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JANET BURTON

AND KAREN STÖBER

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Contents

List of Illustrations	7
Attitudes to Excommunication in the Early Insular Church: Returning to Gildas's Letter to Finnian Stephen J. JOYCE	9
Memory, Myth, and Creating the Cult of St Æbbe of Coldingham Ruth SALTER	31
'Poverty, Queen and Empress': A Re-evaluation of the Grandmontine Conceptions of Poverty and the Evangelical Life Ethan LEONG YEE	51
The Coventry Dispute and Alan of Tewkesbury (1185–98) James BARNABY	83
Rewriting the Rules: Gender, Bodies, and Monastic Legislation in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries Katharine SYKES	107
Pauline Customs within the Esztergom Use: Archaism, Variant, or Usage? Miklós ISTVÁN FÖLDVÁRY	133
<i>The Annals of Dunstable Priory: From Living Memory to Written Record in a Thirteenth-Century Textual Community</i> Harriett WEBSTER	147
The Database of Monasteries, Collegiate Churches, and Convents of the Holy Roman Empire: Germania Sacra Online Bärbel KRÖGER and Christian POPP	175
Reviews	193
Short Notices	227

List of Illustrations

Miklós István Földváy

Table 6.1. A chronological overview of some Pauline liturgical features. 140

Bärbel Kröger and Christian Popp

Figure 8.1. Online resources on monastic houses from neighbouring countries.	181
Figure 8.2. Male Benedictine houses before 1810 in the research area of the Germania Sacra (diocese borders from circa 1500).	182
Figure 8.3. Male Cistercian houses before 1810 in the research area of the Germania Sacra (diocese borders from circa 1500).	183
Figure 8.4. Screenshot of the dataset on the Premonstratensian abbey of Marchtal.	184
Figure 8.5. Screenshot of the dataset on the Cistercian abbey of Chorin.	185
Figure 8.6. Houses of canons in the Halberstadt Diocese.	187
Figure 8.7. Monks of the Benedictine abbey of St Maximin in Trier.	188
Figure 8.8. Database entry for the cathedral chapter of Münster.	189

*The Annals of Dunstable Priory: From Living Memory to Written Record in a Thirteenth-Century Textual Community**

▼ **ABSTRACT** This paper begins by reviewing the evidence for the authorship of *The Annals of Dunstable Priory* following the recent publication of the first English translation of the text. Having established the polyvocal authorship of the annals, it goes on to argue for the ways in which the text represents the views and opinions of the textual community responsible for its production. In particular, it examines the multiple layers of the religious community's identity and its place within the wider world of thirteenth-century England. The investigation reveals how the concern for recording the rights, privileges, and memories of the priory and township reflects broader trends in the thirteenth century, including an increased reliance on the written word and administrative processes.

Keywords Augustinian canons, annals, historical writing, communal identity, administration, manuscript studies.

The world of Dunstable Priory was anything but narrow. Situated on the crossroads of the Ickenield Way and Watling Street, the town in which the priory stood was well-connected. The priory's holdings were extensive, located in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, and Derbyshire. It was founded by Henry I,¹ and enjoyed visits from English monarchs on no fewer than ten occasions in

* I would like to dedicate this article to the memory of David Preest, my collaborator on the Dunstable project, an excellent translator and a valued colleague.

¹ Dickinson, *Origins of the Austin Canons*, p. 115.

Harriett Webster (H.Webster@uwtsd.ac.uk) is Lecturer in Medieval History at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (Lampeter Campus).

the thirteenth century,² as well as hosting a number of royal tournaments.³ Throughout this period the canons of the Augustinian priory in Dunstable maintained a record of such events and occurrences, which is known today as *The Annals of Dunstable Priory*.⁴ The glimpses the text provides of the life and times of the community within the priory, the town beyond its walls, and the wider shires of Bedford, Buckingham, and Essex, are more expansive than many annals of this period. Scholars have utilized the annals extensively in the past to illustrate key events of the First and Second Barons' Wars, the reigns of Henry III and Edward I, and the succession of English bishops, abbots, and priors, but there remains a wealth of information within its pages which is, as yet, untapped. Concerns over the rights of pannage, cost of corn, export duty on wool, and replacing deeds nibbled by mice (as well as what to do when the beer fails) can be just as illuminating as the accounts of major sieges and battles. It is from the pages of extant manuscripts such as *The Annals of Dunstable Priory* that we can build some of the most comprehensive illustrations of life in the medieval period.⁵

Authorship of the Annals

The Annals of Dunstable Priory cover the period of history from the Incarnation of Christ to the year 1279. The text survives in one manuscript (London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius A. X) that was badly damaged in the Cotton Library fire of 1731. Although it has been well restored, the damage combined with its now fragile state make codicological examination difficult, if not near impossible. The manuscript's authorship and composition have, therefore, been a source of discussion since the nineteenth century. The question of whether the manuscript represents the original or a fair copy of the annals

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- 2 Henry I: 1108, 1122, 1131; John: 1204, 1207, 1211, (very nearby — 1215); Henry III: 1229, 1247, 1265, 1267; Edward I: 1275, 1276, 1277.
 - 3 References to tournaments are made under the following years in the annals: 1279, 1280, 1281, 1289, 1290, 1292. Tournaments elsewhere are also recorded on several occasions.
 - 4 References will be made during the course of this paper to three versions of the annals: the manuscript London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius A. X (hereafter referred to as Tiberius A. X); Luard's edition *Annales prioratus de Dunstaplia* (hereafter APD); and David Preest's English translation, *The Annals of Dunstable Priory*, ed. by Harriett R. Webster (hereafter *Annals*). This article uses Luard's Latin and Preest's translation (with minor adjustments).
 - 5 There are a number of studies which build similar pictures of communities based on documentary sources and foundation histories in Yorkshire. These include but are not limited to Burton's *Religious Orders in the East Riding of Yorkshire*, pp. 33–46 especially; Burton, *Monastic Order in Yorkshire*, part II. Perhaps the most similar to what I am attempting here with Dunstable Priory is Jamroziak's *Rievaulx Abbey and its Social Context*, which uses Rievaulx's cartulary to construct a model of the community in its wider context. For a more general consideration of the value of local historical writing in this period, see Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, chap. 13.

has been addressed at length by Paulini and Cheney in particular.⁶ Whether 'autograph' original or 'fair' copy, it is the argument of this article that the Tiberius manuscript represents a working version of the text that was read, updated, and regularly used by the community that produced it.

As is so often the case with medieval chronicles, the early part of the text has been copied from another work, while the section from 1199 to the end of the thirteenth century represents a completely original composition.⁷ It is generally accepted that the impetus for writing the annals came from Prior Richard of Morins. Richard was appointed in 1202 following his transfer from Merton Priory in Surrey and has been recognized as a 'man of affairs',⁸ extensively involved in high-level political and ecclesiastical concerns of the day. It was possibly through his connections that a copy of Ralph of Diss's *Ymagines historiarum* was obtained from St Albans Abbey and used to construct the annals from their beginning to 1199. The very codex used for this purpose survives today in London, British Library, Royal MS 13 E. VI: the margins of this manuscript have been marked up, highlighting the sections which were then copied into the annals.⁹

Richard is known to have been sent to Rome by King John on a mission to obtain the pope's assistance in arranging a peace with the king of France. His successful return, accompanied by the papal ambassador Cardinal John of St Maria in Via Lata, is recorded within the pages of the annals.¹⁰ Prior Richard was also entrusted with investigating accusations of losses brought on the Church by King John in 1212; he preached the crusade on behalf of Pope Innocent III in Huntingdon, Bedford, and Hertford; attended the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215; spent a year in Paris on his return from the latter; and undertook extensive visitation duties in the dioceses of York, Lincoln, and Lichfield. The annals record in detail each of these diplomatic and administrative roles as well as wider issues of the day which Richard no doubt would have learned of or witnessed on his journeys.¹¹ This has led to an assumption that Richard may have written the section of the text up to 1242 himself. However, a combination of errors highlighted by Cheney and the simple pressures of time mean that his direct authorship for the whole section is unlikely. The mistake of placing King John's second marriage in 1201

6 See Cheney, 'Notes on the Making of the Dunstable Annals', and Paulini and Liebermann, eds, *Ex rerum Anglicarum scriptoribus*.

7 It is the latter section that forms the content of the first translation of the annals into English: *The Annals of Dunstable Priory*, trans. by Preest and ed. by Webster.

8 Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, I, 335.

