

MONASTIC READING AT THORNEY ABBEY, 1323–1347

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The only records to survive from the annual Lenten distribution of books in English Benedictine abbeys are four years' notes from Thorney abbey.¹ Although not from consecutive years, all date from the period 1324 to 1330, during the early part of the abbacy of Reynold of Water Newton (1323–47). In the last years of his tenure the monks of Thorney were found to be reading material of a less pious character: two visitations discovered that a scandalous book was circulating among them during the years 1345 to 1347. Like the survival of the Lenten distribution records, this story is unique among English monastic archives. These sources provide two distinct, yet complementary, glimpses of the reading culture at Thorney in the time of Abbot Reynold, which are discussed in turn below.

The two episodes interact to a small degree. Some of the monks named in the visitation records can be identified among those whose monastic reading is documented by the records of the distribution of books. These, however, are very difficult to understand, since many of the monks had the same name and the records do not use surnames; instead numbers are assigned to monks of the same name, and these must be interpreted by forming a sense of the order of seniority in which the names are written down. The only source that supplies surnames for a significant proportion of the monks in this period is a report of the election of a new abbot to succeed Reynold of Water Newton, which names the prior and thirty monks in priest's orders as well as two professed monks who at the time were deacon and subdeacon. This list not only adds surnames for many of the monks named more intimately in the records of the distribution of books; it also shows that the successful candidate was the only monk in this period who incepted as doctor in a university. There is also a link with the visitation records, for the unsuccessful candidate in that election was one of those who handled the scandalous book.

It will become clear that most of the monks were not at all studious readers, and the provision of books was hardly more than enough to meet limited needs. The expectation in the Benedictine *Rule* that every monk should

¹ I am grateful to those friends who have read over this paper for me. Dr. Bruce Barker-Benfield checked my reading of the distribution lists using the videospectral comparator. Dr. Joan Greatrex and Miss Barbara Harvey shared their unrivaled knowledge of English Benedictine records.

read a book during Lent was followed, though strict attendance at the annual distribution was not enforced, and monks did not always relinquish the book at the end of the year.

I. THE LENTEN DISTRIBUTION OF BOOKS 1324–30

The Lenten distribution of books is as ancient as the monastic order, embedded in the *Rule* of St. Benedict himself.² While monastic customs that elaborate on the local traditions for living by the *Rule* rarely say much about the duties of the library-keeper, one duty frequently mentioned is the need to record which book each monk has received as his reading matter for the year. Such records rarely survive.³ Those from Thorney presented here are unique in an English context. The only real comparison is with two lists from Cluny, two hundred years apart, which list the names of monks and the book each took.⁴ The Thorney lists are to my knowledge wholly unique

² *Regula S. Benedicti*, 48.14–16 (ed. R. Hanslik, CSEL 75, 2nd ed. [Vienna, 1977], 117). This requires monks to spend some time reading each day during Lent, “in quibus diebus quadragesimae accipiant omnes singulos codices de bibliotheca, quos per ordinem ex integro legant; qui codices in caput quadragesimae dandi sunt.” This distribution was referred to by different words in different houses; *electio*, *ostensio*, and *demonstratio* are all used by English Benedictine abbeys.

³ Other borrowing records are not in the same category. Examples include the secondary record of twelve books on loan to a monk, “Nomina librorum pro quibus scribor in tabula,” from St. Augustine’s abbey, Canterbury (ed. M. R. James, *Ancient Libraries of Canterbury and Dover* [Cambridge, 1903], 502–3); or the list of monks and the many books each had borrowed from St. Albans, datable 1420 × 1437 (*English Benedictine Libraries* [see next note], 554–63 [B87]); or other records of loans both internal and external (ibid., 32, 128–30 [B27], 153–54 [B33], 534–37 [B83], 593 [B95]). From Continental Benedictine sources, there are several borrowing lists known (Theodor Gottlieb, *Über mittelalterliche Bibliotheken* [Leipzig, 1890], no. 211 [books on loan from Weissenburg, ca. 900], no. 400 [catalogue, 1276, from Saint-Pons, includes some reference to books on loan], no. 392 [list of books loaned by Saint-Ouen in Rouen, 1372–73]). Dr. Giovanni Fiesoli, editor of the ongoing *Repertorio di inventari e cataloghi di biblioteche medievali, Occidente latino, secoli VIII–XV*, adds reference to a loan-list from Casole, saec. xii–xiii (ed. H. Omont, “Le Typicon de Saint-Nicolas-de-Casole,” *Revue des études grecques* 3 [1890]: 89–90).

⁴ In a valuable discussion of the Lenten election, Karl Christ, “In caput Quadragesimae,” *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen* 60 (1943): 33–59, notes that customals use the word *breve* for the precentor’s record but observes, “Keines dieser Breven ist in der ursprünglichen Form erhalten” (44). He mentions two lists from Cluny. A single-sheet record made by the *secretarius* in 1252 is now BNF MS nouv. acq. lat. 2265, no. 25, printed by Léopold Delisle, *Inventaire des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale: Fonds de Cluni* (Paris, 1884), 373–77, which records in a single list 117 monks and the books on loan to them as well as a further eleven books not returned. An even earlier list of books taken by sixty-four monks in an unknown year around the middle of the eleventh century was included in the customal of Cluny that has been preserved at Farfa; the text is accessible in *Liber tramilis*, § 190 (ed. P. Dinter, *Corpus consuetudinum monasticarum* 10 [1980], 261–64), or reprinted from a

in allowing — not without some difficulty — the possibility of comparing the loans taken by the same monks from year to year.⁵ The form of the lists clearly illustrates why their survival is so rare. The precentor, in his role as librarian, has used the back of a thirty-year-old mortuary roll, that of William of Yaxley (d. 1293), abbot of Thorney, which was evidently considered to have served its purpose. The same sheet of parchment was used for several years, and the notes made were in some cases washed out to allow reuse of the same space. The oldest record now legible is that from 1324, with surviving records also from 1327 and 1329; the record from 1330 overlies an earlier one. If the same parchment was used in 1325, 1326, and 1328, the missing records were erased within five years because there was no purpose in retaining the information. It appears that this one piece of parchment may have been in use from at least 1323 until 1330. After that the same piece found a third career. It was cut in two to serve as endleaves in the binding of a tenth-century copy of the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*. This book has survived. It passed through the hands of Thomas Tanner (1674–1735) and came with many of his books to the Bodleian Library in 1736. The Tanner Bede, as it is now known, Oxford, Bodleian MS Tanner 10, has been rebound, and the now detached endleaf is Bodl. MS Tanner 10*.⁶ Such records were obviously not intended for long-term preservation.

The layout each year is the same. This can be seen in the published facsimile, and it is reflected in the layout of the text as printed below. After a heading, “Isti sunt libri quos fratres ceperunt de almario Anno Domini MCCCXXIII” (only the date changes from year to year), the monks are listed in two groups, each one with the book (or in a few cases apparently books) he had borrowed. The sequence of names reflects their seating in the chapter house, where the Lenten distribution took place on the first Monday of Lent each year. The abbot heads the first column, the prior the second

1726 edition in PL 150:1284–85; this list was reprinted with notes on the books, including comparisons with the twelfth-century Cluny library catalogue, and on the monks, including their appearance as witnesses in charters, by André Wilmart, “Le couvent et la bibliothèque de Cluny vers le milieu du XIe siècle,” *Revue Mabillon* 11 (1921): 89–124.

⁵ The texts were first published by K. W. Humphreys, “Book Distribution Lists from Thorney Abbey, Cambridgeshire, 1324–30,” *Bodleian Library Record* 2 (1941–49): 205–10, and again by R. Sharpe, J. P. Carley, R. M. Thomson, and A. G. Watson, *English Benedictine Libraries: The Shorter Catalogues*, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 4 (London, 1996), 598–605 (B100).

⁶ Published in facsimile, *The Tanner Bede*, ed. J. M. Bately, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile 24 (Copenhagen, 1992). The book has been tentatively assigned a Thorney provenance on the evidence of the endleaf, though this shows only that it was there in the fourteenth century, not in the tenth (N. R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*, 2nd ed. [London, 1964], 189).

column, and the monks were seated for the most part in order of seniority along the two sides of the chapter house. This arrangement strongly supports the detailed instructions given for this procedure in the fourteenth-century custumal from Peterborough abbey:⁷

The precentor shall have the names of the brethren being on the abbot's side written in a schedule with the abbot at the top, and the names of those being on the prior's side with the prior at the top, the lists to be kept separate. Then he shall begin to read, "The Lord Abbot, *Flores euangeliorum*, (the gift) of Br. N. de T.; Br. Gilbert of Stanford, *Meditationes S. Bernardi*, (the gift) of Br. R. de S." working downwards name by name along the abbot's side. Then to the prior's side in the same fashion.

As each name is read, the monk must step forwards and place his book carefully on the carpet laid out for this purpose in the chapter house. It appears that at Peterborough the books were marked with the name of the donor in the genitive, but the custumal abbreviates the donors' names here.⁸ Although no custumal survives from Thorney, it seems likely that the two abbeys drew very closely on the same model. While the broad picture is easily accessible, it is frustratingly difficult to interpret the detail of the lists.

⁷ The Peterborough custumals (Lambeth Palace Library, MSS 198, 198b) have not been printed in their entirety; they are discussed by A. Gransden, "The Peterborough Customary and Gilbert of Stanford," *Revue Bénédictine* 70 (1960): 625–38. The relevant passages are printed by K. Friis-Jensen and J. M. W. Willoughby, *Peterborough Abbey*, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 8 (London, 2001), xliii–xlvi, and discussed, xxviii–xxix. It is frustrating that, after describing in such detail the handing in of books, the custumal says nothing about how they were redistributed.

⁸ Some surviving books from Peterborough contain donors' names expressed simply in the genitive. The best known example is marked "Gesta regis .H. secundi Benedicti abbatis" (one of the books given by Abbot Benedict, BP3. 42; now BL MS Cotton Julius A. xi [s. xii]); the inscription induced Thomas Hearne to misattribute the work, Roger of Howden's *Gesta Henrici II*, to Abbot Benedict. Other examples are two psalters marked "Psalterium abbatis Roberti de Lindseye glosatum" (BP4. 4; now Cambridge, St. John's College, MS 81 [s. xii/xiii]) and "Psalterium Roberti de Lindseye abbatis" (BP4. 6; now London, Society of Antiquaries, MS 59 [s. xiiiⁱⁿ]). Further surviving examples cannot be matched with either the records of donations by abbots or with the later-fourteenth-century catalogue: these are another psalter marked "Psalterium fratris Hugonis de Stiuecle prioris" (now Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 53 [s. xiv]), an antiphonal (now Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS 10 [s. xivⁱⁿ]), and compare Walter of Whittlesey's own chronicle, inscribed "Iste liber fuit quondam fratris Walteri de Wytlesse" (now BL MS Add. 39758 [s. xiv¹]). No book marked in this way can be matched with an entry in the late-fourteenth-century catalogue, suggesting that this sort of donor-marking was abandoned by the middle of the fourteenth century.

I present their texts and layout as far as I am able to make sense of the manuscript. Erasure or damage make much of it difficult to read; the record for 1324 has been cut through when the parchment was cut down to make two endleaves, and the cut passes through below John VIII's *Diadema monachorum*. Where the endleaves were folded and stitched is now very hard to read. Entries added by the precentor between columns are hard to interpret, and there are a few places where he has had second thoughts. The texts were first read by Kenneth Humphreys, using ultraviolet light, and I have not been able to read more than he could. Not all of his readings can be confirmed by eye, but as we shall see below, attempts to interpret the seniority implicit in the lists can help us to restore some readings with confidence. By some measure the most completely legible is the record for 1327, which is a material help in reading those on either side of it.

