

The Cistercians in Britain



Narrative of the foundation of Rievaulx from a 13th-century history, the *Narratio de Fundatione*, or foundation history of Fountains Abbey. The preface of the *Narratio* shows it to have been written by a monk of Kirkstall (a daughter house of Fountains) named Hugh, at the request of Abbot John of York, abbot of Fountains from 1203-1211 in order to preserve for future generations of monks the origins of the abbey. Here the foundation of Rievaulx is seen as the prelude to the foundation of Fountains.

During the reign in England of the illustrious King Henry, son of William, nicknamed the bastard, the land was kept in peace before his face. Churches were erected in many places, monasteries were built, and in the absence of wars religion spread. There flourished in that time of happy memory, blessed Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux, a man of splendour, a strenuous worker at the business of God, one who was notable in his holiness and famous in his teaching, being glorious also in the miracles which he wrought. His greatest care was for divine worship and for the salvation of souls. He strove, moreover, to increase his community, giving glory to God with his lips and himself being glorified in his Name. He was the spiritual father of many monks, and he caused not a few monasteries to be built. He sent the soldiers of his army to conquer distant lands, and thus he won notable victories over the old enemy, seizing plunder which he could restore to his King. This man, then, moved by divine inspiration, desired to plant an offshoot of good hope from the noble vine of Clairvaux. He therefore sent a chapter of monks to England, hoping to obtain fruit there as well as in so many other lands. There still exists the letter which he wrote to the king, saying that he wished to seize plunder for his heavenly Lord out of the lands of the king [of England], adding that he had sent valiant soldiers from his army who would not be slow to capture what they wanted. In this manner he concluded his entreaty. And this is what was done. His men were received with honour by the king and the kingdom, and they established new fortifications in the province of York. They constructed the abbey which is called Rievaulx, which was the first plantation of the Cistercian Order in the province of Yorkshire. Those who were sent were holy men, being monks who glorified God in the practice of poverty. They dwelt in peace with all men, although they warred with their own bodies and with the old enemy. They showed forth the discipline of Clairvaux whence they came, and by works of piety they spread the sweet savour of their mother-abbey, as it were, a strong perfume from their own house. The story spread everywhere that men of outstanding holiness and perfect religion had come from a far land; that they had converse with angels in their dwelling; and that by their virtues they had glorified the monastic name. Many therefore were moved to emulate them by joining this company whose hearts had been touched by God. Thus very soon they grew into a great company. . . .

Foundation charter of Walter Espec for Rievaulx Abbey¹

In the name of the holy and indivisible Trinity, Walter Espec, to all the sons of the holy catholic mother church, greetings. Be it known to you all that I have given and conceded, with the consent of Henry, king of the English, and on the advice of Adeline my wife, to God and St Mary of Rievaulx, into the hands of William the abbot and the brethren serving God there, for the love of God and the salvation of the soul of William, king of the English, and for the salvation of Henry, king of the English, and of all their ancestors, and for the salvation of the soul of my father and mother, and for the soul of Hugh de Widlecher, and for the souls of the father and mother of my wife and of our ancestors, nine carucates of land, that is, the land of Griff where there are four carucates, and the lands of Tilleston where there are five carucates, with all their appurtenances, that is, in wood and plain, and pasture, and meadows and waters, and in all other places, to hold in perpetuity, well and in peace, honourably and freely and quit of all customs and aids and charges and interference, and pleas and quarrels, and from all secular service. These are the boundaries:

[here the boundaries of the nine carucates are given in detail]

In addition to this I give them all easements in my manor and forest of Helmesley, that is, material and wood for their own use, and pasture and pannage in my forests of Helmsley, free from all custom, as I enjoyed them freely for my own use. With these witnesses: Thomas, provost of Beverley; Ernald, priest of Beverley; Godfrey, chaplain; Henry de Manferd; Walter, chaplain of Eustace fitz John; Robert, the chaplain of Walter Espec; Geoffrey, clerk of Warter; Ivo, Pain, Hugh, William, Clement his brothers. With the testimony also and with the consent of my nephews, that is, William de Bussei, and Jordan and Roger, who are the sons of my sister Hawise, the oldest child of my father and mother; and my nephews Geoffrey de Trailli and William and Gilbert and Nicholas, sons of my middle sister Albreda; and my nephews Everard and Robert, sons of my youngest sister Adeline. With the testimony also and the consent of my men, that is, William de Stonegrave, Robert Lenveiset, Drogo de Harum, Robert de Sproxton, Peter de Surdeval, William Luvel, Jordan Engelram, William son of Amphrey, William de Surdeval, Roger de Frammeville, Hugh Camin. My neighbours also are witnesses: Henry de Muntfort, Stephen de Meinhil, Gervase de Sneit, and Benedict his son, Roger de Hilton, Anschetin son of William son of Acchelin, and many other neighbours and friends. I, Walter Espec, founded this abbey of Rievaulx on the advice

¹ Translated from J. C. Atkinson (ed), Cartularium Abbathie de Rievalle (the cartulary of the abbey of Rievaulx), Surtees Society 83 (1889), pp. 16-21.

² The man with whom Bernard was in correspondence.

and with the consent of Thurstan, archbishop of York,³ with the advice and consent also of Henry, king of the English.⁴ The lord Pope, Innocent,⁵ confirmed this by apostolic authority.

When was this charter issued? The foundation of Rievaulx, as we know, took place on 5 March 1132. But was the charter issued then?

3

1114-1140.

4

1100-1135.

5

Innocent II, 1130-1143.

These are the perpetual possessions of Rievaulx which were given to us in the following manner:

In the beginning 9 carucates of land were given to the blessed Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux, to wit, 'Grif' and 'Tilleston' in order there to build the abbey in the year 1131. Then, after some years, Odo of Bolthby gave to the lord abbot, William, Hesketh with its appurtenances.

In 1145 Walter Espec¹ gave us Bilsdale with its appurtenances. Stephen 'de Mainil' gave us Stainton with its appurtenances. Gervase likewise, together with Benedict, his son, and Hugh 'de Tuit' gave us the meadow of 'Rokesbergh'. Odo 'de Nes' gave us the meadow of Waterholm. In the time of the lord abbot, Ailred, Gilbert of Ghent gave us the grange of Hunmanby with its appurtenances.

In 1152 William,² bishop of Durham, gave us the grange of Crosby with its appurtenances. Besides this, Hugh,³ bishop of Durham, gave us Cotton with all its appurtenances. In the second year after that, Roger of Mowbray gave us Welburn with its appurtenances. Ralph Beler gave us the whole of 'Hoveton'.

In the year of the Incarnation of our Lord 1158 King Henry II gave us the waste land round Pickering in exchange for Stainton, which Walter of Ghent gave us to build an abbey there. Robert 'de Lasceles' gave us 1 carucate of land in Morton with its appurtenances. Walter Engelram gave us 3 bovates of land with their appurtenances in Welbury. Walter, son of Ivo, gave us half a carucate in Folkton with its appurtenances. Torfin of Allerston gave us 1 carucate of land in Allerston with its appurtenances. Walter Engelram gave us 30 acres of land in Heselerton, and pasture for 1000 sheep.⁴ Peter 'de Tresc' gave us pasture in Arden. Hugh Malebestic gave us 'Oswaldesenges'. Jordan 'de Bussai' gave us half a carucate of land in Bolton. Richard Cumin gave us 1 carucate of land and half a carucate in Staincroft. Adam, son of Peter, gave us 'Rumblesmor' and forges in Stainborough and in Shidlington. Copsi of Tunstall gave us a house in Bolton with a toft. Ralph 'de Novavilla' gave 1 carucate of land in Rigton. In the time of the lord abbot, Silvanus, William, the son of Theobald, gave us 16 acres of land in Folkton. Henry of Willerby, and Alard, his son, gave us 4½ acres of meadow. Torphin of Allerston gave us 12 perches of arable land and 10 perches of meadow. And 10 bovates were quitclaimed to us in 'Hoveton' and 5 acres. The nuns of Welburn gave us 2 bovates of land. Among our forges there were given to us 70 acres and half an acre. Archarius of Tunstall gave us the grange of Bolton with its appurtenances. Everard 'de Ros' gave us the assart of Helmsley and the common pasture of Pockley. Robert of Sproxton, and Simon, his son, gave us land and pasture for 200 sheep in the fields of Sproxton. William of Amundaville gave us 1 acre of land in the fields of Trafford, next to the fishpond of Newsom. All these things did Bernard of Bailleul give us: the land of Teesdale with its appurtenances, with pasture for 60 mares with their foals of two years old, and for six score beasts, and for 12 cows and 2 bulls with their forage; and the land of Westerdale with its appurtenances, and pasture for six score beasts, and the fishpond of Newhouse. Jordan

Payn gave us the grange of Broughton with its appurtenances, and the rest of the freemen of that village joined in the gift. Richard, son of Thurstan, and Robert, his son, and Richard Losth gave us the fishpond of Normanby and 43 acres of land and pasture for 100 sheep and for 8 horses or oxen, and for the baggage beasts that may be necessary. John, the son of John Vinitor, gave us the house and land of Beverley 'in Flammangaria'. Robert of Skirlaugh gave us land in the garden of William, son of Leuric, in Beverley, measuring 60 feet in length and 30 in breadth, in order to build a house there. William of 'Etun' gave us 9 acres and 1 perch of meadow in Layerthorp near York.

¹ He took part in the battle of the Standard.

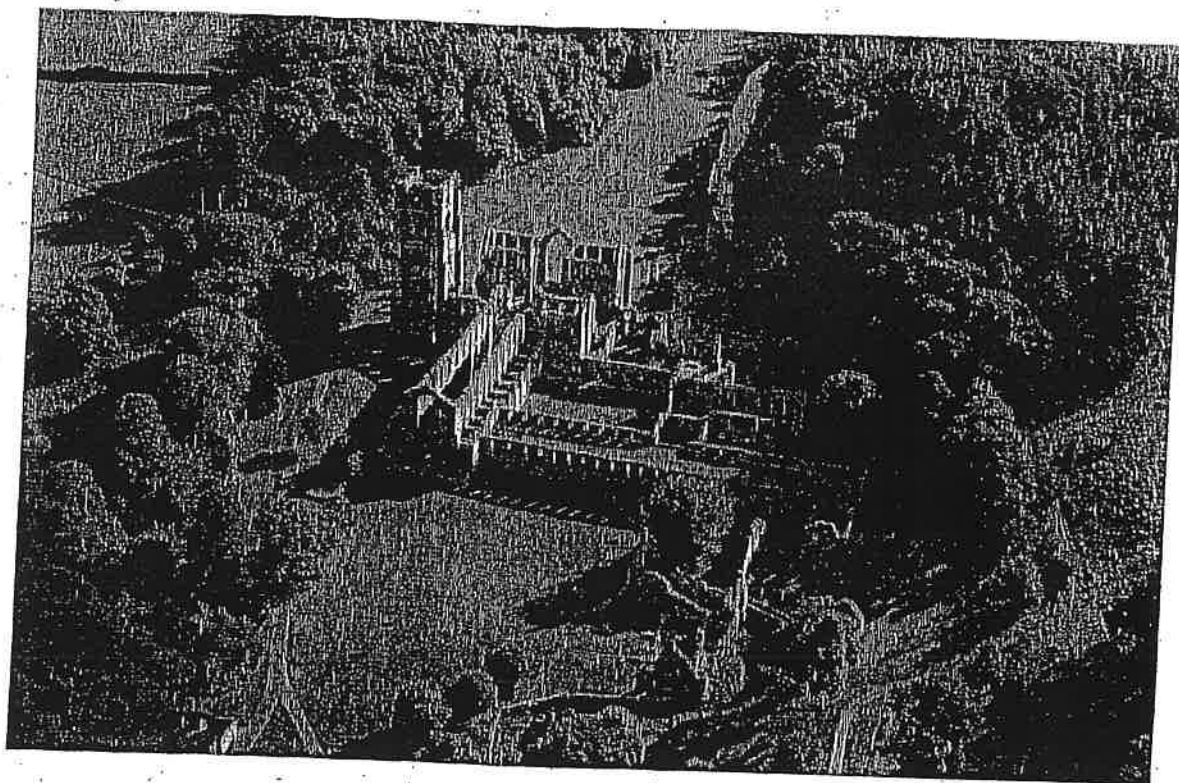
² William of Sainte-Barbe, bishop of Durham, 1143-1152.