9 Cheney argues that the manuscript was borrowed by Dunstable Priory in either 1209 or 1210. For further discussion of the relationship between these two manuscripts, see: Cheney, 'Notes on the Making of the Dunstable Annals', pp. 84–87.

10 *Annals*, p. 4.

11 For further discussion of Richard's itineraries and activity, see Cheney, 'Notes on the Making of the Dunstable Annals', pp. 90–91; Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, I, 297; and Russell, *Dictionary of Writers of Thirteenth Century England*, pp. 111–13.

rather than 1200 and confusing the sons of the duke of Saxony on their visit to England in 1209, argues Cheney, would not have been made by a man such as Prior Richard.¹² To this, it could be added that with a prior so often absent on official duties of one kind or another, from a practical point of view it is more likely that a canon or small team of canons were charged with 'writing up' the information gleaned from his activities, which would also allow for the errors to slip in.¹³

Despite this, there is evidence that Richard of Morins should be considered a 'creative director' of this earlier section of the annals. After giving Ralph of Diss's date for the Incarnation at the beginning of the text, a scribe writes that from then 'et exinde usque ad octavum annum nostrum 1210' (until now are 1210 years, our eighth year).¹⁴ When this statement is taken in conjunction with the information provided later in the text that a former canon of Merton, Richard, was made prior of Dunstable in 1202¹⁵ (with 1210 then being his eighth year of office), this would suggest that Richard of Morins was the subject of the 'nostrum' being referred to above and may, therefore, have authored some sections of the annals.¹⁶ Given the number of different hands involved in composing this earlier part of the text, it would make even more sense to view Richard in this 'director' role. It seems that the annals were frequently added to multiple times per year, as a number of entries are recorded under some years in different inks and even different hands. Take folio 21^{r-v}, for example, upon which we find an account of the year 1222: the changes in ink and hand suggest that it was composed in five phases.¹⁷ It is perhaps of interest to note that while there are several occasions when the hand changes frequently, at other times the hand remains the same, but the ink is a different colour or the nib of the quill has a different duct, which suggests a new phase of writing, even if the scribe did not change.¹⁸ However, these different phases could simply be the result of the Tiberius manuscript being copied up in stages from an original that Cheney believes existed.¹⁹

12 Cheney, 'Notes on the Making of the Dunstable Annals', p. 90.

13 For further discussion of texts that were composed by multiple individuals overseen by a single 'creative director', see Garand, 'Auteurs latins et autographes des XI^e et XII^e siècles', pp. 77–107.

14 APD, p. 3.

15 *Annals*, p. 4.

16 For further discussion of this authorship point, see Luard, 'Preface', p. x, and Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, I, 335–36.

17 Tiberius A. X, fol. 21^{r-v}; for further examples of phases of writing, see Tiberius A. X, fols 5^r, 6^r, 10^r, 11^v, 12^r, 13^r, 14^v, 17^r, 18^r, 22^v, 23^r, 24^r, 28^r, 28^v, 29^v, 31^r, 32^r, 32^v, 33^v, 34^v, 35^v, 36^r, 37^r, 38^r, 38^v, 39^r, 39^v, 40^r, 41^r, 42^r, 42^v, 43^r, 44^r, 45^r, 45^v, 47^v, 48^r, 48^v, 50^r, 50^v, 52^v, 53^r, 53^v, 56^r, 68^r, 73^v, 82^v, 87^v, 88^r.

18 Instances where the ink changes but not the hand: Tiberius A. X, fols 56^r, 65^r, 67^r, 68^v, 71^r, 71^v, 72^v, 78^r, 80^r, 81^r.

19 Cheney, 'Notes on the Making of the Dunstable Annals', p. 88.

The likelihood of Richard having at least overseen the composition of the text until his death in 1242 is also more probable given the changes we see after that point. The absence of Richard's role in selecting or providing content for the annals is particularly palpable. There are instances of repetitious material which suggest that the annals from this date onward were written up every year or so by a number of individuals. Yet there are notable exceptions, one of which is the greater sense of continuity of authorial voice from 1270. The author of this section addresses the reader directly, uses the first and second person, and also makes a number of references, not only to information that will be forthcoming, but also to where — and in how many folios' time — the reader can expect that information. For example under the entry for 1272 he writes: 'De hoc, anno proximo sequenti invenies processum' (you will find out what happened in my account of the next year).²⁰ Similarly, we are told that: 'De hoc infra folio proximo, in itinere Rogeri de Seytone' (I will deal with this in my next folio when I describe the itinerary of Roger Seyton);²¹ 'De hoc istius negotii, infra folio secundo' (see the next folio for developments in this matter);²² and 'De hoc plus ex altera parte folii' (there is more about this in another part of the folio).²³ In other places there is a clear sense that the scribe of a particular section is channelling the views of the whole community of the priory, frequently using the first person plural to express these feelings: 'Iste favorabilis in principio nobis fuit; postea male se habuit, ut infra' (Eudo was on our side to begin with, but he afterwards turned nasty, as I will explain below).²⁴ There are also examples of these communal views being updated: in 1272 the priory took in a blind man named Simon who had been a priest at Westoning, finishing the anecdote: 'he lived there for a very long time at our expense'. Clearly the fiscal burden smarted for some time, as a later hand subsequently added a clause to this statement in the margin: 'scilicet per decem annos' (in fact for ten years).²⁵

It is not only material immediately concerning the priory over which the scribes had such tight control. Matters of national and international importance have been carefully woven into the annals and have their place plotted in the manuscript itself. For example, in 1292 there was a problem with appointing a new pope following the death of Nicholas IV: 'sed propter dissentionem cardinalium diu vacabat ipsa sedes, sicut patebit infra, folio secundo' (although for a long time, because of dissension among the cardinals the see was vacant, as will become clear in the second folio following this);²⁶ and again: 'statuit rex noster vindictam facere contra Scotos, quod et fecit. De hoc plenius

²⁰ APD, p. 254; *Annals*, p. 176.

²¹ APD, p. 262; *Annals*, p. 181.

²² APD, p. 286; *Annals*, p. 196.

²³ APD, p. 298; *Annals*, p. 205.

²⁴ APD, p. 259; *Annals*, p. 179.

²⁵ APD, p. 255; *Annals*, p. 177.

²⁶ APD, p. 372; *Annals*, p. 253.

tractabitur in primo capitulo anni subsequentis' (our king decided to wreak vengeance on the Scots, and this he did, but it will be dealt with more fully in the first chapter of the next year's history).²⁷ These examples demonstrate that for portions of the second half of the text, there was one individual responsible for the historical record, with enough oversight to know what future entries would be made, a practical understanding of the text's spacing and degree of detail there would be, as well as how the information would be split across folios and yearly entries. What this indicates is that the annals even after 1242 were not always added to on an ad hoc basis from year to year or month to month.

Contrary to Cheney's argument that the text is a 'fair copy',²⁸ Tiberius A. X must have been at least a working copy, even if not the autograph, as it was added to and amended over time through various forms of marginalia, headings, and erasures. Each example adds to our understanding of the text's ongoing composition and hints at the developing concerns of the community of Dunstable Priory. On a number of folios with greater scribal continuity, a series of headers can be found in the top margin, and some of the initial *anno* for entries have been rubricated.²⁹ For example, on folio 58^r, the detailed account of Roger Seyton is recorded (fulfilling the promise made in the earlier mention cited above).³⁰ The header in this case is very large and easily read.³¹ Other smaller headings include the translation of St Thomas of Canterbury,³² and the dispute between the churches of Lichfield and Coventry.³³

Some of the information inserted at the top of folios does not constitute a header but furnishes the text with additional information, and is much lengthier. It is unfortunate that the margins of the manuscript were severely damaged in the Cotton Library fire, as most of the marginal additions have been so badly affected by flames, discolouration, or shrinkage, that they are illegible. In some cases, however, it is possible to identify just the odd word from the damaged sections which indicate the type of information provided by the additions, even if the precise detail has been lost. It is still possible to decipher on several folios that the addition at the top of the page concerns matters of local interest. Above the right-hand column on folio 18^v for instance, the supplementary material concerns a frequent figure in the annals, John de

²⁷ APD, p. 397; *Annals*, p. 269.

²⁸ While Cheney argues that the extant manuscript of the annals is probably a fair copy as it is 'altogether too tidy' ('Notes on the Making of the Dunstable Annals', p. 88), Paulini argued that the Tiberius manuscript is the autograph original: Paulini and Liebermann, eds, *Ex rerum Anglicarum scriptoribus*, pp. 505–13.

