

Beyond the Precinct and Worldly Affairs

It was a common perception that the Cistercian monastic order purposely located their abbeys in deserted places far away from human habitation; in reality, Cistercian abbeys were located in inhospitable places due to the wishes of the founding benefactor and the remote nature of the lands granted in the founding endowment. The only statute regarding the location of a new abbey, however, was that no abbey was to be founded in cities, towns or villages. Although they actively removed themselves from settlements of all types, the Cistercian order was not fully removed from the world beyond their precincts and were often immersed in or impinged by worldly events.

Ecclesiastic Offices

There was no decree preventing abbots from becoming bishops or archbishops, although they could only do so with the approval of the Abbot of Citeaux and General Chapter. Abbots who did so were still bound to keep to the Rules of the Order, so were not allowed to wear the fur-lined garments with sleeves lined in a blood-red colour of episcopal office, and instead wore a poor mantle lined with sheepskin.

In 1124, Peter, the third abbot of La Ferté Abbey, Saône-et-Loire, France, became the first Cistercian monk to ascend to episcopal office when he was elevated to the office of Archbishop of Tarentaise, in the historical region of Savoy; he was superseded in 1142 by Peter, the first abbot of Tamie Abbey in the Bauges mountains of France. By 1160, over fifty Cistercian monks had been appointed to episcopal office, including ten cardinals and one pope (Eugenius III, 1145-1153); the first of two Cistercian monks elected to the papacy.

The first episcopal office in England to be occupied by a Cistercian monk was that of the Archbishop of York, when Henry Murdac attained the episcopacy in 1147; replacing William fitz Herbert, formerly the Treasurer of York Minster, who had been elected Archbishop of York in 1140 following the death of Thurstan (a supporter of the disenchanting colony of Benedictine monks who left the Abbey of St Mary in York to found Fountains Abbey). Henry professed as a Cistercian monk at Clairvaux Abbey, Ville-sous-la-Ferté, France, in 1134 he became the first abbot of Vauclair Abbey, Bouconville-Vauclair, France, and in 1144 the third abbot of Fountains Abbey, Yorkshire. The abbots of Rievaulx Abbey, Yorkshire, and Fountains Abbey both appealed the election of William (who they saw as an unfit minister of the Church) who was subsequently deposed in 1147 by Pope Eugenius III, who ordered a fresh election that resulted in the appointment of Henry Murdac (*a hint of nepotism, perhaps*). Eugenius III was the pontifical name taken by Bernardo da Pisa when he was elected pope in 1145; he was ordained as a priest in 1137 before professing as a Cistercian monk at Clairvaux Abbey in 1138, in 1139 he became leader of the Cistercian community in Scandriglia and in 1140 he became the founding abbot of San Anastasio alle Tre Fontane Abbey, both near Rome, Italy.

Papal Schisms and Privileges

The Cistercian order were instrumental during the papal schism of 1130 that occurred following the death of Pope Honorius II, and the subsequent election as pope of both Innocent II and Anacletus II by opposing *obediencies* (divisions) of the College of Cardinals. Due to the influence exerted by Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux, in the courts of Europe, Innocent II was recognized as the legitimate Pope by most European monarchs and the Catholic world in general; Anacletus II was, thereafter, identified as antipope. The schism ended with the death of Anacletus II in 1138 and Innocent II was recognized and accepted by all as the one true Pope.

In 1132, possibly in recognition of the support given by the Cistercian order during the papal schism, Pope Innocent II granted the Cistercian order two privileges in perpetuity. Firstly, the Pope forbade any bishop or archbishop to summon any Cistercian abbot to a council or synod, except on an account of faith - removing Cistercian abbeys from episcopal jurisdiction. The second privilege freed all Cistercian abbeys from the payment of all tithes to the church. In 1155 Pope Hadrian IV limited the privilege from payment of tithes to *novalia* (lands that had not previously been cultivated). This was later reversed by his successor, Pope Alexander III, sometime during 1159-1161 as he was dependent on Cistercian support against a series of antipopes; this continuing privilege attracted much displeasure from numerous bishops who suffered a consequent loss of revenue. In 1180, in an attempt to appease the bishops, the Cistercian General Chapter decreed that new land purchases were to be limited to lands that were *novalia*; this decree was endorsed by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, thereby placating the bishops who gained much from the resultant increase in revenue. Cistercian abbeys and granges were also, by papal declaration, exempt from civil action.

