

MONIALES AND ORDO CISTERCIENSIS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND AND WALES

JANET BURTON

*Isabella comitissa de Arundelle, morum quidem gravitate non mediocriter adornata, circa salutem animae suae diligens et sollicita, divina ut creditur, inspiratione praeventa, quandam abbatiam monialium ordinis Cisterciensis, Marham vocatam, cum summa devotione hoc anno construxit. Cujus rei abbatem nostrum duxit consulendum, ac permissione domini Papae domum nostram intravit, societatem ordinis in capitulo nostro devote petiit et obtinuit; iv. marcas et unum dolium vini conventui ad pitancias donavit.*¹

(“In this year Isabelle, countess of Arundel, not a little adorned by the depth of her virtues, caring and careful for the salvation of her soul, and guided, as it is believed, by divine inspiration, built a certain abbey for nuns of the Cistercian order, by the name of Marham, with the greatest devotion. In this matter she took the counsel of our abbot, and with the permission of the lord pope entered our house, and devoutly sought – and obtained – in our chapter association with our order. She gave four marks and one cask of wine as a pittance for the convent.”)

Thus, under the year 1252, the annalist of the Cistercian abbey of Waverley recorded the foundation of Marham Abbey (Norfolk), along with a heat wave around the feast of St Peter and St Paul [29 June] which led to an excessive number of deaths, an early autumn, the death of Walter Giffard, tenth abbot of Waverley, and the succession of Ralph, abbot of Dunkeswell and former abbot of Tintern, and finally the death of Blanche, mother of King Louis of France. Such precise – if brief – record of the foundation of a Cistercian abbey for women is unusual in an English context. The Waverley annalist seems keen to stress two features of the foundation, first the nobility and good character of the founder, and second that the association with his own house was both important and impeccable. The countess had entered the hallowed portals of a Cistercian chapter house on the highest possible authority. What was recorded here was both the beginning of a process, that is, the inception of a new religious house, and the end of a process, the culmination of negotiations which brought Cistercian women to their new home in Norfolk. Of the prehistory of the abbey we know a little. In 1250 the records of the Cistercian General Chap-

¹ ‘Annales Monasterii de Waverleia’ (‘Annals of Waverley’), in: ‘Annales Monastici’, ed. H.R. LUARD, 5 vols (Rolls Series 36), London 1865-69 (ND 1965-71), 2, pp. 344f.

ter noted that inspection of the abbey for nuns at Marham in England, which the countess of Arundel sought to have incorporated into the Order, was committed to the abbot of Waverley (the senior Cistercian house in England), and the abbot of Beaulieu (which though a late addition to the order had the prestige of being a royal foundation). The abbot of Waverley was charged with informing his colleague of their commission.² However they do not seem to have been in any hurry to act on it, for the following year, 1251, inspection was committed once again (*iterato*) to the same two abbots, who were to judge if Marham was to be, as the countess sought, a daughter of Cîteaux.³

Isabella's foundation charter, like her presence in the chapter house of Cistercian Waverley, was strengthened by external authority, this time both lay and ecclesiastical. She granted the manor of Marham, in her widowhood and for the soul of her mother, Matilda, countess of Warenne († 1248), and her deceased husband, Hugh, earl of Arundel (Hugh d'Aubigny, † 1243), to the abbess and convent of St Mary of Marham. The land, which she had received from her father as her marriage portion, was given to the nuns for the foundation of an abbey of the Cistercian order.⁴ Her charter was witnessed by the bishop of Norwich and the bishop of Chichester from the ecclesiastical arm, and her brothers, Roger, earl of Norfolk and earl marshal of England (Roger Bigod), and Hugh and John. Isabella, as granddaughter of William Marshall, patron of Tintern Abbey in Monmouthshire, where her grandfather, his sons Walter and Anselm and indeed her mother, Matilda, were buried, had sound credentials as a Cistercian patron.⁵ Although the General Chapter records imply that the nunnery of Marham was already in existence when the Cistercian chapter and its abbots intervened, it is clear that Countess Isabella had from the first intended her nunnery to be affiliated to the order of Cîteaux. And so it was, then, that Marham was founded as a Cistercian abbey for women in the same way and largely under the same procedures laid down by the General Chapter for houses of Cistercian men.

² J.M. CANIVEZ, 'Statuta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis ab anno 1116 ad annum 1786', 8 vols, Louvain 1933-1941, 2, p. 355 (1250/43).

³ [...] *et si filia Cistercii sicut requirit comitissa praedicta* [...]: *Ibid.*, p. 364 (1251/26).

⁴ W. DUGDALE / J. CALEY / H. ELLIS / B. BANDINEL (eds), 'Monasticon Anglicanum': a history of the abbeys and other monasteries, hospitals, friaries, and cathedral and collegiate churches, 6 vols in 8, London 1817-1840, 5, p. 744; translated in C.H. BERMAN (ed.), *Women and Monasticism in Medieval Europe: sisters and patrons of the Cistercian Reform* (Documents of practice series), Kalamazoo 2002, pp. 27f., and dated by BERMAN c. 1249.

