

The Deeds of the Sacrists of the Monastery of Bury St Edmunds  
(MS Harley 1005, ff. 120-122).

Trans. W. L. North from the edition of Thomas Arnold, in *Memorials of St Edmund's Abbey* II, Rolls Series (=Rerum Britannicarum Scriptores) 96, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1892, repr. 1967. Pp. 289-296.

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Note the sacrists of this house and their deeds.

In the time of Lord Abbot Baldwin<sup>1</sup>, first Thurstan, then Tolinus, exercised the office of sacrist. After the old wooden church had been leveled in the time of the aforementioned abbot, these two men laid the foundations of our church, raised the walls, completed the presbytery, and brought about the translation of the blessed martyr [Edmund]. They also crafted the bier of the blessed martyr and Saints Botulph and Jurminus using sheets of silver.

In the time of the lord Abbot Robert<sup>2</sup> there followed these two men in this same office a man of almost gigantic stature named Godfrey, a person great in body but even greater in his intellect. He completed the refectory, the chapter, the infirmary, and the abbot's hall. He also purchased a large bell for no modest sum.

2. There followed Godfrey in the time of the lord Abbot Anselm<sup>3</sup> the sacrists Ralph and Hervey, men of complete prudence. They created a perimeter of walls around the atrium of the church, the bell tower [*clocharium*] of the church of St Mary with its tower, and then beautifully sounding gongs [*cymbala*], and the tower of St James. They also had the double vaults on the front of the church sculpted by the fingers of Master Hugh who, although he vanquished all others in other projects, nonetheless surpassed himself in this wondrous work. They also completed the perimeter of walls around the town of St Edmund. Because the free holders of the honor of St Edmund were like rivulets in the construction of the walls in comparison with Hervey, he was the spring. The revenues which the sacrist held in the town of St Edmund by ancient right Hervey gathered up along with the land of Thomas Noel of Hanstede. This fellow Hervey, the brother of Prior Talbot, covered all the costs of copying the great Bible for his brother the prior, and had it painted in an incomparable manner by the hand of Master Hugh. When Hugh did not find vellum skins that suited him in our area, he acquired

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<sup>1</sup> 1065-1097.

<sup>2</sup> 1102-1107.

<sup>3</sup> 1121-1148.

parchment in Scotland. The annual pittances which we now have [Hervey] instituted on the [founder's] anniversaries and acquired the revenues at a given price.

3. Born at Hilderclre, Elias Widwel, nephew of Abbot Ordingus, followed [Hervey] as sacrist. This Elias, after all the outbuildings of the house of St Edmund burned, rebuilt completely the abbot's hall, the refectory, the dormitory, the old sick house, and the chapter. He also began all the other buildings in the court, and he laid the first hand on what his successors happily completed. He had a silver table built before the great altar for 100 marks and instituted the feast of the relics. He instituted a requisition, which had been done before on feast days, by the hand of the sacrist. He had the cross in the choir carved in an incomparable way by the hand of Master Hugh. And when his uncle's own resources were inadequate during the time when the peace was disturbed,<sup>4</sup> [Elias] offer him aid piously and devoutly from the sacrist's property with the consent of the convent.

4. Frodo succeeded [Elias] as sacrist, who dug up 500 marks of land. William Schuch succeeded him, concerning whom nothing worth remembering had been found. William Wiardel succeeded him, and it was not without cause that he was removed from office by the lord Abbot Sampson. Lord Ralph, formerly the almoner, served him for a time in the office of subsacrist, and he brought about the translation of St Botolph and Jurminus. When he died shortly thereafter, Master, later Abbot, Sampson served him in this same office. During his time in office he completed the majority of the choir and one story on the great tower at the western gate.<sup>5</sup>