²⁹ The rubrication is admittedly limited to just a few cases found on Tiberius A. X, fols 13^v, 14^r, and 16^a.

³⁰ *Annals*, p. 181.

³¹ Other examples of header-like additions being found at the top of the folio include Tiberius A. X, fols 14^r, 14^v, 16^r, 17^r, 17^v, 18^r, 19^r, 19^v, 21^r, 26^v, 27^r, 27^v, 28^v, 32^r, 46^v.

³² Tiberius A. X, fol. 17^v.

³³ Tiberius A. X, fol. 26^v.

Narbonne, and priory lands at Segenhoe.³⁴ Similarly, on the following folio a scribe has added information concerning nearby Eaton Bray and Luton,³⁵ and on folio 24^v there are two notes, one on Segenhoe and one on Sintone.³⁶ One entry which seems to be part addition, part header comes on folio 21^r detailing the agreement made between Dunstable and Woburn Abbey on the election of a vicar in Chesham.³⁷

Further to this, additions and notes can be found in the left and right margins of a significant number of folios. These vary in terms of the content and range from notes on births of princes, to correcting a feast day.³⁸ The most significant number of them, however, detail events or decisions relating to the priory and its holdings. For example, on folio 13^r there are two marginal notes, both relating to the priory's interests in Houghton. The base of the folio has also been used for additional information, ranging from subheading-like abbreviations of the content, to lengthy supplementary material. Under both columns on folio 7^v there are notes on the English royal family, one concerning Robert Curthose, the other the death of his brother Henry I.³⁹ Luard actually integrated some of the lengthier passages into the main text without noting it in his edition. One such example concerns the miracles occurring at Bromholm:

Eodem anno multiplicata sunt miracula apud veram crucem de Bromholm, que fuerat Baldewini, imperatoris Constantinopolitani; et quam ab eo accepit quidam capellanus suus Anglicus, et eam in Angliam attulit, et loco contulit memorato.

(In the same year there was a burst of miracles at the true cross in Bromholm, a cross which had once belonged to Baldwin, the emperor of Constantinople. His chaplain, an Englishman, had received it from him, brought it to England, and set it up in Bromholm.)⁴⁰

There is evidence of further editing of the text having taken place in the form of interlinear additions. Though these are not as frequent as other ways in which the text has been amended, they demonstrate an acute attention to detail, even after the fact. For example, 'et Ruxox'⁴¹ has been added to a list of local places with links to the priory, and 'de Boet' has been squeezed in as the site of the castle to which William de Braose was reportedly taken after

34 Tiberius A. X, fol. 18^v.

35 Tiberius A. X, fol. 19^r.

36 Tiberius A. X, fol. 24^v.

37 Tiberius A. X, fol. 21^r. There are also similar notes to be found at the top of fol. 41^r, but these are now illegible.

38 On Tiberius A. X fol. 17^r, the feast day has been changed to the feast of St Elphege from the feast of St Calixtus.

39 Tiberius A. X, fol. 7^v.

40 APD, p. 97; *Annals*, p. 62.

41 Tiberius A. X, fol. 32^v.

being captured by Llywelyn ab Iorwerth in 1229.⁴² In 1212 when the Crown was investigating the losses of various communities following the exactions of King John's reign, the amount 'lost' by Dunstable priory and town ('quadraginta tres librae et quadrigente librae') has been added later to the end of the entry.⁴³

There are not many erasures in the course of the manuscript, but they have been used at times in place of the other methods of amending the text discussed thus far.⁴⁴ In much blacker ink than that used for the previous entry, details of two new canons joining the house are given, and appear to be written over a couple of erased lines of text right at the end of the entries for 1239.⁴⁵ The text inserted over a second erasure also concerns new recruits, as well as an ordination ceremony held at Dunstable (as the see of Lincoln was vacant at that time).⁴⁶ The final three erasures identified are all on folio 54^r, and are much smaller, apparently altering the names given for the wife of the count of Gloucester and the capture of the same count's steward a few lines later. The last example gives details of the legate Ottobuono's council in 1268 in which he apparently 'in quo tranquillitati ecclesiae, statui regni, virisque religiosis plura inseruit fructuosa' (sowed many seeds which were to bear fruit for the peace of the church, the state of the realm and for men of religion).⁴⁷

The manuscript also contains at least one example of an additional folio being inserted into the text: fol. 42^r. Only one side of the parchment has been written on: the other has been left blank, suggesting that it was added some time after these events were written up, as otherwise the reverse of the folio would presumably have been used for further contemporaneous information. The text in question is the agreement (in full) reached between the prior of Dunstable and the town's burgesses on a number of matters including the planting of ash trees, the regulations on beer and bread, and the power of bailiffs. Although this is a special case as the record has been inserted on a separate folio, it is worth highlighting here that every time a writ, deed, or any other legal agreement has been copied out at length in the annals, there is a change in script. It would appear that another scribe or administrator (other than the ones responsible for the main body of the annals) was regularly drafted in to copy official documentation into the historical manuscript, or that a deliberate attempt was made to adopt a different style of writing to make the insertions stand out for readers. This potential division of roles hints at the different responsibilities held by canons within the priory, and suggests that some individuals may have had access to different forms of information.

42 Tiberius A. X, fol. 29^r.

43 Tiberius A. X, fol. 13^v.

44 Tiberius A. X, fol. 54^r (three) and fol. 54^v (two).

45 Tiberius A. X, fol. 36^v.

46 Tiberius A. X, fol. 48^r.

47 Tiberius A. X fol. 54^r; APD, p. 247; *Annals*, p. 17.

On just a few occasions those individuals come to life in flashes of distinct voices or opinions. For instance, comments surrounding the First Barons' War have nuances beyond simple reporting of the facts. Despite initially supporting the barons' rising and Louis's invasion of England in 1216, the author's attitude quickly turns sour; the turning of the tide against Louis by the barony is matched by the author's disenchantment in the face of French 'arrogance'.⁴⁸ When Gilbert, earl of Gloucester, left parliament in 1266, the author of this section displays a personalized interest in the politicking of the day, speculating as to what the earl's motive might have been for heading to the Marches:

volens destruere R[ogorum] de Mortuomari, eo quod provocavit dominum regem, ut dicebatur, contra eum. Sed utrum fuit quod idem comes congregavit ad se ibidem plures magnates et alios, qui in manu armata sibi assisterent, (et erat multitudo copiosa,) quia proposuit amovere alienigenas a terra, ex quo dominus rex noluit sicut fuerat conventum inter eos? Voluit etiam quod exhaeredati omnes sesinam terrarium suarum obtinerent.

(He was aiming to destroy Roger Mortimer, because he claimed that Mortimer had stirred up the lord king against him. Or did the earl go to the Marches because he has there assembled several magnates and others to assist him with an armed force (it was indeed a large army), in his intention to drive foreigners from the land, seeing that the lord king had refused to do this, although it had been agreed between them? He also wanted that all the disinherited should regain possession of their lands.)⁴⁹

Such commentary extends to personal reflections on characters following their deaths, as in the case of the onetime vice-chancellor Kirkby:

Anno gratiae MCCXC inchoante obit Johannes de Kirkebi, episcopus Eliensis et thesaurius domini regis de scaccario; qui quamvis esset multiloquus et rixosus, justus tamen et verax fuit.

(At the beginning of the year of grace 1290 came the death of John Kirkby, bishop of Ely and the treasurer of the lord king at the exchequer. He may have been a non-stop talker and quarrelsome individual, but he was just and true.)⁵⁰

The hopes, fears, and aspirations of the community are often expressed by the anonymous voices of the annals. In 1276 the text records how the priory welcomed a local man and gave him a room in the house; in return 'dedit

⁴⁸ *Annals*, p. 23.

⁴⁹ APD, p. 245; *Annals*, p. 170. Interestingly, this anecdote about the earl was added at the end of the year in a different hand and ink than the previous entries.

