

**The Decline and Dissolution of the**

**Gilbertine Order**

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the Degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy**

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Phyllis and Sidney Rowntree Stephenson and also to that of Sister Gertrude Brown OSB of Stanbrook Abbey in Worcestershire. My interest in the Gilbertine order began many years ago when I first visited the site of St Gilbert's first priory in the village of Sempringham in Lincolnshire. Shortly after, I obtained a copy of the only substantive piece of work that had been written on the Gilbertines; a book written by Rose Graham at the beginning of the twentieth century. From that time I spent much of my spare time finding out what I could about the order and visited many of the sites of the now destroyed monasteries. About twelve years ago I was fortunate to meet up with Sister Gertrude Brown of Stanbrook Abbey who had been an archivist at Lincolnshire Archives before she was professed as a Benedictine nun in the 1930s. It was through the conversations that I had with her that inspired me to begin serious research into this particular order. Unfortunately she died about six years ago and hence she was not able to see the results of my work. As a final note I am grateful to the support my mother gave me during the last years of her life through the many discussions we had on various aspects of my work.

## **Abstract**

The Gilbertine order was unusual in that it was founded for both men and women who lived in adjacent enclosures. The order had its origins in the Lincolnshire village of Sempringham where St Gilbert founded the order in the 1130s. The canons followed the rule of St Augustine and the nuns the rule of St Benedict. The history of the order has been extensively researched by Brian Golding from its foundation until the beginning of the fourteenth century. However, there has been little substantial research on the order in the period from the fourteenth century until its dissolution in 1539. This dissertation continues the work carried out by Golding and examines the later years of the order's history and its dissolution. The main themes of this work are the recruitment of men and women into the order during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the spiritual lives of the nuns, the impact of the dissolution on the lives of the men and women of the order, and their careers after the dissolution. The study will show that in common with other religious orders there was a decline in the popularity of the Gilbertines in the later Middle Ages, and also a relaxation of the rules the nuns followed. In the period after the dissolution, the thesis will demonstrate that the social and economic position of former Gilbertine canons was much better than that of former nuns.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Gilbertine order was founded by St Gilbert in the Lincolnshire village of Sempringham in the 1130's. During the founder's lifetime houses for both men and women were established. Whether Gilbert's original intention was to found an order for both men and women is a matter of debate, and will be discussed in chapter three of this thesis. The canons followed the rule of St Augustine and the nuns the rule of St Benedict. The order rapidly gained popularity within Lincolnshire, resulting in the foundation of seven double houses and three houses for canons only.<sup>1</sup> The largest of the double houses was Watton in Yorkshire, this being the only house founded both for canons and nuns in that county. Two further double houses were founded outside Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, namely Chicksands in Bedfordshire and Shouldham in Norfolk. Three houses for canons were founded in Yorkshire and a further eight smaller priories were established for men in other counties. Despite a number of attempts, the order never expanded beyond England.

The first substantive study of the Gilbertine order was made by Rose Graham in 1901 and covers the history of the order from its foundation up until the dissolution of the order.<sup>2</sup> More recently Brian Golding has made a far more extensive study which extends from the foundation of the order through to the beginning of the fourteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Since the publication of his work no attempt has been made to research the history of the Gilbertine order after this period. The purpose of this study is to examine the history of the Gilbertine order during the fifteenth century and in the period preceding its dissolution in 1539. It will focus on the numbers of men and women who were recruited into the order

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the term 'double house' when applied to religious houses that housed both men and women, see, Katharine Sykes, 'Canonici Albi et Moniales: Perceptions of the Twelfth-Century Double House', in, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 60, No. 2, (April 2009), pp. 233 – 245.

<sup>2</sup> Rose Graham, *St Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertines: A History of the only English Monastic Order*, London, Elliot Stock, (1901).

<sup>3</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order c. 1130 – c. 1300*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, (1995).

during this period, the decline which took place during the last 150 years of the order's history, the daily lives of the Gilbertine canons and nuns, and the social backgrounds of the women who entered the order. This study will also examine the events leading up to the order's dissolution, and the lives of the canons and nuns after they were expelled from their monasteries.

Many monastic houses experienced recruitment problems in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the second half of the fourteenth century all monastic orders suffered loss in numbers due to the Black Death and subsequent outbreaks of plague. The impact of the Black Death on two male communities namely Christ Church Canterbury, and Westminster have been studied by two writers, John Hatcher on Christ Church, and Barbara Harvey on Westminster. The results of their work will be used when assessing the possible impact on the Gilbertine communities.<sup>4</sup> Marilyn Oliva has shown that in the county of Norfolk not all of the houses for women recovered simultaneously.<sup>5</sup> Only five out of a total of eleven such houses in the whole diocese managed to reach the 1350 levels by the time of the dissolution. In fact four of these nunneries did not even reach 50% of the 1350 numbers, one of which was the Gilbertine house of Shouldham. All of the Benedictine houses either managed to reach the fourteenth century levels or were close to their earlier numbers. The Cistercians were not as successful as the Benedictines, their numbers being lower by the 1530s. Russell's examination of the diocese of Lincoln shows that the Benedictine numbers were the same for both 1350 and 1539. However, the Cistercian numbers had fallen by 26% by the time of the dissolution; and the Gilbertine numbers had fallen by 63%.<sup>6</sup> This pattern is reflected in Oliva's study of the nunneries in the diocese of Norfolk.

In the case of the Gilbertines, the recruitment of new members appears to have been a problem towards the end of the fifteenth century. This was highlighted in the General Chapter reports that survive for the years 1501 and 1509. The work that has been carried

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<sup>4</sup> John Hatcher, 'Mortality in the Fifteenth Century: Some New Evidence' in, *Economic History Review, Second Series*, 39, 1, (1986), pp. 19 – 38. Barbara Harvey, *Living and Dying in England, 1100 – 1540, the Monastic Experience*, Oxford, (1993),

<sup>5</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England*, Boydell Press, (1998), p.39.

<sup>6</sup> J C Russell, "The Clerical Population of Medieval England", *Traditio*, 2 (1944), pp. 182-3.

out by Barbara Harvey and Joseph Gribbin on the communities at Westminster and the Premonstratensian orders respectively will be used to compare recruitment patterns within other orders during this period.<sup>7</sup> The ordination lists of Gilbertine canons were used to determine when recruitment became a problem and how effective the measures taken by the General Chapter were at overcoming the problem. The only lists of nuns that have survived for Gilbertine houses are those in the Taxation lists of 1380 and the pension lists compiled at the dissolution. These sources will be discussed in the next section of the chapter. No sources have survived for the fifteenth century to indicate problems with regard to recruitment during this period.

Sharon Elkins and Sally Thompson have both made studies of religious women in medieval England.<sup>8</sup> Both have written extensively about the women in the Gilbertine order to highlight the problems experienced by religious women in the twelfth century. Elkins has shown that during this period female religious communities were experiencing severe restrictions and repression with regard to the autonomy of their communities during the second half of the twelfth century. This thesis will argue that a similar process continued in the case of the Gilbertine order until the time of its dissolution. Thompson claims that the Gilbertine rule was a response to the doubts expressed by twelfth century monastic reformers with regard to women entering religious orders.

The position and role of the nuns within the order had been undermined by the early thirteenth century.<sup>9</sup> One reason for this was the concentration of power in the hands of the master and priors. During Cardinal Ottobuono's visitation of the order in 1268 the control of the individual houses' finances by the nuns was confirmed: no money should be handed over to the canons without the consent and knowledge of the prioress of the house.<sup>10</sup> Financial control of individual houses was originally the responsibility of the nuns. Brian Golding has shown that this situation reached 'boiling point' in the later part

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<sup>7</sup> Barbara Harvey, *Living and Dying in England 1100 – 1540*, Clarendon Press Oxford, (1993).

Joseph A Gribbin, *The Premonstratensian Order in Late Medieval England*, Boydell Press, (2001).

<sup>8</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 3. See also: Sharon Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth Century England*, Chapel Hill, NC, (1988); Sally Thompson, *Women Religious: The Founding of Religious Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*, Oxford, (1991).

<sup>9</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 163.

<sup>10</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Douce 136 fo. 100r.

of the fourteenth century. The discontent amongst the nuns had begun at least a hundred years prior to this.<sup>11</sup> As Brian Golding has shown, however, the canons assumed control of the order's financial affairs in the latter part of the fourteenth century.<sup>12</sup> This contrasted with the position of other orders for women, in which individual houses were free to organise their own finances. As well as losing their financial independence, Gilbertine nuns were offered less spiritual support from the canons. When he founded the order, it was Gilbert's intention that the canons must attend to the needs of the nuns in their houses at all times.<sup>13</sup> During the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, however, a significant number of resident Gilbertine canons were holding benefices in parishes surrounding their monasteries; and this may have led to the spiritual needs of the nuns being neglected.

Gilbertine nuns also suffered from a decline in the order's income. By the end of the fourteenth century, financial demands were being placed on all monastic orders by a succession of kings.<sup>14</sup> In 1310 Edward II demanded foodstuffs from three Gilbertine houses, Catley, Chicksands, and Sixhills. Later in 1319 he requested a loan to finance his actions against the Scottish rebels.<sup>15</sup> This left a number of the Gilbertine priories with serious financial problems. As a result of this fall in income, the needs of the nuns were being neglected, and they were living on a diet which was poorer than that of the canons.<sup>16</sup> In the fourteenth century individual Gilbertine priories began to receive some taxation relief to help them with their financial problems.<sup>17</sup> As a consequence a large number of the order's houses were exempted from ecclesiastical taxes in the early 1400s. These exemptions were granted permanently to all of the Gilbertine houses except

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<sup>11</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order* p. 162 – 3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> The earliest reference to this comes from the foundation charter of Watton priory. In this charter William Fossard makes a gift of the service of two knights to the priory for maintenance of thirteen canons who are to 'serve and provide for the nuns both in spiritual and temporal matters.' British Library MS Stow 502.

<sup>14</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 445.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 446.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 162.

<sup>17</sup> Catley priory in 1304, *Calendar of Close Rolls, 1302-7*, p. 201, Catley and Haverholm priories in 1361, *ibid, 1360-4*, p. 230, Chicksands was pardoned taxation in 1335, 1337, and 1345, and again with Sempringham and Malton in 1356, *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1334-8*, pp. 112 and 536, *ibid, 1343-5*, p. 435, *ibid, 1354-8*, p. 474.



Watton Priory in Yorkshire in 1445.<sup>18</sup> No reason was given for the special treatment of Watton Priory, but this may have been because it was more financially secure than the other double houses of the order. When the valuation of religious houses was carried out in 1535, Watton was the wealthiest of the Gilbertine houses, with an annual value of just over £360. Sempringham Priory was valued at just over £317 per annum.<sup>19</sup>

Research has been carried out on the social backgrounds and the geographical areas from which nuns were drawn. Marilyn Oliva has used wills, pedigrees and other sources to analyse the social groups from which convents drew their recruits in the diocese of Norwich.<sup>20</sup> Her study has shown that the majority of these women were drawn from the urban and parish gentry. Only 5% of these women came from the yeoman families in the diocese. One study that has been made of the geographical regions from which nuns were recruited is that by Janet Burton. In the diocese of York she has shown that nunneries did not rely on recruitment from the immediate area. For example, she notes that Arthington Priory was accepting prospective novices from Pontefract, Castleford and Bawtry, which was on the Yorkshire-Nottinghamshire border.<sup>21</sup>

This thesis extends the research that has already been undertaken by examining the social and geographical origins of Gilbertine nuns. The surviving wills from the latter part of the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth century for the counties of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire were used to establish the social backgrounds of women who entered the order. The Gilbertine order had two other double houses, Shouldham in Norfolk and Chicksands in Bedfordshire. Marilyn Oliva has made an extensive study of the social origins of the nuns in Norfolk including those of Shouldham. The results of her work will be used in this thesis. For the Bedfordshire house of Chicksands, the only list

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 446.

<sup>19</sup> *Valor Ecclesiasticus temp. Hen VIII, Auctoritate Regis Institutus*, ed. J Caley and J Hunter, 6 volumes, Record Commission (London, 1810-34). This valuation was carried out in order to identify religious houses which had an annual income of less than £200. The majority of the houses below this value were dissolved in 1536. However, the Gilbertine houses which fell below this value were not suppressed. The reason for this may have been that the nuns and canons could not have been accommodated in the remaining houses of the order.

<sup>20</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England*, Boydell Press, (1998), p.52.

<sup>21</sup> Janet Burton, 'Looking for Medieval Nuns', in *Monasteries and Society in the British Isles in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Janet Burton and Karen Stober, Woodbridge, (2008), p. 116.

of nuns to have survived is that of the eighteen nuns who were pensioned at the dissolution; no list has survived for the Poll Tax of 1380.<sup>22</sup> A search through the probate registers and other sources has not revealed anything regarding these eighteen women, thus making it impossible to speculate on the social origins of these women. The analysis was also used to show the geographical origins of women recruited into particular houses. Comparisons were made between Watton priory in Yorkshire, the largest of the houses of the order, and the Lincolnshire houses to show the differences in the recruitment areas in these two counties.

The thesis also investigates why Gilbertine women chose a monastic way of life. By the fourteenth century monastic life provided women with a means of achieving a status in life which would have been otherwise hard to obtain. Religious women were given opportunities to demonstrate management skills as office holders within their communities, dealing with the complex business of life within the convent. Marilyn Oliva has shown that for a nun to reach high office within her house, election to such a post depended upon her administrative talents, not her social status.<sup>23</sup> A new prioress would have been selected on her ability to manage the finances of the nunnery and deal with the business of protecting the endowments of the house. The prioress or abbess of a nunnery would occasionally have had to take action when accounts were not settled on time and ownership of priory land was being disputed. Marjorie Harrison has shown that convent leaders were not afraid to use the courts when there was interference with nunnery property or a failure to pay rents and accounts on time.<sup>24</sup>

One aspect of the lives of the nuns that this study will examine is the spiritual activities in which these women participated. Recent work which has been carried out in this field by Vincent Gillespie, Paul Lee, Felicity Riddy and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne will be used

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<sup>22</sup> Deed of Surrender of Chicksands Priory, TNA E322/56.

<sup>23</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England*, pp. 105 – 7.

<sup>24</sup> Marjorie J Harrison, *The Nunnery of Nun Appleton*, University of York Borthwick Paper No. 98 (2001), p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> J C Russell, 'The Clerical Population of Medieval England', pp 177 – 212.

when speculating on the spiritual activities of the Gilbertine nuns.<sup>25</sup> Very few records have survived which give a clear picture of the material that Gilbertine women were reading and how they took part in the daily liturgy of the order. Through a study of recent work that has been carried out on the Gilbertine liturgy and a re-examination of other surviving sources, the thesis will investigate these aspects of the daily lives of Gilbertine nuns.<sup>26</sup> This indicates that some of these women were reading devotional texts in English. In chapter four it will be shown that the nuns did not sing during the daily services within their convents; they only chanted the psalms in monotone or a very simple form of chant.<sup>27</sup>

Another area that this dissertation will consider is the maintenance of discipline within the Gilbertine order. By the early 1220s the Gilbertine order was governed by a single person who was known as the Master.<sup>28</sup> He was responsible for overseeing the finances, administration and the enforcement of discipline within the individual houses. Orders such as the Benedictines and Augustinians followed a common rule, but had no formal mechanisms to enforce discipline across all of their houses. The Gilbertine order solved this problem by monitoring discipline by the regular visitations of each of the houses by the senior members of the order. This thesis will examine the effectiveness of this management structure in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Discipline within nunneries was clearly a cause for concern for diocesan bishops when they conducted visitations of houses under their jurisdiction. However, these visitations

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<sup>25</sup> Vincent Gillespie, *Syon Abbey*, The British Library, (2001). Paul Lee, *Nunneries, Learning and Spirituality in Late Medieval English Society, The Dominican Priory of Dartford*, York Medieval Press, (2001). Felicity Riddy, 'Women Talking about the things of God: a Late Medieval Sub-Culture,' in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150 – 1500*, ed. by Carol M Meale, (1996), pp. 104 – 127. Jocelyn Wogan Browne, 'Outdoing the Daughters of Syon?: Edith of Wilton and the Representation of Female Community in Fifteenth Century England,' in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy*, Brepol, (2000).

<sup>26</sup> Janet Sorrentino, *In Houses of Nuns, in Houses of Canons: a Liturgical Dimension to Double Monasteries*, *Journal of Medieval History*, 28 (2002), pp 361-372.

Heather Josselyn-Cranson, *Moderate psallendo: Musical participation in worship among Gilbertine nuns*, *Plainsong and Medieval Music*, 16, 2, pp. 173-186.

<sup>27</sup> Chapter 4, pp. 143-148.

<sup>28</sup> Katharine Sykes, *The Origins of the Role of Master of the Order of Sempringham, c 1130 – 1230*, D Phil. thesis Oxford University (2007), p. 1. See also, C R Cheney, 'Papal Privileges for Gilbertine Houses', *Medieval Texts and Studies*, Oxford, (1973), pp. 39 – 65.

reports need to be used with care. Penelope Johnson has made a study of the religious women in medieval France.<sup>29</sup> In her study she found that heads of nunneries who were members of the higher social classes and were competent could influence the decisions that were made by the bishops. This was especially true where there was ‘shared kinship’; it was not unusual for bishops to be drawn from the same social classes and families as the monastic superiors.<sup>30</sup> However, heads of nunneries who were members of the lower social classes may have ‘bullied’ these women, or at best they tended to be ‘benign of the convents.’<sup>31</sup> Where there was ‘a shared kinship’ between the visitor and the head of the house this could lead to self regulation within the nunnery, and certain faults may have gone uncorrected.

There are many references in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries to custodians brought in to deal with bad financial management and poor discipline in nunneries.<sup>32</sup> Marjorie Harrison presents a number of examples of poor discipline within the nunnery of Nun Appleton in Yorkshire during the Archbishops’ visitations at this time. In 1319 during Archbishop Melton’s visitation, the nuns were forbidden to give hospitality to brothers from other orders unless it was too late for them to go elsewhere, and nuns were not to leave the cloister in order to speak with these brothers at night.<sup>33</sup> Later cases of poor discipline in houses for women are highlighted in the diocesan registers, especially in the fifteenth century. The Gilbertine order was subject only to internal visitations by senior members of the order, and of course, legatine visitation, for example those which took place in 1238 and 1268. There are no accounts of particular breaches in discipline recorded directly in the few remaining chapter records, only the injunctions that were issued to all of the houses. A search through the Papal Registers has not revealed any breaches of discipline within the Gilbertine order. The chapter records show that relaxations were made to the rule, but they did not give the Gilbertine nuns the same freedoms that were enjoyed by women in some other religious orders.

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<sup>29</sup> Penelope D Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession, Religious Women in Medieval France*, The University of Chicago Press, (1991).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 77.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100.

<sup>32</sup> Marjorie J Harrison, *The Nunnery of Nun Appleton*, p. 11.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

Finally, the dissertation will examine the dissolution of the order and its consequences. This will include the events leading up to the dissolution, the dissolution itself, and its effect on the lives of the nuns and canons. Comparisons will be made with the experiences of members of other religious orders, for example with regard to where these women went after their houses were dissolved and how they spent the rest of their lives. At the dissolution many nuns had very few options: having left their convents they were released from their vows of obedience and poverty, but they were unable to marry because they were still bound by their vow of chastity until 1549.<sup>34</sup> One option open to these women was to look for support from their families. Marilyn Oliva has shown that very little support was given to ex-nuns from family and friends within the diocese of Norwich.<sup>35</sup> Two ex-nuns who were not supported by their families found employment running a school together in Norwich.<sup>36</sup> Alternatively, some of these women may have chosen to live in small groups, pooling their pensions and adhering to a monastic style of life.<sup>37</sup> This dissertation will investigate the choices available to Gilbertine women after the dissolution. The careers of former Gilbertine canons will also be examined, and in particular that of the last Master of the order, Robert Holgate.<sup>38</sup>

### Sources Used

In order to estimate the numbers of canons recruited into the Gilbertine order over the 140 year period from 1400 three main sources have been used. Firstly, in order to obtain a base figure from which to work an exact number of canons and nuns within the Lincolnshire houses was obtained from the late fourteenth century taxation records.<sup>39</sup> The only figures available for Yorkshire in this class of records were those for the house of canons and nuns of Watton Priory. The Ordination Lists in the diocesan records were then analysed for the counties of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire in order to estimate the

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<sup>34</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Medieval England*, p. 201.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p 203.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p 204.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p 203.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Holgate entered the Gilbertine order in about 1500 and probably was a novice at St Katherine's Priory in Lincoln where he was finally ordained as a priest.

<sup>39</sup> TNA. Taxation Records E179/35/16 (1381 Lincolnshire) and E179/68/E179/35/16 (1381 Lincolnshire) and E179/68/11-12 (1377 Yorkshire).

numbers of canons in each of the order's houses in these counties.<sup>40</sup> However, the Ordination Lists for Norfolk have not survived; hence the ordinations for Shouldham Priory cannot be established. Ordinations at Chicksands Priory in Bedfordshire were included in the Lincoln Registers because Bedfordshire was in the diocese of Lincoln. Since there was only one Gilbertine house in Bedfordshire and this was geographically remote from the houses in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, this monastery was excluded from the analysis presented here. These ordination lists are to be found in the bishops' registers for each of the dioceses under study. The ordinations are listed under four headings depending on the order that is being conferred: acolyte, sub-deacon, deacon and priest. The records indicate the order conferred, the date of the ordination, the place where it took place and the religious house of the ordinand. One of the problems which could arise when using these sources is where all of the ordinations were recorded by the diocesan clerk. There is the possibility that the religious house which appears alongside the ordinand's name may not be his resident house, especially in the case of the Gilbertines. The order could have gathered all of the canons to be ordained together at one particular house which was close to where the ordinations were to take place. However, no evidence has been found to indicate that this was the case. The remaining minor houses of canons in other counties such as Clattercote in Oxfordshire and Hitchin in Hertfordshire were also excluded from this analysis since an examination of the Bishops' Registers showed very few if any ordinations were taking place within these houses.<sup>41</sup> The reason for this may be that these particular houses were used as places of training for newly ordained canons before they were placed in one of the larger houses of the order. Thus, it would appear that the majority of ordinations were taking place within the major houses of the Gilbertine order. Comparing the names of the canons in the smaller houses with the Ordination Lists showed that these men were serving their noviciate and taking religious orders in the major houses of the order before they moved on to the smaller

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<sup>40</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office. Lincoln, Bishops' Registers (Ordination Lists), Borthwick Institute, York. Archbishops' Registers (Ordination Lists).

<sup>41</sup> These are houses of the order which had less than six canons and were mainly situated in counties other than Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Bedfordshire and Norfolk.

houses.<sup>42</sup> This indicated that recruitment from the areas surrounding the smaller priories was probably very low or possibly no local recruitment was taking place.

The figures for each Gilbertine house were obtained from the Pension Lists of each house at the dissolution which are preserved in the National Archives. These Pension Lists recorded the pensions that were awarded by the crown to the ex-religious at the dissolution. In some cases these lists covered a number of years after the dissolution and were a valuable source in estimating how long these men and women survived after leaving the religious life.<sup>43</sup> No pensions appear to have survived for the Oxfordshire house of Clattercote, but as already stated, the smaller houses of canons had already been excluded from this analysis. A further source of data regarding the canons was the Faculty Office Registers held at Lambeth Palace Library.<sup>44</sup> After the break from Papal Authority in 1534 all dispensations granted to members of religious orders were granted by the Archbishop of Canterbury. In the two years prior to the dissolution, many of the monks and canons of a number of orders applied for dispensations to be released from their vows to hold benefices whilst remaining within their religious orders. It was clear to these men that the dissolution of their houses was imminent and they were preparing themselves to take up benefices when they fell vacant, even if this occurred prior to the dissolution of their house. The majority of Gilbertine houses were involved in this process and members of each religious community on the eve of the dissolution (including Clattercote Priory in Oxfordshire) were listed. In most cases these lists were identical with the Pension Lists, but in two cases – Sempringham Priory and St Katherine's Priory situated outside the walls of Lincoln – the lists contained a significant number of extra members of the religious community who were not resident at their respective priories. An analysis of the Bishops' Registers for Lincolnshire showed that many of these men had been inducted as vicars of parishes before the dissolution. One

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<sup>42</sup> After a canon had served his noviciate, he may have been initially ordained as an acolyte before taking sub-deacon's orders, or possibly ordained as a subdeacon omitting acolyte's orders. After one to two years as an acolyte he would first have proceeded to subdeacon's orders, followed by deacon's orders and finally he would be ordained as a priest.

<sup>43</sup> The Warrants for the award of pensions to individuals are recorded in E315/233 in TNA. Pension lists for other years occur in various classes in the Exchequer Records and also in the Land Review Records in TNA.

<sup>44</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, Faculty Office Register Vv.

other possibility to account for the remaining absentee canons from these priories is that some of them may have been private chaplains. No evidence to support this hypothesis exists before the dissolution. However, after the dissolution John Boyes, a Gilbertine canon, was serving as chaplain to Sir Edward Dymock.<sup>45</sup>

The source used to demonstrate that the Gilbertine order acknowledged recruitment problems was the Institutions of the order in a unique manuscript held in the Bodleian Library, which also contains fragmentary records of the General Chapter held once a year.<sup>46</sup> These records were created between the thirteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century and they highlighted the concerns leaders of the Gilbertines had over the lack of new entrants to the order. Unfortunately, these records do not give the reasons for the fall in recruitment; they merely say that numbers had fallen and need to be raised. However, these records only demonstrated the shortfall of men entering the order, and not the deficit in women. The Pension Lists were used in conjunction with the Taxation Lists already discussed to show that in a majority of the houses the numbers of female entrants had fallen between 1380 and the dissolution. However, no records have survived to indicate the numbers in the intervening years. If the recruitment of female members into the order was a problem in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, these concerns have not been recorded in the surviving General Chapter records.

The General Chapter records that survive were also used to analyse the reasons for a shortfall in new recruits. The Chapter Records of 1501 and 1509 not only described breeches of the rules that were taking place but also the relaxations to the rules that were felt to be appropriate by the General Chapter that resulted from the annual internal visitations of the individual houses.<sup>47</sup> Similar visitations by the representatives of bishops took place in other orders which enabled comparisons to be made between the Gilbertines and other monastic orders. The records of these visitations for orders which were subject to Episcopal visitation and the injunctions imposed by the bishops were recorded in the

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<sup>45</sup> G A J Hodget, *The State of the Ex-Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln 1547 – 1574*, Lincoln Record Society, Vol 53, p. 107.

<sup>46</sup> Bodleian Library Oxford, MS Douce 136.

<sup>47</sup> Bodleian Library MS Douce 136, fos. 106r and 110r.



Bishops' Registers.<sup>48</sup> Whether the Gilbertines were subject to visitation by the diocesan bishops is a matter of uncertainty in the thirteenth century.<sup>49</sup> It was not until August 1345 that the order obtained full exemption from such visitations; they were only subject to internal visitations by the senior members of the order.<sup>50</sup> Another order which was exempt from external visitation was the Premonstratensians. Surviving visitation records of this order will be used when making comparisons with other orders.<sup>51</sup> Records for other religious orders have survived for the counties of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and these were used for comparison.

Some evidence indicates that during the fifteenth century the management structure of some of the Gilbertine double priories was failing. In 1397 King Richard II was informed of the strife between members of the Gilbertine communities and William Beverley, the Master of the order.<sup>52</sup> It was reported then that Divine Service and 'other works of piety' within the order were being either neglected or were not occurring, and also that the possessions of the priories were being used for inappropriate purposes. The Patent Rolls of the fifteenth century indicated that the position had not improved.<sup>53</sup> Between 1407 and 1411 the Gilbertine priories of Alvingham, Bullington, Catley, Haverholme, North Ormesby, Sempringham, Shouldham and Sixhills, had all been classed as poor nunneries by the Bishop of Lincoln. These Rolls contained evidence that was placed before the Exchequer Court as to why they should be exempt from Ecclesiastical Taxes, and this evidence showed that the Gilbertine nuns argued that the priory possessions had been expressly granted to them by the charters of the founders and benefactors. On production of these charters before the Exchequer Court, the nuns' case was allowed, although entries in the Patent Rolls showed that up to 1445 these exemptions were not

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<sup>48</sup> The Registers for the Diocese of Yorkshire are held in the Borthwick Institute in York and the Registers for the Diocese of Lincoln are held in the Lincolnshire Archives in Lincoln.

<sup>49</sup> Peter MacDonald, 'The Exemption of the Order of Sempringham', in *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, vol. 30, (1995), p. 51.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> J A Gribbin, *The Premonstratensian Order in Late Medieval England*, Woodbridge, (2001).

<sup>52</sup> TNA, Patent Roll E159/226.

<sup>53</sup> *Calendar of Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office*, HMSO (London, 1891 - ), 1334 – 8, pp. 112, and 536, *ibid* 1343-5, p. 435, *ibid* 1354 – 8, p. 474.

permanent.<sup>54</sup> Another factor that caused these houses to be classed as poor nunneries may have been the impact of the Black Death.

One of the most important aspects of this study concerns the dissolution of the Gilbertine houses. The evidence used to examine the dissolution of these houses was found in the State Papers of Henry VIII in the National Archives.<sup>55</sup> Unlike many other orders, the Gilbertine houses were supposed to be exempt from the visitations by Thomas Cromwell's commissioners. However, four priories were entered by the commissioners: these were Shouldham, Mathersey, Clattercote and Chicksands, all of which were outside the core area of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. At Chicksands Priory the Commissioners were challenged regarding their authority and were persuaded to leave before a full inspection was carried out. However, after each inspection in other religious houses, the commissioners prepared reports highlighting alleged malpractice. The contents of these reports must be treated with caution, however, as they are known to have misrepresented the conditions of the religious houses. This thesis will use recent literature to examine the character and the motives for each of the commissioners who visited the religious houses prior to their dissolution.<sup>56</sup> In some instances the commissioners appeared to invent cases of wrongdoing. An example was highlighted by Gasquet from the visitation of 1536 when two nuns from the Augustinian nunnery of Gracedieu in Leicestershire were charged with incontinence.<sup>57</sup> However, in June of the same year these nuns were reported as 'of good and virtuous conversation and living as appeareth by examination and by report of the country desiring all to continue in religion.'<sup>58</sup> James Clark states that the cases of immorality between the middle of the fourteenth century and the dissolution

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<sup>54</sup> *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1441-6, p. 332

<sup>55</sup> *Calendar of Letters and Papers of the Reign of Henry VIII preserved in the Public Record Office, the British Museum and elsewhere in England*, ed J S Brewer et al, 23 volumes, HMSO (London 1862 – 1932).

<sup>56</sup> Peter Marshall, *Religious Identities in Henry VIII's England*, Ashgate, (2006), pp. 135 – 137. Margaret Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation: The Diocese of Lincoln under John Longland 1521 – 1547*, Cambridge University Press, 1981. Richard Rex, *Henry VIII and the English Reformation*, Macmillan, (1993), pp. 60 – 63.

<sup>57</sup> F A Gasquet, *The Eve of the Reformation: Studies in the religious life and thought of the English People*, London (1919), p 163.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, page 163.

within monastic houses were fewer than is often recorded.<sup>59</sup> Between 1347 and 1540 there were only fifteen cases of immorality recorded during the many visitations of religious houses in Yorkshire.<sup>60</sup> The reports for the four Gilbertine houses have been analysed carefully, paying particular attention to the identified individual who wrote the report for Thomas Cromwell. This evidence was then compared with the surviving records from other religious orders.

The last part of this study examines the fate of the canons and nuns after the dissolution. Employment prospects for former nuns were extremely limited. The only positions known to have been taken up by ex-nuns were as governesses or private tutors. The careers of the monks and canons were far easier to follow than those of their female counterparts since many of these men took up posts as parish priests. However, there were many religious men from other orders who were also competing for the limited number of vacant ecclesiastical livings. Indeed vacancies would have occurred only infrequently and many of the men applying for them would have waited a number of years before a parish became available. The Bishops' Registers recorded the institutions to ecclesiastical livings and gave the names of the men lucky enough to obtain them, thus allowing the lives of these men to be followed. A number of these men left wills and inventories which recorded the ecclesiastical positions that they held. The inventories gave information regarding their wealth and the possessions that they had at the time of their death.

The preambles to these wills were used to speculate on the religious convictions of these men both prior to and at the time of their death. However, this had to be done with care. Any conclusions drawn from these sources depended upon whether these wills were made in the Henrician, Edwardian, Marian or Elizabethan periods. One factor that had to be considered was the extent to which the will conformed to the officially sanctioned religious views of that period. These records were also used in conjunction with evidence for men from other orders so as to make comparisons about their respective careers in the

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<sup>59</sup> James G Clark, 'The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England', in *Studies in the History of Medieval Religion*, 18, Boydell, (2002), p. 17.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

years following the dissolution. In some cases these records could be supplemented with the evidence of disputes and other matters which appeared in the Diocesan Court books giving information on more mundane aspects of the lives of such people. Comparable records for nuns during this period were virtually non-existent, probably because they were not able to follow a career in the same way as the men. Fortunately a few wills of ex-nuns have survived which give some insight into their lives.

One unique series of records that have survived are those prepared by the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln Cathedral following an enquiry by Queen Mary into the state of the former members of religious houses and chantry priests in the diocese of Lincoln in 1554.<sup>61</sup> A similar set of records exist for the diocese of Norwich for 1555 which have been published by Baskerville.<sup>62</sup> All of the pensioners in the diocese of Lincoln who were still alive in 1554 were listed in this enquiry, giving their place of residence, their marital status, their sources of income and in some cases their state of health. The Norwich records again list all of the ex-religious for 1555 but the detail is not as extensive as the Lincoln records. These records provided the main source used to analyse the status of the nuns.

The most prominent member of the Gilbertine order at the dissolution was its last master, Robert Holgate, whose career was examined using the Letters and Papers of Henry VIII in the National Archives and the York Diocesan Records in the Borthwick Institute at York. These sources were used to examine his rise to power as Archbishop of York in 1545, his marriage to Barbara Wentworth, the daughter of Roger Wentworth of Elmsale in Yorkshire, his fall from favour at the beginning of Queen Mary's reign in 1554, and finally his imprisonment in the Tower of London.

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<sup>61</sup> TNA, E101/76/26.

<sup>62</sup> Baskerville G A, 'Married Clergy and Pensioned Religious in the Norwich Diocese in 1555,' *English Historical Review*, 48, (1993).

### **The Structure of the Thesis**

The study will begin by examining the lives of the nuns and canons within all of the houses of the Gilbertine order from the end of the fourteenth century. It will also look at the number of men that the order was recruiting from the latter part of the fourteenth century until the dissolution. Using the limited sources available, it will also examine the number of women who were attracted to the Gilbertine monastic life and the social classes from which these women were drawn. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a number of relaxations were made to the enclosure of the nuns. These changes in the rule will be examined in detail, and comparisons will be made with the enclosure of nuns in other orders. One aspect of the life of Gilbertine nuns that has not been addressed fully in previous work is their devotional practices. Thus both the celebration of the daily liturgy and the material that was read by the nuns in the cloister will be explored.

The later chapters will examine the events leading up to the dissolution of the Gilbertine order, and the dissolution itself. In particular, a study will be made of the effect this had on the lives of the canons and nuns. In particular it will focus on how their lives changed after the dissolution both financially and socially. A complete chapter has been devoted to the life of Robert Holgate, the last Master of the order. It will begin by examining his life from the time that he entered St Katherine's Priory in Lincoln as a novice, his education at Cambridge University and his rise to the highest position within the order. Prior to the dissolution Holgate held the posts of Master of the Gilbertine order and that of the Bishop of Llandaff. As Master he successfully brought about the dissolution of the order and the efficiency of his role in this matter did not go unnoticed by the Crown. The study will then go on to describe his meteoric rise to power after the dissolution as Lord President of the North of England, and his eventual promotion to Archbishop of York. The chapter will conclude with his fall from power during the reign of Queen Mary and his confinement and release from the Tower of London.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE GILBERTINE NUNS

#### Introduction – Size and Wealth

This chapter will examine the lives of the nuns within the Gilbertine order. In particular it will focus on the recruitment of women into the order using the few available sources. These figures will be compared with those of other orders at the specific times that data is available. The Institutes of the Gilbertine order and the surviving General Chapter Records will be used to analyse the strict enclosure that the Gilbertine nuns had to endure which was peculiar to this order. Despite this strict regime it will be shown that in Yorkshire, even though recruitment had fallen, Watton priory was still attracting a large number of women entrants compared with other orders in the county. It was in the two counties of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, that the greatest concentration of double-houses were to be found. These two counties will be used to examine the social classes from which the nuns were drawn, and the reasons for women choosing a religious life.

At the end of the twelfth century there were about 138 nunneries in England excluding the double-houses of the Gilbertines. The affiliation of some of the non Gilbertine houses was not always clear cut especially between the Benedictine and Cistercian orders. Linda Rasmussen in her study of St Michael's priory outside Stamford notes that the nuns of this house initially considered themselves to be Benedictines.<sup>63</sup> However, during the thirteenth century there are a number of instances where they refer to themselves as Cistercians. In the fourteenth century they even describe themselves as members of the Augustinian order.<sup>64</sup> In his study of the Cistercian Nuns in Lincolnshire, Coburn Graves stated that the Cistercians refused to admit nuns into their order during the twelfth century.<sup>65</sup> Their leaders 'were fearful that the contemplative character of the order would

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<sup>63</sup> Linda Rasmussen, 'Order, order! Determining Order in Medieval Nunneries,' in *Our Medieval Heritage, Essays in Honour of John Tillotson for his 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. Linda Rasmussen, Valerie Spear and Dianne Tillotson, Merton Priory Press, (2002), pp. 30 – 31.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Coburn V Graves, 'English Cistercian Nuns in Lincolnshire', in *Speculum, A Journal of Medieval Studie*, vol. 54, (1979), p. 493.

suffer if they became involved with the affairs of nuns.<sup>66</sup> The date at which these houses began to identify with the Cistercian order is uncertain. The bishops of Lincoln assumed they were of this order from about 1300; but this is not substantiated by any other sources.<sup>67</sup> At the dissolution, Knowles and Hadcock placed them in the Cistercian order.<sup>68</sup> Thompson has suggested that one reason why they may have claimed this allegiance was to avoid taxation.<sup>69</sup> St Michael's priory was not the only one to claim Cistercian status at this time. The priory of Nun Cotham in Lincolnshire used its Cistercian status to claim exemption from taxation. Other Lincolnshire nunneries that claimed to be members of the Cistercian order and claimed exemption from taxation were Stixwold, Greenfield and Legbourne.<sup>70</sup> However, this thesis will only discuss the double houses that have been identified as belonging to the Gilbertine order.

A further problem has been noted by Janet Burton when studying the history of nunneries in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In her study of Swine priory in Yorkshire, she has shown that for part of its existence this was a double house modelled on the Gilbertines, but claiming to belong to the Cistercian order.<sup>71</sup> Janet Burton is of the opinion that the early nuns of Swine may have been influenced by the Gilbertine priory of Watton which was only a few miles away.<sup>72</sup> The confirmation charter of King Henry II specifically mentions a community of canons, brothers, nuns and a master who was responsible for the administration of the external affairs of the priory, a role which was distinct from that of the canons and brothers.<sup>73</sup> Masters of Swine priory are mentioned up until the mid fourteenth century.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 495.

<sup>68</sup> David Knowles and R Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London, (1971), pp. 272, 275, and 276.

<sup>69</sup> S Thompson, 'The problem of the Cistercian Nuns in the Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries,' in *Medieval Women*, ed. D Baker, Oxford, (1978), pp. 248-9.

<sup>70</sup> Linda Rasmussen, 'Order, order! Determining Order in Medieval Nunneries,' p. 33.

<sup>71</sup> Janet Burton, 'The Chariot of Aminadab and the Yorkshire Priory of Swine,' in *Pragmatic Utopias, Ideals and Communities, 1200 – 1630*, ed. Rosemary Horrox and Sarah Rees Jones, Cambridge University Press, (2001), p. 27.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

During the thirteenth century a further fifteen houses for women were founded, followed by three more in the fourteenth century. Three of these houses were for Benedictine nuns, two for Cistercian nuns, seven for Augustinian canonesses, one for Dominican nuns at Dartford, and five for Franciscan nuns. The last house to be founded for nuns was the double house of the Bridgettine order at Syon in 1414. Five of these houses were located in the south of England, two in London, five in East Anglia and five in the Midlands. Double-houses of the Gilbertine order were found in only four counties in England at the beginning of the sixteenth century: these were Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Bedfordshire, with the greatest concentration of houses in Lincolnshire.<sup>74</sup>

The table below shows the distribution of nunneries in England in the twelfth century. One of the greatest concentration of nunneries was in the North, East and the East Midlands (53%), that was, in the dioceses of York (20%), Lincoln (26%) and Norfolk (9%) and it was noticeable that virtually all of the Cistercian nunneries were found in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire.<sup>75</sup> Of the other nunneries in England, approximately 11% were to be found in the counties east of Northamptonshire, a concentration of houses around the London area and the remainder in the counties in the south of England plus five houses in the north of England (30%). The table below provides a comparison of the number of nuns in the nunneries of Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Bedfordshire in 1380<sup>76</sup> and 1539, for the religious orders which had houses in these counties.<sup>77</sup> Figures for individual religious houses in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire for the years 1380 and 1536/9 where known, are given in Appendices 1 and 2. Unfortunately figures were not available for some of the Yorkshire and Bedfordshire houses in 1380; so that care must

<sup>74</sup> David Knowles and R Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses England and Wales*, (London 1971), pp 171-5.

<sup>75</sup> Sharon K Elkins, *Holy Women of England*, Chapel Hill, (1988). Map facing page 1.

<sup>76</sup> Between 1377 and 1381 an experimental tax was imposed on the clergy. The returns for Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Norfolk are to be found in the Clerical Poll Tax returns in the references given in the next note.

<sup>77</sup> These figures have been obtained from the Clerical Poll tax of 1377/80, Letters and Papers Henry 8 and the Suppression Papers in TNA. The individual references are as follows:-

Clerical Poll Tax:- Lincolnshire – E179/35/16 and E179/35/11

Yorkshire – E179/63/11 and E179/63/12

Norfolk – E179/45/9 and E179/45/14

Numbers at the Dissolution have been taken from Letters and Papers Henry 8 Volume 14, parts 1 and 2. These figures are also given by J C Russell, *The Clerical Population of Medieval England*, *Traditio*, 2 (1944), pp 177-212.



be taken in making comparisons for these houses. For the Gilbertine houses both nuns and lay sisters are included in the 1380 subsidy lists. Apart from the returns for Sempringham priory the nuns and the sisters of the house are listed under separate headings. In the case of Sempringham a gap is left in the manuscript between what is presumed to be the list of nuns and the list of sisters in the house.<sup>78</sup> A list of nuns which has survived for the year 1366 gives the names of all of the nuns in the house for this particular year.<sup>79</sup> Even though some of the names of the nuns have changed between 1366 and 1380, the names of the presumed sisters do not appear on the 1366 suggesting that the assumption made when separating the names is correct. The numbers of Gilbertine nuns used in the table are those making this assumption.

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<sup>78</sup> See; A K McHardy, *Clerical Poll Taxes of the Diocese of Lincoln 1377 – 1381*, Lincoln Record Society, Vol 81, (1992), pp. 53, 54, 56, 57 and 58.

<sup>79</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Bishop Buckingham's Register, fo. 48v.

**Table 1**

RELIGIOUS ORDER	YORKSHIRE		LINCOLNSHIRE		NORFOLK		BEDFORDSHIRE	
	1380	1539	1380	1539	1380	1539	1380	1539
GILBERTINE	61	33	215	79	22	7	30 <sup>80</sup>	18
BENEDICTINE	-	90	15	16	32	31	-	24
CISTERCIAN	-	105	99	73	23	12	-	-
AUGUSTINIAN	-	8	9	8	-	-	-	5 <sup>81</sup>
PREMON-STRATENSIAN	-	-	5	8	-	-	-	-

The most striking feature of this table is that it demonstrates that the numbers of nuns in Gilbertine houses fell dramatically over the period 1380 to 1539: forty-seven and a half per cent for Yorkshire, sixty-three per cent for Lincolnshire and sixty-eight per cent for Norfolk. However, if these figures are considered from the point of view of the actual numbers in each county, in Lincolnshire the number of nuns fell from 215 in 1380 down to 79 in 1539 for the seven houses in the county. In Yorkshire the numbers fell from 61 in 1380 to thirty-two in 1539 for the single double-house of Watton. This showed that in 1539 Watton had three times the average number of nuns in any one of the Lincolnshire houses. If the figures for the number of women in the other Lincolnshire nunneries are then examined for this period the numbers in Benedictine houses remained constant at about sixteen for the only two houses in that county. For the Cistercians the numbers fell from 99 to 73, a fall of 26%, for the seven houses of the order. From these figures it can

<sup>80</sup> This figure includes the lay sisters. The number of nuns is not known TNA E179/35/24, m. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Harrold priory was dissolved in 1536. When the house was dissolved it was said that there were four or five nuns besides the prioress, *Letters and papers Henry VIII*, Vol 13 (1), no. 1520.

be seen that the average number of women in Cistercian houses fell from 14 per house to ten per house, the Benedictine numbers remaining constant at eight women per house in the period investigated. In the Gilbertine houses during this time the numbers fell from thirty per house to eleven per house.

Unfortunately, reliable figures were not available for the number of women in the Yorkshire, Benedictine and Cistercian Houses in 1380; hence it was not possible to say if there was a fall in numbers in these orders.<sup>82</sup> Looking at the 1539 figures it can be seen that the average number of women in each house for the two orders was as follows: for the Benedictines ten women per house for the nine houses of that order, and for the twelve houses of the Cistercian order nine women per house. The single Gilbertine house of Watton had a total of thirty three nuns in 1539, which was far greater than any other nunnery in the county. One interpretation of this was that the Gilbertine houses were far more successful in recruiting women into the order as they were better endowed than either of the other two orders. However, the Gilbertines only had one house in the county; hence women in Yorkshire who wanted to join the Gilbertine order only had the option of a single house. Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers have shown that in the latter part of the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth century, recruitment into Yorkshire monasteries was local, and in some cases very local.<sup>83</sup> Unlike other houses for women in Yorkshire, for Watton to have recruited such large numbers of nuns, they may have recruited women from much further afield in the county and also from other counties. Wealthy families from both inside and outside of Yorkshire who were looking for convents for their daughters may have chosen a house which was well endowed. This figure of thirty three was in excess of that for any of the Gilbertine houses in Lincolnshire.

Between 1350 and 1400 the number of nuns in all orders declined as a result of the recurring plague and J C Russell has estimated that of 5,000 nuns who were members of

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<sup>82</sup> Affiliations for the Yorkshire houses are those assumed by: Claire Cross and Norreen Vickers, *Monk, Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, Volume 150, (1995).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, page 3.

the various religious orders before 1350 about a third died of the plagues and famines of the fourteenth century.<sup>84</sup> Russell based his estimate of about 5000 nuns on the assumption that all nunneries had a full complement of nuns at this time.<sup>85</sup> However, Knowles suggested that there were 3000 nuns in the early fourteenth century.<sup>86</sup> Oliva, who analysed the fall in the number of nuns in the diocese of Norfolk in the period 1350 to 1539, including figures for the Gilbertine house at Shouldham in Norfolk, estimated the numbers of women in nunneries there.<sup>87</sup> She built up a data-base of named nuns over this period including the intervening years between 1350 and 1539 to make this estimate. This data base was compiled from Poll Tax returns (for the late fourteenth century) and the names of nuns in the pension lists compiled at the dissolution. Names of nuns in the intervening years were obtained from wills and bishops' visitations.<sup>88</sup> In the diocese of Norfolk she found the number of nuns fell from 179 in 1350 to 113 in 1400, a fall of 37%. Of the eleven nunneries included in this survey, seven lost between three and five nuns from totals that ranged from ten to twenty-seven (18 – 33%). Three of these houses lost eight nuns each from their communities, from totals ranging from eleven to twenty three (35 – 73%). The most dramatic fall of all was that of the Gilbertine house of Shouldham, where the numbers fell from twenty-two to an estimated figure of four by 1400. By 1450 Oliva estimated that the numbers had fallen to three and by 1539, at the dissolution, the figure had only risen to seven. Between the late fourteenth century and the time of the dissolution, Oliva was relying on the names of nuns recorded in wills and bishops' registers. The figures that she quotes for the periods 1400 – 1450 (4 nuns) and 1450 – 1500 (3 nuns) are much lower than other houses in the diocese.<sup>89</sup> It is possible that these figures were a result of Shouldham priory not recovering from the effects of the plague; but it is perhaps more likely that these figures are inaccurate due to the lack of documentary sources. Hence it can be suggested that Shouldham was the only house in

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<sup>84</sup> J C Russell, *The Clerical Population of Medieval England*, p. 179-182.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, 3 Volumes, Cambridge, (1948-1959), Vol. 2, p. 256.

<sup>87</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England*, Boydell Press, (1998), p. 39.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

the Norfolk diocese which did not recover from a loss of numbers by the end of the fourteenth-century.

Another problem which was affecting Gilbertine double-houses at this time was the level of taxation imposed on their incomes. However, 'individual priories began to receive some taxation relief from the beginning of the fourteenth century'.<sup>90</sup> In 1304 Catley Priory in Lincolnshire, the poorest of the Gilbertine double-houses, was exempted from taxation and in 1361 along with Haverholm priory in the same county taxation was withheld on the grounds that the bishop of Lincoln had certified that their goods were insufficient to maintain their communities.<sup>91</sup> The Bedfordshire house of Chicksands was exempted in 1335, 1337 and 1345 and again along with Sempringham and Malton priories in 1356.<sup>92</sup>

At the beginning of the fifteenth century individual double-houses, namely Alvingham, Bullington, Catley, Haverholm, North Ormesby, Sempringham, Shouldham and Sixhills received some taxation relief. These houses successfully claimed at the Exchequer Court that they ought to be exempt on the grounds that they had been classed as poor nunneries by the bishops of Lincoln and Norwich. In 1404 Robert Wood, an attorney acting on behalf of the prioress and nuns of Shouldham Priory in Norfolk appeared at the Exchequer Court to complain that although the nuns had been certified as poor, their possessions had been taxed. Robert Wood then produced charters belonging to the priory which showed that these possessions had been expressly granted to the nuns by the founders and benefactors of the priory.<sup>93</sup> The charters which appear on this roll only relate to the possessions that had been granted to the nuns. Documents which did not specifically mention the nuns were not produced at the Exchequer Court.<sup>94</sup> By producing material which only related to them would strengthen their case for exemption. In his study of the Lincolnshire Cistercian nuns, Coburn Graves notes that other nunneries in Lincolnshire had been classed as poor by the Bishop of Lincoln, Richard de Gravesend,

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<sup>90</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine order*, page, 446.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* page 446.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* page 446.

<sup>93</sup> TNA Memoranda Roll for 1404, E159/180, Easter Term.

<sup>94</sup> The charters which occur in E159/180 only refer to the nuns.

in 1269.<sup>95</sup> Even though he recognised them as belonging to the Cistercian order he asked the King that these ‘Cistercian’ houses were exempt from taxation on the grounds of their poverty. However, he did not plead on behalf of one of the houses which claimed Cistercian affiliation, Stixwold priory, since this was one of the larger nunneries in the county. In the case of the Gilbertine priories, the revenues which were received by the priory had to support both the male and female communities. From this evidence it appears that these nuns may have had a good case when pleading poverty. From the figures provided in Appendix 1 it can be seen that the incomes that many of these nunneries in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire were drawing from their estates, taxation would have had a significant effect on their net incomes. Records show that they probably obtained very little if anything in return.

Three years later similar cases to this were brought to the court by Catley and Haverholm Priories. In their cases the assessment had been made based on the assessment for taxation made in 1291, and the legal arguments used in the court at this time. These possessions had been granted to the nuns and their predecessors from the time of the gift of the possessions to the priory.<sup>96</sup> They argued that the ‘brethren’ mentioned in the charters put before the Exchequer Court were not permanent members of the particular priory, since they were removable at the will of the Master of the Order, the nuns being permanent members of the particular house.<sup>97</sup> Thus having satisfied themselves that the income derived from the possessions granted by the charters was for the sole use of the nuns, the court allowed the nuns to claim exemption.<sup>98</sup> Following these successful claims, the remaining Lincolnshire double-houses and the double-house of Chicksands in Bedfordshire were also exempted from the taxes of 1406, 1407 and 1410.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Coburn V Graves, ‘English Cistercian Nuns in Lincolnshire’, *Speculum, A Journal of Medieval Studies*, vol. 54, (1979), p. 497.

<sup>96</sup> *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae auctoritate P. Nicholai IV, circa AD 1291*, ed. T Astle, S Ayscough and J Caley, Record Commission, (London 1802).

<sup>97</sup> TNA Memoranda roll for 1405, E159/183, membrane xi, Easter Term. The ‘brethren’ mentioned in these charters presumably were the canons of the order. An analysis of the ordination lists for the canons of the order show that canons unlike the nuns, were not permanent members of a particular house. This will be discussed in the chapter on the canons of the order.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine order*, p 446.

In 1450 the double-houses mentioned above were assessed for the payment of tax, with the male and female communities assessed separately, as a result of the legal cases brought before the Exchequer court earlier in the century. The amounts that each of the communities were liable to be taxed on are given in Table 2 below.

**Table 2<sup>100</sup>**

<b>House</b>	<b>Valuation (Prior)</b>	<b>Tax (Prior)</b>	<b>Valuation (Nuns)</b>	<b>Tax (Nuns)</b>	<b>Valuation in 1526</b>
Alvingham	£8 – 9 – 2d	16s – 11d	£113	£11 – 6 – 0d	£102 – 0 – 0d
Bullington	£45 – 4 – 2d	£4 – 10 – 5d	-	-	£175 – 17 – 0d
Catley	£13 – 1 – 8d	£1 – 2 – 2d	£42 – 1 – 5d	£4 – 5 – 0 d	£71 – 6 – 8d
Chicksands	£30 – 14 – 2d	£3 – 1 – 5d	-	-	£237 – 6 – 8d
Haverholme	£1 – 6 – 8d	2s – 8d	£141 – 17 – 6d	£14 – 3 – 9d	-
North Ormesby	-	-	£119 – 14 – 3d	£11 – 19 – 5d	£104 – 0 – 0d
Sempringham	£1 – 14 – 7d	3s – 5d	£462 – 15 – 0d	£46 – 5 – 6d	£236 – 6 – 8d
Shouldham	£7 – 10 – 7d	15s – 0d	£1 – 4 – 2d	2s – 5d	-
Sixhills	£3 – 2 – 6d	6s – 3d	£269 – 14 – 5d	£26 – 19 – 5d	£152 – 15 – 5d

This table shows the amounts that were to be paid separately by the canons and nuns in each of the double-houses discussed here. However, the Exchequer Court exempted the nuns from the payment of the tax on the grounds that Letters Patent had been granted to Nicholas Revesby, Master of the Order, that specified that these houses were exempt of all taxes on their lands and possessions because they were poor monasteries.<sup>101</sup> However, before this exemption had been granted it appeared that the Lincolnshire collector had already received money from Sixhills Priory, but an entry in the Memoranda Rolls contained an instruction ordering the Sheriff of Lincoln to return the money that he had collected back to the priory.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>100</sup> TNA, Memoranda Roll E159/226, 28 Henry VI (1450) Trinity Term.

<sup>101</sup> *Calendar of Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office*, HMSO (London 1891-), Henry VI 1446-52, p. 499.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

In 1452 a similar assessment was made for these double houses in which these valuations were more or less the same as the returns of two years previously. These sums of money are shown in Table 3 below. Again the Exchequer Court allowed the nuns of these houses to be exempt of all taxes for that year.

**Table 3**<sup>103</sup>

House	Valuation (Prior)	Tax (Prior)	Valuation (Nuns)	Tax (Nuns)	Valuation in 1526
Alvingham <sup>104</sup>	-	-	-	-	£102 – 0 – 0d
Bullington	£45 – 4 – 2d	£4 – 10 – 5d	£203 – 9 – 7d	£20 – 6 – 11d	£175 – 17 – 0d
Catley	£14 – 1 – 8d	£1 – 6s – 2d	£42 – 11 – 5d	£4 – 5 – 1d	£71 – 6 – 8d
Chicksands	£30 – 14 – 2d	£3 – 1 – 9d	£158 – 11 – 3d	£15 – 17s – 0d	£237 – 6 – 8d
Haverholme	£1 – 6 – 8d	2s – 8d	£141 – 17 – 6d	£14 – 6 – 5d	-
North Ormesby	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	£104 – 0 – 0d
Sempringham	£1 – 14 – 7d	3s – 5d	£462 – 10 – 5d	£46 – 5 – 6d	£236 – 6 – 8d
Shouldham	£7 – 10 – 7d	15s – 0d	-	-	-
Sixhills	£3 – 2 – 6d	6s – 3d	£269 – 12 – 9d	£26 – 19 – 4d	£152 – 15 – 5d

The valuation of the nuns for Shouldam is rather curious (£1 – 4 – 2d). The valuation of the nuns' possessions should have been much greater than this figure, and the reason for the discrepancy is unknown. Comparing Tables 2 and 3 (where data is available) shows that over this two year period the valuation levels of assessed taxation of the priories had not changed.

Up until 1452 it appeared that these exemptions were not granted on a permanent basis, but three years later in 1455 permanent exemption was granted to all Gilbertine double-houses except for the Yorkshire house of Watton.<sup>105</sup> No records have survived to show that this exemption policy continued up to the dissolution in 1539. However records from the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln show that all the Lincolnshire double houses, along with all other religious houses in the county, were assessed for the payment of ecclesiastical

<sup>103</sup> TNA, Memoranda Roll E159/228, 30 Henry VI (1452), Michaelmas Term.

<sup>104</sup> Amounts have been left blank.

<sup>105</sup> *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1441-6, page 332.



taxes at the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>106</sup> Only the assessment records have survived, and they do not show if the individual houses actually paid the tax. These valuations which were made in 1526 have been included in Tables 2 and 3. The valuations for Sempringham and Sixhills priories in 1526 are considerably lower than the fifteenth century figures. These discrepancies cannot be explained due to the lack of surviving records.

However, the method of assessment used appeared to be different from that used by the Exchequer Court because instead of assessing the male and female communities separately, the Dean and Chapter assessor based their calculations on the income of the priory as a whole that was including the income belonging to the nuns, after the deduction of the outgoings of the house. These assessments showed that the nuns in the Gilbertine double-houses may not have been exempted from the payment of ecclesiastical taxes. However, no records have survived to show unequivocally that these taxes were paid to the Dean and Chapter.

### **Recruitment of nuns in the counties of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire**

The counties of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire were chosen for this analysis since these two counties had the highest populations of Gilbertine nuns. In the sixteenth century there were twenty-three nunneries in Yorkshire: nine Benedictine, twelve Cistercian, one Cluniac, one Augustinian and one Gilbertine double-house at Watton in the East Riding of Yorkshire.<sup>107</sup> However, it should be noted that there were three other houses for male members of the Gilbertine order in the county, at Ellerton on Spalding Moor, Malton and St Andrews York. For Lincolnshire the figures were: two Benedictine, seven Cistercian, one Augustinian, one Premonstratensian, seven double-houses of the Gilbertine order and three Gilbertine houses of Canons only.

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<sup>106</sup> Dean and Chapter Records, Clerical Subsidies A2/17 (1523) and A/1/12 (1526), Lincolnshire Archives Office.

<sup>107</sup> Janet Burton, *The Yorkshire Nunneries in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, Borthwick Papers No. 36, (1979), page 37.

Returning to Table 1, it can be seen that for Lincolnshire in 1380, 215 out of a total of 338 nuns (64%) were members of the Gilbertine order. By 1539 this number had fallen to 79 out of a total of 176 (45%). However the figures cited for Yorkshire in 1380 were unreliable due to the lack of data; however, in 1539, thirty three out of a total of 235 nuns (14%) were members of the Gilbertine order. In Lincolnshire the percentage of Gilbertine houses compared to those of other orders was 39%, whilst in Yorkshire the figure was only 4.2%. From the table we can see that in 1539 the total number of Gilbertine nuns was 119 of which 33 (28%) were members of the single house in Yorkshire. In Lincolnshire 66% of the total number of nuns were spread through seven houses of the order. Thus, even though the Lincolnshire population of Gilbertine nuns was 42% of the total number of women, these women were distributed over 39% of the nunneries in the county. Despite the fact that the overall numbers of nuns had declined for the Gilbertine order over the period 1380 to 1539, the order were still attracting relatively large numbers of new women entrants.

Before a comparison can be made of the nuns within the various orders three difficult questions need to be addressed. The first question is from what social classes were novices drawn. Secondly, what were these women's reasons for wanting to enter a religious life? Thirdly, what function did female monasticism fulfil in the first half of the sixteenth century? The last two questions will prove to be more difficult to answer.

### **Social backgrounds and geographical areas from which the nuns were drawn**

In analysing the social background of Gilbertine nuns, the method of assigning nuns to particular social classes used was that suggested by Marilyn Oliva.<sup>108</sup> In her book on the nunneries in the diocese of Norwich, she identified five classes: the titled aristocracy, the upper-gentry, lower-gentry or parish-gentry, urban-dwellers and yeoman-farmers.

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<sup>108</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *Aristocracy or Meritocracy? Office Holding Patterns in Late Medieval English Nunneries, Women in the Church*, ed. W J Sheils and Diana Wood, pp 197-208. *Studies in Church History*, Vol 27. Oxford 1990. See also Marilyn J Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England, Female Monasteries in the Diocese of Norwich, 1350 – 1540*, Boydell Press, (1998), pp 52 – 54.

**Table 4**

<b>Social Rank</b>	<b>% of Nuns in Class</b>	<b>% Office Holders</b>
Titled Aristocracy	1	0
Upper Gentry	15	17
Parish Gentry	64	64
Urban Dwellers	16	16
Yeoman Farmers	4	3

This table shows that the majority of female monastic office holders in the diocese of Norfolk came from the Parish Gentry class. However, significant numbers of these positions were taken up by women from the Upper Gentry and Urban dweller classes. In her analysis of the social classes from which nuns came from in the diocese of Norwich between 1350 and 1540, Oliva has shown that 16% came from the Urban classes, 64% from the Parish Gentry and 15% from the Upper Gentry.<sup>109</sup> These figures show that nuns from the Parish Gentry were the most successful in obtaining these posts. Only 16% were recruited from the Urban classes, however, and 16% of these women achieved high office within their houses. 15% were drawn from the Upper Gentry class and 17% of these women became office holders. From this it appears that selection for these posts was on merit rather than the social class from which these women were drawn.

Elsewhere, Eileen Power has argued that late-medieval nunneries were ‘aristocratic institutions, the refuge of the gently born’.<sup>110</sup> The classes from which the religious orders

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<sup>109</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England*, p. 54.

<sup>110</sup> Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries c 1275 to 1535*, Cambridge (1922), p. 4.

drew their novices comprised the nobility, the gentry and the wealthier townsmen. ‘Nuns were not drawn from the lower classes’.<sup>111</sup> Power’s opinion was confirmed by Claire Cross who stated that the surnames of the nuns in sixteenth-century Yorkshire ‘read like a roll call of the northern gentry’.<sup>112</sup> However, John H Tillotson in his paper on Marrick Priory in Yorkshire, advised caution when applying this generalisation.<sup>113</sup> As for aristocratic women, Barbara Harris said that very few of these women entered convents.<sup>114</sup> Tillotson analysed the social status of the thirteen nuns at Marrick Priory at the time of the Dissolution. Nothing was known about six of these women other than that two had surnames derived from local place names, showing that a number of these nuns were recruited from the villages close to the priory. Two others may have had connections with local landowning families whilst another nun, Marjory Conyers, may have had connections with the aristocratic family of that name in Richmondshire. The surnames of three of the other nuns suggested links with tenants of the priory. Christabel Cowper the last prioress of Marrick may have had similar connections.<sup>115</sup> Tillotson then concluded by suggesting that ‘novices were not drawn from the lowest levels of society, because of the financial costs involved in entry to the convent, but they were clearly not aristocratic’.<sup>116</sup> More recently Janet Burton’s research into the identities of women entering Yorkshire nunneries has shown that a substantial number seem to have come from the upper-gentry and the parish gentry.<sup>117</sup> However, Burton notes that these findings must be treated with caution ‘since many of the names were those of prioresses, who may have been of a higher social class than the nuns. Even though the monastic community was theoretically one of equality, there may have been a tendency to carry over social

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Claire Cross, *Religious Life of Women in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*. W J Sheils, D Wood (eds), *Women in the Church*, Studies in Church History 27, Oxford (1990), p 310.

See also, Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks, Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, Volume 150, (1995), *passim*.

<sup>113</sup> John H Tillotson, *Marrick Priory: A Nunnery in Late Medieval Yorkshire*, Borthwick Paper No. 75, University of York (1989), p 6.

<sup>114</sup> Barbara J Harris, *A New Look at the Reformation: Aristocratic Women and Nunneries, 1450 – 1540*, *Journal of British Studies*, Volume 32, (1993), p 91.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* p 6.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* p 7.

<sup>117</sup> Janet Burton, *Yorkshire Nunneries in the Later Middle Ages: recruitment and resources*, in *Government, Religion and Society in Northern England, 1000-1700*, edited by Paul Dalton and John Appleby, Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishers, (1997), p. 108.

status from the secular world.’<sup>118</sup> In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, nunneries would have been eager to supplement their income from sources other than the property which they owned, so that attracting women from wealthy families who were able to make a cash payment when a girl was finally professed as a nun was logical. Brian Golding has said that it is difficult to determine whether the Gilbertines had a ‘fixed charge’ on entry. It is more likely that charges were made on an individual basis depending on the status of the entrant and the relationship of the family with the particular monastery.<sup>119</sup>

Oliva classified women who were of the royal family, from the families of hereditary peers or families of Baronets as titled aristocracy. The Dominican Priory of Dartford was recruiting aristocratic women in the fifteenth century. Paul Lee has shown that two of the prioresses during this period had aristocratic backgrounds and a number of other members of this house, including the daughter of Edward IV, came from this social class.<sup>120</sup> The only Gilbertine nun identified by Oliva who had a close relationship with royalty was Marjorie de Burgh, a nun at Chicksands Priory in Bedfordshire (circa 1300). Her father, Sir John de Burgh, married Cecilia de Baliol in about 1280. Cecilia’s father was John de Baliol, 5<sup>th</sup> Baron of Bywell and Barnard Castle. The Baliol family were the senior claimants to the Scottish throne after the extinction of the Dunkeld dynasty in 1286. However, a number of other women who were members of the titled aristocracy were placed in Gilbertine houses. Robert de Lisle who was given the title Baron of Rougemont by Edward III on the death of his father, gave a psalter to his daughters Audere and Alborou who were nuns at Chicksands priory.<sup>121</sup> A further example is Gwenllian the daughter of Llewelyn ap Gruffudd, Prince of Wales, who was placed in Sempringham Priory as a baby in 1283. Her cousin Gwladys was placed in Sixhills priory and other cousins were sent to Alvingham priory.<sup>122</sup> These girls were imprisoned in

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 151.

<sup>120</sup> Paul Lee, *Nunneries, Learning and Spirituality in late Medieval English Society: The Dominican Priory of Dartford*, York Medieval Press, (2001), p. 99 and pp. 62-3.

<sup>121</sup> Lucy Freeman Sandler, *The Psalter of Robert de Lisle*, Harvey Miller Oxford University Press, (1983), pp. 11 – 12. This psalter is now in the collections of the British Library, BL, MS Arundel 83.

<sup>122</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 153.

Gilbertine priories after the defeat and deaths of Llewelyn and his brother David as 'enemies of the realm' by Edward I.<sup>123</sup>

The upper gentry were classified by Oliva as those who were dependent for wealth on the ownership of large estates and were involved in the offices of the realm and the counties in which they resided.<sup>124</sup> Included in this class were nuns whose fathers were knights and esquires, who may have sat in the House of Commons or filled county offices. An example of such a nun was Joan Foljambe at Sempringham in the mid-fifteenth century. Her father Thomas Foljambe Esq. of Walton, Derbyshire, succeeded to the family estates and manors on the failure of other direct male descendants of Thomas Foljambe, his great grandfather, on the death of Roger Foljambe in 1447. Thomas died in 1451/2 and was buried in Chesterfield.<sup>125</sup>

The lower-gentry or parish-gentry held minor county offices such as constables, bailiffs or stewards to the more prestigious families. An example of a Gilbertine nun in this group was Anne Saltmarsh of Watton Priory at the Dissolution. Her father was John Saltmarsh of Saltmarsh who was Commissioner of Sewers for Howdenshire. He died in 1513 and was buried at Howden in Yorkshire.<sup>126</sup>

The last two classes to be considered were those of urban-dwellers, families who were resident in towns, and were involved in trade, industry and civic government and those of yeoman farmers and substantial freeholders who did not hold any local office.<sup>127</sup> Joan Hurtsky a young nun at Watton Priory at the dissolution came from a landowning family in Watton.

Based on a sample of 216 nuns and 93 office holders within nunneries in the diocese of Norwich, Oliva classified these women as follows.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Marilyn J Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England*, p. 53.

<sup>125</sup> J Foster, *Pedigrees of the County Families of Yorkshire*, Vol 1, (London (1874)). No page numbers.

<sup>126</sup> Dugdale Visitation of Yorkshire, Vol 2, ed. J W Clay, Exeter, (1907).

<sup>127</sup> Yeoman farmer classes were those who did not hold any local offices but were substantial landowners.

<sup>128</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *Aristocracy or Meritocracy*, p 200.

**Table 4**

<b>Social Rank</b>	<b>% of Nuns in Class</b>	<b>% Office Holders</b>
Titled Aristocracy	1	0
Upper Gentry	15	17
Parish Gentry	64	64
Urban Dwellers	16	16
Yeoman Farmers	4	3

The same social classification Oliva had utilised previously was used in this study to analyse the social background of the Watton nuns who appeared on the pension list when the house was dissolved in 1539. Nine of the 33 Watton nuns who appeared on this pension list were traced and biographical details and family connections were found. However, of the eight lay-sisters in the pension list no biographical details have been found.<sup>129</sup> According to the Institutes of the Gilbertine order girls wishing to enter a Gilbertine Priory would have been recruited as lay-sisters if they were unable to read the services.<sup>130</sup>

Brian Golding has suggested that the distinction between nuns and lay-sisters was based on social class and that the latter may have been servants to the families whose daughters

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<sup>129</sup> Lay sisters were women who acted as servants to the nuns. They lived within the convent and they followed a rule which was laid down in the Institutes of the order. TNA, E 315/234 ff. 304v – 313r. This is a MS volume of pensions awarded to various monastic houses. See also Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth-Century Yorkshire*, YASRS Vol 150, (1995).

<sup>130</sup> Dugdale, W, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. J Caley, H Ellis, and B Bandinel, 6 vols. (London, 1846), vol. 6, p. lxxxvi.

became members of the Gilbertine communities, that was, ‘those who were exchanging one master or mistress for another’.<sup>131</sup> The evidence that he provided for this came from a thirteenth-century charter in which Agnes, daughter of Walter Engayne gave land in Kilwick to the Prior of Watton with herself, her two daughters and Edusa her servant. The 1539 Pension List for Watton Priory included eight lay-sisters who were awarded pensions by the crown, but no other double-house of the order appeared to have lay-sisters at the dissolution.<sup>132</sup> If Golding’s suggestion was correct, then this provided evidence that Watton Priory was recruiting women from higher social classes than the other priories of the order at this time.

