

händigen Kreuzzeichen, ebenfalls seine Schreibunfähigkeit bekennd, aber mit der köstlichen Begründung: *quia predestinatu sum introire in monasterio Domini Salvatori sito in Ammiato.*

Siegburg

Rhaban Haacke

Barbara Harvey: *Westminster Abbey and its Estates in the Middle Ages.* Oxford (Clarendon Press) pp. xii + 499. £ 15.00.

The monks of Westminster existed as a quasi-corporate or corporate body for half a millenium before the dissolution of the Abbey in 1540. In that time they built up a vast body of endowment in land, exploited with varying degrees of thoroughness. The first endowments for which there is any suggestion appear to date from the later tenth century in the age of Dunstan, though claims to endowment and foundation were naturally asserted in monkish competition for antiquity from the fictional days of 'King Lucius'.

The Abbey really came to life when King Edward the Confessor (1042-1066) decided to make the church a personal mausoleum. Though he intended this for himself only, he thereby started that close connection between the place and the Crown of England which has continued ever since. The shrine of St. Edward, however, failed as a centre of pilgrimage, and the aura and prestige of the Abbey depended more upon royal associations, above all the Coronation, and as an adjunct to the general centre of government in the complex of buildings at Westminster.

The wealth of the institution was enormous even by the standards of the greater abbeys. By the date of Domesday Book (1086) when the first reliable figures become available, the monks owned some sixty manors, scattered through a dozen English counties, from say Greenford, Hanwell or Hampstead in Middlesex (now deep in suburban London), to remote settlements in Lincolnshire towards the north or in Worcestershire towards the west.

Exploitation of property followed the pattern as elsewhere. Manors were let out at a fixed rent at varying terms. Charters to tenants survive from the days of Abbot Gilbert Crispin (1085-1118) though of course such charters commonly fail to give all the precise terms of tenancy. The monks were faced with the problem of inflation in the later twelfth century and made efforts to recover the estates for direct husbandry, inaugurating the long period of high farming which was sustained until the later fourteenth century. (Archbishop Thomas Becket likewise felt obliged to recover the estates of his see from long-term tenants on taking office in 1162.) In the fifteenth century the monks were content to lease out demesnes and take rents again.

The implicit story is that of thousands of labouring men and women, probably happier on the whole with a distant and possibly easy-going clerical landlord, than with some secular owner intent on maximum profit, though much must depend upon the competence or temperament of the bailiff upon the spot. Tenants of this ecclesiastical corporation were spared at all events from drastic alleviations of fortune due to change of landlord, or the ill-fortunes of wardship.

However, the old-fashioned landlordism exercised by the monks meant that irritants like villein-status tended to survive longer, and many of the Abbey's peasantry in south eastern areas affected by the Revolt of 1381 turned out when their brethren, escaping from a merely lay yoke, broke out into rebellion. Unhappily the Westminster tenants (like others) seized upon and burnt manorial court- and account-rolls, ensuring gaps in the series to-day in the Abbey's muniment room.

Like other religious bodies the monks of Westminster secured control of parish churches. Appendix III of the book displays appropriated benefices, as many as forty-five in number, spread out over nine dioceses. Naturally many of the churches in question correspond with the secular manors where they stand. There are churches in Lincolnshire or in Worcestershire with of course a clutch of



wealthy benefices in or near the City of London, like St. Bride's, Fleet Street or St. Martin's-in-the-Fields.

The mass of material which confronted the author in starting her task was both stimulating and daunting. The sixty manors of Domesday Book had swollen to something like 150 possessions including great estates down to scraps of ground by the end of the middle ages. At the Reformation the monastic body gave way to a collegiate church with minimum convulsion, and with the result that the vast *fonds* of documents remained largely together, though predatory antiquaries went off with a few items in the way of cartularies (which have come to rest not much further off than the British Museum).

The continuous reference W[estminster] A[bbey] M[uniments] in the footnotes and bibliography shows the extent to which the archives can be found intact, though rolls of individual manors out in the country have naturally found their way into local county record offices. It is clear from the list of manuscript sources (covering twenty pages of print, no less) that the author was obliged to contend with, literally, many *kilometres* of parchment in the shape of 6,000 obedientiaries' rolls, surveys of estates or of charters. The mass of documentary evidence needing analysis has been mountainous and the author must be admired for extracting a consistent theme therefrom. However, she has been fortunate in working late in time when a long and devoted series of archivists has made items accessible. (We note the death of Lawrence Tanner on 15 December 1979, one of the great names in the archival history of the Abbey.)

The study, which is eminently worthy of the illustrious institution to which it relates, is confined on the whole by definitions in the preface to the economics of the estates. Consequently the rich liturgical life, and intellectual activities are omitted. However there is some attention paid to the religious and emotional place occupied by the Abbey in the hearts of layfolk. Unhappily Westminster has no list of daily commemorations such as the vast *bede-roll* of Canterbury Cathedral entered into British Museum MS. Arundel 68. Such a list at Westminster would have provided a schedule of all the great and powerful folk in medieval England and (if the list from Canterbury is anything to go by) much biographical material as well. However, the want in some measure is made good by the impressive collection of evidence for burials, confraternity, anniversaries and chantries assembled from different sources by the author. It is worth noting that celebrants for the chantries were largely recruited from monks within the Abbey, rather than from secular priests crowding in from outside, such as those at St. Paul's Cathedral who earned the contemptuous remark from Chaucer, referring to those clergy who ran to London to seek a chantry for souls.

It would be a bold critic who might feel able to find fault with this great work, and the present reviewer will confine himself to one such comment, and then perhaps through personal taste. There is little in the book about *urban* income, which must surely have loomed large in the annual monastic accounts. One parish in the City of London alone (St. Leonard, Foster Lane), produced the large sum of over £ 120 yearly, according to the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, *temp.* King Henry VIII, while St. Margaret's, Westminster, flanking the Abbey according to the same source, rendered over £ 156 *per annum*.

Even the monastic precinct itself had become urbanised, for layfolk had surged in and were doing business in and around departments of the monastery. Conspicuous among these was William Caxton the printer who had brought back his craft from Germany and had set up a workshop at the Almonry. It would have been interesting to have heard something of the rent which he paid and the terms of his tenancy. He can hardly have been alone in doing business within the *enceinte*, and one would like to have learned about the type of tradesmen and their customers whom he saw around him. No doubt they had a distinguished clientèle, as did Caxton with callers such as King Edward IV and family.

Oxford

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