5. Lord Hugh succeeded Lord William Wiardel as sacrist and, after putting on the lead roof, he completed the great western tower with Lord Abbot Sampson most devoutly offered the wood ceiling panels and beams and whatever wood was there. He also completely finished the tower next to the chapel of St Faith as far as the stone work was concerned; on another tower next to the chapel of St Catherin one story was completed. The aforementioned Hugh built a new infirmary and most of the chapel of St Andrew in the time of William the sacrist under the direction of Master Sampson, with lord Abbot Sampson devoutly supplying the beams and any other wood there from his forests. [Hugh] built a pulpit in the church, after the great cross was erected with images of the blessed Mary and St John standing side by side. He rendered the seat of the abbot in the choir noteworthy through the labor of Symon the painter. He conferred

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<sup>4</sup> This phrase "time of troubled peace" is thought to refer to the last year of King Stephen's reign (1151-1154).

<sup>5</sup> See Jocelin of Brakelond, *Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds* c. 9.

[upon the church] embroidered copes worth sixty marks<sup>6</sup> and a golden chalice of five pounds by weight. The sacrist also completely finished the guest house and bathhouse with the lord Abbot Samson generously providing from his forests whatever was needed for the beam work of the aforesaid buildings. But in his actions, his revenues, and expenditures, Hugh wanted to have no one as his associate, even though the lord abbot had ordered this in a full meeting of the chapter. But, all alone, he faithfully and happily completed whatever needed to be done.

Master Walter of Banham succeeded him. He was first the almoner; when he became sacrist, he began and fully completed a new hall for the lord, after the old one had been destroyed. He lined the aqueduct with lead from its head and source for two miles and brought it into the cloister through hidden channels in the ground. He died before he could complete the sanatorium. Nonetheless, whatever we see there in marble, in gilded images, in cement work—either complete or in process—he did it all, because he undertook all sorts of expenditures during his life. He dedicated one hundred marks and more of plate and two marks of gold for the fabrication of an altar front [*tabula*] and he renewed the fabric of the church as any passerby can see. The great tower which lord Hugh the sacrist had completed as far as the cement work, Walter brought to completion with the placement of the pinnacle. He devoutly conferred five silk copes embroidered with gold and one embroidered chasuble. He completely finished the great altar front [*tabula*] over the altar in the choir along with that stone structure which strengthens the beamwork with a gilded candelabrum restored with gold leaf. The 200 beams left over in the cemetery, which Abbot Samson had given, that is 80 from the forest of Wirlingworth and 120 from the forests of Meleford, were dedicated to the renovation of the church.

William of Disc succeeded Walter of Banham. After he had been elected to that office in the proper way and had stayed in it from the day of St Thomas the Martyr until the circumcision of the Lord, that is, for four days, his eyes were unable to sleep. When he saw that he was unable to be useful in this position, he asked Abbot Samson to release him.

After this fellow came Robert de Gravele. He purchased a vineyard—and enclosed it with a stone wall—for the comfort of the sick and those who had been bled. He rebuilt the beamwork of the nave of the church, made a covering above St Edmund and adorned it with a variety of images. When Abbot Samson died, Hugh of Northworld was elected to the abbacy by some, the aforementioned Robert by others. This Robert, when the aforesaid controversy between them lasted no small period of time, provided resources sufficient to both parties. When the decision finally went against this Robert after a time and he had remained in the office of sacrist for some time after the definitive judgment, he was elected to the abbey of Thorney. Richard de

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<sup>6</sup> My thanks to my colleague Jack Bryce, professor of classics, for assistance in decoding “capas bruslatas”.

Lisle succeeded him who did not remain there long before he was elected to the abbey of Burton. When Abbot Hugh was elected to the bishopric of Ely, he was elected again to the abbacy of St Edmund.

Richard of Newport succeeded him. He destroyed the old chapter and built a new one from the ground up. He bought the fishing rights of Ikelingh for no small sum. He also had made a large bell, which is called the Newport, for the greater bell tower at no small expense. After a stand of timber had been purchased from Abbot Hugh II in the manor of Meleford, he constructed all the buildings at Manhale except the hall and the solarium out of stone.<sup>7</sup>

When he had been placed next to his fathers, Gregory the precentor<sup>8</sup> succeeded him, a man born in the region of St Albans. He had not long occupied that post when he was elected to the priory of St Edmund since the merits of his sanctity demanded it. For at his sacred tomb, as we have seen, some are cured of different maladies by the merits of the men of God.