The biographical details of the nine Watton nuns were as follows. Eleanor may have been one of the unnamed daughters of Robert Constable of North Cliffe who was a Sergeant at the Law (a high ranking barrister).<sup>133</sup> Robert was one of the younger sons of Sir Robert Constable of Flamborough. In his will of 2 September 1501 Robert of North Cliffe bequeathed to the prior of Watton two ‘crewetts of sylver’ and to the nuns of Watton 10s – 0d. One of the witnesses to his will was the Prior of Watton, but the will did not mention his daughters by name. It clearly stated that Constable made bequests to two unnamed and unmarried daughters.<sup>134</sup> This man’s widow Beatrix, Lady Greystock, was the widow of Ralph, Lord Greystock, before she married Robert Constable and when she made her will in 1505 she identified one of her daughters as Elizabeth who was then about six years old.<sup>135</sup> One part of her will also described a bequest to the Master of Watton of an annual sum of money to act as guardian to her daughter Elizabeth until she was of age such that she may become a nun.<sup>136</sup> It stated, ‘to the Master of Watton, yerely, during ye space of 6 yeres, 4 marc, to ye finding and exhibition of Eliz my daughter’. She then went on to say,

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<sup>131</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine order*, p. 120.

<sup>132</sup> TNA, E315/234 ff. 304v – 313r.

<sup>133</sup> In the Pension list she has the name Elizabeth. If this is the same person as that in her father’s will, it may be that the scribe may have written her name down incorrectly when he copied the will into the register, or she may have changed her name to Eleanor when she left Watton Priory.

<sup>134</sup> York University Library, Borthwick Institute for Archives, Probate Register 6, fo. 9 Will of Robert Constable.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, Probate Register 6, fo. 141, Will of Beatrix, Lady Greystock.

<sup>136</sup> At this time the Prior of Watton was also Master of the Gilbertine order.



I will it when my daughter Eliz shall com to th'age of 12 yeres, and she be then disposed to be a none, it then my executors shall paie or cause to be paid unto ye said Master of Watton £20, and therwith ye said Master to bere and sustend all maner of charges of profession.<sup>137</sup>

This Elizabeth may possibly be the Eleanor who appeared in the dissolution list of nuns, and if so, it must be assumed that she accepted a religious life at Watton Priory.

Anne Saltmarsh was identified without question from two sources. She was mentioned in the will of Anthony Saltmarsh of Strubby in Lincolnshire that was made in 1550, when he made a bequest to Anne referring to her as 'Dame Anne'.<sup>138</sup> Anne's father was John Saltmarsh of Saltmarsh and Thorganby who was born in 1455. He became Commissioner of Sewers for Howdenshire and died on the 16 August 1513. He was buried at Howden in Yorkshire. His wife was Margaret the daughter of William Brough of Brough.<sup>139</sup> In her pedigree Anne was specifically mentioned as a nun of Watton Priory. John's eldest son Edward, brother to Anne, was a Grand Juror in the trial of the leaders of the Pilgrimage of Grace, and also in the trial of Katherine Howard. He was born in 1485 and died at Thorganby on 2 March 1548 having married twice, firstly to Elizabeth daughter of Sir Brian Stapleton of Wighill, and then to Alice daughter and coheir of Roger Pilkington of Blissington.

Agnes Warner, one of the prioresses of Watton Priory at the dissolution, was a member of the Warner family of Watton who were probably local landowners. An Agnes Warner was first mentioned in her grandfather's will of 1465,<sup>140</sup> and then in her mother's will of 1486 where it was stated 'Agneti Warner moniali de Watton filie mee ...'<sup>141</sup> Thomas Warner of Watton, who was probably uncle to Agnes, did not mention Agnes by name in

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<sup>137</sup> Borthwick Institute, Probate Register 6, fo. 141, Will of Beatrix, Lady Greystock.

<sup>138</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, LCC Will 1549 – 50, 133. Will of Anthony Saltmarsh of Strubby.

<sup>139</sup> Dugdale Visitation of Yorkshire, Vol 2, ed. J W Clay, Exeter, (1907).

<sup>140</sup> York University Library, Borthwick Institute for Archives, Probate Register 4, fo. 117. Will of Richard Warner of Watton.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, Probate Register 5, fo. 300. Will of Alice Gayton of Watton.

his will of 1487 but he left bequests to the nuns and canons of Watton Priory.<sup>142</sup> He also names William Warner, prior of Bullington, as one of the witnesses to his will. Apart from the Warner wills mentioned above, no other trace of this family has been found in the Watton area.

Ann Elleker, sub-prioress of Watton, was probably related to Sir Ralph Elleker of Risby, knight. In his will of 1559 he mentioned two Anne Ellerkers, one his sister and the other 'the daughter of his grandfather'.<sup>143</sup> Since it was known that Anne who was the nun at Watton was alive in 1573, when she paid a subsidy of 4s, then if she was a relative of Sir Ralph, it would be safe to say that she was his sister.<sup>144</sup>

Dorothy Vavasour was probably the daughter of Henry Vavasour of Hazlewood who died in 1509. He married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir John Everingham of Everingham, and his eldest son John married Anne, daughter of Henry 6<sup>th</sup> Lord Scrope of Bolton.<sup>145</sup> Dorothy was not mentioned in Henry's will, but Dugdale in his pedigree of the family included a Dorothy who was described as a nun.<sup>146</sup>

In his will dated 5 December 1511 John Burnholme of Cawood made bequests to *Dominus* William Burnholme (a canon) and Elizabeth Burnholme 'monialis' (nun).<sup>147</sup> He did not say that these were his children, but since they were included between named other children it was reasonable to assume that they were his children. He also did not say where Elizabeth was residing as a nun, but as no other nuns of this name were found it was probable that she was the nun who appeared in the dissolution list of Watton Priory. This appears to be a reasonable assumption given that the name 'Burnholme' was unusual.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, Probate Register 5, fo. 326, Will of Thomas Warner of Watton.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, Probate Register 17, part 1, fo. 91, Will of Rauf Elleker of Risby, Knight. See also Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth-Century Yorkshire*, YASRS Volume 150, p. 404.

<sup>144</sup> TNA, E179/65/349.

<sup>145</sup> Dugdale Visitation of Yorkshire, vol 2, ed. J W Clay, Exeter (1907).

<sup>146</sup> J W Walker, *Yorkshire Pedigrees*, Publications of the Harleian Society, Vol 94, London (1942), p. 330.

<sup>147</sup> Borthwick Institute, Probate Register 8, fo. 80. Will of John Burnholme of Cawood.

Joan Hurtsky, who was under the age of twenty one when she was a nun at Watton, received a bequest from her father William Hurtsky of Watton, landowner, just after the dissolution in 1540.<sup>148</sup> In his will this woman was described as being a nun before the dissolution. He further made a bequest to Robert Holgate, bishop of Llandaff who was Master of the Gilbertine order and President of the Council of the North, ‘to be a good Lord to my children’. Alice Tangatt who can almost certainly be identified as the Alice Tangate who appeared in the Watton Priory pension list,<sup>149</sup> was mentioned in the will of her father William Tangatt of Watton in 1509.<sup>150</sup> The Alice Walles who was left a bequest by her father John Walles of Beswick in 1546 may well have been the nun of the same name mentioned in the dissolution list.<sup>151</sup> The social status of these two latter families was not known but it was likely that they were both local land owners.

From this sample it can be seen that the lowest social class from which women were being recruited; for which we have evidence was that of the local landowners. However, this did not mean that women from lower social classes did not become nuns. The lack of evidence relating to these women made their identification impossible. Inevitably they did not leave wills and other documents to record their names. Indeed it was likely that women from the lower social classes were to be recruited as lay sisters within the order. There were eight such women at Watton the time of the dissolution.

The largest of the Gilbertine Houses in Lincolnshire was the mother house of the order at Sempringham. Of the eighteen Sempringham nuns who appeared in the pension list at the dissolution it was only been possible to connect one to a particular family with any degree of certainty.<sup>152</sup> John Rudd of Quadring made a bequest to his daughter Agnes in his will of 1515 and it was probably the case that this Agnes was the woman who became a nun at Sempringham Priory.<sup>153</sup> By 1529 an Agnes Rudd was a nun at Sempringham Priory since Joan Armstrong of Corby, Vowess, bequeathed to the nuns of Sempringham

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<sup>148</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Probate Register 11, part ii, fo. 573. Will of William Hurtsky.

<sup>149</sup> TNA, E315/234, ff. 304v – 313 r. See also Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth-Century Yorkshire*, YASRS Volume 150, pp. 403 and 405.

<sup>150</sup> Borthwick Institute, Probate Register 8, fo. 14. Will of William Tangatt of Watton.

<sup>151</sup> Borthwick Institute, Probate Register 13, fo 327. Will of John Walles of Beswick.

<sup>152</sup> TNA, E315/233 fo. 32.

<sup>153</sup> TNA. PCC Wills PROB 11/18. Will of John Rudd of Quadring.

3s 4d 'wherof Dame Agnes Rudd is to have 40d'. At the dissolution Agnes Rudd was one of the prioresses of Sempringham. The lack of references to the Sempringham nuns in public documents after 1539 leads to the risky conjecture that such women may have originated from lower social classes than other nuns who were professed at Watton Priory.

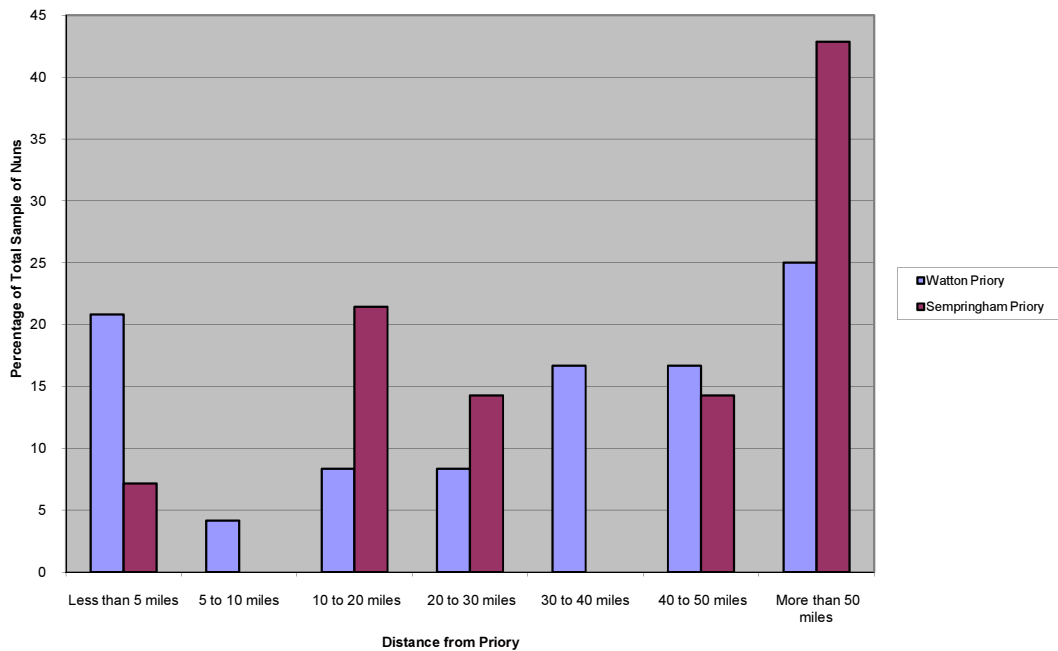
Using the information above and noting nuns who were mentioned in wills, and by using the index to wills for both Lincolnshire and Yorkshire to locate concentrations of surnames within these two counties, it was possible to investigate the recruitment of nuns to the two priories of Watton and Sempringham in geographical terms. These two priories were chosen since they were the largest of the Gilbertine nunneries and this allowed a comparison to be made of the recruitment patterns in the two counties.

The chart below shows the number of nuns and the distance they travelled to be recruited where known, for the two Gilbertine nunneries of Sempringham and Watton at the time of the dissolution in 1539 using the names from the pension lists. Of the twenty nuns at Sempringham in 1539 it has been possible to speculate on the origins of seventeen of these women. For Watton priory the data used was twenty seven out of a total of thirty three nuns.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Pension list for Sempringham priory, TNA E315/233 and for Watton priory, TNA E315/234.

Recruitment Distance



Sempringham and Watton Priors were the two principal houses of the Gilbertine order for nuns and canons. The detailed analysis of recruitment shows that Sempringham was relying on recruits from longer distances away from the priory. Whereas Watton recruited about seven (25%) of its nuns from within a distance of twenty miles, Sempringham only recruited about two (7%) of its nuns from this distance from the house.<sup>155</sup> More than seven (43%) of Sempringham nuns came from a distance of at least 50 miles. Watton was recruiting about the same number over this distance but a lower percentage of its total, 25% compared with 43% at Sempringham priory.

Thus it has been shown that Watton Priory was recruiting a greater proportion of its identifiable nuns from the parish and upper-gentry classes of society rather than from the urban-dwellers or the yeoman farmer classes. Of this sample of nine nuns, three came from the upper-gentry class and six from the parish-gentry. However it cannot be assumed that these figures applied to all the named nuns at the dissolution. There may

<sup>155</sup> Claire Cross has noted that East Riding monasteries appear to have been drawing their recruits from areas close to their houses. Claire Cross, *The End of Medieval Monasticism in the East Riding of Yorkshire*, East Yorkshire Local History Society (1993), p. 8.

have been other nuns who came from the lower classes and whose names were not recorded in the documents of the time. As suggested earlier, of the Sempringham nuns, it was only possible to identify the family of only one of them, Agnes Rudd, who probably came from the local parish-gentry. Therefore a possible conclusion was that Watton was recruiting a significant number of nuns from the higher social classes, which was the reason for the roughly uniform recruitment pattern over the various distances. This fact may also have indicated that Watton Priory may have acquired a position of greater prominence within the Gilbertine order than that of Sempringham where the order was founded. A further piece of evidence to support this proposition was that from 1480 the priors of Watton appeared to have held the post of Master of the Order simultaneously with their house.<sup>156</sup> This leadership might have indicated that Watton Priory became the administrative centre of the Gilbertine order. The valuation of religious houses undertaken nationally in 1535, showed that Watton Priory was valued at over £360, whereas Sempringham Priory was valued at just over £317.<sup>157</sup>

### **Reasons for Entering a Religious Life**

The reasons for women entering a religious life was difficult to ascertain. There are three possible classes into which these women might be placed. The first class was of young women who entered the order of their own free will; secondly, those who were forced into a life within a religious community,<sup>158</sup> for instance because they were the illegitimate daughters of the middle and upper classes; and finally older women and widows who retired to a nunnery to end their days in peace.<sup>159</sup> Widows who joined female monastic communities entered as either professed nuns or vowesses. Vowesses were veiled and took vows of chastity, and sometimes they even remained in their own private residences rather than living within the monastic community.<sup>160</sup> Jane Armstrong of Corby in

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<sup>156</sup> See footnote 11 on page 4 of the chapter on the Canons before the dissolution.

<sup>157</sup> *Valor Ecclesiasticus temp. Henrici VIII, auctoritate Regis institutus*, ed J Caley and J Hunter, 6 Volumes, Record Commission, (London 1810-34), Sempringham, vol. 4. p. 102, Watton, vol. 5, p. 126.

<sup>158</sup> Brian Golding gives a number of examples of women who were sent into Gilbertine priories against their will. Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine order*, pp.152-154. Examples of women in the third class are given in Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England*, p 47-8.

<sup>159</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine order*, p. 152.

<sup>160</sup> Marilyn J Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England*, p. 47.

Lincolnshire may well have been a 'vowess' of either Haverholm or Sempringham Priors before her death in 1529. In her will she was described as a vowess and left Joan Tyssyngton, Prioress of Haverholm, 6s 8d. Jane also left 6s 8d to the nuns of Sempringham and singled out Agnes Rudd who was to have 12d.<sup>161</sup> A young girl's motive for entering a convent may have been one of the following: a genuine call to the religious life, secondly a career path for girls who were unable to find a marriage partner and thirdly a first step in order to achieve a social status that was not available for women outside a religious order. In the sixteenth century the opportunities for women to achieve high status in life were very limited. Entering a convent was one way in which such social advancement could have been achieved.

In 1922 Eileen Power stated that the monastic life provided 'a career, a vocation, a prison, or a refuge for women'.<sup>162</sup> More recently, Brian Golding has said that Gilbertine nunneries were no exception.<sup>163</sup> Many of the women who entered these convents in the early days of the order were drawn from local families who had close ties with the house. They may have been included when land and property were donated to the particular priory. An example of where this took place comes from a charter relating to the Lincolnshire house of Alvingham.<sup>164</sup> In 1179 Roger de Neville, along with a donation of land, 'commended his daughter' into the hands of Master Gilbert of Sempringham in the chapter house of Alvingham so that she become a nun of that house. When a grant of land and property was made to female religious houses there were occasions when the donor may have included members of his family in the gift. The 'gift' of a girl into the religious house could come about in one of two ways. Firstly, the donor could give the property with his daughter as part of the grant as is the case with the grant to Alvingham priory above, or the daughter could be given along with the grant of property to the nuns.<sup>165</sup> These two methods of entry into the priory could mean that in some cases there was an entry payment and in other cases no payment was made.

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<sup>161</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, LCC Wills 1520-31, 98.

<sup>162</sup> Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, Cambridge University Press, (1922), p. 25. Powers views are now considered to be very dated.

<sup>163</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 138.

<sup>164</sup> Bodleian Library Oxford, MS Laud Misc 642, fo. 67v. (Alvingham Priory cartulary).

<sup>165</sup> For examples see, Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 151.

Roberta Gilchrist made a comparison between female and male Benedictine houses and found that nunneries were substantially poorer than monasteries for men.<sup>166</sup> When considered according to the number of women that each house was responsible for supporting, the majority of Benedictine nunneries held property valued at under £5 per nun, whereas male houses had property worth from £10 to £25 per monk or canon. Appendix 1 of this chapter shows the 'Property value per nun' (Ratio X/Y) for all the female houses of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire at the dissolution. Omitting the Gilbertine houses for the moment, the highest valuation for Yorkshire was that of the Benedictine house of Clementhorpe in York, which was valued at £6.95 per nun, the lowest value was for the Cluniac house of Arthington valued at £1.04 per nun. For Lincolnshire the highest value was that of the Cistercian house of Stixwold at £9.50, per nun and the lowest was that of the Cistercian house of Fosse at £0.90 per nun. This table showed that a majority of the houses had a valuation less than £5 per nun, which was in agreement with Roberta Gilchrist's findings.

When analysing the valuation figures for Gilbertine houses care needs to be taken: Gilbertine nunneries were double houses, and therefore direct comparisons with ordinary nunneries are difficult. The valuations of the Gilbertine double houses ranged from £4.4 for Catley in Lincolnshire to £9.3 for Sempringham in Lincolnshire. These figures are higher than those of ordinary nunneries which is probably due to the fact that men had been included in estimating these values. Gilchrist has made an analysis of the value per inhabitant for the male religious of the Benedictine houses only where she found that the bottom limit was £10 per monk.<sup>167</sup> A more useful comparison would be to use the figures for the Augustinian houses. An analysis of the figures given by Knowles and Hadcock shows that for Yorkshire the valuations per canon ranged from £7.5 (North Ferriby priory) to £39.1 (Bridlington Priory). The figures for the houses in Lincolnshire ranged from £2.6 (Torksey priory) to £21.9 (Thornton Abbey).<sup>168</sup> As already stated, comparison of the figures relating to Gilbertine double houses with figures from single sex houses

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<sup>166</sup> R Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture, The Archaeology of Religious Women*, London (1993), p. 44.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses in England and Wales*.



must be treated with caution. However, we can see that the band of figures for the Gilbertine houses falls inside that of the band of values for Augustinian houses in Lincolnshire but, apart from Sempringham and Watton, the valuations fall below the bottom limit for the Yorkshire valuations.

The lowest age at which girls were allowed to enter a convent and become a professed nun was sixteen years but it appeared that some girls were entering convents at a much younger age. Amongst the ecclesiastical court papers preserved in the diocese of York was one document, which referred to the Benedictine nunnery of Yedingham. Out of the ten nuns who were pensioned in 1539 the following nuns were professed before they were sixteen years old.<sup>169</sup>

Joan Foster	professed at 13 years of age
Anne Pecock	professed at 15 years of age
Elizabeth Ferman	professed at 14 years of age
Joan Orton	professed at 13 years of age
Elizabeth Lutton	professed at 14 years of age
Matilda Legh	professed at 14 years of age

This evidence showed that 60% of the Yedingham community entered the convent when they were below sixteen years of age and there is no reason to suppose that Yedingham Priory was any different to other religious houses for women. Thus it may be reasonably be inferred that some religious houses were ignoring the minimum age limit for recruitment in order to maintain numbers. Logically very young girls who entered a convent were more likely to stay as they lacked knowledge of the outside world and would rapidly become institutionalised. However, some of these girls who were professed at an early age may not have had a religious vocation; they may have been placed in nunneries by their families because it was unlikely that they would marry. Eileen Power has argued that monasticism was a natural career for girls who were unable to marry. They could have entered a nunnery without any spiritual qualification because

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<sup>169</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Cause papers CP G 216.

there was nothing else for them to do and ‘monasticism was a pre-eminently respectable career.’<sup>170</sup>

Occasionally Gilbertine houses were used as suitable places for houses of safe keeping. The most famous case concerned the daughters of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, Prince of Wales, and David his brother as mentioned earlier in the chapter. Following their deaths their daughters were sent to Gilbertine nunneries. Gwenllian daughter of Llywelyn was sent ‘in her cradle’ at the king’s command to be made a nun at Sempringham. Here she was brought up and lived until her death fifty four years later on June 7 1337. Her cousin David’s daughter Gwladys was sent to Sixhills priory where she died a year earlier. Other daughters were sent to the Gilbertine priory of Alvingham. The reason the king chose the Gilbertine priories was that they had no connections outside England, and consequently there was little chance of outside interference.<sup>171</sup>

There are other examples of women who were placed in Gilbertine monasteries for ‘safe keeping’. In 1306 Marjorie Bruce who was the younger daughter of Robert Bruce was placed in Watton priory in Yorkshire, Robert Bruce’s sister Christiana, the widow of Christopher de Seton went to Sixhills priory in Lincolnshire.<sup>172</sup> The female relatives of English rebels were also placed in Gilbertine houses. In 1322 Margaret the wife of Hugh Audley who had been involved in Lancaster’s revolt, was placed in ‘safe custody’ in Sempringham priory.<sup>173</sup>

An unusual example of girls being forced to take the veil in a Gilbertine house occurred during the fifteenth century. John de Heronville III was the Lord of the manor of Wednesbury at the beginning of the fifteenth century. When he died in 1406 he was survived by his three daughters, Joan aged 4, Alice aged 2 and Margaret aged 12 months.<sup>174</sup> These girls were heirs to his estates in Wednesbury and Tynmore. As they were underage, a guardian was appointed to look after them and be custodian of the

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<sup>170</sup> Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, p. 5. Powers views are now considered to be very dated.

<sup>171</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 153.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>174</sup> John F Ede, *History of Wednesbury*, Wednesbury Corporation, (1962), p. 49.

manor. In 1415 John de Leventhorpe became their guardian. He intended to keep the manor of Wednesbury in his hands and he did this by marrying Joan de Heronville to his eldest son William. In 1418 the two other girls were placed ‘with the order of the nuns of Sempringham’.<sup>175</sup> Unfortunately the name of the particular house is not recorded. In doing this John de Leventhorpe ensured that the share of the estate that would have passed to these girls would now go to his son’s wife Joan, ensuring that William became the Lord of the manor of Wednesbury.

An example of a girl who had obviously been forced to enter the Benedictine priory of Yedingham was that of Elizabeth Lutton who was mentioned previously. The evidence for this came from two sources: a case that was heard in the Star Chamber between 1531 and 1533<sup>176</sup> and the evidence given in the court paper already mentioned.<sup>177</sup> Elizabeth Lutton was professed as a nun at Yedingham when she was about fourteen years old and she ‘continued in religion in the habit of a nun of the said house for eighteen years’. However, during ecclesiastical court proceedings, which took place between 1525 and 1526, Sir Robert Constable gave evidence about an event that occurred about this time. In his deposition he remembered how

as he came riding from his place of Flamborough to Sir Roger Cholmeley house, his son in law, he called at the said nunnery, which is nigh the highway, to the intent to drink with the Prioress. And when he came thither and called for the said Prioress, two of the nuns came to this deponent, and bade him welcome, saying that the Prioress was not at home, and desired him to take a cup of ale, and so he did. And being in the church amongst the sisters this deponent saw her looking out at a window on high looking into the church. And then this deponent demanded her whether she were with child, and she said yea. And this deponent demanded further whether she was disposed to live like a religious woman, who answered and said in the presence of her sisters to this deponent that she was

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid. See also, *Calendar of the Fine Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office*, HMSO, (1911 – 62), Vol. 14, p. 330.

<sup>176</sup> YASRS, Volume 41, pp. 186-8.

<sup>177</sup> Borthwick Institute, Cause Papers CP G 216.

brought to religion and professed against her will as her sisters knew right well. And the said Elizabeth spoke other words not like a religious woman, whereupon this deponent advised her sisters, in avoiding of further inconvenience and danger, to take good keep of the said Elizabeth, considering that she was with child and in secular weed.<sup>178</sup>

Despite the advice that Constable gave to the nuns, Thomas Scaseby, who may have been the father of her child, subsequently persuaded Elizabeth Lutton to leave the monastery.<sup>179</sup> He then married her:

Contrary to the laws of God and holy church and to the detestable and pernicious example of all other like offenders, and to the ruin and decay of holy religion.<sup>180</sup>

Elizabeth Lutton's name appeared on the pension list of the priory and hence it appears likely that she was forced to assume the habit of a nun for a second time.<sup>181</sup>

Another example of a girl being admitted to a convent against her will was that of Joan Hutton of Esholt Priory in Yorkshire. In 1535, where she was entered in the Archbishop of York's Register of the visitation of the priory, reporting that this woman, 'contrary to her profession had lived incontinently and unchaste and had brought forth a child'.<sup>182</sup> The Archbishop had Joan Hutton placed in solitary confinement in the convent for two years 'to be confined in prison or some secret chamber in the dorter where none of the sisters or secular persons could speak with her without the prioress's licence as a penance. In 1536 when she was thirty years old Joan Hutton asked to be released from her vows when Thomas Cromwell's visitors Layton and Lee visited the priory in that year.<sup>183</sup> However

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<sup>178</sup> YASRS, Volume 51, pp 110-13.

<sup>179</sup> Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks, Friars and Nuns*, p. 551, reference to Thomas Scaseby as the father of Elizabeth's child.

<sup>180</sup> YASRS, Volume 51, p. 113.

<sup>181</sup> Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks, Friars and Nuns*, p. 551. For further discussion of this case see Claire Cross, *The End of Medieval Monasticism in the East Riding of Yorkshire*, p. 16.

<sup>182</sup> Borthwick Institute, Archbishop Register 28, fo. 95r. See also, Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks Friars and Nuns*, p. 565.

<sup>183</sup> TNA, SP1/102 fo. 88v.

this request was apparently not granted as her name appeared on the pension list for the priory in 1539. No reason was given for this refusal but since the visitation by Layton and Lee took place half way through her period of penance it was possible that it was felt inappropriate to consider her request. When her period of imprisonment was complete in 1537 no further opportunity arose for Joan Hutton to request release from her vows and she apparently remained at Esholt Priory until the dissolution.

The archbishops' registers for the diocese of York indicate that during the fifteenth century a number of illegitimate daughters were being placed in nunneries. During that century no less than fourteen cases of dispensations were granted to nuns who were born illegitimate in order that they could be promoted to high office.<sup>184</sup> Even though the election of a new prioress was an internal matter for the convent, the selection needed the approval and confirmation of the diocesan bishop. Of these fourteen cases, nine nuns were to become prioresses. A search through the episcopal registers for both the dioceses of York and Lincoln has failed to reveal any dispensations granted to Gilbertine nuns. Only four similar dispensations have been found in the papal registers; again no dispensations were granted to Gilbertine nuns.<sup>185</sup> Included in the dispensations in the papal registers is one case of a dispensation granted to a nun who had lost her virginity whilst she was a nun. It is not known if this nun ever achieved higher office. All of these dispensations were granted to nuns in the diocese of York, none being found for the diocese of Lincoln. From these figures it may tentatively be concluded that the nunneries in Yorkshire had established a social function in providing an appropriate career for illegitimate girls. The archbishops' registers only recorded those cases where nuns were seeking promotion within the priory and it is possible that there were other nuns, apart from those who were recorded in the registers, who were illegitimate. It cannot be

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<sup>184</sup> Borthwick Institute York, Archbishops Register 18 fo. 327 (Marrick Priory); Register 19 fo. 332v (Sinningthwaite Priory); Register 22 fo. 102v (Rosedale Abbey), fo. 150 (Esholt Priory), fo. 166v, (Ellerton on Swaledale Priory), fo. 170 (Arthington Priory), fo. 333 (Wilberfosse Opriory); *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. W H Bliss, C Johnson and J A Tremlow, HMSO (London 1893-), Vol 6 p 194 (Nun Appleton Priory), Vol 13, p 687, (Wilberfosse Priory).

<sup>185</sup> *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. W H Bliss, C Johnson and J A Tremlow, HMSO, London, (1893 - ), vol. 10, Elizabeth Rillum of Ekyngton priory (unidentified) Yorkshire, p. 408, Margaret Rippon of Rosedale abbey, Yorkshire, p. 411, Joan Goldesburgh of Nun Monkton priory, Yorkshire, p. 471, vol. 12, Margaret Croste of Centon priory (unidentified), Yorkshire, p. 739.

assumed that the Gilbertines were not encountering the same problems with regard to the promotion of nuns to higher office. If they were the method of granting dispensations within the Gilbertine order is not known.

### **Life Within a Sixteenth-Century Nunnery**

The lack of documentary evidence makes it difficult to describe daily life within a Gilbertine Priory from the point of view of the nuns during the first half of the sixteenth century or at any other time. The only substantive source available to give us a glimpse of the life of a Gilbertine nun was the Institutes of the Gilbertine order, although these were written in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Other sources for describing the everyday life of Gilbertine nuns are the General Chapter records which survive from the beginning of the sixteenth century and entries in the Papal and episcopal registers for this period. However, a search of these registers for the sixteenth century has failed to find any entries for Gilbertine nunneries.

The Institutes of the Gilbertine order described in detail the entry of a young girl into a priory, through her noviciate and up to her final profession.<sup>186</sup> When a young girl entered a Gilbertine priory for the first time, only the prioress and novice-mistress were permitted to speak to her. This was so that the girl's suitability to be a nun could be assessed. She was then required to spend a few days in the nuns' guesthouse which ensured that she was in good health and was desirous of undertaking the strict religious observance of the Gilbertine order. It was also necessary to establish that the girl entered the order of her own free will as the rule stipulated that no girl was to be forced to enter the order. The girl also had to be at least twelve-years of age before she entered as a postulant and she would not be able to become a novice until she was at least fifteen-years of age.<sup>187</sup> After leaving the guest house such a novice was presented to the nuns' chapter, where the prioress explained the rigours of the Order, and ask if the girl was willing to accept them.

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<sup>186</sup> MS Douce 136, ff. 73r – 74v.

<sup>187</sup> The ages of Gilbertine novices presenting themselves for their final profession are not recorded. The rule states that they must be at least 15 years of age before they can become a novice. The age of their final profession is not stated but presumably this would be about 18 years of age. However we have seen examples of the novices at Yedingham Priory were being presented as young as 13 years of age. MS Douce 136, fo. 73v.

On or after her fifteenth birthday such a girl entrant became a novice. The liturgical cycle of services in the Gilbertine order was exactly the same as in other orders. The day began with Matins in the early morning before dawn. The first of the hours was that of Lauds at daybreak which was followed by Prime on the first hour. On the third hour was Terce, followed by Sext on the sixth hour and None on the ninth hour. Vespers was the penultimate office of the day followed by the final service of Compline.<sup>188</sup> A Mass would have been celebrated sometime during the morning after Prime. Novices entered the convent before Mass in winter and before Prime in summer and on entering, the following words were said to her: 'Enter, sister, if you wish to suffer the hardships and difficulties of our life for the love of Christ'. Her profession as a novice was then taken by the Master of the Order at the altar in the Nuns' Church. Having made her profession a girl would then have attended communion eight times a year along with the other nuns. During her noviciate the novice was also instructed in the Rule of St Benedict and the Institutes of the Gilbertine order but if she was under the age of twenty-years, the novice had to learn the psalter, the hymnarium, and the canticles by heart and be able to recite the antiphoner. If the novice was unable to recite the Office she had the choice of either leaving the order or becoming a lay-sister. However, a novice over twenty-years old was not forced to learn these offices by heart unless she felt she was able to do this.

As has already been discussed that within some religious orders, girls were admitted as novices below the age of fifteen-years, and this was possibly the case within the Gilbertine order. Indeed, Golding has given examples of girls who were forcibly admitted into the Gilbertine order in the thirteenth century. The evidence presented above demonstrated that a few girls were being admitted to religious orders against their will during the first half of the sixteenth century which was possibly the case in some of the Gilbertine priories.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> For the liturgical cycle of services followed by the Gilbertine order, see the Gilbertine Ordinal, Pembroke college, Cambridge. MS 226.

<sup>189</sup> See pages 34-35 of this chapter. Also see Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, pages 152-4.

## **The Rule of the Gilbertine Nuns<sup>190</sup>**

The opening Chapters of the Gilbertine Institutes were almost certainly the only surviving fragment of the Institutes that were written down by St Gilbert at the foundation of the order. In setting out the rules by which nuns were to live St Gilbert stated, ‘You must make to God a vow of chastity, humility, love, obedience to the good, and perseverance; renounce the world and all property, even a will of your own; and in every other way act in accordance with religion’. However, the theme running throughout the Institutes was that the needs of the nuns were to be paramount and indeed no expense was to be spared in providing for them. In the first chapter concerning the rules followed by the nuns it is emphasised that lay-brothers show greater care to the nuns in all things than they would to the canons of the order.<sup>191</sup> Any brother who failed to conform to this directive would be punished and forced to occupy the lowest position in the order for a year. In contrast the Gilbertine nuns had the responsibility and care of the money and the common seal of the religious house and anything that was bought or sold had to be with the full knowledge of the prioress and her sisters. Chapter three relating to the rules followed by the nuns states that ‘the whole substance of the house was manifested to the prioress and senior sisters who were under her and had care for the house.’<sup>192</sup>

Golding showed that following St Gilbert’s death ‘the nuns were squeezed out from their position of control,’ and in particular the financial control of the Gilbertine houses.<sup>193</sup> Thus money that should have been used for the welfare of the nuns was being diverted to other uses. This was highlighted in the Patent Rolls in the National Archives for 1371 when the nuns of Sempringham complained to the King that the lands and possessions of the priory granted to them by the King were being converted to the sole use of the master, prior and canons of the house.<sup>194</sup> Thus during the time that Nicholas Revesby was Master of the Gilbertine order, in the middle of the fifteenth century, it was evident that the nuns

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<sup>190</sup> This section is based on a translation of the Gilbertine Institutes contained in Oxford Bodleian Library Manuscript Douce 136. Father Hilary Costello of Mount St Bernard Abbey in Leicestershire, who kindly supplied me with a copy, did this translation privately.

<sup>191</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Douce 136, fo. 55v.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, fo. 57r.

<sup>193</sup> Brian Golding, *St Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, page 163.

<sup>194</sup> *Calendar of Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office*, HMSO (London, 1891 -), 1370 – 74, page 110.



were still not making decisions regarding the economy of the individual religious houses. An injunction from this period in the General Chapter records inferred that the priors were selling and leasing lands without consulting the nuns regarding the financing of these transactions.<sup>195</sup> Chapter records after this date were silent on this matter, which led to one of two conclusions: either financial control had been handed back to the nuns or, more probably, the nuns had now relinquished all responsibility for the financial affairs of individual religious houses. This responsibility had now passed to the Master of the order and the priors of the order by the second half of the fifteenth century.

The remaining Institutes regarding the nuns concerned the security of the nuns' cloister, the role of the prioress within the order, the daily liturgical life of the nuns, and the level of literacy expected of women who entered the order as a nun.

### **The Ground Plan of a Gilbertine Monastery**

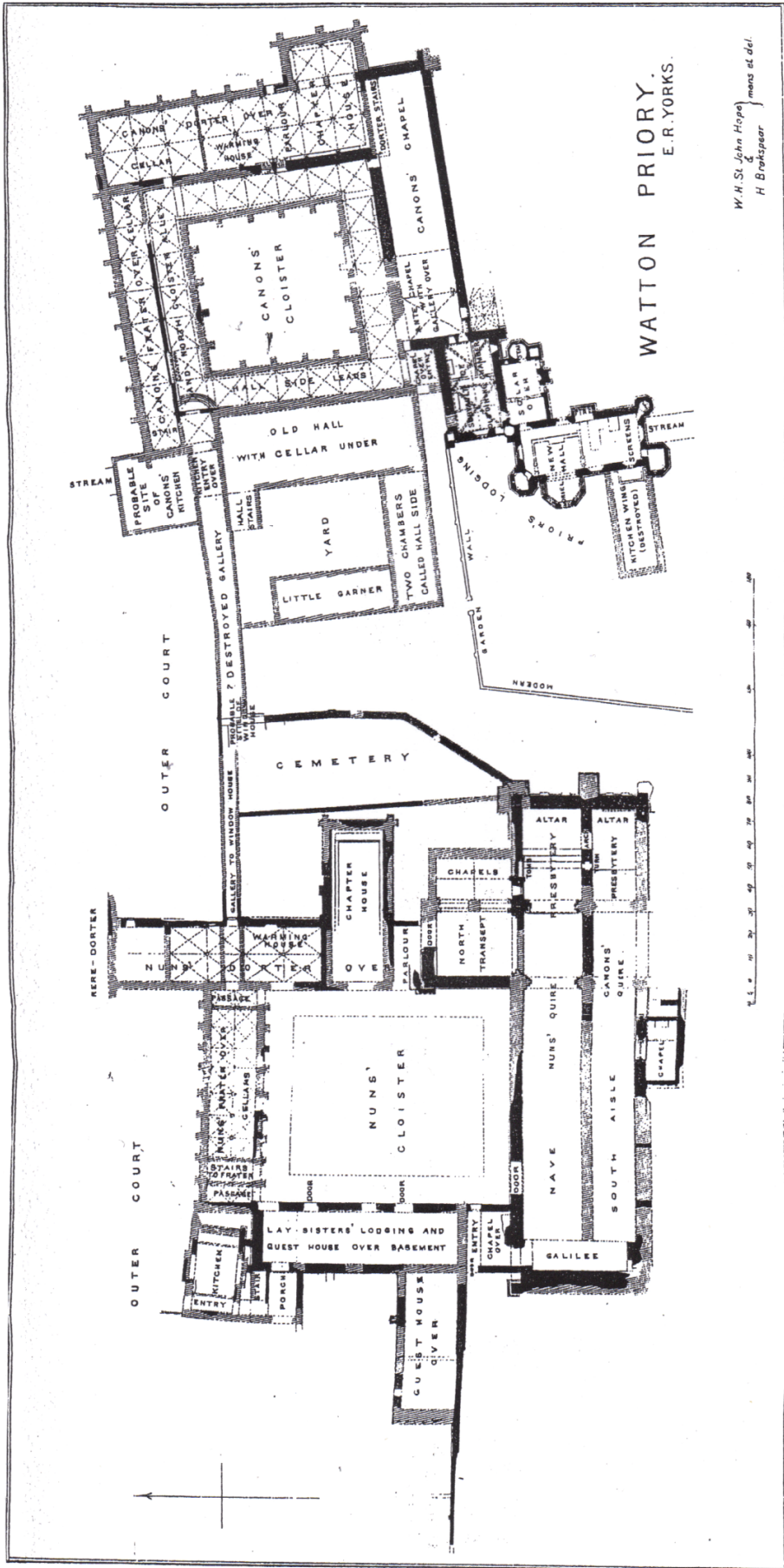
The earliest excavation which took place on the site of a Gilbertine double house was that of W H St John Hope at the end of the nineteenth century. The resulting plan is shown below.<sup>196</sup> According to his plan the nuns' cloister was attached to the church, and the one occupied by the canons to the eastern side of the site. The connecting passage linking the two cloisters providing a possible site for the 'window house', where verbal communication between the two communities occupying the monastery was conducted, was located to the north of the church. The dividing-wall separating the two communities can clearly be seen on the plan of the priory church. The plan also shows the canons' chapel where services were held in the absence of the nuns.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> MS Douce 136, fo. 113r.

<sup>196</sup> W H St John Hope, 'The Gilbertine Priory of Watton, in the East Riding of Yorkshire', *Archaeological Journal*, 58 (1901), pp. 1 – 34.

<sup>197</sup> For further discussion on this plan see:- Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture, The Archaeology of Religious Women*, p. 93.



WATTON PRIORY.  
E. R. YORKS.

W. H. St. John Hope } mens et del.  
H. Brashear }

However, recent field work on the site of Sempringham priory shows that the plan produced by St John Hope was not the model used at Sempringham.<sup>198</sup> The plan of Sempringham priory which is shown below shows that the nuns' cloister was on the north west side of the church (D on the plan) and the canons' cloister was on the south side (I on the plan).

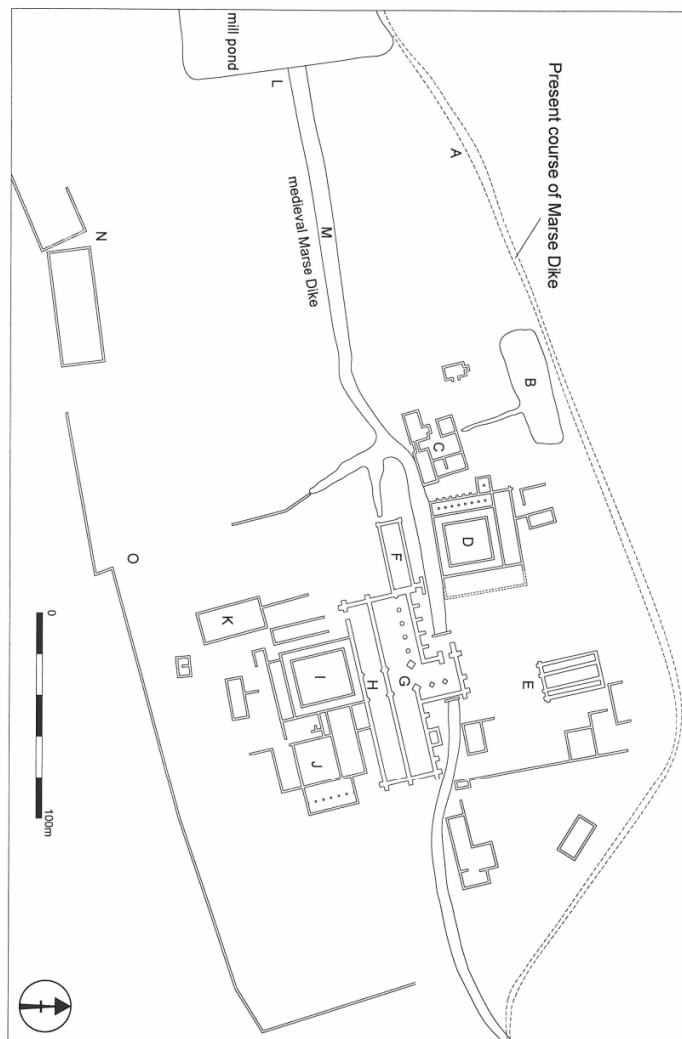
Paul Cope-Faulkener and Glyn Coppack have expressed caution when interpreting St John Hope's plan.<sup>199</sup> They suggest that there was a cloister to the south of the church which was not examined by Hope. The plan of the cloister to the east which he drew on his plan has few firm building walls, and if the walls which are represented as dotted lines are omitted, then the resulting complex is much smaller. It appears that he filled in the missing detail using a post dissolution survey of the priory.<sup>200</sup> Cope-Faulkener and Coppack argue that this southern cloister was originally occupied by the nuns. They go on to suggest that the plan changed as the chapels to the north of the medial wall in the church were not accessible to the nuns. The cloister to the south of the church was levelled and the nuns moved into the northern cloister, the canons moving into the cloister in the eastern part of the site shown on the plan.

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<sup>198</sup> This plan has been passed on to me by Paul Cope-Faulkener of Archaeological Project Services of Heckington near Sleaford, Lincolnshire, with the permission of Glyn Coppack.

<sup>199</sup> Private correspondence with Paul Cope-Faulkener.

<sup>200</sup> TNA SC 12/17/64.



On the Sempringham plan shown above, the means of communication between the two communities is not entirely clear. One possibility is that communication took place

between the men and women through a window house that was placed in the nave of the priory church. However, the purpose of the building marked F on the plan is unclear, and it is possible that it served this function.

### **The Security of the Nuns and Access to the Nuns' Cloister.**

Chapters four to twelve of the Institutes relating to nuns were concerned with the security of the nuns and their protection from the influences of the outside world.<sup>201</sup> Indeed no expense was to be spared to prevent access to the nuns and no one was to enter the nuns' cloister unless 'a very clear cause forced it to happen', for example, when the confession of the nuns was heard, there was a fire in the nuns' quarters or when a nun was dying. The window at which the confession of a nun was heard was to be 'the length of a finger and hardly a thumb in breadth' and was protected by an iron plate.<sup>202</sup> Two nuns and two canons were present at the time of any confession so as to ensure that the priest and nun did not behave inappropriately. When a nun was at the point of death the rite of extreme unction was to be performed either in the nuns' church or in the nuns' infirmary.<sup>203</sup> When the sacrist rang the bell to signify that a nun was at the point of death, four canons and a lay brother entered the nuns' quarters to perform the office of anointing the dead body in the presence of several nuns. Having renounced the ownership of all personal property, nuns were not allowed to either receive or send gifts to anyone.

Communication between the nuns and canons of the Gilbertine order was forbidden except under special circumstances, but even then, contact had to be conducted in the presence of others. Nuns were permitted to speak to the Master of the order, speak to the lay-brothers regarding the business of the house and to have their confessions heard. All business concerning the house was conducted in the 'great window house' which was a building constructed between a communicating passageway between the canons and nuns cloisters. Within this building, communication took place through a window which was constructed such that items could be passed through so that the nuns could not see the

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<sup>201</sup> MS Douce 136, ff. 57v – 62r.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid, fo. 58v – 58v.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, ff. 77r – 78r.

canons and vice versa. Large items were to be passed through a door in the window house.

Chapter ten of the Institutes of the Gilbertine order concerned the precautions to be taken when outsiders entered the nuns' quarters. If a group of people had to enter this area to carry out necessary duties within the nuns' quarters, for example, to conduct repair work to the fabric of the building this had to be done so that the nuns did not see anyone. If the Master of the order wished to enter the nuns' cloister, he could not enter alone, he had to be accompanied by three or four senior canons.

During Cardinal Ottobuono's visitation of the Gilbertine order in 1268 two injunctions were laid down which indicated that nuns had been communicating with the canons, lay-brothers and possibly with non-members of the community. The need for the separation of the sexes in the house was re-emphasised by the Cardinal who stipulated that the size of the turntable window in the window-house be constructed in accordance with the dimensions laid down by St Gilbert. The nuns also continued to be forbidden to work among the canons, or outside the nuns' enclosure, especially within the granges. But the injunction did make one concession with respect to the nuns' contact with the outside world in each of the double houses; friends and neighbours of nuns and lay sisters were now to be allowed to converse freely with the nuns under strict supervision.<sup>204</sup>

The Injunctions of the order of 1508 showed that unlawful access to the nuns' cloister in Gilbertine houses was still taking place.<sup>205</sup> This injunction began by restating the original Institutes regarding the seclusion of the nuns, but it appeared that the rule had again been relaxed slightly, as 'respectable people' were now allowed to enter the nuns' cloister between lunch and vespers. However, men were not allowed to enter at meal-times or when the daily-office was being celebrated, but when people did enter the cloister, food and drink was not to be provided. Presumably the 'respectable people' referred to were

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<sup>204</sup> MS Douce 136, fo. 100. A Grange was a farm that was owned by the priory and supplied the house with food. Many of the Gilbertine granges kept flocks of sheep. The sale of the wool provided the priory with an income. Brian Golding, *St Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, pp. 394 – 5.

<sup>205</sup> MS Douce 136, fo. 108r.

the prior and senior canons entering to discuss business relating to the house, because the injunction specified that the window-house was to be used for communicating with secular people.

### **The Role of the Prioresses**

The Institutes of the Gilbertine order also laid down that each-double house be presided over by three prioresses, although at the time of the dissolution in 1539 this rule had been relaxed so that only two prioresses presided over even the larger houses of the order, namely the priories of Sempringham and Watton, which was a change that may have occurred because of the fall in numbers of nuns, or because of the diminished role of the prioress in the Gilbertine priories.<sup>206</sup> The smaller houses such as Catley, where the number of nuns was in single figures, only had one prioress. In larger houses the prioresses took it in turns, on a weekly basis, to preach sermons to the nuns. These women presided over the nuns' chapter, examined faults and dispensed penances, but they had another major duty, to ensure that either her or one of her colleagues visited the sick nuns on a regular basis. All other nuns were to obey the prioress and to give reverence to the discipline of the rule and the prioress's commands.

When a prioress died, the convent was to elect a new Prioress from the members of the convent; but if they had not elected a successor within fifteen days, the Master of the order could find a suitable replacement from another house and then promote that nun to the position of prioress.<sup>207</sup>

### **The Relaxation of the Rule of the Order**

The surviving statutes issued by the General Chapter which resulted from the internal visitations by the Master of the Gilbertine order showed that the rules were being progressively relaxed from the time they were written down to the middle of the sixteenth century.<sup>208</sup> These injunctions that were being issued by the Gilbertine General Chapter were compared with the injunctions issued by the diocesan bishops to other religious

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<sup>206</sup> MS Douce 136, fo. 62r .

<sup>207</sup> MS Douce 136, fo. 61v.

<sup>208</sup> MS Douce 136.

orders with regard to the maintenance of discipline within their religious communities. However, those issued by the Gilbertine order in four years at the beginning of the sixteenth century have survived as a few folios at the end of the manuscript which contains the Institutes of the Gilbertine order. The years for which these folios have survived are 1501, 1508, 1509 and 1511.<sup>209</sup>

The injunctions of 1501 concentrated on three areas which had a direct bearing on the life of the nuns, the first injunction implied that there was a laxity in the observance of the religious life both within the nuns' conventual church and within their cloister.<sup>210</sup> Thus this injunction stated that the prior was to set an example to others in their devotion and their observance of holy religion and the occupations of the cloister, so that it can be inferred from this that the priors had sometimes been absenting themselves from some of the daily offices within the priory church and which may have also indicated they were absent from the priory for some periods of time. The second injunction concerned the provision of lights and lamps in priories during the night, with particular attention needed in the parts of the priory occupied by the nuns. This section now stated that lamps should burn continuously through the night 'for warding off the dangers of the darkness'. However, unfortunately the injunction did not go further than this, so that it was impossible to link it to the third injunction stipulating that firm locks and double-locks should be used on all doors in order to protect the nuns. However, clearly no expense was to be spared regarding the nun's security. A further injunction, which stipulated that all locks were to be different, appeared to be a consequence of the previous injunctions. This injunction also required that the walls of the priories were to be adequately maintained, which probably implied that security in some priories had become lax so that outsiders had entered the nuns' cloister both during the day and at night.<sup>211</sup> However, it was also possible that some nuns had absented themselves by going outside the convent, but also that canons had entered the nuns' cloister without the prior's permission particularly if the prior was not performing his duties effectively when he was absent from the priory. This would account for laxity in the security of the nuns' cloister identified.

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<sup>209</sup> MS Douce 136, fos. 106r – 111r.

<sup>210</sup> MS Douce 136, fo. 106r.

<sup>211</sup> This is restating the Institutes of the order. *Ibid*, fo. 57v.



By 1508 it was clear that the Gilbertine nuns were leaving their enclosure without the permission of the Master. To illustrate this, the injunctions singled out the case of a Master who died when his successor was elected: it was at a time when some nuns were breaking the rule about leaving their enclosure.<sup>212</sup> When the Master of the order died, his body was brought for burial to Sempringham Priory where the Gilbertine order was founded, but at this time the only nuns allowed out of their cloister were the two prioresses of each house, a senior nun and a lay sister who were to minister to the needs of the prioresses.<sup>213</sup> The Institutes then went on to specify which women were to supervise the cart carrying the prioresses and the nun at this time. The women attending the cart were to be lay sisters of the order. However, by 1509 it was clear that a number of the nuns were leaving their enclosure to attend the election of the new Master, which would have involved contact with the outside world contrary to the rule of the order.

The maintenance of the walls, ditches and hedges around the nuns' enclosure in a Gilbertine monastery were again mentioned but in much stronger terms than before.<sup>214</sup> In order to prevent outsiders from entering the nuns' enclosure, the gates of that area were to be securely locked and the keys entrusted to a senior canon. Indeed the next part of the injunction suggested that there had been numerous occasions when the canons had entered the nuns' cloister without permission: where 'entry was not to be free or allowed for our people to the nuns or for other people as lately negligently permitted nowadays'.<sup>215</sup> This injunction ended by suggesting that access to the nuns' quarters should be only by permission of the Prior or his deputy.

The next injunction reiterated the Institutes of the order by stating that if a nun needed to have contact with a secular person, their meeting had to take place at the 'turning window' as laid down in the Gilbertine order's rule.<sup>216</sup> This aperture allowed conversations to take place without either party being seen by other people and their

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid fo. 108v.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, fo. 2r.

<sup>214</sup> The General Chapter held in 1501 stipulated that the walls and ditches associated with the nuns' enclosure should be adequately maintained. Ibid, fo. 106v.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, fo. 110v.

<sup>216</sup> For the construction of the 'turning window' and the rules that had to be adhered to by the men and women using the 'window house', see, *ibid*, fo. 58r – 59r.

conversations had to take place in the presence of a senior nun. However, again it was emphasised that nuns must not go outside their enclosure for any unauthorised purpose, but presumably as there had been no change in this rule since the previous set of injunctions any such contact was already against the rules.

The final injunction stated that if suitable secular people needed to enter the nuns' cloister this must be done between the hours of lunch (midday) and vespers, with such people only entering this area at other times in cases of emergency. Clearly in the mid-sixteenth century the General Chapter was beginning to relax the rule regarding secular people entering the nuns' cloister, whereas at the time the Institutes were laid down in the twelfth century such contact would have not been allowed under any circumstances.

The 1509 injunctions were relatively short and concerned only the granting of corrodies, annual pensions and perpetual chantries. Indeed there was nothing in these injunctions concerning the nuns. However by 1511 there had been no improvement in the security of access to the nuns, when the injunction also specifically stated that 'secular persons were forbidden from entering the nuns' cloister on the days of processions unless those seeking entry were responsible persons who were judged by the Prior to be suitable people to enter.'<sup>217</sup> Adopting these procedures led to the conclusion that free access to the nuns by outsiders who had been approved of by the Prior was occurring, except when processions were taking place around the cloister. Allowing this to happen could not be neglected 'without danger to salvation'.<sup>218</sup>

Another order which was subject to internal visitation was the Premonstratensians. Joseph Gribbin has made a study of these visitations between 1478 and 1500.<sup>219</sup> The four main areas which are contained in these reports are recruitment into the order, apostacy, canons who absented themselves from their houses, and sexual accusations made against

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid, fo. 110v.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, fo. 110v.

<sup>219</sup> Joseph A Gribbin, *The Premonstratensian Order in Late Medieval England*, Woodbridge: Boydell, (2001), pp. 20 – 100.

individual canons.<sup>220</sup> In common with other orders, apostasy was a common problem with the Gilbertine canons. No cases of this were reported in the General chapter reports, however, fourteen such cases have been noted by Brian Golding which occurred between 1286 and 1415.<sup>221</sup> No cases of Gilbertine nuns being apostate have been located. The problem the Premonstratensians had with recruitment during the later part of the fifteenth century was also experienced by the Gilbertines. The Gilbertine visitations show that canons were absenting themselves from their houses but the visitation records remain silent on the question of sexual faults. It cannot be assumed that the Gilbertines were innocent of such acts, and the order may have had other methods of dealing with these problems which have not been recorded. Gribbin has highlighted one particular point when analysing internal visitation records of religious orders. It is remotely possible that there could have been collusion between members of the order with regard to any misdemeanours that may have taken place. However, he does go on to say that this would have been unlikely.<sup>222</sup>

Marilyn Oliva in her study of the nuns of the diocese of Norwich has shown that the content of the visitation reports must be read with caution. She has compared the visitation reports of the County commissioners with those of the crown commissioners and found that they differed considerably.<sup>223</sup> The crown commissioners were very negative with respect to the lives of the nuns in the diocese, whereas the county commissioners' reports were more favourable and stated that the nuns were of 'good fame' or of 'good conversation and living'. Oliva is of the opinion that these latter reports gave a more truthful picture of the life of these women.

Injunctions produced in 1501, 1508 and 1511 were now compared with those laid down by the archbishops' and bishops' visitations to the houses of other orders of nuns in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire in the early part of the sixteenth century. In Lincolnshire the visitations were carried out between 1517 and 1531 and in Yorkshire, by Archbishop

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Brian Golding, *St Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, pp. 165 – 168.

<sup>222</sup> Joseph A Gribbin, *The Premonstratensian Order in Late Medieval England*, p. 90.

<sup>223</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England*, pp. 193 – 5.

Edward Lee, between 1534 – 35. The injunctions issued to Gilbertine houses were broadly in line with those imposed on religious houses of other orders.

In Lincolnshire three houses were visited, namely, Stainfield, Nuncoton and Legbourne. Bishop William Atwater visited Stainfield Priory in 1525 and expressed the general opinion that all was well there so that no injunctions were issued. However from his general comments it appeared that the nuns there were straying outside the precincts of the priory and associating with lay folk outside by attending weddings and fairs. The bishop's sermon preached during his visitation to Stainfield Priory exhorted nuns not to do this. However, Hamilton Thompson has suggested that this sermon may have related to the benefits of an enclosed life and suggesting that there had been no serious breaches of the rule.<sup>224</sup> This opinion clearly demonstrated that care must be taken when interpreting visitation reports.

Nuncoton Priory was also visited in 1525 and the only fault found there was that silence was not maintained as thoroughly as it ought to have been, partly because unnecessary conversations between the nuns and the workmen rebuilding the cloister were taking place.<sup>225</sup> Elsewhere, at this time, Dr Rayne, the Bishop of Lincoln's representative, visited the Cistercian Priory of Legbourne where he was told by one of the nuns, whose name was not revealed that the corrections that were being administered within the Chapter were being communicated to outsiders. She also told the bishop's visitor that one particular nun was making friends with outsiders, and in particular, with priests. Indeed this nun had built up a friendship and possibly a relationship with a Sir John (surname not known) who was the Chantry Priest of Legbourne. However, the visitation did not find anything untoward happening in this relationship but the nun was still told to stop meeting the priest and to confine herself to the nuns' cloister. The prioress at Legbourne

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<sup>224</sup> A Hamilton Thompson, *Visitations in the Diocese of Lincoln 1517 – 1531*, Volume 3, Lincoln Record Society. (1947).

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*, p 37.

was now accused of allowing the nuns there to have more freedom than they ought, because it was suggested they were speaking to strangers without her permission.<sup>226</sup>

In the other extant Yorkshire visitations occurring in 1534, four priories were visited between August and December.<sup>227</sup> The notice of the visitation of Clementhorpe Priory, outside York, was sent on the 31 July 1534. The letter to the prioress stipulated that all nuns must be present when the visitation took place on 22 August 1534. Presumably it had come to the archbishop's notice that some nuns had absented themselves from the priory without the permission of the prioress.<sup>228</sup> The Cistercian priory of Sinningthwaite was visited on 14 October when eleven injunctions were imposed on the community, mostly relating to of the rule regarding the locking of doors at night and nuns meeting strangers both within the priory and outside it.<sup>229</sup> Such faults also appeared regularly in visitation records elsewhere so that a similar set of injunctions was issued against the nuns of Esholt priory.<sup>230</sup> However, the only fault recorded at Nun Appleton priory at about this same time, was that secular persons were being entertained at meal times in the nuns' refectory.<sup>231</sup>

Even though the Gilbertine order's statutes discussed were somewhat earlier than these examples from other orders, there was a common thread to the faults that occurred in the Gilbertine houses of nuns at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Roberta Gilchrist has stated that the separation of the nuns from the canons was paramount in the houses of double orders.<sup>232</sup> The separation of the men and women was as strict as that of the double order of Fontevrault which had eighteen rules concerning the enclosure of the women. There were two main problems highlighted by the General Chapter records concerning the Gilbertine houses: the security of women within the precincts of the monastery and

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<sup>226</sup> A Hamilton Thompson, *Visitations in the Diocese of Lincoln 1517 – 1531*, Volume 2, Lincoln Record Society, (1944), p 182.

<sup>227</sup> Archbishop Lee's Visitation, 1534-5, *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, Volume 16, (1901), pp. 425-458.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid* p 437.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid* p 439.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid* p 451.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid* p 443.

<sup>232</sup> Roberta Gilchrist, *Contemplation and Action; The Other Monasticism*, Leicester University Press, (1996), p. 110.

their access to the outside world. The original Institutes of the order had laid down in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that care must be taken regarding the security of the nuns at all times and their protection from outside influences. However, by the early sixteenth century the Gilbertine Institutes were far stricter than those of the other religious orders in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, and the injunctions imposed at this time show that they were making attempts to enforce the rule. The statutes of the Brigettine nuns, another double order for both men and women, also had strict rules regarding their nuns having contact with the outside world. Men could only enter their cloister under exceptional circumstances similar to those of the Gilbertines.<sup>233</sup> Brigettine nuns were allowed to speak to members of their families only on certain days of the year, and this was to take place at ‘the grate’ which may have been similar to the window which was covered by an iron plate as used by the Gilbertines.<sup>234</sup> These conversations were to be conducted in the presence of a senior member of the order and with the permission of the superior of the house, again in common with the Gilbertine rule. The Gilbertine injunctions also indicated that nuns in that order had not yet obtained as much freedom as their contemporaries in other orders.

As has already been noted, recruitment to nunneries in the sixteenth centuries was still strong but not as strong as it had been at the end of the fourteenth century. Table 1 shows that between 1380 and 1539 the number of women entering the Gilbertine order had fallen from 215 to 79 in Lincolnshire, and from 22 to 7 in the single house of the order in Norfolk. Cistercian numbers had also fallen over the same time period but not as dramatically. The number of women entering Benedictine houses appears to have remained constant. [

Henrietta Leyser compared late medieval convents to private households and she found that women of the upper classes were accustomed to meeting visitors both within their

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<sup>233</sup> James Hogg, *The Rewyll of Seynt Savioure and other Brigittine Legislative Texts*, vol. 2, Institut Fur Englische Sprache und Literatur Universitat Salzburg, (1978), pp. 15 – 16.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

homes and outside them.<sup>235</sup> Thus, presumably, nuns were also becoming more focused on the outside world in their outlook. However, they wanted to follow a monastic rule which had been laid down many centuries before and there had been very little revision to the rule.<sup>236</sup> However, the tendency for women living inside monasteries to move towards liberalisation was now discernable and sometimes these women took matters into their own hands. In the three Cistercian nunneries featured in the Yorkshire visitation mentioned above - Esholt, Nun Appleton and Sinningthwaite – women had been accused of allowing visitors inside the convent.

A comparison of the number of nuns within the Lincolnshire houses in 1380 and 1539 shows that there had been little change in the population of Benedictine houses, whereas the numbers in Cistercian houses had fallen. However, the numbers of Gilbertine nuns had fallen dramatically between 1380 and 1539. If a comparison is made on the average number of nuns per house for these three orders in 1539, the average for the Gilbertines is eleven, for the Benedictines eight and for the Cistercians twelve. In Yorkshire, even though the number of nuns recruited by Watton priory had fallen it was still attracting relatively large numbers of women. In Norfolk, the recruitment of women into the Gilbertine order had fallen dramatically, the numbers in 1539 falling to 31% of those in 1380.

The few extant visitation records from the first part of the sixteenth century show that Gilbertine nuns were likely to be guilty of the same faults as nuns in other orders. However, it must be remembered that the Gilbertine Institutes were far more rigorous in controlling such behaviour. Extant Chapter Records demonstrate that the Gilbertines were attempting to enforce the rules of the order. These records also showed that although Gilbertine nuns were having contact with the outside world this was not to the same extent as in the Benedictine and Cistercian Houses. The Gilbertines used the same model to monitor discipline in the order as the Cistercians by means of regular visitations

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<sup>235</sup> Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women, A Social History of Women in England 450 – 1500*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, (1995), p 96.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

by senior members of the order. This command structure was very different to that of the Benedictines.

The visitation of the Gilbertine houses took place on an annual basis, while the visitation of the houses of other religious orders appeared to be more sporadic, and this allowed their nuns to live more freely. Indeed the surviving visitation records of the houses of other orders showed that these institutions were becoming increasingly secular as a result of the nuns' contact with the outside world. Thus in some cases the nunneries of some orders were becoming places for women to live when they wished to lead a religious life on their own terms. However, the Gilbertines were certainly attempting to maintain a more traditional religious life close to the ideals of their founder, St Gilbert, and this was one reason why other religious orders were maintaining numbers whilst the numbers in Gilbertine houses were falling.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE GILBERTINE CANONS BEFORE THE DISSOLUTION

#### Introduction

The Gilbertine order had the greatest concentration of their houses in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, hence the chapter will focus on the canons in these two counties. The study will examine the life of a Gilbertine canon from his entry into the order, his training as a novice and his life as a canon within the Gilbertine order. The life of these men within the order will concentrate on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It will also examine recruitment into the order, highlighting in particular, the long term effects of the Black Death. It will then go on to show how the General Chapter took measures to improve the situation in the second half of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century. The Gilbertines were quite active within the parishes outside their monasteries acting as parish priests in surrounding areas. This will be discussed as a possible solution that they used to improve the finances of the order. The ordination lists in the episcopal registers of York and Lincoln will be used to examine the popularity of the Gilbertine order compared with other major orders in each of these counties. Finally the link that the Gilbertines had with Cambridge University through their Priory of St Edmund's outside the walls of the city of Cambridge will be examined in detail .

St Gilbert gave the Rule of St Augustine to his canons and added statutes from the customs of the Augustinians.<sup>237</sup> In each house of nuns there were to be at least seven canons but not more than thirteen, unless the house had the resources to support a larger number of canons without affecting the needs of the nuns.<sup>238</sup> The Institutes of the Gilbertine order showed that the nuns of the order followed a monastic rule whilst the men followed the rules of regular canons. In the early chapters of the Institutes, which may well be in St Gilbert's own words, he subjected his regular canons to the rule of St

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<sup>237</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Douce 136, fo. 1v.

<sup>238</sup> MS Douce 136, fo. 17v.

Augustine *in vigiliis et ieiuniis* ‘in vigils and fasts’.<sup>239</sup> Janet Sorrentino has interpreted this phrase as implying that St Gilbert intended that the night offices of the canons and nuns would be different.<sup>240</sup>

Further evidence to indicate that the liturgical offices of the nuns and canons differed comes from the Gilbertine Ordinal<sup>241</sup> and a calendar found at the beginning of a thirteenth-century Bible and Missal of the Order.<sup>242</sup> In both of these documents all major feasts were referred to as feasts of nine lessons, i.e. the number of readings taking place during the night office. If the canons were following the liturgical offices of the Augustinians, then both of these documents refer to the liturgy of the Gilbertine canons. St. Gilbert stipulated that the nuns followed the rule of St Benedict inferring that they would have followed a monastic form of the liturgy.<sup>243</sup> In a monastic institution, the night office would have consisted of twelve lessons.

According to the *Vita* St Gilbert intended that his personal possessions and goods were to be used for the founding of a male community. However, he was unable to find men who were willing to lead the austere life that he required of them. In the absence of suitable men, Gilbert made over his property for the support of seven girls from the village of Sempringham.<sup>244</sup> Sharon Elkins has taken this extract from the *Vita* to mean that it was never intended that Gilbert wished to establish a community for women only.<sup>245</sup> Brian Golding states that the *Vita* clearly assumes that the girls from the village were already prepared to lead a religious life before Gilbert ceded his property for the founding of a religious community.<sup>246</sup> The *Vita* does not specifically say that he did not want to found an order for women, but that he wanted to use all he owned to establish a community for

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<sup>239</sup> R Foreville and G Keir, *The Book of St. Gilbert*, Oxford Medieval Texts, (1987), page 49. ‘Before the nuns he set for observation the rule of St Benedict, before the clerks the rule of St Augustine, and to all he preached the examples of Christ and his saints and the teaching of the gospels and the apostles.’

<sup>240</sup> J Sorrentino, ‘In Houses of Nuns, in Houses of Canons: A Liturgical Dimension to Double Monasteries’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 28, (2002), p. 364.

<sup>241</sup> Pembroke College, Cambridge, MS 226, fo. 15v.

<sup>242</sup> St. Johns College, Cambridge, MS 239, fo. 3v – 4v.

<sup>243</sup> R Foreville and G Keir, *The Book of St Gilbert*, Oxford Medieval Texts, (1987), p. 49.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid*, pp.31 – 35.

<sup>245</sup> Sharon K Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth Century England*, The University of North Carolina Press, (1988), p. 79.

<sup>246</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 18.

men. St Gilbert had wanted the Cistercian Order to be responsible for the pastoral care of the nuns and governance of his churches but on his visit to the General Cistercian Chapter at Cîteaux this request was refused on the grounds that the Cistercian Order were not permitted to have authority over the religious lives of other orders.<sup>247</sup> As a result of this Gilbert had to choose suitable men who would devote all of their time to the pastoral care of the nuns within the order.<sup>248</sup> This raises the question as to why some Gilbertine priories were founded for men only, all of which with the exception of the double house at Shouldham were founded after 1155, and five of which were founded during Gilbert's lifetime.<sup>249</sup> One suggestion that has been made by Janet Burton is that the house at Malton may have been used as a training ground for the canons who would serve the nuns at Watton. However, she goes on to say that they may have been other reasons for these foundations.<sup>250</sup> Malton priory was entrusted with the care of the hospitals at Malton, Broughton and Norton, and St Katherine's was attached to a hospital in Lincoln.<sup>251</sup> Hospitals were also attached to the priories of Ellerton and Clattercote.<sup>252</sup> Between the foundation of the order and the dissolution, however, it will be shown that the canons were taking up benefices in surrounding areas contrary to the Institutes of the order. As will be shown later, these canons were not necessarily resident in the parishes. However, if the canons were resident then these activities would have given the canons less time to devote to the needs of the nuns.

In common with all other monastic orders, the Black Death had a devastating effect on the populations of the Gilbertine houses.<sup>253</sup> The precise origins of the Black Death are the subject of debate amongst historians and scientists. There is fairly common agreement that it centred in what is the present day Mongolia and originated amongst the rodents in the Central Asiatic Plateau. The spread of the disease may have been due to a number of

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid, pp. 41 – 43. See also Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, pp. 26-33.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid, pp. 45 – 47.

<sup>249</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, Appendix 1. The five houses for canons only founded during Gilbert's lifetime were, St Katherine's Lincoln, Malton, Newstead, Clattercote and Mattersey.

<sup>250</sup> Janet Burton, *The Monastic order in Yorkshire 1069 – 1215*, Cambridge University Press, (1999), p. 90.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, Appendix 1.

