

THE NEW MONASTIC ORDERS OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY

Perhaps the most striking feature of medieval monastic history is the proliferation of new religious groups and orders in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. These were the product of a search for the purest, indeed the perfect, form of monasticism, and are characterized by two main features: the desire to return to primitive monastic observances, either to the eremiticism of the Desert Fathers or to a stricter interpretation of the text of the Rule of St Benedict; and the appeal of apostolic poverty. Both these carried implicit, sometimes indeed explicit, criticisms of the religious life as practised in contemporary monastic houses, and led to what has been termed the 'crisis of monasticism'.¹ These new trends and new religious emotions can be investigated through an examination of four religious orders which, in a greater or lesser degree, transformed monastic life in Britain. These are the orders of Tiron, Savigny, Cîteaux (the Cistercian Order), and La Grande Chartreuse (the Carthusian Order). This is also an appropriate place to consider the military orders, which, although their aims differed widely from those of the conventional orders, were nevertheless heavily influenced by the Cistercians, and made a unique contribution to the development of the monastic life of the period. Of all these groups, the Chartreuse was the first to be founded and the last to reach Britain. And it was the Cistercian Order which was to exert more influence in Europe than any other medieval religious order, although it perhaps had the least auspicious beginning of all.

The desire to return to a life of poverty, the eremitical element, and devotion to the Rule of St Benedict cannot easily be separated, for those men who were inspired to establish communities with a strict

interpretation of and adherence to the Rule were often also hermits.² Up to a point, Bernard of Tiron, one of the most influential of these, had a conventional career as a Benedictine abbot, but he was also a preacher, and at times a hermit. The desire for the solitary life led him to settle in the forest of Craon on the borders of Brittany and Maine; but in 1109, having gathered around him a number of recruits, he founded the abbey of Tiron. A similar person was Vitalis of Mortain, formerly a secular clerk in the household of Count Robert of Mortain, who, like Bernard, lived for a while in the forest of Craon. When he found it difficult to achieve the solitude he desired, he left to establish for himself a hermitage in the forest of Savigny in Normandy (c. 1089). Again, he was joined by disciples, and so he composed for them a simple rule, based on that of St Benedict. The community rose to the status of an abbey between 1112 and 1115. Both Tiron and Savigny became the heads of orders, spreading across the channel into England, Wales and Scotland. Tiron achieved modest success, and Savigny, within thirty years, numbered a congregation of thirty-three houses, fourteen of them in Britain. Tiron kept its independence, while Savigny, under internal pressure, merged with Cîteaux in 1147.

Both Tiron and Savigny produced ways of life which were based on the Rule of St Benedict, but which also incorporated an eremitical element. They have something else in common: they were communities which gathered around an individual. An initial contrast is presented here by Cîteaux, for although the ideals of one man, Robert of Molesme, were influential there, Cîteaux affords an example of a group of men deciding to convert to a harsher régime.³ Robert, like many of his contemporaries, seems to have found it difficult to mould his career into the existing pattern of monastic observance, and in 1075 founded a monastery at Molesme, in Burgundy, where he attempted to live a more austere life, though still within the framework of a community. His failure to do so was the result of success, the appeal of his vision, and in 1098 some of his disciples had little difficulty in persuading him to move on in order to found another community where a stricter interpretation of the Rule might be applied. This was the *Novum Monasterium*, the new monastery, Cîteaux. However, it was not Robert who was to be the formative influence, but the two men who followed him as abbot, Alberic (1098–1109), and the Englishman Stephen Harding (1109–34), who was probably the author of the primitive *Carta Caritatis*, the Charter of Love, which lays out the basic Cistercian principles. A third powerful force in the formation of the Cistercian identity was a man who entered Cîteaux in 1113 and went on to be abbot of Clairvaux and one of the most influential voices in western Europe, St Bernard.

If we ask *how* Cîteaux differed from Tiron and Savigny in its conception of the monastic life, we may give two broad answers. First, the founders of Cîteaux and successive generations of their abbots laid down the basis of their observances in legislation, which was to be followed by all houses. Second, they created a machinery for enforcing the observance of their statutes, through the system of visitation and the annual general chapter. It is the organization of Cîteaux, the creation of an international order which followed common statutes and bound house to house by a system which overrode political boundaries, which was the unique contribution of Cîteaux to the monastic life of the twelfth century. The customs and statutes, which were added to over the years, are witness to the developing aims of the White Monks, to their search for solitude and divorce from the world, poverty and simplicity. The documents lay down the following requirements: that Cistercian houses were not to be built in towns and cities, but were to be remote from the 'habitation of men';⁴ that churches were to be plain and unadorned; that the liturgy was to be unaffected and simple. Cistercian economy was characterized by the prohibition of the traditional forms of revenue enjoyed by Benedictine houses, which yielded income derived from the work of others. The White Monks therefore rejected manors, rents, labour services, mills, churches and tithes. Although their statutes reinstated manual work as a central feature of the timetable, they revolutionized the management of the economy by the creation of a whole new class within the monastery, the *conversi* or lay brethren. In traditional monastic parlance a *conversus* was a man who entered a religious house as an adult, in contrast to one who had been offered as an oblate. It is at the Italian abbey of Vallombrosa that we first encounter the existence of the new *conversi*, the lay brethren, but it was among the Cistercian houses that the idea was most successfully developed. The unique conception of the lay brethren was that they were not servants: they were members of the community. The Cistercians therefore opened up to a whole new set of people – the illiterate laity – a chance to enter a religious community and enjoy its benefits. They provided an outlet for both peasants and men of higher social status who managed and supervised the innovative system of grange-farming which the Cistercians pioneered. The chronology of the early documents is still not clear, and it must be stressed that we are not talking of a house, or an order, that conceived its ideals overnight. These developed gradually, and what has come down to us does not always represent the thinking of the founders of the New Monastery. However, they were very probably part of much Cistercian thinking by the 1120s and 1130s, that is, by the time the order reached Britain.⁵