³ Hugh of Le Puiset, bishop of Durham, 1153-1195.

⁴ Note throughout the prominence given to sheep-farming.

compiled
c. 1189
and copied
into the
abbey's
cartulary

FOUNTAINS ABBEY



The foundation of Fountains Abbey from the 13th-century history, the *Narratio de Fundatione*. The preface of the *Narratio* shows it to have been written by a monk of Kirkstall (a daughter house of Fountains) named Hugh, at the request of Abbot John of York, abbot of Fountains from 1203-1211 in order to preserve for future generations of monks the origins of the abbey. Hugh purports to rely on the reminiscences of an aged monk named Serlo, who had been brought up at St Mary's Abbey in York and therefore witnessed the dramatic events of October 1132, who had entered the religious life at Fountains in 1136 or 1137, and been one of the group who founded Kirkstall in 1147. By the time the *Narratio* was begun, therefore, Serlo would have been going on 100 years old. Hugh received the monastic habit around the year 1183 from Ralph Haget, abbot of Kirkstall, who then went on to be abbot of Fountains. He knew Ralph well, and after 1190 Hugh himself became the eye-witness to what he describes. But the *Narratio* was more than just a reminiscence, and Hugh relied on a number of literary models. Look at the *Exordium Parvum* and *Exordium Cistercii* and see if you can detect any similarities. Does this undermine the credibility of the *Narratio*, that is, is it just a literary account, or does it have historical value?

[translation of selected passages attached]

The Narratio de Fundatione of Fountains Abbey

1. Preface

To the reverend father and lord John, abbot of Fountains, brother Hugh, monk of Kirkstall, greetings now and for ever. It has pleased your excellency, venerable father, that I should tell in a brief account by whose authority and in what way our mother house, that is the holy church of Fountains (over which you now, by God's will, preside) was founded, how that blessed vine of the Lord grew in a place of horror and solitary waste, and thus enlarged, extended its branches to the sea and its seeds to the furthest nations. You have advised me that for greater information I should search the memory of our aged brother Serlo for his recollections, in order that he might make certain what is in doubt, both those events at which he was present and what he heard from others of our order. I have asked the old man about those things which were in doubt. He told me, 'It is 69 years since my conversion, and I was then, as I recall about 30 years old when I entered Fountains to become a member of the convent. I could not be ignorant of what had happened. I myself was present at the egression of the monks from the monastery at York; I knew those who left by face and name from my childhood; I was born in that region; I was brought up among them, and I was related in the flesh to not a few of them. And although I am (as it seems to me) advanced in years, nevertheless I give thanks for my old age because my memory is still with me. Therefore I will tell of the origin of the monastery of Fountains as you order, which I saw with my own eyes or was told of by my elders with undoubted faith.' Therefore I have written down in order what I have heard from the mouth of the old man, taking care to preserve the sequence of events.

2. The foundation of Rievaulx

This chapter is translated separately.

3. Concerning the monastery of York and our first fathers

There were at that time in the monastery of York which is called St Mary's religious men walking in the ways of the fathers, following without quarrel the institutes which were accepted by the majority. They lived in the ways and customs of their fathers, honestly, under a rule and an abbot, but far from the precepts of the Rule, far from the vow of their profession, from the perfection of the discipline of the Cistercians. Several of them, hearing of the

purity of our order were led by a pious instinct to emulate it (their consciences accused them greatly, saying that they were fulfilling their professions less than they should; they saw their own imperfections from the perfection of others). They began to be ashamed of their torpor, to blush and to damn their imperfection and to scorn their free and easy ways.

It embarrassed them that they lived this side of perfection, to have dwelt so long in the land of Moab and to have accepted a heritage beyond the river Jordan. The tumult of the world and the clamour of the city shamed them. They longed with great longing for the desert, for the labour of their own hands, for the ways of the prophets. The first and chief of these were Richard the sacrist, Ranulf, Gamel, Gregory, Hamo, Thomas and Walter. These were the men whom God had chosen as the seed, by whose works and exhortation the remainder were turned to the same course and drawn to agreement. As yet word of this was hidden from the prior, for they feared that this man might be against them, might frustrate the work which they had just begun. But they need not have feared, for this man himself, touched by a similar grace had been transformed in the same way as they had, and shared the same aspirations. For he was ashamed to be using the title of monk in vain, and to have have been less than zealous in the pursuit of his profession. What more do I have to say? He heard the vows which the brothers were making, and giving thanks to God joyfully joined them as a comrade. He was a religious man who feared God, prudent in external matters, a friend of powerful men, for he was known to all on account of the reverence of his religion and especially well-known to the pontiff who then ruled the metropolitan church of York. His name was Richard. Now being their associate he called together and gathered to him those who were of like mind. They were thirteen in number, of one heart and one mind. The simplicity of the Cistercian order attracted them all, to experience poverty and want, and to associate themselves to the holy flocks. They talked together of leaving, of the means of their going, not fearing poverty or the harshness of the winter, thinking only of how this thing could be done without disturbing the peace of the brethren and without scandal. But this was difficult to achieve, for already the word became the deed, already there was talk among the brethren, that the prior [Richard] and his accomplices were in the spirit of levity urging departure from the people, even talking of novelties which were not allowed, both to the contempt of the order, the shame of the house, the confusion of the whole congregation. It seemed that they in their error wished to leave what was secure for what was insecure, wealth for poverty, and

that they did not care at all about the peace of the community, the scandal among the weaker brethren, and the profession which they had long ago made. This dangerous movement threatened to undermine the statutes of the fathers, and the sweetness of their unity.

The matter was brought before the abbot who was then in charge of the house, a man of great age - indeed an old man - called Geoffrey. This man was horrified at the novelty of the matter, calling it a disaster that such inconvenient things should happen to him in his old age - scandal in the house, the order [i.e., the monastic order] destitute, and subversion among the brethren. He warned them to stop what they had begun, that it was presumptuous to try to change for the better what should not be changed, to call to mind the profession which they had made long ago.

4. Concerning Archbishop Thurstan of York

At that time the church of York was ruled over by archbishop Thurstan of blessed memory, a man of great affairs and a lover of religion. Seizing an opportunity Prior Richard went to him and revealed to him their holy plan, asked his advice, and reverently implored his help. He showed him the confusion which existed among the brethren, the prohibition which the abbot had placed upon them, the discipline of the order. He demonstrated to him the importance of their profession, how their way of life had diminished in intensity, the stimulus of their consciences, their desire to achieve something, and how nothing could be done without him using his episcopal authority. The holy bishop recognized this to be the work of God, not of man, and commending his spiritual desire, he offered his advice and promised his help. Together they decided on a day on which the holy bishop should go to the monastery to visit the brothers. When the abbot of the monastery received this order he was afraid that the archbishop would favour the party he was opposed to, and would presume to do something unheard of, to the injury of his house. And so he sent messengers throughout England to monasteries, assembling learned men together, and no small multitude of monks came to meet the archbishop of York. This was all done so that they should resist the rebels and the archbishop and curb the insolence of the brethren. The day came, and the holy bishop appeared in a spirit of gentleness and peace, having with him, as was fitting, serious men, wise clerks, canons, and very many other members of the religious orders. The abbot came to meet him at the exit to the chapter house, and a crowd of

monks with him, denying him entry and saying that he was not allowed to enter with such a crowd, nor should any secular person to be admitted to the secrets of the chapter. He should send away his companions; he alone should enter the chapter if he wished to do so, so that the insolence of his clerks should not disturb the peace of the monastic order. The bishop was not willing to send them away, saying that it was not fitting for him to enter into debate alone, without his advisers there, especially as some of them had come from a long way away. There was a tumult among both clergy and the monks; dissent tore through the cloister, some pushed them away, others tried to enter. Then the archbishop called for silence. He said "You today have withdrawn the obedience which you owe us. We, by the authority of God, withdraw what you have from us, and lay your church under interdict, and suspend the monks dwelling there from celebrating the office."

5. Of the egression of the monks

Thirteen monks left the monastery of York with Archbishop Thurstan, taking with them none of the goods of the monastery, only the habits in which they were dressed. These were their names: Richard the sacrist, Ranulf, Thomas, Gamel, Hamo, Robert de Suella, Geoffrey, Walter, Gregory, Gervase, Ralph, and Alexander. And there joined them a monk of Whitby named Robert, a holy man who feared God, afterwards abbot and founder of the monastery of Newminster, of whom more will be said later. These were the holy men whom God had chosen as the seed, the root of our generation, the plantation to the glory of the Lord. Having left the wealth of their abbey, the affluence of their temporal goods, now it seemed to them for the first time that they had truly renounced the world, because they had with them no goods of the world. But God provided for them. The venerable archbishop, acting as their pastor, received them into his house, providing all things that pertained to their bodily needs.

6. Concerning their persecution by the abbot

[This chapter tells how Abbot Geoffrey of St Mary's wrote to the king, and to various bishops and senior churchmen to tell them what had happened. Thurstan retaliated by writing to William of Corbeil, archbishop of Canterbury and papal legate in England.]

7. The letter of Archbishop Thurstan

[This has been the subject of debate. It exists in two versions, the long and the short, and appears in some manuscripts independently from the *Narratio*. Was it part of the original composition? It is a polemic, designed to justify the actions of those who left St Mary's. It contains an attack on Benedictine monasticism, especially Cluniac monasticism. As commentators have pointed out, this in itself is suspicious, as it was to a Cluniac house, Pontefract, that Thurstan retired and took the habit in 1140. So the status of the letter is difficult to determine: for arguments see the articles by Derek Baker on the booklist. I have not included a translation of the letter, and we pick up the text at chapter 8:]

8. Of two monks who looked backwards

The temptor [i.e., the devil] hated their endeavours and attempted to assail two of the brethren, Gervase and Ralph, with doubts. He instilled into their minds poisonous counsel, disloyal thoughts, fear of solitude, the austerity of the order, the familiarity of their former life. He laid before them the steep ascent, the fear of falling, the pressing danger they were in, the new trials which would always be ahead. He persuaded them to return to their past, to be reconciled to their brethren, to put up with their former mediocrity, to be safe in the middle ground. He said to them, 'Are you better than you fathers were, that you think you can live in the desert, push the man beyond the limits of human endurance, and not be moved by the agonies of the flesh?' What more do I have to say? They succumbed to temptation. They returned to their former ways, and returning once more they were a source of scandal to their friends, a cause of derision to their enemies. But Gervase, gaining his former strength came back to the camp, joined his brethren once more, and washed away the stain on his conversion.