Isti sunt libri quos fratres ceperunt de almario Anno Domini MCCCXXIIIJ					
Dompnus Abbas		Decreta	Prior	Liber Effrem	
Willelmus	ij	Augustinum de [[trinitate]]	Rob[[ertus]]	Psalterium glosatum	
Iohannes	j	Epistolas Pauli	[[]]	Ambrosium de patriarchis	
		Adam [-ecclesiasticam] ystoriam	Willelmus	j	Augustinum super Beatus uir
[[Edmundus]]	j	Augustinum de confessione	Hugo		Hugonem de claustro anime
[-Iohannes] Ricardus	j	Hugonem de sacramentis \\Nouum testamentum//	Edmundus	ij	Nouum testamentum
[[Iohannes]]	ij	Sermones Augustini	Radulphus	ij	Augustinum de uerbis Domini
Thomas	j	Augustinum de uerbis Domini	Iohannes	iiij	Ewangeliu[m] J. glosatum
[[]]		Scolasticam ystoriam	Iohannes	iiij	Epistolas Augustini
Rogerus	j	Ieronimum super Ysayam	[[]]		Meditaciones Bernardi
Iohannes	[[v]]	Librum X collacionum	[[Simon]]		Oracionem Domini
Iohannes	vij	Librum de uiciis et uirtutibus	[[Thomas]]	ij	Scolasticam istoriam
Iohannes	vij	Diadema monachorum	Iohannes	ix	Miracula sancte Marie
[[]]		Librum concordanciarum	Iohannes	x	Actus apostolorum
[[]]		L. iiij decretalium	Ricardus	ij	Exameron Basilii

Distribution of books on the first Monday of Lent, 5 March 1324

Isti sunt libri quos fratres ceperunt de almario Anno Domini MCCCXXVIJ					
Dompnus Abba		Decreta	Prior	Librum Effrem	
Nicholaus		Librum Effrem	Adam	Psalterium glosatum	
Adam		Ecclesiasticam ystoriam	Willelmus	j	Augustinum super Domine exaudi
Willelmus	ij	Oracionem dominicam	Hugo		Hugonem de claustro anime
Iohannes	j	Nouum testamentum	Edmundus	ij	Ambrosium de patriarchis

(Continued)

Edmundus	j	Epistolas Pauli	Iohannes	ij	Epistolas Augustini
Iohannes	ij	Augustinum de uerbis Domini	Willelmus	iiij	Augustinum super Beatus uir
Thomas	j	Sermones Augustini	Simon		Isidorum de summo bono
Willelmus	iiij	Augustinum de trinitate	Thomas	ij	Vitam sancti Thome
Iohannes	v	Librum X collacionum	Iohannes	vj	Regulam sancti Benedicti
Rogerus	ij	Meditaciones Bernardi	Iohannes	ix	Miracula sancte Marie
Iohannes	vij	Ieronimum super Ysayam	Willelmus	v	Actus apostolorum
Thomas	iiij	Gesta Barlaam	Willelmus	vj	Librum parcium
Iohannes	ix	Librum de uiciis et uirtutibus			
					xxv ^a
					Ysidorus de diuersitate canonum Liber concordanciarum

Distribution of books on the first Monday of Lent, 2 March 1327

Isti sunt libri quos fratres ceperunt de almario Anno Domini MCCCXXIX					
Dompnus Abba		Decreta	Prior		Hugonem de claustro anime
[[]]		Librum [[]]	Adam		Scolasticam istoriam
[[]]		[[]]	[[]]		[[]]
Iohannes	j	Augustinum super Domine exaudi	Ricardus		Epistolas Augustini
Iohannes	ij	Epistolas Pauli	Edmundus		Parabolas Solomonis
Iohannes	iiij	Augustinum de confessione	Radulphus		Augustinum de uerbis Domini
Willelmus	iiij	Nouum testamentum	\\Thomas	j	Librum X collacionum//
Iohannes	v	Sermones Augustini	Willelmus	iiij	Psalterium glosatum
Iohannes	vj	Pentateucum	Simon		Ysidorum de summo bono
Iohannes	[-xi] vij	Librum de uiciis et uirtutibus	Thomas	ij	Vitam sancti Thome
Iohannes	[-vii] xj	Meditaciones Bernardi	Iohannes	vij	Regulam sancti Benedicti
			Iohannes	ix	Miracula sancte Marie Aphorismorum
			Willelmus	v	Librum parcium Petrum Blesensem
			Willelmus	vj	Actus apostolorum
					Librum de uiciis et uirtutibus
[[]] anno m ^o ccc ^o xx ^o ix ^o [[]] de sacramentis Instituta [[]] Gesta Barlaam Afforismorum Summa Reymundi Liber de uiciis et uirtutibus					

Distribution of books on the first Monday of Lent, 13 March 1329

Isti sunt libri quos fratres ceperunt de almario Anno Domini MCCCXXX					
Dompnus Abbas		Decreta	Prior		Epistolas Augustini
Nicholaus		Librum Effrem	Adam		Scolasticam historiam
[[Willelmus]]	j	Oracionem dominicam	[[Ricardus]]		Hugonem de claustro anime
Iohannes	iiij	Augustinum super Domine exaudi	[[Edmundus]]		Parabolas Salomonis
		\\Item librum [[]]	[[Radulphus]]		
Yuo		[-Sermones Augustini] \\Item librum decretalium//	Thomas	j	Augustinum de uerbis Domini
Iohannes	iiij	Epistolas Pauli	Willelmus	iiij	Augustinum super Beatus uir
Willelmus	ij	Augustinum de confessione	Simon		Ysidorum de summo bono
Rogerus		Regulam sancti Benedicti	Thomas	ij	Vitam sancti Thome
Iohannes	vj	Pentateucum	Iohannes	ix	Librum afformorum
Willelmus	[[iiij]]	Meditaciones Bernardi	Iohannes	x	Miracula sancte Marie
Thomas	iiij	Librum de uiciis et uirtutibus	Willelmus	v	Pentateucum
Willelmus	vj	Sermones Augustini	[[Iohannes]]	[[xiij]]	Actus apostolorum
Iohannes	xj	Psalterium glosatum			Ambrosius de sacramentis
					[[Ysidorum]]
					Noua logica
vij libri decretalium cum aliis constitutionibus. liber de animalibus. Speculum iuniorum. Item septem sapientes in gallico et alia multa.					
Liber de uiciis et uirtutibus. [[*** washed out ***]] libri deficiunt [[]] colaciones super quosdam psalmos. noua logica. liber Raimundi de uiciis et uirtutibus [[]] miracula sancti Thome. vij in uniuerso.					

Distribution of books on the first Monday of Lent, 26 February 1330

We may begin by considering the list from 2 March 1327, which presents the fewest difficulties in reading the text. The careful layout shows twenty-seven monks, fourteen on the abbot’s side of the chapter house, thirteen on the prior’s, though there are fifteen titles, and it appears that two names can no longer be read. We know that the monks would usually sit in order of seniority — though in different houses custom allowed different obedientiaries to sit above ordinary choir monks — and that monks sat on alternate sides in order. The record here is presumably in order of seniority. Thomas I on the abbot’s side precedes Thomas II on the prior’s side and Thomas III on the abbot’s side. But it is not all so simple. William I on the prior’s side precedes William II on the abbot’s side, but William III on the prior’s side appears to precede William III on the abbot’s. Edmund II appears to precede Edmund I, and the sequence of Johns is not complete, with John III and John VIII missing. Roger II is present but there is no Roger I. We cannot just read alternately from column to column and assume that this gives us the complete order of seniority: some monks must be absent.

This produces the complication that, if there are more absentees from one side of the chapter house than the other, our left- and right-aligned names have no constant position in relation to one another, though (errors of

TABLE 1

1324	1327	1329	1330
1 Domnus Abbas <i>Decreta</i>	1 Domnus Abbas <i>Decreta</i>	1 Domnus Abbas <i>Decreta</i>	1 Domnus Abbas <i>Decreta</i>
1 Prior <i>Liber Ephrem</i>	1 Prior <i>Liber Ephrem</i>	1 Prior <i>Hugo de claustro anime</i>	1 Prior <i>Epistole Augustini</i>
2 Willelmus III <i>Augustinus de [[]]</i>	2 Nicholaus <i>Liber Ephrem</i>	2 [[Nicholas]] <i>Liber [[Ephrem]]</i>	2 Nicholaus <i>Liber Ephrem</i>
2 Robertus <i>Psalterium glosatum</i>	2 Adam <i>Psalterium glosatum</i>	2 Adam <i>Scholastica historia</i>	2 Adam <i>Scholastica historia</i>
3 Iohannes I <i>Epistolae Pauli</i>	3 Adam <i>Ecclesiastica historia</i>	3 [[illegible]] [[illegible]]	3 Willelmus I <i>Oratio dominica</i>
3 [[Adam]] <i>Ambrosius de patriarchis</i>	3 Willelmus I <i>Augustinus super Domine exaudi</i>	3 [[illegible]] [[illegible]]	3 Ricardus <i>Hugo de claustro anime</i>
4 Edmundus I <i>Augustinus de confessione</i>	4 Willelmus II <i>Oratio dominica</i>	4 Iohannes I <i>Augustinus super Domine exaudi</i>	4 Iohannes III <i>Augustinus super Exaudi domine</i>
4 Willelmus I <i>Augustinus super Beatus uir</i>	4 Hugo <i>Hugo de clastro anime</i>	4 Ricardus <i>Epistole Augustini</i>	4 Edmundus <i>Parabole Salamonis</i>
5 Iohannes Ricardus I <i>Hugo de sacramentis</i>	5 Iohannes I <i>Nouum testamentum</i>	5 Iohannes [[III]] <i>Epistole Pauli</i>	5 Ivo <i>Liber Decretalium</i>
5 Hugo <i>Hugo de clastro anime</i>	5 Edmundus II <i>Ambrosius de patriarchis</i>	5 Edmundus <i>Parabole Salamonis</i>	5 Radulphus (no title)
6 Iohannes II <i>Sermones Augustini</i>	6 Edmundus I <i>Epistole Pauli</i>	6 Iohannes III <i>Augustinus de confessione</i>	6 Iohannes IIIII <i>Epistole Pauli</i>
6 Edmundus II <i>Nouum testamentum</i>	6 Iohannes III <i>Epistole Augustini</i>	6 Radulphus <i>Augustinus de uerbis Domini</i>	6 Thomas I <i>Augustinus de uerbis Domini</i>
7 Thomas I <i>Augustinus de uerbis Domini</i>	7 Iohannes II <i>Augustinus de uerbis Domini</i>	7 Willelmus III <i>Nouum testamentum</i>	7 Willelmus II <i>Augustinus de confessione</i>
7 Radulphus II <i>Augustinus de uerbis Domini</i>	7 Willelmus IIIII <i>Augustinus super Beatus uir</i>	7 Thomas I <i>Liber X collationum</i>	7 Willelmus III <i>Augustinus super Beatus uir</i>
8 [[Willelmus]] <i>Scholastica historia</i>	8 Thomas I <i>Sermones Augustini</i>	8 Iohannes [[]] <i>Sermones Augustini</i>	8 Rogerus <i>Regula S. Benedicti</i>
8 Iohannes III <i>Euangelius Iohannis glosatum</i>	8 Simon <i>Isidorus de summo bono</i>	8 Willelmus IIIII <i>Psalterium glosatum</i>	8 Simon <i>Isidorus de summo bono</i>
9 Rogerus <i>Hieronymus super Isaiam</i>	9 Willelmus III <i>Augustinus de trinitate</i>	9 Iohannes VI <i>Pentateuchum</i>	9 Iohannes VI <i>Pentateuchum</i>
9 Iohannes IIIII <i>Epistole Augustini</i>	9 Thomas II <i>Vita S. Thome</i>	9 Simon <i>Isidorus de summo bono</i>	9 Thomas II <i>Vita S. Thome</i>
10 Iohannes [[V]] <i>Liber X collationum</i>	10 Iohannes V <i>Liber X collationum</i>	10 Iohannes VIII <i>Liber de uitis et uirtutibus</i>	10 Willelmus [[]] <i>Meditationes Bernardi</i>
10 [[Willelmus IIIII]] <i>Meditationes Bernardi</i>	10 Iohannes VI <i>Regula S. Benedicti</i>	10 Thomas [[]]IIII <i>Vita S. Thome</i>	10 Iohannes IX <i>Liber aphorismorum</i>
11 Iohannes VII <i>Liber de uitis et uirtutibus</i>	11 Rogerus II <i>Meditationes Bernardi</i>	11 Iohannes XI <i>Meditationes Bernardi</i>	11 Thomas III <i>Liber de uitis et uirtutibus</i>
11 [[Simon]] <i>Oratio dominica</i>	11 Iohannes IX <i>Miracula S. Marie</i>	11 Iohannes VII <i>Regula S. Benedicti</i>	11 Iohannes X <i>Miracula S. Marie</i>
12 Iohannes VIII <i>Diadema monachorum</i>	12 Iohannes VII <i>Hieronymus super Isaiam</i>		12 Willelmus VI <i>Sermones Augustini</i>
12 [[Thomas]] II <i>Scholastica historia</i>	12 Willelmus V <i>Actus apostolorum</i>	12 Iohannes IX <i>Miracula S. Marie / Aphorismi</i>	12 Willelmus V <i>Pentateuchum</i>
13 [[illegible]] <i>Liber concordanciarum</i>	13 Thomas III <i>Gesta Barlaam</i>		13 Iohannes XI <i>Psalterium glosatum</i>
13 Iohannes IX <i>Miracula S. Marie</i>	13 Willelmus VI <i>Liber partiumXXV</i>	13 Willelmus V <i>Liber partium / Petrus Blesensis</i>	13 Iohannes XIIII <i>Actus apostolorum</i>

1324	1327	1329	1330
14 [[illegible]] <i>Libri IIII decretalium</i>	14 Iohannes IX <i>Liber de uitii et uirtutibus</i>		
14 Iohannes X <i>Actus apostolorum</i>	14 [[illegible]] <i>Isidorus de diuersitate canonum</i>	14 Willelmus VI <i>Actus apostolorum / Liber de uitii et uirtutibus</i>	14 [[illegible]] <i>Ambrosius de sacramentis</i>
15 Ricardus II <i>Exameron Basilii</i>	15 [[illegible]] <i>Liber concordanciarum</i>		15 [[illegible]] <i>Isidorus</i>
			16 [[illegible]] <i>Noua logica</i>

seniority apart) the vertical relationships on each side should be stable. The biggest difficulty is attempting to merge the two sides of the chapter house to give one continuous order of seniority for each year, which could then be compared with those for other years.