⁵ William Marshall, as earl of Pembroke (1199-1219), obtained the patronage of Tintern, which passed to his son, another William. In the next generation but one the patronage passed to Matilda's grandson, Roger Bigod.

But Marham was unusual, indeed, it was one of only two female monasteries in England to be fully incorporated into the Order. The other was Tarrant Abbey in Dorset, which unlike Marham was not founded as a Cistercian house. There is evidence for a female community in the late twelfth century – affiliation unknown – and the founder appears to have been Ralph de Kahaines. However, the influential person behind the adoption of Cistercian customs may have been Richard Poore, bishop of Salisbury (1217-1228). As Sally THOMPSON has noted, Bishop Richard enjoyed custody of Ralph's underage son and heir, William (c. 1221), and in 1223 the records of the General Chapter noted that the bishop had requested the incorporation of an abbey into the Cistercian Order.⁶ Although the abbey is not named – indeed it is not even identified as a female community – in 1228 Abbess Claricia of Tarrant made her profession, as abbess of a house of Cistercian nuns, to Bishop Richard of Salisbury. Tarrant's recognized status as a Cistercian house is further demonstrated by two entries in the thirteenth-century chapter records. In 1243 correction and reform of the nuns of Tarrant were committed to the abbots of Boxley and Robertsbridge (both located in Kent, a considerable distance away from Tarrant), with instructions to reconcile and absolve the penitent nuns.⁷ Some years later, in 1257, a claim by the abbot of Bindon against the nuns of Tarrant was referred by the General Chapter to the abbots of Buckfast and Newenham.⁸

But this is to look ahead to the thirteenth century. Long before the foundation of Marham and Tarrant, indeed long before the Cistercian General Chapter apparently relaxed its official line, there were Cistercian houses for women in England. I use the word 'apparently' advisedly. As Elizabeth FREEMAN has recently pointed out, historians should not overlook that the 1213 statute also referred to *moniales* [...] *quae iam etiam incorporate sunt Ordini* ("nuns [...] who are already incorporated into the Order").⁹ To seek possible evidence of incorporation of houses founded before 1213, at a time in which the records of the General Chapter – always incomplete – were even more exiguous, is a perilous and far from helpful quest. That great work of reference, 'Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales', lists twenty-seven female Cistercian houses, a number based on a limited range of evidence.¹⁰ The foundation dates are not

⁶ CANIVEZ, 'Statuta' (note 2 above), p. 29 (1223/30). See S. THOMPSON, *Women Religious: the founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*, Oxford 1991, pp. 96-98.

⁷ CANIVEZ, 'Statuta' (note 2 above), p. 271 (1243/62).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 434 (1257/50).

⁹ E. FREEMAN, *Houses of a Peculiar Order: Cistercian nunneries in Medieval England, with special attention to the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, in: *Cîteaux* 55 (2004), pp. 245-287, at 247.

¹⁰ D. KNOWLES / R.N. HADCOCK (eds), *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales*, London 1971, pp. 271-277. E. FREEMAN, *Houses* (note 9 above), pp. 252f. and 283-286, notes

always easy to establish, but the evidence suggests that most of these – indeed all but three – could date their origins to the period before 1213, some indeed to the 1140s, making their presence almost as early as the majority of male houses of the order. The historiographical debate, certainly in response to the English and Welsh evidence, is no longer ‘were there Cistercian nuns?’ but rather ‘when were there Cistercian nuns?’ and what did the label ‘Cistercian’ actually mean when applied to female houses?¹¹ One approach has been to distinguish houses founded before and after the chronological watershed of 1213, which I have done in the introduction to this paper. Even taking into account that female houses were apparently recognized or incorporated in some way before 1213, the thirteenth-century General Chapter rulings for the admission and recognition of female houses (1213, 1218, 1219, 1220, 1225, 1228 etc) are significant, so in one way it seems reasonable to distinguish between female Cistercian monasteries, those houses recognized in some ways and by some people as Cistercian, founded before 1213, and those founded after. As will be argued however, even this argument assumes a continuity which may not have existed and to some extent it depends on seeing female houses as reflections of male ones, again an image with which I am not comfortable.

Recent historical writing has, quite rightly, brought Cistercian women back into the history of the Cistercian order, and it is good that historians are taking more seriously the evidence for female participation in the movement at an early date. But the problem with regard to England is that only the two houses discussed above – Marham and Tarrant – and one other female Cistercian house in England, Whistones to the north of the city of Worcester, were founded after the formal acceptance of women into the order.¹² This begs the question of definition, what it has meant to a female monastery to ‘be Cistercian’. It has become fashionable to disregard this chronological distinction. Constance BERMAN, with her extensive knowledge of the French Cistercian houses, has accused historians of “falling back on a narrow reading of the juridical situation of women within the Order” and has asserted that they “generally have denied or minimized the role of nuns and nuns have been ignored

thirty five houses and this does not include the Yorkshire house of Thicket, on which see below.

¹¹ For a recent and very helpful treatment see FREEMAN, Houses (note 9 above). See also, for the wider European context, the article by Franz FELTEN in this volume.

