

Chapter 4

THE SUREST ROAD TO HEAVEN: THE COMING OF THE CISTERCIANS

The Cistercian order was undoubtedly the most successful of all the great monastic experiments of the twelfth century. For fifteen years, from 1098 to 1113, Cîteaux showed no signs of outshining other reformed houses which grew from a desire for a life of poverty and a more primitive monastic observance. In 1113, however, began the great years of expansion: the first daughter house of La Ferté (1113) was followed by Pontigny (1114), Clairvaux (1115), and Morimond (1115). By 1152 its family throughout Europe numbered around 340 abbeys. It was Clairvaux under perhaps the most famous of all Cistercians, St Bernard, which was to be the mainspring of expansion in Yorkshire. Although the chronology of the creation of a distinctive Cistercian identity through the *statuta* of the order remains a subject of debate, it is certain that by the time the Cistercians settled in Yorkshire the regulations for the process of foundation were well established. Before a site was occupied it had to be inspected to ensure that it was adequate, and that it was remote, ‘non in civitatibus, nec in castellis aut in villis, sed in locis a frequentia populi semotis’ (‘not in cities, nor in castles nor in vills, but in places far from those where people gather’).¹ Official approval for a new house would be followed by the construction of certain rudimentary buildings, an oratory, refectory, dormitory, guest house, and gatehouse; and the provision of certain books.² The buildings could then be occupied by twelve monks and an abbot. The endowments for a new house would be expected to conform to certain requirements and not include revenue from *spiritualia* (churches and tithes), vills, labour services, manorial revenues, and mills.³

¹ *EP*, p. 78; enshrined in *capitula*, p. 121. Holdsworth (‘Early Cistercian legislation’, in Norton and Park, *Cistercian Art and Architecture*) dates the *capitulum* to between 1098 and c. 1100; see also Christopher Norton, ‘Table of Cistercian legislation on art and architecture’, *ibid.*, p. 318.

² *Capitula*, p. 121. Dated by Holdsworth (‘Early Cistercian legislation’) to between 1098 and 1113; see also Norton, ‘Table of Cistercian legislation’, in Norton and Park, *Cistercian Art and Architecture*, pp. 318–20.

³ *EP*, pp. 77–8; enshrined in *Capitula*, p. 124.

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Some time in the summer of 1131 a group of men arrived at the court of Henry I of England, and presented the king with a letter from Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux:

In terra vestra tenetur praeda Domini mei atque vestri, et illa praeda, pro qua maluit mori quam carere illa. Ego eam sequi disposui, et mittere de nostra militia, qui in manu valida, si vobis non displicet, requirant, recuperent et reducant. Et nunc huius rei gratia praemisi hos quos presentes cernitis exploratores, qui esse rei indagent sagaciter, renuntientque fideliter. Assistite eis tanquam nuntiis Domini vestri, et in ipsius feudum vestrum deservite.⁴

(In your land there is booty of my lord and your lord, booty which he has preferred to die for rather than lose. I have proposed to seize it, and to send men from our army who will, if it is not displeasing to you, claim it, recover it, and restore it with a strong hand. For this purpose I have sent these men whom you see before you to reconnoitre. They will investigate the situation carefully and report back to me faithfully. Help them as messengers of your lord, and in their persons fulfil your duties as a vassal.)

This terse command is the only strictly contemporary source for the coming of the Cistercian monks to Yorkshire, and its brevity masks what must have been a series of complex negotiations; it is this prehistory of monastic foundations which is the most difficult phase to recover. The north of England was not unknown territory to Bernard, for before the Cistercians were sent from Clairvaux to Yorkshire there had been communication in the other direction. The monk William who led the colony to Rievaulx as its first abbot was a Yorkshireman who had entered the monastic life at Clairvaux and as early as 1119 had been Bernard's secretary.⁵ Richard, later to be abbot of Fountains, was another Yorkshireman to become a monk at Clairvaux, as was Henry Murdac, master of the schools, who succumbed to Bernard's persuasion that 'woods and stones will teach you what you can never hear from any master'.⁶ It is clear, therefore, that Bernard would have known of the north, and that its terrain and scattered population made it ideal Cistercian territory. Moreover, a network of communication at a high political level also existed. The Cistercians were careful not to offend the sensibilities of local bishops, and requested their consent before settling in their dioceses.⁷ Archbishop Thurstan, therefore, must have been

⁴ *PL*, 182, cols. 224–5 (letter 92); modified translation from *The Letters of St Bernard of Clairvaux*, ed. and transl. B. Scott James (London, 1953), no. 95.

⁵ Scribe of letter 1, written to Bernard's nephew, Robert of Châtillon.

⁶ *Letters of St Bernard*, no. 107. Thomas, provost of Beverley, was less inclined to be moved, and resisted Bernard's rhetoric: *ibid.*, nos. 108–9.

⁷ *CCP*, p. 89. For what happened when one Devon community failed to seek permission see C. J. Holdsworth, 'The Cistercians in Devon', in *Studies in Medieval History presented to R. Allen Brown*, ed. C. Harper-Bill, C. J. Holdsworth, and J. Nelson (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 179–91 (p. 179).

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consulted about the foundation. Thurstan had met Bernard at the Council of Reims in 1119, and indeed had been present at Saulieu when Calixtus II ratified the Cistercian constitution in December of that year; from the early days of the order, therefore, he had been aware of its aspirations and its strengths.⁸ Moreover the arrival of the monks at court is unlikely to have been the first time that Henry I had been aware of the project. Bernard had had contacts with Henry: for a year or two since the double election to the papacy Bernard had set himself as the advocate of Innocent II – it was this event which gave him his European status – and Bernard it was who persuaded Henry to recognize Innocent.

The coming of the Cistercians to Yorkshire was, it must be remembered, the result of Cistercian initiative, and the conditions for their coming were negotiated at the highest political and ecclesiastical level. What is less clear is when Walter Espec became involved. As we have seen, the Cistercian statutes came to demand that before a site was occupied it had to be provided with rudimentary buildings.⁹ Although we cannot be certain at what date this was formally enshrined in the statutes of the order, we can be confident that Bernard had a destination in mind when he dispatched the colony, and that Walter Espec, founder of Rievaulx, must have been a party to the scheme at an early stage. The *Narratio de fundatione* of Fountains, which admittedly treats the foundation of Rievaulx only as a prologue to momentous events at York, does not mention him at all, but merely states that the monks were sent from Clairvaux ‘seeking fruit among that people’ (*querens fructum in gente illa*). John of Hexham records that Walter Espec ‘monachos . . . directos a Bernardo abbate Clarevallens recepit et posuit in solitudine Blachoumos’ (‘received the monks sent by Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux, and placed them in the solitude of Blachoumos’).¹⁰ Of the twelfth-century sources only William of Newburgh states that Espec issued a direct invitation, and his version probably represents the sequence of events:

a nobili viro Waltero Espec invitati, et a felicis memoriae abbate Bernardo directi, monachi Clarevallenses in Eboracensem provinciam venerant, et in loco qui nunc dicitur Rievallis tunc autem locus erat horroris et vastae solitudinis, mansionem acceperant, praefato viro tradente, et venerabili Turstino episcopalem cum affectu paterno favorem praebente.¹¹

(Invited by the noble man Walter Espec, and sent by Abbot Bernard of blessed memory, monks of Clairvaux came to the province of York, and received a dwelling from the aforesaid man in the place which is now called Rievaulx, and

⁸ Nicholl, *Thurstan*, p. 71.

⁹ *Capitula*, p. 121.

¹⁰ *Memorials of Fountains*, I, 3; Symeon, *Opera*, II, 285.

¹¹ Newburgh, *Historia*, I, 50.

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which was then a place of terror and solitary waste, the venerable Thurstan affording them favour with paternal affection.)

Walter Espec was known to Thurstan as the founder of Augustinian Kirkham, and it may well have been the archbishop who introduced him to Cistercian monasticism, suggested to him the possibility of founding a Cistercian house, and acted as an intermediary in the negotiations. Bernard would not have risked dispatching a group of monks before he was certain that there was a patron to provide lands and a site. The phrase in Bernard's letter 'hos quos praesentes cernistis exploratores qui esse rei indagent sagaciter' suggests that there was an advance party, comprising William and others, who inspected the site offered by Walter Espec before advising Bernard that the proposed endowment would sustain the colony. This was, as Nicholl so well described it, a 'well-planned expedition organised from Clairvaux with the detailed precision of a military operation'.¹²

After leaving the court the Clairvaux monks journeyed north, where they spent some time in York before taking occupation of the site at Rievaulx, on the edge of the North Yorkshire Moors, the formal foundation of which was recorded at the General Chapter as 5 March 1132.¹³ Compared to his lavish endowment of Kirkham the resources which Espec placed at the disposal of the Cistercians were not generous, comprising some nine carucates of moorland, to which was later (1145) added the moorland of Bilsdale.¹⁴ However, in terms of its isolation the endowment suited Cistercian requirements well. There is no evidence that the site was previously occupied, and although there may have been some settlement on what comprised the initial endowment of the abbey at Griff and 'Tilleston' (now Stilton's Farm) it is possible that this had been depopulated following the harrying of the north by the armies of the Conqueror and still not resettled. In many ways Rievaulx was a textbook Cistercian foundation, although the abbey still lay close enough to Walter Espec's castle of Helmsley for him and his guests to ride out to view it.¹⁵

¹² Nicholl, *Thurstan*, p. 154.

