

## Cirencester Abbey

### *The Saxon Minster*

A tradition current before 1800 attributed the foundation of 'a prebendal college' at Cirencester to Alwyn, a Saxon, in the time of King Egbert (802–39).<sup>1</sup> No evidence to substantiate this has been found and it is most unlikely to be true.<sup>2</sup> John Leland, c.1540, unable to discover the founder's name, commented that the church was 'of what Saxon's foundation no man can telle'.<sup>3</sup> The date of its establishment is unknown, although by analogy with other minster foundations in the region probably took place during the period following the conversion to Christianity of the Hwicce sub-kingdom, assigned by Bede to the early 680s.<sup>4</sup>

Excavations in 1964–6 revealed that the medieval abbey had been built on the site of the Anglo-Saxon church.<sup>5</sup> Measuring 179 ft in length with a 52 ft wide nave and an apsidal chancel, this was the longest known church in Anglo-Saxon England. Such a major church in a royal vill was probably a royal foundation, and its size implies that it was an early minster supporting a community of priests.<sup>6</sup> The minster appears to have suffered a diminution of its lands during the Danish invasions of Gloucestershire from the 9th century.<sup>7</sup> By 1066 its resources by comparison with the size of its building were extremely meagre, and there was no mention of a college of priests.<sup>8</sup>

The church in 1066 held two hides of land from the king in Cirencester, in free alms, exempt from all customary dues. It also held six acres of meadow. In 1086 these lands were worth 40s., but the number of priests supported is unknown. William I added to the church's resources by granting the third penny from the new market at Cirencester to St. Mary's and a virgate of land and woodland at Painswick.<sup>9</sup> The church had possibly also been endowed by Regenbald, the famous pluralist who had a connection with Cirencester, since a tradition earlier than 1300 maintained that he had been the dean of the church's community of priests.<sup>10</sup> In the early 1130s there was such a community, who were compensated for losing their church and livelihood when it was replaced by the abbey.<sup>11</sup>

1 J. Collinson, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset* (3 vols, Bath, 1791), II, 191.

2 A.K.B. Evans, 'Cirencester's early church', *Trans. BGAS* 107 (1989), 107-22, on 107-8.

3 Leland, *Itin.* (ed. Toulmin Smith), I, 128.

4 Evans, 'Cirencester's early church', 109.

5 D.J. Wilkinson and A.D. McWhirr, *Cirencester: Anglo-Saxon Church and Medieval Abbey* (Cirencester Excavations IV, Cotswold Archaeological Trust, 1998).

6 Evans, 'Cirencester's early church', 109-10.

7 See below, Anglo-Saxon to Domesday.

8 Evans, 'Cirencester's early church', 110-11.

9 *VCH Glos.*, II, 80

10 Evans, 'Cirencester's early church', 117-118.

11 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 28, 145 (p.141).

### **Early History of the Abbey**

The building of the abbey may have commenced in 1117 when Henry I began a 'new work' at Cirencester.<sup>12</sup> Although this might refer to a castle, there is no direct evidence of a castle there before 1141–2.<sup>13</sup> Two references to the abbot of Cirencester in a pipe role of 1130 provides further evidence of the abbey predating the traditional foundation date of 1131.<sup>14</sup> This first abbot was Serlo (d.1147 x 1149), a protégé of Roger, bishop of Salisbury.<sup>15</sup> The original family of canons at Cirencester abbey came from Merton priory (Surrey), and Cirencester later provided the original canons to Bradenstoke priory (Wilts.).<sup>16</sup>

Work on construction of the abbey continued throughout the twelfth century. Henry I, Stephen, Henry II and Count John all granted exemption from tolls on all goods bought and sold by the abbey; and the grant of Henry I specifically mentioned freedom from tolls on timber to be used for building the church.<sup>17</sup> To augment their income and help with the costs of building the abbey church, Henry II granted the abbot and convent the revenues of the vill of Cirencester.<sup>18</sup> This grant was renewed by Richard I in 1189 for a fine of £100.<sup>19</sup>

Building work must have slowed during the civil war of Stephen's reign, when the castle adjoining the abbey was burned down,<sup>20</sup> although Stephen did grant that the gear and goods of the abbot and canons should be quit of all tolls, presumably in support of their building efforts.<sup>21</sup> Cirencester was visited by both Stephen and the Empress Matilda in this period, although it was Roger, earl of Hereford, who granted the abbot and canons protection and the right to supervise their own business within his jurisdiction.<sup>22</sup> At this time the abbey received the gift of two hides of land in Cirencester, first from Stephen and latterly from Earl Roger, which was confirmed by Henry II.<sup>23</sup>

Besides his grant of the revenues of Cirencester vill, Henry II confirmed the abbot and canons in their possessions and liberties as granted to them by his grandfather Henry

12 'Secundum regis Henrici praeceptum, apud Cirencestrie novum opus est inceptum', *Historical Collections of Walter of Coventry* (Rolls Series, 58), I, 136; A.K.B. Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: The First Hundred Years', *Trans. BGAS* 109 (1991), 99-100.

13 Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: the first hundred years', 99; Evans, 'Cirencester's early church', 120, n.13.

14 *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the Thirty-First year of the reign of Henry I Michaelmas 1130*, ed. Judith Green (Pipe Roll 1, 2012), 63, 99.