¹² Whistones was founded by Walter de Cantilupe, bishop of Worcester (1237-1266), before 1255. There were three female Cistercian houses in Wales. Llansantffraid, a short-lived house of the twelfth century, Llanllŷr, founded in the late twelfth century (on which see below), and Llanllugan, endowed by Maredudd, lord of Cydwain, possibly as early as 1170 but possibly as later as 1244. See D.H. WILLIAMS, Cistercian Nunneries in Medieval Wales, in: *Cîteaux* 26 (1975), pp. 155-174, at 157.

from the beginning, for instance in the mainstream of Cistercian historiography which may be traced back at least to the *Exordium Magnum*, written circa 1200 by Conrad, abbot of the Cistercian abbey of Eberbach”.¹³ BERMAN, nevertheless and in the same publication, which brings together a useful collection of translated sources for the history of Cistercian women, begins with sources for houses which she characterizes as “clearly Cistercian houses [...] thus those founded from the thirteenth century”.¹⁴ I propose to follow BERMAN’S example here, and having already offered the evidence for the Cistercian affiliation of Marham and Tarrant – which alone out of the English female Cistercian monasteries were accorded the title of abbey – to consider other houses which made claim to Cistercian identity. To use the word ‘claim’ is not perjorative, but I wish to explore further what those English and Welsh Cistercian houses which at one time or another used the term ‘Cistercian’ might have been like.

A glance at a map of the English and Welsh Cistercian nunneries is instructive. At first sight there seems to be a correlation between the location of female houses of the Cistercian order and the areas in which the male houses flourished. Thus many female houses occur in Yorkshire, where the Cistercian male houses were significant, and in Lincolnshire, where there was both a strong Cistercian presence and where the Gilbertines, from the 1140s, began to make themselves felt. Proximity of male houses may have been a dynamic in the adoption of Cistercian customs by female houses, or indeed the foundation of nunneries whose founders wished them to be associated with the order from the outset. Thus the Yorkshire nunnery of Sinningthwaite was founded some time before 1155 by Bertram Haget, whose daughter, Gundreda, became a nun there. The Haget family enjoyed a close connection, as benefactors, with Fountains Abbey. A son of Bertram, Ralph, became a monk at Fountains, rising to the office of abbot of its daughter house of Kirkstall in 1182 and returning as abbot of the mother house in 1190/1.¹⁵ Another Yorkshire priory, Swine, was founded for religious women by a priest, Robert de Verli, some time before January 1153, when Hugh du Puiset, who confirmed the foundation in his capacity of archdeacon of the East Riding, became bishop of Durham.¹⁶ It was thus founded at roughly the same time as nearby Cistercian Meaux Abbey, a

¹³ BERMAN, *Women* (note 4 above), p. 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ See D. KNOWLES / C.N.L. BROOKE / R.N. HADCOCK (eds), *The Heads of Religious Houses: England and Wales 940–1216*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 133, 136. For a connection between Sinningthwaite and Fountains in the thirteenth century see below.

¹⁶ See W. FARRER / C.T. CLAY (eds), *Early Yorkshire Charters being a Collection of Documents anterior to the thirteenth Century made from the public Records, monastic Chartularies, Roger Dodsworth’s Manuscripts and other available Sources*, vols 1–12, Edinburgh/Huddersfield 1914–1965, 3, no. 1360.

daughter house of Fountains (1150). Moreover – and to this point I will return – Swine lay not far from the Gilbertine double house at Watton, also founded some time before 1153. The founder of the Gilbertine Order, Gilbert of Sempringham, was influenced to some degree by the Cistercians and even sought Cistercian oversight for the first two houses, Sempringham and Haverholme.¹⁷ Moreover, Bishop Alexander of Lincoln, founder of the second Gilbertine house of Haverholme, described the nuns as *vitam artam, vitam sanctam, vitam scilicet monachorum Cistersensis [sic] religionis arripientes, quantum illius sexus valitudo permittit* (“seizing the strict life, the holy life, the life, that is, of the Cistercian monks as far as the weakness of their sex allows”).¹⁸ As far as Bishop Alexander was concerned, his Gilbertine nuns were to follow a Cistercian lifestyle, but without officially adopting Cistercian identity. Among other female houses that became known as Cistercian Gokewell Priory (Lincolnshire) was founded by William de Alta Ripa, but a benefactor was William de Roumare, earl of Lincoln and founder of Cistercian Revesby,¹⁹ while Stixwould was established by Lucy, dowager countess of Chester, mother of both William de Roumare and another Cistercian patron, Ranulf, earl of Chester.²⁰

Across in the western reaches of West Wales the small nunnery of Llanllŷr near Lampeter was founded by Rhys ap Gruffydd, lord of Deheubarth, who was patron, and in many ways the real founder of the fortunes, of the Cistercian male house of Strata Florida.²¹ Gerald of Wales, in a rather slanted account written long after he had lost the rosy view of the Cistercians evinced in his ‘Journey through Wales’, casts some light on the nature of the nunnery of Llanllŷr and suggests that in origin it had a close association with Strata Florida. In the *Speculum Ecclesiae* Gerald tells a story of how

¹⁷ The question of Cistercian influence on the Gilbertines is a debated point, and beyond the scope of this paper. See, for instance, B. GOLDING, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order, c.1130-c.1300*, Oxford 1995, especially pp. 26-33, 81-86, 112-118.

