

RELIGIOUS HOUSES AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY: FOUNDERS, PATRONS AND BENEFACTORS

FOUNDERS

In the course of this book we have encountered hundreds of men and women, by reference if not all by name, who founded religious houses. Why did they? The specific motives which we have been able to isolate, the desire of kings for support, both spiritual and cultural, penance for particular misdeeds, sickness, commutation of a vow, safeguarding of lands, indication of status and so on, are just that, specific. But motives for monastic foundations go deeper than that, and before we look at the relationship between religious houses and their patrons we need to remind ourselves of that most fundamental of questions: why did men and women found monasteries? Medieval society was at basis pessimistic; progress was a downward spiral which could not be reversed, only arrested. The two factors which could retard it were stability and restoration; and these were the two monastic virtues *par excellence*.¹ Men and women therefore viewed the inhabitants of monastic houses as able to contribute to the salvation of the world by arresting its decline and by preserving the eternal values of the past. Such a view also helps to account for fashions in endowment. When the Cistercians claimed to be restoring primitive monasticism, their appeal to the past struck a powerful chord. On a more personal level, founders expected prayers for their soul: they purchased salvation by the endowment of a religious house in the same way that men and women in the later Middle Ages bought indulgences. Fundamental to society in this period was the belief that intercession could be bought, and that vicarious prayers were sufficient to obtain salvation, without interior change (repentance) or alteration of outward

behaviour. Penance was undertaken by members of the religious orders on behalf of the world. Finally, by establishing monasteries and nunneries founders created what Milis has called a 'functional reciprocity', an unwritten but well-understood contract under which the founder both offered and received certain benefits. These benefits were primarily, though as we shall see, not wholly, spiritual. This chapter will explore more fully of what that 'functional reciprocity' consisted.

PATRONAGE AND ADVOWSON

A monastic patron was, according to the accepted understanding of the word, the heir, direct or indirect, of the founder. Sometimes the patronage descended in the same family in unbroken line from foundation to dissolution. In the majority of instances, however, it passed, like any other piece of property, from one person to another. This could happen through marriage, and it was in this way that the family of Clare acquired the patronage of Tewkesbury Abbey. It could occur, too, when a direct line died out, and the patronage with the rest of the family estate escheated (reverted) to the king and was granted by him to someone else. Patronage might be voluntarily transferred: after the burial of Rosamund Clifford at Godstow Abbey in 1176 the founder's family ceded that role to King Henry II. Victory in war brought to the Lord Rhys ap Gruffydd the patronage of Whitland, Strata Florida, Cardigan and Llandovery, and to Morgan ap Owain that of Goldcliff.² If a religious house held its lands under the terms of feudal tenure, that is, for some kind of service, patronage also meant lordship: the patron was lord of the monastery and exercised wider powers and privileges than a patron who was not lord. Here there was an important distinction between the old and the new orders. When a founder endowed a house, he was in essence enfeoffing a tenant; he was subinfeudating land for service. We have seen how, like lay barons, the major monasteries owed knight service for their lands.³ The new orders tried, and on the whole succeeded, to get grants of land in frankalmoin, that is, in free alms tenure, quit of any secular demands. This is generally indicated in a charter by a phrase such as 'this gift is made in pure and perpetual alms free from all secular service'. Although it has been demonstrated that some of the abbeys of one of the new orders, the Cistercian, did, by the 1150s and 1160s, hold some land for knight service, the holding of lands in frankalmoin, and the lesser role of the patron, remained an important feature of the new monastic orders.⁴ As well as referring to the patron (*patronus*), records refer to the advocate (*advocatus*) of a religious house. On the continent there was a distinct difference between the two. In continental, especially German, terms, the advocate

was originally a protector, chosen by a religious house or by the king to act as its agent. In turn, through exploitation, the advocate might become the master rather than the servant. In canon law he or she might be the same person as the patron, but on the continent the practice emerged of separating the two, of having advocates chosen by the religious who were distinct from the hereditary patron. In practice in Britain this distinction, although recognized in canon law, rarely existed, and the patron and advocate tended to be the same person.⁵ On occasion and especially where a founder was of knightly rather than baronial status, an overlord might assume the role or title of advocate. Peter of Goxhill was founder (*fundator*) of the Premonstratensian abbey of Newhouse and undoubtedly enjoyed the status of patron, but it was his lord, Rannulf of Bayeux, who was described as advocate.⁶

By the end of our period the monastic expansion had all but come to an end, and few new houses were founded between 1300 and the Dissolution of the 1530s. The king was patron of a high proportion of monasteries and nunneries (over a hundred in England), either because the house was a royal foundation, or because a king or queen had been concerned with its refoundation or reformation, or because the house was too ancient for a founder to be identified. This was the case with the pre-Conquest houses, many of which were in any case associated with the royal family of Wessex and England. Then there were houses (about twenty-seven) which had been founded by bishops; in these, as in the cathedral priories, the role of the bishop as patron and as diocesan is not always easy to distinguish.⁷ Finally there were the magnates, and by 1300 there was scarcely a family of this rank of society which was not associated with one or more religious house.⁸ The thirteenth century saw a move towards the greater definition of patronage, while in the twelfth it was a more fluid concept; we must accordingly remember that patronage did not necessarily mean the same thing at all times. A distinction must also be made between different groups of religious: the founders of houses of Black Monks and nuns and Augustinian canons enjoyed wider powers of patronage than those of the Cistercians, Carthusians and Premonstratensians, who from the beginning attempted to minimize lay intervention and to separate themselves from the world. The area in which this distinction is most clearly manifest is the procedure when the head of an abbey or priory died or resigned, and the office became vacant.