15 ODNB, 'Serlo (d. 1147x9), abbot of Cirencester '.

16 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, xix.

17 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 55/20.

18 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 66. See below Landownership.

19 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, nos.32, 77/17.

20 *Gesta Stephani*, 2, 70; A.K.B. Evans, 'Historical Evidence for the Anglo-Saxon Church and Medieval Abbey', *Cirencester: Anglo-Saxon Church and Medieval Abbey*, 15.

21 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 58/12.

22 *Ciren. Cart.*, Iii, 26-7; *Sarum Charters and Documents*, (Rolls Series 97), no.8; *Gervase of Canterbury* (Rolls Series 73), I, 118;

23 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 59, 61/30.

I.<sup>24</sup> He also renewed Stephen's grant that their goods and gear be quit of all tolls.<sup>25</sup> Probably as a result of an examination of the customs and services owed by the tenants of Cirencester,<sup>26</sup> he ordered that all fugitives and villeins who had fled since his grandfather's death be restored to the canons.<sup>27</sup> Henry further ordered that the abbot and canons were not to be troubled concerning their wood of Oakley,<sup>28</sup> perhaps to be identified with the 'forest of Cirencester' cited in the pipe roll of 1130.<sup>29</sup>

The dedication ceremony was held on 17 October 1176,<sup>30</sup> when an indulgence was granted to the abbey, presumably to encourage pilgrims to make donations towards the continued building costs of the church.<sup>31</sup> Henry II also gave up his rights to the revenues during vacancy following the death of Abbot Andrew shortly after the dedication.<sup>32</sup> During a later vacancy in 1186 the king exercised his rights to the temporalities of the abbey, receiving £433 17s. 11d. which was the balance of income over necessary expenditure for the terms of Michaelmas, Christmas and Easter; this was in addition to the old and new money, Byzantine coins and gold and silver cups found in the abbot's treasure chest.<sup>33</sup> Expenses incurred by the king included £7 7s. for roofing the church and repairing the workshops, as well as the costs of six canons who travelled first to Dover and then to London for a stay of two months to secure the election of the next abbot. Cirencester abbey was subject to the land tax known as tallage from its first imposition by Henry II in 1186 until 1214 when the abbey was found to be exempt because it held the vill of Cirencester in free alms.<sup>34</sup>

### **Endowment of the Abbey**

Cirencester was probably the most lavishly endowed of the many Augustinian houses founded by Henry I and his immediate circle.<sup>35</sup> Based on values given in the Valor Ecclesiasticus of 1535, it was the richest Augustinian house in the country, and its wealth derived to an exceptional degree from its initial endowment.<sup>36</sup> Leland noted that its lands had scarcely been augmented since its foundation,<sup>37</sup> and other than the royal grants of the lordship of Cirencester and the Seven Hundreds in the late 12th century, the abbey

24 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 30/3, 67/19, 69.

25 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 62/13.

26 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 20.

27 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 68.

28 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 74/22.

29 TNA, E 372/1, rot 8r m2.

30 *Gesta Henrici*, II, 1, 127; A.K.D. Evans, 'Historical Evidence', 15.

31 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 164.

32 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 70.

33 *Pipe Roll 33 Henry II, 1186-1187*, 26-27.

34 *Pipe Roll 33 Henry II, 1186-1187*, 141; *Pipe Roll 16 John, 1214*, 56; *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 17, 39.

35 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, xxi.

36 D. Knowles & R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales* (1953), 134.

37 Leland, *Itin.*, I, 129.

received no large-scale benefactions after 1133.<sup>38</sup>

In July 1133 Henry I granted the 'whole tenure' of Regenbald to the church of St. Mary of Cirencester which he had founded, and to Serlo its abbot and the canons there, as well as a hide of the king's demesne in Cirencester.<sup>39</sup> Regenbald's post-conquest tenure, with an annual value of c.£46,<sup>40</sup> lay chiefly in four areas: Gloucestershire and north Wiltshire; central Somerset and the Somerset–Dorset border; central Wiltshire and Berkshire; and Northamptonshire. There were also detached properties in Buckinghamshire. In the reign of Edward I the abbot secured quittance of summons to the common eyre in all these counties.<sup>41</sup>

Cirencester abbey's only magnate benefactors were Roger, earl of Hereford, who granted two hides in Cirencester in 1155; and Roger de Clare, earl of Hertford who c.1156–8 gave them the tithe of his demesnes in Rothwell (Northants.). The only possession acquired from outside the geographical grouping of the original endowment was a grant of land in Kerry (Ireland) by Meiler fitz Henry at the end of the 12th century.<sup>42</sup> Most benefactors after c.1150 were members of lesser baronial families and royal servants, and in the 13th century endowments dwindled and were generally given by men of more humble status.<sup>43</sup>

Most of the Gloucestershire properties acquired piecemeal by the abbey lie within 15 miles of Cirencester, either within areas already of interest or close to existing abbey estates.<sup>44</sup> Outside Cirencester the abbey held the churches of Ampney St. Mary, Cheltenham, Driffield and Preston, together with properties in those parishes, and property in Aldsworth, Bristol, Broadwell, Chesterton, Cliveshale, Down Ampney, Edgeworth, Elmstone Hardwicke, Gloucester, Norcote, Preston, Rodmarton, Siddington, Wadle and Wick. No new areas of interest were opened up in the other counties,<sup>45</sup> nor did Cirencester increase its spiritualities significantly.<sup>46</sup>

In Edward II's reign the abbey had to pay £210 as a penalty for acquiring 114 properties in Cirencester and 17 in Minety in the time of Edward I in disregard of the Statute of Mortmain.<sup>47</sup> In 1425 the abbot and convent received papal licence to rent and grant at farm their chapels, churches and other possessions to any persons, clerks or laymen, in perpetuity or on lease, without requiring licence of the ordinaries.<sup>48</sup>

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38 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, xxii.