¹³ P. L. Jansschek, *Originum Cisterciensium* (Vienna, 1877), pp. 22–3; see also Ailred of Rievaulx, *Relatio de standardo*, in *Chron. Stephen*, III, 184; John of Hexham, in Symeon, *Opera*, II, 285. The *Historia fundationis* of Byland and Jervaulx records how, at the General Chapter, 'nomen abbatiae Jorevall inter ceteras abbatias hoc anno fundatas in tabula redigatur' ('the name of the abbey of Jervaulx was entered on the list among the other abbeys founded in that year') (*Mon. Ang.*, v, 571). This provided a record of the seniority of abbots: C. Holdsworth, 'The church', in E. King (ed.), *The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 207–29 (p. 222).

¹⁴ *Cart. Riev.*, no. 42. This is a composite document which may date from the mid 1150s, when Espec is said to have entered Rievaulx. The grant of Bilsdale is dated in the list of benefactions: *ibid.*, p. 260.

¹⁵ *Life of Ailred*, p. 14.

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In terms of its immediate impact on the laity the foundation of Rievaulx was muted, and in its first fifteen years the monks received few additional endowments. Of their benefactors only Roger de Mowbray and his mother, Gundreda d'Aubigny, were of baronial rank; the others were men of modest means, who were attracted to Rievaulx either because of its proximity or because of their tenurial links with Espec. However, a significant exception was King David I of Scotland, a man of varied religious tastes. Around 1134 he was the recipient of a letter from Bernard, asking him to help the monks of Fountains: 'our brothers of Rievaulx were the first to experience the effects of your mercy. You opened to them the treasury of your good will and anointed them with the oil of your compassion and kindness . . . I am as grateful as if you had shown your favours to me personally', he wrote.¹⁶ No charter has survived, so we do not know what form these favours took, but Bernard's letter shows that the contacts between David and Rievaulx predated, or accompanied, the entry of his steward, Ailred, into the abbey.

Ailred was born the son of Eilaf, the hereditary priest of Hexham dispossessed by Thomas II to make way for the regular canons. Educated at Hexham and later at Durham he took service with the king of Scots at whose court he grew to know the king's stepson, Waldef, before his departure to enter the religious life at Nostell.¹⁷ Waldef may well have been the friend from whom Ailred learned of the Cistercian settlement at Rievaulx while on a mission to the archbishop of York on behalf of the king.¹⁸ The story of Ailred's conversion, as told by Walter Daniel, is one of chance: after he left York Ailred stayed with Walter Espec at Helmsley castle, and took the opportunity to visit Rievaulx, where he was met by the prior, guestmaster, porter, and several of the monks. The following day he left for Scotland, but turning aside from the road he sought the abbey once more, where he asked for, and obtained, permission to enter the house. Yet, as Marsha Dutton has argued, Walter Daniel underplayed – either through ignorance or by deliberation – the network of patronage which brought Ailred to Rievaulx. Walter Espec, a Northumbrian as well as a Yorkshire landowner, was well known to David; so too was Thurstan, even though the desire of the king of the Scots for the independence of his church from the jurisdiction of York had in the past

¹⁶ *Letters of St Bernard*, no. 172.

¹⁷ *Life of Ailred*, pp. 2–9, and introduction, xxxiii–li; see also Marsha Dutton, 'The conversion and vocation of Aelred of Rievaulx: a historical hypothesis', in *England in the Twelfth Century*, Proceedings of the 1988 Harlaxton Conference, ed. Daniel Williams (Woodbridge, 1990), pp. 31–49.

¹⁸ *Life of Ailred*, p. 10: '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 . . . '.

strained relations between them. The reception which Ailred received argues that he was no chance recruit, but one whose entry had been carefully planned and was by no means unexpected.¹⁹

Within two years of their arrival in the north the Cistercians had attracted a high-level recruit, one whose entry secured them the support of the king of the Scots. This connection, which strengthened David's contacts with reformed monasticism as well as reaffirming traditional links with the north, was ultimately to result in a number of foundations, deriving from Rievaulx, north of the border, the first of these, Melrose, as early as 1136.²⁰ It also significantly raised the profile of the order. Perhaps surprisingly it took Ailred eight years to achieve office at Rievaulx – in 1142 he was appointed master of the novices – but in those years he was not inactive, and his Scottish connections enabled him, with his abbot, William, to negotiate for peace after the Yorkshiremen's defeat of King David at the Battle of the Standard in 1138.²¹ Even before he became an abbot, Ailred enjoyed a public role.

The impact which the coming of the Cistercians had, therefore, was not as muted in high political circles as it appears to have been among the immediate neighbours of the abbey. Nor did it pass unnoticed in ecclesiastical circles, especially among the Black Monks of York. The circumstances which led to the famous secession from St Mary's in October 1132 and the foundation of Fountains Abbey are documented in the *Narratio de fundatione* of Fountains, written by Hugh, monk of Kirkstall, some seventy years after the foundation, allegedly using the eye-witness account of an elderly monk named Serlo. Details given in the prologue suggest that Serlo had been educated at the York abbey, became a monk of Fountains in the mid 1130s, and would, by the time of writing, have been approaching one hundred years old. Moreover, the obvious parallels with the *Exordium parvum*, and the deliberate portrayal of Fountains as the English Cîteaux to York's Molesme, and the echoes of the *Vita prima* of Bernard, mean that as a historical source the *Narratio* has to be used with caution.²² Enshrined within the *Narratio* but also enjoying a separate manuscript tradition is a long letter, allegedly written by Thurstan to William of Corbeil, archbishop of Canterbury, explaining the circumstances of the secession. Again, the authenticity of this is open to question. The letter survives in at least two manuscripts from the late twelfth

¹⁹ Dutton, 'Conversion and vocation'.

²⁰ Rievaulx produced two daughter houses, six second-generation, and two third-generation houses in Scotland. See Janet Burton and Roger Stalley, 'Tables of Cistercian affiliations', in Norton and Park, *Cistercian Art and Architecture*, p. 396.

²¹ Symeon, *Opera*, II, 291–2; *Chron. Stephen*, III, 171. It is likely, but not certain, that Ailred was with William on this occasion: Dalton, *Conquest, Anarchy and Lordship*, p. 224.

²² Baker, 'English Cistercian chronicles', I and II.

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century; it was, therefore, already in existence by the time that Hugh wrote the *Narratio*, and we can assume that it was accepted as authentic by him.²³ However, is it likely that Thurstan would have written at such length to his rival archbishop only a few years after the termination of the primacy dispute? Or that he would have written so scathingly of the Cluniacs, among whom, moreover, he was to retire only a few years later? These features raise serious questions about the authenticity of the letter. On the other hand, references to the impact which the monks of Clairvaux (rather than Cîteaux) had in York suggest an early date, and mention of the monks of Savigny (at Furness) visiting York is indicative of a date before, or not long after, the merger of 1147, when the name would have ceased to have a separate identity.²⁴ Although the question does not admit of easy resolution, it may be suggested that the letter is either a genuine letter of the archbishop or that it was an early fabrication, dating from nearer the 1140s than the 1180s. If one were to look for a likely time of composition, then a date in the 1140s, when Fountains became embroiled in the disputed election at York, suggests itself as a circumstance in which the monks might have felt the need to validate the foundation, and to confirm it as a canonical one, in much the same way as the *Exordium parvum* was written in order to justify the foundation of Cîteaux.

Despite the problems of the source material, there can be no doubt that what precipitated the crisis at St Mary's was the passage through the city of the monks of Clairvaux *en route* for Rievaulx. It would have been quite natural for the latter to accept hospitality at St Mary's and for them to communicate their ideas to the monks. That they found such a ready audience suggests that there were already the seeds of a reform party. Quite how far discontent had spread, or how far St Mary's might have been deemed in need of reform, is not easy to gauge, given the parallels which are deliberately drawn with the *Exordium*. The monks of St Mary's, led first by the sacrist and then by the prior, Richard, were said to have been ashamed of their apathy, and of the way in which they fell short of the rule in much the same way as had Robert and his companions at Molesme.²⁵ Their ideas were laid out in the manifesto of reform which the letter of Thurstan puts into the mouth of the prior. Baker argued that this is far more coherent than anything that might have been said at the time, and far too reminiscent of the *Apologia*;²⁶ however, I am inclined to

²³ For manuscripts and discussion of the letter, see Nicholl, *Thurstan*, pp. 251–8; also Baker, 'English Cistercian chronicles', I, 17 and II, 185–7, and 'The foundation of Fountains Abbey', *Northern History*, 4 (1969), 29–43 (pp. 33–5). Nicholl is more inclined than Baker to accept the letter as authentic.