ELECTIONS AND CUSTODY: THE NON-EXEMPT ORDERS

We have already discussed in some detail how heads of religious houses were chosen, and noted that by the thirteenth century free election,

which in the twelfth century had been granted as a favour, was now accepted as a right. Nevertheless, canon and common law accepted that the patron had a role to play, and this role became defined. When a vacancy occurred, the patron, whether the king or a noble, had a right to be informed, and he or she then gave permission for the monks or canons to proceed with the election of a candidate. After election, the favoured candidate was presented to the patron for his or her assent, and then by the patron to the bishop for benediction. There was still potential cause for dispute, one circumstance being the conflicting claims of a patron and the head of a mother house of a dependent priory. The patron might regard the prior as a tenant, whereas the abbot would see him as a subordinate to be appointed by him rather than elected in chapter. One instance of this clash of interest occurred in 1200, when the patron of the Cluniac priory of Lewes, Hamelin de Warenne, complained that the abbot of Cluny had appointed a prior to Lewes although the normal procedure would have been for him to be elected by the chapter and approved by the patron.⁹ His claim may well have been true, for an alien priory would have been more dependent for protection on a local patron than on a distant continental abbey. Common sense and self-interest would have suggested to the monks of Lewes that they ensure the goodwill of their patron towards their prior by giving him at least the voice of assent to the election.¹⁰ An extreme example of patronal claims was recorded by Matthew Paris: when Abbot John de Cella (1195–1214) removed the prior of the abbey dependency of Binham, this is what happened:

Robert, who was patron of the church of Binham, took offence because the prior, whom he was in the habit of calling 'his' prior, had been removed without his being asked . . . [he] suddenly laid hostile siege to the church of Binham with the monks in it, as if it were a castle, so that the monks, having nothing to eat or drink, and being about to perish through starvation . . . had to take rain-water from the roof-gutters for drinking water, and get bread made from bran down their throats with a struggle.

Fortunately for the monks their patron, Robert fitz Walter, was as unpopular with King John as he was with the abbot of St Albans, and the king sent help to relieve the siege.¹¹

Consent and approval were, by the thirteenth century, the theoretical limits of a patron's power in elections, and his or her role was a formal one; however, patrons could still use influence to secure the election of candidates of their choice. There were grounds for conflict here as well. If licence to elect had not been requested, then a patron might refuse to recognize the candidate chosen. In 1296 Philip of Hanworth, the

sub-prior of Nocton, appeared before the bishop of Lincoln to have his election as prior confirmed, but the patron of the house, Philip d'Arcy, refused his consent on the grounds that the canons had not asked his permission to proceed with the election. He agreed to waive his privilege – on this occasion only – and consented to Philip's election. However, Bishop Sutton, deeming the election to be invalid and Philip unsuitable, ordered a new election, and Thomas of Louth was chosen. Philip d'Arcy objected on the same grounds as before, but, when summoned by the bishop to explain his attitude, could not convince him to delay the process further. Clearly, the right to grant permission to elect could be perceived as a privilege, not a right.¹²

When the vacancy of a religious house was reported, the lands of the house – or, where the revenues of abbot and convent had been separated, those of the abbot – passed into the custody of the patron, to be administered by him or her until a new head be appointed. Custody was a valuable asset to the patrons of the non-exempt orders. In the reign of Henry III, where the royal records enable us more clearly and consistently to see how long the office of head of the house remained vacant, the average length was from two to six weeks. But the time could vary considerably, and it was a temptation for an unscrupulous patron to keep the office vacant and continue to draw the revenue. This practice was elevated to an art form by William II.¹³ The earls of Clare claimed the right to the custody of the dependencies of Bec during vacancies, and the records suggest that they may have been guilty of deliberate delay in assenting to the election of a new prior the longer to enjoy his revenues. Certainly in 1292 the earl took a considerable time to approve the appointment of a prior for St Neots.¹⁴ Sometimes the potential abuse of the right of custody was recognized, as it evidently was in 1256, when Gilbert Pecche promised the canons of Barnwell that he and his heirs would not waste the goods of the priory during a vacancy, and would send only one servant with a horse and groom to take control of the assets of the house as a recognition of patronage.¹⁵ When she founded Flixton Priory for nuns in 1258 or 1259 Margery de Crek expressly renounced the right of custody.¹⁶ To avoid the greed of patrons or royal servants, a house could apply to purchase its own custody. Thus in 1281 Burton Abbey paid £40 for the right to administer its own goods in the first two months of a vacancy, and agreed to pay £20 a month thereafter. The statutes of the Cistercian Order expressly forbade interference by lay patrons in the election process and denied them the custody. Houses of other orders, too, could aspire to this freedom for themselves. By the early thirteenth century the Augustinian canons of Llanthony Prima claimed that by custom they elected a prior without obtaining leave from the patron, and

that they, not the patron, presented the elect to the bishop. This right was confirmed by their patron, Walter de Lacy, who also formally renounced for himself and his heirs any rights of custody.¹⁷

THE EXPECTATIONS OF A PATRON

The patron of a religious house had certain duties towards his or her house, and in return expected certain benefits. The responsibilities of the office and its rewards are not easily separated. Consider the issue of vacancies, which we have just discussed: a patron took a house into custody and was responsible for overseeing its administration. This was a patronal duty. But he or she could also benefit financially from custody: a patronal reward. It was the patron's responsibility to present the elect to the bishop for benediction, but he or she could use that special status of patron to influence election, to promote a relative or to reward service. In general the benefits enjoyed by a patron can be classified as two types, spiritual and material, but just as it is difficult to make a rigid distinction between duty and reward, so too the boundaries between spiritual and material prizes are blurred. Perhaps it is misleading to see the issue in quite these terms, since a medieval patron would probably have regarded patronage as a package of benefits, rather than as component parts, spiritual and temporal. Nevertheless, in discussing quite what kind of returns a patron might realistically expect, it is convenient to divide them into those expectations which were primarily spiritual and those which were of this world and not the next.