39 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 28/1.

40 *ODNB* Cirencester, Regenbald.

41 *Cal. Close, 1279-1288*, 29, 46, 111, 299, 345, 364, 535.

42 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, xxii-xxiii.

43 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, xxiii.

44 *Ciren. Cart.*, III, x.

45 *Ciren. Cart.*, III, x.

46 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, xxv.

47 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 96/50.

48 *Calendar of Papal Letters*, VII, 410.

### **Royal Connections and Political Life**

Cirencester's communication links made it a convenient base for royal government in the south west.<sup>49</sup> The seat of government at such times was probably the Augustinian abbey, particularly after the castle was razed to the ground in 1142.<sup>50</sup>

The connection between the abbey and the royal family was particularly strong in the 13th century. According to Leland, the heart of Sanchia of Provence (d.1261), wife of Richard, earl of Cornwall, was buried at Cirencester.<sup>51</sup> The abbey would have been a convenient stopping point on the journey between the couple's Gloucestershire manors at Hailes and Lechlade and their main manor down the Thames at Wallingford (Berks. later Oxon.).<sup>52</sup> In 1258-9 the abbot incurred expenses of 66s. 8d. in relation to Sanchia's affairs<sup>53</sup> and had a book written for her sister, Queen Eleanor.<sup>54</sup> Sanchia made a bequest of £100 to the pittance of the abbey,<sup>55</sup> and in 1257 the abbot and convent stood surety for Queen Eleanor and Peter of Savoy for a loan of 1000 m. (£667) made to them by Florentine merchants.<sup>56</sup> In 1400 Thomas, earl of Kent was initially buried in the abbey following his execution at Cirencester, although in 1412 his remains were removed to Mount Grace priory (Yorks. N.R.).<sup>57</sup>

In 1262 the abbot accounted for £39 3s. expended upon jewels and other gifts for the king and queen and Hugh le Despencer,<sup>58</sup> suggesting he steered a careful political course between the royal and the baronial parties. In 1263 the abbey's accounts noted: 'this year there was war in England, such that no wool fleeces were sold this side of the Thames, neither wheat at 'Hakeburn' (Hagbourne, Berks.) or 'Bowell' (?Broadwell, Oxon.) and in other places a lesser amount on account of the war'.<sup>59</sup> The accounts for 1267 show the abbot courting royal favour through gift-giving to royal servants,<sup>60</sup> as well as visiting London and Wallingford. Also in 1267 a new altar was constructed, although its meagre cost suggests it was not connected with the bequest of Sanchia's heart.

It is likely that Edward I was accompanied by his first queen, Eleanor of Castile when staying at Cirencester abbey during the Welsh campaign of 1282.<sup>61</sup> Certainly Edward's second queen, Margaret of France, sojourned at Cirencester in the early 14th century.<sup>62</sup> Isabella of France stayed at the abbey following the capture of Edward II in 1326. In her

49 See below, Medieval Cirencester: Crown and Military Activity.

50 E. A. Fuller, 'Cirencester Castle', *TBGAS* 15 (1890-91), 103-119.

51 Leland, *Itin.*, I, 129.

52 *ODNB*, Richard, first earl of Cornwall and king of Germany

53 Staffs RO, D(W) 1778 P54 B8, f.19.

54 Staffs RO, D(W) 1778 P54 B8, f.18.

55 *Ciren. Cart.*, III, no.283.

56 *Cal. Pat.*, 1247-1258, 557.

57 *Cal. Pat.*, 1408-1413, 416.

58 Staffs. RO, D(W) 1778 P54 B8, f.27.

59 Staffs. RO, D(W) 1778 P54 B8, f.29.

60 Staffs. RO, D(W) 1778 P54 B8, f.36.

61 See below, Medieval Cirencester: Crown and Military Activity.

62 TNA, SC 1/31/184.

room there, and in the presence of Roger Mortimer and others, the Great Seal was transferred from the queen into the custody of William Ayerme, bishop of Norwich, who then used the abbey chapter house to conduct business, using the seal to authenticate writs before leaving for Woodstock.<sup>63</sup>

The abbot of Cirencester was not regularly summoned to attend parliament in the 14th century, but he was present in parliament in 1315 petitioning against the bishop of Worcester, and was summoned there in 1326, 1385 and 1389. In 1350 abbot Hereward was excused attendance at parliaments, councils and other assemblies summoned by the king or his heirs for life.<sup>64</sup> The abbot did not attend parliament during the reign of Henry IV, but was summoned in 1413, when on 22 May the speaker of the commons asked that he be punished over the recent riots in Cirencester.<sup>65</sup> A commission of oyer et terminer was appointed to investigate claim by the abbot to market tallages on all goods,<sup>66</sup> resulting in a victory for the abbot and the confirmation of the abbey's rights in 1423.<sup>67</sup> In 1483 Richard III sent an order to the abbot of Cirencester to make proclamation of his parliament to be held on 23 January 1484.<sup>68</sup> The abbot received writs for personal attendance at parliament in 1509, 1511 and 1514.<sup>69</sup>