The *Carta Caritatis*, which was first composed by Abbot Stephen

Harding before 1119, certainly envisaged that the order would grow. However, it could not have foreseen that before 1152 there would be over three hundred abbeys in Europe; this figure alone is eloquent testimony to the success of the Cistercian appeal. Even more striking is the fact that the Cistercians developed a system of government to oversee this great number of houses. In contrast to the Cluniac, the Cistercian congregation throughout Europe was not seen as a monarchical institution, but rather as a family, with each house bound as a daughter to the mother house from which it was founded. The ties of love and discipline were to be maintained by the annual visitation of each daughter house by the abbot of the mother house. Cîteaux itself was not exempt, and lacking a mother house itself, was visited by the abbots of its four eldest daughters. Furthermore, each year the abbots of every Cistercian house were to gather for the general chapter at Cîteaux. In time, and as Cistercian plantations became more remote, this dual system placed an intolerable burden on individual abbots, and their responsibilities were commuted. Abbots of Scottish houses, for instance, only had to attend the general chapter once every four years.

THE BRITISH HOUSES OF TIRON

Of the three congregations, Tiron was the first to make a foundation in Britain, but its contribution to the general monastic expansion was small. Indeed, it hardly touched England at all, numbering only a handful of modest houses.⁶ However, Earl David, later king of Scotland, brought a group of monks from Tiron (probably in 1113) to settle at Selkirk and form his first monastic foundation in Scotland; their number was increased after a personal visit by David to Tiron in 1116. Indeed there are two significant features of the early history of the Scottish Tironensians. First, continental reform came to Scotland, as indeed it did to Wales, independently from and even ahead of similar developments in Norman England.⁷ Second, Selkirk enjoyed strong connections with the mother house, at least on a personal level, for two of its abbots, Ralph and William, went back to rule Tiron. The Selkirk community was transferred in 1128 to Kelso, where it was one of the most successful and wealthy of all Scottish monasteries and became by 1300 the mother house of a congregation north of the border which numbered four abbeys and three priories. Among these were William the Lion's foundation at Arbroath, made in memory of the murdered archbishop, Thomas Becket, and Lindores, established by William's brother David, earl of Huntingdon, and colonized from Arbroath.⁸ The coming of the Tironensians was a significant chapter in Scottish monastic history.

Roughly contemporary, but far more modest, was their settlement in Wales. Between 1113 and 1115 Robert fitz Martin, lord of Cemais, brought thirteen monks from Tiron to found a priory on the coast of Cardigan Bay at St Dogmaels; and the colony was increased by a further thirteen monks a few years later. The monks were able, with the patronage of Robert's mother, to establish a dependent cell on Caldy Island off the Pembrokeshire coast, although they seem not to have been able to sustain a permanent colony there, and founded another at Pill (Glamorgan) c. 1200. The Welsh Tironensians lacked the royal support they enjoyed in Scotland, but St Dogmaels at least was adequately endowed by its founder. Despite Tiron's place among the reformed orders of the twelfth century, however, the economy of its Welsh houses at least was more akin to that of the Benedictines.⁹

THE CONGREGATION OF SAVIGNY IN BRITAIN

The growth of the Savigniac congregation in Britain began in 1124, with the foundation of the important house of Tulketh in Lancashire, which transferred to Furness in 1127.¹⁰ By 1147 it had fourteen houses in England and Wales,¹¹ all but Rushen on the Isle of Man, the Yorkshire abbeys of Byland and its daughter house of Jervaulx, Swineshead (Lincolnshire) and Calder (Cumberland) founded directly from Savigny. These four were offshoots of Furness, although in 1147 Byland argued, successfully, at the annual general chapter that it was dependent on Savigny rather than the Lancashire abbey. The founders of the Savigniac houses were powerful men, and one of the order's most influential advocates was the man who, as count of Boulogne and Mortain, founded Furness in 1124. Later as King Stephen he planted monks at Buckfast in Devon in 1136 and with his wife established Coggeshall (Essex) a few years later. As a prestigious patron, the count of Mortain, favourite in his later years of Henry I and one of his 'supermagnates', was almost unparalleled, and the favour he showed them could well have contributed to the great vogue for the Savigniacs in the first half of the 1130s.