Spiritual benefits

A significant proportion of charters granting or confirming land and property to a religious house state that this was done 'for the salvation of the soul of' (*pro salute anime*) or 'for the soul of' (*pro anima*) the donor. This indicates a primary function of the religious: to pray not just for humankind generally but specifically for the grantors. Although monks, canons and nuns could be asked by any benefactors for their prayers, there was an expectation that a founder or patron would occupy a special place in the hierarchy of intercession. On occasion this is made specific. The Cistercian house of Jervaulx in north Yorkshire transferred from a site provided by a tenant of the honour of Richmond to one on the lands of the earl, who then assumed the patronage of the abbey. A charter of confirmation describes the earl as 'wishing to provide for the salvation of my soul' and making gifts to 'God and St Mary and the abbey of Jervaulx of the Cistercian Order, which I founded in honour of our Lord Jesus

Christ, and to my monks there serving God and praying for me'.¹⁸ References to 'my monks' or 'my canons' are not unusual. The origins of Egglestone Abbey, a Premonstratensian house, also in north Yorkshire, are obscure, and all that can be said with certainty is that it was in existence by 1198. After some years its endowment was substantially increased by Gilbert de Leya, who gave a manor for the feeding and clothing of nine canons. Some fifty years later one of Gilbert's descendants, Philip de Leya, brought an action before the royal justices in York against the abbot of Egglestone, claiming the right to present all nine canons when vacancies arose. At first this was unsuccessful, but later the abbot was forced to concede that eight canons, in addition to a clerk to be presented by Philip for admission into the house, should celebrate divine service in the abbey church for ever, for the souls of Philip and those of his ancestors and heirs, and that at the death of each canon Philip should have the right to nominate a replacement.¹⁹ The issue at stake here was really the right to present nominees, and it is instructive to note that the abbot never challenged Philip's claim that there should be, in perpetuity, nine canons praying for his soul and those of his ancestors and heirs. What this patron gained, therefore, was not only the right to nominate a high proportion of the canons at the abbey, but also a chantry within the conventual church.²⁰ In this and similar cases both the donor and the recipients had to be careful that spiritual favours, that is, prayers, which charters linked to grants of land, were not interpreted as simony. The records demonstrate how a house of modest size and endowments was not independent of its benefactors, but held land of them for spiritual service.

A founder or patron could specifically ask a religious house for rights of confraternity. The precise nature of these rights is not easy to assess; there was no universal definition of the phrase, and charters are rarely specific about its nature. Confraternity might entitle the patron or benefactor to an obit, that is, a mass recited on the anniversary of his or her death, or to distribution of alms or pittances in his or her memory on the same occasion. Confraternity rights usually conveyed the idea that in some way the recipient became a part of the religious community, entitled to certain benefits including the privilege of enjoying, at his or her death, the same prayers as a member of the community would have. The Premonstratensians formalized this right, and the ordinal which records the liturgical practices of the order in the late twelfth century laid down in detail that founders were to receive the same benefits at their death as a canon dying in his own abbey.²¹ Their names were to be written into the calendar of those for whom special prayers were to be recited, and were to be read aloud in chapter every year on their anniversary; for thirty

days after their death a portion of food (prebend) was to be placed in the refectory of the house and then distributed to the poor; a number of vigils and masses were said for the soul, and every member of the house, priest, canon or layman, was charged with the recitation of a number of masses, psalters or pater nosters, as appropriate. Very special benefactors might be taken into the prayers of the entire order, like Peter des Roches in 1219, and Talley's patron, Rhys ap Maredudd, in 1280, but this was rare and required the consent of the general chapter. This was the practice in other orders, too, and one demonstration of the loyalty felt by the Cistercians to the princes of north Wales was the securing, at the instance of the abbot of Aberconwy, of full confraternity of their order for David, brother of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd.²²

As their final days approached founders and patrons might go one step further than the rights of confraternity and decide to take the habit, and die as a monk, canon or nun of their house. This was known as entry *ad succurrendum*. It was not common for members of the aristocracy to enter the religious life during their prime, although there are some examples, like Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare, who entered St Neots a few years before his death.²³ However, there are numerous instances of those who took the habit on their deathbed, men like Ralph de Haia, founder of the Premonstratensian house of Barlings (Lincolnshire), who became a canon and was buried there. The founders of Beauchief (Derbyshire), Robert son of Ranulf, and Langley (Norfolk), Robert fitz Roger, both died as canons and thereby became entitled to the full prayers of the community.²⁴ In Wales Owain Cyfeilog, founder of Strata Marcella, 'having taken upon him the habit of religion', died there in 1197. Prince Llywelyn ap Iorwerth died in the monastic habit at Aberconwy in 1240, and two sons of Rhys ap Gruffydd became monks at Strata Florida and another at Whitland.²⁵ Hugh de Morville, constable of Scotland, ended his days as a Premonstratensian canon at Dryburgh, which he had founded.²⁶ Very occasionally, although it was a direct contravention of the statutes, women were allowed to be clothed in the Cistercian habit on their deathbed, notable examples being Alice de Gant, wife of Roger de Mowbray (at Fountains) and Matilda de Braose, widow of Gruffydd ap Rhys and daughter-in-law of the Lord Rhys, who received the habit at Llanbadarn Fawr and was later interred at Strata Florida.²⁷ To die after converting one's life and becoming a member of a religious order, especially after a life of violence and warfare, gave a better chance of salvation and went one better than, as a lay person, receiving the prayers of the community. The promise of reception into a religious house, should the patron be so minded, was sometimes written into a charter granting land. Gilbert de Gant was patron of the family foundations

of Bardney (Benedictine), Bridlington (Augustinian) and Rufford (Cistercian). From Bridlington he received a promise that

for the redemption of my sins and for the particular love which I have always had for the church of St Mary of Bridlington, I have bound myself to the said church in this way: that wherever I shall end my life, I shall receive a burial place in the monastery of Bridlington. And if by chance God in his grace shall touch my heart and give me the opportunity to leave the vanities of the world behind and serve him in poverty, I shall receive the habit of religion in the aforesaid monastery, and end my days among those with whom I was brought up from my infancy. For it seems to me appropriate that where I entered this world from my mother's womb, there I should leave this world in the mother of all.²⁸

This contains a number of interesting details – the reference to the education of a patron's heir at a monastery, for instance. It is also a useful reminder that the relationship between members of a founder's family and his or her religious house was one that could persist literally from the cradle to the grave.