### **Internal Structure and Management**

Cirencester abbey was subject to visitation and correction by its diocesan, the bishop of Worcester, as well as by the general chapter of the Augustinian order.<sup>70</sup> Throughout its history various allegations of mismanagement and misconduct were made against the abbots. Possibly some were put about by the disgruntled townspeople of Cirencester, as in 1327 Bishop Cobham reported that 'a horrible rumour has reached us and given us the bitterness of tears to drink'.<sup>71</sup> As well as receiving correction and instruction, however, the abbots also acted as instruments of reform in other religious houses.<sup>72</sup> In 1288 the abbot of Cirencester was one of the two presidents of the general chapter of the Augustinian order held at Dunstable (Beds.).<sup>73</sup> The abbot and convent were often represented at diocesan synods and other gatherings by a proctor.<sup>74</sup>

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63 *Foedera*, II, 169.

64 *Cal. Pat.*, 1348-1350, 476.

65 *Cobbett's Parliamentary History of England* (1806), I, 320.

66 *Cal. Pat.*, 1413-1416, 38; D. Rollison, *Commune, Country and Commonwealth* (2011), 62.

67 *Cal. Pat.*, 1422-1429, 165-6.

68 *Cal. Close, 1476-1485*, no.1152.

69 *L&P Hen. VIII, 1509-1513*, nos.205, 963; *L&P Hen. VIII, 1513-1514*, no.3464.

70 TNA, E 135/1/10.

71 *Bishop Cobham's Register, 1317-1327*, 224-5.

72 *Sarum Charters and Documents* (Rolls Series, 97), nos.115-116; *Register of Bishop Giffard*, part 1, 13; *Calendar of Papal Letters*, vol i, 8, 42.

73 *Annales Monastici*, III, 341.

74 *Ciren. Cart.*, III, 107; *Registrum Sede Vacante*, 68, 268-9; *Historia et Cartularium Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae*, I, 144; *Ancient Deeds*, I, C.1302.

*Financial Mismanagement*

Abbot Richard (1187–1213) appears to have sold corrodies to raise ready cash.<sup>75</sup> The bishop appointed three treasurers with responsibility for all the abbey's finances and for rendering accounts four times a year to two other canons appointed as scrutineers. A similar system had been pressed upon the Augustine house of Waltham by Celestine III in 1191. The financial system was scrutinised again under Hugh of Bampton, when the bishop ordered that all the abbey's income should be placed in a central chest, with keys held by two elected canons; the abbot, however, was to be allowed to command expenditure.<sup>76</sup> All documents had to be read aloud in chapter both before and after sealing, and three custodians of the seal were absolved of obedience to the abbot in matters relating to the seal.<sup>77</sup>

Obedientary accounts from the 1250s and 1260s reveal a compromise system whereby the treasurers disbursed revenue to certain obedientaries (the cellarer, the kitchener and the abbot's chaplain), while others received and handled their own income.<sup>78</sup> The warden of St. John's church, Cirencester for example drew his income directly from altarge and rents, but paid his surplus to the treasurer. Bishop Cantilupe may have initiated this system, as his series of laxer injunctions concerning the abbey income is now bound up with the obedientary accounts.<sup>79</sup> By 1276 the system was in disarray, however, since Bishop Giffard found that the prior had spent the abbey's money on relatives, raised money on credit to pay debts, stolen and sold abbey property and squandered its assets.<sup>80</sup>

In 1351 Bishop Thoresby found that proper finances were not being kept.<sup>81</sup> During the abbatial vacancy in 1352 the prior and brethren ordained that the convent's officials were to make up daily accounts of their expenses each night in the treasurer's presence,<sup>82</sup> and in 1378 all revenue was to be paid solely to two treasurers.<sup>83</sup> The obedientary system had revived by 1535 when rents were being assigned to nine obedientaries.<sup>84</sup>

*Moral Misconduct*

Bishop Giffard found the prior to be unchaste and a drunkard in 1276, and concluded that even the most discreet abbot would have a very hard time righting the wrongs done at the abbey.<sup>85</sup> Fifty years later Bishop Cobham reprimanded the abbot, for permitting some canons to wander about the country and others to lead immoral lives.<sup>86</sup> These

75 See below: Corrodies.

76 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 328.

77 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 327/186.

78 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, xx; Staffs. RO, D(W) 1778 P54 B8.

79 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, xx, n.7.

80 *Reg. Giffard*, 86-7.

81 *VCH Glos*, II, 82.

82 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, xx-xxi, 169-70

83 *Reg. Wakefield*, no.843.

84 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, xx, n.8.

85 *Reg. Giffard*, 86-7.

