G. Hall (London, 1965), p. xi.

¹⁰ *Glanvill IV*, pp. 1, 43.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

the question of determining who made the last presentation might still have to be resolved, but the royal writ would order the withholder of the church to return it to the plaintiff. If he or she did not do so, the writ allowed for the summoning of the royal court to deal with the matter.¹² The advantage of the assize of darrein presentment was that it “[was] quicker than the *Precipe*, and serve[d] to get a presentee into the vacant church before the bishop [became] entitled, after the lapse of three months, to present.”¹³

The following cases of disputed advowsons involving Plympton Priory demonstrate the variety of approaches used by either the priory or rival claimants. The jurisdiction of the royal courts seems to have been accepted by both the laity and the canons, but the latter also seem not to have been reluctant to enlist the assistance of their patrons, the bishops of Exeter, when required.

St. Andrew’s, Sutton

The first evidence we have of a challenge to Plympton Priory’s right to a church is from the decade after its foundation as an Augustinian house. Reginald I de Valletort, who may have been the donor of the fisheries to Plympton, challenged the priory’s rights to the church of St. Andrew’s at Sutton. His reasons for doing so are rather unclear, given that Prior Geoffrey had presented Reginald’s bastard son by the daughter of Dunprust, hereditary priest of St. Andrew’s, to the vicarage of the church c. 1128.¹⁴ Bishop William Warelwast, recounting the history of the dispute, said that he had summoned the two parties, Reginald and the canons, before him and that they had gathered together old men in order to establish their cases. Two older men, Leofric of Chaddlewood and Wulfmaer of Coleford, swore on the gospels that they had heard from elders and knew themselves that before the Normans conquered England St. Andrew’s belonged to the church of Plympton. They also swore that the canons of Plympton held St. Andrew’s, along with its chapels and all its appurtenances, as their own possession until the time

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 44–5.

¹³ Hall, *Glanwill*, p. 183. This episcopal right had been declared in canon 17 of the Third Lateran Council of 1179.

¹⁴ *EEAE XI*, #23, pp. 23–4n.

when the king gave Sutton to Reginald de Valletort.¹⁵ It was decreed that the canons of Plympton had possessed the church “perpetually in peace”; Bishop William endorsed this judgement c. 1137 and threatened anyone who ignored it with anathema.¹⁶

Thomas, the vicar of St. Andrew’s and Reginald’s son, gave the key of the church back to Prior John of Plympton (1169 × 1176) as he was dying.¹⁷ Not all members of the Valletort family were content to give up their rights to St. Andrew’s, however: probably in 1172 or 1173,¹⁸ Sir Johel de Valletort began proceedings in the name of his nephew,¹⁹ who was in his custody, to retrieve the church of St. Andrew’s. According to Bartholomew, bishop of Exeter (1161 × 1184), Johel had injuriously vexed the canons concerning the church of Sutton, and the matter had been brought before the royal justiciars, Richard de Luci, Geoffrey Ridel, archdeacon of Canterbury, and Richard of Ilchester, archdeacon of Poitiers.²⁰ In a letter to the justiciars after they had heard the case, the bishop reminded them that the canons had shown them a charter which showed that King Henry I had given the church of Sutton, and that the canons had also shown the justiciars the charter of c. 1137 of Bishop William Warelwast.²¹

It seems rather odd that there should have been a charter of Henry I in which he granted the church of St. Andrew’s to Plympton Priory. According to Bishop William’s charter, the elders Leofric and Wulfmaer had sworn that the church of Plympton had possessed the church of Sutton since before 1066. How then could Henry I have been the

¹⁵ *EEAE* XI, #23, p. 23: “... ecclesia Sutton membrum Plimton’ ecclesiae habebatur, et personae Plimton’ ecclesiae ipsam cum capellis et omnibus pertinentiis suis usque ad tempus quo Reginaldus de Valletorta ex regis dono susceperat Suttonam in pace tenerant sicut suam propriam possessionem.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Barlow dates the bishop’s notification between March 14 and September 27, 1137 (the latter date being that of the bishop’s death). Such specific dating is rather puzzling, given the imprecise dates Barlow provides for the witnesses in his list of *fasti*: Robert Warelwast was archdeacon of Exeter from c. 1113–38; Hugh was archdeacon of Totnes from 1137?–62; and William occurred as archdeacon of Cornwall c. 1128–50 (*EEAE* XII, pp. 306, 308, 310). The last witness, Edmarus Cuic, may have been a canon of Exeter Cathedral; he may have been the “Edmarus” who appeared in the chapter’s confirmation of Bishop William Warelwast’s gift of 60 shillings to the priory on the death of each canon (*EEAE*, XI, #22, p. 22n).

¹⁷ *EEAE* XI, #23, pp. 23–4n.

¹⁸ *EEAE* XI, #120, p. 110n.

¹⁹ The nephew was probably Reginald de Valletort II, who died in 1187 (Sanders, p. 91).

²⁰ *EEAE* XII, #120, pp. 109–10.

²¹ *Ibid.*

donor of the church? However, Bishop William's charter did imply that Plympton's possession of St. Andrew's had lasted only until the time when Reginald de Valletort received the manor of Sutton from Henry I. Presumably Reginald had seized or attempted to seize the church, hence the court case of c. 1137. Might the charter of Henry I presented to the justiciars have been a re-grant of the church of Sutton to Plympton? If so, why was it not mentioned in the judgement of c. 1137? This royal charter might also have been a now-lost confirmation to the canons of their rights to the church at Sutton. In his letter, Bishop Bartholomew stated that the priory had been entitled to the church of Sutton since its foundation ("*quas a fundamento ecclesie sue habuisse noscuntur*"), but it is not clear whether he meant the foundation of the secular college in Anglo-Saxon times or the foundation of the Augustinian priory in 1121, or whether indeed he meant uninterrupted possession.

Bishop Bartholomew reminded the justiciars in his letter that when they had heard the case at Northampton, they had tried to arrange a peaceful resolution of the dispute between Sir Johel and the canons.²² However, Sir Johel had continued to damage and injure the lands, fisheries, and church of Plympton Priory "*tanta iniquitate et temeritate,*" and as a consequence, he deserved to have ecclesiastical penalties imposed upon him. Bishop Bartholomew had declined to carry these out, but he told the justiciars that he was prepared to do so if they did not coerce Johel to comply. Clearly, his plea to the justiciars yielded no results, and the bishop imposed an interdict upon Johel's lands.²³

The case was appealed to Rome in 1174x1175; Johel's messenger, who arrived first, successfully sought a papal commission to Richard, archbishop of Canterbury, to investigate Johel's complaint about the interdict.²⁴ When the representative of Plympton Priory arrived at the Curia, however, he produced the charter recording Bishop William Warelwast's judgement of the c. 1137 case.²⁵ The representative of Johel de Valletort claimed that Johel and "his predecessors had held the patronage up to the present time, and that [Bishop William's] charter had never been seen before." Pope Alexander III decreed that neither party had come adequately prepared, and commissioned

²² Ibid.

²³ Mary G. Cheney, *Roger, Bishop of Worcester 1164-1179* (Oxford, 1980), Appendix II, #37, pp. 334-5.

²⁴ Ibid., Appendix II, #52A, p. 344.

²⁵ Ibid., Appendix II, #37, pp. 334-5.

Richard, archbishop of Canterbury, and Roger, bishop of Worcester, to hear the case; if they found for Plympton Priory, the interdict was to be enforced, silence imposed on Johel “and his party,” and, if Johel did not repent, the judges-delegate were to excommunicate him.²⁶ The pope nullified the previous commission to the archbishop of Canterbury, made in response to Johel’s representative’s version of events, as it had been obtained by “suppression of the truth.”²⁷

On June 27, 1175, the judges-delegate passed judgement at Lambeth. As they had cited Johel to appear by a fourth and peremptory edict and he had not shown up nor sent a representative, they declared him contumacious.²⁸ Archbishop Richard and Bishop Roger inspected the charter of Bishop William Warelwast. Bishop Bartholomew of Exeter definitively established the authenticity of the document by comparing its seal with those attached to other charters of Bishop William Warelwast.²⁹ This was the normal practice at the time for establishing the validity of charters produced in court.³⁰ Canon Stephen of Plympton also swore that he had sought the papal commission on the basis of a transcription of this charter; he and another canon took an oath that they had been told by the elders of Plympton Priory that the charter was indeed an authentic document of Bishop William Warelwast.³¹ The judges-delegate declared that they accepted the authenticity of the charter and that the Church of St. Andrew’s consequently belonged to Plympton. Archbishop Richard and Bishop Roger imposed silence upon Johel and those who had instituted the action against the canons and forbade him or his men from molesting, bothering, or disturbing the canons about the church.³²

Johel de Valletort turned out to be a formidable opponent, however. By 1176, he had presented Walter de Coutances, royal vice-chancellor and archdeacon of Oxford, and later royal justiciar, bishop of Lincoln, and archbishop of Rouen, to the church of Sutton.³³ Walter, as well as

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., Appendix I, #53, pp. 283–4.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ C.T. Flower, *Introduction to the Curia Regis Rolls, 1199–1230*, Selden Society vol. 62 (London, 1944), p. 281.

³¹ Cheney, *Roger, Bishop of Worcester*, Appendix I, #53, pp. 283–4.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ralph V. Turner, ‘Clerical Judges in English Secular Courts: The Ideal versus the Reality,’ in *Judges, Administrators and the Common Law in Angevin England* (London, 1994), 162–3.

being a *familiaris regis* to Henry II, was a Cornishman who came from a knightly family.³⁴ This may explain why he and a member of the Valletort family—which also owned lands in Cornwall—would be known to each other. An excerpt from what seems to have been a chronicle kept at Plympton sheds further light on this matter:

The aforementioned Johel did not cease then to impede our law, but presented Walter de Coutances, chancellor to the lord king, afterwards archbishop of Rouen, to the aforesaid church. Whereupon a composition was made between him and us by Bishop Bartholomew and Prior John so that he might hold the aforesaid church from us in return for giving us three silver marks annually; which he did for a while, but after he was promoted to the episcopate of Lincoln [in 1183], Prior Martin conceded the church to John de Coutances, Walter's nephew, to be held in the same way. John swore fidelity in our chapter.³⁵

John de Coutances was not only the nephew of Walter, but was also a rising member of the ecclesiastical hierarchy: he succeeded his uncle as archdeacon of Oxford by 1184, he was dean of Rouen by 1188 or earlier, and he was consecrated bishop of Worcester in 1196.³⁶ John of Coutances' own links with Henry II are indicated by the appearance of his name in the witness lists of two of the king's late charters.³⁷ By presenting such powerful and influential men to Sutton church, Johel displayed a keen sense of strategy: even though the judges-delegate had found against him, he knew that he could keep his claim alive if he presented men the bishop of Exeter and the prior of Plympton would be reluctant to antagonize. The bishop was in an especially

³⁴ Peter A. Poggioli, 'From Politician to Prelate: The Career of Walter of Coutances, Archbishop of Rouen, 1184–1207' (Ph. D. Diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1984), pp. 18–9. Walter owned some land in Coutances, hence his appellation "de Coutances." His family was not of high status, but they did make some grants of land to Tavistock Abbey.

³⁵ Bodl. MS. James 23, p. 164: "Praefatus tamen Johel nondum cessavit impedire ius nostrum sed presentavit ad memoratam ecclesiam dominum Walterum de Constantiis domini Regis cancellarium, post futurum Archiepiscopum Rotomagensem; unde facta est compositio inter ipsum et nos per Bartholomaeum Episcopum et priorem Johannem ut ipse praefatam ecclesiam teneret de nobis reddendo annuatim 3 marcas argenti quod et ipse diu fecit. Sed eo promotus in Episcopum Nicholiensem [sic: Lincoln] prior M. concessit illam ecclesiam Johanni de Constantiis eodem tenore tenendam, nepoti praedicti Walteri, et ipse in capitulo nostro fidelitatem juravit."

³⁶ *English Episcopal Acta IV: Lincoln 1186–1206*, ed. David M. Smith (London, 1986), #59n., #69n., #80n.

³⁷ Robert W. Eyton, *Court, Household, and Itinerary of Henry II* (Hildesheim, 1974), pp. 282, 295.

difficult situation, as his acceptance of the presentee would imply that he believed Johel de Valletort was the true patron.³⁸ What discussions went on between Bishop Bartholomew, to this point so supportive of Plympton Priory, and the prior over the proper course of action one cannot know, but it is possible that there was some degree of collaboration in their response to Johel's cunning move.

Given the royal connections of Walter and John de Coutances,³⁹ any action to deprive them of this benefice might well have resulted in unpleasant consequences. By making an agreement with the new incumbents, Plympton Priory did not have to concede the advowson; indeed, the payment of a pension would seem to indicate an acknowledgment on the part of the incumbent that the priory was the legitimate patron of the benefice. The canons perhaps felt that their best recourse was to tolerate the situation until Sir Johel's nephew came of age or Sir Johel died.⁴⁰ Interestingly, Sutton is not mentioned in Bishop John the Chanter's confirmation (1186 × 1188) of all *spiritualia* and *temporalia* granted or confirmed to Plympton Priory by bishops of Exeter.⁴¹ This may have been because the patronage of the church was still considered to be disputed, or it may have simply been because the bishops of Exeter had not confirmed to the priory the *spiritualia*—including the chapels and Sutton church—which had come to it as an “inheritance” from Plympton Minster. Certainly in the thirteenth century the canons seem to have been in secure possession of Sutton church; they were listed in the register of Bishop Walter Bronescombe as being the patrons of Sutton when they made a presentation in 1264.⁴² As the senior line of the Valletorts had died out by 1275,⁴³ the canons had no further challenges from that quarter. Sutton, along with its dependent chapel

³⁸ As J.W. Gray pointed out: “Not only personal qualifications, but presentation by the true patron were necessary to canonically valid admission and institution...” See ‘The Ius Praesentandi in England from the Constitutions of Clarendon to Bracton,’ *English Historical Review* 67 (1952), 482.

³⁹ During the last decade of Henry II's reign, Walter de Coutances was one of the most frequent witnesses to the king's charters. Ralph V. Turner, *Men Raised from the Dust: Administrative Service and Upward Mobility in Angevin England* (Philadelphia, 1988), p. 16.

⁴⁰ Sir Johel seems to have outlived his nephew, and appears in the Pipe Rolls in the late 1180s regarding a dispute with a Robert Foliot over lands in Devon (*PRS* 34 Henry II, p. 170). He was also involved in a robbery case in Cornwall in 1200 (*CRR*, v. 1 Richard-2 John, pp. 267).

⁴¹ *EEAE* XII, #168, pp. 150–2.

⁴² *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #564, p. 13.

⁴³ Sanders, pp. 90–1.

of St. Budeaux, was included in Bishop Grandisson's confirmation of Plympton Priory's *spiritualia* in 1335.⁴⁴

An interesting aspect of this case is the support given to Plympton Priory by Bishop Bartholomew. Whether it was writing to the royal justiciars urging them to action, excommunicating Sir Johel and laying an interdict on his lands, or assisting the papal judges delegate in verifying the authenticity of Bishop William Warelwast's charter, Bishop Bartholomew demonstrated a great eagerness to defend the rights of Plympton Priory. As a frequent papal judge-delegate himself, and as an expert on canon law,⁴⁵ Bishop Bartholomew was the perfect ally for Plympton in circumstances such as these. He obviously took seriously his responsibilities not only as diocesan, but also as patron of several religious houses.

It is also interesting to see how, in the decades after the Constitutions of Clarendon, the issues of jurisdiction in cases of advowson were worked out in practice. The Sutton case reveals that the original venue for Sir Johel's action was the Curia Regis; when a judgement there was ineffective in resolving the dispute, the bishop of Exeter had to intervene and threaten the imposition of ecclesiastical penalties if the justiciars did not put further pressure upon Johel. That the bishop did indeed have to resort to an interdict would seem to suggest that royal justice was less speedy and reliable in this instance.⁴⁶ Johel de Valletort, when faced with an unsatisfactory verdict in the royal court, appealed to the pope and very nearly succeeded in persuading him of his side of the story. While the final judicial sentence on the matter was given by papal judges-delegate, the ultimate resolution of this dispute came about through a compromise between the two parties. In the end, neither royal nor ecclesiastical justice was effective in countering the strategies of a clever and determined plaintiff with no legal right to an advowson.

⁴⁴ *Reg. Grandisson* II, p. 775.

⁴⁵ Morey, *Bartholomew of Exeter*, pp. 36, 39, 44–52.

⁴⁶ C.R. Cheney stated in regard to the question of whether the royal or ecclesiastical courts offered "swifter and surer justice" that "recent studies of the working of the royal court of the Angevins... do not show it in a very favourable light" (*From Becket to Langton*, p. 108).

St. Just-in-Roseland: Darrein Presentment

Hardly had a resolution been reached in the Sutton dispute before Plympton Priory became involved in another disagreement over a church. Episcopal involvement was a feature of this case, as well. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, in the 1180s a dispute arose between Plympton Priory and John le Sor. This concerned the patronage of the Cornish church of St. Just-in-Roseland which was resolved by a composition made in 1188 × 1190 between the two parties before the royal justiciars.

An agreement was made by the parties before the royal justiciars: John and his heirs would present a suitable cleric to the prior and his successors, and together they would present the cleric to the bishop of Exeter for institution to St. Just. Plympton Priory would receive an annual pension of half a mark while Alured, the vicar of St. Just, lived, but after his death the pension would increase to a mark. John and his heirs would not be able to present any candidate, however, who could not provide assurance that he could pay the annual pension to Plympton Priory.⁴⁷ While this agreement addressed the issue of the procedures to be followed concerning presentations, it did not clearly state which party was rector of the church of St. Just.

The matter was re-opened at the beginning of the next century. At the Cornish Eyre at Launceston in 1201, an assize of darrein presentment was adjourned at the request of John le Sor to determine the patronage of St. Just church, which was then vacant.⁴⁸ John le Sor, who was a tenant of an episcopal estate in Cornwall,⁴⁹ claimed the advowson against Bishop Henry Marshal of Exeter. The bishop's representative, William of Taunton, disputed the assertion that the church was vacant and claimed instead that the prior of Plympton was the rector of St. Just.⁵⁰ The claim in an assize of darrein presentment that the church was not indeed vacant was called the "exception of plenarty." The

⁴⁷ *EEAE* XII, #170, pp. 153–4: "nisi quilibet presentatus idoneam cautionem presiterit quod ipse annuatim solvet quiete nobis et successoribus nostris in perpetuum predictam marcam argenti..."

⁴⁸ *Pleas before the King or his Justices, 1198–1202*, ed. Doris M. Stenton, Selden Society vol. 68 (London, 1952), vol. 2, pp. 148–9.

⁴⁹ In a survey made between 1207 and 1212, John Le Sor held an acre and a half of the bishop of Exeter in Cornwall (*BF* I, p. 44).

⁵⁰ *Pleas before the King or his Justices, 1198–1202*, pp. 148–9.

normal response of the court was to ask for evidence of admission and institution to the church, such as certificates from the bishop, an archdeacon, or other ecclesiastical official.⁵¹ Of course, when the defendant in this sort of assize was himself a bishop, the situation became rather more complicated.

Prior Johel appeared and endorsed William of Taunton's statement with the claim that he was indeed the rector and had been for forty years. Indeed, he had presented the current perpetual vicar, William de Kaune. John le Sor contradicted this version of the situation: he stated that on the day he had sought the writ the church of St. Just had not been vacant, that the prior was not the rector, and that an agreement had been made between them providing for joint presentations to the benefice and a pension for Plympton Priory. John was able to support his position by showing the original charter and a confirmation charter of Bishop John the Chanter. This seems to have flustered Prior Johel, who acknowledged that there had been some sort of agreement, but that he was not sure of the details; he was granted permission to check the priory's muniments, but he neither produced the documents nor returned. The bishop and his attorney similarly could not refute the case of John Le Sor.⁵² The hearing was to resume at Westminster one month from Michaelmas.

At the court of Michaelmas, 1202, the case was resolved in the presence of Bishop Henry and Osbert Le Sor, who represented his father. A foot of a fine reveals that the bishop recognized that the plaintiff held the advowson of the church of St. Just, "saving an annual pension to the Church of Exeter of thirty marks, and one silver mark to Plympton Priory at Michaelmas."⁵³

In this case, the inconsistencies in Prior Johel's version of events suggest that John le Sor's claim to the advowson of the church was the stronger one. If Prior Johel had indeed presented William de Kaune to the perpetual vicarage, this would seem to have been a violation of the agreement between the priory and John Le Sor that the latter was to present a cleric to the former. Of course, as we have seen with the case of Sutton church, "illegal" presentations did occur and seem to have been the recourse of parties who knew they had weak claims to

⁵¹ Gray, 'Ius Praesentandi,' 496–7.

⁵² *Pleas before the King or his Justices, 1198–1202*, pp. 148–9.

⁵³ *Fines sive Pedes Finium sive Finales Concordiae in Curia Domini Regis*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph Hunter (London, 1835–44), p. 353.

benefices. The fact that Prior Johel only acknowledged the 1188 × 1190 agreement—an agreement to which he was a party—when it was produced in court, and then claimed to be unclear of its contents, is rather suspicious. His retreat to the priory and subsequent non-appearance would also suggest that Prior Johel knew that he had been out-manuevered by the legitimate claimant.

The role of Bishop Henry Marshal in this case demonstrates the close ties between the priory and its patron: the bishop supported the prior of Plympton in his assertion that he was the rector of St. Just when he must have known that the earlier charters had not established the right of the prior to this advowson. The lack of definite resolution regarding the identity of the rector in these charters created an ambiguity which bishop and prior perhaps viewed as an opportunity which could be exploited. It is also puzzling that the bishop would claim the exception of plenarty in the royal court, when he could offer no certificates of admission and institution to establish his case. Perhaps he felt that the justiciars were unlikely to demand such evidence from the bishop himself, in which case he was mistaken.⁵⁴ In this circumstance, the interests of both the priory and the bishop were threatened, and bishop and prior co-operated in order to resist a lay claimant's assertion of rights to a church. In the end, both the bishop of Exeter and Plympton Priory were able to preserve their financial interests in the church of St. Just. Plympton continued to receive a pension of one mark from St. Just until the dissolution.⁵⁵ Into the fourteenth century, the Le Sor family continued to present to the church of St. Just-in-Roseland.⁵⁶

*Legal Disputes and Conveyances of the Thirteenth Century:
Evidence from the Curia Regis Rolls and Feet of Fines*

For one who desires to learn about the legal disputes in which the canons of Plympton were engaged in the early thirteenth century, there are certain challenges. The sources for such conflicts are problematic:

⁵⁴ Gray pointed out that “the secular courts would not accept a bare exception of plenarty, unsupported by evidence of admission and institution” (*Ius Praesentandi*, 496).

⁵⁵ This is shown consistently in the *Taxatio*, Bishop Grandisson's confirmation of *spiritualia*, and the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*. See Table 1.

⁵⁶ In 1309, Reginald le Seor was instituted to St. Just; the patron is listed as John Le Seor (*Reg. Stapledon*, p. 253).

the Curia Regis rolls provide some information about such cases, but often few details are given, and resolutions of the conflicts might not be recorded at all. Other valuable sources are the feet of fines. These documents—also known as final concords or fines—recorded agreements between parties in the royal courts. They are known as “feet” because they were the third portion, the *pes*, of a cirograph made in triplicate; each party would have their own copy, and the “foot” would be kept by the court. One must keep in mind, however, that many—perhaps the majority of—fines were not resolutions of actual conflicts between the plaintiffs and the defendants. As the fines made before the royal justices were the most secure method of conveying land and advowsons, people who wished to sell or donate land to another party frequently chose to do so by creating fines rather than charters.⁵⁷ Consequently, even though each foot of a fine declares that one party was a plaintiff, another a defendant, and that a certain plea was made in court, the actual event may have been simply a straightforward sale or grant. Because there is very often no other source to provide a context for the fines, one may not be able to ascertain whether the fine is the conclusion to a court case or a conveyance. Despite these qualifications, the Curia Regis rolls and the feet of fines do provide, in the absence of a cartulary, valuable evidence regarding Plympton’s *spiritualia* and *temporalia* in this period. As well, some of the feet of fines involving Plympton Priory can be identified as resolutions of disputes. They further establish the involvement of the royal courts in the hearing of cases regarding advowsons of churches.

One example of a foot of a fine which seems not to refer to a dispute is that of February 3, 1202, when Richard of Sideham remitted and quit-claimed the advowson of Marystow church to Plympton Priory.⁵⁸ Marystow had been given to Plympton Priory by Fulk Fitz Ansgar and his wife Adeliz, tenants of Roger de Nunant, before 1158;⁵⁹ presumably Richard was a descendant or heir from a collateral branch of the family. The fine was made between Richard and Prior Johel of Plympton, the

⁵⁷ John Hudson, *The Formation of the English Common Law: Law and Society in England from the Norman Conquest to Magna Carta* (London and New York, 1996), pp. 208–9. Hudson points out that a fine “was conclusive proof [of conveyance] in future cases, and—unlike a charter—required no one to warrant it.” Warranty was guarantee of tenure.

⁵⁸ *DFFI*, #31, p. 22. In the terminology of the feet of fines, the instigator of the suit is called the “claimant” or the “plaintiff”; the possessor of the land or church whose ownership is being challenged is called the “tenant” or the “deforciant.”

⁵⁹ *MDE* #3, p. 135.

latter through his representative, Richard Marchepais, who frequently appears in the priory's records in this period. The prior gave Richard of Sideham twenty shillings in return for his remission and quit-claim. Quite probably, the prior had initiated this transaction and was simply forestalling potential litigation by seeking from the heir of a benefactor a renunciation of his claims to the church or property in question. In this instance, then, the fine seems to be little different from the quit-claims Plympton Priory participated in during the twelfth century.

In another case regarding the advowson of a church, the circumstances suggest that the foot of the fine recorded the resolution of an actual conflict, although the possibility remains that the "case" was a straightforward conveyance. This is indicated by earlier entries in the *Curia Regis* rolls which record the existence of pleas before the king's justiciars. In 1206, the rolls for the Michaelmas term mention that William de Vernon, earl of Devon, had begun an action against Prior Robert of Plympton over the advowson of an unspecified church.⁶⁰ Over the next two years, various attempts were made to set a date for the hearing of the case,⁶¹ but this did not finally occur until June 8, 1208. On that date, a fine was made between Earl William, deforciant, and Prior Robert, plaintiff, who was represented by David Aaron and Richard Marchepais.⁶² In the foot of the fine, the church is finally named: Exminster, which was on the estates of the earls of Devon by the river Exe.

The fact that Prior Robert was the plaintiff in this case indicates that he was probably the initiator of the process; however, his motives for doing so are obscure. There is no previous record of a gift from a member of the Redvers family to the priory of the church of Exminster,⁶³ and the court records are silent as to the arguments presented by the prior's representatives in support of Plympton's claim to the church. There is the possibility that this foot of a fine is no more than a record

⁶⁰ *CRR*, vol. 4 7–8 John, p. 300. "Dominus G. significavit justiciariis quod Comes Devonie posuit loco suo coram eo Willelmum Baucan vel Gilbertum de Mara . . . versus priorem de Plinton' de placito advocacionis ecclesie ad lucrandum vel perdandum." The entry lists a number of other people against whom the earl of Devon was initiating actions at the same time.

⁶¹ *CRR*, vol. 5 9–11 John, pp. 66, 130, 162.

⁶² *DFF* I, #59, p. 36.

⁶³ Exminster had been a demesne manor of the Redvers earls of Devon since at least the 1140s. Bearman points out that this concord is the first evidence of the advowson of the church there being in the hands of Plympton Priory (*RC*, p. 139n.)

of the donation, and that the four entries in the Curia Regis rolls merely refer to the setting of a date for the final concord. However, most of the other feet of fines for Plympton do not have so many correlating entries in the Curia Regis rolls, which suggests that they were not actual disputes. In any event, Earl William did end up acknowledging the right of the prior and convent to Exminster and granting the church “in free alms.” In return, “the prior received him into all benefits and prayers which shall be made in his church of Plympton forever.”⁶⁴ If there had been feelings of rancour between the two parties over this issue, Prior Robert must have felt that it was important not to alienate a powerful member of a family with a history of generosity to the priory. However, as Golding notes in reference to the Gilbertine order, a house would “frequently grant confraternity rights in return for quitclaims of advowsons.”⁶⁵ Consequently, the language of exchange of benefits in the feet of fines must be viewed with caution, as this does not inevitably indicate that tension existed between the parties.

If the canons of the priory felt that the fine between them and Earl William had established their right to the advowson of Exminster church once and for all, they were mistaken. In 1260, John Bloyo appeared in the court of the King’s Bench to seek the replevin of the advowson of the church of Exminster to the prior of Plympton.⁶⁶ An action of replevin indicated that the advowson had been distrained;⁶⁷ John Bloyo was in effect appearing in court to say that the advowson had been unjustly seized, and to appeal for its return until the matter went to court. The earl of Devon at this time was Baldwin V, the last male of the Redvers line who was to die in 1262 after having been earl only since 1257. From the judicial record, it is not clear whether Baldwin V or another party had challenged the priory’s right to the advowson of the church of Exminster. Whatever the circumstances behind this

⁶⁴ *DFI* I, #59, p. 36.

⁶⁵ Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham*, p. 366.

⁶⁶ *CCR*, vol. 11 Henry III, 1259–61, p. 159. “Johannes Bloyo venit coram rege in crastino Pasche et petit advocacionem ecclesie de Exminstr’ priori de Plumpton’ replegiari, que capta etc. propter defaltam etc. coram justiciariis de Banco versus Baldewinum de Insula ut dicitur”

⁶⁷ Actions of replevin were very common at this time: see *CCR*, Henry III vol. 11, 1259–61, *passim*.

dispute, Plympton Priory retained its right to present to the church, and indeed did so until the dissolution.⁶⁸

In another instance, a protracted court case arose between Plympton Priory and a person who was the heir of a twelfth-century benefactor. Between 1199 and 1202, Alan of Buckland and the prior appeared in court a number of times concerning three and a half ferlings of land at Egg Buckland, near Sutton, and a half ferling of land in Hooe, Plymstock.⁶⁹ Alan was not only a local landowner, but was a royal servant with good connections: in 1201, one of the court entries refers to the fact that he is “in royal service with William Brewer,”⁷⁰ onetime sheriff of Devon, royal justiciar, and eventually, custodian of the bishopric of Exeter in 1223–24.⁷¹ Alan’s original claim in 1199 was that he was entitled to the lands by right and inheritance, and that the prior had unjustly deprived him of the land by force.⁷² Prior Joel came to court and denied that he had employed force; he also contended that he ought to hold those lands, as well as others, from Alan. In 1200, in another encounter at the Curia Regis, Prior Joel stated that Alan’s father, Guy of Buckland, had given the priory the lands in question, and produced charters of confirmation to support this.⁷³ Alan retorted that if his father had made such a charter, it was due to the illness from which he died. He placed himself under the judgement of a jury of men from the neighbourhood and the witnesses of the confirmation charter, since the witnesses named in the charter of donation had all died. The prior decided to rely on the persuasiveness of the facts as stated in his documents.

The witnesses must have supported the case of Plympton Priory. Ultimately, a final concord was made between the two parties the next year. In the foot of the fine, made on July 1, 1201, Alan acknowledged

⁶⁸ The priory next made a presentation to Exminster in 1274 (*Reg. Bronescombe* II, #994, p. 69).

⁶⁹ *CRR*, vol. 1 1 Richard I–2 John, pp. 89, 127, 233, 257, 300, 375, 422, 441. Also *Rotuli Curiae Regis*, ed. Sir Francis Palgrave (London: Record Commission, 1835), vol. 1, pp. 313, 411, and vol. 2, p. 36.

⁷⁰ *CRR*, vol. 1 1 Richard–2 John, p. 375.

⁷¹ Barlow, *EEAE*, pp. xlvii–xlviii. William Brewer played an important role in the administration of the government during the minority of Henry III, hence his appointment as custodian of the see. Brewer used his influence in this position to arrange the election of his nephew—another William Brewer—as bishop of Exeter in 1224.

⁷² *CRR*, vol. 1 1 Richard–2 John, p. 89.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

all the land to belong rightfully to the priory; for his part, Prior Joel granted the land to Alan and his heirs forever in return for 12s paid for all service (except foreign service) at Michaelmas and Easter.⁷⁴ Some decades later, Alan's heir, Isabella Giffard (also known as Isabella of Buckland), showed herself to be her father's daughter and contended that the priory had acted in contravention of the fine made with her father in 1201. In 1237, she instituted court proceedings concerning the customs and services attached to the land,⁷⁵ and on June 25, 1238, she and Prior Robert made a fine. Isabella conceded that the land did indeed belong to the prior and the church of Plympton, and in return, the prior granted it to her and her heirs on the same terms as those mentioned in the fine of 1201. Prior Robert also gave Isabella five marks.⁷⁶

Heirs or relatives of twelfth-century benefactors also made conveyances of land or confirmations of existing grants to Plympton Priory through the use of fines. For example, in 1201–02, Reginald de Weston, who was named as the “tenant” in the case, recognized that four ferlings of land with appurtenances at Westonsham, from the demesne of Weston, belonged to Prior Joel.⁷⁷ Godfrey de Weston had given land at Ham to Plympton Priory by 1158,⁷⁸ and Godfrey's son William of Weston confirmed this grant of four ferlings of land from the demesne at Westonsham between 1171 and 1173.⁷⁹ It would seem logical to assume that these four ferlings are the same ones mentioned in the 1201–02 fine, although it is odd that given the earlier donation of the land to the priory, Reginald is the party deemed the “tenant.”

⁷⁴ *DFP* I, #45, pp. 28–9. The prior excepted from the grant, however, the wood of “Briggerig” and the land Henry son of Walter held of Alan. When Henry was to come of age, he was to pay back to the prior the loan which the prior had made to Henry's father upon the land of Mainston.

⁷⁵ *CCR*, vol. 3 Henry III, 1234–37, p. 571. “Isabel Giffard attornavit loco suo H[a]m[onem] de Karevil versus Priorem de Plynton de pluribus consuetudinibus et serviciis que idem Prior exigit et in tenemento ipsius Isabelle in Bocland' et Ho.” Isabel evidently married into the Giffard family, who also had historic connections with Plympton Priory. See previous chapter.

⁷⁶ *DFP* I, #274, pp. 136–7. Within a few years, Isabella had died. In 1242–43, the “heir of Isabella Giffard” was recorded as holding “duo feoda” in Egg Buckland, in Compton, and in Hooe, “set non facit inde nisi servicium ii feodorum et dimidii” (*BF* II, p. 789).

⁷⁷ *Fines sive Pedes finium*, vol. 1, p. 55. The action had been initiated in 1200; an early Curia Regis roll records that the prior of Plympton had appointed Richard Marchepais to act for him (*CRR* vol. 1, p. 297).

⁷⁸ *MDE* #3, p. 135.

⁷⁹ *EEAE* XI, #142A, p. 132. See Chapter Three for discussion of Plympton Priory's obligations to the Weston family in return for this gift.

Perhaps this is because Prior Joel was the one who sought the fine? Or possibly because even though Godfrey de Weston had given the land in the twelfth century, the Westons had remained on the land as actual tenants. The latter is a likely possibility, given that the fine states that Prior Joel had conceded the land and the appurtenances to Reginald for life, and that after the death of Reginald “the land will revert to the prior or his successors, quit of Reginald’s heirs.”⁸⁰

In other instances, the feet of fines do seem to record new conveyances, whether they be sales or donations. In 1202, Prior Joel and Thomas, son of Gervase of Winsor made a fine whereby Thomas granted the prior a mill at Horthill, the suit of the mill from Thomas’ lands, Horthill itself, a ferling of land at Winsor, and a wood near Filesham Brook.⁸¹ In return, Prior Joel gave Thomas two silver marks and Thomas’s son Gervase one bezant. Thomas and his father do not appear in the surviving twelfth-century donation charters, so Thomas may well have been a “new” benefactor.

Similarly, William of St. Stephen was not obviously related to any of Plympton Priory’s known twelfth-century benefactors (keeping in mind, of course, our imperfect knowledge of the genealogies of the Devon gentry in this period). William conveyed to Plympton Priory land at Dean, on the fringe of Dartmoor, on June 30, 1228. He gave and granted two ferlings and two and a half acres of land in Chiscumbe, to be held of him and his heirs forever, for as much foreign service as would be owed on a ferling of land.⁸² Almost twenty years later, William of St. Stephen granted to Plympton Priory the manor of Overdene, an estate equivalent to one and eight parts of a fee in 1242–43. William had held this manor of Nicholas Fitz Martin, lord of Dartington.⁸³ Like the land of Chiscumbe at Dean, the manor of Overdene was to be held by the priory of William and his heirs forever; in this case, Plympton Priory had to give to the “chief lords of that fee” a silver mark each Easter for services due from the manor, but William and his heirs would attend to providing the homages and reliefs due from the manor.⁸⁴ This was not a straightforward donation, however: Prior Robert de Molton

⁸⁰ *Fines sive pedes finium*, vol. 1, p. 55. Reginald was to pay the priors of Plympton 10s annually, at Michaelmas and Easter.

⁸¹ *DFI* I, #42, p. 27. Winsor is in Ermington hundred, near Yealmpton.

⁸² *DFI* I, #232, p. 113.

⁸³ *BF* II, p. 764.

⁸⁴ *DFI* I, #447, pp. 222–3. William of St. Stephen recognized the right of the prior to the manor, including “demesnes, homages, and services of free men, villeinages, woods, meadows, and pastures” and anything else belonging to the manor.

gave sixty silver marks (£40) to William for the manor. Given the size of this sum—much larger than any of the token payments mentioned in the feet of fines or in charters⁸⁵—this is undoubtedly a sale. This is the clearest evidence we have of Plympton Priory purchasing land in the vicinity of previous holdings,⁸⁶ a common strategy of religious houses to consolidate their holdings. The value given for the manor of Dean Prior in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* was £40 8s 3d,⁸⁷ which would seem to suggest that Plympton Priory had done little to increase its revenues from this source over the centuries.

Conflicts with Hugh de Courtenay

Plympton's dealings with the earls of Devon became complicated once again with the succession of the young heir of the Honours of Plympton and Okehampton, Sir Hugh de Courtenay II, who came of age in 1297.⁸⁸ Hugh II, who was recognized by King Edward III as earl of Devon in 1335, was the great-great-grandson of William de Vernon, by descent from William's daughter Marie, who married Robert de Courtenay, lord of Okehampton. Sir Hugh, unlike most of his predecessors as earls of Devon, played a prominent role on the national scene. He was summoned to Parliament regularly from 1298/9 to 1334, fought in the Scottish wars, was one of the Lords Ordainers in 1313, and by 1318 had become a member of Edward II's council.⁸⁹ A man of some determination, Hugh II was unlikely to have been very tolerant of

⁸⁵ For example, on June 17, 1268, Prior Robert Blund of Plympton reached a final concord with Baldwin de la Flere and his wife Mabel concerning a messuage and a ploughland at La Flere and La Dune (in Sherford). Baldwin and Mabel acknowledged that all services and dues pertaining to the messuage and land belonged to the priory "as by their gift," to be held from Baldwin and Mabel and from Mabel's heirs "in free and perpetual alms forever." In return for all services and suit of court, the priory was to give them one clove of gillyflower each year at Easter. For his part, Prior Robert received Baldwin, Mabel, and Mabel's heirs into the spiritual benefits of the priory (*DFP* II, #670, pp. 342–3).

⁸⁶ Nicholas de Buseye sold Prior Geoffrey land at Netherdene (also known as Nitherdene) between 1128 and 1158 (*MDE* #3, p. 135). In 1242–43, the priory held 3 parts of half a fee at Nitherdene of Nicholas Fitz Martin, lord of Dartington (*BF* II, p. 764). Plympton Priory also owned the church of Dean by 1184/85 (*English Lawsuits from William I to Richard I*, vol. 2, pp. 612–3).

⁸⁷ *MDE* #28, p. 148. The *Taxatio* value is much smaller—£6 3s—but given the unreliability of the figures in the *Taxatio*, this discrepancy need not be overly troubling.

⁸⁸ Sanders, p. 70.

⁸⁹ *Complete Peerage*, vol. 4, p. 324.

what he perceived to be Plympton Priory's encroachments on some of his rightful possessions. By the early fourteenth century, a dispute had arisen between the two parties over a plot of land in Plympton called "Le Sablon."⁹⁰ The prior and convent were forced to remit to Sir Hugh the southern half of Le Sablon, the boundaries of which were drawn up by the two parties on April 18, 1305. Sir Hugh was thorough in his investigation of the matter—the charter refers to his having "inspected and understood the muniments" of the canons—and decided to quit his and his heirs' claim to the residue of the plot, with appurtenances, from the causeway to the land of Woodford.

Shortly thereafter, Sir Hugh challenged successfully Plympton Priory's right of presentation at the chapel of "Bratlegh." In a charter dated June 7, 1305, Prior John of Plympton conceded, remitted, and quit-claimed to Sir Hugh the advowson of Bratlegh church together with the land adjoining it and all its appurtenances.⁹¹ The priory also remitted and quit-claimed to Sir Hugh the annual pension of three marks which they had received from the chaplain at Bratlegh. The mystery here is the identity of this chapel: Plympton Priory is not otherwise known to have received a pension from, or claimed the advowson of, a Bratlegh chapel. It is tempting to suppose that "Bratlegh" is an alternate spelling of "Brightley," a locale near Okehampton; indeed, Jeanne James, whose M. Phil. thesis was on chapels in Devon, equated the two.⁹² Evidence from the episcopal registers indicates that a chapel existed at Brightley in the fourteenth century: there are records of presentations of priests to a chantry chapel there by Sir Hugh de Courtenay's son in 1344 and 1349.⁹³ The chapel building might have been newly constructed by Sir Hugh in the fourteenth century, or it might have been a structure dating back to the brief period in which Cistercian monks—who later moved to Forde—lived at Brightley.⁹⁴ It is this short-lived monastic interlude at Brightley that suggests a possible connection with Plympton Priory: the

⁹⁰ Courtenay Cartulary, DRO TD 51, pp. 229–30. "Le Sablon" is described in the charter as lying on the western part of the causeway which ran between "Clapere" (a street in Plympton) and the chapel of Plympton St. Mary, which stood in the cemetery of the conventual church. This may well be the first documentary evidence of the chapel's existence. For the full text of this charter, see Appendix 2.

⁹¹ Courtenay Cartulary, DRO TD 51, pp. 63–4.

⁹² Jeanne James, 'Medieval Chapels in Devon,' M.Phil. thesis, University of Exeter, 1997, pp. 40, 270.

⁹³ *Reg. Grandisson* III, pp. 1342, 1383.

⁹⁴ Hoskins, *Devon*, p. 447. In the early 1950s, Hoskins noted that an "ancient house" and "the remains of a chapel, now used as a barn," still existed at Brightley.

founder of the Cistercian house at Brightley was Richard Fitz Baldwin, lord of Okehampton, and after his death it was his sister and heiress Adeliz who provided the unhappy monks with the lands in east Devon on which to establish Forde.⁹⁵ Adeliz, it may be recalled from the previous chapter, was a benefactress of Plympton Priory as well, founding the canons' cell at Marsh Barton and granting them the chapel of St. Mary in Exeter Castle and its four prebends. Perhaps after Adeliz arranged for the move of the Cistercians to east Devon she granted the chapel at Brightley to the canons of Plympton.⁹⁶

If the concession by the prior of Plympton concerning "Bratlegh" in 1305 is connected to a twelfth-century grant of Brightley chapel by Adeliz, lady of Okehampton, to the canons, the extant records are silent on this point. This is not surprising, given that specific information about many medieval chapels in Devon is thin on the ground. Indeed, Plympton's relationships with some of its chapels—such as Wembury, Shaugh, and Brixton—are only clarified with the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*: neither the Taxatio of 1291 nor Bishop Grandisson's confirmation of Plympton's *spiritualia* in 1334 include information on Plympton's chapels. Only occasional references such as the one above to the chapel of Plympton St. Mary point to their existence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and, keeping in mind the *lacunae* in the documents for Plympton, it is possible that Plympton Priory received an otherwise unrecorded pension from a chapel at "Bratlegh" or Brightley for a time.