<sup>253</sup> J C Russell, *The Clerical Population of Medieval England*, p. 179-182.

ecological disasters which occurred in the first half of the fourteenth century.<sup>254</sup> The spread of the disease through Europe depended upon the movement of people and goods from the east to the west. By 1347 it had reached the Mediterranean, Sicily being hit by October of that year. It then spread through the west coast of Italy and making its way into southern France.<sup>255</sup> It is thought that the Black Death first appeared in England at Weymouth in Dorset sometime between late June and early August 1348. London was probably struck by about 1 November 1348 and by Easter of the following year it had reached Walsham in Suffolk.<sup>256</sup> It had reached its peak in England by April and May 1349 both in terms of geographical spread and the numbers of deaths.<sup>257</sup>

The effects of the Black Death in terms of mortality has been studied using the monastic communities of Christ Church Canterbury and Westminster Abbey in London.<sup>258</sup> Both of these studies examined the mortality rates during the fifteenth century. John Hatcher's study of the monks of Christ Church Canterbury was made using a sample of 414 monks over the period 1395 to 1505.<sup>259</sup> He defined a crisis level as a rate equivalent to 40 deaths per 1000 persons per annum. Using this criteria there were no fewer than twenty seven occasions (one year in four), which could be classified as a crisis year. He found that the peaks occurred less frequently in the second half of the period of study (1451 to 1505) than in the first half of the period. However, in the second half of the fifteenth century there were eight occasions when the mortality rate exceeded 60 per 1000 per annum.<sup>260</sup>

Barbara Harvey carried out a similar study on the monks of Westminster Abbey between 1390 and 1529. In her study she used a sample of 328 monks over the period 1390 to 1529.<sup>261</sup> One of her conclusions was that the mortality rates resembled those of Christ Church Canterbury. Due to the smaller monastic population at Westminster she

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<sup>254</sup> John Hatcher, *The Black Death, an Intimate History*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, (2007), p. 32.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid*, p. 47.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 75 – 6, and 127.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid*, p. 127.

<sup>258</sup> John Hatcher, 'Mortality in the fifteenth century; some new evidence', *Economic History Review*, Second series, 39, (1986), pp. 19 – 38, and Barbara Harvey, *Living and Dying in England, 1100 – 1540, the Monastic Experience*, Clarendon Press Oxford, (1993), pp. 114- 129.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 28 – 29.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>261</sup> Barbara Harvey, *Living and Dying in England, 1100 – 1540, the Monastic Experience*, p. 116.

calculated that the critical minimum figure must be placed higher than that at Canterbury setting it at 100 per 1000 per annum. Using her modified criteria, nine crisis years were identified, four of which, 1419 – 20, 1433 – 4, 1463 – 4, and 1478 – 9 just hit her crisis level. In 1419 – 20 and 1478 – 9 the mortality rate was above this figure and was at least 150 per 1000 per annum.<sup>262</sup>

John Hatcher has shown that using the extensive records which have survived from Christ Church Priory in Canterbury that death rates in Canterbury were due to four epidemic diseases, namely, plague, ‘asmatia’, ‘epidemia’ and sweating sickness. He has shown that during the fifteenth century, instances of plague (Black Death) occurred on at least ten occasions between 1414 and 1500. Large numbers of deaths occurred in the priory in 1457 (16 deaths) and 1470 – 1 (17 deaths) in a population which lied between 75 and 95 monks.

Coupled with this, the mismanagement of the order in the second-half of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth century resulted in the near collapse of the order during the fifteenth century. At least two attempts were made to improve the recruitment into the order and hence bring the number of canons in each house up to a specified level depending on the resources of the individual houses. It will be shown that the success of these moves appeared to have only been successful in Yorkshire where numbers were restored to acceptable levels.

A comparison of the recruitment levels of the major religious orders in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire showed that the number of men entering religious orders in Lincolnshire was in decline as compared to the numbers of men in Yorkshire. It appears that monasticism remained strong in Yorkshire as late as 1536, when the Pilgrimage of Grace took place across the North of England and Lincolnshire. One cause of this rebellion was the imminent closure of the religious houses. The revolt which took place in Yorkshire was far more serious than that of the revolt in Lincolnshire. It is difficult to draw conclusions comparing the popularity of monasticism in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

because of the number of monastic houses in each county. More importantly the populations of the two counties from which these men would be drawn would be significantly different.

In common with other monastic orders, the Gilbertines sent some of their canons to study theology and other relevant subjects at Cambridge University. Many of the Yorkshire monasteries and especially the friaries in that county had established strong links with the centres of learning at Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>263</sup> Claire Cross notes that A M Emden has calculated that of the 750 religious men who studied at Oxford, 366 were monks and 383 were friars. Thirty three Yorkshire religious men were known to have studied at either Oxford or Cambridge fifteen being monks and eighteen were known to be friars.<sup>264</sup> The Gilbertines established a priory at Cambridge outside Trumpington Gate in 1290, which was attached to the university. This priory was founded so that the canons of the order could study theology at the university. The majority of the canons who obtained degrees from the university became priors of the major houses of the order and some became Masters of the order.<sup>265</sup> These were canons who were destined to hold high office and have influence in how religious changes taking place in the first half of the sixteenth century would affect the Gilbertine order. Robert Holgate the last Master was one of the members of the order who obtained his BD and DD from the university.

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<sup>263</sup> Claire Cross, *Monastic Learning and Libraries in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*, in, *Humanism and Reform: the Church in Europe, England and Scotland, 1400 – 1643, Essays in Honour of James K Cameron*, ed. James Kirk, Blackwell, (1991), p. 256.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>265</sup> James Bolton was Prior of Watton in 1482 (Borthwick Institute, York, Archbishop Register Rotheram I, fo. 22.) He occurs as Master in 1501 (Bodleian Library, MS Douce 136, fo. 106.) Bachelor of Theology in 1493 (Mary Bateson, *Grace Book B Part 2*, Cambridge University Press, (1905), p. 66.)

Thomas Hurtsky was prior of Watton in 1530 (*Testamenta Eboracensia, A Selection of Wills from the York Registry*, Vol. 5, Surtees Society, (1884), p. 299). He occurs as Master in 1535 (Dugdale *W Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. J Caley, H Ellis, and B Bandinel, Vol. 7, (London 1846), p. 947). B Th 1531, (William George Searle, *Grace Book Gamma*, Cambridge University Press, (1908), p. 252.)

Robert Holgate was Prior of St Katherine's outside Lincoln in 1536, (*Letters and Papers Henry 8* Vol. 4, No. 6047.) He was Master in 1536. (Bodleian Library, MS Laud 642, fo. 118v), D Th in 1536 (William George Searle, *Grace Book Gamma*, Cambridge University Press, (1908), p. 319.)

Richard Bretton was Prior of Bullington in 1538, and Doctor of Civil Law in 1519 (C H Cooper *Athenae Cantabrigienses*, Vol. 1, 1500 - 1585, Deighton, Bell & Co; and Macmillan & Co, (1858), page 69.)

Richard Hobson was prior of Newstead in 1538, and BD in 1528, (*ibid.* page 69).

Thomas Norman was prior of Mattersey in 1538 and BA in 1521, (*ibid.* page 69).

For the heads of Gilbertine priories, see : *Heads of Religious Houses: England and Wales*, Volume 3 1377-1540, ed. David M Smith, Cambridge, (1972-2008), pp. 598-607.

### **The Gilbertine Novice**

When a young man presented himself for entry into the Gilbertine order he would be received in the chapter house where he would relinquish all of his goods and property on the understanding that nothing would be returned to him since he gave all he owned to God.<sup>266</sup> When he had been received he would then kneel at the altar of the priory church taking a vow that he would remove from himself all temptations to leave the order. When he had been admitted, an ordained canon was assigned to him to teach him the Institutes of the order, his duties within the church and to bring him to fear and love God. He was only to be presented to the nuns when he had assumed the habit of the order and had spent some time in the house. Novices were not to perform any duties within the priory church such as reading the lessons or intoning the responses. During his noviciate he was expected to learn by heart the Antiphoner, Gradual, Psalter, Canticles and Hymnal.<sup>267</sup> The Institutes of the order allowed for mature men to enter the order.<sup>268</sup> If a man entered the order as a novice and was more than thirty years old, he would not be expected to learn all of the liturgical offices unless he was able to do this easily.

The Institutes of the order describe how a novice was received into the order in the thirteenth century.<sup>269</sup> Before the novice made his final profession in the chapter, the rule of St Augustine and the rule of the Gilbertine order were to be read over to him two or three times and carefully explained. If there were any points that he did not understand he had to ask that they were explained again to him until he fully understood the rule of the order. After accepting the habit of a Gilbertine canon he was to be presented by the whole body of canons to the nuns in their chapter. This procedure may well have been the practice in the early days of the order, but no evidence survives to suggest that it continued into the sixteenth century.

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<sup>266</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Douce 136, fo. 17v

Compare with the Augustinian Rule. In Chapter 1 of the Rule, Purpose and basis of Common Life, the Rule states: "Call nothing your own, but let everything be yours in common." (A translation by Robert Russell OSA based on the text of Luc Verheijen, OSA; *La regle de Saint Augustin, Etudes Augustiniennes*, Paris (1967).

<sup>267</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Douce 136, fo. 18r.

<sup>268</sup> It will be shown later in the Chapter that this part of the rule was possibly used to boost numbers within the order during the first half of the sixteenth century.

<sup>269</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Douce 136, ff. 17v – 18v.

After his final profession, a canon was firstly presented for ordination as an acolyte. Shortly after this he progressed to sub-deacon, deacon and finally priest. During the second half of the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth century the ordination lists showed that a canon could progress from sub-deacon to priest within a time span of one to two years. It has not been possible to say with any degree of certainty how long a canon remained an acolyte since many of the bishops' registers did not record all the presentations to the orders of acolyte. From the small amount of data available it appeared that a canon remained as an acolyte for no more than two years.

### **Recruitment of Canons into the Gilbertine order**

As discussed earlier in the chapter, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Black death had drastic effects on the monastic populations of Westminster and Christ Church Canterbury. John Aberth has used English episcopal registers and manorial records to show that death rates in England ranged between 40 – 70% during the first outbreak of the disease in 1348 – 1350.<sup>270</sup> No records remain of the deaths in Gilbertine houses, but the religious suffered severely everywhere. An analysis of the ordination lists from 1350 to 1400 showed how recruitment into the order suffered during this period.<sup>271</sup>

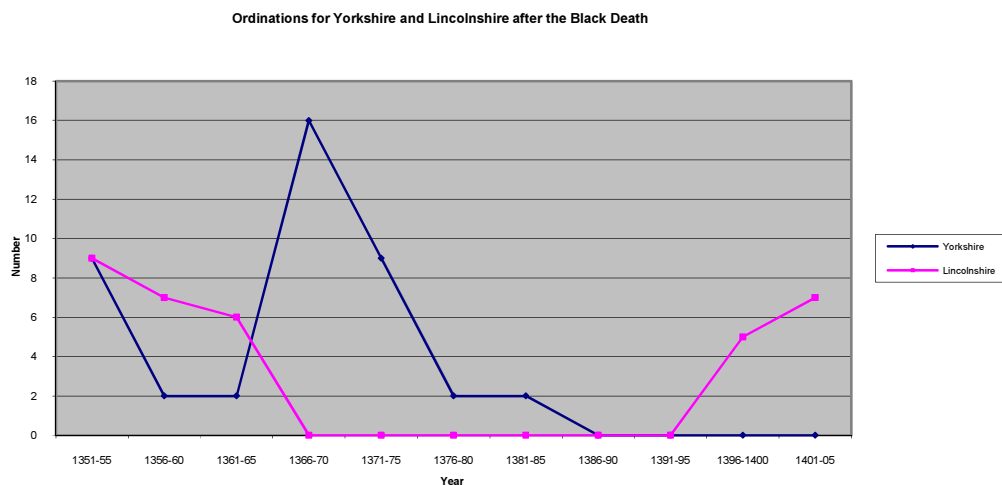
The graph below shows the numbers presenting themselves for ordination (sub-deacon, deacon and priest) between 1350 and 1405 for Gilbertine houses in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire.

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> These lists are available in the Registers of the Diocesan Bishops. Detailed references will be given when these are discussed.





Surviving records show in more detail how particular monastic houses of other orders suffered during this period. At Westminster Abbey the abbot and 27 monks died, at St Albans the abbot and 47 monks, at Croxton the whole community apart from the abbot and prior and at Meaux only 10 monks were left out of a total of 50 monks and lay brethren.<sup>272</sup> The graph above shows the possible effect of the Black Death on the Gilbertine order in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. Taking the case of Lincolnshire first it can be seen that up until 1360 canons were being put forward for ordination. These figures indicate that the Black Death might not initially have had a dramatic effect on the population of the individual Lincolnshire houses. However, from 1365 until 1390 no canons were put forward for ordination. It can be concluded from this that no recruitment was taking place during this period, presumably because the population in the surrounding areas had suffered badly. The graph shows that just after this period, the number of novices entering the order in Lincolnshire was insufficient to fill the empty places. In the case of Yorkshire the situation was somewhat different. Between 1360 and 1375 the number of canons being ordained was significantly higher than that of Lincolnshire. The number of ordinations in Yorkshire fell to zero twenty years later than that for Lincolnshire.

These graphs show that the initial outbreak of the Black Death reached Lincolnshire before arriving in Yorkshire. The Yorkshire Gilbertine houses did not see the effects of

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, p 179.

the disease until about 1371 when the number of ordinations which took place fell off rapidly. However in Lincolnshire the effects occurred earlier in about 1365. These results show that the disease may have hit Yorkshire much later than it did in Lincolnshire.

An additional factor, which may have slowed down recruitment during this period, was the financial status of a number of the Gilbertine houses during the first half of the fifteenth century. Two entries in the Patent Rolls for 1444 indicated that the revenues for certain houses were not sufficient for the expenses of the residents, and Henry VI exempted these houses from all aids, subsidies, tallages tenths and fifteenths.<sup>273</sup> Further evidence to justify the poverty of these houses was given in the Memoranda Rolls for this period. The roll for the Trinity Term for 1450 listed the taxable revenue for each of the houses listed in the above-mentioned Patent Rolls.<sup>274</sup> The prior and canons are assessed for tax separately from the nuns for each of the houses. In Chapter 2 it was shown that the nuns argued that the possessions of the houses had been granted to them by their founders for their sole use.<sup>275</sup> This would have been impractical as the canons would have required some form of income in order to support them. Table 1 shows that in 1450 with the exception of Chicksands and Bullington, the canons assessment of tax is very low compared to that of the nuns where the figures are available. The reason for the higher rate of taxation in these two houses cannot be accounted for with the available data. The number of canons in each of the double houses would have been less than the number of nuns, hence the income required for their support would have been proportionally less than that for the nuns. It was probably agreed between the canons and nuns of each of the houses that a small part of the possessions be made over to the canons for their support. The rolls then went on to say that the nuns were exempt from taxation by virtue of the exemption granted in the patent rolls, only the prior and canons are liable for tax. In three cases the roll simply said that the nuns are exempt and no value was placed on the nuns' income. The valuations for 1291 (The Taxation of Pope Nicholas) and the valuation given in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, which was compiled just before the dissolution, are

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<sup>273</sup> *Calendar of Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office*, HMSO London, Henry VI, vol. 4, p. 332. The houses mentioned in these entries are as follows:- Sempringham, Watton, Chicksands, Shouldham, Haverholme, Catley, Bullington, Sixhills, North Ormesby and Alvingham.

<sup>274</sup> TNA, Memoranda Roll E159/226.

<sup>275</sup> Chapter 2, p. 29.

listed in the table below (Table 1) together with the taxable revenues for these houses in 1450. Where data is available the taxable income of each of the houses is in excess of the taxable incomes both before and after 1450. It may be that the assessors overvalued the possessions in 1450 in order to increase the tax revenues.

One year later, on 18 November 1451, the state of affairs had not improved.<sup>276</sup> A pardon was granted to Nicholas Revesby, Master of the order and the priors and prioresses of the houses listed in the above mentioned table, of all debts, accounts etc. due by them.

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<sup>276</sup> *Calendar of Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office*, HMSO London, Henry VI, page 499.

**Table 1 – Valuations for 1291, 1450 and 1535**

	<b>1291</b>	<b>1450</b>	<b>1535</b>
<b>Sempringham</b>	£366.45	Nuns £462.15 Prior £1.72	£317.20
<b>Chicksands</b>		Nuns: Exempt Prior £30.71	£212.17
<b>Shouldham</b>	£207.39	Nuns £1.21 Prior 7.53	£138.90
<b>Haverholm</b>	£140.59	Nuns £141.87 Prior £1.33	£70.80
<b>Catley</b>	£50.90	Nuns £42.55 Prior £13.08	£34.93
<b>Bullington</b>	£196.18	Nuns: Exempt Prior £45.21	£152.40
<b>Sixhills</b>	£166.97	Nuns £269.72 Prior £3.13	£135.02
<b>North Ormesby</b>	£146.76	Nuns £191.71 Prior?	£80.59
<b>Alvingham</b>	£110.56	Nuns £113 Prior £8.45	£136.74
<b>Watton</b>		Nuns: Exempt Prior £1.21	£361.94

This poor financial status of some of the houses of the order may have arisen due to mismanagement within the order in the last half of the fourteenth century under the Mastership of William of Beverley. On 10 and 16 May 1371 the nuns of Sempringham Priory complained that the lands, possessions and rents were converted to the use of the Master, Prior and Canons of the house who had been appointed to minister to the nuns

and celebrate divine office.<sup>277</sup> This resulted in hardship being inflicted on the nuns within the Priory. On 4 January 1397 the King was informed that there was strife between certain persons within the Priory of Sempringham and William Beverley, Master of the order, regarding divine services and other works of piety which were now diminished and withdrawn and the possessions of the priory had been dissipated.<sup>278</sup>

The surviving Chapter records show how far things had deteriorated during the mid fifteenth century and it was recognised that recruitment was at a crisis level, with the possibility of the collapse of the order. An injunction in these records stated that ‘Priors shall show more diligent care in the multiplication of communities, because of the sterility and poverty by which the whole order is threatened with almost final ruin’.<sup>279</sup> The extent of the problem during the mid fifteenth century can be seen from the ordination lists within the bishops’ registers. The bar graph below shows the number of ordinations of sub-deacons in Gilbertine houses in the dioceses of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire over the period 1451 to 1540. The figures for the diocese of Salisbury, where the Gilbertines had two small houses of canons were omitted from the analysis due to the very low number of ordinations which took place. The ordination lists for the diocese of Norwich, the only other diocese where the Gilbertines had a house, have not survived. The figures for sub-deacons orders have been used since the bishops’ registers do not record all of the ordinations at acolyte level.

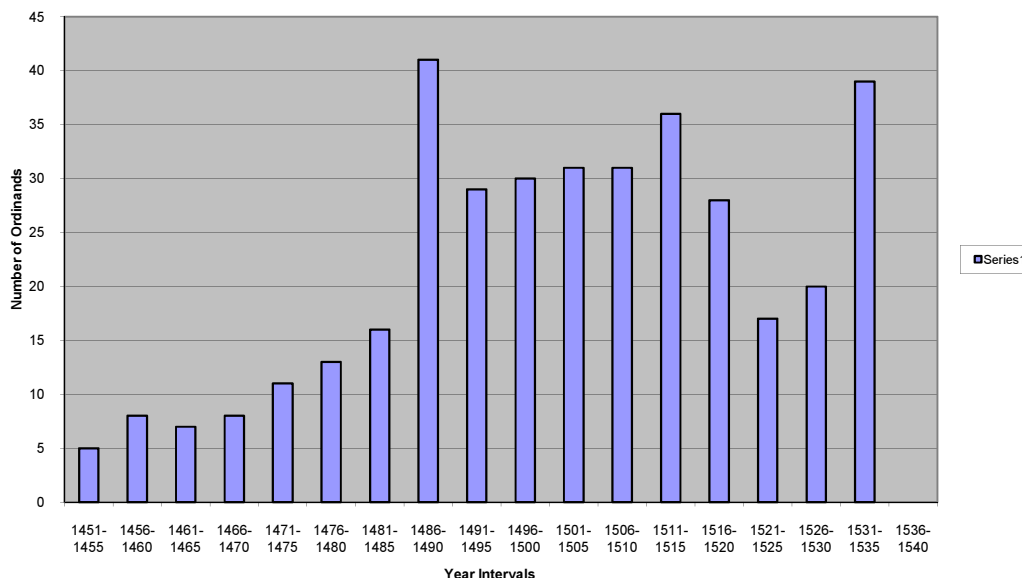
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<sup>277</sup> *Calendar of Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office*, HMSO London, Edward III, page 110.

<sup>278</sup> *Calendar of Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office*, HMSO London, Richard II, page 50.

<sup>279</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Douce 136, fo. 113.

Number of Sub Deacon Ordinations in Gilbertine Houses over the Period 1451 to 1540



Here we can see that the number of ordinations that took place in the second half of the fifteenth century was low except for 1486 - 1490.<sup>280</sup> Between 1490 and 1500 the figures fall slightly but are higher than those prior to 1486. The reaction to this injunction must at best have only been partially successful, since in the 1501 chapter records it was recorded that the numbers of canons in each of the houses of the order had decreased.<sup>281</sup> The problem may not have resolved itself significantly during this period. Any measures that were taken would not have had an immediate effect; it would have taken a number of years to build up a population of fully ordained and experienced canons. Penalties were laid down compelling priors to find suitable persons to increase the numbers in the houses of the order.<sup>282</sup> The target figures set for each house are given below in Table 2.

<sup>280</sup> This data has been obtained from the Ordination lists in the Archbishops of York Registers and those of the Bishops of Lincoln. The Registers used are as follows: Diocese of York:- Borthwick Institute, York, Registers 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27 and 28; Diocese of Lincoln :- Lincolnshire Archives Office, Registers 19, 21, 22, 24, 25 and 26.

<sup>281</sup> Bodleian Library MS Douce 136 fo 106v-107v.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

Table 2 compares the target figures set for individual houses in 1501 against actual numbers of canons in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire houses at the dissolution.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Douce 136 fo. 106v.

**Table 2 – Numbers of Gilbertine Canons in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire Houses**

<b>HOUSE</b>	<b>1501</b>	<b>1540 (Dissolution)</b>
Alvingham	8	8
Bullington	12	10
Catley	4	3
Haverholme	6	8
Lincoln	12	14
Newstead <sup>284</sup>	-	6
North Ormsby	8	6
Sempringham	16	19
Sixhills	10	8
<b>Totals for Lincolnshire</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>82</b>
Ellerton	10	5
Malton	14	11
Watton	18	8
York	7	4
<b>Totals for Yorkshire</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>28</b>

<sup>284</sup> No target was set for Newstead in 1501.



From this table we can see that in Lincolnshire the higher figures set by the General Chapter were very nearly achieved for the majority of the houses, and in three cases they were exceeded. The target of 76 was for the nine houses of the order in the county giving an average of eight canons per house. In Yorkshire the target was set at forty-nine for the four houses giving an average of twelve canons per house. If we examine the 1540 figures, Lincolnshire exceeded the target for the county by six giving an average of nine canons per house. In Yorkshire there were only twenty-eight canons at the dissolution giving an average of 7 canons per house. These figures appear to indicate that the Lincolnshire houses were more successful in the recruitment drive. However, it will be shown in Chapter 7 that at Sempringham and Lincoln a number of these canons were not resident within the priories but were acting as full time parish priests in the years prior to the dissolution. If these men are omitted from the totals then Sempringham and Lincoln had not in fact reached the targets set down by the General Chapter. The chapter records do not specify the roles that these extra canons are to perform, only that each house should strive to meet these targets. These two sets of figures do not however show how recruitment was affected in the years between 1501 and 1540.

The 1501 injunctions stipulated that the number of canons in the Yorkshire houses were expected to contribute forty-nine canons to the total for the two counties, whereas the nine Lincolnshire houses were expected to only contribute 76 canons. In the next section it will be shown that in the years between 1501 and 1540 Yorkshire houses were in fact recruiting far better than those in Lincolnshire in the early part of the century, but by 1540 the recruitment into the order in Yorkshire had fallen off as demonstrated by the figures in Table 2. However, it appeared that the General Chapter may have overestimated the success of the Yorkshire houses.

The following table (Table 3) attempts to compare recruitment over the same period in the major houses of the order both in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. The two largest houses in each of these counties were chosen for this analysis: the Lincolnshire houses of Sempringham and St. Katherine's outside the walls of Lincoln, and the Yorkshire houses of Watton and Malton.

**Table 2. Comparison of Ordinations for Lincolnshire and Yorkshire over the Period 1451 to 1540**

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Lincoln</b>	<b>Sempringham</b>	<b>Malton</b>	<b>Watton</b>
1451-5	n/a	n/a	7	4
1456-60	n/a	n/a	8	23
1461-5	n/a	n/a	7	13
1466-70	n/a	n/a	8	8
1471-5	3	2	7	12
1476-80	5	4	9	12
1481-5	2	10	10	12
1486-90	7	17	13	23
1491-5	8	5	17	17
1496-1500	9	10	15	23
1501-5	16	11	0	13
1506-10	10	4	7	8
1511-5	12	10	22	19
1516-20	9	10	7	27
1521-5	2	6	15	16
1526-30	0	9	9	7
1531-5	0	18	23	18
1536-40	0	0	2	1

The ordination lists for the period 1451 to 1471 have not survived for the diocese of Lincoln; hence it was not possible to estimate the level of recruitment during this period. The table shows that after 1475 up until 1500 the recruitment into the Gilbertine houses in Yorkshire taken in total was far higher than that into the Lincolnshire houses. In the five-year period after 1500 the situation was reversed where Sempringham and Lincoln were recruiting at twice the rate of that of Watton and Malton. Between 1505 and 1510 they were recruiting at much the same level in each county, and in subsequent years the situation returned to that of the latter part of the fifteenth century. In Yorkshire it was concluded that the order had not lost its popularity, as it appeared to have done in Lincolnshire. The injunctions of the mid-fifteenth century and those of 1501 were clearly aimed at individual houses. The figures in Table 2 show that in Yorkshire the recruitment of novices was not taking place at a uniform rate, suggesting that novices were going through in batches.

### **The Age Range of Men Entering the Order in the Sixteenth Century**

During the first half of the sixteenth century it appeared that a significant number of men were presenting themselves as novices above the age of eighteen years old. When Gilbert devised his rules regarding the recruitment and training of canons he adopted the Cistercian norms.<sup>285</sup> The earliest a boy could enter a Gilbertine monastery as a probationer was at the age of fifteen.<sup>286</sup> According to the Institutes of the order he could not become a canon before reaching the age of twenty. It will be shown in the next section that a significant number of men who were entering the order were over this minimum age limit. A number of post Dissolution documents gave the ages of a small number of the ex-Gilbertine canons. Using this data in conjunction with the ordination dates from the bishops' registers it was possible to estimate to a reasonable degree of accuracy the age of the sample of canons at their first ordination, i.e. that of sub deacon. It was assumed that the minimum age for this stage of ordination would have been twenty. Whilst compiling the ordination data it was noticed that the majority of canons went on to become deacons and then priests. Hence, where the year of ordination as a

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<sup>285</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 147.

<sup>286</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Douce 136, fo. 17r.

sub-deacon was wanting in the registers, this was estimated from the dates of ordination to either that of deacon or priest. In the table, estimated ages are shown in brackets.

**Table 3 - Estimated Ages of Canons when becoming Sub Deacons**

Name of Canon	House	Age in 1552 <sup>287</sup>	Age in 1575 <sup>288</sup>	Age in 1576 <sup>289</sup>	Estimated age as Sub Deacon	Estimated age in 1539
John Golding	Ellerton	53			20	40
Roger Dowe	Ellerton	44			(22)	31
Robert Michelson	Ellerton	42			22	29
William Spencer	Ellerton	43			26	30
Robert Emerson	Malton		72		(27)	36
Robert Laverock	Malton		75		31	39
Thomas Marshall	Watton			61	17*	24
William Bysset	York	55			22	42
Thomas Gray	Haverholme			66	(22)	29
William Pigott	Sempringham			74	(20)	37
John Jackson	Sempringham			81	(23)	44
Anthony Laughton	Sempringham			63	(21)	26
William Skelton	Bridge End			67	(21)	30
John Colman	Lincoln			59	(23)	22
Humphrey Spensley	Cambridge			67	(25)	30
Thomas West	Catley			78	26	41

<sup>287</sup> TNA, E101/76/23.

<sup>288</sup> TNA, E179/35/349.

<sup>289</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Diocesan Records, Liber Cleri 1576.

The sample shown above, (Table 3), shows that of the sixteen men whose ages have been estimated when they became sub deacons, five were more than twenty-three years of age. It was possible that one solution to overcome the recruitment problem was to allow older men to enter the order (which was allowed according to the Institutes of the order) rather than rely on the tradition of accepting young men only. Thomas Marshall gave his age as 61 in 1576 which would have made him about 17 years of age when he was a sub deacon.<sup>290</sup> The Institutes stated that a young man could not be admitted as a canon until he was twenty. Either Thomas gave his age incorrectly or the rule had been relaxed in this particular case. A lack of data prevented an analysis of the age range of men entering the order before the beginning of the sixteenth century. The data in the above table listed four of the five canons of Ellerton who were resident at the dissolution. Knowing their ages in 1552 showed that apart from the prior, John Golding, the canons were aged about thirty when their house was dissolved.

### **The Age Profile of Gilbertine Canons at the Dissolution**

If we make the assumption that canons took sub-deacons' orders between the ages of twenty and twenty-three then by using the ordination lists it was possible to build up an approximate age profile of the Gilbertine canons at the dissolution. However, it was noted whilst compiling this data that in a small number of cases not all the ordination stages were recorded in the registers, which will result in small errors when analysing this data. Making the same assumption for the other monastic orders, - Benedictines, Cistercians, Cluniac, Carthusian Augustinian Canons, Premonstratensian Canons and the Grandimontines - it was possible to compare age profiles for the major religious orders in other counties. Yorkshire was chosen because the ordination lists for the religious houses in Yorkshire have all been published for the individual houses for the period 1490 to 1539.<sup>291</sup>

An analysis of the ages of all of the religious houses for men in Yorkshire was carried out using the ordination lists where possible. In some cases it was not possible to estimate

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks, Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*. Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series Volume 150 (1995).

ages owing to the ordination data not being available. Table 4 shows the age profiles in five-year blocks for all of the orders for men in Yorkshire, the data having been extracted from the ordination lists using the criteria already used above for estimating ages.

**Table 4. Age Profiles of the Male Religious in Yorkshire at the Dissolution**

	Sample Size	Total No at Dissolution	20 to 25	26 to 30	31 to 35	36 to 40	41 to 45	46 to 50	51 to 55	56 to 60	60+
<b>Gilbertine</b>	24	28	0	16	3	1	2	2	0	0	0
<b>Benedictine</b>	90	120	7	26	10	20	14	5	6	5	7
<b>Premonsratensian</b>	14	20	0	2	3	4	2	2	1	0	0
<b>Augustinian</b>	145	163	12	25	16	43	11	9	13	8	8
<b>Cistercian</b>	143	189	5	2	13	24	14	8	13	18	22
<b>Cluniac</b>	5	13	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0
<b>Carthusian</b>	9	26	0	2	0	1	1	2	1	1	1
<b>Grandimontine</b>	4	5	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1

Table 4a below shows the age ranges of the canons in the individual Gilbertine houses in Yorkshire. In each case the table shows the actual numbers of canons who fell into each of the age ranges.

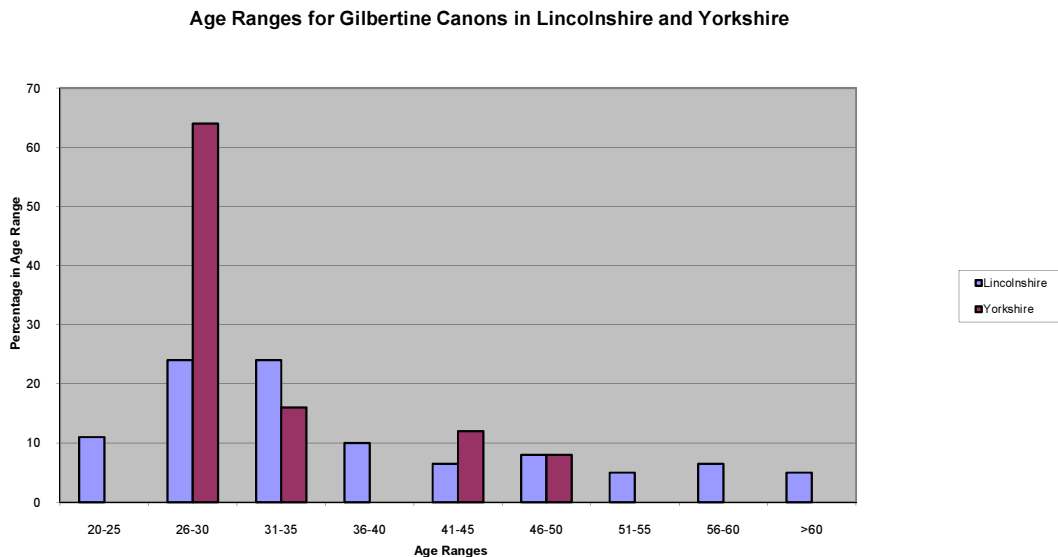
**Table 4a**

	Sample Size	Number at Dissolution	20/25	26/30	31/35	36/40	41/45	46/50	51/55	56/60	60+
<b>Ellerton</b>	4	5	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Malton</b>	10	11	0	8	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Watton</b>	6	8	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>York</b>	4	4	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0

This table shows that out of the total of 26 canons whose ages could be estimated at the dissolution for the Yorkshire Gilbertine canons, sixteen were in the age range of twenty six to thirty (62%). Appendix 1 shows the age ranges of the men in other religious orders in Yorkshire in the individual religious houses. It has already been shown that four of the five Ellerton canons were aged thirty at the dissolution indicating that the assumptions that have been made in compiling this table are valid. None of the other orders appear to have had as young a population as the Gilbertines at the time of the dissolution. The table shows that 80% of the Gilbertine canons were in the age group between 26 to 35, and no canons were aged over 50. In the Premonstensian houses the ages ranged from 26 to 55 whereas for the other order of canons in the county, the Augustinians, the ages ranged from 20 to 60+, 4% of the total being over the age of 60. The Cistercian order had the widest spread of ages, from 20 years of age through to 60+, 15% of the monks being over the age of 60. The Benedictine order showed a similar spread of ages, however, only 7% were over 60. The figures in Table 2 show that the Yorkshire houses were recruiting relatively large numbers of men into the order in the years between 1511 and 1535.

However, the figures in Table 4 indicate that these houses were recruiting larger numbers of men towards the end of this period since the majority of these men were aged between 26 and 30. The discrepancy in these figures may be due to the fact that canons were not attached to any one house. If the Yorkshire houses were exceeding their maximum numbers, canons from these houses would be sent to other houses where the numbers were low.

The bar chart below shows the age profiles for all of the Gilbertine canons of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire in 1539. These results showed that that in Yorkshire the number of young men in the order was much higher than that for Lincolnshire.



These numbers have been estimated from the dates of ordination given in the bishops' registers and were compared with the sample of ages in the table above. It was concluded from this data that the recruitment drive in Yorkshire was attracting young as well as older men into the Gilbertine order. However, it appeared that the recruitment in Lincolnshire was not so successful.

### **Education of the Gilbertine Canons**

In common with the other monastic orders, the Gilbertines sent suitable canons to be students at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge to study theology and other suitable



subjects. In the case of the Gilbertines, they set up a small priory outside the walls of Cambridge which was attached to the University solely for the use of their own canons. In 1301 the Gilbertines attempted to set up a priory in Stamford so that the canons of the order could attend the schools in the town. However, the lifetime of the schools in the town was short lived due to the rivalry of Oxford which caused these schools to close down in the 1330's. The priory at Stamford appears to have disappeared during this period, however, the Gilbertines appeared to have kept some of the lands which were part of the original endowment until the dissolution.<sup>292</sup>

In 1290 Pope Nicholas IV sent a mandate to the Archdeacon of Stowe in Lincolnshire requiring him 'to grant the place held by the Friars of the Sack in Cambridge, which they were about to leave, to the Master and brethren of Sempringham who often sent members of their order to study at the Castle of Cambridge'.<sup>293</sup> This was the first site that the Gilbertines occupied in Cambridge before they finally found a permanent site a few days later. On the 12 June 1290, Cicely, daughter of William of St Edmund's received a licence to alienate to the Gilbertines two acres of land in Cambridge together with the advowson of the Chapel of St Edmund.<sup>294</sup> In September that year the Pope gave the Master of the Order of Sempringham a licence to have 'within their house a discreet and learned Doctor of Theology to teach those of the brethren who desire to study that science'.<sup>295</sup> In 1291, it was recorded by the chronicler of Barnwell Abbey in Cambridge that the canons of Sempringham had established themselves at the chapel of St Edmund and 'were very assiduous in attending lectures and disputations'.<sup>296</sup>

St Edmund's Priory was never a very wealthy landowner in Cambridge. By the middle of the fifteenth century it was in serious financial trouble. The order petitioned the crown for help since the priory had been founded:

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<sup>292</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, pp. 175-6.

<sup>293</sup> *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. W H Bliss, C Johnson & J A Twemlow, HMSO (London) Volume 1, p. 514.

<sup>294</sup> *Calendar of Patent Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office*, HMSO, (London) 1281-92, p. 363.

<sup>295</sup> *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. W H Bliss, C Johnson & J A Twemlow, HMSO (London) Volume 1, p. 516.

<sup>296</sup> *Liber Memorandum Ecclesie de Bernewelle*, ed. J W Clark (Cambridge, 1907), p. 212.

‘for the education and maintenance of scholars, canons regular of that order studying in sacred theology and other liberal sciences, has nothing in its endowment save the site of the priory and lands to the value of 10 marks per annum and that the said order used to exhibit scholars, elected by the master’.<sup>297</sup>

The crown responded by granting a licence to the priory to acquire lands to the value of £100 per annum.<sup>298</sup> However, no evidence has survived to show that the priory acquired any extra lands.

A number of taxation records, which are preserved in the diocesan records of Lincoln and the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, showed that the majority of the priory’s income came from payments made by individual houses of the order. Table 5 shows the amounts that each house was contributing in 1536.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> *Calendar of Patent Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office*, HMSO, (London) 1446-52, pp 76-77.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>299</sup> J Caley and J Hunter eds., *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, 6 Vols (London 1810-34), Alvingham Vol iv, p. 58, Bullington Vol iv, p. 84, Catley Vol iv, p. 123, Chicksands Vol iv, p. 195, Haverholme Vol iv, p. 118, North Ormesby Vol iv, p. 62, Sempringham Vol iv, p. 34, St. Katherine’s Lincoln Vol iv, p. 30, Mattersey Vol v, p. 178, Newstead Vol iv, p. 71.

**Table 5**

<b>House</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>House</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Alvingham	13s – 4d	Ellerton	Nil
Bullington	16s – 0d	Fordham	Not known
Catley	Nil	Hitchin	Not known
Chicksands	16s – 0d	St Katherine Lincoln	16s – 0d
Haverholme	10s – 0d	Malton	Not known
North Ormesby	13s – 4d	Marlborough	Not known
Sempringham	16s – 0d	Marmont	Not known
Shouldham	Not known	Mattersey	10s – 0d
Sixhills	Nil	Newstead	4s – 0d
Watton	Not known	Poulton	Not known
Clattercote	Not known	York	Not known

The amount that each priory paid appeared to be linked to the incomes of the individual houses. Catley was one of the poorer houses of the order and consequently it made no contribution, but as to why Sixhills and Ellerton made no contribution is not known.

We can assume that St Edmund's only accepted Gilbertine canons to study at the University since there was no evidence to show that other orders or secular men were studying there. Judging from the canons who were known to have studied there, it was likely that there were only a very small number of canons studying at the University who were resident at any one time. Evidence to support this comes from the following source. John Leventhorp of Lincoln in his will of 29 January 1435 left the sum of £6 – 13 – 2d annually until a debt of 100 marks was paid to the Master of Sempringham [i.e. for 10 years].<sup>300</sup> This sum of money was to be used to support two canons who were priests at schools within the University of Cambridge, neither of whom could withdraw from the

<sup>300</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, Archbishop of Canterbury Register Chichele, fo 452v.

aforsaid University until he was a Bachelor of Theology. We can only assume that they were resident at St Edmund's. The fragmentary registers of the bishops of Ely, show that in addition to the prior, one or two canons may have been permanent residents at St Edmunds.<sup>301</sup> In 1416 two canons were presented for ordination as sub-deacons in September of that year.<sup>302</sup> It was possible that they were the only two canons in addition to the prior at the time, but it could be argued that there may have been a least one other.

Comparing these ordination lists with the Cambridge University Grace Books<sup>303</sup> in the latter part of the fifteenth century,<sup>304</sup> it was possible to show that two types of canon were resident at the priory: canons who were not attending the University since their names do not appear in the Grace Books, and canons who were studying within the University. One or two canons, in addition to the prior, would have been required in order to assist in the education of the canons who were attending the University. These canons would also be required in the day to day administrative tasks of the priory.

Very few names of individual Gilbertine canons who were students are known. The majority of these names occurred during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Most of these canons went on to be priors of the more wealthy houses of the order and in some cases became Masters of the order. Examples of such canons were James Bolton, Thomas Hurtsky and Robert Holgate. From this it can be concluded that the order was selecting canons to be educated at St Edmund's, who were capable of managing houses of the order, rather than the ordinary canons of the individual houses.

An insight into the life of a Gilbertine canon studying at the University was obtained from the University Grace Books. Gilbertine canons were known to have studied Theology and Canon Law. An example of a canon who studied theology was John Durant who was ordained acolyte on the 24 September 1491 and priest on the 24

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<sup>301</sup> Ely Diocesan Registers 1, 2 and 3. These Registers are held in Cambridge University Library.

<sup>302</sup> Walter Siberston was ordained Subdeacon on the 14 September 1416, Ely Diocesan Register Fordham, fo 266r, Thomas de Watton was ordained Subdeacon on the 19 September 1416, *ibid*, fo. 266r.

<sup>303</sup> These books contain the names of men who obtained degrees from the University of Cambridge.

<sup>304</sup> *Grace Book A*, ed. Stanley M Leathes, Cambridge (1897).

September 1496 at St Edmunds Priory.<sup>305</sup> The intermediate ordinations have not been found in Alcock's register which could mean that these ordinations may have taken place whilst he was resident at another priory. However, a search of the registers for the diocesan registers for York and Lincolnshire shows that these ordinations were not recorded in these registers. The ordination lists for the diocese of Norwich have not survived making it uncertain where these ordinations took place or indeed if they ever took place. The Grace books for the University of Cambridge show that he was a student at the university from about 1492/3 until 1502/3 indicating that he must have been resident in Cambridge between these years.<sup>306</sup> He may well have been a permanent member of the community before he began his studies or, he may have been identified by the senior members of the order as a person who could benefit from a university education and was sent to Cambridge before commencing his studies. According to the Statutes of the University, theology required a ten-year period of study.<sup>307</sup> For some reason he was permitted to complete his studies in the slightly shorter time of nine and a half years.<sup>308</sup>

The first four years of study included attendance at lectures on the Bible, the Sentences of Peter Lombard and at public disputations. In the fifth year of study theological candidates were admitted to 'oppose'. This was the most serious part of the course and extended over most of the academic year. It involved the student taking part in not less than sixteen disputations. The candidate acted as 'respondent', that was he opened the discussion and presented his case. This he did once to his master (his director of studies) and any number of times to the masters of the faculty. The opponents, of whom there may be several in some cases, argued against the respondent. It was up to the respondent to fight his case by arguing against the opponents. Finally he brought the disputation to a conclusion. Having carried this process out successfully he was considered to be 'bacularius formatus in theologia' and was admitted to the degree of Bachelor of Theology. The process was finalised by a solemn lecture on 'Lombard's sentences' and the candidate was then 'fully

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<sup>305</sup> Ely Diocesan Register 3 (Alcock), fo. 230 and 241.

<sup>306</sup> William George Searle, *Grace Book Gamma*, Cambridge University Press (1908), pp 20-21.

<sup>307</sup> *Grace Book A*, ed. Stanley M Leathes, Cambridge 1897, Introduction, page xxvi.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*

bachelor'.<sup>309</sup> In the case of Durant he only acted as a respondent on two occasions in order to be admitted to the degree of BTh.<sup>310</sup>

### **The Movement of Canons from One House to Another**

There was evidence from the Ordination lists that canons were not confined to one particular house. There were many examples of canons taking sub-deacon's orders in one house and taking deacon's and priest's orders in other houses. The bishops' registers also showed that only the major houses of the order were presenting the majority of canons for ordination. A possible conclusion which may be drawn from this is that all the novices who were recruited may have been sent to one of the larger houses of the order for their initial training. Janet Burton has suggested that when Malton priory was founded in the twelfth century, it may have been used as a training centre for the canons who would eventually move on to the double house at Watton.<sup>311</sup> This meant that the major houses were supplying the smaller houses with canons as and when they required them.

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<sup>309</sup> *Grace Book A*, p xxvi.

<sup>310</sup> *Grace Book Gamma*, pp 20-21.

<sup>311</sup> Janet Burton, *The Monastic Order in Yorkshire 1069 – 1215*, Cambridge University press, (1999), p. 89.

**Table 6**

<b>House</b>	<b>Number of Ordinations</b>	<b>Percentage per House</b>
Alvingham	38	3%
Bullington	65	5.5%
Catley	12	1%
Chicksands	61	5%
Ellerton	77	6%
Haverholme	22	2%
Lincoln	83	7%
Malton	218	20%
Marlborough	3	< 0.5%
Mattersay	33	3%
Newstead	1	< 0.5%
North Ormsby	13	1%
Poulton	1	< 0.5%
Sempringham	118	10%
Sixhills	53	4%
Watton	293	24.5%
York	100	8%

Table 6 above shows the number of ordinations taking place in the houses of the Gilbertine order between 1451 and 1540 using the available data from the ordination lists in the bishops' registers. This clearly shows that the larger houses of the order, Watton, Malton and Sempringham were accepting the majority of candidates for ordination. Even though the house at York was relatively small compared to the three houses above, it still presented large numbers of men for ordination. The bar chart on page 86 shows how these ordinations were distributed over the period 1451 to 1536. This chart also shows

that the overall number of ordinations slowly increased from about 1451 to 1486. The number of ordinations suddenly peaked reaching its highest level in 1486 to 1490, remained steady at about 30 to 35 ordinations per five year period between 1491 and 1511. The numbers fall off before peaking at thirty nine ordinations in 1531 to 1535. This final peak in numbers may be explained with the impending dissolution of these priories. The canons may have anticipated the closure of their houses and were taking the opportunity of preparing themselves for a life outside of the monastery, that is, employment as parish priests.

Table 2 on page 88 shows the pattern of ordinations taking place in four of the larger houses of the order between 1451 and 1540. Unfortunately the ordination data is missing for those which were taking place in Lincolnshire between 1451 and 1470 hence analysis of these figures will be confined to the years 1471 to 1540. At St. Katherine's priory in Lincoln where 14% of the ordinations for the four priories took place between 1471 and 1540, the number of ordinations slowly rises to a peak of sixteen ordinations which took place between 1501 and 1505. Table 2 shows that over the period 1451 – 1540 the numbers of ordinations taking place at Sempringham priory were quite erratic, the highest numbers taking place in 1486 to 1490 and 1531 to 1535. Again at Malton the pattern is erratic with peaks in 1491 to 1495, 1511 to 1515 and 1531 – 1535. Of the four priories, 37% of the ordinations took place at Watton priory. The pattern is less erratic than that of Sempringham and Malton with the highest number taking place between 1516 and 1520. Apart from St Katherine's, large numbers of ordinations took place between 1531 and 1535. As discussed above, the canons in these three priories may have been anticipating their futures after the dissolution. As to why the ordinations at Lincoln had fallen to zero in this period is not clear.

Not all of the Gilbertine houses were double houses. In Lincolnshire there were three houses for canons only, in Yorkshire there were the same number and also eight small houses were founded for canons in other counties. Elsewhere in the diocese of Lincoln there were two small houses for canons only: Clattercote in Oxfordshire and New Biggin outside Hitchin in Hertfordshire. In the diocese of Ely there were the two small houses of



Marmont and Fordham, plus the priory of St Edmund's, which was attached to Cambridge University. Further south, houses were founded in the diocese of Salisbury, namely Poulton and St Margaret's outside Marlborough. In the diocese of York, just over the Yorkshire Nottinghamshire border was the Gilbertine house of Mattersey. An injunction in the Chapter Records for 1508 described these houses as 'minor' houses of the Order and inferred that the majority of the convent consisted of canons who were either sub deacons or deacons and possibly novices.<sup>312</sup> The injunction went on to say that canons who entered such houses 'were better received from the beginning in the habit of canons or clothed with it in any of these houses'. It was probably the case that men who had not taken priest's orders spent some time in one of these houses away from the influences of their home counties, or as the latter part of the injunction suggested, some young men were admitted as novices into these houses rather than the major houses of the order.

### **Canons Presented to Benefices Outside of the Priory**

St Gilbert chose the Augustinian rule for the canons of his order. Brian Golding has suggested that this would have been a natural choice for Gilbert since the care of religious women would have been suitable for men who followed this religious order.<sup>313</sup> Two Augustinian communities had experimented with nunneries, those of Arrouaise and Prémontre.<sup>314</sup> It would have been Gilbert's intention that his canons were to be the guardians of the nuns thus leaving them little time to be in contact with the outside world.

In common with all other monastic orders, along with the grant to them of lands and property, they were granted the advowson of churches; the right of nominating a suitable person to act as the parish priest. It was the responsibility of the diocesan bishop to ensure that the nominee was suitable to be admitted to the benefice. The candidate had to be twenty five years of age, be known for 'his quality of learning, and the commendable

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<sup>312</sup> MS Douce 136, fo. 108v.

<sup>313</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 31-2.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*

nature of his way of life.<sup>315</sup> He also had to be ‘in orders’ and be capable of taking priest’s orders if he had not already done so. If the bishop deemed him to be suitable, then letters were sent to the archdeacon or his official.<sup>316</sup> One of the churches that Robert Chesney Bishop of Lincoln granted as an endowment to St Katherine’s Priory outside Lincoln in 1148 was Bracebridge. During the fifteenth century canons from St Katherine’s priory were being presented to this vicarage.<sup>317</sup> In 1435 William Dyghton was presented to the vicarage. On his resignation in 1450 he was succeeded by another canon of St Katherine’s, John Hammond. In this case a note was added in the Bishop’s register that such an appointment was contrary to custom *per clericos seculares et nulletenus regulares regi et gubernari consuetum*. Nevertheless other canons, William Cely in 1464, Richard Wakefeld in 1474, James Dymoke in 1488 and Robert Wittewonge in 1504, followed his appointment.

In 1449 the Prior of St Katherine’s John Bushby was presented to the rectory of Hykeham, which he held to his death in 1466. In 1462 the Prior and Convent of Bullington presented Richard Waynflete Abbot of Kirkstead to the vicarage of Hackthorne. On his resignation the presentation fell to the turn of St Katherine’s who nominated one of their own canons John Staynfeld. In 1466 they presented to the vicarage of Saxby John Grave an Augustinian Canon of Bridlington, who for some reason was deprived of this office in 1474. Their own canon Richard Wakefeld, afterwards vicar of Bracebridge was presented to the vicarage of Marton in 1473. He was succeeded by John Hansande and Thomas Jackson. The vicarage of Canwick was held by another canon of the house, John Katerynson from 1501 to 1529.

The fact that these men had been presented to the benefice does not necessarily mean that they were resident within the parish. In the next section it will be shown that there is evidence to show that some of the canons were holding more than one benefice

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<sup>315</sup> Margaret Bowker, *The Secular Clergy in the Diocese of Lincoln 1494 – 1520*, Cambridge University Press, (1968), p. 64 – 5.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> This following list of canons has been extracted from the Bishops’ of Lincoln Registers in the Lincolnshire Archives Office by:- R E G Cole, *The Priory of St Katherine’s without Lincoln, of the Order of St. Gilbert of Sempringham*, Lincoln Architectural Society Reports Vol. 27, p 303. This list has been checked with the Bishops’ Registers held in the Lincolnshire Archives Office.

simultaneously. The constitutions of Ottobuono in 1268 condemned the practice of holding more than one benefice at a time with ‘the cure of souls’<sup>318</sup> which prevented the priest from residing in a single parish in order that he could carry out his duties fully.<sup>319</sup>

A possible reason for St Katherine’s priory using its own canons as parish priests in churches which had been granted to the priory would be that of saving money that otherwise would have been given to a secular priest. Entries in the Institution lists in the Bishops’ registers suggest that this practice was common within the Gilbertine order. If the canon was non resident the care of the parish would have been undertaken by a curate. A curate would only have been paid a salary which would have been much less than the annual income of the benefice. Margaret Bowker has suggested that when priests were reported as being non resident, they did in fact officiate at the major feast days such as the Easter Communion.<sup>320</sup> In the case of canons holding more than one benefice, this would have taken the canons away from their primary duty of the care of the nuns.

### **Dispensations Granted to Gilbertine Canons**

In the five years prior to the dissolution many of the monks and canons in the Gilbertine monasteries throughout the country began to apply for dispensations in order that they could work as parish priests. Many of these men would have foreseen that the dissolution of their houses was imminent and they were preparing themselves for when this happened. The Calendars of Papal Letters and the Faculty Office registers held in Lambeth Palace Library show that a number of Gilbertine canons were granted dispensations to hold a benefice outside the priory. After the breach with Rome in 1534, the Faculty Office dealt with all such dispensations. Unfortunately, transcripts of the Papal Registers have not been published for the period after 1521. Hence from 1521 to 1534 it is not known how many dispensations were granted.

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<sup>318</sup> ‘Cure of souls’ – Offices of the priest which included, instruction by means of sermons, admonitions, and administration of the sacrament.

<sup>319</sup> Margaret Bowker, *The Secular Clergy in the Diocese of Lincoln*, p. 85.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid*, p. 88.

A dispensation was a relaxation in canon law. Canon law was not divine law, but came about through tradition and Papal decrees. Papal dispensations can be divided into three classes, two of which apply to the clergy and the other to the laity.<sup>321</sup> One of the dispensations which applied to the clergy concerned the tenure of benefices. Two instances where these dispensations applied were the releasing of men in religious orders from their vows to become secular priests. The other instance concerned the holding of ‘benefices in plurality’. The papacy had for a long time tried to enforce restrictions on clergy holding more than one benefice ‘with the cure of souls’. A dispensation was equivalent to a title deed, which had legal standing. Without it an institution to a benefice would in theory be refused.

The institution lists in the Lincoln Bishops’ Registers showed that there were a number of canons who had been granted benefices who did not appear to have been granted a dispensation. Some of these dispensations may be in the unpublished Papal Registers from 1521 to 1534. D S Chambers has stated that not all Papal letters were entered into the registers.<sup>322</sup> If this were true, then this would explain the cases where there is no recorded dispensation. However, there was the possibility that canon law was being ignored so that priories could install their own canons into appropriated churches in order to increase their revenues and avoid any payment that would have been demanded by the Papal court. The Papal registers recorded nine dispensations granted to Gilbertine canons over the period 1476 to 1514. Of these nine only three can be identified with any degree of certainty who had taken up benefices after the granting of a dispensation.

John Aton the prior of Chicksands was granted in January 1477 a

‘dispensation to receive and retain for life with the said priory, or if he resign it, with any other similar benefice of the said order, any other benefice with cure

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<sup>321</sup> D S Chambers, *Faculty Office Registers 1534 – 1549*, Oxford Clarendon Press (1966), p. xv.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid*, p. xvii.

wont to be governed by secular clerks, even if a parish church and to resign it simply or for exchange, as often as he pleases.’<sup>323</sup>

This dispensation allowed John Aton to take up a benefice, resign it and take up another presumably doing this as many times as he wished. A motive for doing this would be to allow him to take up more lucrative benefices at each exchange. There was a three year gap before John Aton took up a benefice outside the priory. He was instituted as vicar of Linslade in Buckinghamshire on the 8 November 1480. In 1493 it appeared that Chicksands priory had lost the appropriation of Linslade vicarage.<sup>324</sup> John Aton reapplied for his dispensation to hold a benefice outside the priory to be confirmed, as ‘he fears the said letters could be branded surreptitious with the passage of time’. This dispensation was granted on the 30 January 1493.<sup>325</sup> On the 26 July of the same year he was presented to the rectory of Wroughton again in Buckinghamshire, and he resigned it in 1498.<sup>326</sup> William Gayton the prior of Sixhills obtained a dispensation on the 15 July 1508 ‘to receive and retain any benefice, with or without cure, usually held by secular clerks.’<sup>327</sup> Two years later on the 2 June 1510, his own priory presented him to the vicarage of Tealby in Lincolnshire.<sup>328</sup>

The case of Robert Helmesley was rather more problematic. He was ordained firstly sub deacon, then deacon and finally priest in 1477 at Sempringham Priory.<sup>329</sup> He was granted a dispensation ‘to receive and retain any benefice, with or without cure, usually held by secular clerks’ on the 13 February 1497.<sup>330</sup> A Robert Helmesley who described himself as a priest (not a canon) was presented by the Gilbertine priory of Bullington to the vicarage of Burgh in Lincolnshire in 1495.<sup>331</sup> If these were the same person, then Robert must have held this benefice for two years before seeking his dispensation. He was granted a

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<sup>323</sup> *Calendar of the Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. W H Bliss, C Johnson, and J A Twemlow, HMSO, (London, 1893- ). Volume 13, p. 591.

<sup>324</sup> George Lipscomb, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Buckingham*, 4 volumes, Vol. 3, p 467.

<sup>325</sup> *Calendar of Papal Registers*, Volume 16, p. 52.

<sup>326</sup> Lipscombe, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Buckingham*, Vol. 3, p 467.

<sup>327</sup> *Calendar of Papal Registers*, Volume 18, p 571.

<sup>328</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Bishop’s Register 23, fo. 5v.

<sup>329</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Bishop’s Register 21.

<sup>330</sup> *Calendar of Papal Registers*, Volume 16, p. 672.

<sup>331</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Bishop’s Register 22, fo. 7r.

further dispensation in 1504 when he was prior of Sempringham to hold two benefices.<sup>332</sup>

The conditions of the grant were as follows:

‘the secular or one, at his choice. Of the regular *in titulum* or, if he prefers, the secular or two regular *in commendam* for life; he may resign them, at once or successively, simply or for exchange, as often as he pleases’.<sup>333</sup>

This is an example of a Gilbertine canon holding ‘benefices in plurality’ and allowed Robert Helmesley to hold two benefices simultaneously, and to resign them and take up others as many times as he pleased. There was no record of him taking up any further benefices. The Faculty Office Registers listed eight Gilbertine canons who were granted dispensations before the dissolution. The dispensations that were granted to virtually all canons on the eve of the dissolution have been excluded from this list.

William Spendley a canon of Alvingham Priory was granted a dispensation to hold a benefice on 20 June 1538.<sup>334</sup> Six days later he was instituted to the vicarage of Bennington in Lincolnshire, being presented by the prior and convent of Alvingham. Miles Gill who was described as a canon of the Order of Sempringham, and was a canon of Chicksands at the dissolution, was granted a dispensation to hold a benefice on 12 January 1537.<sup>335</sup> He was instituted six years later to the church of Timberland in 1543.<sup>336</sup> William Hall, who as the former Prior of Haverholme, was similarly granted a dispensation to hold a benefice on the 20 October 1536.<sup>337</sup> Presumably as no suitable benefice was available he remained as prior of his house. He had to wait until 1541 before he was instituted as vicar of Gedney in September of that year.<sup>338</sup> It can be seen that in most cases it was a few years before benefices became available after the grants of dispensations. There is only one case, that of William Spendly, who obtained a vicarage within a few days of the grant of the dispensation.

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<sup>332</sup> *Calendar of Papal Registers*, Volume 18, p. 441.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, Faculty Office Register Vv, fo. 202r.

<sup>335</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Bishop’s Register 28, fo. 47r.

<sup>336</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Bishop’s Register 28.

<sup>337</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, Faculty Office Register Vv, fo. 101v.

<sup>338</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Bishop’s Register 28, fo. 55v.

### **Numbers of men entering into the Gilbertine order in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries**

The following table shows the numbers of men ordained into the four main religious orders in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire: Benedictines, Cistercians, Augustinian Canons, Premonstratensian Canons and Gilbertine Canons. Other orders existed in these counties, the Carthusians who had Charterhouses in both counties, the Grandimontines who had a single house at Grosmont in Yorkshire and the Cluniacs again only having a single house at Pontefract in Yorkshire. These latter two orders were omitted from the analysis because of both of their low numbers and only being resident in one county. The Carthusians were also omitted because of the low number of candidates presented for ordination by this particular order. Ordination figures have been published for Yorkshire which show that for the Charterhouse at Hull three of the monks at the dissolution out of a total of seven had not been presented for ordination.<sup>339</sup> At Mount Grace priory only two out of the community of twenty who were in residence at the dissolution were ordained.<sup>340</sup> The solitary lifestyle of the Carthusians would not have necessitated large numbers of their monks to have become priests. Because of this the Carthusians were also omitted from the analysis.

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<sup>339</sup> Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks, Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth century Yorkshire*, p. 218 – 9.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid* p. 225.

**Table 7. Ordinations in Lincolnshire (L) and Yorkshire (Y)**

Dates	Gilbertine		Benedictine		Cistercian		Augustinian		Premonstratensian	
	L	Y	L	Y	L	Y	L	Y	L	Y
1451-5	-	4	-	11	-	16	-	23	-	0
1456-60	-	12	-	26	-	15	-	33	-	6
1461-5	-	7	-	11	-	14	-	35	-	2
1466-70	-	7	-	29	-	17	-	26	-	2
1471-5	4	8	13	20	4	20	2	42	7	4
1476-80	8	11	17	20	10	13	12	26	10	8
1481-5	12	13	13	25	7	26	14	41	10	9
1486-90	17	14	16	10	9	25	5	23	7	8
1491-5	15	15	7	26	7	37	7	20	5	13
1496-00	11	21	12	18	9	35	5	30	19	7
1501-5	18	12	10	17	11	42	19	33	7	6
1506-10	15	13	27	26	7	17	19	35	17	13
1511-5	18	19	15	10	2	20	14	26	15	8
1516-20	10	16	11	25	0	26	10	35	2	9
1521-5	9	11	5	38	6	41	6	47	13	16
1526-30	20	8	17	0	16	15	11	23	5	3
1531-5	24	22	9	31	1	23	11	32	11	8
1536-40	0	1	0	8	0	8	4	9	0	2

From 1476 to 1535 the recruitment level of Gilbertine Canons in Yorkshire varied between eleven and twenty two, apart from 1526 to 1530 when the intake was eight. This



gave an average intake of about fifteen over a five-year period. Over the same time span the recruitment into the Benedictine order varied from ten to thirty eight, excluding the five year interval from 1526 to 1530 when the intake was zero, the average being about twenty two over a five year period. Up until 1505 the Benedictines were recruiting about twenty over a five-year period. The recruitment into the Cistercian and Augustinian orders seemed to be more widespread, the intake varying between thirteen and forty two for the Cistercians, and twenty to forty seven for the Augustinians. For the single house of the Premonstratensian order in the county, the intake varies from four to sixteen.

The number of monks and canons who eventually were ordained as priests after being ordained as deacons can be estimated from the surviving pension lists and matching the names with those in the ordination lists. This has been done extensively for Yorkshire for the major religious orders for men. Unfortunately, pension lists for Lincolnshire are not extensive; hence figures obtained only represent a small number of houses. In some cases data is unavailable for some religious orders. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 8 below.<sup>341</sup> Two columns are shown, firstly the total number of priests as a ratio to the total number of priests in the order at the dissolution for each religious order and secondly this ratio expressed as a percentage.

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<sup>341</sup> The figures for Yorkshire have been extracted from Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks, Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*. Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series Volume 150 (1995).

The figures for Lincolnshire have been obtained as follows; Ordination Lists, Lincolnshire Archives Bishops Registers 22, 24, 25, and 26. The pension lists used are as follows: - the Benedictine houses of Crowland, Spalding and Bardney, the Augustinian house of Kyme, the Carthusian house of Axholme and all of the Lincolnshire Gilbertine houses. The names were extracted from the Warrants for pensions printed in, *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, Volume 14, No. 1032.

**Table 8 – Number of Monks/Canons who were ordained as Priests**

Religious Order	Yorkshire		Lincolnshire	
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%
Benedictine	75/105	71	26/60	43
Cistercian	114/187	61		
Gilbertine	21/28	75	60/85	71
Cluniac	3/13	23		
Augustinian	105/163	64	8/10	80
Premonstratensian	10/19	53		
Carthusians	4/27	15	1/8	12.5
Grandmontine	3/5	60		

In compiling this table errors arose for two reasons. Firstly in a very few cases difficulty occurred in matching names due to spelling variations. Secondly and more importantly, it was apparent that not all of the ordinations were recorded. It was quite obvious whilst compiling this data that in a small number of cases the lower orders had not been recorded (sub deacon and deacon). This could have arisen for the following reasons: the scribe may have forgotten or not bothered to compile complete lists for the lower orders or more probably an order of ordination may not have taken place, for example a canon may have taken priests orders when previously he was only a sub-deacon.

The number of priests within the individual communities would have varied depending on the particular needs of the house. Religious orders, which were serving a number of parish churches outside the monastery, would have required a relatively large pool of men to fulfil this function. For orders such as the Carthusians and the Cluniacs, very few priests were required since they had very little contact if any with parish churches. Thus their only need for priests was to serve their own communities. The table showed that the Gilbertines in Yorkshire appeared to have the highest percentage of priests compared to the other orders (sample size of twenty eight canons from four houses). However, the Augustinians had the higher percentage of priests in Lincolnshire. This figure is based on a sample of one religious house whose complement of canons at the dissolution was ten. The Gilbertine sample consisted of 85 canons from nine houses. On the basis of these sample sizes care must be taken when making conclusions in Lincolnshire. If we examine the figures from the point of view of making comparisons between the regular canons and monks, more meaningful conclusion can be drawn because of the larger sample sizes. In Yorkshire the number of regular canons who were ordained as priests was 139 out of a total of 215 (65%) compared with 196 out of 332 (59%) for the monks. The corresponding figures for Lincolnshire are 68 out of 95 (72%) for the regular canons and twenty seven out of 68 (40%) for the monks. From these figures we can see that the regular canons were more likely to be ordained than the monks resulting in them being active in serving parishes in the surrounding area.

Close to the dissolution it was apparent to the monks and canons of all orders that they would have to support themselves in some way after they were ejected from their houses. An examination of the ordination lists showed that prior to the dissolution a larger percentage of men were presenting themselves for priest's orders. In order that a clerk could be promoted to holy orders he had to have a guarantee of financial support to maintain the dignity of his orders.<sup>342</sup> This came about by possession of a 'title'. In the case of canons and monks, their own monastery provided this. In the case of a beneficed priest, the financial support came from the income that he drew from the parish.

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<sup>342</sup> R N Swanson, *Titles to Orders in Medieval English Episcopal Registers*, in *Studies in Medieval History presented to R H C Davies*, ed. H Mayr-Harting & I Moore, London (1985), p. 223.

Unbeneficed clerks had to find a sponsoring institution before the ordination took place. The ordination lists in the episcopal registers showed that religious houses sponsored large numbers of unbeneficed ordinations. Without such a sponsor the financial burden fell directly on the diocesan bishop to support the ordinand. Naturally, the bishops would not want to take on this burden. After the dissolution a title would have been difficult to obtain without the sponsorship of a parish or the help of a person who was willing to give a financial guarantee. One example of an ex-Gilbertine canon who was ordained as a priest after the dissolution was John Colman who was a canon at St Katherine's outside Lincoln. He was ordained priest on 25 March 1542 and his sponsor was [...] Danby, who was described as an 'armiger', probably a professional soldier.<sup>343</sup> By 1554 Colman had become curate of Waltham in Lincolnshire<sup>344</sup> and in 1576 he had become Rector of Waltham.<sup>345</sup> For Lincolnshire it is unfortunate that ordination lists have not survived for the period 1450 to 1470. The data from 1471 to 1540 showed quite a different pattern for this county, the variation was slightly more erratic and the average levels of recruitment for some orders were significantly lower.

The following chart gives a direct comparison for all of the Gilbertine houses in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire for the years 1401 until 1540.

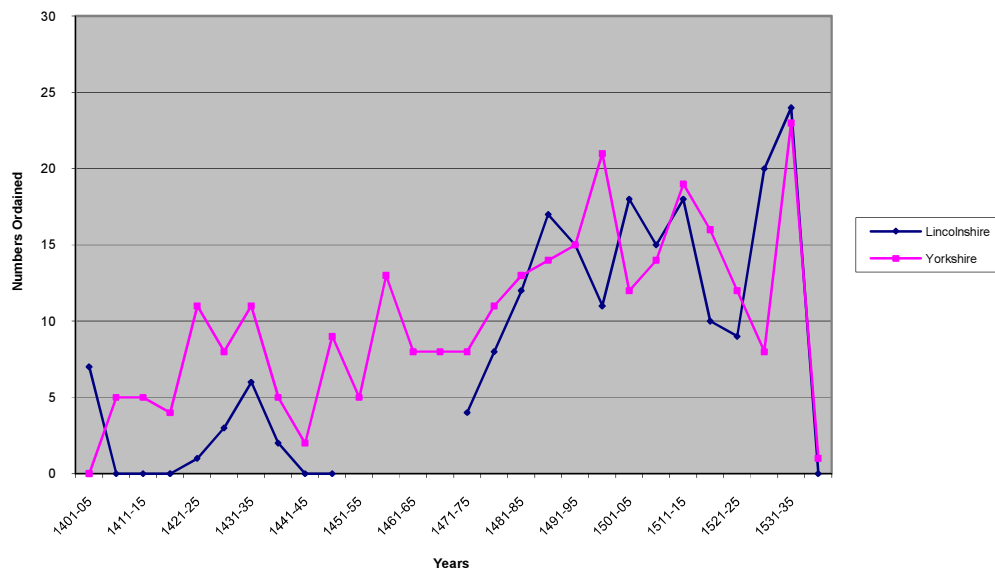
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<sup>343</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Bishops Register 16, fo. 63r.

<sup>344</sup> G A J Hodgett, *The State of the Ex-Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln*, Lincoln Record Society, Volume 53 (1959), p. 111.

<sup>345</sup> *Lincoln Episcopal Records in the Time of Thomas Cooper Bishop of Lincoln 1571-1584*, ed. C W Foster, Lincoln Record Society Vol. 2, (1912), page 177.

**Gilbertine Ordinations in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire**



The graph on page 81 shows that in Yorkshire no ordinations were taking place between 1390 and 1405 whereas the ordinations in Lincolnshire were gradually increasing. It also shows that during the years just after the Black Death the Yorkshire houses were recruiting reasonable numbers into the order whereas the Lincolnshire houses were recruiting none. The reasons for these differences is not entirely clear. As discussed earlier it may have been due to the poor financial management within the order at the end of the fourteenth century. The Bar Chart on page 86 gives the number of sub deacon ordinations for all of the Gilbertine houses between 1451 and 1540. This chart shows that between 1451 and 1485 the numbers of canons who were presented for sub deacon's orders was steadily increasing. After 1485 the numbers increased somewhat, apart from a dip between 1516 and 1526. The graph above shows that after 1401 the recovery was following similar patterns for the two counties apart from opposing trends in 1500.

**Conclusions**

After the Black Death the Gilbertine order in common with the other religious orders suffered badly with regard to loss of numbers within their communities. In the subsequent years the recovery in Yorkshire suggests a similar pattern to that in Lincolnshire from about 1425 apart from c.1501 when ordinations increase in Yorkshire but decrease in

Lincolnshire. The poor recruitment in the early years of the fifteenth century may be due to the after effects and other outbreaks of the Black Death which occurred in the second half of the fourteenth century. However, the figures in Table 2 show that in 1540 the targets set for Yorkshire by the General Chapter had not been met, whereas in Lincolnshire these targets had been reached by the majority of the houses. In the absence of further data a possible conclusion for this discrepancy may be that in Yorkshire a relatively large number of canons may have died in the years leading to the dissolution and with the imminent closure of these houses they failed to recruit new members. The Chapter records make it very clear that a significant number of the houses were at crisis level in terms of the number of canons required to serve the nuns of the order.