The desire exhibited by Gilbert de Gant for burial in the monastic church was by no means unusual. Patrons, and even benefactors who did not enjoy that special status, could hope to associate themselves in death with the religious. We have already seen in chapter 6 how burial in the churches and cemeteries of the mendicant orders was a cause for jealousy on the part of some parish clergy. It also caused rivalry on the part of monastic houses which had often provided the final resting place for their founders and patrons. Although the Cistercian *Carta Caritatis* restricted lay burial to guests and hired workers dying within its monasteries, this ruling came to be disregarded, and the White Monks like the Black offered burial to lay folk, and principally to their patrons. Many instances of burial within religious houses could be cited. Earl Ranulf of Chester, patron of the Benedictine abbey of Chester, chose that his heart should be interred at Dieulacres, the Cistercian community which he transferred there from Poulton. Sweetheart Abbey took its name from the heart of John Balliol, which the founder of the abbey, Balliol's wife Lady Devorguilla, caused to be buried beside her in the abbey church. The choice of burial place reveals much about the loyalties of a family both to a dynasty and to a religious house.²⁹ Some prominent families continued to be buried in the same place for generations. Others chopped and changed. During the first generation of settlement in Britain, and beyond, several families took members back to Normandy for burial. Robert de Beaumont, count of Meulan and earl of Leicester, who died in 1118, was buried at the monastery of Préaux, founded by his grandfather, which had been the resting place for several generations of his family. However, the

investigations of Dr Golding on the subject of knightly burials have indicated that, although loyalty to Norman houses remained strong, surprisingly few of those people whose intentions can be uncovered chose to be buried in Normandy; perhaps cultural assimilation in Anglo-Norman England was quicker than some historians have been willing to allow.

Where a family was associated with one or more house, preference might be given consistently to one, or favours spread around. The Ros family, heirs of Walter Espec, usually chose Kirkham Priory over Rievaulx Abbey. Members of the Gant family, on the other hand, were buried at both the Benedictine abbey of Bardney and their Augustinian foundation at Bridlington. Although she was patron of Whitby and Sallay, Matilda de Percy chose to be buried at Fountains Abbey, despite the Cistercian ban on lay – especially female – burials. It may well have been allowed because of Matilda's special devotion to the church. A similar devotion was expressed by William de Braose (d. 1211), who asked that wherever he died, whether in England or Wales, his body should be interred in the priory church of St John of Brecon 'because this is the church which I love before all others, and because after God and St Mary I have greater confidence in St John'.³⁰ In 1200 the earl of Strathearn placed Augustinian canons in the Culdee house of Inchaffray because 'we hold the place in such affection that we have chosen in it a place of burial for ourselves and our successors, and have already buried there our first-born son'.³¹ The family of Beauchamp was traditionally laid to rest in Worcester Cathedral Priory, and the wish of one of its members to be buried by the Franciscans of that town was strongly resisted, although his son, the first Beauchamp earl of Worcester, succeeded where his father had failed.³² By providing the service of burial a religious house fulfilled an obligation to a patron; at the same time it could hope to gain financially, both through the gift often associated with a request for burial and the expectation of further patronage from the family. It was for this reason that there were numerous disputes between churches for the body of a patron. In 1107 when Roger Bigod, earl of Norfolk, died, he was buried at Norwich Cathedral. But his body was also claimed by the monks of Thetford, a Cluniac house which Bigod had founded. The wrangle resulted in a case being brought in the king's court and won by the bishop.³³

Material benefits

As well as spiritual benefits, a patron might expect material returns by virtue of his or her special status. We have noted elsewhere how places for

monks, canons and nuns within religious houses might be limited by the resources of the community, and how as a result of visitations it was not unknown for bishops to place a ban on the reception of further novices. Given these restrictions, it is not perhaps surprising that one of the advantages of patronage was perceived as the right to have entry into a community for a member of family or another nominee. Again, whether the right to nominate an entrant is to be termed a spiritual or material benefit is debatable. Certainly for the nominee it was spiritual, in that it offered entry into the religious life; it also secured his or her prayers for the patron. We have seen in another context one instance of the patron of a Premonstratensian house, Egglestone, claiming the right to nominate a specific number of canons to pray for his soul. But there are also grounds for arguing that the right of nomination could offer a material benefit, since it could relieve the patron of the necessity of maintaining a relative or servant within the secular household; it also secured a place in a religious house for a member of his or her family, one with a religious vocation, or who for some reason was deemed to be unsuited to life within the secular community. On occasion a nunnery appears to have been founded in order to provide for a female relative; and other instances show gifts being made when a kinswoman entered the house.³⁴ Relatives of founders are known to have been professed at Sinningthwaite, Campsey Ash (where Joan and Agnes, sisters of the founder, both held the office of prioress), the Gilbertine houses of Alvingham and Bullington, and many others.³⁵ Monasteries and nunneries recognized that in return for material support, they might have to concede to a patron the right of nomination of one or more of their members. And so between 1240 and 1250 the abbot and convent of the Premonstratensian house of Welbeck agreed, for the soul of Hugh son of Simon of Ropsley, to receive two secular clerks as canons.³⁶ In 1231 the Premonstratensian general chapter authorized Torre Abbey to take account of 'any magnate or noble, who, knowing your poverty, wishes to place and institute one or more canons or lay brethren in your house', and accordingly the abbey granted to Hugh Peverel the right to 'institute in perpetuity one canon in our house, that is an honest and suitable person and one worthy of the religious habit'.³⁷ Although the fact that the permission of the general chapter had to be sought suggests that this was not a common practice among the Premonstratensians, other instances can be cited. The Benedictines of Great Malvern granted to the family of Beauchamp the right to nominate one monk in succession, to pray for the salvation of its members. As Dr Mason has pointed out, this meant that the family also had a monk who would, in the monastic chapter, be able to look after the interests of the patrons.³⁸ Sometimes the right of nomination belonged, not to the

patron, but to his or her lord, or to another powerful benefactor. Arthington Priory was founded between c. 1150 and 1158 by Peter of Arthington, but it was William de Curcy who, some years later, claimed for his mother Avice de Rumilly, a benefactor of the nunnery, that 'there shall always be in the house of Arthington a nun whom my mother Avice shall place there; when my mother is dead, I, her son and heir, and my heirs, shall have the same privilege . . . in perpetuity'.³⁹ William de Stuteville specifically renounced a similar privilege at Westwood.⁴⁰ The influence which a patron brought to bear to secure the entry of a nominee into a religious house was probably more often informally recognized than expressed in the written word. There may have been financial as well as personal reasons for allowing a patron oversight of the admission of novices. At the nunnery of Flamstead the patron, Roger de Tosny, stipulated that any nuns to be admitted over the agreed maximum of thirteen must be approved by him or his heirs. The motives behind this arrangement may have been control over the resources of the community, to ensure that they were not overstretched by the reception of too many women.