When we set the double columns of this list between those from 1324 and 1329, the questions multiply. The information from all four years' records has been abstracted and tabulated as Table 1, with those sitting on the abbot's side aligned left in their column and those on the prior's side aligned right. When one tries to follow a name across from column to column, it is apparent that the group of monks present changes every year, so that one cannot simply follow one monk's name on a single row across the columns. Monks distinguished by number can in some cases be seen to change. Monks would have died, and those professed after them would move up in seniority. So, where there were two Edmunds in 1324 and 1327, there is only one in 1329 and 1330, probably the junior of the two. Some who were absent in one year are present in another year, and vice versa, so that individuals can go and return, leaving an empty seat and only a temporary adjustment in the apparent seniority. Where there had been two Ralphs in 1324 and one in 1329 and 1330, there was none in 1327: Ralph II of 1324 had become Ralph in 1329, so we may infer that the senior Ralph, absent in 1324, was dead by 1329, perhaps sooner; while in 1327 neither was present at the distribution. And in 1330 Ivo appears for the first time, but his seniority was such that he must have been professed before 1324 and yet absent during the three earlier distributions on record.

Now, when a monk dies and his place is taken, we have to infer what would have been the consequences for a record such as this. The logical assumption must be that when one monk dies, all the monks who are his juniors will change sides in the chapter house, since the seating alternated from side to side as one sat further and further from abbot or prior. This is still the custom in some cathedral chapters today. So, when William I died, William II moved from being third on the abbot's side to take the more

senior place second from the prior, and at the same time he became William I; and in the following list, after the death of Adam, he has crossed back to take the second place from the abbot. Line by line, however, this is not obviously inferable from the table. Simon, for example, continues to sit on the prior's side through the seven years reflected in this table. This means that his place has been affected each year by an even number of deaths, but he has moved up in seniority on the same side. Now, if we had month-by-month records, we should no doubt see him changing sides from time to time. Thomas II always sits one place below Simon on the prior's side, and John V remains on the abbot's side between them in seniority. In 1324 and 1327, Edmund I sits on the abbot's side and Edmund II on the prior's, but by 1329 it appears that Edmund I has died, so that the remaining Edmund no longer needs a number; he still sits on the prior's side. On the other hand, Thomas I was on the abbot's side in 1324 and 1327, but in 1329 and 1330 he has moved to the prior's side. To establish the pattern of alternating seniority from abbot's side to prior's side and back may prove impossible. Where a changeover is noticeable, there must have been a death. One monk's absence, on the other hand, should not affect the side on which anyone else sits.

The precentor's policy in numbering monks has also to be inferred. The small pool of names in use must have made for some practical difficulties within the community — on the abbot's side in 1329 we find three Johns next to one another, then one William, and four more Johns. It must surely be the case that the numbering always reflected actuality, and that when a monk died all those with the same name junior to him would be renumbered. No one acquired a number upon profession and retained it for the duration of his monastic life. On the other hand, the precentor was not simply counting Johns and Williams as he wrote their names down, first along the abbot's side and then the prior's. He knew the current seniority, and he was able to use it even when someone was sitting out of place: so in 1324 William III ranks next to the abbot, five places above William I in apparent seniority; he must have held an obedience that gave him a higher place in the seating but not in the underlying seniority among the living Williams. Where several names can be followed from year to year in a fixed order, as with Simon, John V, and Thomas II, a change of numbering would show up. But for most monks, our grasp of the seniority is not so clear.

There is a very awkward question to be answered. How far can a person's books be used to help track his progress from year to year? Since what we are aiming for is to be able to follow books, it is dangerous to make assumptions in precisely the area where answers are sought. Even so, William VI was reading "Liber partium" in 1327, and in 1329 William V had the same book; since we have been able to infer earlier that William I had died in this

period, we can probably infer with safety that Williams have been renumbered. In the case of John IX, he appears to have retained *Miracula S. Mariae* from 1324 to 1329, when he changed it for a *liber aphorismorum*, passing the *miracula* to John X; in 1330 he still has the *aphorismi*. This is an important observation, because it suggests that right through the period of the lists John IX has retained the same number and therefore all the Johns above him in seniority have remained the same.

It is obvious that not all were present on any of the four occasions. Discontinuities in the numbers associated with the common names point to this, and so does the occasional presence of less common names. Nicholas, a senior figure next to the abbot from 1327 to 1330, is missing in 1324; he does not appear lower down the list before he replaced William III in whatever office he held, and he can hardly have entered the community at this level of seniority. Richard was absent in 1327, but he might well be Richard I of 1324. Ralph was absent in both 1324 and 1327, and Ivo was absent from all the records before 1330. They may have returned from the abbey's cell at Deeping St. James, which was about a half-day's walk away.⁹ Robert, on the other hand, was present only in 1324, when he was a senior monk; he had most probably died by 1327.

The treatment of names in these records is frustratingly familiar. We are helped, however, because another source has preserved further evidence for the names of the monks of Thorney around this date. The evidence comes from the register of Thomas de L'Isle, bishop of Ely, who made a visitation of the monasteries of his diocese during his second year in office, 1346–47, becoming entangled in disputes with several of them, Thorney included.¹⁰ During the course of this dispute, Abbot Reynold died on 16 April 1347.¹¹ Thomas of Gosberkirk, prior of Deeping, went with astonishing speed to the regent for license to elect a successor.¹² The result was a disputed election,

⁹ Deeping St. James lies about eight miles WNW from Thorney as the crow might fly over the fen; a monk would have to take the road through Crowland to cross the fen and the river Welland.

¹⁰ John Aberth, *Criminal Churchmen in the Age of Edward III: The Case of Bishop Thomas de Lisle* (University Park PA, 1996), 27–41.

¹¹ David M. Smith and Vera C. M. London, *The Heads of Religious Houses: England and Wales*, vol. 2, 1216–1377 (Cambridge, 2001), 75.

¹² License was authorized by the regent and issued under the seal of absence at Reading, 17 April 1347 (*Calendar of the Patent Rolls 1345–1348* [London, 1903], 268; copy in Cambridge University Library MS 3021, fol. 471v). Warranted “by letter of the Keeper,” that is the infant Prince Lionel, *custos Angliae*, license may have been effectively authorized by the chancellor, John Offord, or by Simon Islip, a member of the regency council who had custody of the Keeper's own seal. (King Edward III was in France at the time and his seals were working in a Chancery set up at Calais; on the regency administration in England, see T. F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of England*, 6 vols. [Manches-

of which we have two accounts. On 27 April 1347 the monks who had been opposing the bishop now declared their willingness to submit to his visitation and correction, and on the same day they elected William de Haddon, seventeenth in seniority, as their new abbot. In the report of the election, sent to Bishop Thomas, he was described as “doctor iuris,” an educated man, who is probably to be identified with William VI of the 1327 distribution, William V in 1329 and 1330, both of whose reading could be interpreted as law-books; seventeen years later, he would have risen to William III in the precentor’s numbering.¹³ The whole community subscribed to this election, among them the thwarted candidate, Robert of Corby, senior, twentieth in seniority and cellarer at the time, who on the same day wrote an account of the election from his side of the story, which was copied into a cartulary of the abbey.¹⁴ From this we learn that William de Haddon incepted at Oxford after graduating as bachelor in canon law at Cambridge.¹⁵

The report to Bishop Thomas, copied into his register, supplies the names and surnames of the prior and thirty-two other monks in what we may take to be their order of seniority:

ter, 1920–33], 3:164–66, 223; 5:21–25.) The election of the new abbot took place at Thorney on 27 April, and at Reading on 30 April the regent authorized letters patent notifying the bishop of Ely of the royal assent to the choice of William de Haddon (*Calendar of the Patent Rolls 1345–1348*, 280), further evidence of the speed with which the abbey communicated with government. Meanwhile, during the vacancy at Thorney, the king’s escheator in Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire had taken charge of the temporalities of the abbey; these were released to William de Haddon under a mandate of 22 May (*ibid.*, 294). In return the abbey was required to provide a pension for one of the king’s clerks (*Calendar of the Close Rolls 1346–1349* [London, 1905], 363).

¹³ The report of the election was included in the bishop’s register, now deposited in Cambridge University Library, MS EDR G/1/1, pt. 2, fols. 49r–50r. From here it was transcribed by the Cambridgeshire antiquary, William Cole (1714–1782), in 1752, Cole MS 23, now BL MS Add. 5824, pp. 164–66 (now fol. 165r, 166r, 167r, according to British Library rules; Cole himself initially used only the recto, but he used the versos to copy other material in 1769).

¹⁴ The Red Book of Thorney, now Cambridge University Library, MS Add. 3020–3021 (s. xiv), fols. 471v–472v. This is the only surviving cartulary (though we know of the existence of others, known as the Black Book and the Green Book). Robert of Corby subsequently petitioned the pope, claiming that he had been elected abbot and had resigned for the sake of peace; in 1351 he was compensated with two monks’ portions, suitable lodgings within the abbey, and a pension of eight marks per year (W. H. Bliss, *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Petitions to the Pope*, vol. 1, AD 1342–1419 [London, 1896], 219; Smith and London, *The Heads of Religious Houses* 2: 75–76).

¹⁵ “Vir literatus in iure peritus in uniuersitate Cantabrig’ in decretis baccallarius et in uniuersitate Oxon’ eiusdem iuris professor effectus et approbatus” (fol. 472r); he does not appear in Emden’s biographical register for either university (see Table 2, note on line 41).

coram nobis, fratre Johanne de Wittles' priore, omnibus et singulis commo-
nachis et confratribus nostris, uidelicet fratribus Rogero de Bernewell dicti
monasterii suppriori, Johanne de Ely, Edmundo de Hawe, Thoma de Gos-
berkirk, priore prioratus siue celle de Depying ad dictum monasterium
notorie pertinent' ac eidem subditi et subiecti, Radulfo de Brampton, Iuone
de Broughil, Willelmo de Burgo seniore elemosinario, Willelmo de Sutton
custode maneriorum, Simone de Thorp hostilar', Johanne de Rypton, Thoma
de Dodesthorp, Johanne de Harwedon tercio priore, Johanne de Wittleseye
seniore sacrista, Johanne de Tyryngham, Johanne de Chateriz, Willelmo de
Haddon, Johanne de Depyng precentore, Johanne de Sybston infirmar',
Roberto de Corby seniore celerar', Johanne de Burgo custode capelle beate
Marie dicti monasterii, Willelmo de Burgo iuniore refectorar', Johanne de
London, Roberto de Corby iuniore coquinar', Waltero de la Launde,
Johanne de Croyland, Thoma de Ellesworth receptor', Ricardo de Spaldyng
pittanciar', Roberto de Islep, Henrico de Sutton succentor', Nicholao de
Fletton subsacrista monasterii predicti, quorum quilibet tunc et diu antea
fuerat dictum ordinem sancti Benedicti iuxta formam regule inde habite et
dicti monasterii consuetudinem expresse professus in etate legitima ac in
ordine sacerdotali notor' constitutus, necnon Alano de Kyrketon diacono et
Thoma de Staunton subdiacono, dictum ordinem consimiliter professis, et in
etate sufficienti constitut'.

After John of Whittlesey, prior, comes Roger of Barnwell, subprior, who
may be assumed to have seniority by office rather than by date of profes-
sion. Among all the other monks obedientiaris have no position of prece-
dence; third prior, sacrist, and precentor all take their places in what must
be seniority by profession.