During the period 1378-1417 there occurred the Great Papal Schism when opposing factions of the College of Cardinals elected two popes, Urban VI (residing in Rome) and Clement VII (successor of the Avignon papacy, residing in Avignon). Though not bearing any influence during this schism, the Cistercian order was severely impacted when Urban VI and Boniface IX forbade the abbots of Cistercian abbeys loyal to the Avignon antipopes from attending the annual General Chapter, causing the General Chapter to become fractured; abbots of abbeys in Italy met in Rome, those of abbeys in the Holy Roman Empire met in Vienna, whilst smaller regional gatherings were held in Nuremberg, Worms and Heilsbronn - and, for a short period from 1394-1400, abbots of abbeys in England met at the Cistercian abbey of St Mary Graces in London.

Knights Templar

Bernard of Clairvaux was a strong advocate of the Knights Templar and was the leading force in promoting their Rule (of militant knight and Cistercian spirituality) to the Council of Troyes in 1128, for approval and subsequent endorsement as a religious order. The Knights Templar, correctly known as the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon, and also known as the Order of Solomon's Temple or, more simply, the Templars, were a military order founded in 1119 on Temple Mount in Jerusalem. They sought a monastic existence modelled on the Cistercian *ordo* (way of life, liturgy and ethos), which was reflected in their white cloaks, plain armour and unadorned horse-trappings. Originally created to protect Christian pilgrims travelling the Holy Land, they were quickly considered to be one of the most skilled Christian fighting forces during the Crusades; often as shock troops of the vanguard. Each Templar Commander took an oath to defend all religious; bearing a specific affinity with the Cistercians, who the Templars saw as their brethren and kindred.

Crusades to the Holy Lands

The Cistercian order was instrumental in soliciting support for a second Crusade to the Holy Lands. Following the loss of the County of Edessa (one of the four Crusader States of the *Outremer*) in 1144 to the Oghuz Turkish Zengid dynasty of the Seljuk Empire, Pope Eugenius III called for a second Crusade and delegated preaching for the crusade to the Cistercians. Bernard of Clairvaux led the Cistercian effort. He inaugurated the campaign during Easter 1146 when he preached to a large gathering of French nobles and knights in the presence of King Louis VII in Vézelay, central France. Bernard continued to preach the crusade throughout 1146 and early 1147 across France, Flanders, the Rhineland and other Germanic territories of King Conrad III. The German contingent of King Conrad III departed for the Holy Lands in May 1147, followed by the French contingent of King Louis VII in June 1147, with the Second Crusade coming to a disastrous conclusion in July 1148. This failure

of the Second Crusade seriously damaged the reputation of the Cistercian order (and that of the Knights Templar) with governments and courts throughout Europe, and was a cause of particular humiliation to Bernard.

Although the Cistercians were not directly embroiled in subsequent crusades to the Holy Lands, the crusades became a matter of liturgical focus on several occasions. In 1268 the Christians of the Holy Lands were suffering significant setbacks throughout the *Outremer*:

The Principality of Antioch, although remaining an autonomous state, had become a vassal of three different neighbouring powers - the Byzantine Empire (1138-1153 and 1159-1183), the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (1254-1260) and the Ilkhanate of the Mogul Empire (1260-1268), before being finally conquered by the Mamluk Sultanate in 1268.

The County of Tripoli remained an autonomous state, although a vassal to the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and had not suffered any incursions from the Mamluk Sultanate, despite the recent conquering of their northern neighbour (the Principality of Antioch) by the Mamluks.

The Kingdom of Jerusalem had all but ceased to exist and what remained consisted of coastal lands in what is now northern Israel, and southern and central Lebanon, with the capital at Acre.

Consequently, the General Chapter of 1268 decreed that all abbeys perform a special mass each Wednesday in support of the Holy Lands fight for survival.