¹⁸ M.G. SNAPE (ed.), *English Episcopal Acta, I, Lincoln 1067-1185*, Oxford 1980, no. 37.

¹⁹ THOMPSON, *Women* (note 6 above), p. 105, notes that an early confirmation of the foundation of Gokewell was attested by the abbot and chapter of Cistercian Kirkstall, although others are witnessed by the Augustinian canons of Thornholme. Similarly the foundation of Greenfield was attested by the abbot of Louth Park (Cistercian) but also by the prior of Grimsby (Augustinian).

²⁰ On Stixwould see THOMPSON, *Women* (note 6 above), p. 169; C.V. GRAVES, *English Cistercian Nuns in Lincolnshire*, in: *Speculum. A journal of medieval studies* 54 (1979), pp. 492-499; and ID., *Stixwould in the Market Place*, in: J.A. NICHOLS / L.T. SHANK (eds), *Medieval Religious Women I, Distant Echoes*, Kalamazoo 1984, pp. 213-235.

²¹ WILLIAMS, *Cistercian nunneries* (note 12 above), pp. 163-171.

*Erat domus monialium pauperum in dextralis Walliae parte superiori sita, a Reso Grif-fini filio principe regionis illius suis nostrisque diebus egregio fundata, et praediis ac pas-cuis, quibus vivere iuxta modulum suum Deoque servire poterant, caritative dotata [...]*²²

(“There was a house of poor nuns located in the upper part of south Wales, founded by Rhys ap Gruffydd, lord of that region and most famous in our days, and charitably endowed with estates and pastures on which they might live according to their custom and serve God [...].”)

Although Gerald does not name the nunnery, this can only be the small female house of Llanllŷr. Gerald goes on to tell a story of how the monks of another unnamed, and rich, monastery – clearly Strata Florida – oppressed the poor nuns and appropriated their lands. What is of interest here is the way Gerald describes Llanllŷr:

[...] domus monialium exilis et exigua ab initio cultum et habitum exteriorem ordinis Cisterciensis et institutionem etiam interiorem quoad muliebri sexui licuit, ab eadem divite domo susceperat et magisterio ipsius ordinationi quoque et gubernationi tanquam subdi-tam et ex toto subjectam se subjecerat.

(“[...] the ruined and humble house of nuns had from the beginning received from that same rich house the outward practice and habit and also the internal constitution of the Cistercian order as far as was possible for the female sex, and had also subjected itself to the instruction, government, and direction of that same house as subject and submissive in all things.”)

Gerald’s choice of words in terms of female adoption of Cistercian customs (*quoad muliebri sexui licuit*) echoes the language of papal bulls, but more closely the charter of Bishop Alexander of Lincoln for Haverholme.²³ The *Speculum Ecclesiae* leaves us in no doubt that to Gerald’s mind there was a constitutional relationship between Llanllŷr and Strata Florida, probably facilitated or arranged by the founder, Rhys ap Gruffydd, lord of Deheubarth. It is not difficult to see how the oversight of the affairs of the female house by its larger and more powerful male counterpart could have been taken for, or misrepresented as, exploitation.

These instances suggest that the adoption of a Cistercian identity by female houses might be influenced at a local level by the wishes of their founders and patrons, or by association with, and encouragement by, local Cistercian men. But the recognition of Cistercian attributes could be wider, and there is evidence that in the twelfth century successive popes recognized a number of

²² ‘Speculum Ecclesiae’, in: ‘Giraldi Cambrensis Opera Omnia’, ed. J.S. BREWER, 8 vols (Rolls Series 21), London 1861-91 (ND 1964-66), 4, pp. 152f.

²³ See above p. 6. (Arbeitspaginierung!!!###)