We have seen in an earlier chapter how it was part of the duty laid on his monks by St Benedict to provide hospitality and to receive guests 'as Christ himself'. Although any traveller or visitor could make use of monastic hospitality, it was understood that the patron's status gave an unquestioned right to stay at the house. When a bishop tried, for the financial well-being of a community, to limit the number of guests that might be received, the patron was excepted. Patrons were the only women guests whom their statutes permitted within Cistercian houses, and they were only allowed to stay one night, a restriction which was sometimes repeated by bishops for houses of other orders. As well as providing for their personal well-being when they stayed as their guests, a religious house might furnish financial support for its patrons in time of need. One instance is provided by the d'Oilly family, members of which were benefactors of both the old and the new orders, but more specially patrons of Oseney. Despite this status the family showed as much devotion to other foundations as to Oseney; and it was not until 1232, for instance, that a member received burial there.⁴¹ It has been demonstrated that a newly found interest in the Augustinian house came at a time when the d'Oillys were in financial difficulties. Here the canons were able to assist, for they bought from d'Oilly the manor of Weston on the Green, in order that their patron be able to pay off his debts to the Jews. Roger de Mowbray freed his Cistercian foundation, Byland Abbey, from paying for the use of his seal, so that the monks did not have to pay for any charter giving or confirming their property. But in subsequent years the

monks aided Roger by paying him £300, for which they held pasture in Nidderdale in mortgage for ten years. It was, however, not with his monks of Byland or his canons of Newburgh that Mowbray had most financial dealings. It was Fountains Abbey which time and again provided funds 'as testimony and in commemoration of a grant', 'as help for my journey to Jerusalem', and 'in my great need'.⁴² In 1243 the abbot and convent of Tewkesbury stood surety for their patron, the earl of Gloucester, for the loan of £100, and nine years later the heads of three houses of which Clare was patron, Tewkesbury, Keynsham and Stoke, went to speak to the king about guaranteeing his loans.⁴³ Although the Cistercian statutes and later the acts of the English Benedictine provincial chapters forbade monks to stand as sureties, the practice of helping a patron in economic difficulties persisted. Grants by benefactors as well as patrons were frequently sales or loans disguised as gifts in free alms. In other financial matters, religious foundations served their patrons. The abbot of Tewkesbury (1301) and the priors of Canons Ashby (1228), Breamore and Christchurch (1293) all acted as executors for the wills of their lay patrons.⁴⁴ Monasteries sometimes held money in security for their patron, as the abbot of Aberconwy did for Prince Llywelyn in 1280,⁴⁵ and on occasion they also preserved their documents safe. Although relatively little is known, within our period, of how magnates kept their archives, it is certain that the king used the major abbeys to store royal records. Henry II, for instance, placed a copy of his coronation charter at an abbey in each county, and some religious houses were similarly responsible for custody of copies of Magna Carta.⁴⁶

The duties and responsibilities which were expected of a patron could be rewarded in unexpected and less formal ways. Monastic chronicles might take an interest in the family of the patron, as the Tewkesbury annals, kept until 1263, did in the Clare earls of Gloucester; it has also been suggested that *Tewkesbury II*, an account of the opposition of the barons to King Henry III from 1258 to 1263, may have been composed in order to promote the interests of Richard de Clare, earl of Gloucester, the leader of the moderates among the baronial party.⁴⁷ It was at Strata Florida that the *Brut y Tywysogyon*, the deeds of the Welsh princes (1175–1332), was written, and here too were compiled the Welsh annals, which demonstrate the loyalty felt by the monks to their patrons of the house of Dinefwr; and the monks and canons of Abergavenny, Tintern and Llanthony Prima preserved the genealogies of their patronal families. Monastic writers might therefore bolster the prestige of their patrons by celebrating their deeds in battle, and telling of their glorious ancestry.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PATRON

The first duty of a patron was to provide lands for the support of the community. Initial endowments varied considerably in both the amount and quality of land and in the value of other resources; if they proved inadequate, later patrons might be expected to increase this endowment. Patrons were certainly expected, on succeeding to their lands, to confirm a monastery in possession of its property. On very rare occasions charters reveal how deeply this duty was felt. Matilda de Percy granted the church of Tadcaster to the monks of Sallay because 'the greatness of their poverty redounds to the shame and disgrace of my father and all his heirs'.⁴⁸ New sites might be provided or secured.⁴⁹ A patron was also expected to guarantee lands and secure agreements, as Richard de Morville, constable of Scotland and patron of Dryburgh, confirmed agreements between its canons and those of St James, Northampton, concerning transfers of lands.⁵⁰ He or she might also encourage the provision of grants by family and tenants. We have already remarked how Jervaulx Abbey was founded by a tenant of the honour of Richmond. Even before the community transferred to a location on the lands of Earl Conan, the earl's father had taken an interest in the foundation of his tenant. A tradition recorded in Jervaulx's foundation narrative tells how Count Alan had asked to be informed of the progress of the work.

When all the preparations for the construction of the first building had been made, brother Peter sought out the count as he had been ordered. When he [the count] came to the place where the house was to be built, he called four or five of his knights who had come with him, and said to them, with a smile on his face, as if he were joking: 'we have all got great lands and possessions. Therefore, let us now help with our own hands and build this house in the name of our Lord, and each one of us shall give land or rent in perpetual alms for the upkeep of the part he has raised.'⁵¹

This graphically illustrates the influence of a powerful patron, in this case the lord of the founder. Not all Count Alan's knights apparently shared his sense of humour and were only willing to agree to his proposal on certain conditions.

Lands and property, once given, needed to be retained, and here again a monastery or nunnery might look to its patron for protection against encroachment and for assistance when it encountered opposition. Ranulf of Chester, although a 'pinchpenny patron' as far as the granting of lands is concerned, nevertheless went to the help of his houses on more than one occasion. He intervened in a quarrel between the monks of Chester and Robert of Hastings, the monk of Canterbury whom they had

accepted as abbot under royal and archiepiscopal pressure in 1186, and secured his deposition.⁵² As well as being patron of Chester, which passed to him as direct heir, and Dieulacres, which he founded, Ranulf was patron of the Lincolnshire house of Spalding, which he inherited in 1198. He intervened in a dispute over land between Spalding and Crowland, although in this case his intervention was unsuccessful.⁵³ When Roger de Mowbray left England in 1147 his abbey of Byland was harassed by Robert and William de Stuteville, who were trying to regain some of their family lands which had passed to Mowbray and been granted by him to the monks. Other knights started to imitate them. Roger's immediate action was to write to the offenders, ordering them to desist and promising to hold a judicial enquiry on his return to England. He wrote also to his officials commanding them 'to protect and defend Abbot Roger of Byland and his brother monks and their land, as if it were their own land'. This last phrase finds an echo in many a charter.