There are two major difficulties in trying to read across from the distri-
bution records to this list of monks present at the election of the abbot. The
first is substantive: seventeen years have passed since Lent 1330, time
enough for a significant proportion of the monastic community to have died
and for a considerable number of new monks to have been professed. Even
so, there is a good prospect that, allowing for one or two names to have
dropped out, we might be able to find a meaningful overlap in names
between the two sources. The second difficulty is merely practical: without
surnames in the book records, we must rely on the sequence of names to
find a match in the list provided by the report. Such matches can be found.
In the distribution for 1330 the names in Table 1 — John III, Ivo, John
III, William II, Roger, John VI on the abbot's side, Edmund, Ralph, Tho-
mas I, William III, Simon, Thomas II on the prior's side — overlap signifi-
cantly with the sequence following the prior and subprior in 1347: John of
Ely, Edmund de Hawe, Thomas de Gosberkirk, Ralph of Brampton, Ivo de
Broughil, William de Burgo, William of Sutton, Simon of Thorpe, John of
Rypton, Thomas de Dodesthorp, John de Hawarden. The seniority in 1347
should be reliable, but in 1330 we still have not established how far we can
go in interleaving the two sides of the chapter house into one order of

TABLE 2
SHOWING RECONSTRUCTED SENIORITY OF MONKS AND THE CIRCULATION OF
BOOKS AMONG THEM

	1324	1327	1329	1330	1347
1	1 Domnus Abbas <i>Decreta</i>	1 Domnus Abbas <i>Decreta</i>	1 Domnus Abbas <i>Decreta</i>	1 Domnus Abbas <i>Decreta</i>	
2	1 Prior <i>Liber Ephrem</i>	1 Prior <i>Liber Ephrem</i>	1 Prior <i>Hugo de claustro anime</i>	1 Prior <i>Epistole Augustini</i>	1 John of Whittlesey, prior
3	<Nicholas absent>	2 Nicholaus <i>Liber Ephrem</i>	2 [[Nicholaus]] <i>Liber [[Ephrem]]</i>	2 Nicholaus <i>Liber Ephrem</i>	
4	2 Robertus <i>Psalterium glosatum</i>	<Robert deceased, si- des change over>			
5	<Ralph I absent>	<Ralph I deceased, si- des change over>			
6	3 [[Adam]] <i>Ambrosius de patriarchis</i>	2 Adam <i>Psalterium glosatum</i>	2 Adam <i>Scholastica historia</i>	2 Adam <i>Scholastica historia</i>	
7	<Adam absent>	3 Adam <i>Ecclesiastica historia</i>	3 [[Adam]] [[illegible]]	<Adam deceased, sides change over>	
8	4 Willelmus I <i>Augustinus super Beatus uir</i>	3 Willelmus I <i>Augustinus super Domine exaudi</i>	<William I deceased, sides change over, Williams are renumbered>		
9	<William II absent>	4 Willelmus II <i>Oratio dominica</i>	3 [[Willelmus I]] [[illegible]]	3 Willelmus I <i>Oratio dominica</i>	
	<someone missing>	<someone missing>	<deceased?>		
10	3 Iohannes I <i>Epistolae Pauli</i>	5 Iohannes I <i>Nouum testamentum</i>	4 Iohannes I <i>Augustinus super Do- mine exaudi</i>	<John I absent>	
11	5 Hugo <i>Hugo de claustro anime</i>	4 Hugo <i>Hugo de claustro anime</i>	<Hugh deceased>		
12	4 Edmundus I <i>Augustinus de confessione</i>	6 Edmundus I <i>Epistole Pauli</i>	<Edmund I deca- sed>		
	<someone missing>	<deceased>			
13	5 Ricardus I <i>Hugo de sacramentis Nouum testamentum</i>	<Richard absent>	4 Ricardus <i>Epistole Augustini</i>	3 Ricardus <i>Hugo de claustro anime</i>	
	<someone missing>	<deceased>			
14	6 Iohannes II <i>Sermones Augustini</i>	7 Iohannes II <i>Augustinus de uerbis Domini</i>	5 Iohannes [[II]] <i>Epistole Pauli</i>	<John II absent>	3 John of Ely
15	6 Edmundus II <i>Nouum testamentum</i>	5 Edmundus II <i>Ambrosius de patriarchis</i>	5 Edmundus <i>Parabole Salomonis</i>	4 Edmundus <i>Parabole Salomonis</i>	4 Edmund de Hawe
	<someone missing>	<someone missing>	<someone missing>	<someone missing>	
16	7 Radulphus II <i>Augustinus de uerbis Domini</i>	<Ralph absent>	6 Radulphus <i>Augustinus de uerbis Domini</i>	5 Radulphus (no title)	6 Ralph of Brampton
	<someone missing>	<someone missing>	<deceased>		
17	8 Iohannes III <i>Euangelium Iohannis glosatum</i>	6 Iohannes III <i>Epistole Augustini</i>	6 Iohannes III <i>Augustinus de confessione</i>	4 Iohannes III <i>Augustinus super Exaudi domine</i>	
18	7 Thomas I <i>Augustinus de uerbis Domini</i>	8 Thomas I <i>Sermones Augustini</i>	7 Thomas I <i>Liber X collationum</i>	6 Thomas I <i>Augustinus de uerbis Domini</i>	5 Thomas de Gosberkirk

	1324	1327	1329	1330	1347
19	<Ivo absent>	<Ivo absent>	<Ivo absent>	5 Ivo <i>Liber Decretalium</i>	7 Ivo de Broughil
	<someone missing>	<someone missing>	<someone missing>	<someone missing>	
20	9 Iohannes III <i>Epistole Augustini</i>	<John III absent>	<John III absent>	6 Iohannes III <i>Epistole Pauli</i>	
			<someone missing>	<someone missing>	
21	2 Willelmus III <i>Augustinus de</i> [[trinitate]]	9 Willelmus III <i>Augustinus de</i> <i>trinitate</i>	<William II absent>	7 Willelmus II <i>Augustinus de</i> <i>confessione</i>	8 William de Burgo
22	<William III absent>	7 Willelmus III <i>Augustinus super Bea-</i> <i>tus uir</i>	7 Willelmus III <i>Nouum testamentum</i>	7 Willelmus III <i>Augustinus super</i> <i>Beatus uir</i>	9 William of Sutton
23	8 [[illegible]] <i>Scholastica historia</i>		8 Willelmus III <i>Psalterium glosatum</i>		
24	10 [[illegible]] <i>Meditationes Bernardi</i>				
25	9 Rogerus <i>Hieronymus super</i> <i>Isaiam</i>	<Roger absent>	<Roger absent>	8 Rogerus <i>Regula S. Benedicti</i>	2 Roger of Barnwell, subprior
26	11 [[Simon]] <i>Oratio dominica</i>	8 Simon <i>Isidorus de summo bono</i>	9 Simon <i>Isidorus de summo</i> <i>bono</i>	8 Simon <i>Isidorus de summo</i> <i>bono</i>	10 Simon of Thorpe
27	10 Iohannes [[V]] <i>Liber X collationum</i>	10 Iohannes V <i>Liber X collationum</i>	8 Iohannes [[V]] <i>Sermones Augustini</i>	<John V absent>	11 John de Rypton
28	12 [[Thomas]] II <i>Scholastica historia</i>	9 Thomas II <i>Vita S. Thome</i>	10 Thomas II <i>Vita S. Thome</i>	9 Thomas II <i>Vita S. Thome</i>	12 Thomas de Dodesthorp
29	<Roger II absent>	11 Rogerus II <i>Meditationes Bernardi</i>	<Roger II deceased>		
30	<John VI absent>	10 Iohannes VI <i>Regula S. Benedicti</i>	9 Iohannes VI <i>Pentateuchum</i>	9 Iohannes VI <i>Pentateuchum</i>	13 John de Hawarden
31	11 Iohannes VII <i>Liber de uitibus et</i> <i>uirtutibus</i>	12 Iohannes VII <i>Hieronymus super</i> <i>Isaiam</i>	11 Iohannes VII <i>Regula S. Benedicti</i>	<John VII absent>	14 John of Whittlesey, sacrist
32	12 Iohannes VIII <i>Diadema</i> <i>monachorum</i>	<John VIII absent>	10 Iohannes VIII <i>Liber de uitibus et</i> <i>uirtutibus</i>	<John VIII absent>	15 John of Tyringham
33	13 Iohannes IX <i>Miracula S. Marie</i>	11 Iohannes IX <i>Miracula S. Marie</i>	12 Iohannes IX <i>Miracula S. Marie</i> <i>Aphorismi</i>	10 Iohannes IX <i>Liber aphorismorum</i>	16 John of Chatteris
34		12 Willelmus V <i>Actus apostolorum</i>	<see row 23>	10 Willelmus [[III]] <i>Meditationes Bernardi</i>	
35	13 [[illegible]] <i>Liber</i> <i>concordanciarum</i>	13 Thomas III <i>Gesta Barlaam</i>	<Thomas III absent>	11 Thomas III <i>Liber de uitibus et</i> <i>uirtutibus</i>	
36	14 Iohannes X <i>Actus apostolorum</i>	<John X absent>	<John X absent>	11 Iohannes X <i>Miracula S. Marie</i>	
37	14 [[Willelmus VI]] <i>Libri IIII decretalium</i>	13 Willelmus VI <i>Liber partium</i>	13 Willelmus V <i>Liber partium</i> <i>Petrus Blesensis</i>	12 Willelmus V <i>Pentateuchum</i>	17 William de Haddon
38	15 Ricardus II <i>Exameron Basilii</i>	<Richard II deceased>			
39		<William VII absent>	14 Willelmus VI <i>Actus apostolorum</i> <i>Liber de uitibus et</i> <i>uirtutibus</i>	12 Willelmus VI <i>Sermones Augustini</i>	
40		14 Iohannes XI <i>Liber de uitibus et</i> <i>uirtutibus</i>	11 Iohannes XI <i>Meditatio</i> <i>nes Bernardi</i>	13 Iohannes XI <i>Psalterium glosatum</i>	

	1324	1327	1329	1330	1347
41		14 [[]] <i>Isidorus de diuersitate canonum</i>		<John XII absent>	18 John of Deeping
42		15 [[]] <i>Liber concordanciarum</i>			
43				13 [[Iohannes XIII]] <i>Actus apostolorum</i>	19 John of Sibston
44				14 [[illegible]] <i>Ambrosius de sacramentis</i>	20 Robert of Corby senior
45				15 [[illegible]] <i>Isidorus</i>	21 John de Burgo
46				16 [[illegible]] <i>Noua logica</i>	22 William de Burgo junior
					23 John of London
					24 Robert of Corby junior
					25 Walter de la Launde
					26 John of Crowland
					27 Thomas of Elsworth
					28 Richard of Spalding
					29 Robert of Islip
					30 Henry of Sutton
					31 Nicholas of Fletton
					32 Alan of Kirkton
					33 Thomas of Stanton

- 1 Abbot Reynold retains the same text throughout.
- 2 The identity of the claustral prior through this period is not known. It is possible that in the course of seven years a prior retired. It is tempting, for example, to guess that Hugh from row 11 may have become prior between 1327 and 1329, keeping the same book as he had before, and exchanging books in 1330 with Richard in row 13. It is not possible, however, to identify a prior who reverted to his original seniority among the choir monks.
- 3 The restoration of Nicholas's name in 1329 is as good as certain.
- 4 "Robertus" was read by Humphreys. It is very difficult to make out, but there is certainly a -b- in the middle of the name.
- 5 Ralph's existence in 1324 is proved by Ralph II in row 16. Whether he should be placed so high in the seniority is speculative. An absentee at this point in 1324 is required by the alternation; since Adam in row 6 does not change side between 1324 and 1327, two monks senior to him must have died in that period. It is possible that