Tavistock Abbey and Plymstock

The one chapel for which we have definite evidence of a twelfth-century relationship with Plympton Priory was the one in Plymstock. The settlement of Plymstock was about three miles from the priory; today it, like Plympton, is a suburb of Plymouth. The area was evidently exceptionally productive: the *Valor* records that Plympton Priory

⁹⁵ *MDE*, pp. 338, 342.

⁹⁶ Muddying the waters further is the assertion by Sir William Pole, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century antiquary, that the chapel of "Brightlegh," to which four prebends were attached, was in Exeter Castle, and its patronage belonged to the lords of Okehampton. See William Pole, *Collections towards a Description of the County of Devon* (London, 1791), pp. 4–5. It is unclear on what evidence Pole based this claim; it is not corroborated by other records.

received an income of £62 a year from this chapel, an extraordinarily high sum.⁹⁷ H.P.R. Finberg pointed out that as Plymstock was in the “highly fertile region of the South Hams,” it benefited from the protection of nearby ridges, and its limestone soil, “for centuries grew excellent wheat-crops.”⁹⁸ If the glebe land, tithes, and offerings yielded even a fraction of the *Valor* amount in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, one can see why parties who felt they had a claim to this chapel were interested in asserting their claims.

The essential reason for the disputes at Plymstock was that the two wealthiest religious houses, Tavistock Abbey, the wealthy Benedictine monastery, and Plympton Priory, both had claims in the area. Tavistock Abbey owned the manor of Plymstock from before the Conquest,⁹⁹ whereas the chapel of Plymstock seems to have had a historic connection with the minster at Plympton. Finberg found evidence that even in the twelfth century, Tavistock Abbey had “recognized...the pre-eminent aptitude of Plymstock soil for wheat-growing.”¹⁰⁰ In the decades after its refoundation as an Augustinian priory, Plympton found its right to the chapel being challenged by the monks of Tavistock. The “strife, disputes, and accusations” (“*lis et contencio et calumpnia*”) were resolved—for a time—by an agreement which was drawn up between Abbot Walter and the monks on one hand and Prior Richard Pilatus and the canons on the other in c. 1164.¹⁰¹ The charter stated unequivocally that the chapel was to remain in perpetuity a possession of Plympton Priory, freely and without any more troubles. The “spiritual fraternity” of the agreement was evidenced in the arrangements regarding deceased members of the abbey and priory. The canons of Plympton would say

⁹⁷ The figure given in the Ministers’ Accounts (*MDE* #30, p. 150) is even higher: £72. No other chapel or church, except for the conventual church with its dependent chapel of Plympton St. Mary, brought the priory such an impressive income (*MRH*, pp. 137–45, *passim*).

⁹⁸ Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 86–7.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 5. Edwy, brother of King Edmund II Ironside, granted Tavistock Abbey his manor at Plymstock. Domesday Book records that the Abbey had two virgates of land at Plymstock.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 241. The *Valor* records that in 1535 Tavistock Abbey received £12 9s 3d in money rents at Plymstock; however, it also received £26 10s 10d in wheat-rents (rents in kind). It should be kept in mind that “the manor was not co-extensive with the parish,” constituting only about 900 acres (Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, p. 87). Hence the discrepancy between the priory’s income from the chapel and the Abbey’s income from the manor.

¹⁰¹ *MA* II, p. 500 (see also *Reg. Lacy* IV, pp. 274–6). Finberg dates the document to c. 1164.

the same services upon the death of an abbot or monk of Tavistock as they would do for a prior or canon of Plympton. As well, if an abbot of Tavistock were to die, the canons at Plympton were to provide a full daily pittance of food in their refectory throughout the year after his death, and the monks of Tavistock would do the same when a prior of Plympton died. If a monk of Tavistock were to die, the pittance at Plympton would take place on the day of the announcement of his death.¹⁰² When the monks of Tavistock visited Plympton, they were to be received as familiar brothers (*“sicut fratres familiares”*) in the choir, refectory, and dormitory, and so, too, would be the canons of Plympton visiting Tavistock.

The charter contains clauses which indicate a subordinate status for Plympton Priory, however. This may have been a holdover of some arrangement between the monks of Tavistock and the priests of Plympton minster before 1121. Or, this may have been the price Plympton had to pay to mollify its powerful neighbour. The agreement states that if the abbot and convent of Tavistock had to call the prior or any of the canons of Plympton to the abbey, the prior or canon had to go. As well, if for any reason the abbot required the assistance of the prior of Plympton or one of the canons in business pertaining to the rights of the abbey, the prior or canon had to pay for his own expenses if the matter was to be handled within the diocese, or at the abbot's expense if outside. In addition, when a new chaplain was to be placed at the chapel, the prior of Plympton had to present him to the abbot and convent of Tavistock as a measure of respect. The chaplain and the prior of Plympton had to promise honorable service to God. The prior of Plympton would correct a chaplain who required discipline, or remove one who was incorrigible. Finally, when any of the monks of Tavistock came to Plymstock, the chaplain had to provide free entry to the chapel, as well as candles for dinner, matins, and service in the chapel.

Tavistock Abbey and Plympton Priory had uneven relations over Plymstock. In 1228, the Easter sitting of the Curia Regis heard two cases concerning the priory and land at Plymstock. In the first one, an Ada Forestarius complained that he had been assaulted on the

¹⁰² Ibid. “Abbas debet habere plenariam prebendam in refectorio Plimpton per totam primum annum obitus sui, et monachi in prima die annunciationis obitus sui. Simili modo prior de Plympton plenariam habebit prebendam in refectorio Tavistochiae per totum annum obitus sui primum, et canonici prima die annunciationis obitus sui.”

road between Plym Bridge and Roborough by Geoffrey le Hostiller and Walter de Durevill.¹⁰³ They had stolen from him nine shillings in pennies, a nag with harness worth nine shillings, and a sword worth twelve pence. They then seized him and put him in the stocks until the sheriff decided what to do with him.¹⁰⁴ The involvement of Plympton became clear when Geoffrey, Walter, Thomas Splot, and Richard Gupill testified that the prior of Plympton had a curtilage in Plymstock which he had enclosed with a hedge, which Ada and a force of fifteen armed men threw down in the middle of the night. Prior Richard de Brugis appealed to the sheriff of Devon, who had knights and legal men inquire whether the prior had the right to raise the hedge. They agreed that he did. So, Prior Richard again constructed a hedge and a gate; once again, Ada and his armed men tore it down on the night of the Thursday after Martinmas (November 11, 1227). Walter was nearby and heard the tumult and raised a clamour against the malefactors, who fled over the Plym to Roborough hundred. Geoffrey, the king's serjeant, raised the "hue" (*uthesium*) against them; some fled into the woods, some into a church. Geoffrey found Ada in the church and confiscated his belongings (the horse, harness, and sword), and seized him when he left the church. The prior of Plympton came and made a fine for him and his men for forty shillings. While there is no mention of the participation of the abbot of Tavistock in encouraging these attacks, the competing claims of priory and abbey in this area, and the escape route of the attackers over the Plym to the north-west—in the direction of Tavistock Abbey—suggests the possibility that the wrongdoers might have expected a not unwelcoming reception from the monks of Tavistock.

In the second case of the Easter term concerning Plympton and Plymstock, Tavistock Abbey became more clearly involved. It seems quite the coincidence that another case would come up concerning a different curtilage of land at Plymstock during the same judicial term; this land is likely the same as that which provoked the outburst of Ada Forestarius. Abbot John of Tavistock sought against Prior Richard the curtilage of land with its appurtenances.¹⁰⁵ The prior came to court and sought an inspection by a jury of the land in question; a day was

¹⁰³ *CRR*, vol. 13 Henry III, 1227–30, p. 120.

¹⁰⁴ Another plaintiff, Ralph Buket, made a similar complaint against Thomas Splot, who relieved him of 8s 3d, an axe, and a knife, and then put him in the stocks.

¹⁰⁵ *CRR*, vol. 13 Henry III, 1227–30, pp. 120–1.

also set for judgement by the justiciars. The final concord between Plympton and Tavistock over this issue survives, and records that on June 30, 1228, that “recognizance of the great assize was summoned” to settle this issue.¹⁰⁶ The resolution was that the abbot of Tavistock acknowledged, remitted, and quit-claimed the curtilage to the prior of Plympton. In return, Warin son of Joel granted the abbey two pounds of wax to be delivered annually at Daccumbe at Easter.¹⁰⁷ As far as we know, this agreement settled the matter of the disputed ownership of the curtilage at Plymstock.

In the early fourteenth century, the two religious houses demonstrated that they were able to co-operate in certain instances. A charter survives in the Devon Record Office which reveals that on the Friday after August 15 in 1302 a wall was built in Plymstock between Tavistock’s manor and Plympton Priory’s Grange manor.¹⁰⁸ Tavistock and Plympton agreed that the wall would be a common one, and that both houses would be involved in its maintenance. A couple of years later, however, this spirit of co-operation seems to have been overshadowed by Tavistock Abbey’s desire to re-assert its rights regarding the chapel at Plymstock. On November 27, 1304, Prior John de la Sturte acknowledged the terms of the twelfth-century agreement between the two parties.¹⁰⁹ He also admitted that he had been derelict in fulfilling these obligations to the abbot of Tavistock, and agreed to pay him twenty casks of wine in compensation. The abbot of Tavistock remitted five of these. That the priors of Plympton would continue to make such concessions (although clearly they were less than diligent about fulfilling them) is a testament to the value they placed on the chapel of Plymstock. Both the gifts in kind to the abbots and the implied inferior status of the priory must have been irksome, but for the canons Tavistock’s goodwill and co-operation must have been worthwhile. As with the case of the

¹⁰⁶ *DFI* I, #200, p. 98.

¹⁰⁷ Warin’s grant of wax was to come from one ferling of land in Plymstock held by Henry Haghene; if Henry or whoever else who held the land did not deliver the wax, the abbot or his successors were allowed to “distrain them for their chattels found on the said land until full payment be made.”

¹⁰⁸ DRO W1258M/D74/2. The document is badly stained in parts, and the details of the arrangement are not legible.

¹⁰⁹ *MA* II, p. 500. In addition to the terms spelled out in the charter of c. 1164, Prior John acknowledged that the priors of Plympton were obliged to provide the abbots of Tavistock with six white loaves of bread, two flagons of wine, and five candles each time they visited Plymstock manor. Plympton also had to give each abbot-elect who had to make journeys for his confirmation, up until the time of his installation, a decent palfrey and groom.

curtilage, the monks of Tavistock could make difficulties for the canons of Plympton if they so chose.

A century later, one of the parties decided to seek confirmation of the charter of c. 1164. The Duke of Bedford's collection at the Devon Record Office contains two copies of a royal inspeximus charter concerning this document. The king in question was King Henry IV or V—“*Henricus Dei gracia rex Anglie et Francie et dominus Hibernie*”—who dated his charter “*sexto die Novembri anno regni nostri octavo.*”¹¹⁰ Unfortunately, there is no witness list which might have assisted with dating; the year in question might have been 8 Henry IV (1406) or 8 Henry V (1420).¹¹¹ It is not clear whether the monks of Tavistock or the canons of Plympton sought this royal confirmation of the earlier agreement. Relations between the abbey and the priory seem to have been troubled in these years: in addition to the issue of the chaplain at Plymstock, there were other, unspecified, sources of tension.¹¹² The confirmation charter may have been sought by the prior and canons of Plympton before the decision was made to involve arbiters, in the hopes that this document would strengthen Plympton's case.

Since the two parties were not able to resolve the problem of which rights each had over Plymstock chapel, arbiters were brought in. These men were Masters Roger Bolter, precentor of Exeter Cathedral, and John Waryn, canon of Exeter Cathedral, as well as William Wynard and John Coplestone, who were to provide a judgement to which both parties could agree to adhere. To a great extent the subsequent “award” of June 15, 1429, was a re-assertion of the previous obligations of Plympton listed in the documents of c. 1164 and 1304.¹¹³ What was new to the “award” text was a more detailed description of the obligations of the prior and canons of Plympton regarding the provision of chaplains to serve the spiritual needs of the tenants of Tavistock Abbey's

¹¹⁰ DRO W1258M/D74/4. The other copy of the inspeximus charter, DRO W1258M/D74/4(2) is in poor condition.

¹¹¹ The only other names provided are those of John Thorlby and William Prestwyk. Thorlby was a royal clerk at Westminster; his name appears in the Patent Rolls a number of times between 1408 and 1422. See *CPR Henry IV* vol. 3, 1405–08, p. 440 and vol. 4, 1408–13, p. 261; *Henry V* vol. 1, 1413–16, pp. 206–7, 303 and vol. 2, 1416–22, pp. 105, 112, 151, 443. William Prestwyk was an attorney active in 1407. See *CPR Henry IV* vol. 3, 1405–08, p. 328. On the back of DRO W1258M/D74/4 a later hand has written “6 Nov. 8 Hen. 6 [1429],” but this would hardly fit with subsequent events.

¹¹² “...necon aliis querelis et demandis diverse dissensiones, lites et discordie nuper habite et mote fuissent...” (*Reg. Lacy IV*, p. 269).

¹¹³ *Reg. Lacy IV*, pp. 268–77.

manor at Plymstock. Plympton Priory committed itself to appoint a suitable chaplain from the secular or regular clergy to say matins, the Mass, and vespers at Plymstock chapel every Sunday and on feast days and to administer the sacraments and sacramentals to those living on the manor of Plymstock, only ceasing to do this with legitimate cause. The agreement also required the chaplain to say Mass in the chapel every Wednesday and Friday and to be present, always and continually, within the boundaries of the parish on Ash Wednesday, the three days afterwards, and the two weeks before Easter. If the chaplain turned out not to be suitable, then the bishop of Exeter could remove him and the prior and convent of Plympton would have to find a chaplain who was.

These arrangements suggest that in the past, the parishioners of Plymstock had had grievances about the standard of spiritual care provided by the chaplains appointed by Plympton Priory. This is also indicated by another obligation imposed upon Plympton Priory in the agreement of 1429: the canons had to appoint a second chaplain, either secular or regular, to spend the night in a chamber next to an old chapel by the great gate of Plympton Priory so that he would be available to perform the sacraments of baptism, communion, and penance for the parishioners of Plymstock in times of emergency. The chaplains appointed after 1429 may well have been satisfactory and competent, but this did not in itself guarantee smooth relations between the parishioners of Plymstock and the canons of Plympton, as will be seen in Chapter Six.

An air of finality prevailed in the text of the agreement of 1429. The arbiters stated that all previous documents—especially the charter of c. 1164 and the “confession” of Prior John from 1304—were rendered null and void by this new agreement.¹¹⁴ Indeed, the older documents were sent to the bishop of Exeter for judicial cancellation. As well, both parties agreed that if either party defaulted on making a composition embodying the arbiters’ award by Christmas, 1429, that party would have to pay 500 marks. The composition was drawn up and sealed by the abbot and convent of Tavistock on December 10, 1429, and by the prior and convent of Plympton on October 7, 1429; it was confirmed by Bishop Lacy on December 12, 1429. The composition of 1429

¹¹⁴ *Reg. Lacy* IV, pp. 271–2.

marks the last recorded instance of conflict between Tavistock Abbey and Plympton Priory over Plymstock.¹¹⁵

The documents recording the disputes between Plympton Priory and Tavistock Abbey shed light on the potential for centuries-long quarrels developing between wealthy and powerful religious institutions in areas of overlapping jurisdictions. While the normal state of relations between the abbey and the priory may have been characterized by the supportive “spiritual fraternity” proclaimed in the charter of c. 1164, our knowledge of such relations is by necessity limited to the evidence of the surviving documents. The willingness of both parties to assert their claims repeatedly in a variety of venues and with a variety of methods over such a long period of time demonstrates the enduring strength of institutional memories of rights and entitlements at religious houses. Overall, when examining the history of Plympton Priory, from the latter part of the twelfth century to the mid-thirteenth century, one sees a religious house which generally displayed a good understanding of what was required of it in order to maintain its rights, its lands, and its churches. Ever willing to defend itself in challenges to rights, Plympton Priory usually came out ahead, although not always without concessions and compromises.

¹¹⁵ The material in this chapter on Tavistock Abbey and Plymstock was previously published as “Tavistock Abbey, Plympton Priory, and Plymstock from the Twelfth to Fifteenth Centuries,” *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries* 39 pt. 1 (2002), pp. 12–18.

CHAPTER FIVE

MAXIMIZING THE INHERITANCE: PLYMPTON PRIORY AND ITS CHURCHES AND CHAPELS

One of the most remarkable features of Plympton Priory was the large proportion of its income—slightly more than a half—which it derived from spiritual sources.¹ As has been seen in previous chapters, Plympton, like many other Augustinian houses,² benefited from the twelfth-century lay movement to renounce ownership of churches, as well as from the generosity of its episcopal patrons, who were well-placed to transfer the advowsons of churches and pensions to the priory. For the canons of Plympton Priory, the first two hundred years after the foundation of the house constituted a time of perpetual vigilance over the steady flow of spiritual income into the coffers of the priory. As has been seen, the heirs of benefactors too often showed a willingness to attempt to reclaim advowsons they felt their ancestors had been over-generous in donating to Plympton Priory. Bishops Bartholomew and Henry Marshal of Exeter had fulfilled their duties as patrons by offering assistance to the canons of Plympton in some of these struggles. The relationship between the bishops of Exeter and the canons of Plympton Priory continued to be crucial to the success of the canons' attempts to protect and augment the income from their churches and chapels. The bishops of Exeter could not be taken for granted, however: if the priors and canons of Plympton assumed that the fact that the bishops were their patrons meant that they could be somewhat casual about respecting episcopal rights and episcopal wishes, they were to be sorely mistaken. Co-operation—rather than courting conflict—with the bishops of

¹ Plympton Priory had by far the highest income from *spiritualia*—£454 7s 2.5d—of any Augustinian house in England for which we have definite income figures. The next closest was the famous pilgrimage house, Walsingham Priory, which received £301 14s 10d. Unfortunately, such wealthy houses as Bristol, Cirencester, St. Bartholomew's-Smithfield, Osney, St. Osyth, and Waltham do not have income breakdowns in the *Valor*, and so consequently it would be risky to assume that the value of Plympton's *spiritualia* exceeded those of these houses (Robinson, *Geography*, pt. 2, Appendix 14, pp. 382–8).

² Robinson calculated that according to the *Valor*, 36% of the income of the entire order in England in 1535 came from *spiritualia* (Robinson, *Geography*, p. 172).

Exeter usually was the more reliable route to ensuring that the canons ultimately got what they wanted.

Gerrans

The thirteenth century began on a positive note for Plympton Priory in terms of its relations with the bishops of Exeter. Bishop Henry Marshal (1194–1206), who had been involved in the dispute over whether the prior of Plympton was the rector of St. Just-in-Roseland in 1201, was also involved in an agreement with Plympton Priory regarding the church of Gerrans, in Cornwall. The church of Gerrans seems to have been dependent on the priory's cell of St. Anthony-in-Roseland.³ In this case, the advowson clearly belonged to the bishops of Exeter; the matter in question was the allotment of tithes to the respective parties. As there is no previous extant reference to Plympton Priory's connection to Gerrans church—for example, it is not mentioned in Bishop John the Chanter's confirmation of 1186 × 1188—this document may well record the original donation of a share of tithes to the priory from the bishop of Exeter. The agreement, which was made on July 8, 1203, stated that the bishops of Exeter would have “full right in perpetuity to confer on whomsoever they will the whole tithe of their demesne, both in fruits and other things belonging to the aforesaid church” as well as “a half of all the tithes and of the occasional offerings of the altar yielded from the parish.”⁴ Both Gerrans and St. Anthony were located on the “great episcopal manor of Tregony,”⁵ which explains why Bishop Henry was concerned with protecting the right of the bishops of Exeter to dispose of the tithes of their demesne lands as they saw

³ The exact status of Gerrans church is unclear. In this agreement, it is called “ecclesia.” However, when the bishops collated rectors to the church in the fourteenth century, the collations were made “ad porcionum in ecclesia” or to the “porcio curata ecclesie parochialis” (*Reg. Stapeldon, passim*, and *Reg. Grandisson, passim*). The only exception is Bishop Grandisson's confirmation of Plympton's *spiritualia* from 1335, in which Gerrans is referred to as a chapel dependent on Plympton's cell of St. Anthony-in-Roseland. In the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, the entry refers to the “capella parochialis S. Gerendi a predicta rectoria S. Antonii dependens” (*MDE* #28, p. 149). In the episcopal registers, however, Gerrans appears over and over as a rectory in its own right.

⁴ *Reg. Bronescombe* I, #327, p. 111. The text of the document survives in a later confirmation by Bishop Walter Bronescombe made on May 19, 1261. Given the tensions between Bishop Bronescombe and Plympton Priory which erupted in the fall of 1261 (for which see below), the timing of this confirmation is interesting.

⁵ *EEAE*, XI, #1, pp. 1–2n.

fit. Plympton Priory would receive the other half of the parish tithes (including the tithes of fruits and other things) and of the altar offerings, “to be turned to their own use in perpetuity.”⁶ The settlement also affirmed the episcopal right to present a chaplain to the benefice and stated that the bishops would take care to choose men who would make every effort to render the proper sum to Plympton Priory.

This agreement, which seems to have been a straightforward donation, indicates the continued interest of the bishops of Exeter in increasing the revenues of Plympton Priory. While the assignment of the tithes from the episcopal demesne lands elsewhere would have diminished this income, the yield of half the tithe from the “fruits and other things” of the parish was a not insubstantial portion. Plympton Priory would thus have received a significant amount of the greater and lesser tithes of Gerrans parish, the greater consisting of a tenth of the grain grown in the parish, while the latter would consist of other produce, such as fruit, vegetables, hay, forest windfall (like acorns), animals and products derived from them (for example, wool, milk, and beeswax).⁷ The occasional offerings to the church by parishioners could also add up to an impressive sum. Parishioners were expected to make oblations at Christmas, Easter, and the feasts of the dedication of the church and of the saint to which the church was dedicated. In addition, they were encouraged to make oblations when they attended Mass and communicated, and, as has been previously mentioned, to make donations of grain at Martinmas (the church-scot).⁸ That Plympton Priory did well from this gift of a portion of Gerrans church is indicated by the value listed in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*: the moiety of the tithes was £13 6s 8d, which exceeded the income Plympton received from a number of its other churches and chapels in 1535.⁹

⁶ *Reg. Bronescombe* I, #327, p. 111.

⁷ Moorman, *Church Life*, pp. 114–9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 126–32. For the history of church-scot, see Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp. 157–60, 434–8.

⁹ *MDE* #28, p. 149. On June 8, 1292, Thomas Bitton, bishop of Exeter, was granted a licence for the alienation in mortmain of the advowson of a moiety of the church of St. Gerrans, Cornwall, to Plympton Priory (*CPR*, Edward I vol. 2, 1281–92, p. 496). The alienation of the other moiety to Plympton Priory seems not to have occurred, however, as the *Valor* records that Plympton Priory only had one half of the tithes of Gerrans, rather than all the tithes.

*Conflicts with the Patron:
Bishop Bronescombe and Plympton Priory, 1255–63*

Bishop Henry Marshal's involvement in the augmentation of Plympton Priory's *spiritualia* indicates the spirit of co-operation that prevailed between this religious house and its patrons in the twelfth and first half of the thirteenth centuries. Relations were not always so calm, however, especially when the plans of the priors and canons of Plympton for increasing their spiritual income came up against the differing priorities of the bishops of Exeter. The bishops were not inherently opposed to the idea that Plympton Priory should take opportunities to maximize revenues from its churches and chapels; they simply wished to see the canons respect episcopal rights and return episcopal favours in the process.

While the canons of Plympton had long sought to safeguard their spiritual income and patronal rights through vigilant protection of their advowsons, they were also interested in maximizing the income from some of their churches through appropriation. This practice originated in the twelfth century and became a popular means by which monasteries—usually pleading poverty or the costs of providing hospitality—could increase their revenues from parish churches.¹⁰ Typically, when a religious house was given a parish church, it became the church's patron, obtained the right to present the rector and received merely a pension from the church's revenues; if it chose to appropriate these revenues, the religious house would become a corporate rector which would present a vicar to attend to the cure of souls.¹¹ After an appropriation, the religious house usually received the great tithe (the hay and grain), whereas the vicar received the altar-dues and the small tithe, which together were commonly known as the altarage.¹²

At ecclesiastical councils throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, attempts were made to regularize the appropriation process and prevent excessive exploitation of parochial revenues by the monasteries. In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council sought to ensure adequate support for the parish clergy by instituting perpetual vicarages: canon 32 declared that the patron or bishop had to ensure that a reasonable

¹⁰ Moorman, *Church Life in England*, p. 39.

¹¹ B.R. Kemp, 'Monastic Possession of Parish Churches,' 147–8.

¹² Reginald A.R. Hartridge, *A History of Vicarages in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1930), pp. 36, 38.

portion of a church's revenues were set aside for the parish priest, and that the rector, if unable to reside in the parish himself, had to arrange for the creation of a perpetual vicarage.¹³ The perpetual vicarage was meant to provide a decent income and security of tenure for those who were actually serving parish churches. Still, the system of appropriation by religious houses was open to obvious abuse: funds which might have stayed in the parish and been used for poor relief might instead be channeled towards the improvement of a religious house's food and wine.¹⁴ The religious house might also try to cut costs by hiring the cheapest chaplain or vicar rather than the most fit.¹⁵ It is well to keep in mind, though, that monastic corporate rectors were not the only offenders in this respect: pluralists and absentee rectors who served at court or at a university might use the added resources gained from appropriations in a similar fashion.

On May 22, 1255, Pope Alexander IV granted the prior and convent of Plympton permission to "hold to their uses [i.e. appropriate] the church of Egg Buckland in [the diocese of Exeter] of their patronage, value 12 marks."¹⁶ The appropriation would "take effect on the death or resignation of the rector, Master Nicholas de Plympton, papal subdeacon and chaplain."¹⁷ Along with the conventional phrase stating that a portion of the income should be reserved for the vicar of the church, the grant specifies that the "diocesan's consent" is "not required" for this appropriation.¹⁸

It is not known why the priory appealed directly to the pope, in essence going over the head of the bishop of Exeter. Perhaps Master Nicholas, as a papal chaplain, suggested this route. By the fourteenth century, the more common method of seeking appropriation involved the monastery petitioning the bishop for approval: the bishop would initiate an inquiry in the neighbourhood of the church and ascertain whether the religious house did indeed need the extra income; the bishop would seek the consent of the cathedral chapter, after which

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 20–1.

¹⁴ Moorman, *Church Life in England*, pp. 40–1. Moorman gives instances of monasteries appropriating parish churches in order to provide pittances (extra food), pocket-money, feasts, and better clothing for the monks.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁶ *CPL* I, p. 317.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

formal confirmations would be drafted.¹⁹ The actual appropriation occurred on the death or resignation of the rector, at which time the bishop would ordain a vicarage stipulating the income of the vicar.²⁰

Less usual was appropriation through acquisition of a papal bull, perhaps because of the considerable expense involved in obtaining one. The petitioning monastery, if successful, might see papal letters dispatched to the bishop allowing the appropriation if the reasons behind the petition were legitimate; alternately, the monastery might receive the bull itself which permitted direct appropriation upon the voidance of the rectory—no episcopal intervention was required.²¹ Plympton Priory sought this latter type of bull. The papacy did not exactly encourage monasteries to evade episcopal scrutiny, but by issuing such bulls, it could not help but provide a loophole in the normal appropriation process. Pope Innocent III had declared, in a letter of 1204 to the bishop of Ely, that religious houses needed the consent of the diocesan to appropriate churches unless they obtained an indulgence from the pope which said that they could do so “without the consent of their bishop.”²² Plympton Priory was by no means alone in asking for “direct appropriation” bulls: Hartridge pointed out that papal “permission to appropriate on voidance [i.e. on the death or resignation of the rector] was not rarely given.”²³ In any event, the papal grant was to cause the canons of Plympton Priory more trouble than they could have foreseen.

Five years later, on May 27, 1260, the same pope sent an indult to Plympton Priory granting the canons permission “in accordance with an indult of Pope Celestine, to hold all their churches on their voidance” and to appropriate the church of Dean of their patronage, worth little

¹⁹ Roy Martin Haines, *Ecclesia Anglicana: Studies in the English Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1989), p. 4. The monastery needed to be in possession of the advowson of the church it was endeavouring to appropriate. Haines also notes that “successful opposition” by bishops to appropriations was “rare.”

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Hartridge, *History of Vicarages*, p. 31.

²³ *Ibid.* Hartridge cites several examples of monasteries in England and France obtaining papal indulgences to appropriate without the diocesan’s consent being required. His view is that this practice was a “bad policy, striking a terrible blow at local church discipline, and encouraging the monks in their frequent insubordination to the bishops” (p. 32).

more than £6 13s 4d.²⁴ Dean had belonged to the priory since at least 1186 × 1191, when it was listed in the episcopal confirmation charter as being one of the churches the bishops of Exeter had either given or confirmed to Plympton Priory.²⁵ The appropriation of this church was needed, according to the canons, because of an increase in the demands of “hospitality” at the priory. Another interesting phrase is used in this indult: “notwithstanding that they have presented to the bishop divers clerks to be instituted rectors of the said church.”²⁶ The bishop’s involvement in the process of institution to benefices in the past was acknowledged, but once again it seems to have been assumed that papal approval was an acceptable substitute for episcopal approval in regard to the appropriation of parish churches. When the bishop of Exeter later challenged the appropriation, he claimed that Celestine’s privilege had been subsequently rendered invalid by a “contrary act” on the part of the pope.²⁷ Bishop Bronescombe did not elaborate, unfortunately, on what the nature of this contrary action had been.

A few months after Pope Alexander approved the priory’s appropriation of Dean church, Walter Bronescombe, the bishop of Exeter, passed a judicial sentence against the priory. On October 5, 1261, he ordered that the church of Egg Buckland and its fruits were to be sequestered until the bishop “ordained otherwise.”²⁸ The bishop had summoned the prior and convent of Plympton before him to demonstrate by what right they held the churches of St. Kew, Dean Prior, and Egg Buckland. The canons of Plympton contended that they were legally entitled to hold the church of Egg Buckland due to the privilege granted them by Pope Alexander IV. This gave them permission to “enter into possession of” Egg Buckland “when it should happen to fall vacant by the resignation or decease of the rector of the same.”²⁹ Bronescombe was not convinced, however: he declared that the condition concerning the resignation or death of the rector had not been established to him or the previous bishop of Exeter and that, in any event, the terms of

²⁴ *CPL I*, p. 372. The Pope Celestine in question was probably Celestine III (1191–98), as Celestine IV died in 1241 a few days after his election, likely without performing any official duties. See J.N.D. Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford, 1986), p. 192.

²⁵ *MDE* #14, p. 138.

²⁶ *CPL I*, p. 372.

²⁷ *Reg. Bronescombe I*, #389, p. 133.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 131. Master Nicholas de Plympton seems to have resigned the church of Egg Buckland by this point.

the papal privilege had not been preserved. Bronescombe found that his episcopal rights (*ius dyocesani*) had been infringed upon and that no-one had been canonically presented to him or his predecessor for institution to the vicarage of Egg Buckland.³⁰ This was his reason for the sequestration of the fruits of the church.

Challenged over their rights to Dean Prior, the prior and canons had to retract a previous claim that they had held it from a “certain Italian” (a rector instituted by Bishop Blund) in exchange for a fee-farm payment.³¹ The existence of this previous claim would suggest that there had been some previous investigation into their entitlement to the church of Dean Prior. The canons maintained that the privilege of Pope Alexander IV, citing the indult of Pope Celestine, was sufficient to confirm them in their ownership of the church. Bishop Bronescombe rejected this argument because of its several purported flaws: firstly, they had taken possession of it initially without anyone else’s permission; secondly, Pope Celestine later had withdrawn his privilege, rendering his original grant invalid; thirdly, Pope Alexander’s privilege was invalid because they had already appropriated Dean Prior by the time they applied for it; and finally, Alexander’s privilege was contingent on the truthfulness of the facts presented to him, and as the information was “for the most part false,” it was only just that the convent should lose the benefice they had sought from him.³² The bishop deprived them of Dean Prior and, moved by a spirit of charity, gave it to Master Gervase of Crediton, a prominent cleric in the diocese of Exeter during this period.³³

The church which particularly attracted the bishop’s attention, however, was that of St. Kew in Cornwall, also known as the church of Lannowseynt. St. Kew had been given to Plympton Priory by Bishop William Warelwast, who had received it from King Henry I in 1123; Warelwast in turn had given it to the canons of Plympton

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Master Gervase of Crediton later became the rector of Calstock, and held the benefice of West Down for a lengthy period *in commendam*. He was also a prebendary at the collegiate church of Crediton. In 1288 Master Gervase acted as Bishop Bronescombe’s proctor at the synod in London because the bishop was occupied by business in his diocese (*Reg. Bronescombe* II, #579, p. 14; #960, p. 63; #693, p. 26; #1289, p. 121).

shortly thereafter.³⁴ The charter in which Henry II confirmed the gifts made to Plympton Priory included St. Kew, with all its appurtenances, and specified that as the secular canons of that church died off, their prebends would fall to the use of the regular canons of Plympton.³⁵ Warelwast's donation, as Bronescombe conceded, had been confirmed by the chapter of Exeter, and by later bishops of Exeter. However, Bishop Bronescombe decided that the original collation by Warelwast and the subsequent confirmation had been invalid, the church therefore lacked a governor, and consequently the right of ordination and collation devolved to him.³⁶ His argument for this action rested on the view that Bishop Warelwast had had no right to alienate St. Kew, since as bishop he was "procurator" rather than "lord" of the things of his church and could not give away anything without the chapter's consent.³⁷ The chapter had indeed confirmed the donation, but Bronescombe stated that this was done "long afterwards," as if this would cast doubts on the legitimacy of the chapter's action.

Aside from questioning the episcopal right to alienate church property, Bronescombe also contended that Warelwast had wrongly claimed that there were no secular canons at St. Kew at the time he gave it to Plympton and that the church had been vacant; indeed, there continued to be secular canons at the church throughout Warelwast's life, according to later episcopal records.³⁸ Bronescombe considered this fact to be important because, in Warelwast's original collation of the Augustinian canons of Plympton to the church of St. Kew, he had "seemed to imply" that this collation would become valid "on the removal or decease of the clerks or secular canons." If Plympton had indeed taken possession before the benefice had become vacant, this action would have rendered their possession invalid. Bronescombe

³⁴ Warelwast's charter does not survive, but it was shown by the canons of Plympton to Bishop Bronescombe, and it made an appearance early in the next century in the lawsuit brought against the priory by certain Cornishmen. See Chapters One and Six for further discussion of Plympton and its relationship with St. Kew.

³⁵ *MDE* #3, p. 135. The church of St. Kew seems to have been appropriated by the priory at some point in the twelfth century.

³⁶ *Reg. Bronescombe* I, #389, p. 131. When a benefice remained vacant because the patron was unable to make an appointment or simply failed to do so, the right of institution reverted to the bishop, who would then make a collation to the benefice.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 130: "Quia vero prefatus W(illelmus) episcopus, qui rerum ecclesie sue procurator erat non dominus, sine legitimo consensu capituli res sue ecclesie alienare potuit, ad huiusmodi donationem processit."

³⁸ *Ibid.*

proceeded to criticize the priory for replacing the secular canons with regulars “without the consent and sanction of the diocesan” and for leaving the church utterly empty of any priest. “Since divine worship should be increased, not diminished,” and since St. Kew lacked a lawful governor (*legitimo governatore*), according to Bronescombe, the church reverted to the bishop for collation.³⁹

Plympton Priory was thus deprived of three of its appropriated churches in what must have been a rather uncomfortable confrontation with Bishop Bronescombe. One might conclude from the severity of the bishop’s rebukes that the priory had seriously incurred his wrath and that the deprivations were irrevocable. All was not what it seemed, however. Two days later, Baldwin, the prior of Plympton, and the canons Walter le Hostiller and Robert Blund (later prior), surrendered the title of Dean Prior to the bishop. The church then lacked a rector because of the resignation; nevertheless, the priory still possessed the advowson of Dean Prior, and the prior presented Master Nicholas de Plympton, papal chaplain, archdeacon of Norfolk, and former rector of Egg Buckland, to the church.⁴⁰ The bishop accepted this presentation, but had to defer it, as he had appointed Master Gervase of Crediton to the church; Gervase, stating that he wished the best for the religious, resigned Dean Prior to the bishop. The bishop in turn instituted the archdeacon to the church *in commendam*, “assigning it to him at his pleasure,” on October 7.⁴¹

However, on October 15, Master Nicholas de Plympton resigned the benefice. Bronescombe’s reaction to this event was to grant, very graciously, the priory the appropriation of Dean Prior church “for the relief of the need of the poor folk and pilgrims who flocked” to the priory.⁴² Bishop Bronescombe acknowledged the priory’s full title and right of presentation to the church, and its ownership of Dean Prior’s fruits and offerings, except for a “suitable portion for the vicar, who is to be canonically presented” to the bishop. The dean and chapter of Exeter gave their consent.⁴³ On the same day Prior Baldwin presented

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁴⁰ Master Nicholas de Plympton—who, on the basis of his name, must assuredly have known the priory and been known to it—seems to have held the church of Bridestowe, also in the patronage of the priory, *in commendam* in 1259–60 (*Reg. Bronescombe* I, #131, p. 41; #169, p. 51).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, #394, p. 135.

⁴² *Ibid.*, #400, p. 139.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, #401, p. 139.

David de Beare to the bishop for institution to the vicarage of Dean Prior.⁴⁴ It is not known when precisely the priory retrieved the advowsons of Egg Buckland or St. Kew: there is no mention of such procedures in the episcopal registers, although these registers do become rather patchy in the latter part of the thirteenth century. However, the records of Bishop Quinel, which Hingeston-Randolph included in his edition of the registers of Bishop Bronescombe, do include a record of Plympton Priory presenting one Reymund de Lanhocho to the vicarage of St. Kew in 1283.⁴⁵ As well, Bishop Stapeldon's register records that the priory made a presentation to Egg Buckland in 1318, and Bishop Grandisson recognized Plympton's right to both churches in his confirmation of the priory's *spiritualia* in 1334.⁴⁶

So what is to be made of this episode? The bishop took away three churches from Plympton Priory, then turned around and approved the appropriation of one of them a few days later. One cannot help but suspect that there was a certain element of unrecorded co-operation between the bishop, the priory, and Masters Nicholas and Gervase in this matter. Clearly the main concern of the bishop was to assert his right to approve the appropriation of churches to monasteries within his diocese. The decision of the prior and canons of Plympton to seek papal rather than episcopal permission to undertake appropriation was the spark that set off the fire; the bishop could not let this infringement on his rights go unanswered. One wonders whether, if the priory had not decided to obtain papal consent for the appropriations, the bishop ever would have challenged the validity of the original institutions. In Bishop Bronescombe, however, the monasteries of Devon were to find a zealous defender of episcopal rights and conformity to the letter and spirit of canon law.⁴⁷ During his episcopate, Bronescombe came into much more serious conflict with Tavistock Abbey over a contumacious

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, #402, p. 139. After the assessment of the vicarage, it was found to consist of "all the occasional offerings, the tithes of hay, the land at the fixed rent of four shillings and sixpence, one and a half farthings of sanctuary land immune from the payment of tithes, and thirty shillingsworth of the garb tithes, together with the acceptance of the ordinary burdens, while the extraordinary ones are to be divided proportionately."

⁴⁵ *Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, p. 372.

⁴⁶ *Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 209; *Reg. Grandisson II*, p. 775.

⁴⁷ Walter Bronescombe had been closely affiliated with the royal court before becoming bishop of Exeter. In 1251 Henry III sent him to the papal curia to attend to matters of royal concern. He was archdeacon of Surrey at the time of his promotion to the see of Exeter. See Marion Gibbs and Jane Lang, *Bishops and Reform 1215–1272, with Special Reference to the Lateran Council of 1215* (London, 1934), pp. 191, 199.

abbot whom he deposed,⁴⁸ with Forde Abbey over a presentation to a benefice,⁴⁹ and with Buckland Abbey over its founding in 1279 without an episcopal licence.⁵⁰ Indeed, Bishop Bronescombe also tried to force the canons of Plympton to pay suit of court at Crediton for lands they held at Stockleigh.⁵¹ Unfortunately for the canons, within a few years, the bishop was to find fault with them again.

On the 21st of August, 1263, Walter le Hostiller, canon of Plympton and proctor for the subprior and other obedientiaries of the priory,⁵² wrote a letter in which he acknowledged the bishop's rights—which were “to be used discreetly (*et ea pacifice utatur et quiete*)”⁵³—over the priory during a vacancy.⁵³ The event which had spurred this latest dispute had been the death of Prior Baldwin on March 26th of the same year.⁵⁴ It seems from Walter le Hostiller's letter that in some way the priory had thwarted the bishop's patronal right of custody and had elected Brother Robert Blund prior, seemingly without episcopal licence. The bishop imposed sentences of excommunication and interdict on members of the priory for their transgression. Walter le Hostiller begged that they

⁴⁸ Olivia F. Robinson, *Reg. Bronescombe* I, p. xxxviii. See also Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 23–4. Finberg's description of the events is more sympathetic to the abbot of Tavistock than is Robinson's brief appraisal. Robinson includes a list of the charges of mismanagement against the abbot for which he was eventually deposed. In 1265, Bishop Bronescombe sought to discover from the abbot by what right the abbey held its appropriated churches; when the abbot did not appear to defend the abbey's rightful claim, the bishop sequestered the churches' revenues and sent men to confiscate property. A great deal of damage was alleged to have been done, and the abbot initiated a civil suit against the perpetrators. Finberg's judgement is that the bishop had acted in an “arbitrary” fashion and had been probably put up to these actions by greedy “subordinates.”

⁴⁹ Robinson, *Reg. Bronescombe* I, p. xxxviii. This particular conflict resulted in mutual excommunications and a long-drawn-out struggle involving the pope, the king, and the Cistercian abbots of England.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xxxviii. Bronescombe only absolved the monks of Buckland on his deathbed, after appeals from the queen and the archbishop of Canterbury. See Christopher Holdsworth, ‘The Cistercians in Devon,’ in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. Allen Brown*, eds. Christopher J. Holdsworth, Christopher Harper-Bill, Janet L. Nelson (Wolfeboro, N.H., 1989), pp. 179–91.

⁵¹ In 1284, Bishop Quinel reversed a previous judgement against Plympton Priory by Bishop Walter Bronescombe and released the prior from all suit in the bishop's court at Crediton by reason of his land at Stockleigh. This decision was confirmed by Bishop Edmund Lacy, Apr. 25, 1446 (*Reg. Lacy* II, pp. 351–2).

⁵² He had been appointed proctor by Subprior Thomas on August 20 (*Reg. Bronescombe* II, #496, p. 4). The obedientiaries named were the sacristan, precentor, cellarer, and the steward.

⁵³ *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #488, p. 2.

⁵⁴ *Reg. Bronescombe* I, #474, p. 161.

be absolved from their sentences and promised that at least one of the excommunicates and others from the priory would appear at Exeter Cathedral on a day appointed by the bishop for the benefit of absolution. In regard to their offences, he submitted himself, the subprior, and convent, to the judgement of the Dean of Wells and the archdeacons of Exeter and Norfolk, as long as they rendered their judgement by the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14). The canons of Plympton would observe their findings “under penalty of 100 silver pounds.” Afterwards, once Robert Blund had renounced his election, the priory would seek a licence for election from the bishop and re-elect him, this time canonically, so that the bishop would be able to perform the necessary presentation.