Protection against physical attack might also be needed, or if this failed, restitution after the fact. Violence suffered by a religious house was sometimes the result of its identification with the interests of its founder or patron. The latter's enemies might, in fact, invade and despoil a monastery as they did any other part of his possessions. In 1143, during the troubled reign of King Stephen, the monks of Selby elected as abbot Elias Paynel, cousin of Henry de Lacy, lord of Pontefract, and it has been suggested that the monks were here trying to secure for themselves the protection of a powerful local patron.⁵⁴ The plan had its disadvantages, however, for through its association with Lacy the abbey became fair game for attack by his enemy, Earl William. In roughly the same years, rivalry between Gilbert de Gant and Henry de Lacy resulted in so much damage to Henry's monastery of Pontefract that the priory church had to be rebuilt and reconsecrated in 1154 x 9. Gilbert's Augustinian foundation at Bridlington was attacked by his rival William of Aumale, who 'excluded the regular canons, and invaded and defiled the church' and apparently made his camp in the monastic buildings. Later he made restitution to the canons 'for the wrongs which I have done to them'. Either the culprit, or a patron, or in some cases both, were expected to make good the damage that had been sustained.⁵⁵

THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF PATRONAGE: WALES

The last paragraph shows instances of how the individual and personal rivalries between magnates could override religious considerations and lead to attacks on abbeys and priories by those who were, in other circumstances, enthusiastic founders and patrons of monastic houses. In

Wales the situation was pushed even further, for religious houses, because of the loyalties of their patrons, could become identified with cultural and political divisions.⁵⁶ Wales in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that is, before the English conquest in the years following 1277, comprised two distinct types of territory. First there were the lordships carved out by Norman and Anglo-Norman barons and knights, who held extensive powers there; second, there was Welsh Wales, *Pura Wallia*, those areas where the Welsh princes continued to rule, in theory having sworn fealty to the English king, but in practice independent of his control. Some religious houses, such as Tintern and Neath in the South, were founded by and remained in the control of Anglo-Norman lords. Others, especially in the North, were Welsh foundations. Some changed hands. Whitland and its daughter houses of Strata Florida and Cwmhir were located in *Pura Wallia* and in the case of the first two acquired, and in the third, began life with, a Welsh patron. Their recruits were Welsh, their cultural and literary tastes were Welsh, and they were endowed by the local Welsh landowners. In the course of the thirteenth century and by conquest, Whitland and Cwmhir passed to Anglo-Norman patrons. The choice their abbots and monks might be called on to make was between loyalty to a new patron and beyond him to an English king, and loyalty to their brethren and those members of the locality with whom they associated, whose language and culture they shared and whose political aspirations might conflict with those of the patron. From time to time this clash of interests surfaced. In 1217 two Cistercian abbots and five priors were deposed by the general chapter of the order; details of the episode are not entirely clear, but it seems likely that English political pressure had been brought to bear after the abbot of Strata Florida had tried to have lifted the sentence of excommunication imposed on Wales for its support of the French invasion of England in 1216. Some of the actions of the Welsh religious in support of the native dynasties could have been seen as provocative. In 1238, for instance, it was at Strata Florida Abbey that all the princes of Wales gathered to swear fealty to David, son of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, prince of north Wales; and the abbots of Aberconwy and Strata Florida took a serious personal risk when they journeyed to London in 1248 to ask for the body of Gruffydd ap Llywelyn, who had died accidentally in the Tower. This they were granted, and took back for burial in the abbey of Aberconwy. Finally, when the last native-born prince of Wales, Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, was killed by the English in December 1282 and his head sent to Edward I, it was at a nearby Cistercian house, Cwmhir, that his body was laid to rest.

There was a price to pay for such loyalty, which it would be

anachronistic to call national feeling or sentiment, but which went beyond the duty owed to a single patron. In 1212 King John ordered the destruction of Strata Florida, 'which harbours our enemies'. Five years later the Anglo-Norman lords of Cemais, Kidwelly and Carew battered down the doors of Whitland Abbey, stripped the church of its treasures, beat the monks and killed their servants. In 1228 a grange of Cwmhir at Gwern y Gof was burnt in retaliation for help given by the monks to the Welsh. These actions were matched by Welsh attacks on Anglo-Norman foundations. The church of Kidwelly Priory was burnt by Gruffydd ap Llywelyn; Grace Dieu was destroyed when the Welsh disputed the right of the founder to the site; and between 1257 and 1265 Carmarthen Priory, which lay just outside the royal borough itself, was burnt during a Welsh attack. The English Crown recognized that monasteries, whoever their patron might be, could be the victims of war, and there are numerous instances of compensation paid from the treasury to religious houses which had sustained war damage. After the second campaign of Edward I against Llywelyn (1283–4), £1,700 was paid to the Welsh church, of which £897 16s. 8d. went to religious houses. However, there was a disparity in the sums of money paid to individual houses, which may not only reflect the degree of damage, but also represent punishment for those monasteries which actively aided the Welsh cause. When the conquest was over Edward I made a progress through Wales, during which he visited several monastic houses, some of which were recompensed for war damage. Like lay leaders, heads of the religious orders had to conform to the new régime and swear allegiance to the English prince of Wales. They had to serve new masters and new patrons, and were used by the English king as tools in the imposition of the English yoke on Wales.