- the person needed in this row is unknown, and that Ralph I's name should be entered after row 9.
- 6 On the prior's side Adam is a more plausible conjecture in 1324 than Ralph I would be.
 - 7 In entering Adam as absent in 1324, I am treating the erroneous entry crossed out under Edmund I (in row 12) as probably resulting from the incorporation of an outstanding loan from the 1323 record, "[–Adam ecclesiasticam] ystoriam"; see below, p. 264.
 - 8 William I's decease is necessary. Williams further down the list have been renumbered; note, e.g., in row 37 William VI in 1327 to William V in 1329.
 - 9 William II must have been absent in 1324. His restoration in the illegible line in 1327 is highly probable. It is compatible with evidence for his seniority and his rather limited reading matter.
 - 11 Hugh might have moved from row 11 in 1324 and 1327 to become prior in 1329, but one should not assume so merely on the evidence of the work he was reading. If one were to assume that Hugh were incapable of any more challenging reading than *De claustro animae*, one would have to suppose another change of prior in 1330.
 - 12 Edmund's decease is necessary, since Edmund II in row 15 loses his number.
 - 13 It is unclear whether "Iohannes Ricardus I" should stand; perhaps "Iohannes" should have been struck out. In 1324 Richard I is necessary (to explain Richard II in row 38); no John is possible in this line, since John I (row 10) and John II (row 14) both have places on the abbot's side.
 - 14 John II in 1329 is a plausible restoration, supported by John I (in row 10) and John III (row 17).
 - 15 Edmund II loses his number because Edmund I (row 12) died between 1327 and 1329. There appears to be someone missing on the abbot's side between rows 15 and 16 in all four years. The person was dead by 1347.
 - 16 Ralph II loses his number because Ralph I (row 5) died between 1324 and 1327. There appears to be someone missing on the prior's side in 1324 and 1327. That person's death between 1327 and 1329 would explain John III's move from the abbot's side to the prior's side.
 - 17 John III's reading shows progression to ever larger and more challenging works, rare among these monks.
 - 18 The record from 1329 proves that Thomas was not senior to Ralph (row 16). His place in the election report of 1347 therefore appears to be incorrect.
 - 19 It might be thought unlikely that Ivo would be absent for so long. There is a possibility that he was prior in 1324 and 1327, but the choice of books argues against this.
 - 21 William III's book in 1324 can probably be restored by comparison with 1327; no one else had this book on loan at the time.
 - 23 This row presents a serious problem. William III in 1329 would have been William V in 1324 and 1327, and he appears in row 34 with a very different placing in seniority. Are we to imagine that in this one year there was a dramatic deviation from seniority? The illegible name in 1324 cannot be restored.
 - 24 The illegible name cannot be restored.
 - 25 Roger's progression from Jerome's formidable commentary on Isaiah, through some years of absence, to a copy of the *Rule* begs some large questions. By 1347 Roger of Barnwell had become subprior, and one might guess that he was already studying the *Rule* with its commentaries in preparation for office. It should perhaps be noted that the Jerome was also read by John VII (row 31), whose reading matter was otherwise less demanding and also included the *Rule*.
 - 26 The restoration of Simon's name in 1324 is secure. He was obviously not a great reader, progressing from a commentary on *Pater noster* only as far as Isidore's unchallenging *Sententiae* (known as *De summo bono* in the Middle Ages).
 - 27 The restoration of John V's numbering appears secure.

- 28 The restoration of Thomas II's name in 1324 is probably secure.
- 30 In rows 30–36 there are five Johns; by 1347, there are only four. It is not possible to align the names from 1347, therefore, with the distribution lists. Numbering shows that none of these Johns died between 1324 and 1330, and it need not be assumed that one of them had died between 1330 and 1347. During those years John Chatteris had been prior — he was holding office at the time of the visitation in 1345 — and in 1347 the new prior, John Whittlesey, may have been one of these five. One of these Johns, Iohannes de Hawarden, appears in the episcopal register, fol. 47r, as “Iohannem de Harewedon,” who held the internal office of almoner and the external office of *custos maneriorum* at the same time.
- 32 John VIII's position on the abbot's side suggests the possibility of an absentee between John VII and John VIII on the prior's side in 1324 and 1327. The absentee would have been dead by 1329.
- 33 John IX's reading matter appears to confirm that all Johns above him survived through the whole period of the lists.
- 34 William V should not appear next to John IX on the prior's side in 1327 nor next to Thomas III on the abbot's side in 1330.
- 35 The illegible name in 1324 might be William V or Thomas III to judge from the table, but his reading matter is weightier than either of them might be expected to have studied. If both were absent, then we should have to conjecture another monk whose name is unknown.
- 37 The restoration of William VI's name in 1324 is a guess. The *Liber partium* may be a law book, and this would form a plausible succession of reading for William de Haddon, “doctor iuris,” who was elected abbot in 1347.
- 38 Richard II appears only here. He was reading a demanding book for one so new to monastic life. Perhaps he entered religion late in life and died soon afterwards.
- 39 William VII would have become William VI between 1327 and 1329. Assuming that John IX in 1327 (row 40) is really meant for John XI (since John IX has already appeared in 1327, row 33), then in 1330 William's seniority over John on the abbot's side is proved. William VII is perhaps the first recruit subsequent to the 1324 distribution.
- 40 John XI is presumably another new recruit.
- 41 The name is illegible in 1327, and it cannot be assumed that John XII was reading Isidore's *De diuersitate canonum*, a familiar title for his *Epistula ad Massonem*. The suggested identification with John of Deeping is merely speculative. John of Deeping was Bachelor of Canon Law by 1347 and (assuming that it is the same person) would be elected abbot of Thorney in 1365. He lived until 12 November 1396. A. B. Emden (*A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500* [Cambridge, 1963]) assumed that he was a graduate of Cambridge.
- 42 The *Liber concordanciarum* has passed from the illegible monk in row 35 to another illegible name here. It seems unlikely that this would be given to a newly professed monk.
- 44 With so few names legible at the foot of the distribution list in 1330, the alignments against names from the 1347 election report are more accidental than anything more solid.



seniority. Armed with this information, one can attempt to match names from 1347 to 1330 as a starting point for working backwards towards 1324, and a seniority can be worked out that is consistent with the information from earlier years. Not all absentees can be inferred, but a sequence can be constructed that would put these names into order of seniority in 1330: John II (absent), Edmund, Ralph, John III, Thomas I, Ivo, John IIII, William II, William III, Roger (who was given higher seniority as subprior in 1347), Simon, John V (absent), Thomas II, and John VI. Two monks, John III and John IIII, must have died in the years between 1330 and 1347; the only anomaly in the sequence of names is among the less common names, Ralph, Thomas, Ivo in 1330, or Thomas, Ralph, Ivo in 1347. It is fortunate that there are several unusual names in this part of the list; Edmund, Ralph, Ivo, and Simon provide a more secure basis for reading across the list than would more common names. This sequence represents those monks who were well down the seniority in 1324 but have risen to the top (after the prior and subprior) in 1347.

The earliest episcopal register to survive from the diocese of Ely is that of Bishop Simon Montacute (1337–45), now Cambridge University Library MS EDR G/1/1, pt. 1; the register of his predecessor, Bishop John Hotham (1316–37), is known to have existed, but only from fourteenth-century references.¹⁶ If it had survived to preserve a record of the election of Reynold of Water Newton as abbot of Thorney in 1323, we should be in a much stronger position in tackling these lists of names. Bishop Montacute's register, however, does allow us to track the most recent entrants at Thorney through the record of ordinations.¹⁷ These are all monks who have joined since 1330. John of London and Robert of Corby Jr., twenty-third and twenty-fourth in seniority at the time of the 1347 election, were ordained deacon on Thursday, 13 March 1339 (pt. 1, fol. 103v). Walter de Launde, twenty-fifth in seniority, was ordained subdeacon on the third Friday in Lent, 16 March 1341 (fol. 108r) and priest on Good Friday, 29 March 1342 (fol. 111v). Three recruits, John of Crowland, Thomas of Elsworth, and Richard of Spalding, were ordained acolyte on 16 March 1341 (fol. 108r), licensed to all minor orders on 22 September 1341 (fol. 96v), and ordained deacon on 29 March 1343 (fol. 111r). Among the newest monks at the time of the election, Robert of Islip and Nicholas of Fletton had been ordained deacon on 1 April 1346 (pt. 2, fol. 93v), when Henry of Sutton and Alan of Kirkton were ordained subdeacon (fol. 92v). Henry of Sutton was ordained

¹⁶ David M. Smith, *Guide to Bishops' Registers of England and Wales: A Survey from the Middle Ages to the Abolition of Episcopacy in 1646* (London, 1981), 67.

¹⁷ Cambridge University Library MS EDR G/1/1, pt. 1, fols. 97r–119v (1337–45); pt. 2, fols. 91r–101r (1346–56).

priest a year later on 17 March 1347 (fol. 95v), when Alan of Kirkton became deacon and Thomas de Staunton, the most junior to participate in the election, became subdeacon (fol. 95v). By 17 December 1347, Alan of Kirkton was approved for ordination to the priesthood in the following year, and another monk of Thorney, William de Burgo, clerk, was allowed to be ordained “ad omnes minores quos nondum recepit et ad omnes maiores ordines” (fol. 85v): he is perhaps William de Burgo Jr., twenty-second in seniority at the time of the election. It would appear from this that twelve monks had been trained for ordination during the period 1339–47. A similar number of monks may have joined the abbey between February 1330 and March 1339, though comparisons will suggest that during those years deaths outpaced recruitment.

Now, to construct an overall table of seniority requires a solution to what amounts to a puzzle in combinatorics. The result is presented above as Table 2. Certain rules already deduced must be observed. Unless the precentor has made a mistake, a person’s placing among the names in any one record of one side of the chapter house should reflect his seniority relative to those above and below him; this can be tested by following the arabic figures before each name as one reads, left or right, down a column. Since most monks at some time move from one side to the other, there is the opportunity to fix relative seniority against rather more than half of the other names. Names that appear for the first time in one of the later lists in a position of seniority can be presumed to have been absent in earlier years. For monks of the same name, their numbers must always reflect a current series, so that gaps in the series represent absentees. From year to year, a person’s number may stay the same or become smaller as he rises in seniority, but since the numbering reflects overall seniority the same individual’s number cannot become larger, for no one can lose seniority. Where seniority depends on holding office, as with William III in 1324, numbering remains unaffected.

The list provides one signal that should alert us to deaths. Where a monk moves from one side to the other, a death, or an odd number of deaths, must have occurred above him in the seniority. So, in row 9 of Table 2, William II moves from the abbot’s side to the prior’s side when William I dies; he moves back when Adam (II) dies. Absentees do not cause this changeover. Ideally, if we were able to reconstruct the whole seniority, it ought to be possible to draw a zigzag line down each column of the table, as one follows seniority from abbot’s side to prior’s side and back. This is possible in all four years’ records from the abbot’s entry down to row 9. At this point a conjectured absentee, who must have died before 1329, allows the alternation to continue in 1324, 1327, and 1329 as far as row 12. From here rows 13 to 15 are all right in 1327 and 1329, but there are problems in

1324 and 1330. In 1324, we appear to have two absentees on the prior's side, between Edmund I and Richard I and between him and John II; no names can be found to fill those gaps. In 1330, alternation would work smoothly from William I on the abbot's side to Richard on the prior's side in row 13, but John I has not died (or the other Johns would have been renumbered), so we must allow space for him; he ought by now to be on the prior's side, but that leaves us with two consecutive monks on the same side. Again, one should perhaps conjecture an absentee, whose name cannot be recovered. I am reluctant to introduce numerous blank lines, and I must for the time being present a reconstruction in which the perfect alternation of seniority cannot be restored.

The table presented here must come quite close to reflecting the seniority of the monks named in the records. It does not accurately show the alternation of seniority between the abbot's side and the prior's side, because there is the probability that there were some monks absent throughout the period of record. It would be foolhardy even to claim that this sequence is the only one that satisfies all the inferred criteria. It is probable that, in most cases, it allows us correctly to follow an individual monk's entries from year to year by reading across a single row. There are, however, some areas where doubts linger and alternatives are clearly possible. These problems are pointed out in the notes on the individual rows of Table 2.

The table provides some indication of how many monks belonged to the community at this time. In 1324 there were twenty-seven monks present, but it appears that there must have been at least thirty-eight monks whose names we know; the full complement could be five or six more than that, if one were to conjecture enough absentees to achieve a regularly alternating seniority. A similar number inferable from the record in 1327 is thirty-nine monks whose names we know, while in 1329 it is only thirty. The number appears to be nearer to thirty-five in 1330. At the time of the election in 1347 there were thirty-three monks present, and it is claimed that this represented the whole convent. It appears, therefore, that the number of monks was in decline over Abbot Reynold's time.

Perhaps the most surprising point to emerge from these comparisons is how many monks were absent from the annual distribution. Its importance in the *Rule* and in customals has led us to assume that it was a solemn occasion when all members of a Benedictine community would attend, and yet we find nearly one third of the community absent.

Non-attendance might imply that monks were able to avoid the discipline of reading even one book during the year. Worse, it might mean that a book handed out at the beginning of Lent in one year could not be checked back into stock by the precentor a year later. It is just about possible to infer such a situation here. In 1327 there were two monks named Adam —

not numbered. The record for 1324 has an error that suggests that one of them, absent in that year, still held in 1327 a book that he may have taken in 1323. Where the corrected text in 1324 shows that Edmund I borrowed Augustine's *Confessiones*, the words "Augustinum de confessione" replace a partially crossed-out entry "[–Adam ecclesiasticam] ystoriam," with the name of Br. Adam tabulated as a book rather than a monk; in 1327, Adam on the abbot's side had borrowed *Ecclesiastica historia*, that is, Rufinus's Latin translation of Eusebius. It is possible that he had the same book three years earlier, and that an entry for such a loan should be reinstated before Edmund, but if so, why is it crossed out? Yet how could such an error be made? One might guess that in 1323 Adam had had Rufinus and retained it for several years to come, that in 1324 his name was copied in error (in the wrong column) from the previous record, but he was absent on the date of the distribution in 1324, and therefore the record was struck out.