²⁴ Nicholl, *Thurstan*, p. 256. ²⁵ *Memorials of Fountains*, I, 5–8.

²⁶ Baker, 'English Cistercian chronicles', I, 17.

agree with Nicholl that such a programme would have sat uneasily with Cistercian practices later in the century, and is therefore unlikely to have been fabricated at Fountains then. It reads like – and may well have been – a second *Apologia*.²⁷ It reflects issues and ideas that were current in the 1130s, not the 1180s. The coming of the Cistercians to the north provoked the monks into action, to demand the kind of reform – the reintroduction of manual labour, the rejection of revenue from *spiritualia*, and the adoption of a simpler lifestyle – which would have aligned them with Cistercian monasticism. It was not, apparently, the establishment of a Cistercian monastery which they advocated; it was reform from within.²⁸ And reform, or change, was precisely what the elderly and conservative abbot, Geoffrey, was anxious to avoid. The enormity of what was proposed should not be underestimated. St Mary's was the largest and most prestigious abbey in the north, which regarded itself as a royal foundation. That its endowments should be dismantled and its grandeur undermined was unthinkable, and when Archbishop Thurstan intervened on behalf of his friend Prior Richard,²⁹ Geoffrey retaliated by summoning support. According to the *Narratio*, 'missis . . . nunciis de vicinis per Angliam monasteriis, viros convocat litteratos, et convenit multitudo monachorum non modica' ('sending messengers from neighbouring monasteries throughout England, he summoned literate men, and no small crowd of monks gathered'); the 'letter of Thurstan' more specifically identifies those who gathered at St Mary's as neighbouring monks of Marmoutier (Holy Trinity) and Cluny (Pontefract).³⁰

Thurstan's attempted visitation, aimed at bringing reconciliation, brought instead division, and he was forced to take into his protection the thirteen monks who were ejected by their brethren.³¹ Between October and December they remained in the archbishop's household, until, after celebrating Christmas at his manor of Ripon, he provided them with the site for a monastery in the valley of the river Skell. The foundation of Fountains was unplanned; it was a spontaneous event. Thurstan, un-

²⁷ It should be remembered that William, abbot of Rievaulx, was a close associate and former secretary of Bernard: might he indeed have brought a copy of the *Apologia* with him to England?

²⁸ It is true that Hugh implies that the reformers planned to leave ('tractant mutuo de egressione sua, de modo egressionis . . . solum id cogitantes, quomodo salva pace fratrum et sine scandalo res ad effectum possit produci' ('they discussed together their departure and the method of departure, thinking only this, how this matter could be achieved while preserving the peace of the brethren and without scandal'): *Memorials of Fountains*, I, 7) but this may be hindsight speaking, or it may be that they planned to leave should their plan for reform be rejected.

²⁹ Richard was 'familiaris et notus pontifici qui tunc metropoli Eboracensi praesidebat' ('a friend and well known to the pontiff who at that time presided over the metropolitan see of York'): *Memorials of Fountains*, I, 6.

³⁰ *Memorials of Fountains*, I, 8, 24.

³¹ The monks were named, but is it coincidence that the number of reformers corresponded so precisely to the minimum number of monks required to staff a new Cistercian foundation?

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doubtedly aware of the depletion of the resources of the see under his predecessors, could not afford to alienate many of the archiepiscopal lands, and the monks had to be content with the site of the house and the nearby hamlet of Sutton. Like Rievaulx, the isolation of Fountains was only relative; although described (echoing the *Exordium parvum*) as a place of terror and solitude, it nevertheless lay only three miles from the archiepiscopal manor of Ripon.³² Prior Richard was elected the first abbot.³³

The furore provoked a flurry of correspondence. Abbot Geoffrey wrote to the king and to the archbishop of Canterbury to complain. The new community was in a precarious position, and two of the monks, Gervase and Ralph, were unable to sustain the harsh conditions and returned to York. After some months the decision was taken – perhaps with the encouragement of Abbot William of Rievaulx – to ask that Fountains be received into the Cistercian order as a daughter house of Clairvaux. The date of this is uncertain: it was after the monks received a charter of confirmation from Henry I (doubtless secured by Thurstan) which refers to the community as one following the Rule of St Benedict, and was probably late in 1133 or early in 1134.³⁴ Bernard intervened to support the new community. He wrote to Abbot Richard praising his actions, for to Bernard the breaking of a monk's vow of stability (which leaving one monastery for another entailed) could be justified when the move was to a stricter order:

Your progress from good to better is no less wonderful, no less gratifying, than a conversion from evil to good. It is much more easy to find many men of the world who have been converted from evil to good than it is to find one religious who has progressed from good to better . . . your most salutary and remarkable action has not only given great joy to myself . . . but also to the whole church, since it is all the more celebrated for being so rare. The merest prudence demanded that you should rise above that mediocrity which is so near to apostasy and leave behind you that tepidity which God vomits from his mouth.³⁵

He also sent a monk of Clairvaux, Geoffrey d'Ainai, to instruct the monks in the tenets of Cistercian monasticism, and wrote to David of Scotland asking him to help the monks.³⁶ He proved sensitive, as well, to

³² *Memorials of Fountains*, I, 32; cf. *EP*, pp. 59–60. ³³ *Memorials of Fountains*, I, 33, cf. *EP*, p. 61.

³⁴ *EYC*, I, no. 61.

³⁵ *Letters of St Bernard*, no. 171. Bernard was not always so enthusiastic: on the embarrassment caused by monks leaving their houses to enter Cistercian ones, see Bernard of Clairvaux, *Cistercians and Cluniacs*, pp. 68–9.

³⁶ *Letters of St Bernard*, no. 172: 'I do not think your Highness can be ignorant of how these brothers, inspired from on high, came forth into a desert place from the church of the Blessed Mary at York where observance was perfunctory. They have had to endure many persecutions and injuries inflicted on them sometimes with force and sometimes with guile.'

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the dilemma of Abbot Geoffrey who wrote to him for advice on how to treat the two monks who had returned to St Mary's.³⁷ The reception of the community into the Cistercian order made little material difference, and great hardship was suffered as the monks struggled to construct the buildings.³⁸ Gifts of bread from well-wishers did little to alleviate their difficulties, and by 1135 the monks were seriously contemplating abandoning the site and moving to France, where Bernard was to make a grange of Clairvaux available to them. What rendered this unnecessary was the entry, into Fountains, of Dean Hugh of York, and one of the canons, Serlo. They brought money and goods, and, in the case of Hugh, his books which formed the basis of the abbey library. They brought prestige, too, and from 1135 until the death of Abbot Richard in 1139 sufficient endowments were received to ensure the continuance of the abbey. On what prompted the decision of Serlo and Hugh we can only speculate, but it would not be too far-fetched to see the hand of Thurstan behind the action which would save the community of which he was the unwitting founder.

The reversal in the fortunes of Fountains was remarkable by any standards. Its territorial expansion, made possible by grants of land in the vicinity of the abbey from Robert de Sarz and Raghild his wife, and of the vill of Cayton, ensured the means to support the community. By 1137 the number of monks had grown sufficiently for a colony to be founded from Fountains at Haverholme; a second followed in 1138 or 1139 at Newminster in Northumberland, on lands granted by Ralph de Merlay, and a third was planned, though not realized, on lands given by Count Alan of Brittany in Masham and Aldburgh.³⁹ The status of the abbey was underlined when Abbot Richard I was chosen to accompany the papal legate, Alberic, on his journey around the north of England in 1138; he returned to Rome with him, and died there the following year.⁴⁰ He was succeeded by his namesake, the former sacrist of St Mary's, who seems to have accepted office reluctantly, since he three times sought permission from Abbot Bernard to resign. This was refused, and it was as abbot that Richard died on his return from the General Chapter of 1143, at Clairvaux itself.⁴¹

³⁷ *Ibid.*, nos. 168–9. ³⁸ On the building of Fountains see below, pp. 300–2.

³⁹ *Memorials of Fountains*, I, 54–61, 66–9; *EYC*, I, nos. 64, 502; *ibid.*, IV, no. 18. Haverholme, granted by Bishop Alexander of Lincoln, was abandoned in 1139 in favour of Louth Park. A bull of Eugenius III (*EYC*, I, no. 79) confirmed grants for the foundation of abbeys by Adam Fitz Swain, of Rainborough, Newhill, and other lands (*ad abbatiam edificandam*), and by Eustace Fitz John, in Troutsdale (*ad abbatiam construendam*). These were never realized, and Adam's grants went in 1153–4 to his new foundation at Monk Bretton.

⁴⁰ *Memorials of Fountains*, I, 70–3; C. T. Clay, 'The early abbots of the Yorkshire Cistercian houses', *YAJ*, 38 (1952–5), 15–16; *HRH*, pp. 132–3. For John of Hexham's comment on Richard, see Symeon, *Opera*, II, 300–1.