A few days later, on August 30, the canons entertained Bishop Bronescombe at Plympton and several matters of business were discussed and resolved. The canons acknowledged in front of many witnesses that they were required to keep two of their number at the church of St. Kew, and vowed that they would send two canons there immediately.⁵⁵ Concerning their sequestered property and personal transgressions, which were not specified, the subprior declared on behalf of the convent that they would pay the bishop 100 marks. On September 2, John Marker the sacristan, Robert Spolt the cellarer, and Brother Britius all received absolution from their sentence of excommunication from the dean of Exeter at Exeter Cathedral.⁵⁶ Two months later, Bishop Bronescombe confirmed the election of Brother Robert Blund as prior, ordering the archdeacon of Totnes to install him; at the same time he told the subprior and convent that they should be obedient in spiritual matters.⁵⁷ He then commanded Master Robert de Polamesforde, custodian of the priory, to assign to the prior the administration of the temporalities and those things committed to him in the time of vacancy. A couple of years later, Bishop Bronescombe forgave the remaining 50 marks owed to him by Plympton Priory.⁵⁸

This sequence of events is very revealing about relations between the bishop and the priory during the time of vacancy. It seems that there were two major infractions here: firstly, the refusal to grant custody of the priory to the bishop after the death of the prior and

⁵⁵ *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #495, p. 3.

⁵⁶ *Reg. Bronescombe* I, #475, p. 161.

⁵⁷ *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #508, p. 5.

⁵⁸ *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #607, p. 17.

secondly, the election of a new prior without episcopal licence. Given that the surviving documents in the episcopal registers do not reveal the complete story of this conflict, the motives and behaviour of the canons of Plympton Priory must remain somewhat elusive. Surely, after their unpleasant dealings with Bishop Bronescombe a short time before during the struggle over the appropriations, they must have known that he was not a man to treat insubordination—whether real or perceived—lightly. In this case, even though the exact details of the canons' transgressions are not known, it is quite clear that they did not accord the bishop his full rights as patron and diocesan after the death of their prior. Canon law dictated that religious houses electing new priors needed the licence of their bishop; English customary law stated that the patron of a house had the right of custody—and enjoyment of the religious house's revenues—during the time of vacancy. Since the canons of Plympton had impeded in some way the bishop's exercise of his custodial rights, and had dared to elect a new prior without the bishop's approval, the negative response of Bishop Bronescombe to their actions should have come as no surprise.

*Spiritualia in the Fourteenth Century:
Appropriations, Alienations, and Augmentation*

By the beginning of the fourteenth century, Plympton Priory had appropriated the churches of St. Kew, Sutton, Tamerton Foliot, Marystow, Maker, Egg Buckland, and Dean Prior. This can be discerned by an examination of the institutions to benefices recorded in the earliest surviving episcopal records for the diocese, those of Bishops Walter Bronescombe, Peter Quinel, and Thomas Bitton. In the instances when the priory is listed as presenting someone to a rectory, it is clear that the church has not been appropriated. In the instances when the prior presented someone to a vicarage, the church had been appropriated and hence converted from a rectory into a perpetual vicarage. In the cases of Dean Prior and Egg Buckland, as we have seen, there were difficulties with the canons' initial attempts to appropriate these churches, but these were overcome shortly thereafter: Bishop Bronescombe allowed the appropriation of Dean Prior on October 15, 1261,⁵⁹ and by 1275

⁵⁹ *Reg. Bronescombe* I, #401, p. 139.

and 1283 respectively Plympton Priory was presenting vicars to Egg Buckland and St. Kew.⁶⁰ As there is no record of Plympton Priory attempting to obtain papal permission to appropriate St. Kew before the troubles of the 1260s, the appropriation may well have occurred before the surviving papal registers begin in 1198.

Similarly, no entries survive from the thirteenth-century episcopal registers to indicate efforts by the canons to appropriate the churches of Sutton, Maker, Marystow, and Tamerton Foliot. With Sutton, we have evidence that the priory was presenting vicars from a quite early period, the decades immediately after the foundation of the priory in 1121.⁶¹ There is no such evidence for the other three churches, but they were likely appropriated at an early stage as well. We first encounter presentations of vicars at Tamerton Foliot, Marystow, and Maker in 1283–84, 1266, and 1264 respectively.⁶²

That Plympton Priory had indeed appropriated all of these churches by March, 1335, is indicated by an episcopal confirmation of the priory's *spiritualia* issued that year by Bishop Grandisson.⁶³ Grandisson, exasperated by the priory's indebtedness, had made a visitation to the house and had noted Plympton's possession of numerous *spiritualia*.⁶⁴ Subsequently he summoned a representative of the priory to come to him and prove Plympton's title to its appropriated churches, chapels, pensions, and portion of tithes. All of these were listed, the churches being grouped with their dependent chapels⁶⁵ and the pensions being

⁶⁰ *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #1070, p. 80, and *Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, p. 354. There are no entries in the episcopal registers for these two churches indicating when exactly Plympton Priory regained possession of them after the sequestration of 1261. Similarly, there are no records indicating when the bishops of Exeter accepted or allowed their appropriations by Plympton.

⁶¹ *EEAE* XI, #23, pp. 23–4n.

⁶² *Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, p. 357; *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #633, p. 19; #551, p. 10.

⁶³ *Reg. Grandisson* II, pp. 775–6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 775. Although the bishop issued a mandate for visitation on Sept. 29, 1328, this was revoked the next day (*Reg. Grandisson* I, pp. 403–4). As Grandisson is known to have been at Plympton on November 18, 1330 (*Reg. Grandisson* III, p. 1526), this is most likely the time when the visitation occurred, even though no record of a mandate survives. Bishop Grandisson also established a commission of inquiry into the state of the priory on July 24, 1331 on account of its indebtedness and poor government. He stated that in the months since his visit, the mismanagement had gotten worse rather than better (*Reg. Grandisson* II, pp. 620–1).

⁶⁵ The churches and chapels are: the conventual church of Saints Peter and Paul, Plympton, with its dependent chapels of Plympton St. Mary, Plympton St. Thomas (Plympton St. Maurice), Brixton, Wembury, Plymstock, Shaugh, and Sampford Spiney; the church of St. Anthony-in-Roseland with the chapel of St. Gerrans; the churches

listed by value.⁶⁶ The sub-prior (and later prior) Robert Forde appeared as proctor, and proved to the bishop that Plympton Priory had legitimately owned and possessed its *spiritualia*, with the knowledge and approval of the bishops of Exeter, from time out of mind.⁶⁷ He obviously established his case, as Bishop Grandisson decreed in a definitive sentence that Plympton Priory had legitimate title to all of its churches, chapels, pensions, as well as its portion of tithes.

The timing of the confirmation may not have been entirely unrelated to Bishop Grandisson's plan to create and endow a new collegiate church at Ottery St. Mary in East Devon. Grandisson had begun his negotiations to buy the manor and church of Ottery St. Mary in January, 1334, and on December 15, 1337, the king granted a licence for the foundation of the new collegiate church.⁶⁸ On January 12, 1338, Grandisson appointed the first warden and canons of Ottery St. Mary, and soon after they petitioned him for financial assistance.⁶⁹ He obliged by allowing them to appropriate Ilsington church in May, 1338, and by writing the pope for confirmation of the appropriation.⁷⁰ Plympton Priory had possessed the advowson of this church since 1186 × 1188,⁷¹ and had received a pension of £5 a year from it.⁷² One might suspect

of St. Kew and Maker; the church of Sutton with the chapel of St. Budeaux; the churches of Egg Buckland and Dean; the church of Tamerton Foliot with its chapel of Maristow; and the church of Marystow with its chapels of Thrushelton and St. James in the Wode (also known as St. James Inchewode). The cell of Marsh Barton is referred to as a chapel. The chapel of St. John-in-Arcubus, Exeter, is omitted from this list, even though it appeared in the *Taxatio* of 1291 as providing the priory with 20s a year (*Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, p. 452). There is a copy of this confirmation in the British Library which differs from the copy in the episcopal register only in that it omits the chapel of Sampford Spiney (BM Add Ch. 67571).

⁶⁶ The annual pensions were: 12 marks from Ugborough, 5 marks from Exminster, 40s from Newton St. Cyres, 100s from Ilsington, 40s from Stokeinteignhead, 10 marks from Blackawton, 10 marks from Bridestowe, 2 marks from St. Mawgan-in-Pydar, 1 mark each from Bratton, Meavy, and St. Just-in-Roseland, and five pounds of wax from Peter Tavy. The payment due to the priory from the prebend of each canon of Exeter Cathedral who died or became a member of a religious order was also mentioned. The one portion was the moiety of the tithes—excepting those from episcopal demesne—at Gerrans.

⁶⁷ *Reg. Grandisson* II, p. 776. Forde produced letters, sworn testimony, and various other documents to support his case.

⁶⁸ John Neale Dalton, *The Collegiate Church of Ottery St. Mary* (Cambridge, 1917), pp. viii, 263n.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 263n.

⁷⁰ *Reg. Grandisson* I, pp. 133–7. Pope Clement VI confirmed the appropriation in 1343.

⁷¹ *MDE* #14, p. 138.

⁷² 'Taxatio of Pope Nicholas IV,' *Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, p. 459.

that the bishop, in asking the priory to prove its rights to its spiritual possessions, had been hoping that the canons would fail to do so in regard to certain of its churches or pensions. Should this have occurred, then the bishop could have claimed them for his new foundation.

Still, Grandisson had not challenged the priory's possession of any of its churches, so why would he have them give up Ilsington, and—more to the point—why would Prior John of Englebourne and the canons of Plympton agree to give up one of their churches? As we have seen, they had staunchly defended their rights to their *spiritualia* in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. What could account for their change of attitude now? And moreover, why would the prior of Plympton suddenly decide, as he stated in his letter to the pope supporting the appropriation, that the advowson of Ilsington was useless (*inutile*) to the priory?⁷³

The situation is not clarified by consultation of the Calendar of Patent Rolls, which reveals that a mere few months after Grandisson's confirmation of the priory's *spiritualia*, the king issued a licence to the priory to alienate in mortmain the advowsons⁷⁴ of the churches of Ilsington, Stokeinteignhead, Bridestowe, Bratton, and Peter Tavy.⁷⁵ Why would the prior and canons give up the advowsons of all these churches? One reason may have been that as long as they continued to receive their pensions, the canons were willing to assist the bishop, their patron. For indeed, the appropriation document for Ilsington specified that the priory would continue to receive its £5 a year.⁷⁶ One must also not rule out the possibility that some understanding existed between Bishop Grandisson and the canons of Plympton; this might have involved either unrecorded payments or concessions which would have served as incentives for them to help the bishop in his project. The prior and canons may have been quite willing to bargain, given their difficulties with debt in this period,⁷⁷ a situation which caused Grandisson great

⁷³ *Reg. Grandisson* I, pp. 133–7.

⁷⁴ As advowsons of churches were considered in England to be temporal property, they fell under the limitations on conveyances of property to religious houses imposed by the Statute of Mortmain of 1279 (Kathleen Wood-Legh, *Studies in Church Life in England under Edward III* [Cambridge, 1934], p. 127).

⁷⁵ *CPR*, Edward III vol. 3, 1334–38, p. 114.

⁷⁶ *Reg. Grandisson* I, pp. 133–7. The priory stopped getting its pension from Ilsington at some point in the next two hundred years, as it does not occur in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Tanner MS 342 f. 178v (see Table 1) or in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (*MDE* #28, pp. 148–9).

⁷⁷ Other references to the debts and neediness of the priory in the 1330s—aside from those relating to the visitation of 1331—can be found in *Reg. Grandisson* I, pp.

annoyance.⁷⁸ As well, the new prior may have wished to re-establish good relations with Grandisson after an incident in 1329 which resulted in the imposition of episcopal sanctions on the priory and the bishop's collation of a poor clerk to the church of Ilsington.⁷⁹

Bratton, Bridestowe, and Stokeinteignhead were, as will be seen, some of the "episcopally-dominated" benefices in Plympton Priory's patronage. Consequently, the canons may have felt that by handing over the advowsons, while retaining the pensions, they were not losing anything but merely acknowledging a *fait accompli*. And in the cases of Bratton and Bridestowe, Plympton Priory was still receiving pensions from them in 1535.⁸⁰ For some reason, the alienation of the advowson of Stokein-

231–2, II, pp. 775–6, and II, pp. 872–3. Grandisson had to deal with financial problems and debts at most of the religious houses in the diocese in the 1330s and 1340s, which he tended to blame on maladministration. Finberg suggests that the houses may just as easily have been suffering from "deep-seated economic ills," however (Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, p. 262).

⁷⁸ Relations do not seem to have been good between the priory and Bishop Grandisson from 1328 to 1332, probably because the priorate was in the hands of the rather difficult Matthew de Mimminglond in these years (he died in 1332). One suspects that the responsibility for the mismanagement of the priory fell on his shoulders. Perhaps during the episcopate of Bishop Stapeldon—who, as treasurer for the Crown, was often absent from the diocese—Mimminglond came to feel that he had the freedom to run the priory as he wished without interference. Grandisson was a much more dedicated shepherd to his flock, however, and had a low tolerance for what he perceived to be moral laxity.

⁷⁹ Acting on a papal mandate, Grandisson had summoned the prior and canons to his presence to hear witnesses swear to the good character of Richard Langacre, a poor clerk, and to present any reason for not proceeding with his provision to a benefice in their gift (*Reg. Grandisson* I, p. 439). They did not appear on the specified date. Grandisson sent them a very strongly-worded letter, citing them to come to him for the imposition of sanctions (*Reg. Grandisson* I, p. 459). In May, 1329, he collated Richard Langacre to the rectory of Ilsington (*Reg. Grandisson* I, p. 500). Presumably the prior had not bothered to present anyone within six months of the previous incumbent's death. In 1331, John XXII issued a mandate to Grandisson and two canons of Exeter to give Langacre the church of Ilsington (*CPL* II, p. 360). On the same day the pope remitted to Langacre the first two years' fruits of the benefice (*CPL* II, p. 368).

⁸⁰ *MDE* #28, p. 148. The amounts—£5 6s 8d from Bratton, and £6 13s 4d from Bridestowe—are the same as those which appear in the *Taxatio* of 1291. Pensions could sometimes be difficult to collect, however: in 1384–85 Plympton Priory won a court judgement against the rector of Bratton, Richard Bolham, over unpaid moneys owed to them. The judges ordered Bishop Brantingham to sell the fruits and revenues of the church, which the bishop had sequestered, in order to make up the 23 marks owed to the priory, as well as 5 marks in damages. See *Year Books of Richard II: 8–10 Richard II 1385–1387*, eds. Leonard C. Hector and Michael J. Hager (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), pp. 148–51 and Leonard C. Hector, 'Reports, Writs and Records in the Common Bench in the Reign of Richard II,' in *Medieval Legal Records edited in Memory of C.A.F. Meekings*, eds. R.F. Hunnisett and J.B. Post (London: HMSO, 1978), pp. 280–2.

teignhead seems not to have proceeded, as presentations were made by Plympton Priory to the benefice later on in the fourteenth century.⁸¹ It is not clear whether the incumbent of Peter Tavy continued to give the priory five pounds of wax a year; perhaps because this was a pension paid in kind, the recorders of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* did not bother to list it. Interestingly, at around the same time that Plympton Priory was alienating advowsons to the bishop of Exeter, it seems that the canons alienated one to a secular lord: by 1314, the advowson of the Cornish church of St. Mawgan-in-Pydar had passed to the Arundell lords of Lanherne.⁸² In this case as well, the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* shows that the priory continued to receive its pension of £1 6s 8d until 1535.⁸³

The fact that Plympton Priory made over advowsons not just to Bishop Grandisson but to the lords of Lanherne, both within the span of a few years, both at a time of serious indebtedness, strongly suggests that the priory received some sort of financial benefits from these concessions. The transfer of advowsons by religious houses, who might not have taken the opportunity to fully make use of them, was by no means an unusual procedure at this time: as R. N. Swanson has pointed out, “alienations were common in late medieval England.”⁸⁴ And of course, one must be cautious about assuming that because the Crown issued licences for alienation or appropriation these were necessarily implemented. As we have seen in the case of Stokeinteignhead, the parties involved may have decided for some reason not to take the process further.⁸⁵

One way in which Bishop Grandisson may have hoped to compensate Plympton Priory for the loss of these advowsons was by allowing it to appropriate several churches. Oddly, even though the priory had alienated the advowson of Bridestowe church to Grandisson in 1335,

⁸¹ *Reg. Grandisson* III, pp. 1441, 1463.

⁸² *Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 256; see also *Reg. Grandisson* I, p. 194, and III, pp. 1272, 1314, 1449. In the Cornwall Record Office, there is a group of receipts issued by David Berle, prior of Plympton, to the rector of St. Mawgan-in-Pydar for payment of the installments of the pension in 1498–99 (CRO AR 16/9–16/14). I must thank Dr. Oliver Padel for bringing this reference to my attention.

⁸³ *MDE* #28, p. 149.

⁸⁴ Robert N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215–c. 1515* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 246.

⁸⁵ Another example of a failed alienation occurred in 1292, when Bishop Bitton obtained a royal licence to give Plympton Priory the advowson of a moiety of the church of St. Gerrans, Cornwall (*CPR*, Edward I, vol. 2, p. 496). There is no indication that this indeed was implemented.

in October, 1338, the king granted the bishop a licence to alienate in mortmain this same advowson to the priory and to allow the priory to appropriate Bridestowe.⁸⁶ At the same time, the king allowed Grandisson to alienate the advowson of Bratton to the chapter of Exeter Cathedral and that of Ilsington—although this was really more of a confirmation by this point—to Ottery St. Mary.⁸⁷ However, only the transfer of Ilsington, which we know to have occurred by this point, actually seems to have come about. There are no further records in the fourteenth century of the prior of Plympton making presentations to Bridestowe church, and the fact that the pension the priory received was the same amount in 1535 as it had been in 1291 indicates that no appropriation occurred.⁸⁸ As well, the institution records from the episcopal registers for the remainder of the fourteenth century indicate that the chapter of Exeter did not make presentations to Bratton church; rather, the bishops collated men themselves to the benefice. Consequently, it would seem that Grandisson's plan to assist Plympton by allowing the canons to regain and appropriate Bridestowe came to naught.

However, another attempt at appropriation in 1338 was more successful. Prior John of Englebourne and the canons petitioned Grandisson to allow them to appropriate their church of Newton St. Cyres on account of the serious financial difficulties they were experiencing.⁸⁹ The document illustrates the range of reasons religious houses might supply to justify why they needed extra income. The canons stated that they were being persecuted by several temporal lords and their bailiffs; they were greatly burdened by the cost of providing hospitality to travellers, a fact made worse by their proximity to the port of Plymouth; and finally, they needed to repair their cell at St. Anthony-in-Roseland, which had been damaged by fire during a raid by the French. Grandisson and the dean and chapter of the cathedral gave their consent to the appropriation of Newton St. Cyres and its dependent chapel of Norton on May 25,

⁸⁶ *CPR*, Edward III vol. 4, 1338–40, p. 151 (also *MDE* #22, p. 141). The royal licence stated that this alienation would allow for the support, performance, and increase of divine worship and other works of piety at the priory.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 151–2.

⁸⁸ Appropriations, as one would expect, usually resulted in substantial increases of income. For example, when Plympton Priory appropriated the church of Blackawton, from which it had previously obtained a pension of £6 13s 4d, its income from the benefice rose to £26 13s 4d in 1535 (*MDE* #28, p. 149).

⁸⁹ *Reg. Grandisson* II, pp. 872–3.

1338.⁹⁰ That the appropriation went ahead is indicated by the increase in income—from £2 in 1291 to £15 in 1535—and the fact that when the priory next made a presentation to the church of Newton St. Cyres, the canons were presenting a vicar rather than a rector.⁹¹

This was not the only attempt by Plympton Priory to increase its spiritual income in this period. As the town of Plymouth expanded and prospered in the later Middle Ages, so the priory could not help but be aware of the growth in titheable products and income in the parish. However, because of the arrangement with the perpetual vicars of St. Andrew, Plymouth, the vicars received tithes from the mills, fisheries, increase of animals, as well as the income of the parishioners.⁹² The canons repeatedly asked Bishop Grandisson to augment their portion of the tithes,⁹³ which presumably was limited to the tithes of grain—an income source which would decline as the town grew. On October 10, 1333, the bishop ordered an inquiry to be established at Plymouth church—at which clergy, laity, and the better-known residents of Plymouth would be present—to investigate the shares of the tithes due to the vicar and the priory.⁹⁴ At the same time, he summoned the prior and canons to him and to bring evidence of their rights to the church and asked the vicar, William of Woolleigh, who at this time was in the process of becoming a canon at Plympton,⁹⁵ to show up as well. The inquiry seems not to have yielded results satisfactory to the prior and canons, however, as they had initiated a cause against William of Woolleigh over the augmentation of the portion by January, 1334.⁹⁶

Nothing more is heard of these proceedings—William of Woolleigh died in the interim—until September, 1347, when Pope Clement VI sent a mandate to the dean of Exeter asking him to confirm the

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ *Reg. Grandisson III*, p. 1335. Subsequent presentations in Grandisson's register are to the vicarage rather than to the rectory of Newton St. Cyres (*Reg. Grandisson III*, pp. 1375, 1498).

⁹² *Reg. Grandisson II*, pp. 714–5. Over the course of the fourteenth century, the name "Sutton" or "Sutton Prior" came to be replaced by the name "Plymouth." For the remainder of this chapter, "Plymouth" will be used.

⁹³ Grandisson refers to the augmentation having been demanded frequently and incessantly by the canons ("augmentacionem frequenter et assidue postulata").

⁹⁴ *Reg. Grandisson II*, p. 715.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 674. Woolleigh resigned by December, 1334, when Master Nicholas de Weylonde, canon of Plympton, was instituted (*Reg. Grandisson III*, p. 1305).

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 734. Grandisson committed the cause to Thomas of Nassington, archdeacon of Exeter, and William of Crowthorn, another episcopal official.

arrangement concerning the portion at Plymouth. This letter stated that William of Crowthorn “by special commission from the bishop,” had increased the portion of the tithes to the priory, and that afterwards the bishop had added fifty marks (£33 6s 8d) to this and had taxed the vicarage.⁹⁷ William “acquiesced,” and he and one or two of his successors made the payments to the priory. Still, the most recent incumbent, Robert de Middelond, and Thomas of Donne, canon of Plympton, continued to engage in litigation at the Roman curia over the augmentation. Despite this situation, the pope agreed to the priory’s request to confirm the arrangement.

Robert de Middelond’s attempt to thwart Plympton Priory’s attempt to increase its portion from Plymouth resulted in more difficulties for the priory, however. At the request of Robert, Clement VI had issued a mandate to the Abbot of Buckland and Master Walter de Botrioux, a canon of Exeter Cathedral, to sequester the fruits of the vicarage of St. Andrew, Plymouth, until the issue had been resolved once and for all at the curia.⁹⁸ These two men displayed a reluctance to yield to the priory a sequestered quarterly payment of 12.5 marks even after the case had been decided at Rome. Bishop Grandisson was enraged at this violation of the episcopally-approved augmentation, and cited the two men to appear before him and explain their actions.

Ultimately, it seems that some sort of compromise was reached whereby Plympton Priory received an increase in the amount it received from Plymouth, although not as much as Bishop Grandisson had tried to obtain for them. According to the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, Plympton Priory received £23 in 1535 from the church of Plymouth, a sum which consisted of £15 from tithes and an annual pension of £8 from the vicar.⁹⁹ The figures which appeared in the *Taxatio* of 1291 were £5 6s 8d from the church and £4 6s 8d from the vicar of Sutton (Plymouth). These latter amounts must be viewed with caution, however, given the unreliability of information on appropriated churches in the *Taxatio*.¹⁰⁰

While conflicts between religious houses and bishops are a common feature of medieval religious history, relations between Plympton Priory

⁹⁷ *CPL* III, p. 263. The sum was to be paid to the priory in portions at four times during the year.

⁹⁸ *Reg. Grandisson* II, p. 1071.

⁹⁹ In addition, Plympton received £9 in tithes from Plymouth’s dependent chapel of St. Budeaux (*MDE* #28, p. 148).

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix Three.

and the bishops of Exeter seem generally to have been smooth and mutually supportive. The priory's dealings with Bishop Bartholomew and Bishop Henry Marshal in the twelfth and early thirteenth century are good examples of this. The tensions between priory and bishop during the episcopate of Walter Bronescombe seem to have been due to unfortunate and impolitic decisions on the part of the canons, as well as to the forcefulness of Bishop Bronescombe's personality. Relations between the equally strong-minded Bishop Grandisson and Plympton also had their rough spots, but this does not mean that the priory's bishop and patron was unwilling to assist the canons when called to do so. Overall, when examining the history of Plympton Priory in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, one sees a religious house which generally—albeit with occasional lapses—displayed a good understanding of what was required in order to maintain its rights and churches and to enhance its spiritual income.

CHAPTER SIX

PLYMPTON PRIORY AND THE LAITY: CHALLENGES TO THE AUTHORITY OF THE PRIORY

As has been demonstrated, the canons of Plympton Priory displayed an abiding interest in the protection of their rights to the sources of their spiritual income. This chapter throws into high relief the competing conceptions of the purpose of *spiritualia*: for the laity, churches and chapels were primarily meant to be sites of divine worship, and the main duty of their incumbents was to attend to the spiritual needs of the parishioners. Whatever the state of pastoral care in these parishes in earlier times, by the later Middle Ages significant segments of the lay population came to perceive it as inadequate. From the point of view of the canons of Plympton, churches and chapels provided income that would support the canons in their duties of reciting the Office and celebrating Masses in the conventual church. The attempts to derive greater incomes from their spiritualities did not necessarily indicate an indifference on the part of the canons towards the state of pastoral care in the parishes under their jurisdiction. Indeed, it is due to the limitations of the sources that we tend to hear only of the complaints and the tensions between parishioners and priory; lesser disputes may have been settled peacefully by the priory and laity without resort to the bishop or the Crown. However, it is hard to escape the impression that a gap was widening in the late Middle Ages between laity and canons in regard to lay expectations of what the priory was obligated to do for the parishioners. While the canons were pre-occupied with issues of management, of defending their rights to their *spiritualia* and making the most of them financially, the laity were beginning to consider their churches and chapels the *loci* of community identity.

Recent scholarship into parish life in late medieval England has shed light on the development of this sense of corporate identity. Katherine French has defended the notion of a parish as a community “defined by a broader range of characteristics than administrative necessities, geographic borders, or social similarity,” a community in which religious rituals and celebrations were key components in the

formation of a “sense of belonging.”¹ One of the duties which was central in this process was the upkeep of the parish church: as Eamon Duffy has pointed out, “what was imposed on the laity as their collective responsibility became the focus of their corporate awareness.”² In the thirteenth century, fabric funds appeared in various English parishes for the purpose of collecting and managing donations for the maintenance of the church building and of items such as books and vestments necessary for the services held within it.³ These fabric funds were controlled by lay parishioners, and, along with the development of the office of churchwarden, indicate the increasing involvement of the laity in the day-to-day administration of parish life. That these responsibilities were expressions of lay desire to gain some amount of control over the symbol of their community identity, rather than unwelcome burdens imposed by Church authorities, can be seen in the zeal with which parishioners engaged in programs of rebuilding the naves of their churches. In one case from the diocese of Exeter, 460 parishioners of the church of Bodmin, which belonged to the Augustinian canons of Bodmin Priory, between 1469 and 1472 paid the substantial sum of £270 to rebuild the nave.⁴ Thousands of parish churches in England experienced renovations, alterations, or enlargements from the fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries; the collective effort and collective investment required to mount these programs demonstrates the powerful identification between community and parish church in this period.⁵

Another development of this period was that parishioners who attended chapels of ease—chapels dependent on a mother church—began to agitate for full parochial rights for their chapels, including the performance of the Mass and the creation of burial grounds. The status of these chapels reflected the fact that parish boundaries had been fixed by the early thirteenth century; these boundaries did not necessarily take into account community borders or the possibility of

¹ Katherine L. French, *The People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval Diocese* (Philadelphia, 2001), pp. 21–2.

² Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400–c. 1580*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, 2005), p. 133.

³ Andrew Brown, *Church and Society in England, 1000–1500* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 90–1. It was during the thirteenth century that parishioners became responsible for the care of the naves of their parish churches.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁵ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 132.

community growth.⁶ As parishioners increasingly came to see their places of worship as reflections of corporate identity, they also displayed a readiness to complain to the courts and to the bishops about neglect on the part of those charged with their spiritual care. As R.N. Swanson has pointed out,⁷ between the Black Death and the Reformation, challenges by parishioners of chapels to the rights of the mother church increased and court cases became common. Parishioners of a chapel might openly defy the parish church and obtain their own priest for their chapel, “effectively declari[ng] independence,” but more commonly the legal action and papal appeals resulted in a compromise in which the mother church would retain its status and receive a pension from the chapel but the chapel would gain the right of burial and develop into something “which was tantamount to an independent parish.”⁸ Such court cases could go on for years, however, and were a real test of the determination of the chapel-goers to expand the rights of their places of worship.

This chapter investigates the expression of lay discontent at Plympton Priory’s governance of its churches and chapels from the fourteenth up to the early sixteenth centuries. For the most part we will explore how the aspirations of the parishioners manifested themselves in regard to the gaining of greater independence for chapels dependent on the priory, but on occasion—as at St. Kew and Plymouth—lay dissatisfaction with the overlordship of the priory expressed itself in both the spiritual and the temporal spheres. Consequently, no artificial distinction will be made here between events in these two realms, even though the primary focus will be on the priory’s role in the cure of souls, and the perceptions and reactions of the laity.

St. Kew

An early example of this popular willingness to challenge the authority of religious institutions in the diocese of Exeter was the court case

⁶ Robert N. Swanson, ‘Parochialism and Particularism: The Dispute over the Status of Ditchford Fray, Warwickshire, in the Early Fifteenth Century,’ in *Medieval Ecclesiastical Studies in Honour of Dorothy M. Owen*, eds. M.J. Franklin and Christopher Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 241–2.

⁷ Robert N. Swanson, *Church and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1993), p. 219.

⁸ Swanson, ‘Parochialism and Particularism,’ p. 243.

brought by a group of Cornishmen against Plympton Priory in the first years of the fourteenth century. The church in question was St. Kew, which has been previously discussed as the source of troubles for Plympton in the 1260s.⁹ As has been mentioned in Chapter One, at the Cornish Eyre of 1302 a group of Cornishmen complained that the prior of Plympton was not fulfilling his duties to the church of St. Kew.¹⁰ According to Cornish tradition, King Edgar (959–75) had given the church to the canons of Plympton minster with two carucates of land and a hundred shillings' rent “for the purpose of supporting two of them in perpetual residence at Lanow in order to offer hospitality, distribute alms, and celebrate divine service for the souls of the donor and his successors.”¹¹ The Cornishmen contended that for the last fifteen years there had been no canons at St. Kew and hence no services had been performed there. The prior responded that the priory had received St. Kew as a gift from William Warelwast, and he produced William's charter and Henry II's confirmation charter as proof. Since presumably no conditions regarding services were mentioned in these documents, the case against the prior would seem to have lacked validity.

The assize court of 1305 found the traditional account of the Cornishmen to be more convincing than that of the prior nonetheless, and the court ordered the prior to re-institute the two canons at St. Kew.¹² The prior appealed this judgement to the king, but in 1307 Edward I only conceded that secular clergy (the vicar as well as a chaplain) might be allowed to take the place of regular canons obliged to serve at St. Kew.¹³ This was not the last of this matter, however. Throughout the fourteenth century, Plympton Priory endured challenges to its ownership of land at St. Kew,¹⁴ challenges which were sometimes explicitly linked with the priory's duties to maintain divine services at the church.

At first, the entries in the *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous* seem to refer to straightforward allegations of violation of the Statute of Mortmain by the priory. This statute had been passed in 1279 in order

⁹ See Chapter Five.

¹⁰ Picken, ‘The ‘Landochou’ Charter,’ p. 36.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p. 37.

¹³ *CPR*, Edward I vol. 4 1301–07, p. 512.

¹⁴ In the remaining records, “Lannow” is the name more frequently used for this area, but for the sake of preventing confusion “St. Kew” will continue to be used here.

to control the transfer of property into the “dead hands”¹⁵ of religious houses. While the statute forbade the conveyance of property to religious houses, the Crown could still issue licences permitting alienations. Indeed, the actual aim of the statute was likely not the prohibition of the transferral of all lands and advowsons to the religious houses—an unrealistic goal—but the requirement that all such transferrals be sanctioned by royal licences.¹⁶ In Plympton Priory’s case, one of the royal escheators, William Trussel, after holding an inquisition of office, found that the prior and convent had acquired two acres in fee in “Talkogon”¹⁷ from one Richard Fot, without a licence, after the statute had been passed.¹⁸ On October 14, 1331, Edward III wrote Trussel in regard to his seizing of the lands of St. Kew and Talkogon from the priory.¹⁹ Trussel’s version was that he had not done so, but that he had only confiscated certain chattels belonging to the priory as he had found by inquisition that the canons of Plympton had not taken care to distribute bread to the poor there for twenty years.²⁰ It seems that Trussel had been following normal procedures concerning violations in mortmain: the escheator, upon discovering that a religious house had acquired land without a licence, would seize the property, hold an inquisition to determine its worth, and “collect this sum annually until he was ordered to surrender the holding into other hands.”²¹

In his letter, King Edward III cited the decision of his grandfather to allow the canons to appoint secular clergy “to celebrate divine service, distribute alms, and exercise hospitality in the name of the prior and canons” as such service “could be more honestly and suitably celebrated by secular priests than by men of religion dwelling outside the convent

¹⁵ Such land was considered “dead” to the rest of society because the religious houses, as theoretically immortal institutions, would possess it for eternity.

¹⁶ Wood-Legh, *Studies in Church Life in England*, pp. 61, 69. Wood-Legh’s conclusion was that the law, according to this interpretation, was “rigorously enforced” and that “the obtaining of a royal licence was a real necessity.”

¹⁷ The land, also called “Taltogon” and “Talcogow,” was located near St. Kew.

¹⁸ *CCR Edward III* vol. 2, 1330–33, p. 469.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 349. It seems that the prior had written to the king in the interim about this matter, as Edward III’s letter of May 27, 1332 made reference to the king having found out from the prior that the lands had not been acquired after the Statute of Mortmain (*CCR Edward III* vol. 2, 1330–33, p. 469).

²⁰ *CCR Edward III* vol. 2, 1330–33, p. 349. Trussel claimed that the priory was obliged to give out 4.5d worth of bread at St. Kew twice a week.

²¹ Sandra Raban, *Mortmain Legislation and the English Church, 1279–1500* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 73.

in a private place.”²² He ordered the escheator to cease interfering with the land or goods of the prior.²³ The immediate result, however, was that another inquisition was made on December 14, 1331, into the priory’s alleged acquisition of land at Talkogon near St. Kew.²⁴ It was found that the priory was “seised thereof before the publication of the statute from time before memory.”²⁵ The priory seems not to have received immediate satisfaction, however, as Edward III was writing to William Trussel again on May 27, 1332, telling him not to meddle any further with the priory’s lands at St. Kew and Talkogon and to restore the issues of the lands.²⁶ In 1332 the priory also received a pardon for having acquired land at Trevynek—a village near St. Kew—from a Nicholas de Tregellast without a licence, in violation of the statute.²⁷

Fifty years would pass before royal intervention was required again in the matter of St. Kew. In 1361, Prior Robert Forde—who likely thought that the matter had been resolved—granted two carucates of land at St. Kew to John Treury and his sons Richard and Roger, as well as to William Caly and Parnell Persoun, for their lives.²⁸ Since the prior had neglected to obtain a royal licence to do this, the king’s escheator, John de Aston, again seized the lands. Even though Edward III pardoned the prior for this action in 1376–77, the seizure seems to have been in

²² *CCR* Edward III vol. 2, 1330–33, p. 349.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 349–50.

²⁴ *CIM* vol. 2 (1307–49), #1265, p. 309.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *CCR* Edward III vol. 2, 1330–33, p. 469. The king reiterated that the priory had owned this land from before the statute of Mortmain, according to the findings of the 1331 inquisition. Edward III sent this order again to the new escheator, Henry le Gulden, on February 3, 1333, as William Trussel had been removed from office before it could be carried out (*CCR* Edward III vol. 3, 1333–37, p. 14).

²⁷ *CPR* Edward III vol. 2, 1330–34, p. 304. Problems regarding this land seem to have recurred several decades later when the prior petitioned the Black Prince (also the Duke of Cornwall), who was staying at Plympton at this time, regarding it in 1355: according to the prior, Prior Matthew de Mimminglond had acquired a ferling of land at Trevynek without licence, which constituted a violation of the statute of Mortmain. As a consequence William Trussel seized it, “extending” the land back to the priory for a rent of 5s a year. The prior complained that even though he had been pardoned by the king for violation of the statute, the priory was still being forced to pay the 5s. The Black Prince ordered his auditors to look into this. They found that the exaction of the money was indeed unjust, and recommended that the prince order his men to make restitution to the priory (*The Register of Edward, The Black Prince* Vol. 2: ‘The White Book of Cornwall, 1351–1365’ [London: HMSO, 1931], pp. 85, 91–2).

²⁸ *CCR*, Richard II vol. 2, 1381–85, p. 316. The land at Talkogon near St. Kew is variously said to have been two Cornish acres or a messuage and a Cornish acre. The standard carucate in Devon was 64 acres; a Cornish acre was about 40–60 acres.

effect until at least 1383, when Richard II had to order his escheator, William of Brightleigh, to cease bothering Plympton Priory about the St. Kew land and to deliver to the prior any issues from it.²⁹

Less than a decade later, however, the troubles sprang up again: an inquisition was taken *ex officio* in April, 1391 and it found, once again, that King Edgar had given the manor and advowson of St. Kew to the canons of Plympton for the support of two canons to say Masses for the souls of the king and his ancestors and for the distribution of alms to the poor.³⁰ The inquisitors found that the priory had withdrawn the canons, as well as alms and the maintenance of the chapel³¹ for the previous sixty years. As a consequence, it was declared that Plympton Priory had to forfeit the manor and the advowson of St. Kew to the king. This indeed occurred, but the prior quickly appealed the case: on June 28, 1391, King Richard II wrote his escheator, John Haule, to tell him to return the issues of the manor and advowson to Plympton Priory, as justices in chancery had found that the seizure had been “insufficient and unlawful.”³² Whether this was the resolution of the issue is not entirely clear: on July 10, the lands of Talkogon and Trevyneke and their issues were committed to the prior at Westminster by mainprise of John Tille and John Lecche of Devon.³³ The justices allowed the priory’s enjoyment of these lands until a court decision was reached as to whether they belonged to the Crown or the prior.³⁴

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *CIM*, vol. 5, 1387–93, p. 175. The value of the manor was stated to be £5, and the advowson £50.

³¹ Ibid. The record of the inquisition states that the canons were obliged to give alms to forty poor every Wednesday and Friday. One of the canons was supposed to hold services in the chapel in the churchyard, and the chapel was to be maintained at the priory’s expense. In addition to withdrawing the canons and the alms, the prior had ceased to repair the chancel. Traditionally, maintenance of chancels fell to the holder of the benefice, whereas the parishioners were expected to care for the nave of their church. This is exemplified by a visitation of the archdeaconry of Totnes in 1342, when the parishioners at Dean Prior (another church appropriated to Plympton Priory) were enjoined to fix poorly-painted images, a bad roof, and broken windows, under pain of a 40s penalty. The chancel, the responsibility of the prior, was in such a poor condition that it could not be repaired for fewer than 16 marks. The prior had given the vicar, Sir Simon Stibbe, a mark towards the repair of his home, although the visitor felt that two marks were needed (George G. Coulton, ‘A Visitation of the Archdeaconry of Totnes in 1342,’ *English Historical Review* 26 [1911], 110).

³² *CCR*, Richard II vol. 4, 1389–92, p. 366.

³³ *Calendar of Fine Rolls*, Richard II vol. XI, 1391–99, pp. 4–5.

³⁴ The justices had the option to allow recovery of the lands in question by the alleged violators of the statute until a judgement was rendered, but “more often, especially

However, in 1393, a plea was still pending in Chancery between the Crown and the prior as to whom the land at St. Kew, as well as that at Trevynek, belonged.³⁵

In this complicated case, it is not always easy to identify the true reasons behind the harassment of the priory, for this is what seems to have been occurring. Despite the finding of the inquisition of 1331 that the priory had possessed the land at Talkogon from time immemorial, and despite Edward III's orders to his escheators to stop bothering the priory about this land, attempts to challenge the priory's rights recurred. Similarly, even though one might have assumed that the matter of the canons' obligations at St. Kew would have been settled in 1305 and 1307, by the end of the century they were back in court asserting their entitlement to St. Kew.

One must wonder to what extent the canons' alleged laxity about fulfilling the conditions of service supposedly attached to their tenure of St. Kew motivated these legal challenges. The court case of the Cornishmen in 1305 seems to have been the origin of the idea that Plympton Priory had been given the land and church of St. Kew by a king of England and that these could be regained. An ever cash-strapped Crown and over-zealous royal bureaucrats might have found such a temptation hard to resist. The accusation of 1391 that divine services were not being carried out strikes one as unconvincing, as the prior was presenting secular priests in the fourteenth century—most recently in 1362³⁶—and the priory had made an agreement with the vicar in 1355, Sir Henry Tresodorne, regarding the provision for support of a chaplain as well as the vicar at St. Kew.³⁷ There is no evidence in

as time went on, the property remained in the king's hands" (Raban, *Mortmain Legislation*, p. 74).

³⁵ *CCR*, Richard II vol. 5, 1392–96, p. 145.

³⁶ *Reg. Grandisson* III, p. 1480. A certificate from the time of the dissolution of the chantry chapels in the 1540s mentions that, according to a document found at Plympton Priory, at some point before the house was dissolved, a prior had also dedicated the tithes from some villages on the north side of the parish of St. Kew to pay for the employment of a priest to sing in the church and say prayers for the soul of the king; as a consequence, this priest was always referred to as the "king's priest" (*MDE*, p. 489).

³⁷ *Reg. Grandisson* II, pp. 1141–2. According to the terms of the agreement, the vicar and his successors would provide for the chaplain and his expenses, and they would also bear the responsibilities of repairing the chancel and maintaining the books of the church, as well as paying all episcopal and archidiaconal dues (all duties which had traditionally fallen to the priory as corporate rector). As a subsidy of these expenses, the priory granted to the vicar and his successors the great tithes of Bethbolegh,

the episcopal registers that the canons were derelict in their pastoral responsibilities.

However, there might have been more to this situation than is apparent. While we tend to hear only of the involvement of the escheators, these men may well have been acting upon the complaints of local inhabitants. Consequently, this may have been a case of people in Cornwall who wished to make difficulties for the priory, and possibly gain access to the lands in question for themselves. Raban found that “the escheators’ powers were a godsend to those with grievances against churchmen” and that religious houses were at some considerable risk of losing lands due to false accusations of violation of the statute.³⁸ Simple ignorance or confusion as to chronology on the part of the jurors at the inquisitions could also lead to unjust verdicts against accused religious houses.³⁹ However, the unrelenting challenges to Plympton Priory’s rights to St. Kew, Talkogon, and Trevynek over the course of the fourteenth century suggest that parties either in Cornwall or at Westminster—or both—were making concerted efforts to deprive the priory of these lands. In the case of the church and land at St. Kew, the accusations of neglect on the part of the canons may simply have served as a smokescreen for the real motivations of the accusers.