The most plausible explanation for the absence of some of the monks — at least five or six at any one time, perhaps more — is that they were resident at the abbey's cell at Deeping St. James (Lincs.), north of Peterborough, and that the *Rule's* requirements in the matter of the distribution of books were satisfied within the small community there. We have evidence for a separate deposit of books at Deeping in the fourteenth century. This is an inventory of books "de armariolo monachorum de Estdeping" among the additions in the cartulary of Deeping priory, which was compiled very soon after the period of our distribution lists in 1332.¹⁸ Only paleography provides a clue as to how much after 1332 this list was written. It includes eighteen volumes of library books and eight service books. Two items, both grammatical works, were the gift of John of Tiryngam, who appears in fifteenth place in the 1347 election report and is probably to be identified with one of the Johns in rows 30–36.¹⁹ What might argue against this explanation, however, is the presence in each year at the distribution of Thomas I, whom comparison with the election equates with Thomas of Gosberkirk, who was prior of Deeping in 1347 and indeed, already ca. January 1330. Two or three other monks might have been resident at Trockenholt (Cambs.), another dependency of the abbey.²⁰

Another significant conclusion is one that must always have been obvious, though it is too easily forgotten. The stock of books required to meet the demands of the annual Lenten distribution does not have to be extensive. In these lists we see for the most part the same rather limited

¹⁸ Sharpe et al., *English Benedictine Libraries* (n. 5 above), 606–8 (B102).

¹⁹ "Hugucio de dono fratris Iohannis Tiryngam" (B102. 11), "Brito de dono fratris Iohannis Tiryngam" (B102. 13).

²⁰ L. F. Salzmann, VCH *Cambridgeshire*, vol. 2 (London, 1948), 214.

collection circulating among the monks. The number of distributed books documented by these four lists is only forty-five, though the titles of a few other books, not distributed, and in some cases missing, are also added at the end of the distributions in 1329 and 1330. It appears that an absentee might retain a book right through a period of absence without showing it at the annual distribution. Ralph in row 16 had the same book in 1324 and 1329, but he was absent in 1327. If he had been away for a long period, he might have surrendered the book, though one cannot be sure. Those absentees conjectured in Table 2 need not account for many books whose titles are not documented at all. A list of books and their circulation is appended.

Allowing for the uncertainties in some parts of the reconstructed table of seniority, it is nonetheless possible to see quite clearly that in assigning books to different monks the precentor seems to have taken account of their capacity for reading. A few of the monks were undaunted by large and difficult books. William I, for example, in row 8, was working his way through Augustine's enormous *Enarrationes super Psalmos*. William III, becoming William II, in row 21, had a diet of Augustine, with *De trinitate* for several years and then *Confessiones*. John III, in row 17, reads progressively more difficult books, from Augustine's *Epistulae* in 1327, the *Confessiones* in 1329, to the second volume of the *Enarrationes* in 1330. His copy of St. John glossed in 1324 may have been relatively light by comparison, and one wonders whether in some intervening year he had been able to read the first volume of the *Enarrationes*. There were evidently two copies of Augustine's *Sermones de uerbis Domini*. One of them may have been kept by Ralph, in row 16, for at least six years; Thomas I, in row 18, surrenders the book after 1324 in exchange for another volume of Augustine's *Sermones* in 1327; he has some easier reading in 1329, the first book of John Cassian's *Collationes*; but in 1330 he returns to Augustine and the *Sermones de uerbis Domini*. Other monks, even some quite senior figures, were obviously not dedicated to reading. Adam, in row 6, had *Psalterium glosatum* in 1327, which might have been quite basic, yet in 1329 and 1330 he was reading a school text, *Historia scholastica*, which was intended to present the Bible to schoolboys in the accessible form of verse. This is surely surprisingly elementary for someone of his seniority. William II, later William I, in row 8, was even more basic in his reading: the Lord's Prayer in 1327 and still in 1330. In such a case, a commentary is surely implied, but these tend to be short and simple; the book may have contained other texts, but, if so, the precentor at least characterized the book by this one title.²¹ Simon, in row 26, also

²¹ It is common to find that, in noting the contents of a book on a flyleaf, the precentor adopts a formula that gives precedence to one work, with a phrase such as "in quo continentur" to introduce the remaining contents; this pattern is also found in medieval

studied the Lord's Prayer, but by 1327 he had moved on to the elementary theology of Isidore's *Sententiae*, another short book that he was still reading in 1330, though again the volume might well have contained other texts. Thomas II in row 28 and John XI in row 40 are not much more advanced in their reading. From these cases, it would seem that the precentor was sensitive to the needs of his brethren in his distribution.

There are some more surprising cases. Richard I, if correctly matched in row 13, progresses from Hugh of Saint-Victor's *De sacramentis christianae fidei*, a substantial work, through Augustine's *Epistulae*, to the lighter text of Hugh of Fouilloy's *De claustro animae*. Perhaps he had wanted it sooner, but someone else had a higher claim on it. Two readers progressed from Jerome on Isaiah, a very substantial work, to the *Rule* of St. Benedict, Roger in row 25 and John VII in row 31. This seems surprising. The copy of the *Rule* must surely have been a commentary. If it was the same copy as had been read by John VI in 1327, someone who went on to tackle the Pentateuch, it was perhaps not a light commentary. In rows 33, 34, 35, and 36 the reading matter is for the most part quite easy, though John IX seems to have acquired an interest in medical aphorisms. What, then, are we to do with *Liber concordanciarum*, a companion to serious study rather than a book to read, whose borrower in 1324 is illegible?

It must always have been the case that some monks were not capable of ambitious reading, yet the *Rule* had required that a monk should read his book all the way through in the course of Lent. Custom had relaxed this requirement, and the books distributed at the beginning of Lent were usually brought back into the chapter house on the equivalent date in the following year. Custom usually required that a monk should have read the book through in that time. At Thorney, it is clear that some monks were slow readers and were allowed to retain books from year to year. In no fewer than fourteen rows in our table, a monk has the same book in two or more consecutive distributions (allowing consecutive to stretch past an absence in rows 7, 16). In two cases monks revert in 1330 to books they had studied in earlier years (rows 18, 22). Simon (row 26) and Thomas II (row 28) retained the same book for five years, and so did John IX (row 33). The abbot was the only member of the community who held the same book throughout the period of record. Perhaps a dispensation was allowed him in recognition of his administrative duties, though one wonders rather whether he did not simply keep Gratian's *Decretum* for reference. At Peterborough the obedientiaries were allowed a dispensation for not reading their books within the year. Here at Thorney, however, we cannot tell which of

library catalogues. It is usually though not invariably the first work that is chosen to represent the volume as a whole.

the monks in these lists held obediences. One of them is presumably the precentor, who could not have been absent from the annual distribution, though we have no means of identifying him within the records.

The notes of books not distributed in 1329 and 1330, and more especially the note of books missing in 1330, suggest that the precentor was attempting to document the whole circulating stock of books. Can this really be so?

Humphreys, who first discussed these lists, thought not. "This cannot represent the total number of books at Thorney at this time for none of the manuscripts recorded by Mr. Neil Ker in his *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain* can be identified with the works recorded here, nor are any of the books at Thorney noted by Leland to be found in these lists."²² He envisaged that the lists represented a distinct supply of books for the annual distribution. Some customals refer to *libri annuales*. At Abingdon abbey the library was in the keeping of the *cantor* but in his absence the *succentor* should take care of the keys, if he were reliable; otherwise the precentor should leave them with the prior or subprior. On the other hand, the succentor ordinarily held the keys of the cupboards in which the *libri annuales* and the *libri cantus* were kept.²³ The monks did not take to their dormitory the books distributed to them; rather, they were held in a cupboard convenient for daily access, so that the books to which the succentor had access were not so much a distinct collection as the books held on reserve in an easily accessible cupboard during the course of a particular year. The thirteenth-century customal from Eynsham abbey, a close relative of the Abingdon customs, makes the same distinction regarding *libri annuales* and *libri cantuum*.²⁴ In neither case can this be shown to be a stock of circulating books that was distinct from another library of books retained for reading in the cloister.

Little is known of the library at Thorney.²⁵ The Franciscans who recorded copies of *auctoritates* at the end of the thirteenth century did not include

²² Humphreys, "Book Distribution Lists" (n. 5 above), 206.

²³ The Abingdon customal (1189), edited from BL MS Cotton Claudius B. vi (s. xiii²), fols. 183r–207v, by Joseph Stevenson, *Rolls Series 2* (1858), 2:336–417 (at pp. 373–74).

²⁴ The Eynsham customal, edited from Bodl. MS Bodley 435 (*SC 2374*) (s. xiv¹), fols. 3r–131r, by Antonia Gransden, *Corpus consuetudinum monasticarum 2* (Siegburg, 1963), 166.

²⁵ Salzmann's comments (*VCH Cambs.*, 2: 215), based on these lists and the few surviving books, include some notable errors. He mentions a work of Anselm and "the inevitable Sentences of Peter Lombard," neither of which are supported by evidence, and he interpreted Ker's reference to "Beda &c." in Oxford, St. John's College, MS 17, as a copy of the *Historia ecclesiastica*; the book contains Bede's *De temporum ratione* with other computistical material; the twelfth-century and later Thorney annals were removed from the manuscript and are now BL MS Cotton Nero C. vii, fols. 80–84. Dr. David Rundle tells me that this manuscript was given to Duke Humfrey of Gloucester by the abbot of Thorney in

any information from Thorney in *Registrum Angliae*, and Henry de Kirkestede's only apparent mention of a book there in the fourteenth century appears to have been a slip.²⁶ Fewer than a dozen books survive from Thorney abbey that are old enough to have belonged to the abbey in the 1320s, only five of these with an *ex libris* inscription, and not one with any form of shelf-mark.²⁷ The tenth-century gospel-book, now BL MS Add. 40000, whose front leaves served as the abbey's *liber uitae* in the twelfth century, was probably not distributed. An early twelfth-century book containing Sulpicius Severus on St. Martin, with other hagiographical collections on St. Vincent and St. Paula, now Bodl. MS Laud Misc. 364, preserves the earliest *ex libris* of Thorney, "Liber sancte Marie de Thorneia" (added s. xiii); this cannot be matched among the books in the distribution. The twelfth- and thirteenth-century volume that includes Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis* and Cicero's *De amicitia*, as well as other booklets, now BL MS Royal 15 A. x, was marked "Liber precentorie Thorneye," and one would assume that it was part of the claustral library, though this too cannot be matched here. Another book made by a precentor of Thorney in the years around 1300, now Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 297, has no *ex libris* and was perhaps held by an obedientiary, since most of its contents might be considered practical.²⁸ Two little books of the tenth and eleventh centuries, now in the National Library of Scotland, MS 18. 6. 12 (Persius's *Satires*), and MS 18. 7. 8 (Caelius Sedulius's *Carmen paschale*), both of them texts for the school, were marked in the thirteenth century with the *ex libris* "Liber succentorie Thorneye," suggesting the possibility of two collections — one in the charge of the precentor for the monks, another in the charge of the succentor for the boys in school. This division may have continued long after our period. A fifteenth-century book, now Dublin, Trinity College, MS 448, was marked "Iste liber constat precentori de Thornay," a specificity that implies other books not in the precentor's custody.

Only one book now known to survive from Thorney offers a possible match with the books distributed by the precentor in the 1320s. This is now

1431, as appears from an inscription at fol. 177v. I wonder whether it may be identified with the item in the fourteenth-century Deeping book list, "Liber de compoto cum aliis compilacionibus" (B102. 12).

²⁶ *Registrum Angliae*, ed. R. H. Rouse and M. A. Rouse, *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 2* (London, 1991), 274; Henry de Kirkestede, *Catalogus de libris authenticis et apocryphis*, ed. R. H. Rouse and M. A. Rouse, *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 11* (London, 2004), 552.

²⁷ Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain* (n. 6 above), 189. The number of items does not easily square with the number of physical volumes in the thirteenth century.

²⁸ An inscription identifies the writer as Br. John Brito (fol. 29r), who is described as precentor of Thorney in a receipt entered at fol. 105r, which includes a date in 1292. A document of 1307 is also included (fol. 177v).

Bodl. MS Bodley 680 (SC 2597) (s. xiii²), which once belonged to Ralph, *clericus*, of Newton, before it came into monastic ownership, as two inscriptions show, “Liber Radulphi clerici de Neutun” (entered late in the thirteenth century), “Liber afforismorum sancte Marie et sancti Botulphi de Thorneye ex dono Radulphi de Neutona clerici nostri” (entered a little later, s. xiii/xiv). The text is *Liber aphorismorum* by Urso, a Salernitan physician of the late twelfth century.²⁹ This is perhaps the book that John IX borrowed in 1329.