English female houses as Cistercian. Nun Cotham (Lincolnshire) was founded by Alan de Mouncels before 1153, for his grant was confirmed by Henry Murdac, the Cistercian archbishop of York, who died in that year.²⁴ In 1153/4 – so within just a few years of the foundation – Pope Alexander III took into his protection Prioress Matilda and the convent, and confirmed their lands. The bull does not mention the order or way of life of the nuns.²⁵ By 1168/9 the same pope – again with no mention of a monastic affiliation – protected the nuns from exaction on tithes on newly cultivated land.²⁶ At some point between then and 1177 the pope issued a further confirmation for Prioress Matilda and the nuns, and commanded that the *ordo monasticus, qui in uestra ecclesia secundum Dei timorem et beati Benedicti regulam noscitur institutus [...]* *obseruetur* (“the monastic order which is known to have been instituted in your church according to the fear of God and the Rule of the Blessed Benedict should be observed [...]).²⁷ Finally by a bull issued at the Rialto, Venice, in 1177 Alexander confirmed the *ordo monasticus, qui secundum Beati Benedicti regulam et institutionem Cisterciensium fratrum in monasterio uestro noscitur institutus, perpetuis temporibus inuiolabiliter obseruetur* (“the monastic order, which is known to have been instituted in your monastery according to the Rule of the Blessed Benedict and the institutes of the Cistercian brethren, should be observed inviolate for all times”), adding that no-one should presume to exact tithes from land cultivated by their own hands, or from feed for their animals.²⁸ This last bull was repeated by Lucius III between 1181 and 1185.²⁹ The evidence of papal bulls would seem to suggest that at some point – which we can narrow to between 1168 and 1177 – the nuns of Nun Cotham received papal recognition as a Cistercian priory, a house following the Rule of St Benedict and the institutes of the Cistercian brethren. A bull not printed by Walther HOLTZMANN but collected by Roger DODSWORTH from original charters which in the seventeenth century were stored in St Mary’s Tower, York, was issued jointly to Nun Cotham and the Yorkshire priory of Swine, also at Rialto and so possibly also in 1177. This confirmed to the two houses freedom from the payment of tithes as enjoyed by Cistercian men, *sicut fratribus Cisterciensibus indultum sit de clementia sedis apostolicae* (“as may be the indult to the Cistercian brethren by clemency of the Apostolic See”).³⁰ Some years before, in 1172, that same pope, Alexander III, had issued

²⁴ J. BURTON (ed.), *English Episcopal Acta V, York 1070-1154*, Oxford 1988, no. 124.

²⁵ W. HOLTZMANN (ed.), *Papsturkunden in England*, 3 vols (*Abhandlungen der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, phil.-hist. Klasse NF 3,33*), Göttingen 1952, 3, no. 95.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 164.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 236.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 241.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 359.

³⁰ DUGDALE / CALEY / ELLIS / BANDINEL (eds), ‘*Monasticon*’ (note 4 above), 5, p. 494.

papal protection to another Yorkshire house, Sinningthwaite, and to its prioress Christina, ordering that *ordo monasticus qui secundum Dei et beati Benedicti regulam et institutionem Cisterciensium fratrum in eodem monasterio institutus est* should be preserved. Thus a series of papal bulls, from Alexander to Lucius III and Gregory VIII,³¹ reinforces the Cistercian identity of Sinningthwaite – whether in terms of exemption from tithes of the kind enjoyed by Cistercian brethren or in terms of following the Cistercian institutes. In 1204 Pope Innocent III confirmed lands and tithe exemption to the Yorkshire nunnery of Hampole, stating that the nuns followed the Rule of St Benedict and the institutes of the Cistercian Order, and he referred also to the time *antequam Cisterciensis ordinis instituta susciperet*. This phrase is significant because it is a clear indication that the nunnery had not been founded as a Cistercian priory but had subsequently adopted Cistercian customs. This may have been between the issue of a papal bull by Adrian IV in 1156, which granted Cistercian-style privileges but did not refer to the nunnery following the institutes of the Cistercian Order, and 1204.³² Thirteenth-century papal bulls, which have recently come to light, describe the small Yorkshire nunnery of Thicket as *Cisterciensis ordinis* and following the *ordo monasticus* [...] *secundum Deum et Beati Benedicti regulam atque institutionem Cisterciensium fratrum*.³³

Thus it is clear that an (admittedly small) number of female houses received papal recognition as Cistercian houses, or houses following Cistercian customs, though in the 1170s the distinction between the two might not have been as clear as it was to Cistercian men in 1228.³⁴ Although these bulls generally provide papal protection for the nuns, and refer to them following the Rule of St Benedict and the institutes of the Cistercian order, the purpose behind them seems to be linked specifically to the question of Cistercian privileges, especially tithes. Sally THOMPSON suggested that it was for that very reason that female houses claimed to be Cistercian.³⁵ She cites the case of Langley Priory, which in the late twelfth century claimed to be exempt from the payment of tithes be-

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 465f.

³² York, Borthwick Institute for Archives, Cause Paper CP E. 195, discussed in J. BURTON, *The Convent and the Community: cause papers as a source for monastic history*, in: P. HOSKIN / CH. BROOKE / B. DOBSON (eds), *The Foundations of Medieval English Ecclesiastical History: studies presented to David Smith*, Woodbridge 2005, pp. 63-76, at 66-68.

³³ York, Borthwick Institute for Archives, Cause Paper CP F.221, discussed in BURTON, *Convent* (note 32 above), pp. 68-70.

³⁴ CANIVEZ, *Statuta* (note 2 above), p. 68 (1228/16), where it was stated that no further monasteries of nuns were to be built in the name or under the jurisdiction of the Order, nor were they to be associated to the Order. However they could use Cistercian customs ([...] *nostras institutiones* [...] *aemulare*) but were not to be under the supervision of, or visited by, Cistercian men.