86 *Reg. Cobham*, 189.

complaints were repeated by Bishop Thoresby in 1351.<sup>87</sup> The 1352 ordinances went some way to correcting this. In 1378 Bishop Wakefield ordered the removal of Nicholas Fairford, keeper of Cheltenham church, as a result of the scandal caused by the 'infamy of his person'.<sup>88</sup> In 1389 an investigation ordered by the Augustinian general chapter found that the canon William Alderton was being treated unjustly.<sup>89</sup> Alderton had been returned to the abbey by Bishop Wakefield some ten years previously, after a period spent at Leeds priory (Kent).<sup>90</sup>

### ***Relations with bishopric of Worcester***

There was resistance from the abbot and convent of Cirencester to accepting visitation from the prior of Worcester while the see was vacant in 1301–2.<sup>91</sup> In 1338–9 the abbot's proctor made canonical obedience to the prior of Worcester and appointed a day to treat finally concerning the visitation of the monastery.<sup>92</sup> In future vacancies visitations were made by the prior of Worcester.<sup>93</sup>

### ***Proceedings upon election of an abbot***

As recorded in the register of the bishop of Worcester, following the abbot's death in 1307 the whole convent met in the chapter house to agree a date for the election of his replacement. On that day warning was given to all who were excommunicated, interdicted or suspended to retire. The form of scrutiny was chosen, scrutators appointed and a scrutineer to compare the votes. Adam of Brokenborough was chosen and his election was not opposed.<sup>94</sup>

In the late 14th century the abbot and convent secured permission from Pope Urban VI that any abbot canonically elected should stand as the true abbot, without any interference from the diocesan, archdeacon or other, and that such an abbot could receive benediction from any catholic bishop in communion with the apostolic see.<sup>95</sup> This grant was annulled by his successor. In 1402 the future abbot William Best (1416–30) was granted dispensation to hold any dignity despite his illegitimacy.<sup>96</sup>

### ***Corrodies***

Corrodies within the abbey are first recorded in an ordinance dealing with financial mismanagement. An archiepiscopal visitation c.1200 discovered that Abbot Richard (1187–1213) was selling corrodies to raise money, resulting in a superfluity of servants and horses. A servant named Jordan conducted all business matters in return for three

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87 VCH Glos, II, 82.

88 Reg. Wakefield, no.843.

89 Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: From Heyday to Dissolution', 131.

90 Reg. Wakefield, no.798.

91 *Annales Monastici*, IV, *Annals of Worcester*, 551.

92 *Registrum Sede Vacante*, 268-9.

93 *Registrum Sede Vacante*, 192, 202, 430.

94 *Registrum Sede Vacante*, 98-99.

95 *Calendar of Papal Letters*, IV, 518.

96 *Calendar of Papal Letters*, V, 505.

corrodies, for himself, his wife, and his servant. The abbey was ordered henceforth to give no more than three corrodies, the creation of other corrodies for sale being close to simony.<sup>97</sup> The abbey and convent were actively granting corrodies c. 1300 in return for gifts or quitclaims of land and office in Cirencester.<sup>98</sup> In 1425 the abbey agreed to pay a pension to a physician, Thomas Newton, in return for his care of all the canons before all living persons, excepting only the king and Lord and Lady Lovel.<sup>99</sup> In 1432 Henry VI granted a package of benefits including a corrody worth 5 m. (£3 6s. 8d.) in Cirencester abbey to John Somerset, for his service in teaching him and preserving his health.<sup>100</sup>

The restriction made in c.1200–5 on the number of corrodies did not extend to those requested of the abbot and convent by the king. The obediary accounts from the mid-13th century record payments made in support of pensions for royal clerks,<sup>101</sup> which by the early 14th century had become an excessive burden.<sup>102</sup> In petitions to the king royal servants might specify that they wanted a corrody at Cirencester abbey.<sup>103</sup> In 1300 Edward I requested a corrody for his serjeant, Guy de Bedford.<sup>104</sup> In 1308 Edward II nominated John de Norton for a corrody by reason of the creation of a new abbot, the first recorded instance of this arrangement.<sup>105</sup> In 1310 Edward requested another corrody for William the Cook, to provide a 'fitting chamber' for William and the necessaries for himself, two grooms and two horses.<sup>106</sup> In 1318 the king initiated legal proceedings, when Cirencester resisted providing a corrody for the king's yeoman John de Horsle.<sup>107</sup> In 1319 William de la Mare was provided with a corrody.<sup>108</sup> At the creation of a new abbot William de Kirkeby, clerk, was awarded a pension until he could be provided with a benefice.<sup>109</sup> In 1327 the abbot and convent agreed to provide a corrody for Margaret de Abhale, and to give William de Spyneye the corrody previously held by Ralph le Sergeant.<sup>110</sup> In 1330 Edward III asked the abbot and convent to provide a corrody for Richard de Tetbury, in addition to John de Rostele and William de la Spyney. It was agreed that the abbey would accept three royal corrodians on this occasion, but would in the future be burdened with no more than two royal nominees at a time, not excepting the royal right to request a benefice for a clerk

97 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 327/186; *English Episcopal Acta 34 Worcester 1086-1218*, ed. Mary G. Cheney, no.110; Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: the first hundred years', 109-110.

98 *Ciren. Cart.*, III, 187, 211, 291-2.

99 Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS B.326, fo.14.

100 *Cal. Pat.*, 1429-1436, 241.

101 Staffs. RO, D(W) 1778 P54 B8, Img\_5973.

102 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, xxxiv.

103 TNA, SC 8/145/7228.

104 *Cal. Close 1296-1302*, 402

105 *Cal. Chart. W*, 269.

106 *Hockaday Abs.*, Cirencester (1310).

107 *Cal Chart. W*, 486.

108 *Cal. Close*, 1318-1323, 117.

109 *Cal. Close*, 1318-1323, 247.