There is no basis in evidence for assuming that Thorney had anything resembling a serious library at this period. If there were other books forming a library for study, this collection would appear to have been managed quite separately from the limited stock that was distributed, but it is probably safer to draw the more conservative inference. In any case the early fourteenth century was a time when Benedictine libraries had in many places been allowed to stagnate for a century and a half; even where there was a steady increase in the stock of books, they were received almost exclusively through the donations of individual monks or the abbey’s other contacts, men such as Ralph of Newton, rather than through any deliberate policy of library-building. If the monks did not themselves acquire books, there would have been little increase in reading stock for many years. Thorney was not a poor abbey — some smaller and poorer Benedictine houses, such as Dover, did maintain a more substantial library in the later fourteenth century — but it was surrounded by richer and more prestigious abbeys, such as Ramsey, Crowland, and Peterborough. From Ramsey we have two incomplete witnesses to a substantial library in the years immediately after 1328.³⁰ Hundreds of books had been received by donation, mainly from monks, over the previous hundred and fifty years, a numerically considerable collection but in no sense a treasure-house of learning. Only a handful of the donor monks had owned significant collections of books; most left only a few very basic texts. Our knowledge of the library at Crowland is more limited; around the end of the thirteenth century, the Franciscans had recorded more than a hundred titles at Crowland, predominantly works of the Fathers.³¹ The evidence from Peterborough is far from

²⁹ There is an edition of the text by Gebhard von Jagow, “Die naturphilosophischen, ausführlich kommentierten Aphorismen des Magister Urso Calabrien” (diss. Leipzig, 1924).

³⁰ Two fragmentary copies survive of a catalogue of the library at Ramsey, both of them printed with notes by Sharpe et al., *English Benedictine Libraries* (n. 5 above), 330–50 (B67, two leaves remaining from a booklet), 350–415 (B68, five membranes remaining from a roll).

³¹ The union-reference 63 for Crowland occurs against 110 titles in *Registrum Angliae*; references collected by Rouse and Rouse, *Registrum Anglie*, 274–75. There is a considerable measure of correlation between this and the list of titles entered at the back of a book

continuous. Gifts from the abbots are known from the late twelfth century onwards, but very few of these books can be traced in the library as described (in an oddly incomplete manner) in the late-fourteenth-century *Matricularium*, though some older, twelfth-century books are evident in that catalogue.³² By the late fourteenth century the library at Peterborough must have numbered more than 350 volumes, still rather less than half the number likely to have been available at Ramsey. Why, then, does it appear that the precentor at Thorney in the 1320s appears to have had so few books in his keeping? It is possible that the richer abbeys recruited the more intellectually talented novices, leaving Thorney a backwater, where nonetheless the reading imposed by the *Rule* was observed according to the capacities of the different monks. From the 1340s, when the expectation increased that abbeys should send a few monks to study in the university, it is possible that the book supply might have increased at a place such as Thorney, but the absence of evidence prevents our pursuing that line of thought.

The results from this investigation of the only attested Lenten distribution do not encourage an elevated view of Benedictine learning at Thorney, but they are not less interesting for that. We have seen, as we can see nowhere else, a real glimpse of the community in an intimate way, sitting in their seniority along the two sides of the chapter house, known to the precentor and presumably to one another principally by a forename. In spite of the importance attached to the Lenten distribution of books by Benedictine custom, we have also found a considerable rate of absenteeism, though this may be explained by separate arrangements made at the dependent cells for monks dwelling there. We have found considerable laxity regarding the expectation that the books should be read through before the end of the year, but we have also observed some sensitivity on the part of the precentor in allowing books to be distributed as appropriate to the intellectual attainments of the monks. There were always monks who read little. In thinking more widely about medieval monastic libraries, we should allow that, unless we make contrary assumptions, even an abbey of the size and resources of Thorney may not have maintained a significant library in the early fourteenth century.

from Crowland, printed with notes by Sharpe et al., *English Benedictine Libraries*, 113–25 (B24); illustrated by Rouse and Rouse, *Registrum Anglie*, cxlix.

³² Friis-Jensen and Willoughby, *Peterborough Abbey*, 49–177 (BP21).

APPENDIX: LIST OF BOOKS SHOWING THEIR CIRCULATION AMONG THE MONKS

*Loans are identified by year/row*³³

- Ambrose, *De patriarchis* [CPL 132], assigned to [[Adam]] in 1324/6; assigned to Edmund II in 1327/15.
- Ambrose, *De sacramentis* [CPL 154], perhaps unassigned in 1329 (see below under Hugh of Saint-Victor, *De sacramentis*); assigned to [[illegible]] in 1330/44.
- Aristotle, *Liber de animalibus* [Thorndike/Kibre 1188], unassigned in 1330.
- Aristotle, *Logica noua*, assigned to [[illegible]] in 1330/46; also listed as missing in 1330.
- Augustine, *Confessiones* [CPL 251], assigned to Edmund I in 1324/12; assigned to John III in 1329/17; assigned to William III, William II in 1330/21.
- Augustine, *De trinitate* [CPL 329], assigned to William III in 1324/21, 1327/21.
- Augustine, *Enarrationes super Psalmos* [CPL 283], vol. 1 (“super Beatus uir”), assigned to William I in 1324/8; assigned to William III, William III in 1327/22, 1330/22.
- , vol. 2 (“super Domine exaudi”), assigned to William I in 1327/8; assigned to John I in 1329/10; assigned to John III in 1330/17.
- Augustine, *Epistolae* [CPL 262], assigned to John III in 1324/20; assigned to John III in 1327/17; assigned to Richard in 1329/13; assigned to Prior in 1330/2.
- Augustine, *Sermones* [CPL 284], assigned to John II in 1324/14; assigned to Thomas I in 1327/18; assigned to John V in 1329/27; assigned to William VI in 1330/39.
- Augustine, *Sermones de uerbis Domini* [a common grouping of ninety-nine sermons on the Gospels and Epistles: analysis and list of manuscripts by P. P. Verbraken, *Revue Bénédictine* 77 (1967): 27–46; most English copies lack the last ten sermons], assigned to Ralph II in 1324/16; assigned to John II in 1327/14; assigned to Ralph in 1329/16; assigned to Thomas I in 1330/18.
- Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron*, trans. Eustathius [CPG 2835; PL 53:867–966], assigned to Richard II in 1324/38.

³³ These abbreviations are used:

BHL = *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina*

CPG = *Clavis patrum graecorum*

CPL = *Clavis patrum latinorum*

Bernard, Ps., *Meditationes* [PL 184:485–508], assigned to [[illegible]] in 1324/24; assigned to Roger II in 1327/29; assigned to John XI in 1329/40; assigned to William V, William [[III]] in 1330/34.

BIBLE

Pentateuchum (copy 1), assigned to John VI in 1329/30, 1330/30.
(copy 2) assigned to William VI in 1330/37.

Psalterium glosatum, assigned to Robert in 1324/4; assigned to Adam in 1327/6; assigned to William V, William III in 1329/23; assigned to John XI in 1330/40.

Parabola Salomonis, assigned to Edmund in 1329/15, 1330/15.

Nouum testamentum, assigned to Edmund II in 1324/15; assigned to John I in 1327/10; assigned to William III, William III in 1329/22.

Euangelium Iohannis glosatum, assigned to John III in 1324/17.

Epistolae Pauli, assigned to John I in 1324/10; assigned to Edmund I in 1327/12; assigned to John II in 1329/14; assigned to John III in 1330/20.

Actus apostolorum, assigned to John X in 1324/36; assigned to William V in 1327/34; assigned to William VI in 1329/39; assigned to John XIII in 1330/43.

Collationes super quosdam psalmos [unidentified], listed as missing in 1330.

Ephrem, *Liber Ephrem* [CPL 1143] (copy 1), assigned to Prior in 1324/2, 1327/2.

(copy 2) assigned to Nicholas in 1327/3, 1329/3, 1330/3.

Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, trans. Rufinus, assigned to Adam in 1327/7.

Gesta Barlaam [*Barlaam et Iosaphat apud Indos*, BHL 979], assigned to Thomas III in 1327/35; unassigned in 1329.

Gratian, *Decretum*, assigned to Abbot Reynold in 1324/1, 1327/1, 1329/1, 1330/1.

Gregory IX, *Decretales* [ed. Friedberg, *Corpus iuris canonici*, 2. 1–928], (copy 1) Books I to IV, assigned to [[William VI]] in 1324/37; assigned to Ivo in 1330/19.

(copy 2) Books I to VII with the *Constitutiones*, unassigned in 1330.

Hugh of Fouilloy, *De clauastro animae* [PL 176:1017–1182], assigned to Hugh in 1324/11, 1327/11; assigned to Prior in 1329/2; assigned to Richard in 1330/13.

Hugh of Saint-Victor, *De sacramentis* [PL 176:173–618], assigned to Richard in 1324/13; perhaps unassigned in 1329 (see above under Ambrose, *De sacramentis*).

Instituta [John Cassian? Justinian?], unassigned in 1329.

Isidore, *Epistula ad Massonem de diuersitate canonum* [CPL 1209], unassigned in 1327/41; “Isidorus” [no title], assigned to [[illegible]] in 1330/45.

- Isidore, *Sententiae (De summo bono)* [CPL 1199], assigned to Simon in 1327/26, 1329/26, 1330/26.
- Jerome, *Super Isaiam* [CPL 584], assigned to Roger I in 1324/25; assigned to John VII in 1327/31.
- John Cassian, *Collationes*, Book I [CPL 512], assigned to John V in 1324/27, 1327/27; assigned to Thomas I in 1329/18.
- Liber aphorismorum* [Urso, if correctly identified with Bodl. MS Bodley 680], assigned to John IX in 1329/33, 1330/33; also listed as unassigned in 1329.
- Liber concordantiarum* [biblical concordances], assigned to [[illegible]] in 1324/35; assigned to [[illegible]] in 1327/42.
- Liber de uitiiis et uirtutibus* [unidentified] (copy 1), assigned to John VII in 1324/31; assigned to John XI in 1327/40; assigned to John VIII in 1329/32; assigned to Thomas III in 1330/35.
perhaps (copy 2) assigned to William VI in 1329/39.
perhaps (copy 3) unassigned in 1329, 1330.
- Liber partium* [a legal text], assigned to William VI, William V in 1327/37, 1329/37.
- Liber septem Sapientum* [in French], unassigned in 1330.
- Miracula S. Mariae* [version unidentifiable], assigned to John IX in 1324/33, 1327/33, 1329/33; assigned to John X in 1330/36.
- Miracula S. Thomae* [version unidentifiable], listed as missing in 1330.
- Oratio Dominica* [unidentified commentary on *Pater Noster*], assigned to Simon in 1324/26; assigned to William II, William I in 1327/9, 1330/9.
- Peter of Blois, unspecified work, assigned to William V in 1329/37. Peter of Blois, archdeacon successively of Bath and London, was a prolific writer; another Peter of Blois, canon of Chartres and archdeacon of Dreux, was the author of *Speculum iuris canonici* (ed. T. A. Reimarus [Berlin, 1837]), which circulated in England without the author's name.
- Petrus Comestor, *Historia scholastica* [PL 198:1053–1722], (copy 1) assigned to [[illegible]] in 1324/23; assigned to Adam in 1329/6, 1330/6.
(copy 2) assigned to [[Thomas]] II in 1324/28.
- Raymond of Penyafort, *De uitiiis et uirtutibus*, listed as missing in 1330.
- Raymond of Penyafort, *Summa de casibus* [ed. X. Ochoa and A. Diez, *Universa bibliotheca iuris* 1B (Rome, 1976)], unassigned in 1329.
- Regula S. Benedicti* [CPL 1852], assigned to John VI in 1327/30; assigned to John VII in 1329/31; assigned to Roger in 1330/25.
- Septem in uniuerso* [unidentified], listed as missing in 1330.
- Smaragdus, *Diadema monachorum* [PL 102:593–690], assigned to John VIII in 1324/32.
- Speculum iuniorum* [Bloomfield 5103], unassigned in 1330.
- Vita S. Thomae* [version unidentifiable], assigned to Thomas II in 1327/28, 1329/28, 1330/28.