Plymouth

In the fourteenth century, the priory also began to experience difficulties regarding its spiritual and temporal authority in Plymouth. The beginnings of Plympton Priory’s rights over Plymouth are rather obscure, although they likely came about at some point in the twelfth century, probably as a result of benefactions from the Valletorts.⁴⁰ As lords of the

Tywartheny, Croppyngge, Hille, Tretheven, Dale, Nywetone, Red Smythe, and Penlengarou, all in the parish of St. Kew. This was in addition to what the vicar received from the manse and glebe-land (*Reg. Grandisson* III, pp. 1141–2).

³⁸ Raban, *Mortmain Legislation*, pp. 74–6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁴⁰ An inquisition made in 1281 at Exeter found that the manors of Maker, Plymouth, and Kings Tamerton had been given to Roger de Valletort by Henry I. The prior of Plympton testified that the vill of Sutton with the assize of bread and beer had belonged to the priors of the house “for many years,” having been granted by a charter of Henry III. Another inquisition in the same year found that the prior, aside from the assize of bread and beer, had had £14 9s 6.5d in rents from free tenants of Sutton “from time immemorial.” In another part of the town (Sutton Vautort), John de Valletort received

town, the priors were entitled to hold courts and views of frankpledge, the annual gatherings of men of the vill for the purpose of ensuring good behaviour.⁴¹ An inquisition into the rights of the prior of Plympton over Plymouth in 1385 demonstrated the range of seignorial rights the lord of the borough could exercise: the prior was entitled to the assize of bread and beer and assay of weights and measures (that is, the right to enforce standards in these areas). His authority consequently covered millers, bakers, butchers, sellers of wine and mead, cooks, and people who made bread outside the town but brought it into the borough to sell.⁴² Aside from the extensive control over a significant number of people which these rights implied, these privileges also served as sources of income for the priors, as they received set dues at the views of frankpledge and fines from transgressors at their courts and at the assizes. The canons of Plympton Priory administered their rights and properties in the town through a reeve, who was chosen by 12 tenants of the priory in Plymouth each year and presented by them to the priory's steward, who swore him into office.⁴³ The reeve collected tolls and fines due to the priory, while the steward presided over the court each Monday. King Henry III had granted Plympton Priory permission to hold a weekly market and an annual fair in Plymouth on the feast of St. John the Baptist.⁴⁴

During the fourteenth century, the citizens of towns which were monastic boroughs—that is, which had monasteries as their lords—began to chafe at the restrictions imposed on them. As Norman Trenholme explained in his monograph on English monastic boroughs, there were two main phases of discontent with monastic overlords in this period. Resistance first broke out in various towns such as St. Albans and Bury St. Edmunds in the 1320s to 1340s, and then broke out again in the wake of the revolt of 1381. In Trenholme's view, the sources of these conflicts tended to be “the failure of the monastic corporations to recognize the growing corporate spirit of the townsmen and to con-

certain rents and the Abbot of Buckland had the assize of bread and beer. The Crown received £4 from the port of Plymouth each year (*CPMR*, pp. 10–1).

⁴¹ At the view, the representative of the lord would check to see if every man who ought to be in frankpledge actually was. If one of the group of men was accused of a crime and did not present himself at the view, the town would be fined (Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, vol. 1, p. 570).

⁴² *CPMR*, pp. 11–2. See also *CIM*, vol. 4, 1377–88, #279, p. 160.

⁴³ *CIM*, vol. 4, 1377–88, #279, p. 160.

⁴⁴ *CPR*, Henry III vol. 4, 1247–58, p. 263.

cede them rights of self-government and of commercial control such as were obtained by royal boroughs.”⁴⁵ Of course, the monasteries were disinclined to make any such concessions if this meant a loss of income, and consequently tended to be intransigent in the face of demands for greater liberties on the part of the inhabitants of the boroughs.

At Plymouth, the first flare-up was in 1311, when burgesses tried to erect stalls in the market for the sale of fish, meat, and other goods without licence from the prior of Plympton.⁴⁶ The two parties agreed that the construction of unlicensed stalls would cease, and that the prior would build eighteen stalls to be rented out for a penny each to the burgesses. Perhaps this agreement gave the burgesses confidence, for a few years later, in 1317, they were seeking a royal inquisition into the jurisdictions of Plymouth, seemingly in the hope that if certain waste places in the town belonged to the king, Plymouth might be made a free borough and the burgesses would be allowed to run their own market and fair.⁴⁷ This did not come to pass, but discontent towards Plympton Priory continued to simmer.⁴⁸

In 1335, Plympton Priory’s bailiff for Plymouth and the collector of the priory’s rents in the town became a target of this hostility. John Hayward was attacked by people unknown who were “burning with demonic rage.”⁴⁹ The bailiff sought sanctuary in the church of St. Andrew’s in Plymouth, but the men broke down the doors, dragged him out, wounded him with swords, and beat him badly with cudgels, breaking his legs. It is not clear whether there was a specific or general grievance against the bailiff as rent-collector, or whether the attackers were attempting to vent their dissatisfaction with the overlordship of the priory by assaulting the representative of their authority in the town. Bishop Grandisson excommunicated the still-unknown assailants, but

⁴⁵ Norman M. Trenholme, *English Monastic Boroughs: A Study in Medieval History* (Columbia, 1927), p. 1.

⁴⁶ *CPMR*, p. 37. It seems that the issue of whether Plymouth might be made a free borough came up during the inquisition of 1281, when “Matthew de Clynedon found that it would neither prejudice the king nor any others if Plymouth were made a free borough, and the inhabitants free burgesses, saving the service to the lords” (*CPMR*, p. 11).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 35–6.

⁴⁸ Another possible outbreak may have occurred at Plympton in 1333, when Prior John of Englebourne had to obtain episcopal permission to reconcile the chapel of Plympton St. Mary after it was polluted by the spilling of blood. Grandisson ordered an inquiry into the incident (*Reg. Grandisson II*, pp. 714, 769).

⁴⁹ *Reg. Grandisson II*, pp. 788–9.

this seems not to have deterred those in Plymouth who were resentful of the priory's authority in the town.

The next year the ire of certain townsmen focused on the figure who represented the priory's spiritual influence in Plymouth, the vicar of St. Andrew's. It is perhaps no coincidence that at this time the vicar, Nicholas de Weylonde, was a canon of Plympton Priory. In 1336, a band of parishioners forcibly ejected the vicar from office and installed the cleric Roger de Trevelyiaux instead.⁵⁰ The mob broke into Weylonde's house, stole the contents⁵¹ as well as £20 in cash, and imprisoned Weylonde in Buckland Abbey with the collusion of the abbot. When Bishop Grandisson sent one of his officials, a priest named Walter de Kynelond, to read out letters on the bishop's behalf, the priest was attacked and driven away. On June 26, Grandisson charged the Abbot of Tavistock to put the town of Plymouth under an interdict, since the citizenry had failed to prevent these crimes and indeed had kept silent about them, a fact which suggests that the discontent against the priory was not confined to a small group of rabble-rousers. Grandisson also excommunicated the assailants, amongst whom were the vicar's assistant priest and two chantry priests at St. Andrew's.

Bishop Grandisson relaxed the sentence of excommunication against the rebels on August 9, 1336, when Trevelyiaux and the others threw themselves at his feet, begging for absolution and for the interdict to be lifted.⁵² Grandisson postponed the relaxation of the interdict, instead ordering John of Englebourne, prior of Plympton, to assemble the vicar, Nicholas de Weylonde, some other priests, respectable citizens of the town, and the other parishioners at the church of St. Andrew's in Plymouth.⁵³ The prior was to remind the parishioners of their crimes against God, the Church, their vicar, and the episcopal office, and exhort

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 814–5, 817–9, 823–4. Roger de Trevelyiaux was probably the same Roger de Trevikaus of Sutton who, on January 10, 1335, obtained from the Pope the reservation of a benefice in the gift of Plympton Priory—worth 20 marks with the cure of souls, and 15 marks without—at the request of Cardinal Matteo Orsini OP “whose cleric he is” (*CPL* II, p. 516). Needless to say, after this incident, the prior did not present him to a benefice. Roger seems to have felt that the priory should have presented him to St. Andrew's when it became vacant in 1334: Grandisson, in his mandate of May 28, 1336, dared him to prove his entitlement to the church (*Reg. Grandisson* II, pp. 814–5).

⁵¹ Cups, silver spoons, vessels, provisions, and bedding were specified (*Reg. Grandisson* II, p. 818).

⁵² *Reg. Grandisson* II, pp. 823–4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

them to mend their ways. After this, the prior, acting under episcopal authority, was to lift the interdict and solemnly celebrate Mass. The laying of the interdict seems to have had a sobering effect upon the populace, as there are no further records of violent outbursts against the priory. Nonetheless, by the end of the fourteenth century, dissatisfaction with the overlordship of the priory manifested itself again, this time in the form of a quest for a borough charter for Plymouth.

At Plymouth, the townspeople were successful at an earlier date than at other towns in obtaining freedom from monastic lordship,⁵⁴ although the process of gaining corporate status was still far from speedy. In the 1380s, one of the burgesses, Humphrey Passour, fraudulently obtained a royal writ, was elected mayor of Plymouth by certain people, and usurped the rights of the priory's reeve. Passour also took over the Monday court, keeping the steward away by force.⁵⁵ The royal inquisition of 1385, summoned at the request of the aggrieved prior, found that Passour had acted illegally, and that furthermore, his election as mayor was invalid because such a position had never existed at Plymouth.⁵⁶ While the rights of Plympton Priory in the town were re-asserted, tensions between religious and townsfolk continued until the canons decided to rid themselves of these troubles.⁵⁷ In 1439, the priory divested itself of most of its lands and its lordship over Plymouth in return for an annual fee-farm rent of £41.⁵⁸ It retained three messuages with gardens in Plymouth, St. Nicholas Island, the church of St. Andrew, and all of its lands and possessions in the parish of Maker.⁵⁹ Plymouth received its borough charter in the same year.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Many monastic boroughs, such as Bodmin (controlled by another Augustinian priory), had to wait until the dissolution to gain their charters (Trenholme, *English Monastic Borough*, p. 77).

⁵⁵ *CIM*, vol. 4, 1377–88, #279, p. 160; see also *CCR*, Richard II vol. 2, 1381–85, p. 507 and *CPR*, Richard II vol. 2, 1381–85, p. 597.

⁵⁶ *CIM*, vol. 4, 1377–88, #279, p. 160.

⁵⁷ *CPMR*, pp. 11–2.

⁵⁸ *MDE* #25 and 26, pp. 144–5. The fee-farm rent was reduced to £29 6s 8d in 1463–64 because of “the poverty into which the borough has fallen” (*CPMR*, p. 27). In 1533–34 an act of Parliament declared that the fee-farm rent would be discharged altogether in return for the appropriation of the churches of Ugborough and Blackawton to Plympton Priory (*CPMR*, pp. 12–3, 41–2).

⁵⁹ *Rotuli Parliamentorum; ut et petitiones, et placita in parlamento*, eds. Richard Blyke, John Strachey (London: [n.p.], 1780–1832), vol. 5, p. 19.

⁶⁰ Interestingly, in 1440, the mayor and commonalty of Plymouth rewarded Richard Trenode, a Bristol merchant, and Thomasine Venour of Plymouth, his sister and widow of William Venour, for the expenses and work they put into the gaining of the borough charter by making an agreement with the prior and convent of St. Germans.

The resistance of the canons of Plympton to relinquishing their rights over their borough of Plymouth was the typical response of religious in similar positions. In the later Middle Ages, after the initial flood of donations had dwindled to a trickle at many older houses, religious houses were reluctant to transfer to burgesses privileges which yielded dues, fines, and other forms of income. A cursory examination of English episcopal registers of the fourteenth century reveals that this was a time when many religious houses—Plympton Priory was hardly alone—were suffering from chronic indebtedness. This might well have rendered the religious houses even less willing to concede anything to the burgesses of their boroughs. The complaints of the townspeople regarding their rights should not be viewed in isolation from contemporary attempts by the laity to assert greater control over their spiritual lives, however: the two were complementary trends which had a significant impact on religion and society in late medieval England.

Disturbances at Chapels

Resistance to lay aspirations for greater self-government is especially evident in the dealings of Plympton Priory with the parishioners of its dependent chapels. These chapels were scattered around the area surrounding Plympton, ranging from Plymstock, a mere three miles away, to Sampford Spiney, about sixteen miles away on the edge of Dartmoor. Plympton Priory experienced more difficulties with parishioners of its chapels than the other Augustinian houses in the diocese. This was largely because, as an ancient mother-church in the district, it had a greater number of chapels. Neither Hartland Abbey, Frithelstock Priory,⁶¹ Bodmin Priory, nor St. Germans Priory seem to have possessed well-established chapels.⁶² Most of Plympton's chapels were

The mayor and burgesses paid the canons—for St. Germans was also an Augustinian priory—£200 to support a chaplain to say Masses for Trenode and Venour and their families at the altar of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the parish church of St. Andrew (*CPMR*, pp. 36–7).

⁶¹ The canons of Frithelstock were involved in an attempt to establish a chapel to house an image of the Virgin Mary in the fourteenth century, but Bishop Grandisson had grave doubts about this cult and ordered it suppressed and the chapel destroyed. See Nicholas Orme, 'Bishop Grandisson and Popular Religion,' *TDA* 124 (1992), 109–13.

⁶² Of course, since chapels did not constitute benefices and thus did not appear in records of institutions in the episcopal registers, knowledge of their existence is often

located in the prosperous South Hams region of Devon, and as the villages in which they were located expanded, so the desire for local autonomy developed. The prosperity of the region is reflected in the chapel values listed in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535 for Plympton Priory: it received annually £30 from Brixton, £62 from Plymstock, and over £43 from Wembury.⁶³ These incomes exceed those of many English parish churches, and even of smaller Augustinian houses.⁶⁴ In total, Plympton Priory received more than £195 from its chapels in 1535, a significant portion of its income from *spiritualia*, which was listed as £454 7s 2.5d in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*. With such large amounts at stake, it is no wonder that Plympton Priory tried its best to resist the agitation of its parishioners.

There were several types of chapels in the medieval parochial landscape. Firstly, there were domestic chapels, mostly in the homes of the gentry and nobility, for which episcopal licences had to be obtained.⁶⁵ Secondly, there were cult chapels, such as the one the canons of Frit-helstock tried to set up, which housed images of saints and attracted pilgrims.⁶⁶ Thirdly, there were “chapels-of-ease,” those centres of worship established to serve people in hamlets, villages, and towns who lived some distance from their parish churches.⁶⁷ Most of Plympton Priory’s chapels belonged in the last-mentioned category, although it did have a cult chapel dedicated to St. Mary on Plym Bridge,⁶⁸ and seemingly

sketchy. The dissolution records which specify *spiritualia* are most helpful in this regard. Along with the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, as printed in Oliver *MDE*, the lists of contents from the Minister’s Accounts identify chapels of each religious house. See *Lands of Dissolved Religious Houses*, Lists and Indexes Society Supplementary Series no. III vol. 1 (New York: Kraus Reprints, 1964), *passim*.

⁶³ *MDE* #28, p. 148.

⁶⁴ For example, Beeston Priory had an income in 1535 of £43, Hempton Priory £32, and Wymondley Priory £29 (*MRH*, pp. 137–45 *passim*).

⁶⁵ Nicholas Orme, ‘The Later Middle Ages and the Reformation,’ in *Unity and Variety*, p. 63; see also, by the same author, ‘Church and Chapel in Medieval England,’ *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Series, 6 (1996), 76–80. Domestic chapels became very common in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *CPL* V, p. 304. The indulgence of the Portiuncula was granted in 1400 to penitents who gave alms for the repair and maintenance of the conventual church at Plympton, the chapel of Plympton St. Mary, and St. Mary Plymbridge. In 1450, the prior of Plympton obtained papal permission to appoint priests to be confessors at St. Mary Plymbridge (*CPL* X, p. 63). For the issuing of indulgences for the benefit of chapels and bridges, see Nicholas Orme, ‘Indulgences in the Diocese of Exeter, 1100–1536,’ *TDA* 120 (1988), 24.

some sort of cult chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas on what is now called Drake's Island off Plymouth.⁶⁹ Finally, there were chantry chapels, which could be free-standing buildings or altars in a church where priests, supported by an endowment, would say private masses in perpetuity for the souls of the founder and his or her family. Chantry chapels became increasingly popular from the thirteenth century onwards, and a "substantial minority" were served by the religious.⁷⁰ Plympton Priory may well have permitted chantry chapels to have been built in its conventual church, as archaeological excavations have revealed that several chapels were added to the south aisle and the south transept in the fifteenth century.⁷¹

The Church tried to legislate the proper relationships between mother churches and their chapels by carefully defining the privileges of the latter so as not to conflict with those of parish churches. Parishioners of chapels still had to pay tithes to the incumbent of their parish church and to contribute towards to the upkeep of the church, and they were required to attend Sunday services at the church.⁷² The chaplains who presided at the chapels had to take vows of obedience to rectors or mother-churches and pay them a small sum.⁷³ The lack of baptismal fonts and burial grounds⁷⁴ at chapels was also a mark of their subject status. The central issue was that the greater the number of rituals allowed to be performed at the chapels—such as burial, the Mass, celebration of feast-days, processions—the greater the likelihood was that the chapels-of-ease would become independent entities. The ultimate threat would be that the chapel might attain full parochial rights and consequently owe the mother church nothing from its offerings

⁶⁹ *MDE*, p. 129.

⁷⁰ Kathleen L. Wood-Legh, *Perpetual Chantries in Britain* (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 5, 130.

⁷¹ Cynthia Gaskell Brown, 'Plympton Priory, Devon,' Report for the Devon Religious Houses Project, 1986–87, p. 4 (Typescript, Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery). See also Paul Gibbons, 'Plympton Priory: A Review of the Physical Remains,' in *Archaeological Investigations and Research in Plymouth, Vol. 2: 1994–95*, ed. Kenneth Ray, Sarah Noble, and Sophia Sharif (Plymouth: Plymouth Archaeology Occasional Publications, #4, 1998), p. 101.

⁷² Orme, 'Later Middle Ages,' p. 63. Usually services could only be held at the chapels on weekdays or saints' days.

⁷³ Moorman, *Church Life*, pp. 12–3.

⁷⁴ According to the Winchester Statutes of 1262 × 1265, chapels with graveyards were to be built in every village more than two miles from the parish church (*CS*, vol. 2 pt. 1, p. 704). This was the ideal, however, and could hardly have been expected to have been implemented in the large parishes with low population densities of rural Devon.

or tithes. As R.N. Swanson has noted, “Mother churches could rarely afford the secession of their chapelries, although such attempts were common [in the period 1350–1540].”⁷⁵ Katherine French sees these attempts on the part of chapel-goers to gain convenient access to the sacraments as evidence of “the interconnection of place and corporate religious activity” and of the “bonds of community” which tied the laity to the parish.⁷⁶

An example of the kinds of obligations Plympton Priory might have to one of its chapels can be found in the 1429 agreement between Tavistock Abbey and the priory concerning the chapel at Plymstock.⁷⁷ The document required Plympton Priory to supply a secular or regular chaplain to say matins, Mass, and vespers on Sundays and on other days on which work was forbidden.⁷⁸ The chaplain would provide the sacraments and sacramentals⁷⁹ for the abbots’ tenants at Plymstock and would perform Mass every Wednesday and Friday. This chaplain would also have to be present in the parish for Ash Wednesday and the three days following it, and for the two weeks before Easter. According to the agreement, Plympton Priory also had to supply a chaplain to stay overnight in a room next to the old chapel at the priory gate in order to administer the sacraments of Eucharist, baptism, and last rites when these were urgently required by the people of Plymstock.⁸⁰ While these requirements may have been more strictly laid out at Plymstock than at other chapels which did not have the option of complaining to another powerful religious house, they are indicative of the kind of standards of service which chaplains could be expected to meet.

The first disturbances regarding the priory’s chapels occurred at Plympton in 1385, generally a time of social unrest in England as the country was still experiencing the aftermath of the revolt of 1381. Just as the townspeople of Plymouth resumed their attempts to gain

⁷⁵ Swanson, *Church and Society*, p. 219. In Swanson’s article, ‘Standards of Livings’ in *Religious Belief and Ecclesiastical Careers*, he describes a prolonged “row” between Merton College and a dependent chapel of its appropriated church, Great Wolford, which began in 1400 (pp. 174–5).

⁷⁶ French, *The People of the Parish*, pp. 25–7.

⁷⁷ For discussion of the Tavistock-Plympton conflict over Plymstock, see Chapter Four.

⁷⁸ *Reg. Lacy* IV, p. 270.

⁷⁹ Sacramentals were rites lacking the status of sacraments but still approved by the Church, such as the blessing of wedding rings and baptismal water, as well as the purification (also known as churching) of women.

⁸⁰ *Reg. Lacy* IV, pp. 270–1.

borough status, the parishioners of Plympton St. Mary incurred episcopal disapproval for instituting a dedication feast at their chapel.⁸¹ The chapel of Plympton St. Mary, which is now the parish church of the community, was situated in the cemetery of Plympton Priory, a mere stone's throw from the conventual church. Bishop Brantingham ordered the parishioners to stop infringing on his rights and those of the prior and cease the celebration of this Feast at their chapel or face excommunication.⁸² On the same day as the bishop sent his mandate (November 10, 1385), Master John Lugans, Rector of Petrockstowe, also received a royal commission to "hear and determine a dispute which had arisen between the prior and convent of Plympton and the parishioners of Plympton St. Mary."⁸³ The parishioners and their chaplain, Alfred Gyst, were undaunted; the next year, Bishop Brantingham cited Gyst to appear before him for violating his original mandate.⁸⁴ At the same time, in another mandate, the Bishop wrote to Gyst and the chaplains of Plympton St. Thomas, Wembury, Plymstock, Brixton, and Shaugh chapels, stating that it had come to his attention that some chaplains had celebrated divine services on Sundays and other feast days before Mass was celebrated at the parish church and that some had also celebrated private Masses on such days.⁸⁵ Bishop Brantingham ordered them to stop these practices, or else they would be cited to appear before him at Exeter Cathedral.

That tensions were indeed running high at this time between the priory and some members of the laity in the area is suggested by a memorandum of mainprise made in Chancery in 1387 under pain of £100 by various men for the good behaviour of four others, "that they shall not levy any armed force, nor make or procure to be made any unlawful assemblies contrary to the peace, especially against the prior and convent of Plympton or their house, nor do or procure anything tending to breach the peace or to the terror of the said prior and con-

⁸¹ The point of a dedication feast was to commemorate the day on which the church had been dedicated by a bishop. Bishops often granted indulgences to those who came to the church as a means of helping the parishioners to remember the date. See Nicholas Orme, *English Church Dedications with a Survey of Cornwall and Devon* (Exeter, 1996), p. 8.

⁸² *Reg. Brantyngham* I, p. 593.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 623.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 622.

vent or others of the people.”⁸⁶ This effort to ensure good behaviour may not be directly connected to the actions of the parishioners and chaplain of Plympton St. Mary, but the possibility of a wider-spread hostility towards the priory, including intimidation by threat of physical force, ought not to be ruled out.

Thwarted in their attempts to hold a dedication feast, the parishioners of Plympton St. Mary continued to incur the wrath of Prior John Shaldon by having their palms blessed on Palm Sunday by their own hired chaplain and holding their own procession rather than going to the conventual church for these purposes. Eamon Duffy has called processions “archetypal parish gatherings” which expressed “the religious dimension of community” which was so much a feature of late medieval civic identity.⁸⁷ In England, Palm Sunday processions were possibly second only to those on Corpus Christi day in terms of liturgical complexity and interest to the laity.⁸⁸ It is not surprising, then, that the Palm Sunday processions at Plympton St. Mary should prove to be a flash point in the struggles between the parishioners and the canons. The response of the prior was to seek in 1386–87 an archiepiscopal confirmation of the obligation of the parishioners to attend the priory for the Palm Sunday rituals; he subsequently obtained a papal confirmation as well.⁸⁹ The people of Plympton St. Mary continued to defy

⁸⁶ *CCR*, Richard II vol. 3, 1381–85, p. 315. The mainprise meant that the four men—Guy Brit, Thomas Sturte, John Wille, and John Gybbe of Chaddlewood—became bound for the appearance in court of the accused (John Newenham, Peter Silverloke, John Wogwille, and William Stone). On the same day the former made mainprise for another group, John Wille of Langage, John Puaus, Roger Pral, Thomas Jone, Robert Elys “tincler,” William Porter, Ralph Baker, John Crokker, and Ralph Hille. Chaddlewood and Langage were villages to the east of Plympton.

⁸⁷ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 136.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–7.

⁸⁹ Referred to in *Reg. Lacy* II, pp. 36–8. For the confirmation by William Courteney, Archbishop of Canterbury, who had recently conducted a visitation of the diocese of Exeter, see Joseph H. Dahmus, *The Metropolitan Visitations of William Courteney, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1381–1396* (Urbana, 1950), pp. 34–5. The archiepiscopal confirmation re-affirmed the status of Plympton St. Mary as a dependent chapel and made clear that the parishioners were responsible for paying the costs of maintaining the prayer-books in the chapel. The services in the chapel were to be conducted according to the Sarum rite, and the feast of the dedication of the chapel was to occur the day after the feast of SS. Simon and Jude (October 28th). On that day as well as on other major feast days, the parishioners were required to make offerings in certain specified amounts (a minimum of a quarter-penny, half-penny, or penny). They also had to proceed to the conventual church on the day after the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14th), the dedication day of the church, “in acknowledgement of their loyalty” (although they were not required to make an offering when celebrating

the priors for decades, though, and in 1436–37 Prior Nicholas Selman appealed to Bishop Lacy to prevent the parishioners from persisting in this defiance.⁹⁰

Finally, in 1441, arbitrators drew up a composition between Plympton Priory and thirteen men of Plympton St. Mary to settle the problems between them.⁹¹ The status of the chapel was a matter of compromise: it was to be a parochial and curate chapel dependent on the mother church (the conventual church of the priory), and the parishioners would belong to both the chapel and the mother church. Except for the priory's servants, who could use either church or chapel, the parishioners would receive the sacraments and sacramentals at the chapel from a chaplain chosen by the priory. In addition, the priory would send a canon to serve with the chaplain on Sundays and feast days, in continuance of another tradition.⁹²

The Palm Sunday problem was resolved by laying out very specifically the procedures to be followed on that day. Two churchwardens would go to Prime Mass at the priory on that day and offer 7d to the canon celebrating the Mass in recognition of the priory's status as mother church to the chapel. After that, the chaplain of Plympton St. Mary would carry the palms to the chapel, bless them, and distribute them to the parishioners, who would then process around the chapel. Their presence at the procession in the conventual church would no longer be required; they could also process in the chapel on Rogation Days, Ascension Day, and St. Mark's Day.⁹³

Further clauses of the composition of 1441 specified that the priory would repair the stalls and lecterns in the choir and chancel of Plympton St. Mary chapel.⁹⁴ As well, Prior Nicholas agreed that the priory would no longer grant licences for burial within the chapel without consulting the chapel's wardens and without obtaining an indemnity of 6s 8d to cover the disturbance and the damage to walls, pavement, and furniture of the nave during interments. He also agreed that the priory would not unreasonably withhold licence for burial. Bishop Lacy ratified this agreement between the two parties, and set penalties

the dedication of the conventual church). Finally, the parishioners had to participate in the Palm Sunday procession at the conventual church.

⁹⁰ *Reg. Lacy* II, pp. 36–8.

⁹¹ *Reg. Lacy* III, pp. 244–56.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 248–9.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 249–50.

to ensure co-operation: if the parishioners did not offer the 7d to the priory each Palm Sunday, services would be suspended at the chapel. If the canons of Plympton Priory failed to perform their duties on Palm Sunday, offices and Prime Mass would be suspended on that day.⁹⁵ In 1450, Pope Nicholas V confirmed this agreement.⁹⁶

The provision made in the agreement of 1441 concerning burial within the chapel is notable, as the right to bury the dead locally seems to have been a major element in the movement for greater autonomy amongst chapel parishioners. There are numerous examples from the fifteenth century in the diocese of the laity petitioning the bishops of Exeter for burial privileges for their chapels rather than enduring the inconvenience of carrying the dead to the mother church for interment. At a time when prayers for the dead were such an important part of lay piety, being buried in one's own community, where surviving friends and relatives would be more likely to remember to pray for one's soul, was an important consideration.⁹⁷

The people of Plymstock demonstrated their dissatisfaction with this tradition in 1448 by refusing to transport the body of one Thomas Walter to Plympton for a funeral Mass and interment in the churchyard.⁹⁸ The distance was not great—about three miles—but it seems that distance was less of an issue than the desire to assert the community's independence of the priory. Bishop Lacy intervened, asking Prior William Hyll to grant an exceptional licence, without prejudice to his rights, for Walter's burial in the chapel or churchyard at Plymstock, as by that point the body had been lying unburied in the chapel for seven days and was in an advanced state of decomposition. Lacy pointed out that the smell and condition of the body were such that the people of Plymstock could not be compelled to take it to Plympton without danger, scandal, and offence to human nature.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 252–5. This was in addition to the staggeringly large penalty of 1,000 marks already stipulated in the composition.

⁹⁶ *CPL* X, pp. 61–2. For a study of another dispute involving a house of Augustinian canons and parishioners receiving the sacraments in the nave of the conventual church, see Janet Burton, 'Priory and Parish: Kirkham and its Parishioners, 1496–7,' in *Monasteries and Society in Medieval Britain: Proceedings of the 1994 Harlaxton Symposium*, Harlaxton Medieval Studies, VI, ed. B. Thompson (Stamford, 1999), pp. 329–47.

⁹⁷ French, *The People of the Parish*, p. 25. French relates the account of the people of Leigh-on-Mendip in Somerset petitioning the pope for burial rights for their chapel in 1405.

⁹⁸ *Reg. Lacy* III, pp. 269–71. Walter was a Wembury man who had died while on a visit to Plymstock.

Whether Prior Hyll granted the licence is not known, but a few months later Bishop Lacy was writing him again to grant special licences for the burial of the deceased of Plymstock at their chapel “pending a delayed arbitration between the priory and John Harry and fellow parishioners about right of burial there.”⁹⁹ The parishioners ended up initiating a lawsuit against the priory in the Court of Arches, in the midst of which Plymstock suffered from a “severe pestilence.” The still-defiant parishioners “utterly refused” to bring the dead to Plympton, and once again the priory granted special licences for burial at Plymstock.¹⁰⁰ The ultimate resolution of the court case is, unfortunately, not known.

Other chapels attained the right of burial seemingly with fewer struggles. By the late fifteenth century, the canons of Plympton may have felt that the costs of court battles exceeded the sums given as burial-offerings, and consequently were willing to make peace with their parishioners. In 1477, the priory granted the right of burial to their parochial chapel at Brixton.¹⁰¹ This agreement defines the exact obligations of the prior to the chapel: once a year, he would send a canon or secular priest to the chapel for “all divine services and ministrations, all sacraments and sacramentals,” and every Sunday and feast day would perform Mass, matins, and evensong.¹⁰² For these services, the parishioners would pay 13s 4d, five times a year, in even portions. Interestingly, in this case, the parties set out what would happen in the case of multiple burials on one day: the prior would receive 1s 6d if two men or women were brought to the chapel for burial on the same day, 9d if more than three servants or children were brought.

In 1482, Prior David Bercle and John Stubbes, perpetual vicar of Plymouth, sought episcopal permission to allow the chaplain of St. Budeaux, a chapel dependent of St. Andrew’s, Plymouth, to perform burials and baptisms, and to continue to hold the traditional divine

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 271–2.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 272–3.

¹⁰¹ H. Montagu Evans, ‘Wembury: Its Bay, Church, and Parish: Part 1,’ *TDA* 41 (1909), Appendix III, 284. Evans does not mention the location of this document. That it did or does indeed exist is corroborated by Oliver, who mentions it in the *MDE*, p. 132. By its nature, it most likely would belong in the unpublished episcopal registers of Exeter of the later fifteenth century.

¹⁰² Evans, ‘Wembury,’ 284. If the churchwardens and parishioners wished to have a second evensong on a Sunday afternoon—the first evensong being held right after Mass—they were to provide the priest with meat and drink.

services there.¹⁰³ Bercle and Stubbes also agreed to pay the salary for the chaplain and build him a suitable manse, thirty feet long and sixteen feet wide, adjoining the chapel of St. Budeaux.

While the priory relented with some chapels, it remained resistant to the demands of some parishioners until the end. In 1535, the churchwarden and a number of parishioners of Wembury wrote a letter of complaint to King Henry VIII, asserting that the prior of Plympton made £50 per annum from the parish, but the closest priest was at Plympton, four miles away.¹⁰⁴ They claimed that many people had died without the benefit of last rites or baptism. They cited a number of examples, such as John Weryn, who sent in great haste for a priest to christen a sick child, and waited at the church from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The child died before the priest arrived. Also, on one Easter Monday when three women had come to make their purification, the prior did not send a priest for any divine services. The only services at the chapel were on Sunday, when a priest or canon would come from Plympton to say Mass, matins, and evensong before noon, then go back before dinner. The parishioners claimed that “the priest has often been sore sick and in great jeopardy of life from travelling through the rain, hail, or snow.” According to them, three priests died from making this trip.¹⁰⁵ Further, the prior would not send a priest for burial for a fee of less than 7d.

A note of conspiracy and paranoia enters the petition when the writers began to discuss the mood of apprehension in the parish of Wembury. The petitioners said that there were 500 people in the parish, of whom more than 420 were communicants. Half the parish consisted of tenants of the priory. The bailiff of the priory’s steward had told these tenants when he was holding court that the prior had heard about the parishioners’ plans to find their own priest and wanted the tenants

¹⁰³ *CPMR*, p. 40. St. Budeaux is a neighbourhood of Plymouth, on the Devon side of the Royal Albert Bridge over the Tamar River from Saltash, Cornwall.

¹⁰⁴ *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII*, 1535, vol. IX, #1147, p. 391. The petitioners also said that the prior received 13s 4d as a fee-farm payment as well as offerings from the parishioners in return for the celebration of the sacraments at Wembury chapel.

¹⁰⁵ One might suspect a certain amount of exaggeration for effect here, as Wembury is not very far from Plympton, the terrain is fairly gentle, and the climate of the South Hams very mild. The church at Wembury does stand on an exposed cliff overlooking the sea, however. For exaggeration in a similar case of chapel-goers seeking expanded rights for the chapel at Kingsbridge, Devon, see Brown, *Church and Society in England*, p. 89.

to know that if they had any part in this, they would forfeit their holdings.¹⁰⁶ So, the other half of the parish (to which the writers belonged) did not tell the prior's tenants in Wembury what they, the non-tenants, were going to do, although the writers claimed that the tenants knew "all this to be true but did not speak." For ten years they had had a hired priest, who served them well, but the prior had ordered his tenants not to contribute to his support. The chapels at Plymstock, Brixton, and Shaugh were, these parishioners contended, just as ill-served as Wembury, and none brought the prior less than £30 per annum.¹⁰⁷ The writers asked the king to remedy the situation. Whether the king took any immediate action is not known, but four years later he gave satisfaction to the discontented parishioners of Wembury, and perhaps of the rest of Plympton's chapels, by dissolving the priory.¹⁰⁸

The accounts of the conflicts in the fourteenth century between Plympton Priory and those over whom it held temporal and spiritual authority provide insight into relations between the religious and the laity in the later Middle Ages. We gain some sense of the grievances of the laity, their increased desire for local control, and their frustrations with the authority exerted by religious houses. Whether they were dissatisfied Cornishmen at St. Kew, townspeople at Plymouth hoping for corporate status, or parishioners of chapels agitating for parochial rights, the laity connected to Plympton Priory came to display a greater willingness to challenge the influence the priory had over their lives. It is well to remember, however, that the documents tend to record the tensions and conflicts between religious and laity, and are often silent about the day-to-day good relations that may often have prevailed. To oppose laity and religious as perpetually antagonistic to each other would be a serious distortion of the situation. Nevertheless, the sometimes difficult relations between the Augustinian canons and the laity in the later Middle Ages were symptomatic of tensions inherent in English society at this time. As communities came to define their identities and reconsider their primary loyalties, old affiliations and obligations were

¹⁰⁶ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*, vol. IX, #1147, p. 391.

¹⁰⁷ This was not probably quite accurate, as Shaugh, according to the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, brought in only £21 in 1535 (still, a not insubstantial sum). See *MDE*, #28, p. 148.

¹⁰⁸ After the dissolution, in 1547, King Edward VI granted the church of Plympton and its chapels (including Wembury) to the dean and chapter of St. George's, Windsor (*MDE*, p. 133).

often perceived as obstacles and restrictions. The Augustinian canons, as lords of boroughs, landowners, and rectors of churches and chapels, were probably not any more hostile to change than members of other religious orders, or other institutions, but neither, so it would seem, were they any the more welcoming of it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE REGULAR AND THE SECULAR: PLYMPTON PRIORY AND ITS CONNECTIONS TO THE SECULAR CLERGY

As was seen in Chapter Three, a topic of research which has drawn much attention from scholars of medieval monastic history has been the support that religious houses received from their patrons and benefactors. Less work has been done, however, on the subject of the religious houses themselves as patrons of the secular clergy.¹ This is surprising, since many religious houses possessed the right to present clerics to various parish churches—a right also known as the “advowson” in England—and consequently played an important role in assisting members of the secular clergy to obtain benefices.² A religious house that possessed many advowsons or advowsons yielding high incomes was likely to receive many expressions of interest from unbeneficed clerics

¹ Christopher Harper-Bill, ‘The Struggle for Benefices in Twelfth-Century East Anglia,’ *Anglo-Norman Studies XI*, Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1988, ed. R. Allen Brown (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 113–32, discusses the influence of the papacy, the episcopacy, and the Crown on monastic presentations to benefices; Richard K. Rose, ‘Priests and Patrons in the Fourteenth-Century Diocese of Carlisle,’ in *The Church in Town and Countryside: Studies in Church History*, vol. 16 (Oxford, 1979), pp. 207–18, includes religious houses in his examination of the patrons of the beneficed clergy in the diocese of Carlisle; Barrie Dobson, *Durham Priory, 1400–1450* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 144–72, discusses the patronage of the prior of Durham, as does Robert Donaldson in ‘Sponsors, Patrons and Presentations to Benefices—Particularly those of the Prior of Durham—during the Later Middle Ages,’ *Archaeologia Aeliana* 38 ser. 4 (1960), 169–77. For the sake of comparison, see Richard Brown, ‘The Ecclesiastical Patronage of the Bishops of Winchester, 1282–1530,’ *Southern History* 24 (2002), 27–44. An earlier version of the findings in this chapter was accepted for publication in vol. 25 (2004) of *Medieval Prosopography* as ‘The Incumbents of Benefices in the Gift of Plympton Priory, 1257–1369’; this volume is forthcoming.

² The normal procedure was that the superior and members of a religious house would, when a benefice in their gift became vacant, present to the bishop the man they wished to become the next incumbent of that benefice. The bishop would then institute the candidate to the benefice. The incumbent might be a rector—that is, he would receive the majority of the tithes associated with the benefice—or a vicar. A religious house would appoint a vicar if the house had appropriated the benefice, which involved the religious house obtaining a greater share of the tithes and officially becoming the rector of the church. The vicar would carry out the normal pastoral duties and would receive a set portion of the tithes and possibly certain dues and offerings as well. See Hartridge, *A History of Vicarages in the Middle Ages*, pp. 36–8.

and their supporters or relatives. Plympton Priory was a house in such a position: by the fourteenth century it possessed the greatest number of advowsons of any religious house in the diocese of Exeter.³ The fact that Plympton Priory possessed, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the advowsons of eighteen churches⁴ meant that its prior and canons frequently participated in finding clerics to fill the benefices in their gift. In addition, religious houses could exercise patronage through providing “titles”—documents in theory expressing financial support—for men who wished to be ordained. As will be seen, the involvement of the canons of Plympton Priory in this practice waxed and waned over the course of the fourteenth century and into the fifteenth.

The purposes of this chapter are to investigate the participation of Plympton Priory in the distribution of titles, and also to demonstrate the importance of religious houses in providing benefices to members of the secular clergy through a case study of the patronage of this particular English religious house in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. A goal of this study is to make use of this cross-section of the beneficed clergy in order to examine more closely the education, levels of ordination, origins, and connections of men who served as rectors or vicars in this period. Through a prosopographical examination of the kinds of men who were incumbents of benefices in the gift of Plympton Priory, one can gain a fuller understanding of the links between the priory and the secular clergy in the diocese, as well as a more complete picture of the place of a major religious house in providing support to those seeking benefices. In addition, such an investigation produces a cross-section of the secular clergy in this region for more than a hundred years, throwing into high relief the great diversity within the clergy and, in particular, the “class” differences between rectors and vicars. By providing information on the careers of more than one hundred members of the secular clergy, this study also sheds light on the local experience of some of the “hot-button” issues in the Church in the

³ *Reg. Grandisson* III, pp. 1661–75.

⁴ In the middle of the thirteenth century, the prior and canons of Plympton had the right to present to eighteen rectories and vicarages, all in the diocese of Exeter: these were Blackawton, Bratton-Clovelly, Bridestowe, Dean Prior, Egg Buckland, Exminster, Ilsington, Marystow, Meavy, Newton St. Cyres, Peter Tavy, Stokeinteignhead, Sutton (Plymouth), Tamerton Foliot, and Ugborough in Devon and Maker, St. Kew, and St. Mawgan-in-Pydar in Cornwall. By c. 1340, Plympton Priory had alienated the advowsons of Bratton-Clovelly, Bridestowe, Ilsington, Peter Tavy, and St. Mawgan-in-Pydar. (*Reg. Bronescombe*, *Reg. Stapeldon*, *Reg. Grandisson*, *passim*).

thirteenth and fourteenth centuries regarding the clergy: education levels, absenteeism, pluralism (the holding of more than one benefice), and level of ordination.

Included in this study are those men who were collated to benefices by the bishops of Exeter. In these instances the bishop rather than the prior and convent of Plympton chose the candidate because the priory was in a period of vacancy after the death of a prior or because the canons had let six months pass since the death of the previous incumbent.⁵ As well, those who were provided to their benefices through papal appointment feature in the total count. An inclusive approach provides greater insight into the range of men who served as rectors or vicars of benefices in the gift of Plympton Priory; it also affords an impression of the amount of autonomy a religious house like Plympton Priory might have had in the exercising of its patronage. Separating out the incumbents selected only by the prior and canons of Plympton would be impossible, given that in a number of instances it is not known whether the clerics were presented, collated, or provided. Such a separation would also be misleading in any event: as will be seen, just because the prior and canons presented a cleric to a benefice does not mean that they did so of their own free choice.

The Incumbents of Benefices in the Gift of Plympton Priory, 1257–1369

The main sources for this study are the registers of the bishops of Exeter between the years 1257 and 1369.⁶ In the majority of cases, the identities of men presented to benefices can be determined through consultation of the records of their institutions in the episcopal registers, but the names of some incumbents occur in other sorts of records in the registers, while others appear in the *Calendar of Papal Letters* and

⁵ Peter Heath, *The English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation* (London, 1969), pp. 31–2.