⁴¹ *Memorials of Fountains*, I, 73–8. See also Clay, 'Early abbots', 16.

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It has been useful to dwell at some length on the foundations of Rievaulx and Fountains, for they highlight an important point. The expansion of the Cistercian order was remarkable, even phenomenal. To a certain extent this has to be explained, as we shall see, by the appeal of the White Monks to patrons. In order for a monastery to exist it needed lands and resources and these were provided, by and large, by the laity.⁴² However, the success of the Cistercians has also to be seen as a product of the appeal of their particular spirituality. Cistercian monasticism flourished because men wished to become Cistercian monks. The reinterpretation of the life and career of Ailred of Rievaulx by scholars such as Marsha Dutton has been useful in demonstrating that a Cistercian abbot did not necessarily give up a public role. But such reassessment should not conceal that it was to a Cistercian monastery, rather than the Augustinian priory of Hexham or the cathedral of Durham – both of them a part of Ailred's Northumbrian heritage – that he turned in order to fulfil the call of the cloister. Nor should we forget the intense heartsearching which the introduction of Waldef to Cistercian spirituality brought him. Even allowing for the literary motifs of the *Narratio* we cannot disregard the impact which the Cistercians had on the monastic vocations of those at St Mary's. To recover and recapture that sense of spirituality is difficult, and it is the aspect of monastic history most hidden from us. The sources which allow us a glimpse into the uniqueness of the White Monks were, after all, mainly written by them to present a self-image to the outside world.

Nevertheless, any attempt to explain its appeal must try to understand what drew men to the Cistercian observance of the monastic life. Rievaulx, Fountains, and others, did not have a monopoly of monastic vocations, and the Cistercian expansion did not halt the growth of houses of other orders. However, the evidence we have suggests that Ailred, Waldef, and the two Richards at Fountains were not the only outstanding recruits attracted by the spirituality of the White Monks. Maurice, 'a man of great sanctity and of outstanding judgement . . . [who] had climbed so high as to be called by his companions a second Bede; and truly in his day, by his pre-eminence both in life and learning he alone could be compared with Bede', was drawn from the cloisters of the Benedictine cathedral priory of Durham to the solitude of Rievaulx.⁴³ Thorald, abbot of Fountains, was described as 'homo, in scripturis sacris, non mediocriter

⁴² Apart from Thurstan three bishops were Cistercian founders. Waverley was established by Bishop William Giffard of Winchester. Alexander of Lincoln founded Louth Park, and in 1139 rescued the ailing house of Otley, moving it to Thame. In Wales Bishop Bernard of St David's brought monks from Clairvaux to Whitland.

⁴³ *Life of Ailred*, p. 33.

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edoctus, et in liberalibus studiis apprime eruditus' ('a man no little educated in the holy scriptures and very learned in the liberal arts').⁴⁴ Ralph Haget, son of a Yorkshire knightly family, monk and abbot of Kirkstall, and abbot of Fountains, was, for Knowles, the man who best characterized and summed up Cistercian monasticism.⁴⁵

It is clear that in the growing prosperity of the twelfth century, and the increasing complexity of society, the striving of the Cistercians for simplicity, for primitive ideals, for poverty, and for seclusion, struck a powerful chord in the consciences both of those outside and those within the monastic order. The belief which comes clearly through the letters of Bernard of Clairvaux, that the Cistercians represented all that was best, all that was purest, in the monastic life, found a response throughout Christendom. Walter Daniel wrote his life of Ailred as a eulogy, not an *apologia* for the Cistercian order. But perhaps the most vivid part of the whole work is the section where the Cistercian way of life is described to Ailred. What the friend – whether Waldef or another – chose to highlight was the way in which the Cistercians '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'; their abstemiousness ('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 egalitarianism ('personal standing is merged in the equality of each and all'). Although it may be striking a note of what appealed to Walter Daniel personally, the life conveys the same sense of the physical beauty of the natural sites of Cistercian houses as that sounded by Orderic Vitalis:

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 name of 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.⁴⁶

The locations of Rievaulx and St Mary's, York were a world apart.

Thurstan had had a hand in both the foundation of Rievaulx and of Fountains. He was also instrumental in securing the future of the third of

⁴⁴ *Memorials of Fountains*, I, 105. ⁴⁵ Knowles, *Monastic Order*, pp. 356–9.

⁴⁶ *Life of Ailred*, pp. 10–13; see also Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV, 327.

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William of Newburgh's *tria lumina*, Byland Abbey. In 1134, just as Ailred entered Rievaulx and the monks of Fountains struggled for existence, the Lancashire Savigniac abbey of Furness started on the road to expansion by sending a colony to Calder in Cumberland. As with Fountains, our knowledge of the early years of Byland depends on the reminiscences of an old man, this time Abbot Roger, as mediated through his successor, Philip. However, the Byland *Historia* is in many ways a much simpler work than that of Fountains, and uses none of the literary borrowings and models which characterize the later work. In 1134, at the invitation of a lay patron, Ranulf Meschin, Furness sent a colony of thirteen monks to Calder.⁴⁷ It was a conventional foundation, and it was not until its fourth year, 1137, that events took an unconventional turn, when the abbey was destroyed by the Scots under William Fitz Duncan.⁴⁸ Having had little time in which to establish themselves, the monks returned to Furness, but were refused entry.⁴⁹ Nicholl interpreted this as a split between conservatives and radicals such as had occurred at York.⁵⁰ However, there is no suggestion in the *Historia* that the foundation of Calder was prompted by a desire for reform or was anything more than a routine colonization, probably made by Ranulf soon after the death of his father.⁵¹ Rather, the failure of the Furness monks to take back their colleagues was due to one of the two reasons – or a combination of both – suggested by Roger: that Abbot Gerald of Calder failed to yield his abbatial status, and it would have been impossible to have an abbey with two communities and two abbots under one roof; or that the material resources of Furness would have been too strained to take in a further thirteen monks.⁵² Possibly, too, the return was seen as apostasy, and

⁴⁷ *Mon. Ang.*, v, 349. The *Historia* does not name the founder. B. D. Hill, *English Cistercian Monasteries and Their Patrons in the Twelfth Century* (Urbana, 1968), p. 98, identifies him as Ranulf de Gernons, earl of Chester. However, it is clear from a bull of Eugenius III and a charter of Henry II that the founder was Ranulf Meschin, son of William Meschin, founder of St Bees and joint founder of Emsay (Bolton): *EYC*, vii, 7.

⁴⁸ *Mon. Ang.*, v, 349. This author identified the chief components of the Scottish army as the men of Galloway, which accords with Ailred of Rievaulx and Richard of Hexham: *Chron. Stephen*, iii, 152, 189, 193.

⁴⁹ No appeal seems to have been made to a lay patron. The date of the death of Ranulf Meschin cannot be established with precision. He was dead by 1140, and may have died any time after 1135. He was succeeded in his Cumberland estates by his sister, Alice de Rumilly, whose husband, William Fitz Duncan, was the very man who devastated Calder. The marriage probably took place after William's invasion of Cumbria and Lancashire: Dalton, *Conquest, Anarchy and Lordship*, pp. 211–14.

⁵⁰ 'Probably it was another case of the conservatives who stayed at home feeling that the high-minded reformers . . . should now put up cheerfully with the consequences of their idealism': *Thurstan*, p. 202.

⁵¹ 'in or shortly before 1135': Dalton, *Conquest, Anarchy and Lordship*, p. 211.

⁵² Janet Burton, 'The abbeys of Byland and Jervaulx, and the problems of the English Savigniacs, 1134–1156', in *Monastic Studies*, II, ed. J. Loades (Bangor, 1991), 119–31.

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regarded with the same suspicion as Abbot Geoffrey of St Mary's felt on the return of Gervase and Ralph.