The Gilbertine order always allowed older men to enter the order, men above the age of thirty were not compelled to learn all of the liturgical offices which was compulsory for younger men entering the order. However, one solution to overcome the recruitment problem may have been to allow a greater proportion of older men to be admitted. Another possibility is that the minimum age limit may have been dropped in certain cases. The estimated age of Thomas Marshall when he became a sub deacon was seventeen which was below the minimum age limit of twenty before a young man could be admitted as a canon. Despite this policy evidence shows that at the dissolution the age profile of the canons of the Yorkshire priories was relatively young compared to those of other religious orders showing that a number of these older men may have been recruited close to the dissolution. From this we can conclude that within the county of Yorkshire, the Gilbertine order and its traditions were very much alive, whereas in Lincolnshire it had entered a decline.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE GILBERTINE NUNS

#### Introduction

This chapter will examine the two most important areas in the lives of the Gilbertine nuns. Firstly the type of reading material that may have been available for the nuns to read within their libraries and secondly the liturgical life of the Gilbertine nuns. In each case the available evidence will be used to analyse their lives from the foundation of the order onwards. Owing to the lack of evidence in the later years of the order it will only be possible to speculate on how their lives had changed by the beginning of the sixteenth century. The existing material concerning their spiritual lives, plus the statutes issued by the General Chapter at the beginning of the sixteenth century will be used to form a picture of their lives during the latter years of the order. Before embarking on a discussion of the type of material that nuns were reading, it will be necessary to examine the literacy of the women who were members of religious orders.

A number of writers have written on the subject of the spiritual lives of the nuns of other orders. Paul Lee in his study of the nuns of the Dominican priory of Dartford has examined the learning and Latin literacy of these nuns. He concluded that literacy in English nunneries from the end of the thirteenth century was mostly vernacular.<sup>346</sup> He also goes on to say that literacy did not necessarily include the ability to be able to write. He uses the example of certain nuns from Syon Abbey who were writing their own breviaries in the sixteenth century, but were performing the task badly.<sup>347</sup> The ownership of printed books at Syon Abbey has been discussed by Vincent Gillespie in his work on this abbey.<sup>348</sup> He gives examples of printed works which were both acquired by the Abbey and works which were owned by individuals. In Leland's list of Manuscripts

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<sup>346</sup> Paul Lee, *Nunneries, Learning and Spirituality in Late Medieval English Society, The Dominican Priory of Dartford*, York Medieval Press, (2001), p. 136.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid*, p. 138.

<sup>348</sup> Vincent Gillespie, *Syon Abbey*, The British Library, (2001). Nancy Bradley Warren, *Spiritual Economies, Female Monasticism in Later medieval England*, University of Pennsylvania Press, (2001), pp. li – lvi.

belonging to the Lincolnshire monasteries compiled just before the dissolution, Leyland lists a number of Gilbertine houses which had libraries consisting of printed books. He obviously considers the contents of these works to be mundane as he does not give any titles or a clue as to the number of these books which he found.<sup>349</sup> However, one printed book which almost certainly belonged to a Gilbertine nun at Watton priory has survived.<sup>350</sup> This demonstrates that the men and women in Gilbertine houses were taking advantage of the new technology of printing and may have been taking advantage of the 'new learning' that was being published.

Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Felicity Riddy have carried out work on the spiritual lives of these women in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>351</sup> Wogan-Browne uses the fifteenth century English life of Edith of Wilton to examine the spiritual lives of communities of women in the fifteenth century.<sup>352</sup> Felicity Riddy has examined the book ownership of nunneries in the fifteenth century and she concludes that the literary culture of nuns during this period 'not only overlapped but was more or less indistinguishable from that of devout gentlewomen.'<sup>353</sup> As will be shown in this chapter the titles of very few works that may have been used by Gilbertine nuns are known. However, it may be that women in Gilbertine monasteries were reading similar material.

The surviving book catalogues and the lists of known books which are known to have belonged to religious houses indicate that the members of these houses were 'engaging with the new spirituality emerging from outside the clerical establishment.'<sup>354</sup> These lists

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<sup>349</sup> Liddell, J R, 'Leland's Lists of Manuscripts in Lincolnshire Monasteries', *EHR*, 54 (1939).

<sup>350</sup> See See pages 129-130 of this chapter.

<sup>351</sup> Felicity Riddy, 'Women Talking about the things of God: a Late Medieval Sub-Culture,' in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150 – 1500*, ed. by Carol M Meale, (1996).

Jocelyn Wogan Browne, 'Outdoing the Daughters of Syon?: Edith of Wilton and the Representation of Female Community in Fifteenth Century England,' in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy*, Brepol, (2000).

<sup>352</sup> Jocelyn Wogan Browne, 'Outdoing the Daughters of Syon?: Edith of Wilton and the Representation of Female Community in Fifteenth Century England,' pp. 393 – 409.

<sup>353</sup> Felicity Riddy, 'Women Talking about the things of God: a Late Medieval Sub-Culture,' in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150 – 1500*, p. 110.

<sup>354</sup> James G Clark (ed), *The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England*, Woodbridge, (2002), p. 19.



show that Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton were popular authors.<sup>355</sup> Surviving evidence shows that the commitment to reform in reading material was centred on the Carthusians in London and the Brigittine nunnery of Syon. Titles of known works show that members of these communities were producing devotional and pastoral texts.<sup>356</sup> In addition to the London Charterhouse, spiritual material was being written by members of Mount Grace priory in Yorkshire. Writers from this house included Nicholas Love, one of his works being the *Myrroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*. In this work Love ‘proposes each episode of the gospel narrative to the readers affective meditation’ he explains any difficulties which may occur and offers advice in their devotional use.<sup>357</sup> Evidence of book ownership in nunneries apart from that of book lists come from bequests and gifts of books by individuals to the religious houses. In the fourteenth century the majority of these books were liturgical. However, at the beginning of the fifteenth century devotional material was being added to the libraries of nunneries.<sup>358</sup> Up until about 1450 many of these books were in French, but later additions consisted mainly of books written in English.<sup>359</sup> The book gifts to nunneries doubled between 1349 and 1501 which shows that there was a growth of general literacy in these houses.<sup>360</sup> Mary Erler has shown that the number of non service books that were owned by a nunnery would have depended on the date of the foundation of the house, its wealth and its characteristic spirituality.<sup>361</sup> Forty six books are known to have belonged to the nuns of Syon Abbey. Of these thirty seven were for liturgical use and nine belonged to their library. In addition to these are eleven printed books all of which appear to have belonged to individual nuns.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> For a discussion on the works of Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton, see Jonathan Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire*, Boydell Press, (1988).

<sup>356</sup> James G Clark (ed), *The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England*, p.19.

<sup>357</sup> James Hogg, *Mount Grace Charterhouse and Late Medieval Spirituality*, University of Salzburg, (1980), pp. 18 – 23.

<sup>358</sup> Mary C Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety in Late Medieval England*, Cambridge University Press, (2002), p. 39.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid*, p. 40.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid*, p. 41.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid*, p. 31.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid*, p. 36.

### **Literacy and Learning in the Religious Orders for Women**

Schools in medieval England were intended for the education of boys not girls. Generally they were run by clerks and their primary purpose was to provide instruction in the reading and writing of Latin. This education began with the reading and singing of liturgical texts, progressing to the study of Latin grammar, prose composition and finally if they progressed this far, to reading Latin literature and learning the principles of literary criticism. The more able boys then would have attended one of the universities at either Oxford or Cambridge. Such a university education would have allowed them to enter the ranks of the clergy or the civil service.<sup>363</sup>

The education of women was far more restricted. Of the girls from noble families a small number may have been able to attend one of the public grammar schools.<sup>364</sup> For the majority of women the only available schooling was that provided by the nunneries. David Bell has suggested four levels of literacy with regard to English nuns which applied to Latin literacy.<sup>365</sup> ‘The first and simplest level was the ability to read a text without understanding it. The second level was to read and understand a well known liturgical text.’ This level of literacy would have continually exposed a nun to the offices of the church and might well have provided her with some basic Latin and a general idea of how the language worked. This method was used in schools where the psalter and the primer were used as the basic school books for learning the language. Nuns at this level would have had little if any understanding of the grammatical rules. ‘The third level would involve the reading and understanding of non liturgical texts or less common texts from the liturgy.’ The final and highest level ‘was the ability to compose and write a text of one’s own.’

A very early view held by Baskerville and Power was that the majority of the nuns were illiterate i.e. were ignorant of Latin.<sup>366</sup> Their argument is based on the fact that the

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<sup>363</sup> David N Bell, *What Nuns read: Books and Libraries in Medieval English Nunneries*, Cistercian Publications Kalamazoo, Michigan – Spencer, Massachusetts (1995), p 58.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid*, p 59.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>366</sup> G Baskerville, *English Monks and the Suppression*, New Haven (1937), p 208.  
Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, Cambridge (1922), p 246-60.

diocesan bishops furnished the individual nunneries with English translations of the injunctions that were imposed on their houses after a visitation had taken place.

Baskerville also gives an example of the Augustinian nuns of Lacock in Wiltshire who knew French well and that the rule of the order that they had in their library was written in French.<sup>367</sup> This cannot be accepted as applying to all nunneries. In the diocese of Norwich for example, the nuns seem to have understood Latin because the bishops' injunctions to them were in that language. There is no evidence to show that they were translated into English.

Alexandra Barrett and Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran viewed the definition of literacy differently. They both regarded being able to read and write in French and English as being literate.<sup>368</sup> Barrett showed that learning and literacy of nuns in Latin deteriorated in the Middle Ages. In Anglo Saxon times Abbesses both received and sent letters in Latin and treatises were written for the nuns in Latin. She also gave an example of a nun, Muriel, of Wilton Abbey in Wiltshire, during this period who wrote Latin verse.<sup>369</sup> Hoepfner Moran argued that we should not be misled by the prejudices of the medieval writers who often considered only those with a facility in the Latin language to be educated or literate.

Virginia Bainbridge on her work on the women and learning of the nuns of Syon Abbey, has suggested that a person who could read could not automatically write since these skills were not taught together as they are today.<sup>370</sup> When reading, some people could follow a text as it was being read out loud, or they could follow the text in a book with the help of pictures, for example an illustrated book of hours.<sup>371</sup> She identified three levels of literacy amongst the nuns of Syon. Firstly, using the liturgical books that were

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid, p. 208.

<sup>368</sup> Alexandra Barrett, "Introduction", in *Women's writing in Middle English*, ed. Alexandra Barrett, New York, (1992) p. 3.

Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran, *Literacy and Education in Northern England 1350-1550, A Methodical Inquiry*, Northern History 17 (1981), p. 5. See also, Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran, *Education and Learning in the City of York 1300 – 1550*, Borthwick Paper no. 55, Borthwick Institute (1979).

<sup>369</sup> Alexandra Barrett, "Introduction", in *Women's writing in Middle English*, p. 3.

<sup>370</sup> Virginia Bainbridge, *Syon Abbey and its Books, Reading, Writing and Religion, c. 1400 – 1700*, ed. by E A Jones and Alexandra Walsham, Woodbridge: Boydell, (2010), p. 85.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

used during the liturgy, secondly devotional treatises that were written in English or French and thirdly books which were read for pleasure. This latter level would have demanded a much greater degree of understanding.<sup>372</sup>

An examination of the lists of surviving books that were owned by English nunneries showed that a large amount of French literature was circulating among English female religious houses.<sup>373</sup> Apart from biblical and liturgical material we find works on the Lives of the Fathers of the Church and the Lives of the saints, works by Robert Grosseteste, and Peter of Peckham. M. Dominica Legge has suggested that a MS which is now deposited in York Minster Library contains Peter of Peckham's 'La Lumiere as Lais' and may have belonged to the Gilbertine priory of Shouldham in Norfolk.<sup>374</sup> This particular work is written in French and according to A T Baker the original work was written some time after 1270.<sup>375</sup> Legge has concluded that this particular work was written by a professional scribe in or for Shouldham priory during the last quarter of the thirteenth century. She goes on to speculate that Peter of Peckham began as an Augustinian canon in Surrey and may have moved to become a member of the Shouldham community.<sup>376</sup> Some of this Anglo Norman literature was written specifically for nuns or in some cases for particular nunneries. Some of it may even have been written by nuns themselves.

By the middle of the fourteenth century the language of the literate laity had changed from French to English.<sup>377</sup> During this period more people were able to read, hence the demand for books increased, resulting in the price of books falling.<sup>378</sup> Many of the English nunneries might have taken advantage of this and would have expanded their libraries with these books. David Bell stated that of all the surviving books from English nunneries date from after 1400 and that more than two thirds of the non liturgical

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid, pp. 85 – 86.

<sup>373</sup> Neil Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books*, London (1964).

<sup>374</sup> M D Legge, Pierre de Peckham and his 'Lumiere as Lais', *Modern Language Review*, 46 (1951), p. 193. York Minster Library MS. XVI. N. 3.

<sup>375</sup> A T Baker, in *Revue des Langues Romanes*, LIII, (1910), p 317.

<sup>376</sup> M D Legge, Pierre de Peckham and his 'Lumiere as Lais', p. 193.

<sup>377</sup> David Bell, *Ibid*, p. 57.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

volumes are in English.<sup>379</sup> Apart from the Wycliffe translations of the scriptures we find English versions of patristic and medieval treatises and a number of original works by such writers as Capgrave, Chaucer, Hilton. We also find anonymous works and translations of works such as the Ancrene Rule, the Book of the Craft of Dying, The Cleansing of Mans Soul, The Dream of the Pilgrimage of the Soul etc. Alice Henley, Abbess of Godstow caused an English translation to be made of the Latin Abbey Register in to which were copied all the charters of her Abbey.<sup>380</sup> In the preface the translator says that ‘nuns for the most part are well learned in English books’.

A similar impression of nuns being well learned in English books is given in a book that was written for the nuns of Syon Abbey. The ‘Myroure of Oure Ladye’ was written especially for the nuns by one of the brothers of the abbey.<sup>381</sup> At Syon Abbey the education of the nuns continued within the cloister where it was the duty of the Bridgettine brothers to train the nuns for their contemplative vocation.<sup>382</sup> It contained a devotional treatise on the divine service, a translation and an explanation of the Hours and masses of Our Lady as was used at Syon Abbey. He described the types of books that they should read and the way that they should profit from them. He had the following to say regarding the reading of their books.

‘ And therefore the Pope byddeth that this holy service shulde be sayde studiously. For study is a grete and a vyolente applying of the harte to do a thyng with a greate and a fervent wyll. And therefore firste to sayth studiously and then devoutly. But for yf youre harte be set sadly, and inwardly to study aboute the stablynge of the mynde in God, ye can not singe ne saye hys service devoutly.’<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid, p. 71.

<sup>380</sup> *English Register of Godstow Nunnery, near Oxford*, ed A Clark, EETS/OS, 129, London, (1911), pp 25-26.

<sup>381</sup> *Syon Abbey and its Books, Reading, Writing and Religion, c. 1400 – 1700*, p. 86.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> John Henry Blunt, *The Myroure of Oure Ladye, Containing a Devotional Treatise on Divine Service, with a Translation of the Offices Used by the Sisters of the Brigittine Monastery of Sion at Iselworth, During the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, Early English Text Society, Extra Series, (1873), Vol 19, p. 63.

## Literacy and Learning – The Gilbertine Nuns

It is clear from the original Institutes of the Order that girls of various levels of literacy in Latin were accepted as novices.

If anyone comes to conversion to become a nun and the prioress or the novice mistress sees that it is not possible for her to be taught the office in the church, before she is received it should be told to her that she should apply herself to, as the literate, to the office of the church.<sup>384</sup>

This sentence shows that novices were accepted into the order who had not been taught the basic Latin in order to understand the daily offices used by the order. Such girls were given the opportunity to learn sufficient Latin in order to fulfil this requirement once they had been accepted as a novice.<sup>385</sup> Using David Bell's definitions of literacy, during the thirteenth century it was expected that a nun would have achieved at least the second level of literacy, that is, to be able to read and understand a liturgical text. However, if it was determined that a novice was not capable of learning the basic Latin texts that would be required of a choir nun, the girl would be given the option of becoming a lay nun (*laicas monachas*).<sup>386</sup> If this was unacceptable to her, she could leave the order.

In the later statutes of the order issued by the legatine visitation of 1268 was a statement which endorses the fact that not all of the nuns were able to understand Latin.<sup>387</sup> This particular statute concerns the sealing of documents concerning the business of the priory. Three senior nuns, not the prioress, held the key of the chest which held the convent seal, no one person holding more than one key. If a document required the seal of the house, the seal was brought to the chapter house by the three nuns along with the prioress. Prior to sealing the document, the contents were read to the nuns' representatives at the window house by the senior canons of the house. It was then taken

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<sup>384</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Douce 136 fo. 74 It must be remembered that these Institutes were laid down in the thirteenth century.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> MS Douce 136, fo. 74r..

<sup>387</sup> MS Douce 136, fo. 89v – 90r. The statutes issued by the legatine visitation are to be found on ff. 88r – 94r.

to the nuns' chapter house where it was explained in a 'language known to all' and after discussion it would be signed. Brian Golding has suggested that such a language was probably French or English rather than Latin.<sup>388</sup>

Gilbertine nuns were expected, in common with all other orders of nuns, to read one book during the year. The Institutes tell us that on the first Sunday in Lent, at the end of the Chapter, books were distributed to the nuns for them to read in the coming year. Those who had not read the books allocated to them in the previous year were to ask for pardon. This implied that all the nuns could read, the lettered nuns may have read Latin texts and the unlettered nuns would read either French or English texts.<sup>389</sup>

### **The Library of the Gilbertine Nuns**

Up until recently the only books that are known to have belonged to individual Gilbertine Houses were those that have been identified by Neil Ker, David Bell and the list compiled by John Leland on his travels around the country prior to the dissolution of the monasteries.<sup>390</sup> This list includes books with identifiable titles owned by particular houses plus unidentified holdings of printed books owned by a number of houses. The books that have been identified by Ker and Bell, apart from one, may have formed part of the canons' libraries. The remaining book, a psalter, was given by Robert de Lisle in 1339 to his daughters Audere and Alborou who were nuns of Chicksands priory.<sup>391</sup> After their deaths the psalter was to remain with the nuns at Chicksands.

By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it is unlikely that many of the Gilbertine nuns would have had sufficient knowledge of Latin to enable them to read documents that were written in this language. Evidence to support this comes from the translation of the

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<sup>388</sup> Brian Golding, *Keeping Nuns in Order: Enforcement of the Rules in Thirteenth Century Sempringham*, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 59, No. 4 October 2008.

<sup>389</sup> MS Douce 136 fo. 70v.

<sup>390</sup> N R Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain; A List of Surviving Books*, (Royal Historical Society, 1964). N R Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain; A List of Surviving Books, Supplement to the Second Edition*, edited by Andrew G Watson, (Royal Historical Society, 1987). David N Bell, *The Libraries of the Cistercians, Gilbertines and Premonstratensians*, (The British Library, 1992). J R Liddell, "Leland's Lists of Manuscripts in Lincolnshire Monasteries", *EHR*, 54 (1939), 88-95.

<sup>391</sup> BL, MS Arundel 83.

*Vita* that was made by John Capgrave an Austin Friar of Kings Lynn in 1451.<sup>392</sup> In his prologue, Capgrave tells us that the work was commissioned by the Master of the Order (Nicholas Reysby), ‘for the solitarye women of your religion which unneth can undyrstande Latyn’.<sup>393</sup> In general, their knowledge of Latin would have been at a rudimentary level to enable them to learn particular texts by heart and having their meanings explained to them. It was possible that a very small number of these women would have had knowledge of the language to enable them to translate Latin sermons into English before the prioresses could deliver them to the nuns. If there were no nuns who could perform this task, then the translation would have been carried out by the canons of the house.

Watton priory in the East Riding of Yorkshire was the largest and wealthiest of the Gilbertine houses at the dissolution, but neither Neil Ker nor David Bell has identified a single volume which belonged to this priory. The library of Watton must have been substantial at the time of the dissolution and the records of the time give no clue as to the disposal of its contents. Robert Holgate, the last Master of the Gilbertine order, was granted the site of the priory, excluding the nuns’ church, when the priory was dissolved. It is possible that he may have taken possession of a substantial part of it since he used the prior’s lodging as one of his residences whilst he was President of the Council in the North and Archbishop of York.<sup>394</sup> However, an inventory of his goods at the time of his death does not mention any substantial book ownership.<sup>395</sup> During the time that he was confined to the Tower of London by Queen Mary it may well be the case that they were either destroyed or passed into other hands.<sup>396</sup>

Three works have now been identified as belonging to individual Gilbertine Houses, which may have been used by the nuns of the order, including two of which belonged to

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<sup>392</sup> John Capgrave’s *Life of St Gilbert* has been published in:- J J Munro, *John Capgrave’s Life of St Augustine and St Gilbert of Sempringham*, Early English Text Society, (1910), pp. 61 – 142.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid*, p. 61.

<sup>394</sup> For an account of the Life of Robert Holgate see, A G Dickens, “*Robert Holgate; Archbishop of York and President of the King’s Council in the North*”, *Reformation Studies*, pp 323 – 353.

<sup>395</sup> Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 105.

<sup>396</sup> For an account of Holgate’s confinement in the Tower see A G Dickens, *ibid*, pp 347 – 8.



either Watton Priory or to individual nuns who were resident at Watton. These particular works are as follows:

The Gospel of Nichodemus (Printed Book), British Library Shelf mark C.21.c.20 (2), (1518)

British Library, Egerton MS 3245

Cambridge University Library MS Hh. 1. 11

A further manuscript has been identified which almost certainly belonged to the nuns library of a Gilbertine house.<sup>397</sup> Unfortunately it has not been possible to identify the particular house which owned it with any degree of certainty. The content of this manuscript and the evidence linking it with the Gilbertine nuns will be discussed below.

### **1. The Gospel of Nichodemus**

In the 1518 edition of the ‘Gospel of Nychodemus’ which is written in Middle English and is now in the British Library, the name ‘dame Margaret Nicholson’ appears twice.<sup>398</sup> Birrell has suggested that the dame Margaret mentioned was a nun and may be identified with a nun of the same name who was a member of the Benedictine house of Elstow in Bedfordshire at the time of the dissolution.<sup>399</sup> However, Meale has suggested that this could be the Margaret Nicholson who was a nun at the Gilbertine Priory of Watton in Yorkshire.<sup>400</sup> A handwritten index on the flyleaf of this volume indicates that the Gospel was one of fifteen works that formed part of a more substantial book.<sup>401</sup> Birrell’s research has shown that fourteen of these (including the Gospel) are known to have survived in the collections of the British Library after the original volume was split up sometime between 1757 and 1800.<sup>402</sup> This apocryphal gospel was popular during the middle ages

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<sup>397</sup> British Library MS Harl. 2406.

<sup>398</sup> British Library, Nychodemus Gospell [Translated into English], Published by Wynkyn de Worde, London (1518), Shelf mark C.21.c.20 (2).

<sup>399</sup> T A Birrell, *The Parizzi Lectures, English Monarchs and their Books: From Henry VII to Charles II*, (The British Library, 1985), p 11.

<sup>400</sup> Carol M Meale, The Miracles of Our Lady: Context and Interpretation, in D Pearsall, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain 1150 – 1500*, (Cambridge, 1993), p. 132, n 74.

<sup>401</sup> See Appendix 4.

<sup>402</sup> T A Birrell, The Printed Books of Dame Margaret Nicollson: A Pre-Reformation Collection, in ed. J. Bakker, J. A. Verleun, and J. v.d. Vriesenaerde, eds. *Essays on English and American Literature and a*

and its content featured in the art and drama of the time. It contained the story of Joseph of Arimithaea which had a special attraction for the English on account of the Glastonbury Legend.

An examination of the calendar of saints which precedes the Gospel shows that it probably had a Northern origin due to the inclusion of the feast of St John of Beverley on the 7 May and the inclusion of the feast of St Gilbert on the 4 February. The inclusion of these two saints gave a more likely owner of this work to the Watton nun. Her name appears both on the handwritten index and on the final folio of the calendar which shows that the calendar originally belonged to the original complete volume whilst it was in the possession of Margaret Nicholson. If we accept that this book belonged to the Gilbertine nun then we have clear evidence of the material that was being read by one particular nun who probably was resident at Watton priory.

The family of Margaret Nicholson cannot be identified with any degree of certainty. However, a search of the wills in the York Registry in the Borthwick Institute at York may give a clue to her identity. In his will of 1555, William Nicolson of Flamborough, who describes himself as 'husbandman,' gave his sister Margaret two shillings. No surname is attached to Margaret's name. This may imply that she was unmarried and was living with her brother at the time. Given the proximity of Flamborough to Watton and the evidence in the will it is possible that Margaret may have been a member of this family.

## **2. British Library MS Egerton 3245**

Another possible example of a book that may have belonged to the library of the Gilbertine nuns of Watton is a manuscript in the Egerton collection in the British Library.<sup>403</sup> This is a composite volume containing *The Prick of Conscience*, the treatise *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and a number of religious pieces both in verse and prose of

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*Sheaf of Poems Offered to David Wilkinson on the occasion of his retirement from the Chair of English Literature in the University of Groningen*, (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1987), p. 31.

<sup>403</sup> British Library, Egerton MS 3245. This manuscript is discussed in *British Museum Quarterly*, xiv, 1939 – 40.

late fourteenth century origin. The poem *the Prick of Conscience* was probably written by Richard Rolle but the authorship of *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* is debatable.

Richard Rolle was born c.1300 in Thornton Dale in North Yorkshire. He was the son of a small householder and was supported by Thomas Neville, archdeacon of Durham to study at Oxford University. However, he gave up his studies and returned to the north of England to become a hermit. Despite living a life of solitude he yearned for financial security, and an early patron gave him a cell in his own house, and later a lady supported his seclusion from the world on her estate. Whilst he was a hermit, he wrote a number of mystical works both in Latin and English. The latter part of his life was spent as a hermit close to the Cistercian nunnery of Hampole near Doncaster in Yorkshire. One of his last works was *The Form of Living* which was written to provide Margaret Kirkeby, an anchoress, with guidance on how she should live her life as a recluse.<sup>404</sup> One of his main works may have been the religious poem called the *Pricke of Conscience*. In this work he tells us that it was written in English for those who were unable to read Latin. The poem consists of a prologue and seven books, which examine the beginnings of man's life, the unstableness of the world, death and why death is to be dreaded, purgatory, doomsday and the pains of hell and the joys of heaven. Living close to a community of women could indicate that one of the audiences for this work may have been religious women.

Julia Boffey has described *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* as 'a programme of spiritual building figured allegorically as the construction of an abbey'.<sup>405</sup> It itemises the constituent parts and personnel necessary for the project in ways that are designed to help readers towards some apprehension of true religion of the heart'.<sup>406</sup> This particular work originated in the second half of the fourteenth century as a translation of a French text. The original French version may have been intended for the audience of women. However, the more inclusive forms of address in the English version indicate that it was intended for a wider readership. Julia Boffey expresses doubts as whether this work was

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<sup>404</sup> This account of Richard Rolles life is taken from, *The Middle Ages 700 – 1550*, edited by Michael Alexander and Felicity Riddy, Macmillan, (1989), p. 179.

<sup>405</sup> Julia Boffey, 'The Charter of the Holy Ghost and its Role in Manuscript Anthologies,' *Year Book of English Studies*, vol. 33, (2003),p. 120.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

written by Richard Rolle even though the work appears alongside other works by this author.<sup>407</sup>

On four folios of the manuscript is written the name 'Robert Holgate' in a sixteenth-century hand. There is a strong possibility that this was the Robert Holgate who has already been mentioned and was Master of the Gilbertine order at the dissolution. Also in the hand of the same period is written 'John Danyell oeth this boke'. A family by the name of Daniell were land owners in the nearby village of Kilnwick and the John Daniell mentioned may have been a member of this family.<sup>408</sup> Another member of this family living in Kilnwick mentions Watton Priory and John Bolton who was Master of the order at this time in a will dated 1504.<sup>409</sup> A nun by the name of Alice Daniell is on the pension list of the priory at the dissolution who we can safely say was a member of the Kilnwick family.<sup>410</sup> It is just possible that this volume may have belonged to Alice whilst she was a nun at Watton, taking it away with her when the priory was dissolved. However, with the name of Robert Holgate appearing in the manuscript it is also possible it could have belonged to the canons library. Using this evidence there is a strong possibility that this manuscript was at Watton priory in the sixteenth century.

The religious lyrics which are included at the end of the manuscript may give an insight into the devotional material that was being used by Gilbertine nuns in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>411</sup> This section contains eleven devotional pieces of which nine are unique to this manuscript.<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>408</sup> A John Daniell is recorded at this time as living in Kilnwick. Borthwick Institute, Probate Register 11, fo. 428, Will of William Daniell of Kilnwick (1540).

<sup>409</sup> Borthwick Institute, Probate Register 6, fo. 122 Will of William Daniell of Kynlwyke (1504).

<sup>410</sup> Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks, Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, (1995), Vol. 150, p. 404.

<sup>411</sup> These pieces have been transcribed, items 1 – 5 and 8 – 11 are in R. H. Robbins, 'The Gurney Series of Religious Lyrics', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 54, (1939), pp. 369 – 390. Items 6 & 7 are printed in C. Brown, *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century*, (Oxford, 1924), pp. 114 – 119.

<sup>412</sup> R H Robbins, 'The Gurney Series of Religious Lyrics', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 54, (1939), p. 369.

The lives of Gilbertine nuns, in common with other enclosed orders for women, revolved around a constant cycle of prayer and meditation both in private prayer and the liturgy of the order.<sup>413</sup> A number of the meditations and devotions which appear in this manuscript would have been used during the nuns' periods of private meditation and during the daily liturgy. As to the question of the participation of the Gilbertine nuns in the liturgy of the order, this has been the subject of debate for some time and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. It will be shown that the Institutions of the order and other sources suggest that they did not 'sing' during the daily office but either 'chanted in monotone' or used very simple melodies during parts of the services. However, it would appear that the canons of the order used chants that were based on those used by the Cistercian monks. Some of the Gilbertine offices were celebrated separately, that is, the canons used their own oratory within their own enclosure, and the nuns used their half of the priory church.<sup>414</sup> However, on other occasions, for example on major feast days, the two communities came together in the Priory church, the nuns and canons being separated by a wall which ran the length of the church.<sup>415</sup>

The surviving Ordinal of the order concentrated on the canons' participation within the services with only passing references to the presence of the nuns.<sup>416</sup> This document makes a clear distinction between how the canons and nuns participated. The canons are to 'sing' the antiphons, versicles, responses etc, whereas the nuns were to 'chant' the psalms.<sup>417</sup> No mention was made of the nuns chanting any other parts of the office apart from the psalms, this being their only active part during the office. This would indicate that during the choral parts of the service the nuns would remain silent and may well have meditated during these parts of the service. Some of the material mentioned above could have been examples of the material that was used during their meditation.

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<sup>413</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 109.

<sup>414</sup> Raymonde Foreville and Gillian Keir, *The Book of St Gilbert*, (Oxford Medieval Texts, 1987), p 139. See also, Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine order c. 1130 – c. 1300*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995), pp. 127-8.

<sup>415</sup> Foreville and Keir, *The Book of St. Gilbert*, p. 46.

<sup>416</sup> *The Gilbertine Rite*, ed R M Wooley, 2 vols, Henry Bradshaw Society, 59, 60, (1921-2), vol 1, see for example page 11, the celebration of the Christmas office in the houses of nuns.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid*, pp 62-3.

Two examples from the Egerton manuscript where such material may have been used by Gilbertine nuns are as follows. The first example is a devotional prayer which is headed 'Here beginniþ an oryson of devout entent to be seyed in þe seyng of þe sacrament'.<sup>418</sup> This would have been a prayer which was used during the consecration of the bread at the altar. This prayer is transcribed as follows:-

Welcolme, Lord, in forme of bred  
For me þou þolidist peynful ded  
Blisful body sacrid me befor  
Haf mercy on me I be nouht lorn  
Heyl Iesu crist, saveour of þis world  
The fadrís sone of hevene  
Holy, oft sacrid, lyffiche in flesch  
Sopfast God and verrey man  
The, þe precious body of Iesu Crist  
With al my herte I wurchipe.<sup>419</sup>

The second example which is headed 'Here folwiþ also a devociun to be seyed in tyme of þe levacaun'.<sup>420</sup> This prayer would have been used during the elevation of the host during the Mass:-

I þank þe, Iesu. Of al þy goodnesse  
I cry þe mercy for all my wickednesse  
Iesu for þy passion  
þou kep me fro temptaciun  
Save þou me fro helle  
And bring me þy ioie in to dwelle. Amen.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>418</sup> MS Egerton 3245, fo. 185r.

<sup>419</sup> MS Egerton 3245, fo. 185r.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

During the act of consecration of the bread and wine and the elevation of the host, the nuns would not have heard this part of the service since it took place at the altar within the canons' half of the church. It would have been during these periods of silence that the nuns would have meditated using these prayers.

Before the nun entered the church to celebrate Mass she would have made her confession either to one of the canons, or through private prayer. Included in the meditational prayers in this manuscript was a confessional prayer consisting of 80 lines which begins as follows:-

Al weldand God of myhttis most  
Fadir and sone and Holy Gost  
To þe, Iesu, þat deyd on Croys.<sup>422</sup>

During this prayer she makes her confession to 'Iesu þat deyd on Croys' asking for forgiveness for her sins of 'pryde, coveytyse, letcherye, ydilnes, slauthe, glotenye' and in 'spitouse spechis spokin'. She ends her confession by asking the Virgin Mary, St John the Baptist and Saint Peter to pray for her and 'lose me of sinnis'.

### **3. Cambridge University Library MS Hh. 1. 11**

Two manuscripts are known which contain sermons which were directed at Gilbertine nuns; Bodleian Library MS Lyell 8 and British Library MS Royal 4 B VIII. The Bodleian Library sermons are 'all in praise of Gilbert and his foundations' and have been dated to the early thirteenth century.<sup>423</sup> However, all of these sermons are written in Latin. Not many sermons that have been written in English for the use of nuns have survived; one example of such a work is the 'Sermo angelicus' which appears in a collection of Theological Tracts in a manuscript in the University Library at Cambridge.<sup>424</sup> Veronica O'Mara claims that this sermon was written for the Benedictine nuns of Carrow in Norfolk. This sermon was a translation based on a Latin sermon which appeared in the

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid. fos. 183v – 185r.

<sup>423</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 187.

<sup>424</sup> Cambridge University Library, MS. Hh. 1. 11 fos. 128-132.

‘Sermon Angelicus’ (The Brigittine Breviary).<sup>425</sup> The dialect of the text is East Anglian and it has been suggested that it was probably written in Norfolk. Her argument that it was written for the nuns of Carrow rests on two rather weak arguments. The habit described fits that which is known to have been worn by Benedictine nuns but accurate descriptions of the habits of other orders of nuns are not known in as much detail. Her other argument is that Carrow was sufficiently wealthy to enable it to afford the translation of such a work from the original Latin. Neither of these arguments can point to the origin of this manuscript as belonging to Carrow Priory; they can, but they are not conclusive proof.

This sermon was for the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and was almost certainly written for a community of nuns. The first section of the sermon deals with God’s choice of Mary as mother of his son, emphasising her purity of spirit. A description follows of how the apostles and others were led to her sepulchre after her death and witnessed the raising of her body

‘reysed ayen of oure lorde, here sone, to everlestynge lyf al whyk with þe soule, honourably was to hevене assumpte and abouyn alle othere exaltd in eternal glory’.<sup>426</sup>

The compiler then goes on to describe the ‘seven dignities’ of the Virgin using parts of the nuns’ habit as metaphors for the virtues that the nun should strive to attain. Her ‘smok’ represents contrition and confession, her ‘kirtle’, trust in God, one of the sleeves representing righteousness, the other mercy. Her two boots represented her will to amend her sinful ways and her will to do good works and refrain from evil ways. Her girdle reminded her to do God’s will not her own. The knives which hung from her girdle represented the perpetual joy which would lead her to loving God and renouncing evil. The knowledge of God and what she owed him, her sisters and the world were embodied in the surplice. Her mantle was faith;

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<sup>425</sup> Veronica O’Mara, *A Study and Edition of Middle English Sermons*, (Leeds Texts and Monographs, 1987), pp 141 – 223.

<sup>426</sup> Cambridge University Library, MS Hh. 1. 11. fo. 129v.



‘for as yowre mantyl curyth al yowre vesture and clothyng and alle be undir þat, on þe same wise ye may comprehend al thyng be yowre feith.’<sup>427</sup>

At this point the compiler diverged slightly from the Latin source in that he interprets the ‘lace of þis mantel’ allegorically as the meditation on the Lord’s passion. The remainder of the metaphors are not in the Latin original. The wimple and the veil are used as allegories of two of the vows that a nun makes at her final profession that is abstinence and obedience. The ring that she wears on her finger consists of gold, silver and a stone. These represent three things, desire only God, put away all vain glory and pride and hate uncleanness of flesh. According to O’Mara, the compiler has taken these metaphors from a document that is unknown to us.<sup>428</sup>

A possible contender for the ownership of the manuscript was that of the Gilbertine house of Shouldham in Norfolk. One statement which has been retained in the manuscript is that it appears to have been written by someone who was a member of the same order where he refers to the Blessed Virgin Mary as ‘owre mother’. O’Mara is of the opinion that the compiler was either a member of the same order or a secular priest who acted as a chaplain to the nuns.<sup>429</sup> Janet Burton however, has suggested caution in assuming that the phrase ‘owre mother’ implies the compiler was a canon or a chaplain attached to the order.<sup>430</sup> Her opinion is that this phrase may be a general term which was used when referring to the Blessed Virgin Mary. If we are considering a male authorship, which is the opposite of what Burton suggests, then the author must have been a male member of the community or less likely a chaplain attached to a house of nuns.

A Brigittine monk wrote the original Latin sermon for the Brigittine nuns of Sion Abbey. The Brigittines were a double order, that is, in common with the Gilbertines, they had both male and female members living in separate enclosures using a common church.

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid. fo. 131r.

<sup>428</sup> Veronica O’Mara, *A Study and Edition of Middle English Sermons*, p. 219.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid, p. 204.

<sup>430</sup> Janet Burton, private correspondence, November 2009.

Even though the evidence is not conclusive, it is reasonable to suggest that this work was adapted for the use of nuns in another double order, such as the Gilbertines, rather than for an order of nuns only. However, Briggittine texts may well have been used by other orders.<sup>431</sup> This argument is reinforced by the fact that the compiler of this sermon has only omitted material that pertained to the Briggittine nuns. This sermon appeared to have been written with the purpose of reminding the nuns of their vows and how they should conduct their daily lives.

One of the roles of the prioresses of the order was to deliver sermons to the nuns.<sup>432</sup> The sermons would almost certainly have been delivered in English during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The sermon described above is the only surviving sermon written in English that may have been given to communities of Gilbertine nuns. A number of early sermons which are known to have been written for Gilbertine nuns are all in Latin have already been mentioned.<sup>433</sup> If these were being used in the last two centuries of the order's existence, then, either translations of these sermons existed at the time and have now been lost, or some of the prioresses were capable of reading and translating a Latin text. The surviving Latin sermons were written for specific feast days and in particular a few were written in honour of St. Gilbert.

If we are to assume that this manuscript was read by Gilbertine nuns, we now have further examples of material that was being read by these women. The list of other works contained in this document is given in Appendix 3.

#### **4. British Library MS Harl 2406<sup>434</sup>**

MS Harl 2406 is described as a 'Theological Book'. The first part of the manuscript contains a number of prayers and other theological items both in English and Latin. The 'Pater Noster', 'Ave Maria' and 'Credo' are written in English on folio 1. The three main items are as follows; a 'Devout treatise for the use of nuns', the treatise 'The Abbey of

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<sup>431</sup> Veronica O'Mara, *A Study and Edition of Middle English Sermons*, p. 172.

<sup>432</sup> MS Douce 136, fo. 62v.

<sup>433</sup> Bodleian Library MS Lyell 8 and British Library MS Royal 4 B VIII.

<sup>434</sup> British Library, MS Harl 2406.

the Holy Ghost' and more importantly a letter written by Walter Hilton to a Gilbertine nun and translated into English by Richard Rolle of Hampole.

Walter Hilton was born before 1343 and died on March 24 1396 whilst he was a canon at the Augustinian Priory of Thurgarton in Nottinghamshire. There is evidence to indicate that he was educated at Cambridge University where he obtained the degree of Bachelor of Civil Law before January 1371. Sometime before 1386, like Richard Rolle, he became a hermit and developed a devotion to the life of the Carthusians. In 1386 he wrote an epistle entitled *De Utilitate et Prerogativis Religionis* for his friend Adam Horsley who was about to enter the Carthusian order. The most famous of his works is that of the *Scale of Perfection* which has survived in sixty two manuscripts. This work consists of two books, the first of which is addressed to a woman who has been recently enclosed as an anchoress and provides her with a number of spiritual exercises and meditations. The second book again is addressed to the anchoress and also to a larger more sophisticated audience; its major themes are 'the reformation of the soul in faith alone and in both faith and feeling'.<sup>435</sup>

Unfortunately it is not possible to identify the house from which the document originated with any degree of certainty. The evidence for a Gilbertine ownership comes from two pieces of evidence contained within the manuscript. As has already been stated this manuscript contains a letter written for a particular nun at Sempringham priory by Walter Hilton. This sole piece of evidence cannot be used to say that the manuscript belonged to Sempringham priory since the content of this letter probably circulated amongst all the double houses of the order.

This letter was in English and has been written by Walter Hilton to a 'friend', who was most likely a Gilbertine nun and is written to remind her of her devotional duties. She clearly lived in a community, referring to her sisters and the Chapter. St Gilbert is specifically mentioned as one whose aid is to be sought in her difficulties. At the

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<sup>435</sup> This account of the life of Walter Hilton is taken from, John P H Clark and Rosemary Dorward, *The Scale of Perfection by Walter Hilton*, Paulist Press New York, (1991), pp. 13 – 16.

beginning of the letter Hilton declares he himself is neither a good leader nor a good teacher.

‘a blinde man is no good leder, no doume man is no good techer, but in þis gostly mater I am both blinde and doume, and þerfor I can nouth wele lede to teche, nevye lesse to ye worschippe of gode I shalle expone it as I can’<sup>436</sup>

He then states that man must fight against three enemies, namely, the devil, the flesh and the world. Using a quotation from Job, he likens mans fight against evil to that of a knight, saying that

‘a Christian man in his baptism is made Christ’s knight to fight against his enemies.’<sup>437</sup>

These three enemies are to be defeated by abstinence and chastity against the evils of the flesh, obedience against the devil and a despising of riches against the world. In order to fight these enemies a man must be armed with ‘five rules of good living’. The remainder of the letter then goes on to describe these five rules. These rules are as follows, firstly to fight the temptations of the devil, secondly to do good works, thirdly to confess sins, fourthly to be prepared to forgive her fellow sisters and finally Hilton gives the nun advice on living the communal life.

In the work which follows this letter, and was written in the same hand as the letter, is ‘The Abbey of the Holy Ghost’ which has been mentioned above. The work was addressed to a ‘Brother and Sister’. At first sight this would imply that it was written for the use of particular individuals. However the work preceding the letter which was written in the same hand as the letter, makes it clear that it was written for nuns (plural).

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid, fo. 58r.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

The item preceding this letter was a devout treatise which appeared to have been drawn up for the use of nuns who could well have been nuns of other orders as well as the women members of the Gilbertine order. The section was headed as follows:

‘Tary yu noucht for to turn to gode and delay noth fro day to day; for þe unmercifull deth ravesched sudeynly wrechēs’,<sup>438</sup>

In the catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts in the British Library, the compiler of the catalogue has described this particular work as ‘A devout treatise, seeming to have been drawn up for the use of nuns’.<sup>439</sup> However, the content of the work does not specify that it was for a female audience. The author of the catalogue may have assumed that it was for the use of nuns using the Hilton letter and that both works were written in the same hand. If it was written for the use of nuns, then the work gives the nun advice on the way in which she should lead her life within the convent. The headings of each of the sections are given in Appendix 6.

The evidence presented indicated that this was probably written for a male/female audience and in particular the female members of the community. The presence of the letter written specifically for a Gilbertine nun does not tie it down to a Gilbertine house in itself since other female communities may have read this. Taken in conjunction with the other evidence and in particular the reference of a male readership points very strongly to a community of men and women i.e. a Gilbertine community.

On folio 1 of this manuscript was written the name Thomas Leventhorpe and the date 1557 when presumably this addition was made. The document appeared to have fallen into the hands of this man shortly after the dissolution of the monasteries. Branches of the Leventhorpe families had connections in both Yorkshire and Hertfordshire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Thomas may have been a member of either of these families which makes it difficult to suggest which Gilbertine house may have owned this

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<sup>438</sup> *Ibid*, fo. 36r.

<sup>439</sup> *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts in the British Museum; with Indexes of Person, Places and Matters; Printed by Command of His Majesty King George III, (1806 – 1812), vol. 2, p. 347.*

document. The Gilbertine order did have a double house at Chicksands in Bedfordshire which could be one possible candidate, the Yorkshire connection could lead to Watton Priory being the owners. Without more evidence it is not possible to give a provenance for this manuscript with any degree of certainty.

### **The Participation of the nuns in the Gilbertine Liturgy**

The Gilbertine canons followed an adapted form of the Augustinian rule (secular) and the nuns followed an adapted Benedictine rule (monastic). Monastic worship differed in small but significant ways from that of communities of regular canons. The most striking difference was that of the office of Matins where the number and arrangement of the psalms and readings during the office differed between the two uses. Monastic Matins called for twelve lessons, whereas the secular rite only had nine.

When the two communities celebrated Matins together it would have been impractical for them to have used two different rites. The surviving Ordinal of the order which was written for the whole order only mentions the celebration of the office with nine lessons.<sup>440</sup> However, there is one piece of conflicting evidence in the documentation of the order. In the section concerning the duties of the lay sisters on a feast day in the Institutes, it speaks of the office of Matins having twelve lessons ‘*In die xii lectionem qua laborant sorores ...*’ Much of the Institutes were copied from a copy of the Cistercian Customs in about 1150.<sup>441</sup> This particular reference could be due to an error on the part of the scribe compiling the Gilbertine document.

Further evidence to indicate that the two communities followed a common secular office again comes from the Institutes. They specify that the liturgical books of the order should be *uniform* throughout.

And in all the abbeys (*sic*) of our order, an indissoluble unity shall persist forever;  
it is established that the Rule of Saint Augustine and of Blessed Benedict should

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<sup>440</sup> Pembroke College Cambridge, MS 226. This document makes frequent references in the plural ‘*in domibus canonicorum*’ and ‘*in domibus sanctimonialium*.’

<sup>441</sup> Rose Graham, *St Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertines*, London (1901). p. 48.

be understood and kept in one way by all. Hence the same books, however much it is possible in so far as it pertains to the divine office, also the food, the clothes, these will be the same for all: Missal, epistolary, text (of the gospel) collector, gradual, antiphony, rule, hymnal, psalter, lectionary, calendar, let them be everywhere uniformly kept.<sup>442</sup>

Despite the fact the Institutes were copied from the Cistercian use, the scribe was careful at this point to state that the canons and nuns followed two different rules but implied that the liturgical offices were common between the two communities. St Gilbert would have almost certainly envisaged this problem from the beginning and would have modified the Benedictine rule followed by the nuns accordingly.<sup>443</sup>

The participation of the Gilbertine nuns in the liturgy of the order has been the subject of much debate in recent years.<sup>444</sup> In the very early years of the order's history the way in which the nuns 'sang' the office was somewhat limited. The evidence of this comes from Aelred of Rievaulx's account of the Nun of Watton which was written in about 1166.<sup>445</sup> In the preamble to his account he describes the nuns of that house as 'the handmaids of Christ, in the midst of daily manual labour and the *customary chanting of the psalms*.'<sup>446</sup> From this it could be concluded that their only musical contribution to the services of the daily office was the chanting of the psalms, the remaining parts of the service being merely spoken. In the absence of a Breviary that was used by the Gilbertine nuns, there is no firm evidence to support this hypothesis. The only documents which are available are the Institutes of the Order and a surviving copy of the Gilbertine Ordinal. The latter of these two documents concentrates on the way in which the canons celebrated the various offices within the Order. There are only sporadic references as to how the nuns

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<sup>442</sup> Bodleian Library MS Douce 136, fo. 26v. This passage is copied verbatim from a Cistercian source (with the addition of the reference to the Rule of St. Augustine).

<sup>443</sup> For a full discussion on the commonality of the liturgical offices in the double houses of the Gilbertine order, see: Janet Sorrentino, *In Houses of Nuns, in Houses of Canons: a Liturgical Dimension to Double Monasteries*, *Journal of Medieval History*, 28 (2002), pp 361-372..

<sup>444</sup> For a recent account of this subject see: Heather Josselyn-Cranson, *Moderate psallendo: Musical participation in worship among Gilbertine nuns*, *Plainsong and Medieval Music*, 16, 2, pp. 173-186.

<sup>445</sup> Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 139, ff. 149r – 151v.

<sup>446</sup> Michael Stephenson, *The Gilbertine Priory of Watton*, Borthwick Paper No. 116, Borthwick Institute University of York, (2009), p. 7.

participated. However, the Institutes of the Order confirm that some of the nuns were specifically trained in psalmody.

‘Let the nuns who hold the psalmody, stand together in the choir, and the other women separately in the other choir. Let each take place that is proper in her conversion, unless anyone through negligence does not wish to make music, and then let such a one be placed last of all. Let those who have been well educated begin the psalms according to their order, at the command of the Prioress.’<sup>447</sup>

In this part of the Institutes it is inferred that the psalms are performed ‘musically’ which could mean ‘chanting’ rather than singing.

John of Salisbury in 1159 provides additional evidence that the Gilbertine nuns were under some form of musical restriction. In the ‘Policratus’ he wrote:

‘Therefore a certain venerable man, the father of about 700 nuns, prescribed this rule for his monasteries, that all their singing should cast off manners of all melodious performance, and that they clearly should be content only in the *pronunciation of psalms and praises*. Indeed softness, related to pleasure was suspected by this holy man, inasmuch as pleasure is the father of lust.’<sup>448</sup>

The next reference to musical participation comes from a Papal Bull of Pope Alexander III in 1178. In this document Alexander comments on the manner in which the nuns perform the divine office:

‘[the nuns perform] the office not by singing musically but by chanting or reading, with dignity and at a moderate pace.’<sup>449</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> MS Douce 136, fo. 66.

<sup>448</sup> John of Salisbury, Bishop of Chartres, d. 1180, *Policraticus, Selections, English*, ed. Joseph B Pike, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; London; Oxford University Press (1938), p. 48.

<sup>449</sup> Sharon Elkins, ‘All Ages, Every Condition, and both Sexes: The Emergence of a Gilbertine Identity’, in *Distant Echoes: Medieval Religious Women I*, ed. John A Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank, Kalamazoo (1984), p 177.



The reading that is mentioned here could refer to the parts of the office which were not chanted (the psalms). In a Bull issued by Pope Innocent IV (1243-54), the same paragraph was repeated with the addition of one word, 'reading *distinctly*'. This method of chanting as described in the Papal Bull of Alexander III was confirmed by an account of the Gilbertine order in a poem written by Nigel de Longchamp in 1179-80. In his poem he describes the nuns 'singing the psalms directly, *without a tune*.'<sup>450</sup>

A story that was related in the *Speculum Ecclesiae* written by Gerald of Wales in 1216 may indicate a laxity in the enforcement of this statute in some of the houses of the order.<sup>451</sup> The story concerns a canon and a nun, who were meeting secretly, and they eventually eloped over the convent wall. The two became aware of each other whilst the services were taking place within the priory church and their 'voices excelled all others'. The story goes on to say that St Gilbert punished the nuns by restricting them to the humble chanting of psalms, stating that prayer and devotion were more important than singing.<sup>452</sup> Since this incident took place during Gilbert's lifetime then it must have occurred before 1189. It is also possible for it to have taken place before the Papal Bull of 1178. If this story was true and it took place after 1178 then it would appear that there had been some laxity in the way the nuns chanted the daily office and could mean that the nuns had been 'singing' rather than 'chanting' the offices as laid down in the two previous Papal Bulls.

The next reference to nuns chanting the office was in the Institutes of the order. Brian Golding has suggested that the thirteenth-century Institutes of the order were formalised between 1220 and 1238 in the sole surviving manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS

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<sup>450</sup> *Nigel de Longchamp's Speculum Stultorum*, ed. J H Mozley and R R Raymo, Berkeley and Los Angeles (1960), vol 2, lines 2401-12.

<sup>451</sup> *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, 8 volumes, ed John Sherren Brewer, James F Dimock and Sir George F Warner, (London, 1873; reprinted 1964), 4, pp. 184-6.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid* p. 185.

Douce 136, that is shortly after Gerald of Wales' story of the canon and the nun.<sup>453</sup> The paragraph in the statutes reads as follows:

'We do not allow our nuns to *cantare*, but absolutely forbid it desiring more that they '*indirecto psallere*' with the sainted Virgin perpetual mother of Almighty God and daughter in a spirit of humility, than that they overthrow the minds of the weak through lascivious rhythmic modulations with that daughter of Herodius.'<sup>454</sup>

This statute raises two questions, what was meant by the phrase *indirecto psallere* and how should we translate and interpret the verb *cantare*. Literally the phrase *indirecto psallere* means to sing psalms indirectly. Heather Josselyn-Cranson has stated that this phrase may have been derived from a phrase which is well known to chant scholars.<sup>455</sup> *Psalmodia in directum* refers to the singing of psalms straight through without the antiphons which usually accompanied them that is the singing of psalms in this manner would render them plain. The verb *cantare* translates as 'to sing, play'. This would mean that the nuns were not allowed *to sing* which is in direct opposition to the phrase *indirecto psallere*.

Rose Graham interpreted it to mean that 'the rule forbade all music, the organ, and every kind of chant.'<sup>456</sup> Brian Golding in his more recent work on the order makes no mention of this.<sup>457</sup> Sharon Elkins assumes that the statement was following that of the Cistercians, that is the forbidding of the use of polyphony.<sup>458</sup> More recently Elizabeth Freeman has

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<sup>453</sup> Brian Golding, *Keeping Nuns in Order: Enforcement of the Rules in Thirteenth-Century Sempringham*, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol 59, No. 4, October 2008, pp. 657-679. Bodleian Library Oxford, MS Douce 136.

<sup>454</sup> MS Douce 136, fo. 66. Herodius was wife of Herod Antipas, mother of Salome, and instigator of the beheading of John the Baptist.

<sup>455</sup> Heather Josselyn-Cranson, 'Moderate psallendo: Musical participation in worship among Gilbertine nuns', *Plainsong and Medieval Music*, 16, 2, (2007), p. 183.

<sup>456</sup> Rose Graham, *S Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertines*, (London, 1901), p. 74.

<sup>457</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertines*.

<sup>458</sup> Sharon Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth Century England*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988, p. 139.

suggested that the Gilbertine nuns recited the psalms silently so that the canons could not hear them and ‘would not be tempted by the sweetness of their voices.’<sup>459</sup>

In the chapters of the Institutes which deal with the canons the following sentence appears in the chapter concerning the ‘ecclesiastical duty, chanting, silence and work’ of the canons.

‘We completely prohibit the “*organum*”, “*decentum*”, “*fausetum*” and “*pipeth*” in the divine service to *all our people of both sexes*.’<sup>460</sup>

The word ‘*organum*’ could relate either to the musical instrument or to the use of polyphony. “*Decentum*” is an alternative word for ‘*discantus*’ which means a descant. The meaning of ‘*pipeth*’ is somewhat more problematic; it could refer to a particular form of chant or possibly to a musical instrument. This seems somewhat contradictory to the statute governing the nuns. The canons’ statute does not forbid all forms of music but does forbid the use of instruments and any form of ornamentation when chanting. It is possible that the scribe when compiling the Gilbertine Institutes copied the Cistercian statutes verbatim. When the Cistercian order was founded in 1098 they devised their liturgy such that the chants were devoid of any vocal elaboration.<sup>461</sup> A possible conclusion is that the scribe intended to say that the above statute only applied to the canons. Evidence to support this comes from the Missal that probably belonged to the Gilbertine priory of Saint Katherine outside the walls of Lincoln which was a house of canons-only. This Missal contains six *Gloria* intonations which can be found in the *Liber Usualis*.<sup>462</sup> Their presence in the manuscript implied that these melodies were not unique to the Gilbertine order, but were used by many of the other monastic communities. Three of them were in the main text of the manuscript, the remainder had been added in the outside margin of the folio. According to the *Liber Usualis*; the first three came from the

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<sup>459</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Nuns in the Public Sphere: Aelred of Rievaulx’s ‘De sanctimoniali de Wattun’ and the Gendering of Authority*, *Comitatus* 27 (1996), p. 73.

<sup>460</sup> MS Douce 136, fo.18.

<sup>461</sup> Heather Josselyn-Cranson, *Creative Remembering: A study of the Mass and Office for the Feast of St Gilbert of Sempringham*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Boston University School of Theology, (2004), p. 68.

<sup>462</sup> *Liber Usualis*, (Edition with English rubrics), Tournai (1934), Revised in 1961.

tenth century and the other three from the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. The latter date may explain the reason why they were added later to the Missal.

John Capgrave in his English translation of the Life of Saint Gilbert, records that the first seven women who formed the first community of nuns under Saint Gilbert, were enclosed ‘under the wall of the church of Seynt Andrew’ so that ‘thei myte prey and have parte eke of all dyvyne servyse, both in seying and in eryng’. Capgrave wrote his account in the mid-fifteenth century. The surviving copies of the Life of Saint Gilbert that were written before Capgrave’s English version make no mention of the participation of the nuns in the liturgy. Capgrave claimed to have written his version from an early Latin copy. Either he had access to a copy of the Saint’s life that has not survived, or he was describing their role at the time that he wrote his version, or reconstructing the past as he thought it might have been. If the latter case is true, then it appeared that the nuns were not singing the office but, as Capgrave described ‘seying and in eryng’. This could be interpreted as chanting in monotone. ‘Eryng’ could be interpreted as listening to parts of the office as I have already suggested.

A further fifteenth-century source, the Ordinal of the Order, confirms that the nuns were not singing but they were chanting the psalms. On 16 June 1445 Sempringham Priory celebrated the fact that King Henry VI had exempted certain houses of the order from the payment of taxes to the crown. This celebration took the form of a special Mass and prayers that were said on this particular day and were to be repeated on an annual basis. During this office it is specifically stated that the canons are to ‘sing’ the psalms and the collects, but the collects are to be ‘chanted’ by the nuns. Before the Mass was celebrated

Every literate nun should say by herself one fiftieth of the psalms. Indeed every illiterate nun, as well as every lay brother and sister, all in a similar way, are to perform the psalter of the most glorious Virgin in the meantime with a pious mind.<sup>463</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 226, fo. 38v.

Following this entry in the Ordinal is a description of the Mass that is to be celebrated in memory of John, Viscount Beaumont.<sup>464</sup> During this mass every nun was to say one nocturne of the psalms of David.

In both the above cases, the emphasis was on 'saying' not 'singing' the psalms. At no point are nuns mentioned with regard to other parts of the office. This could infer that they took no active part only listening to the canons singing.

### **Conclusion**

Three of the four manuscripts almost certainly can be linked with the libraries of Gilbertine houses. However, the provenance of the Cambridge manuscript is somewhat more tentative. The identification of these manuscripts has given an insight into the material that these women might have been reading in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The predominant language used in these works was English, indicating that the Gilbertine nuns who could read may only have been reading English texts. However, the presence of some Latin material indicates that a small number were sufficiently educated to be able to read and understand a Latin text. Some of the Latin texts that appear in these documents were standard prayers that would have been learnt by the nuns to use in their periods of meditation. It would have not been necessary for them to have been able to translate these prayers directly, as the meaning of them would have been explained to them at the time they were taught them.

There is no doubt that the Gilbertine canons 'sang' during the daily offices and the Mass. The chants that they would have used would be predominantly those of the Cistercians. Any that were composed purely for the Gilbertine order would have had Cistercian roots. However, the nuns only chanted the psalms. This they would have done in monotone or in a very simple form of chant. The Institutes of the order also tell us that they would

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<sup>464</sup> John Beaumont for whose benefit this office was written was a benefactor of Sempringham Priory. In his will dated 8 September 1396 he directs that his body is to be buried in Sempringham Priory Church near the burial place of his father. Amongst his bequests he leaves 'to Sempringham Priory the little cross made of our Lord's Cross'. The antiphons for the Feast of Relics show that amongst the relics was one of the Holy Cross, presumably this was the one mentioned in Beaumont's will. *The Gilbertine Rite*. ed. R M Woolley, 2 vols, Henry Bradshaw Society (1921-2), 59, p. xxiv.

have read some of the collects. No mention was made of any other participation during the daily services. From this we can conclude that when the canons and nuns celebrated together, the nuns would have only joined in during the chanting of the psalms. For all other parts of the service they would have listened to the canons and may well have been encouraged to meditate during these parts of the service.

The prohibition against the nuns singing appears to have been enforced up until the mid fifteenth century and it is possible that this was maintained up to the dissolution. It is possible that the canons in some of the priories may have abandoned the simple form of chant that was used in the early days of the Cistercian order and like the Cistercians they may well have extended their musical repertoire using polyphonic settings. This hypothesis is based on the sole piece of evidence that Sempringham priory employed an organist at the dissolution.<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> TNA, SC6/HENVIII/2030.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE DISSOLUTION OF THE GILBERTINE MONASTERIES

#### Introduction

Henry VIII secretly married Anne Boleyn on the 24 January 1533 at a time when the Pope had not annulled his first marriage to Katherine and he had forbidden Henry to marry again.<sup>466</sup> In order to solve the problem Thomas Cromwell devised a Statute in April 1533, the Act of Restraint of Appeals, that would free the King from the jurisdiction of the Papacy.<sup>467</sup> This Act ended the practice of removing cases from the English courts to Rome on appeal. In future all cases were to be settled in English courts, which derived their authority from the King. The Act claimed that the English crown was 'imperial' and as such all matters whether they be temporal or spiritual, could be dealt with by the English courts. These courts had the authority of the King who in turn had the authority of God. While the Bill was debated in Parliament, the Convocation of Canterbury met to consider the annulment of the King's marriage. With the agreement of Convocation, Archbishop Cranmer annulled the marriage allowing Henry to marry Anne Boleyn. As a result of his actions, Pope Clement VII issued a bull excommunicating Henry in September 1533.<sup>468</sup>

In order for Henry to sever the links with Rome completely, a number of other measures had to be taken which included the following. Firstly in March 1534 the Second Act of Annates refined the methods of elections of bishops and heads of religious houses. Secondly in December 1534 another statute made the clergy liable to pay to the King one year's income on assuming a benefice (First Fruits) and 10% of their income thereafter (Tenths). During April 1536 Robert Holgate as Master of the Gilbertine order of Sempringham was required to pay to the Crown one tenth of the annual income of the

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<sup>466</sup> John Guy, *Tudor England*, Oxford University Press, (1988), p.132.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid.

<sup>468</sup> Richard Rex, *Henry VIII and the English Reformation*, Macmillan Press, (1993), p. 18.

Gilbertine Priors in England. The valuation that was placed on the order at this time was £2475.91.<sup>469</sup>

The breach with Rome was completed with the Act of Supremacy in December 1534, which now left the way clear for Henry's second marriage to take place. In 1534, 105 signatures including those of Cranmer as Archbishop of Canterbury, Edward Lee Archbishop of York, Cuthbert Bishop of Durham, the Bishops of Lincoln, London and a number of heads of religious houses were appended to the following declaration:

‘The Roman Bishop does not have any greater indiction conferred to him by God in the sacred scripture in this kingdom of England than any other external Bishop.’<sup>470</sup>

Robert Holgate signed the above document as Prior of the Gilbertine House of St Katherine's at Lincoln. Since no other Gilbertine canons from St Katherine's signed this document, it may be reasonable to conclude that Holgate was agreeing with the declaration as an individual and not on behalf of his house or the order in general.

The first general commissioners appointed by Thomas Cromwell descended on the religious houses between 13 June 1534 and 22 October 1534 to demand of the religious adherence to the Oath of Supremacy.<sup>471</sup> Fourteen returns have survived for Lincolnshire but there are no returns for Yorkshire in this collection. Of these fourteen returns, all were for Benedictine and Augustinian houses. Four out of five of the Benedictine houses subscribed to the Supremacy and all of the Augustinian houses subscribed. Neither the Cistercians nor the Premonstratensians appeared in these lists. As will be discussed later, the Abbots of Kirkstead (Cistercian) and Barlings (Premonstratensian) along with their respective communities took part in the rebellion against the dissolution of the Lincolnshire houses. Significantly no returns appeared to have survived for either of

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<sup>469</sup> TNA, E334/1, In January 1535 the income of the Gilbertine order was assessed at £2409.90 (Valor Ecclesiasticus).

<sup>470</sup> British Library Add MS 38656.

<sup>471</sup> A number of the acknowledgement of Supremacy returns are preserved in TNA within the Exchequer Court Records (E25).



these orders in Lincolnshire. However, an absence of a return cannot be taken to mean that they did not subscribe, as the returns may have been lost. There was evidence to indicate that some of these returns may not have survived. Brown Willis claims that Christopher Cartwright, the last prior of the Gilbertine house of North Ormesby in Lincolnshire, subscribed to the King's Supremacy in 1534 together with six brethren.<sup>472</sup> He also claimed that John, the last prior of Chicksands in Bedfordshire, subscribed to the same on the 12 October 1534. Neither of these returns has survived in the collections in the National Archives. These were the only two Gilbertine houses to have supposedly subscribed to the Act.

In January 1535 Thomas Cromwell organised an ecclesiastical census and a visitation of all religious establishments to assess the wealth and condition of the church. This census known as the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* was completed by July 1535.<sup>473</sup> This document served both as a valuation of the assets of religious houses and recorded clerical incomes for taxation purposes. Cromwell's motives were twofold; firstly to encourage voluntary surrenders of monastic establishments and secondly to collect incriminating evidence on the conditions within the monasteries which he could use to persuade Parliament into authorising mandatory dissolution of these houses.<sup>474</sup>

The valuations taken from the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* in 1535 of the Religious houses in both Lincolnshire and Yorkshire are shown in Appendix 7.

In the autumn and winter of 1535 Thomas Cromwell sent out Commissioners to investigate the moral standards of the religious houses. These visitors carried with them two documents: a long questionnaire that was to be administered to each of the religious and a set of injunctions to be issued at the end of the visitation.<sup>475</sup> The questionnaire covered the whole range of duties of the religious life, as well as a section dealing with

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<sup>472</sup> Browne Willis, *The History of Abbies*, Vol 2, London (1719).

<sup>473</sup> John Guy, *Tudor England*, p. 147. See also, *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, ed J Caley & J Hunter, Record Commission London (1810 – 34).

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>475</sup> David Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae, a synodo verolamiensi A.D. CCCC XLVI. ad Londinensem A.D. MDCCXVII. Accedunt constitutiones et alia ad historiam Ecclesiae Anglicanae spectantia: a Davide Wilkins*, London (1733), Vol 3. pp 786 – 91.

the superior and his or her administration of the house. There was no emphasis on sexual faults and no mention of the inquisitorial methods that were to be employed.

The injunctions began by reminding the head of the house and the community of the oaths they had taken regarding the Acts of Succession and Supremacy. The injunctions were as follows. Firstly, members of the community were not to leave the precincts of the monastery. Secondly, women were to be excluded from male houses. This injunction implied that men were excluded from the houses of nuns. Thirdly, for the space of one hour a lesson of Holy Scripture was to be read to the whole community. Fourthly the communities of men and women were to be made aware of the unprofitable nature of ceremonies: that is the traditional monastic observances of offices, processions, fasts and penances. The brethren were to be instructed that these were not pleasing to God, but merely remote preparations for the interior and spiritual service of Christ. Fifthly, no one under the age of twenty-four years was to be professed. Sixthly, Relics were not to be exhibited for 'increase of lucre'.<sup>476</sup> If pilgrims wished to make a donation, the money must go to the poor. Seventhly, each day Queen Ann was to be remembered in their Mass. Finally, if any superior, or any subject of the house, infringed any of these injunctions, any member might denounce him at once to the King or his Visitor General or his deputy. The Visitors also had the power to add to these injunctions depending on the needs of the individual house.

The instructions given to the Visitors when visiting houses of the Gilbertine order were as follows:

'If it aper to the said comyssioners that any of the said howses within ther survey to be of the ordre of gylbtynes that then they shall no further proced but anyone the governors of the same howses that they with all celerity do apere before the Chanceler and Commissioner of the Court of Augmentacon at Westminster wher they shall know further of the kings pleasure.'<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> David Wilkins, *Concilia Magnæ Britanniae et Hiberniae*, p. 791.

<sup>477</sup> TNA, SP5/4 (L & P Hen VIII Vol. x, No. 721 (3)).

Robert Holgate was a friend of Thomas Cromwell and was one of the King Henry VIII's chaplains.<sup>478</sup> It is possible that the reason why the instructions given to the visitors were not to enter Gilbertine houses was that this task may have been entrusted to Holgate to carry out personally.

Four men were appointed to lead the teams of visitors who were to survey the religious houses throughout the country.

Richard Layton was a Doctor of Canon Law who held the posts of a Clerk in the Chancery Court and was also a clerk to the Privy Council. In addition to these appointments he also held a number of ecclesiastical benefices. David Knowles described him as making reckless and wholesale charges against the monastic communities when using his questioning methods. Knowles concluded by saying:

Bearing in mind Layton's evident impurity of mind and confessed desire to please, he would hesitate to give full credence to any accusation of his, however plausible or amusing it might be.<sup>479</sup>

Thomas Legh, also a Doctor of Canon Law, was a colleague of Richard Layton. In 1532 he was Ambassador to Denmark and would have had first hand knowledge of the suppression of monasteries abroad. Knowles is somewhat harsh in analysing his character. He describes him as 'a humourless overbearing man, cold but more incisive of mind than Layton. Conceited in behaviour, sharp to brutal in manner, he was a generally unsympathetic character.'<sup>480</sup>

In her study of medieval monasticism in the East Riding of Yorkshire in the years preceding the dissolution, Claire Cross is of the view that Layton and Legh had the deliberate intention of 'discrediting and belittling the monastic way of life'. She goes on

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<sup>478</sup> Geoffrey Moorhouse, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: The Rebellion that shook Henry VIII's Throne*. Phoenix, (2002), p. 78.

<sup>479</sup> David Knowles, *Bare Ruined Choirs: The Dissolution of the Monasteries*, (Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 157.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 157-8.

to say that ‘they were concerned exclusively with exposing sexual offences.’<sup>481</sup> Marilyn Oliva gives examples of supposed sexual impropriety when these two men visited Blackborough and Shouldham priories in Norfolk but goes on to say that the reports do not necessarily reflect the truth.<sup>482</sup> A further example of where Dr Layton found sexual scandal within a Yorkshire nunnery is described by Marjorie Harrison in her paper on the Nunnery of Nun Appleton. It was reported that at the time of the visitation, two nuns at this particular house had borne children.<sup>483</sup>

John Ap Rice was a Notary Public who took part in the examination of the Carthusians. He was a shrewd, critical man who was prejudiced against the religious men and women, and carried through in East Anglia the programme outlined by Layton for the North.<sup>484</sup> John Tregonwell was a layman like Ap Rice. Although he was in sympathy with the reforms, he was the most independent of the visitors and did not hesitate to plead the cause of a house which in his eyes seemed deserving.<sup>485</sup>

Peter Marshall in his study of ‘forged miracles’ and the exposing of false relics prior to the dissolution of the religious houses thinks that the reputation that these men had acquired as ‘unprincipled thugs’ was somewhat harsh. Marshall describes these visitors as ‘intelligent and educated men’ and the reports that they wrote were ‘witty, cruel and politically astute’.<sup>486</sup> Richard Layton was particularly active in exposing false relics he found in the houses that he visited. For example at a cell of Lewes priory he confiscated what were claimed to be the ‘chains of St Peter’ which women placed around themselves during childbirth.<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> Claire Cross, *The End of Medieval Monasticism in the East Riding of Yorkshire*, East Yorkshire Local History Society, (1993), p. 18.