9. Of the grant of a monastery and the election of an abbot

Meanwhile Christmas Day came, and the venerable archbishop went with his household to celebrate the holy feast at Ripon. While he was there, during the feast, he assigned, from the patrimony of St Peter, a place for the site of a monastery. It was uninhabited, covered with thorns, lying between the mountains and the rocks, more suitable to be the lair of wild beasts than the habitation of men. Its name was Skeldale, that is, the valley of the river [Skell] which flowed through it. The holy archbishop

added a village with the fields lying next to it, called Sutton. And this was the origin of the mother house which is now called Fountains. And when this place had solemnly been confirmed to them they discussed, as was right and proper, the election of an abbot who could, as father and pastor of their souls, lead them to God. The holy archbishop was present, and presided over the election to ensure that it was carried out according to the Rule, and with common consent they elected as abbot Richard the prior. The archbishop consented to the election, confirmed and blessed the elect, and he became first abbot of Fountains. But what was this man of God to do? He had monks, but he had no monastery. There was nowhere he could receive them, nowhere for them to lay their heads, nowhere for them to shelter from the harshness of the climate, the pouring rain - and it was winter. However, he fulfilled the office which had been laid upon him as best he could, arming himself with his faith against the harshness of poverty. He relied on the help of God and, having accepted the archbishop's blessing, he and his holy community took themselves off to the secret solitude. It was a real wonder to see men of such faith and fervour that neither the harshness of the winter, nor the horror of their solitude, nor the lack of goods, deflected them from their purpose or delayed them from what they intended to do. There was no money in their bags, no wheat in barns, nothing for their daily food, unless they were able to obtain anything from the generosity of the archbishop. There was no house for them to live in, no shelter for them to hide under, no comfort against the harshness of the winter, unless any were afforded by the high rocks.

10. How they slept and ate under the elm tree

[This describes how elm tree afforded shelter, and how the monks maintained the monastic horarium, despite their circumstances.]

11. How they subjected themselves to the Cistercian Order and the house of Clairvaux

Now the Winter was passing they discussed their predicament, their way of life, the observance of the Rule and the form of discipline, for they did not wish to be led into error. The holy simplicity and the perfection of the life of salvation of the Cistercian Order was pleasing to all of them. Therefore with common consent they sent messengers to Abbot Bernard, indicating that they had chosen Clairvaux as their mother house and he himself as their father abbot, and that they were ready to follow his advice and heed his orders. However, in order that

they might receive from him a way of life and the discipline of holy religion, they wrote to him telling him of the reason why - and how - they had left the monastery of York, the stimulus to their consciences, their proposals for reform, the way the abbot had persecuted them, and the archbishop's generosity. The holy archbishop wrote for them, upholding and commending their cause. The blessed man [Bernard] received their messengers and when he heard what they had to say he rejoiced, and gave thanks to God. For he knew in his spirit that this was the work of God and not of man and that he could not ignore it.

12-14 Three letters of St Bernard

[These were addressed to (i) Abbot Richard, written in either 1133 or early 1134, commending his actions. At the end of it Bernard mentions a brother Geoffrey. This is Geoffrey d'Ainai, whom Bernard sent to Fountains to instruct the monks in the observances of the Cistercian Order. (ii) to Archbishop Thurstan, praising his good works, and (iii) to Abbot Geoffrey of St Marys, York, who had evidently written to Bernard to ask what to do with the two monks who had returned to the monastery].

15 Concerning the monk Geoffrey whom St Bernard sent to Abbot Richard and the convent so that he might teach them the ways of the order

When these things were done the messengers who had been sent to Clairvaux came home, having in their company a certain monk of Clairvaux named Geoffrey, a holy and religious man. We need not doubt the sanctity of this man, who was held in such regard by Bernard that he sent him from his side to teach our first fathers how to live according to the ways of the Cistercians. I saw him as a man of great age, of modesty, a man industrious in both spiritual and human affairs; he had begun and instituted monastic life in many places This Geoffrey, as I say, came to Fountains and was honorably received by his fellow monks and they were reassured, and at the command of the abbot they submitted themselves to the discipline of the Cistercian Order. They listened to the words of the old man and took them to heart. On his advice they built the offices [monastic buildings], and learnt to sing the chant and say their psalms as the old man taught them. They embraced his orders with reverence, and like wax accepts the impress of the seal, so they received the form of the Cistercian way of life. The man from Burgundy marvelled at the great need which he found among the Englishmen, their swiftness to obey him, their frugality in eating, the seriousness of their ways. He

found them strong in their faith, bottomless in their charity, patient in their poverty. Their number grew, and there were added to them 10 clergy and lay men who were received as novices according to the teaching of the Order. However, as yet they had received no further possessions, no fields to cultivate, no means of sustenance except for what they had obtained from the archbishop.

16 [This chapter tells of the growing need for food, which was so great that the monks were forced to eat the leaves of the trees.]

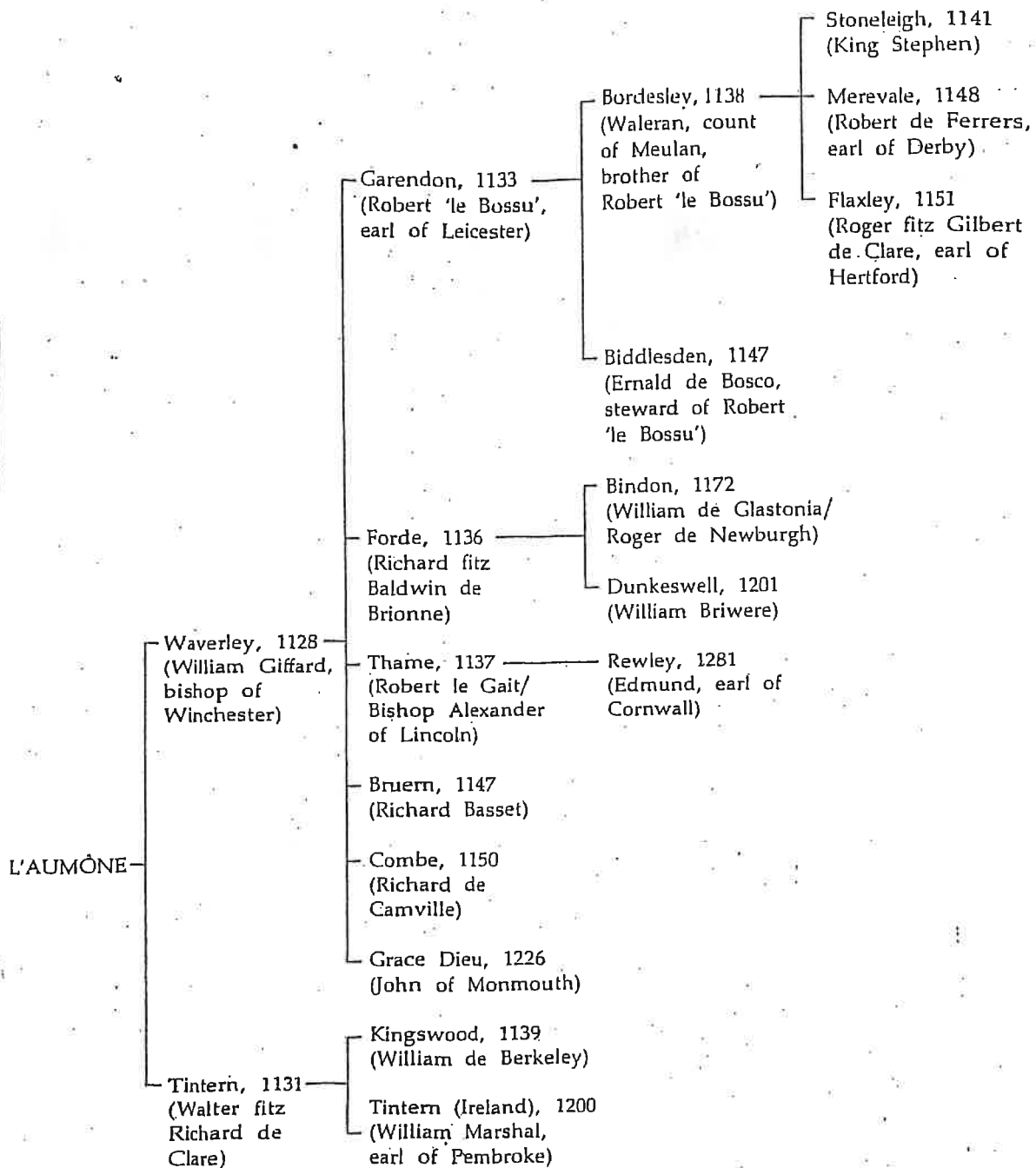
17 [A poor man is given bread, despite the poverty of the house, and - a sign of heavenly blessing - at that precise moment two men, sent by Eustace Fitz John, lord of Knaresborough, arrived with food from their master who had heard of the monks' need.]

18. Of the consolation that was brought to them by Hugh, dean of York

The brothers laboured for two years in great poverty and had no hope of alleviation other than that God should see that they put their trust in him. The abbot, almost in despair, went to his lord at Clairvaux and, explaining to him his distress and the inconvenience of their location asked if he and his comrades could be received in those parts [Burgundy] as they had no hope of maintaining themselves in their own place. St Bernard was moved to compassion and placed at their disposal a grange of his house, with the adjacent fields, where they might live until something better was provided for them. But the Lord provided better When the abbot [Richard] returned back again from overseas he happened to meet a noble man named Hugh, who was dean of York, a man of great importance and considerable wealth. And the Lord had planted a sound idea in his heart, that he should confer himself, and his goods, on the abbey of Fountains. And so it was done. He was a rich man, not only in money and goods but also in books of sacred writings, and by bringing these with him he was the first to breathe life into the library at Fountains. The brethren were comforted by the things which had happened, and recognizing them to be the work of God they spent the money which he had brought with him wisely.