Following their rejection the Calder monks, knowing of Archbishop Thurstan's support of the Fountains monks, decided to journey across the Pennines to ask for his advice. Here Abbot Roger's memory as to the sequence of events apparently failed him. One version, and probably the more accurate, is that the monks reached York where they were received generously enough (*satis liberaliter*) by Thurstan, who on the advice of some of his clerks sent them to Roger de Mowbray who would provide for them from his ample patrimony.⁵³ Roger dispatched them to Hood (about four miles north-west of Byland Abbey) where Robert d'Alneto, a former monk of Whitby and a relative of Roger's mother, was living as a hermit. The other version is that on their way to York the monks were met by chance (*casualiter*) by a steward of Roger's mother, Gundreda, who conducted them to the Mowbray castle of Thirsk. Gundreda, spying them from a high window, was moved by their wretched condition, promised them a place to live and resources, and sent them to her relative at Hood. This second version, which echoes a passage in the foundation history of Forde, Devon, may be a playful invention designed to enliven the narrative; it does, however, assign a more prominent role in the foundation to Gundreda, and makes her, rather than Thurstan, the prime influence.⁵⁴ It was, however, these two who persuaded Roger de Mowbray to improve on his first, clumsy attempt to provide for the monks. He had granted them a tenth of all the food of his household, and a *conversus* named Ligulf was deputed to follow the Mowbray household to collect the offerings. At the instigation of his two advisers Roger granted land instead, and by 1140 the monks had secured the vaccary (cattle station) of Cam, and land in Wildon, Scackleton, and Airyholme.⁵⁵

In February 1142 Abbot Gerald died, and was succeeded by Roger, formerly sub-cellarer at Calder and now novice master at Hood, who ruled the house for a remarkable fifty-four years until his retirement in 1196.⁵⁶ The years which followed were marked by the entry of a number of men from the Mowbray household as *conversi*, and the resources they brought with them enabled the monks to create their first grange of Wildon. The growth in numbers also made necessary a move from

⁵³ Roger is said to have newly obtained his majority (*Mon. Ang.*, v, 349), which accords with Ailred of Rievaulx, who calls Roger *adhuc puerulus* at the Battle of the Standard (*Chron. Stephen*, III, 183). However, see below, note 57.

⁵⁴ On the incident at Forde see *Mon. Ang.*, v, 377–8; Burton, 'Foundation of the British Cistercian houses', p. 29; Holdsworth, 'Cistercians in Devon', p. 183.

⁵⁵ *Mowbray Charters*, nos. 33–7.

⁵⁶ The office of novice master could not have been an onerous one, for according to the *Historia*: 'nec haberet nisi unum novicium' ('he had only one novice') (*Mon. Ang.*, v, 350).

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Hood, which had never been intended as more than a temporary home. It was a *locus angustus*, too restricted for the building of an abbey,⁵⁷ and on Gundreda's urging Roger provided a second site, comprising the vill and church of Old Byland (Byland on the Moor), which had formed part of her dowry. It was from this settlement that the abbey was to take its name.⁵⁸ However, the new site lay too close for comfort to the abbey of Rievaulx, and was abandoned in 1147 in favour of a third site on waste land near Stocking (Kilburn), a grant much more suitable for what was by now a Cistercian house.⁵⁹

The first decade of the Cistercian expansion was a period of remarkable success, when, with buoyant recruitment, royal and archiepiscopal backing, and with assistance from lay patrons and benefactors, three foundations had taken place, and Fountains and Rievaulx had both embarked on the road to expansion. The tenth anniversary of the foundation of Rievaulx was, however, to usher in an era of controversy. Just as the monks of Clairvaux had brought not peace but a sword to the community of St Mary's, so their revolutionary activity continued. When the Cistercian patron and protector, Thurstan, died in February 1140, just a month after his retirement to the Cluniacs of Pontefract, there was a prolonged controversy about his successor.⁶⁰ It was a politically sensitive appointment at the best of times, but in the situation in which King Stephen found himself – his kingdom in a state of war, the empress in control of the west country and the Scottish king, although contained by the Battle of the Standard, still in control of the northern shires – it was crucial that the post should fall to one who could, as Thurstan had done in 1138, hold the north loyal to the king. What Stephen needed was an ecclesiastical counterpart to his secular henchman, William of Aumale, earl of York.

⁵⁷ Newburgh, *Historia*, 1, 52. The Byland *Historia* twice makes the point that Hood was only occupied 'quousque locum ipsis competentiore alibi assignaret' ('until he might grant a more suitable place for them elsewhere'), and 'quousque . . . Rogerus de Molbray venit ad terras suas de custodia regis Stephani' ('until Roger de Mowbray recovered his lands from the custody of King Stephen'), thus placing the emergence of Roger from his minority after the settlement at Hood: *Mon. Ang.*, v, 349–50.

⁵⁸ *Mon. Ang.*, v, 350, where the move is dated 1143. However, the correct date seems to be 1142, since the site was said to have been occupied for five years and abandoned in 1147. See also Clay, 'Early abbots', pp. 9–10. The Savigniacs did not, as did the Cistercians, ban the acceptance of churches.

⁵⁹ Old Byland was reduced to a grange: *Mon. Ang.*, v, 351. For grants made to Byland in the period 1142–7 see *Mowbray Charters*, nos. 41–5; *EYC*, ix, nos. 119–20.

⁶⁰ David Knowles, 'The case of St William of York', *CHJ*, 5 (1936), 162–77, 212–14, reprinted in *The Historian and Character* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 76–97. See also C. H. Talbot, 'New documents in the case of Saint William of York', *CHJ*, 10 (1950–2), 1–15; A. Morey, 'Canonist evidence in the case of St William of York', *CHJ*, 10 (1950–2), 352–3; D. Baker, '*Viri religiosi* and the York election dispute', *Councils and Assemblies*, Studies in Church History, 7, ed. G. J. Cuming and D. Baker (Oxford, 1971), pp. 87–100.

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After a year of what John of Hexham saw as prevarication,⁶¹ and rejected candidates – including, apparently, Prior Waldef of Kirkham – the choice of the chapter fell, under the watchful eye of the earl of York, on William Fitz Herbert, treasurer of the cathedral church.⁶² William Fitz Herbert, however, was not without his enemies, and his election was immediately opposed by two senior archdeacons, Walter of London and Osbert de Bayeux – possibly themselves disappointed candidates. The earl moved quickly to suppress their opposition, and Fitz Herbert sought out the king, who confirmed him in the temporalities of the see. Within a month, however, Stephen had suffered defeat at the Battle of Lincoln, and been imprisoned. The opposition to the archbishop-elect grew, and to it the Cistercians now added their weight: an immediate appeal was made to the pope, accusing William of intrusion, and charges of simony and immorality were subsequently added.

Derek Baker has suggested that the degree of opposition to William among the York chapter makes it likely that there was some truth in the allegation that he had been intruded by royal interest, and he has argued convincingly that it was the maturity and experience of William to which the electors objected: he would be no pliable puppet. Knowles and others saw the Cistercian opposition to the election as a response to the reaffirmation, at the Lateran Council of 1139, of the right of the *virī religiosi* of a diocese to participate in an election, a right which they wished to assert. According to Baker's reassessment, the Cistercians were mobilized by patrons with family connections among the York canons. Whatever the motives, the end result was the same: from 1142 the Cistercians spearheaded the opposition to the royal candidate to the see of York. Ailred of Rievaulx was sent to the papal curia where, according to Walter Daniel, he distinguished himself.⁶³ When the pope summoned the parties to Rome in the spring of 1143, William found himself faced by the abbots of Rievaulx and Fountains in person, as well as Waldef of Kirkham and Cuthbert, prior of Guisborough. Moreover, the personal involvement of the Yorkshire Cistercians brought the affair to the attention of St Bernard, and fixed his unwelcome attention on England. In 1143, as we have seen, Abbot Richard II of Fountains died at Clairvaux. Under the Cistercian constitution, as Bernard was fully aware, he should as father abbot have presided over the election of a new abbot at Fountains.⁶⁴ Instead, he sent reinforcements in the person of the Yorkshireman Henry Murdac, former monk of Clairvaux and now abbot of Vauclair, with a letter which in veiled language ordered

⁶¹ Symeon, *Opera*, II, 306–7. ⁶² Cf. Baker, 'Legend and reality', pp. 59–82.

⁶³ *Life of Ailred*, p. 23. ⁶⁴ *CCP*, p. 101.

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his election.⁶⁵ Murdac's voice was added to that of Abbot William of Rievaulx, whom Bernard reminded of the need for moderation in the affair: 'your zeal is well-known to me and . . . it would not help your house if it were to flare up beyond the bounds of prudence and discretion'.⁶⁶ The pressure continued to be applied by William and Murdac in England, and by Bernard through a torrent of letters until, with the election of a Cistercian pope, Eugenius III, Fitz Herbert was deposed. Seeing Murdac as the prime mover in the affair, supporters of Fitz Herbert attacked Fountains, and fired some of the newly constructed buildings.⁶⁷ They overlooked the abbot, who lay before the altar in prayer, and were therefore unable to vent their wrath on him in person. However, their conviction as to Murdac's role in the deposition of Fitz Herbert must have seemed confirmed when, in December 1147, Murdac was himself elected archbishop by a majority of the electors. Murdac, reformer though he was, evidently felt no embarrassment at his pluralism, for he continued to hold the office of abbot, ruling Fountains through suffragans, Maurice (1148), Thorald (1148–50), and Richard (1150–3, abbot 1153–70).⁶⁸

Murdac's election marked the zenith of Cistercian involvement in the disputed election, and the victory which the reform party achieved had both moral and practical consequences. The Cistercians had succeeded in securing the deposition of the king's candidate, on whom Stephen had conferred the temporalities of the see, and whom his brother, Henry of Blois, bishop of Winchester, had consecrated in 1143. Moreover, although Murdac's activities as archbishop were curtailed by the refusal of the citizens of York to allow him to enter the city, he had, nevertheless, been elected and consecrated archbishop without the consent of the king. When in 1148 he was received by the king of the Scots at Carlisle – then under Scottish control, and in an area, Cumbria, which David regarded as an historic part of his own kingdom – and on the same occasion as the knighting of the young Henry of Anjou, the political capital and the political potential must have been clear for all to see. It was perhaps on this occasion that the king of the Scots and the archbishop of York explored ways in which they could work to their mutual benefit; and when in 1149 the allied forces of David of Scotland, Henry of Anjou, and Ranulf, earl of Chester, planned to capture the city of York, they may

⁶⁵ To the prior and monks of Fountains: 'choose for yourselves with one voice, as I have every confidence you will, a worthy shepherd of your souls, in company with the abbots of Rievaulx and Vauclair, whose advice I wish you to follow as if it were my own'. But to Henry Murdac: 'I charge you, brother Henry, that you submit out of charity to the choice of our brothers at Fountains, if, with the advice of the venerable abbot of Rievaulx, they elect you as their abbot': *Letters of St Bernard*, nos. 173–4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, nos. 199–201.