Little is documented of the growth of the Savigniac houses in Britain, but the early history of the abbeys of Byland and Calder, and their relationship with Furness, hints at many of the problems which plagued the congregation in Britain. It also reminds us that monastic foundations were not always trouble-free.¹² In 1134 Furness Abbey sent a colony of thirteen monks to Calder in Cumbria to settle on land donated by Ranulf Meschin. No reason is given in the sources for what motivated Meschin, but subsequent events suggest that the monks of Furness themselves would have welcomed the foundation of a new colony

because of pressure of increasing numbers at the abbey. In 1137, however, Calder was burnt by the Scots who raided and devastated the Cumbrian countryside, and had to be abandoned. The monks returned to Furness but were refused entry, and the abbot of Byland who, sixty years later, set this event down in writing from an eyewitness account suggested two reasons for the attitude of the Furness monks: the refusal of the abbot of Calder to resign his abbatial status; and an unwillingness on the part of the Furness monks to share their resources. Refused entry at Furness, the monks decided to look for another patron, and to approach Thurstan, archbishop of York, for help. On their journey over the Pennines they encountered Gundreda, mother of the young baron, Roger de Mowbray, who persuaded her son to become their patron. After moving four times in an attempt to find a suitable site, the colony settled in 1177 at New Byland on the southern edge of the North Yorkshire Moors, where it prospered.

The early history of Byland accordingly reminds us that life was uncertain, and that experiment was often necessary before a final, appropriate site for an abbey was acquired. The vicissitudes of the community are paralleled by those of its daughter house, Jervaulx in Wensleydale. Jervaulx began with a group of monks from Savigny who (for reasons which are not documented) were in Richmondshire, and who were offered the site for a new religious house at Fors by Acaris, son of Bardolf. At a ceremony to mark the erection of the first building, Acaris's lord, Count Alan of Brittany and Richmond, offered the monks his own support. The sequel to these events is instructive. Count Alan soon after returned to his Breton estates, and visited Savigny to inform its abbot of the new foundation. The reaction can scarcely have been what he expected, for Abbot Serlo refused to ratify the existence of the latest daughter house. His opposition was apparently based on the dangers and hardships encountered by other Savigniac houses in England – could he have been thinking of Byland here? He did all he could to bring the monks back to Savigny and was only reluctantly persuaded to let the colony continue when Byland offered to assume responsibility as its mother house. At the same time, Byland was having its own problems, and like Jervaulx these seem due, in part at least, to the ineffectiveness of the Savigniac system of filiation. In an important way, Byland could be said to have had no mother house, since Furness, arguably, had shed that role in 1138. By 1141, when Byland had acquired patrons and benefactors, and was beginning to flourish, the monks decided to place their house directly under the subjection of Savigny, and the plan was accepted. Years later this was contested by Furness, and we may see the episode in the context of the resistance of the Lancashire monks to the

merger of Savigny with the Cistercians. The history of the northern Savigniac houses, which is better documented than that of other houses of the congregation, is suggestive of weakness within the Savigniac system, of a lack of central control. Both the failure of Abbot Serlo to maintain his authority and his personal admiration for the White Monks led him to petition for the entire congregation to be accepted into the order of Cîteaux in 1147. Savigny was a monastic experiment which had failed. The surrender to the authority of the White Monks was opposed by Furness, which saw its freedom of action curtailed. There were also reservations on the part of some Cistercians, who took steps to ensure that the advent of the Savigniacs did not result in falling standards (something of which they stand accused); in 1148 Ailred as abbot of Rievaulx sent monks to the Savigniacs of Swineshead 'to illuminate it with the Cistercian way of life'.¹³

THE COMING OF THE CISTERCIANS

The fortunes of the Savigniacs in Britain, who were part of a loose organization which failed as an independent congregation, and the houses of Tiron, which never gained a foothold in England, contrast sharply with the success of the Cistercian Order. Here the British expansion began later, in 1128, and despite the general chapter's attempted ban on new foundations in 1152, continued into the late twelfth century and beyond until there were over eighty houses in Britain. The expansion began modestly enough. In 1128 the elderly bishop of Winchester, William Giffard, settled monks from the French house of L'Aumône on his estates at Waverley. From L'Aumône, too, came the monks to staff the second British Cistercian house, that of Tintern, established by a relative of Giffard, Walter fitz Richard de Clare, one of the early Norman conquerors of south Wales, who placed the monastery not many miles from that other symbol of his power and 'Normanness', his castle at Chepstow. Although Waverley was a foundation that did not achieve the celebrity of the northern Cistercian houses, like Rievaulx, it was an important one and became the mother house of a notable monastic family.¹⁴

Waverley was one of three main springboards of Cistercian expansion. The others, both northern, began more publicly. In 1131–2 a group of monks from Clairvaux arrived at the court of King Henry I of England bringing with them a letter from their abbot, Bernard. In characteristically forthright language Bernard told the king: 'In your land there is a possession of my lord and your lord . . . I have arranged for it to be taken back, and have sent men from our army who will (if it is not displeasing

to you) seek it out, recover it and restore it'.¹⁵ We know nothing of the negotiations which must have preceded the advent of these monks, who were to go on to found Rievaulx Abbey in Yorkshire, but the Englishmen who had entered the monastic life in the Cistercian houses of Burgundy must have supplied Bernard with valuable local knowledge of conditions in the North. Among them was William, Bernard's secretary, sent as first abbot of the new plantation. As a result of discussions between the king, the archbishop of York and one of the royal justices named Walter Espec, the monks were settled on a site in the Rye valley only a few miles from Espec's castle at Helmsley.