⁵⁰ APD, p. 358; *Annals*, p. 244.

nobis ad summam viginti marcarum; sub spe tamen gratiae largioris' (he gave us the sum of twenty marks, although we had hopes of a larger gift).⁵¹ In 1274 after refusing to bury a woman who had taken her own life, the canons relented and 'Composuimus cum eis, quia timuimus eorum privilegia' (we came to an agreement with [the Hospitallers], because we were afraid of their powers).⁵² And in 1290 a rather wistful comment is made following the account of a papal envoy 'admonishing' the king for imposing prohibitions on the English Church: 'Et utinam per hoc status ecclesiae Anglicanae aliquoties emendetur' (I only wish that the church of England was improved in this fashion on other occasions).⁵³

One thing that is clear about the process of composition is that it was ongoing throughout the thirteenth century and involved several individuals from the priory. The hands of editors, rubricators, and multiple scribes are apparent on the pages of the manuscript. There was also clearly an intention that the text would be added to further at a later date, as blanks have been left for precise details of costs, names, and places, presumably by someone with access to that type of information.⁵⁴ *The Annals of Dunstable Priory* should therefore be considered typical of the genre, added to frequently by many, to form a record of the house's affairs set against the wider backdrop of history.

The Annals as Historical Record

If the annals are typical in the manner in which they were composed, their content and historical perspective is similarly characteristic of monastic histories of the period. They display layers of historical understanding and interest, from evidence of God's hand in human affairs, international, national, and local events, to concerns relating to the priory itself. What becomes clear very early on in the text is the belief in divine agency as a potent force in human affairs. A local lord found to be abusing his position of power and devastating a local population dies, 'infernali igne percussus' (struck down by the fires of hell).⁵⁵ God is also seen to demonstrate his displeasure in the latest crusading ventures: 'In qua Damietta, ultione divina, tanta fuit hominum mortalitas' (many men were killed in Damietta by the avenging hand of God).⁵⁶ Individual humans believing they are in some way above or not subject to the same divine rules are similarly dealt with. After Bishop Richard of Durham's 'shocking behaviour [...] of the sort that you would

⁵¹ APD, p. 274; *Annals*, p. 189.

⁵² APD, p. 260; *Annals*, p. 180.

⁵³ APD, p. 365; *Annals*, p. 248.

⁵⁴ Examples of such blanks can be found on Tiberius A. X, fols 49^r, 49^v, 66^v, 79^r, 80^r, 81^r, 81^v.

⁵⁵ APD, p. 54; *Annals*, p. 28.

⁵⁶ APD, p. 56; *Annals*, p. 30.

only expect to find in a story' is uncovered by an investigation, he manages to overturn the findings during a visit to Rome. But his deception does not go unpunished: 'Deus autem, qui nulla hypocrisi potuit irrideri, dictum Ricardum episcopum tanta percussit ophthalmia quod vix homines potuit sicut arbores intueri' (God cannot be mocked by any play acting and he struck Bishop Richard with such severe ophthalmia that he could scarcely see men even as trees).⁵⁷ Divine agency is not always vengeful, however. In 1241 King Henry III 'et nisi Dominus providisset fere captus' (was almost captured, but for the grace of God)⁵⁸ when campaigning in France; when Richard of Cornwall set off for his coronation in Germany 'velaventis et mari, Deo gubernante, commisit; et sic sanus et incolumis pervenit' (he committed his sails to the winds and sea with God as his helmsman, and so arrived safe and sound at his destination),⁵⁹ while the English fleet was saved from capture by the French: 'Sed ecce! ventus sub Austro succrevit' (But a miracle! Just in time a south wind blew up).⁶⁰

These last examples demonstrate the relative importance of the English royal family to the priory's canons, though the nature of the relationship varied depending on the individual monarch. One of the only vignettes in the entire annals to contain direct speech concerns the healing of a rift between Henry III and his son Edward after the latter temporarily aligned himself with the reformers,⁶¹ expressing a degree of empathy not often present in the text:

sed quidam malitiosi falsis rumoribus inter patrem et filium suum Edwardum discordiam seminarverunt, asserentes quod dictus Edwardus et consilarii sui guerram domino regi movere procurarunt [...] Rex vero prohibuit, ne filius suus Edwardus, nec aliquis qui de consilio suo extiterat, coram ipso venirent, dicens, 'Coram me non appareat filius meus Edwardus, quia si eum videro, quin ipsum ad osculum pacis recepit, et regina mater sua similiter, quae, ut dicebatur, causa totius malitiae extiterat.'

(But certain malicious people by means of false rumours sowed discord between the father and his son Edward, claiming that Edward and his counsellors had taken steps to stir up a war against the lord king [...] the king would not allow his son Edward nor any who had given his son advice to come into his presence. 'My son Edward must not appear before me', he said, 'because, if I see him, I shall not be able to stop

57 APD, p. 68; *Annals*, p. 40. A similar case involved Frederick II after his repeated failure to depart on crusade: *Annals*, p. 63: 'Sed Deus non irridetur', APD, p. 107.

58 APD, p. 158; *Annals*, p. 109.

59 APD, p. 203; *Annals*, p. 140.

60 APD, p. 99; *Annals*, p. 63.

61 Edward made his stance official in what have become known as 'the Provisions of Westminster' drawn up in 1259. For more on this and his alliance with de Clare and de Montfort, see Carpenter, 'The Lord Edward's Oath to Aid and Counsel Simon de Montfort, 15 October 1259', pp. 241–52, and Jobson, *First English Revolution*, pp. 36–38.

myself from kissing him.' In the end, stirred to the depths by a father's love and won over by the prayers of the magnates, he received his son with the kiss of peace, as did the queen his mother, who, as some said, had been the cause of the whole trouble.)⁶²

Even when the overall tone is in support of the monarchy, there are insights into wider concerns that the English may have had relating to the royal court in the thirteenth century. There are numerous barbed comments about the interference of foreign nobles⁶³ and clergymen⁶⁴ which are tinged with a critique of the king. These remarks even extend to questioning the duplicitous behaviour of the queen of England, Eleanor of Provence herself, as can be seen in the above citation and the following comment: 'suplicans eos attentius et multa promittens et plura largiens; et quod duxisset ad mare manum armatam innumerabilem' (because of her very persistent prayers and many promises and still more bribes, an armed force beyond counting had been brought to the coast).⁶⁵

So the community was not always uncompromisingly in support of the monarchy. During the First and Second Barons' Wars, the canons' sympathy often lay with the rebels, presumably because they represented greater freedoms and privileges for ordinary folk. This is most clearly seen in episodes where Simon de Montfort faces the royal faction and 'auxilio Dei fultus' (received help and support from God).⁶⁶ In fact Simon is described in such reverential terms he becomes something of a martyr to the cause:

comes Leicestriae cum suis Deum habens prae oculis et justitiam, eligens mori potius pro veritate, quam juramento praestito contraire [...] fide munitus, praeliaturus praelia Domini [...] et Dei adiutorio roborati, dictus comes et qui cum eo errant ceperunt regem Angliae.

(the earl of Leicester with his men had God and justice before his eyes and chose to die for the truth rather than be false to his sworn oath [...] fight the battles of the Lord, protected by his faith [...] the earl and his men, strengthened by help from God, captured the king of England.)⁶⁷

The community at Dunstable was well informed of other matters relating to international politics and relations, though most often through the activities of the royal family or English aristocracy. The election of Richard of Cornwall to the German throne sparks and maintains an interest in affairs in that region

62 APD, pp. 214–15; *Annals*, pp. 147–48.

63 For examples, see *Annals*, pp. 20, 26, 105, 112, 126, 148, 153, 154, 155, 161, 170, 192, 214.

64 Comments on the interference of Italian clergy are the most prevalent; for examples see *Annals*, pp. 27 n. 4, 63, 86, 87, 105, 116, 117, 137, 147, 240, 246.

65 APD, p. 233; *Annals*, p. 161.

66 APD, p. 215; *Annals*, p. 148.

67 APD, p. 232; *Annals*, p. 160.

of Europe.⁶⁸ The English king's constant campaigns in France (Gascony in particular) frequently dominate a year's account.⁶⁹ Even Sicily features, both when Henry III tried to buy the kingdom for his son Edmund,⁷⁰ and again during the drawn-out conflict known as the Sicilian Vespers.⁷¹ One other arena which receives sustained interest throughout the century concerns the continued attempt to win back the Holy Land, with frequent references to events in Damietta, northern Africa, and lists of knights leaving and returning from the east,⁷² which is perhaps due to the substantial involvement of the English in the Barons' Crusade, and Louis IX and Edward I's roles in the crusades of the later thirteenth century.