<sup>482</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England*, Boydell Press, (1998), p. 193.

<sup>483</sup> Marjorie J Harrison, *The Nunnery of Nun Appleton*, Borthwick Paper No. 98, (2001), p. 20.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>486</sup> Peter Marshall, *Religious Identities in Henry VIII's England*, Ashgate, (2006), p. 135.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*

Visitation records only survive for four Gilbertine houses: Chicksands (Bedfordshire), Shouldham (Norfolk), Clattercote (Oxfordshire) and Fordham (Cambridgeshire).

Chicksands and Shouldham were the only two houses of canons and nuns. All of these houses lie outside of the core regions of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. They have been included to show that the commissioners did try to enter Gilbertine houses despite the instructions that were given to them. Richard Layton visited Chicksands Priory in the later part of 1535. In his letter to Thomas Cromwell he describes what he found at Chicksands as follows.

Hit may please your mastershippe to understande, that in goyng northwards from London I towke in my way towards Lichefelds, wheras I appointede to mete with Doctor Leig, first a priorie of Gylbertyns and nunnes inclosede and closse, wheras they wolde not be so answerede, but visitede them, and ther fownde two of the saide nunnes not baron, one of them *impregnavit supprior domus*, an other a serving man. The two prioresses wolde not confesse this, nother the parties, nor none of the nunnes, but one old beldame, and whan I objectede agayns the saide prioresses, that if they could not shewe me a cause reasonable of that ther conseilement, I muste nedes and wolde punnishe them for ther manifeste perjurie, ther answer was that they were bownde by ther religion never to confesse the secrete fawttes done emongiste them, but onely to ther owne visiture of ther religion, and to that they were sworne evere one of them at ther firste admission.<sup>488</sup>

Layton and Legh visited Shouldham Priory in 1536 where they accused two of the nuns of incontinence.<sup>489</sup> It was claimed that Joan Plumstede had borne a child of a priest and that Margery Beubery had a child by a layman. Within the same county of Norfolk, three other nunneries were also visited. At Blackborough Priory he suspected three of the nuns including the prioress of incontinence. At Marham Priory Barbara Mason the prioress was charged with having borne a child by the Prior of Pentney and four of the nuns were

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<sup>488</sup> British Library MSS Cott. Cleop. E IV, fo 131.

<sup>489</sup> TNA, SP1/102.

accused of having children by priests and laymen. Similar accusations were made against the nuns of Crabhouse. Margaret Studfield the prioress had given birth to a child and two other nuns had children by single men. Another nun was accused of having two children, one by a priest and the other by a layman.<sup>490</sup>

Comparing Layton and Legh's report with that of the county commissioners, Thomas Mildmay and Richard Southwell, the commissioners' report paints a completely different story.<sup>491</sup> At Blackborough Priory it was reported that all the nuns were 'of good fame' and the nuns of Crabhouse were living respectable lives. However, it appeared that the nuns of Marham Priory were not leading such virtuous lives. Five of the nuns were of 'scandalous report', and three asked for dispensations to leave the order whereas the rest wished to continue in religion.

John Tregonwell visited Clattercote Priory in September 1535. This was a small Gilbertine priory founded originally as a leper hospital with a prior and two or three canons.<sup>492</sup> He described the state of the priory in a letter to Cromwell as follows.

From thence to Clattercote a house of the order of Gilbertines, where I found three canons beside the Prior. That house is old, foul and filthy. Whether their living be according I cannot tell, for they desired me that I would not visit them because (as they said) that you had given (by your commission) full authority to the Prior of Sempringham to visit all their order, so that no man but he should meddle with that order, and because I would not reap the harvest without your pleasure to me known, I departed then no business done.<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England*, Boydell Press (1998) p.193.

<sup>491</sup> TNA, SP5/2/246-254.

<sup>492</sup> William Page, *Victoria County History, 'House of the Gilbertine order: The priory of Clattercote', A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 2* (1907), pp. 105.

<sup>493</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, Vol 9, No 457.

### Validity of the Visitors' reports

The commissioners' reports did not necessarily reflect the truth. One contributing factor may have been questionable methods of obtaining information. David Knowles made the following conclusion regarding these reports.<sup>494</sup> 'Countless accusations of sodomy and incontinence among the male religious were both exaggerated and unfounded.' From this he concluded that there was no reason to accept the commissioners findings on the moral condition of the nuns. However, Sybil Jack has been somewhat more objective in her assessment of these reports, by concluding that the agents were willing to seek out and exploit any scandal that they found.<sup>495</sup> Marilyn Oliva in assessing the validity of the commissioners reports in the diocese of Norwich states that they did not necessarily reflect the truth. The methods of questioning used by the commissioners 'appear to have cast doubts on the validity of their claims.'<sup>496</sup> Gasquet went further by disregarding the visitor's reports concerning the nuns of Gracedieu Priory in Liecestershire because of contradictory evidence.<sup>497</sup> In the visitation of February 1536 two nuns from the priory were charged with incontinence. However in June of the same year the nuns were reported as being

of good and virtuous conversacon and lyving as apperyth by examynacon and by report of the countreye desiring all to contynewe in ther relygyon ther.

David Knowles uses the example from Gracedieu and also the case of the Franciscan nuns of Denney Abbey in Cambridgeshire.<sup>498</sup> On the 30 October 1535 Dr Legh writes to Cromwell regarding Denney Abbey as follows.

At Denney we found half a dozen who, with tears in their eyes, begged to be dismissed.....They will not need to be put forth, but will make instance to be delivered. They at Denney say that they live against their conscience.

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<sup>494</sup> David Knowles, *Bare Ruined Choirs*, p. 161.

<sup>495</sup> Sybil Jack, *The Last Days of the Smaller Monasteries in England*, *Journal of Ecclesiastical Studies*, 21 (1970), pp 97 – 124.

<sup>496</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England*, p. 193.

<sup>497</sup> H E Cardinal Gasquet, *English Monastic Life*, Methuen London (1910), p. 159.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*

In the following year the nuns of Denney Abbey petitioned Thomas Cromwell to allow them to continue in religion. On the 17 August this request was granted.

Claire Cross compares the visitations carried out prior to the dissolution with the diocesan visitations which took place a century earlier. If the diocesan visitations had been carried out in the same 'hostile manner' as those carried out by Cromwell's commissioners, then the results would have been similar. The findings of the diocesan visitations were for correcting any wrongdoing that was found, whereas Cromwell's commissioners were using the evidence to justify the dissolution of the religious houses.

From the examples given above it can be seen that the reports on individual houses and the moral state of the religious persons within those houses were somewhat unreliable. The content of the reports depended largely on who compiled them and their motivation for producing the reports. Not all of the religious men and women would have led blameless lives, there would have been cases of moral laxity within the religious orders, but not necessarily to the extent as appeared in the Visitors reports.

Another objective of these visitations was to establish the annual incomes of each of the religious houses. This information was used to establish which of the houses would be dissolved in 1535/6 under the first Parliamentary Act. This Act permitted Henry to dissolve and dismantle monasteries whose annual revenues were less than £200. The reason given was that they were poor and their numbers were minimal. The Act passed in 1539 ensured the closure of the houses, which survived the first round of suppression. The tables in Appendix 7 show the dissolution dates, annual revenues and numbers of nuns for the nunneries of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire prior to the dissolution. Apart from Watton Priory none of the Yorkshire houses had a valuation greater than about £83, yet only nine were suppressed in the first round. The number of nuns in each of these houses was ten or less, but of the houses, which survived until 1539, seven of these had ten or fewer nuns. In Lincolnshire only three houses were suppressed in 1536, one of these Stainfield had a population of sixteen nuns. Of those, which survived until 1539, Fosse and St Leonard at Grimsby only had eight nuns in each Priory. From these figures we can



see that there was no clear financial reason why some houses were suppressed and others survived until 1539.

### **The Pilgrimage of Grace**

In 1536 a bill was put before the Parliament, which called for the dissolution of all monasteries in England with an income of £200 or less. The Gilbertine houses were exempted from the first round of dissolutions even though the majority of the houses had an income which was less than £200.<sup>499</sup> The dispossessed religious communities were then given the choice of moving to another house or taking a pension. For the male ex-religious a third option was available, that of taking up a vacant benefice.

In some areas the monasteries gave up quietly with no public outcry. However, in some parts of the north of England the commissioners met with stiff opposition. Troubles began in Lincolnshire on 1 October 1536 when riots broke out at Louth and spread throughout the county. This was not the only uprising. The Lincolnshire rebellion lasted from 1 October until the 18 October. The rising in Yorkshire known as the Pilgrimage of Grace lasted from October to December 1536, and a further set of risings in the North West took place sporadically in January and February 1537. Of the three rebellions, the Pilgrimage of Grace was the greatest threat to the Crown.<sup>500</sup>

The rebellion in Lincolnshire ended as quickly as it started. Throughout the Lincolnshire rising there was a constant tension between the gentry and the rank and file members of the community. The rebellion collapsed on the 18 October 1536 when the King refused to

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<sup>499</sup> Unlike the Benedictines and the Cistercians, the Gilbertines only had a relatively small number of houses for the women of the order. Closing down the nunneries which had small incomes would have made it difficult for the remaining houses to have accommodated these nuns. Claire Cross has stated that the government had little choice but to let some monasteries continue beyond the the first round of dissolutions in 1536, since there would have been no available places to place the expelled nuns and monks. (Claire Cross, 'The End of Medieval Monasticism in the East Riding of Yorkshire,' *East Yorkshire Local History Society*, (1993), p. 22.

<sup>500</sup> For further reading on the Pilgrimage of Grace, see G Moorhouse, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: the Rebellion that Shook Henry VIII's Throne*, Phoenix (2003). See also, R W Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Politics of the 1530s*, OUP, (2001).

negotiate with the rebels. The gentry were not prepared to risk all and they persuaded the rank and file rebels to disband.<sup>501</sup>

It has been estimated that between 700 and 800 priests, monks and canons became involved in the Lincolnshire uprising.<sup>502</sup> Amongst these were the Abbots of Kirkstead and Barlings and their communities. Only one Gilbertine house was known to have taken part in the Lincolnshire uprising, St Katherine's at Lincoln. In a letter to Thomas Cromwell, the Prior of St Katherine's, William Griffith, was described as:

sometyme a Prior removable of the house of Saynt Katherine beside Lyncolne and removed from his said office for settinge forward the late commotion in Lyncolneshir and in contynewance favoringe the same and for other his misdemeanours in the myspendinge to evill purpose the goodes of the said house.<sup>503</sup>

There is no evidence to suggest that any other members of his community took part in the Lincolnshire rebellion.

Shortly after the collapse of the Lincolnshire rebellion a far more serious one took place in Yorkshire. The causes of the Yorkshire uprising were very similar to that which took place in Lincolnshire. The main leaders were Robert Aske, a lawyer who lived at Aughton by the river Derwent, Lord Darcy and Sir Thomas Percy. The Aske family was principally associated with estates outside of Richmond in North Yorkshire which they had obtained just after the Conquest. In the twelfth century, Roger de Aske founded the Benedictine nunnery of Marrick priory. Sometime during the fourteenth century, a branch of this family settled at Aughton in the Derwent valley in the East Riding of Yorkshire which was close to the Gilbertine priory of Ellerton. Richard Aske of Aughton died in 1460 aged forty and was buried in the priory church of Ellerton. Robert Aske was the

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<sup>501</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>503</sup> British Library Harl MS 283, fo. 164.

great grandson of Richard Aske and was the last recorded member of the family.<sup>504</sup>

Elizabeth Aske who was the daughter of Robert was described as a nun at Watton priory in the will of her brother Sir John Aske who died in 1497.<sup>505</sup> Sir John was also buried in the priory church of Ellerton ‘before the image of the Blessed Mary, where the Gospel is wont to be read by the deacon.’<sup>506</sup>

On the 12 October 1536 the Pilgrims restored the Cistercian Abbey of Sawley. The Abbot and his convent had possession of their house for about five months. Other monasteries became involved including Jervaulx where the former Abbot of Fountains Abbey was living. He offered the leaders of the rebellion twenty marks to restore him to Fountains, ‘saying that he was unjustly put out by the visitors’. At his examination in the Tower he denied that he had said this but he was found guilty of treason and was executed at Tyburn on the 25 May 1537.<sup>507</sup>

Some of the canons of the Augustinian house of Warter in Yorkshire attempted to regain possession of their house. The sub-prior took part in the insurrection and was tried as a traitor and hanged in chains at York in February 1537.<sup>508</sup> The Pilgrims controlled much of Yorkshire and were far too numerous and organised for the forces loyal to the King to risk a battle. In December 1536 the Duke of Norfolk on behalf of the King was forced to agree a partial acceptance of the demands of the rebels, including a full pardon for all. Believing that they had succeeded with their demands, the rebels disbanded and returned to their homes. However, the King had no intention of keeping the truce or making any concessions. In January 1537 the Duke of Norfolk was sent to the North to restore order.

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<sup>504</sup> *Testamenta Eboracensia, A Selection of the Wills from the York Registry*, Volume 2, Surtees Society, (1884), p. 275 footnote.

<sup>505</sup> Borthwick Institute York, Probate Register 5, fo. 496.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>507</sup> Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*, YAS Vol 150 (1995), p 117.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid* p 346.

### **The Role of The Gilbertines in the Pilgrimage of Grace**

The main centre for the uprising in Yorkshire was around the East Riding town of Beverley which was a few miles south of the Gilbertine Priory of Watton.<sup>509</sup> The close proximity of Watton to Beverley explains the involvement of the canons in the Pilgrimage of Grace. Not all of the canons were wholly committed to the rebels. Even though the sub-prior Harry Gyll was hanged as a traitor for his part, there was a degree of uncertainty as to his commitment to the cause. Thomas Lather, the cellarer of the priory was probably sympathetic with the aims of the rebellion since he had distinctly conservative religious views after the dissolution of his house.<sup>510</sup> He must have been silent about his views during the rebellion since he survived as a canon up until the dissolution and was awarded a pension. The only known canon who did not share these views was Thomas Webster who according to the ordination lists was a canon at this time. As will be discussed in chapter 6, this man probably had reformist views. At the dissolution he appeared on the pension lists as the sub-prior of Watton and was probably acting as prior in the absence of Robert Holgate. This was probably his reward for staying loyal to Holgate and not supporting the Pilgrimage. As will be seen later, Thomas Webster received further rewards from Holgate for his loyalty.

The Priory of Malton played a less dramatic part in the Pilgrimage than did the canons of Watton. According to Moorhouse, William Todde the prior of Malton was imprisoned for his part in the rebellion and eventually released.<sup>511</sup> However, Hoyle is of the opinion that Todde was never tried for his part and that he probably survived into the 1560s.<sup>512</sup> What is known is that he was examined in London by Layton, Tregonwell and Leigh in April 1537 in order that he could answer questions regarding his part in the rebellion. It is not known if he was imprisoned whilst these examinations were taking place.<sup>513</sup>

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<sup>509</sup> Geoffrey Moorhouse, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: The Rebellion that Shook Henry VIII's Throne*, Phoenix, (2002), p. 80.

<sup>510</sup> See Chapter 7, *Canons after the Dissolution*, pp. 199-200.

<sup>511</sup> Geoffrey Moorhouse, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, p. 336.

<sup>512</sup> R W Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, pp 409-10.

<sup>513</sup> Letters and Papers Henry VIII, Vol 12 (i), p. 467, No. 1023.

The Gilbertine Priory of Watton lies a few miles to the north of Beverley in the East Riding of Yorkshire. One of the ringleaders of the Pilgrimage of Grace in the East Riding of Yorkshire was the farmer John Hallom of Cawkeld who was one of the leaders of the woldsmen and townsmen of Beverley. Hallom detested Thomas Cromwell and collected rhymes composed against him. This was because he held him responsible not only for the abrogation of holy days and the plunder of the church but also for supporting the appointment of Robert Holgate as Prior of Watton and Master of the Gilbertine order.<sup>514</sup> Hallom had personal reasons for disliking Holgate, regardless of the fact that he had fled from Watton Priory and deserted his post. According to the sub-prior of Watton, Hallom was ‘greatly incensed’ with Holgate for evicting him from a farm hold.<sup>515</sup> He also insisted that Hallom pay him twenty marks rather than make a tithe payment of corn ‘when God should send it’.<sup>516</sup>

On the Sunday before St Wilfred’s Day (12 October 1536) in the parish church of Watton, the priest omitted to mention St Wilfred’s Day ‘for it was wont always to be a holy day here’. Hallom openly asked before the congregation why it had been omitted. The priest answered that St Wilfred’s day and other feasts were put down by the King’s authority and the consent of Convocation. This did not satisfy the congregation, and after mass was over they said they would have their holy days ‘bid and kept as before’. So great was Hallom’s hatred of Holgate that soon after, accompanied by a large company of men armed with bills and clubs, he invaded the priory whilst the canons were at dinner. In the presence of the Priors of Ellerton and St Andrew’s, York, he tried to force the community to elect a new prior and depose Holgate who by now had fled to London. The canons said it was against their statutes, since their prior was alive and not lawfully removed. He then said that if they would not comply ‘he would spoil’ their house and nominate a new prior himself. Faced by such a threat the canons nominated James Lawrence, the Prior of Ellerton, as their new Prior.<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> R W Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*. p. 189.

<sup>515</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, Vol 12 (1), No 201 pp 99 – 100.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*

The Watton canons who were not sympathetic to the rebellion must have taken this threat seriously, since there are four recorded cases where they reluctantly gave financial aid to the rebels. On 19 October Sir Thomas Percy wrote to the sub-prior of Watton asking him to send two geldings and went on to say ‘I trust that you will not say nay.’<sup>518</sup> This may have been a veiled reminder of the threat that was made by Hallom some days earlier. Sir Thomas Percy must have had knowledge of the livestock that was at Watton Priory as he specifically requested one of the geldings ‘be a great trotting bay gelding, which I look for as one.’

On the 23 October Robert Aske and Sir Thomas Percy wrote to the brethren of Watton Priory. It would appear that there had been desertions from the rebel ranks, two of whom were the Watton men, William Smith and Thomas Nettleton.<sup>519</sup> They were commanded to deliver to the bearer ‘all goods within the Lordship of Watton which belonged to William Smith and John Nettleton, who have deserted from this our pilgrimage.’ Just over two weeks later on the 10 November Robert Aske obtained permission from the Earl of Northumberland to raise money from a spice plate which was kept at Watton Priory,

and as for my Lorde of Northumberland writing a sufficient for the spice plate being at Watton Abbey I have obteyenedd in my hand for the same under my Lords signe manuell the 10 day (10 November).<sup>520</sup>

By now James Lawrence was the unwilling prior of the Watton community.<sup>521</sup> After some hesitation, and some heavy hints from Aske, that this would be a ‘small return for the efforts that he had made on their behalf over the past few weeks’, Lawrence delivered the plate to the ring leaders in person. Robert Aske acknowledged the receipt of the spice plate and thanked the Watton community four days later for complying with his wishes.

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<sup>518</sup> TNA, SP1/108 No 792.

<sup>519</sup> TNA, SP1/109 No 903.

<sup>520</sup> TNA, SP1/111 No 1039.

<sup>521</sup> During the Pilgrimage of Grace Hallam forced the Watton community to accept James Lawrence the prior of Ellerton to become prior of Watton. This incident will be discussed in chapter 6, pp. 198-199.

He ended the letter by asserting that; “he never intended to be a suppressor, but a maintainer of religion.”<sup>522</sup>

The fourth case of the Watton community giving aid to the Pilgrims comes from the evidence given by Harry Gyll the Sub Prior of Watton during the examination of Hallom at Kingston upon Hull on 23 January 1537.<sup>523</sup> This examination took place before William Rogers, mayor of Hull, Sir Ralph Ellerker, Sir John Constable, Sir William Constable, and others in the presence of John Ap Rice a notary public. In his evidence Harry Gyll said that they sent £10 ‘to the captains of the first insurrection’ in order ‘to save their goods’.<sup>524</sup> The date of this transaction is not recorded but in view of the threats made it must have been soon after Hallom’s invasion of Watton Priory. The only corroboration of this was in the evidence of Thomas Lather the cellarer of Watton priory given at the same time.<sup>525</sup>

Harry Gyll was the sub-prior of Watton at the time that Robert Holgate fled to London and James Lawrence was nominated as the new prior of Watton. He agreed to send two geldings to the rebel forces, possibly as a result of threats that were made by Hallom on his visit to Watton Priory. He also admitted to giving £10 to the rebels in order ‘to save their goods,’ another threat made by Hallom. By February 1537 Harry Gyll had been branded a traitor for supporting the Pilgrims<sup>526</sup>. In a letter from Sir Ralph Ellerker junior to Thomas Cromwell he said; ‘the King will learn by the bearer (John Fowbery) what traitors have been arraigned, and how many shall be put to execution’. He then went on to say:

there is ix, wheroff ther is one gentyll man called Wyvell and thre chanons, one the sub prior of Watton and two of Warter (Warter priory) wyche was taycyn by

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<sup>522</sup> TNA, SP1/111 No 1069.

<sup>523</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, Vol 12 (1) No 201, pp 99 – 100.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>525</sup> See the evidence of Thomas Lather in: *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, Vol 12 (1) No 201.

<sup>526</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, Vol 12 (1), No 410.

Nycolles Rudstone, and I brought from Hull six wheroff is cast two, the sub prior of Watton and one Cault.<sup>527</sup>

On the 13 February 1537 Norfolk sent a bill of the names of those who should be executed to Cromwell.<sup>528</sup> In the bill were listed the names of those who were to be kept in prison ‘who could not be indicted for lack of evidence.’

It would appear that the evidence against Gyll was compelling since he appeared among those who were to be executed. From the evidence above it appeared that Gyll’s only faults were that he gave two geldings and £10 to the rebels, probably under duress. For Gyll to have been executed there must have been an unrecorded instance of Gyll giving more positive support, or there may have been some other reason. Prior to Holgate’s departure to London, Harry Gyll would have been Holgate’s deputy at Watton. A possible reason that he may have given support to the rebels after Holgate fled was that he might have been aggrieved at not becoming prior of Watton. Since the late fifteenth century it had become customary for the prior of Watton to be also Master of the Gilbertine order, hence any new prior of that house would have required experience in the management of a substantial house of the order.<sup>529</sup> Harry Gyll’s experience would have been somewhat limited and it would not have been expected that he could be head of the house and the whole order. James Lawrence was prior of Ellerton which had a hospital attached to it and he was a natural candidate as he would have had the necessary managerial experience. Hence this hypothesis can be discounted.

A more plausible explanation was that Gyll may not have been a supporter of Holgate. We know that he and James Lawrence gave help to the rebels as discussed above. These two acts may have caused Holgate to regard Gyll as a traitor for acting without the authority of his prior. According to Gyll, Hallom was ‘greatly incensed’ with Holgate for being evicted from his farm hold. Anybody who supported Hallom would not have been

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<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid No 416 (2).

<sup>529</sup> David M Smith, *The Heads of Religious Houses in England and Wales III 1377 – 1540*, Cambridge University Press, (2008), for priors of Watton see pp. 606-7, and Masters of the order, pp. 603-4.



a friend of Holgate. The John Fowbery mentioned in Ellerker's letter identified Hallom as a rebel leader to the guards at the entrance to the City of Hull, which immediately led to his arrest.<sup>530</sup> John Fowbery was one of the original members of the Pilgrimage of Grace. He was a servant of Thomas Howard's son, the Earl of Surrey, and had since decided that it was healthier to be a loyalist.<sup>531</sup> Fowbery was also one of the men who laid charges against Sir Robert Constable.<sup>532</sup> He implied that Constable was against the agreement reached between the Duke of Norfolk and the rebel leaders at Doncaster, which was false. He also alleged that Constable had written a letter to Sir Francis Bigod, which encouraged Bigod to delay the start of the rising until the weather was better, when in fact its purpose was to stop him joining the rebellion at all.<sup>533</sup>

By changing sides, Fowbery wanted to show Cromwell and Holgate that he was now loyal to the Crown. If Holgate regarded Gyll as a traitor for his actions then Fowbery had the ideal opportunity to prove his loyalty to the Crown by bringing about the arrest of Harry Gyll. Sir Ralph Ellerker recognised Fowbery's loyalty as he stated in a letter to Thomas Cromwell that 'thinks Cromwell should help him to some farm that Hallom had of the house of Watton.' Presumably this was the farm from which Holgate evicted Hallom.

In February 1537 there was a renewed peasant uprising led by Sir Francis Bigod to revive the Pilgrimage of Grace.<sup>534</sup> Bigod saw the Pilgrimage of Grace as a possible vehicle for a genuine reform of the monasteries, which he preferred to their suppression. However, his resumption of the rebellion was opposed by Robert Aske and the other leaders of the

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<sup>530</sup> Letters and Papers Henry VIII. Vol 12 (i), p. 202, No. 410.

<sup>531</sup> Geoffrey Moorhouse, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, p. 287.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid*, p. 338.

<sup>533</sup> Sir Francis Bigod was one of the Yorkshire Commissioners who were responsible for compiling the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*. He was instrumental in securing the arrest of George Lazenby, a Cistercian monk who preached against the King's supremacy. He gradually distanced himself from Cromwell because of his changing religious beliefs. He was not enthusiastic for the abolition of the religious life, he wanted to improve and reform the religious orders. He was executed at Tyburn in June 1537 for his part in the Yorkshire rebellions.

<sup>534</sup> For an account of Sir Francis Bigod's part in the rebellion, see, R W Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*. pp 378 - 84.

rebellion, and it soon collapsed. Sir Francis Bigod, Robert Aske, Lord Darcy, Sir Thomas Percy and Sir Robert Constable were amongst the 200 men who were executed.

William Todd, Prior of Malton, was accused of having participated in this latter stage of the Pilgrimage of Grace and was imprisoned in the Tower of London. In April 1537 he made a sworn statement in which he said that he had initially given the Pilgrims some assistance, but he denied that he had sent any aid during the second part of the rebellion.<sup>535</sup> On the Tuesday before the start of the second rebellion, Bigod was at Malton Priory, according to the testimony given by William Todd when he was examined in the Tower. At his examination Todd admitted that about fifteen years ago he had seen two documents at Rosendale in Westmoreland. The first was a roll of parchment which is described as follows:

‘a roll of parchment of half a yard in length and half a quarter of a yard broad or thereabouts wherin was painted a moon painted growing, with a number of years growing as the moon did, and where the moon was at the full there was a cardinall painted, and beneath him the moon waned and ij monks painted a rowe, one under another headless, to a certain number, and in the midst of that roll was a strike made as an overthwarde partition, and under that line in the nether part of the roll a child painted with axes and butchers knives and instruments about him.’<sup>536</sup>

I have not seen an interpretation of this prophecy, and the following may be a possible interpretation. The rising of the moon could be interpreted as the rise of the old church in a reformed form and the reference to the monks could mean the reform of the monastic orders. The latter part may be a reference to Cardinal Wolsey, who was the son of a butcher. This could represent the end of the old corrupt church and the rise of the reformed church. This was very much in keeping with Sir Francis Bigod’s vision of the

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<sup>535</sup> *Monks Nuns and Friars*, p. 381.

<sup>536</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, Vol 12 (1) No. 1023.

new church and hence he would have almost certainly have known the interpretation of the prophecy, despite his denial of it.<sup>537</sup>

The other document that Todd described was a printed book called 'Metodius'. During the Middle Ages, prophecies which had been supposedly attributed to Bishop Methodius who died about 300 AD were widely circulated. In the seventh century false stories regarding predictions of the end of the world were attributed to him. These stories were widely circulated and 'greatly influenced popular expectations about the end of the world,' and in particular they warned against the 'rise of the Antichrist'.<sup>538</sup> A sixteenth century version of these prophecies, 'A prophecy of a New World Emperor,' predicted the date for the beginning of the last days of the world as 1534. By 1535 according to this English version, 'disaster will engulf the world and Rome will fall.' 'All religion will cease and nuns will be turned out of their convents and defiled, priests will deny they were ever priests and the Pope will flee from Rome'.<sup>539</sup> The prophecy also referred to 'a commotion of the planets' which Sharon Jansen has used to date the event as being in the year 1529. In the text it probably refers to a conjunction of the planets which took place in this year. However, after 1536 the word 'commotion' was widely used to refer to the Pilgrimage of Grace, a word which Todd used when describing Bigod's rebellion.<sup>540</sup> The book referred to by Todd may well have been a copy of this work. According to his testimony he kept it 'lying open in his chamber for every man to loke on'. He had shown both the scroll and the 'prophecy' to Francis Bigod during the Pilgrimage of Grace. In his testimony, Todd said that he did not attempt to interpret the meaning of these documents and neither did he ever speak against the King.<sup>541</sup>

During the latter stages of the Northern rebellion one of Bigod's servants came to Malton Priory and 'ordered the examinaton pain of death' to send 'to the master on the morrow.' Todd begged him not to make him do it since he already had too many enemies. As a result of this conversation he did not send men or give any aid whatsoever to Bigod.

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<sup>537</sup> Evidence to support this is given below.

<sup>538</sup> Sharon L Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy under Henry VIII*, Boydell Press, (1991), p. 131.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid*, p. 134.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>541</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, vol. 12 (i), No. 1023, p. 468.

However, he did admit to sending a servant to the leaders of the first insurrection and also he sent a cart and two men ‘without harness under compulsion’.<sup>542</sup>

If we contrast this with the statement that Bigod made at his examination on 8 February 1537 we can see that there was some agreement, but with regard to William Todd’s interpretation of the prophecies there was disagreement.<sup>543</sup> In his testimony he said that William Todd had shown him a copy of the prophecy, which Todd admitted to, but Bigod went on to say he had not understood it until now. Either Todd had explained the meaning to him or Bigod already knew the significance of it. According to Todd’s testimony, he said that he had not tried to interpret the prophecies. As to who was believed, we can only judge from the fate of each of them. Sir Francis Bigod was executed at Tyburn during June 1537. It must have been judged that William Todd’s small part in aiding the rebels was not given willingly. He must have been pardoned since in December as the late Prior of Malton he was granted a dispensation to hold a benefice.<sup>544</sup>

### **The Dissolution of the Lincolnshire Houses**

All of the Gilbertine houses survived until the last round of the dissolution process even though the valuation of the majority of the houses was less than £200. This was the figure laid down as guide for making the decision of which houses were to fall in 1536. A reason for this was that it would have been difficult to accommodate all of the canons and nuns who wished to continue in religion in the one or two houses that could have been kept open. Claire Cross has said that the government had no choice but to let some of the smaller monasteries escape dissolution otherwise there would have been no suitable institutions available to accept the expelled men and women.<sup>545</sup> This was a more practical option for many of the other religious orders in the country due to the fact that they had many more available houses than had the Gilbertines.

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<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>543</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, Vol 12 (1) No 369.

<sup>544</sup> D S Chambers, *Faculty Office Registers, 1534 – 1549*, Oxford (1966), p 116.

<sup>545</sup> Claire Cross, *The End of Medieval Monasticism in the East Riding of Yorkshire*, East Yorkshire Local History Society, (1993), p. 22.

The first of the Lincolnshire houses to be surrendered was St. Katherine's outside Lincoln on 14 July 1538. This was two months before the other houses of the order in the county. Robert Holgate was the Prior up until the time that he became Prior of Watton and Master of the order. He was succeeded by William Griffith who accused him of stealing a chalice and a pair of censers of the same value from the Priory. Holgate was cited to answer charges before the King's Commissioners. William Griffith was deprived of his position as prior for having taken part in the Lincolnshire rebellion in 1536 and for dissipating the goods of his house. He then entered the priory by force, expelled the new prior and maintained his position until the surrender. William Griffith's behaviour after his deprivation may be a reason for St. Katherine's being dissolved two months before the other houses of the order in the county.

The remainder of the Lincolnshire houses were surrendered between 18 September and 2 October 1538. The table in Appendix 8 gives a valuation of all the Lincolnshire houses except St Katherine's a few days after the surrenders were taken.<sup>546</sup> The valuations taken from the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* have also been included (in brackets) to show how the valuations had changed from those taken in 1535. Apart from Alvingham and Newstead the figures taken from the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* appear to be lower than the figures at the dissolution. This could be explained by the motives used by Henry VIII when he compiled the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*. In 1534 Henry decided to create a new annual income tax of 10% on the income from all church lands. In order to carry this out he had to commission a survey of all church lands and property. It is possible that the heads of these houses concealed some of the income that came into their houses in order to reduce their tax liabilities. It will also be noticed that there were discrepancies between the number of canons and nuns appearing on the deeds of surrender and the first pension

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<sup>546</sup> This table has been constructed from a document amongst the State Papers of Henry 8 (TNA SP1/242 fo. 86) dated 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1538. It consists of a valuation, the amounts paid in pensions, the number of religious in each house, a valuation of the lead and bells, the amount of plate owned by each house and any other goods of monetary value for the Gilbertine Priors in Lincolnshire plus the Gilbertine Priory of Mattersey in Nottinghamshire. The Gilbertine House of St Katherine's at Lincoln has been omitted from the list. It has been possible to estimate the sums in certain columns. These have been shown bracketed. This document was evidently used by John Freman, one of the Lincolnshire Commissioners, to give Thomas Cromwell a valuation of all the Gilbertine Priors in Lincolnshire (TNA SP1/137 pp. 89 – 92). This is the overall valuation of the Gilbertine Priors compiled for Thomas Cromwell which does include that of St Katherine's, hence the estimates given in the appropriate columns.

lists. Where the number on the pension list was less than the number at the dissolution, one reason for this discrepancy could be due to the death of a canon or a nun. A G Dickens in his analysis of the payment of pensions to the ex-religious has shown that a small number of the ex-religious sold their pensions for lump sums.<sup>547</sup> In the cases where this occurred it would have been the responsibility of the person who bought the pension to collect it from the crown commissioners; the name of the original recipient would no longer appear on the pension list. Other possible reasons could be due to the pension recipient losing his pension patent or he may have moved into another county and failed to tell the commissioners of his move.<sup>548</sup> Where there are more on the pension lists is rather more difficult to explain. A possible explanation is that they have moved from another house.

On the same day as the data in the table below was provided, John Freman wrote to Thomas Cromwell to describe the condition of all the Gilbertine houses in Lincolnshire that had been suppressed. As it ‘would be tedious to you to read all the books, I send you a brief of them’. Presumably the data in the table was the source of the information sent to Cromwell. The summary of Freeman’s data sent to Cromwell was as follows:<sup>549</sup>

Yearly revenues	£1407
Pensions to Priors canons and nuns	£574 – 6 – 8d
Remaining	£832 – 13 – 4d
Household stuff and plate	£1266 – 3 – 2d
Wages, rewards, costs and charges	£509 – 13 – 6d
Remaining	£756 – 9 – 8d
Bells and lead	£3972 – 13 – 4d
Value of goods sold and unsold deducting charges	£4729 – 3 – 0d

<sup>547</sup> A G Dickens, *The Edwardian Arrears in Augmentations Payments and the Problem of the Ex-Religious*, EHR, 40, (1940), p. 406.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid, p. 408.

<sup>549</sup> TNA, SP1/137 pp 89 – 92.

John Freeman's overall accounts for the Gilbertine priories (SP1/137) does include St. Katherine's priory. By using the totals in this document it has been possible to estimate the figures which would apply to St. Katherine's. These are shown bracketed as { .. } in the table in Appendix 1. The one figure which stands out for St Katherine's was the amount paid in pensions, £37 – 6 – 8d.<sup>550</sup> This fell well below the figure obtained from the pension lists of £95 – 6 – 8d. Even if the pension paid to William Griffith was deducted (he may not have been paid his pension of £40 initially), this still left a total of £55 – 6 – 8d. One possible explanation was that some of the canons were in sympathy with William Griffith and had taken part in the Lincolnshire rebellion. This may have accounted for the fact that this house surrendered two months before the others in the county. If this were the case, then the pension lists show that their pensions were restored after the dissolution.

#### **William Griffith, the Last Prior of St Katherine's**

A number of letters have survived in the collections of the State Papers Domestic for the reign of Henry VIII regarding William Griffith in the months leading up to the dissolution. These letters give an insight into the events during the last days of a Gilbertine Priory.

On the 1 March 1538 Cuthbert, Bishop of Durham, wrote to the Lord Privy Seal on behalf of Robert Holgate, Bishop of Llandaff, with regard to William Griffith, 'sometime a Prior removable of the house of St Katherine beside Lyncolne'. Apparently William Griffith had been removed from office for 'setting forward the late commotion in Lyncolneshir' and for 'myspendinge to evill purpose the goods of the said house.'<sup>551</sup> As a result of this he [Griffith] then entered the Priory by force and removed the canon who had been appointed as Prior of St Katherine's according to the rules of the Gilbertine order. It appeared that William Griffith had been deprived of his office for having accused Robert Holgate of stealing a chalice and a pair of sensors from St Katherine's

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<sup>550</sup> Calculated from TNA, SP1/137, the overall valuation of Gilbertine priories in Lincolnshire compiled by Freeman for Thomas Cromwell.

<sup>551</sup> British Library, Harl. MS 283, fo. 164.

Priory. Cuthbert wrote to the Lord Privy Seal pleading the innocence of Robert Holgate saying that ‘ye might sone put suche a disobedientary (William Griffith) to silence’.

By 31 May 1538 William Griffith had been reinstated as Prior of St. Katherine’s. In a letter to Thomas Cromwell he claimed that Robert Holgate had confessed before Cromwell that he had stolen the chalice and censors, which were worth a great deal of money.<sup>552</sup> In a footnote to the letter he asked that he may speak with him before Robert Holgate comes to see him, as it would be to the King’s advantage. Unfortunately the reasons why he wanted to speak with Cromwell so quickly were not recorded. Presumably he wanted to plead his case to ensure his future after the dissolution of his house.

In a further letter to Thomas Cromwell on the 28 June 1538 Griffith described himself as ‘the late Prior of St. Katherine’s without Lincoln.’<sup>553</sup> It was doubtful if he had been deposed yet again as it was more likely that he was anticipating the dissolution of his house, which took place two weeks later. On the deed of surrender he was listed as the prior. This letter consisted of an inventory of the livestock and crops both harvested and still in the field. He began by thanking Cromwell ‘for the cheritable gudnes towarde me shewed at all tymes. He mentioned three men, John Hardy, Robert Richardson and William Bate, who were tenants of the Priory and were looking after the Priory livestock. He described these three men as ‘very good I thynke, ther wylbe labor for them to yowr Lordshepe.’ He went on to say:

‘it wyll plese yowr Lordshepe to aponnt them that shalbe her in comysson wat corn and catell I schall have to lyve apon and a son as I and my company be dyssolvdy I wylbe with yow.’<sup>554</sup>

Presumably Thomas Cromwell had allowed Griffith to remain at the Priory’s farm in Lincoln since he thanked Cromwell ‘for the cheritable gudnes towarde me’. Griffith was

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<sup>552</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, Vol 13 (1), No. 1103.

<sup>553</sup> TNA, SP1/242 fo. 32.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*



probably ill and infirm at this time and he died about a year after the dissolution of his house. He asked Cromwell to allow the three men mentioned to retain their tenancies so that they could manage the farm for him. If William Griffith were ill and not likely to live much longer, this would have been a sensible solution in order to prevent him causing any more trouble.

Two other documents, written after the dissolution of St. Katherine's, deal with an outstanding debt of the Priory. William Griffith wrote to Cromwell in July 1538.<sup>555</sup> This letter was written within days of the dissolution of the Priory, since Griffith refers to the time 'when the howse was surrendered to the Kings majestie.' Apparently he owed £40 to the treasury of the First Fruits and Tenths. His reason for not paying was that the house was in debt to the King by an amount of £40. In his letter he said that Holgate had ordered the Priors of Sempringham and Bullington to pay the outstanding amount 'with out my dyssyor or consent'. In mitigation he reminded Cromwell that Holgate had the chalice and the pair of censors, which were worth more than £200.

By 26 November 1540 William Griffith had died. A document in the Chancery Proceedings in the National Archives record a case brought by the former Priors of Sempringham and Bullington against John Copeland, the executor of William Griffith's will.<sup>556</sup> It appeared that the two Priors had paid £35 towards Griffith's debt to the Court of the First Fruits and Tenths and were trying to claim the £35 back out of his estate. His estate was valued at £60 and John Copeland was refusing to pay the two former priors the £35. Unfortunately the outcome of the case is not known.

### **Conclusion**

When Thomas Cromwell's agents were given instructions as to how they were expected to carry out the visitation of the religious houses, they were told not to enter the houses of the Gilbertine order. This task may have been delegated to Robert Holgate through his friendship with Thomas Cromwell. However, four houses of the order were visited, two

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<sup>555</sup> TNA, SP1/242 fo. 62.

<sup>556</sup> TNA, C1/1035/6.

of which were double houses of the order namely Shouldham and Chicksands. In both of these houses the visitors reported sexual impropriety amongst the nuns of the order. Evidence from the visitation records of other religious orders show that the validity of these reports are questionable. There is no evidence to show that the moral standards of the women of the Gilbertine order were any different to those of other orders for women.

The only Gilbertine priory in Lincolnshire that is known to have participated in the rebellion known as the Pilgrimage of Grace was St Katherine's priory in Lincoln. However, the rebellion in Lincolnshire soon collapsed. The uprising in Yorkshire posed a much greater threat to the crown. Two Gilbertine priories in Yorkshire were known to have participated, Watton and Malton priories. Not all of the canons within these two priories were sympathetic with the aims of this rebellion. The Watton canons played a much greater role than the canons at Malton priory. Harry Gyll the sub prior at Watton at the time was the only person to be hanged for the part that he played. It is questionable however, as to if he played a major part in assisting the rebels. It is possible that through Holgate's influence, Harry Gyll may have been singled out to take responsibility for the help that the Watton canons gave to the rebels. The available evidence showed that his only fault was that he gave two geldings and £10 to them. When Holgate had left for London Harry Gyll was only the sub-prior of the house not the Prior. Gyll may have thought that he should be promoted to the office of prior but for some unrecorded reason this did not occur. This could have resulted in 'bad blood' existing between these two men, and Holgate may have made a case against Gyll resulting in him being hanged.

All of the Gilbertine houses were reprieved from the first round of dissolutions in 1536 even though a large number of the houses were worth less than £200 per annum which was the threshold set by Cromwell. They were probably reprieved because of the problems that would have arisen in re-housing the nuns of the order in a reduced number of houses; these women would not have been able to join other orders.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE GILBERTINE CANONS AFTER THE DISSOLUTION

#### Introduction

The documentary sources that have been used to study the lives of the Gilbertine canons after they were ejected from their houses are as follows: the monastic pension lists, wills and inventories, institutions to benefices in the diocesan registers and chantry certificates for monks and canons who were chantry priests after the dissolution. One other document that was consulted was the returns of the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln to Queen Mary made at the beginning of her reign in 1554 regarding the state of the ex-religious in the diocese of Lincoln. These returns give much biographical material for these men who were still alive at this time. Unfortunately no such detailed documents have survived in their entirety for other dioceses, making comparisons difficult. Pension lists are problematic since lists for some houses have not survived. When these lists were compared with the signatures on the Deeds of surrender, occasionally there were discrepancies in the numbers of ex-religious. Care had to be exercised in the use of wills as not all of the ex-monks and canons left wills; there were instances where it is obvious that a will was left but a copy of it has not survived.

After the dissolution the lives of the ex-canons and monks did not change as dramatically as those of the ex-nuns. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly the level of pensions paid to the male ex-religious was higher in general than those of the nuns. Secondly, canons had the option of taking up a benefice as and when they became available in order to supplement their pensions. During the reign of Edward VI, the law changed with regard to clerical marriage.<sup>557</sup> Some of the ex-religious did marry during Edward's reign, but many of these married clergy were deprived of any benefices they had acquired during the first year of Mary's reign.

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<sup>557</sup> Helen L. Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation, Precedent, Policy and Practice*. Ashgate, (2000), pp. 180-183.

During the period from 1540 to 1574 the economic situation of the country was extremely difficult as the country was going through a period of inflation. David Hackett Fischer has shown that the prices of food and raw materials rose rapidly in the mid sixteenth century, for example the price of grain doubled between 1540 and 1560.<sup>558</sup> The pensions that were awarded to the ex-religious were fixed amounts and did not rise with the rate of inflation. In 1542 board and lodging could be obtained for a shilling a week but by 1552 this had risen three fold.<sup>559</sup> The pension was designed to provide a living for someone in retirement, not for someone with financial obligations. Many of the Gilbertine canons were awarded pensions of between £2 and £2 – 13 – 4d per annum; three senior canons of Sempringham Priory were awarded pensions of £6. The former priors were awarded pensions ranging from £10 to £20, the exceptions being the priors of Sempringham and Chicksands who were awarded £30 per annum. Hence the majority of the former Gilbertine canons were living a life close to poverty. In order that they could sustain a reasonable standard of living they would need to find some form of employment. The only practical solution to this was to find some benefice that they could serve. Vacant benefices would not be immediately available and it would have taken some years for a suitable position to become available.

Payments of pensions were made on a regular basis until 1551, but soon afterwards payments fell into arrears. Evidence of this comes from the non-payment of pensions in 1552 which were recorded in the 1552 pension returns.<sup>560</sup> The economic crisis of this period resulted in the government having to make economies and the ex-religious were not exempt from this. These returns indicated that in many cases the pensions had not been paid over the whole year. It can only be assumed that many ex-religious who had not obtained a benefice by this time may have died in poverty.

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<sup>558</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *The Great Wave: Price Revolutions and the Rhythm of History*, Oxford University Press, (1996), p. 74.

<sup>559</sup> G A J Hodgett, *The State of the Ex-Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln*, Lincoln Record Society, Volume 53, (1959) page xi.

<sup>560</sup> Return of the Commissioners listing pensioners in County Lincoln: TNA E101/76/18.

### The Number of Gilbertine Canons at the Dissolution

The following two tables show the known numbers of monks and canons in the counties of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire at the time of the dissolution. Using surviving pension lists and other associated documents it was possible to calculate the numbers of canons and monks who survived the dissolution for certain specific years. Unfortunately the surviving data did not allow direct comparisons to be made between the two counties for a specific year but the data for Lincolnshire in 1554 and the figures for Yorkshire in 1556 were close enough in time for a reasonable comparison to be made.

**Table 1 - Lincolnshire**

<b>Monastic Order</b>	<b>1539<sup>561</sup></b>	<b>1550<sup>562</sup></b>	<b>1554<sup>563</sup></b>
Benedictine	72	30	13
Cistercian	71	2	2
Premonstratensian	58	2	1
Augustinian	97	15	9
Carthusian	8	1	1
Gilbertine	81	50	28

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<sup>561</sup> Pensions paid to ex-religious recorded in the Miscellaneous Books of the Exchequer Augmentation Office, TNA, E315/245.

<sup>562</sup> Schedule of pensioners in the county of Lincoln in the Books of the Court of Augmentations, TNA, E101/76/18.

<sup>563</sup> Returns of the Dean and Chapter to Queen Mary's enquiry into pensioners in the diocese of Lincoln, TNA, E101/76/26.

**Table 2 - Yorkshire<sup>564</sup>**

<b>Monastic Order</b>	<b>1539<sup>565</sup></b>	<b>1556<sup>566</sup></b>	<b>1564<sup>567</sup></b>	<b>1573<sup>568</sup></b>	<b>1582<sup>569</sup></b>
Benedictine	114	51	21	5	1
Cistercian	153	76	40	15	3
Premonstratensian	9	7	4	3	2
Augustinian	104	60	28	14	4
Carthusian	24	10	3	2	1
Gilbertine	27	16	8	3	1

Considering the data for Lincolnshire first, it was seen that 62% of the male Gilbertine population survived until 1550. The next highest figure was that for the Benedictines where only 42% survived. Of the remaining orders these ranged from 3% for the Cistercians to 15.5% for the Augustinians. By 1554 the number of surviving Gilbertines had fallen to 35% and for the Benedictines down to 18%. A direct comparison with

<sup>564</sup> In the table for Yorkshire, the Cluniac house of Pontefract and the Grandimontines of Grosmont have been omitted since these orders did not have any of their houses in Lincolnshire. Grosmont priory only had five canons at the dissolution of which three survived in 1556 (60%). Due to the small sample size this was ignored in the analysis. Pontefract priory had thirteen canons at the dissolution of which six appear on the 1556 pension list (46%). This figure falls in the range of surviving members of other orders in that particular year. This table has been compiled from figures, which have been extracted from Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks, Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series Vol 150 (1995).

<sup>565</sup> Pensions paid to ex-religious recorded in the Miscellaneous Books of the Exchequer Augmentation Office, TNA, E315/245, E315/246.

<sup>566</sup> TNA, E164/31.

<sup>567</sup> TNA, LR6/122/8.

<sup>568</sup> T M Fallow, *Names of Yorkshire Ex-religious, 1573; their Pensions and Subsidies to the Queen theron*, Yorkshire Archaeological Journal, (1907), Vol. xix, 100 – 4.

<sup>569</sup> TNA, LR6/122/9.

figures for Yorkshire could not be made. The available data for the ex-religious in this county was only available for the years 1539 and 1556. By examining the figures for 1556 it was seen that the Gilbertine population had fallen to 56% of that at dissolution. However, looking at the other orders it was seen that figures had a range extending from 42% for the Carthusians to 58% for the Augustinians. The data for the Premonstratensians was ignored due to the small sample size.

The large fall off in numbers in the pension lists from the dissolution up until the end of Edward's reign and the beginning of Mary's reign would have been largely due to the death of the more elderly members of the religious orders. However, this may not have been the sole reason. Some of these men may have sold their pensions or, they may have been too ill and may not have had friends or relatives who could have collected their pensions. The members of the Carthusian order from the Hull charterhouse were the only religious order in the East Riding of Yorkshire to have returned to the religious life during Mary's reign,<sup>570</sup> One of these monks Thomas Synderton along with a number of the Mount Grace Carthusians joined the refounded charterhouse at Sheen in Richmond in 1556. On Elizabeth's accession this community migrated to the charterhouse at Bruges in Belgium where Thomas Synderton died in 1580. This would have not been an option for the Gilbertines unless they were willing to become members of another order since they never successfully established themselves outside of England.

However, it is possible to draw two conclusions from these figures.. Firstly, young men were being attracted to the order in Lincolnshire during the sixteenth century. This indicated that at the dissolution, the Gilbertines were still recruiting more young men as well as older recruits than the other religious orders. In Yorkshire the pattern is the same, however, this was also true for the other orders in the county. Secondly, as will become clear later, ex-Gilbertine and Augustinian canons were finding employment more easily

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<sup>570</sup> Claire Cross, 'The End of Medieval Monasticism in the East Riding of Yorkshire', *East Yorkshire Local History Society Local History Series, No. 47*, (1993), p. 36.

than the ex-religious of other orders. It will be shown later that of the 27 Gilbertine canons that were alive in 1554, 21 had found benefices.<sup>571</sup>

### **Canons obtaining Benefices after the Dissolution**

After these canons had been ejected from their priories the only means of support that they would have had would have been the meagre annual pension paid out by the crown. The younger men would have been keen to obtain employment, which would have supplemented their pension. Employment for the older members would have been more difficult and many of those may have died within a few years of the dissolution.

One employment opportunity open to these men was that of parish priests when benefices became vacant. There was the possibility that they could have taken over parish churches that were once appropriated by their priories. Claire Cross in her study of the ex-religious men in Yorkshire after the dissolution, found that the canons of Haltemprice and Warter priories, both being Augustinian houses, found benefices in their local areas and in some cases were employed by the churches that once belonged to their priories.<sup>572</sup> However the canons from Bridlington priory, another Augustinian house, were not so lucky.<sup>573</sup>

William Wood the last prior of Bridlington became actively involved in the Pilgrimage of Grace and was eventually executed in May 1537.<sup>574</sup> The results of his actions lead to the confiscation of the priory and its possessions by the crown after the failure of the rebellion leading to the house being leaderless at the time of the suppression.<sup>575</sup> This may be the reason why the Bridlington canons were not successful in obtaining benefices after the dissolution of their priory. After the dissolution the canons of the Augustinian house of Kirkham in Yorkshire not only obtained benefices of churches which once belonged to the priory, but were to all intents and purposes still part of the local community to which they had served in the centuries before.<sup>576</sup>

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<sup>571</sup> These figures have been obtained from, TNA , E101/76/26.

<sup>572</sup> Claire Cross, 'The End of Medieval Monasticism in the East Riding of Yorkshire', p. 39.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

<sup>574</sup> Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks Nuns and Friars in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, Vol 150, (1995), p. 255.

<sup>575</sup> Claire Cross, 'The End of Medieval Monasticism in the East Riding of Yorkshire', p.40.

<sup>576</sup> Janet Burton, *Kirkham priory from Foundation to Dissolution*, University of York Borthwick Paper No. 86, (1995), p. 27.



The returns of the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln Cathedral to Mary's enquiry into pensioners in the diocese of Lincoln showed how many of the ex-religious had acquired benefices by 1554.<sup>577</sup> These returns showed that there were 52 ex-monks and canons who were still drawing monastic pensions from the Crown in the county of Lincolnshire.<sup>578</sup>

The following table shows the numbers of ex-religious from the various monastic orders within the county of Lincoln who had found a benefice compared with the total from the order who were still receiving pensions.

**Table 3 - Number of Monks/Canons who had pensions and found Benefices after the Dissolution**

<b>Religious Order</b>	<b>Number<sup>579</sup></b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Gilbertines	21/27	78%
Carthusians	0/1	0%
Augustinian	9/10	90%
Cistercians	0/2	0%
Benedictines	6/12	50%

This table shows that the Gilbertines in Lincolnshire were successful in finding employment after the dissolution (21 out of a total of ex-canons who were receiving pensions, compared with 15 out of 25 for the remaining monastic orders). However, from a percentage point of view, the Augustinians were more successful than the Gilbertines. Including the Augustinian Canons with the Gilbertines, the Regular Canons of Lincolnshire had secured 30 out of the total of 36 benefices (83%) held by the ex-religious in 1554. Members of the Cistercian order did not in general serve as parish

<sup>577</sup> TNA E101/76/26

<sup>578</sup> The numbers of monks and canons who were ordained as priests within their own communities prior to the dissolution has been analysed in the chapter titled "The canons before the dissolution."

<sup>579</sup> The figures in this column show the numbers of canons/monks who found benefices out of the total number who were receiving pensions.

priests in the middle ages.<sup>580</sup> The Carthusians followed a different lifestyle to that of other monks, living a solitary life for much of the time. They would have had very little contact with the outside world and it was doubtful if they worked outside of the monastery. The Augustinian canons however, had served as parish priest in order to supplement their revenues. Members of religious orders who were carrying out these duties would be in a better position to continue after the dissolution.

The factors which would have determined the ease by which an ex-monk or canon could have obtained a benefice were as follows. The main factor was the availability of a suitable parish. Some of the ex-religious would have had to wait a number of years before a suitable living became available. The older and infirm members of religious communities would have found it more difficult than the younger members to find a benefice. For example, Christopher Cartwright, who was the prior of the Gilbertine house of North Ormesby continued as a chantry priest at the chantry of Quadring Eaudyke in Lincolnshire after the dissolution of his house. In the report that was prepared prior to the dissolution of the chantry in 1548, he was described as being 63 years of age and unfit to carry out his duties.<sup>581</sup>

The following table shows the 21 out of the 27 Gilbertine Canons who appeared in the returns who held benefices in 1554, the value of the living and the pension awarded by the crown in 1539. The remaining five ex-canons were described as having no ecclesiastical preferment and their only income was their monastic pension. The one exception is that of Christopher Cartwright the former prior of North Ormesby who had an additional pension from his dissolved chantry of Quadring Eudyke in Lincolnshire.

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<sup>580</sup> Claire Cross, 'The End of Medieval Monasticism in the East Riding of Yorkshire.' p. 38.

<sup>581</sup> TNA E 301/33.

**Table 4 - A List of Gilbertine Canons Holding Benefices in 1554**<sup>582</sup>

Name	Religious House	Benefice	Value	Pension
Robert Whittinge	Alvingham	North Thoresby	£5 - 6 - 8	£2 - 13 - 4
John Bowton	Alvingham	Cockerington	£5 - 0 - 0	£2 - 0 - 0
Edmund Tate	Alvingham	Cuxwold	£5 - 0 - 0	£2 - 0 - 0
John Tyson	Bullington	Folkingham	£6 - 0 - 0	£2 - 0 - 0
Thomas Byggs	Bullington	Hackthorne	£4 - 0 - 0	£2 - 0 - 0
William Longhorne	Bullington	Horsington	£1 - 6 - 8	£2 - 0 - 0
John Franke	Bullington	Steeping Parva	£9 - 0 - 0	£2 - 13 - 4
John Boyes	Bullington	Private Chaplain	£2 - 13 - 4	£2 - 0 - 0
Thomas Tyson	Bullington	Langton by Wragby	£4 - 13 - 4	£2 - 0 - 0
Thomas West	Catley	Gedney	£5 - 6 - 8	£2 - 13 - 4
Christopher Hudson	Catley	Dorrington	£6 - 0 - 0	£2 - 0 - 0
John Bray	Haverholme	Ruskington	*	£2 - 0 - 0
Richard Wilson	Lincoln	Boultham	£7 - 0 - 0	£4 - 0 - 0
John Colman	Lincoln	Waltham	£5 - 0 - 0	£2 - 0 - 0
Thomas Clippingdale	Lincoln	South Thoresby	£6 - 13 - 0	£5 - 6 - 8
Thomas Lame	Lincoln	Kelstern	£6 - 13 - 0	£5 - 0 - 0
Richard Tyson	Lincoln	Bishop Norton	£9 - 0 - 0	£5 - 6 - 8
John Haggas	Newstead	Utterby	£1 - 13 - 4	£2 - 0 - 0
Robert Bell	Sempringham	Stowe & Birthorpe	*	£6 - 13 - 4
John Leach	Sempringham	Braceby	£5 - 0 - 0	£4 - 0 - 0
John Obrie	Sixhills	Whitton	£5 - 0 - 0	£2 - 0 - 0

Of the 20 benefices (excluding the post of private chaplain) listed in Table 4, only five of these belonged to Gilbertine foundations before the dissolution.<sup>583</sup> A search through the institution lists for the diocese of Lincoln shows that none of these men held these

<sup>582</sup> This table has been compiled from data in TNA E101/76/26, the returns of the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln Cathedral concerning the ex religious in the diocese in 1554.

<sup>583</sup> The rectories listed in Table 4 which belonged to Gilbertine foundations are as follows:- Cockerington (Alvingham), Hackthorne (Bullington), Langton by Wragby (Bullington), Ruskington (Haverholme), and Stowe & Birthorpe (Sempringham). *Valor Ecclesiasticus temp. Hen VIII, Auctoritate Regis institutus*, ed. J Caley and J Hunter, 6 volumes, Record Commission (London, 1810-34). vol. iv, p. 58 (Alvingham), p. 84 (Bullington), p. 118 (Haverholme), p. 102 (Sempringham).

benefices before the dissolution, indeed, they did not appear to hold any benefices outside of their respective monasteries.

The data in Table 4 was compared with a Clergy Visitation that was carried out in 1551 of all the parishes in Lincolnshire.<sup>584</sup> This return gave the name of the parish and the name of the incumbent. An analysis of the data led to the following conclusions. Eleven of the canons who held benefices in 1554 had acquired them before 1551; the remainder obtained theirs between 1551 and 1554. There was no evidence to show that the remaining ten had benefices before 1551 hence they had to wait at least twelve years until a suitable living became available. Another reason why the remaining eleven canons found employment in parishes in such a short space of time was that at the beginning of Mary's reign a number of clergy were deprived of their livings because they had married. These deprivations would have resulted in a number of benefices being suddenly available giving unemployed priests the opportunity of employment. Of the 20 canons in Table 4, only Christopher Hudson is known to have been married.<sup>585</sup> In order to retain his benefice, he may have elected to divorce his wife.

Eight of the canons who held benefices in 1551 do not appear in the 1554 list hence it must be assumed that they had died, moved into another diocese or possibly they may have sold their pensions. One canon, Robert Thornall, a former canon of Newstead Priory, who appeared in the 1551 list, was described in 1554 as having no ecclesiastical preferment and married. He may well have lost his living as curate of Woodhall when Mary came to the throne.

Two of the canons in the visitation returns had sold their pensions within a few years of the dissolution. This meant that their names did not appear in the 1554 returns. Anthony Langton sold his pension on 12 October 1542 for the sum of £5 – 13s – 4d to Thomas Smyth, a clerk. Two months later in December of that year he had been preferred to the vicarage of Horbling in Lincolnshire, the living being held by the crown. If a pensioner

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<sup>584</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Diocesan Records Vj 13, Liber Cleri

<sup>585</sup> G A J Hodgett, *The State of the Ex-Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln*, p. 119.

was promoted to a living by the crown the payment of the pension was supposed to terminate if the living was an equivalent or greater value. Many ex-religious did not relinquish their pensions upon accepting benefices where the promotions were from patrons other than the crown. According to the Commissioners returns regarding monastic pensions in 1552, it appeared that Langton had tried to draw his pension after becoming vicar of Horbling. The entry in the returns regarding this were as follows:

And the said Antony Langton confessed before us [the king's commissioners] that about December in the xxxiiij<sup>th</sup> yere of our late sovereign lord Henry the viij<sup>th</sup> he was preferred to the vicarage of Horbling co. Linc. Of the said Kings gift and promocion so as it shold seme by his owne confession that the payment of his seid pencion shold then have ceased by that occasion.<sup>586</sup>

Anthony Jackson, however, when he sold his pension on 7 December 1539 for the sum of £6 to Thomas Pannell, did not try to draw his pension. After having sold his pension he became vicar of Billingborough in Lincolnshire. Both Horbling and Billingborough lied within a few miles of Sempringham Priory where both Langton and Jackson had been canons.

In 1551 one canon held two benefices simultaneously. John Colman a former canon of St Katherine's Priory in Lincoln was vicar of Fiskerton and was also curate at Waltham.<sup>587</sup> The latter position may have been taken when his position of chantry priest at Waltham was dissolved. The ex-Gilbertine canon John Boyes listed in the table above was living in Scrivelsby and was chaplain to Sir Edward Dymock knight, from whom he received £2 – 13s – 4d.<sup>588</sup> Robert Bell and John Bray were not awarded pensions at the dissolution as they both obtained benefices immediately afterwards, the value of their benefices being equal to or greater than the pension that may have been awarded.<sup>589</sup> Robert Bell acquired

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<sup>586</sup> TNA, E101/76/18, m 6.

<sup>587</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Diocesan Records Vj 13, Liber Cleri.

<sup>588</sup> G A J Hodgett, *The State of the Ex-Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln*, p. 107.

<sup>589</sup> John Bray, TNA E314/77. Robert Bell G A J Hodgett, *The State of the Ex-Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln*, p. 117.

the benefice of Stowe and Birthorpe as a condition of his pension of £6 – 13s – 4d from being a canon of Sempringham priory. A certificate signed by William Hall the ex-prior of Haverholme Priory, assigning John Bray to the cure of Ruskington, has survived in the National Archives. This document detailed what John Bray was entitled to as an income from serving the cure of this parish in Lincolnshire.

The said John was to receive certain fruits of the same benefice as tithes hay, all oblations, tithes milk, tithes flax and hemp and all other tithes and profits belonging to the same church, except tithes corn, wool and lambs which belong by indenture under the convent seal of the same house [Haverholm priory] to one John Hall and his assigns'.<sup>590</sup>

The table below (Table 5) shows similar data for the fifteen other ex-religious who obtained benefices by 1554.

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<sup>590</sup> TNA E314/77.

**Table 5 – Ex-Religious Men from other Orders who obtained Benefices by 1554** <sup>591</sup>

Name	Religious House	Benefice	Value	Pension	Religious Order
Robert Edlington	Kyme	Dunsby	£4 – 0 – 0	£5 – 0 – 0	Augustinian
Ralph Fayerfax <sup>592</sup>	Kyme	Croft	£7 – 15 – 4	£30 – 0 – 0	Augustinian
Thomas Harpham <sup>593</sup>	Newhouse	Flixborough	£13 – 10 – 0	£20 – 0 – 0	Augustinian
Thomas Hornell	Nocton Park	Metheringham	£8 – 0 – 6	£6 – 13 – 4	Augustinian
Thomas More	Thornholme	Appleby	£10 – 3 – 2	£6 – 18 – 8	Augustinian
John Hiltonne	Thornton	Louth	£7 – 6 – 8	£6 – 0 – 0	Augustinian
Robert Huitt	Thornton	Welton	£6 – 0 – 0	£15 – 0 – 0	Augustinian
Chistopher Smythe	Thornton	Withcall	£5 – 6 – 8	£6 – 13 – 4	Augustinian
Stephen Thomson	Thornton	Wooton	£4 – 18 – 4	£6 – 13 – 4	Augustinian
William Burrowe	Bardney	Bardney	£7 – 0 – 0	£5 – 0 – 0	Benedictine
Otto Buttolle	Bardney	Brothertoft	£3 – 6 – 8	£5 – 0 – 0	Benedictine
Thomas Mawer	Bardney	Hogsthorpe	£10 – 0 – 0	£5 – 6 – 8	Benedictine
John Morpetes	Bardney	East Halton	£5 – 6 – 8	£5 – 0 – 0	Benedictine
Roger Skipwith	Bardney	St. Nicholas Lincoln	£5 – 0 – 0	£5 – 6 – 8	Benedictine
Peter Freston	Crowland	Friskney	£5 – 13 – 4	£5 – 6 – 8	Benedictine

Of these fifteen benefices shown in Table 5, only three belonged to the respective monastic houses. The value of the benefices in this table ranged from £3 – 6 – 8d up to £13 the average value being £6 – 17 – 2d. Comparing these figures with those in Table 4, shows that the range of values of the benefices being taken up by Gilbertine canons

<sup>591</sup> Compiled from TNA E101/76/26.

<sup>592</sup> Ralph Fayerfax was the Abbot of Kyme at the dissolution of his house. G A J Hodgett, *The State of the Ex-Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln*, p. 118.

<sup>593</sup> Thomas Harpham was the Abbot of Newhouse at the dissolution of his house, Ibid p. 78.

ranged from £1 – 13 – 4d up to £9, the average value being £5 – 8 – 0d. From these figures we can see that other monastic orders were acquiring higher valued benefices than the Gilbertine canons. An examination of the pensions that these men were receiving shows that other monastic orders were receiving higher pensions than the Gilbertines. The valuations of the Gilbertine houses in 1534 ranged from £34 (Catley) to £317 (Sempringham).<sup>594</sup> For the monastic houses in Table 5 the valuations ranged from £43 (Nocton Park) up to £1093 (Crowland).<sup>595</sup> Despite the higher valuation of some of the non Gilbertine houses it can be seen that the Gilbertines were receiving much lower pensions. In the case of the Gilbertine houses pensions were paid both to the canons and the nuns. In the double houses the number of nuns exceeded the number of canons which may explain the low pensions paid to the men of the order. Table 5 shows that the range of pensions being awarded were between £5 and £15 to non Gilbertines whereas Table 4 shows that the range of pensions awarded to Gilbertine canons only ranged from £2 to £6 – 13 – 4d. The pensions of Ralph Fayerfax and Thomas Harpham have been omitted from the analysis since they were both heads of their respective houses. No heads of Gilbertine houses were serving benefices in 1554. Even though the other orders apart from the Augustinians, were not as successful as the Gilbertines in obtaining benefices, these men were financially better off than their Gilbertine colleagues.

Of the ex-monks and canons mentioned in the above tables four were incumbents of chantries until they were dissolved in the reign of Edward VI. Three of these chantry priests were former Gilbertine canons. Robert Whyting, who was a member of the Alvingham community, was a chantry priest at the Corpus Christi chantry in Alford Lincolnshire. He was granted a pension of £4 – 2 – 6d when the chantry was dissolved.<sup>596</sup> In the Lincolnshire Chantry Certificates of 1548 he was described as ‘Robert Whytinge of the age of 40 years who was a canon of the late monastery of Alvingham.’<sup>597</sup> John

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<sup>594</sup> The following valuations have been taken from the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*:- Alvingham £128, Bullington £158, Catley £34, Haverholme £70, St Catherine’s Lincoln £202, Newstead £38, Sempringham £317, Sixhills £138. *Valor Ecclesiasticus temp. Hen VIII, Auctoritate Regis institutus*, ed. J Caley and J Hunter, 6 volumes, Record Commission (London, 1810-34). vol. iv, pp. 58, 84, 123, 118, 30, 71, 102, 83.

<sup>595</sup> Valuations of non Gilbertine houses, Thornton £591, Newhouse £99, Nocton Park £43, Kyme £101, Thornholme £105, Bardney £366, Crowland £1093, *ibid* pp. 73, 74, 123, 77, 117, 87, 81.

<sup>596</sup> TNA E101/76/18.

<sup>597</sup> TNA E301/33 No 56.



Leach, a former canon of Sempringham Priory, was chantry priest at Corpus Christi chantry in Grantham and was described as being 40 years of age and was granted a pension of £5.<sup>598</sup> John Colman an ex-canon of St Katherine's Priory at Lincoln was the incumbent of Waltham chantry in Lincolnshire. He was described as being 30 years of age and 'fit enough to serve the cure'.<sup>599</sup> He was awarded a pension of £4 – 7s – 7d when the chantry was dissolved in 1549.

Not all of the Gilbertine canons appeared on the deeds of surrender of the individual priories. The dispensations granted in 1536 to canons to hold benefices with a change of habit showed that four priories appeared to have more canons attached to them than were declared on the deeds of surrender.<sup>600</sup> These canons were not permanent residents within the priory but were acting as parish priests. The total number of canons who were serving in this way was ten.<sup>601</sup> A search of the institutions to parishes in the Bishops' Registers showed that seven of these men were serving in parishes before the dissolution, one as early as 1498, and four were still serving parishes in 1551. Of the three who were unaccounted for, they may have served as un-beneficed priests, in which case their institutions would have been unrecorded, they may have moved out of the diocese, died, or possibly the institutions were not recorded by the diocesan clerk.

The returns made by the Dean and Chapter recorded the names of two monks from Bardney Abbey who appeared to have relinquished their religious vows and were both living secular lives.<sup>602</sup> John Brampton, who was awarded a pension of £1 – 6s – 8d when the abbey was dissolved, was living in Horncastle with his wife as a tanner. John Lanktonne one of his fellow monks was living in Billingham on a similar pension with his wife and is described as a yeoman. There is only one record of an ex Gilbertine canon

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<sup>598</sup> *ibid* No 92.

<sup>599</sup> *ibid* No 37.

<sup>600</sup> Numbers of canons who signed the deeds of surrender:- St Katherine's Lincoln, 14 (TNA E322/129), Sempringham, 16 (TNA 322/210), Bullington, 10 (TNA 322/24), Sixhills, 8 (TNA 322/215). The numbers of canons seeking dispensations in 1536 are recorded in, Lambeth Palace Library, Faculty Office Register Vv, St Katherine's Lincoln 17 (fo. 214v), Sempringham, 19 (fo. 224v), Bullington, 12 (fos 232v & 253v), Sixhills, 10 (fo. 252r).