After him Nicholas, who was born in the region of Warwick, became sacrist. Among the many good things that he did, he had a magnificent bell cast in the choir, which is called the "sacrist's bell". He was the first from whom the pixis of the offering was taken and assigned to the treasurers. When in his last days he was struck by paralysis, he voluntarily gave up the office and, passing many years in the infirmary, he received annually from the sacristy 40 solidi in specie for as long as he lived.

Simon of Lyton succeeded him, a most prudent and circumspect man. After making a brief stay there, he was promoted to a higher position and became prior of St Edmund. While he was in this office [of sacrist] he had cast a bell in the choir which is called "Lyton". Not long afterward he was called to the abbacy of St Edmund.

Richard Horningsheath succeeded him, but after he had occupied the position for some time, he gave up the post either willingly or unwillingly because the abbot, prior, and convent wanted it. For he was a beloved old man and a person devoted solely to agriculture and not to preserving the liberties [of the monastery].

Richard of Colchester succeeded him. When, in his day, the dispute between Count Richard of Gloucester and us was resolved, there was granted to the count for the sake of the peace the manor of Manhale with Breninge, land at Gaisle used for almsgiving, and a manor of Southwold belonging to the cellarer. In his time, it was decided by the convent that it would devote only twelve pounds a year to the repair of the church's ruins and no more. Nonetheless, beyond the aforesaid twelve pounds

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<sup>7</sup> Marginal note in ms: he assigned the xx s. annual revenue at Manhale and the xx s. annual revenue at Ikelingham for the restoration of the convent and the poor on the day of his anniversary, that is 2 marks for the convent and 1 mark for the poor, according to the Martyrology. This Richard of Newport faithfully maintained the property of the monastery and multiplied its lands and revenues as above in the martyrology.

<sup>8</sup> The "precentor" is the position of head or lead chanter during the liturgy.

[worth of repairs] he built a new hall which is called Spanne for the recreation of the convent. For two years this fellow held from the convent all the cellarer's rent-producing manors, paying the full rent, but in the meantime, the convent responded with twenty pounds a year. At that time, the cellarer was William de Beccles, to whom the aforementioned sacrist, just like a renter, answered in all things which pertained to the kitchen and the office of subcellarer. He even did so concerning the *pisiss*, that is, the cellarer's alms. Struck down with paralysis within fifteen days from the time he gave up the said rent and shortly thereafter saying goodbye to life, he was placed next to his fathers [having lived to a] ripe old age.

Simon of Kingston, who was born in the region of Canterbridge, succeeded him. He had initially fulfilled the office of subcellarer, then chamberlain. He did nothing worthy of memory and gave up his office either willingly or unwillingly.

He was succeeded by William of Luton, who was raised to the aforesaid office from that of chamberlain. In his time, the king was granted half of all temporal and spiritual goods of the religious as well as of the prelates and ecclesiastical persons in aid of his war against the king of France. In this contribution as in other unfortunate and unpredictable cases, William was troubled in many ways and violently afflicted. He is the first one who reduced the worship of God in the church and cut by more than half the candles and lamps around St Edmund, St Botolph, and other sanctuaries, a measure which I don't think granted him any advantage. And although he was an honorable and modest man in other respects, in the things that he was bound to do for the convent, he was super-rigid and austere. Furthermore, for many years prior to his death nothing of the sort could be extorted save by the judgment of his will. Nonetheless, he did usefully repair and fittingly adorn the buildings of the manors and the revenues in the town. When he died he left almost no money, he was nonetheless held in great debt to various creditors and especially to the servants of the manors. For he increased the stocks and supplies of the manors, especially in sheep.

Richard of Brunne from the county of Grantebridge, who grew up in the town of Brunne, succeeded him, after being raised from the office of subcellarer.