Their arrival caused quite a stir. As they passed through the city of York they were seen by a group of monks from the Benedictine house of St Mary's, a rich foundation which enjoyed much prestige as the foremost abbey of the North. These Black Monks were so impressed by the poverty and simplicity of the Clairvaux group that they immediately petitioned for the reform of their monastery. We may perhaps think of the arrival of the White Monks in the diocese of York as the event which set alight smouldering discontent within the community of St Mary's, but whether it was a catalyst or a final straw, the event was catastrophic.¹⁶ The reforming party led by the prior argued that the monastery's wealth should be given away and a more rigorous and ascetic lifestyle adopted; the abbot and his supporters refused to listen. On an October day in 1132 the two parties confronted each other, the abbot backed by religious leaders from other houses within the diocese. Archbishop Thurstan of York was there too, supposedly to mediate, but his role, as things turned out, was to take into his own household thirteen monks of the reforming party who were forcibly ejected from St Mary's. At the turn of the year he provided them with land in the valley of the river Skell near his manor at Ripon. Here a new house was built, not at first Cistercian, but some time after 1133 taken into the order as a daughter house of Clairvaux. Thurstan could afford to supply only the bare minimum of resources, and until the arrival, a few years later, of two members of the cathedral clergy of York Minster as recruits, the continuation of the community, Fountains Abbey, was by no means assured.

These four early Cistercian houses illustrate for us the diverse nature of Cistercian foundations and show how the initiative for expansion came from the White Monks themselves, from archbishops and bishops, from kings and barons. It was from these centres that the Cistercian movement in Britain blossomed. Waverley's contribution was to spread through three generations within the South and midlands. Rievaulx dominated Lincolnshire and pushed north into Scotland, and Fountains became the mother of seven daughters and three granddaughters in Yorkshire and the

eastern counties of England. There is no single explanation for the phenomenal success of the Cistercian Order and its domination of monastic foundations in the years after 1131. The British experience is part of a European one. In the twelfth century the White Monks were themselves convinced, and convinced others, that if monasticism had 'exclusive possession of authentic Christianity', then theirs was the highest form of monasticism. But can we go beyond this kind of general observation, and discover what motivated lay men and women to found Cistercian houses? Why did the White Monks enjoy such outstanding popularity? Often our only source for a monastic foundation is the charter, a legal document couched in formal language which records the transfer of land to a community. In a few fortunate instances we can learn more from foundation narratives and chronicles. We know, for instance, that a baron named Henry de Lacy fell ill, and vowed that if he recovered he would found a monastery. Accordingly when he was well again he went to Fountains Abbey to ask for a group of monks to establish a daughter house. Fountains also provided the colony for Meaux Abbey, whose founder had made a vow to go on crusade, but who, as he grew older and fatter, became less enthusiastic for the enterprise; he was easily persuaded, by a Cistercian monk, to endow a monastery instead. But instances like these can only explain so much. They may tell us why Henry de Lacy and William of Aumale founded monasteries, but they do not tell us why they founded Cistercian ones.¹⁷

The main Cistercian expansion was confined to the two decades between the sending of the Cistercian mission from Clairvaux in 1131 and the ban placed on further expansion in 1152. Spiritual movements are not immune from the pressures of fashion; a new order with a reputation for austerity and sanctity might enjoy a great appeal. This attraction would have been magnified by the patronage of royalty – Henry I of England and David I of Scotland – in the same way as the count of Mortain enhanced the prestige of the Savigniacs in the 1120s and early 1130s. The Cistercian founders of the twelfth century were among the greatest in the land; in the early years it was from those intimately connected with the royal court that the White Monks found their most powerful patrons. The spread of one particular order could be facilitated by family and tenurial connections, and a glance at the names of those who founded Cistercian houses confirms this as an important factor. Within the Waverley group, the first daughter house was founded by Robert de Beaumont, a close adviser of King Henry I. In 1133, two years after the arrival of the Clairvaux monks at court, he founded a Cistercian house at Garendon in Leicestershire. Robert's twin brother, Waleran, had inherited the family estates in Normandy, and was a benefactor of various religious houses

there. But in 1138, when he acquired estates and high office in England, he decided to found a Cistercian community at Bordesley in Worcestershire – and he brought monks from his brother's house to do so.¹⁸ A second daughter house of Garendon, Biddlesden (1147), was established by Robert de Beaumont's steward. Here we see family and feudal relationships perhaps not influencing the decision to found a monastery, but more certainly directing the choice of the Cistercian Order, and the mother house within it. The importance of personal connections is also indicated in the fortunes of the order in Scotland, where it was closely associated with one man, King David I (1135–53). We have already encountered David as the man who introduced the order of Tiron north of the border, and as a monastic patron he had interests which were far from exclusive. His first contact with the Cistercian Order may well have come in 1134 when a man to whom he was very close, his steward, Ailred, became a monk at Rievaulx. Two years later David made his first Cistercian foundation in Scotland at Melrose, colonized from Rievaulx; and Rievaulx it was which provided monks for Dundrennan Abbey, also founded by the king. From Rievaulx, through the mother houses of Melrose and Dundrennan sprang eight of the nine other Scottish abbeys of the order, most of them intimately connected with the royal house.¹⁹