<sup>601</sup> The number was made up as follows, 3 canons attached to St Katherine's Priory at Lincoln, 3 Sempringham canons, 2 Bullington canons and 2 canons from Sixhills.

<sup>602</sup> TNA E101/76/26.

who may have left the religious life at the dissolution for a short period. In the returns already referred to, Miles Gill, the ex-Chicksands canon who was living at Thorpe Tilney in Lincolnshire in 1554, was described as being married and is described as ‘a husbandman although he is a priest’.<sup>603</sup> On the 3 February 1543 he was instituted as the vicar of Timberland in Lincolnshire and according to the visitation return of 1551 he still held this post in that year.<sup>604</sup> A search through the Bishops registers for the reign of Queen Mary shows that there was no record of him being deprived of his living for having married, nor is there any record of him being reinstated to his clerical duties. Since there is no record of the vicarage of Timberland being vacant during this period it is possible that Miles Gill was persuaded to divorce his wife shortly after the 1554 enquiry and hence he was able to resume his parish duties.

### **Biographies of four former Gilbertine Canons**

The biographies of four Gilbertine canons are given below. Thomas Webster and John Golding appeared to have accepted the religious reforms of the time and in the case of Thomas Webster, this worked to his advantage. He had remained on good terms with Robert Holgate who used his position to ensure that Webster found a suitable appointment almost immediately after the dissolution. In contrast the other two former canons, Thomas West and Thomas Layther appear to have retained conservative views, Thomas West more so than Thomas Layther. The biography of Robert Holgate the most prominent member of the Gilbertine order will be examined in the final chapter of this thesis.

### **Thomas Webster**

Thomas Webster was made a sub deacon at York on 21 December 1532, deacon on 28 February 1533/4 and priest on 20 February 1534/5.<sup>605</sup> As sub prior of Watton at the dissolution he received an annual pension of £5.<sup>606</sup> Watton Priory was surrendered on 9 December 1539 and Robert Holgate presented him to the vicarage of Misson in

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<sup>603</sup> G A J Hodgett, *The State of the Ex-Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln*, p. 121.

<sup>604</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Bishops Register 28 fo. 82, Clerical Visitation of 1551, Liber Cleri Vj13

<sup>605</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Archbishop’s Register 28, ff 184v, 192v and 190r.

<sup>606</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, Vol. XIV part 2, No. 663, p 242.

Nottinghamshire on 24 March 1540.<sup>607</sup> Before the dissolution the Gilbertine priory of Mattersey in Nottinghamshire had appropriated Misson Church. Robert Holgate and Thomas Norman, prior of Mattersey, granted the right of presentation of this church, to John Hilsey, bishop of Rochester, and Robert Holgate as bishop of Llandaff on 1 May 1538.<sup>608</sup> On 4 May 1543 Thomas Webster resigned the living of Misson.<sup>609</sup> In December 1544 it was recorded that he was instituted to the Hospital of St John at Nottingham.<sup>610</sup>

By 1546 he had become the incumbent of St Wilfred's Chantry in York Minster.<sup>611</sup> In the Chantry Certificate for this year he was said to be 38 years old, well learned and of 'honest conversation' and qualities and he drew an annual income from this chantry of £6.<sup>612</sup> The 1546 Chantry Certificate stated that he drew an income of £6 – 15s – 11d, which was almost certainly that of Hayton.<sup>613</sup>

At this time he was still in contact with Robert Holgate, as his signature appeared as a witness to the foundation deeds of both Malton Grammar School (4 May 1547) and Robert Holgate's Free School at York (10 January 1546/7), both founded by Robert Holgate.<sup>614</sup> By 1548 he had acquired yet another living, that of the vicarage of Hayton which he probably held for the rest of his life, and in this year he was appointed as one of Robert Holgate's chaplains after Holgate had been promoted to the position of archbishop of York.<sup>615</sup> The register recorded that he had been granted a dispensation to hold another benefice 'with or two without the above'. It was probably just after this time that he acquired the vicarage of Hutton Cranswick. No record has survived of his institution to

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<sup>607</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Archbishop's Register, 28, fo 61v, ADM 1540/10.

<sup>608</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, ABM 1540/10.

<sup>609</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Archbishop's Register 28, fo 62r.

<sup>610</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Institution Act Book 1, fo. 9r.

<sup>611</sup> TNA, Chantry Certificates E301/63.

<sup>612</sup> During his time as a Chantry Priest within York Minster, he would have resided at St William's College close by the Minster along with other Chantry priests who served in the Minster.

<sup>613</sup> There is no record of him being instituted to this vicarage but in 1548 the Faculty Office Register states that he was Vicar of Hayton: Lambeth Palace Library, Faculty Office Register A, page 333.

<sup>614</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Malton Grammar School Foundation Deed: Bishopthorpe Papers Bp Sch 36, York Grammar School: Bishopthorpe Papers Bp Sch 53.

<sup>615</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, Faculty Register A, p 333.

this vicarage but it was known that he resigned from Hutton Cranswick on 10 September 1553.<sup>616</sup>

His final appointment was to the Master of the Hospital of St Mary Magdalene at Ripon. He was appointed Master on 8 September 1553 and he retained this position for the rest of his life.<sup>617</sup> He was recorded as receiving his pension in 1564.<sup>618</sup> and was still described as Master of the Hospital during the visitation of 1567/8, which investigated the decay of the Hospital.<sup>619</sup> In the visitation records he was described as follows:

the said Mr Webster Master and the said Mark Metcalf and Christopher Bawderbie clerke felowes of the said hospital are not resident upon the same And the howseis of the said hospital to ruyne and decaie and ther is no provision for releiffe of the poor ther [...] forsomechoe as the court dothe understand that the said Master is impotente and not able personallie to appere therefore the court orderethe that the said Mr Webster do some in a proxie and constitute proctor sufficientlie enstructed to answeere word by word unto the obiecter.”

During the visitation of 1567/8 Webster was clearly an absentee Master of the hospital. Presumably he was resident in Hayton at this time where he had been instituted as vicar in 1548. In the absence of other evidence it cannot be established if he was ever in residence at Ripon as the Master of the Hospital. He was last mentioned in November 1571 as the vicar of Hayton subscribing to the articles of religion.<sup>620</sup>

### **John Golding**

John Golding was initially a member of the Watton community before he became prior of Ellerton. He was ordained sub deacon on 17 December 1519, deacon on 15 March 1522 and priest on 20 December 1522, all of which took place whilst he was a canon at Watton

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<sup>616</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Archbishop's Register 29, fo 50v.

<sup>617</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Archbishop's Register 29, fo. 51v.

<sup>618</sup> TNA LR6/122/8 m. 24.

<sup>619</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Visitation Book V1567/8 CBI.

<sup>620</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Institution Act Books INST AB 2 part3, fo. 161r.

Priory.<sup>621</sup> Ellerton Priory was surrendered on the 11 December 1538 and in addition to his pension of £13 – 6 – 8d he received an additional payment of £5.<sup>622</sup> In the following year on 25 March he received a dispensation to hold a benefice with change of habit.<sup>623</sup> Soon after the dissolution he was instituted to the vicarage of Wigton in November 1540<sup>624</sup> and he held the living until December 1545 when he acquired the rectory of Burghwallis.<sup>625</sup>

He was briefly a prebendary in St Sepulchre's chapel in York Minster from March 1546 until its dissolution.<sup>626</sup> Shortly afterwards he obtained the Mastership of St Mary Magdalene Hospital in York.<sup>627</sup> Later in 1551 he was promoted to the rectory of Birkin and the prebend of Givendale all of which he retained until his death in 1556.<sup>628</sup> In 1552 it was reported that he was aged 53 and that his pension of £13 – 6s – 8d had not been paid for the last year.<sup>629</sup> In 1552 it was reported that he was aged 53 and that his pension of £13 – 6s – 8d had not been paid for the last year.<sup>630</sup> No will has survived for him, but it is presumed that he left one as Anthony Swynbank, a former canon of Malton, Ralph Duffeld and John Dawson are all mentioned as the executors of his will in a chancery case brought against Anthony Swynbank.<sup>631</sup>

Thomas Webster and John Golding appeared to have been close allies of Robert Holgate from just before the dissolution and probably up until his death in 1555. This may explain why both of these men were successful in obtaining employment within a short time of the dissolution of their houses. The majority of the Gilbertine canons who obtained benefices had to survive on their monastic pensions and the income from one benefice.

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<sup>621</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Archbishops Register 27, ff. 186r, 193v, 197v. See also Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, Volume 150 (1995), page 401.

<sup>622</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, Vol XIV Part 1, No. 185, p. 600.

<sup>623</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, Faculty Office Register Vv, fo. 268v.

<sup>624</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Archbishops Register 29, fo. 17v.

<sup>625</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Archbishops Register 29, fo. 23v.

<sup>626</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Archbishops Register 29, fo. 24v.

<sup>627</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Archbishops Register 29, fo. 43v.

<sup>628</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Archbishops Register 29, fo. 116r.

<sup>629</sup> TNA E101/76/23.

<sup>630</sup> TNA E101/76/23.

<sup>631</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Chancery Act Book, Chanc. AB 8, fo. 225r.

However, both Webster and Golding had multiple appointments apart from their pensions. Robert Holgate became Archbishop of York in 1545 and it is possible that Holgate may have used his influence to enable these men to hold multiple ecclesiastical appointments.

Shortly after the collapse of the Pilgrimage of Grace Thomas Webster became sub-prior of Watton. During this rebellion, John Hallam one of the ringleaders forced the Watton community to accept James Lawrence the prior of Ellerton to become their prior and Master of the Order of Sempringham, as Holgate had fled to London. Hallam was no friend of Robert Holgate since Holgate had evicted him from his farm at Cawkeld, a grange which was owned by Watton priory.<sup>632</sup> He had been evicted because Holgate had insisted that he pay his tithes in cash rather than in kind. After Holgate restored order at Watton, it was possible that Thomas Webster was elected as sub prior when Henry Gill was executed as a traitor for the part he took in the Pilgrimage of Grace. Holgate would have wanted a deputy he could trust, and keep order within the community during his long absences from Watton Priory. Holgate had been elected as bishop of Llandaff in May 1537 and was appointed as Lord President of the North in June 1538. These duties would have given him very little time if any to devote to the running of the Gilbertine order. In 1536 Webster is also one of Thomas Cromwell's commissioners when the will of Robert Skynner was proved before Robert Holgate and John Broxholme, commissioners for Thomas Cromwell in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury in 1536.<sup>633</sup>

The Watton community appeared to have been split into two factions, those who supported the Pilgrimage of Grace and those who opposed it.<sup>634</sup> Notable supporters at Watton were Harry Gill, the sub prior, who was executed as a traitor, Richard Wilkinson and Thomas Layther, who all supported the rebels at the time. William Gott, another Watton canon could possibly be included as there was mention of a William Gott, who had acquired the living of Carlton in Lindrick in Nottinghamshire, where it was reported

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<sup>632</sup> Geoffrey Moorhouse, *The Pilgrimage of Grace, The Rebellion that Shook Henry VIII's Throne*, Phoenix, (2002), pp. 78-9, 192.

<sup>633</sup> TNA, PROB 34/4/4, Thomas Cromwell's Probate Jurisdiction as Vice-regent of Henry 8; Will of Robert Skynner, proved before Robert Holgate and John Broxholme, commissioners.

<sup>634</sup> The role of the Watton canons in the Pilgrimage of Grace has been discussed in Chapter 5, pp. 164-172.

in 1567 that ‘contrary to the lawful ordinances of this realm made in that behalf [he] doth usually say the communion for the dead at the burial.’<sup>635</sup> Having this conservative attitude in 1567 may have indicated that he was sympathetic to the rebel cause in 1536. Of the other canons, it is not possible to speculate on their views. Thomas Webster was almost certainly against the rebel cause, and may have had only one or two canons that he could have called on for support. His period of office of sub-prior from 1536 until the dissolution must be assumed to have been successful as no further disturbances were recorded and Watton was the last Gilbertine house to be surrendered.

John Golding may have been appointed prior of Ellerton soon after the failure of the Pilgrimage of Grace. If this was the case he would have replaced James Lawrence who had been pressed by Hallom to take charge of Watton priory. Holgate would have been suspicious of a man who had been nominated by someone who had defied him. He would have been much happier with a person who he could trust. This man may have been John Golding who like Thomas Webster could maintain peace within his community. Both Webster and Golding were rewarded for their efforts. This action would have gone a long way to helping Robert Holgate climb the political ladder to become Lord President of the North in 1538. Both of these canons became Chaplains to the Archbishop of York during Holgate’s time as Archbishop.<sup>636</sup>

### **Thomas Layther**

Thomas Layther was ordained deacon at York on 25 March 1531.<sup>637</sup> Sometime before 1537 he became a canon at Watton Priory when in January 1537 he had risen to the office of cellarer of the priory.<sup>638</sup> During the time of the Pilgrimage of Grace, it was alleged that he had written a bill for the rebels who demanded money from Watton Priory.<sup>639</sup> For the sake of the safety of the house it was decided to send the rebels £10. Further threats were made demanding that the Priory should give the rebels one of their horses, and this was

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<sup>635</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Visitation Records, V1567/8 CB1, ff. 1r, 6r, 60r.

<sup>636</sup> John Golding was Holgate’s chaplain in May 1545, Faculty Office Register, Reg. A, p 126, and Thomas Webster was chaplain in December 1548, Faculty Office Register, Reg. A, p333.

<sup>637</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Sede Vacante Register 5A, fo. 670r.

<sup>638</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, Vol. XII part 1, No. 201.

<sup>639</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, op cit.

followed up with further demands for more horses. Again the community complied to save the Priory being 'spoiled', especially as their Master [Robert Holgate] had left and was known as a traitor 'among the commons'.<sup>640</sup>

In his confession made in January 1537 he admitted during the rising to participating in the election of the prior of Ellerton as their prior and Master to replace the absent Robert Holgate. Lather escaped being executed and spent a short time in prison for his involvement in the uprising.<sup>641</sup> Despite this he was awarded a pension of £4 at the suppression of his house.<sup>642</sup>

After the dissolution he may have been instituted to the vicarage of Bishop Burton, which was only a few miles away from Watton Priory, in 1546. He then acquired the rectory of St Saviour's in York in October 1550, which he retained until his death in 1567. In the Royal Visitation of 1559 he was listed as the incumbent of St Saviour's and appeared to have conformed to the Articles of Religion issued by Queen Elizabeth.<sup>643</sup> Even though he conformed, he was a friend of Dr Lee of York, a supposedly dangerous recusant.<sup>644</sup> Further evidence of possible conservative views came from his will. In the preamble he invoked the Virgin Mary and requested that his body was buried in the chancel of St Saviour's Church in York.<sup>645</sup> Amongst his bequests he leaves a copy of 'Ellyotes Dictionary' to Thomas Watson the younger which was a Latin English dictionary published by Sir Thomas Elyot in 1538. This dictionary was widely used to translate religious texts into English at this time. Layther may have had conservative views, but the evidence indicates that they may have been complex. Possession of this dictionary cannot be used to assume that he firmly believed that religious text should be in English; he may have possessed it to conceal his conservative views.

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<sup>640</sup> Ibid.

<sup>641</sup> Claire Cross, 'The End of Medieval Monasticism in the East Riding of Yorkshire', p. 42.

<sup>642</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, Vol XIV part 2, No. 663.

<sup>643</sup> TNA, SP12/10 fo 155v.

<sup>644</sup> J C H Aveling, *Catholic Recusancy in the City of York 1558 – 1791*, Catholic Record Society (1970), pp. 25-6.

<sup>645</sup> Borthwick Institute York, Archbishops Register 30, f 45r – 45v.



## Thomas West

Thomas West was a former canon of one of the poorest houses of the order, Catley Priory. He was ordained sub deacon in March 1524,<sup>646</sup> deacon in April 1525<sup>647</sup> and priest in March 1526,<sup>648</sup> all at North Ormesby Priory. At the dissolution of his house he was awarded a pension of £2 – 13s – 4d per annum. According to the 1554 returns already mentioned he was curate of Gedney worth £5 – 6s – 8d per annum and was not married.<sup>649</sup> He was instituted to the vicarage of St Martin's in Lincoln.<sup>650</sup> In the Liber Cleri he was described as 'vicar of St Martin's Lincoln (£3 – 13 – 4d) aged 78, not married, knows but little Latin and but little versed in sacred learning'.<sup>651</sup>

Entries in the churchwardens' accounts for St Martin's for the period April 1572 to April 1574 showed that Thomas West may have been conservative in religion. The accounts for the two years are said to end at the 'Feast of the Annunciation' (25 March). This feast day had been abolished in 1549 along with the other feasts of the Virgin Mary.<sup>652</sup> In July 1559, Queen Elizabeth issued a set of Injunctions for the 'suppression of superstition' and 'to plant true religion'.<sup>653</sup> These Injunctions were modelled on those of Edward's reign, and abolished the cult of saints and the dead. In addition the clergy were to discourage dying parishioners from making any religious obit provisions other than bequests to the poor and the highways. These accounts show that mortuary payments were being made to the vicar: 'the some of 3s – 4d received for the mortuary of Elizabeth Lathorpe' who was one of his parishioners.<sup>654</sup> In the previous four-year period, April 1568 to April 1572 money was received for the sepulchres two more of his parishioners, Elizabeth Taylor and Katherine Bente. These mortuary gifts could indicate that West was conservative in

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<sup>646</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Bishops Register 15 f 9r.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid, f 11v.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid, 13v.

<sup>649</sup> TNA E101/76/26.

<sup>650</sup> The date of his institution has not been found but according to the Liber Cleri of 1576 he was vicar of St Martins in Lincoln in 1576 (Lincolnshire Archives Diocesan Records). See also *Lincoln Episcopal Records in the Time of Thomas Cooper Bishop of Lincoln*, ed. C W Foster, Lincoln Record Society Volume 2, (1912), page 158.

<sup>651</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Diocesan Records, Liber Cleri 1576.

<sup>652</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars, Traditional Religion in England c. 1400 – c. 1580*, Yale University Press (1992), p. 465.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid, p. 568.

<sup>654</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Churchwardens accounts for St Martin Lincoln, L1/5/12.

religion. Alternatively these payments were reflecting the views of some of his parishioners and that Thomas West was turning a blind eye to them.

### **The Marriage of the Ex Religious**

Amongst the records of the Exchequer Court in the National Archives are a number of returns made by the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln regarding Queen Mary's enquiry into the pensions of the ex-religious in the Diocese of Lincoln in 1554.<sup>655</sup> These returns include those of the Archdeacons of Lincoln, Stow and Bedford and they give a record of the marital status of all the ex-religious who were still alive in 1554. During this year there were approximately 100 former monks and canons, 101 ex nuns and 159 former chantry priests who were all receiving pensions from the crown. Of these 27 monks and canons, 20 nuns and 17 chantry priests expressly stated that they were married. In Lincolnshire there were 54 former monks and canons in the year of this enquiry. Of these, 28 were ex-Gilbertine canons, three of whom declared that they were married. Of the remaining ex-monks and canons, only four others declared that they were married at the time the enquiry took place. All of these were ex-Benedictine monks out of a total of 13 who had survived to this date.

Clerical marriage had been legal since the spring of 1549 and as we have seen 11% of the surviving Gilbertines had married and 13% of the surviving Benedictines had done the same.<sup>656</sup> The returns mentioned above classified non married clergy under three headings; those who had never married, not married or ever had been and unmarried. The table below (Table 6) summarises the marital state of these 54 ex-monks and canons under these headings. The categories of 'never married' were added to 'not married or ever has been'.

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<sup>655</sup>TNA, E101/76/26.

<sup>656</sup> An Act, which permitted clerical marriage, passed through the House of Lords on 19 February 1549. (House of Lords Journals, i, p343).

**Table 6 – Marital State of Ex-Monks/Canons after the Dissolution**

<b>Religious Order</b>	<b>Never Been Married</b>	<b>Unmarried</b>	<b>Married</b>
Gilbertine	10	15	3
Augustinian	4	5	0
Premonstratensian	1	0	0
Benedictine	2	7	4
Cistercian	2	0	0
Carthusian	1	0	0

G A J Hodgett assumed that the ‘not married’ term was the equivalent of ‘never married’.<sup>657</sup> However, the term ‘not married’ may have included those men who had become widowers. It could also be interpreted as that they had originally been married but by the time these returns were compiled, they had divorced their wives. He based his assumption on the Archdeaconry of Bedford which always used the latter term, whilst the Archdeaconry of Huntingdon always used the former. However, for the Archdeaconry of Lincoln a mixture of terms were used. It may well be that in the counties of Bedford and Huntingdon the commissioners preferred to use a standard reply in the returns, or it may be that they did not enquire too deeply into the personal lives of the ex-religious. The Lincoln commissioners may have been rather more diligent and may have chosen the wording of the replies more carefully.

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<sup>657</sup> *The State of the Ex Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln 1547 – 1574*, Lincoln Record Society Volume 53 (1959), p xx.

In the diocese of Lincoln which consisted of over a thousand parishes, there were 111 institutions to vacant benefices due to deprivation of the previous incumbent during the reign of Queen Mary, of this total of 111, 43 were in the county of Lincoln.<sup>658</sup> Table 7 below shows that in 1554, 101 institutions to benefices in Lincolnshire have been recorded. In all cases the reason for the change in incumbent is given. In general four reasons are given. These were, lawful vacancy where no reason is given; deprivation; death of the previous incumbent and finally resignation of the previous incumbent, where no reason is given. Returns for Bedfordshire and Hampshire have been included for comparison purposes. Hampshire has been included since this particular county remained religiously very conservative from the dissolution and into the early years of Elizabeth's reign.<sup>659</sup>

**Table 7 – Reasons Given for Vacation of Benefices**

Reason for Vacancy	<b>Lincolnshire</b>	<b>Bedfordshire</b>	<b>Hampshire</b>
Lawful Vacancy	45	8	24
Deprivation	43	16	19
Death	10	9	9
Resignation	3	2	18

The reason for deprivation was not always given but in the rare cases where it was, it was given as marriage. Of these 111 deprivations in the diocese of Lincoln, only three gave

<sup>658</sup> Helen L Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation, Precedent, Policy and Practice*, Ashgate, (2000), p. 189.

<sup>659</sup> Correspondence with Margaret Cooke at Hampshire Record Office February 2003.

the reason as the previous incumbent being married.<sup>660</sup> An examination of the institutions in the county of Lincolnshire for this period showed that out of a total of 101 institutions 43 were a result of the previous incumbent being deprived of his living, the reason for the deprivation was not given.<sup>661</sup> This high number of deprivations may indicate that rather more clergy were married prior to this enquiry. A significant number of the clergy may have given up living with their wives either voluntarily or possibly by force. This may have been the reason for a large number of ex religious declaring themselves to be ‘unmarried’ in the returns already discussed. There was only one recorded case of an ex-Gilbertine canon, Thomas Gray of St Katherine’s priory Lincoln, who was deprived of his living through marriage.<sup>662</sup> The Lincoln diocesan records have been lost for this particular period and hence it is possible that there were many more such cases. From the figures in Table 7 we can see that within the counties of Lincolnshire and the parts of Bedfordshire that were within the Diocese of Lincoln, between 43 and 46% of the clergy were deprived of their livings in the first year of Queen Mary’s reign. If the majority of these deprivations took place because of marriage, then it is fair to assume that rather more of the ex-monks and canons had been married at the beginning of Mary’s reign and had been persuaded to divorce their marriage partners. The level of deprivations for marriage throughout the country during Mary’s reign varied greatly. In London one third of the clergy were deprived, one tenth in the diocese of York, a quarter in Suffolk and Norfolk and one third in Essex. However, in Lancashire only seven of the 257 beneficed clergy appear to have married and in the dioceses of Exeter and Coventry and Lichfield the figure was only about ten percent of the total number of clergy.<sup>663</sup>

An example of a Gilbertine canon who was deprived of his living during this period is that of Thomas Gray who was a member of the community of St Katherine’s Priory at Lincoln. Just before the dissolution he was granted a dispensation to hold a benefice with change of habit on 31 August 1538.<sup>664</sup> As a result of this dispensation, he may have obtained a benefice, as he was not awarded a pension at the dissolution. On 2 May 1547

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<sup>660</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Bishops Register 28.

<sup>661</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Bishops Register 28.

<sup>662</sup> TNA, E337/4

<sup>663</sup> Helen L Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation*, p. 189.

<sup>664</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, Faculty Office Register Vv, folio 214v.

he was instituted to the rectory of Ruskington and on 8 May 1554 he was deprived of his living for having married Helene Maltby.<sup>665</sup> He was restored to his rectory on 1 July 1559 and since he mentions Helene his wife in his will presumably he remained with her throughout his deprivation or lived apart from her only for the duration of Mary's reign.<sup>666</sup> This may indicate that Thomas had Protestant convictions, and this was reinforced by an entry in the survey of 1566 into the furniture and books remaining in parish churches in Lincolnshire.<sup>667</sup> The purpose of this survey was to find out if any of the images, ornaments and Mass books remained in churches after Queen Mary's death. On the 26 April 1566 Ruskington parish church was visited and it was noted 'mass bookes with suche like popish mass bookes defaced and made a waie as Sir Thomas Graye our parson saith.' This was carried out in the first year of Elizabeth's reign. In the visitation of 1576 he was described as being 66 years of age, as being married, residing in his parish, performing the holy mysteries prescribed by public authority, knew a little Latin and was moderately versed in sacred learning.<sup>668</sup>

Another Gilbertine canon who was known to have married was Anthony Langton who was a member of the Sempringham community. The only reference to him having married was that he made a bequest to his two daughters, Jane Antony and Mary Wilkinson in his will of 1582.<sup>669</sup> In the Liber Cleri of 1576 he was still the vicar of Horbling, aged 63, not married, residing within his parish, performing the holy mysteries prescribed by public authority, knew little Latin and moderately versed in sacred learning.<sup>670</sup> In order for him to have surviving children in 1582 it is almost certain that he would have been married at some stage in his life. If he had married before Mary came to the throne then he would have had to separate from his wife in order that he could continue being a parish priest.

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<sup>665</sup> TNA, E337/4.

<sup>666</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, LCC Will 1583 i, 62.

<sup>667</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Diocesan Records, Church Furniture Fur/2.

<sup>668</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Diocesan Records, Liber Cleri 1576.

<sup>669</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, LCC Will 1583 ii, 62.

<sup>670</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Diocesan Records, Liber Cleri 1576.

### **Wills and Inventories of Gilbertine Canons**

Of the 79 Lincolnshire Gilbertine canons listed at the dissolution, twenty one were known to have left wills and eleven inventories of goods of former canons have survived. If a degree of care is exercised when interpreting the preambles to a few of these wills it may be possible to gain an insight into the religious convictions of these canons after the dissolution of their houses.

For a number of years the last will and testament has been used as a source for the study of the piety of the people who drew up these documents. However, care must be exercised when trying to establish the religious attitudes of these people. In 1969, J D Alsop who was examining wills made in the mid sixteenth century, questioned whether the religious preamble was part of a set form or whether it reflected the wishes of the testator.<sup>671</sup> He went on to state that research had shown that ‘lukewarm or muted preambles’ were not necessarily evidence of religious apathy. The great majority of the wills which he examined had either brief or non committal statements where the testator bequeathed ‘his soul unto almighty God,’ or, used a standardised expression of either Catholic, Protestant or Puritan format.<sup>672</sup> In some instances these wills may have been written by scribes who may have worded these preambles reflecting their own views rather than those of the testator.

Eight years later, M L Zell who was also analysing sixteenth century wills expanded on Alsop's work by categorising the preambles under three headings.<sup>673</sup> The first category which he referred to as Catholic, had a formula where the testator asks for intercession on his behalf of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints. The second type which he called ‘non traditional’ omitted references to the Virgin Mary and the saints and has the simple form ‘I commend my soul to almighty God’. The final type which he regards as reflecting Protestant views emphasise the sinfulness of the testator and relies solely on the mercy of

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<sup>671</sup> J D Alsop, ‘Religious Preambles in Early English Wills as Formulae’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 40, No. 1, (1989), p. 19.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

<sup>673</sup> M L Zell, ‘The Use of Religious Preambles as a Measure of Religious Belief in the Sixteenth Century’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, Volume 50, No. 122, (1977), page 246.

Christ for his salvation. He goes on to say that there is no practical way of determining whether the will was written by the testator or by a scribe. From the sample of wills which he studied for the Kentish gentry between 1535 and 1565, he found that two forms of traditional preamble make up the majority in the Edwardian period.<sup>674</sup> However, he found that during the reign of Queen Mary the preambles were predominantly Protestant indicating that these testators had little obligation to reflect the established religious doctrine of the day and were expressing their own religious opinions.<sup>675</sup>

In her study of York Clergy Wills in the period 1520 - 1600, Claire Cross stated that the city of York did not produce any clergy who had protestant sympathies in the mid sixteenth century. During the Edwardian years these priests usually omitted any reference to the Virgin Mary and the saints, but reverted to the standard formula and requested requiem masses for their souls when Mary came to the throne.<sup>676</sup> She goes on to say that the clergy during the Elizabethan years still 'convey a persistent religious conservatism'.<sup>677</sup>

Clive Burgess in his study of late medieval Bristol wills is more concerned with the purpose of the will. He makes the point that the will focuses on the testator's priorities 'at the time of his death' only, that is, repentance and confession were essential for salvation, and it does not give a true indication of the testator's concerns during his lifetime.<sup>678</sup> Wills cannot be read in isolation; they must be read along with other documentary sources, provided they exist of course. However, Rob Lutton does not entirely agree with Burgess on his conclusion that the will focuses on the testator's priorities at the time of death. He claims that 'testamentary piety' was not wholly removed from lifetime practices.<sup>679</sup>

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<sup>674</sup> Ibid, p. 247.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid, p. 247.

<sup>676</sup> Claire Cross, *York Clergy Wills 1520 – 1600: II City Clergy*, Borthwick Texts and calendars 15, (1989), p. x.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid, p. xii.

<sup>678</sup> Clive Burgess, 'Late medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence Reconsidered', in *Profit Piety & the Professions in Later Medieval England*, ed. M A Hicks, Alan Sutton, (1990), p. 16.

<sup>679</sup> Rob Lutton, *Lollardy and orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England: Reconstructing Piety*, Boydell, (2006), pp. 16-19.



Clive Burgess has advised caution when using the preambles of wills to gain an impression of the testator's pious intent.<sup>680</sup> These wills may have been written by scribes who may have worded these preambles reflecting their own views rather than those of the testator. This is an opinion which is held by A G Dickens who says that parish priests and notaries often gave advice on how the preambles should be written.<sup>681</sup> He has made an extensive study of sixteenth century wills for a number of counties including Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. Rob Lutton takes this further by saying that these preambles should be 'studied within the context of the whole will' since a standard wording may have been used both in the preamble and the religious bequests.<sup>682</sup> If a degree of care is exercised when interpreting the preambles to a few of these wills it may be possible to gain an insight into the religious convictions of these canons after the dissolution of their houses.

In the analysis which follows of the surviving wills of Gilbertine canons, it was assumed that they were all literate and would have written their own wills unless they were unable to do so due to illness. Even then they would have dictated the contents to a scribe and almost certainly composed their own preambles. In order to draw conclusion from these preambles the following factors ought to be taken into account. Firstly the preamble must be read along with the remaining content of the will. Secondly, the will must be read in conjunction with any other documentary sources. This is not possible in many cases due to the lack of suitable documentary sources. Finally, the period in which the will was drawn up must be taken into account. Even when all of these factors have been taken into account, it may not be possible in some cases to obtain a true picture of the testators religious convictions.

The will of Robert Holgate, the last Master of the order has been omitted from this analysis, it will be discussed in the chapter which is devoted to Holgate. Of these

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<sup>680</sup> Clive Burgess, 'Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence Reconsidered', in *Profit Piety & the Professions in Later Medieval England*, ed. M A Hicks, Alan Sutton, (1990), p. 15.

<sup>681</sup> A G Dickens, 'The Early Expansion of Protestantism in England, 1520 – 1558', in *The Impact of the English Reformation 1500 – 1640*, ed. Peter Marshall, Arnold, (1997), p. 104.

<sup>682</sup> Rob Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England: Reconstructing Piety*, Woodbridge, Suffolk; Boydell Press, (2004), p. 13.

eighteen wills two occur during the reign of Henry VIII, two during the Edwardian period, four during Queen Mary's reign and the remaining ten during the reign of Elizabeth.<sup>683</sup> Of the eighteen surviving wills, only two can be read in conjunction with other source material. In the case of Thomas West the churchwardens accounts survive for the time that he was a parish priest in Lincoln.<sup>684</sup> The second case confirms that a bequest was received by Horbling church to which the bequest was made by Robert Bell.<sup>685</sup> The analysis of the remainder of these wills relied on the preambles being read in conjunction with the remaining part of the will and the period in which the will was made.

For the two wills made during the time of Henry VIII, Thomas Lyoll commits his soul both to God and the Blessed Virgin Mary. He also requests that mass and dirge are celebrated after his death and that some vestments that he owns are given to Bullington church.<sup>686</sup> However, the will of James Walles which was made in 1539 is quite different. He bequeaths his soul to 'almighty God my maker' but does not make any reference to the Blessed Virgin Mary, nor does he request masses to be said for his soul.<sup>687</sup> The will of Thomas Lyoll is typical for this particular time, but that of James Walles is far more neutral which is surprising for this period in time.

Only two wills are available for the Edwardian period. In 1549 William Hall, the former prior of Haverholme priory bequeathed his soul to almighty God and

'to his only and most dearly beloved son our saviour Christ Jesus both God (*sic*) and may surely trusting through his infinite and abundant mercy [*document damaged*] and finally by the mercy of his most painful death and passion most

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<sup>683</sup> The eighteen wills used in this analysis are as follows, Lincolnshire Archives Office; Richard Golding LCC will 1558 iv, 119, John Colman, LCC will 1581, 193, Robert Whytting, LCC will 1563, 126, John Bowton, LCC will 1562, 150, Edmund Tate, LCC will 1554-6, 198, Thomas Boyes, Stowe Wills 1553-67, 268, Thomas Lyoll, Lincoln Sundrey Wills No. 125, 1546, John Tyson LCC will 1564, 28, Humphrey Spensley LCC will 1584, 312, Thomas West, LCC will 1577 i, 60, Robert Bell, LCC will 1557 iii, 192, Anthony Langton LCC will 1583 ii, 62, James Walles LCC will 1538-40, 194, Thomas Gray, LCC will 1583 i, 62, John Owbery, LCC will 1562, 316, TNA; William Hall PCC will PROB 11/22, Richard Tyson PCC will PROB 11/42B, John Stevenson PCC will PROB 11/31.

<sup>684</sup> Lincolnshire Archives LCC Will 1577 i, 69, Churchwardens accounts for St. Martin Lincoln, L1/5/12.

<sup>685</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, LCC wills 1557, iii, 192, Horbling Town Book, Horbling Parish documents 7/10.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid*, Lincoln Sundrey Wills No. 125, 1546.

<sup>687</sup> *Ibid*, LCC will 1538-40, 194.

obediently and willingly suffered upon the cross for his redemption of all  
amankind'.<sup>688</sup>

He then goes on to bequeath his soul to the Blessed Virgin Mary 'the mother of our saviour Jesus Christ' and the whole company of heaven. In her study of York clergy wills discussed above, Claire Cross found that during this period the clergy in the city of York omitted any reference to the Virgin Mary. After a preamble that appears to reflect the protestant views held during the Edwardian period the reference that Hall makes to the Virgin Mary at the end of his preamble cannot be explained in the absence of other documentary sources. In the remainder of his will he makes no reference to masses being said for him nor does he leave any vestments to his parish church. However, he does remember his fellow canons and nuns at Haverholme priory by leaving to all those who are still alive 6s – 8d each. The will of John Stevenson is more typical of the time. He bequeaths his soul to almighty God, but makes no mention of the Blessed Virgin Mary or masses to be said for his soul.

During the reign of Queen Mary four wills have survived all of which mention the Blessed Virgin and the company of saints in heaven but three of them then go on to simply make bequests to family relatives and friends.<sup>689</sup> In the absence of any other evidence in these wills, we can only treat them as being neutral in their religious convictions. However, when Richard Tyson died at the end of Queen Mary's reign, his will showed that he was far more conservative than the other three.<sup>690</sup> He bequeathed his soul to almighty God and to the Lady Saint Mary and requested that his body was buried in the north side of the choir of Bishop Norton church. Amongst his bequests he gave 10s 'to the fynding of one lampe and oyle to be burninge all the whole space of dyvyne service, sermons makinge and homilies readinge' if the laws of the time permit. He also gave '2 pound of waxe for two tapers the one to be before the Trinitie and the other before our Ladye and durynge the tyme that the sepulchre is in the quere at Easter'. He willed that the two tapers burned before the sepulchre and gave 13s – 4d for this purpose.

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<sup>688</sup> TNA; William Hall PCC will PROB 11/22.

<sup>689</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Richard Golding LCC will 1558 iv, 119, Edmund Tate, LCC will 1554-6, 198, Robert Bell, LCC will 1557 iii, 192, TNA Richard Tyson PCC will PROB 11/42B.

<sup>690</sup> TNA PROB11/42B.

Bequests of altar cloths were made for use at the high altar and ‘one redde chamlett vestmente with the awibe and all other thyng fytt to say the masse with.’ Following these preambles bequests were made to family and friends and in a number of cases the poor of the parish.

The remaining ten Gilbertine wills were all made during the reign of Elizabeth. After 1558 all references to St Mary disappeared apart from two wills, that of Thomas Layther which was discussed above, and that of John Tyson made in 1564.<sup>691</sup> Thomas Tyson committed his soul to ‘God almightie to our Blessed Ladie sancta Marie and to all the companie of heaven’ and requested that his body was buried in the chancel of Sixhills church. He also left a Latin Psalter to Humphrey Spensley, a fellow Gilbertine canon who was prior of the Gilbertine House in Cambridge before the dissolution. In the absence of more compelling evidence both in the will and other sources we can only speculate that Tyson may have had conservative views. Thomas West bequeats his soul to ‘almighty God my maker and redeemer.’ In the absence of other sources it would be tempting to say that West may have either had neutral or possible protestant leanings. The evidence discussed above which was obtained from the church wardens accounts shows that this man appeared to have possibly been conservative in religion. This shows that Clive Burgess’s conclusion of studying the will in conjunction with other sources is valid.

The will of Thomas Boyes which was made in 1559 is more problematic. This will was made at the end of Mary’s reign and the beginning of Elizabeth’s. In the preamble to his will he bequeaths his soul to ‘God and the Blessed Virgin Mary’. The most likely conclusion that we can draw from this is that of a neutral will given the time at which it was written.

Of the seven remaining wills during this period, six can only be classed as neutral. As an example, John Bolton of Cockerington in his will of 1562 began by saying ‘I hollie comyt my bodie and soule to the tender mercy of almightie God my creator and maker with suche hope and trust in him to have remission and forgiveness of all my sinnes done

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<sup>691</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, LCC Wills 1564, 2.

in this transitory life.’<sup>692</sup> It could be argued that these wills exhibit a protestant flavour, but in the absence of other evidence this cannot be concluded with any certainty.

However, the preamble to the will John Owbery of Fotherby (1562) went much further than that of John Bolton.

I comyt my soule to the tender mercie of my heavenlie father with [...] trust and belief to obtain at his handes mercie and forgiveness for all my former [...] life spent in time past either in synne vanitie or other plesannt delectacion of this fraile worldlie pleasure and that onlie throughe and for the painfull passion of his most blessed sonne our saivor Jesus Criste my most mercifull lovinge redeemer who with shodding his most precious blod having washed awaie my sinnes and made full satisfaction to my heavenlie father and hath appeared his [...] wrate and displeasure wortholie conceaned or at the least muche by me [...] the same sothat with pfecte [...] Therin I do nowe utterlie frome henceforthe defie the malice of my gosthlie enimie the devil sinne and eathe and purpose verilie [...] goddess grace never to be in the thraldome more but after my mortal life here ended I hope to be ptaker of the heavenlie in [...].’<sup>693</sup>

He then goes on to say that his executor should bury his body where it is convenient. Of all the wills drawn up in this period, John Owbery is showing distinct protestant views.

Occasionally bequests were made to fellow canons who were still living. Robert Bell, a former Sempringham canon, left to his former colleague, Anthony Langton, and now his parish priest at Horbling, an ‘old riall in golde to pray for my soull my tepett and my best bonett and one of my beste lymbekes’.<sup>694</sup> He also gave to the church of Horbling 3s – 4d. It was known that this bequest was fulfilled from the churchwardens’ accounts of the period.<sup>695</sup> ‘December 1559 Receyved of Antony Langton ye vicar for ye legacye of Sir Robert Bell given to ye churche 3s – 4d’. William Hall the former prior of Haverholm in

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<sup>692</sup> Ibid LCC Wills 1562, 150.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid LCC Wills 1562, 316.

<sup>694</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, LCC Wills 1557, iii, 192.

<sup>695</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Horbling Town Book, Horbling Parish documents 7/10.

his non conservative will of 1549<sup>696</sup> made bequests to a former Haverholm canon John Bray and to Humphrey Spensley the former prior of St Edmunds in Cambridge who was now vicar of East Rasen in Lincolnshire.

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<sup>696</sup> TNA, PROB 11/22 F44 Populwell.

## Property Left by the Ex-canons after the Dissolution

The table below (Table 7) shows the value of the goods of eleven canons as given by their inventories which are deposited in the Lincolnshire Archive Office.

**Table 7 – Value of Goods of eleven ex-Gilbertine Canons**

NAME	INVENTORY REF & DATE	FORMER HOUSE	VALUE OF GOODS	ANNUAL INCOME <sup>697</sup>
Robert Whiting	INV 41/254 (1563)	Alvingham	£32 – 15s – 0d	£12 – 2 – 6d
John Bolton	INV 40/85 (1562)	Alvingham	£4 – 8s – 4d	£7 – 0 – 0d
John Boyes	INV 25/86 (1556)	Bullington	£15 – 19s – 0d	£4 – 13 – 4d
Thomas West	INV 61/90 (1577)	Catley	£5 – 5s – 7d	£8 – 0 – 0d
John Bray	INV 44/443 (1566)	Haverholm	£11 – 6s – 2d	Not known
Richard Golding	INV 23/27 (1558)	Haverholm	£8 – 6s – 8d	Not known
Richard Wilson	INV 36/549 (1559)	Lincoln	£46 – 4s – 4d	£11 – 0 – 0d
Thomas Clippingdale	INV 1565/523 (1565)	Lincoln	£39 – 12s – 4d	£11 – 10 – 2d
Robert Baker	INV 28/93 (1556)	Sempringham	£4 – 6s – 8d	Not known
James Walles	INV 2/129 (1539)	Sixhills	£92 – 3s – 4d	£20 – 0 – 0d
John Owbrey	INV 40/260 (1562)	Sixhills	£17 – 6s – 10d	£7 – 0 – 0d

From the table it was seen that of the eleven former Gilbertine canons, seven left

<sup>697</sup> These figures have been obtained from G A J Hodgett, *The State of the Ex-Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln*. These figures apply for the year 1554 when the value of benefices were known. In the case of James Walles, this figure is for his pension only. In three cases it was not possible to establish the annual incomes of three of the canons. John Bray had an annual pension of £2 which was awarded as a condition of his pension. (TNA E314/77) It is not clear as to whether he had any other income. Richard Golding did not receive a pension from Haverholme. He may have had to serve a benefice instead of receiving a pension. Robert Baker received a pension of £4 in 1539 (TNA E315/233) but does not appear on any other subsequent pension lists, In 1541 he became vicar of St Andrews at Sempringham (Lincolnshire Archives Bishops Register 28, fo. 76). It is possible that he drew the income as a parish priest instead of receiving his pension.

goods and chattels which had a value of less than £20. Comparing these figures with the annual incomes, four of these men had an income that was less than £10 per annum. Unfortunately the annual incomes of the other three ex-canons is not known Three others left goods with values ranging from £30 to £40, their annual incomes being about £12. The case of James Walles will be discussed below.

An analysis of the inventories of these ten former canons showed that the houses that they were dwelling in probably consisted of no more than two to three rooms.<sup>698</sup> The contents of the rooms consisted of basic furniture and household utensils to sustain a modest lifestyle. The poorest of these men had a few sheep on land surrounding their houses, plus a horse for transportation. The wealthier appeared to have had a small amount of land where they were growing wheat, barley etc. Thomas Clyppingdale in his inventory also listed the following livestock, two oxen, twenty sheep, twenty ewes, a number of pigs and four young colts. He was also able to entertain a number of guests in his house since he has a table, three forms, one long settle and a number of chairs. Printed cloths hung on the walls, which indicate that he enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle.

In contrast with this, John Bray listed the following items within his house: an old featherbed with bolster, mattress, coverlet and sheets, brass and pewter, a counter and a chest. This would have resulted in him having a far more basic lifestyle than Thomas Clippingdale. As for livestock he had three cows and five calves, twenty sheep, pigs and chickens.

James Walles however, left goods to the value of £92. As for 'ready money' he had £20 and was owed £40, the ready money far exceeding the value of goods of many of his fellow canons. He was the former prior of Sixhills Priory having being awarded an annual pension of £20. Having died so soon after the dissolution, he would have only received very little of his pension if any at all. Whilst he was prior he was vicar of the

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<sup>698</sup> The inventory of Robert Whyting (Lincolnshire Archives INV 41/254 only mentions his bed chamber, the hall and the kitchen. The will of John Bray (Lincolnshire Archives INV 44/443) list his household goods as 'An old feather bed with bolster, mattress and sheets, brass and pewter and a counter and a chest. It is highly unlikely that he would have required more than two rooms for these few items.



parish of Tealby in Lincolnshire, which was close by the priory. He was instituted to the parish in April 1524 by Sixhills Priory, whilst he was prior of his house.<sup>699</sup> If he was to have dealt with the day to day running of Sixhills priory he would not have been able to have served the parish of Tealby on a full time basis. It is possible that he may have used one or more of his canons, or non beneficed priests to carry out the duties of the parish priest, possibly retaining most of the income for himself. Over this fifteen year period he would have been able to have saved a considerable amount of the income which may explain the possessions and the large sum of money which he left when he died. He may well have continued to live in the prior's lodging after the dissolution of his house retaining his personal property.<sup>700</sup> The goods listed in the inventory indicated that the size of his house must have been larger than that of his fellow canons.

### **Conclusions**

Unlike the Gilbertine nuns, no evidence has survived to indicate that the ex-canons attempted to form small groups living to a religious rule. These ex-canons had a greater chance of gaining employment than the ex-nuns of the order. Their main source of employment was that of parish priests which resulted in them having to move away from their respective houses and their former colleagues. Probate records do show that in a small number of cases they appear to be keeping in touch with other ex-Gilbertine canons. These friendships were not restricted to members of the same religious house. William Hall the ex-prior of Haverholme who became the vicar of Gedney, was still in contact with Humphrey Spensley the former prior of the Gilbertine house of St Edmund in Cambridge.<sup>701</sup> Humphrey Spensley had become vicar of East Rasen which was about 60 miles from Gedney. Closer friendships were formed especially when they were working in neighbouring parishes or living in the same parish. Anthony Langton made a bequest to his old colleague Robert Bell from Sempringham priory who was living in the same parish and may well have been living with Langton.<sup>702</sup>

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<sup>699</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Bishops Register 15 fo. 5v.

<sup>700</sup> John Browne the former Abbot of Kirkstall lived out his retirement in the gatehouse of the Abbey. C Cross and N Vickers, *Monks Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, Vol. 150, page 143.

<sup>701</sup> TNA, PROB 11/22 F44 Populwell.

<sup>702</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, LCC Wills 1557, iii, 192.

Attempts were made by the members of other orders to set up much more formal groups. One example is provided by the ex-monks of Monk Bretton Priory in Yorkshire. Many of the members of this house remained in the same area as their dissolved house.<sup>703</sup> The last abbot hoped that the house would be restored during the reign of Queen Mary, with its surviving members returning to their communal life there. With the advances of Protestantism after Mary's death, however, monasticism no longer had a place in society; consequently the hope that Monk Bretton priory could be re-established vanished.<sup>704</sup>

The available evidence showed that the Lincolnshire canons were successful in obtaining benefices after the dissolution. However, the Augustinians, who were also regular canons, were more successful than the Gilbertines. An examination of how they reacted to the change in the law regarding clerical marriage, wills and other documents showed that a small number of these men still held conservative religious views even into Elizabeth's reign, whilst many may have accepted the religious reforms of the time. Surviving records for the ex religious in Yorkshire were not as comprehensive as those for Lincolnshire and it was not possible to say with any degree of certainty how many of the Yorkshire canons and monks obtained benefices after the dissolution. It appeared that many of the ex-Gilbertines in this county did not leave wills, or if they did, these documents have not survived.<sup>705</sup> Each of the Gilbertine houses appeared to have had communities which held a spectrum of views, no one house being identified as conservative or reformist. An example is the Lincolnshire house of Bullington. The last prioress, Mary Sutton left a will, which was very conservative, yet the surviving wills of the Bullington canons do not show this degree of conservatism.

The pensions paid to the Gilbertine canons after the dissolution were in general lower than those paid to members of the other religious orders. In the Gilbertine double houses

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<sup>703</sup> Claire Cross, 'A Yorkshire religious house and its hinterland: Monk Bretton Priory in the sixteenth century', in *Christianity and Community in the West*, ed. S. Ditchfield, Aldershot, (2001), p 86.

<sup>704</sup> Ibid.

<sup>705</sup> It is known that John Golding, the former prior of the Gilbertine house of Ellerton in Yorkshire did leave a will, however, this document has not survived. (Borthwick Institute York, Chancery Act Book, Chanc. AB 8, fo. 225r.

the number of nuns exceeded the number of canons. Since the nuns also received a pension, this may explain why the amounts paid to the canons were lower than those paid to members of other orders. An examination of the pensions paid to non Gilbertines in Lincolnshire compared to the valuation of their respective houses shows that apart from the head of the house the level of pension paid did not correlate to the valuation of the house.<sup>706</sup> In the case of the Gilbertine houses the wealthier houses of the order namely Sempringham Watton and St Katherine's Lincoln paid marginally higher pensions to some of their canons.<sup>707</sup> The heads of the Gilbertine houses were receiving pensions which reflected the valuation of the house and were not dissimilar from the pensions paid to heads of other orders.<sup>708</sup> These low level pension payments would mean that these men would be far more eager than other ex-religious to find employment as quickly as possible.

The figures showed that it was the ex-regular canons who were becoming secular priests. For the county of Lincolnshire, out of a total of 36 ex-religious men, 30 of them were formerly members of the Gilbertine and Augustinian orders, the remaining six being former Benedictine monks. The Gilbertines in common with the Augustinians, had a lot of experience of serving as parish priests outside of their monasteries before the dissolution, giving them a natural advantage over other ex-religious men. Unlike the canons of Augustinian houses in Yorkshire studied by Claire Cross and Janet Burton, the Lincolnshire Gilbertine canons had to find work some distance from their priories, only a few of these men took over churches which once belonged to their priories. However, canons who had been allies of Robert Holgate during his time as Master of the Gilbertine order, obtained more than one benefice which were held simultaneously and were obtained soon after the dissolution. These posts were given to senior members of the order who would not have had recent experience of serving a parish. It is unlikely that these men were ever resident permanently in any of the parishes that they were supposedly responsible for. The day to day running of these parishes would have been

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<sup>706</sup> See Pension Warrants in TNA 315/233.

<sup>707</sup> See Pension list, E314/20/11 (Sempringham), Pension Warrants E315/233 (Lincoln), Pension list E315/246 Watton).

<sup>708</sup> See Pension Warrants in TNA 315/233.

delegated to non beneficed priests, who may have been paid a fraction of the value of the benefice, the remainder being retained by the ex-canons.

Only two wills were available for canons during the Edwardian years. One of these canons left a will which was of a neutral form making it difficult to assess his religious convictions. The will of William Hall is problematic since the wording of the preamble to his will appears to be contradictory. Without any other evidence it was not possible to say what his religious convictions were. During the Marian period three of the four canons left relatively neutral wills, the preambles which they used may have been standard forms which were used at this time. However, one of the wills showed distinctive conservative views. Two canons appear to have held conservative views through into Elizabeths reign, one canon appears to have had strong protestant views and the remainder were of a neutral nature. The general conclusion that we can draw from this is that a large number of these men were happy to follow the religious climate dictated at the time. Only three canons Thomas West, Richard Tyson, and John Obrey were prepared to declare their true religious allegiance.

The surviving evidence in Lincolnshire showed that only the Gilbertines and Benedictines appear to have married when the law permitted them to do so. However many more may have married before the 1544 returns already mentioned. As these returns refer to men who have never married and those who are unmarried, the latter term may indicate that they married but were compelled to live apart from their wives during Queen Mary's reign.

The lifestyles of the ex-Gilbertines varied, depending on their annual incomes, varying from having the bare essentials of daily life, to modest wealth. The latter class consisted mainly of the ex-priors of the order. Unfortunately it has not been possible to assess the lifestyles of the members of the order who did not find employment since none of them have left wills or inventories of their goods.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE GILBERTINE NUNS AFTER THE DISSOLUTION

#### Introduction

The expulsion of the nuns from their monasteries into the outside world would have had a serious psychological impact on women who were members of religious orders. This would have been more severe for the Gilbertine nuns because of their stricter enclosed lifestyle. Nuns who followed strict enclosed lives would have followed a rigid timetable of services within the conventual church, periods of private study and prayer, and set meal times. They would have had no experience of having to fend for themselves in the outside world. However, for the monks and canons, this change in lifestyle would not have had such a serious impact. Many of these men would have had the experience of working as parish priests, possibly living outside the monastery for periods of time. After the dissolution they would have had the opportunity of serving as parish priests as and when vacancies arose to supplement their pensions.

The prospects for younger nuns would have been far better than those for the older and elderly nuns. Life outside the monastery for the older women would have been a distant memory and they would have no experience of coping with a lifestyle, which may have changed over the years. Taking on the responsibility of having to support themselves would have been very difficult. Three options would have been available to the younger nuns after they had been expelled from their convents. Firstly they could return to their families if they had any close relatives who were still alive; secondly they could find employment to supplement the meagre pension that had been awarded to them by the crown; or thirdly marriage would have been a possibility. Claire Cross has stated that it would be inconceivable for the Ellerker family of Risby to allow Anne who was a member of the Watton community to live below the poverty line.<sup>709</sup> A number of nuns took up a further option, that of living in small groups perhaps living a life not too dissimilar to that which they had been following within the monastery. This would have

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<sup>709</sup> Claire Cross, *The End of Monasticism in the East Riding of Yorkshire*, p. 43.

been particularly attractive to older women who no longer had any marriage prospects, no close relatives who were alive or found it impossible to find employment. Ex-nuns who were living this life may have wished to continue a communal life similar to that which they were accustomed to in their convents. Some of these women may have retained a religious vocation which may have been reflected in their new communal lives.

As well as exploring the various options available to these women, the small amount of surviving source material will be used to analyse the lifestyles of these women after the dissolution. The first section however will examine the financial status of these women at the moment of expulsion from their houses, using the surviving pension records in the National Archives.

### **Pensions Awarded to the Nuns**

Appendices 9 and 10 show the pensions awarded to the nuns in the counties of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire where the records have survived. These tables show the pensions that were awarded to the heads of houses, those paid to the senior and older nuns and the pensions paid to the remaining nuns. In order to compare one house with another, the total pensions paid for a particular house were expressed as a ratio with that of the net income of the house at the dissolution. It was probably intended that this income would have been sufficient to pay the pensions, possibly with a small surplus. It can be seen for some houses in Yorkshire this was not being achieved. The most notable exception was that of the Cluniac house of Arthington where the annual income was insufficient to pay the pensions of the nine nuns. For the Gilbertine double houses, the pensions of the canons have been included in the calculations. Calculations involving the nuns only are shown in brackets below the total figures in both of the appendices.

Appendix 2 for Lincolnshire showed that 43% of the income from all of the dissolved houses was spent on the pensions of the ex-nuns. The figures for Yorkshire were quite different. The average of all the dissolved houses in the county being paid out in the county was 90% of the income, whereas for the Gilbertine house of Watton, the ex-religious were only receiving 29% of the ex-priory's income. At the dissolution the lands

and possessions of Watton priory were granted to Robert Holgate. No record of pension payments for this house have been found for this house before Holgate's death. It is possible that Holgate paid these pensions to the ex-religious of the house from the revenues that he drew from the Watton estates. After his demise in 1554 the payment of these pensions reverted back to the crown. In Lincolnshire the valuations of the houses of nuns in 1540 ranged from £13.99 to £383.77 (including the Gilbertine houses) with an average value of £113.34; excluding the Gilbertine houses the range was £13.99 to £165.37, the average being £58.65. The valuation of the Yorkshire nunneries (excluding Watton priory) in the same year ranged from £11.42 to £83.19, the average value being £33.10. Excluding the Gilbertine houses, this shows that the nunneries in Yorkshire were poorer than those in Lincolnshire and would explain why a larger amount of the net income in Yorkshire was being spent on pensions compared to Lincolnshire. If the pensions of the heads of houses were omitted, then it can be seen that the range of pensions being paid to the nuns varied from £1 to £3 - 6 - 8d. The higher pension of £3 - 6 - 8d was only paid to the deputy head of the house the sub-prioress, the highest pension paid to an ordinary nun being £2 - 13 - 8d. It appeared that a decision had been made that ordinary nuns would receive a pension of £2 or less and senior nuns a sum just over £2 irrespective of the income received.

In general, the heads of nunneries received pensions which were greater than those of the nuns of their respective houses. The formula as to how the amount was calculated is not clear. An examination of the figures indicated that at least two factors were being considered when calculating the amount to be paid. Firstly, the income the property of the house generated after the dissolution, which would have been a major contributing factor and secondly, the number of nuns in the house. The two Cistercian houses in Lincolnshire, Nun Coton and Stixwold both had thirteen nuns at the dissolution, but the Prioress of Nun Coton received a much less pension than that of her sister house. In this case the overriding factor determining this pension was not the number of nuns in the house, but the income that was generated by the property which belonged to the priory. Marilyn Oliva has stated that the convents estimated value was not the only factor which

determined the pension of the head of the house.<sup>710</sup> Grace Sampson who was the last prioress of Redlingfield in Suffolk whose priory was valued at £67, received a pension of £13 – 6 – 8d even though her house was heavily in debt. A factor which may have influenced this level of pension may be due to the fact that Edmund and Grace Bedingfield, two of the priories main benefactors, purchased the priory after the dissolution and allowed Grace Sampson to stay in her old lodgings after the dissolution. Edmund and his wife may have intervened to procure her a better pension than the amount that was assessed by the commissioners.<sup>711</sup>

G A J Hodgett calculated that for the Diocese of Lincoln, 60% of women fell into the group who were receiving pensions of £2 or less.<sup>712</sup> This group of women would have lived in poverty and this would have worsened during the inflationary years of the late 1540s.<sup>713</sup> Using the pension lists for Lincolnshire Gilbertine houses, 36% of the nuns who were receiving a pension of £2 or less may have either died, moved out of the diocese before 1550 or could not be located since their names no longer appear on these lists. Of the 64% who survived beyond this date, four of these nuns out of a total of 44 had married. Not knowing the ages of these women did not allow conclusions to be drawn as to whether this was due to poverty or simply due to old age. However, if we assume these pension lists were drawn up in age order, that is senior nuns at the beginning working down to novices at the bottom, this showed that approximately 16% of the younger women had died before 1550, which would indicate that poverty must be taken into consideration.<sup>714</sup> Marilyn Oliva has compared the pensions that were awarded to nuns and the male religious in the Diocese of Norfolk.<sup>715</sup> She has suggested that the reasons why lower pensions that were being paid to the women was that women in medieval society and the church were of a lower status of that of the men. An example she uses to

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<sup>710</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and Community in Late Medieval England*, pp. 196.

<sup>711</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>712</sup> G A J Hodgett, *The State of the Ex Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln 1547 – 1574*, Lincoln Record Society Vol. 53, (1959).

<sup>713</sup> See chapter 6.

<sup>714</sup> Lists of nuns, which have been drawn up before the dissolution in pre dissolution monastic surveys where ages have been given, support this hypothesis. TNA SP5/2 This document gives the ages of the nuns in 1536 for the following Yorkshire nunneries:- Esholt, Handale, Baysdale, Thicket, Wilberfosse, Yeddingham, Wykeham, Swine, Nunkeeling, Hampole, and Kirklees.

<sup>715</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and Community in Late Medieval England*, pp. 196-7.



illustrate this is that for the Gilbertine house of Shouldham in Norfolk where the prior received a pension of £20 per year, but the prioress Elizabeth Fincham only received £5.<sup>716</sup>

### **Marriage**

Marriage for ex-nuns had been legal since 1549 and of the 101 ex-nuns listed in the Dean and Chapter returns of 1554, 20 of these women expressly stated that they were married.<sup>717</sup> These women are listed in Table 1 below.

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<sup>716</sup> Ibid.

<sup>717</sup> G A J Hodgett, *The State of the Ex Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln*.

**Table 1 – Ex-Nuns who are known to have married before 1554<sup>718</sup>**

<b>Name of Nun</b>	<b>Religious House</b>	<b>Monastic Order</b>	<b>Name of Husband</b>	<b>Place where she is living in 1554</b>
Margaret Gyboll	Chicksands	Gilbertine	Not Known	Biggleswade (Beds)
Catherine Cropper	Bullington	Gilbertine	Robert Page	Lincoln
Bridget Mone	Bullington	Gilbertine	William Patrick	Market Rasen
Sibyl Parsell	Haverholme	Gilbertine	Not Known	Steeple Gidding (Hunts)
Joan Astley	Sempringham	Gilbertine	Christopher Hudson	Dorrington
Joan Jordan	Sempringham	Gilbertine	Not Known	Grimsby
Joan Kirkbie	Sixhills	Gilbertine	William Pratt	Lincoln
Sibil Talbot	Sixhills	Gilbertine	Michael Bushee	Leake
Alice Thompson	Sixhills	Gilbertine	Richard Keale	Dalderby
Anne Walles	Sixhills	Gilbertine	Richard Grysbie	Middle Rasen
Elizabeth Wright	Sixhills	Gilbertine	John Burnesley	Market Rasen
Joan Laundesdall	Grimsby	Augustinian	Not Known	Donington
Alice Foster	Elstow (Beds)	Benedictine	Thomas Browning	Bourne
Anne Castilforth <sup>719</sup>	Gokewell	Cistercian	Robert Staynton	Amcotts
Elizabeth Ryder	Heynings	Cistercian	Christopher Sawer	Gainsborough
Joan Myssenden	Legbourne	Cistercian	William Ottbody	Corby
Elizabeth Skipwith	Nun Coton	Cistercian	Thomas Billesbie (gent)	Raithby
Agnes Bones	Stixwold	Cistercian	Nicholas Field	Tattersall
Alice Chapman	Irford	Premonstratensian	Edward Person	Tattersall
Cecelia Turner	Irford	Premonstratensian	Richard Marshall	Glanford Brigg

As already previously discussed, care must be exercised in interpreting the terms ‘not married’ and ‘never married’. It may be that some of those who stated that they were ‘not

<sup>718</sup> This list has been compiled from, G A J Hodgett, *The State of the Ex-Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln*, pp. 77-125.

<sup>719</sup> Anne Castilforth was the prioress of Gokewell at the dissolution of her house. G A J Hodgett, *The State of the Ex-Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln*, p. 79.

married' were forced to live apart from their spouses due to action taken against them during the early years of the reign of Queen Mary. Of the 20 nuns recorded in the returns who admitted to being married, 11 of these were ex Gilbertine nuns. In fact one of these nuns, Joan Asley, an ex-Sempringham nun, married Christopher Hudson an ex canon of Catley Priory. Christopher Hudson was instituted to the vicarage of Dorrington in Lincolnshire in 1549.<sup>720</sup> In the Dean and Chapter Returns he is said to be the vicar of Dorrington and that he was married to Joan Astley.<sup>721</sup> However, in 1553 Henry Watsonne was presented to the vicarage by Queen Mary. It is not clear as to whether Hudson had been deprived of his living or whether he had resigned, since the reason for the new institution was given as 'right vacant'.<sup>722</sup> Christopher Hudson died in the first year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth hence it was unlikely that he obtained another benefice.<sup>723</sup> Of these nine nuns, five were from the dissolved Gilbertine priory of Sixhills in Lincolnshire. Of these five nuns the inventories of either the ex-nun or her husband or both parties have with one exception have survived. The values of the estates of Elizabeth Wright and Sybil Talbot and the husbands of the ex-nuns where known, are summarised in the table below.<sup>724</sup>

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<sup>720</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Bishops Register 26, fo. 21.

<sup>721</sup> G A J Hodgett, *The State of the Ex-Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln*, p. 119.

<sup>722</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Bishops Register 28, fo. 7v.

<sup>723</sup> G A J Hodgett, *The State of the Ex-Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln*, p. 129.

<sup>724</sup> All of these Inventories are in the Lincolnshire Archives Office. The references are as follows. Inventory of William Patrick, husband of Bridget Mone, INV 81/612, Inventory of Robert Page, husband of Katherine Cropper, INV 28/224, Inventory of Joan Jordan, LCC Will 1543-56, 329, Will of Richard Keale, husband of Alice Thompson, LCC Will 1561, 245, Inventory of Elizabeth Wright, INV 67/399, Inventory of John Burnesley husband of Elizabeth Wright INV 33/279, Will of Richard Grysbie husband of Anne Walles LCC Will 1580, 201, Inventory of Sybil Talbot, INV 36/750, Inventory of Michael Bushey, husband of Sybil Talbot, INV 36/711.

**Table 2 – Valuation of ex-Gilbertine Nuns Estates**

<b>Name</b>	<b>House</b>	<b>Value of Estate</b>	<b>Value of Husband's Estate</b>
Bridget Mone	Bullington	Not Known	£4 (1591) plus Will
Katherine Cropper	Bullington	Not Known	£6 – 16 – 6 (1556)
Joan Jordan	Sempringham	Value of goods not given	Not Known
Joan Asley	Sempringham	Not Known	Not Known
Alice Thompson	Sixhills	Not Known	Will but no Inventory
Elizabeth Wright	Sixhills	£115-0-10 (1583) plus Will	£173-14-2 (1558) plus Will
Anne Walles	Sixhills	Not Known	Will but no Inventory
Sybil Talbot	Sixhills	£15-15-11 (1559)	£20-13-4 (1559)
Joan Kirkbie	Sixhills	Not Known	Not Known

Three inventories of nuns who were not married have survived. Margaret Boswell who was prioress of the small double house of Catley in Lincolnshire, left goods to the value of £4 – 4 – 0 in 1553.<sup>725</sup> However Isabell Walles, the sub-prioress of Sixhills, left considerably more, £23 – 14 – 8 in 1546.<sup>726</sup> Isabell had relatives in the Sixhills area after the dissolution and the difference may be due to her close family looking after her.

<sup>725</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Inventory INV 20/275.

<sup>726</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Inventory INV 32/275.

Margaret Boswell settled in the nearby village of Walcot close to the dissolved priory. In her will she does not mention any of her family only leaving small items to her friends.<sup>727</sup> Having no surviving family she probably decided it was best to stay in the area which she knew and where there were people who were willing to look after her. A third inventory may belong to an ex-Bullington nun. It is not possible to say with any certainty that it is the inventory of Elizabeth Tangat who appeared on the pension list of the priory, the only hint that they may be the same person is the rarity of the surname in Lincolnshire.<sup>728</sup> If it is the same person, then she appears to have been living a very poor life as the total sum of her goods and chattels only came to £2 – 14 – 4d.

From the available information it can be concluded that marriage did not necessarily give these nuns a way of life that could be better than comfortable. The only exception is that of Elizabeth Wright who died a relatively wealthy woman. Her husband John Burnesley was a textile dealer in East Rasen in North Lincolnshire. Judging from his inventory he must have been successful when he died in 1558. The inventory of her husband lists all the items in the shop where he was trading in textiles, whereas the inventory of Elizabeth, which was made in 1583, makes no mention of any such stock. By this time she would have been relatively old and would have been living in retirement. It is not known if she was running her husband's business after his death. A summary of her inventory is as follows.

In the Hall	£2 – 2 – 8d
In the Kitchen	£2 – 19 – 0d
In the Parlour	£37 – 15 – 8d
In the “Chamber”	£25 – 0 – 0d
Corn in the Barn	£29 – 0 – 0d
In the Farm Yard	£5 – 19 – 8d
Corn in the fields	£3 – 15 – 8d <sup>729</sup>

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<sup>727</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Inventory INV 20/276. Her will is included with the inventory of her goods.

<sup>728</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Inventory INV 8/117.

<sup>729</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, INV 67/399.

She must have been running the textile business or had some one to look after it for her close up to her death in order that she would have had the income to maintain this lifestyle. Quite clearly her values in life had changed dramatically since the days when she was a professed nun. The preamble to her will is typical of the time; 'I commend my soul into the hands of Almighty God my creator and redeemer and my body to be buried in the church yard of East Rasen'.<sup>730</sup> By this date all her fellow sisters at Sixhills would have died hence it would not be expected that any bequests would be made to them and wills of this date would not have included masses to be said for her soul. In the previous chapter the interpretation of the preambles of wills were discussed. From the conclusions that were drawn it is not possible to say if Elizabeth had adapted to a protestant way of life or if she retained any conservative views.

### **Post Dissolution Life**

An analysis of the Lincolnshire returns already discussed show that of the whole population of the ex-religious in the Diocese of Lincoln who survived until 1554, forty seven were living in the area where they had been in profession. Many only moved a few miles away from where they had been in religion. A small number of ex-monks, canons and nuns moved into the Diocese of Lincoln from other Dioceses, as they may have had family roots in this diocese.

Elizabeth Thimbleby who was previously a nun at North Ormesby moved back to her family home of Irnham, which was some distance away from the priory (approximately 50 miles) where she lived before the dissolution.<sup>731</sup> In chapter 2 it was shown that in this same time period Sempringham was recruiting 40% of its nuns from distances greater than 50 miles. The case of Elizabeth Thimbleby may suggest that other Gilbertine houses in Lincolnshire were recruiting significant numbers of nuns from distances well away from their priories. Originally the family was seated at Poolham Manor near Horncastle in Lincolnshire which was not far away from North Ormesby and where she may have been living at the time she entered into religion. Her father, Richard Thimbleby of

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<sup>730</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, LCC Wills 1582, 371.

<sup>731</sup> Pension List for North Ormesby priory, TNA E315/233.

Poolham Manor married Elizabeth, sister and one of the co heiresses of Sir Godfrey Hilton of Irnham.<sup>732</sup> An item in a manuscript in the diocesan records at Lincoln gives an insight into her religious convictions after she left the Gilbertine priory.<sup>733</sup> During the early years of the reign of Elizabeth parish churches were instructed to destroy all images, service books of ‘papistrie’, vestments, crucifixes and all other ‘monuments of superstition’. In the parish of Irnham in March 1565 ‘one cope and a vestment borrowed of Mrs Elizabeth Thymelbie a nunn and at the defacing of all the said monuments of superticion the said cope and vestment were delivered to Mr John Thymelbie which had defaced the same’. John Thymelby was nephew to Elizabeth and was the son of the first Sir John Thymelby of Irnham. Elizabeth died soon after this on 11 August 1567 and she may have been too ill to take possession of them personally.<sup>734</sup> Having possession of such items would indicate that Elizabeth had strong conservative views and that Irnham parish church was sympathetic with her views. On the accession of Elizabeth to the throne, the churchwardens were forced to destroy all such items, but they seemed content to return them to their original owner. It is stated that her nephew had defaced the vestments and not the churchwardens whose responsibility it was to ensure all items were defaced or destroyed. There is the possibility that John told the churchwardens that he had defaced them but in fact they may have remained intact.

