

THE FRIENDSHIP NETWORKS OF CHRISTCHURCH PRIORY

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ABSTRACT

The Augustinian canons at Christchurch maintained atypically extensive friendships with other religious houses throughout England and in Normandy. Using evidence taken mainly from the priory's 14th-century cartulary (both in facsimile and the published translation), this article plots, with approximate dates, the growth of the reciprocal obituary pieties which underpinned these far-reaching friendships. Houses which became friends of the priory are analysed according to both location and rule. Factors leading to the evolution of these conventual friendship networks are discussed, with special attention paid to the practicalities of communication between houses. Later expansion of the priory's friendships is demonstrated using independent evidence.

INTRODUCTION

The scribe who compiled the cartulary of the Augustinian canons at Christchurch, Twynham (now in Dorset) in the later 14th century arranged his material methodically. Five sections of the book cover the counties in which the priory held property: Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall (treated as one), and Wiltshire (Hanna 2007, xix, 3). The sixth contains more than 400 miscellaneous entries claimed in the scribe's prefatory comments to be of particular importance. Of these, two relate directly to aspects of the priory's friendships. The first records benedictions customarily accorded to special friends (*specialibus amicis*) and the other, which provides the main focus of this discussion, includes the names of 47 religious houses

with which it maintained the reciprocal pieties that sustained its conventual friendships. These houses were situated across 15 English counties and in Normandy. Although more than half were Augustinian, Benedictine monasteries and nunneries, Cistercian monasteries, and one Premonstratensian priory are also named. The identification of so many widely separated houses following different rules, although not wholly without parallel, is none the less remarkable (Burton 1979, 325–33; Knowles 1966, 474). Factors which contributed to this far-reaching religious presence shed light on life at Christchurch Priory and, in a wider context, add to existing knowledge of conventual custom and practice. The cartulary is cited in this paper in square brackets using the numbers in Hanna (2007).

The earlier of these important entries is *De beneficiis fieri consuetudinis* ('benedictions made in accordance with custom') [978]. This deals with confraternal friends, that is to say men and women who, often with their families, were granted obituary benefits as though they were canons of the priory. The cartulary records more than 30 instances of this desirable status being conferred, usually in return for benefactions [e.g. 170, 274, 532, 661, 770]. While most of the recipients of this privilege were laity, clerics so rewarded included the abbot of Quarr, who in 1284 was granted confraternity as part of the settlement of a property dispute [57]. *De beneficiis* details what happened when confraternal friends died. Their names were read in chapter and a solemn service performed with clerical ostentation commemorated each death. The Office of the Dead was followed next day by mass at the high altar with nine readings. The



Fig. 1 Religious houses cited in the text. The numbers correspond with the order in which the houses are named

1. Merton. 2. Southwick. 3. St. Denys. 4. Breamore. 5. Osney. 6. Bodmin. 7. Stanley. 8. Quarr. 9. St. Augustine's, Bristol. 10. Montebourg. 11. Plympton. 12. Tavistock. 13. Launceston. 14. Cirencester. 15. Bruton. 16. Romsey. 17. Winchester. 18. Clerkenwell. 19. Goring. 20. Littlemore. 21. Godstow. 22. Forde. 23. Hartland. 24. Lyre (Liré). 25. St. Wandrille. 26. Glastonbury. 27. Ivychurch. 28. Milton Abbas. 29. Albury (Newark). 30. Wherwell. 31. Beaulieu. 32. Shaftesbury. 33. Bayham. 34. Southwark. 35. Combwell. 36. Mottisfont. 37. St. Gregory's, Canterbury. 38. Bury St. Edmunds. 39. St. Frideswide. 40. Wilton. 41. Sherborne. 42. Sandleford. 43. Poughley. 44. Selborne. 45. Abingdon. 46. Bolton in Craven. 47. Bradenstoke.

deacon and subdeacon attended, and those in charge of the choir wore silken copes. Lay members of the priory said 50 psalms. Since absentee canons were required to say mass at another time, the obsequies were performed by, and not merely in the name of, the whole community. The names of the dead were entered in the priory's martyrology in order that each might be commemorated in perpetuity, and a generous dole of food was given to no fewer than 40 poor persons by way of alms. Mortuary bills (*breuia*) were sent to all convents in England, Scotland and Wales as if for a canon (*sicut pro canonico*). The deceased was also granted the spiritual benefits of 42 religious houses with which Christchurch had obligations of reciprocal piety (*ecclesiarum conventualium que nobis spiritualiter obligantur et ad quas obligantur que nobis*). The eleemosynary activity, coupled with the expenses of communication between houses, must have amounted to a significant charge on the priory's income. Although *De beneficiis* does not name the 42 houses or specify the benefits, it is in most respects more detailed than the other document. *Rubrica de mutua obligatione specialis firmitatis inter nos et diversas domos religiosas* ('pledge of special mutual constancy between us and sundry religious houses') [1026] states the manner in which the death of a canon was to be commemorated both at the priory and elsewhere. Read together, these complementary entries, which have several features in common, give an overall picture of Christchurch's obituary pieties. Both specify a special service with every canon to say mass, provide for those in lesser orders to say 50 psalms, call for an annual memorial mass, and are explicitly mutual. *Rubrica de mutua obligatione*, which also provides for what appear to be trentals, is specific on the last point: *idem servicium pro canonico defuncto illarum ecclesiarum cum cognovimus obisse persolvemus* ('we will perform the same service for a deceased canon of that house when we learn of his death'). However this later document's exceptional features, which lie at the heart of this discussion, are: i) the increase in the number of houses which shared in the mutual pieties from 42 to 47, and ii) all of them are identified.