³⁵ THOMPSON, *Women* (note 6 above), pp. 103-106.

cause it was a Cistercian house, a claim initially accepted by papal judges delegate but later overturned. This appears to be the only documented occasion on which a claim to Cistercian identity was made.³⁶ Twelfth-century popes, therefore, appear to have had few qualms about accepting that a number of English female houses followed Cistercian customs. Moreover, royal authorities were also persuaded by some houses to accept that they were Cistercian. In 1294 the Patent Rolls record Legbourne, Nun Cotham and Nun Appleton as Cistercian.³⁷

However not all agreed that these nunneries were to be regarded as Cistercian. In 1270 John, abbot of Cîteaux, wrote from the General Chapter to the dean of Lincoln informing him – indeed complaining – *quod abbatisse monialium de Stikeswolde, de Grenefeld, de Cotum, de Legeburn, de Goukenwell, de Sancto Michael extra Stamf, licet habitum ordinis nostri portare videantur, non tamen sunt de ordine nostro nec eidem ordine incorporate, propter quod nec gaudere debent privilegiis et libertatibus ordinis nec de nostro ordine reputari* (“that the abbesses of the nuns of Stixwould, Greenfield, Nun Cotham, Legbourne, Goxwell and St Michael outside Stamford, although they are seen to wear the habit of our order, nevertheless are not of our order nor incorporated into our order, on which account they ought not to enjoy the privileges and liberties of our order nor ought they to be considered to belong to our order”).³⁸ This is uncompromising language. It would appear that to the abbot of Cîteaux, none of these Lincolnshire houses were officially recognized as Cistercian, at least not in 1270. Two other aspects of the abbot’s letter are worthy of note. First, it implies that there was a recognized Cistercian habit for women. Second, as far as the abbot was concerned, the claim to Cistercian identity seems to have been linked to its claims to privileges, probably tithe exemptions.

Were Cistercian nuns, then, recognizable by a distinctive habit? Was this part of their identity? To Gerald of Wales, as we saw earlier, the habit of the nuns of Llanllŷr (*habitum exteriozem*) distinguished them as Cistercian nuns. Such distinction was less clear in the *Mappa Mundi* of Gervase of Canterbury, written c. 1201. In listing houses of nuns in different dioceses Gervase attempted to classify them by the colour of their habits. In Yorkshire and Richmondshire he listed eleven nunneries, perhaps only around half of those in existence at the time. Three nunneries which are generally classified as Benedictine (St Clem-

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106; DUGDALE / CALEY / ELLIS / BANDINEL (eds), ‘Monasticon’ (note 4 above), 4, no. 5. FREEMAN lists Langley as a Cistercian house (FREEMAN, Houses (note 9 above), p. 284).

³⁷ Calendar of Patent Rolls. Edward I: 1292-1301, 4 vols, ed. H.C.M. LYTE, London 1895, 3, p. 90. See also the examples given by FREEMAN, Houses (note 9 above), pp. 260-264.

³⁸ Close Rolls of the reign of Henry III preserved in the public record office, 14 vols, London 1938, vol. 14 (1268-1272), p. 301.

ent's, York, Nunkeeling and Marrick) are described as houses of *moniales nigrae*, as was Augustinian Moxby. Cistercian Keldholme, Rosedale and Sinningthwaite are described as houses of *moniales albae*, as one might expect for Cistercian houses. However Cistercian Ellerton and Swine were classed as *moniales nigrae*, while Cistercian Hampole and Wykeham, like Gilbertine Watton was a house of *canonici albi et moniales*. The Welsh Cistercian nunneries of Llanllŷr and Llanllugan – interestingly denoted as abbeys – were of *moniales albae*.³⁹ Such variation may reflect the state of Gervase's knowledge (which was not comprehensive enough to allow him to include all houses) but equally may be indicative of a variety of practice as regards the adoption of habits.

I have referred so far to nunneries following a Cistercian 'way of life' and to papal bulls that refer to the nuns following the institutes of Cistercian men. It is in this area – rather than in the question of privileges to which claim might be made – that we encounter most difficulty. How are we to perceive nuns as Cistercian? The statutes of the early thirteenth century refer to strict enclosure (1213, 1218, and 1220), lack of possessions, i.e., poverty (1218), and, in 1244, and written evidence of exemption from episcopal jurisdiction, as features of incorporated nunneries.⁴⁰ However, as we have seen, most English and Welsh Cistercian nunneries were founded before these requirements were articulated. Clearly, that they may not have met these strict criteria did not preclude their recognition by papal, and later royal and episcopal authorities.

English Cistercian nunneries may have been characterized by a lack of possessions and an austerity in buildings and lifestyle, but such a statement demands deeper investigation than is possible in this short paper. Though the sites of a number of Cistercian female houses were liminal, and their resources straightened, such could also be said of Benedictine nunneries. Poverty and poor sites seem to be features of those nunneries founded after the Norman Conquest, particularly in the north. It is also clear, from the English evidence, that Cistercian nunneries were not exempt from episcopal visitation. There was no formal association between English Cistercian nunneries and male houses or their abbots. In February 1276, for instance, Archbishop Giffard of York issued a mandate to the prioresses of Hampole, Nun Appleton, and Sinningthwaite, and other prioresses in the diocese, ordering them to receive Friars Minor or Friars Preacher as their confessors as they customarily did, even though this had been forbidden by Cistercian abbots: *Fratres Minores aut Predica-*

³⁹ See Gervase of Canterbury, 'Mappa Mundi', in: *The Historical Works of Gervase of Canterbury*, ed. W. STUBBS, 2 vols (Rolls Series 73), London 1880 (ND 1965), 2, pp. 439-443. The 'abbatia de Hudham' is to be identified as Llanllugan: see WILLIAMS, *Cistercian nunneries* (note 12 above), p. 158. For discussion of the colour of habits see THOMPSON, *Women* (note 6 above), pp. 100-102.