⁶ The year 1369 was chosen as a terminal date for this study because it marked the death of Bishop John Grandisson and the end of his voluminous register; as well, in 1372, Plympton Priory granted the advowsons of six of its churches to three laymen for a period of 20 years (*Reg. Brantyngham*, I, pp. 275–6). In addition, the priory was involved in a court case with the Crown which resulted in the King making presentations to two of the priory's benefices. Consequently, the period of 1379–94 is one of reduced involvement on the part of the priory in the management of its own benefices.

the *Calendar of Papal Petitions*.⁷ Unfortunately, due to the gaps in the bishops' registers,⁸ not all institutions were recorded, nor all incumbents mentioned. Keeping this limitation in mind, the records consulted contain 118 references to men who were rectors or vicars of churches in the gift of Plympton Priory. It should be noted that since some of the clerics served as rectors or vicars of more than one benefice in the gift of Plympton Priory during the course of their careers, the figure of 118 includes several duplicates; once these duplicates have been excluded, the number of known individuals is actually 111.⁹ Of these individuals, only one was a canon of Plympton Priory: Master Nicholas de Weylonde, who became vicar of Sutton (Plymouth) in 1334.¹⁰ As has been mentioned previously, some scholars have asserted that since the Augustinian canons were an order of clerics, they were involved in pastoral work in a way that the monastic orders were not.¹¹ The evidence from Plympton Priory suggests that while the canons may possibly have undertaken pastoral duties at chapels over which the priory had rights, it was abnormal for canons to be presented to benefices in the gift of the priory in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.¹² The

⁷ Unfortunately, no letters of request to the prior regarding benefices have survived from Plympton as they have for Durham Priory. See Dobson, *Durham Priory*, p. 145.

⁸ The register for Bishop Quinel (a.k.a. Quivel/Quivil) from the late thirteenth century is incomplete, and the register of Bishop Bitton, his successor, is not extant. Bishop Quinel's partial register is included in F.C. Hingeston-Randolph's edition of the register of Walter Bronescombe.

⁹ Several incumbents held different benefices in the gift of Plympton Priory at various points in their careers. These were Roger de Toriz (Bratton and Bridestowe; *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #642–3, p. 20), Walter de Bratton (Newton St. Cyres and Dean Prior; *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #576, p. 14), Hugh Splot de Plympton (Exminster, Meavy, and Ugborough; *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #995, p. 69; #530, 7; #641, p. 20), Walter de Mymmelonde (Bratton and Meavy; *Reg. Stapeldon* 196, p. 234), and William de Nassingtone (Bratton and Newton St. Cyres; *Reg. Grandisson* III, p. 1279; also *CPL* II, p. 362).

¹⁰ *Reg. Grandisson* III, p. 1305. The bishop allowed this arrangement on condition that a fellow canon would reside with him. As was mentioned earlier, in 1336, certain parishioners attacked Weylonde and as a consequence Bishop Grandisson put an interdict upon Sutton (*Reg. Grandisson* II, pp. 814–5, 817–9, 823–4).

¹¹ For example, Peter Heath stated that the "raison d'être" of the Augustinian canons "was pastoral rather than meditative" (*English Parish Clergy*, p. 175); Leonard E. Elliott-Binns, in *Medieval Cornwall* (London, 1955), p. 328n, wrote that these canons "regularly undertook parochial duties."

¹² This situation changed in the fifteenth century, however, as several canons of Plympton, including one of the priors, sought and received papal dispensations to hold benefices (*CPL* V, p. 429; *CPL* X, p. 62; *CPL* XI, p. 620; *CPL* XVI, p. 453). This seems to have been part of a larger trend towards religious holding benefices in this period: see Robert N. Swanson, 'Universities, Graduates, and Benefices in Later Medieval England,' *Past and Present* no. 106 (1985), 37.

vast majority of the men discussed in this study, then, were members of the secular rather than regular clergy.

What becomes apparent when examining these 111 individuals is the striking difference between the careers of the rectors and those of the vicars.¹³ As will become apparent, the men who were rectors tended to be better-educated and better-connected; they were often officials of the episcopal curia, and they frequently held canonries at Exeter Cathedral or at other collegiate institutions in the diocese of Exeter. Their names normally appeared over and over in the bishops' registers. As for the vicars, few were masters. Their names crop up infrequently in the bishops' registers; normally one sees them in the records of their presentations, but that is all. The vicars hardly ever had canonries or offices elsewhere. There is no evidence in this group of a vicar "moving up the ladder" and ultimately becoming a rector (although one rector, Walter de Bratton, did resign his benefice for a vicarage).¹⁴ In terms of numbers, the groups are fairly evenly balanced: there are records of 59 rectors and 51 vicars occurring between the years 1257 and 1369.¹⁵

The clear distinction between the two groups is due to the differences between the two types of benefices. As A. Hamilton Thompson noted, "as a rule, it may be said that the normal rectory was like a prebend in a cathedral church, which often consisted of the fruits of the parish church, a benefice sought after by members of the higher clergy as a source of income."¹⁶ Vicarages, however, because of the much smaller incomes attached to them, the requirement that the vicar be a priest at the time of institution, and the obligation to reside in the parish,¹⁷ would have been much less appealing to a busy church lawyer or a scholar who wished to defer his ordination to the priesthood. Vicarages would be more likely to appeal to men of the region who had little thought

¹³ For differences in status among members of the secular clergy in thirteenth-century England, see John R.H. Moorman, *Church Life in England in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1945), pp. 24–58 and Brown, 'Ecclesiastical Patronage of the Bishops of Winchester,' 36–41.

¹⁴ Walter de Bratton resigned the rectory of Newton St. Cyres for the vicarage of Dean Prior in 1264 (*Reg. Bronescombe* II, #576, p. 14).

¹⁵ These totals do not include Walter de Bratton.

¹⁶ Alexander Hamilton Thompson, *The English Clergy and their Organization in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1947), p. 102.

¹⁷ Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England*, p. 44. Swanson does note, however, that the situation changed somewhat in the fifteenth century with increasing non-residence and pluralism among vicars.

of rising to the heights of the church hierarchy or spending years of study at Oxford. Dobson found that the vicarages in the gift of Durham Priory in the first half of the fifteenth century tended to attract local men for whom the obligation of residence was not a deterrent.¹⁸

Men drawn to the vicarages in the gift of Plympton Priory would also have had to be satisfied with quite modest incomes: according to the *Taxatio* of 1291, the vicarage of St. Kew was valued at 40s, the vicarage of Dean Prior at 20s, and the vicarage of Egg Buckland at a mere 6s 8d.¹⁹ The most valuable of Plympton Priory's vicarages was that of Sutton (Plymouth), which was valued at £4 6s 8d in 1291 and 1349 and £5 in 1350.²⁰ Probably because of its reputation for providing the highest income of the vicarages, Sutton attracted incumbents whose profile—well-educated and well-connected—more closely matches that of the rectors examined in this study than that of the vicars. In terms of the value of the rectories, those in the gift of Plympton Priory provided more substantial incomes than the vicarages, but these were still not sizeable. The rectory of Exminster stands out with a value of £20 in 1309.²¹ Plympton Priory's lack of any really "fat" benefices probably explains why few nationally prominent clerics appear in the list of its incumbents. For diocesan officials and episcopal friends who might have possessed a canonry or two elsewhere, however, the income from the rectory would have been a welcome supplement.

It is to be expected that the best-educated of the beneficed clergy would be concentrated amongst the rectors, and would overlap closely

¹⁸ Dobson, *Durham Priory*, p. 149. The value of the seven vicarages was between £10 and £16 each in 1535. Dobson notes that even so, "there was never any shortage of candidates."

¹⁹ *Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, pp. 471, 457, 458. Because of difficulties with the *Taxatio* (there were numerous errors and omissions), one must treat the information derived from it with caution (see Robinson, *Geography of Augustinian Settlement*, pp. 110–20, 145). When the prior and canons of Plympton presented David de Beare for institution to the vicarage of Dean Prior in 1261, the assessment of the vicarage stated that as vicar he would receive a portion of the grain tithes worth 30s, the tithes of hay, some land immune from tithes payments, land for which he would pay 4s 6d in rent, and the altar offerings (*Reg. Bronescombe I*, #402, pp. 138–9).

²⁰ *Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, p. 458; *CPL III*, p. 295; *CPL III*, p. 389. There was litigation between some vicars of Sutton and Plympton Priory in the mid-fourteenth century regarding the division of the income of Sutton church (see Chapter Five); this seems to have been resolved in 1349 (*CPP I*, p. 159).

²¹ *CPL II*, p. 64; in 1318, its value appears as £18, and in 1351 as £17 1s 4d (*CPL II*, p. 90; *III*, p. 419). The rectory of Stokeinteignhead provided an income of £7 6s 8d in 1318 (*CPL II*, p. 178) and £8 in 1358 (*CPP I*, p. 326). The rectory of Ilington yielded £1 6s 8d in 1331 (*CPL II*, p. 360).

with the group consisting of cathedral canons, pluralists, and episcopal officials. For those who aspired to join the ranks of the Church elite, a university education could increase their odds of reaching this goal.²² Not surprisingly, the vast majority of masters who filled Plympton Priory benefices were rectors rather than vicars. Between 1257 and 1369, only five masters were incumbents of vicarages in the gift of the priory. Of these five, four were vicars of Sutton.²³

Of the total number of men who were instituted to Plympton Priory benefices in the period 1257 to 1369, 38 were masters at the time of their presentation, and one seems to have become a master while he was an incumbent.²⁴ In addition to those who bore the title of master, there are four individuals who obtained some university education, as is shown by the fact that they received licences of non-residence in order to pursue their studies.²⁵ Of these 42 individuals with degrees or some measure of higher education, 37 were rectors.

For most of these university-educated individuals, there is no indication of what sort of degrees they obtained or studies they pursued. Those who obtained degrees are usually only identifiable as such because "Master" appears in front of their names in the records. There are a number of exceptions, however, which enable one to obtain some sense of the relative popularity of the various degrees. Nine students are known to have pursued legal training: William de Beare, William

²² Robert N. Swanson, 'Learning and Livings: University Study and Clerical Careers in Later Medieval England,' *History of Universities* 6 (1986–87), 83–5.

²³ The four vicars of Sutton who were masters were William de la Stane, who was instituted in 1264 (*Reg. Bronescombe* II, #564, p. 13), and then William de Wolleghe, Robert de Middelond, and Ralph de Ryngstede in the fourteenth century (*Reg. Grandisson* III, pp. 1305, 1071, 1251). Wolleghe ultimately resigned the vicarage in order to become a canon at Plympton Priory, despite the fact that he had been embroiled in litigation against the canons when they attempted to increase their share of the income from the church of Sutton (*Reg. Grandisson* II, pp. 674, 714–5, 734, 768–9). The fifth vicar who was a Master was William Trenchard, vicar of Marystow (*Reg. Bronescombe* II, #1301, p. 123).

²⁴ This was George de Byneleghe, who is described as a master when he received his licence for non-residence for the purpose of further study in 1330 (*Reg. Grandisson* I, p. 580). He had been rector of Blackawton since 1309 and seems not to have been a master at that time (*Reg. Stapeldon* pp. 47, 191). In addition, Robert, rector of Bratton-Clovelly, received a licence to farm out his benefice in 1285 (*Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, p. 316). This might possibly have been for the purpose of study and he may have also received a licence for non-residence, but there are unfortunately many gaps in the records from Bishop Quinel's episcopate.

²⁵ These men were John de Swafelde, John de Schireford, John de Mymmynglonde, and Richard de Wodelonde (*Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 287; *Reg. Grandisson* I, p. 379; *Reg. Grandisson* I, p. 407; *Reg. Grandisson* I, p. 402 and II, p. 789).

de Nassington, Richard Norreis, and Otto de Northwode studied both canon and civil law; Thomas de Plympstoke was a bachelor of civil law, Nicholas Terrier obtained a licentiate in civil law, and William de Kilkenny received a doctorate in civil law; Master Henry de Kilkenny received a licence of non-residence to study canon law for five years;²⁶ and Ralph de Ryngstede had a bachelor's degree in civil law in addition to his M.A.²⁷ A few individuals had pursued or were pursuing theological studies: William de Newetone alias Excestre, who held doctorates in theology and medicine, and Robert de Middelond, who had also obtained a doctorate in theology.²⁸ Richard Norreis, in addition to having an M.A. and a bachelor's degree in canon and civil law, was described as "well advanced in theology" in 1334 when he was rector of Ugborough.²⁹

Eleven of those who appear as masters in the records are known to have been or likely were Oxford graduates;³⁰ only one, Ralph de Ryngstede, was definitely a graduate of Cambridge.³¹ For the majority of those with the title master or with some history of having attended university, then, there is no clear evidence as to which university they attended. It is possible that George de Byneleghe, rector of Blackawton, studied at the University of Paris, as he received a licence of non-residence to study specifically at Paris, or elsewhere, for the years 1319–21; he had received a similar licence to study overseas in the years 1310–12.³² Richard de Wodelonde, rector of Stokeinteignhead, received a licence of non-residence to study in England or overseas, as did William de Beare, rector of Bridestowe.³³ However, given the

²⁶ Alfred B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500* (Oxford, 1957–59 [hereafter *BR*]), I, p. 172; II, pp. 1339, 1366, 1372, 1488, 2221, 2186; *Reg. Bronscombe & Quivil*, p. 317.

²⁷ Alfred B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 499.

²⁸ *BR* II, pp. 659–60, 1274.

²⁹ *CPL* II, p. 406. Master Andrew de Kilkenny received a licence of non-residence to study theology for five years in 1281, but resigned his benefice a year into his studies (*Reg. Bronscombe & Quivil*, p. 317).

³⁰ These were William de Beare, Robert Broke, William de Newetone alias Excestre, Roger de Inkpenne, William de Kilkenny, Robert de Middelond, William de Nassington, Richard Norreis, Otto de Northwode, Thomas de Plympstoke, and Nicholas Terrier (*BR* I, pp. 172, 272, 659–60; II, pp. 1002, 1274, 1339, 1366, 1372; III, pp. 1488, 2186, 2221).

³¹ Emden, *Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge*, p. 499.

³² *Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 47.

³³ *Reg. Grandisson* I, p. 402; *Reg. Grandisson* II, pp. 637–8. William de Beare was in Paris when he received this licence in November, 1331, suggesting that he might have

vagueness of the wording of such licences—information on where the person receiving the licence is to study is frequently absent—it would be inadvisable to assume that these men definitely studied abroad or that no other incumbents of Plympton Priory benefices studied overseas.

The issues of clerical education, licences of non-residence, and absenteeism are closely intertwined. One of the more common reasons for an incumbent not to be residing in his benefice was that he was pursuing his studies elsewhere. After the promulgation of the constitution *Cum ex eo* by Pope Boniface VIII in 1298, it became easier for rectors to obtain from their bishops licences of non-residence for the purpose of study. Such licences, which allowed the rector to collect the revenues of his benefice during his absence, required that he be ordained subdeacon within a year of receiving the licence and deacon and priest within a year of the expiration of the licence as well as arrange for a qualified member of the clergy to fulfill his pastoral duties on his behalf.³⁴ Leonard Boyle pointed out that the aim of this statute was to allow young men who had not yet proceeded to the higher clerical orders the opportunity to obtain a university education, supported by the income from their benefice.³⁵ The sixteen³⁶ recipients of such licences who were incumbents of benefices in the gift of the priory were almost all masters already when they were granted their licences, and most of them were at least subdeacons,³⁷ suggesting that they did not quite fit Boyle's profile of *Cum ex eo* licence recipients as men at the beginning of their careers. Interestingly, one of the sixteen was a vicar rather than a rector. This was rather more unusual, given that in

been studying there already. He had had a licence of non-residence to study from Michaelmas, 1330, to Michaelmas, 1331 (*Reg. Grandisson* I, p. 579).

³⁴ Leonard E. Boyle, OP, 'The Constitution "Cum ex eo" of Boniface VIII: Education of Parochial Clergy,' *Mediaeval Studies* 24 (1962), 272–3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 275–6.

³⁶ A seventeenth incumbent may also have received licences of non-residence to study: Robert, rector of Bratton, had licences to put out his benefice to farm in 1283 for one year and in 1285 for three years (*Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, pp. 316–7). The reason he was farming out his benefice was not stated; quite possibly it was that he would be absent on study leave, as the licences of non-residence to study frequently also give permission for the recipient to farm out his benefice.

³⁷ The only recipient known to have become a master after he started receiving licences was George de Byneleghe, mentioned above (*Reg. Stapeldon* pp. 191, 47; *Reg. Grandisson* I, pp. 580, 596; II, p. 889). Whether Robert Peyke, rector of Exminster, was in major or minor orders at the time of his presentation is not known (*Reg. Grandisson* III, p. 1388). Ralph de Ryngstede, vicar of Sutton, was the only incumbent of a Plympton Priory benefice who had not yet reached the subdiaconate by the time he received his licence of non-residence (*CPL* III, p. 433).

England perpetual vicars had to obtain papal dispensations from their vicarial oath of residence before they could seek the episcopal licence,³⁸ a process which must have discouraged many. This individual, Ralph de Ryngstede, was a vicar of Sutton, however, and as we have seen, the vicars of Sutton seemed to have had more in common with rectors than with vicars of other benefices.

The length of time allowed for study leave varied greatly from recipient to recipient. Walter de Mymmelonge and John de Milletone each received licences of non-residence for less than a year, while Ralph de Knovyle, Gilbert de Knoville, Robert Peyke, and Richard de Langacre all received licences for one-year periods.³⁹ In addition to the two Kilkennys mentioned above, who both obtained licences for five-year periods, William de Beare and Ralph de Ryngstede were allowed to be absent from their benefices for the same number of years, while Thomas de Plympstoke and William de Newetone alias Excestre each received licences totaling six years.⁴⁰ Three incumbents of Plympton Priory benefices obtained licences which added up to seven years or more. Robert Broke, who became rector of Bratton in January, 1322, had licences for non-residence from July, 1322 to Michaelmas, 1323 and from September, 1324 to September, 1325.⁴¹ In December, 1326, Broke obtained a licence to be absent from Bratton for seven years continuously; a few years into this third licence he resigned Bratton and obtained another benefice.⁴² Of his seven-year tenure as rector of Bratton, he seems to have spent five on study leave. George de Byneleghe, the incumbent who seems not to have been a master at the time of his presentation, spent virtually all of the first twelve years of his time as rector of Blackawton absent from his benefice because he was pursuing his studies; in later years, he received three more licences not to reside, although in two of these cases the reasons for his absence

³⁸ Boyle, 'The Constitution "Cum ex eo",' 290–4.

³⁹ *Reg. Stapeldon*, pp. 45, 313, 85, *Reg. Grandisson* II, pp. 695, 637.

⁴⁰ De Beare obtained five licences of a year each (*Reg. Grandisson* I, p. 579; II, pp. 637–8, 713, 826, 850); Ralph de Ryngstede received a papal indult to study for a five-year period (*CPL* III, p. 433); Thomas de Plympstoke was granted three one-year licences and then a three-year licence (*Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 156). William de Newetone received two two-year licences and two one-year licences (*Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 383; *Reg. Grandisson* I, p. 341).

⁴¹ *Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 84.

⁴² *Reg. Grandisson* I, p. 16; III, p. 1279.

are not specified.⁴³ Richard Norreis, who had obtained his M.A. by 1318, continued his studies in law and then theology while he was rector of Inwardleigh in Devon and subsequently rector of the Plympton Priory benefice of Ugborough. His licences for study leave totaled six years during the time when he held Inwardleigh, and seven and a half years during his tenure of Ugborough.⁴⁴ Norreis' investment in higher education served him well, as he obtained canonries at Chichester and Exeter and became chancellor of the Bishop of Ely in 1346.⁴⁵

Pursuing a higher education was not the only reason why incumbents might be absent from their benefices. For many rectors occupied with episcopal, papal, or royal affairs, there could have been no thought that they would have continuously resided in their benefices. With so many clergy in need of incomes, it would likely have been quite easy to find a cleric who would carry out the duties of the parish priest for some portion of the rectorial income. The rectors, given their interests in the wider world, might well have viewed the prospect of residing in a rural parish like Ugborough or Meavy with sentiments akin to those expressed by the poet Robert Herrick. In 1628, Charles I appointed Herrick to the vicarage of Dean Prior, a church which had been in the gift of Plympton Priory less than a century earlier. In one poem, "Discontents in Devon," Herrick declared that: "More discontents I never had / Since I was born, then [*sic*] here; / Where I have been, and still am sad, / In this dull Devon-shire."⁴⁶ While one must take

⁴³ *Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 47; *Reg. Grandisson I*, pp. 580, 596. Byneleghe's last dispensation for non-residence was likely not for study leave, as the dispensation stated that he was allowed to reside in his benefice intermittently (*interpolatim*) and that he was to stay within the Diocese of Exeter (*Reg. Grandisson II*, p. 889).

⁴⁴ *BR II*, p. 1366. Norreis had obtained the reservation of a benefice worth £20 in the gift of Plympton Priory from the pope in 1317; even though he was presented to Inwardleigh first, the reservation was confirmed in 1318 (*CPL II*, pp. 159, 173). By 1329, he had resigned Inwardleigh and been presented to Ugborough (*Reg. Grandisson I*, p. 507; *III*, p. 1271).

⁴⁵ *BR II*, p. 1366; Alfred B. Emden, 'Additions and Corrections to *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, Supplemental List No. 2,' *Bodleian Library Record*, 7 (1962/64), 157.

⁴⁶ Robert Herrick, *The Poems of Robert Herrick*, ed. L.C. Martin (London, 1965), p. 19. In 'To Dean-Bourn, A Rude River in Devon By Which Sometimes He Lived,' Herrick called his parishioners "a people currish; churlish as the seas; / And rude, almost, as rudest salvages [i.e. savages]" (*ibid.*, p. 29). More recently, the dissatisfaction with rural life felt by many intellectual members of the clergy was stated forcefully by the late Northrop Frye. Before he became the noted literary critic and professor of English, he spent a summer as a student minister in rural Saskatchewan on the Canadian Prairies;

into account Herrick's own prejudices (he was a Londoner), it is not unlikely that incumbents of Plympton Priory's rectories felt a similar lack of enthusiasm for the idea of abandoning their careers as episcopal officials, church lawyers, or scholars in order to tend to their flock in isolated parishes.

Of course, such incumbents occasionally sought licences of non-residence for purposes other than study leave. An example would be Master William de Beare, rector of Bridestowe, a lawyer who received a licence of non-residence in 1328 in order to serve Master John Bloyou, a canon of Exeter, for an indefinite period; he was granted another licence for a reason not specified in 1329.⁴⁷ Richard de Langacre, who had obtained the Plympton Priory benefice of Ilsington through papal provision, received dispensations from residence in his parish in 1335 and 1336 to serve Earl Warenne.⁴⁸ The records of the episcopal dispensations for non-residence can only tell us so much about how much time an incumbent might have spent in his parish. Licences might have been granted which were not recorded in the episcopal registers, or some incumbents might have neglected to seek the dispensation before taking a leave of absence. As well, it is unclear to what extent a busy rector might be away from his benefice for periods of time too short to warrant obtaining a licence for non-residence.

Hand-in-hand with the issue of how many of the incumbents of Plympton Priory's benefices were resident is the question of how many of them were pluralists, since the two groups frequently overlapped. Pluralism—the possession of several benefices at the same time—was a common feature of the late medieval church and one which had fierce critics and staunch defenders.⁴⁹ A pluralist obviously could not personally serve a number of benefices unless they were quite close together; consequently, he would have to employ stipendiary priests—who might or might not be conscientious pastors—to fulfill his duties. The Council of Lyons in 1274 attempted to reduce the potentially negative consequences of pluralism by distinguishing between benefices which

during this time he declared, "I would commit suicide without the slightest hesitation if I thought I should have to stay out here all my life." See *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp, 1932–1939*, vol. 1, ed. Robert D. Denham (Toronto, 1996), p. 240. Within two years Frye was studying at Oxford.

⁴⁷ *Reg. Grandisson* I, pp. 420, 528.

⁴⁸ *Reg. Grandisson* I, pp. 781, 811.

⁴⁹ William A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (1955; repr. Toronto, 1980), pp. 35–43.

entailed the cure of souls and those which did not.⁵⁰ A cleric could hold one benefice without cure at the same time as one with cure; if he wished to hold two—or more—benefices with cure at the same time, a dispensation was required.⁵¹ Of course, simply because these men held “compatible” benefices does not necessarily mean that they saw their primary responsibility as tending to the benefice that required the cure of souls. As was pointed out by Pantin, “the man who held two “compatible” benefices, one with cure and one without, did not necessarily reside in either.”⁵²

In the majority of cases of pluralism amongst the incumbents of benefices in the gift of Plympton Priory, the benefices were “compatible”—that is, the Plympton Priory benefice they received would be one with cure, and the other benefice(s) were those without cure, usually canonries at collegiate churches and at Exeter Cathedral. Many of the pluralists seem to have been affiliated with the bishops of Exeter, who possessed the right to present to the canonries at Exeter Cathedral and at several collegiate churches.⁵³ Some of these men were or became quite powerful members of the diocesan administration: for example, Roger de Toriz, an “intimate” of Bishop Bronescombe,⁵⁴ and rector of Blackawton and then Bridestowe, was Archdeacon of Exeter; a canon of Bosham, and ultimately Dean of Exeter Cathedral;⁵⁵ Bartholomew of St. Laurence, was rector of Exminster and Archdeacon of Exeter, resigning the rectory when he became Dean of Exeter Cathedral.⁵⁶ Andrew of Kilkenny, rector of Bridestowe and canon of Crediton, was an episcopal official who also went on to become Dean of Exeter,⁵⁷ he resigned from Bridestowe in 1282 and the prior and canons of Plympton presented his relative, Henry of Kilkenny, to the same benefice.⁵⁸ A

⁵⁰ Most of those who held benefices without cure—sinecures (from *sine cura*)—were canons at cathedrals or collegiate churches (Peter Heath, *Church and Realm, 1272–1461* [London, 1988], pp. 24–5).

⁵¹ Pantin, *English Church in the Fourteenth Century*, pp. 37–8.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁵³ Collegiate churches—such as Bosham, Crediton, St. Teath, and Glasney—and cathedral chapters provided bishops with useful means for supporting favoured clerics.

⁵⁴ *Reg. Bronescombe* I, p. xxiii.

⁵⁵ *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #642–3, p. 20; I, #415, pp. 144–5; II, #818, pp. 42–3.

⁵⁶ John Le Neve, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae, 1300–1541, IX Exeter*, compiled by Joyce M. Horn (London, 1964), pp. 4, 12, 22; *CPL* II, p. 64.

⁵⁷ *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #1368, p. 131; II, #1281, p. 120; I, p. xxii.

⁵⁸ *Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, p. 338. Henry was a canon of Exeter, as well.

canon of Exeter Cathedral who was an incumbent of one of Plympton's benefices later turned out to be very troublesome: Roger of Colyton, precentor and then Dean of Exeter engaged in recurring battles with Bishop Grandisson in the early years of Grandisson's episcopate.⁵⁹

Some pluralists were episcopal relatives or long-time friends: Otto de Northwode, who was rector of Stokeinteignhead and treasurer of Exeter before becoming archdeacon of Exeter,⁶⁰ was a nephew of Bishop Grandisson.⁶¹ William of Nassington, rector of Bratton for a couple of years in the 1330s and canon of Exeter,⁶² moved to the diocese with his brothers Thomas and John after assisting Grandisson in the archdeaconry of Nottingham before his elevation to the see.⁶³ Thomas of Stapeldon, rector of Exminster, was the brother of Bishop Walter Stapeldon and he similarly prospered through his connections.⁶⁴

The list of pluralists prepared for Simon Langham, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1366 provides a snapshot of how many pluralists were holding Plympton Priory benefices at a given time. The list shows that only four of the priory's benefices were held by men who possessed other benefices, and these were all benefices without cure.⁶⁵ All of these pluralists seem to have been members of the ecclesiastical elite who required financial support. Nicholas Terrier, who held a licenciate in civil law, was a canon of Exeter; Thomas Tuggel was a canon of Exeter and of St. Probus college in Cornwall; John Burel was a canon of Crediton college; Ralph de Ryngstede, in addition to being a canon of Exeter Cathedral, was also a canon of Bangor and Heytesbury.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ *Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 191; *Reg. Grandisson III*, pp. xxxvi–xxxviii, xl–xli; *Fasti*, pp. 4, 7, 12, 23.

⁶⁰ *Reg. Grandisson III*, p. 1441; *Fasti*, pp. 10n, 13, 18n, 33. Otto also held prebends at three collegiate churches.

⁶¹ David N. Lepine, 'The Origins and Careers of the Canons of Exeter Cathedral 1300–1455,' in *Religious Belief and Ecclesiastical Careers in Late Medieval England*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 1991), p. 93.

⁶² *Reg. Grandisson III*, p. 1279; *Fasti*, p. 27.

⁶³ Lepine, 'Canons of Exeter,' 93.

⁶⁴ *Reg. Stapeldon*, pp. 216, 372; *Fasti*, p. 25; Mark Buck, *Politics, Finance and the Church in the Reign of Edward II: Walter de Stapeldon, Treasurer of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 28–30. Thomas also held prebends at the cathedral, Bosham, and Crediton.

⁶⁵ The four were Nicholas Terrier, the rector of Exminster, Thomas Tuggel, rector of Stokeinteignhead, John Burel, rector of Ugborough, and Ralph de Ryngstede of the diocese of Lincoln, vicar of Sutton (*Reg. Grandisson II*, pp. 1251–3, 1255).

⁶⁶ *CPL III*, p. 419, BR III, p. 2221; *Fasti*, pp. 36–7, *Reg. Grandisson III*, p. 1253; *Reg. Grandisson III*, p. 1252; *CPL III*, p. 433.

There exists only a handful of cases from between 1257 and 1369 in which incumbents of benefices in the gift of the priory sought papal dispensations to hold “incompatible” benefices. In the first, Cardinal Francis Gaetani sought from Pope Boniface VIII in 1300 a dispensation for one Richard de Plimpstoke, who was his chaplain.⁶⁷ The cardinal stated that Richard “after the council of Lyons, successively obtained the churches of Exminster and Uffculme, without being ordained priest or getting a papal dispensation.” The pope granted the dispensation, allowing Richard (at that time a subdeacon) permission to retain both benefices as well as canonries and prebends at Lincoln and Wells cathedrals.⁶⁸ This case of pluralism was to be connected with another, however. By 1308, Richard de Plimpstoke had been deprived of the benefices of Exminster and Uffculme, and his successor as rector of Exminster was Bartholomew of Saint Laurence, archdeacon of Exeter.⁶⁹ Richard unsuccessfully challenged Bartholomew over the position of archdeacon in 1308, but Richard’s contention that Bartholomew could not be an archdeacon and a rector at the same time, since both positions entailed the cure of souls, led to Bartholomew procuring a papal dispensation the next year.⁷⁰ Relations between these two rectors of Exminster seem to have remained tense.⁷¹ Exminster appears again in the next record of pluralism: in 1311, Thomas de Stapeldon, the brother of the bishop, obtained a papal dispensation to hold the rectories of Exminster and Bishopsteignton as well as his prebend at the collegiate church of Bosham in Sussex.⁷²

In another possible case of pluralism, there is conflicting evidence as to whether or not the incumbent had a papal dispensation to hold

⁶⁷ *CPL I*, p. 588.

⁶⁸ In the same year as he received his papal dispensation, Richard de Plimpstoke was to become embroiled in disputes with Bishop Bitton of Exeter and Walter Stapeldon, then an episcopal official. Subsequently, Richard tried to derail Stapeldon’s election as bishop: see Buck, *Politics, Finance and the Church*, pp. 38–40, 42–5.

⁶⁹ *Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 324; *CPL II*, p. 64.

⁷⁰ *Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 413; *CPL II*, p. 64; Buck, *Politics, Finance and the Church*, pp. 42–3. Whether Bartholomew of Saint Laurence really needed to obtain a papal dispensation was not clear, as “medieval canon law” had reached “no firm verdict” on whether an archdeaconry could be considered a benefice which involved the cure of souls: see Buck, *Politics, Finance and the Church*, p. 43n.

⁷¹ Richard seems not to have been the forgiving sort: in 1312 he was accused in a royal writ of having broken into Master Bartholomew’s house at Exminster and carried away goods to the value of 100 marks (*Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 424). Coincidentally, at the same time Richard owed 100 marks to the abbot of Tavistock (*Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 423).

⁷² *CPL II*, p. 90.

more than one benefice with cure at the same time or not. Stephen de Brawode became rector of Alphington in 1312, and he received a papal dispensation to hold the church of Tibbeshulf in the diocese of Coventry as well.⁷³ The dispensation stated that on resigning one of these benefices, he was allowed to accept another of similar value. In 1316, he became rector of Stokeinteignhead, but by 1318, Master William de Newetone had acquired this benefice through papal provision; the papal letter authorizing the provision states that the “last rector has held [it] as a pluralist without papal dispensation.”⁷⁴ This statement probably refers to the fact that since the issuing of the papal bull *Execrabilis* in November, 1317, all previous dispensations for pluralism had been revoked and the surplus benefices were set aside for provision.⁷⁵ Brawode did co-operate in a timely fashion, however, resigning Stokeinteignhead and Alphington in person before an episcopal commission on February 5, 1318.⁷⁶ It is unclear whether or not Brawode had held onto Tibbeshulf or not.⁷⁷ There are, in addition, a number of other examples of incumbents who might have held a Plympton Priory benefice at the same time as they were incumbents of other benefices with cure.⁷⁸ On the whole, however, there is little

⁷³ *Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 184; *CPL II*, p. 99.

⁷⁴ *Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 262; *CPL II*, p. 178.

⁷⁵ J. Robert Wright, *The Church and the English Crown, 1305–1334: A Study based on the Register of Archbishop Walter Reynolds* (Toronto, 1980), pp. 12–3. *Execrabilis* dictated that, with some exceptions, the holders of incompatible benefices were to retain only one benefice with cure.

⁷⁶ On the same day, Thomas de Stapeldon resigned the church of Exminster (*Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 43).

⁷⁷ Stephen de Brawode was another member of the clergy who found himself the subject of royal writs: in 1312, he was ordered to respond to the accusation of William de Burgh and his wife Ysolde that he owed them 20 marks (*Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 442). In 1316, he had been rendering service to King Edward II overseeing some royal revenues; when he fell behind in providing accounts of these, his benefice was sequestrated (*Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 436). Around the same time, his name appears in a writ as owing £700 to Queen Margaret, widow of Edward I; in 1321, several years after her death, he was still owing money to her estate (*Reg. Stapeldon*, pp. 437, 439).

⁷⁸ For example, Master Nicholas de Plympton, who became rector of Bridestowe in 1259, had received five dispensations to hold more than one benefice with cure between 1250 and 1257 (*CPL I*, pp. 261, 291, 315, 317, 353). It would seem likely that he possessed other benefices with cure outside the Diocese of Exeter. As well, Master William de Beare, rector of Bridestowe, received in 1343 an extension of his papal dispensation for illegitimacy “so as to hold another benefice,” but there is no evidence that he did indeed obtain another benefice with cure (*CPL III*, p. 115; *BR I*, p. 172). Master Roger de Inkpenne received in 1355 a similar extension, in this case to obtain another benefice in addition to the one he had just resigned, even though he held “two other benefices... by dispensation of Clement VI” (*CPL III*, p. 575); he became rector

evidence that benefices in the gift of Plympton Priory were occupied to any great extent by men who held benefices entailing the cure of souls elsewhere.

The priors and canons of Plympton in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries must have found themselves frequently occupied with the business of handling requests for presentation to their rectories and vicarages. But to what extent did the priors and canons exercise freedom of choice over whom they would present to the bishop of Exeter for institution? How much pressure was put on them by bishops, popes, and their own friends and relatives? Unfortunately, few documents survive which would shed light on the actual decision-making process. As R.N. Swanson has stated regarding incumbents of benefices in the gift of religious houses, "There is no knowing what tensions hide behind the bland statements of their presentations . . ."⁷⁹ One can assume, however, that the priors and canons of Plympton were well aware of the benefits that might accrue from being co-operative.⁸⁰ It should be kept in mind that Plympton Priory received only relatively small pensions from its rectories.⁸¹ As a consequence, their chief value to the priory was probably their role in helping the canons to establish connections with—and to gain the favour of—men of influence, either through presentations of the men themselves or their protégés⁸² to benefices in the gift of the priory.

of Stokeinteignhead in 1356 (*Reg. Grandisson* III, p. 1441). Master Henry de Kilkenny obtained a papal dispensation in 1255 to hold one more benefice with cure in addition to the two he already had as well as his prebend at Chichester (*CPL* I, p. 323); in 1282, he became rector of Bridestowe (*Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, p. 338).

⁷⁹ Swanson, *Church and Society*, p. 75.

⁸⁰ Some religious houses virtually reserved benefices for influential, well-educated men—especially lawyers and church administrators—who could be expected to be of assistance to them (Heath, *English Parish Clergy*, p. 34).

⁸¹ According to the *Taxatio*, the priory received £6 13s 4d from Bridestowe, £5 6s 8d from Bratton, £5 from Ilsington, and £1 6s 8d from St. Mawgan-in-Pydar (the priory lost the advowsons of all four in the fourteenth century, but continued to receive pensions from all but Ilsington). Blackawton yielded a pension of £6 13s 4d, Ugborough £8, Exminster £3 6s 8d, and Stokeinteignhead £2 (*Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, pp. 450–81).

⁸² According to R. Donaldson, "The right to choose an incumbent was an important one, and no patron was likely to present a candidate chosen by somebody else unless it was made worth his while, either by some specific payment or service, or (probably much more common) by a vaguer understanding that the sponsor's good will would be at his disposal if required. If the sponsor was a local potentate or if he had influence in governmental or high ecclesiastical circles such good will was worth having." See 'Sponsors, Patrons, and Presentations to Benefices,' 170.

The number of incumbents of Plympton Priory benefices who were affiliated with the bishops of Exeter indicates that the bishops likely frequently appealed to Plympton Priory to assist them in supporting members of the diocesan hierarchy. Thirty rectors and two vicars holding benefices in the gift of the priory held canonries or prebends at the cathedral or at other collegiate churches whose patron was the bishop of Exeter, either during their incumbency of a Plympton Priory benefice or later in their careers. While the bishops of Exeter had more opportunities for patronage than some of their episcopal colleagues who had to deal with cathedral priories,⁸³ the number of requests they received for support must have been not inconsiderable, especially when one keeps in mind the pressure on bishops to appoint royal and papal candidates.⁸⁴ On some occasions, the prior of Plympton might have taken the initiative and presented individuals whom he knew belonged to the episcopal circle, thereby hoping to win favour with the bishop. The potential benefits to be had from co-operation with the bishop of Exeter—who was, after all, patron of Plympton Priory—must have outweighed the loss of autonomy that was experienced by the prior and canons in these cases.

Indeed, the domination of certain of Plympton's benefices by episcopal officials suggests that an understanding had been reached between the priors and the bishops. For example, the prior of Plympton tended to present episcopal officials to the rectories of Exminster, Blackawton, Meavy, Stokeinteignhead, Bratton, Ilsington, and Bridestowe, and Ugborough.⁸⁵ Of the ten known rectors of Exminster during the period 1257–1369,

⁸³ Dobson contended that at Durham in the fifteenth century the bishop's pressure on the cathedral priory to present his candidates to benefices in their gift was "continuous" (*Durham Priory*, p. 146). Harper-Bill also found that in the twelfth century, the bishops of Norwich, who had few desirable benefices in their gift, pressured religious houses in the diocese to present episcopally-favoured clerics for institution to the religious houses' own benefices (Harper-Bill, 'Struggle for Benefices,' 131–2).

⁸⁴ In 1349, Bishop Grandisson wrote a letter to King Edward III in which he declined to present some of the king's clerks to benefices, even though he had done so in the past. Grandisson's explanation for his refusal was that the demands of having to advance papal provisors and members of his own family had resulted in a backlog of other men to whom he felt he owed positions. Grandisson also worried about not having any offices available for theologians he wished to attract to the diocese (Pantin, *English Church in the Fourteenth Century*, pp. 115–6).

⁸⁵ In 1335, the priory received a royal licence to alienate the advowsons of the rectories of Ilsington, Bridestowe, Bratton, Stokeinteignhead, and Peter Tavy to Bishop John Grandisson of Exeter (*CPR*, Edward III vol. 3, 1334–38, p. 114). The alienation of Stokeinteignhead seems not to have proceeded, as the priory continued to make presentations to this benefice.

nine had ties to the diocesan hierarchy.⁸⁶ Exminster was probably especially attractive as a benefice, given its relatively high income and proximity to Exeter (if the incumbent ever wished to visit his parish). The church of Meavy was at the other end of the rectorial scale: the parish was situated at the edge of Dartmoor, and it likely did not provide a substantial income for its incumbents. Of the ten known rectors of Meavy for these years, only four had obvious connections to the bishops of Exeter at the time of their presentations.⁸⁷ This would seem to suggest that the bishops of Exeter were actively involved in helping their officials to obtain the most desirable benefices available and that they relied on the cooperation of the priors and canons of Plympton on a regular basis.

Of course, not all of the men of influence who held Plympton's benefices obtained them exclusively by episcopal influence. Some had petitioned popes to reserve benefices in the priory's patronage for them until vacancies occurred. As is well-known, the issue of provision was extremely controversial in the fourteenth century: English objections to the practice escalated as the provisions themselves did during the 1340s, resulting in the Statute of Provisors of 1351 and its re-issuings in 1365 and 1390.⁸⁸ However, Plympton Priory's benefices do not seem to have been subject to papal provision on a large scale, perhaps because few of its benefices were very valuable; some cases of provision and hoped-for provision do occur in the records nonetheless. There are a number of cases in which petitioners received reservations but never seem to have

⁸⁶ William de Bisman had prebends at St. Teath, Crediton, and Exeter Cathedral; Hugh Splot was a member of Bishop Bronescombe's household; Bartholomew of Saint Laurence was archdeacon of Exeter and canon of the cathedral; Thomas de Stapeldon was an episcopal relative; Richard de Brailegh ultimately became dean of the cathedral; Thomas de Plympstoke represented Bishop Grandisson in a court case; Henry de Galmetone was an official of the archdeacon of Totnes; Robert Peyke was a notary public who seems to have served Bishop Grandisson; Nicholas Terrier was a canon of Exeter (*Reg. Bronescombe* II, #540, p. 9; #630, p. 19; #1046, 75; *Reg. Bronescombe* I, p. xxvii; *CPL* II, p. 64; *Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 216; *Fasti*, p. 4; *Reg. Grandisson* pp. 1, 188–9; *Reg. Grandisson* II, pp. 921–2; *Reg. Grandisson* II, pp. 769, 776; *Fasti*, pp. 30–1). The troublesome Richard de Plimpstoke, mentioned above, is the only known incumbent of Exeter in this period whose possible ties to the bishop of Exeter are unclear.

⁸⁷ Richard de Braundsworthy was a canon of Exeter (*Reg. Bronescombe* II, #1059, p. 77), Hugh Splot de Plympton was a member of the episcopal household (*Reg. Bronescombe* I, p. xxvii), and Walter de Mymmélonde was a canon of Glasney when he died (*Reg. Stapeldon*, pp. 196, 293). William de Nywenham was appointed a penitentiary for the rural deanery of Tamerton after he had been rector of Meavy for ten years (*Reg. Brantyngham*, p. 254).

⁸⁸ Heath, *Church and Realm, 1272–1461*, pp. 125–32, 213–8.

been presented.⁸⁹ Others were more successful: Richard Norreis⁹⁰ and John Burel,⁹¹ successive rectors of Ugborough, did obtain provision to benefices in the priory's patronage. Pope Clement VI reserved the vicarage of Sutton for Ralph de Ryngrstede when it was known that the benefice would soon be vacant.⁹² As well, the rectory of Exminster was reserved to the pope during the tenure of Henry de Galmetone (1343–49), but it is unclear whether his successor, Robert Peyke, was a papal provisor.⁹³ Peyke became rector while the Black Death was raging in the diocese, so perhaps the pope's claim was overlooked. The next rector of Exminster, Nicholas Terrier, did quite clearly obtain the benefice through papal provision, however.⁹⁴ An example of a pope and a bishop co-operating to provide someone to a benefice can be found in the case of Master William de Newetone alias Excestre, who became rector of Stokeinteighhead through a papal provision that occurred at the request of Bishop Stapeldon.⁹⁵

There were several occasions, however, when the canons of Plympton, displaying an unhappiness with papal provisions shared by many of their countrymen, actively resisted presenting the petitioners. For example, in 1357, Pope Innocent VI granted the petition of John Uppehulle, bachelor of canon and civil law, for the vicarage of Newton St. Cyres.⁹⁶ The problem was that the benefice was not empty: the prior had presented someone else, possibly illegally.⁹⁷ Nothing seems to have come

⁸⁹ For example, Henry Giffard, a student at Oxford in 1366, petitioned Urban V for a benefice in the gift of Plympton Priory (*CPP* I, pp. 517, 521). Urban granted the request, but there is no record of Giffard's tenure of a Plympton Priory benefice. As well, there is the confusing case of three men vying for the rectory of Newton St. Cyres in the 1260s, two of whom—Walter de Bratton and William de Capella—may have been provisors (*Reg. Bronescombe* II, #576, p. 14; #675, p. 24; *CPL* I, p. 414).