II. THE CASE OF THE SCANDALOUS BOOK, 1345–47

It is a curious accident that has delivered reports of a scandalous book from the only religious house in England where the individual reading of the monks can be traced.³⁴ The problem first emerged late in 1345, more than fifteen years after our latest distribution record. The see of Ely was vacant after the death of Bishop Simon Montacute on 20 June 1345, and Hugh de Seton, a canon of Exeter cathedral, was deputed by John Stratford, archbishop of Canterbury, to act as “uicarius generalis ac custos spiritualitatis ciuitatis ac dioc[esis] Eliensis.” He made a visitation of several monasteries in the diocese, exercising the archiepiscopal right of visitation in a vacant see. Writing to the monks of Thorney, he says:³⁵

Nuper monasterium uestrum personaliter uisitantes. . . . Ad hec quia comperimus quod ex inuencione et occupacione cuiusdam libri in custodia fratris Iohannis de Chateriz, tunc prioris ipsius monasterii existentis, inordinata et pudenda scripture nequaquam commendanda continentis, oblocuciones et scandala pulularunt, et quod dominus abbas predictus, ad finem quod cessarent huiusmodi oblocuciones et scandala, ordinauit et precepit quod dictus liber combureretur, prout idem dominus abbas super hoc per nos interrogatus asseruit ac eciam quamplures monachi singillatim interrogati asseruerunt ipsum dominum abbatem sic ordinasse et precepisse, a nullo ipsorum percipere seu informari poterimus ordinacioni et precepto predictis hucusque effectualiter paritum extitisse. Nos reputantes et iuste prout debemus huiusmodi ordinacionem et preceptum dicti domini abbatis laudabiliter innitentes ad consumpcionem ut sic contentorum in eodem ualeret memoria deperire, rationabilia fuisse, ac pietati et sinceritati religionis plurimum conuenire, ut expedicus quo uobis possibile est effectui mancipemus ordinacionem et preceptum predicti domini abbatis precipimus in uirtute obediencie et monemus primo secundo et tercio, ac pro perempt’ termino in hiis scriptis quamcumque et qualemcumque personam dicti monasterii, eciam si religiosa fuerit cuiuscumque status aut gradus extiterit que dictum librum habet seu tenet de presenti, quod infra sex dies a tempore huius monicionis nostre sibi facte quorum duos pro primo, duos pro secundo, et reliquos duos pro tercio et peremptor’ termino ac monicione canonica assignamus, dictum librum totaliter comburet et quod ipsum libri inspeccionem in toto uel in parte citra ipsius combustionem huiusmodi nulli alteri faciat seu fieri quantum in eo est permittat seu librum ipsum copiat aut copiarum faciat et si hactenus copiatum fuerit, eius copiam si eam habuerit igni eciam commendet et comburi faciat cum effectum. Prohibemus eciam sub pena predicta ne aliquod cauilliose seu dolose fiat per quamcumque excogitatam uiam seu quocumque colore magis memoria contentorum in predicto libro perpetuetur seu in posterum perseueret, monemus insuper quamque personam religiosam primo, secundo, et

³⁴ L. F. Salzman in VCH *Cambs*, 2:215; Sharpe et al., *English Benedictine Libraries*, 598.

³⁵ EDR G/1/1, pt. 2, fol. 47r; part transcript, part summary, by the Cambridgeshire antiquary William Cole (1714–1782), in BL MS Add. 5824, pp. 161–62; quoted in part by Aberth, 28 n., and by Sharpe et al., *English Benedictine Libraries*, 598.

tercio peremptor' in uirtute obediencie et sub pena excommunicacionis ne de contentis seu aliquo contentorum in dicto libro predicto fratri Iohanni de Chateriz obieccio fiat de cetero irritatiua seu increpacio aliqualis. Et ne secreta capituli ipsius monasterii exterius quod absit publicentur seu manifestentur imposterum uel ob ea exnunc aliquod iurgium suscitetur uel contencio inter religiosas personas predictas, monemus ipsas omnes et singulas conuicem et diuisim quod occasione premissorum uel eorum alicuius se inuicem non molestant seu a quo aut per quem predicta detecta fuerunt non explorent uel exigant quouis modo seu huiusmodi deteccionem alicui imponant clam uel palam quouis quesito colore sub pena excommunicacionis predictae. Et quid fecerit in premissis dominum archiepiscopum nos aut alium ipsius in hac parte uicarium [*ends in mid-sentence*].

The book, however, was not destroyed, either on the abbot's instructions or on those of the archbishop's delegate. On 2 October 1346 Bishop Thomas L'Isle himself began a visitation, but he was thwarted by litigation. The death of Abbot Reynold came about on 16 April 1347, and on 27 April his successor, William de Haddon, previously *penitentiarius*, was elected. Then on 18 June 1347 Bishop Thomas himself visited Thorney.³⁶

Subsequenter uero, uidelicet xvij die mensis Iunii Anno Domini millesimo ccc^{mo} xlvij^o, prefatus reuerendus pater in domo capitulari dicti monasterii de Thorn[eye], hora prima diei, pro tribunali sedens, dictam uisitacionem suam ibidem uolens complere tam in capite quam in membris, corrigendo et puniendo excessus iuxta comperta in eadem uisitacione, ut premititur, et detecta, fratribus Willelmo de Sutton et Roberto de Corby seniori inter alia obiecit quod ipsi maliciose quendam librum diffamatorium ad capud lecti fratris Iohannis de Chateriz, ipso inscio et inuito surripuerunt, qui hoc coram ipso confitentes, humiliter submiserunt in omnibus alte et basse gracie et uoluntati dicti patris pro huiusmodi commisso, qui quidem reuerendus pater eorum contricionem perpendens statim misericordia motus eis remisit gracie et fauorabiliter suam culpam, sub tamen bono gestu eorundem in futurum, iniungendo illis et omnibus et singulis monachis dicti monasterii sub pena excommunicacionis maioris quod librum illum diffamatorium cum omnibus suis copiis comburerent sine mora. Postea siquidem dictus reuerendus pater sentenciam diffinitiuam uirtute huiusmodi processus habiti contra fratrem Iohannem de Chateriz latam, nichilque proposito seu probato, nullo eciam oppositore in ea parte apparente seu reclamante, de consensu expresso abbatis et tocius conuentus dicti monasterii nunc ibidem cassauit, et quicquid sequenter propter illam irritauit et totaliter annullauit iudicialiter per decretum, ipsumque Iohannem de Chateriz pronunciauit ab omnibus sibi impositis in hac parte immunem et ipsum restituit integraliter sue pristinae bone fame. Omnes insuper monachos et confratres dicti monasterii prius discordes ad concordiam reduxit et pacis osculum tunc ibidem firmiter iniungendo in uirtute sancte obediencie et sub pena excommunicacionis de qua

³⁶ EDR G/1/1, pt. 2, fol. 48r-v; transcribed by William Cole, BL MS Add. 5824, pp. 96-97; quoted in part by Aberth, 30 n., and Sharpe et al., *English Benedictine Libraries*, 598.

premittitur omnibus et singulis ipsius monasterii monachis, ne quis eorum in posterum ratione dicti libri seu processus inde habiti aut alicuius dicti uel facti alteri impropere uerbo uel facto uel alicui infestet quouis quesito colore. Et subsequenter idem reuerendus pater omnes et singulos monachos qui super aliquibus excessibus fuerant in dicta uisitacione notati iuxta comperta huiusmodi correxit canonice tunc ibidem penitenciamque salutarem eis iniunxit quam in spiritu humilitatis et animo contrito benigniter admiserunt in omnibus et per omnia reuerenter. Totus autem processus tam uisitacionis predicte quam litis huiusmodi in curia Cantuar' habite necnon correccionum et aliorum actorum in hac parte habitorum in archiuis domini episcopi cum aliis munimentis remanent custodiend'.

Given the concern to stop gossip, it is not surprising that the account leaves us unclear as to what was going on. First of all, we learn little of the character of the scandalous book. Salzmann pondered “whether the book was heretical or obscene, but the latter seems more probable.”³⁷ Aberth observed, “the popularity of the book and the jocularity that seemed to follow in its wake strongly suggests that Seton objected on decorous rather than doctrinal grounds”; he speculated as to whether it might be “some kind of ribald Latin verses as are found in *The Cambridge Songs* or *Carmina Burana*” (both, of course, books with a monastic provenance).³⁸ If one were guessing on these lines, bawdy fabliaux might be more likely. Something obscene is suggested by the report in 1345, “A book containing things in breach of good order, shameful, and not at all fit to be committed to writing.”³⁹ The adjective *diffamatorius*, on the other hand, used in 1347, provides little or no clue. Nor can we infer its circulation, though there was evidently much concern over copying or committing to memory. The book had come to light in the keeping of Prior John of Chatteris, and this gave rise to gossip and accusation. No explanation is offered, and John, it seems, had at first suffered an adverse ruling, which was quashed — he gave up the office of prior between 1345 and 1347, which may have been a consequence of this embarrassment — and orders were given “that no troublesome objection should be made hereafter, nor any kind of accusation, concerning the contents of the book or any part of them, to Brother John of Chatteris.” There was concern too about accusations as to who had disclosed the existence of the book. The abbot had ordered the destruction of the book, but by the time of Hugh de Seton’s visitation it was not known who had the book, though it could not be established that it had been destroyed. It emerged again a year or more later, when two named monks “surrepti-

³⁷ VCH *Camb*s, 2:215.

³⁸ Aberth, *Criminal Churchmen*, 29.

³⁹ Aberth incorrectly translates this phrase, “containing things improper and shameful, not at all commending of scripture.”

tiously planted the book at the head of the bed (*ad caput lecti*) of Br. John of Chatteris." One more naturally expects *surripere* to mean that they removed it *from* the head of the prior's bed, but his being cleared of all blame supports the first reading.⁴⁰ It seems that the book was planted on him as a prank, though the prior's bed was at this date very likely in his own lodging rather than in the dormitory. One is left to suppose that as prior in 1345 he had confiscated the book without making a disciplinary fuss, but after this had become public other monks got their hands on it again and hid it. If the intention was to retain it, why then plant it on John de Chatteris, who had once had it in his keeping as prior?

William de Sutton was a monk of some seniority at this date, ninth at the time of the election of the next abbot. He may be identified with William III in 1330 (row 22). Robert de Corby, senior, ranked twentieth in 1347, and he was probably professed after 1330; in 1347, he disputed the election of William de Haddon as abbot. Neither of them can have been exactly adolescents when they played this prank on John de Chatteris, prior in 1345 though no longer in 1347, who was sixteenth in seniority at the time of the election.⁴¹

The scandal provides a sidelight on the reading culture of the monks. Even if many of them did not cheerfully read large and learned tomes, they might nonetheless read for entertainment. It is also assumed that a handful of monks might be able to copy a text for themselves without having to explain what they were doing to the precentor, who would be the most obvious person to supply parchment, pens, and ink. Perhaps these were available as a matter of course to ordinary monks, if they had an inclination to write as well as read. It is perhaps a rather startling inversion of expectations to find evidence that something close to the standard of a magazine was available, and popular, but against the rules of a monastic house in the 1340s.

Monastic reading has always occupied a large share in the study of medieval books and reading habits. Rarely, however, does the evidence allow us to see beyond those monks who themselves composed works that have come down to us or wrote notes in the margins and other spaces of actual books

⁴⁰ Salzmann followed expectation, writing that the bishop "admonished the prior, at whose bedhead it had been found, Robert of Corby, the cellarer, who *took it away* and circulated it, and all who read it" (VCH *Cambs*, 2:215). This is somewhat different from what the text says.

⁴¹ Smith and London (*The Heads of Religious Houses* [n. 11 above], 2:96) have overlooked the references in the visitation to John of Chatteris as prior in 1345 and in the report of the election to John of Whittlesey as prior in 1347. The editors record, however, that a John of Chatteris occurs as prior on 30 December 1364 (BL MS Harley 3658, fol. 21v). If they are the same person, he would have resumed office after an interval.

that have survived. The evidence presented here provides a unique insight into the reading of an entire monastic community over a period of years. Overall, one cannot be surprised to find that the level of interest in reading books varied between the more academic and less academic members of the community, though all appear to have been literate, even to the level of furtively passing around a naughty quire that would not be permitted by the prior. We should beware, however, of thinking that the 1320s — any more than any other decade — typify medieval monastic reading: no matter that some of the books may have been in the cloister for a century or two, this evidence comes from the end of a period of long-term decline in English Benedictine libraries. If we had similar evidence from twenty years later, when Benedict XII's encouragement of university study had taken effect, the supply of books might have been renewed — though Thorney would surely never have been a center of learning. While the Peterborough customs precisely set the scene in the chapter house for the exchange of books at the beginning of Lent, even these customs hardly prepare one for the number of absentees we have discovered or the inevitable change of seats caused by a death in the community. The solution offered to the combinatoric puzzle may not be the only possible one, but its intricacies reveal much about the changing composition of the monastic family, its recruitment, its temporary absences, and its bereavements. What we know in principle about sitting by seniority at the daily chapter meetings is made vivid, and we realize how far from static the monastic routine must have felt as the years took their toll on the members of an average monastery. From the same evidence we have found important insights into the reading culture of the community, in all its diversity.

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