⁴⁰ FREEMAN, *Houses* (note 9 above), pp. 247-251.

tores [...] ad vestras confessiones audiendas, sicut hactenus fieri consuevit, non obstante inhibitione ex parte abbatum Cisterciensis ordinis vobis facta, recipere studeatis (“you should take care to receive friars minor or friars preacher [...] to hear your confessions, as has been the custom hitherto, notwithstanding the prohibition placed on you by abbots of the Cistercian order”). This they were to do because the Cistercian abbots had no ordinary or delegated jurisdiction over them (*quia dicti abbates in vos nullam habent jurisdictionem ordinariam, vel etiam delegatam*).⁴¹ The prioresses were enjoined to take no notice of the abbots. However, in November of that same year one of those nunneries, Sinningthwaite, appealed though the persons of three *religiosae mulieres* and *sorores*, Prioress Isabella, and Margaret and Ingreta, nuns of the monastery of Sinningthwaite *ordinis Cisterciensis* to the notary public, sitting in the church of St Pauls in London.⁴² They stated that time out of mind, their monastery had been free from episcopal visitation, and moreover that the prioresses were accustomed to be confirmed by the abbot of Fountains, not the archbishop.⁴³ They appealed that the attempts on the part of the current archbishop to conduct a visitation were uncanonical. Nevertheless the archbishops of York, like the bishops of Lincoln, regularly visited the nunneries of their diocese, even those whom they themselves from time to time addressed, or recognized, as Cistercian. However, despite the assertion by the Sinningthwaite nuns, the evidence indicates that apart from the two fully incorporated houses, Marham and Tarrant, for which there are no documented instances of episcopal visitation, bishops did regularly visit female Cistercian houses, while at the same time proclaiming that these monasteries were indeed Cistercian.⁴⁴

Episcopal visitation can also shed some light on internal arrangement of the nunneries. At a visitation of Nun Cotham Bishop Hugh of Lincoln (1209-1235) issued a series of institutions for the house.⁴⁵ There was to be a master and prioress and a community of no more than thirty nuns, as well as twelve lay brothers, a master chaplain and two other chaplains. The master and prioress and one wise nun were to have custody of the seal and documents, and there

⁴¹ The Register of Walter Giffard, Lord Archbishop of York, 1266-1279, ed. W. BROWN (Surtees Society 109), Durham 1904, p. 295.

⁴² For the appeal see DUGDALE / CALEY / ELLIS / BANDINEL (eds), ‘Monasticon’ (note 4 above), 5, pp. 464f. For the visitations of the Yorkshire Cistercian nunneries see J. BURTON, The Yorkshire Nunneries in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries (Borthwick Paper 56), York 1979, pp. 27-36. For Lincoln, see FREEMAN, Houses (note 9 above), pp. 267-270.

⁴³ For a possible connection between Fountains and Sinningthwaite in the latter’s early years, see above, p. 5. (Arbeitspaginierung!!!!###).

⁴⁴ See the instances cited in FREEMAN, Houses (note 9 above), pp. 267-270.

⁴⁵ D.M. SMITH (ed.), The Acta of Hugh of Wells, Bishop of Lincoln 1209-1235 (Lincoln Record Society 88), Woodbridge 2000, no. 447; translated in BERMAN, Women (note 4 above), pp. 119-121.

were to be granges, although the nuns were not to visit these. Masters, who had no affiliation with the Cistercians, are documented at a number of Cistercian nunneries. Archbishop Wickwane of York appointed a monk of Benedictine Whitby to the guardianship of Handale and Basedale in 1268; a Premonstratensian canon of Croxton became guardian of Swine in 1287, and in 1290 he was replaced by John Bustard, canon of the Trinitarian friary of St Robert of Knaresborough, and later still by the rector of Londesborough. Hampole was committed to the vicar of Wath in 1280 and the vicar of Conisborough in 1281.⁴⁶ At Cistercian Swine, which, it will be remembered, was recognized as Cistercian in papal bull (1177), the internal organization documented in a visitation of 1268 seems closely to have resembled the arrangement of a Gilbertine double house, with regular canons and lay brothers, as well as lay sisters – even down to the window house through which the women and men communicated, which was characteristic of Gilbertine houses.⁴⁷