⁹⁰ Norreis obtained the reservation of one of Plympton's benefices in 1317–18 even though he was rector of Wardleigh at the time (*CPL* II, pp. 159, 173).

⁹¹ By 1366, he was canon of Crediton as well as rector of Ugborough (*Reg. Grandisson* III, p. 1252). See also *CPP* I, p. 296 and *CPP* I, p. 346.

⁹² *CPL* III, pp. 389–90.

⁹³ *CPL* III, p. 419; *Reg. Grandisson* III, p. 1388.

⁹⁴ *CPL* III, p. 419.

⁹⁵ *BR* I, pp. 659–60.

⁹⁶ *CPP* I, p. 303. At the same time he was a canon of Crediton and was litigating at the Curia for a canonry at Exeter; he also held the church of Torbryan, which he said he was willing to resign.

⁹⁷ Uppehulle alleged in 1363 that after the resignation of John Lynham—who had been presented in 1318—that the benefice had been left empty for so long that it had lapsed to the Apostolic See (*CPP* I, pp. 471–2). Consequently, the priory's presentation of William de Molton—of which there is no record in Grandisson's register—would have been invalid. However, according to Grandisson's register, the priory had canonically

of Uppehulle's provision to Newton St. Cyres, for in 1363, Sir John de Beauchamp petitioned Pope Urban V on behalf of John Denis for this church, even though the prior and canons were still "unlawfully detaining it."⁹⁸ There is no record of Denis obtaining Newton St. Cyres, either: the next incumbent was a Sir Geoffrey Breye.⁹⁹

One type of papal provision that does crop up three times in the records relating to Plympton Priory is that of the expectative grace *in forma pauperum*. In such a case, a "poor clerk"—that is, a member of the clergy who was unbeneficed or whose benefice yielded a meager income—appealed to the pope for provision to a benefice in the gift of a particular patron the next time the benefice should become vacant. In theory, the benefice was to yield an income of no more than 20 marks if it entailed the cure of souls and no more than 15 marks if it did not; if no benefice was vacant, the patron might be required to give the poor clerk a pension.¹⁰⁰ In two cases, the petitioners obtained vicarages in the gift of Plympton Priory: Reginald Atte Watere was instituted as vicar of Dean Prior in 1345 and John Persoun was instituted as vicar of Marystow in 1337.¹⁰¹ In the third case, the implementation of the provision went rather less smoothly: in December 1328, Bishop Grandisson sent a mandate to the prior and canons of Plympton on behalf of Richard de Langacre to appoint him to one of their benefices.¹⁰² The canons did not show up to respond to this mandate, which seems to have irritated Grandisson, who re-issued the mandate; on May 22, 1329, Grandisson collated Langacre to Ilsington, a rectory in the gift of Plympton Priory and whose incumbent conveniently had recently died.¹⁰³ At some point, the prior and canons granted Langacre a pension of £5. Having obtained both a benefice

cally presented vicars for institution to Newton St. Cyres in 1342 and 1349, so the facts cannot have been as they were stated to the pope.

⁹⁸ *CPP I*, pp. 471–2. Denis expected to be presented as a poor clerk to a benefice in the gift of Ramsey Abbey, but he stated he would resign this. In 1361, Pope Innocent VI had granted Guy de Briane, the king's ambassador, who was acting on behalf of John Uppehulle, B. Can. and Civ. Law, the church of Havant (Diocese of Winchester) "notwithstanding that he has canonries and prebends at Exeter and Crediton, value together 8 pounds and papal provision of the church of Newton St. Cures, of which he has not yet gotten possession, and the church of Tor Bryan" (*CPP I*, p. 370).

⁹⁹ *Reg. Grandisson III*, p. 1498.

¹⁰⁰ Wright, *The Church and the English Crown*, pp. 18–9.

¹⁰¹ *Reg. Grandisson III*, pp. 1348, 1317.

¹⁰² *Reg. Grandisson I*, p. 439.

¹⁰³ *Reg. Grandisson I*, pp. 458–9, 500.

and a pension, Langacre wrote to Pope John XXII, concerned that the pension might render his provision to the benefice invalid; he was allowed to retain the rectory.¹⁰⁴

The pressure to present might also come from those who were employed in the service of the canons of Plympton, or from members of the local lay elite, who had sons or protégés in need of benefices. Unfortunately, no records survive which would shed light on these sorts of requests. In a couple of cases, however, there is the possibility that priors of Plympton arranged for the presentation of their relatives to benefices in their gift. An example is Master Walter de Mymmelonge, who was quite likely related to Matthew de Mimminglond, prior in the early fourteenth century. The prior and canons of Plympton presented Master Walter to the rectory of Meavy in 1309; by the time of his death in 1321, he was rector of Bratton, another benefice in the patronage of Plympton Priory.¹⁰⁵ In addition, a John de Mymmynglond appears as rector of Peter Tavy in 1328; he was probably either John de Mymmynglond or John de Mymelonge, junior, both of whom received first tonsure in a ceremony at Plympton Priory in 1319.¹⁰⁶ These are the only identifiable cases in which familial ties were quite likely to have been a factor in the choice of incumbent for a priory benefice.

Another revealing feature of the records of presentations is the information provided on the orders of the incumbents. Along with pluralism and absenteeism, the presentation of men who were only in the minor orders of the clergy, usually acolytes, was a concern to many in the Church.¹⁰⁷ This is because only those in the major orders of the clergy—subdeacons, deacons, and priests—could fulfill the range of clerical duties.¹⁰⁸ If the incumbent of a benefice were in minor orders, he would have to arrange for a qualified assistant to perform the priestly

¹⁰⁴ *CPL* II, p. 360.

¹⁰⁵ *Reg. Stapeldon*, pp. 234, 298; *Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, pp. 413, 428.

¹⁰⁶ *Reg. Grandisson* I, p. 407; *Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 528.

¹⁰⁷ Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran, 'Clerical Recruitment in the Diocese of York, 1340–1530: Data and Commentary,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 34 (1983), 24–5. Moran described the attempts of the Council of Lyons in 1274 and the archbishops of York in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries to require rectors to be ordained at least to the subdiaconate, and vicars to the priesthood, within a year of institution to a benefice. Archbishop Greenfield went so far as to declare that those who did not conform to these rules would face the sequestration of their benefices.

¹⁰⁸ Moorman, *Church Life in England*, pp. 223–5. Only priests could be the celebrants at Mass; deacons could read the gospels at Mass and perform baptisms; subdeacons assisted the deacons and priests at Mass (Heath, *Parish Clergy*, p. 15).

functions that he himself could not. To what extent, then, did the incumbents of Plympton Priory benefices tend to adhere to the canonical requirements regarding ordination? The information on this issue is far from complete: evidence is lacking as to the level of ordination for 34 of the 111 known incumbents, and it is not always clear in the remaining cases. As well, fairly complete ordination lists for the diocese of Exeter between 1257 and 1369 survive only from the episcopate of Stapeldon. Still, one can determine that a substantial number of the men whom the prior of Plympton presented to the priory's benefices were in major orders.¹⁰⁹ Of the 77 incumbents for whom we have some information as to level of ordination, 56¹¹⁰ were in major orders at the time of their institution to a priory benefice; an additional thirteen are known to have been in major orders during their incumbencies, but the lack of institution records in their cases makes it impossible to know what their status was at the time that they became incumbents. Even these numbers are somewhat misleading, however, as some of the men whom the prior of Plympton presented when they were in minor orders soon afterwards received higher orders, as canon law dictated.¹¹¹ For example, in 1318, the prior of Plympton presented John de Milletone to the rectory of Peter Tavy while he was still a clerk; he became a subdeacon less than two months later, however.¹¹² In only five cases has no evidence emerged as to whether the incumbents in question proceeded from minor orders to major while they held Plympton Priory benefices. One might be inclined to give John de Stapleford, a clerk, credit for possibly having good (albeit unrealized) intentions: he died a mere nine days after he became rector of Meavy.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ That is, they were either priests, deacons, or subdeacons. Men who were designated as "clerics" or "chaplains" in the institution records would have been in minor orders (doorkeeper, lector, exorcist, or acolyte) (Moorman, *Church Life in England*, p. 34).

¹¹⁰ Two of these men, Walter de Bratton and Hugh Splot de Plympton, were incumbents of more than one benefice in the gift of Plympton Priory. Bratton was a clerk when rector of Newton St. Cyres, but proceeded to the subdiaconate when he became vicar of Dean Prior (*Reg. Bronescombe II*, #576, p. 14). Splot was a clerk when he was presented to Meavy and then to Ugborough, but was a deacon when presented to Exminster (*Reg. Bronescombe II*, #530, p. 7; #641, p. 20; #863, p. 50; #994, p. 69).

¹¹¹ Canon law dictated that those instituted to benefices in minor orders had to be ordained priest within a year of their institution (Lepine, 'Canons of Exeter,' p. 107).

¹¹² *Reg. Stapeldon*, pp. 116, 241.

¹¹³ *Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 234.

There was some change in the situation over time. The episcopal registers show that for the period 1257–1326, of the 46 incumbents for whom we have ordination information, fewer than half (eighteen) were priests at the time of presentation. The figures for the years between 1327 and 1369 are rather more problematic, due to the impact of the Black Death. The plague raged during the episcopate of Bishop Grandisson (1327–69), and because of the high mortality rate amongst the parish clergy and the increased need for clergy in major orders,¹¹⁴ we see a consequent increase in the proportion of men who were priests: 22 of the 31 incumbents for whom there is ordination information were priests at the time of their institution to priory benefices. As we unfortunately lack the ordination lists for Bishop Grandisson's episcopate, it is difficult to know how many of these priests were young men who had quickly moved up the orders due to the great demand for their services in the diocese. Certainly, dispensations for the ordination of men who were under-age or illegitimate increased significantly in the decades after the Black Death.¹¹⁵ The canons of Plympton Priory themselves sought a dispensation in 1372 to allow young members of their community to be ordained in their twentieth year, "as the recent plague has caused a serious reduction in the number of priests."¹¹⁶ As a consequence of the difficulties inherent in the institution records, and the occurrence of an extraordinary event such as the Black Death, it is impossible to know whether the prior and canons of Plympton made a point of choosing men in major orders for presentation to their benefices. On the whole, however, the figures which do exist suggest that the problem of unqualified incumbents was perhaps not as significant for the parishioners of Plympton's benefices as it might have been elsewhere.

A final characteristic of the incumbents which merits consideration is the question of how many were likely to have been natives of the diocese of Exeter. This is no easy task, as there is little to rely upon other than surnames which might indicate Devon or Cornwall origins. Some individuals do appear as having received their first tonsure in ordination

¹¹⁴ Nicholas Orme, 'The Later Middle Ages and the Reformation,' in *Unity and Variety: A History of the Church in Devon and Cornwall*, ed. Nicholas Orme (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1991), p. 56. About a third of the parish clergy in the diocese of Exeter died.

¹¹⁵ In the wake of the Black Death, Bishop Grandisson ordained, with special papal permission, 50 illegitimate candidates and 100 men who were underage (*Reg. Grandisson III*, p. lxvi).

¹¹⁶ *Reg. Brantyngham II*, p. 263.

lists in the registers of the bishops of Exeter, which suggests that they might have been local youths, but such lists unfortunately survive only in Bishop Stapeldon's register for the period under discussion.

Attempting to ascertain the origins of the incumbents by relying on place-name surnames brings one up against the obstacle of the reliability of such names as indicators of geographic origin. As David Lepine has mentioned in regard to the canons of Exeter Cathedral, place-name surnames may have referred not to birthplaces, but to the area in which an individual cleric began his career.¹¹⁷ There is also, of course, the issue of whether a place-name surname was simply inherited from a parent. This becomes more of a problem when examining the fourteenth-century data: over the course of this century, surnames increasingly became heritable, and it is less clear whether place-name surnames indicate actual origin in a particular locale.¹¹⁸ An example of this is Thomas de Plympstoke, rector of Exminster in 1319¹¹⁹ and nephew of the lawyer Master William de Plumstock.¹²⁰ One must be cautious about assuming that Thomas actually was from Plymstock in Devon when "de Plympstoke" and its variants may have simply been family names at this point. The issue can be made even murkier when one comes across place-name surnames which are not necessarily distinctive: that is, Nicholas de la Lake might have come from a locale near a body of water in Devon or in some other county. While bearing in mind the concerns about the reliability of surnames as evidence of origin, the evidence does suggest that a significant number of the incumbents of benefices in the gift of Plympton Priory originated within or had connections to the diocese of Exeter. Twenty-two incumbents bear names that include known Devon or Cornwall place-names;¹²¹ at

¹¹⁷ Lepine, 'Canons of Exeter,' pp. 88–9. While Lepine writes specifically about cathedral canons in this article, his warnings about assuming too much from place-name surnames is relevant for any consideration of clerical and religious origins in this period.

¹¹⁸ Peter McClure, 'Patterns of Migration in the Late Middle Ages: The Evidence of English Place-name Surnames,' *Economic History Review* 32 (1979), 167–8. McClure states that "the growth of hereditary naming is not likely to interfere seriously with one's results until after the middle of the fourteenth century in the south and midlands [of England]..."

¹¹⁹ *Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 217.

¹²⁰ *Reg. Grandisson I*, pp. 188, 189.

¹²¹ These are Roger de Toriz (a variant spelling of Torr ridge), Nicholas de Plympton, Gervase de Crediton, Walter de Bratton, Peter de Plymstock, Walter de Torintone, Hugh Splot de Plympton, Gilbert de Plympton, John de la Torre, Reymund de Lanhoho, Roger de Sutton, Richard de Coletone, William de Binworthy, Richard de Plimpstoke,

least another twenty-one incumbents, almost all from the fourteenth century, bear names which might possibly be variants of Devon or Cornwall place-names.¹²²

In addition to the place-name surnames, origins in or connections to Devon and Cornwall might be suggested by surnames which are also those of prominent families in these counties. For example, William Trenchard, the vicar of Marystow from 1278 to 1309, likely came from the Anglo-Norman Trenchard family of Devon.¹²³ William de Sicca Villa (Satchville), who was presented by the prior of Plympton to the rectory of Meavy in the thirteenth century, was probably a member of the knightly Satchville family of Devon.¹²⁴ Walter de Ferrars, rector of Stokeinteignhead in 1282, was almost certainly related to the old Norman knightly family of the same name.¹²⁵ He had previously been presented to the church of Bere Ferrars by Sir Reginald de Ferrars in 1279.¹²⁶

Cornish origins seem likely in the case of a few incumbents of benefices in the gift of Plympton Priory. If the old Cornish rhyme—"By Tre-, Pol-, Pen-/Ye may know most Cornish men"¹²⁷—is true, then Nicholas de Penhal and Henry Tresodron, successive vicars of St. Kew in Cornwall,¹²⁸ were quite likely natives of that county. In addition, Reymond de Lanhoho, vicar of St. Kew in the 1280s, was probably from the area, as Lanhoho seems to have been a variant of Landoho, an early name for the church.¹²⁹

Thomas de Plympstoke, Peter de Honetone, John de Lustleghe, John de Stapleford, John de Schireford, William de Newetone alias Excestre, Thomas Tuggel of Tiverton, and William de Wooleghe. See *PND*, *passim*.

¹²² These are David de Beare, Richard de Braundsworthy (Brentesworthy), William de Beare, William de la Slade, William de Miriefelde, John de Crewecombe, John de Lynham, John de Milletone, Nicholas de la Lake, Simon Crosse, John Wynstone, John Atte Poune, Henry de Galmetone, John de Devenebiry, William de Cloubery, William de Nywenham, Richard de Wodelonde, Nicholas de Weylonde, Robert de Middelond, and Roger de Harstone (*PND*, *passim*).

¹²³ *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #1301, p. 123; David Postles, *The Surnames of Devon* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 238, 257.

¹²⁴ *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #643, p. 20; Postles, *Surnames of Devon*, p. 87.

¹²⁵ *Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, p. 356; Postles, *Surnames of Devon*, pp. 87, 119.

¹²⁶ *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #1354, p. 130.

¹²⁷ G. Pawley White, *A Handbook of Cornish Surnames* (Camborne, 1972), p. 5.

¹²⁸ *Reg. Grandisson* III, pp. 1382, 1388.

¹²⁹ *Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, pp. 354, 372; W.M.M. Picken, 'The Manor of Tremaruustel and the Honour of St. Keus,' *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, n. s. 7 (1975/1976), 224-6.

The number of incumbents bearing names from areas near the priory would seem to indicate that the canons of Plympton played a particularly important role in offering opportunities of support for clergy who were from the region. For example, there were a number of men who were termed “of Plympton,” as well as “of Plymstock,” and “of Sutton” (communities which were within a few kilometres of Plympton). There was the previously mentioned Master Thomas de Plympstoke; Master Nicholas de Plympton, who had a career in high ecclesiastical circles;¹³⁰ Peter de Plymstock, a vicar of Dean Prior in the thirteenth century;¹³¹ Gilbert de Plymptone, a vicar of the Cornish church of Maker;¹³² Hugh Splot de Plympton, whom the prior and canons of Plympton presented, at various times, to the rectories of Exminster, Meavy, and Ugborough;¹³³ Roger de Suttone, vicar of Tamerton Foliot, a village near Sutton/Plymouth;¹³⁴ and the infamous Richard de Plimpstoke, mentioned above.¹³⁵ After Richard de Plimpstoke’s time—c. 1300–17—and up to the end of Grandisson’s episcopate in 1369, surnames bearing place-names from the vicinity of Plympton do not occur in records of institutions to Plympton Priory’s benefices. Perhaps this is because the evolution of surname practices in the fourteenth century, as noted previously, or possibly because the prior and canons had less freedom to choose local men as the pressure from the bishops of Exeter to present their candidates increased.

The matter of the origins of the incumbents also bears upon the question of how many of the rectors and vicars actually resided in their parishes. If J.R.H. Moorman’s contention—that local men were more likely to remain in their parishes—is correct,¹³⁶ then the findings of this study suggest that many of the incumbents at Plympton’s benefices may have been resident.¹³⁷ But is Moorman’s assertion correct when

¹³⁰ Master Nicholas was at various points in his life a royal clerk, a papal chaplain, archdeacon of Norfolk, and canon of Exeter Cathedral, as well as being incumbent of the churches of Dean Prior and Bridestowe, both of which were in the gift of Plympton Priory (*Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, p. 228; *Reg. Bronescombe* I, #131, pp. 40–1; #169, pp. 50–1; #394, pp. 134–5; *CPL* I, pp. 261, 291, 315, 317).

¹³¹ *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #656, p. 22.

¹³² *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #551, p. 10.

¹³³ *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #995, p. 69; #530, p. 7; #641, p. 20.

¹³⁴ *Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, p. 357.

¹³⁵ *Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 216.

¹³⁶ Moorman, *Church Life in England*, pp. 24–5.

¹³⁷ They would most likely have been so during the period 1355–69. Bishop Grandisson tried to enforce residency among the parish clergy by refusing to issue licences for non-residence after 1355 (*Reg. Grandisson* III, p. 1174).

examining the careers of local men who “made good,” joined the upper ranks of the church hierarchy, and attended university, that is, men who were rectors rather than vicars? Master Nicholas de Plympton, Richard de Plimpstoke, and Master William de Newetone alias Excestre¹³⁸ would have likely been too busy with their other commitments to contemplate living in their parishes on a regular basis.

Titles

In addition to making presentations to benefices in their gift, the prior and canons of Plympton Priory also assisted members of the secular clergy by assigning them “titles” at the time of their ordination. A normal feature of the ordination lists which appear in episcopal registers, titles were attached to the names of those who were being ordained to the orders of subdeacon, deacon, or priest.¹³⁹ In theory, the title ensured that the ordinand had “guaranteed financial support to maintain the dignity of his orders” and was a “basic requirement” for those seeking ordination.¹⁴⁰ The lists show that clerics who were not already beneficed clergy or religious were ordained either “to their own patrimony”—that is, their own resources were sufficient to support them until they were to receive a benefice—or “to the title of X,” X being an individual, a religious house, or some other corporate entity. The latter form of title constituted the majority by the end of the fourteenth century, a change which has caused some scholars, such as H.S. Bennett, to wonder whether the titles represented actual guarantees of support or were fictions, “paper qualifications” bought by ordinands.¹⁴¹ Swanson hypothesized that the increased activity of religious houses in supplying titles indicated a development in diocesan

¹³⁸ Master William de Newetone seems to have spent much of his time as rector of Stokeinteignhead in Oxford studying for his doctorate in medicine. He vacated that benefice by 1328 and went on to obtain a doctorate in theology as well. Master William ultimately became a royal clerk, serving as physician to Queen Philippa and an envoy to the king of France in 1340. He also wrote an anti-Ockham text. See *BR I*, pp. 659–60 for details of his career.

¹³⁹ Robert N. Swanson, ‘Titles to Orders in Medieval English Episcopal Registers,’ in *Studies in Medieval History presented to R.H.C. Davis*, eds. Henry Mayr-Harting and R.I. Moore (London, 1985), p. 233.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 234; Henry S. Bennett, ‘Medieval Ordination Lists in English Episcopal Registers,’ in *Studies presented to Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, ed. J. Conway Davies (London, 1957), pp. 28–9.

administrative practices: diocesan officials may have “delegated responsibility” to certain religious houses for the examination of candidates, and the titles given these candidates were merely a formality.¹⁴² Geddes, in her study of Llanthony Secunda Priory at Gloucester (also known as Lanthony by Gloucester), found that the priory’s hospital of St. Mary Magdalene at Dudstone provided titles for far more clerics at the end of the fourteenth century than it could possibly support, suggesting that these titles “meant something other than a guarantee of financial support.”¹⁴³ On the other hand, there were few ordinations to the title of Llanthony Secunda Priory in the fourteenth century; she concluded that these “probably were genuine statements of patronage.” Swanson did point out that richer institutions were less likely to provide titles than poorer ones: for example, Norwich Cathedral offered few titles, whereas a nearby hospital offered hundreds.¹⁴⁴ A. Hamilton Thompson contended that the involvement of poor religious houses in providing titles could be explained by the fact that many houses had trust funds to pay for the salaries of priests who served in chantry chapels established at the behest of testators.¹⁴⁵ He dismissed the idea that there might be “illicit pacts” between the houses and the ordinands but did not offer an explanation as to why less well-off religious institutions were more heavily involved in the practice than wealthier ones.

The evidence from the ordination lists of the episcopal registers for Exeter reveals that Plympton Priory’s practices concerning titles changed over the course of the fourteenth century. As the ordination records for the episcopate of Bishop Grandisson (1327–69) have unfortunately not survived, we must rely on lists covering the years 1308–21 and 1370–94. These two sets of lists reveal that in the earlier period, Plympton Priory provided the titles for the ordination of only four men: William de la Hulle (or Hill), William de Limestone, Henry de Porta, and Robert de Raddon.¹⁴⁶ Only one of these, William de la Hulle (or Hill), was ever presented by the prior of Plympton to a benefice.¹⁴⁷ Upon investigating the identities of others who were involved in the process from 1308 to

¹⁴² Swanson, ‘Titles,’ 355.

¹⁴³ Geddes, ‘Priory of Lanthony by Gloucester,’ p. 355.

¹⁴⁴ Swanson, ‘Titles,’ 242.

¹⁴⁵ Hamilton Thompson, *English Clergy*, p. 143.

¹⁴⁶ *Reg. Stapeldon*, pp. 234, 505, 525, 533. Robert de Raddon (a place where Plympton Priory held land) may have had some kind of more personal connection with the priory, as he received first tonsure in the chapel of the prior in 1310 (*Reg. Stapeldon*, p. 234).

¹⁴⁷ *Reg. Stapeldon*, pp. 234, 467.

1321,¹⁴⁸ it appears that certain religious houses, such as Buckfast Abbey and Tavistock Abbey, were fairly active in providing titles. However, in the diocese of Exeter, the provision of titles seems to have been dominated in this earlier period by the beneficed clergy and by the laity.

However, by the episcopate of Bishop Thomas Brantingham at the end of the century, the situation had changed along the lines described by Swanson. Lay involvement in the giving of titles seems to have virtually vanished from the diocese; the ordinands by this point received titles almost exclusively from religious houses.¹⁴⁹ Certain houses such as Launceston and Tavistock continued to give titles to large numbers of ordinands, but others, such as Plympton Priory, had by this point become more active participants. From 1370 to 1394, Plympton Priory provided titles for eighteen ordinands. The records of institutions from Bishop Brantingham's register show that Plympton Priory did not present any of these men to benefices in their patronage. Five ordinands did obtain benefices in the diocese, but were presented by other patrons. This lack of subsequent support on the part of the priory would seem to indicate that titles had indeed lost, as Swanson contends, much of their original meaning for clergy and religious house alike. And yet, what is one to make of the notable increase in numbers of titles provided by Plympton Priory by the end of the fourteenth century? If wealthier houses tended not to be very active in this procedure, what does this increase signify? What about Bennett's suggestion that poorer houses may have raised funds by charging ordinands for titles?¹⁵⁰

One should keep in mind that compared to other houses in the diocese—such as the poor Benedictine house of Tywardreath or its sister Augustinian house, Bodmin Priory—Plympton Priory was still not a major supplier of titles to ordinands in the latter part of the century. Indeed, during the episcopate of Bishop Stafford (1395–1419), the priory was less active in the provision of titles, appearing in the ordination lists granting titles for only eight or nine men.¹⁵¹ The prior

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

¹⁴⁹ *Reg. Brantyngham*, *passim*.

¹⁵⁰ Bennett, 'Medieval ordination lists,' 29.

¹⁵¹ *Reg. Stafford*, pp. 425–67 *passim*. There is some uncertainty as to whether Henry Promptyslegh, who was ordained to the title of Pilton Priory for his ordinations as deacon and priest, was really ordained to the title of Plympton Priory when he became a subdeacon (*Reg. Stafford*, p. 449). Ordinands did not always rely on the same religious houses for all three ordinations, but they very commonly did so, and this fact as well

and canons began to provide titles more regularly again during the period when Edmund Lacy was bishop in the fifteenth century: the ordination lists of his register reveal that between the years 1420 and 1455, thirty-three men relied on Plympton Priory for titles.¹⁵² At a rate of fewer than one a year, the numbers of men making use of the assistance of the priory at ordination time hardly shows that the canons of Plympton were being profligate in their distribution of titles. Also, as wealthy as a house might be, it might still fall into financial difficulties, or simply wish to take advantage of a source of income which required few obligations on its part. We know that the priory's finances were not in a healthy state by 1329 and again in 1331, when Bishop Grandisson ordered an inquiry into them.¹⁵³ Certainly, Plympton Priory would have incurred heavy legal expenses in the latter half of the fourteenth century, when it was involved in several long-running disputes with the Crown.¹⁵⁴ Perhaps, then, the increase in the number of titles over the course of the fourteenth century, and again—after a lull—in the fifteenth century, signified a growing awareness on the part of the priory as to the monetary benefits which might be gained from this process. It is hard to see why the religious houses would provide more and more titles over time if they were doing so only at the request of the bishops or out of friendliness towards aspiring members of the clergy. No matter how cordial relations might be between bishop and religious, or between ordinand and religious, it would seem more likely that financial incentives existed, especially in the cases in which some religious houses granted enormous numbers of titles.

Plympton Priory, then, played the role of intermediary in the religious life of the diocese of Exeter, possessing the desired goals—titles, benefices, and the incomes attached to them—of aspiring and well-established clerics alike. These commonplace activities of assisting with ordinations and presenting to benefices were the main points of contact between Plympton Priory and the beneficed or hoping-to-be-beneficed

as the similarity of the names of the two houses suggests that the record of title for Promptslegh's ordination as subdeacon might be in error.

¹⁵² *Reg. Lacy* IV, pp. 66–257 *passim*.

¹⁵³ *Reg. Grandisson* I, pp. 231–2 and II, pp. 620–1.

¹⁵⁴ These disputes concerned the lands of Talkogon and Trevynek and the controversy surrounding the patronage of Plympton Priory initiated by Edward III. The patronage case will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

clergy of the diocese. Of course, as we have seen, the prior and canons of Plympton Priory did not have perfect autonomy in terms of decisions concerning presentations: their actions and choices intersected with episcopal and papal agendas. While this interconnectedness may have proved an annoyance to the canons on occasion, it did confirm their significance to the secular clergy and Church hierarchy of the diocese of Exeter and beyond.

As for the secular clergy themselves, this case study has shed some light on the diversity in the ranks of the rectors and vicars in this part of England in this period. Taking into account the fact that the records provide far from complete information about these individuals, it has still been possible to identify trends among those who held benefices in the gift of Plympton Priory. A slight majority of the total number of known incumbents between 1257 and 1369 were rectors, and among this group there were many men who moved in the higher echelons of the diocesan administration. Most of the rectors had some university education, and about half are known to have held canonries and prebends at Exeter Cathedral or collegiate churches during their careers. The greater visibility of the rectors in the surviving documents should not blind us to the importance of the vicars, however. While few of these, except for the anomalous vicars of Sutton, were university-educated or sufficiently well-connected to obtain canonries or prebends, they did perform the normal duties of pastoral care in these parishes around Devon and Cornwall. The vicars may be largely unknown to us except for their names, but they would have been prominent in the lives of their parishioners in ways that the rectors would not have been.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CANONS OF PLYMPTON PRIORY

It is unfortunate that unlike the rich documentary evidence from other religious houses such as Durham Priory or Westminster Abbey, no obediatory rolls survive from Plympton Priory. The documentation that would provide one with a view into the priory itself to see what its internal structure was like and how the house was run is largely absent. Frustratingly, then, it is very difficult to say much about the priors and canons themselves as individuals. In this chapter, an effort will be made to re-construct what little can be known through the examination of a sample group of canons from the fourteenth century.

One issue that comes up again and again in discussions of the Augustinian canons is the extent to which they engaged in the cure of souls. In the following pages, after a discussion of what we know of the origins of individual canons and their links to the communities, the evidence for the participation of the canons of Plympton in the cure of souls, both in the capacity of beneficed clergy and in less formal roles, will be explored. The methodology employed has been largely prosopographical in approach; that is, the group under discussion—the canons of Plympton Priory—has been analyzed according to geographical origin, careers, and education.¹

The Canons in the Fourteenth Century

While the names of priors and some canons do appear in documents preserved in the episcopal registers or in the governmental records of the period, it seems quite likely that the majority of canons remain unknown to us. Still, we can identify numerous canons of Plympton Priory. Some of these names can be gleaned from the ordination lists in the episcopal registers for the periods of 1308–21 and 1370–92; these yield the names of thirty-two canons. The ordination lists from

¹ For a description of the prosopographical methodology, see George Beech, ‘Prosopography,’ in *Medieval Studies: An Introduction*, ed. James M. Powell, 2nd ed. (Syracuse, 1992), pp. 185–226.

the episcopate of Bishop Grandisson (1327–69) have unfortunately been lost, but the names of ten canons appear in his register in other contexts. A few other names appear in other sources during his episcopate.² Consequently, when the priors are factored in, we know the names of forty-eight of the canons of Plympton Priory during the fourteenth century.

This is obviously a number much lower than the actual total, as the ordination lists cover only thirty-five years of the century. The number of names for the two periods of surviving ordination records—twelve in thirteen years, and then twenty in twenty-two years—would suggest that there was a fairly constant number of new recruits and men “progressing through the ranks” during the century, although of course the Black Death must have had an impact on the population of the priory in mid-century.³ It is known that there were nineteen canons at Plympton Priory in 1377,⁴ twenty-three in 1434–35,⁵ and twenty-one in 1534.⁶

Surname evidence for the period 1308–21 suggests that the majority of the canons ordained in these years were from Devon, and of these most were from communities in the South Hams district of Devon

² For example, Thomas Tokere and Thomas of Donne appear in the *Calendar of Papal Letters* (CPL III, pp. 598, 263) and Richard, brother of John Crocke at Mille appears in the *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, vol. 11, #615.

³ It is not known how many of Plympton’s canons died during the Black Death in the diocese in 1348–49 and 1361. That the priory did suffer losses is indicated by a reference in Bishop Brantyngham’s register (*Reg. Brantyngham* II, p. 263). However, it is unlikely that the devastation would have been as severe as at Bodmin Priory, where only two canons survived; otherwise there would most likely have been some record of this in Bishop Grandisson’s register. The rapid turnover of vicars at Plympton’s churches of Tamerton Foliot and Egg Buckland, which were only a few miles from the priory, suggests that the district did indeed endure substantial fatalities.

⁴ Robert J.E. Boggis, *A History of the Diocese of Exeter* (Exeter, 1922), pp. 262–3. Boggis obtained his figure from the clerical subsidy roll for the archdeaconry of Totnes. When one compares the number of canons at Plympton with the numbers of religious at other houses in the archdeaconry at this date (1377), it is clear that the other houses had suffered much more than Plympton from the Black Death and its after-effects. The Cistercian abbeys of Buckland and Buckfast had nine and fifteen monks respectively; the Benedictine and Premonstratensian abbeys at Tavistock and Torre each had eleven, while the small Benedictine priories of Modbury and Totnes were reduced to one monk each. There were nine nuns at Cornworthy Priory. The prior of Plympton had the highest income amongst the religious in the archdeaconry: £160 6s 8d.

⁵ *MDE*, p. 132.

⁶ *MRH*, p. 171. There were nineteen canons at the surrender of the priory in 1539. Knowles and Hadcock speculate that there were “probably forty” canons at the priory in the thirteenth century, but there is no clear evidence to support this figure.

or other areas near Plympton.⁷ However, surname evidence must be treated with caution: as has been mentioned above, place-name surnames may have referred not to birthplaces, but to the area in which an individual began his career.⁸ By the end of the fourteenth century, the names that appear in the ordination lists of Bishop Brantyngham prove more difficult to decipher. Firstly, by the end of the fourteenth century, place-name surnames cease to be unequivocal indicators of origin for the individuals holding them.⁹ Secondly, none of the surnames in the registers contain “de” any longer,¹⁰ which adds to the confusion as to whether these names refer to places. For example, did Thomas Marshall come from the village of Marshall in Devon, or did he descend from someone who had once held a position as a marshal? While some surnames seem derived from Devon place-names—for example, Shaldon, Combe, Coryton, and Holland—the majority are not identifiable as such. Perhaps, too, after the Black Death the priory began to draw recruits from a wider area.

Attempting to assess the social status of the canons is similarly problematic. None bears the names of the most distinguished families in Devon in this period, such as the Courtenays, Pomerays, or Zouches, nor, definitely, of the knightly families of the county such as the Peverells, Giffards, or Bonvills.¹¹ In the cases of Nicholas de Pin or Thomas of Donne, there may have been connections with the knightly families of these names, but this cannot be considered a certainty. As Lepine has also pointed out, one must not be overly hasty about claiming origins in groups of lower social status based on negative evidence, although people with unknown origins are not likely to have come from the

⁷ For example, Leigh, Strashleigh, Englebourne, and Pruston Barton are all in Coleridge hundred, where Plympton Priory held land. Cheverstone (near Kenton) and Exminster were also close to the lands of Plympton’s cell, Marsh Barton. Coryton is near Plympton’s lands and church in the Marystow/Thrushelton area. Buckland is a few miles north-west of Plympton, and Colebrook is a neighbourhood in Plympton. Forde is in East Devon. Pin may refer to the place-name in East Budleigh hundred in East Devon, or to the de Pin family, who were benefactors of Plympton Priory in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Oliver, *Additional Supplement to the MDE*, pp. 14–5).

⁸ Lepine, ‘The Origins and Careers of the Canons of Exeter Cathedral 1300–1455,’ pp. 88–9.

⁹ McClure, ‘Patterns of Migration in the Late Middle Ages,’ 167–8.

¹⁰ It is possible that this was due to a change in the editorial practice of F.C. Hingeston-Randolph, editor of the episcopal registers of the diocese of Exeter.

¹¹ The names of the canons have been compared with the lists of the baronial and knightly families of Devon listed in Sir William Pole’s *Collections towards a Description of the County of Devon* (London, 1791), pp. 34–71.

“prominent baronial and knightly families whose pedigrees are best known.”¹²

Sadly, there are no surviving documents which would indicate how frequently popes or bishops of Exeter tried to exert influence upon the priory to accept their nominees as canons. Since benefices were the focus of papal interest, such cases were not likely to be common in any case. One example does appear in a papal mandate, however, which would seem to indicate that papal backing did not automatically guarantee a welcome into the priory. In 1326, Matthew de Mimminglond, prior of Plympton, refused to accept John de Holinp as a canon, tore up the papal letters ordering him to do so, and threw them in Holinp’s face.¹³ As a consequence, John XXII cited Mimminglond to appear before him.

Turning to the issue of the canons and their participation in the cure of souls, an examination of the records of institutions preserved in the episcopal registers indicates that virtually none of the canons served in churches belonging to Plympton Priory as beneficed clergy during the period for which we have records. Of the institutions from 1257 to 1394, in only one case do we see a canon taking on the cure of souls at a parish church. This was Master Nicholas de Weylonde, whom the prior presented to the vicarage of Sutton in 1334,¹⁴ a benefice which had been left vacant by Master William de Wolleghe, who had decided to become a canon at Plympton Priory.¹⁵ Whatever their involvement in the cure of souls in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries—an involvement for which there is little evidence, either positive or negative—it is clear that in the later thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries the priors of Plympton were appointing secular clergy to the churches in their patronage rather than expecting the canons to exercise parochial responsibilities themselves.

Of course, it ought to be noted that over the course of the fifteenth century, a number of canons of Plympton Priory did receive papal dispensations to hold benefices, whether they entailed the cure of souls

¹² Lepine, ‘The Origins and Careers of the Canons of Exeter Cathedral 1300–1455,’ p. 95.

¹³ *CPL* II, p. 252.

¹⁴ *Reg. Grandisson* III, p. 1305. See Chapter Six for the attack on Nicholas de Weylonde by a mob in Plymouth.

¹⁵ *Reg. Grandisson* I, pp. 466–7 and pp. II, 768–9. In 1332, Master William of Wolleghe wished to become a canon at Plympton, but he was not given licence to do so by the bishop until 1334.

or not. They were certainly not the only religious in England seeking such dispensations in this period: Heath calculated that between 1447 and 1492, 413 English religious obtained papal dispensations to hold benefices, of whom 177 were Benedictine monks, 144 were Augustinian canons, and 75 were mendicants.¹⁶ An example from Plympton Priory is John Dygoun, who in 1401 obtained a dispensation to hold, “together with his canonical portion in Plympton” any benefice, even if it was usually served by the secular clergy.¹⁷ It is to be doubted whether Dygoun actually intended to leave Plympton and carry out an incumbent’s duties himself, however. He had also received a papal confirmation a few months earlier of an arrangement between him and the Prior John allowing him a private room at the priory, very specific and generous provisions of food and clothing for himself and his servant, and exemption from mandatory attendance at choir for the recitation of divine office.¹⁸ Prior William Hill also obtained such a licence in 1462—on the basis of increased demands to provide hospitality for travellers—but it is hard to imagine that the superior of the priory would have much time to fulfill the duties of a parish priest.¹⁹ Indeed, in a dispensation granted to the priory in 1450, the practical motives behind the presentation of canons to benefices are apparent: the prior had petitioned the pope, explaining that as

they have the patronage of a number of benefices with and without cure wont to be governed by secular clerks, and that if they could present three of their canons for as many of such benefices, and have such three benefices governed by them, it would be a relief to the prior and convent, and provision would probably be better made to the said benefices...²⁰

¹⁶ Peter Heath, *The English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation* (Toronto, 1969), pp. 175–8. Heath cites a variety of reasons provided to justify the holding of benefices by religious, including the support of infirm abbots or priors, the need for income during study, and occasionally enthusiasm to undertake pastoral care. Heath assumes that the Augustinian canons were more likely to have been resident in their benefices, but admits that there is little evidence of this.

¹⁷ *CPL* V, p. 429.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 356. Heath suggests that for some petitioners a benefice was “a concealment of apostasy, a remedy for the inmate who found the Rule too demanding or too lax.” He cites the example of a canon at the Augustinian priory of Ashridge who obtained a dispensation to hold a benefice in 1462 because he was sick and could not take part in the divine services at his house (Heath, *English Parish Clergy*, p. 176). One suspects that similar motivations might have been present in John Dygoun’s situation.

¹⁹ *CPL* X, p. 620.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

From the point of view of the canons, it would seem to be sensible to have the option to eliminate the middlemen—the perpetual vicars and rectors—and maximize the spiritual income for the priory, pressed for funds as it often seems to have been. With the papal dispensation, they could employ stipendiary priests or celebrate divine worship themselves, as they saw fit.

There are indications, however, that the canons of Plympton personally undertook the celebration of divine worship at some of the priory's chapels, especially those in or quite near Plympton, at least in this later period. Since these chapels did not constitute benefices, they do not appear in the records of the institutions in the episcopal registers. In documents concerning arrangements between Plympton Priory and its chapels in the fifteenth century, there are references to canons being involved in holding services. This was the case at Plympton St. Mary, where canons traditionally celebrated Mass on Sundays and feast days.²¹ At Brixton, the prior, according to the 1478 agreement, could send either canons or secular priests to preside at services.²² The composition between Tavistock Abbey and Plympton Priory in 1429 specified that the prior could choose either secular or regular chaplains to fulfill the specified duties at Plymstock.²³ In the register of Bishop Lacy, we also encounter Sir William Holdyche, a canon of Plympton Priory, appearing as curate of the chapel of St. John-in-Arcubus, in Exeter, in 1454.²⁴ Finally, in the letter of complaint from parishioners at Wembury to Henry VIII in 1535, the petitioners refer to either a priest or a canon coming from Plympton to their chapel on Sundays.²⁵ While these cases do not indicate the scale of the canons' involvement in the cure of souls at their chapels, they do suggest that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it was not unusual for the canons to take part in the celebration of divine worship at these locations.

One must also note an episcopal licence granted to the canons of Plympton Priory in 1376–77 to “perform divine services themselves, or

²¹ *Reg. Lacy* III, p. 248. In the 1441 composition between the priory and the parishioners of Plympton St. Mary, it was stated that the priory would pay for a suitable secular chaplain for the chapel, and in addition a canon would come from the priory to celebrate divine worship with the chaplain on Sundays and feast days as was the usual and customary practice (“more solito et consueto”).

²² Evans, ‘Wembury: Its Bay, Church, and Parish,’ 284, Appendix III.

²³ *Reg. Lacy* IV, p. 270.

²⁴ *Reg. Lacy* III, p. 198.