110 *Cal. Close*, 1327-1330, 230, 242.

each time a new abbot was elected.<sup>111</sup> Thereafter royal servants received corrodies only when an occupant had vacated the office through death or retirement.<sup>112</sup> Benefices continued to be provided to royal candidates on the creation of a new abbot.<sup>113</sup>

### **Further Building Work**

Building work presumably stopped temporarily during the interdict in John's reign, when the profits of the abbey went into the royal coffers; but work on the cloisters must have been nearing completion during the 1220s, when a conduit to bring water to the lavatorium was required. The cloisters were built to the north of the abbey church, which occupied the site of the Anglo-Saxon minster, as there was insufficient room within the precinct to the south.<sup>114</sup> The church tower may have been completed under Abbot Hugh of Bampton, as according to William Worcestre two bells were consecrated in Cirencester in 1238 (although these could have been for the parish church).<sup>115</sup>

Before 1300 abbot Henry of Hampnett was probably raising revenues for further building work. In 1292 he secured the grant of an indulgence from the pope for those who visited the church during the octaves of the main four feast-days associated with the Virgin Mary.<sup>116</sup> Three new altars were consecrated in the abbey church in 1309, possibly in newly constructed eastern chapels.<sup>117</sup> When Bishop Bransford visited the abbey in 1346, canons spoke about the lady chapel as if it were a recent construction by Abbot Hereward. Under his prudent financial management the abbey had recovered from considerable indebtedness in 1335 and been able to rebuild and strengthen the abbey church, and erect various buildings within the precinct and on the abbey's other properties. Extra income was secured to support services in the lady chapel, and Bishop Bransford granted 40 days' indulgence for all who gave contributions or support to the campaign.<sup>118</sup> In 1351 Abbot Hereward secured a grant from Clement VI, valid for ten years, of a year and 40 days' relaxation of enjoined penance to penitents who assisted the rebuilding of their church,<sup>119</sup> which was probably the reason for the Black Prince's visit in 1353. William Worcestre's measurements made in 1480 suggest a chapel of considerable size, with an estimated width (with the aisle) of 22 paces (c.39 ft) and a measured length of 44 yds.<sup>120</sup> Visiting just before the dissolution, Leland noted the contrast between the older east end of the church

111 *Cal. Pat.*, 1327-1330, 540; *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 105/70.

112 *Cal. Close*, 1330-1333, 136; *Cal. Pat.*, 1429-1436, 241; *Cal. Close*, 1377-1381, 343; *Ciren. Cart.*, II, 735, 743; *Cal. Close*, 1461-68, 104.

113 *Cal. Close*, 1333-1337, 518; *Cal. Close*, 1349-1354, 507; *Cal. Close*, 1354-1360, 543; *Cal. Close*, 1360-1364, 284; *Cal. Close*, 1461-1468, 248; *Materials for a history of the reign of Henry VII* (Rolls Series 60), II, 354, 546.

114 Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: the first hundred years', 110-112.

115 Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: the first hundred years', 113, and n.23.

116 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 171.

117 Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: From Heyday to Dissolution', 128.

118 Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: From Heyday to Dissolution', 123.

119 *Calendar of Papal Letters 1342-1362*, 456.

120 Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: From Heyday to Dissolution', 123.

and the comparatively recent building west of the transept.<sup>121</sup>

The new dignity of being mitred, bestowed on the abbot of Cirencester in 1379,<sup>122</sup> may have led to the building of a lodging separate from the cloister, as implied by the survey taken at the dissolution.<sup>123</sup> It lay between the cloister and the Spital Gate Grange, and had recently been extended when the abbey was dissolved in 1539.<sup>124</sup>

### **Intellectual Life**

The new foundation of Cirencester Abbey attracted the support of the pious and learned Robert of Bethune, bishop of Hereford, at whose instance Pope Innocent II granted the canons their first privilege in 1136.<sup>125</sup> The abbey was able to recruit two notable scholars: Robert of Cricklade, who later became prior of St. Frideswide's, Oxford; and Alexander Nequam, who used his influence with King John to secure some useful concessions for the house. The abbots were generally widely respected, although in the later years of Abbot Richard (1187–1213) the abbey faced financial disaster. His successor, Alexander Nequam, was its most renowned abbot;<sup>126</sup> it reputedly rained blood in Cirencester after his death.<sup>127</sup>

Cirencester Abbey did not produce a chronicle or annals, but Abbot Hugh of Bampton ordered the compilation of its cartulary, entailing a through survey and ordering of the abbey's documents.<sup>128</sup> The abbey appears to have built up a substantial library, of which only 33 of its books survive. Of these 25 date from the 12th century, and another three were written in the 12th or early 13th century and just under a half were copies made by the canons at the abbey.<sup>129</sup> Henry of Kirkstede, who compiled a catalogue of the works of standard ecclesiastical writers in English monastic libraries in the third quarter of the 14th century found 48 of these authors represented at Cirencester by one or more works, to a total of 260 items bound within a lesser number of manuscript books. Comparison between surviving manuscript books and Kirkstede's list shows that he did not include all the texts kept at Cirencester. Leland mentioned ten works at Cirencester, most not represented by survivals nor on Kirkstede's list.<sup>130</sup>

### **Relations with the Town**

There was significant conflict between the abbey and the inhabitants of Cirencester.<sup>131</sup> In 1385 the townspeople were said to have done 'unheard of things' to the abbot and

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121 Leland, *Itin.*, I, 129.