⁶⁷ See below, p. 301.

⁶⁸ On these, see below, p. 165.

have done so with the cooperation of Henry Murdac.⁶⁹ Part of David's strategy for retaining the northern counties of Northumbria and Cumbria, which he regarded as part of his birthright, was to secure the alliance of the archbishop of York, and to orientate the interests and sympathies of the Yorkshire church towards the north.⁷⁰

However, did the alliance of the Cistercians with the anti-Fitz Herbert party affect the pattern of further Cistercian settlement? The 1140s and early 1150s, a period of civil war, were decades of great expansion for Rievaulx and Fountains, which produced between them six English daughter houses, as well as seven of the third generation. Is there a connection between the political situation and Cistercian expansion? Or was it merely coincidence, that is, that the Cistercians arrived in the north in 1132, and in 1152 the order itself attempted to arrest further growth? The Cistercian expansion during the 'Anarchy' can be viewed in a number of ways. B. D. Hill contended that there was a close connection between Cistercian expansion and the Anarchy, in that the barons who founded Cistercian houses did so to oppose the king, for by granting land in free alms tenure they deprived the king of land which had formerly yielded knight service.⁷¹ I have argued elsewhere that there is indeed a connection between Cistercian foundations and the Anarchy, but it is to be seen as a product of political instability and tenurial insecurity in a rather less specific way. The rival claims of king and empress, of king's earls and empress's earls, of feoffees of both, produced a desire to stake a claim to land and to title and to power, and this could be assisted by the foundation of a religious house.⁷² This proposition must be tested with regard to the north.

Clearly we must look at the Cistercian expansion in two ways: internal colonization within the county, and foundation of daughter houses of Yorkshire abbeys further afield. Both argue for buoyant recruitment, made possible through the continued appeal of the Cistercian vocation. The expansion of the family of Rievaulx took place in two main areas, Scotland and the midlands. The foundations made by King David, sometimes in collaboration with his son, Henry, at Melrose (1136) and Dundrennan (1142),⁷³ strengthened the ties between the Cistercians and the Scottish kingdom. After the Battle of the Standard in 1138, and again

⁶⁹ Dalton, *Conquest, Anarchy and Lordship*, p. 173.

⁷⁰ On David's objectives, see, for instance, G. W. S. Barrow, 'The Scots and the North of England', in King, *Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign*, pp. 231–53.

⁷¹ Hill, *English Cistercian Monasteries*, pp. 38–40.

⁷² Burton, 'Foundation of the British Cistercian houses', pp. 24–39.

⁷³ K. Stringer, 'Galloway and the abbeys of Rievaulx and Dundrennan', *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, 55 (1980), 174–7, argues that Dundrennan owed its origins to the initiative of King David, rather than Fergus of Galloway, and is to be seen in the context of the need to secure Galloway after the annexation of the northern counties.

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after the Battle of Lincoln in 1141, this must have had clear political implications for the king. Moreover, as Paul Dalton has pointed out, the visit of Archbishop Malachy of Armagh to the Scottish court in 1139 on his way to Rome and Clairvaux, and again in 1148, in the year after the election of Murdac, produced a vital link between the Scottish court, the Yorkshire monasteries, and St Bernard.⁷⁴ Rievaulx had a clear Scottish connection and sympathy, and it is significant that Stephen's charter of confirmation for Rievaulx was issued very early in his reign, before the foundation of Melrose.⁷⁵

In 1143 Rievaulx sent out a third colony, this time to Revesby (Lincolnshire) under the leadership of Ailred. We should remember, however, that a foundation could be a long time in the planning, and official Cistercian dates of foundation refer to the occupation of the site. The foundation of Revesby was probably being planned throughout 1141 and 1142, that is, at precisely the point at which the Yorkshire Cistercians were proclaiming their opposition to the archbishop-elect, and, by implication, to the king. Could this have been in the mind of William de Roumare, who in 1139 had been created earl of Lincoln by Stephen? The coincidence of the dating is suggestive, for in 1141, following the Battle of Lincoln, Roumare defected to the empress. I do not go as far as Hill in suggesting that the foundation of a Cistercian house at Revesby was intended to deprive the king of political power. However, I would argue that for a man such as Roumare, planning to found a Cistercian monastery to add to Augustinian Warter, the choice of Rievaulx as a mother house would have been an attractive proposition.

If one were to look for an instance of political manipulation of a monastic house in order to announce affiliations and loyalties, then the foundation of Revesby might be a case in point. R. H. C. Davis also pointed to the struggle for control of Byland Abbey as an instance of the same phenomenon.⁷⁶ The unorthodox origins of Byland in a sense left it without a mother house since Furness could have been said to have renounced its obligations and responsibilities when its monks refused to take back the remnant of the Calder colony. In 1141 Abbot Gerald foresaw that the growing wealth of Byland might attract the attention of Furness, and so laid before the General Chapter of Savigny a plan to subject Byland to the mother house of the order.⁷⁷ This was accepted.

⁷⁴ Dalton, *Conquest, Anarchy and Lordship*, pp. 223–5.

⁷⁵ *RRAN*, III, no. 716; see Holdsworth, 'The church', p. 227.

⁷⁶ R. H. C. Davis, *King Stephen 1135–1154*, 3rd edn (London, 1990), pp. 99–101.

⁷⁷ One might note in this context the rule in *CCP* (p. 91) that 'nullius commodi corporalis exactionem mater ecclesia a filia requirat' ('the mother church may not require from the daughter the payment of any temporal goods'). Although Gerald's anxieties predate the merger of 1147, it is instructive to note the prominence of this regulation.

However, the issue of affiliation became a real, rather than a theoretical, problem some years after the recolonization of Calder in 1142, when Abbot Hardred of Calder II claimed jurisdiction over Byland.⁷⁸ He was persuaded to drop his claim at the General Chapter, probably that of 1151, but Furness did not let the matter rest, and laid its own claim to jurisdiction over Byland. The case was referred to Ailred of Rievaulx, who decided for Byland and Savigny and against Furness. In so doing he cited the testimony of the abbot of Savigny, that Roger de Mowbray, patron of Byland, had taken the decision to subject his house to Savigny, and had declared so in the General Chapter.⁷⁹ Davis interpreted this as a political gesture, that Roger, having decided to adhere to the Angevin camp, removed his abbey from filiation with King Stephen's own foundation of Furness. Roger fought for King Stephen at the Battle of Lincoln and was captured by the earl of Chester. He was then forced to make concessions and to ally himself, through marriage to the sister of Gilbert de Gant, with the earl's party. It was around this time that he wrested control of Byland from Furness. He then removed himself from the struggle by taking the cross, and it is on his return, in the late 1140s and early 1150s, that his more obvious Angevin leanings can be seen.⁸⁰ The problems of Byland, and its daughter house of Jervaulx, stemmed from the weak control which the order of Savigny maintained over its abbeys, and an inadequate system of filiation. However, the whole question cannot be divorced from the political context, and it may be that when Furness vigorously opposed the merger of the two orders in 1147 it did so partly because it feared its own autonomy would be curtailed, and partly through a desire not to affiliate with an order whose Yorkshire members had stood out against its own patron, King Stephen.⁸¹

In the case of the family of Rievaulx, therefore, it can be suggested that there was a strong political element in a patron's choice of order and mother house. Is the same true of Fountains? The year 1147 was an *annus mirabilis* for the Yorkshire Cistercians, for Fountains added to its family a daughter house at Barnoldswick (19 May)⁸² and granddaughters, through Newminster, at Sallay in the extreme west of the county (6 January) and Roche in the extreme south (30 July).⁸³ Is there any evidence that the

⁷⁸ *Mon. Ang.*, v, 352. According to Roger, the abbot justified his claim to Byland because Furness 'parum aut nihil de eorum curavit destitutione' ('cared little or nothing about their sorry state'), seeming to confirm the behaviour of the Furness monks in 1137. See Burton, 'Abbeys of Byland and Jervaulx', 120–5.