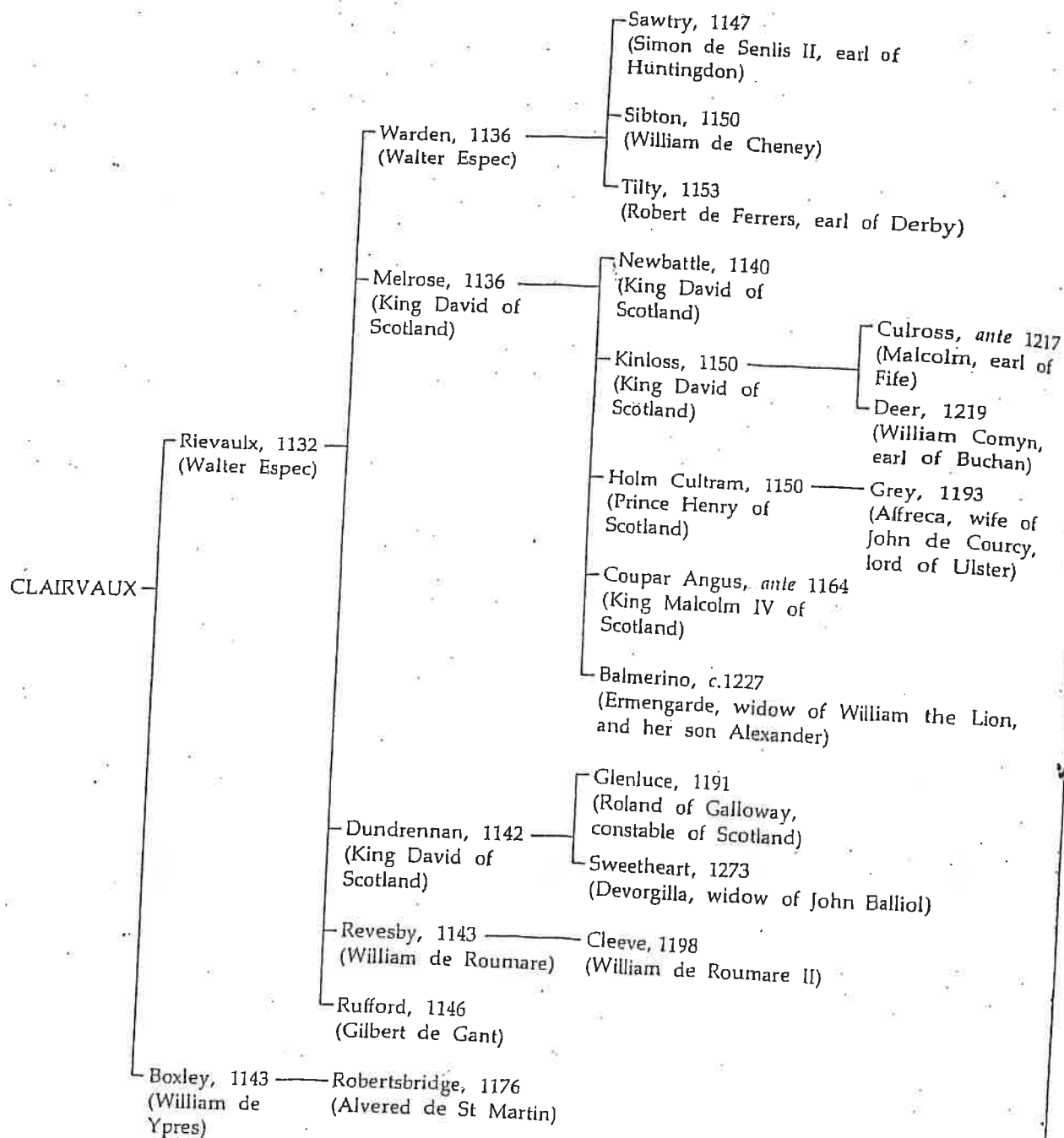
[the *Narratio* continues to tell the history of the house into the thirteenth century. We leave it here, with the future of Fountains secured by the entry gifts of Dean Hugh and the growing attention which the abbey attracted as a result.]

I THE FAMILY OF L'AUMÔNE

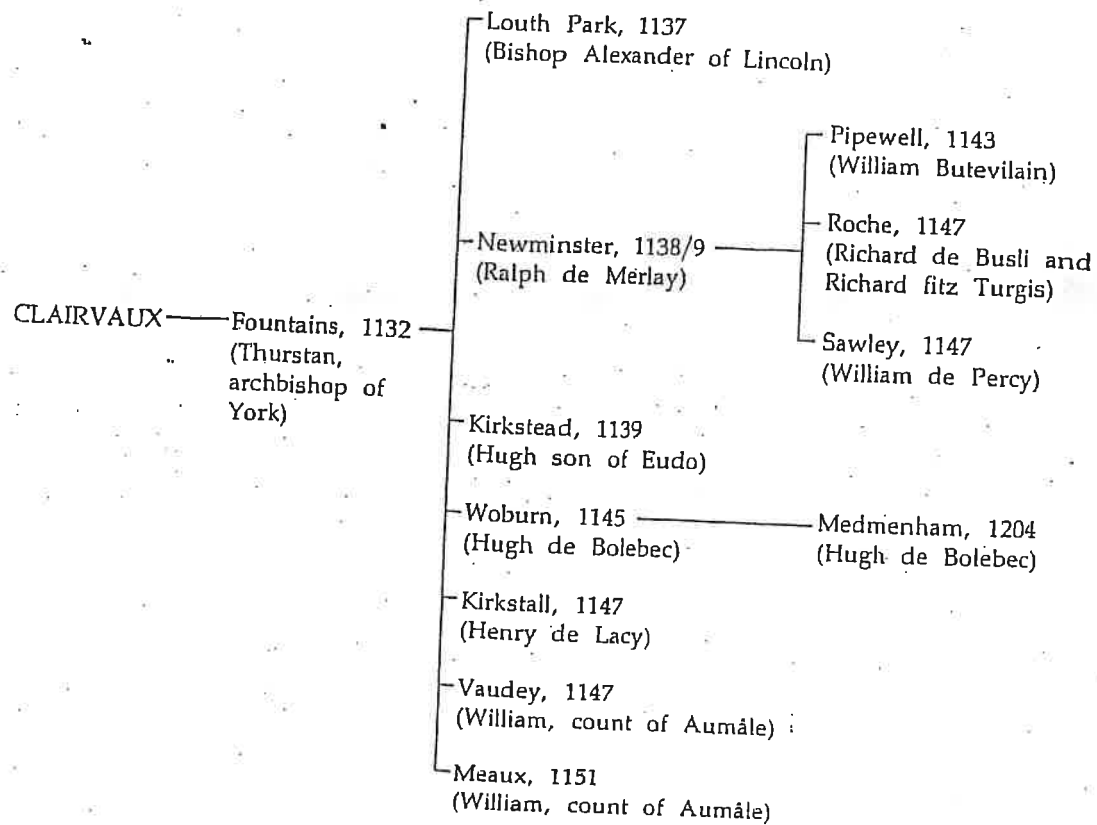


JANET BURTON AND ROGER STALLEY

II THE FAMILY OF CLAIRVAUX (RIEVAULX AND BOXLEY)



III THE FAMILY OF CLAIRVAUX (FOUNTAINS)



etiam
aliquid
libris ar
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m. t. sed
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ipso
omiseri
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silo

ipia epia in nomine opii pngat. ut
qeqd in speculo caritatis. hoc enim
Libro nomen imponit. lectori dis
plicuerit. non t qui paruerit. sed
michi qui multum coegerim in
putetur. Vale in xpo dilecte frater.

EXPLET: EPIS

INNOVAT: PROL



ERE SCOR VERA

& discreta humilitas uirtus est.
mea autem & mei simili u. defect
uirtutis. De qua ppha. Vide humi
litatem meam & erunt me. Nazari

MS Douai 392, fol. 3r, the opening words of the text of Aelred's *Mirror of Charity*, formerly belonging to the abbey of Anchin. This is probably the only surviving medieval representation of Aelred. He is depicted in relation to St Bernard, whose figure, seated in the act of writing, faces him from the opposite page.

THE LIFE OF AILRED

Introduction

The Life of Ailred of Rievaulx was written by Walter Daniel, who became a monk of Rievaulx c. 1150. His father, Daniel, was also a monk of Rievaulx. When referring to his father, Walter uses the title *dominus*, lord, which is usually taken to refer to his secular status before he became a monk. Walter is titled *magister*, master, which means that he had been education in the schools, but he may not have been further afield than York or Durham. He was a prolific writer, most of his works being theological. However, only two of his writings have survived, one of them the Life, which was written shortly after Ailred's death in January 1167.

It is advisable to read the Introduction by F. M. Powicke, and indeed to read the whole text (I have a copy, and there is one in the Library). I have supplied below a modified translation of selected portions, and summarized the rest.

Text and Summaries

Preface and Chapter 1

This is addressed to Abbot H., who cannot be positively identified. It laments the death of Ailred, evidently a recent event.

Chapter 2

This tells of how Ailred, as a boy, was in the service of King David of Scotland. He alleges that (p. 3) 'The King was so fond of him that he made him great in his house and glorious in his palace Indeed, if he had not unexpectedly entered the Cistercian order he would have honoured him with the first bishopric in the land. In any case, he was steward of the royal household'.

Chapter 3

Tells how a scurrilous knight tried to undermine Ailred.

Chapter 4

Tells how Ailred felt the call to become a monk.

Chapter 5

Shortly afterwards he was in the neighbourhood of the city of York where he was come on business to the archbishop of the diocese. By a happy chance he heard tell, from a close friend of his, how; two years or more before, certain monks had come to England from across the sea, wonderful men, famous adepts in the religious life, white monks by name and white also in vesture. For their name arose from the fact that, as the angels might be, they were clothed in undyed wool spun and woven from the pure fleece of the sheep. So named and garbed and gathered together like flocks of sea gulls, they shine as they walk with the whiteness of snow. They venerate poverty, not the penury of the idle and negligent, but a poverty directed by a necessity of the

will and sustained by the thoroughness of faith, and approved by divine love. They are welded together by such firm bands of charity that their society is as 'terrible as an army with banners'. Trampling the flowers of the world with the foot of forgetfulness, counting riches and honours as dung, beating with the fist of conscience on the faces of mutable things, spurning fleshly desires and vain glory in food, drink, act, affectation, alike in the abundance and scarcity of goods, running an even course in the fit use of them between right and left they observe at all times a discreet uniformity, using only so much and such means of sustaining life as will just maintain the needs of the body and their fervour in the worship of God. For them everything is fixed by weight, measure and number. A pound of bread, a pint of drink, two dishes of cabbage and beans. If they sup, the remnants of their former meal are dished up again except that, instead of the two cooked dishes, fresh vegetables, if they are to be had, are served. When they rest on their beds, each of them lies alone and girdled, in habit and tunic in winter and summer. They have no personal property; they do not even talk together; no one takes a step towards anything of its own will. Everything they do is at the motion of the prelate's nod and they are turned aside by a like direction. At table, in procession, at communion and in other liturgical observances, all of them, small and great, young and old, wise and ignorant are subject to one law. Personal standing is merged in the equality of each and all; there is no inequitable mark of exception, except the greater sanctity that is able to put one man above others. The only test of worth is the recognition of the best. The humbler a man is the greater he is among them, the more lowly in his own esteem the more pleasing in the opinion and the judgement of the rest. Women, hawks and dogs, except those ready barkers used to drive away thieves from houses, do not enter the gates of their monastery. By their exceeding love they stifle among them the bane of impatience, and every growth of anger and the smoky emanations of pride, and so, in the words of the *Acts of the Apostles*, by the grace and love of the Holy Spirit they are made 'of one heart and of one soul'.