CHRONOLOGY

While there is no palaeographic evidence that names were added after the scribe finished his initial recension, there are differences in the way the descriptions are formulated. Even allowing for possible inconsistency on the scribe's part, these linguistic variations (which are not apparent in translation) imply that the document was compiled either from a single exemplar to which additions had been made, or from more than one exemplar. Whichever explanation is preferred, the heterogeneity reflects the gradual growth of the priory's friendships over a period of time. Each house is individually referred to as '*eccā*', the usual scribal contraction denoting a church (which is expanded through the rest of this paragraph). Southwick is *ecclesia de Suthuryk* and 22 others, including two of the three 'French' monasteries, are named in the same way, e.g. *ecclesia de Forda*, *ecclesia de Lira*; Ivychurch is *ecclesia Ederosa*. Some patron saints are specified, e.g. *ecclesia sancti Petri de Bodmine* and *ecclesia sancti Aug' qui sita est juxta Bristowiam*. Location is also elaborated in other instances: *ecclesia Montisburgie in Normanie*, *ecclesia de Suthwerk extra London* and, surprisingly in view of Beaulieu's proximity to Christchurch, *ecclesia Belli Loci Regis in Foresta Nova*. (Although Bayham was also known as *Belhus Locus*, Beaulieu was normally called *Belhus Locus Regis* to reflect its foundation by King John; reference to the New Forest was therefore unnecessary.) Except for Wherwell, Goring and Wilton, nunneries are identified as such, e.g. *ecclesia sancti monialium de Rumseia*, *ecclesia de sancti monialium de Wyntonie*. Marian references are expressed in various ways, viz. *ecclesia sancti Marie Glastonie*, *ecclesia beate Marie de Boltune in Cravene*, and *ecclesia sancta Marie de Bradnestoke*. The detailed description of Clerkewell combines several of the above features: *ecclesia sancti monialium que ad borealem partem civitatis Lundonie sub titule Regine celi deo serviunt . . . clericorum fons*. Only the Premonstratensians at Bayham are identified by rule (*ecclesia alborum canonicorum de Begham*).

Merton's position at the head of the list can be attributed to its status as Christchurch's mother-

Table 1 All houses compared by rule

Augustinian canons	24	Augustinian canonesses	1
Benedictine monks	9	Benedictine nuns	8
Cistercian monks	4	Premonstratensian canons	1

Table 2 Figures for the male houses

Augustinian	24	out of	56	=	42.9%
Benedictine	5	out of	35	=	14.3%
Cistercian	4	out of	19	=	21.1%
Premonstratensian	1	out of	8	=	12.5%

house, while the rest of the sequence probably approximates the order in which the other houses first began to reciprocate the obituary pieties. It seems likely that the practice started *c.* 1150 when the first Augustinians were installed at Christchurch (VCHH, vol. II, 152; Hanna 2007, xxxiii). Three named superiors were to be inscribed in the priory's martyrology, but only Christine prioress of Clerkenwell can be identified – from archival evidence dated *c.* 1144, 1152–61, and *c.* 1160–70 (Knowles *et al.* 2001, II, 214). When these dates are read alongside Merton's position at the start of the list, it is reasonable to infer that the custom of reciprocal piety arrived with the first canons. However, the final name was not added until the second quarter of the 13th century at the earliest. Most of the houses were founded during the reigns of Henry I (1100–35) and Stephen (1135–54) with a few, of which Hartland (between 1159 and 1184) was the last, during the later 12th century. Sandleford (no. 42) may have been as late as 1204, and the four that can be securely dated to the next century also occur in the last third: Mottisfont (no. 36) founded in 1201, Beaulieu (no. 31) transferred from Faringdon in 1204, Bayham (no. 33) founded 1208–11. The total cannot have been reached before Selborne (no. 44) came into being in 1233 (Knowles and Hadcock 1971, *passim*).

In view of the absence of evidence to the

contrary, it is presumed that no more than the named 47 houses were participating in 1372, when the scribe finished his initial compilation [1354]. However, the penultimate section of this article will show that toward the end of the 15th century, seven unlisted houses were involved in a similar network which included Christchurch; all of them were long established by that time, but it is not known when they first became friends. Obituary mutuality involving the priory therefore not only continued but also attracted new participants, although the precise extent of the friendships at any given time cannot be established.