⁷⁹ See L. Delisle, 'Documents relative to the abbey of Furness, extracted from the archives of the abbey of Savigny', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 6 (1851), 419–24.

⁸⁰ Dalton, *Conquest, Anarchy and Lordship*, pp. 168–9.

⁸¹ Delisle, 'Documents relative to the abbey of Furness'.

⁸² Removed to Kirkstall around 1152.

⁸³ For the date of Sallay, see *Cart. Sallay*, I, 1; *EYC*, xi, 27.

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founders of Kirkstall, Sallay, or Roche were attempting to express implicit opposition to the king or deprive him of services? The foundation history of Kirkstall states that Henry de Lacy, who, it should be remembered, was already patron of the family monasteries at Pontefract and Nostell, was motivated to found a religious house as a result of illness. On his recovery and in fulfilment of a vow he went to Fountains to ask for a group of monks to colonize a religious house. This he planted on his estates in the west of Yorkshire about ten miles from Skipton, in the vill of Barnoldswick.⁸⁴ Henry de Lacy, whose family had only been restored to favour in 1135, was a supporter of Stephen, but he seems to have wavered in his loyalty in 1148/9. At the very least his vulnerability to Scottish attack on his estates at Clitheroe (Lancashire) must have suggested the wisdom of remaining aloof from the struggle.⁸⁵ It was on these exposed and precarious estates that his Cistercian house was planted.

The endowment which the monks received was, by Cistercian standards, an inappropriate site; it lay in a vill and there was a church there. Why did Lacy choose to offer the monks such an unsuitable site? The general location for the new house might be explained by the fact that it would, presumably, have been unwise to add a third monastery to his south Yorkshire estates, in competition with Pontefract and Nostell. However, the particular choice of Barnoldswick may also have suggested itself to Lacy because, like the founders of Sawtry and Biddlesden, he wished to gain all the benefits of founding a religious house while using lands to which he had uncertain title.⁸⁶ He had held Barnoldswick of Hugh Bigod, earl of Norfolk, but had long since failed to pay the yearly rent due. The foundation was made with no reference to Hugh Bigod, and the negotiations between Henry Murdac as abbot and Henry de Lacy resulted in the formal occupation of the site under Abbot Alexander. The consequences were far-reaching, and involved the monks in a tedious and expensive law suit brought by Hugh Bigod. Could we suggest, then, that in the case of Barnoldswick any connection with the Anarchy has less to do with the demonstration of political loyalty – since Lacy could not be described as having links with the Angevins or the Scots, but rather being simply in a vulnerable position – than with the nature of the endowment; and that the foundation of Barnoldswick falls into that class of Cistercian monastery that was a symbol of political presence and tenurial power? Possibly, but it may be significant that Alexander, abbot of Lacy's foundation, witnessed a charter of William Fitz Duncan for Embsay Priory,

⁸⁴ For this, and the details which follow, see *Foundation of Kirkstall*, pp. 173–9.

⁸⁵ Dalton, *Conquest, Anarchy and Lordship*, p. 175; G. W. S. Barrow, 'King David I and the honour of Lancaster', *EHR*, 70 (1955), 85–9.

⁸⁶ On these see Burton, 'Foundation of the British Cistercian houses', pp. 28, 30–1.

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which was addressed to Henry Murdac. When we consider that the same charter was witnessed by the abbot of Sallay – founded by William de Percy, who did have close connections with the Scottish king – then I am inclined to agree with Paul Dalton, that ‘King David also appears to have been cultivating links with . . . Fountains’.⁸⁷ Moreover, Barnoldswick was the one Yorkshire Cistercian site which failed in all ways to conform to the Cistercian ‘desert’ whether real or psychological. Not only was it unsuitable because of the insecure title of the donor, but also because it was an existing settlement comprising a vill and a church. The author of the foundation history apparently felt no embarrassment at explaining the sequence of events.

There was a church at Barnoldswick, very ancient and founded long before, with four parochial vills, that is, Marton and another Marton, Bracewell and Stock, besides the vill of Barnoldswick, and two small vills belonging to it, that is, Elfwynestrop and Brogden, of which the said monks were by this time in possession, after the removal of the inhabitants. On feast days the parishioners met at the church with the priest and clerks according to custom, and became a nuisance to the monastery and the brethren residing there. Desiring therefore to provide for the peace and quiet of the monks, the abbot – it may be with some want of consideration – pulled the church down to its foundations, in the face of the protests of clerks and parishioners. And so no small controversy arose concerning such an unusual and highhanded proceeding.⁸⁸

The parishioners took their complaint to the archbishop, Henry Murdac, who refused to give a ruling, but referred the case to the pope. The pope, also a Cistercian, declared that ‘the less good should yield to the greater, and that the case be gained by the party which would bring forth richer fruits of piety’. That party was the Cistercian order. Accordingly, a classic case of depopulation of a site was followed by the removal of the nuisance of the neighbouring church; Henry Murdac made arrangements for the redistribution of parishes and authorized the appropriation of the new parish churches of Bracewell and Marton to the abbey.⁸⁹ Even the reformer was adapting to the political and tenurial realities of the north.

Barnoldswick, however, was a site which failed. The foundation narrative complained, as did the author of the Jervaulx history of its own first site, of poor weather and continual rain (a complaint echoed in a charter of Sallay Abbey, only six miles away).⁹⁰ It speaks also of attacks by plunderers, and given the troubles which the Craven area might have sustained from Scottish raids, this is not unlikely. How the second site,

⁸⁷ Dalton, *Conquest, Anarchy and Lordship*, p. 225. ⁸⁸ *Foundation of Kirkstall*, pp. 174–5.

⁸⁹ York Minster Library, MS P1(2)1 (possibly spurious); printed *EEA*, v, no. 121, where dated c. 1152 x 14 October 1153, revising the date of 1147 x 50 given in *EYC*, III, no. 1471.

⁹⁰ *EYC*, XI, no. 50; see below, pp. 196–7.

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further east at Kirkstall, was obtained, is instructive. The initiative was taken by Abbot Alexander, who seems to have shown the same single-mindedness as he exhibited towards the parishioners of Barnoldswick. While away from his house on business he happened upon a group of hermits living under the leadership of a man from the south of England named Seleth. Alexander was much taken with the site, and set about acquiring it. First he convinced Seleth that he and his brethren would be better off as Cistercians:

He began then gently to admonish the brethren about the health and progress of their souls, putting before them the danger of their individual wills, the small number of their brethren, that they were disciples without a master, laymen without a priest, calling them to a greater perfection and a better form of religion.⁹¹

He also gained the assent of Henry de Lacy for the transfer of the convent; and he settled a feud with William Peitevin, who held the land, and acquired the site for the monks. Some hermits were absorbed into the community; others were paid to leave. In his ruthless action Alexander gained a more secure site for his abbey, and at the same time boosted recruitment. The founder may, however, have had more say in the choice of Kirkstall than the foundation history suggests, for Kirkstall lay on an ancient way which linked Pontefract to the Lacy castle of Clitheroe.⁹²

Quite why William de Percy, like Richard de Busli (Builli) and Richard Fitz Turgis (joint founders of Roche),⁹³ turned not to one of the two illustrious Yorkshire abbeys of Rievaulx and Fountains but to the second daughter of Fountains, Newminster in Northumberland, is uncertain. It may have been a practical matter, for by 1147 Fountains had sent out seven colonies and Rievaulx three. Since under Cistercian statutes a minimum of thirteen monks was required for a new foundation, the loss of manpower, particularly for Fountains, may have made difficult the foundation of two more daughter houses in 1147.⁹⁴ In the case of Sallay there may have been a more personal connection, for Robert, abbot of Newminster, had formerly been rector of Gargrave, in the Craven area.⁹⁵ Whatever the reason, the effect was to draw Cister-

⁹¹ *Foundation of Kirkstall*, pp. 177–8.

⁹² Dalton, *Conquest, Anarchy and Lordship*, pp. 6–7, note 11.

⁹³ It is clear that the charters of the founders of Roche had been issued before the precise location of the abbey had been decided, for they specify that the monks were to construct their abbey on whichever side of the water they wished: *Mon. Ang.*, v, 502–3, nos. 1–11.

⁹⁴ Was this the reason why three foundations, planned before 1146, were not realized? See above, note 39.

⁹⁵ It should be noted that, although William de Percy is credited with the foundation of Sallay, his grant of land in Sallay and Dudland, which accompanied the foundation, was preceded, perhaps by several years, by a sale, by Swain son of Swain, a Percy tenant, of two carucates of land in Sallay, to the abbot of Newminster: *EYC*, xi, nos. 12–13 (*Cart. Sallay*, i, nos. 1–2).

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cian monks, under the patronage of the Scottish king and his allies or dependents, into a familial pattern which spread from Yorkshire through the northern counties under Scottish control, into Scotland itself.