Well, as I have said, these holy men reached England safely from their monastic wrestling ground across the sea. They set up their huts near Helmsley, the central manor of their protector, Walter Espec, a very notable man and one of the leading barons of King Henry I. The spot was by a powerful stream called the Rye in a broad valley stretching on either side. The name of their little settlement and of the place where it lies was derived from the stream and the valley, Rievaulx. High hills surround the valley, encircling it like a crown. These are clothed by trees of various sorts and maintain in pleasant retreats the privacy of the vale, providing for the monks a kind of second paradise of wooded delight. From the loftiest rocks the waters wind and tumble down to the valley below, and as they make their hasty way through the lesser passages and narrower beds and spread themselves in wider rills, they give out a gentle murmur of soft sound and join together in the sweet notes of a delicious melody. And when the branches of lovely trees rustle and sing together and the leaves flutter gently to the earth, the happy listener is filled increasingly with a glad jubilee of harmonious sound, as so many various things conspire together in such a sweet consent, in music whose every diverse note is equal to the rest. His ears drink in the feast prepared for them, and are satisfied.

Chapter 6

Such was the story – and a true story – which Ailred was told by his friend. At this point he exclaimed, 'And where, oh where, is the way to those angelic men, to these

heavenly places?' 'Don't be disturbed,' said his friend, 'they are close to you, and you know it not. You have only to ask and they can easily be found,' He replied, 'O, how greatly do I desire, how ardently I thirst for the sight of them, and to see for myself what you have told me about that happy place'. 'Go thither,' returned the other, 'but seek first the leave of the archbishop and receive his blessing, and, if you wish, God will satisfy your desire before the sun sets.' Carried away by eager desire for the things to come he hurries to the prelate, obtains his leave and blessing, rushes back to his lodging, mounts his horse, does not stop to go in, and, with the hastiest of farewells to his hosts, speeds his mount he knows not where. But his informant makes him follow behind and, spurring their horses to a gallop, they reach before nightfall the castle of Helmsley, two miles from Rievaulx. There the lord, Walter Espec, the founder of the abbey, gave them a triumphant welcome. They spent the night with him very happily, and as he told him still more about the life of the monks Ailred's spirit burned more and more with inexpressible joy.

Chapter 7

Next morning the lord Walter, accompanied by a few people of the vicinity, goes with him to the monks. Ailred meets the prior, the guest master and the keeper of the gate. They take the young man to prayers, his face washed with tears, his heart consumed in humble confession to his Lord. After prayers they preach the word of God. The power of their talk of spiritual things is almost too great for him to bear. He gives full vent to the outpourings of his breast; the fountain of his tears gushes forth like a deluge flooding the earth. His heart of flesh was so full of pious affections and moist with the dew of continual mercies that it was easier to refuse a smile at urbane jests and honest pleasantries than to restrain his tears at words of admonishment and the talk that edifies. Yet it was not on that day that the calls of the place made him choose it as his home. He returned with the lord Walter Espec to the castle and spent another night there, like the last. After some talk among the company about a number of things they went to bed until the morning star appeared. Then, aroused from sleep, he called to his servants to bridle, saddle and harness the horses and, when all was ready, he said farewell to the most noble Walter and set out on the journey to his lord the King in Scotland. Now he had to pass along the edge of the hill overlooking the valley, where a road led down to the gate of the monastery, and when he reached the spot, still aflame with the heat of the Holy Spirit, that is to say, with the love of the Lord Jesus, he asked one of his servants, whom he called his friend, if he would like to go down to the abbey and learn something more than he had seen the day before. Oh, the mercy of our God, ever to be proclaimed by those who wish to make their home in Christ! Oh, how faithful is our God in clemency and kindness! For, as our father would tell us, if the friend he had asked if he wished to go down to the monastery or not had said 'I have no mind to go,' he himself in that hour would not have gone down with him as he actually did. Take note here of the outshining humility of this gentlest of men, whose own will depended on the will of his servant. God indeed opened the mouth of that servant. He said, 'I am for going down', and what the servant preferred to do the lord decided should be done. So they went down to the monastery of Rievaulx. Today as yesterday the prior, with the guest master, and the keeper of the gate and a great company of the brethren hasten to meet him and do him honour. They have a shrewd suspicion that the will of the visitor, who has come to them again, has been prompted by longing for his well-being; and, since he listens to their words with an eager and unreserved attention, making them his own with tears

as things to be embraced; they are led on to probe his mind with more searching admonitions. I need say no more. He agrees at last to become a monk. They all rejoice and are glad together. There was no more dissembling for him, now that his duty has been made clear. He divided all his goods; he abandoned everything that he had. He kept beside him only the one man of his company who was not unwilling to stay. As he owned to me afterwards, the four days of waiting where he was were like a thousand years, so great was his longing and haste to be taken to the novices' cell. He had no eyes for the light of day; all that time he saw only the horror of night. All the same, during those four days, though he could find small pleasure in the companionship of the monks, he greatly edified the brethren in the guesthouse by the humility with which he prostrated himself at the feet of all, the fervent charity with which he burned to serve them, the wisdom with which he talked to them so effectually of the divine commands.

Chapter 8

When the four days were ended he was borne off to the novice-house; but first he was brought before the whole convent to be examined about his intention, and there, as elsewhere, he moved all to tears by the grace of the replies that proceeded out of his mouth. It is not easy for me to speak of him as he was in the novice-house; for there earth was turned to gold. His teacher in that school still lives, Simon, Abbot of Sartis, a notable monk. Weary with age, he draws nearer and nearer to the prize; yet in the meanwhile let him speak of our dearly beloved father Ailred in the house of the novices. Speak, old man, speak, speak the truth about him, while you are alive to do so. Do not fear the saying 'Praise no man while he is alive, for he is already asleep in the Lord and has gone to heaven.' In truth, he says, he was my companion, not my pupil, and by his assiduity he excelled his teacher in that school. So you, good old man, you, who made him better than yourself, proclaim him as your superior in the good life. Tell us when and where. When? In the days of his young manhood when the heat of the blood so often erases the mind and clouds the feelings and burns away the energy. Where? In the testing place of his noviciate, where a man finds it so hard to stamp out the old and endure the present and make precaution against future vices. But let the old man speak further of what he knew. Let him say or rather I will say what I have heard him tell, not once or twice but seven times and more. 'He was a good man and a man of virtue when still a novice, at the stage when what is old and deep-rooted or new and unexpected are all too often in many an obstacle to virtue. These things in no way held him back even as a novice from virtue. During the time of his training in Christ he excelled all his comrades and fellow-soldiers in humility and glowed in piety. Indeed, it was as you may see a single lamb in a flock of sheep, not any lamb but a little he-lamb, submitting himself to every sheep and in every movement and wriggle of his body paying flattering attentions to all of them. Just so have I watched him attentively wait upon all the novices with whom he lived, abase himself utterly in their ranks, and above human measure in his humanity to the rest. The most remarkable thing in one who exceeded all the other virtues was a charity, which won the victory over himself. Every time he submitted the preference of his own will to the need of another he won this victory. If I were to tell all the occasions when he did this, a sort of miracle, indeed a sort of martyrdom-for it is a martyrdom and a very great and outstanding one to silence one's soul for a brother's sake, as it is written, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life (*animam*) for his friends," for this is indeed to lay down one's soul for a neighbour-if, I say, I were to set out all the occasions on which he fulfilled this, lack of time would impose

silence upon me before I had reckoned them'. But, as I am in much haste, I pass much by, and deliberately consign to oblivion some of that infinite detail, lest by piling up the riches in too long a work I should weary the reader. So let us make Ailred a monk forthwith.

Chapter 9

When a whole year had passed by in the cell where the tyros of Christ are proven, he confirmed his dedication of himself by his written profession before the altar in the church in the presence of all, as the blessed Benedict commands. There he is vested in the sacred robe, that is the habit sanctified by the Abbot's blessing, and henceforth is regarded as a member of the monastic body. And, as he was, like David, somewhat 'ruddy and withal of a beautiful countenance and goodly to look to', he gave great delight to the eyes of those who looked upon him. Those early days of his warfare he adorned with the three marks of the monastic life, holy contemplation, sincere prayer and honest toil. Never was he to be found unengaged in one or other of these three things, and he delighted in them 'as all in riches.' Either he was meditating on the divine law or beseeching his God or doing some profitable task. First let us see him in the first duty and show forth the objects of his meditation.

Chapters 10-13

These tell of Ailred's life as a monk, at prayer, work, and meditation.

Chapter 14

While Ailred so prospered in the monastic life his abbot, the lord William, observing his labour and solicitude for the good, determined to admit him to the intimacies of his counsel and to the discussion of matters closely affecting the household of Rievaulx. He discovered that Ailred was ten times as wise and prudent as he had supposed, and that he revealed an unexpected ease in the solution of hard, difficult and important problems. The venerable William had no fears about the good issue if Ailred had had early cognisance of a case; for, made aware of the facts, he was like a second Daniel in disentangling cases and coming to a prudent decision. When the Abbot sent him to Rome on the famous case of the dissension at York he was received so graciously by the Lord Pope, and expounded the business and brought it to conclusion with such energy, that the esteem and admiration which he won after his return was widespread. It was then that the lord William put him in charge of the novices, to make them worthy vessels of God and acceptable to the Order and even examples of perfection to those who truly yearn to excel as patterns of goodness. This he did and made good monks of them; some are still alive to testify, as much by the sweetness of their character as by the living voice to his praiseworthy industry. Their manner of life is such that they seem to bear blossoms more dazzling white than the white flowers around them and reveal a yet greater loveliness of incomparable grace. To show by one instance the compassion in his heart and his perfection in the religious life, let those hear who wish to hear what he did, or rather what God, working through him, did, for a certain brother.

Chapter 15

The secular clerk who did not take easily to the monastic life.

Chapter 16

Ailred's ascetic practices

Chapters 17-18
Ailred's writings and intellectual qualities

Chapter 19

The house of Rievaulx conceived a third daughter in her womb and showed signs that the time of her labour was drawing near. And when she gave birth, the midwives chose Ailred as bearer and nurse of the latest lusty addition to the family, declaring that, nourished by the milk of his solicitude, it would quickly grow into a stout child. And so it was. How? The brethren sent from Rievaulx to a place in Lindsey, twenty miles from the royal city of Lincoln, elected him as their abbot.

Chapter 20

After his arrival with them in this place he rapidly and powerfully increased by the grace of Jesus Christ the number of the brethren. The abbey has two names - one, Saint Laurence, from the name of the saint to which the church of the place where the abbey was built was formerly dedicated (the church is still there), the other Revesby, the name of the township. In this place the holy father made miraculous progress. As he sweats in exhausting and endless labours on behalf of his tender little flock, he is comforted by God and made glad by His manifold blessing. His fame runs through the whole countryside. Bishop, earls, barons venerate the man and the place itself, and in their reverence and affection load it with possessions, heap gifts upon it and defend it by their peace and protection. The bishop orders him to preach to the clergy in their local synods and he does so; to bring priests to a better way of life, as he does not fail to do; to accept grants of land from knights in generous free-alms, and he obeys, since he had realised that in this unsettled time such gifts profited knights and monks alike, for in those days it was hard for any to lead the good life unless they were monks or members of some religious order, so disturbed and chaotic was the land, reduced almost to a desert by the malice, slaughters and harryings of evil men. And so he desired that that land, for which almost all men were fighting to the death, should pass into the hands of the monks for their good; and he knew that to give what they had helped the possessors of their goods to their salvation, and that, if they did not give, they might well lose both life and goods without any payment in return. And so the servant of the Lord, greatly beloved by all in the province, indeed by the whole realm and most of all by the king, made his house rich and fruitful. Within, the religious life waxed every hour and grew day by day; without, possessions increased and gave a regular return in money and means for all kinds of equipment. For God was in that house and the Lord blessed it greatly. There was no sterility there, for our Jacob begat twins by both Leah and Rachel, as he preached fear and justice to the administrative staff and impressed the duties of prayer and love upon the contemplatives in the cloister, saying to the former, 'Fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want in them that fear Him,' and to the latter, 'They that dwell in Thy house, O lord, shall always be praising Thee.' And here I must write something about the miracles that God wrought there through his servant Ailred.