In 1270 King Louis IX of France undertook the eighth Crusade to the Holy Lands against the Hafsid Dynasty of Ifriqiya (eastern Algeria, Tunisia and western Libya). At the request of Louis IX and his Queen, the General Chapter of 1270 instituted in all abbeys a special monthly procession that was performed after the chapter meeting along with special prayers and psalm chanting as spiritual support to the success of this Crusade. The General Chapters of 1271, 1272 and 1273 again decreed further liturgical performances by all abbeys for the success of the ninth Crusade and recovery of the Holy Lands; although the ninth Crusade met with some limited success, it was undersized to recover the Crusader States to their former glory, and by 1303 the final vestiges of the *Outremer* were overthrown by the Mamluk Sultanate.

Crusades Against the Pagans and Heretics

Bernard of Clairvaux also preached for crusades against the remaining pagans of northeast Europe, resulting in the Wendish Crusade of 1147 against the Polabian Slavs; a grouping of the Abrotrites, Rani, Liutizians, Wagarians and Pomeranians Slavic tribes - also known, collectively, as Wends. Pope Innocent III had particular faith in Cistercian loyalty and ability, and often appointed Cistercian monks as papal legates. In the first decades of the thirteenth century, he turned to the Cistercians to carry out his plans to eradicate heresy in the Languedoc and Midi in the south of France, appointing abbots Guy II de Paray of Citeaux Abbey, Saint-Nicolas-lès-Citeaux, France and Berthold of Morimond Abbey, Parnoy-en-Bassigny, France to lead the investigations of heretic cases. Following the assassination of papal legate and Cistercian monk, Peter of Castelnau of Fontfroide Abbey, Narbonne, France in 1208, a crusader army was despatched against the heretics in the south of France, that included abbot Arnaud Amaury of Citeaux Abbey (successor to Abbot Guy II) as the papal envoy.

Beyond the Precinct

Cistercian abbeys often became enmeshed in disputes with their benefactors or their descendants; usually when the true economic value of donated land became apparent - generally, as a result of efficient Cistercian land husbandry and their grange system. They also became involved in disputes with abbeys and houses of other orders. The approximate nature of land measurement and boundary designation were other causes for dispute between Cistercian abbeys and their neighbours. In many instances such disputes involved violence upon the abbey, its community, property, possessions and livestock. Mediation could be achieved by an influential neighbouring bishop or other senior clergy, or abbot, or through judicial process; in extremis an abbot could turn to the King or similar territorial ruler. Sawtry Abbey had its fair share of disputes:

The lands as set out in the founding charter, pertaining to be the entirety of the manor of Sawtry Judith, extended beyond the manor and into the adjacent fen, to include a portion of Whittlesey Mere; which put the Abbey in dispute with the parishes of Conington and Holme, and the abbeys of Ramsey, Thorney and Peterborough (all Benedictine). These disputes were not defended, which left the Abbey in possession of approximately one-half of the lands granted in the founding charter.

Disputes with the abbots of Ramsey and Thorney abbeys were only too probable where the lands and fisheries of all three houses lay so close together; numerous suits of this kind are on record, settled sometimes in favour of one monastery and sometimes of another.

There were suits with the rectors of parishes where the monks had property on the subject of tithes; the Cistercian privilege of immunity being here as elsewhere constantly called in question.

In the 13th century there was a suit with the son of David, Earl of Huntingdon, over eight virgates of land in Conington which had been given to the Abbey when the Earl chose it for his burial-place. This was settled in favour of the Abbey.

It was complained in 1303 that the abbot admitted apostates from the Dominican order without sufficient inquiry; it seems to have been a common fault of Cistercian houses at this time, that they were too ready to admit those who sought an escape from another kind of discipline than their own.

In England and Wales, abbots sat as peers in parliament due to their status as prominent landholders. Despite considering themselves exempt, as Cistercian abbeys were free from all secular services, many abbots attended parliament when summoned; although, generally speaking, the overall attendance of Cistercian abbots at the House of Lords was extremely poor when compared to others of similar status and circumstance. Between 1295 and 1377, for instance, the abbots of Beaulieu Abbey, Hampshire, were summoned forty-three times, Fountains Abbey twenty-eight times, Rievaulx Abbey seventeen times, Byland Abbey, Yorkshire, twelve times and Warden Abbey, Bedfordshire, six times.