THE WIDER MONASTIC INTERESTS OF THE NOBILITY

There were some circumstances in which it was difficult for a monastery to identify a founder: we have noted how a number of the friaries of each of the mendicant orders came into being as the result of corporate action, so that there was no single founder. The anchoritic origin of nunneries also makes it difficult at times to associate them with one family. In such circumstances a house might place itself under the protection of a powerful patron. Alternatively benefactors, those who made endowments to a religious house without having the special status of founder, could be more important. One house which found itself in this position was Fountains Abbey, one of the most wealthy and important houses of the North which, as we have seen, resulted from a breakaway movement by

a group of monks from the York Benedictine abbey, who were given shelter and then a site for a new house by the archbishop of York. Archbishop Thurstan had had his hand forced, and he probably could not afford to deplete further the lands belonging to the see of York by endowing the house generously. The new foundation was, therefore, forced to rely on magnates, knights and peasants for material support, great and small.⁵⁷ Among the baronage of the North, the Mowbrays, Stutevilles and Percys, although closely involved with family foundations of their own, were nevertheless generous in their gifts, and acted at times as patrons or advocates of the house and derived suitable benefits. Roger de Mowbray was called on to settle disputes between the monks and Drogo the forester. William de Stuteville was interred at Fountains. Three members of the Percy family, William II, his daughter Matilda, countess of Warwick, and her nephew Richard, all received burial at Fountains, despite their devotion to their own family monasteries of Whitby and Sallay. Alice de Rumilly, a great benefactor of the house, was described once as 'advocate' of the monks, though this probably meant that she was acting as guarantor of the particular lands which she had given; she was accordingly 'protector' of the monks in a limited sense.⁵⁸ Dr Wardrop's close analysis of the Fountains charters has revealed that a remarkable number of spiritual benefits were granted by the monks to members of all strata of society. Over ninety requests for burial were recorded. This illustrates two things: first, the devotion to the Cistercian abbey felt by local people, those of both knightly and lesser rank; and second, the range of monastic interests exhibited by the very well-to-do. Roger de Mowbray was patron of two, and benefactor of over forty, religious houses in England and Normandy. From many he received spiritual succour; from others, notably Fountains, he received also more immediate and tangible rewards in the form of loans and mortgages needed to finance his earthly adventures, rebellion against the king, and crusade and pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

One family whose monastic patronage has been studied in detail is that of Clare, members of which were founders of priories dependent on Bec and among the principal English benefactors of the Norman house.⁵⁹ Later branches of the family were founders of the Cistercian abbeys of Tintern and Ford. They acquired the patronage of the Augustinian priory of Little Dunmow, founded the Arrouaisian community at Bourne, established regular canons at Walsingham, and brought the Austin friars to England. Some of the Clare foundations, like Bourne and Clare itself, were honorial, that is, they were connected with the particular honour in which they were located, not with the whole family. When the Clares

became earls of Gloucester in 1217 their power base moved from the east of England to the west, and the most important house of which they were patrons was now Tewkesbury Abbey. Here it was that the Clare earls were buried, not in one of their ancestral monasteries. Like many well-to-do monastic founders and patrons, Roger de Mowbray and the Clares and others whom we have noted elsewhere, like David I of Scotland, did not limit their benefactions to one house or one order. Their endowments reveal a wide range of interests and a desire for the prayers of many groups of religious. Their interests were also, in part at least, dictated by the material benefits to be enjoyed by patronage of a religious house.

Like any other piece of property the patronage of a religious house could be a cause of contention. Rival claimants might vie for its ownership. Patron and monastery might fall out. Patron and mother house might dispute each other's rights in a dependent priory. There were arguments over rights in elections and custody, and over conflicting interests of patron and house as landlords and tenants. But however strained a relationship might be, it was one which neither side could afford to neglect. The patron needed the prayers of his or her community; the community, unless very powerful in its own right, needed protection. Small and poor houses, especially nunneries, were vulnerable, and this may explain the voluntary submission to a patron which we meet occasionally. The tiny Yorkshire convent of Foukeholme, for instance, agreed to commit itself to the custody of its patron William de Coleville: this meant that Coleville and his heirs had the right to consent to the election of the prioress, to authorize the appointment of any male master or guardian, and to approve the reception of all nuns, sisters and lay people.⁶⁰ Such intervention would not have been welcome at all religious houses, but the economic circumstances of Foukeholme made such dependence a necessity of life.

The relationship of patron and house was one of infinite variety. Some of its aspects were formal, others less so. Just as monastic houses might cement the relationship with their patrons by compiling their genealogies or celebrating family exploits in annals and histories, so too did patrons show their affection and esteem by the giving of gifts. These tokens of esteem were indicative of a special bond. Walter de Gant, founder of Bridlington, presented to the canons a phylactery and relics which his brother Baldwin had sent him from Jerusalem. Edmund of Cornwall gave to Hailes Abbey a relic of the Holy Blood; this was not just a gesture, for it gave the abbey a pre-eminence and a chance to profit from the pilgrim trade. The success of a religious house reflected the success and prestige of its founder and subsequent patrons.

BISHOPS AS PATRONS

We have already considered some aspects of the role of the diocesan bishop in the affairs of the religious houses of his diocese, notably, in the case of the non-exempt orders, his right to hear the profession of monks, to bless the newly elected head of a house, and to visit monasteries and nunneries periodically to ensure the maintenance of discipline. In other instances there was a closer relationship because the bishop stood in the role of patron. Some houses had episcopal patrons because they owed their foundation to bishops, and we might think here, among many, of Bishop Alexander of Lincoln's foundations at Dorchester on Thames, Haverholme, Louth Park and Thame, William Giffard of Winchester's Cistercian house at Waverley, Bishop Roger of Coventry's abbey of Buildwas, and Bishop Bernard of St David's monastery at Whitland. At other houses bishops later acquired the patronage: King John, for instance, granted the patronage of Glastonbury, St Osyth's and Thorney to local bishops,⁶¹ and the acquisition of Glastonbury by the bishop of Bath and Wells marked the end of a long attempt to gain control of the rich abbey, during the course of which many appeals had been made to Rome.⁶² Sometimes the functions of patronage might be shared, as they were at the Premonstratensian monastery of Titchfield, founded by Peter des Roches, bishop of Winchester; his successors remained patrons, but the Cantilupe family became the canons' advocates.⁶³ In addition bishops might act as a kind of unofficial patron, looking after the interests of the houses of their diocese, confirming their possessions and settling their disputes, especially perhaps when they lacked a strong lay patron.⁶⁴