122 *Ciren. Cart.*, III, 120.

123 Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: From Heyday to Dissolution', 131.

124 Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: From Heyday to Dissolution', 134.

125 *Ciren. Cart.*, I, xix.

126 Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: From Heyday to Dissolution', 115-116.

127 *Annales Monastici*, II, 289.

128 Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: From Heyday to Dissolution', 116.

129 Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: From Heyday to Dissolution', 117.

130 Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: From Heyday to Dissolution', 121-122.

131 See below, Medieval Cirencester, manors and estates.

convent and threatened to do all the damage they could.<sup>132</sup> Richard II ordered the Keepers of the Peace to deal with the offenders.<sup>133</sup>

Despite the many points of tension which on occasion gave rise to dissension, relations between individuals and the abbey could be cordial, especially in the religious sphere of life. The abbot and convent was the rector of Cirencester's parish church, and as such was responsible for the upkeep of the chancel, repairs to which were accounted for in 1271.<sup>134</sup> The creation of fraternities and chantries can be viewed as expressions of independence from the abbey, but this is not the same as antagonism to the church. Richard Porter, one of those who was instrumental in the setting up of the fraternity of the Holy Trinity, made a gift of money to every canon of the abbey in his will;<sup>135</sup> Richard Dixon, one of two knights behind the Trinity chapel, left £20 to the abbot and convent;<sup>136</sup> and William Nottingham, who set up St. Thomas's hospital, left them £40 in order that they pray for his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed.<sup>137</sup> John Pratt left 20s. to the abbot, 13s. 4d. to the poor, and 6s. 8d. to every canon in order for himself and his wife to be counted brother and sister of the abbey and remembered in their masses for twelve months after his decease.<sup>138</sup> Others left monetary gifts to the abbot and convent: Richard Poynter made a payment to all the canons;<sup>139</sup> John Cosyn left £3 to the abbot and convent;<sup>140</sup> Gilbert Glasyer left 20s. to the abbot and convent and 3s. 4d. to John Hope, canon.<sup>141</sup> Yet others hoped to be buried in the conventual church. Nicholas Poynter expressed this wish and left his silver cup to the use of the highest office in the refectory of the monastery, as well as making gifts to the abbot and canons, both those in and those not yet in priests' orders;<sup>142</sup> Thomas Nele paid for four canons to carry his body into the monastery, and made a gift to canons for having his body laid out in the monastery.<sup>143</sup> Others relied upon the authority of the abbot if their executors failed to perform their duties. If Adam Baker's executors were negligent in executing his will, the abbot was to have power to make arrangements with them for disposing of his worldly goods for the benefit of his soul;<sup>144</sup> and Hugh Norres directed that, if a piece of white damask cloth which he intended to be used in the parish church at specific feasts were withheld after due warning, it was to be given to the use of the conventual church.<sup>145</sup>

132 *Cal. Pat.*, 1381-1385, 593; *Cal. Close*, 1381-1385, 529.

133 *Cal. Pat.*, 1381-1385, 593.

134 *Staffs. RO*, D(W)1788/P54/B8, f.23v.

135 *Hockaday Abs.*, Cirencester (1397).

136 *Hockaday Abs.*, Cirencester (1438).

137 *GA*, D4590/3/1.

138 *Worcs. RO*, John Pratt (d.1513).

139 *TNA*, PROB 11/2A/30.

140 *TNA*, PROB 11/2A/66.

141 *TNA*, PROB 11/2A/356.

142 *TNA*, PROB 11/2A/200.

143 *TNA*, PROB 11/10/492.

144 *Hockaday Abstracts Cirencester* 1489.

145 *Worcs. RO*, Hugh Norres senior (1535).

## Value

Until 1251, when temporalities were included, Cirencester abbey was regularly assessed for ecclesiastical taxation only on its spiritualities. An assessment made in 1254 valued its spiritualities at £303 7s. 1d. annually, and its temporalities at £88 9s. 8d.<sup>146</sup> In 1276 Cirencester valued itself at £500, but increases in valuation figures (and hence the revenues raised) were expected and did not necessarily reflect a jump in actual value.<sup>147</sup> The valuation of 1291 was almost twice that of 1254, the increase mainly reflecting an undervaluation of temporalities in the earlier year.<sup>148</sup> The valuations continued to increase, reaching £1,333 6s. 8d. for the forced loan to the king raised by Cardinal Wolsey. The abbey's wealth was assessed at £1,131 1s. 5d. in Ministers' Accounts after the Dissolution.<sup>149</sup> Cirencester was routinely fined at the higher rate for failing to attend general chapters.<sup>150</sup>

In 1267 the abbot and canons fined with the king by 60 m. (£40) to have custody during the entire vacancy.<sup>151</sup> The pipe rolls show that the vacancy of 1281 brought no more than 50s. 10d. to the Crown.<sup>152</sup> In December 1306, anticipating an imminent vacancy, the abbot and canons agreeing with Edward I to pay £100 for each three months in return for custody of their temporal property during a vacancy.<sup>153</sup> This was in the context of Edward I's aggressive actions against both the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of Durham in that year.<sup>154</sup> To forestall such aggression Cirencester's grant specified that no sheriff, escheator or bailiff could intermeddle in any way with the abbey, and that if the king summoned his army during a voidance the prior and convent should not be bound to do service for their own demesne knights' fees. The grant to John of Leckhampton, abbot of Cirencester, in April 1394, that the abbey be not charged more than £100 for the voidance, as his long suit for livery was not his fault, gives some indication of the extraordinary deal that the abbey entered into in 1306.<sup>155</sup> In 1464 Edward IV pardoned the abbot and convent the £100 at the next voidance of the abbey.<sup>156</sup>

## The Dissolution

In 1307 there were 40 canons, and in 1428 there were 24, one of whom was a scholar

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146 *Ciren. Cart.*, II, nos.459-60.