A Cistercian abbot was responsible for the education of the monks in his paternal care, which, in the main, was a continuous process carried out within the confines of the abbey. Education of selected monks became more established from the mid-thirteenth century with the introduction of Cistercian colleges attached to established universities; one such being St Bernard's College, Oxford University, in 1437; this college was suppressed in 1539 during the dissolution of the monasteries, and upon the site of which St John's College, Oxford University, was subsequently founded. By the end of the thirteenth century, advanced

studies were integral to Cistercian statutes with the General Chapter decreeing severe punishments for abbots who neglected the education of their monks. After the *Benedictina* Bull from Pope Benedict XII in 1336, academic learning became a requirement for the Cistercian order. In 1482 the General Chapter instructed that all English monasteries were to send monks to study at Oxford at the abbey's expense; those monasteries with twenty-six or more monks were to send two monks, those with twelve or more monks were to send one monk, whilst those with less than twelve monks were to combine their resources and send one monk between them.

Worldly Events

The Cistercian order was not removed from other worldly events and suffered significant consequences both collectively and regionally; the effects of which were often exacerbated by overlapping events.

In 1298, King Edward I prohibited abbots of English and Welsh abbeys from travelling to the General Chapter at Citeaux and repeated the prohibition on many occasions in the fourteenth century. This was to stop the Cistercian abbots from taking their General Chapter taxations (which were considered by King Edward I as clerical levies to the Crown) from England and Wales to France.

In 1315-1317, there occurred a Great Famine throughout Europe. This was precipitated by poor weather in the Spring of 1315, with uncharacteristically wet weather until the Summer of 1317, resulting in crop failures until the harvest of 1317. The unseasonal wet weather also resulted in high rates of disease in livestock, which contributed to the lack of available food. However, the effects of the Great Famine, particularly low arable yields due to the consumption of seed stocks, were felt until 1322. The famine undermined both governments, monarchs and the Roman Catholic Church and was seen as divine retribution for misrule, corruption, and religious doctrinal errors. The failure of prayer to end the famine undermined the institutional authority of the Church; the repercussions of which adversely affected the Cistercian order as much as other monastic orders, religious houses and the wider clergy. A series of lesser famines later the same century severely impacted on the social structure of England which led to the Peasants' Revolt of 1381; any upheaval to rural society had a detrimental impact to the efficiency and productivity of the Cistercian grange system.

The Hundred Years War from 1337-1453 was a series of battles (Crécy, Poitiers and Agincourt being some of the better known) and conflicts between the French royal house of Valois and the English Plantagenets, which regularly affected the ability of abbots to attend General Chapter at Citeaux Abbey.

From 1347-1351, Europe was ravaged by the Black Death, a bubonic plague that devastated populations with death tolls of thirty to sixty percent, which was virulent throughout England and Wales from June 1348 to December 1349. Subsequent lesser outbreaks of bubonic plague occurred in England in 1360-1363, 1471, 1479-1480, and 1563-1564, in Paris from 1464-1466 and in Venice from 1576-1577. Cistercian abbeys suffered no less than other communities, with lay brother populations, particularly those in the granges, suffering the biggest and irreversible losses; lay brother numbers, significantly reduced by plague and war, continued to decline throughout the latter half of the fourteenth century. The savage losses of the Black Death and the subsequent reductions by 1380 were widespread:

In 1335, Bordesley Abbey, Worcestershire, had thirty-four choir monks and ten lay brothers, by 1380 this had reduced to fourteen monks and one lay brother.

When the Black Death arrived, Meaux Abbey, Yorkshire, had forty-three choir monks and seven lay brothers, with only ten monks and no lay brothers remaining after 1350; it is recorded that on 12 August 1249, the abbot and five monks perished.

Newenham Abbey, Devon, fared even worse; before the Black Death, the abbey had twenty-three choir monks and three lay brothers, afterwards there were three monks only remaining.