The annals, therefore, demonstrate Dunstable Priory's connections to the wider world in ways beyond the borrowing of manuscripts from nearby houses and a well-connected prior. The geographical location of Dunstable meant that it was well situated for news, and within proximity of key events of the thirteenth century. Many of the detailed accounts with the First and Second Barons' Wars, for example, are owing to a combination of Dunstable's relative position to incidents centred on Bedford and slightly further afield, at Fotheringhay and Kenilworth: Dunstable was, after all, on one of the main roads in and out of London. As a result, many people personally involved in the action came into direct contact with the canons. A case in point is the siege of Bedford, the annals' version of which is the most complete and detailed of any contemporary account. First, the layout of the siege is described:

captum est castrum sub hac forma. Ex parte orientali fuerat una petraria, et duo maggunella, quae cotidie turrin infestabant. Et ex parte occidentis erant duo maggunella, quae turrin veterem contriverunt. Et unum maggunellum ex parte australi, et unum ex parte aquilonari, quae duo in muris sibi proximis duos introitus fecerunt. Praeter haec erant ibi duae machinae ligneae arte fabrilis supra eminentiam turris et castri erectae, ad opus balistariorum et exploratorum. Praeter haec, erant ibi pleraeque machinae, in quibus tam balistarii quam fundibularii in insidiis latitabant. Praetera erat ibi machina, quae vocabatur Cattus, sub qua fossores subterranei, qui mineatores appellantur, ingressum et egressum habebant, dum muros turris et castri suffoderunt.

(Bedford castle was captured in the following way. On the east side, there were one catapult and two siege engines which battered the

68 For entries relating to Germany after Richard's coronation, see *Annals*, pp. 139–40, 142, 152, 160, 161, 170. For matters relating to Frederick II, king of Sicily and holy Roman emperor, see *Annals*, pp. 13, 28, 69, 74, 77, 83, 84, 89, 96, 101, 104–05, 106, 111, 115, 124, and 125 for his death.

69 *Annals*, pp. 59, 63, 64, 67, 111, 127, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133–34, 135, 178, 229, 260, 261, 268–69, 272, 274.

70 *Annals*, pp. 50, 77, 137–38, 216.

71 *Annals*, pp. 206, 216, 217, 249, 261.

72 *Annals*, pp. 27, 28, 29, 36, 37, 50, 69, 72, 86, 96, 98, 114, 118, 122, 260.

tower every day. On the west side, there were two siege engines which pulverised the old tower. Then there was one siege engine on the south and one on the north, and these two made two gaps in the walls nearest to them. Besides these there were present two skilfully made machines of wood which were built up to overlook the tower and the castle, and these were used by slingers and spies. In addition to all these there were several engines in which slingers and stone-throwers were lying hidden in ambush. Finally, there was at the siege a machine called the 'Cat', under cover of which subterranean diggers called 'miners' advanced and withdrew as they dug under the walls of the tower and castle.)⁷³

The four stages of the attack on the castle are then related, including details of the deaths suffered in each wave. It would seem that the townspeople of Dunstable were involved primarily in the second wave which attacked the outer bailey. The text records how

in qua plures occisi sunt; in qua nostri lucrati sunt equos cum ernasiis, loricas, et balistas, boves et bacones et porcos vivos, et alia multa quorum non est numerus. Domos autem cum blado et foeno qui intus fuerant combusserunt.

(in this attack more people were killed, while our own people of Dunstable took as loot horses with their sets of harness, breastplates, slings, live oxen, hogs, and pigs, and many other things beyond counting. They also burnt the sheds inside the castle where the corn and the hay were stored.)⁷⁴

The men of Dunstable involved in the third wave were not so lucky: many died securing the inner bailey, while 'decem etiam ex nostris turrim ingredi cupientes, inclusi sunt et ab inimicis retenti' (ten of our men in their desire to enter the tower were shut in it and held prisoner by the enemy).⁷⁵ The aftermath of the attack is also given in considerable detail, presumably because the leader of the rebellion in this area, Falkes de Bréauté, was sentenced at Bedford, and was already known to and disliked by the community at Dunstable for his treatment of a nearby monastic house:

armigeri Falconis crudeliter tractaverunt monachos de Wardona; unde unus ex eis mortuus est et alii quidam vulnerati, occasione cujusdam nemoris eorum. Et circitur triginta ex eis usque ad castrum de Bedeford tracti sunt per lutum violentur.

(In the same year the squires of Falkes de Bréauté so cruelly treated the monks at Wardon [Abbey] that one of them was killed, some others

⁷³ APD, p. 87; *Annals*, p. 55.

⁷⁴ APD, pp. 87–88; *Annals*, p. 55.

⁷⁵ APD, p. 88; *Annals*, p. 55.

wounded and about thirty of them were unceremoniously dragged through the mud all the way to Falkes' castle at Bedford. The quarrel was over a wood belonging to the monks.)⁷⁶

The inclusion of this detailed account reveals further connections the priory had with the wider world and reflects some of the aspects of life in which they clearly had an interest. The canons evidently used local people as sources of information, be they those conscripted into the forces fighting at Bedford Castle, or in the inhabitants of the local monastery of Wardon. They were also concerned with the outcome of major political and military activities, including the deaths of those involved in the fighting: the circumstances surrounding Falkes's eventual death are carefully recorded.⁷⁷ Perhaps most telling, however, is the focus on the booty gained by the townspeople following their attack on the outer bailey. The taking of horses — with their harnesses — shows a practical understanding of useful loot, so too does the specific detailing of the livestock captured.

Local people and the concerns they shared with the canons of Dunstable Priory take up a good deal of space in the annals, beyond their military feats in local sieges. It is clear that the priory's connection with the region surpassed simply spiritual or pastoral responsibilities, and was considered important enough to enter written record. Every year issues surrounding the presentation of vicars, filling of tenancies, and gathering of rents were recorded.⁷⁸ Another facet of the priory's administrative responsibility (and a key economic asset) related to agriculture, particularly the maintenance and defence of pasture and pannage rights. Great care is therefore taken at every opportunity to commit these to writing, not just in the annals but also in the priory's cartulary:

Eodem anno Willelmus filius Heliae fecit nobis charteam de habendia quinquaginta porcis annuatim in nemore suo de Ocleie, liberis a padnagio; et saisinam eodem anno habuimus.

(In the same year William, son of Helia, made a charter for us concerning our feeding fifty pigs a year in his wood at Ockley Hockliffe, free from pannage. We received seisin that same year.)⁷⁹

The annals also reflect a very pragmatic, and at times prosaic, attitude towards the outside world. For instance, there are more than two dozen references to

⁷⁶ APD, p. 52; *Annals*, p. 27.

⁷⁷ *Annals*, p. 56.

⁷⁸ Take, for example, the issue of vicarages. In the years 1220 and 1283, the canons had lengthy dealings with their vicarages leading to the drawing up of legal agreements. Other years in which vicars, their deaths, appointments, and disagreements, are recorded: 1204, 1222, 1226, 1231, 1238, 1240, 1241, 1242, 1246, 1248, 1251, 1252, 1254, 1260, 1264, 1273, 1274, 1281, 1283, 1289, 1294.

⁷⁹ APD, pp. 60–61; *Annals*, p. 34.

the weather in the text;⁸⁰ recording the cost of corn and other cereal crops is a constant concern;⁸¹ while the implications for the community of alterations to either is clearly understood: 'Eodem anno fuit magna siccitas in aestate, autumnus pluviosus, et in hyeme frigus forte, et nimius defectus foenii et foragii; et de utroque caristia inaudita' (In the same year the summer was very dry, the autumn rainy, and the winter extremely cold with a severe scarcity of hay and fodder. For both reasons the price of corn broke all records).⁸² A similar preoccupation with the going rates of wool and the relative prices from the Peak or from Dunstable is also demonstrated.⁸³ The sheep themselves were clearly a valuable commodity, as evidenced by the canons' concern in instances of sheep rustling and an evident tone of satisfaction when the perpetrators are brought to justice:

dum haec agerentur, die Sancti Fremundi venerunt quidam latrones hora vespertina in campis versus Sewelle, et oves eleemosynarii invititis bercariis fugaverunt versus Leitone. Quod cum Dunstapliae esset auditum, exuntes servientes de prioratu cum hominibus de villa, duos apud Sewelle ceperunt cum ovibus. Qui in crastino apud Passecumbe judicialiter sunt suspensi.