Chapters 21-23
Miracle stories

Chapter 24

While the venerable father Ailred shone in the magnificent radiance of these and many other miracles and virtues, death, the last enemy, ended the life on earth of William, abbot of Rievaulx. His life indeed is to be blessed. From him, as from an inexhaustible well, streams of the religious life have watered those who have come after him, and to this day flow and overflow in full measure in the house of Rievaulx and in her daughters.

Chapter 25

Maurice succeeded him, a man of great sanctity and of outstanding judgement, befitting one who had from his boyhood drunk the wine of spiritual gladness in the cloister at Durham, and, refreshed by the bread of Cuthbert, had climbed so far as to be called by his companions a second Bede; and truly in his day by his pre-eminence in both life and learning he alone could be compared with Bede. I myself have seen this man and knew him well, and I know how few men of his quality the world of mortal men contains. But, irked by the uneasy burdens of pastoral care, he resigned his stewardship after two years and preferred to resume his seat in the cloister.

Chapter 26

Ailred was duly chosen by the brethren in his place, and now began to shine more brightly than ever. Like the sun at noonday he spread still more widely the clearness of his light. There are some who think that ambition brought him to the headship of the house. Every good man knows that this is false. That his virtue provoked jealous men to lie is not surprising – virtue never fails to stir envy – and how many jealous busybodies this man of peace had to endure! Some few of them are still alive. And in his life he stilled his monsters; for the malignant and misguided men who rose up against him were indeed as monsters...

Chapters 27-28

Ailred's prophecies

Chapter 29

He turned the house of Rievaulx into a stronghold for the sustaining of the weak, the nourishment of the strong and whole. It was the home of piety and peace, the abode of perfect love of God and neighbour. Who was there, however despised and rejected, who did not find in it a place of rest? Whoever came there in his weakness and did not find a loving father in Ailred and timely comforters in the brethren? When was anyone, feeble in body and character, ever expelled from the house, unless his iniquity was an offence to the community or had destroyed all hope of his salvation? Hence it was that monks in need of mercy and compassion flocked to Rievaulx from foreign peoples and from the far ends of the earth, that there in very truth they might find peace and the holiness without which no man shall see God. And so wanderers in the world to whom no house of religion gave entrance, came to Rievaulx, the mother of mercy, and found the gates open, and entered by them freely, giving thanks unto their lord. If any one of them in later days had taken it upon himself to reprove in angry commotion some silly behaviour, Ailred would say, 'Do not, brother, do not kill the soul for which Christ died, do not drive away our glory from this house. Remember that we are sojourners like our fathers, and that it is the singular and supreme glory of the house of Rievaulx that above all else it teaches tolerance of the infirm and

compassion with others in their necessities. And this is the testimony of our consciences, that this house is a holy place because it generates sons who are peacemakers. All', he would continue', whether weak or strong, should find in Rievaulx a haunt of peace and there, like the fish in the broad seas, possess the welcome, happy, spacious peace of charity.

Chapter 30

I must not omit to mention the extent to which this holy mansion, the house of Rievaulx, grew under the hand of the venerable father. He doubled all things in it, monks, *conversi*, laymen, farms, lands, and every kind of equipment; indeed he trebled the intensity of the monastic life and its charity. On feast days you might see the church crowded with the brethren like bees in a hive, unable to move forward because of the multitude, clustered together, rather, and compacted into one angelic body. Hence it was that the father left behind him at Rievaulx when he returned to Christ, one hundred and forty monks and five hundred *conversi* and laymen. His material legacy was great enough, under prudent management, to feed and clothe a still greater number, and to leave something for his successors.

Chapter 31 – end

Rievaulx under Ailred. Ailred's writings. His death.

Charter of William de Roumare for Revesby Abbey

Translation:

Charter of William de Roumare for the foundation of the abbey of St Lawrence of Revesby.

To the king of England, archbishops, bishops, abbots, and all the clergy, to earls and barons, and to all the sons of the holy mother church, William de Roumare, earl of Lincoln, and William his son, and Hawise his countess, greetings. Know that we have given and conceded to God and St Mary and the monks of Rievaulx into the hands of William the abbot, for the construction of an abbey of the Cistercian order, for our souls and for the souls of our fathers and mothers, and all our ancestors and successors, the whole land of Revesby, and Thoresby and Schicthesbia with all their appurtenances, fully, in wood and plain, in meadows and waters, in fisheries and marshes, by their boundaries, free and quit from all customs and pleas and causes and from all earthly service in perpetuity, well and honourably. And because this land is not of my own demesne, I have granted an exchange to the men who hold it in fee and hereditiy, that is, to Lambert nephew of Bristive and his heir, for two carucates of land in Revesby, and for those things which belong to the two carucates, two carucates in Miningesbia with the countrymen living there, for the service of one quarter of a knight's fee as he had [i.e., owed] in Revesby. And to Robert Briwere and his heir, for two carucates in Schithesbia and Thoresby and Revesby and those things belonging to the two carucates (all of which he held of me for the service of one knight), one carucate and half a bovate in Austeriales, and the countrymen living there for the service of a quarter of a knight. And to Hugh the baker and William his brother I have given for two carucates in Thoresby and those things which belong to them, which they hold for bakery service, 13 bovates in Miningisbia and the church with its appurtenances for the service of half a knight. And to Ivo the priest of Thoresby I have given in exchange for his church of Thoresby the church of Kirkby with its appurtenances and the toft by the cemetery.

.....

To the country men (rustici) remaining in Schicthesbia and Thoresby and Revesby who wish to receive land I have given an exchange. To others I have given permission to leave, with all their possessions, without injury.

There follow two lists. The first is headed These are the names of those who remained and received lands of me. There are 5 men named. The second list is headed And these are the names of those who sought and received their liberty. There are 9 men named from Revesby, 11 from Stichesby, and 10 from Thoresby.

The document is witnessed by Alexander, bishop of Lincoln, one archdeacon and several lay persons.

There are two other foundation charters.

The writings of Ailred of Rievaulx

Chronology

1142-3 Speculum Caritatis (the Mirror of Love); written at the command of St Bernard while Ailred was novice-master at Rievaulx.

1152-3 Genealogia Regum Anglorum (Genealogy of the Kings of England), addressed to Duke Henry of Normandy (later Henry II); contains a eulogy on King David I, recently dead.

1154-60 Life of St Ninian

1155 Treatise on the saints of Hexham, probably written for the occasion of their translation on 3 March 1155.

1155-7 De Bello Standardi (Tract on the Battle of the Standard, 1138); written after the death of Walter Espec, whom tradition says entered the abbey of Rievaulx and died there as a monk c. 1155.

1155-63 During these years was writing the sermons on Isaiah, the De Spirituali Amicitia (On Spiritual Friendship) and De Institutione Inclusarum (On the institution of recluses), the last of these written for his sister who was a nun.

1163 Vita Confessoris, the life of Edward the Confessor, written at the request of a kinsman of Ailred, Laurence, abbot of Westminster, for the translation of Edward the Confessor.

1163-4 Publication of the sermons on Isaiah.

1165-6 De Anima (On the Soul)

No longer extant:

The letters of Ailred, begun after his visit to Rome in 1142; there was a collection of his letters - over 300 in number - still at Rievaulx in the fifteenth century.

the lusts of the flesh are quietened, or rather absorbed by the love of God, there is nothing hard in a life of virtue, because the soul has nothing to disturb it any more that cannot be dissolved in love.

To control the pleasures of the eyes and ears must necessitate a certain amount of effort on the part of those who have not wholly accepted the yoke of Christ. For where bad habits have been already formed, the Lord's yoke is not found to be a light burden. On the contrary, it may seem very hard indeed, since it implies the contempt of all pleasures. But in fact the liberty which is bestowed on those who know how to despise pleasures, is quite as great as the delights that these vanities afford to those who still enjoy them.

I shall not, however, say anything here about the pleasures of the sense of smell, because, although there are plenty of people who do abuse this sense, monks are unlikely to find much trouble in losing the taste for sweet scents and smells that are pleasant.

The pleasures of hearing

SINCE we are not speaking here of those who are openly given to bad ways, I shall consider those who use religion as a pretext for justifying the pleasures which our ears may enjoy. Under the old dispensation musical instruments were allowed, since they were figures of the truth yet to come. But now that the Church has outgrown the stage of types and figures, what are we doing, I often wonder, with the thunder of organ music, the clash of cymbals, and elaborate part-settings for different voices? We hear monks doing all sorts of ridiculous things with their voices, plaguing us with womanish falsettos, spavined bleating and

tremolos. I myself have seen monks with open mouths, not so much singing, as doing ludicrous feats of breathing, so that they looked as if they were in their last agony or lost in rapture. I have even seen them waving their arms about, beating time to the music, and contorting their bodies in all directions. And they honestly do this in the name of religion, for they think that they are giving God a greater honour than if they sang without all this fuss. The simple folk who hear them may well be impressed by the organ music, but they cannot help laughing as they see such a ridiculous show going on in the choir. They are in fact more likely to think that they are watching a stage play than praying in church. There is no awe here before the dread majesty of God, and no respect for the holy table at which Christ is lapped in linen and His most precious blood poured out, where heaven opens and angels throng about us, bringing earth and heaven together. The practices that the holy fathers of old ordered and laid down for their simple people, that they might be moved to devotion and the love of God, have become nothing but an excuse for frivolous pleasure, and the mere sound of singing is preferred to the meaning of the words that are sung.

Sense and sound together are meant to stir us to devotion, and therefore the sound of our music must be sober and moderate. It must keep within its appointed bounds and not trespass on the words, so that our minds are distracted from their meaning. Saint Augustine admits that our souls may well be drawn to devotion through hearing songs sung, but he insists that if we find more joy in the sound than in the sense of what is sung, we are none the better off for it.⁷² And again he says that if he felt he was getting more pleasure from the tune than from the words, he would feel that he sinned gravely, and would rather not hear the singers at all.

If anyone who has turned his back on the foolish vanities of which we are speaking, should be tempted to return to

From: Ailred of Rievaulx, *Speculum Caritatis*.

them, and should prefer these barbarous contortions and technician's refinements to the simple and true mode of singing laid down by Augustine, Ambrose and Gregory, it is easy enough to see how the conflict between two such contrary tastes comes about. It is worldly concupiscence—not the yoke of charity—that irks him.