²⁵ *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic*, Henry VIII, vol. 9, p. 391, #1147.

employ suitable chaplains to do so, in the chapels dependent on their appropriated churches.”²⁶ Of the appropriated churches with such chapels, Sutton had at least two, St. Budeaux and St. Katherine on the Hoe, Marystow also had two, at Thrushelton and at St. James in the Wode, and Newton St. Cyres had one at Norton. Other churches appropriated to Plymouth may have had such chapels, but given the often ephemeral nature of their existence, and the fact that many did not survive into modern times, it is impossible to know with certainty how many chapels would have been covered by this licence. One must be cautious, too, in interpreting this licence as an indication of renewed interest in the cure of souls, as the licence does permit the canons to employ others to take their place. The canons may possibly have sought the licence because, in the years following the Black Death, the shortage of priests meant that the canons wanted to be able to step in themselves if the chapels were short-staffed. Alternatively, as with the papal dispensation of 1450 mentioned above, financial motives may well have been a factor: the canons may have wished to garner the income that would normally have gone to chaplains. Even if the canons employed stipendiary priests to take their places at these chapels, they might still have realized some profits from these arrangements.

The matter of the canons’ involvement in the cure of souls cannot pass without noting the opinion of J.C. Dickinson, the eminent scholar of the English Augustinian canons. While acknowledging that more work needed to be done in this area, he stated that “it seems clear that to the end of their days the medieval Austin canons never engaged in parish work on any substantial scale though it now [i.e., c. 1340–c. 1500] became more common than before. The larger houses might send a brother or two to one of their livings but this was probably more for financial reasons than anything else, and possibly in some cases to give a particular person a break from monastic routine.”²⁷ This increased interest in obtaining benefices was definitely present amongst the canons of Plympton Priory in the later Middle Ages, but whether this was an expression of their “original mission” as an order

²⁶ *Reg. Brantyngham* I, p. 376.

²⁷ J.C. Dickinson, *The Later Middle Ages from the Norman Conquest to the Eve of the Reformation*, vol. 2 of *The Ecclesiastical History of England* (London, 1979), pp. 287–8. Dickinson noted that the bishops were generally not keen on sending canons away from their houses to benefices, and they tried to require the canon who was the incumbent to bring at least one companion in order to preserve some sort of conventual life. Dickinson believed that these requirements were often disregarded.

is doubtful. That the Benedictines' desire to obtain benefices exceeded that of the Augustinians would seem to indicate that other factors and motivations were at play. For Plympton Priory, we simply do not have firm evidence one way or the other regarding the participation of the canons in fulfilling the duties of beneficed clergy in the twelfth and first half of the thirteenth centuries. From 1257 to 1394, there is only the one case of a canon of Plympton obtaining a benefice. Of course, the fifteenth-century evidence regarding the chapels suggests that personal service by the canons at these smaller centres of worship may have been occurring for some time. However, as with the issue of the canons and the procuring of benefices in the fifteenth century, it is unwise to reason backwards from these later activities and to assume that they are characteristic of the earlier period, as well.

Names of Canons of Plympton Priory in the Fourteenth Century

1308–21

Nicholas of Leigh	Robert of Forde, later Prior	Nicholas de Pin
Herbert of Cheverstone	Richard of Buckland	Simon de Solers
Hugo of Exminster	Richard of Strashleigh	Robert de Wicheforde
John of Englebourne, later Prior	Matthew Mimminglond, Prior	Robert of Pruston

1328–69

Master Nicholas de Weylonde	William of Wolleghe	John Bacoun
John de Wy of Meavy	Ralph Persoun, Prior	Robert Gyrard
Richard Fairwood	Richard de Gatepathe	Robert Hode
Thomas Doulish, Prior	Nicholas Wellesforde	Richard, brother of
Thomas Tokere	Thomas of Donne	John Crocke att Mille

1370–92

John Shaldon, Prior	Roger Ros or Roche	Lucas Mathe
William Jarde	William Laurence	William Lywer
John Coryton	Thomas Marshall	John Holonde
Michael Combe	John Judde	Peter Sturt
John Dygoun	Robert Symon	Henry Carpenter
John Gripa	Thomas Morgan	Nicholas Selman,
Thomas Cokeworthy or	Walter Nasman/ Nansman/Nosman	later Prior
Coleworthy		

CHAPTER NINE

THE PATRONAGE CASE: THE CROWN, THE BISHOPS OF EXETER, AND PLYMPTON PRIORY

A theme that has re-appeared throughout this book has been the importance of patronage, whether it be the patronage of Plympton Priory by the bishops of Exeter or the patronage exercised by the canons themselves in regards to the churches in their gift. The fourteenth century witnessed another development in the story of patronage and the priory. One might think that this had been established in the twelfth century with the re-foundation of the minster at Plympton as a house of Augustinian canons by Bishop William Warelwast, an act which led to the bishops of Exeter being acknowledged as the patrons of Plympton Priory without question from 1121 up until the middle of the fourteenth century. Indeed, the value of the right of patronage became very evident during the reign of King Edward III, when the king wrested the right of the patronage of Plympton Priory from Bishop Grandisson of Exeter. The subsequent court struggles lasted for decades, until Bishop Thomas Brantingham successfully petitioned King Richard II and Parliament for the restitution of the right of patronage of Plympton Priory. This dispute must be viewed in the context of larger issues of relations between the Crown and the Church in the fourteenth century, however, particularly in regard to controversies concerning the growth of royal presentations to benefices.¹ By the time of Edward III, the king's household and the government were staffed by vast numbers of clerks whose primary means of support came from the benefices to which the king presented them.² The demand placed upon the king for livings was unrelenting, with the result that efforts to augment royal ecclesiastical patronage intensified. New opportunities for

¹ P.C. Saunders, 'Royal Ecclesiastical Patronage from Winchelsey to Stratford,' *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 83 (2001), 96–7. For the extension of the Crown's rights of patronage as an effort to limit papal provisions, see Ann Deeley, 'Papal Provision and Royal Rights of Patronage in the Early Fourteenth Century,' *The English Historical Review* 43 (1928), 497–527.

² W. Mark Ormrod, *The Reign of Edward III: Crown and Political Society in England, 1327–1377* (New Haven, 1990), p. 127.

presentations of the king's clerks opened up with the seizure of alien priories and the dissolution of the order of the Knights Templar, but the fuller exploitation of the royal right to the advowsons belonging to monasteries and bishops during abbatial or episcopal vacancies was key in increasing the number of benefices at the king's disposal.³ In order for the king to gain access to the benefices in the gift of a monastery during the times when it lacked a superior, however, the king had to be the patron of the house in question.

The patronage of a religious house involved a number of other benefits in addition to the right to enjoy the temporal income of the house⁴—which were rather substantial in the case of Plympton Priory—and to make presentations to the monastery's churches during vacancies. A patron had the right to be notified when a superior of a house was to be elected and to issue a licence for the election;⁵ the patron could also exercise considerable influence over the choice of who the successor to the departed superior would be.⁶ In a document from 1378 which defined the rights of the bishops of Exeter in regard to Plympton Priory, evidence was presented that the bishops had traditionally issued such licences and had also instituted and enthroned the new priors; in addition, the bishops had the right to appoint a gate-keeper (usually an episcopal servant) to serve at the gate of the priory during custody.⁷ A patron could also have the right to expect that the religious house would accommodate a person of his choosing—such as a relative or servant—in their retirement years. Most of the evidence for such

³ Saunders, 'Royal Ecclesiastical Patronage,' 101–5. The royal right to the revenue of a bishopric and to make presentations to benefices in the gift of the bishopric during vacancy was referred to as the "regalian right." See Margaret Howell, *Regalian Right in Medieval England* (London, 1962) for the development of this right.

⁴ Patrons of houses of the "non-exempt orders"—that is, the Benedictines, nuns, and Augustinian canons—had more extensive patronal rights in this area than patrons of Cistercian houses, who were not allowed the right of custody during vacancy (Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders*, pp. 212, 214).

⁵ An example of this can be seen in the register of Bishop Walter Bronescombe: after the death of Prior Baldwin in March, 1263, and several months of turmoil between the bishop and the canons of Plympton (for which see above, Chapter Five), Bishop Bronescombe confirmed the election of Robert Blund as prior and ordered him to be installed by the archdeacon of Totnes. In addition to commanding the obedience of the subprior and canons, the bishop ordered Master Robert de Polamesforde, who had managed the priory during the custody, to release the temporalities of the house back to the canons. See *Reg. Bronescombe* II, #508, p. 5.

⁶ Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders*, p. 213.

⁷ *CPR*, Richard II vol. 1, 1377–81, pp. 250–1.

retirement arrangements, or corrodies, comes from royal records, as the Crown could request that religious houses under royal patronage and other co-operative houses accept royal servants as corrodians. The first king to make the most of this patronal right was Edward I, who sought corrodies for his men from over a hundred religious institutions during his reign.⁸ From the point of view of the Crown, this was a convenient way to reward loyal servants in their retirement years. Royal demands on religious houses to put these servants up escalated during the reign of Edward II, however; complaints that the Crown was abusing its privileges increased as well, with the result that in his first Parliament, Edward III promised to seek corrodies only from houses at which he had this right.⁹

The patronage conflict involving Plympton Priory began with a corrody, or rather, with the prior's refusal to grant a corrody to a royal servant. In this case, the Crown alleged that the priory had previously accepted a royal servant by the name of William Bacon as a corrodian in the reign of Edward II.¹⁰ If this had indeed happened—and given what else the lawyers for the king were later to contend, it is reasonable to maintain some skepticism about the Crown's account—the acceptance of the prior and canons of Plympton of William Bacon does not necessarily mean that they were acknowledging royal rights of patronage over their house. From c. 1290 until 1327, religious houses not in the king's patronage found themselves being asked to accept such corrodians, and they were still working on developing convincing arguments and effective tactics to aid them in resisting these attempts.¹¹ On the other hand, the acceptance of a royal servant as a corrodian at a religious house could be seen by the king's lawyers as setting a precedent in regard to the house in question: if it had ever taken in a corrodian, even if the king was not the patron, then surely the house should accede to subsequent requests.

This is indeed what occurred between the Crown and Plympton Priory. Some time between 1347 and 1364, King Edward III ordered Plympton Priory to accept his servant, John de Assh of the Devon town

⁸ Larry W. Usilton, 'Edward I's Exploitation of the Corrody System,' *American Benedictine Review* 31 (1980), 223–4.

⁹ Barbara Harvey, *Living and Dying in England, 1100–1540: The Monastic Experience* (Oxford, 1993), p. 189.

¹⁰ *CPR*, Edward III vol. 13, 1364–67, pp. 214–5.

¹¹ Harvey, *Living and Dying*, p. 189.

of Otterton, as a corrodian.¹² A document from 1365¹³ laid out what the corrodian was to receive: for life, John de Assh would receive a room and a stable at the priory, as well as a furred gown, shoes, candles, and horseshoes for his horse, all of the grade suitable to one of the esquires of the priory; every day he would receive two loaves of white bread and one loaf of barley bread, two meals of meat, and two gallons of ale just as a canon of the house would have. His groom would also be clothed and fed just as the grooms of the prior were, and his horse would receive hay and oats.¹⁴

The prior, Robert Forde, refused to grant this corrody, however. At some point those advising the king concluded that an effective way to force a concession from the prior was to claim that the king had the right to impose a corrodian on Plympton Priory since it was in actuality a royal, not an episcopal, foundation. The choice of the king and his ministers to assert that the Crown held the right of patronage to Plympton Priory might seem surprising to objective observers. Given the documentary evidence of the transfer of this right from King Henry I to Bishop William Warelwast, and given that subsequent bishops of Exeter had been exercising the normal rights of patronage over the priory for more than two hundred years without previous complaint from the Crown, the royal claim would seem to have been weak. Of course, as W. Ormrod has pointed out, Edward III and his lawyers demonstrated great proficiency in the 1340s and 1350s in advancing tenuous royal claims to the patronage of benefices.¹⁵ The consequence of the Crown employing this tactic was that Prior Forde was summoned before the council of the king for contempt; he appeared some time between January 25 and December 4, 1364.¹⁶ The record shows that when Prior Forde walked into court, he was well-armed with documentary

¹² John de Assh served the Crown as a commissioner of oyer and terminer in Devon (*CPR*, Edward III vol. 9, 1350–54, pp. 521, 522).

¹³ *CCR*, Edward III vol. 12, 1364–68, p. 204.

¹⁴ This is a fairly typical collection of entitlements. For further examples of what corrodies might entail, see, by this author, 'Retirement Arrangements and the Laity at Religious Houses in Pre-Reformation Devon,' *Florilegium* 22 (2005), 59–79, as well as Harvey, *Living and Dying*, pp. 201–5.

¹⁵ Ormrod, *The Reign of Edward III*, pp. 124–7.

¹⁶ The text relating what transpired during the prior's appearance before the council of the king can be found in the 1679 edition of the *Liber assisarum* (pp. 227–8). The date given is 38 Edward III. Since the regnal year of Edward III began on January 25, and Robert Forde was dead by December 4, 1364 (*Cal. Fine Rolls*, vol. 7, 1356–68, p. 299), the events the text describes must have occurred during these months.

evidence to prove that since Plympton Priory was an episcopal rather than a royal foundation, he was not obliged to accept a royal corrodian into his community.¹⁷ The prior brought with him the charter of Henry I granting the church of Plympton to Bishop William Warelwast¹⁸ as well as the charter in which Henry I confirmed the priory's possession of two hides of land.¹⁹

The case of the king was that these charters did not prove that Henry I had granted the patronage to the bishops of Exeter. Indeed, the royal interpretation of the documents was that there had been a chapel founded by a king of England on the same spot before the time of the priory, and to that chapel belonged the two hides of land; as well, the charters of Henry I demonstrated that that king had the right to change a college of secular canons into a priory of regular canons. For these reasons, Edward III was the rightful patron of Plympton Priory. The jury arrived, and Henry Greene, Chief Justice of the King's Bench, re-iterated the royal position that the patronage of Plympton Priory had not been transferred from the Crown to the bishops of Exeter when Bishop Warelwast re-founded the church of Plympton as a house of Augustinian canons. The lawyer speaking for Prior Forde responded that the king's assertion that a royal chapel had been on the site was not proven by documents, and fell beyond the bounds of human memory, and as a consequence the jury could not form an opinion on the existence of such a chapel; what *was* clear was that from the time of human memory, the bishops of Exeter had possessed the right of patronage over the priory.

The Chief Baron of the Exchequer, William de Skipwith, invoked the legal principle that "prescription does not run against the king where he has right," that is, that if a king had originally been the patron of the religious institution on the site, his successor on the throne inherited that right; the prior's lawyer challenged this claim. The response of the

¹⁷ The *Liber Assisarum* text, which is in Latin and Law French, was summarized by Oliver (*MDE*, p. 129) and has recently been paraphrased by David J. Seipp of the School of Law at Boston University as part of his Medieval English Legal History Year Books Project. See "An Index and Paraphrase of Printed Year Book Reports, 1268–1535 compiled by David J. Seipp;" the identifying Seipp number is 1364.166ass. (<http://www.bu.edu/phpbin/lawyearbooks/display.php?id=13163>). Since the recorder of the original *Liber Assisarum* text mistakenly put down "priory de Plymouth" instead of "Plympton," Seipp identifies the house in question as the Carmelite friary at Plymouth, which is incorrect.

¹⁸ For the questions surrounding this charter, see Chapter One.

¹⁹ Bodl. MS. James 23, p. 152.

jury was that there had been a royal chapel on the site, and the chapel (the patron of which was the king) was now in the hands of the prior of Plympton, but as to who was the patron of Plympton Priory, king or bishop, they could not say. The lawyer for the prior pointed out that this was not much of a verdict. Justice Greene informed him that no greater precision was needed from the jury, and stated that since the verdict was that there had been a chapel of royal foundation at Plympton in ancient times, and since the documents produced by the prior did not indicate that the patronage had been conveyed from the Crown to the bishop, then the king had to be patron of the priory.²⁰ It got worse for Prior Forde: Greene went on to say that on account of the prior's assertion that the bishop was the patron and because of the priory's history of electing priors without the permission of their rightful patron, the king, the Court awarded not just the patronage to the king, but also the temporalities of the prior until he had rendered satisfaction to the king. Greene finished up by saying that the court wished to consider punishing Prior Forde through the imprisonment of his body.

King Edward III issued a plea of attachment against the prior, but Forde died before it could be carried out.²¹ The records are silent on developments until December, 1364, when a commitment was made to the subprior and the canons by the king that the keeping of the priory—which had been in the hands of the king's escheator for Devon, Thomas Cheyne, since Prior Forde's death—would be returned to them until judgment was rendered regarding the patronage case in the king's court.²² At some point the canons of Plympton went ahead and elected a new prior, Thomas Doulish, after licence had been granted them by the bishop of Exeter, John de Grandisson; the bishop, following tradition, instituted and enthroned Thomas Doulish as Prior of Plympton.²³ The king later claimed that Prior Doulish and the sub-prior and the other canons had tried to gain access to the temporalities of the priory which were then in the possession of Thomas Cheyne.²⁴

²⁰ As George Oliver stated, "the law, as stated by the court, is not only at variance with that which is now held to be law, but also with what had been held to be so in the same reign" (*MDE*, p. 129).

²¹ *CPR*, Edward III vol. 13, 1364–67, pp. 214–5.

²² *Cal. Fine Rolls*, vol. 7 1356–68, p. 299.

²³ *CIM*, vol. 4 1377–88, pp. 40–1.

²⁴ *CPR*, Edward III vol. 13, 1364–67, p. 214.

Edward III summoned Doulish and his supporters to answer the royal accusations. In early 1365 the case was heard at the court of the King's Bench. Prior Doulish re-asserted the opinion of the canons that the bishop of Exeter was their patron, not the Crown, and he also denied that they had removed the escheator, Thomas Cheyne, from the priory.²⁵ It seems that Bishop John de Grandisson was not present, and there is no mention of counsel acting on his behalf at these proceedings to defend his right of patronage. A later document from his successor as bishop of Exeter claimed that Bishop Grandisson had not been summoned to the proceedings.²⁶ The prior and the canons decided to call for a jury, but the verdict of the jury could hardly have been to their liking. While the members of the jury found that Thomas and his supporters amongst the canons did not "intrude themselves into the priory," they did declare that a chapel with four secular chaplains had existed at the site before the time of the foundation of the priory, and that the chapel and its possessions had been transferred to the priory. Since the priory was essentially a continuation of the chapel, and the chapel had been founded by an ancestor of the king, then the king was the lawful patron of Plympton Priory. The temporalities were also to remain in the king's hands until he was to receive satisfaction regarding his rights of custody during the recent vacancy. The finding of the jury in favour of the Crown's case despite convincing evidence otherwise may seem odd, but it should be seen in the context of the success of the Crown in this period in obtaining "implausible verdicts" from juries in similar cases regarding contested patronage rights over bishoprics and religious houses.²⁷ As Anne Deeley said in regard to false verdicts in cases involving papal provisors, "the verdict of the jurors often shows that they had a greater respect for the power of the Crown than for the truth."²⁸

An immediate consequence of the court decision in favour of King Edward III was that Thomas Doulish was removed as prior. Since it had been found that King Edward was the true patron of Plympton

²⁵ *Ibid.* That this must have occurred in the first few months of 1365 is indicated by the fact that the royal licence to elect a prior to replace Thomas Doulish was granted on May 12, 1365 (*ibid.*, p. 120).

²⁶ *CIM*, vol. 4, 1377–88, p. 40.

²⁷ For clearly false jury verdicts in cases regarding the right of presentation during vacancy, see Saunders, 'Royal Ecclesiastical Patronage,' 105–9.

²⁸ Deeley, 'Papal Provision and Royal Rights of Patronage,' 525.

Priory, this meant that the priory had needed his licence for the election of a successor to Prior Robert. Since the canons had not done this, their election of Thomas Doulish was found to be invalid. On May 12, 1365, King Edward granted the canons a licence to elect a legitimate prior, as long as “Thomas Doulish...be not present at, or have any voice in, the election.”²⁹ On June 15 of that same year, we see the king granting his assent to the election of Ralph Persoun, one of the canons, as Prior of Plympton.³⁰

In November, 1365, Prior Ralph finally granted to John de Assh the corrody which the King had been seeking for him at Plympton Priory. The prior had to pay John £20 in addition to the conditions specified for his board and upkeep at the priory.³¹ Also in the month of November of 1365, we see a number of priests who held benefices in the gift of Plympton Priory appealing to the Crown for ratification of their rights to their benefices.³² These men had likely been instituted to their benefices by Bishop Grandisson during the voidance at the priory (since the right to present to a religious house’s benefices during vacancy was another right of the patron). Since the court of the King’s Bench had now declared that the bishop of Exeter was not the rightful patron of Plympton Priory, these priests were clearly concerned that their entitlement to their benefices might be challenged.

The next development, in February of 1366, was that King Edward declared that all the temporalities of the priory were to remain in the hands of the king’s men until the Prior Ralph, who had recently sworn his fealty to the king, paid £100 into the exchequer.³³ However, Edward kept for himself the income from the temporalities which had accumulated during the time of vacancy, the traditional right of a patron. He also graciously renounced all claims to the temporal income which ought to have gone to him during past vacancies “out of compassion for the priory, which through misrule and for other causes is miserably depressed.” This may well have been a considerable sum, given that Plympton Priory is known to have had at least eighteen priors in the

²⁹ *CPR*, Edward III vol. 13, 1364–67, pp. 120–1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³¹ *CCR*, Edward III vol. 12, 1364–68, p. 204.

³² *CPR*, Edward III vol. 13, 1364–67, pp. 187 (Meavy), 191 (Exminster and Bridestowe), 424 (Bratton).

³³ *CPR*, Edward III vol. 13, 1364–67, pp. 214–5.

period from 1121 to 1365;³⁴ however, in most of these cases we do not know how long the vacancies lasted.

Due to a gap in the register of Bishop John Grandisson, we do not know what this strong-minded bishop thought of the actions of King Edward III and of his sudden deprivation of the patronage of Plympton Priory. It is hard to imagine that Bishop Grandisson accepted these infringements of his rights complacently or resignedly. We know that bad feelings had existed between king and bishop a few years earlier, in 1351–52, when Edward III seized the temporalities of Bishop Grandisson, a matter that triggered criticism of Edward by the church hierarchy.³⁵ As well, it seems that even before Edward III wrested the right of patronage of Plympton Priory from the bishop, he had successfully acquired the right of patronage of Bodmin Priory.³⁶ Bodmin, as may be recalled, was another house of Augustinian canons which had been founded by Bishop William Warelwast around the same time as Plympton; as a consequence, the bishops of Exeter had heretofore been regarded as the patrons of Bodmin Priory. The Augustinian priory of St. Germans in Cornwall had also attracted the attention of royal servants interested in identifying religious houses whose episcopal patronage might be in doubt. In 1358, Bishop Grandisson entreated the

³⁴ David Knowles, Christopher N.L. Brooke, Vera C.M. London, David Smith, *Heads of Religious Houses: England and Wales*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2001), I, p. 181; II, pp. 447–8.

³⁵ Ormrod, *Reign of Edward III*, pp. 126, 134; W.R. Jones, 'Bishops, Politics, and the Two Laws: The Gravamina of the English Clergy,' *Speculum* 41 (1966), 232.

³⁶ After the Black Death swept through the diocese in 1348–49, the prior and all but two of the canons of Bodmin Priory died; on March 18, 1349, an inquisition was held at Lostwithiel on the initiative of Edward, the Black Prince (and also Duke of Cornwall) in the presence of his servants, John Dabernoun and John de Skirbek (his steward and his keeper of fees in Cornwall, respectively). The jury found that Bodmin Priory was a royal foundation, having been established by an unknown king of England; nonetheless, the Crown had not exercised rights of patronage during vacancy, but "from time beyond the memory of man," the bishop of Exeter had done so. See *MDE*, p. 15; *Reg. Grandisson*, II, p. 1077; Jankulak, *Medieval Cult of St. Petroc*, pp. 65, 137–9. Ultimately, however, the king had his way: by October 7, 1350, he was presenting to a church in the gift of Bodmin Priory "by reason of the late voidance" at the house (*CPR*, Edward III vol. 8, 1348–50, p. 575) and in 1366 he returned the keeping of the priory to the prior, "which had been taken into the king's hand because the present prior had been elected without the king's licence" (*CPR*, Edward III vol. 13, 1364–67, p. 241). It appears that a corrodian was at the centre of the Bodmin case as well: in another record from 1366, the royal justification for the seizure of the priory and its temporalities was that the priory had not accepted "Walter Chauntermerle, the king's servant, when the king sent him to them to have sustenance in their house" (*Cal. Fine Rolls*, vol. 7, 1356–68, p. 330).

Prince of Wales to prevent John Dabernoun and John de Skirbek—the same servants who had presided at the inquisition regarding Bodmin in 1349—from interfering with the bishop’s right of patronage regarding St. Germans.³⁷ On June 30 of the same year, the Prince of Wales wrote to Dabernoun and Skirbek, asking them to clarify what they were up to. The prince also ordered them to try to avoid having an inquisition into the right in question, but if this was impossible, “they are to have the inquisition made in as secret a manner as they possibly can, so that neither the bishop nor any of his men many know of it, and to certify the prince’s council thereon.”³⁸

The outcome of these inquiries was that the inquisition, which was held before Skirbek, found that the history of St. Germans showed that it was clearly an episcopal foundation, and hence “the patronage of the house, with its custody on the death of a prior, was absolutely vested in the bishop of Exeter for the time being.”³⁹ However, the king was not daunted, and in 1366 summoned the prior of St. Germans to court for questioning as to the identity of the rightful patron of the priory.⁴⁰ The documents provided by the prior supposedly included charters (lacking seals) of various previous kings of England which established that the priory was a royal foundation; the prior admitted that the king was the rightful patron, acknowledged that all the former priors had been elected without royal licence, having been “admitted and confirmed by the bishop of Exeter, and submitted himself to the king’s grace.”⁴¹ In return for the prior’s co-operation, the king seized the priory and its temporalities, but immediately returned them to the

³⁷ Grandisson wrote: “Inasmuch as I well know that you do not wish your own church of Excestre or any other to be harmed or diminished, I pray you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost to order your ministers, especially John Dabernoun and Skirbeek, not to do anything to the prejudice of myself or any church in the matter of the advowson or patronage of my house of St. Germeyn . . .” Grandisson proceeded to explain the history of the rights of the bishops of Exeter to the church, which in the early Middle Ages had been the see of its own bishopric (*The Register of Edward, the Black Prince*, vol. 2, p. 143).

³⁸ Earlier in the letter to Dabernoun and Skirbek, the prince mentioned that he “has written to the bishop that he will send one of his council to those parts to enquire into the truth of the matter and certify him thereon; and this he has done because he does not wish the bishop to know by whom the enquiry is made” (ibid.).

³⁹ This text comes from the exemplification of the inquisition as it was made by Edward III on Oct. 8, 1538. The exemplification is itself preserved in a confirmation by Richard II from 1383, which he issued by letters patent at the request of Bishop Brantingham (*MDE*, pp. 1, 4).

⁴⁰ *Cal. Fine Rolls*, vol. 7, 1356–68, p. 331.

⁴¹ Ibid.

prior, whom he pardoned, and from whom he only sought a fine of a hundred shillings. Evidence from the patent rolls indicates that during a vacancy at St. Germans in 1367, the king was exercising the custodial rights of a patron: he issued a licence for election of a new prior, gave his assent to the choice of prior, and released the temporalities at the end of the process.⁴² It is hard to escape the conclusion that the Crown was targeting the houses of episcopal patronage in the diocese of Exeter.

The documents are silent about the matter of whether the king was the legitimate patron of Plympton Priory for some years, although the canons of Plympton had their share of conflicts with the Crown in the interim.⁴³ By 1378, Bishop Grandisson had been dead for almost ten years, succeeded by Bishop Thomas de Brantingham, a longtime royal servant, in 1370. Brantingham was Edward III's treasurer of the exchequer from 1369 until 1371; he was re-appointed treasurer under Richard II in 1377 until 1381, when left this position just a few months before the uprising of that year.⁴⁴ Shortly after Edward III's death in 1377, Prior Ralph Persoun of Plympton also died, and on March 2, 1378, King Richard II granted a licence to the subprior and canons for the election of a new prior; on March 20, Richard gave his assent to the election of John Shaldon as prior.⁴⁵ It is around this time that we start to see Bishop Brantingham make efforts to regain the patronage

⁴² *CPR*, Edward III vol. 13, 1364–67, pp. 376, 385, 388.

⁴³ The king challenged Prior Persoun for the right of presentation of the church of Sutton; the court judgement had gone against the prior (who had defaulted) and the incumbent, Thomas de Dincotes, chaplain. Edward III presented his own cleric, Sir John Hanneye, in July, 1371 (*Reg. Brantyngham* I, p. 17; the prior was hardly the only head of a religious house to take the path of least resistance by defaulting: see Saunders, 'Royal Ecclesiastical Patronage,' 109). In November of the same year, the king issued a writ of *quare impedit* against the prior of Plympton, the bishop of Exeter, and William de Middelworthe (incumbent) for the right of presentation of the church of Blackawton (*Reg. Brantyngham* II, p. 184). In the same month, the king sought information from Bishop Brantingham as to who the rectors of the church and priors of Plympton had recently been; the bishop responded with the information he had, but this was patchy (*Reg. Brantyngham* II, p. 183). It appears that the king seized the temporalities (which included the advowsons of churches) of Plympton Priory for a time. On May 25, 1372, the king presented Sir John Folkyngham to the rectory of Blackawton "*ratione temporalium Prioratus de Plymptone in manu sua existencium*" (*Reg. Brantyngham* II, p. 21).

⁴⁴ T.F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England* (Manchester, 1928), vol. 3, pp. 261–2, 332, 356, 455, 459. He briefly returned to the post of treasurer in 1389.

⁴⁵ *CPR* Richard II vol. 1, 1377–81, pp. 121, 147.

of Plympton Priory. Perhaps the bishop felt his chances of success were better after the deaths of Edward and the prior who had been elected during the original controversy. Also, his status was considerably different from that of Grandisson, who owed his position as bishop of Exeter to papal provision; as a minister of the Crown, Brantingham was a person of influence at court with impeccable credentials as a supporter of the royal point of view. It was unlikely that his attempts to re-visit this issue would be seen as an act of insubordination against his king.

Some time between the death of Prior Ralph Persoun and the granting by the king of a licence to elect a new prior at Plympton, Bishop Brantingham petitioned King Richard, his council, and Parliament asking that the matter of the patronage of Plympton Priory be re-opened.⁴⁶ Bishop Brantingham's petition re-iterated the episcopal interpretation of the facts of the case: since Henry I had granted Bishop William Warelwast the minster at Plympton and the church at Bodmin, and since Bishop William Warelwast had founded and endowed Plympton Priory and Bodmin Priory on the sites of these churches, the bishops of Exeter had been and continued to be the rightful patrons of both priories. He appended the charter of King Henry I granting the churches of Bodmin and Plympton to William Warelwast to support his case. On May 26, 1378, the Great Council decided to investigate the question of who was the rightful patron of Plympton Priory.⁴⁷ They established a commission of five men, including the escheator for Devon, to call a jury to look into the matter. The jury convened that June to hear the bishop's case.⁴⁸ As further evidence that the bishops of Exeter had traditionally exercised the right of patronage over Plympton Priory, Bishop Brantingham cited all the instances of voidance at Plympton Priory over the last hundred and more years, and demonstrated that in every instance of voidance, the bishops had appointed gate-keepers at the priory gate and had issued licences to the canons to elect their new priors, whom the bishops always instituted and enthroned (including Thomas Doulish). Bishop Brantingham asserted that all had gone well until the suit between Thomas Doulish and the Crown, in which Grandisson had not been summoned, and which resulted in the loss of the patronage of Plympton Priory to the king.

⁴⁶ *CIM*, vol. 4, 1377–88, #60, pp. 40–1.

⁴⁷ *CPR*, Richard II vol. 1, 1377–81, pp. 250–1.

⁴⁸ *CIM*, vol. 4, 1377–88, #60, pp. 40–1.

The jury found that the Bishop of Exeter was indeed the rightful patron of Plympton Priory. The jurors concluded that “neither king Edward III nor any of his ancestors had any right or claim in the priory” before King Edward claimed this right. They also stated that they “truly understand and believe both by charters, royal confirmations, and other evidences shown to them and by oral tradition that the account of the foundation of the priory by Bishop William [Warelwast] given in the petition is true, and that the foundation of the priory was confirmed by a charter of King Henry also shown to the jurors as evidence. The bishops of Exeter have enjoyed the right of patronage until John de Grandisson was hindered therein.”⁴⁹

Despite the findings of the jury, however, the patronage of Plympton Priory was not immediately returned to Bishop Brantingham. The bishop had to petition the king and council again, this time asking that the Chancellor certify before Parliament that the bishop was indeed the patron of Plympton Priory. The matter was referred to the king’s justices in Chancery and the king’s serjeants for further consideration.⁵⁰ During these proceedings, before Justice John Cavendish, the king’s counsel Michael Skillyng argued that the patronage of Plympton Priory ought not be restored to the bishop of Exeter.⁵¹ He re-stated the royal case, which was that one of the king’s ancestors had founded a minster on the site of the later priory and by rights the king ought to be considered patron of the priory which succeeded the minster. Ultimately, after a debate in the king’s presence, the justices were to consider the results of the inquisition; however, for some reason, they deferred judgment, a step which seems to have exasperated Bishop Brantingham. Once again, he had to petition the king, this time to urge the justices to proceed to make a judgement in the case.

However, the justices dragged their heels with this case and ignored the royal writ to proceed to judgement, deferring yet again. Bishop Brantingham’s petition was read before Parliament, at which the king’s justices appeared, as well; the result was that on February 1, 1380, the king sent a writ to Justice Cavendish and his colleagues “to proceed with such speed as they reasonably may to render judgment.”⁵² The judgement must have been given quite promptly, as the custody of the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *CCR*, Richard I vol. 1, 1377–81, p. 274.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 282.

priory seems to have been back in the bishop's hands in less than two weeks. On Feb. 13, 1380, the bishop issued commissions to Master Roger de Chesterfield and Sir Thomas de Stayndrope to take custody of Plympton Priory's temporalities and to get rid of the "burdensome and useless retinue" (*onerosam familiam et inutilem*).⁵³ It was prudent of Brantingham to have acted when he did, as a year later, in 1381, he either resigned or was dismissed as treasurer and returned to his diocese as a man of reduced influence at court.

After seventeen years, normalcy was restored, and the patronal rights of the bishops of Exeter over Plympton Priory restored. The dispute is revealing in that it demonstrates the ease with which a determined king could achieve his goal despite right clearly being on the other side. Creative interpretations of documents, appeals to events in the far distant past, and co-operative juries were useful counter-measures to charter evidence and traditional practices which had endured for more than two centuries. This case also shows how clever the legal advisors of Edward III were: what started out as a request to accommodate a royal servant as a corrodian turned into a battle for the patronage of a major religious house. The situation might not have escalated if Prior Forde had taken the approach that peace with the king, even at the cost of providing for a royal servant, was the better option than incurring the wrath of his sovereign. To be fair to the prior, however, he could hardly have foreseen that Edward III would take the approach that he did; Forde was likely more worried about the financial implications of receiving royal corrodians and the number of such requests the king might make.⁵⁴ As well, it appears that Edward III was looking for an excuse to make a bid for the patronage of Plympton Priory, given that he had been successful in his attempts to deprive the bishop of Exeter of the same rights over Bodmin Priory in 1349 and St. Germans Priory in 1358. Plympton Priory would have been an even greater prize than

⁵³ *Reg. Brantyngham*, p. 419. The patronage of both Bodmin and St. Germans Priory also returned to episcopal hands, as Bishop Stafford was exercising the rights of custody during vacancies at these houses in 1403 and 1404, respectively (*Reg. Stafford*, pp. 26, 314).

⁵⁴ In 1322–23, the monks of Glastonbury Abbey were accommodating six royal servants as corrodians at the same time (Harvey, *Living and Dying*, pp. 189–90). At the royal foundations of Tavistock Abbey and Buckfast Abbey in Devon, the situation eventually normalized so that one corrodian resided at each house at a time; when the corrodian died, the king would supply a successor. See Fizzard, "Retirement Arrangements and the Laity," 12–6.

these two houses: its substantial wealth would have made the right to administer its temporalities during vacancy an attractive privilege. As well, while the benefices in the gift of the prior of Plympton were nowhere near as valuable as prebends at secular cathedrals, any opportunity for the king to expand his ecclesiastical patronage must have been welcome. The tense relations between Edward III and Bishop Grandisson must have been the match that lit the fire of this dispute, as the fact that Edward sought to obtain recognition as patron of three religious houses whose advowsons had traditionally belonged to the bishops of Exeter suggests a personal element to the dispute, a desire to punish the bishop and put him in his place. With the deaths of the principals involved, and with the replacement of animosity between king and bishop with improved relations, the patronage of Plympton Priory reverted to those who had held it since its inception in 1121.

CHAPTER TEN

DISSOLUTION

As Plympton Priory entered the final decades of its existence as an institution, certain issues from the past, such as the desire of parishioners at some of the priory's chapels, continued to demand the attention of the priors and canons. Financial problems also reasserted themselves during the priorate of David Bercle, to the extent that Bishop Oldham ordered the prior to retire to one of the priory's cells until "a new system of economy could be arranged and the embarrassments be cleared away."¹ New concerns and trends appeared in this later period, however. As was seen in Chapter Eight, the fifteenth century saw the canons of Plympton Priory, like religious elsewhere in England in this period, apply for papal licences to hold benefices in their own names. Priors and canons of Plympton in this period also sought papal licences to vary their clothing from the standard elements of the habit of the Augustinian canons so that they could wear shoes rather than boots and cloaks with armholes or sleeves.² If these developments suggest a lessening of devotion to the communal life and to the rigours of the *vita apostolica*, one must keep in mind that the Augustinian canons had never had as great a reputation for strictness as, say, the Cistercians or the Carthusians. Indeed, Knowles referred to these canons as the "least austere" of the religious orders "at all periods."³ An archiepiscopal visitation of Plympton Priory in 1492 suggests that while the canons might not have been known for lives of great personal deprivation, they

¹ *MDE*, p. 132. The excuse for the financial difficulties of the priory was the expense of putting up travelling members of the elite. Bishop Oldham issued his order in 1505; it is not known whether Bercle retreated to Marsh Barton or to St. Anthony-in-Roseland.

² See, by this author, 'Shoes, Boots, Leggings, and Cloaks: The Augustinian Canons and Dress in Later Medieval England,' *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 2 (2007), 245–62.

³ David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England, Vol. 3: The Tudor Age* (1959; repr. Cambridge, 1961), p. 14. For concerns about laxity amongst the Augustinian canons and members of other religious orders and attempts at reform in the early Tudor period, see pp. 158–60 in the same volume; see also Benjamin Thompson, 'Monasteries, Society and Reform in Late Medieval England,' in *The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England*, ed. James G. Clark (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 184–9.

did not attract negative comment for unusually lax standards, either.⁴ Overall, the surviving records suggest that, apart from the financial difficulties of the early 1500s, many aspects of the community's existence continued on as they had for centuries, with new men becoming canons, the priors making presentations to benefices, and the laity entering into land-holding arrangements with the priory.⁵

In some ways, the history of Plympton Priory during the 1530s is better documented than that of previous eras. This is because of the survival of sources connected to the dissolution of the house in 1539. One important collection of texts can be found in The National Archives in the Miscellaneous Books of the Court of Augmentations (E 315/91–105). Between the years 1536 and 1554, this court was charged with handling the business that arose from the dissolution of the monasteries in England and Wales. The Miscellaneous Books consist of records of appearances before the court of people who had been granted or sold annuities and/or corrodies⁶ by the religious houses, or had held offices at or leases from the houses. These individuals petitioned the court for reimbursement, and since the view of the court was that the Crown was liable for all charges upon the income of the dissolved monasteries, their petitions tended to be granted.⁷ Another source which complements the Miscellaneous Books is a nineteenth-century manuscript book in the Devon Record Office written in the

⁴ *The Register of John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1486–1500*, vol. 2, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 1991), #293. The prior at this time was David Bercle; the financial difficulties which the prior would ultimately find himself in had either not yet manifested themselves or were not apparent to the visitor. In addition to the prior, eleven canons of Plympton presented themselves (one of whom was vacationing from his studies at Oxford), as did the prior of Marsh Barton; the prior of St. Anthony-in-Roseland and one other canon appeared at Penrhyn in Cornwall. One canon was absent because he was at Marsh Barton, and one canon, Henry Tancret, was “wandering in apostasy on the borders of Wales, under sentence of excommunication because he had left the priory without licence.”

⁵ Amongst the Roborough manuscripts in the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office are a number of deeds of homage to the priors of Plympton from those holding land by military service in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; an example from 1481 is a deed of homage to Prior Bercle from John Heghestant for land in Croketon near Maristow (Plymouth, PWDRO 70/195).

⁶ A corrody was a package of entitlements in one's retirement years, usually to set amounts of food, beverages, and clothing and to shelter; these could be granted or sold to lay people, members of the secular clergy, and prominent members of religious communities.

⁷ Walter C. Richardson, *History of the Court of Augmentations, 1536–1554* (Baton Rouge, 1961), pp. 73, 75.

hand of Rev. George Oliver, the compiler of the *Monasticon Dioecesis Exoniensis*. This book consists of Oliver's abstracts of records which were seemingly generated by officials of the Court of Augmentations who had access to the original texts of the grants and leases; most of the abstracts duplicate entries in the Miscellaneous Books, but some are unique records. All of the material from the Court of Augmentations is of interest because of the insight it provides into the connections between the priory and a range of lay people—servants, leaseholders, members of the local elites—in the final years of its existence.

Annuities

One common accusation against religious houses in the 1530s is that once it became clear that dissolution was imminent, the superiors granted annuities and corrodies and made appointments to offices with great alacrity and generosity.⁸ In essence, they were incurring financial obligations which the Crown, with its policy of taking on the debts of the dissolved monasteries, would be required to meet. The Crown had attempted to limit these practices with a provision in the Act of the Suppression of the Lesser Religious Houses of 1536 which rendered any such grants or appointments made within a year before the act was passed null and void.⁹ Despite this policy, the Court of Augmentations was frequently tolerant of such late grants: in the records of annuities granted by Prior Howe of Plympton, none were denied by the court, even ones granted as late as January, 1539. Some of these grants do indeed seem to represent favours done to friends, especially those who

⁸ Joyce Youings, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* (London, 1971), pp. 58–9. Knowles also made a reference to monks who “took alarm and made friends on a lavish scale with what mammon of iniquity they still possessed”: see *The Religious Orders in England*, Vol. III, p. 353.

⁹ The authors of the act of 1536 did not mince words: “...divers of the chief governors of such religious houses, determining the utter spoil and destruction of their houses, and dreading the suppressing thereof, for the maintenance of their detestable lives, have lately fraudulently and craftily made... gifts, grants, and leases, under their convent seals...” (Youings, *Dissolution of the Monasteries*, p. 157). Youings raised the possibility that since many members of parliament in 1536 may have been the recipients of monastic fees as office-holders, they would have been disinclined to forbid all such claims. Interestingly, no compensation was arranged for patrons of religious houses (*ibid.*, pp. 43–4). A less strongly-worded refusal to honour grants made less than a year before suppression was contained in the act confirming the king's title to the monasteries (*ibid.*, p. 83).

belonged to the elite of Devon, but it is difficult to prove this, as the texts of the annuities inevitably state that the prior was making the grant “on account of good service” (*pro bono servicio*) or “on account of good advice” (*pro bono consilio*) given in times past and in times to come. These words may have been empty statements, but in some cases they may have represented a close relationship between a lay man of influence and the canons of Plympton Priory. Others annuities may have been sold by Prior Howe for ready cash, but it is impossible to detect these, as the Plympton annuity texts preserved in the Miscellaneous Books generally contain the same stock phrases justifying the grants with few additional details.¹⁰

Bearing in mind these uncertainties, one can state that it is clear that Prior Howe was engaged in a rush to issue annuities in the final months of the existence of Plympton Priory. Up to this point he had been quite restrained about making such grants: he had only issued four in 1535, one in 1536 (to Thomas Cromwell), three in 1537, and four in the first nine months of 1538. Something changed in October, however: this must mark the time when Prior Howe accepted that his only course was to surrender Plympton Priory. Perhaps it was the news that Cromwell’s agent, Sir Richard Pollard (a Devon man), spent part of September engaged in dismantling the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury Cathedral.¹¹ If even the grandest monastic cathedral in England was not immune to the intervention of Cromwell’s men, it must have seemed that there was little hope for Plympton. September was also the month when the number of surrenders of religious houses to the dissolution commissioners significantly escalated: in the earlier months of 1538, there had rarely been more than six surrenders a month, but in September there were sixteen and in October twenty.¹² Prior Howe saw the writing on the wall, and in October of 1538 started

¹⁰ An exception comes from a grant from 1535. Prior Howe did issue an annuity of £4 to Brother Alexander Barclay, professor of sacred theology, but this grant seems to have been purchased by Barclay for 40 marks (Kew, TNA E 315/96, ff. 230b–231). This annuitant seems to have been the same Alexander Barclay who, in the course of a widely varied career, was, in succession, a grammar master, poet, parish priest, doctor of divinity, monk, and friar. It is unclear what his connection with Prior Howe was, although Barclay had been a grammar master at Ottery St. Mary in Devon in the early sixteenth century. See Nicholas Orme, *Education in the West of England, 1066–1548* (Exeter, 1976), pp. 87, 166–7.