Apart from Tarrant and Marham, only one English Cistercian nunnery, Cookhill, appears elsewhere in the records of the General Chapter. In 1491 the Chapter records noted the *privationem, amotionem, depositionem et destitutionem* of sister Joan [Joan Frankelden], until recently abbess of Cookhill in the diocese of Worcester, and the *promotionem, provisionem, institutionem et installationem* of sister Elizabeth Webbe to the position of abbess.⁴⁸ This was done on the authority of the abbots of Fountains and Stratford Langthorne, and the General Chapter report was both preceded and followed by letters between English Cistercian abbots and the Chapter.⁴⁹ Further, when in 1520 a commission and visitation was enjoined on the abbots of Stratford Langthorne and the London house of St Mary Graces for the visitation and reform of English Cistercian houses, four nunneries were included. These were Tarrant and Marham, Cook Hill, and one which does not appear in other earlier records as Cistercian, Pinley.⁵⁰ In 1533 a similar commission was granted for visitation and reform of English Cistercian houses. This time the abbots of Woburn and St Mary Graces were to visit a number of Cistercian abbeys, including the *monasteria monialium* of Tarrant,

⁴⁶ For these references see BURTON, Yorkshire nunneries (note 42 above), p. 35. See also EAD., The Chariot of Aminadab and the Yorkshire Nunnery of Swine, in: R. HORROX / S.R. JONES (eds), Pragmatic Utopias: ideals and communities, 1200-1630, Cambridge 2001, pp. 26-42, at 28f.

⁴⁷ For a fuller discussion of Swine see *ibid.*, pp. 30-32.

⁴⁸ CANIVEZ, 'Statuta' (note 2 above), 6, 22 (1491/49); D.M. SMITH (ed.), The Heads of Religious Houses England and Wales, 3, 1377-1540, Cambridge 2008, p. 639.

⁴⁹ See C.H. TALBOT (ed.), Letters from the English Abbots to the Chapter at Cîteaux 1442-1521 (Camden Society fourth series 4), London 1967, pp. 130-139, 146-148, 152-154. For a full discussion see FREEMAN, Houses (note 9 above), pp. 270-272.

⁵⁰ CANIVEZ, 'Statuta' (note 2 above), 6, pp. 577f. (1520/29); see also TALBOT, Letters (note 49 above), pp. 237, 258, 260.

Marham, and Cookhill (Pinley being omitted). The abbots of the Yorkshire houses of Fountains and Byland were given the same commission in relation to a second group of English houses, including the *monasteria monialium* of Nun Appleton, Sinningthwaite, Esholt, Hampole, Arthington, Ellerton, Swine, and Kirklees (Yorkshire), Newcastle (Northumberland), and Wallingwells, Greenfield, Stixwould, Gokwell, and Nun Cotham (Lincolnshire). Thus in 1533, as the storm clouds of the English dissolution of the monasteries began to gather, the Cistercian order recognized their responsibility towards seventeen female houses in England. Put another way, just a few years before their dissolution certain of the English nunneries may have sought refuge in renewed association with an international monastic order.

As argued earlier in this paper, historians have moved on from a view that sees Cistercian women as marginalized from the mainstream of Cistercian reform, and accepted that – notwithstanding the ‘official’ line of grudging acceptance that emerges from the records of the General Chapter – Cistercian men, be they abbots, priors, monks, founders or patrons, and indeed popes and bishops, did indeed see a place for women. In seeking to explore further what it might have meant to women to ‘be Cistercian’, however, it still seems reasonable to draw some kind of distinction between the fully incorporated abbeys, which enjoyed both a status within the order and exemption from episcopal supervision and jurisdiction, and other houses which were founded at an earlier date, and whose ties with the order may have, for a long period, have been less formal. Such an argument does not seek to underplay the place of women within the Cistercian movement. It does, however, suggest that there is no reason to see the Cistercian *vita religiosa* for women as a mere imitation of that of Cistercian men. Elizabeth FREEMAN has done much to further our understanding of attitudes towards Cistercian women in medieval England, in particular by searching in sources which had eluded earlier historians.⁵¹ Her conclusion, that “once we broaden our understanding of Cistercian nuns to include these unofficial houses then a much richer appreciation is possible of Cistercian women’s history”, is a welcome one. But we must not expect a ‘one size fits all’. Female houses were different to male houses. They were subject to episcopal visitation. They drew their confessors, not from among Cistercian monks, but from friars and others; they had masters from among the ranks of parish clergy, regular canons, Benedictine monks, and this may have rooted them more firmly in their local communities than male houses. They might have lay brothers, but equally, as at Swine, they might adopt a Gilbertine style of administration which included a role for regular canons. Here we may be seeing a distinction between

⁵¹ See in particular FREEMAN, Houses (note 9 above), p. 263, note 70. Here FREEMAN refers to her current study on ‘Cistercian Nuns in England c. 1150 to 1550: a gendered history of a monastic institution’.

nuns *ordinis Cisterciensis*, in the sense of female houses which were incorporated into the Order, and nuns following the *ordo Cisterciensis* in terms of the way of life of the White Monk, following, as twelfth-century papal bulls phrased it, the *instituta fratrum Cisterciencium*. Such a decision allowed them to participate in the Cistercian way of life, but may have left them freer to adapt their lives to their own local circumstances.