([1264] on the day of St Fremund [11 May] at evening time, some thieves in the fields around Sewell drove off towards Luton the almoner's sheep, despite the resistance of the shepherds. When the news reached Dunstable, some priory servants with men from the town arrested the two men with the sheep at Sewell. The next day the men were lawfully hanged at Passecumbe.)⁸⁴

This vignette also demonstrates the close relationship between the priory and the town, working together for the good of the community to bring these men to justice. And this is not an isolated example of the wider community's struggles and triumphs featuring in the pages of the priory's historical record. For example, after the devastation caused by bad weather killing a significant number of sheep, there was cause for relief when a cure for the scab was found, and the recipe duly noted:

Eodem anno ex magna pluvia, quae quasi continue fuerat in aestate fere omnes oves loca convallium pascentes, tantem humiditatem et pinguedinem interius conceperunt, quod generalis mortalitas ovium postea sequebatur: ita quod in partibus Dunstapliae vix habimus ducentas oves in Martii subsequenti. Oves tamen in Ciltria et in Pecco sanae et

80 *Annals*, pp. 10, 12, 13, 21, 36, 46, 49, 50, 63, 65, 82, 144, 157, 180, 193, 196, 197, 210, 217, 231, 232, 233, 261, 262, 263, 267.

81 *Annals*, pp. 69, 86, 88, 94, 113, 128, 130, 132, 136, 138, 141, 144, 152, 175, 183, 184, 194, 206, 224, 230, 231, 254, 256; and shortages of corn: pp. 137, 141, 142, 143, 145, 265, 268.

82 APD, p. 370; *Annals*, p. 252.

83 *Annals*, pp. 110, 112, 132, 134, 152, 176, 179, 183, 189, 197, 102, 215, 253, 264, 265, 269, 272.

84 APD, p. 321; *Annals*, p. 160.

vegetes remanserunt. Contra scabiem, quae generaliter omnes oves Angliae presserat per septennium praecedens, remedium didicimus quanquamtarde. Fecimus enim quoddam ungentum [ex] uncto veteri et vivo argento et verdegrez; et inde, ubicunque scabies se monstrabat, [locum illum] unximus, et prurigo mox cessavit.

(In the same year, because of the great rains which continued for more or less the whole summer, all the sheep who pastured in the valleys became so wet and swollen inside that they almost all died. Around Dunstable we had scarcely two hundred sheep by the end of the following March, although our sheep in the Chilterns and in the Peak remained healthy and strong. And then, although late in the day, we discovered a remedy for the scab, which had attacked all sheep everywhere in England for the previous seven years. For we made an ointment out of a mixture of old silver and quicksilver and verdigris. Then, wherever the scab showed itself, we smeared the place with ointment, and the itching soon stopped.)⁸⁵

The priory was responsible for a significant amount of maintenance to buildings on their various holdings as land and property owner.⁸⁶ Sometimes, they built from scratch, as they did with Ruxox in 1248:

post Pascha, coepimus aedificare novam domum [...] scilicet solarium et cellarium, et coquina, et thalamum in medio ad panem et cervisiam, et thalamum in medio ad panem et cervisiam, et daeriam. Quibus omnibus pane et cervisia et calce, quae de cellario fuerunt.

(immediately after Easter [19 April] we began to build a new house [...] consisting of a solar and a cellar, a kitchen, a room in the middle for bread and beer, and a dairy. Prior Geoffrey provided the money for all of this, apart from the bread, beer and lime which came from the cellarer.)⁸⁷

At other times, adverse weather and the sheer expense of building projects become the focus of concern:

Eodem anno in aestate combusta est grangia nostra ad foenum in curia nostra de Dunstable, cum foeno, meremio, et aliis repositis in eadem. Item ipso anno auximus curtilagium nostrum, et fecimus extra murum veterem novum murum; circa quod fecimus grandes expensas, et conventus juit ad hoc de sua camera quadraginta solidos. Sed murus ille, propter aeris intemperiem in aestate, statim corrui in hyeme subsequenti. Alias autem

85 APD, p. 306; *Annals*, p. 210.

86 *Annals*, pp. 7, 35, 38, 46, 64, 103, 106, 113, 118, 121, 122, 123, 124, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 132, 141, 142, 149, 174, 175, 178, 184, 190, 193, 194, 203, 206, 220, 233, 234, 243, 263, 268, 272.

87 APD, p. 175; *Annals*, p. 121.

ruinas murorum circa gardinum, circa herbarium conventus, et alibi, infra curiam et extra plures habuimus ipso anno, et difficiles ad reparandum.

(In the summer of the same year the hay barn in our yard at Dunstable was burnt down with the destruction of the hay, the timbers and the other things stored in it. Also in the same year we enlarged our courtyard by building a new wall outside the old one. This was extremely expensive. The convent helped by giving forty shillings from its own resources. But because of the bad weather that summer, the new wall immediately collapsed the following winter. In this same year we also suffered from the collapse of several other walls, namely those around the priory's garden and its herbarium and others elsewhere, both inside the precinct and outside it. All these broken walls were hard to repair.)⁸⁸

What is striking about this entry, and similar ones found throughout the text, is that even the individuals responsible for the community's historical record show an awareness and sensitivity to very practical problems associated with building work and adverse weather conditions. Admittedly it may be that the house's historian had other administrative roles that made him aware of building schedules and expenses, but at the very least it shows that not all within the house were solely occupied with spiritual and pastoral concerns.

In fact, the priory was involved in construction controversies in the wider, urban setting of Dunstable town. For instance, a disagreement arose over the height and covering of butchers' stalls:

Eodem anno carnifices de villa super scabella sua, ubi carnes vendunt, ligneas domunculas erexerunt, quae postea, quia terram tetigerant, per priorem et totam communitatem burgi sunt amotae. Persmisit tamen prior, quod de foliis loca sua cooperirentur, ita quod terre non haerent.

(In the same year the town butchers built wooden sheds over the counters where they were selling their meat. But when these sheds eventually touched the ground, they were removed by the prior and all the burgesses of the town. But the prior did allow the butchers' counters to be covered with boards, provided that they did not touch the ground.)⁸⁹

Of even greater importance than butchers' stalls, however, were the rights and suits relating to tolls,⁹⁰ markets,⁹¹ and fairs⁹² held in Dunstable, as these

88 APD, p. 388; *Annals*, p. 263. For further records of building works, see pp. 7, 35, 38, 46, 64, 103, 106, 113, 118, 121, 122, 123, 124, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 132, 141, 142, 149, 174, 175, 178, 184, 190, 193, 194, 203, 206, 220, 233, 234, 243, 263, 268, 272.

89 APD, p. 281; *Annals*, p. 194.

90 *Annals*, pp. 31, 80, 175, 197, 220, 226, 241, 246, 248, 256, 276.

91 *Annals*, pp. 5, 15, 59, 61, 225, 226, 227, 241, 248, 256, 266, 276.

92 *Annals*, pp. 225, 226, 227.

were a significant source of income for the house. Great emphasis is therefore placed upon the community's historical rights in this regard:

Concessit etiam quod dictus prior et omnes homines sui, et res suae, sint quieti per totam terram in mercatis et nundinis, et in omni transit viarum et pontium, de theloneo, passagio, pontagio, et lastagio, shiris et hundredis, wapentakiis, scottis, geldis, danegeldis, hidagiis, assartis, operationibus, et aliis regalibus, praestationibus, auxiliis vicecomitum, tyzingpeny per quam clamat habere visum.

([King Richard] also granted that the said prior and all his men and his goods should be free of charges throughout the whole land at markets and fairs, road crossings and bridges, tolls and ferries, and from tolls for bridge repair, export duties, shires and hundreds, wapentakes, tributes levied on all subjects, imposts, danegelds, hide-gelds, assarts, labour-services and other requirements of the king, or for giving help to sheriffs and the money paid to the sheriff through which he claims to hold his inspection.)⁹³

Despite their rights to charge to townsfolk, the priory was subject to the same laws of the land, and on more than one occasion was made to pay the same fines as the rest of the town when their measures were wrong.⁹⁴

Other more worldly concerns revealed in the pages of the annals include anxiety over the cost and availability of produce central to the maintenance of a happy monastic community such as bread,⁹⁵ wine,⁹⁶ and beer.⁹⁷ Accounts of the acquisition and provision of these vital foodstuffs once again bear witness to the links the priory had with the wider community:

eodem anno, circum festum Johannis Baptistae, habuimus defectum de cervisia; et mutuo accepimus brasium de H. Chadde ad amuntiam viginti librarum; et praetor haec quinque dolia vini pro decem marcis; et a festo Sancti Michaelis praecedente, avens comparavimus ad seminandum, et equis domesticis et aliis, quadrigenta quarteria. Et praeter haec, ab octabis Purificationis, dedimus panem pro praebenda equis domesticis et aliis, usque ad novum granum.