Rievaulx Abbey had fifteen choir monks and three lay brothers remaining, Kirkstall Abbey, Yorkshire, had seventeen choir monks and six lay brothers remaining, Byland Abbey had twelve choir monks and three lay brothers remaining, Jervaulx Abbey, Yorkshire, had sixteen choir monks and two lay brothers remaining, Whalley Abbey, Lancashire, had twenty-nine choir monks and one lay brother remaining and Fountains Abbey had thirty-four choir monks and ten lay brothers remaining.

The Hussite wars of 1420-1434 were fought throughout the central European regions of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Saxony and Hungary which prevented abbots of Cistercian abbeys in these regions from attending General Chapter. Restrictions imposed by the wars on the movement of abbots severely impacted their ability to carryout annual visitations of Father Immediate and to maintain discipline in their daughter-houses.

Notes:

Avignon Papacy (1309-1378) was the period when seven successive popes resided in Avignon, in the Kingdom of Arles within the Holy Roman Empire, rather than in Rome, as a result of conflict between the papacy and the French crown. King Philip IV of France forced the election of Clement V (a French papal candidate) as pope in 1305, who refused to take residency in Rome and subsequently relocated the papal court to Avignon in 1309. Successive Avignon popes were John XXII 1316-1334, Benedict XII 1334-1342, Clement VI 1342-1352, Innocent VI 1352-1362, Urban V 1362-1370 and Gregory XI 1370-1378.

The Great Schism (1378-1417) occurred when opposing factions of the College of Cardinals elected two popes, Urban VI (residing in Rome) and Clement VII (residing in Avignon). Throughout the schism Urban VI and his successors - Boniface IX, Innocent V and Gregory XII, were the Roman popes whilst Clement VII and his successor - Benedict XIII, were the Avignon antipopes. This was further complicated when the Council of Pisa, in 1409, declared Alexander V as a second antipope; he and his successor - John XXIII, were the Pisan antipopes. The schism was finally resolved when John XXIII called the Council of Constance (1414–1418). The Council arranged the abdication of both Gregory XII and John XXIII, excommunicated Benedict XIII, and elected Martin V as the new pope reigning from Rome.

Outremer (literal translation, 'overseas') was the collective term for the four Crusader states established in 1098 (in the final years of the first Crusade to the Holy Lands) until 1291. The four states were the County of Edessa 1098-1150, the Principality of Antioch 1098-1287, the County of Tripoli 1102-1289 and the Kingdom of Jerusalem 1099-1291.

Virgate, also known as a yardland or yard of land, was an English unit of land that was primarily a measure of tax assessment rather than area. The virgate was usually (but not always) reckoned as a $\frac{1}{4}$ hide and notionally (but seldom exactly) equal to 30 acres. It was also reckoned as the amount of land that a team of two oxen could plough in a single annual season.

Hide was an English unit of land measurement originally intended to represent the amount of land sufficient to support a household; traditionally taken to be 120 acres (49 hectares). It was also a measure of value and tax assessment, including obligations for food-rent, maintenance and repair of bridges and fortifications, manpower for the army, and (eventually) land tax.

Referenced Documents

British History Online. 1926. Houses of Cistercian Monks: The abbey of Sawtry. In: Page, W., Proby, G. and Norris, H E., eds. *A History of the County of Huntingdon: Volume 1*. London: Victoria County History, pp. 391-392.
Available at: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/hunts/vol1/pp391-392> (Accessed: 1 August 2016).

Burton, J. and Kerr, J. 2013. *The Cistercians in the Middle Ages, 2nd ed.* Woodbridge: Boydell Press.

Dalgairns, J. D. 2015. *Life of St. Stephen Harding, Abbott of Citeaux, and Founder of the Cistercian Order.* New York City: Magisterium Press.

France, J. 2012. *Separate but Equal: Cistercian Lay Brothers 1120-1350.* Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

Inskip Ladds, S. (1914) 'Sawtry Abbey, Huntingdonshire', *Transactions of the Cambridgeshire & Huntingdonshire Archaeological Society*, 3(9), pp. 339-374.

Jamroziak, E. 2013. *The Cistercian Order in Medieval Europe 1090-1500.* Abingdon: Routledge