The alternatives to marriage for an ex-nun were severely limited. The pension that was awarded to her by the crown would have scarcely been sufficient for her to survive from day to day on her own. Merry Wiesner has stated that in England and Ireland where all of the monasteries were taken over by the crown, many of the nuns only received very small pensions and were expected to return to their families.<sup>735</sup> If their families were willing to take them into their households then they would have been able to maintain reasonable standards of living. For many of the nuns especially the older ones this may not have

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<sup>732</sup> Edward Peacock, *English Church Furniture, Ornaments and Decorations at the Period of the Reformation*, London (1866). It has not been possible to confirm the genealogy of Elizabeth Thymbleby from primary sources. Edward Peacock does not give the sources which he used.

<sup>733</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Diocesan Records FUR/2, Monuments of Superstition.

<sup>734</sup> TNA, Returns into the Exchequer concerning pensioners in the diocese of Lincoln, Exchequer Special Commission E178/3248 m 4d.

<sup>735</sup> Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Convents Confront the Reformation: Catholic and Protestant Nuns in Germany*, Marquette University Press (1998), p. 15.

been an option as their families may have moved from the area or over the years they may have lost touch with each other. An analysis of a number of sets of records has shown that a small number of ex-nuns either lived in pairs or in a rare number of cases as a small community.

In the very conservative Diocese of Winchester two groups of nuns were living a communal life.<sup>736</sup> In her will dated 1547 Elizabeth Shelly, who had been Abbess of St Mary's in Winchester, was living with six of the former nuns from the dissolved abbey. Diana Coldicott has gone as far as to say that they were still living in some of the abbey buildings. Elizabeth Shelly names Walter Dashwood as one of her executors and describes him as her chaplain.<sup>737</sup> Similarly, Morpheta Kingsmill, Abbess of Wherwell, in her will of 1570, left household legacies to six former Wherwell nuns who had been presumably living with her ever since the surrender of their abbey 30 years earlier.<sup>738</sup>

With regard to the Gilbertines, we only have a hint of such a life existing after the dissolution in a very small number of cases. The Lincolnshire returns give two possible examples both with regard to former nuns of Chicksands Priory in Bedfordshire. These returns tell us that Margaret Odell and Isabell Lanikyne were both living at Henlow and

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<sup>736</sup> Correspondence with Margaret Cooke at Hampshire Record Office who has made a study of the conservative religious views which were held in the county from the dissolution up until the reign of Elizabeth I.

<sup>737</sup> Diana K Coldicott, *Hampshire Nunneries*, Chichester: Philimore (1989), p. 143.

<sup>738</sup> Examples of monks and canons who continued to live religious lives after the dissolution are as follows. In the diocese of Winchester the Bishops registers record four cases of ex monks who had taken up benefices, resigning the aforesaid benefices to return to a monastic life in 1556. In the county of Norfolk there is a similar case, that of Stephen Bailey an ex monk of St Albans Abbey in Hertfordshire, who resigned his living in Norfolk to become a monk. Presumably he had returned to his former home at St Albans since in the burials register of St Albans Abbey (now the Parish Church) at his burial in February 1558/9 he described as 'monachus'. On the border between Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire we have the case of a number of the ex monks of Thorney Abbey living together in Whitlesey. There is the well known case of the ex monks of Monk Bretton Priory in Yorkshire, the former Prior was living nearby in Worsborough living with a number of ex monks as a community and had with them 150 books from the monastic library. They appear to have held out a hope that one day the Priory would be refounded, since in his will William Browne the former Prior included a proviso that if it should come to pass 'by any manner of means that the late dissolved monastery of Monk Bretton should be erected and inhabited with religious persons' his executors should restore his house in Worsborough, two closes, and all his vestments, books and household goods to the monastery.



Alice Clarke and Margaret Granger were living in Campton.<sup>739</sup> Both of these places were close to the former priory and it would be reasonable to assume that they were living together in each case possibly following a modified monastic rule or merely pooling their pensions for financial security. A more decisive case is that of three former nuns of the Lincolnshire house of Bullington who almost certainly were following a monastic rule. In her will of 1558 Mary Sutton the ex-Prioress makes a bequest to three former nuns as follows: 'Item to 3 of my sisters in profession and so contynuing 3 yeards of lynecloth'.<sup>740</sup> Two of these sisters can be identified as Agnes Grey and Dorothy Fishbury both former nuns of Bullington and both living at Ingham<sup>741</sup>. It has not been possible to identify the third one with any degree of certainty.

After the dissolution of the monasteries in Ireland, many Irish nuns fled to convents on the continent, or continued to fulfil their religious vows in hiding, awaiting an opportunity to emigrate to a nunnery on the continent<sup>742</sup>. Claire Cross in her study of the Yorkshire religious after the dissolution, has said that of the 250 nuns in that county, some of those who did not marry tried to retain the ways of their former lives.<sup>743</sup> It is not inconceivable that ex-nuns in this country who chose to continue a religious life did so in the hope that monasticism would be restored one day, or that they could have found support to send them to religious institutions abroad. During the reign of Queen Mary an attempt was made to re-establish religious communities in England. Cardinal Pole who was Mary's cousin, had been appointed by the Pope to bring about a reconciliation with Rome in August 1553. Pole had 'big plans for the restoration of the monasteries' and to assist him he brought over advisors from the reformed Italian Benedictine congregation of Monte Cassino. However, despite his efforts only seven religious houses were founded in which about 100 ex-religious returned to a monastic life.<sup>744</sup> With such a small number

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<sup>739</sup> G A J Hodgett, *The State of the Ex Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln*, pp. 91-2.

<sup>740</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Stowe Will 1553-67, 206.

<sup>741</sup> TNA E101/76/26.

<sup>742</sup> Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Convents Confront the Reformation*, p. 15.

<sup>743</sup> Claire Cross, 'Community Solidarity Among Yorkshire Religious After the Dissolution', in, *Monastic Studies, The Continuity of Tradition*, ed. Judith Loades, (1990), p. 252.

<sup>744</sup> Peter Marshall, *Reformation England 1480 – 1642*, Bloomsbury Academy, (2003), p. 100.

of refounded houses, there would be little opportunity for the majority of the women who wished to return to a religious life to do so.

During the reign of Elizabeth the Catholic gentry of Yorkshire began to send their sons to continental seminaries to be trained as missionaries or simply to receive a Catholic education.<sup>745</sup> One of these men was Dr Thomas Vavasour of York who sent his son to the seminary of Douai in northern France in 1573.<sup>746</sup> This Dr Vavasour may have been a relative of Dorothy Vavasour who was a nun at Watton priory at the time of the dissolution. At the end of the sixteenth century five communities of English Benedictine nuns had been established in Flanders, one such house being in Brussels.<sup>747</sup> In 1597 Mary Percy daughter of the Earl of Northumberland with many other ‘persons of quality’, left England to begin a religious life in Brussels.<sup>748</sup> In 1614 the abbess of this house was Mary Vavasour who was daughter of Sir William Vavasour of Hazelwood in Yorkshire, the same family of the Gilbertine nun Dorothy mentioned above.<sup>749</sup> The lateness of the foundations of these houses would have made it impossible for ex-nuns in this country to continue in a religious life within a convent. However, it did give families the opportunity to place their daughters in nunneries during the latter years of Elizabeth’s reign.

The only glimpse of the lives of ex-nuns that we have after the dissolution is recorded in the reports that were prepared for the monastic pensioner commissioners. In 1555 three of the nuns from the Gilbertine Priory of Shouldam who were still living in the Diocese of Norwich were described as follows:

Joan Plumpsted, dwellinge in the parryshe of Saint Margarett in Norwiche, lately Supprioresse of the late Pryorie of Shuldham, living contynentlye, hath a yearely pencon of 40s paide to her at twoo termes in the yeare by equall porcons at Burye,

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<sup>745</sup> J T Cliffe, *The Yorkshire Gentry from the Reformation to the Civil War*, Athlone Press, (1969), p. 273.

<sup>746</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>747</sup> ‘Who were the nuns?’ A Prosopographical Study of the English Convents in exile 1600 – 1800.. This is a project being run by Queen Mary College, London. See the following web site:- [wwtn.history.qmul.ac.uk/](http://wwtn.history.qmul.ac.uk/).

<sup>748</sup> *Ibid* p. 2.

<sup>749</sup> *Ibid* p. 4.

and hath nothinge besides the same pencon to lyve upon, and ys reputed and taken to be a good and catholicke woman.<sup>750</sup>

Margaret Scorer, dwellinge in the parryshe of Sainte Peter of mancroft in Norwiche, lately one of the Systers of the late Priorye of Shuldham lyvinge continentlye, hath an annuall pencon of 13s 4d paide to her at twoo termes of the yeare, by equall porcons at Burye, and hath no thinge to lyve upon besides the same pencon, and is reputed an honest catholick woman<sup>751</sup>.

Fayth Smyth dwellinge in Fakenham within the cowntie of Norff: unmarried – lately a nune in Shouldham hath an annuall pencon of 40s paide to her at Burye, she ys a Catholicke woman.<sup>752</sup>

These women appeared to be living celibate lives after the dissolution and they are described as ‘catholick women’. The word ‘catholick’ must be interpreted with caution and cannot be used to assume that they were holding on to conservative religious views.. Baskerville takes the opinion that this word refers to them having not married.<sup>753</sup> He gives the example of Dr. Rougham of Bury who is described as an ‘honest and catholic man’ in 1555, but in 1528 he had been preaching Luther’s opinions in Oxford.

The prioress had apparently moved to the neighbouring county of Cambridgeshire sometime after the dissolution as she appears in the commissioner’s report for 1571 as follows:

Leverinton. Mrs Elizabeth Fyncham of late dwellinge in Leverington in the diocese some tyme prioresse of Sholdham on Norf. Had a yerely pencion of 100s she dyed in the yere of our Lord 1561.<sup>754</sup>

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<sup>750</sup> Baskerville G, A, ‘Married Clergy and Pensioned Religious in the Norwich Diocese in 1555’, *English Historical Review* 48 (1933) p 211. Baskerville has transcribed these entries from a MS which has been preserved amongst the records of the Diocese of Norwich. The only other document known to have survived which gives this amount of detail is that for the Diocese of Lincoln already discussed (TNA E101/76/26).

<sup>751</sup> Ibid p. 211.

<sup>752</sup> Ibid p. 214.

<sup>753</sup> Ibid p. 208.

<sup>754</sup> TNA, E178/3234.

Joan Deram had apparently settled at Hedenham in Norfolk some time after 1555, as she did not appear in the returns for that year. In 1571 the commissioners did not know when she had died or whether she had any other income apart from her pension from Shouldham Priory.<sup>755</sup>

A number of Gilbertine nuns appear to have moved some distance away from their convents after the dissolution. Both Ursula Lenton and Ursula Skevington both ex nuns of Sempringham moved to the county of Leicestershire.<sup>756</sup> Ursula Skevington was the daughter of Sir William Skevington of Dunchurch in Kent. This William, her father, was the son of Thomas Skevington of Skeffington in Leicestershire.<sup>757</sup> Presumably Ursula had relatives in Leicestershire when she left Sempringham and they were willing to look after her. It may well be that Ursula Lenton was also a native of that county. Sibyl Parsell formerly a nun at Haverholm Priory was living in Steeple Gidding in Huntingdonshire in 1554 and is described as married, but unfortunately her husband's name is not given.<sup>758</sup> Joan Stockwith who was the Prioress of North Ormesby Priory is reported to be living with her brother who is rector of Upton in Huntingdonshire.<sup>759</sup> Agnes Waters an ex nun of Bullington Priory had moved to Aston Sandford in Buckinghamshire by 1554 and she informed the commissioners that she had never been married.<sup>760</sup> She is one of the very few Gilbertine Nuns to have left a will.<sup>761</sup> In the commissioners' report for 1574 for the county of Leicestershire it is reported that Margaret Turpyn former nun of Sempringham Priory was buried at Theddingworth on 1 March 1557.<sup>762</sup>

The reasons as to why these women moved such distances can only be a matter of speculation. Agnes Waters may have received her profession at the Gilbertine priory of Chicksands in Bedfordshire and for some unknown reason was moved to the Lincolnshire

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<sup>755</sup> TNA, E178/3234.

<sup>756</sup> TNA, E178/3251.

<sup>757</sup> <http://boards.ancestry.co.uk> .

<sup>758</sup> TNA, E101/76/26.

<sup>759</sup> Ibid.

<sup>760</sup> Ibid.

<sup>761</sup> Buckinghamshire Record Office, D/A/WF/6/111.

<sup>762</sup> TNA, E178/3248.

Priory of Bullington. Two other possibilities are that either her family lived in Lincolnshire when she was professed as a nun and subsequently moved to Bedfordshire, or, that Bullington priory recruited her from Bedfordshire. It was shown in Chapter 3 that the canons were not confined to a particular house. However, no records have survived to indicate that the nuns of the order were moved from house to house on a regular basis. The only reference to movement of nuns is when a prioress was elected. If the convent could not agree on the result of an election, the Master had the power to promote a nun to the position not necessarily from the house where the vacancy had arisen.<sup>763</sup>

Many of the nuns would have had to rely on the generosity of surviving members of their families for financial support. If surviving relatives had moved or the only surviving branch of the family lived some distance away, then the ex-nun would have had to move. The case of Joan Stockwith is a good example. She moved in with her brother who was the rector of the parish of Upton in Huntingdonshire. Nothing is known of the family of this particular nun. Again it is possible that her family originally came from Lincolnshire but after her profession may have moved to Huntingdonshire or they were a family from that county. If her brother was her only surviving relative then he may have agreed for her to move in with him. Another example Sibyl Parcell who found a husband (whose name is not known) to support her but this necessitated her having to move to the county of Huntingdonshire. There is the possibility that she either had relations in the county or originally came from Huntingdonshire. After moving back to the county she may have then met her future husband.

### **Economic Position of the ex Nuns after the Dissolution**

With few exceptions the only regular income that was available for the ex-nuns who had not married, was the meagre pension given to them by the Crown. The only occupations that were available for these women were either as children's teachers or as governesses with wealthy families. Within the diocese of Lincoln there is only a single example of an ex-nun taking employment.<sup>764</sup> Joan Deane was described as a nun who was living in the

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<sup>763</sup> *Monasticon*, vi. 2, p. xlvi.

<sup>764</sup> TNA, E101/76/26.

house of Sir George Gifford at Middle Claydon in Buckinghamshire, and was a former nun of Syon Abbey who had been granted an annual pension of £6. She was governess to the children of Sir George Gifford MP teaching Latin to his daughters and a niece.<sup>765</sup> Joan was not a nun of a religious house in the diocese of Lincoln, but had moved into Buckinghamshire after the dissolution. It is not known if she was related to the Gifford family or whether she had family connections in Buckinghamshire. A second example comes from the diocese of Norwich. In his will, Thomas Roberts, mercer of Thetford in Norfolk, mentions that two ex nuns of Campsey Ash, Isabella Norwich and Bridget Cocket, rented a room from him, “where they keep school”.<sup>766</sup> However, it is possible that Elizabeth Wright who has been discussed above, may have assisted in her husband’s business. All of the nuns in the diocese of Lincoln, with the single exception given above, were surviving solely on their pensions in the early part of Queen Mary’s reign. In contrast, the ex-monks and canons were free to supplement their pensions, which in general were larger than those of the women religious, by taking up a benefice or more than one in some cases.

A G Dickens claims that £8 to £9 – 6 – 8d was an insufficient living for a vicar just after the dissolution.<sup>767</sup> However G A J Hodgett<sup>768</sup> is inclined to think that £5 was an adequate amount for the years before 1545. This pension was intended for someone in retirement, not with any financial obligations. A significant number of nuns had pensions of £2 or less and it would be reasonable to assume that these women would have had serious financial problems. According to the Lincoln returns already mentioned 60% of the nuns fell into this category. 27% of the nuns had pensions of between £2 and £5 leaving 15% who had pensions greater than £5.<sup>769</sup> The majority of the Gilbertine nuns were awarded pensions of £2, which was marginally better than many in Lincolnshire. It must be noted

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<sup>765</sup> Virginia R Bainbridge, ‘Syon Abbey: Women and Learning c. 1415 – 1600, in *Syon Abbey and its Books Reading, Writing and Religion*, ed by E A Jones and Alexandra Walsham, Studies in Modern British Religious History, (2010) p. 90.

<sup>766</sup> Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and Community in Late Medieval England*. Boydell Press, (1998) p 202.

<sup>767</sup> *The Edwardian Arrears*, English Historical Review, iv, (1940), 416.

<sup>768</sup> G A J Hodgett, *The State of the ex Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln 1547 – 1574*, Lincoln Record Society Volume 53 (1959), xvii.

<sup>769</sup> TNA, E101/76/26.

that these pensions were awarded in 1539/40 and they did not increase with inflation and by 1554 the value of these pensions would have been eroded by a considerable amount.

To give some idea of the value of the pensions that were awarded to the nuns, we can compare these annual sums with the annual income of unskilled and skilled workers between 1541 and 1550.<sup>770</sup> An unskilled worker during this period earned 4<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d per day. In order for him to have an income of £5 per year he would have had to work for 253 days in the year. If he had worked for the whole year and, if we allow for him having one day off per week the annual income would have been over £6. These figures show that some of these ex nuns would have been barely able to survive on these low pensions.

In her study of the fate of the nuns in the diocese of Norwich after the dissolution, Marilyn Oliva found that a number of nuns stayed together in small groups for financial security.<sup>771</sup> Some of these women would have spent many years of their lives living in a communal atmosphere which would have influenced their lifestyles after the dissolution. Living in this way would also have enabled them to carry out a modified form of religious life.<sup>772</sup>

To make matters worse they had to pay taxes out of these meagre pensions. In the Clerical Subsidy of 1540 all pensioners had to pay 10% per annum for two years from their pensions. The Court of Augmentations deducted these amounts before the pension was paid out.<sup>773</sup> Henry VIII raised over £3200 per annum from the monastic pensions alone in 1541-2.<sup>774</sup> The subsidy of 1543 was set at 10% per annum for three years and the subsidy of 1545 was set at 3 shillings in the pound for the ensuing 2 years, with pensions under £2 being exempt.<sup>775</sup> In 1553 if a pensioner was receiving more than £2, they had to

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<sup>770</sup> A. G. Dickens, *The Edwardian Arrears in Augmentation Payments and the Problems of the Ex-religious*, E.H.R., 40 (1940), p. 416.

<sup>771</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>772</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>773</sup> 32 Henry 8, Cap 23 (Statutes of the Realm iii, pp. 776 – 8.

<sup>774</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, Vol 17, No 258, page 137. *Letters and Papers Henry 8*, Vol 18 (2), No 231, p. 121.

<sup>775</sup> 34 & 35 Henry 8, Cap 28 (Statutes of the Realm, iii, 951 – 3. 37 Henry 8, Cap 24, (Statutes of the Realm iii, 1016 – 18).

pay the full rate of 10% for three years.<sup>776</sup> However, clergy who had benefices, which were worth less than £5 per year, were exempt from the subsidy. The Elizabethan subsidy lists show that this very heavy rate of taxation was continued to the last, aged nuns in 1573 were paying four shillings a year on pensions of £2 – 6 – 8d or less.<sup>777</sup>

During 1552 a large number of monastic pensions were not paid. Substantial arrears in Augmentation payments had been piling up for many months, and a large part of these arrears remained unpaid at least until the end of 1552, if not longer. A G Dickens has made an extensive study of these arrears but some of his figures for Lincolnshire are inaccurate.<sup>778</sup> The following figures have been extracted from the returns in the National Archives.<sup>779</sup> In 1552 it was reported that 183 pensions were unpaid, of these 114 were to ex-canons and monks and 69 to ex-nuns. If we examine the case of the Gilbertine nuns, thirty four pensions were unpaid and thirteen pensions were paid. As to why these pensions were unpaid is not explained in the source material. In some cases it may have proved difficult for the commissioners to trace these people, especially if they had moved and not made the authorities aware of where they had moved to. However, this would not account for all of the unpaid pensions. Baskerville has the view that the pensions of the former religious were either withheld or withdrawn from them.<sup>780</sup> A G Dickens disputes this view, and suggests that the Crown had to protect itself against pension frauds of all kinds, and it was for this purpose that the commission of 1552 was appointed. The commission had to enquire as to whether a pensioner was alive or dead which would indicate that they were trying to avoid making payments to surviving relatives.

### **Religious Attitudes of the Ex Nuns after the Dissolution**

Very few documents survive which can give us an insight as to how convent life moulded their religious views and how these views changed after the dissolution. Wills are by far the best source of information, but regrettably only six of the ex Gilbertine nuns left

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<sup>776</sup> 7 Edward 6, Cap 13 (Statutes of the Realm iv (1), 190-1.

<sup>777</sup> T. M. Fallow, 'Names of Yorkshire Ex-Religious, 1573: their Pensions and Subsidies to the Queen thereon', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, (1907), vol. xix, pp. 100 – 4.

<sup>778</sup> A G Dickens, *The Edwardian Arrears in Augmentation Payments and the Problem of the Ex Religious*. p. 385.

<sup>779</sup> TNA, E101/76/18.

<sup>780</sup> Baskerville, *English Monks and the Suppression of the Monasteries*. London; Cape, (1940), p. 106.



wills.<sup>781</sup> Using this small sample and the conclusions regarding the reading of wills from the previous chapter, these wills will be analysed in a similar manner to those of the canons.

Margaret Boswell the ex prioress of Catley made her will in 1553 at the end of Edward's reign and the beginning of that of Mary. The preamble to her will began by bequeathing her soul to 'almighty God my creator and redeemer'. She makes no reference to the Virgin Mary nor does she request masses to be said after her death. During the Edwardian reign this testament would be regarded as being typical for this period. It would have been impossible to speculate on the true religious feelings of Margaret Boswell from this one document. However, during the reign of Queen Mary, the absence of a reference to the Virgin Mary could be interpreted as her having protestant views. Unfortunately this will occurs at the changeover point between the two reigns, making it impossible to gauge Margaret Boswell's religious views.

Joan Jordan made her will in 1554 which was one year after Mary came to the throne.<sup>782</sup> In the preamble she described herself as 'late non of ye late desolvde howse of Sempyngham'. She went on to bequeath her soul to 'God ye father who hath made me and to God ye sone my redeemer and sayvoure'. The rest of the bequests were to family and friends. The Pension Commissioners of 1554 described her as married (her husbands name is not given, although it is remotely possible that she married a man who had the same surname as herself) and she was too ill to travel (*tanta debilitate corrupta est*) to collect her pension. Yet when she wrote her will she was using her maiden name and no mention was made of a husband in the will. Two possibilities exist; firstly her husband may have died or she may have been forced to live apart from her husband. Unfortunately the Diocesan Court Books for this period are not complete for Lincolnshire hence we can only speculate on this matter. Joan makes no mention of the Virgin Mary in the preamble

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<sup>781</sup> Lincolnshire Archives; Margaret Boswell (Prioress of Catley priory) 1553, INV 20/276, Joan Jordan (Sempringham priory), 1559, LCC wills 1543 – 56, 329, Isabell Wallys (sixhills priory) 1558, Wills Var 54, Mary Sutton (Prioress of Bullington priory) 1558, Stowe wills 1553 – 67, 206, Isabell Burnesley (Isabel Wright of Sixhills priory) 1582, LCC wills 1582, 371, Buckinghamshire Record Office; Agnes Waters (Bullington priory) 1559, Will W.f.6.111.

<sup>782</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, LCC Will 1543-56, 329.

to her will which may have been expected at this time. With this omission it is tempting to speculate that she may have had protestant leanings at the time she wrote her will.

Elizabeth Walles was a nun at Sixhills priory and made her will at the end of Mary's reign in 1558.<sup>783</sup> The preamble to her will was as follows. 'I bequeath my soule to God almyghtie to our blessed Ladie St Marie and to all the holie companie in heaven and my bodie to be buried in the church of Allhallowes in Sixill next to my brother Richard'. However, she makes no mention of masses to be said for her soul after her death. In the absence of other evidence the reference to the Virgin Mary in the preamble to her will cannot be used to assume that she had Catholic leanings.

Mary Sutton the ex Prioress of Bullington Priory in Lincolnshire left an extremely conservative will in 1558.<sup>784</sup> Initially she bequeathed her soul to 'Almyghty God' and to 'Our Lady Saint Mary the Virgin' and her body was to be buried within the Church of Willerton. In itself we cannot read too much into this preamble, as many wills of this period contained these words. However, Mary Sutton added further bequests, which leave us in no doubt as to what her religious convictions were. She left 12d to every priest who attended her funeral and said mass and dirge for her. On the seventh day after her funeral 13s – 4d was to be distributed to all the priests who sang mass and dirge for her. Finally she bequeathed to 'little Mary Suttone' her Agnus Dei with 'the pictour of ye crucifix and Marie and John in it'. Three years after this the rood lofts with the crucifix and images of Mary and John were being torn down and burnt throughout Lincolnshire.<sup>785</sup> It has already been mentioned above that she made a bequest to three of her fellow nuns who were still following a monastic way of life.

Agnes Waters who made her will in 1559 at the beginning of Queen Elizabeths reign had a similar preamble to that of Elizabeth Walles, 'I bequeath my soul to almyghtie God and to owre blessed Lady Sanct Mary and to all the holy company in hevyn.'<sup>786</sup> Agnes Waters

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<sup>783</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Wills Var, 54.

<sup>784</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Stowe Will 1553-67, 206.

<sup>785</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Diocesan Records FUR/2.

<sup>786</sup> Buckinghamshire Record Office, Will W.f.6.111.

was an ex nun of Bullington Priory a fellow sister of Mary Sutton whose will was discussed above. After the dissolution she settled in Buckinghamshire which was part of the Diocese of Lincoln. It is just possible that with the reference to the Virgin Mary in the preamble to her will and that she was a nun under the leadership of Mary Sutton that she may have had conservative views.

Isabell Wright who married John Burnesley was a nun at Sixhills priory and made her will well into the reign of Elizabeth in 1582.<sup>787</sup> In her preamble she bequeaths her soul to ‘the hands of almighty God my creator and redeemer’. This is typical of the time but in itself, it cannot be assumed that she had protestant views. At this point in Elizabeth’s reign, if she still had conservative feelings she may well have not wanted to display these views.

### **Conclusions**

At the dissolution the level of pensions paid to the Gilbertine nuns was no worse than that of other orders. However, compared to the canons and monks, these pensions were significantly lower. Without financial help from their families or the generosity of friends these women would soon have been below the poverty line. When these pension lists were drawn up it may have been assumed by the commissioners that these women would return to their families in order to support them for the rest of their lives. However, especially in the case of the older nuns, close family relations may have died or even moved out the area, making this option impossible. Pension lists would indicate that some nuns might have died soon after the dissolution because of poverty. If their religious convictions would allow, a number of nuns married to secure financial security. It cannot be assumed that because a nun married she had Protestant leanings. However, Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers have stated that some Yorkshire clergy viewed the decision of nuns to marry to be a sign of their commitment to the reformed faith.<sup>788</sup> There is no direct proof, but rather more nuns may have married before the reign of Queen

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<sup>787</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, LCC will 1582, 371.

<sup>788</sup> Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks Nuns and Friars*, p. 11.

Mary and were forced to divorce their husbands. The married nuns mentioned appear to have remained with their husbands throughout Mary's reign.

Another option that was available to women who felt they still had a religious vocation was to live in small groups, perhaps living a life not too dissimilar from their lives in the nunnery. The example of the Hampshire nuns shows that they had their own chaplain to celebrate mass for them. No evidence has survived to show that any of the ex-nuns from the Gilbertine house of Watton formed such groups. However, many Yorkshire nuns from other orders did attempt to follow a monastic rule after the dissolution.<sup>789</sup> The group led by Mary Sutton, the ex Prioress of Bullington, may have been living such a life as she specifically states that they are 'continuing in religion'. These women may have hoped that one day circumstances would have allowed them to return to their religious houses, especially when Mary became Queen. However, this did not happen and they would have had to be content to live within the small groups which they had formed. Emigration to the continent did not become a viable option until the end of the sixteenth century.

Apart from the case of Mary Sutton, records have not survived which allow an analysis of the lives of the prioresses after the dissolution. Claire Cross has shown that one ex-prioress from a Yorkshire nunnery lived a very comfortable life after the dissolution.<sup>790</sup> Katherine Nandyke was the ex-prioress of Wykham priory and was clearly living the life of a gentlewoman. However, Claire Cross also describes the case of the last prioress of Ellerton, Joan Harkey. When Joan died in 1554 her entire goods consisted of two brass pots, a frying pan, a chair, a bed and a few other basic household items valued at £3 – 6s – 8d.<sup>791</sup>

From the analysis of the available data, it can be seen that some of these women adapted to the new religion, either because they believed in the new ways, or they conformed with the official policy of the time whether it be reformist or conservative. In some cases, a

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<sup>789</sup> Ibid, pp 9-10.

<sup>790</sup> Claire Cross, The End of Medieval Monasticism in the North Riding of Yorkshire, *The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, Volume 78, (2006), p. 156.

<sup>791</sup> Ibid.

number of ex-nuns found financial security either by living in small groups or finding marriage partners. Mary Sutton and possibly other women still clung to the beliefs of the old church.

## CHAPTER 8

### ROBERT HOLGATE

#### Introduction

Robert Holgate joined the Gilbertine order when he was about eighteen years old. In his late twenties or early thirties he was educated at the Gilbertine House of St Edmund's attached to Cambridge University where he obtained his Bachelor of Divinity degree. By his mid thirties he was Prior of St Katherine's in Lincoln, holding this post until 1536. He then became Master of the Gilbertine order and one year later he was translated to the Bishopric of Llandaff, holding the post of Master of the Gilbertines simultaneously. It was during this same year that he obtained his Doctorate in Divinity from Cambridge University. He finally rose to the position of Archbishop of York in September 1544.<sup>792</sup>

During his time at Cambridge he would have taken part in debates regarding the reformation of the church. Holgate was clearly on the conservative wing of the reform movement placing a great deal of emphasis on scriptural teaching, preferring prayers for the living rather than the dead, and denouncing the use of saintly relics. Initially he clung to the doctrine of the transubstantiation but by the time of his marriage he changed his views on this matter. However he did have a high regard for the Virgin Mary up until the time of his death.

With regard to the question of clerical marriage, it appeared that Holgate changed his views on this matter during his later life. At the time of his marriage to Barbara Wentworth he defended his position vigorously. However at his downfall at the beginning of Queen Mary's reign for having married, he did admit to making a mistake in having done so. When Holgate entered the Gilbertine order, he would have taken a vow of celibacy when he became a canon. After he left the order it appeared that he had no objection to clerical marriage.

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<sup>792</sup> Rose Graham, *St. Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertines: A History of the Only English Monastic Order*, Elliot Stock, (1901), pp. 174 – 5. See also, A G Dickens, *Robert Holgate: Archbishop of York and President of the King's Council in the North*, St. Anthony's Hall Publications No. 8.

### **His Birth and Early Life.**

According to tradition Robert Holgate was born in the parish of Hemsworth in the County of York.<sup>793</sup> The only reference to his parents, Thomas and Elizabeth, is in a pedigree of the Holgate family of Yorkshire.<sup>794</sup> Both Dickens<sup>795</sup> and Boulter<sup>796</sup> considered this pedigree to be inaccurate but neither of them give reasons for their doubts. A search through probate records and records in the National Archives has so far failed to substantiate any part of this pedigree. In an Inquisition Post Mortem held on 11 May 1556 it was testified that Robert Holgate had been seized of property to the annual value of £12.<sup>797</sup> He had died previously on the 15 November and his heir was Thomas Holgate son and heir of Henry Holgate of Clayton deceased, brother of Robert.<sup>798</sup> The above-mentioned pedigree makes no mention of Henry Holgate. Until further evidence comes to light, this pedigree cannot be relied upon.

The first mention of Robert Holgate as a member of the Gilbertine order was in the episcopal registers of the diocese of Lincoln. In March 1504 he was ordained acolyte at St Katherine's Priory Lincoln,<sup>799</sup> and in April 1508 he was described as a canon of St. Katherine's Priory when he was ordained as a deacon.<sup>800</sup> In the following September he was ordained as a priest at the same priory.<sup>801</sup> This raises the question as to why he chose a religious life in Lincolnshire. Why did he not join the community at the nearby Augustinian House of Nostell Priory in Yorkshire, which is within a few miles of Hemsworth?

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<sup>793</sup> The evidence, which supports this tradition, is as follows. First, of the grant of arms made to him by William Felow, Norroy King of Arms, on 29 June 1539, refers to him as "Reverendissimus in Christi Pater Dominus Robertus Halgat de Hemesworth in comitatu Ebor acensi" (W C Boulter, *A Biography of Archbishop Holgate*, Archbishop Holgate Society Record Series No. 2 (1949), p 25). Second there is a reference to his succession to the See of Llandaff in 1537, and he is described as Robert Halgate or Holgate of Hemesworth in Yorkshire Anthony A Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, Ed. Bliss. 2 Volumes, (1721), Volume 2, page 711. Thirdly in his will proved on 5 December 1556 he directs that within two years of his death a Hospital of one Master and twenty brethren and sisters be erected in Hemsworth in the county of York, plus the foundation of one of his schools at Hemsworth (TNA, PCC Will. PROB 11/38, 25 Ketchyn). Finally, in his will he refers to "all my lands tenements possessions and hereditaments called Bisset house and Bisset lands lying in the parishes of Hemsworth and Felkirk in the said county of York."

<sup>794</sup> Harleian Society Publications, Vol XL, *Familiae Minorum Centium*, MS 613, pp1282 – 1283.

<sup>795</sup> A G Dickens, *Robert Holgate Archbishop of York and President of the Kings Council in the North*, St Anthony's Hall Publications No. 8, p 3, Note 2.

<sup>796</sup> W C Boulter, *A Biography of Archbishop Holgate*, Archbishop Holgate Record Society Series No 2, p 7.

<sup>797</sup> *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem and other analogous documents in the Public Record Office*, HMSO (London 1904 -), 2 & 3 Phillip and Mary, p 2, No. 30.

<sup>798</sup> Henry Holgate of Clayton was buried in Barnsley in 1543, and his will is in the Probate Registers in the Borthwick Institute at York, PROB Reg 11, fo. 688.

<sup>799</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Lincoln, Lincoln Bishops Register 23, fo 49v.

<sup>800</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Lincoln, Lincoln Bishops Register 23, fo 71r.

<sup>801</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Lincoln, Lincoln Bishops Register 23, fo 72r.

One possible reason for him entering the Priory of St Katherine's at Lincoln was as follows. This priory was unusual in that it was attached to a substantial orphanage and hospital.<sup>802</sup> Towards the end of his life we know that Robert Holgate founded three schools in Yorkshire, Hemsworth, York and Malton plus a hospital at Hemsworth.<sup>803</sup> It was possible that he saw his vocation in serving the poor and the sick. This in itself, however, would not have been a sufficient reason for him to move to Lincolnshire. Hospitals were attached to a number of religious houses in Yorkshire; in particular there was the large hospital of St Leonard's at York. Two Gilbertine houses in Yorkshire both had hospitals attached to them. Ellerton priory was attached to a hospital and Malton priory supervised three hospitals, one of which was in Old Malton, one in the village of Broughton one mile away from Malton and the third in the neighbouring town of Norton.

Another reason for him joining the Gilbertines may have been the unusual nature of the order in that it was a purely English foundation. At the time that Robert joined, the Gilbertines had no interests outside of England. The Order was exempt from the regular visitations of the diocesan bishop and was answerable only to the Master of the order. The possibility of rising to this powerful position within a monastic order may provide another reason why he chose the Gilbertines. If we are to believe the pedigree already mentioned, then Robert was not the heir to the family estate at Hemsworth. The family property would have descended to his elder brother John. If we are to assume that he chose the religious life for reasons of status then the Gilbertine order may have attracted him because he could see a career route beyond that of the head of a particular Priory, that is, the head of the whole order.

A more plausible reason for him joining the St Katherine's community was that by 1500 he may have been resident in the Lincoln area. A Thomas Holgate was living in the village of Waddington not far from Lincoln in 1534.<sup>804</sup> A Thomas Howgate of Waddington made his will in October 1546 but he made no mention of Robert, property or relatives in Yorkshire.<sup>805</sup> Despite the difference in spelling of the surname, the Thomas Holgate mentioned in the Visitation report and Thomas Howgate were almost certainly the same person. Since there

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<sup>802</sup> R E G Cole, *The Priory of St Katherine without Lincoln, of the Order of St Gilbert of Sempringham*, Lincoln Architectural Society Reports, Vol 27, p 264.

<sup>803</sup> TNA, PCC Wills PROB 11/38. *Deed of Foundation of the Free School of Robert Holgate York*, Archbishop Holgate Society Record Series No. 1.

<sup>804</sup> Lincolnshire Archives. Diocesan Visitation Records Vij/1. In the visitation of the parish in 1534 Thomas Holgate is one of the four sworn men of the parish.

<sup>805</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, LCC Wills 1545-6 fo 294.



was no proven connection between Robert Holgate and the Holgates of Waddington we can only speculate that these families may have been related. There is a strong case to support the hypothesis that Robert lived near to Lincoln in that St Katherine's was one of the more wealthy houses of the order and was the only religious house of any size nearby. Hence this could have been a natural choice for him if he were seeking a religious life.

Sometime after his ordination at St Katherine's he moved to the Gilbertine House at Cambridge where he became prior by 1523.<sup>806</sup> The Gilbertine House of St Edmunds at Cambridge had been founded for Gilbertine canons who wished to study Theology.<sup>807</sup> In 1523 Robert Holgate proceeded to the Degree of Bachelor of Divinity at the University.<sup>808</sup> As noted in chapter three, the Bachelor of Divinity degree required a ten year period of study.<sup>809</sup> This indicates that he started his studies in 1513, four years after he was ordained a priest. It can be conjectured that he moved to Cambridge shortly before commencing his studies in 1513.

Contemporaries of Holgate at Cambridge included Stephen Gardiner, who graduated Bachelor of Civil Law in 1518 and became Bishop of Winchester, Edmund Bonner who became Bishop of London and Richard Sampson who became Bishop of Chichester. None of these became reformers, and Smith lists Gardiner and Bonner as two of the three outstanding leaders of the conservatives.<sup>810</sup> To balance the ideas and outlook of such men were people like Nicholas Ridley who became Bishop of London, Robert Barnes an Augustinian Friar, Myles Coverdale, Hugh Latimer who became Bishop of Worcester and Thomas Cranmer who were all leading reformers at that time. In the years prior to 1520 many of these future church leaders were gathering in the White Horse Inn in Cambridge. Known members of this group included Thomas Thirlby, Stephen Gardiner, Nicholas Heath, John Skip, Edward Fox

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<sup>806</sup> In 1523 Robert Holgate was prior of St Edmunds Priory in Cambridge. Lincolnshire Archives Bishops Reg 25, fo. 7.

<sup>807</sup> In September 1290 the Pope gave the prior and brethren of St Gilbert licence to have within their house [Cambridge] a discreet and learned doctor of Theology to teach those of the brethren who desire to study that science: *Calendar of the Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, ed W H Bliss, C Johnson, and J A Twemlow, HMSO (London, 1893 - ), Volume 1, p 516.

<sup>808</sup> Mary Bateson, *Grace Book B2 Containing the Accounts of the Proctors of the University of Cambridge, 1511 – 1544*, (Cambridge, 1905), p 115.

<sup>809</sup> Chapter 3, p101.

<sup>810</sup> L B Smith, *Tudor Prelates and Politics, 1538 - 1558*, (Princeton 1953), p 43. Edmund Bonner lost his see on 1 October 1549 and Stephen Gardiner was deprived on 14 February 1551.

and Nicholas Shaxton, all of whom obtained Cambridge degrees.<sup>811</sup> This group of men, dubbed ‘Little Germany’, discussed the Lutheran ideas that were circulating in Europe in the early sixteenth century.<sup>812</sup> Holgate was never listed as attending any of these meetings; but he must have been aware of the ferment that was going on under the chairmanship of a fellow monk, Robert Barnes.

The subsequent careers of the six men who met at the White Horse Inn illustrate the diversity of opinion within the early English Reformation, and the continuing influence of conservative attitudes. After 1539 Henry VIII ‘grew tired of religious experimentation’, and looked for men like Thomas Thirlby who were effective administrators rather than reforming theologians.<sup>813</sup> Thirlby made an impact as a junior government official and he was rewarded with the archdeacon’s office of Ely in 1534.<sup>814</sup> Thirlby became Bishop of Westminster in 1540. He then went on to be Bishop of Norwich in 1550 and finally became Bishop of Ely from 1554 to 1559, when he was deposed by Queen Elizabeth at the beginning of her reign. He remained loyal to the Catholic church throughout the Reformation. His knowledge of canon law enabled him to be active in participating in the negotiations with the Pope regarding the divorce between Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon.<sup>815</sup>

Stephen Gardiner, another member of the group that met at the White Horse, also achieved prominence in the English church. After graduating from Cambridge, he embarked on a diplomatic career as secretary to Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. In 1531 he became Bishop of Winchester but was imprisoned in the Tower of London throughout the reign of Edward VI for his opposition to the religious changes that were taking place. He was released and restored as Bishop of Winchester when Mary came to the throne and was appointed Lord Chancellor until his death in 1555.<sup>816</sup> Nicholas Heath also became a Catholic bishop; he was made Bishop of Rochester in 1539 and Bishop of Worcester in 1543. However, his Catholicism was less rigid than that of Stephen Gardiner. He was prepared to accept the new prayer book which was published in 1549, though he opposed the new ordinal that was

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<sup>811</sup> Andrew Chibi, *Henry VIII’s Bishops Diplomats, Administrators, Scholars and Shepherds*, James Clarke & Co. Cambridge, (2003), p. 25.

<sup>812</sup> G R Elton, *England under the Tudors*, London, The Folio Society, (1997), p. 111.

<sup>813</sup> Andrew Chibi, *Henry VIII’s Bishops Diplomats, Administrators, Scholars and Shepherds*, p. 11.

<sup>814</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

<sup>815</sup> T F Shirley, *Thomas Thirlby, Tudor Bishop*, Church Historical Society London, (1964). See also, H C G Matthew, *Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, (2004), vol 54. pp. 251- 253.

<sup>816</sup> *Ibid*, vol. 21, pp. 433 – 445.

introduced at the same time. For his refusal to accept the ordinal he was deprived of his bishopric in 1551. On Queen Mary's accession to the throne he was re-instated as bishop of Worcester and in 1555 he was promoted to the archbishopric of York. When Elizabeth became Queen he refused to crown her because she would not allow the host to be elevated at her coronation. He resisted Elizabeth's acts of supremacy and uniformity and was eventually deprived of the archbishopric in 1559.<sup>817</sup>

Edward Fox became Bishop of Hereford in 1535, holding the position until his death in 1539. Along with Stephen Gardiner, Fox was a secretary to Cardinal Wolsey. Whilst he was in this position, he took an active role in persuading the universities to decide in the King's favour with regard to his divorce.<sup>818</sup> Andrew Chibi places him alongside Thomas Cranmer as one of the radical thinkers of the time. Their views counterbalanced the views of conservatives such as John Stokesley and Edward Lee.<sup>819</sup>

John Skip succeeded Fox as Bishop of Hereford in 1539 until his death in 1552. While he was in Cambridge he was linked with the development of reformed opinions in religion. In 1530 Stephen Gardiner listed him as one of the supporters of the King's divorce.<sup>820</sup> The last member of the group of men who met at the White Horse was Nicholas Shaxton. His interest in Lutheranism was probably spurred within his own college rather than at the White Horse meetings. Along with Fox, he was a strong supporter of the King's divorce. He agreed with many of the reformers in supporting the 'primacy of scripture', and in impugning the principles of purgatory and transubstantiation. Shaxton became Bishop of Salisbury in 1535 but resigned in 1539 because he opposed the King's Six Articles, for which he was imprisoned.<sup>821</sup>

If Holgate had been a member of this group he would have been exposed to a wide range of views regarding the church. Even if he was not a member, he could not have been unaware of the debates that were taking place as he would have been mixing with these men during his studies. As he was in his late thirties in the 1520s, his opinions may not have been as radical as his fellow students. By now he would have been looking to becoming prior of his own house

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<sup>817</sup> H C G Matthew, *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 26, pp. 179 – 181.

<sup>818</sup> *Ibid*, vol. 20, pp. 627 – 629.

<sup>819</sup> Andrew Chibi, *Henry VIII's Bishops; Diplomats, Administrators, Scholars and Shepherds*, James Clarke & Co. Cambridge, (2003) p. 11.

<sup>820</sup> H C G Matthew, *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 50, pp. 874 – 875.

<sup>821</sup> *Ibid*, vol. 50, pp. 133 – 136.

of St Katherine's and to acquire a position of influence within the Gilbertine order. Adopting radical views at this stage would not have been helpful in his quest to attain high office within the Gilbertine order.

Sometime before 1529 he must have returned to St Katherine's Priory as he was summoned in person to attend the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury in his role as Prior of St. Katherine's.<sup>822</sup> Interestingly, the Prior of St. Katherine's was summoned to appear on behalf of the following smaller Gilbertine houses: Haverholme, Catley, Newstead, Shouldham, Marlborough and Poulton. It would have been expected that the Master of the Gilbertines would have represented these houses if their own prior was unable to attend. Robert Holgate may well have seen an opportunity to rise within the ranks of the Gilbertine order. By representing these houses he would have demonstrated that he was a person capable of taking responsibility and representing the Gilbertine order outside the cloister. He also may have been exploiting weaknesses within the leadership of the order since by 1536 he had become the Master.

### **Robert Holgate as Master of the Order of Sempringham**

On the death of the Master a special chapter was held.<sup>823</sup> The prior of the house where the death took place notified the other houses of the order. The prior and prioresses of each of the houses assembled in the Chapter House at Sempringham to elect a successor. St Gilbert instructed them to seek out the quality of a person of 'devout religion, disciplined character and discreet wisdom rather than deep learning or noble birth'.<sup>824</sup>

Four electors were chosen who 'have the fear of the Lord before their eyes, and zeal for the order'.<sup>825</sup> These four then selected five priors and four canons. The names of the nine chosen were then announced to all in the chapter house. If anyone objected to any of those who had been chosen they were to be removed from the election process. The thirteen electors then met alone to elect a new Master. Once they had agreed on a successor, they were to announce their choice in the chapter house of the nuns. The new Master would then be led to the altar in the priory church and from there to the chapter of the nuns where he would swear to keep all

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<sup>822</sup> Rob. Prior of St. Katherine's without Lincoln. *Calendar of Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII preserved in the Public Record Office, the British Museum and elsewhere in England*, ed. J S Brewer et al. 23 volumes, HMSO (London 1862 – 1932), Vol 4 No 6047.

<sup>823</sup> W Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. J Caley, H Ellis and B Bandinel (London 1846) Vol 6 p. xxxi.

<sup>824</sup> MS Douce 136, fo. 2.

<sup>825</sup> Ibid.

the liberties and institutes of the order. The only evidence of the proceedings regarding the election of the Master of the order comes from the confirmation of the election of Robert Hurtsky as Master in 1508.<sup>826</sup> The entry in this register states that the election was carried out ‘by canonical election according to the statutes of the general council.’<sup>827</sup> This election was ratified by the General Chapter of the order assembled at Sempringham priory.<sup>828</sup> It is possible that the rules for election had been changed but no records survive to show that they were changed.

During the thirteenth century it was a matter of uncertainty and dispute as to whether the Gilbertine order was exempt from episcopal visitation. It was not until 1345 that the Pope confirmed the order’s privileges and exemptions and declared it ‘free from ordinary jurisdiction for ever’.<sup>829</sup> However, this exemption caused friction with the Bishops of Lincoln.<sup>830</sup> Despite this friction the episcopal registers for the fifteenth century contain no references of the exercise of episcopal jurisdiction.<sup>831</sup> By the sixteenth century, however, it would appear that the bishops of Lincoln were ignoring the papal instructions as the registers for 1508 show that a new Master had to swear an oath of obedience to the diocesan bishop or one of his suffragan bishops.<sup>832</sup> The oath taken by Thomas Hurtsky, predecessor of Robert Holgate has been preserved in this entry:

‘I brother Thomas, Master of the order of Sempringham, before you reverend father in Christ Lord Augustinius, Bishop of Liden, promise to the reverend father and Lord William, by the grace of God Bishop of Lincoln, and to his successors, due canonical obedience with the privileges indulged in by my order, aforesaid, from the apostolic seat.’<sup>833</sup>

According to the Institutions of the order, after his election he would have left his community and would have embarked on an continuous visitation of all of the Gilbertine Priors,

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<sup>826</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Bishops Register 23, fo. 119v.

<sup>827</sup> Ibid.

<sup>828</sup> Ibid.

<sup>829</sup> Peter MacDonald, ‘The Exemption of the Order of Sempringham’ in *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, vol. 30, (1995), p. 51- 52.

<sup>830</sup> For a discussion of this, see, Peter MacDonald, ‘The Exemption of the Order of Sempringham’, p. 51 - 52

<sup>831</sup> Ibid.

<sup>832</sup> Lincolnshire Archives Office, Bishops Register 23, fo. 119v.

<sup>833</sup> Ibid.

visiting each one theoretically at least once in the year.<sup>834</sup> It was necessary that he visited the other houses regularly since his seal was necessary on any financial transactions that were carried out.<sup>835</sup> A few leases of the sixteenth century show that these visitations were taking place as the signature of the Master appears alongside those of the prior and convent of the particular house.<sup>836</sup> Not only did he regulate the spiritual life of each community - for example receiving all novices and hearing their final profession - he also controlled the economic activity of every house, his assent being required for all but the most insignificant transactions, and his seal was required on all documents issued by the order. He also presided over the general Chapter, which was held once a year, at one of the larger priories of the order.

By the end of the fifteenth century it appeared that the role and status of the Master had changed. From after 1480 up until the dissolution the Master of the order was in many cases the Prior of the wealthiest house of the order at Watton in Yorkshire.<sup>837</sup> David Smith has listed the priors of Watton and also the Masters of the order during this period.<sup>838</sup> From 1490 to 1539 the list of Masters are as follows: James Burton, Richard Spencer, Thomas Hurtsky and Robert Holgate. Richard Spencer's role of Master appears to have lasted only two or three years.<sup>839</sup> The list of priors of Watton during this period are: James Bolton (almost certainly the same James Burton above), Thomas Hurtsky, William who only occurs in 1510, Thomas (no surname given) and Robert Holgate. The name James Lawrence occurs during the period that Holgate was prior, the election of whom will be discussed below. David Smith has stated that a Thomas Hurtsky was prior of Sempringham in 1535.<sup>840</sup> It is possible that Thomas moved temporarily to Sempringham priory as its prior for some reason which is unknown. The Thomas in the list of Watton priors may well be the Thomas Hurtsky who

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<sup>834</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 103.

<sup>835</sup> MS Douce 136, fo. 5v.

<sup>836</sup> Examples of these are as follows:- Borthwick Institute York MON 11. Lease granted by John Prior and the convent of Malton Prior, signed by Robert Holgate Master of the Order 20 July 1538. British Library Add MS 53647 Lease by Robert Holgate Master of the order of Sempringham and John Prior of Chicksands to John Bennett of lands in Swineshead (Lincs) 27 May 1538. These two leases show that in May 1538 Holgate was in Chicksands in Bedfordshire and by July of the same year he had travelled all the way up to Malton in Yorkshire.

<sup>837</sup> In the will of William Danyell of Kynwike, Yorkshire, dated 1504, James Bolton is described as Master of Sempringham and Prior of Watton. Borthwick Institute PROB Reg 6, fo. 122. In the Pardon Roll, Public Record Office C 67/58 m. 15, Thomas Hurtsky is described as Prior of Watton and Master of the Order of St Gilbert, and Master, Rector or Governor of the house of Sempringham and all the Priors of that Order. 5 July 1510.

<sup>838</sup> David M Smith, *The Heads of Religious Houses England and Wales III 1377 – 1540*, Cambridge, (2008), pp. 604 and 607.

<sup>839</sup> *Ibid*, p. 604.

<sup>840</sup> *Ibid*, p. 604.

headed the house previously. William may have been appointed a temporary prior in his absence.

The first reference to Robert Holgate being Master of the Order occurs in the Exchequer Office of First Fruits and Tenths Composition Books in the National Archives. On 6 April 1536 he was described as Master of the Order.<sup>841</sup> In July 1536 John Hilsey, Bishop of Rochester, wrote to Thomas Cromwell to ask ‘to allow the Master of the Gilbertines, the Prior of Watton to enjoy his office with all *in commendam* and doubts not he will do the King good service’.<sup>842</sup> Not only had Holgate established himself as Prior of Watton and Master, but also either willingly or unwillingly, had been recommended to Cromwell as a person who could be of value to him. By the following month John Hilsey was asking Cromwell that Holgate be recommended to the vacancy of the Bishop of Llandaff.<sup>843</sup>

The election of Robert Holgate as Prior of Watton must have taken place before July 1536 and possibly before 6 April 1536. On the 23 January 1537 during examinations at Hull concerning John Hallom’s part in the Pilgrimage of Grace, John Hallom stated that the Prior of Watton (Robert Holgate) was not lawfully chosen, and he stated that Holgate admitted that only three or four of the brethren elected him. Hallom goes on to say:

for while he was here he was good to no man and took of this examine 20 marks in money where he should have been paid in corn when God should send it, and he gives many unkind words to his tenants in his court more like a judge than a religious man.

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Harry Gyll the Sub Prior of Watton in his deposition at the same hearing declared that:-

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<sup>841</sup> TNA, E 334/1.

<sup>842</sup> TNA, SP 1/105 No. 188.

<sup>843</sup> TNA, SP 1/105 No. 260.

<sup>844</sup> *Calendar of Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII preserved in the Public Record Office, the British Museum and elsewhere in England*, ed J S Brewer et al. 23 volumes, HMSO (London 1862 – 1932), Volume 12, No 201, p 92. For an account of the career of Harry Gyll see, Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, “*Monks Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*,” *Yorkshire Archaeological Record Series*, 150 (1995), p. 397.

the Prior of St Katherine's (Robert Holgate) not only took it upon himself to be Prior of Watton but also to meddle in the office of Master of the Order contrary to the will of the convent of Watton.<sup>845</sup>

Quite clearly the election of Robert Holgate as Master was not carried out according to the rules of the order. It can be inferred from these depositions that the election may have taken place at Watton with only the members of the Watton community present. The deposition goes on to say that John Hallom proceeded to Watton Priory with a band of men and demanded that they elect a new prior in place of Robert Holgate. If they refused then he said that he would take it upon himself to nominate a candidate, and pointed to James Lawrance who was Prior of Ellerton at the time.<sup>846</sup> In the examination concerning Robert Aske's part in the Pilgrimage of Grace, Aske stated that Holgate had fled to Cromwell, 'being one of his promotion,' and had left 60 to 80 brethren and sisters with less than 40s to survive on.<sup>847</sup> Three letters between 19 October 1536 and 14 November 1536 were addressed to the Sub Prior of Watton and not to the prior suggesting that Holgate was in London at this time.<sup>848</sup>

At the time of Holgate's apparent election as prior, the names of six of the canons at Watton Priory have survived, namely, Harry Gyll the Sub Prior, John Jackson, Thomas Asheton, Thomas Lather, Richard Wilkinson and Anthony (surname not known).<sup>849</sup> Records in the National Archives give some insight into the characters of these canons. Harry Gill was the sub prior at this time was a supporter of the Pilgrimage of Grace and had a part to play in the attempted removal of Holgate from the office of Prior of Watton and the subsequent election of James Lawrence. Being sub prior at this time he would have taken responsibility for trying to remove Robert Holgate from his position; hence he paid the price by being hanged in chains at Watton.<sup>850</sup>

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<sup>845</sup> *Calendar of Letters and Papers*, Vol. 12, p. 201.

<sup>846</sup> For an account of James Lawrence see Cross and Vickers, "Monks Nuns and Friars", p. 374.

<sup>847</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry VIII*, Vol. 12, p. 201.

<sup>848</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry VIII*, Vol. 11, Nos. 792, 903 and 1069.

<sup>849</sup> This may well have been Anthony Whitefield who was ordained Sub Deacon, Deacon and Priest at Watton Priory between 1533 to 1534/5. Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York, Register 28, ff. 186v, 192v and 190r.

<sup>850</sup> Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks Nuns and Friars*, p. 397.



John Jackson openly spoke against Robert Holgate, saying that he would not accept him as Master or Prior.<sup>851</sup> No further references have been found relating to this canon. If he had not suffered the same fate as Harry Gill he may well have died before the dissolution as there was no John Jackson on the pension list of Watton priory. Thomas Asheton suffered the same fate as Harry Gill. He openly stated that he did not agree with the King being supreme head of the church and that an insurrection was required to overturn this.<sup>852</sup> Thomas Layther and Richard Wilkinson both spoke against Holgate as Prior of Watton. Both of these canons survived to the dissolution and appear on the pension list of the priory. After the dissolution Thomas Lather settled in York as the rector of the parish of St Saviours.<sup>853</sup> He was a friend of the York physician, Dr Roger Lee, a convicted recusant.<sup>854</sup> In his will, Thomas Lather invoked the Virgin Mary in the preamble indicating his own conservative religious sympathies.<sup>855</sup>

However, the sub prior at the dissolution, Thomas Webster, may have been a friend of Robert Holgate. In March 1540/1 very soon after the dissolution of Watton Priory, Holgate presented Webster to the vicarage of Misson in Nottinghamshire.<sup>856</sup> Thomas was not mentioned by name during the Pilgrimage of Grace, but he was almost certainly present at the time as he was ordained priest at Watton Priory on the 20 February 1534/5.<sup>857</sup> By 1546 as well as his monastic pension and the income from his vicarage, he was a chantry priest at St Wilfrid's Chantry within York Minster and Master of the Hospital of St John in Nottingham.<sup>858</sup> This was obviously a reward for Webster's loyalty to Holgate during the Pilgrimage of Grace. He was perhaps one of the minority of the canons of Watton who supported Holgate.

### **Robert Holgate as Bishop of Llandaff**

On 10 August 1536, John Hilsey the Bishop of Rochester wrote to Thomas Cromwell recommending Holgate as the next bishop of Llandaff.<sup>859</sup> On the resignation of the Spanish Dominican George de Athequa as Bishop of Llandaff early in 1537, Robert Holgate was

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<sup>851</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry VIII*, Volume 12, No 201, See also , Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, "Monks Nuns and Friars," p. 398.

<sup>852</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry VIII*, Volume 12, No 201, Deposition of William Horsekey. In his deposition he declares that "there is never a good one of all the canons of that house (Watton) and they all bear a grudge to their Prior and would fair have a new one."

<sup>853</sup> Claire Cross, *York Clergy Wills 1520 – 1600*, Borthwick Texts and Calendars 15, (1989). Page 91.

<sup>854</sup> J C H Aveling, *Catholic Recusancy in the City of York 1558 – 1781*, Catholic Record Society, (1970).

<sup>855</sup> Claire Cross, *York Clergy Wills 1520-1600: II City Clergy*, Borthwick Texts and Calendars 15 (1989), pp. 91-2.

<sup>856</sup> Borthwick Institute, Archbishops Register 29, fo 50.

<sup>857</sup> Borthwick Institute, Archbishops Register 28, fo.62.

<sup>858</sup> Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, *Monks, Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*. YAS, (1995).

<sup>859</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry VIII*, Vol. 11, No 260.

elected to the post, obtained the royal assent on 19 March 1537<sup>860</sup> and was installed Bishop of Llandaff on the eve of Trinity Sunday 1537.<sup>861</sup>

John Hilsey was head of the Dominican order in England as well as Bishop of Rochester. A recommendation from a person of this standing would have been invaluable to ensure such a career move. John Hilsey entered the Order of Dominican Friars at Bristol. From there he moved to the Dominican house at Oxford and in May 1527 graduated BD and proceeded to DD in 1532. It was also possible that he may have studied at Cambridge where he may well have met Robert Holgate. In May 1533 he was Prior of the Dominican House at Bristol and in April the following year Thomas Cromwell appointed him Provincial and Commissioner of the Dominican Order. In 1535 he had succeeded the martyred John Fisher to the see of Rochester. Hilsey was instrumental in exposing a number of fraudulent relics, in particular, ‘the Blood of Hales’ and ‘the Rood of Boxley’. The exposure of these supposed relics reached a climax in the early months of 1538.<sup>862</sup> Hilsey displayed the ‘idolatrie and crafte’ of the Rood of Boxley at St. Paul’s Cross. He denounced the monks for having profited by deceiving the people who had come to see the relic.<sup>863</sup> Along with Dr George Browne, who was Provincial of the Augustinian Friars, he was given the right to visit the friaries of their respective orders throughout England.<sup>864</sup> Another bishop who denounced the use of false relics was the bishop of Salisbury, Nicholas Shaxton. He issued injunctions condemning the ‘intolerable superstition caused by stinking boots, mucky combs, ragged rochets, rotten girdles, pyld purses, great bullocks’ horns, locks of hair, gobbets of wood, under the name of parcels of the holy cross’.<sup>865</sup>

Virtually no material which can be directly attributed to Holgate has survived. However, John Hilsey wrote a work entitled ‘A Manual of prayers or the Primer’ which was published in 1539 just after his death. This was written on the command of his patron Thomas Cromwell. Some conclusions can be drawn from this text. First, it showed clearly the desire to harness the traditional materials of the Primer to a reformed message. Secondly, the book contained

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<sup>860</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry VIII*, Volume 12 (1), p. 352.

<sup>861</sup> J Strype, *Memorials of Thomas Cranmer Lord Archbishop of Canterbury*, Oxford: Ecclesiastical History Society, (1848), p 135.

<sup>862</sup> Peter Marshall, *Religious Identities in Henry VIII’s England*, Ashgate, (2006), p. 138.

<sup>863</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>864</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H C G Matthew and Brian Harrison, vol. 27, (OUP), pp. 241 – 242.

<sup>865</sup> Peter Marshall, *Religious Identities in Henry VIII’s England*, p. 142.

many of the traditional materials and was less hostile to prayers for the dead and honour to the saints than others published at this time. Thirdly, there was a long treatise on the presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Mass. He denounced the various ‘superstitions’ that were common at this time but he condemned any disbelief in a real presence at the Mass. This was a view which was initially held by Robert Holgate. In 1548 whilst Holgate was Archbishop of York a committee of Bishops and doctors were examined upon the offices of the church, particularly on the Eucharist; and they gave their replies to a questionnaire.<sup>866</sup> In answer to the question ‘What is the oblation and Sacrifice of Christ in the Mass?’ Holgate replied:

‘The oblation and sacrifice of Christe in the Mass, is the presenting of the very body and blood of Christe to the heavenly Father, under the forms of bread and wine, consecrated in the remembrance of his passion, with prayer and thanksgiving for the universal church.’<sup>867</sup>

To the question ‘Wherin consisteth the Mass by Christs institution?’ was,

‘The Mass, by Christ’s institution, consisteth in the consecration and oblation of the very body and blood of Christe, with prayer and thanksgiving, and receiving of the same, as appeareth in the evangelists.’<sup>868</sup>

Holgate’s answer to the first of these questions was somewhat ambiguous. He spoke of the ‘very body and blood of Christ’ as being present during the Mass, but then went on to say that the bread and wine are consecrated in ‘the remembrance of his passion’. It is possible that Holgate had not resolved this theological problem at the time he provided these answers to the questionnaire. Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley were in a similar position at this time; they came to regard the Lutheran view of the Eucharistic presence as verging on the trivial and blasphemous.<sup>869</sup> They regarded it as a more fitting tribute to God’s glory to see his presence as a spiritual fact about the service of eucharist, a revelation of his

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<sup>866</sup> G Burnet, *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England*, Ed N Pocock, Oxford (1865), Vol. 5. p 197 seqq.

<sup>867</sup> G Burnet, *A History of the Reformation of the Church of England*, Volume 5, p. 201.

<sup>868</sup> Ibid.

<sup>869</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor Church Militant: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, (1999), p. 68.

presence to true believers, not a transformation of bread and wine.<sup>870</sup> There is no surviving evidence to show that Holgate followed the views of these bishops.

The 1549 Prayer Book was also ambiguous with regard to this question. Cranmer manipulated the material in the prayer book such that it expressed the convictions which he had reached in the previous three years, that was there was no real presence of Christ in the bread and wine, and that the self offering of Christ on the cross has nothing to do with the congregation's offering of thanksgiving in each individual eucharist.<sup>871</sup> However, the rather ambiguous wording of the prayer book allowed the 'eucharist to be dressed up as something very like the old Mass by those who wanted it'.<sup>872</sup>

In the last year of his life, when Holgate wrote his will and endowed land for his hospital at Hemsworth, he stipulated that prayers were to be said daily for the Virgin Mary within the hospital.<sup>873</sup> In the preamble to this will, he also 'bequeaths his soul to almighty God, our Lady Saint Mary and all the holy company of heaven.'<sup>874</sup> These elements of his will appear to indicate conservative leanings. The prayer book of 1552 abolished all but one of the feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, including the great harvest celebration of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>875</sup> That said, other aspects of Holgate's will strike a less conservative note. There are no mentions of masses to be said after his death; his funeral is to be conducted 'without pomp, pride or vanity'.<sup>876</sup> Given that his will was made in the early years of the reign of Queen Mary, it would have been acceptable for Holgate to express devotion to the Virgin more fully. It is significant, perhaps, that he chose not to do so.

### **Holgate as Lord President of the North**<sup>877</sup>

As a result of the Pilgrimage of Grace it was necessary to strengthen and reorganise the Government of the North of England. New instructions were issued to the Northern Council in January 1537, and in the autumn Cuthbert Tunstall Bishop of Durham as Lord President

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<sup>870</sup> Ibid.

<sup>871</sup> Ibid. p. 89.

<sup>872</sup> Ibid.

<sup>873</sup> TNA, PCC Will, Prob 11/38 (Register Ketchyn). His will is dated 4 December 1556.

<sup>874</sup> Will of Robert Holgate 27 April 1555, TNA, PROB 11/38.

<sup>875</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400 – c.1580*, Yale University Press New Haven and London, (1992), p. 464-5.

<sup>876</sup> Ibid.

<sup>877</sup> For an account of the Council in the North, see R R Reid, *The King's Council in the North*, Rowman and Littlefield (1975).

replaced the Duke of Norfolk. Shortly after the rebellion, Robert Holgate was appointed as a member of the council. From the outset it appeared that he was a very active member of the council and a trusted advisor to Tunstall. This was illustrated in the following extract from a letter from Tunstall to Cromwell in November 1537:

My Lord of Llandaff can enforme your Lordship of all particularytes in all thinges, who hat bene present at all our sittinge and doynge, to whome it may like your Lordship to gyff full credence therin. Surely, he is a man veray mete to serve the King in these partes, of whose company I do take great comfort, seinge I have so wise a man to aske advise of, and so hole and intier to the Kinge, as he is.<sup>878</sup>

For this post the King presumably selected Holgate, as the monarch had been responsible for the appointment of the original Council members for a short time previously. In all probability Cromwell's favour would have secured Holgate's place on the Council, but for the first time Hilsey did not appear to have brought Holgate's name to the fore. This may be explained by the fact that this was not an ecclesiastical appointment. Tunstall's part in Holgate's election to the Council was a question that must remain unanswered, but, as already stated, he was instrumental in Holgate's promotion to the position of President of the Council in June 1537 at the age of about 40. This was a position which he held for the next eleven years.

Why was Holgate elevated to this role? For work in this sphere Holgate was in many ways eminently suited; he was a native of the North, he had shown clearly on whose side he stood in the Pilgrimage of Grace by his flight from the rebels, his academic abilities were well known, and he was not by nature a man of extremes, being by temperament an administrator rather than a revolutionary. He was an upholder of law and order and favoured any legal and peaceful means of settling disputes; but above all his patrons and past actions had shown him to be a King's man, and a stout upholder of the Royal Supremacy and the changes in church life that this idea entailed.<sup>879</sup> Holgate's rapid promotion to the post of Lord President of the Council of the North relied on all of these qualities as well as having friends who could help him achieve his goals.

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<sup>878</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry VIII*, Volume 5, p. 122.

<sup>879</sup> A G Dickens, *Robert Holgate Archbishop of York and President of the King's Council in the North*, St Anthony's Hall Publications No 8 p 4.

The instructions that were given to Holgate give us the first detailed account of the organisation and the make up of the Council of the North. These instructions stipulated that the council was to be made up of a Lord President, a number of councillors chosen from the northern nobility and gentry, and a secretary.<sup>880</sup> The Lord President was the King's representative in the north and so 'the same etiquette must be observed towards him as towards the King, kneeling only excepted.' The Lord President's commands were to be obeyed at all times.<sup>881</sup> The Council met four times during the year for the administration of justice, each session lasting a month, at York, Newcastle, Hull and Durham respectively. During Holgate's time as President the Council in the North he was responsible for quashing two rebellions which took place in Yorkshire, the Wakefield conspiracy which took place in 1541 and the Seamer rebellion which took place in 1549.<sup>882</sup> The Wakefield uprising came about due to the executions following the Pilgrimage of Grace and the seizure of monastic lands. The Seamer rebellion took place near to Scarborough, and one of the reasons for this uprising was the dissolution of the exceptional number of chantries and chapels which were in this area.<sup>883</sup>

Having being made Bishop of Llandaff, Holgate had now entered the political arena and religious matters including the leadership of the Gilbertine order took second place. He did his best to keep in touch with Llandaff throughout this period via his Commissary William Baker and his Chancellor John Broxholme. John Bird, formerly Provincial of the Carmelites and later Bishop of Chester was his Suffragan in Llandaff from 1537 to 1539.<sup>884</sup>

There were only two other religious matters that Holgate was connected with at this stage in his career. The first was in 1540 when the King appointed a commission to revise the Bishops Book; he also appointed another to produce an authorised *Rationale of Ceremonial*. The committee of bishops appointed by Henry VIII to produce the Bishops' Book first met in 1537. The bishops on this committee divided into two camps, reformers and conservatives. Richard Sampson (Bishop of Chichester), Cuthbert Tunstal (Bishop of Durham) and John

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<sup>880</sup> R R Reid, *The King's Council in the North*, p. 154.

<sup>881</sup> Ibid.

<sup>882</sup> A G Dickens, 'Robert Holgate Archbishop of York and President of the King's Council in the North', in *Reformation Studies*, Hambleton Press, (1982), pp. 332-3.

<sup>883</sup> Ibid. For further reading regarding Holgate's role as President of the Council of the North, see, Ibid pp. 330 – 7.

<sup>884</sup> L Thomas, *The Reformation of the Old Diocese of Llandaff*, Cardiff: W Lewis, (1930), p. 58.

Stokesley (Bishop of London) worked together to defend the 'old usages and traditions of the church.'<sup>885</sup> However, Thomas Cranmer (Archbishop of Canterbury), Hugh Latimer (Bishop of Worcester), Nicholas Shaxton (Bishop of Salisbury), Edward Foxe (Bishop of Hereford) and Thomas Goodrich (Bishop of Ely) were all reformers.<sup>886</sup> Holgate was a member of the 1540 commission along with five other bishops, Goodrich of Ely, Clerk of Bath and Wells, Capon of Salisbury, Sampson of Chichester and Bell of Worcester.<sup>887</sup> This was an attempt to explain what the church had taught about ceremonial so that lay people might understand the meaning of actions performed in services, rather than new suggestions for ceremonial. The work was not original and the compilers relied upon the work of Durandus and his 'Rationale Divinorum Officiorum', and their main intention was to prove that every act of the priest, and detail in the service found its justification in the Gospel. The extent of Holgate's contribution to this compilation is uncertain; it was unlikely that his work for the Council of the North left him much time to make any significant contribution.