(In the same year, around the time of the feast of John Baptist [24 June], we had a beer failure. We bought on credit from Henry Chadde twenty pounds worth of malt, and also five casks of wine worth ten marks. Also from the previous feast of St Michael [29 September]

⁹³ APC, p. 331; *Annals*, p. 226.

⁹⁴ *Annals*, pp. 70, 79, 182, 183, 185, 192, 226, 247, 255, 270.

⁹⁵ *Annals*, pp. 7, 79, 119, 121, 122, 143, 151, 181, 187, 194, 195, 197, 198, 200, 216, 221–22, 262, 263, 266, 268.

⁹⁶ *Annals*, pp. 61, 143, 182, 222, 264, 269.

⁹⁷ *Annals*, pp. 119, 120, 143, 151, 181, 182, 185, 187, 194, 195, 197, 200, 221, 266, 268.

we bought oats for sowing and forty quarters of them for our own horses and others. Besides this, from the octave of the Purification up to the time of the new grain we gave bread for food to our own horses and others.)⁹⁸

There are very few historical narratives from the period that pay such close attention to the community's shopping list, suppliers, or the benefits of consuming those goods:

a festo Sancti Johannis Baptistae totum potum nostrum emmimus, scilicet quarterium de communi brasio pro sex solidis et octo denariis. Et inter haec, duo dolia vini comparavimus pro novem marcis, quae in conventu expendimus, et multum nobis profuit. Et sciendum, quod expendimus hoc anno, in pane, potu, et praebenda, quater-viginti librae et amplius.

(from the feast of John the Baptist onwards we bought all our own drink, a quarter of communal beer costing six shillings and eight pence. We also bought for nine marks two casks of wine. We drank it all in the monastery, and it did us a power of good. You should know that in this year we spent more than twenty-four pounds on bread, drink and food supplies.)⁹⁹

The Purpose of the Annals

From the evidence of the annals' composition and contents, their purpose becomes clearer: a reference work, a record of the house and the network in which it functioned at every level from internal administration, local affairs, relations with barons and monarchs, and even international figures when they entered the stage. So important was maintaining this physical 'paper trail' for the community, that if a deed got nibbled by mice, a new one had to be made:

Eodem anno, circa festum Sancti Jacobi, fecit nobis archidiaconus Derbiae cartam suam novam de ecclesia de Bradeburne; quia alia a muribus fuit corrosa, quam antea dictus archidiaconus nobis confecerat.

(In the same year around the feast of St James [William] archdeacon of Derby made us his new charter for Bradbourne church, as the former charter made for us by the archdeacon had been nibbled into bits by mice.)¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ APD, p. 219; *Annals*, p. 151.

⁹⁹ APD, p. 208; *Annals*, p. 143. For further discussion of this, Given-Wilson cites the examples of chronicles maintained at the Cistercian house of Meaux and Benedictine house of St Albans as recording similar levels of detail: *Chronicles*, pp. 86–94.

¹⁰⁰ APD, p. 161; *Annals*, p. 111.

This mentality was in keeping with wider trends in the thirteenth century. Bureaucratic systems were becoming not just the norm but essential, whether it be for kingdoms like England or France, or an institution like the papacy. The wider adoption of such practices both allowed for and perhaps necessitated the cross-referencing of documentation, which can be seen in the annals. For example, decisions recorded in the royal rolls are noted in the text together with a reference to the roll type and number, together with the opening line of the writ.¹⁰¹ The benefits of implementing this system are shown to work too, as there are cases cited in the annals where this attention to past judgements and their documentation results in a beneficial outcome for the priory. In one instance, the prior was acquitted over an issue of land ownership at Worthing in 1259:

vocavimus ad warrentum rotulos Willelmi de Euerwic et sociorum ejus de itinere apud Bedeford, multis annis a retro transactis; et statim quaesita sunt rotuli, et inventum est quod frater dictarum mulierum perdidit terram illam per magnam assisam coram dictis justiciariis; et sic nos recessimus quieti.

(We called as evidence the rolls of William Euerwick and his fellow justices, with their transactions from a circuit at Bedford of many years ago. The rolls were at once looked out and it was found that the brother of the three daughters had lost the land at Worthing at the great assize before those particular justices. So we left the court cleared of the accusation.)¹⁰²

If a case was ongoing, or the author of that section considered a judgement to be of particular significance, decisions were recorded in full in the annals themselves, in addition to a cross-reference to the version found in the rolls of the king or exchequer.¹⁰³ In the lengthy suit between the priory and the Hospitallers over the payment of a rent charge, two writs issued by King Edward are copied out in full into the annals.¹⁰⁴ The formal agreement reached, its witnesses, and the location in the kings rolls are also recorded, before a summary of the fines and rents owed are given:

Postea concordati fuerunt partes apud Westmonasterium coram Johanne de Mettingham, Elia de Bekingham, Willelmo de Bereford, Petro Maulure, justiciariis domini regis, a die Paschae in quindecim dies, anno regni regis Edwardi vicesimo-tertio, in hunc modum, prout continetur in rotulo xliiii^o, ejusdem termini, qui sic incipit: *Prior de Dunstaple in banco*.

(The affair was made up between the parties at Westminster before the following justices of the lord king: John de Mettingham, Elias Bekingham, William Bereford and Peter Malure. This happened within

¹⁰¹ See the following examples: *Annals*, pp. 32, 59, 73, 82, 206, 208, 224, 239, 242, 249, 255.

¹⁰² APD, p. 212; *Annals*, p. 146.

¹⁰³ *Annals*, pp. 32, 59, 73, 82, 88, 146, 188, 206, 207, 208, 224, 229, 234, 239, 242, 249, 255.

¹⁰⁴ *Annals*, pp. 266, 267.

the fifteen days after Easter day in the twenty-third year of the reign of King Edward. The agreement is contained in the forty-third roll of the same term, and begins *The prior of Dunstable at the bench.*)¹⁰⁵

It is perhaps of interest to note that this concern for entrusting decisions to the written word spills over into the priory's interactions with the local secular community. One case which dominates large sections of the second part of the annals relates to the various disputes between the priory and Millicent Montault of nearby Eaton Bray.¹⁰⁶ Both sides are shown to be aware of official legal and administrative processes, and seem keen to ensure they are properly applied:

Et Milesenta quaesita si praedicta concordia coram cancellario in capella sua recitata, ad petitionem partium sit irrotulata in rotulis de cancellaria in perpetuam memoriam, pro casibus qui possent processu temporise venire, dicit quod non constat ei pro certo utrum irrotuletur necne: sed dicit quod nota concordiae tradita fuit in manu cancellarii; unde intelligit potius quod irrotulatur quam non.

(When Millicent was asked if the parties had asked for the agreement, which had been read out before the chancellor in his chapel, to be entered on the rolls of the chancery as a perpetual memory for cases which could happen over the course of time, she said that she was not certain whether it had been entered or not, but that, as a note about the agreement had been put in the hand of the chancellor, she thought it more likely that it had been enrolled than not.)¹⁰⁷

There are also intriguing insights into the problems associated with the evolving process of cross-referencing records. Who it was that actually entered the information into the rolls was clearly of concern: in 1286 the prior's own clerk is not allowed to enter the information, presumably the fear being that he would record something not quite correct that would give the priory an additional advantage or right.¹⁰⁸

Most importantly, however, the annals provide evidence of how these written records did actually serve their intended purpose as a reference in future disputes. The above-cited example of the rights granted to the priory by King Richard is one, whilst a second example features an inquiry into the vicarages and rents in the priory's control:

Eodem anno, mense Octobri, per Hugonem secundum Lincolniae episcopum, ordinatae et taxatae sunt vicariae in ecclesiis, quas canonici

¹⁰⁵ APD, p. 394; *Annals*, p. 267.

¹⁰⁶ Millicent features regularly in the pages of the *Annals*; see, for example, pp. 178, 179, 181, 187, 200, 204–05, 233–44, 254, and 272. She and her husband Eudo la Zouche inherited considerable lands in the area following the death of her brother George Cantilupe in 1273.

¹⁰⁷ *Annals*, p. 239. APD, p. 351.

¹⁰⁸ *Annals*, p. 229.

de Dunstaplia habent in usus proprios; praehabita in capitulis, in quibus consistunt, diligenti inquisitione de aestimatione tam ecclesiarum quam vicariarum, et in quibus competentius vicariae consistere possent. Ordinationis vero in scriniis episcopi repositae verba sunt haec.