A Cistercian founder, then, might have been influenced by those to whom he was related, with whom he had political associations or from whom he held lands. He might be impressed by the sanctity and reputation of the White Monks. He might also be attracted by their desire – enshrined in their legislation – for remote sites, and for lands which they could cultivate themselves. They wanted no manors, and no estates which brought income from the work of tenants and peasants. In short, they wanted the type of site and lands with which it might best suit a founder to part. A baron like Walter Espec could found Rievaulx at very little expense to himself; and Rievaulx only prospered because its reputation, which it built up especially under Abbot Ailred, attracted other benefactors. It was in the uplands of Yorkshire and Wales, where uncultivated lands were still to be had, that the Cistercians grew richest and most powerful, their wealth coming from their ability to farm their own lands, to develop sheep farming and from it a trade in wool. The small expense involved in setting up a Cistercian house may accordingly have influenced a founder trying to decide what kind of house to establish. However, not all their sites were remote, and the researches of historical geographers have indicated many cases where lands given as Cistercian endowments were far from marginal. The foundation of Meaux Abbey in East Yorkshire, for instance, entailed the reduction of a village to the home grange (farm) and the removal of its inhabitants; and

when Revesby Abbey was founded in 1147 three villages were destroyed, whereupon a handful of peasants were relocated and the rest became lay brothers. It was doubtless cases such as these which led to accusations of greed and ambition levelled against the Cistercians. One critic, Walter Map, commented that:

because their rule does not allow them to govern parishioners, they proceed to raze villages, they overthrow churches and turn out parishioners, not scrupling to cast down the altars and level everything before the ploughshare.²⁰

Founders and patrons are only one side of the story, however, and we have seen how the impetus for a foundation might come from the monks themselves: how, although Rievaulx was founded by Walter Espec, the initial idea for the Cistercian colonization of Yorkshire came from St Bernard – a man whose powerful personality and high European profile is often quoted as an important factor in itself in the spread of the order; how Fountains was a result of monastic pressure, albeit unplanned; and how Meaux was established at the suggestion of a Cistercian monk. Many Cistercian convents grew quickly in numbers.²¹ In the 1160s, when Walter Daniel wrote the life of Ailred, abbot of Rievaulx, he claimed that there were at the abbey under Ailred's rule 140 monks and 500 lay brothers.²² We need to allow here both for exaggeration by Walter Daniel and for the particular appeal of Rievaulx in Ailred's time. However, we should also consider the possibility that Cistercian monks themselves actively sought new patrons and new houses as the growth in numbers placed a strain on resources. Such economic problems may have been a reason for the rejection of the Savigniac monks of Calder who returned to Furness in 1138.

One fact which did not escape the notice of twelfth-century chroniclers was that the rate of monastic foundations increased dramatically during the reign of King Stephen (1135–54). Expansion in these nineteen years was dominated by two groups: the Cistercians, and religious women. The reign, during which Stephen's cousin, the Empress Matilda, contested the throne, is sometimes characterized as a period of anarchy, or breakdown in royal government, and although conditions were not uniform throughout the country, it is clear that in many areas there was a great deal of confusion about who were royal officials and about who held land. And it was amid this tenurial uncertainty that the Cistercians flourished. Some foundations can be directly linked to the climate of disorder, and it is instructive to look again in this context at Garendon and its daughter houses. The foundation of Garendon by the earl of Leicester in 1133 was part and parcel of his conflict with the earl of Chester over lands in the Charnwood area: it was founded on Chester

property.²³ The establishment of Bordesley by the Norman twin Waleran of Meulan coincides quite precisely with his elevation by King Stephen to the earldom of Worcester (1138). Was the abbey intended to furnish a symbol of Waleran's newly found power and authority in the Midlands? A more explicit example is provided by Biddlesden (1147). The land on which the abbey was built had reverted from its tenant to the lord of the honour, the earl of Leicester, and he had granted it to his steward Ernald de Bosco. Ernald was worried that the previous holder might try and claim the land from him, and so on the earl's advice he founded an abbey there. He now enjoyed the status and privileges of a monastic founder but had at the same time effectively prevented the reclamation of the estate.²⁴

The same kind of underlying motive in a period of tenurial insecurity can be seen in the foundation of Sawtry (Huntingdonshire), a 'grand-daughter' through Warden of Rievaulx, and it provides another demonstration of the importance of David I as a link in the chain of monastic patronage.²⁵ The earldom of Huntingdon was held by King David and from 1136 by his son, Henry; but in 1138, when David supported his niece Matilda against King Stephen, the English king confiscated the earldom and granted it to one of his own men, Simon de Senlis II. During the period of Scottish tenure of the earldom strong links had been forged, and tenants of King David there, like David Olifard, resented the new earl and rebelled against him. Olifard's fee at Sawtry was confiscated, and it was here that Simon built a Cistercian abbey (1147). In one stroke he had provided himself with a community of monks who would pray for him; erected a symbol of his power and status as earl; and denied to his enemy Olifard the opportunity to regain his estate at a later date. Whether or not the White Monks were innocent victims is unclear. Certainly in some instances the insecurity of their title to land caused long legal wrangles. The rather jaundiced pen of Walter Map, on the other hand, blamed Cistercian greed: 'how gratefully do they enter upon lands that are given by someone who is not the true owner . . . caring not so much how they get them as how they may keep them', he wrote.²⁶ Certainly the connection between the Cistercian foundations and the anarchy introduces a more overtly political dimension to monastic foundation and patronage.