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The wandering of the eyes

It is now time to say something about the lust of the eyes, which the holy fathers call curiosity or inquisitiveness, for it is not merely an external vice. It has its inner aspect too. As regards the external aspect, to start with, this covers the pleasures of those superficial attractions that the eyes delight in—the shape of things, their colour, the delicacy of their workmanship—in painting, sculpture, wrought vessels, clothes and shoes, and in all that is over and above basic necessity. The lover of this world is drawn into fleshly pleasure by such delights of the eyes.

When we are attracted to the outward show of things that are made with men's hands, we are leaving behind our Maker and bringing to nought the souls which are of His making. Thus there is no place at all in monasteries for the sculpture and painting that you find in other places—pictures and carvings, for instances, of cranes and hares, of harts and does, ravens and magpies. These are not the embellishments that Antony and Macarius sought in their desert hermitages; they are simply the ornaments of silly women. They are absolutely irreconcilable with monastic poverty; they are food for wandering eyes. And for the man who has bent his back to the yoke of divine love and found Jesus' company within his own soul, what use is there

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for all the external pomps and shows that others love? Having once accepted the limitations of a life of bare necessity, he takes up with others of like mind, and shuns any sort of habitation that is too large or extravagantly vaulted—a wicked waste of space and materials. He is happy enough to say his prayers in a little chapel of rough, unpolished stone, where there is nothing carved or painted to distract the eye; no fine hangings, no marble pavements, no murals that depict ancient history or even scenes from Holy Scripture; no blaze of candles, no glittering of golden vessels. All such things will seem to have become loathsome to him; and to be in a place where such things are, will make him feel like one expelled from paradise and imprisoned in a dungeon of filth and squalor. He sees things as Saint Paul saw them, when he said that we look not at the things which are seen but at those which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but those which are not seen are eternal.⁷⁰

This is the way that we learn to be meek and humble of heart, to find the hidden sweetness that is signified in the words, *All the glory of the king's daughter is within.*⁸⁰ All of us should examine our own lives, and so know what we are without having to judge ourselves by comparison with others.⁸¹ And if in this way we are not to glory in other men, how much less can we have glory in objects that are dumb and senseless like gold and stone?

As to curiosity in its inward aspect, here we have to consider three things. Firstly there is the delight that men take in useless or even dangerous knowledge. Then there is the pleasure that we may be tempted to find in other people's lives, not for the sake of imitating their virtues but for criticizing their faults or envying them their worldly goods, or simply for the sake of satisfying idle curiosity. And lastly there is what we might call a general disturbance and preoccupation with the things of the world that results

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from all this. No little vexation of spirit is caused both to those who are thus immoderately occupied in vanities, and to those who would try to dissuade them from it. Often we meet with people who have given their minds to the empty philosophy of this world, and who are in the habit of reading the gospels in the same way that they read Virgil, studying Horace along with the prophets, and Cicero as if he were no different from Saint Paul. Such people are likely to acquire a taste for versifying, making up love songs and invectives—all of which things are, of course, forbidden by the Rule because they are the happy hunting ground for all sorts of vicious and lascivious thoughts, for quarrels and many kinds of foolishness. These make a man, in the words of Elihu, act as if he had a bellyful of new wine which needs vent and which will burst the vessels into which it is put.⁸² And when a man who has been intent all day on empty show and listening to gossip, recollects himself at last, it is only to find that he has brought a host of frivolous images to his soul, which trouble his conscience and even drive away his sleep with fevered dreams. Thus his prayers are constantly interrupted by thoughts of adventures and battles, and knights and kings.

And there is yet another, a more evil type of curiosity, which belongs especially to those who have some degree of virtue. I mean the temptation to prove their worth by working miracles, which is simply tempting God, and was prohibited in the law of Moses. *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*,⁸³ we read, and Saint Paul says the same: *Neither let us tempt Christ*.⁸⁴ This horrible vice may bring about a dreadful punishment, for instance if the miracle worker does not achieve what he had hoped for and should commit the sin of despair through his disappointment, or should incur the sacrilege of blasphemy.

Now we come to the third branch of the evil root which the Apostle calls the pride of life. There are many kinds of pride, but here we shall consider only two of them: firstly the love of praise, and secondly the desire to lord it over others. And who shall say how much trouble these can give, good Lord? When, for instance, I am upset by a correction or an insult, or by some detraction or contradiction, or if I am downcast by sadness, I shall, when I look for the cause of this, find it deeply hidden away in the lowest roots of vanity. Because of this deep-seated vanity, I have thought great things of myself, and am now downcast because I see that my self-estimate was completely false. And yet I have no wish to be corrected or blamed. All I wish for is praise or honour from the lips of all my acquaintances.

When the soul is infected by this poison, we quite often think to ourselves that other people esteem us holy, and as soon as we see that we are mistaken even in this, we give way to depression and misery. And we are always on the look-out so as to have the first place wherever we sit in company, to receive the first greeting, and to have our opinion sought first. The more our whims are pandered to, the more we like it, and the more furious we become when our wishes are denied.

THE degree to which the soul may be corrupted by the lust for power can be told only by those who have known it themselves, and who have subsequently been delivered from

FOUNDERS OF MONASTERIES IN WALES.

Monastery	Patron	Mother-house	Date
Brecon	Bernard of Neufmarché	Battle	about 1110
Cardiff	Robert Fitz Hamon	Tewkesbury	1106
Carmarthen	Henry I	Battle	about 1110
Chepstow	William Fitzosbern	Cormeilles (France)	1071
Cydweli	Roger, bishop of Salisbury	Sherborne	1114
Ewenni	Maurice of London	Gloucester	1141
Llanbadarn Fawr	Gilbert Fitz Richard	Gloucester	1116-7
Pembroke	Arnulf of Montgomery	St Martin, Sééz (France)	about 1098

(a) Benedictine houses.

(b) Cistercian houses

Monastery	Patron	Mother-house	Date
Whitland	John of Torrington	Clairvaux (France)	1140
Cwm-hir	Cadwallon ap Madog	Whitland	1176
Strata Florida	Rhys ap Gruffudd	Whitland	1184
Strata Marcella	Owain Cyfeiliog	Whitland	1170
Llantarnam	Hywel ap Iorwerth	Strata Florida	about 1179
Aberconwy	Llywelyn the Great	Strata Florida	1186
Cymer	Llywelyn the Great	Cwm-hir	1199
Valle Crucis	Madog ap Gruffudd	Strata Marcella	1200

Monastery	Patron	Mother-house	Date
Grace Dieu Margam	John of Monmouth	Dore (Herefordshire)	1226
	Robert, earl of Gloucester	Clairvaux (France)	1147
Neath	Richard de Granville	Savigny (France)	1130
Tintern	Walter Fitz Richard	L'Aumône (France)	1131

STRATA FLORIDA ABBEY, CEREDIGION

Below are two sources for the foundation and history of Strata Florida.

(A) Extracts from the *Brut y Tywysogion*, or Chronicle of the Welsh princes. This is a record of events in the history of Wales from the time of Cadwaladr ap Cadwallon, who, according to the Chronicle, died in 681 or 682, to the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd in 1282. Uncertainty exists as to the actual authorship of the *Brut*, but many historians believe that it was compiled at Strata Florida. Certainly there are frequent references to the abbey.

1164 In that year through the will of God and at the instigation of the Holy Spirit, a community of monks came to the place called Strata Florida.....

1185 ...In that year died Dafydd, abbot of Strata Florida...

1186 ...In that year, about the month of July, a community of monks went from Strata Florida to Rhedynog Felen in Gwynedd. And then died Peter, abbot of Clairvaux.

1191...And Owain ap Rhys died at Strata Florida...

1201 ...In that year the community of Strata Florida went to the new church on the eve of Whit Sunday after it had been nobly and handsomely built ... and in that year died Gruffydd...son to the Lord Rhys and a prince of Wales by right and inheritance, after assuming the habit of the Order at Strata Florida, and there he was honorably buried.

1204 ...Hywel son of Lord Rhys the Great was slain in Cemmaes through treachery by the men of Maelgwn his brother; and he died after he had assumed the habit of the Order of Strata Florida, and he was honorably buried in the same grave as Gruffydd his brother.

(B) Extract from the 'foundation charter' of the Lord Rhys, 1184

Be it known to all that I, Rhys, prince of South Wales, have begun the task of building the venerable abbey called Strat-fflur; since its inception I have loved and cherished it, increased its estates and possessions and enlarged them as much as I could, with the assistance of the Lord, granting to it with a devout mind for the cure of my soul and the souls of my predecessors and successors, pasture, arable, and mountain land for the grazing of animals, as much as was fitting, and the same gift which I have conferred on the said monastery I confirm again in this year of 1184...Also my three sons, Gruffydd, Rhys and Maredudd have at the same time, in the same place, conferred the same gift upon the abbot of Strat-fflur...

SOME RULINGS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER ON ECONOMIC MATTERS

1157 [19]

It is not allowed to anyone to sell tanned hides, either those which we or other people produce, nor wool which we have bought.

1181 [5]

If a father abbot finds that a daughter house to be bound by very great debts he is – unless he knows there to be good cause – to punish the abbot of that place and his officials very severely and by any means to prevent them from increasing their debts.

1181 [10]

If it is necessary, wool may be sold in advance, but no more than one year in advance.

1182 [9]

It is known that through excess debt not only danger but also ruin threatens many of our monasteries. For this reason we lay down that those who owe more than the sum of 50 marks shall not buy lands, nor erect new buildings, unless there is urgent need and then with the assent of the father abbots.

1188 [10]

It is known that not only danger but also ruin threatens many of our monasteries through excess debt. For this reason we lay down that as long as an abbot shall owe more than the sum of 50 marks he shall refrain from buying lands, and erecting buildings, unless by chance the building can be carried out or purchase made through alms given especially for this purpose without damage to the house, or through the sale of lands.

1188 [14]

It is known that through excess debt not only danger but also ruin threatens many of the monasteries of our order. For this reason we lay down that whoever is in debt to the tune of more than 50 marks shall from now on refrain from the purchase of lands and from constructing buildings, unless by chance alms have been given to them for these uses; or if another possession has been sold so that the purchase or building can be completed.

1191 [42]

In order to temper cupidity in our order and the reputation for always acquiring things – by which we ought to be repelled – we propose firmly that we should completely abstain from now on from any purchase of lands, possessions and moveable goods.

1208 [5]

Concerning land that shall be less useful or so remote that they cannot usefully be cultivated, the General Chapter thus declares that it is allowed to those that have such lands to lease them or otherwise deal with them as they can.