¹¹ Knowles, *Religious Orders in England*, Vol. III, p. 353.

¹² George W.O. Woodward, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* (London, 1966), p. 111.

issuing annuities.¹³ On October 31 alone he granted nine annuities. He seems to have met most of his commitments with these grants, as Howe issued only a few more: three in November (one of which was for Richard Pollard)¹⁴ and one in January, 1539.¹⁵

The amounts of the annuities were generally quite small: of the thirty-seven such grants by Plympton Priory in the Augmentations records, most range from 20s per annum to 40s per annum, with four of 53s 4d, one of £4, and one of £5.¹⁶ There is only one annuity of an unusually high amount, and that is the one involving £30 per annum granted by Prior Howe to George Carew, Archdeacon of Totnes, in 1537.¹⁷ The sum total of the annuities issued by Prior Howe between 1535 and 1539 comes to £94 11s 3d—not a vast amount, but one that was equivalent to just over a tenth of the priory's income as reckoned in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*. For the sake of comparison, it is useful to look at the case of the Cistercian house of Kirkstall Abbey in Yorkshire. Post-dissolution records reveal that the Crown reimbursed the holders of fifty-one annuities in amounts ranging from 6s 8d to 60s per annum.¹⁸ These are modest sums in themselves, but the total came to £58—roughly between a fifth and a sixth of the abbey's income. As G.W.O. Woodward has pointed out, such high numbers of annuities eating up such a large portion of a monastery's revenues could hardly

¹³ The total number of annuities definitely granted in October, 1538, amounts to twenty; another annuity, the text of which omits the regnal year, was probably granted on October 31 of this year (TNA E 3154/96, ff. 22b–23).

¹⁴ TNA E 315/100 f. 241, ff. 258b–259, and ff. 335b–336. In November, 1538, Prior Howe also granted Thomas Whythead of Saltash the first and next advowson and nomination to the vicarage of Ugborough (TNA E 315/95, ff. 184–184b); he made a similar grant involving the vicarage of St. Kew to Christopher Hornebroke of Plymstock (TNA E 315/96, f. 102b).

¹⁵ TNA E 315/95, ff. 19–19b.

¹⁶ The grants of 53s 4d (5 marks) were to Richard Chalons (TNA E 315/96, ff. 51b–52), a local member of the gentry; Sir Richard Pollard (TNA E 315/100, pp. 258b–259); Walter Hendle/Henley, gentleman (TNA E 315/100, f. 241); and Sir Thomas Denys (E 315/100, ff. 343–343b). The annuity of £4 was for Brother Alexander Barclay (TNA E 315/96, ff. 230b–231). The grant of an annuity of £5 was made Thomas Cromwell (TNA E 315/96, ff. 116–116b); Prior Howe was certainly not the only superior of a religious house to try to win favour with the architect of the dissolution policy.

¹⁷ TNA E 315/96, ff. 9b–10; Exeter, DRO 22868. This high amount certainly bears some explanation, but the text of the grant contains nothing out of the ordinary to justify this extraordinary sum. Possibly the prior had borrowed a large sum of money from the archdeacon and the annuity represented a means of re-payment.

¹⁸ Woodward, *Dissolution of the Monasteries*, p. 26.

have been normal practice; the only logical explanation is that they were a response to word that suppression was soon to occur.¹⁹

The annuitants of Plympton Priory represented a diverse group of individuals. There were men like Sir Richard Pollard, whose annuity may represent an attempt by Prior Howe to make a last-minute effort to save the priory from suppression, or, alternatively, a gesture of friendship towards someone in a position to influence what the prior's final pension might be. Prior Howe was not the only superior of a Devon religious house to make a goodwill offering to Richard Pollard: from March to November, 1538, Pollard was granted annuities by five other Devon houses, the values ranging from 26s 8d from Buckland Abbey to £10 from Tavistock Abbey.²⁰ Prior Howe granted a number of annuities to other men of influence at court. Another example is Sir Thomas Denys, a Devon man by birth who was sheriff of Devon many times; he also later became the chancellor of Anne of Cleves.²¹ In October, 1538, Prior Howe granted him an annuity of 53s 4d.²² This was just one of many routes of access to monastic income for Denys: he obtained, over a twenty-year period, annuities and appointments to offices from seven religious houses in the county, including the chief stewardship of the lands of Polsloe Priory, of the collegiate church of Ottery St. Mary, and of Buckfast Abbey.²³ Of more immediate assistance to Plympton Priory might have been John Tregonwell, one of

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26–7.

²⁰ TNA E 315/100, ff. 258b–260. Pollard had been one of three royal commissioners to Hartland Abbey in 1534 who sought the deposition of the abbot: see Lawrence Snell, *The Suppression of the Religious Foundations of Devon and Cornwall* (Marazion, 1967), p. 66. He was also understeward of Tavistock Abbey in 1535 (*MDE*, p. 110). A few months after the dissolution of the Devon monasteries, Pollard was involved in the trial and execution of the abbot of Glastonbury in the autumn of 1539 (Knowles, *Religious Orders in England*, Vol. III, pp. 380–2). After the dissolution, Pollard purchased the site of Forde Abbey from the Crown—Forde not being one of the monasteries which had granted him an annuity (Snell, *Suppression of the Religious Foundations*, p. 169).

²¹ Joyce Youings, *Devon Monastic Lands: Calendar of Particulars for Grants, 1536–1558*, Devon and Cornwall Record Society New Series, Vol. 1 (Torquay, 1955), p. xxii.

²² TNA E 315/100, ff. 343–343b.

²³ TNA E 315/92, 13–13b; E 315/96, ff. 17–17b; E 315/100, ff. 321–321b, 344b–345, 353, 353–354, 366b–367b; Youings, *Devon Monastic Lands*, pp. 81, 137. In addition to the moneys granted him by the religious houses, Sir Thomas Denys did very well from the dissolution: he obtained the site of Buckfast Abbey, the site of St. Nicholas Priory in Exeter, property belonging previously to Torre Abbey, and lands from Sherborne Abbey in Dorset; he also rented land which had belonged to Dunkeswell Abbey, and claimed a tenement in Plymouth which had belonged to the Carmelite Friary there (Youings, *Devon Monastic Lands*, *passim*).

the dissolution commissioners for Devon and Cornwall, who began his travels through the counties to receive surrenders in February, 1539. Tregonwell, a Cornishman by birth, possessed a doctorate in civil law and had been a proctor for the king during his divorce case; he had also been involved in the visitation of monasteries in 1535 and 1536.²⁴ Prior Howe had granted him an annuity of 40s in 1535,²⁵ perhaps out of concern for where the visitation might lead. Tregonwell did rather better in 1538, possibly once news spread of his new role in taking surrenders of religious houses. In April and September of that year the abbots of Forde and Torre each gave him an annuity of 40s; in December, less than three months before Tregonwell's colleague William Petre obtained the surrender of Plympton, Prior Howe appointed Tregonwell to the office of chief steward of their lands in Devon, a post which involved an annual salary of 53s 4d.²⁶ It is hard to imagine that Prior Howe expected Tregonwell would actually serve in that capacity for any length of time. On the other hand, no matter when he had been appointed to this position, it is unlikely that Tregonwell would have had to perform many duties as chief steward: Knowles pointed out that by the early Tudor period, the office of chief steward rarely involved much in the way of work, and served mostly as a way for the monasteries to establish connections with men of influence.²⁷ Whatever Howe's expectations in appointing Tregonwell to this office might have been, his friendship with Tregonwell—and with these other well-connected men—might have had something to do with the fact that when Howe surrendered the house on March 1, 1539, he received a pension of £120 per annum, an amount only equalled in the diocese of Exeter by Abbot Gabriel Dunne of Buckfast.²⁸

²⁴ Snell, *Suppression of the Religious Foundations*, pp. 62–3. David Knowles noted that Tregonwell was no anti-monastic zealot: he was the “most independent” of the royal visitors and had given praise to monasteries he felt were deserving at that time (Knowles, *Religious Orders in England, Vol. III*, p. 273).

²⁵ TNA E 315/96, ff. 46b–47. A year earlier in 1534, the abbot of Buckland had granted Tregonwell an annuity for the same amount (TNA E 315/96, ff. 40b–41).

²⁶ TNA E 315/96, ff. 199b–200, 201–201b, 56–56b.

²⁷ Knowles, *Religious Orders in England, Vol. III*, p. 285.

²⁸ Snell, *Suppression of the Religious Foundations*, pp. 143, 144. Prior Howe had also granted an annuity of 53s 4d to Walter Hendle/Henley, solicitor of the Court of Augmentations, in November, 1538 (TNA E 315/100, 241; Richardson, *History of the Court of Augmentations*, p. 43). Earlier, in 1535, Howe had granted an annuity of 26s 8d to John Amadas and his son, Amadas being a crown servant who held a corrody at Tavistock Abbey, where he caused trouble by reporting the abbot to Cromwell (TNA

In addition to the men with royal connections, individuals from less exalted stations in life appear as recipients of annuities from Plympton Priory. At the higher end of the social spectrum were members of the local landed gentry who may have had ties of friendship or economic relationships with the prior and canons of Plympton. An example would be Richard Chalons, a gentleman of Plympton St. Maurice who had been one of those to whom Prior Howe granted an annuity on October 31, 1538.²⁹ Chalons had had ties with Plympton Priory dating back some years: in 1527, Prior Howe had granted him the first and next presentation at Exminster church,³⁰ and, according to the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, Chalons was the tithe-farmer for the church of Plympton itself as well as of the chapels of Shaugh and Brixton.³¹ The last annuity granted by Prior Howe, on January 14, 1539 (six weeks before surrender), was to Richard Strode, esquire, another member of a locally-prominent Plympton family.³² As Strode does not appear elsewhere in the Augmentations records in relation to Plympton, this might well have been a case of Prior Howe doing a small favour—the annuity was for only 26s 8d—for a personal friend. Such might also have been the situation with John Gilbert, esquire, and John Ridgeway, gentleman, both from well-off Devon families who obtained an annuity of 20s from Prior Howe in November, 1538.³³ Each man had connections to other religious houses in the county: Gilbert and Ridgeway shared the chief stewardship of Torre Abbey, Gilbert on his own was chief steward of Totnes Priory, and Ridgeway possessed annuities from the abbeys of Buckfast, Buckland, and Tavistock.³⁴ They are not otherwise known to have been connected to Plympton Priory.

E 315/100, f. 278b; see also by this author, 'Retirement Arrangements and the Laity at Religious Houses in Pre-Reformation Devon,' *Florilegium* 22 [2005], 14–5).

²⁹ TNA E 315/96 ff. 51b–52. According to the Devon Lay Subsidy Rolls, a Richard Chalons was taxed in 1525 for over £26 worth of goods: see Thomas L. Stoate, *Devon Lay Subsidy Rolls, 1524–7* (Bristol, 1979), p. 162.

³⁰ TNA E 315/99, f. 22b.

³¹ *MDE*, #28, p. 148. At Michaelmas, 1538, Prior Howe confirmed to Chalons and Walter Shere the farm of the tithes of Brixton for 21 years, the farm of the small tithes and oblations of Plympton St. Maurice for 35 years, and the farm of the tithes of Plympton St. Mary for 21 years (DRO DD 22882, 22889, 22891).

³² TNA E 315/95, ff. 19–19b. In 1525, Richard Strode paid tax on goods worth £160 in Plympton St. Mary parish (*Devon Lay Subsidy Rolls*, p. 165).

³³ TNA E 315/100, ff. 335b–336.

³⁴ TNA E 315/100, ff. 332b–333; *MDE*, p. 243; TNA E 315/100, ff. 355–356; DRO DD 22923.

Besides Chalons, there were a number of other men who acted as tithe-farmers or bailiffs for Plympton Priory who also received annuities from Prior Howe. Nicholas Dyer, bailiff of the manor of Boringdon, was granted an annuity of 40s in October, 1538,³⁵ as was Richard Hoper, bailiff of Wembury and tithe-farmer for Plymouth, Egg Buckland, and Tamerton Foliot,³⁶ both men had been in these positions in 1535.³⁷ Thomas Whythead of Saltash, recipient of the grant of a presentation to Ugborough church in November, 1538, obtained the farm of the tithes of Sampford Spiney in September of that year at that same time as he and Robert Kemp leased the tithes of the chapel of St. Budeaux for 25 year.³⁸ A couple of texts from Oliver's "Abstracts" shed light on how the position of bailiff could be passed down within a family: in the first, Elizabeth, wife of Thomas Maynard, and his sons Thomas and Walter leased Plympton Priory's land at West Sherford in Brixton parish in 1515 for 89 years; for this they paid £20 per annum in rent, but along with the lease came the right to be bailiffs of the manor of East Sherford.³⁹ Apparently Thomas Maynard the younger became bailiff of Sherford, as his name appears in that capacity in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*; this was probably the same Thomas Maynard who conveyed, in September, 1538, to his wife, Anne, the reversion of the land in West Sherford where he was then living.⁴⁰ The rent was the same as it had been in 1515, as was the stipulation that Anne and her sons John, Nicholas, and (yet another) Thomas would act as bailiffs. Another bailiff, Nicholas Slannynge, was re-appointed to his position as bailiff of Plympton Grange manor in September, 1538 (he had served in this capacity in 1535); in this case, in addition to his annuity of 40s, he (and his son after him) was to receive a corrody of meat and drink when he was at the priory, provisions for his horse, and a livery gown a year.⁴¹

³⁵ *MDE*, p. 147; DRO DD 22876. In 1525, Dyer paid tax on £18 worth of goods in Plympton St. Mary parish (*Devon Lay Subsidy Rolls*, p. 165).

³⁶ TNA E 315/96, ff. 156–156b; DRO DD 22883.

³⁷ *MDE* #28, p. 147.

³⁸ See above, fn. 14; TNA E 315/96, 184–85b; DRO DD 22886 and DD 22874. At Christmas, 1538, Whythead obtained the lease of the manor of Maristow for 40 years with Richard Edgecombe (DRO DD 22899).

³⁹ DRO DD 22896.

⁴⁰ DRO DD 22901.

⁴¹ DRO DD 22900; *MDE*, #28, p. 147. Similarly, Richard Fortescue, appointed surveyor of the priory's lands in 1537, was granted by Prior Howe an annuity of 4

Monastic servants also make an appearance amongst the annuitants of Plympton Priory. It is sometimes a little unclear what their social status might have been. Walter Shere, for example, who held the position of purchaser of goods for the priory and received an annuity from of 40s from Prior Howe, was also involved in farming the tithes of several of the churches of Plympton Priory.⁴² In September, 1538, Prior Howe also granted an annuity to Johanna Hoper, widow, of Boringdon, who may possibly have been related to the Richard Hoper who was bailiff of Wembury. The rationale for the grant to Johanna Hoper was that she had worked as a supervisor of the servants on the priory's manor of Boringdon.⁴³ While she did not seem to hold an official title, her work was obviously of value to the priory; the fact that her annuity of 40s is equal in amount to those of some of the men of higher rank testifies to this.⁴⁴ Other servants to obtain annuities were John Gosse, purveyor and buyer of food, and William Greene, principal cook for Plympton Priory.⁴⁵ The documents are silent as to why Prior Howe granted annuities to only these servants, as there must have been many more who worked at Plympton Priory. However, there are numerous other names of individuals in the annuity texts who have no identifying descriptions and are not from well-known families; some of these annuities may have been directed to servants as well. One must also keep in mind the fact that the Court of Augmentations records might not represent all the annuities granted to monastic servants, or others, by the priors of Plympton.

marks per annum as well as meat, drink, and lodgings for him and his two servants when he visited the priory, as well as a livery coat a year (DRO DD 22881).

⁴² TNA E 315/96, ff. 22b–23. For sharing the farming of tithes with Richard Chalons, see above, n. 31; Shere also leased the farm of the tithes of Maker for 25 years and of Plymstock Chapel (with Christopher Hornebroke) for the same term at Michaelmas, 1538 (DRO DD 22875, 22890).

⁴³ TNA E 315/96, ff. 60b–61.

⁴⁴ The only other single woman to receive a grant of an annuity from Prior Howe was Johanna Waymonde of Ashburton, Devon. He granted her 20s a year in October, 1538, for the sake of charity (*ex intuitu charitatis*): TNA E 315/98, ff. 98–98b.

⁴⁵ John Gosse received his annuity of 40s—granted for good daily service (*pro bono servicio quotidiano*)—in October, 1538 (TNA E 315/96, f. 130b); William Greene's annuity of 46s 8d was also granted in October, 1538 (TNA E 315/96, ff. 200b–201).

The End

As has been mentioned, Prior John Howe surrendered the Priory of St. Peter and St. Paul at Plympton to William Petre on the first of March, 1539, and in exchange for his co-operation received a pension of £120 a year. There were eighteen other canons at Plympton present to accept pensions, which ranged in value—according to the status of the canon and the length of time he had lived at the priory—from £10 per annum for the subprior and another canon to £4 13s 4d for several others.⁴⁶ At the dissolution, some ex-religious were given the option to serve the cure at parish churches and chapels, and this is seen in the case of Plympton: two of the canons, Henry Luxton and Bernard Cole, were to serve as parish priests at Shaugh and Wembury, respectively.⁴⁷ Prior Howe retired to Exeter College, Oxford, and was still living there and enjoying his pension in 1553.⁴⁸ In the ensuing twenty years, the lands of Plympton Priory were mostly granted or sold,⁴⁹ but it was only in the second year of the reign of Elizabeth I that the site of the priory itself was granted to Sir Arthur Champernon.⁵⁰ One would cherish any document that described the personal responses of the canons, their tenants, or their parishioners to the end of a religious institution that had been such a prominent part of the religious, social, and economic lives of the people of Devon for so long. Unfortunately, no such text has come to light, so one can only speculate as to who might have been delighted to see the canons go, and who might have mourned their departure.

Conclusion

As was mentioned in the introduction, little now remains of the priory of Saints Peter and Paul at Plympton either in terms of its physical

⁴⁶ *MDE*, #29, p. 150; see also Snell, *Suppression of the Religious Foundations*, pp. 108, 143.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*; Snell, *Suppression of the Religious Foundations*, p. 109.

⁴⁸ *MDE*, p. 133.

⁴⁹ See Youings, *Devon Monastic Lands*, pp. 4, 21, 30, 45, 47, 49–50, 53, 56–8, 63–4, 66, 78, 93–4, 97–8, 114, 121, 124, 126, 128, 129.

⁵⁰ *MDE*, p. 133. In November, 1538, Lord and Lady Lisle had been hoping to obtain Plympton Priory, but this did not come to pass. See *The Lisle Letters*, ed. Muriel St. Clare Byrne (Chicago and London, 1981), vol. 5, #1291–2, pp. 313–4.

structure or of its muniments. An unfortunate consequence of this situation is that the prominence of this institution in the religious landscape of late medieval England has heretofore not been adequately assessed. While this book has not attempted to be a complete history of all aspects of the history of Plympton Priory, it has endeavoured to explore in some depth a number of themes: the importance to Plympton Priory of early donations from the laity and the episcopacy, the close ties between the priory and the bishops of Exeter, the significance of *spiritualia* to Plympton Priory as a source of wealth, and the regularity with which the canons found themselves in court defending their interests. By engaging in a close analysis of an individual house of Augustinian canons, it has been possible to learn much about the creation, endowment, difficulties, successes, and activities of the canons at this locale.

One theme which has recurred throughout this book has been the question of whether the canons at Plympton undertook the cure of souls at their churches. Despite the assumptions that canons of this order were traditionally involved in pastoral care, the evidence from Plympton Priory suggests that a cautious approach ought to be taken in regard to this issue. Plympton, like so many other English religious houses, lacks crucial documentation of institutions to benefices in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries which would enable scholars to track the participation of the regular canons in the parochial lives of their wider communities. Once records do become available for Plympton Priory, in the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the picture that emerges is of a religious institution largely monastic in character. The canons virtually never served at their churches as beneficed clergy in the period for which we have documentation, although they do seem to have tended to some of the chapels near the priory. If the canons of Plympton were typical members of the order in medieval England, it would be unwise to assume that the participation of the Augustinian canons in the cure of souls was commonplace.

Another theme of this work has been the importance of the “networks of patronage” which surrounded Plympton Priory in its first few decades. By deriving broad-based support from a number of different circles in the diocese and county, the priory was able to build up an endowment consisting of diverse sources of income and rights. Indeed, without the willingness of the magnates of Devon and their vassals to make benefactions to the episcopal foundation at Plympton, the priory could never have become the wealthiest Augustinian foundation in the

region and the second-wealthiest religious house in the diocese. The bishops of Exeter maintained their interest in this house of their patronage over the centuries, generally intervening on behalf of the priory when they could be of assistance, such as when the canons' rights to their churches were threatened. The tenacity displayed by the canons of Plympton when such disputes arose helps to explain how the priory was able to maintain its entitlement to its *spiritualia* and *temporalia*.

Of course, as has been seen, the possession of spiritual and temporal rights by the priory entailed responsibilities and obligations on the part of the canons of Plympton. As patrons of the advowsons of so many churches, they were in the position to assist a large number of clerics in need of benefices. Plympton Priory also assisted those seeking ordination by providing titles, the theoretical guarantees that the ordinands could rely on the priory for support. Of course, the priory benefited as well from their rights to churches: throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the canons of Plympton displayed a keen interest in the management of their *spiritualia* and the maximization of this form of income through appropriation and augmentation. The canons may have felt on occasion that some of their churches, lands, and privileges were hardly worth the troubles the priory endured on their behalf. The recurring difficulties at St. Kew and Plymouth must have been serious irritants, and expensive ones if the legal expenses incurred in the canons' defence of their rights at these places are taken into account. The legal costs involved in resisting the claims of King Edward III to the patronage of the priory must similarly have been far from negligible.

This book has also explored the responses of discontented laity, especially the parishioners of chapels, to the control Plympton Priory exercised over the delivery of religious services in their communities. Evidence from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries demonstrated the increased willingness of the laity to give voice to their concerns and take action to assert their feelings of local identity and loyalty. The passions engendered by this developing desire for greater control at the parochial level were apparent in the incidents at Plympton St. Mary, Plymstock, and Wembury. The canons of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries displayed the same determination to protect their rights as had their predecessors of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. However, the climate had indeed changed, and in some cases compromise rather than prolongation of legal struggles seemed the preferred course of action. Of course, one must keep in mind that many of the connections

between the canons of Plympton and the laity—especially those who were servants or friends of the canons—were mutually beneficial ones rather than ones defined by conflict and tension.

In conclusion, this book has provided an analysis of key developments in the history of one particular house of Augustinian canons from its foundation until its dissolution. Of course, the experiences of other houses of Augustinian canons might have differed substantially from those of Plympton Priory; indeed, this is very likely given the great diversity within the order in terms of size, wealth, and influence. It is hoped, therefore, that other scholars will decide to make more Augustinian houses in England the subjects of study so as to deepen our understanding of the ways in which the numerous communities of this order related to the laity, the secular clergy, the episcopacy, and the Crown. The role of the Augustinian canons—and canonesses—in the religious history of later medieval England could yet be more extensively explored.

APPENDIX ONE

THE *SPIRITUALIA* OF PLYMPTON PRIORY

advwsn = advowson

Church	Episcopal Charter 1186 × 88 (<i>MDE</i> #14)	Taxatio 1291 (Bodl. MS Tanner 342)	Episcopal charter 1334 (<i>MDE</i> #21)	Valor Ecclesiasticus 1535 (<i>MDE</i> #28)	Ministers' Accounts 1540–41 (<i>MDE</i> #30)
<i>Appropriated churches</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Category, value</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Value</i>
Blackawton <i>Appropriated 1534/5</i>	Yes	£6 13s 4d	£6 13s 4d (pension)	£26 13s 4d	—
Dean Prior <i>Appropriated 1261</i>	Yes	£5	church	£8 10s	£8 10s
Egg Buckland <i>Appropriated by 1275</i>	Yes	£3 6s 8d	church	£9	£9
Maker <i>Appropriated by 1264</i>	Yes	£5	church	£11 6s 8d	£11 6s 8d
Marystow <i>Appropriated by 1266</i>	Yes	£12	church	£8	£8
Newton St. Cyres <i>Appropriated 1338</i>	No	£2*	£2 (pension)	£15	£15
Plympton Priory Church and Plympton St. Mary	—	£33 6s 8d	church	£80	£74
St. Kew <i>Appropriated by 1283</i>	Yes	£8 6s 8d	church	£20	£20
Sutton Plymouth <i>Appropriated in 12th century</i>	No	£5 13s 4d	church	£23 rectory: £15 pension from vicar: £8	£23 rectory: £15 pension from vicar: £8
Tamerton Foliot <i>Appropriated by 1283–84</i>	Yes	£6 6s 6d	church	£10 13s 4d	£9
<i>Chapels</i>					
Brixton	No	—	chapel	£30	£30
Plymstock	No	—	chapel	£62	£72
Plympton Thomas	No	—	chapel	£11	£11
Sampford Spiney	No	—	chapel	£9 6s 8d	£9 6s 8d
St. Budeaux <i>(dependent on Sutton)</i>	No	—	chapel	£9	£9
St. John-in- Arcubus, Exeter	No	£1†	—	£9 17s 2.5d	£9 19s 2.5d

Table (cont.)

Church	Episcopal Charter 1186 × 88 (MDE #14)	Taxatio 1291 (Bodl. MS Tanner 342)	Episcopal charter 1334 (MDE #21)	Valor Ecclesiasticus 1535 (MDE #28)	Ministers' Accounts 1540–41 (MDE #30)
Shaugh	No	—	chapel	£21	£20
Wembury	No	—	chapel	£43 13s 4d	£40 13s 4d
<i>Pensions</i>					
Bratton + <i>Advwsn until</i> <i>c. 1335</i>	No	£5 6s 8d	£5 6s 8d	£5 6s 8d	£5 6s 8d
Bridestowe + <i>Advwsn until c. 1335</i>	Yes	£6 13s 4d	£6 13s 4d	£6 13s 4d	£6 13s 4d
Exminster + <i>Advwsn</i>		£3 6s 8d	£3 6s 8d	£3 6s 8d	£3 6s 8d
Ilington + <i>Advwsn (transferred</i> <i>to Ottery St. Mary,</i> <i>1337)</i>	Yes	£5†	£5	—	—
Meavy + <i>Advwsn</i>	No	13s 4d	13s 4d	13s 4d	13s 4d
Peter Tavy + <i>Moiety of advwsn</i>	No	—	5 pounds of wax	—	—
St. Just-in- Roseland	Yes	13s 4d	13s 4d	13s 4d	13s 4d
St. Mawgan-in- Pydar + <i>Advwsn until c. 1314</i>	Yes	£1 6s 8d	£1 6s 8d	£1 6s 8d	£1 6s 8d
Stokeinteignhead + <i>Advwsn</i>	Yes	£2	£2	£2	£2
Ugborough + <i>Advwsn</i>	Yes	£8	£8	£8	£8
<i>Other</i>					
Exeter Cathedral Chapter: £4 on the death of each canon	Yes	—	£4	—	—
Gerrans: moiety of tithes	No	—	chapel dependent on St. Anthony	£13 6s 8d	—
St. Anthony-in- Roseland: cell	Yes	—	church	£5	£17

* This is the value in the copies of the *Taxatio* printed in *Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil* and the Record Commission edition; the copy in Oxford, Bodl. Tanner MS 342, which seems to have been a fourteenth-century updating of the *Taxatio* after the appropriation of Newton St. Cyres, lists the amount as £8.

† No values are given in the Bodl. MS Tanner 342 copy of the *Taxatio* for St. John-in-Arcubus or Ilington; these are the amounts printed in the *Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil* and the Record Commission editions.

APPENDIX TWO

CHARTERS FROM THE COURTENAY CARTULARY,
DEVON RECORD OFFICE TD 51

1) pp. 63–4 June 7, 1305 *Plympton Priory concedes and quit-claims to Sir Hugh de Courtenay II the advowson and pension of “Bratlegh” (Brightleigh?) chapel and the land adjacent to it.*

Omnibus Christi fidelibus ad quos presens scriptum pervenerit frater Johannes Prior de Plimpton et eiusdem loci conventus salutem in Domino sempiternam. Noveritis nos concessisse remisisse et omnino quietum clamasse Domino Hugoni de Curtenay advocacionem capelle de Bratlegh que est de feodo suo, una cum terra adiacente et omnibus aliis pertinentiis suis; habendam et tenendam sibi et heredibus suis advocacionem predictam cum suis pertinentiis sine aliquo retenemento nobis vel successoribus nostris in perpetuum. Remisimus etiam et quietum clamavimus eidem domino Hugoni et heredibus suis annuam pensionem trium solidorum quam de instituto in eadem capella percipere solebamus. Concessimus et presenti scripto confirmavimus quod quodcumque et quosciscumque capellam predictam vacare contigerit liceat predicto Hugoni et heredibus suis capellanum ad eandem capellam presentare absque impedimento vel reclamacione nostri vel successorum nostrorum in perpetuum. In cuius rei testimonium presenti scripto sigillum nostrum commune apposuimus. Datum apud Plimpton septimo die Junii anno regni regis Edwardi tricesimo tercio; testibus Roberto abbate de Tavistok, domini Stephano de Hackumbe, Roberto Beaupeal, Thoma de Cyrecestre militibus, Helia Coffyn, Johanne Cadye, Roberto de Brodenymet, et aliis.

2) pp. 229–30 June 5, 1305 *Agreement between Plympton Priory and Sir Hugh de Courtenay II concerning a plot of land called “Le Sablon” in Plympton. Plympton Priory remits a half of the plot to Sir Hugh, who in turn quit-claims the residue of the plot with the part from the causeway to the land of Woodford.*

Cum aliquando inter dominum Hugonem de Curtenay dominum de Plymptone ex parte una et religiosos viros Johannem Priorem de Plymptone et eiusdem loci conventum ex altera calumpnie agitentur super quadam placia terrae que vocatur Le Sablon que est in occidentali parte calcete qua itur de la Clapere ad ecclesiam Beate Marie de

Plympton, cuius placie tam predictus dominus Hugo quam predicti religiosi hinc inde vocabant proprietatem tandem inter ipsos conquieverunt in hac forma, videlicet quod predicti prior et conventus pro se et suis successoribus remiserunt predicto Domino Hugoni et heredibus suis australem medietatem predictae placie imperpetuum, secundum quod bunde facte inter ipsos in vigilia Penthecostes anno regni regis Edwardi tricesimo tercio testantur, scilicet a dicta calceta linealiter versus occidentem usque ad metam que est in medio fluminis, salvo predictis religiosiis et eorum successoribus quod libere possint mundare chanelum de latitudine septem pedum aque que dicitur Langebroke quando voluerint ab eorum clauso quantum voluerint versus mare. Et quod aqua de Coriz¹ currat in transversum utriusque partis placie predictae sicut fecit die confectionis presencium usque ad mare. Et predictus Dominus Hugo inspectis et intellectis munimentis predictorum religiosorum et eorum Jure et predictae placie possessione totum residuum predictae placie cum pertinentiis a predicta calceta usque ad terram de Wodeford pro se et heredibus suis predictis religiosiis et eorum successoribus sicut ius ecclesie sue de Plympton quiete clamat et tenore presencium confirmat imperpetuum tenendum sine aliqua calumpnia vel demanda. In cuius rei testimonium, hiis mutuis scriptis alternatim sigilla sua apposuerunt. Testibus Roberto abbate de Tavystok, domino Stephano de Hackumbe, Roberto Beaupeal, Thoma de Cyrecestre, Baldewyno le Bastard militibus, Willelmo de Niweton, Johanne de Colleham, Willelmo de Kemel et aliis. Datum [apud] Plympton die et anno predictis.

3) pp. 266–7 1219 × 1242² *Regrant and confirmation by Robert de Courtenay to Plympton Priory and canons of Marsh Barton of gifts of 21 acres of land at Marsh Barton called “Swynparroke,” 11 acres of land called “Swynescastel,” 30 acres of land called “Ocham” and all the land of “Lonedialond,” and all the lands they held in the time of his mother Hawise de Courtenay. He also granted them a conduit of water in Alphington in exchange for a quit-claim of the canons regarding the churches of Kenn and Alphington, the prebends of Exeter castle chapel, and the mill of Marsh Barton.*

¹ Possibly Tory Brook in Plympton?

² Dating based on dates of Hawise de Courtenay (1219) and Robert de Courtenay (1242) (Sanders, 70).

Sciant omnes ad quos presens scriptum pervenerit quod ego Robert de Courtenay reddidi Deo et ecclesie Beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli de Plymton et canonicis ibidem Deo servientibus et ecclesie Beate Marie de Marisco extra civitatem Exonie ad predictam ecclesiam de Plymton pertinenti viginti et unam acram terre in marisco meo de Alfington. Scilicet terram in australi parte gardini Sancte Marie de Marisco que dicitur Swynparroke in quo continentur decem acre prout bunde facte sunt sacramento legalium hominum meorum de Alfington. Et terram ex alia parte eiusdem gardini que dicitur Swynscastel in quo continentur undecim acre per bundas suas sicut antiquum ius ecclesie eiusdem et ditorum canonicorum de Plymton. Insuper etiam dedi et concessi memoratis ecclesiis et canonicis pro salute anime mee et Marie uxoris [mee] et antecessorum meorum et successorum 30 acras terre scilicet totam terram que vocatur Ocham ex australi et boriali parte vie que tendit a ponte de Schepwalle usque ad terram Walteri de Fraxino per bundas factas sacramento hominum meorum. Et totam terram de Lonedialond in qua continentur 5 acre per bundas factas sacramento predictorum hominum meorum, que terre sunt in dominico meo de Alfington; has autem predictas terras dedi et concessi et hac presenti carta mea confirmavi Deo et memoratis ecclesiis de Plymton et de marisco et canonicis in eisdem ecclesiis Deo servientibus simul cum omnibus terris et possessionibus quas prius habuerunt tempore Hawise de Courtenay matris mee cum omnibus pertinentiis suis in viis et semitis in pratis et pascuis in aquis et exitibus et omnibus libertatibus, tenendas et habendas in liberam puram et perpetuam elemosinam et omnino quietam. Preterea dedi et concessi dictis canonicis conductum aque per terram meam et hominum meorum de Alfington a filo aque descendente de Alfington usque ad eorum officinas de marisco sicut eis sufficere et expedire videbitur et competentem et liberum cursum aque ab eorum officinis usque ad proprium aque canalem; pro hac restitutione et donacione mea Antonius Prior de Plymton et eiusdem loci conventus remiserunt placitum et totum ius quod clamabant se habere in occlesiis [sic] de Ken et Alfington et prebendis castelli Exoniae et molendino de marisco unde traxerunt me in causam coram iudicibus a domino papa Honorio tercio delegatis scilicet Domino Jocelino Bathonie Episcopo et Magistro Roberto de Berkeleya canonico Wellensi, renunciantes omnibus impetratis et impetrandis. In dicta causa hac predictas terras possessiones et libertates cum omnibus predictis per presens scriptum obtuli super altare Beate Marie de Marisco. Quas ego et heredes mei contra

omnes homines warentizare tenemur. Quod ut ratum et inconcussum
permaneat presens scriptum sigilli mei appositione duxi roborandum;
hiis testibus. etc.

Note:

[] indicate additions, or, in the case of [*sic*], a correction

APPENDIX THREE

THE *TAXATIO* OF POPE NICHOLAS IV

The *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* was a valuation of all church income, both temporal and spiritual, carried out in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland in 1291–92. Pope Nicholas IV ordered the assessment so that a tenth of the income could be given to Edward I for the crusade he had promised to undertake. The assessors in each diocese were usually two clerics of the diocese who took sworn statements from incumbents as to their incomes.¹ There was some variation in practice amongst assessors in their recording practices: in the diocese of Exeter, for example, all benefices which had incomes of less than 6 marks—and hence were not liable to be taxed—were recorded nonetheless, whereas in other dioceses they were omitted.² However, the results listed in the *Taxatio* are problematic. Robinson’s investigation of the *Taxatio* for his study of the Augustinian canons demonstrated that because of the many inaccuracies and omissions in the assessment, the lists must be used with great caution.³ Appropriated churches—a significant source of income for religious houses—were not included in the returns of the majority of dioceses.⁴ The information is more reliable for some dioceses than for others: the diocese of Exeter, for example, was grossly under-assessed both in terms of *spiritualia* and *temporalia*.⁵

The text of the whole *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* was printed by the Record Commission in 1802 from the Exchequer copy in the Public Record Office. In 1889, as an appendix to his edition of the *Register of Walter Bronescombe*, F.C. Hingeston-Randolph printed a version of the *Taxatio* for the diocese of Exeter. The text came from what Hingeston-Randolph contended was a near-contemporaneous copy of the *Taxatio*.⁶ The information in these two texts of the assessment is virtually identical.

¹ J.H. Denton, “The Valuation of the Ecclesiastical Benefices of England and Wales in 1291–2,” *Historical Research* 66 (1993), 234.

² *Ibid.*, 238, 244–5. Benefice holders who held a number of benefices worth singly six marks or less still had to pay a tenth of the sum total.

³ Robinson, *Geography of Augustinian Settlement*, pp. 110–20, 145.

⁴ Rose Graham, “The Taxation of Pope Nicholas IV,” in *English Ecclesiastical Studies* (London, 1929), p. 296.

⁵ Robinson, *Geography of Augustinian Settlement*, pp. 119–20.

⁶ *Reg. Bronescombe & Quivil*, p. 450.

Finally, there survives in Bishop Tanner's copy of extracts from the lost Plympton cartulary a list of the priory's *spiritualia*. The version from Bodleian MS. Tanner 342 seems to have been an incomplete fourteenth-century updating of the returns made in 1291. This is suggested by the fact that the value for Ilsington church is omitted on account of its transferral to Ottery St. Mary, and by the fact that the value for Newton St. Cyres has increased, as one would expect after its appropriation by Plympton in 1338.

An examination of the information from the assessment on Plympton Priory's *spiritualia*, when compared with other sources such as the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* and Bishop Grandisson's confirmation of 1334, demonstrates that there are serious *lacunae* in the printed texts. The two largest sources of Plympton Priory's spiritual income according to the *Valor*—its appropriated churches and its chapels—have been almost entirely omitted from the printed texts of the survey. When values are given for Plympton Priory's appropriated churches, no mention is made of their connection with the priory. Essentially, the Plympton material in the *Taxatio* as it appears in the Record Commission edition and in Hingeston-Randolph's edition of the register of Bishop Bronescombe are lists of the priory's pensions.

The assessment as listed in the MS version is more complete than the printed texts, as it includes incomes from the priory's appropriated churches. It is hard to gauge the accuracy of these figures, as they are quite different from those in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* and the Ministers' Accounts of the sixteenth century. Then again, since these values were based on income sources—tithes, offerings, the yield of glebe land—which were subject to economic influences like inflation, increased or decreased productivity, and alterations in personal wealth, one would expect them to have changed over time. Conversely, the figures listed for the pensions in the manuscript copy are identical to those which appear in the *Valor*, with the exception of Blackawton, which was appropriated in the sixteenth century.

Values from the Different Copies of the *Taxatio* for the *Spiritualia*
of Plympton Priory

x [] = The value given for a church in the printed texts of the *Taxatio* when no mention is made of its affiliation with Plympton Priory

vic = value of the vicarage

Name of Church	Taxatio (Record Commission)	Taxatio (Reg. Bronescombe)	Taxatio (Bodl. MS Tanner 342)
Church of Plympton	£33 6s 8d	£33 6s 8d	50 marks (£33 6s 8d)
Church of Dean	x [£5; vic: £1]	x [£5]	7.5 marks (£5)
Church of Sutton	x [£5 6s 8d; vic: £4 6s 8d]	x [£5 6s 8d; vic: £4 6s 8d]	8.5 marks (£5 13s 4d)
Church of Tamerton	x £4 vic: 3s 4d	x [£4]	6.5 marks (£6 6s 6d)
Church of Marystow	x [£12]	x [£12]	18 marks (£12)
Church of Maker	x [£5] [sic: Sacre]	x [£5]	7.5 marks (£5)
Church of St. Kew	x [£8 13s 4d; vic: £2]	x [£8 13s 4d; vic: £2]	12.5 marks (£8 6s 8d)
Church of "Gansted"*	—	—	3 marks (£2)
Church of Egg Buckland	x [£3 6s 8d; vic: 6s 8d]	x [£3 6s 8d; vicarage: 6s 8d]	5 marks (£3 6s 8d)
Church of Newton St. Cyres	£2 †	£2	12 marks (£8)
Pension from Ugborough	£8	£8	12 marks (£8)
Pension from Stokeinteignhead	£2	£2	3 marks (£2)
Pension from Blackawton	£6 13s 4d	£6 13s 4d	10 marks (£6 13s 4d)
Pension from Ilington	£5	£5	—
Pension from Exminster	£3 6s 8d	£6 13s 4d	5 marks (£3 6s 8d)
Pension from Bratton	£5 6s 8d	£5 6s 8d	8 marks (£5 6s 8d)
Pension from Bridestowe	£6 13s 4d	£6 13s 4d	10 marks (£6 13s 4d)

Table (*cont.*)

Name of Church	Taxatio (Record Commission)	Taxatio (Reg. Bronescombe)	Taxatio (Bodl. MS Tanner 342)
Pension from Meavy	13s 4d	13s 4d	1 mark (13s 4d)
Pension from St. Just	13s 4d	13s 4d	1 mark (13s 4d)
Pension from St. Mawgan-in-Pydar	£1 6s 8d	£1 6s 8d	2 marks (£1 6s 8d)
Chapel of Sampford Spiney	x [£2]	x [£2]	—
Church of St. Gerrans	x [rectorial portion: £2 6s 8d; portion of the Prior of St. Anthony: £2 6s 8d]	x [rectorial portion: £2 6s 8d; portion of the Prior of St. Anthony: £2 6s 8d]	
Church of St. Anthony	x [£3]	x [£3]	—
Chapel of St. John in Arcubus, Exeter	£1	£1	—
Total			£123 13s 6d

* This church does not appear elsewhere in the surviving records of Plympton Priory's *spiritualia*. There is no church of this name in Devon and Cornwall. A hamlet named Ganstead exists in Humberstone, but it does not seem to have had a parish church in the Middle Ages, and Plympton Priory is not otherwise known to have had any connections with this place.

† The Record Commission text of the *Taxatio* states that the Prior of "Plumpton" received £2 from the church of Donne in the deanery of Cadbury, but this seems to have been an error for Newton St. Cyres, which was in the same deanery.

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