147 Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: From Heyday to Dissolution', 124.

148 *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae auctoritate P. Nicholai*, 234b ; Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: From Heyday to Dissolution', 126.

149 Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: From Heyday to Dissolution', 134.

150 *A Calendar of the Registers of the Prior of Llanthony by Gloucester*, ed. J. Rhodes (Gloucestershire Record Series 15, BGAS, 2002), no.231;

151 *Cal. Pat.*, 1266-1272, 29, 31.

152 TNA, E 372/125.

153 *Cal. Pat.*, 1301-1307, 486; *Ciren. Cart.*, I, 93.

154 Michael Prestwich, *Edward I* (Berkeley, 1987), 540-547.

155 *Cal. Pat.*, 1391-1396, 418.

156 *Cal. Pat.*, 1461-1467, 325.

at Oxford.<sup>157</sup> In 1534 there were 21 canons,<sup>158</sup> and in December 1539 when the abbey was dissolved there were only 17.<sup>159</sup> The same number of canons were present during a visitation of the abbey by the prior of Llanthony in 1511 (see table).<sup>160</sup>

<b>Visitation of 1511</b>	
<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>
John Hagbourne	Abbot
Prior Forest	Prior
John Bristowe	
John Durrisley	Chamberlain, Pittancer and Kitchener
John Dorney	
John Paynesqyke	Hosteler
John Ashton	Chaplain and warden of the Lady Chapel
John Blake	Cellarer, Almoner and warden of Cheltenham parish church
Richard Syssetur	Warden of the parish church of St. John, Cirencester, sacrist and warden of the infirmary
William Burforde	Warden of the refectory
William Cernay	Precentor
Richard Brodwel	
Thomas Bray (absent)	Subsacrist
Thomas Compton	
William Hakebourne	
William Minsterworth (absent)	
John Saperton (absent in apostasy)	
Thomas Frome (absent in apostasy)	

In 1534 the abbot and 20 canons subscribed to the royal supremacy. Five years later, on 19 December, 1539, those who remained surrendered their house to the royal commissioners. The abbot received a pension of £200 a year, the prior £13 6s. 8d., the cellarer £8, twelve canons £6 13s. 4d. each, and another £5 6s. 8d., while William Phelps became vicar of the parish church. Wages were paid to 110 officers and servants of the household.<sup>161</sup>

The commissioners deemed as superfluous the church with its adjoining chapels, the cloister with the chapter-house, the dormitory, refectory, library, guest-hall, the infirmary

<sup>157</sup> VCH *Glos*, II, 83.

<sup>158</sup> TNA, E 25/31.

<sup>159</sup> Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: From Heyday to Dissolution', 134.

<sup>160</sup> *Calendar of Llanthony Priory Registers*, no.236.

<sup>161</sup> VCH *Glos*, II, 83.

complex, and the quarters of the cellarer and other officers of the abbey. The convent kitchen and outhouses, and a group of domestic buildings, were too close to the condemned buildings to avoid destruction. Spared as useful for the new tenant were the abbot's house and its out-buildings; baking, brewing and malting houses; the barn with its two entries in Spital Gate Grange; the granary in the lower courtyard and gate of the courtyard; the wool-store with the stable by the mill, and the almery grange.

In May 1540 the site of the abbey, with the spital and almery granges and the abbey's land in Minety, were leased for 21 years to Roger Basing, and Barton Grange to William Berner. Basing set in motion without delay the demolition of the monastic buildings.<sup>162</sup>

### **List of Abbots**

1. Serlo, 1130–1147
2. Andrew, 1147x9–1176
3. Adam, 1177–11183
4. Robert, 1183–1186
5. Richard, 1187–1213
6. Master Alexander Nequam, 1213–1217
7. Walter, 1217–1230
8. Hugh of Bampton, 1230–1250
9. Roger of Rodmarton, 1250–1267
10. Henry of Munden, 1267–1281
11. Henry of Hampnett, 1281–1307
12. Adam of Brokenburgh, 1307–1320
13. Richard of Charlton, 1320–1335
14. William Hereward, 1335–1352
15. Ralph of Escote, 1352–1358
16. William of Martley, 1358–1361
17. William of Lynton, 1361–1363
18. Nicholas of Ampney, 1363–1393
19. John of Leckhampton, 1393–1416
20. William Best, 1416–1430
21. William Wotton, 1430–1440
22. John Taunton, 1440–1455
23. William George, 1455–1464
24. John Sodbury, 1464–1478
25. Thomas Compton, 1478–1481
26. Richard Clive, 1481–1488
27. Thomas Aston, 1488–1504
28. John Hagbourne, 1504–1522
29. John Blake, 1522–1539

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<sup>162</sup> Evans, 'Cirencester Abbey: From Heyday to Dissolution', 135.