(In the same year in the month of October, by the second Hugh to be bishop of Lincoln vicarages were established and taxed in the churches which the canons of Dunstable have for their own use. The bishop made a careful enquiry beforehand in the relevant documents as to the value of these churches and vicarages and as to how the vicarages could be suitably funded. In the bishop's book chest are stored these words about his arrangements.)¹⁰⁹

There follows a list of each vicarage and how much it is worth.¹¹⁰

It is not only monastic houses and ecclesiastical officials who inquire into the rights and incomes of the priory, necessitating this type of record. Following the disruptive reign of King John, there were many investigations into the losses of churches in particular, but also the baronage who had suffered. As a result, during the reign of Henry III the main administrative concern of all parties was the writ known as *Quo warranto*. This aimed to establish by what authority they held every right, privilege, land, or property.¹¹¹ The canons were clearly not impressed when their records were examined, but a slight hint of smugness indicates pride in their record keeping: 'they received the keys of all the offices from the bailiffs and rummaged through all our secrets but found nothing except forty pounds deposited in our church.'¹¹² This is in part perhaps a sign of the times: troubles with two civil wars, an increasingly literate and writing-focused administration,¹¹³ and ever more litigious society with the infrastructure of law, courts, and means of proving rights and liberties.¹¹⁴ On a simpler level, it also demonstrates that the importance and privileging of the written word was fundamental to the proper functioning of society in England by the thirteenth century.

There is further indication of the manner in which the annals were used and updated by the community. The evidence of an editing hand in the form of marginal additions and corrections made with erasures has been outlined

¹⁰⁹ APD, p. 59; *Annals*, p. 32.

¹¹⁰ Given-Wilson cites similar cases at St Albans and Meaux Abbey where the monasteries' chronicles doubled up as a form of 'narrative cartulary' and were actually used in legal cases as proof. See *Chronicles*, pp. 79–93 for details.

¹¹¹ For similar examples during Edward III's *inspeximus* inquiry, see Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, p. 92.

¹¹² *Annals*, pp. 264–65.

¹¹³ The seminal work on this phenomenon remains Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*, now in its third edition (Oxford, 2013).

¹¹⁴ For more on the evolution of this infrastructure in thirteenth-century England, see Musson, *Medieval Law in Context*.

above. To these, however, we can add three further indications of the way in which the records contained in the annals were read by the community. First, there is the underlining of events which were clearly deemed worthy of note. Marriages, births, and deaths of monarchs or their immediate family are underlined throughout the text, making these significant moments of national historical importance easy to identify when flicking through the folios of the annals. The first item to be underlined is the birth of Prince John,¹¹⁵ soon followed by the death of King Richard.¹¹⁶ Other examples include the death of Geoffrey Mandeville,¹¹⁷ the coronation of Henry III,¹¹⁸ the deaths of William Marshal¹¹⁹ and Prince Llywelyn,¹²⁰ Richard of Cornwall's wedding,¹²¹ the birth of prince Edmund,¹²² and Richard of Cornwall's election as king of Germany.¹²³ More obvious even than the underlined sections, are those instances where a decorative bracket of sorts has been drawn around the circumference of the portion of text to be highlighted. These slightly lengthier moments in history include the dedication of the church at Dunstable,¹²⁴ the prior's uncovering of an attempt at forging a deed,¹²⁵ the refusal of England's barons to help fund Henry III's plans to purchase the kingdom of Sicily for his son Edmund,¹²⁶ and the coronation of Richard of Cornwall at Aix-la-Chapelle.¹²⁷ Perhaps the most visually obvious way in which the reader's attention is drawn to particular entries in the annals is the pointing fingers or *manicules*. These are used on numerous occasions and occur in the central space between the two columns of text, as well as the left and right margins.¹²⁸

In combination, these three ways in which the annals have been marked up demonstrate an interest in the royal family, the wider holdings of the priory, the local area, and legal and financial concerns. More than that, however, they signal even more strongly that this was a text that was intended to be used as a reference of sorts for more than just the administration and preservation of the priory's rights. The community was also interested in their place in the wider historical events of the thirteenth century.

115 Tiberius A. X, fol. 9^r.

116 Tiberius A. X, fol. 11^a.

117 Tiberius A. X, fol. 14^v.

118 Tiberius A. X, fol. 17^r.

119 Tiberius A. X, fol. 31^r.

120 Tiberius A. X, fol. 37^r.

121 Tiberius A. X, fol. 39^r.

122 Tiberius A. X, fol. 40^r.

123 Tiberius A. X, fol. 46^v. Other underlined events can be found on the following folios: 29^r, 37^r, 55^r, 55^v, 56^r, 57^r, 65^r, 75^v, 77^r, 78^v, 79^r, 81^r, 86^v, 88^v.

124 Tiberius A. X, fol. 14^r: 'dedicata est ecclesia de Dustaple ab Hugone secundo Lincolniensi episcopo', APD, p. 42.

125 Tiberius A. X, fol. 19^r.

126 Tiberius A. X, fol. 46^r.

127 Tiberius A. X, fol. 47^r.

128 Tiberius A. X, fols 6^r, 7^v, 14^v, 15^v, 16^v, 17^r, 17^v, 88^r.

Conclusion: The Value of the Annals

'Monasteries and nunneries were both worlds within themselves and part of the wider communities of order and congregation, town and countryside, parish and diocese, castle and manor',¹²⁹ and this is easily seen in the descriptions of the community and Dunstable Priory preserved in the folios of its annals. At times those layers of identity overlapped harmoniously, or were unified in response to an outside threat, such as during the civil war: 'fuit ipsa libertas saepius in periculo; sed salvata est, Deo gratias' (the liberty of Dunstable itself was quite often in danger, but saved, thanks be to God).¹³⁰ Interestingly, this community seemed unified in the eyes of those outsiders, too. Following a violent (and deadly) altercation between the king's falconers, inhabitants of the priory, and townspeople, 'Mane vero facto, regem apud Wallingford adierunt, de priore, canonicis, familia, et burgensibus querimoniam facientes' (in the morning the falconers came to the king at Wallingford and complained about the prior, the canons, the community and the townspeople).¹³¹ Yet the folios of the annals also record times of civil strife, as in 1295 when 'Et fuit illud praesentatum per villatam in odium nostri, contra consuetudinem obtentam inter nos et illos' (the town had brought this accusation out of hatred of us, which was the opposite of the usual relations between us and the townsmen).¹³²

The annals were a product of their times. The historical account compiled by the canons of Dunstable Priory details many of the century's key events, but also gives insights into how the *zeitgeist* affected the way they viewed their world and the nature of their interactions with it. The type of record they left behind is also an indication of their concerns, a mixture of historical narrative and legal or administrative account of each year. At times those views might be coloured by the individual writing that section, perhaps even Prior Richard of Morins himself, or the anonymous scribe who thought that the bishop of Ely talked too much. But some opinions are more representative of the community as a whole, such as the frustration with foreign influences in court and ecclesiastical circles. Even the representation of royal figures is more nuanced, as the annals' compilers are selective with their praise, and even outrightly critical at times.

The real value of *The Annals of Dunstable Priory* goes beyond the face-value content of the pages. It helps us to understand and ask deeper questions about the communication and spread of information, the sharing of textual sources, degree of integration with the local community enjoyed (or suffered) by the inhabitants of the priory. While the priory may have been a typical monastic

¹²⁹ Burton, *Monastic Order in Yorkshire*, p. 155.

¹³⁰ APD, p. 335; *Annals*, p. 229.

¹³¹ APD, p. 273; *Annals*, p. 188.

¹³² APD, p. 399; *Annals*, p. 270.

house on almost every level (concerned as it was with matters such as the house itself, its estate and lands, legal disputes, taxes, and rivalries) the degree of detail in which this is recorded helps us to paint a vivid picture of the community.¹³³ Added to this, we have a very local perspective on national and international events, a viewpoint which official histories written for medieval kings, lords, and bishops, do not necessarily provide. Perhaps studying annals such as this could be the basis for new forms of microhistorical research, or using computational methodologies such as network theory analysis to understand even further the complex web of influences in medieval society. The use of monastic annals such as this could also be used in future in combination with other lower ranking historiographical texts to provide the next generation of social histories of the Middle Ages.

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¹³³ Indeed, it can be compared to the picture painted by the *Gesta abbatum* of the urban community and St Alban's place within it or the portrayal of rural Yorkshire emerging from Meaux Abbey's chronicle. See Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, chapter 5 for the former and chapter 12 for the latter, and Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, p. 94.

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