By 1152, when the Cistercian general chapter tried to place a ban on further foundations, the main expansion in England was over, and between then and the end of the twelfth century only a handful of houses were established. However, the order enjoyed a resurgence of foundations under royal patronage after 1204, when a colony founded the year before by King John moved to Beaulieu. The foundation was in part a peace offering made after John's reconciliation with the order following

his attempt to impose heavy taxes upon its English houses.²⁷ The number of monks grew, and the house sent out colonies to establish Netley (1239), Hailes (1246), Newenham (1247) and later still St Mary Graces in London (1350), all founded by kings and members of the royal household. The second half of the twelfth century saw further foundations in Scotland, but the major area of expansion after 1152 was Wales. Already by this date there were six houses of White Monks there. On the eastern borders in Herefordshire but straddling the ecclesiastical boundaries was Abbey Dore, the only English daughter house of Morimond; in the South were Tintern, Margam and Whitland; the remaining two houses, Basingwerk in the North and Neath in the South, joined with the congregation of Savigny in 1147. Most of these houses played no further part in the Cistercian expansion. Tintern, Margam and Neath were in an area which had been conquered by the Normans and never really succeeded in gaining the respect or the benefactions of the native Welsh. Indeed they were identified with the Anglo-Norman conquerors and from early in their history were likely to be attacked.²⁸

It was the Carmarthenshire house of Whitland which was to become the key to further expansion, to a movement which became identified with the native Welsh princes. It did not start that way, for the first foundation in Welsh Wales, Strata Florida (1164), was made by the Norman constable of Cardigan castle, Robert fitz Stephen. The following year, though, Ceredigion passed from Norman control into the hands of Rhys ap Gruffydd, lord of Deheubarth and leading baron of south Wales. Rhys took over the patronage of Strata Florida and came to be regarded as its founder. He also took over the patronage of Whitland, and now that the Cistercians were no longer completely identified with the Norman invaders (Strata Florida was a daughter house of Whitland, and Whitland of Clairvaux, so neither had constitutional links with an English house) there was no barrier, no Welsh opposition, to expansion. The Welsh princes, contacts of the Lord Rhys, founded houses in their turn. From Whitland were established Strata Marcella, founded in 1170 by Owain Cyfeilog, prince of Powys, and Cwmhir, founded in 1176 by the prince of Ceri and Maelienydd. From Strata Florida sprang the communities of Llantarnam (Caerleon) and Conwy (Aberconwy), whose effective founder, Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, was the leading Welsh prince of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. His benefactions established Conwy as the most substantial of Welsh Cistercian landowners. The Cistercians' own initiative also contributed to their Welsh success. Valle Crucis near Llangollen was founded as the last Welsh abbey of White Monks in 1201 at the request of the abbots of Whitland, Strata Florida, Strata Marcella and Abbey-Cwmhir.

Welsh success was partly due to the chord struck by the Cistercians among the native princes, and their ability to become identified with Welsh self-awareness and aspirations. Although the Welsh abbots were forced to co-operate with the English at the time of the Conquest (1282), this close native connection continued: Welsh princes were buried at Cistercian abbeys; Strata Florida for a while compiled the *Annales Cambriae*, the Welsh annals, and it was here between 1175 and 1332 that the *Brut y Tywysogion*, the chronicle of the Welsh princes, was composed. Another reason for Cistercian success in Wales – as in the north of England – was the suitability of the Welsh terrain for the needs of Cistercian communities. Remote sites there were to be had in plenty, and uncultivated lands ready to be opened up. However, as in England some opposition was aroused by Cistercian methods of land acquisition. Gerald of Wales quoted a contemporary proverb: ‘they are bad neighbours just like the White Monks’. But he could also admire their technical expertise: ‘settle the Cistercians in some barren retreat which is hidden away in an overgrown forest: a year or two later you will find splendid churches there and fine monastic buildings, with a great amount of property and all the wealth you can imagine’.²⁹ As in northern England, the coming of the Cistercians was accompanied by an expansion of arable farming, but particularly in the uplands by large-scale sheep farming and wool production.

The Cistercian story is therefore one of rapid and resounding success, which transformed the primitivist aspirations of Robert of Molesme and his companions for a more austere lifestyle, and the intention, articulated by their successors in the 1130s and subsequent years, to restore a life based strictly on the Rule of St Benedict. Indeed, Cistercian legislation went far beyond the Rule in its deliberate attempts to impose uniformity in the design of its buildings, its provision of books, its liturgy and its administration.³⁰ The White Monks succeeded in translating into a reality that desire, characteristic of monastic communities from the tenth century onwards, to band together, to coalesce into an order, by creating a network of houses over which authority could be maintained. As with all success stories, the Cistercians were to find it difficult to maintain their ideals, and their popularity with founders and benefactors put them under pressure. The sites available were not always remote; and financial necessity might force the acceptance of prohibited resources. One early victim was the ban on the grant of churches, and from as early as the 1140s the White Monks, in direct contravention of the statutes, began to accept these gifts. However, in many ways the Cistercians remained true to the intentions of their fathers. Their innovative grange economy enabled them to remain outside the traditional manorial system; and the *conversi*

continued to act, as they had been intended, as a buffer between the monks and the outside world, able to act for them in commercial and business affairs, and leave the brethren free from worldly distractions. The creation of a class of 'pseudo-religious' suited the economic and social conditions of the time, a period of rising population and labour glut, and the number of lay brethren remained buoyant until economic changes of the fourteenth century reversed labour trends. However, by the end of the twelfth century there are indications that *conversi*, in the Cistercian Order as in the Gilbertine, were beginning to find their inferior status, as neither monks nor lay men, irksome and unable to satisfy their own aspirations.

