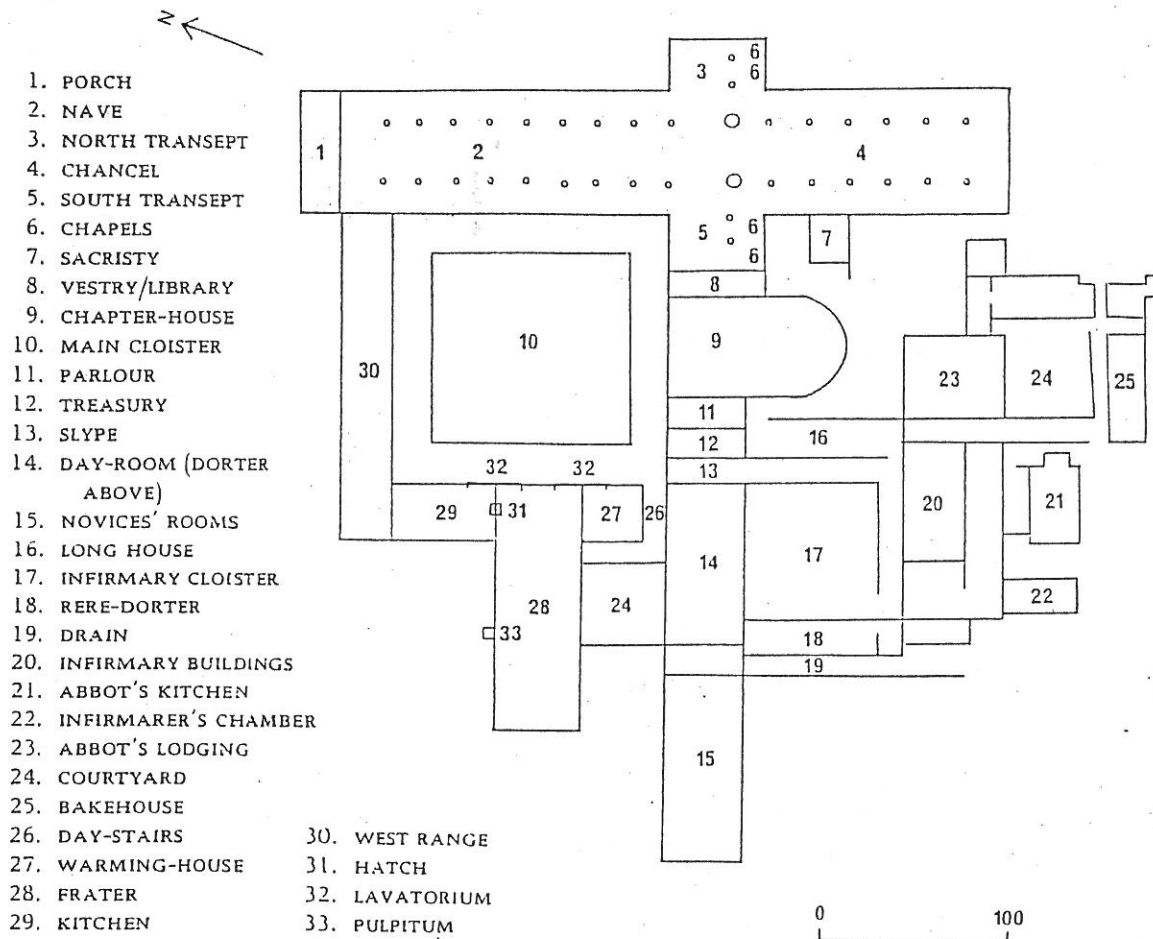


Cistercian buildings

(I) Ground plan of Rievaulx Abbey



overleaf: Rievaulx: interior of the church, looking down the choir towards the nave (from east to west)

(II) Ground plan of Fountains Abbey



overleaf: aerial view of Fountains Abbey from the west. The long building in the foreground, running centre left to right, is the west range, containing the lay brothers' accommodation.

THE CRITICS OF THE MONKS

Walter Map

Walter Map was a secular (i.e., non-monastic) clerk who was born between 1130 and 1135. He was in the service first of Bishop Gilbert Foliot of Hereford and then of London, and later of King Henry II. He was from the English-Welsh border, and his writings seem to indicate that he was a Welshman living on the English side. He was an older contemporary, and friend of, Gerald of Wales. Walter may have been educated at Gloucester Abbey, and went to study in Paris by 1154. He entered the service of Foliot, and by 1173 was a clerk in the royal household. He was a canon of St Pauls, London, probably from 1173, and held numerous churches in his own home country, including Westbury on Severn. His career at court seems to have ended with the death of Henry II in 1189, but even before then he had been pursuing higher office in the church, becoming a canon of Lincoln cathedral and chancellor of the same by 1186. He progressed to be precentor (c. 1189) and finally archdeacon of Oxford (1196 or 1197). He was twice mentioned as a possible bishop, at Hereford in 1199 and St Davids in 1203, but failed to achieve promotion, and died as archdeacon of Oxford in 1209 or 1210. His was a successful, but not exceptional, career as a scholar and civil servant.

De Nugis Curialium, or 'Courtiers' Trifles', is an account of Walter Map's household, and a vivid snapshot of the 'mental furniture of a learned and witty 12th-century clerk'. The indications in the text are that it was written in the early 1180s, but it was not all written as a piece, at the same time. For instance, the satire on the Cistercians (*Distinction 1, chapter 25*) has been accepted as, in origin, a separate tract which was incorporated into *De Nugis* at a later date. The book itself is a concoction of tales - funny stories, ghost stories, miracles - and satire and invective. One target of his satirical writing was the Cistercians. He did not criticize all monks, and has good things to say of the Grandmontines, Gilbertines, and Carthusians. But he has no good to say at all of the Cistercians - even St Bernard is mocked for his failure to perform miracles. His special criticism is reserved for the greed of the White Monks. So why the invective against the Cistercians in particular? One clue lies in the verse written against Walter Map, probably by the sub-prior of the Augustinian priory of St Frideswides, Oxford, at the time when Walter was archdeacon. The verse accuses Map of saying derisory things about the Cistercians, and suggests a possible reason: that the Cistercians failed to pay tithes to Map in one of the parishes whose church he held. This means that we are looking very carefully at Map's reliability, or partiality, as a witness. In what does his criticism rest? Is he accusing the Cistercians of falling from 'ideals' to 'reality' (or corruption), or does he not really believe that the 'ideals' ever existed? And was he a lone voice, or did the Cistercians have other critics? A useful comparison would be Map's friend Gerald, archdeacon of Wales. Why was he critical of the White Monks? Was it for personal reasons?

There are two sections in which Walter Map talks of the Cistercians. The first is *Distinction 1, chapter 24, Of the Origin of the Cistercians*. The second, which we shall be looking at in detail is *Distinction 1, chapter 25, A Digression of Master Walter Map on Monks*. I have provided a xerox copy of the English text, without the facing page Latin original. You will notice various footnote numbers in the text; many of these refer to the biblical source for Map's quotations and allusions, and I have added them only when I have thought it necessary.