The committee that was appointed by Thomas Cromwell was predominantly traditionalist in character. However, it contained other bishops who were cautious reformers apart from Holgate such as Thomas Goodrich, Bishop of Ely. Due to the representation of conservatives on the committee, the result of their deliberations was a 'systematic and detailed defence of traditional ceremonial'.<sup>888</sup> The final work dealt with such matters as the consecration of churches, the ceremony of baptism, the celebration of the daily hours in the church including the ceremonies associated with the Mass.

Concessions were obviously made due the presence of moderate reforming bishops such as Holgate on the committee, notably with regard to the celebration of Mass. The text of the Ceremonial said virtually nothing about the doctrine of the sacrifice of the Mass; it passed over the prayers of oblation in the canon of the Mass without mention, and described the Mass as 'a remembrance of the passion of Christ whose most blessed body and blood is there consecrated.'<sup>889</sup> These words are virtually identical to those in the latter part of Holgate's answer to the question that was later put to him in 1548. As far back as 1540 he may well have been formulating his view on this particular theological question. In the 1530s and the

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<sup>885</sup> G W Bernard, *The King's Reformation, Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church*, Yale University Press, (2005), p. 477.

<sup>886</sup> Ibid.

<sup>887</sup> H Maynard Smith, *Henry VIII and the Reformation*, Macmillan, (1948), Page 391.

<sup>888</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 427.

<sup>889</sup> Ibid. p. 428.

early years of the next decade Thomas Cranmer took the Lutheran view on the question of Eucharistic belief. However, after discussions with Nicholas Ridley and Martin Bucer in 1546/7 he abandoned any idea of the real presence.<sup>890</sup> Holgate might not have held such clear views as Cranmer, as his answers to the questions put to him regarding the ‘real presence’ were not consistent. When Holgate was asked ‘What is the oblation and sacrifice of Christ in the Mass,’ he spoke of ‘the very body and blood of Christ.’ However, when asked ‘Wherein consisteth the Mass by Christ’s institution,’ he spoke of ‘the remembrance of his passion.’<sup>891</sup> There was clearly some tension between these two responses.

Eamon Duffy states that the *Rationale of Ceremonial* that was agreed in 1540 represented a decisive reaffirmation of the value of the traditional ceremonies which had been under intense evangelical pressure over the past five or six years.<sup>892</sup> This particular document was silent on the matter of images being used in churches. However it defended the veiling of images during Lent indicating that some parish churches were openly displaying religious images.

The second religious matter with which Holgate was connected at this time was an attempt to revise and improve the Great Bible of 1539. At the third session of Convocation on 3 February 1542, Cranmer posed the question whether it could be retained ‘without scandal, error, and manifest offence to Christ’s faithful people’.<sup>893</sup> The majority of the bishops who were present at this Convocation voted that it could be revised to good effect. A committee was appointed, which was to ‘consider all errors in religion’ whilst examining the texts.<sup>894</sup> Holgate was assigned to the writings of St Peter. The work was brought to an end in March of that year when Cranmer brought a message from the King as Supreme Head of the Church, forbidding Convocation to meddle any further with the Great Bible as the universities were to take over the task. Since no trace of Holgate’s work remains it is impossible to say how far he had proceeded with it. This incident serves as a further indication of Holgate’s academic standing, however.

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<sup>890</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer, A Life*, Yale University Press, (1996), p. 614.

<sup>891</sup> See page 259 of this chapter.

<sup>892</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer, A Life*, p. 614.

<sup>893</sup> Andrew Alan Chibi, *Henry VIII’s Bishops, Diplomats, Administrators, Scholars and Shepherds*, James Clarke & Co. Cambridge, (2003), p. 237.

<sup>894</sup> *Ibid.*



## **Robert Holgate as Archbishop of York**

During the last five years of his Presidency Holgate was also Archbishop of York. It was on 16 September 1544 that he was suggested as Archbishop. On this day Shrewsbury, Lieutenant General in the North and Bishops Tunstall and Sadler wrote to the Privy Council notifying them of the death of Archbishop Lee the previous Saturday and recommended Holgate as his successor, since

his Majesty should promote an honest and painstaking man, and save the charges of the Presidents diets, amounting to nigh £1000 yearly, besides having the first fruits and gift of Llandaph. The archbishopric with the small things he enjoys in this county would enable him to maintain the office of President.<sup>895</sup>

Henry took their advice and in January 1545 he renewed Holgate's Presidential Commission but reduced his salary from £1000 to £300.<sup>896</sup> During the same month he was consecrated as Archbishop of York in Lambeth Chapel, Cranmer and the Bishops of Westminster and Chichester being present. In the consecration ceremony Cranmer evidently wanted to make some innovations of an anti-papal nature, and someone sympathetic to the King's cause was obviously required to be the recipient of the preferment. The oath Holgate swore at his consecration as Archbishop was a new form, which all future Bishops were intended to take. It was considered sufficiently important to be written out fully in Cranmer's register.<sup>897</sup> Holgate affirmed that:

having now the veil of darkness of the usurped power, authority and jurisdiction of the See and Bishop of Rome clearly taken away from my eyes, [I] do utterly testify and declare in my conscience that neither the See nor the Bishop of Rome, nor any foreign potentate hath, nor ought to have any jurisdiction, power or authority within this realm, neither by God's laws nor any other just law or means.<sup>898</sup>

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<sup>895</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry VIII*, Vol. 19 (2), No 239.

<sup>896</sup> A G Dickens, 'Reformation Studies', *Robert Holgate Archbishop of York and President of the King's Council in the North*, p. 338.

<sup>897</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, Cranmer's Register. fo. 309.

<sup>898</sup> *Ibid.*

He then went on to say that:

he would take the King's Majesty, his heirs and successors to be the only supreme head of the Church of England and Ireland in earth and under God, and all other his Highness' dominions.<sup>899</sup>

Finally he repudiated any oaths he had previously made in maintenance, defence or favour of the Bishop of Rome.

The second important innovation in the consecration service was the Pallium delivered to the Archbishop-elect, the symbol of metropolitan jurisdiction normally given by the Pope. The Pallium was a garment which had particular connections with the Papacy, and Cranmer's probable motive for the inclusion in the service was a deliberate act by the Archbishop to confirm the break in Papal authority in England.

We must now consider why and how Holgate achieved his final promotion. In the absence of direct evidence it is only possible to speculate on how this came about. As Lord President of the Council in the North he proved himself to be an able administrator and a conscientious worker, with a flair for organisation and attention to detail.<sup>900</sup> He had shown himself to be a good and loyal servant of the Crown, and the King and the hierarchy could not safely ignore such people. Holgate's succession of promotions all testified to the fact that faithful service was rewarded. From Shrewsbury's letter to the King suggesting Holgate's appointment it was apparent that economy also played a part in the promotion. A sum of £700 a year was no small sum of money to forfeit.

Written works by Holgate are few and far between. However, one rare example throws some light on Holgate's theological thought. On 15 August 1552 he issued his thirty injunctions for York Minster.<sup>901</sup> Here, more clearly than before, Holgate showed his sympathy with the continental reformers, and the great emphasis he placed on evangelical and scriptural matters. These injunctions were ordered to be read once every quarter within the Minster. He

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<sup>899</sup> Ibid.

<sup>900</sup> For a discussion of Holgate's role as Lord President of the North, see A G Dickens, *Robert Holgate: Archbishop of York and President of the King's Council in the North*, Borthwick Paper No. 8, Borthwick Institute, York, (1955).

<sup>901</sup> Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, Archbishop Register 29, fo 58 – 60.

emphasised the need for the education and diligence of the clergy and made provision for a well-learned man in divinity to be appointed for the reading of the Divinity lecture. Vicars and other junior clergy were commanded to give ‘diligent ear’ to the lecture and were to be examined on its contents by the reader at least once a month.

Vicars Choral under the age of 40 and deacons were to memorise every week one chapter of St Paul’s Epistles in Latin. The Choristers had to learn one chapter of the Gospels or the Acts in English once a fortnight. Every vicar was to have a copy of the New Testament in English and to read a chapter from the Gospels after dinner and a chapter from the Acts after supper every day. The singing in the Minster was to be clear and distinct. The organ was not to be played during the Divine Service, but was permitted at other times. Sentences from Holy Scripture were to replace the tabernacles above the High Altar. He also ordered that three keys to the library door were kept by three vicars choral, who were to accompany anyone other than ‘a dignitary or a canon’ while they were in the library and allow no harm to come to the books. He then gave examples of book titles that were to be provided within the library: ‘Musculus’ Commentaries upon Matthew, John Brentius upon Luke, Calvin and Bullinger upon the Epistles, and Erasmus’ Annunciations on the New Testament.’ The titles of these works showed that Holgate was keen to replace the books within the Minster Library to emphasise the new learning.<sup>902</sup>

When Holgate devised these statutes for York Minster he may have been influenced by the rules from the Institutes of the Gilbertine order. In chapter 4 of this thesis it was shown that the nuns were prohibited from singing the daily office but were to chant the psalms in monotone.<sup>903</sup> This would have ensured that the words of the psalms would have been recited distinctly and clearly. Holgate required the vicars choral to sing in a clear and distinct manner during divine service. The Gilbertine Institutes forbade the use of instruments and any form of ornamentation when chanting the daily office.<sup>904</sup> Again we see the influence of the Gilbertine Institutes in not permitting the organ to be used in divine office in York Minster. The York Minster statutes state that the library door had to be kept locked, the three keys being held by separate vicars choral. Access could be obtained only in the presence of a member of the senior clergy. In the Gilbertine priories, all books were kept by the nuns in

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<sup>902</sup> Ibid.

<sup>903</sup> Chapter 4, p. 143.

<sup>904</sup> Ibid, p. 147.

their own cloister. Any books required by the canons had to be requested from the senior nuns at the window house connecting the two cloisters.<sup>905</sup>

### **Holgate's Marriage**

The fullest account that we have of Robert Holgate's marriage is that given by Robert Parkyn who was curate of Adwick le Street near Doncaster who died in 1570.<sup>906</sup> He left a manuscript volume which contained a conservative account of the Reformation up until 1555. According to Parkyn, Robert Holgate married Barbara Wentworth on the 15 January 1550 at Bishopthorpe in Yorkshire. The marriage took place a month before the bill permitting men in holy orders to marry. He made no secret of his intentions as banns were read at both Bishopthorpe and the parish of his prospective wife, Adwick le Street in South Yorkshire. Parkyn in his narrative suggested that a Doctor Tongue secretly married them before this date.

Parkyn's account of the marriage was as follows:

in christenmesse weak after was pulischide the bandes of matrimony both in the parische churches of bischoppethorppe, and aithwyk by the streatt in Yorkshire bitwixt Robertt Ebor (alias Hollegaitte) archebischope of York of the one parttie: and Barbara Wenttworthe dowghtter of Roger Wenttworthe Esqwyer of the other partie, wich Barbara was before tyme maryede in hir childeheade unto a yunge gentillman namyde Anthony Norman (wich mariage turnyde to grett trouble & besynes after wardes) how be itt the saide Archebischope and barbara was jonyde to gether in mariage at Byschoppthorppe the 15 day of ianuary (anno ubi supra) vz. Feria 4 post octavas epiphaniae thowgh thay were maryede before secreattly as the heretyk Doctor Tonge reporttyde in the kynges ma<sup>tie</sup> his cowrtt, yea that he dyd solennizaitt the sacramentt of matrimony unto tham his selffe.'<sup>907</sup>

From this account it can be seen that the ceremony took place on the 15 January 1550 at Bishopthorpe, the seat of the Archbishop of York. According to the Visitation of William

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<sup>905</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 180.

<sup>906</sup> Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Lat. Th. D. 15. See also A G Dickens, 'Robert Parkyn's Narrative of the Reformation', in *The English Historical Review*, (1947), LXII (CCXLII), pp. 58 – 83.

<sup>907</sup> Bodleian Library Oxford, MS Lat. Th. D. 15, fo. 136.

Harvey in 1552 Barbara Wentworth was a member of the Elmsall branch of the Wentworth family.

‘The right reverent father in God, Robert Holgat, Archbushope of York, maryede Barbara, dowghter of Roger Wentworth of Elmsale.’<sup>908</sup>

Roger was the second son of Thomas Wentworth of North Elmsall who was described as a gentleman, and lived at Hamthwaite in Robert Parkyn’s parish of Adwick le Street.

Holgate’s marriage took place at a time when the marital status of priests was being debated. Serious efforts to achieve a completely unmarried clergy date back to the twelfth century. However, the ideal of a celibate clergy dates back to the early days of Christianity.<sup>909</sup> There was a popular belief that the priest who celebrated the Mass should be ‘sexually pure’.<sup>910</sup> In 1491 a Lollard suspect who conceded that priests should be able to marry said that they could only celebrate mass at times when they were not having sexual intercourse with their wives.<sup>911</sup> Sir Thomas More who was an advocate of a celibate priesthood said that priests should ‘live chaste for the reverence of the sacraments, and to insist that the hands defile not the man, and much less can they defile Christ’.<sup>912</sup> Even married laypeople were expected to abstain from sex for three days before receiving the sacraments. According to Robert Parkyn some priests who had married before the Act of 1549 were reluctant to elevate the host at Mass.<sup>913</sup>

The Protestant view on clerical marriage was based on the fact that priestly celibacy could never be other than ‘a delusion and a deceit’.<sup>914</sup> Protestants saw celibacy to be impossible except for a very small minority. God had ordained marriage as a remedy for fornication, a remedy revealed in scripture.<sup>915</sup> Before the 1549 Act permitting priests to marry, there had been numerous cases of priests having illicit relationships with both single women and

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<sup>908</sup> *Visitations of the North part 1*, Surtees Society, Vol. 122, p 55.

<sup>909</sup> Peter Marshall, *The Catholic Priesthood and the English Reformation*, Clarendon Press Oxford, (1994), p. 142.

<sup>910</sup> *Ibid*, p. 161.

<sup>911</sup> *Ibid*, p. 161.

<sup>912</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>913</sup> Bodleian Library Oxford, MS Lat. Th. D. 15, fo. 135v.

<sup>914</sup> Peter Marshall. p 163.

<sup>915</sup> *Ibid*.

married women. Removing the need for a celibate priesthood would go a long way to eradicating this problem.

There was a possible link between Holgate's marriage in 1550 and his questioning of the real presence in the Mass. In 1548 he may have doubted the doctrine of transubstantiation according to the answer he gave to the question, 'What is the oblation and Sacrifice of Christ in the Mass? If by 1550 he had now resolved this question - that was the bread and wine were not transformed into the body and blood of Christ - may have convinced him that he could still celebrate Mass and be married.

Holgate was not alone in marrying, for figures of the Marian deprivation of married priests show there was a considerable number of such priests who married. In fact he was a strong advocate of marriage within the priesthood. Three incidents support this view. Firstly, Robert Holgate as Archbishop of York united with Cranmer in ordering a visitation of the whole kingdom. In his own province, Cranmer directed that one of the points for enquiry was:

'whether any do contemn married priests, and, for that they be married, will not receive the Communion or other sacraments at their hands'.<sup>916</sup>

Every argument was to be used to persuade them to marry, declaring that celibacy was dangerous to salvation, and any priests who adhered to it would be regarded as a papist and an enemy of the King.<sup>917</sup>

As early as 1539, Cranmer had argued that it was a great hardship for the former monks and canons to observe the vow of chastity, since they had now renounced the vows of poverty and obedience.<sup>918</sup> Cranmer as Archbishop of Canterbury had already been married twice at this time and his second wife was still living and kept secretly at his palace.

Secondly, early in her reign Mary received a petition from John Houseman who had been a deacon at York Minster for seven years. In 1550/1 he had been deprived of his living and prevented from being admitted to the priesthood by Holgate because of the 'extorte myghte,

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<sup>916</sup> Henry C Lea, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church*, Watts & Co. London (1932), p. 406.

<sup>917</sup> Ibid.

<sup>918</sup> Ibid, p 402.

power pretended and malycious mynde' of the Archbishop. The reason for this was that Houseman had said:-

that yt were better for prystes not to marye then for to marye And for the cause the Archbysshoppe sayde your poore orator neyther shoulde have his office nor yet be preeste so longe as he was Archebysshoppe of York because he was sore against the mareage of preestes.<sup>919</sup>

The third incident illustrated the immense opposition to the idea of married priests which was particularly strong in the conservative North of England. The following case occurred in the Cause Papers of the Diocese of York and was dated circa 1550.<sup>920</sup> William Brogden came to see Holgate at Cawood castle seeking the vicarage of Wymersley since the aforesaid vicarage had become vacant and 'that he had thadvouson therof and that he was certeyn and sure of the good will of the patron named in his advowson.'

After hearing his case Holgate, 'fell into displeasent words' and said that Brogden 'was a sedicious person and sower of noughty doctryn' and that he should not have the lyving of Wymersley. The 'noughty doctryn' referred to concerned a conversation that Brogden had with two other priests in the house of Robert Banks at Wentbridge. Whilst they were drinking they 'fell in reasonynge together of divers matters by way of disputation and for tryall of learninge only.' One of the subjects discussed was the marriage of priests. Brogden said during this discussion 'that no man was able to prove by any ancient writers that it was lawful for priests to marry.'<sup>921</sup> In his examination he said that this was a private conversation, which was conducted in Latin, and at no time did he speak of this matter outside of Robert Banks' house. This conversation must have been communicated to Holgate for him to react in the way that he did. It was not until the reign of Mary and the deposing of Holgate as Archbishop that William Brogden was finally presented to the vicarage of Wymersley.<sup>922</sup>

On Mary's accession to the throne, Holgate was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of London on the 4 October 1553 for 'diverse his offences'. One of these offences may have

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<sup>919</sup> National Archives SP10/8.

<sup>920</sup> Borthwick Institute, York. Cause Papers CPG 431 and 433.

<sup>921</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Cause Papers CP G 433.

<sup>922</sup> Borthwick Institute, York. Presentation Deed, Adm 1554/17 dated 9<sup>th</sup> May 1554.

been his marriage to Barbara Wentworth.<sup>923</sup> Ordinary priests who had married during the time of Edward VI were instructed to ‘divorce’ their wives and to live apart from them. However, more likely reasons for his imprisonment at this time was because of his denial of the true presence and other reforming measures that he had supported.

In December 1554 Robert Holgate petitioned through Sir Richard Southwell, a member of the Privy Council, for release from the Tower and to be restored to clerical duties.<sup>924</sup> In this petition he claimed that his only fault was in marrying Barbara Wentworth:

the said Robert saith that he being the aige of threscore and eight yeares married a gentilwoman called Barbara Wentworth by the counsell of Edwarde then Duke of Somersett and for feare of the laite Duke of Northumberlande using to call him papiste and he thought verelye then that he myght have done soo by godes lawes and the kinges.<sup>925</sup>

He went on to say that he ‘married unwiselye gyving evell example to other to do the like’

When referring to others who had been deprived in a similar manner to him he said

he haith more to saye for his restitution then they have, being moche further gone amysse in religion then he was and with obstynacie, he submyttith himselfe for his onely faulte.<sup>926</sup>

Holgate was only admitting to one fault, that of marriage, whilst he accused his fellow clerics of adopting more radical changes to religious doctrine. In his petition he said that ‘he was counsellled to marye by the Duke of Somerset and others and the great feare of the Dule of Northumberland’.<sup>927</sup> Later in his petition he gave the following reason for being afraid.

‘When he (Holgate) was the Warden of the Marcheis in the North he (Northumberland) wrote to me in causes of dyvers light parsons offenders that shulde

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<sup>923</sup> TNA, London Privy Council Registers PC 2/4 p 26.

<sup>924</sup> TNA, SP 11/6 No. 146.

<sup>925</sup> Ibid.

<sup>926</sup> Ibid.

<sup>927</sup> Ibid.



forbeare the odre of justice, which I might not doo. And soo I wrote to him accordingelye, and then he touke such displeasure with me that for that and other suche like matters he put me forth of the rowme of the president and could laye no offence to my charge.’<sup>928</sup>

This may well refer to a letter that was written to Holgate as Lord President of the North on 4 May 1547. This letter concerned persons detained in prison on various indictments as well as offences against the Statute of the Six Articles (1541).

According to A G Dickens, Holgate may have spent the last days of his life in the former Master of Sempringham’s ‘headhouse’ in Cow Lane in the Parish of St Sepulchre’s in London.<sup>929</sup> He died on 15 November 1555 and his heir was Thomas Holgate, the son of his late brother Henry Holgate of Claydon. He willed that his body was to be buried in the parish church within the parish where he should die. His funeral ‘shalle done be withoute wordlie pompe, pride or vanitie.’ Dickens presumed that he was buried in the Church of St Sepulchre in London.<sup>930</sup>

### **Holgate’s Post Dissolution Foundations**

Before his death in 1555, Robert Holgate founded three free Grammar Schools in Yorkshire, one in his possible birthplace of Hemsworth, one on the site of the Priory at Malton and a further in the cathedral close at York.<sup>931</sup> In addition to these three schools he also founded a Hospital at Hemsworth which catered for both men and women.<sup>932</sup> Robert Holgate ordained in his foundation documents that Hebrew, Greek and Latin were to be taught to the scholars who attended the schools. The school day lasted from seven o’clock in the morning until five o’clock in the afternoon with a break of one hour for lunch. Prayers were to be said every morning and evening by the schoolmaster and scholars before the start of their lessons.<sup>933</sup>

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<sup>928</sup> TNA, SP11/6 No. 146.

<sup>929</sup> A G Dickens, ‘Robert Holgate: Archbishop of York and President of the King’s Council in the North,’ in *Reformation Studies*, Hambleton Press, (1982), p. 350 -1.

<sup>930</sup> A G Dickens, *Robert Holgate Archbishop of York and President of the King’s Council in the North*, St Anthony’s Hall Publications No. 8.

<sup>931</sup> Borthwick Institute, Bishopthorpe Papers, BP Sch 26.

<sup>932</sup> Calendar of Patent Rolls, 3 & 4 Philip and Mary, Part IX, p. 471.

<sup>933</sup> In a small notebook of 63 pages the detailed constitutions of the free school at Malton were copied out in the seventeenth century (York Minster Library, Dean and Chapter Library, B2/3f/1. The details of the morning and evening daily services are as follows:- ‘The school master and his successors daily at their entry into the said school *kneeling upon ye knees* with their scholars shall devoutly say the psalm *Deus misereatur nostri et benedicat nobis etc.* to the end with *Gloria patri*. The school master saying the first verse and the scholars the

The psalm that was used for the morning service was the psalm that was used in the monastic and secular rites of Lauds on a Sunday.<sup>934</sup> It is possible that Holgate was influenced by his time as a Gilbertine canon when he devised this order of service. Also, on every Sunday the schoolmaster and scholars were to attend divine service in the local parish church. The first schoolmaster of the Grammar school at Malton was Thomas Norman. This may have been the same Thomas Norman who was the last prior of the Gilbertine priory of Mathersey in Nottinghamshire.<sup>935</sup>

The Hospital at Hemsworth was founded two years after his death in 1555. This hospital was founded for twenty men and women of the parishes of Hemsworth, Felkirk, Kirkeby and Wragby under the guardianship of a resident Master.<sup>936</sup> The residents of the hospital were to be selected by the parson of Hemsworth church, the two church wardens and four of the ‘most honest parishioners’. The constitutions of the hospital laid down that the Master was to be priest and to have obtained a Divinity degree from either Oxford or Cambridge universities.<sup>937</sup> All of the brethren of the hospital were to wear the same uniform, the men a white gown and the women a long white gown ‘gird unto them with their girdles’. All were to eat their meals together and not in their individual rooms. No one was permitted to enter the houses of the brethren except in times of sickness, any visitor who entered had to be more than fifty years of age.

Holgate specified in the constitutions of the hospital the order in which the daily services were to be conducted in Hemsworth parish church. These were to be attended by all the brethren of the hospital. The daily service was to be celebrated before eight in the morning and also in the evening. The first part of the service was a long prayer that was broken down into verses, one verse recited by the Master and the next by the brethren of the hospital, and

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second and so to the end thereof with *Kyrie eleison etc, Pater noster etc. Ac ne nos etc. Emitte spiritum tuum et creabunt, Et renovabis faciem terre, Oremus deus qui corda fidelum*, and one collect beginning, *Deus in cujus manu etc.* and for the King’s majesty his heirs and successors King’s of the realm and one other for the founder during his life beginning *Pretende domine famulo tuo*, and after his death the collect beginning, *Inclina domine aurem* and at night at the going from the school the school master and his successors and their scholars to sing the anthem beginning, *Maria virgo semper leture*, or some other at the discretion of the schoolmaster and his successors for the time being with the versicle *Ora pro nobis sancta dei genitrix etc*, a collect of our Lady, two collects for the King and ye founder and the third for all Christian souls.

<sup>934</sup> John Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century*, Clarendon Press Oxford, (1991), p. 258.

<sup>935</sup> Borthwick Institute, Bishopthorpe Papers, BP Sch 26.

<sup>936</sup> York Minster Library, Dean and Chapter Records B 2 (3) f. This is a seventeenth century copy of the deed of foundation of Hemsworth Hospital dated 20 September 1557. The original version of this document is not known to survive. (This has been extracted from a typed sheet which is enclosed with the document.)

<sup>937</sup> Ibid.

repeated in this way until the end of the prayer. The text of this prayer is given in the constitutions. This was followed by a collect and a number of prayers, including a prayer for Robert Holgate and the executors of his will for founding the hospital, followed by the Lord's Prayer, during which all of the brethren knelt. The Master then recited the ten commandments, the brethren reciting a response after each commandment. The service concluded with a collect and other specified prayers.<sup>938</sup>

It is possible that this order of services drew on Holgate's earlier experience of monastic life. No detailed service book has survived which gives comprehensive texts of prayers that were used by the Gilbertine order. However, it was shown earlier in this chapter that when Holgate devised the injunctions for York Minster he was influenced by his time as a Gilbertine canon in the injunction on the use of organs and singing in the Minster.<sup>939</sup> His early years as a canon were spent at the Hospital attached to St Katherine's priory in Lincoln which used lay sisters to look after the residents. The inhabitants of this hospital might have attended services daily, which could have been delivered by the canons of the priory. No records have survived to indicate the form of services that were followed, but it is conceivable that they used a similar format to that described for Hemsworth hospital in their daily worship.

## Conclusions

Two pieces of evidence exist which show that Holgate was taking an active interest in ecclesiastical affairs outside the Gilbertine order which may have a bearing on his later career outside the order. In 1529 as prior of St Katherine's in Lincoln, not only did he represent a number of the priors of Gilbertine houses at the Convocation that was held in Canterbury that year, but he also represented the abbot of the Premonstratensian house of Barlings in Lincolnshire.<sup>940</sup> This indicates that Holgate was involving himself in issues outside his own order. Two years later, whilst still prior at Lincoln, he was present as the 'lawful constituted proctor' of Stephen Gardiner when he was installed to the archdeaconry of Leicester in Lincoln Cathedral.<sup>941</sup> Holgate had received his Bachelor of Divinity Degree from Cambridge in 1524 and he may well have come into contact with Gardiner whilst he was there. Being present at his installation may indicate that a friendship had developed between these two

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<sup>938</sup> Ibid.

<sup>939</sup> See page 267 of this chapter.

<sup>940</sup> *Letters and Papers Henry VIII*, Vol. 4, No. 6047.

<sup>941</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Acts, - Dean and Chapter A/3/5, fo. 109v.

clerics. As Gardiner was an early proponent of ecclesiastical reform, it is possible that Holgate was already active in the debates that were taking place within the church.

Whilst Holgate held some conservative views, he also believed that there was a need to reform the church. If we are to believe that he was closely allied to the views of John Hilsey, then Holgate would have been in favour of removing what he regarded as the superstitious elements within the church, for example the cult of relics and the use of images. He may not have been against the use of prayers for the dead and there is no doubt that he had a special regard for the Virgin Mary. At the dissolution he probably still believed in the doctrine of the true presence at the Mass. However, by the time of his marriage in 1550 he had changed his mind on this matter. In 1534 he signed the declaration against the Papal Supremacy in England as Robert Holgate, Prior of St Katherine's in Lincoln.<sup>942</sup> It was very likely that he genuinely subscribed to this declaration, since in his consecration as Archbishop of York, he was the first bishop to renounce the authority of Rome openly. Holgate also accepted the pallium from the Archbishop of Canterbury, which symbolically showed that he was accepting the authority of the King rather than the Pope, through the Archbishop of Canterbury.

He was a strong believer in preaching in a language that all could understand, and that priests should devote time to reading the Bible to enable them to preach to their congregations. Nonetheless, he was not against the reading of scripture in Latin as he saw a need for this in the academic world.

His handling of the Pilgrimage of Grace in Yorkshire and his education at Cambridge University brought him to the attention of Thomas Cromwell in London who saw him as a future leader in the North of England. As Bishop of Llandaff he proved himself to be an excellent administrator, which led him to become Lord President of the Council in the North. If it had not been for the reign of Queen Mary he may well have been a future Archbishop of Canterbury.

In his apology Holgate puts forward a powerful justification for his career and hopes for restitution to that of Archbishop of York. He apologises for only one thing, that of marriage.

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<sup>942</sup> British Library, Add MS 38656.

He gave the reason for his marriage as that of the fear of the Duke of Northumberland calling him a Papist.

Holgate was a cautious reformer. Along with other bishops who held similar views, he appears to have moderated the opinions of some of the more radical reformers on the various committees to which he belonged. His experience in the Gilbertine order continued to shape some of his attitudes, as was indicated by the services that he formulated for use in his post dissolution foundations. Despite these views, he still achieved the penultimate position of authority within the Church of England. His considerable administrative skills made him the ideal candidate for the position of Archbishop of York.

## CHAPTER 9

### Conclusions

In her study of medieval Yorkshire nunneries, Janet Burton has shown that they attracted members of the gentry despite the fact that they were small and poor compared to religious houses for men.<sup>943</sup> This dissertation has shown that this was the case with the Yorkshire Gilbertines, who were recruiting women mainly from the upper and parish gentry. However, in Lincolnshire the order recruited mainly from urban dwellers and the yeoman farmer class. Burton has argued that pressure was placed on the convents to restrict the numbers of entrants into the various orders in order to balance numbers against resources. She concludes from this that there was still a high demand from women who wished to enter a religious order. This appears to have been the case for the Yorkshire Gilbertines. The figures for the number of nuns at Watton at the dissolution suggest that the order was still receiving a large number of applications from women. However the numbers at this time in the Lincolnshire houses suggest the opposite view. These nunneries remained an integral part of local society, providing an outlet for female vocation, a place of education of the young and a retirement home for widows. In this respect, the surviving sources suggest that the Gilbertines were performing a similar function to the nunneries of other orders.

Brian Golding has stated that by 1300 the Gilbertine order had reached its peak.<sup>944</sup> Benefactors who had traditionally supported the order financially had now moved their support to the chantries and parish churches. St. Gilbert's original vision of the order had virtually vanished by the beginning of the fourteenth century. His unique structure of men and women living close together in adjacent enclosures in harmony and discipline had become an order in which the canons had assumed a dominating role and the nuns had been deprived of their status within the order. This study has shown that in the years following this, the situation had not improved and may in fact have worsened.

The broad conclusions of this dissertation can be summarised as follows. During the latter part of the fourteenth century and during the fifteenth century, the Gilbertine Order experienced serious financial and management problems. Despite this, however, serious

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<sup>943</sup> Janet Burton, *Yorkshire Nunneries in the Middle Ages: Recruitment and Resources*, in *Government, Religion and Society in Northern England, 1000 – 1700*, edited by Paul Dalton and John Appleby, Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishers, (1997), pp. 104 – 16.

<sup>944</sup> Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, p. 4.

attempts were made to ensure the security of the nuns' enclosure from outside influences. This was in contrast to other religious orders where the security of the enclosures of nuns had, in some cases, virtually broken down. As a consequence, Gilbertine nuns led a more secluded life than women in other orders. Whilst the situation was not perfect for the leaders of the order because concessions had been made for their nuns when some of their responsibilities were taken from them, their enclosure was still more secure than in other orders. Despite these measures to improve the security of the nuns, there is evidence to show that the canons were neglecting their spiritual needs. By the end of the fifteenth century and in the early sixteenth century many of the canons were taking up benefices in local churches. However, this did not necessarily mean that they were resident within these parishes. They may have only visited the church on the major festivals during the year. In the cases where they were resident, this would mean that there would have been a reduced number of canons within their own priories to support the nuns.

One of the main reasons why the Gilbertines were experiencing problems can be traced back to the impact of the Black Death and its after effects which may have led to poor recruitment in the fifteenth century. A further factor which may have contributed to problems within the order may be due to poor financial management at the end of the fourteenth century. The order's Institutes stipulated that the nuns had the care of the communities' money. Thus they authorised the expenditure of their religious houses and their assent was necessary for the alienation of possessions.<sup>945</sup> By 1223 the General Chapter for that year showed that the power of the Master had increased; he was now assuming powers over and above the authority of the General Chapter.<sup>946</sup> Similar problems were occurring in nunneries of other religious orders. Janet Burton examined a similar problem that was highlighted by Archbishop Giffard's visitation of the Cistercian Priory of Swine in Yorkshire in 1268.<sup>947</sup> That priory was originally founded for both nuns and canons, and in its early days was managed in a similar way to a Gilbertine Priory with separate cloisters for the men and women. The canons there apparently followed the Premonstratensian Rule and lay brothers who were also attached to the priory followed the Cistercian Rule.<sup>948</sup> The priory became an ordinary nunnery from about 1344 until its dissolution in 1539, and during Archbishop

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<sup>945</sup> Transferring or surrendering of property.

<sup>946</sup> Brian Golding, *ibid*, p 162.

<sup>947</sup> Janet Burton, *Yorkshire Nunneries in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries*, Borthwick Papers No 36, (1979), p 31.

<sup>948</sup> An order of regular canons founded at Prémontré in France in 1121 that followed the Rule of St. Augustine.

Giffard's visitation it was found that the canons and lay brothers were misusing the convent funds, thus depriving the nuns of food while the canons themselves did not go short. Poor financial management then resulted in the priory falling into debt: it owed at least 140 marks.<sup>949</sup>

The continual references in the General Chapter Records to lax security within the nuns' enclosure indicates that the Gilbertines were attempting to enforce the rules of the order to minimise any outside influences in the lives of the nuns. The Chapter Records do not provide specific examples of how security had relaxed, apart from revealing the need to improve security at the entrances to the nuns' enclosure. However, visitation records of other religious orders give examples where heads of religious houses and the nuns either entertained guests within their abbeys and priories, with nuns making unauthorised visits away from their houses over a number of days. In religious houses subject to external visitation, the bishop was responsible for ensuring that the injunctions were being carried out, whereas the Gilbertine priors would have held direct responsibility for their own houses. The priors would have also had regular contact with their communities and were in a good position to ensure that any injunctions imposed on their community by the General Chapter were implemented. Diocesan bishops would not have had regular contact with the convents and hence were not in a position to ensure that these houses complied with these injunctions. The Gilbertine nuns' enclosure may have been far more secure than that of nuns of other orders: this would have been ensured by the canons maintaining the security of the entrance to the nuns' cloister and the close supervision the canons had over the nuns' behaviour.

The surviving General Chapter Records show that by the beginning of the sixteenth century a number of relaxations had been made to the Gilbertine rule. These changes took place between the establishment of the rule in the thirteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century. Two major relaxations of the rule which took place in the thirteenth century were that nuns were now allowed to speak with their friends and relatives under strict supervision and they were allowed to have a personal income.<sup>950</sup> No substantial changes to the rule for nuns were recorded in the General Chapter Records from then until the dissolution in 1539. However it cannot be assumed that such changes did not take place because extant records from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth century are fragmentary.

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<sup>949</sup> 1 Mark = 13s – 4d.

<sup>950</sup> Brian Golding, *ibid* p. 163.



No records survive for the second half of the fifteenth century, although one piece of evidence suggests that major relaxations were still being made. This is contained in monetary accounts prepared by the Commissioners at the time of the dissolution, which show that Sempringham Priory was employing an organist.<sup>951</sup> The thirteenth century institutes made it clear that organs were not to be used at any time.<sup>952</sup> This clearly demonstrates that relaxations were being made to parts of the Gilbertine rule.

The extant bishops' registers for the first part of the sixteenth century show that Gilbertine canons may have been neglecting the needs of the nuns in some of the houses. These registers show that a significant number of canons had been instituted as vicars and rectors in nearby parish churches. This did not necessarily mean that the particular canon was resident within the parish throughout the year. The religious house would have been responsible for providing a priest to serve in any of the churches that were appropriated by the priory in the absence of the named canon. If a priest who was not a member of the Gilbertine Order served one of the parish churches, he may have been paid a salary that was lower than the income that was being generated by the parish. This would have ensured that the priory received an income even though it would have been less than the amount received if their own canon had been resident. Canons who served churches which were not appropriated by the Order would also have generated extra income for the local Gilbertine priory, despite the fact that this was contrary to the institutes laid down by St Gilbert. Men in other religious orders were also taking up benefices at this time; but it should be remembered that canons and monks of these orders did not have the responsibility of caring for nuns. With this level of outside activity, many of the Gilbertine canons may have been absent from their priories, leaving a reduced number of canons to care for the nuns.

During the latter part of the fifteenth century the Gilbertine order was experiencing difficulties in recruiting men. The most likely reason for this problem would have been due to the aftermath and further outbreaks of the Black death which has been mentioned above. These problems were highlighted in the few surviving Chapter records from the beginning of the sixteenth century. At these chapter meetings the priors of the individual houses were instructed to increase the numbers of canons within their houses. The analysis of the ages of men within the order during the sixteenth century and the comparison of the names of these

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<sup>951</sup> National Archives, SC6/HENVIII/203.

<sup>952</sup> W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed J Caley, H Ellis and B Bandinel, vi, London (1846), p. xlii.

men in the ordination lists shows that one way they tried to overcome the problem was to recruit older men into the order.

The history of the Gilbertine Order in the first half of the sixteenth century was dominated by the involvement of the Yorkshire houses and to a lesser extent the Lincolnshire houses in the Pilgrimage of Grace. This rebellion proved to be the most serious challenge to Henry VIII's reformation of the church in England. One of the centres of this rebellion was around the town of Beverley which was only a few miles from the largest of the Gilbertine houses at Watton. A number of the canons there aided the rebel cause by denouncing the royal supremacy. The Lincolnshire Gilbertine houses appear not to have involved themselves in the rebellion to the same extent as the Yorkshire canons, which may indicate that the Yorkshire Gilbertines were more conservative in their religious views than the communities in Lincolnshire.

By the end of 1539 all of the Gilbertine houses had been dissolved. Having left their communal way of life the only income guaranteed to the canons and nuns was the pensions awarded to them by the Crown. The Gilbertine canons would have undoubtedly been better prepared than the nuns for a life in the outside world since many of them had already served as parish priests, and these men would have been able to seek employment when suitable posts were available, while the women of the order would not have been equipped for such a radical change. If the tightening of the nuns' enclosure in the early sixteenth century had been implemented effectively, women in the Gilbertine order would have enjoyed less contact with the outside world than those in other orders. A number of these nuns, especially the older women, would not have had families to return to after the dissolution in 1539. Many of the older women may have died soon after leaving their religious houses because of old age and the lack of resources to support themselves. The younger women had to live alone in poverty, or pool their pensions with other ex-nuns and live in small groups, possibly under a modified religious rule. Another alternative for such women was marriage, which a number of Gilbertine nuns entered so as to gain a more secure lifestyle.

In some cases the changes in lifestyles that many of these men and women experienced must have caused them to adapt to the religious reforms that were taking place. The only sources available to demonstrate this are the preambles to the surviving wills that were left by these men and women. The preambles to wills often followed a standard formula reflecting the

conventions of the time, which means that only cautious interpretations can be made from them regarding the testators' religious convictions. However, careful analysis shows that a large number of the ex-canons were happy to follow the religious climate of the time. However, three canons were prepared to declare their true religious allegiance.

The lack of surviving wills for the women of the Gilbertine order made it impossible to carry out an extensive analysis of their religious views using this type of source. The majority of the wills of nuns indicate that these women accepted the reforms of the time, either because they believed in the new ways, or they conformed with the official policy whether it be reformist or conservative. However, the will of Mary Sutton and the returns made about her for the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln show that some women ejected from the order maintained conservative views, living in small groups following a religious rule.

Records have also survived which allow the careers of a number of canons to be examined for the period after the dissolution of their houses. One particular example was the last Master of the order, Robert Holgate. During his lifetime he realised the need to reform the church, but not to the extent envisaged by some of his contemporaries such as Nicholas Ridley and Thomas Cranmer. His experience in the Gilbertine order shaped some of his attitudes which are demonstrated in the foundation deeds and constitutions of his post dissolution foundations at Hemsworth, York and Malton. After the dissolution he enjoyed a senior career within the Church of England. The other members of the Gilbertine order were not so lucky. The only career that an ex-canon could pursue was that of a parish priest. The only known exception was Thomas Webster, the ex-subprior of Watton, who was appointed in 1553 as the Master of the Hospital at Ripon, a post which he retained for the rest of his life. The women of the order fared much worse as employment in the mid sixteenth century was difficult to obtain. Some of the younger women may have returned to their families but many lived alone or in small groups surviving on their meagre pensions.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 – Yorkshire

HOUSE	ORDER	VALUATION (X)	No in 1380	No in 1536/9 (Y)	RATIO X/Y	YEAR DISSOLVED
Arden	Benedictine	£2.03	-	6	2.00	1536
Marrick	Benedictine	£48.91	-	13	3.76	1539
Nunburnholme	Benedictine	£8.09	-	3	2.70	1536
Nunkeeling	Benedictine	£35.77	-	13	2.75	1539
Nun Monkton	Benedictine	£75.62	-	-	-	1536
Thicket	Benedictine	£20.92	-	9	2.32	1539
Wilberfoss	Benedictine	£21.84	-	10	2.18	1539
Yedingham	Benedictine	£21.83	-	9	2.43	1539
Clementhorpe York	Benedictine	£55.56	-	8	6.95	1536
Basedale	Cistercian	£20.07	-	10	2.01	1539
Ellerton	Cistercian	£15.53	-	6	2.59	1536
Esholt	Cistercian	£13.27	-	9	1.47	1539
Hampole	Cistercian	£63.28	-	19	3.33	1539
Handale	Cistercian	£13.95	-	9	1.55	1539
Keldholme	Cistercian	£29.30	-	6	4.88	1536
Kirklees	Cistercian	£19.41	-	7	2.77	1539
Nun Appleton	Cistercian	£73.49	-	19	3.87	1539
Rosedale	Cistercian	£37.62	-	8	4.70	1536
Sinningthwaite	Cistercian	£60.46	-	9	6.71	1536
Swine	Cistercian	£83.19	-	20	4.15	1539
Wykeham	Cistercian	£25.88	-	13	1.99	1539
Arthington	Cluniac	£11.42	-	11	1.04	1539
Moxby	Augustinian	£26.14	-	10	2.61	1536
Watton	Gilbertine	£360.84	61	33 (+ 8)	8.80	1539

Lincolnshire

HOUSE	ORDER	VALUATION (X)	No in 1380	No in 1536/9 (Y)	RATIO X/Y	YEAR DISSOLVED
Bullington	Gilbertine	£158.40	45	25	6.5	1539
Sempringham	Gilbertine	£317.20	56	34	9.3	1539
Alvingham	Gilbertine	£128.74	29	26	5.0	1539
North Ormesby	Gilbertine	£80.59	30	15	5.4	1539
Sixhills	Gilbertine	£135.04	36	23	5.9	1539
Catley	Gilbertine	£34.93	19	8	4.4	1539
Haverholme	Gilbertine	£70.80	-	15	4.7	1539
St Michael Stamford	Benedictine	£65.99	-	16	4.1	1536
Stainfield	Benedictine	£98.40	15	16	6.2	1539
Legbourne	Cistercian	£38.42	13	10	3.8	1539
Greenfield	Cistercian	£62.32	15	10	6.2	1536
Nun Cothom	Cistercian	£46.88	16	13	3.6	1539
Stixwould	Cistercian	£114.26	29	12	9.5	1539
Heynings	Cistercian	£49.26	18	13	3.8	1539
Fosse	Cistercian	£7.18	8	8	0.9	1539
St Leonard Grimsby	Augustinian	£9.73	9	8	1.2	1539
Irford	Premonstratensian	£13.99	8	5	2.8	1536

Affiliation to particular orders taken from, David Knowles and R Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London, (1971), and, Claire Cross and Norreen Vickers, *Monk, Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, Volume 150 (1995).

**Appendix 2 – Age ranges of men at the Dissolution in non-Gilbertine houses in Yorkshire**

**Benedictine**

	Sample Size	Total No at Dissolution	20 to 25	26 to 30	31 to 35	36 to 40	41 to 45	46 to 50	51 to 55	56 to 60	60+
Monk Bretton	13	14	0	4	4	2	0	2	0	0	1
Selby	24	24	2	6	0	6	4	2	1	2	1
Whitby	19	22	0	6	6	2	2	0	1	0	2
Holy Trinity York	10	10	0	0	0	4	3	0	2	0	1
St Mary's York	34	50	5	10	0	6	5	1	2	3	2

**Cistercian**

	Sample Size	Total No at Dissolution	20 to 25	26 to 30	31 to 35	36 to 40	41 to 45	46 to 50	51 to 55	56 to 60	60+
Byland	21	25	3	4	0	3	0	4	0	3	4
Fountains	30	32	0	4	0	9	1	3	4	4	5
Jervaulx	2	16	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Kirkstall	15	31	0	2	4	1	0	1	2	3	2
Meaux	21	25	2	3	1	6	3	0	2	2	2
Rievaulx	23	23	0	8	3	1	4	0	2	3	2
Roche	15	18	0	3	1	4	1	0	2	0	4
Sawley	16	19	0	2	3	0	4	0	1	3	3

### Cluniac

	Sample Size	Total No at Dissolution	20 to 25	26 to 30	31 to 35	36 to 40	41 to 45	46 to 50	51 to 55	56 to 60	60+
<b>Pontefract</b>	5	13	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0

### Carthusian

	Sample Size	Total No at Dissolution	20 to 25	26 to 30	31 to 35	36 to 40	41 to 45	46 to 50	51 to 55	56 to 60	60+
<b>Hull</b>	7	7	0	1	0	1	0	2	1	1	1
<b>Mount Grace</b>	2	19	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

### Grandimontine

	Sample Size	Total No at Dissolution	20 to 25	26 to 30	31 to 35	36 to 40	41 to 45	46 to 50	51 to 55	56 to 60	60+
<b>Grosmont</b>	4	5	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1

## Augustinian

	Sample Size	Total No at Dissolution	20 to 25	26 to 30	31 to 35	36 to 40	41 to 45	46 to 50	51 to 55	56 to 60	60+
<b>Bolton</b>	15	15	1	1	1	3	3	2	2	0	2
<b>Bridlington</b>	14	15	3	2	0	6	0	1	1	1	0
<b>Drax</b>	5	5	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Guisisborough</b>	20	25	1	8	1	5	1	1	2	1	0
<b>Haltemprice</b>	9	9	0	1	3	1	1	0	3	0	0
<b>Healaugh Park</b>	6	6	0	0	1	3	1	0	0	1	0
<b>Kirkham</b>	13	18	1	0	4	6	1	0	0	1	0
<b>Marton</b>	6	6	0	0	1	3	1	0	1	0	0
<b>Newburgh</b>	17	18	4	2	3	0	2	2	1	0	3
<b>North Ferriby</b>	5	8	0	1	0	2	0	1	1	0	0
<b>Nostell</b>	22	29	1	7	0	10	0	2	0	2	1
<b>Warter</b>	9	9	1	1	0	1	2	0	2	2	0

## Premonstratensian

	Sample Size	Total No at Dissolution	20 to 25	26 to 30	31 to 35	36 to 40	41 to 45	46 to 50	51 to 55	56 to 60	60+
<b>Coverham</b>	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Easby</b>	6	10	0	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Egglestone</b>	7	9	0	2	0	1	1	2	1	0	0



### Appendix 3

The Printed version of the Gospel of Nichodemus which belonged to Margaret Nicholson.

Folio 1r

- j The ffurst booke is of Nychodemus gospel
- ij The seconde booke the myrrur of gold
- iiij The thirde booke intytled the next way to heven
- iiij<sup>the</sup> The iiij<sup>the</sup> booke of the deying creature
- v The v<sup>the</sup> booke of the complaint of the soule
- vj The vj<sup>the</sup> booke of the frute of the redemcion
- vij The vij<sup>the</sup> booke the dietary of goostly helthe
- viiij The viij<sup>the</sup> booke of the remydye a geinst troublons of temptations

*At the bottom of this folio is written in another hand dame Margeryret Necylsone*

fo. 1v

- ix The ix<sup>th</sup> booke of the sainge of oure lady salter
- x The x<sup>th</sup> booke of exornatoryum curatorum
- xj The xj<sup>th</sup> booke of Jacob and his xij sonnes
- xij The xij<sup>th</sup> booke of miracles of our lady
- xiiij The xiiij<sup>th</sup> booke of Joseph of Aramathia
- xiiij The xiiij<sup>th</sup> booke of the testament of John Lydgate
- xv The xv<sup>th</sup> booke of the castell of Laboure

*On the last page of the calendar is written in the same hand as the previous owners name is dame margaret nicollson oweth thys boke.*

#### Appendix 4

##### Birrell's reconstructing of 'Dame Margaret's Book'

1. Nychodemus Gospel W. de Worde (1518) C.20.C20(2)
2. The mirroure of golde for the sinfull soule W. de Worde (1522) 697.f.32
3. Peter of Luxemburg, The next way to heven W. de Worde (1522) C.24.C.4
4. The deyenge creature W. de Worde (1514) C.21.c.29
5. Complaynt of the soule W de Worde (1519) C.21.c.26
6. The fruyte of redempcyon W. de Worde (1514) C.21.c.23
7. The dyetary of ghostly helthe H. Pepwell (1526) C.21.c.31
8. The remedy ageynst the troubles of temptacyons  
W. de Worde (1519) C.21.c.22
9. Exoneratorium curatorum H. Pepwell (1525) C.21.c.27
10. The story of Jacob and his xii sones J. Skot (1522-3) C.21.c.25
11. The miracles of our blessyd lady W. de Worde (1514) C.21,c.30
12. The lyfe of Joseph Armathia R. Pynson (1520) C.21.c.28
13. The testament of John Lydgate R. Pynson (1520) C.21.c.3
14. The castell of laboure W. de Worde (1512) C.21.c.21
15. Mary, Q consort of Louis XII, The Solemnites<sup>20</sup>  
R. Pynson (1509) C.21.b.12

## Appendix 5

Cambridge University Library MS Hh.I.11 list of contents.

1. The Incarnation and Passion of our Lord, translated into English from the latin original of St. Bonaventura
2. Missa de nomine Iesu officium
3. A Dialogue between Wysdom and the Disciple on the Sacrament, in English
4. A Prayer on the Seven Words of our Lord on the Cross, in English
5. A Meditation on the Blessed Virgin, in English
6. 'A Sovereyn comfort for a soule dishesyd', in English
7. Meditations on Psalms 90 and 91, in Latin
8. 'A Sovereyn and a Notable Sentence to comforte a person that is in Temptation', in English
9. Speculum Peccatoris by Richard Hampole in Latin
10. A Life of St. Elizabeth, in English
11. A Sermon on the Assumption of our Lady, in English. This is the sermon which has been discussed above.
12. 'The vii joyes of owre lady seynt mary', in English.

## **Appendix 6**

MS Harl 2406 folios 36r to 57v.

1. How the world should be despised
2. How poorness should be had
3. Of the setting and the rule of life
4. That tribulation should be suffered patiently
5. How we shall be patient
6. How we shall pray
7. How we shall meditate
8. How you shall read
9. Of the cleanness of the heart
10. How we shall love God

## Appendix 7 - Yorkshire

HOUSE	ORDER	VALUATION (x)	No in 1536/9 (W) (W)	X/W	TOTAL PENSION (Y)	PENSION OF HEAD OF HOUSE (Z)	Y/X	Z/X	YEAR DISSOLVED
Arden	Benedictine	£2.03	6	2.00	-	£4.00	-	1.970	1536
Marrick	Benedictine	£48.91	13	3.76	£26.00	£5.00	0.53	0.102	1539
Nunburnholme	Benedictine	£8.09	3	2.70	-	£3.33	-	0.412	1536
Nunkeeling	Benedictine	£35.77	13	2.75	£30.82	£8.00	0.86	0.224	1539
Nun Monkton	Benedictine	£75.62	-	-	-	£13.33	-	0.176	1536
Thicket	Benedictine	£20.92	9	2.32	£16.00	£6.66	0.76	0.318	1539
Wilberfoss	Benedictine	£21.84	10	2.18	£20.00	£8.00	0.92	0.366	1539
Yedingham	Benedictine	£21.83	9	2.43	£18.64	£6.66	0.85	0.305	1539
Clementhorpe York	Benedictine	£55.56	8	6.95	-	£6.66	-	0.120	1536
Basedale	Cistercian	£20.07	10	2.01	£16.00	£6.66	0.80	0.332	1539
Ellerton	Cistercian	£15.53	6	2.59	-	£3.00	-	0.193	1536
Esholt	Cistercian	£13.27	9	1.47	£16.64	£6.00	1.25	0.452	1539
Hampole	Cistercian	£63.28	19	3.33	£52.28	£10.00	0.83	0.158	1539
Handale	Cistercian	£13.95	9	1.55	£18.29	£6.66	1.31	0.477	1539
Keldholme	Cistercian	£29.30	6	4.88	-	£5.00	-	0.171	1536
Kirklees	Cistercian	£19.41	7	2.77	£12.30	£2.00	0.63	0.103	1539
Nun Appleton	Cistercian	£73.49	19	3.87	£38.30	£3.00	0.52	0.040	1539

Rosedale	Cistercian	£37.62	8	4.70	-	£6.00	-	0.159	1536
Sinningthwaite	Cistercian	£60.46	9	6.71	-	£6.66	-	0.110	1536
Swine	Cistercian	£83.19	20	4.15	£59.00	£13.33	0.71	0.160	1539
Wykham	Cistercian	£25.88	13	1.99	£23.30	£6.66	0.90	0.257	1539
Artington	Cluniac	£11.42	11	1.04	£19.00	£5.00	1.66	0.438	1539
Moxby	Augustinian	£26.14	10	2.61	-	£6.66	-	0.255	1536
Watton	Gilbertine	£360.84	33 (+8)	8.80	-				1539

## Lincolnshire

HOUSE	ORDER	VALUATION (X)	No in 1536/9 (W)	RATIO X/W	TOTAL PENSIONS (Y)	PENSION OF HEAD OF HOUSE (Z)	Y?X	Z?X	YEAR DISSOLVED
Bullington	Gilbertine	£158.40	25	6.5	£69.32	£4.00	0.41	0.025	1539
Sempringham	Gilbertine	£317.20	34	9.3	£141.23	£5.00	0.37	0.016	1539
Alvingham	Gilbertine	£128.74	26	5.0	£52.65	£3.33	0.40	0.026	1539
North Ormesby	Gilbertine	£80.59	15	5.4	£39.33	£3.33	0.31	0.041	1539
Sixhills	Gilbertine	£135.04	23	5.9	£66.31	£4.00	0.39	0.030	1539
Catley	Gilbertine	£34.93	8	4.4	£19.32	£2.66	0.50	0.076	1539
Haverholme	Gilbertine	£70.80	15	4.7	£44.64	£3.33	0.43	0.047	1539
St Michael Stamford	Benedictine	£65.99	16	4.1	-	£8.00	-	0.121	1536
Stainfield	Benedictine	£98.40	16	6.2	-		-	-	1539
Legbourne	Cistercian	£38.42	10	3.8	-	£7.00	-	0.181	1539
Greenfield	Cistercian	£62.32	10	6.2	-	£10.00	-	0.161	1536
Nun Cothom	Cistercian	£46.88	13	3.6	£26.82	£6.00	0.50	0.128	1539
Stixwold	Cistercian	£114.26	12	9.5	£44.14	£15.0	0.30	0.132	1539
Heynings	Cistercian	£49.26	13	3.8	£21.82	£6.66	0.30	0.135	1539
Fosse	Cistercian	£7.18	8	0.9	£6.28	£1.66	0.40	0.231	1539
St Leonard Grimsby	Augustinian	£9.73	8	1.2	£13.48	£4.00	0.60	0.411	1539
Irford	Premonsra- tencian	£13.99	5	2.8	£14.98	£5.00	1.07	0.357	1536





## Appendix 8

Name of House	Annual Value October 1538	Total Pensions	Number of Canons	Number of Nuns	Bells and Lead	Plate (gilt)	Plate (Parcel gilt)	Other Items
Sempringham	£400 (£317.20)	£170	15	18	£1324	215 oz	191 oz	2 rich altar cloths
Haverholme	£95 (£70.79)	£44-13-4	8	8	£180-10-0	9 oz	33 oz	-
Catley	£37 (£34.93)	£17-13-4	3	4	£64	-	-	-
Bullington	£202 (£158.40)	£132-13-4	9	15	£590	114 oz	71 oz	Rich cope of clothe of gold. Suit of rich bawdykyn with a cope. 1 rich altar cloth of gold
Sixhills	£170 (£135.04)	£64-13-4	7	15	£539	133 oz	52 oz	-
Alvingham	£120 (£128.74)	£49-13-4	7	9	£75-18-1	-	29 oz	-
North Ormesby	£85 (£80.59)	£39-6-8	6	9	£220	93 oz	40 oz	-
Newstead	£38 (£38.72)	£18	6	-	£161	34 oz	4 oz	Also there remaineth more to be paid by a speciality £13-13s
Mattersey	£60	£20-13-4	5	-	£142	28 oz	4 oz	-
Lincoln	{£260} (£202.25)	{£37.7}			{£1574.9}			

## Appendix 9 Yorkshire

Order	House	Number of Nuns at Dissolution	Pension of Head of House	Pension of Senior Nuns	Pension of Nuns	1540 Valuation	Total Value of Pensions	Ratio Pensions/Val
Benedictine	Marrick	13	£5	£2 - £3.33	£1 - £1.33	£49.91	£26.00	0.52
Benedictine	Nun Keeling	13	£8	£2.33	£1.5 - £2	£35.37	£31.00	0.88
Benedictine	Thicket	9	£6.66	£1.33 - 1.65	£1	£20.92	£16.00	0.76
Benedictine	Wilberfoss	10	£8	£1.66	£1 - £1.33	£21.84	£20.00	0.92
Benedictine	Yedingham	9	£6.66	£2	£1.33	£21.83	£18.66	0.85
Cistercian	Basedale	10	£6.66	£1.33	£1	£20.07	£16.00	0.8
Cistercian	Esholt	9	£6	-	£1.33	£13.27	£16.66	1.26
Cistercian	Hampole	19	£10	£2.66 - £3.33	£2	£63.28	£52.33	0.82
Cistercian	Handale	9	£6.66	£1.66	£1.33	£13.95	£18.33	1.31
Cistercian	Kirklees	7	£2	£2	£1.66	£19.41	£12.33	0.64
Cistercian	Nun Appleton	19	£3	£2.33	£2 - £1.66	£73.49	£38.33	0.52
Cistercian	Swine	20	£13.33	£2.33 - £3.33	£2	£83.19	£59.00	0.71
Cistercian	Wykeham	13	£6.66	£1.66 - £2.33	£1.33	£25.88	£26.00	1.00
Cluniac	Arthington	9	£5	£1.66	£1.33	£11.42	£19.00	1.66
Gilbertine	Watton <sup>953</sup>	32 + (9)	£4 - £5	£2 - £2.66	£1.66 (£0.66)	£360.85	£85.34 (£52.34)	0.24 (0.14)

<sup>953</sup> Each of the nine lay sisters received a pension of £0.66. £85.34 was the total pension bill for the whole community, of which £52.34 went to the nuns.

## Appendix 10 - Lincolnshire

Order	House	Number	Pension of Head of House	Pension of Senior Nuns	Pension of Nuns	1540 Valuation	Total Value of Pensions	Ratio of Pensions to Valuation
Cistercian	Heynings	13	£6.66	£1.66	£1.5	£74.58	£21.82	0.30
Cistercian	Fosse	8	£1.66	-	£0.66	£15.78	£6.28	0.40
Cistercian	Nun Coton	13	£6	£1.66 - £2	£1.5	£59.80	£26.82	0.45
Cistercian	Stixwold	13	£15	£3.33	£2 - £2.33	£165.37	£44.18	0.27
Augustinian	Grimsby	8	£4	£1.66	£1.4	£22.38	£13.48	0.6
Premon.	Irford	5	£5	£2	£1.33	(£13.99)	£14.98	
Gilbertine	Alvingham	13	£3.33	-	£2	£131.82	£52.65 (£26.00) <sup>954</sup>	0.40 (0.2)
Gilbertine	Bullington	16	£4	£2.33	£2	£169.31	£69.32 (£33.32)	0.41 (0.20)
Gilbertine	Catley	4	£2.66	-	£2	£38.98	£19.32 (£9.32)	0.50 (0.24)
Gilbertine	Haverholme	8	£3.33	£2.66	£2	£103.88	£44.64 (£14.64)	0.43 (0.14)
Gilbertine	N. Ormesby	9	£3.33	-	£2	£126.19	£39.33 (£19.33)	0.31 (0.15)
Gilbertine	Sempringham	18	£5	£2.66 - £3.33	£2,33	£383.27	£141.23 (£87.23)	0.37 (0.23)
Gilbertine	Sixhills	7	£4	£2.66	£2	£168.07	£66.31 (£34.31)	0.39 (0.20)

<sup>954</sup> The figures in column 8 for the Gilbertine Houses give the total pensions awarded to the whole community. The figures in brackets below these figures are the amounts that were awarded to the nuns. The corresponding ratio of the nuns pensions to the valuation of the house is given in brackets in column 9.

## Appendix 11

Among the York Diocesan Records are the cause papers of a nullity suit brought by Barbara Wentworth against her husband Anthony Norman.<sup>955</sup> Dr John Rokeby heard this suit in the Chancery Court of York on the 2 and 4 May 1549. Regrettably no sentence has survived for this case but the replies to questions put on Norman's behalf to the witnesses revealed a number of facts regarding Barbara's first 'marriage'. A form of marriage had been solemnised before a number of witnesses in the parish church of Adwick eighteen years previously when Barbara would have been five years old and Anthony Norman would have been seven years of age.

Further evidence regarding this marriage was revealed in the Chancery Proceedings in the National Archives.<sup>956</sup> This action concerned the forcible abduction of Antony Norman and the marriage of Antony to one of the daughters of Roger Wentworth. Roger Wentworth had abducted Antony from Thomas Norman one of the executors of the will of John Norman who was the father of Anthony. The action went to say that George Norman the heir to John Norman's estate had

'unlawfully without consent married the said Antony beyinge butt 9 yeres of age unto one of the daughters of the said Roger Wentworth who was 6 yeres of age.'

They both lived together in Barbara's father's house at Adwick until five or six years ago. On reaching the age of discretion (12 years old) Barbara was examined several times by her uncles, but she consistently refused to accept Anthony Norman as her husband saying that could never do so 'because she coulde not fynde it in hir harte to love hym'. The evidence given indicated that Anthony Norman accepted this and that the marriage had never been consummated. There was only one piece of evidence that may have indicated affection between the couple, and that was the evidence given by Thomas Cavell an ex servant of the Wentworth family. He claimed that he saw the couple kiss on one occasion 'but it was whan that he (Anthony) had been fourth of the towne.' The 'lowe pepill thereabout' thought of them as man and wife because 'they were maried in the face of the church.'

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<sup>955</sup> Borthwick Institute York, Cause Papers, CPG 404.

<sup>956</sup> TNA, Chancery Proceedings, C1/659/40.

From this evidence it appeared that Anthony Norman's case was a weak one. Canon Law stated that marriage between infants was null, unless it was consented to by the parties after reaching the age of discretion. 'Quod sponsalia' was the age of seven, but 'quod matrimonium' was fourteen for a boy and twelve for a girl. According to the evidence given in the nullity suit Barbara was only five years old at the supposed marriage ceremony. Hence it seemed that the contract made in infancy was invalid. Even though both of them lived in Barbara's father's house in Adwick there was no evidence that they were living together as man and wife since when Barbara was examined at twelve years of age she declared that she could not find it in her heart to love him. Hence Anthony Norman's case to prove that they were living together failed and it is fair to say that the judgement would have gone against him. If this were the case then the marriage between Robert Holgate and Barbara Wentworth would be perfectly legal.

Curiously, Anthony Norman brought a suit of bigamy against Robert Holgate in November 1551. He did not make his plea to the Privy Council until two years after Holgate's public marriage. Why did he do this? According to the nullity suit it was not a love match between Barbara and Anthony.

If we are to believe that the Anthony Norman, who appears in the Records of the Borough of Doncaster between 1546 and 1555, was the same Anthony Norman under discussion, then this may give an answer. On the 21 October 1546 an Anthony Norman appeared in the list of free tenants of the borough in the place of a John Norman who may have been Anthony's father. He was next mentioned on 14 January 1552 where Christopher Man sued him for debt. Later that year Richard Lemyngue sued him again for debt. Three years later on The 18 April 1555 Edward Hanley sued him yet again for debt. Interestingly he was omitted from the list of free tenants from 25 October 1554.

Quite clearly at the time of his suit against Holgate, Anthony Norman was in financial difficulties. It may be that he embarked on this suit in a desperate attempt to prevent bankruptcy. There is one other possibility that the suit he brought against Holgate may have brought about his financial demise.

The reactions of the Privy Council to this suit can be seen from two entries in the Privy Council Registers. On 20 November 1551 Holgate was summoned to appear along with his

wife as quickly as possible before the council. Three days later however, he was sent a letter to say that he could appear at the normal time as he would in the course of his duty be attending parliament. On the same day a letter was sent to Sir Thomas Gargrave, Mr. Challonour and Dr. Roukesbye to examine

‘and use suche meane to undersatnd the circumstances and very trouth of the matter betwene the Archbishop of Yorke and one Norman who claymeth the sayd Bishops wyfe to be his’.<sup>957</sup>

Obviously the Privy Council were now taking Normans allegation less seriously. Two other references to Holgate and his wife would indicate that the marriage was deemed legal. A further entry in the Privy Council Registers dated 16 April 1553 orders the Chancellor of Augmentations to sell

‘landes and tenementes to the yerely value of xxx<sup>li</sup> to the use of hym sellf and his wyfe and the longer lyver of them both, and after theyr disceasse the same landes to remayne to tharchebusshoprike of Yorke.’<sup>958</sup>

The Patent Rolls for 27 May 1553 show a similar grant to himself and his wife to hold for life in survivorship, the remainder once again going to the Archbishop of York.

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<sup>957</sup> National Archives, Privy Council Registers PC2/4 Page 448.

<sup>958</sup> National Archives, Privy Council Registers PC2/4 page 707.

## Appendix 12

Sometime during his imprisonment an inventory of Holgate's goods and debts was compiled. The following is a transcript of the document which is now preserved at Corpus Christ College Cambridge<sup>959</sup>.

Concerning ye Archb. of York.

Robert Holgate a Gilbertyne

Monye specyalties of detts plate jewels and writings lefte at Battersaye by Robt. late Archbishop of Yorke when he was comytted to the Tower.

Firste in golde coyness £300

Itm specialties of good detts £400

Itm in plate gilte and pcell gilte sixteen hundreth unce.

Itm a myter of fine golde with two pendants sett rownde aboute the side and myd with verye fine peynted dymonds saphers and balists and all the plane with ther good stones and parles and the pendants in lyke maner weyinge 125 unce.

Itm 6 or 7 great rings of fine golde with stones in them wherof 3 fyne blew saphers of the best, an emered very fine a good turkeys and a dymond.

Itm a serpent tonge sett in a standerd of sylver gylte and gravne.

Itm tharchbishops seall in sylver.

Itm his signet an olde antyke in golde.

Itm the cowerpayne of his leasse of Watton betwyxte the late Duke of Northumberland and him and an obligacon of a thowsand ponds for pformance of covenenats of the Duke ptie with the letters patent of his purchase of Scrowbye.

Taken from Cawod and other place wich did apertayne to the saide Archbisshop by Ellys Markham.

Firste in redye mony nyne hundreth pounds.

Itm rcd by him two myters

Item received by him in plate pcell gilte 370 unce

Itm in gilte plate 1557 unce

Itm one broken crose of sylver gilte with one image broken wayinge 47 unce.

Itm rcd one obligacon conteyninge £37 5s 10d

Itm an other conteyninge £15.

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<sup>959</sup> Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 105.

Itm an other conteyninge £10

Itm solde by the saide Markham five skore beasse and 400 muttons as he is enformed.

Itm taken by the saide Markham at Huntington of the saide Archbishops 8 bease and 80 muttons.

Itm taken by the saide Markam a great horse thre ambling geldings and in redy moneye £10.

Itm nowe of late he hathe solde all the shepe belonginge to the saide Archbishop wich he supposeth to be two thousande five hundreth or ther aboute.

Itm in February the laste the saide Markam toke away two turkey carpyts as big and so good of woole as [...] subiect hadd also a chest full of copes and vestments of cloth of teshewe two verie good beds of downe and 6 of the best yonge horsyes that was at Cawod and also dyvers hangings of varders and cloth of arras and pfferd to make porte sale of all my housolde stuffe in the houses wherof thre were very well fornysed and two metly well.

Itm the saide markam spent and solde all myn store housholde as wheat 2 hundreth quarters malte five hundreth quarters otts 3 skore quarters wyne five or six bottles saltfyshe and lynge 6 or 7 hundreth with very muche [...] skore as fewell hey with mony other things necessary for housholde.

Itm ther was at Cawod horses yonge and olde fower of five skore.

Itm they have received the rents of my owne lands five hundreth pounds yerly at the lest on and above all aforewritten.

Itm the saide Markham gave mony away to dyvers suche as I ought nothing to the value of an hundreth pounds and above as I am credeably enformed and for that purpose as I think that suche sholde geve enformacon againste me of treason or other inconvenyanne.

Itm the said Markam and other by his commandment toke away good harnys and artillery sufficient for 7 skore men wich coste me above two hundreth pounds.

Itm a specialtie of olde hirste hermytage and others £37 5s 10d.

Itm fower hundreth skore of woole by estymacon £120.

Itm of Hewe Woorrall for tre yeres rent of the psonage of Doncaster the rent of every yere £30 6s 8d. Summa £88.

Itm of the same Warrall for fower yeres rent of Warmist.....every yere £5 7s 10d. Summa £21 12s 8d.

Itm of Mr Marshall £63.

Itm of Jamys Foxe £68.

Itm of William Davell £6.



Itm of Sir John Sutton 40 quarters of wheat due for the yere before I was comytted to the Tower.

Itm the same Sir John for 6 skore quarters of barley due fo the same yere.

Itm of the same Sutton for 40 quarters of wheat due at the same tyme I was comytted to the Tower.

Itm of the same for two hundreth quarters of barleye the same yere.

All that is aforewritten is in the schedule annexed to the bill of complaint aforesaid.

#### Post Script

Since the begynninge of September the last the saide Markam hath prayed the furniture of five houses that belonge to the late Archbishop of Yorke and lefte the same with the keepers of the houses and bownde every of them by obligacon that theyther the saide stuffe or the price yt it was praised to shalbe delyved at evy tyme betwixt this and Christmas whon the same shalbe called for.

At the same tyme he toke away from Cawod a very good bedd of downe with a covyng to the same of redd damaske doble warded with fringe of redd sylke and thre curteynes of redd sarsenett with other furniture to the said bedd.

Itm at the same tyme he toke away of the best yonge horses ther and a bruyng pan of copper wich was an implement of that house.

Itm as I am enformed he hath taken away the stalles quere at Watton wich was verie good and verie fayer and also the solls in the dorter wich was left whole standinge ther with much other wayneskott for sellering for ther was meny fayer houses sellered [...] only above but also all the walls and hath taken away many implements of housholde ther.

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