As the Cistercian Order in Britain grew in maturity it began to assert itself in the wider church. When in 1141 William fitz Herbert was elected archbishop of York at the request of King Stephen, the Yorkshire Cistercians objected and insisted on the right, newly proclaimed at the Lateran Council of 1139, of the religious orders, the *virī religiosi* of a diocese, to participate in the election of its bishop. Their actions led ultimately to William's deposition and the election in 1147 of a Cistercian archbishop of York: Henry Murdac was the first diocesan since the Conquest to be elected and consecrated without royal assent.³¹ From its remote origins in the marshes of Burgundy, the Cistercian Order had come to occupy a powerful place in church politics.

THE CARTHUSIANS

Discussion of one other initiative of the twelfth century will bring us back to where this chapter opened, to the aspirations of those men who came to found new orders; but it will also present us with a complete contrast to the rapid success of the White Monks. This initiative was the order of the Grande Chartreuse, which has survived to this day, but whose growth in the twelfth century was slow. High in the French Alps near Grenoble, Bruno of Cologne, former master of the cathedral school of Reims, founded a small community in the 1080s. We know little of the observances or way of life in the Chartreuse in these early years, but its inspiration seems to have been that same rejection of wealth within the contemporary church and the desire to return to a more primitive observance and worship that we have encountered elsewhere. More direct influence might have come from Robert of Molesme, with whom Bruno had spent some time after leaving Reims. By 1128 the Chartreuse, and its colonies which were beginning to be founded, had acquired a set of customs which drew on a number of familiar traditions: the institution of the lay brothers was borrowed from Vallombrosa and Cîteaux, and in



1142 the general chapter was introduced on the model of the White Monks. What the Carthusians succeeded in doing was to recreate, psychologically, the conditions of the desert. They created a group hermitage in which the emphasis was on isolation, on personal contemplation and individual spiritual striving. The function of the community was to provide the stability of a shared dwelling and a degree of communal support through only two daily services (Matins and Vespers) in the priory church. The conception of the order is explained by Adam of Eynsham in his life of the Carthusian bishop Hugh of Lincoln: the Carthusians 'combined solitude with community life. They lived alone lest any should find his fellows an obstacle to him; they lived as a community so that none should be deprived of brotherly help.'³² The Carthusian customs strictly limited the numbers admitted into each community: there were to be no more than the apostolic number of twelve monks, a prior and a limited number (about sixteen) of lay brothers. There was accordingly, and quite deliberately, no possibility of a repetition of the Cistercian experience of abbeys of hundreds of monks and lay brothers. The spread of the order was slow, too, and by 1200 there were only thirty-nine Carthusian priories in Europe.

In Britain there was only one, Witham, located on the borders of Somerset and Wiltshire. Its founder was King Henry II of England, and his motive was repentance and restitution for the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket in 1170. Despite its royal founder the new house got off to an uncertain start, and its fortunes only changed when in 1180 Henry brought from La Grande Chartreuse the procurator of the house, Hugh of Avalon, to be prior of Witham. The life of Hugh, written by Adam, a monk of Eynsham around 1212, describes how Hugh found at Witham a tangled state of affairs.³³ The monks and lay brethren were living in huts; no attempt had been made at building or to provide alternative accommodation for the peasants who were still living on the site. Hugh took matters in hand. As in the mother house in the Alps, so Witham was divided into two houses, the upper house, built of stone around a cloister, and a lower house, built of wood, for the lay brothers. The prior, one of the few men who could venture to face the famous Angevin wrath, became a close friend and adviser of Henry II, and in 1186 he was appointed by the king to the bishopric of Lincoln.³⁴ Both the interest of the king and the respect enjoyed by Hugh did much to establish the reputation of the English charterhouse. However, Hugh worked hard to ensure that Witham would not expand as Cistercian houses had done, by adhering rigidly to the custom which made certain that the number of aspirants always exceeded that of recruits; and such selectivity helped to ensure the high standards of observance for which the Carthusians –

although they had their critics among other orders – were famous throughout the Middle Ages.³⁵ There were no Carthusian houses in Wales, and Scotland had only one, Perth, founded in 1429. Scotland was, however, influenced by one movement, which had affinities with both the Cistercians and the Carthusians, and which never reached England or Wales. The rule of the order of Val des Choux, founded by a Carthusian *conversus*, was confirmed by the pope in 1205. William de Malvoisin, bishop of St Andrews, is credited with the introduction of the Valliscaulian monks to Scotland (1230), and King Alexander II founded a house at Pluscarden, one of three Scottish monasteries of the order.

The flowering of the Carthusian Order in England proved in fact to be a late phenomenon linked to the aftermath of the Black Death.³⁶ In the fifteenth century the last charterhouse had as its founder yet another king with a bad conscience: Sheen on the Surrey bank of the Thames was established by Henry V in recompense for his father's execution of Archbishop Scrope. The spirit and aspirations of the Carthusian Order can best be appreciated by visiting a Carthusian site. Remains like those at Mount Grace in Yorkshire, whose foundation falls outside the chronological scope of this study, nevertheless speak volumes about the way the Carthusians institutionalized the desert: the church is small, reflecting the lesser demands of community worship, and around the large cloister are not the traditional communal buildings but individual cells each with its own garden, in which the monk said the remainder of the offices, ate, slept, worked and read. This reminds us of the desire for solitude and simplicity which inspired and characterized the new religious movements of the twelfth century.