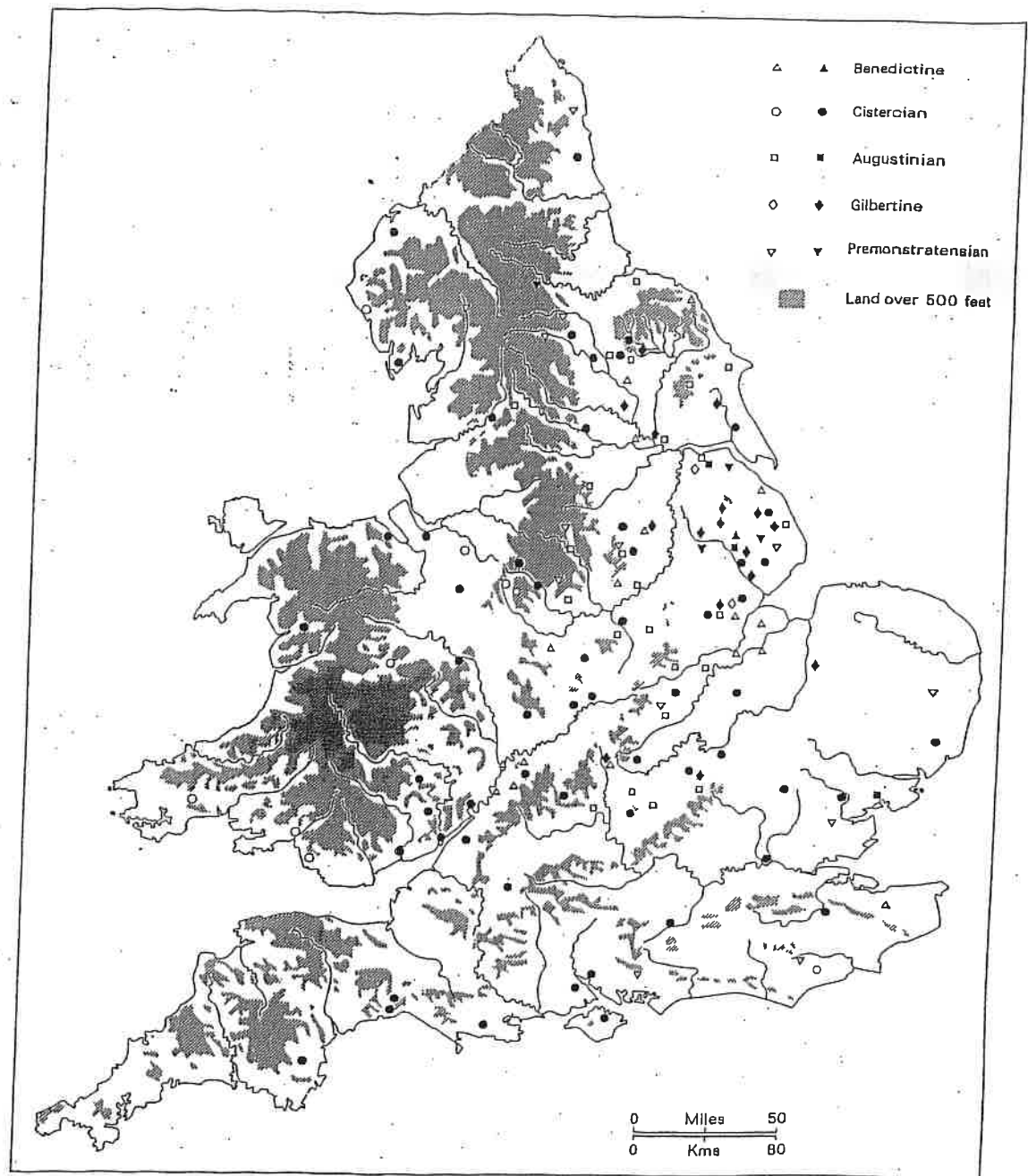


FIG. 12

Religious houses with wool for sale according to F. B. Pegolotti (ca. 1300). The solid symbols represent houses marketing wool in the usual three grades and with quotations for at least two.

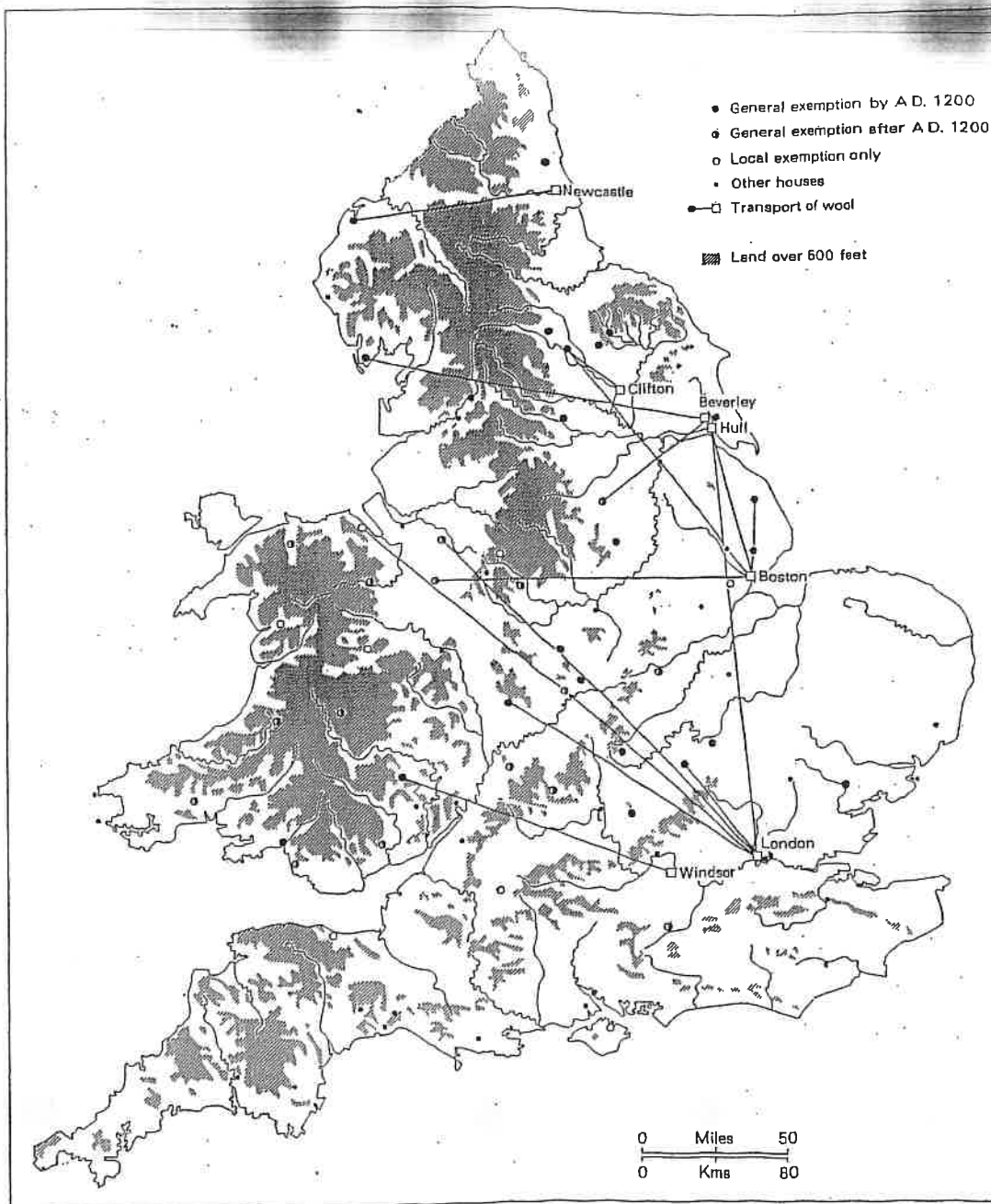


FIG. 17

Cistercian houses with toll exemptions and/or transporting wool (Appendices 6 and 7).

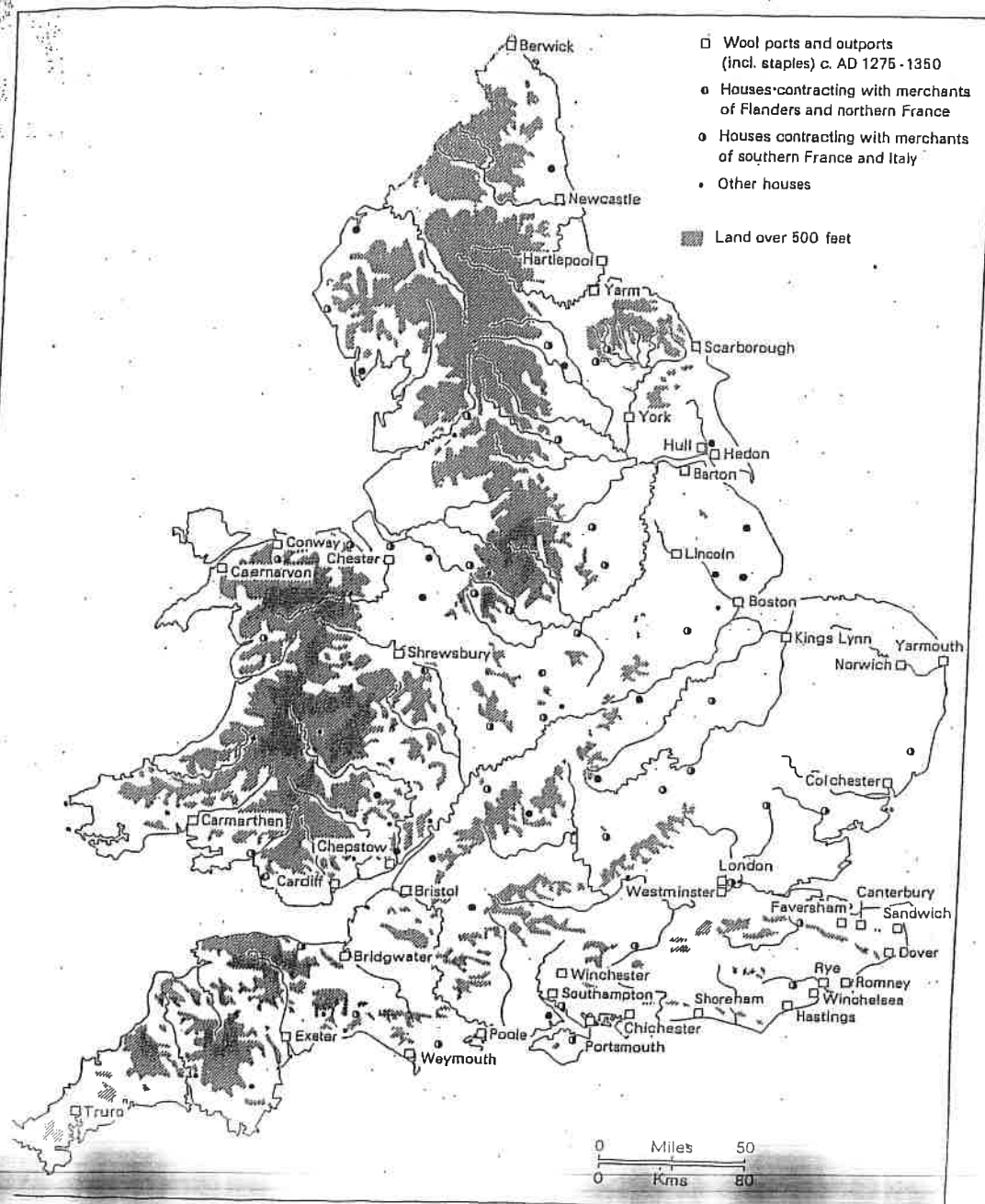


FIG. 19

Cistercian houses contracting with foreign wool merchants (Appendix 10)
and the distribution of the chief wool-exporting ports.