One could make a strong case for there being a distinctly political dynamic to the Cistercian expansion from both Rievaulx and Fountains, due to the actions of patrons and founders who were pro-Angevin or pro-Scottish. The exception to this, at first sight, is William of Aumale, earl of York, upholder of royal authority in the shire and, according to William of Newburgh, 'quasi rex in Eborascira', himself almost a king in Yorkshire, who was the founder of two daughter houses of Fountains. Paul Dalton's reassessment of William's career, however, has shown that he moved from self-interest ('pursuit of territorial ambitions at the expense of public order and royal authority') to a more openly hostile position to the king.⁹⁶ Dalton linked William's foundation of Meaux from Fountains, dating formally from 1 January 1151 but clearly planned earlier, to his shift from the royalist and pro-Fitz Herbert camp to a recognition of the realities of Murdac's authority. What is surely more telling, however, is his earlier Cistercian foundation, from Fountains, at Bytham (23 May 1147), which removed to Vaudey in 1149. It was, according to the Meaux Chronicle, while the earl was visiting Vaudey during the construction of the buildings that Adam, a monk of Fountains who was overseeing the work, suggested that Aumale's anxieties about having failed to fulfil a vow to go to the Holy Land might be eased by the foundation of a second Cistercian house. Bytham was clearly being planned early in 1147 if not in 1146, before Henry Murdac's election as archbishop, with the status of William Fitz Herbert not fully resolved, and with pressure for his deposition still being maintained.⁹⁷ How are we to interpret this? Either William of Aumale had already changed camps; or he was indifferent to the question of who was archbishop, and perhaps welcomed ecclesiastical anarchy in which to pursue his own ambitions; or he was moved by the spiritual dynamic of Cistercian expansion, and eager to join the ranks of those who benefited, as founders, from the prayers of the White Monks.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Dalton, *Conquest, Anarchy and Lordship*, pp. 169–74.

⁹⁷ English, *Lords of Holderness*, p. 20, and Christopher Holdsworth, *The Piper and the Tune: Medieval Patrons and Monks*, The Stenton Lecture, 1990 (University of Reading, 1991), p. 12, connect the foundation of Bytham to Aumale's recognition of Murdac as archbishop, but the chronology shows that the foundation predated his election.

⁹⁸ William was certainly enthusiastic enough about making the foundation at Meaux to part, albeit reluctantly, with land which he had recently purchased to enclose for a deer park. Abbot Burton, who recorded this tradition, took great interest in the derivation of the name Meaux (Latin, *Melsa*) but despite his attempts to find a theological origin, it was in fact the name of the Domesday Book vill, forming part of the soke of Aldbrough: *DB*, I, fo. 324a.

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The case of William of Aumale demonstrates that to classify Cistercian patrons as 'Angevin', or 'opponents of the king', is at best too clear-cut an explanation, at worst misleading. Here again the wider context is important. Rievaulx's daughter houses also included Warden, founded by Walter Espec himself on his patrimonial estates in Bedfordshire (1136). One of Warden's daughter houses was Sawtry, established by Simon II de Senlis (1147) in order to assert his control over a corner of the earldom of Huntingdon, which Stephen had confiscated from Prince Henry of Scotland and granted to the earl.⁹⁹ Here we see family and tenorial connections at play. What seems to undermine Hill's thesis more convincingly, however, is that not all Cistercian founders are to be identified as Angevin supporters, which is the logical conclusion of his argument. While it is true that neither Stephen nor his queen, in contrast to the empress, was a patron of the Cistercians, Stephen did confirm, sometimes more than once, the foundation or endowment of Cistercian houses. Professor Holdsworth has drawn attention to royal charters issued for eleven out of thirty-nine Cistercian houses founded in his reign. Nine of these eleven were established by Stephen's loyal supporters who fought for the king.¹⁰⁰ The foundation of a Cistercian house – like that of Rufford by Gilbert de Gant and deriving from Rievaulx – was not always the action of a man who wished to demonstrate his Angevin sympathies.¹⁰¹ Eighteen Cistercian houses were established in the short period between 1146 and 1148; eight of these were founded by men close to King Stephen, and three by supporters of the Empress Matilda. As Christopher Holdsworth suggests, 'some more internal rhythm of monastic life' rather than political influence may be involved; and the coincidence of the timespan with the date of the Second Crusade, preached by St Bernard, may be significant.¹⁰²

The Cistercian expansion in Yorkshire and from Yorkshire was the result of a complex interweaving of factors. Above all the dynamic of expansion was spiritual: monks and patrons were drawn by the attraction of the new movement which offered to monks the 'surest way to heaven'. However, there was also, in the north, a political dimension. The Cistercians had a

⁹⁹ K. Stringer, 'A Cistercian archive: the earliest charters of Sawtry Abbey', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 6 (1980), 325–34.

¹⁰⁰ Holdsworth ('The church', pp. 226–7) includes in this list William of Aumale, whose foundation at Meaux, but not at Vaudey, received a charter of confirmation.

¹⁰¹ On Rufford see Burton, 'Foundation of the British Cistercian houses', pp. 31–2; *Rufford Charters*, ed. C. J. Holdsworth, Thoroton Society Record Series, 29, 30, 32, 34 (1972–81), 1, xx–xxvi. Gilbert's father had previously made a grant to Rievaulx of land at Stainton 'for the foundation of an abbey'; this did not take place, and Rufford may have been made to fulfil his father's wishes.

¹⁰² Holdsworth, 'The church', pp. 222–3; *Rufford Charters*, 1, xxiii, where it is suggested that foundations made in these years may have been made by men 'who dare not leave home'.

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high political profile during this period because of their involvement in the disputed election, and this may have been particularly appealing to founders with Angevin sympathies. Their foundation of a Cistercian house was a statement of their own political identity, but it is unlikely that they envisaged the kind of practical advantage suggested by Hill. The evidence further suggests that the political and tenurial uncertainties of the period were conducive to monastic foundations, in that the establishment of a religious house could stake a claim to disputed lands and title; the Cistercians were in place at the right time to benefit. Moreover, in such unsettled times men might feel in more need of the spiritual comfort, and insurance, that a monastic foundation would offer.¹⁰³ Let us allow a near-contemporary to have his assessment. Walter Daniel described the actions of Ailred as abbot of Revesby.

His fame runs through the whole countryside. Bishops, earls, barons, venerate the man and the place itself, and in their reverence and affection 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 goods to their salvation, and that, if they did not give, they might well lose both life and goods without any payment in return.¹⁰⁴

Here, then, was one Cistercian abbot who deliberately used the political and tenurial stresses and strains to further the Cistercian movement.

The Cistercian expansion was not a phenomenon that can, or should, be explained by reference simply either to ecclesiastical or to political motivation. The reasons why a baron founded a Cistercian house were as varied as were the barons themselves. They might found a monastery because of illness and impending death (Kirkstall), or to compensate for a broken vow (Meaux). They might choose to found a Cistercian one because of the resonance of political affiliation, or for family reasons, or quite simply because Cistercian monasticism was perceived as the holiest there was. We should remember, as well, that of the eight Yorkshire houses only five were 'text-book' Cistercian foundations, with full colonies sent at the invitation of a lay patron to a site which had been

¹⁰³ A point made in connection with Revesby by Holdsworth, *The Piper and the Tune*, pp. 9–13.

¹⁰⁴ *Life of Ailred*, p. 28.

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inspected and approved. Fountains was an unplanned, accidental foundation; the community of Byland, established as a Savigniac house, came to its Yorkshire location by chance; and its daughter house of Jervaulx came into being when an informal group of Savigniac monks were taken in by a tenant of the honour of Richmond, and then taken over by the patronage of the earls. It was not without many anxieties that the abbot of Savigny was prevented from dismantling the foundation.¹⁰⁵

The dynamic of Cistercian expansion in Yorkshire has to be seen in the wider context of the dispersal of the families of its two premier abbeys, Rievaulx and Fountains. The influences which brought the monks to Yorkshire, and secured them their power and prestige, came both from the continent and from the north. It came first from the cradle of Cistercian monasticism, Burgundy, and from the greatest of all White Monks, Bernard. It was nurtured by that continental churchman, Thurstan, and sustained by Henry Murdac, himself a product of the monastic cross-culture of the north of England and Europe. The axis of expansion lay also across the border into Scotland, and the energy and fervour of David I and Prince Henry ensured that Rievaulx's influence there was high. At no time more than in the 1140s was that axis from Burgundy to Scotland more pronounced. That the impetus went out of Cistercian foundations in the north after 1151 was due less to the ending of ecclesiastical and political faction than to the internal dynamic of the order, which attempted to put a halt to further foundations.

¹⁰⁵ *Mon. Ang.*, v, 568–9. The author of the *Historia* did not know what had brought the monks to Wensleydale, but recorded a tradition that brother Peter, a man skilled in medicine, was in the household of the earl of Richmond to heal the sick and collect alms. See Burton, 'Abbeys of Byland and Jervaulx', 125–8.