THE MONASTIC KNIGHTS

The military orders of the Knights Templar and Hospitaller were, in one sense, a culmination of the development of the concept of Christian warfare and Christian knighthood, which received its most significant ratification at the preaching of the First Crusade in 1095. The process by which the fighting instincts of the aristocracy were approved, even sanctified, is a complex one and owes much to tenth-century movements, like the Peace of God, as well as to the crusades. Yet the military orders were also a product – albeit a paradoxical one – of the new monasticism of the twelfth century, and as such deserve mention in this chapter. They are, too, a part of the development of the religious orders in Britain, for although the main arena of their activities lay in the Holy Land, where the Hospitallers cared for pilgrims visiting Jerusalem and the Templars guarded the routes which approached the Holy City, and where both

played a major role in the military victories and disasters of crusader battles, the knights acquired estates in the West, where they founded small houses. These acted as centres from which to administer property and to recruit from the local population.³⁷

Both the Hospitallers and the Templars had been in existence for some considerable time before they were incorporated into the body of monastic orders, but from their earliest days they had developed a style of life which was, in essence, monastic. They took vows of chastity and obedience, and lived a common life. Very little, in fact, was needed to transform these quasi-monastic groups, and this was achieved when both acquired a rule. That of the Templars, which was devised by St Bernard, and which received papal approval in 1139, was based on the Rule of St Benedict and not unnaturally bore the imprint of Cistercian observances and influence.³⁸ The Rule of the Knights Hospitaller, in its surviving form a later composite document, owed much to the Rule of St Augustine, and thus cast its members in the role of canons regular. By these rules the 'New Knighthood'³⁹ was firmly established as monastic and cenobitical. Whether stationed in the East or in one of the outposts in the West, the knights followed a monastic régime; they were committed to poverty, lived in common, and, except when they were engaged in military duties, followed the religious offices.

Both orders divided their western houses into provinces (called priories by the Hospitallers), comprising individual preceptories (Templar) or commanderies (Hospitaller). The Knights Templar were the first of the two to establish themselves in Britain.⁴⁰ Around the year 1128 the founder of the order himself, Hugh de Payens, created their headquarters at the Old Temple in London. It was in London, too, that the Hospitallers chose first to settle.⁴¹ Here c. 1144 Jordan of Bricett, a Suffolk landowner, granted land in Clerkenwell for the creation of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem. From their London bases the knights were successful in attracting endowments, and all over the country preceptories and commanderies were established, sometimes on the initiative of lay folk, sometimes by the knights themselves, as their possessions in a region made it expedient to have a local centre for administration and collection of revenue. Most preceptories and commanderies probably comprised a preceptor, one or two brethren (often those who had retired from active duty), sergeants (serving men of humbler social origin than the knights) and a chaplain or two. By the end of the twelfth century there were roughly thirty-four houses of each order in England and Wales and one of each in Scotland. In the following century nearly fifty more establishments were created, indicating that the knights retained their popularity and continued to increase their centres

of operation well after the number of new foundations of other orders had contracted. Their well-wishers included members of all sections of society, from the tenants of the major honours to the king himself. Those who gave estates on which houses were founded included King Stephen and Queen Matilda, King David of Scotland, and earls, archbishops and bishops. The chronology of foundation and expansion indicates that the success of the knights had, as we might expect, some correlation with the crusading movement, for it was when crusades were being preached – in the 1140s and again in the 1190s – that endowments appear to have increased. Land and property were given both by those, like Roger de Mowbray, who took the cross, and by those who stayed at home.⁴² Papal mandates and bishops' letters show that many who in a fit of enthusiasm made a vow to go on crusade lived to regret it; and the commutation of such a vow by the endowment of the military orders fighting in the East must have seemed an appropriate gesture.

The knights did not always rely on the pious instincts of the laity to expand their territorial holdings. On occasion they exchanged property in one area for land in another in order to consolidate their estates and facilitate their exploitation. They used cash to purchase land; and, like the Cistercians, were active in the clearance of scrub and waste land for cultivation. Around the preceptories of Temple Newsham (Yorkshire) and Temple Bruer (Lincolnshire) the knights were active in the clearance of marsh and fen and their reclamation for agricultural use.⁴³ The great inquest into the extent of the lands of the Templars, which dates from c. 1185, demonstrates not only the size of their land holdings by that date, but how enmeshed they were, as landowners and landlords, in the rural life of England.

The Knights Templar and Hospitaller were a radical concept, and provide perhaps a fitting climax for this discussion of the impact of the new orders of the twelfth century. Quite how contemporaries regarded them – as monastic knights or fighting monks – is not clear; nor is it certain which half of their *personae* would have been more easily identifiable. In the Holy Land their military role was obvious. In Britain the number of knights must always have been relatively small, and their duties mainly administrative. For this reason it could be argued that the activities of the knights in Britain belong more properly to a discussion of the economic and agricultural development of the country. However, the knights certainly have a place in the history of the religious orders in Britain as elsewhere. It was the achievement of St Bernard and others successfully to fuse the fighting talents of the knightly class with their religious aspirations. They sanctioned the ideal of a Christian knighthood dedicated to holy war, and made it possible for men who had no

inclination to enter the traditional spiritual retreat of the cloister still to become members of a monastic order. In time the knights outgrew their original purpose. In the East, military defeats, culminating in the fall of Acre in 1291, undermined their credibility, while in the West their role as bankers and international financiers laid them open to charges of corruption and arrogance, and prey to royal greed. At the very end of our period the Templars were on the brink of disgrace and dissolution, as one of the monastic adventures of the twelfth century came to an end.