Bishops as patrons enjoyed the same expectations as their lay counterparts. They took advantage of the rights of hospitality. In the latter part of the twelfth century a bishop of Coventry claimed hospitality at Buildwas 'because the abbey was founded by one of my predecessors', and 'I can and ought to go to those brothers whenever I wish, more certainly than to others.'⁶⁵ In another diocese and another century John of Pontoise, bishop of Winchester, claimed that Titchfield, of which he was patron, had always given hospitality to previous bishops when they returned from the continent.⁶⁶ There are instances when bishops as patrons seem to have rescued a house from mismanagement. In the thirteenth century Archbishop Winchelsey appointed a custodian for St Gregory's, Canterbury, to sort out its debts. Archbishop John le Romeyn of York (1285–96) wrote to the abbot of Clairvaux and to the Cistercian visitors in England to complain about the poor state of affairs at Fountains. Some time later, because of the chaos of its financial management, the king took the abbey into his custody.⁶⁷ This is one of the very few instances of an

archbishop of York acting as patron of the house founded by one of his predecessors.

There are two abbeys which Knowles singled out for special attention as episcopal abbeys, where, he argued, the bishop enjoyed a special status as patron. These were Eynsham and Selby. The community at Eynsham, an early eleventh-century foundation, had been moved to Stow by Bishop Remigius of Lincoln, but the monks were brought back to Eynsham by his successor Robert Bloet (1093–1123). The bishop of Lincoln thereafter had the right to appoint the abbot and to control the temporalities of Eynsham. Selby in Yorkshire was a Benedictine house in which the kings of England took an interest. Not long after its foundation, William II granted the abbey to the archbishop of York ‘to hold as the archbishop of Canterbury holds the church of Rochester’. This terse phrase is difficult to interpret, but it seems to confer on the archbishop some powers of patronage over Selby. Whether these were ever exercised is difficult to know. There are later documentary references to the intervention of an archbishop of York in the affairs of Selby, particularly in the deposition and appointment of its abbots. However, whether these instances represent the actions of a patron or a diocesan is not easy to distinguish; this is a general problem in attempting to assess the role of episcopal patrons.⁶⁸

A similar dichotomy or, perhaps, lack of definition, in the role of the bishop can be observed at the ten English and one Scottish monastic cathedrals. In these institutions the role of the bishop could be interpreted in a number of ways. He stood in the place of abbot, and the resident head of the community was thus the prior. But in a way the bishop of a cathedral priory was also its patron: towards the end of our period the bishop of Winchester claimed to be both abbot and patron of the cathedral priory, abbot because he professed the monks, and patron because he answered for the temporal services due from the community. The monks denied that he was either and claimed the king as their patron.⁶⁹ From the Conquest onwards the relationship of bishop and community came under greater pressure than it had hitherto known. Election was a key issue. The *Regularis Concordia* had laid down that the bishop was to be elected by the chapter, but this conflicted with the claims of the king, and in the case of the archbishop of Canterbury, with the bishops of the province. Nearly every election to the southern metropolitan see witnessed attempts by the monks to assert their right to be the sole electors of their abbot. Further, as abbot, the bishop had the right to appoint the prior, but the period under review saw a move towards claims to election by the community. There were also disputes about the administration of priory lands, especially after the separation of the

revenues of bishop (abbot) and convent. William Giffard, although a noted patron of the religious orders, nevertheless quarrelled with his monks at Winchester over the temporalities after the division of revenues. Much of the long period of office of Hugh du Puiset of Durham (1153–95) was troubled by his attempts to administer the temporalities of the priory.⁷⁰

Such uneasy relationships led to a number of celebrated disputes, the most notorious of which was probably that between Baldwin, the Cistercian archbishop, and the monks of Canterbury. Baldwin was translated from Worcester by the king in 1184, and was not one of the candidates proposed by the monks. He caused an early clash by depriving the priory of some of its property, but the main problem came with his proposal to found a collegiate church which would have threatened the pre-eminence of the cathedral. The idea outraged the monks, who appealed to Rome. During the course of the quarrel Baldwin kept the monks imprisoned within the cathedral precinct and suspended services. Henry II was in favour of the scheme for a collegiate church, but his son Richard I forced its abandonment.⁷¹ Quite what capacity Baldwin was acting in is unclear. Was it as abbot or patron? The Canterbury dispute is only one, albeit a famous one, of a number of clashes between bishops and monasteries in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Not all concerned the relationship of a bishop to his cathedral priory; others were created when bishops challenged title to monastic property or to spiritual jurisdiction over parish churches, or when religious houses sought exemption from episcopal visitation. In these instances the monasteries clashed with the bishop as diocesan. But there can be no doubt that the uniquely British institution of the cathedral monastery brought with it problems, which were not easily solved, for the bishop who was at one time both abbot and patron.

Over the period covered by this study the role of the patron, whether lay or episcopal, was subject to a number of changes. First, and most obviously, by 1300 far more people were involved with religious houses in the capacity of patron than in 1000, when to all intents and purposes the royal house was the special advocate and protector of all monasteries and nunneries. The widening of the social group from which founders were drawn is a common European experience. In the course of the twelfth century the constitutions of the new orders tried to delineate, indeed circumscribe, the powers of the patron, while in the thirteenth, developments in canon and civil law tended to define more sharply a patron's powers, especially with regard to elections and custody. Moreover, it has been remarked that patrons' charters of the thirteenth century

are more likely than in previous years to be specific. Not only do they more commonly make endowments for a particular purpose – the buying of books, for instance, or the relief of the poor – but they are also more confident in their demands. No longer did patrons expect spiritual benefits in whatever form the recipients of their generosity thought fit. They were more likely to define the number and type of prayers and masses to be celebrated for their souls, and even impose sanctions for the non-performance of spiritual services.⁷² There is much that we do not know, however, of contacts between a religious house and its patron on a less formal level. The vast majority of day-to-day dealings are simply not recorded in the written sources. However, what this chapter has amply revealed is the degree of dependence of a religious house on its local patron in all sorts of ways, and the reciprocal nature of the relationship. It is clear, too, that the withdrawal from the world which monks, canons and nuns sought was far from total, and that their ability to pursue a life of prayer, contemplation and spiritual service within the confines of their house depended in large measure on the material support offered by their lay patrons and benefactors.