ORDINANCE

The 38 houses of canons and monks, and nine women's houses are listed by rule in Table 1. With the exception of Bolton-in-Craven (no. 46) and Bury St. Edmunds (no. 38), all the houses named in England lie south of a notional line drawn between Cirencester (no. 14), Godstow (no. 21), and Clerkenwell (no. 18). Within this area, the totals can be expressed as percentages of the total houses of their respective orders. Including Christchurch, figures for the male houses are Table 2.

Eight of the nine women's houses were Benedictine, the exception being the Augustinian

canonesses at Goring, one of a total of five houses of the order in the area. The resultant figure of 20% compares with 33.3% of the 24 Benedictine nunneries.

Christchurch's conventual friends, therefore, were twice as likely to be other Augustinians as Cistercians, who were second in percentage terms, with little to choose between the other two orders. The preponderance of Augustinians (Black Canons) in the earlier part of the list suggests that friendships developed initially within the Augustinian order, to which no fewer than 11 of the first 15 houses belonged. Since the three nearest, Southwick, St. Denys, and Breamore (nos. 2, 3 and 4) immediately follow Merton, Christchurch's obituary practice may have taken root in southern Hampshire before spreading further afield and to other orders. All the closest Augustinian priories are included, with the nearest omissions as far away as Keynsham (Somerset, between Bath and Bristol) and Tortington (Sussex, near Arundel). Within the order, size and wealth seem not to have been issues. Great establishments like Merton and its wealthy daughter-house at Cirencester are named alongside less successful houses such as Selborne, which declined and was extinct before 1459 (VCHH, vol II, 8), or Sandleford, which was dissolved *c.* 1480 (VCHB, vol IV, 34). However, the other orders do not conform to this pattern. Beaulieu was the closest of all the named houses yet it was the last of the Cistercian monasteries in the list, and several nearby non-Augustinian houses are conspicuous by their absence. The Benedictines at Cranborne and Horton are not mentioned even though they were even closer to Christchurch than nearby Breamore, the priory's neighbour in the Avon valley. The Premonstratensians were represented by Bayham (no. 33) rather than Titchfield or Durford, both of which were closer. Although the absence of Titchfield might be due to its late foundation in 1232, Durford came into being before 1196 and the earliest date for Bayham has been given as 1199 (Colvin 1951, 184, 89, 112). Even the latest of the three pre-dated the foundation of Selborne in 1233.

FRIENDSHIP AND HOSPITALITY

The initial contact between individuals which led to friendship between houses could have come about in a variety of ways. For example Christchurch, like all religious houses, had business and legal dealings which involved its senior clerics in absences from home, both at Westminster [e.g. 57, 169, 470] and elsewhere [e.g. 846 1062, 1078]. Although most venues were south of the Cirencester-Godstow-Clerkenwell line mentioned in the previous section, it was at York that Prior Edmund of Ramsbury was ordered to appear in person before the King in 1328 (VCHH, vol II, 155). At this point it should be noted that, even though judicial process was frequently settled, those houses that went to law against Christchurch tended not to become friends. For example, in 1255 the priory resolved a tithe dispute with the Cistercians at Netley 'with the help and intervention of mutual friends desirous of removing any injustice' [391]. Although the nature of the assistance and the identity of these friends are not known, the priory's perception of even-handed justice may not have been shared by the monks at Netley, who were required to make a payment of £10 as part of the settlement. Like most houses that took on Christchurch, Netley is not named in *Rubrica de mutua obligatione*. However, the list includes nearby Breamore, which disputed not only tithes but also, famously, the church at Sopley [238–42] and Quarr, which contested ownership of the priory's mill at Throop [207–11]. It will be argued below that it was not mere proximity or, in the case of Breamore, the shared Augustinian rule which accounted for the presence of these houses among the 47. Further opportunities to meet other Black Canons were provided by the general chapters which became mandatory for all religious orders after the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. Part of the *raison d'être* of these gatherings, which the Augustinians were supposed to hold every three years, was to bring like-minded religious into contact with one another. Lastly in this connection the influence of the mother-house was metaphorically never far away. Cirencester (no. 14), from where

Bradenstoke (no. 47) was settled, Bodmin (no. 6) and St. Gregory's, Canterbury (no. 37) all shared Christchurch's filiation to Merton.

The process by which acquaintance between individuals developed into conventual friendship was fostered by hospitality, a monastic duty since the early years of the Church. The 6th-century Rule of St. Benedict spoke approvingly of guests whom no monastery was ever without (*hospites que nunquam monasterio desunt*) and the priory was not found wanting in this quality. In 1170, Archbishop Becket granted a petition by the Christchurch canons who were 'devoted to religious observance, the provision of hospitality and other charitable works' [25]. Later in the century, Bishop Walter of Salisbury confirmed *inter alia* the church at Puddletown (Dorset) to the priory specifically 'to foster hospitality and works of charity, and so that the canons ... may carry out their religious duties and works of piety' [712]. These aims must have been accomplished satisfactorily, since in 1219 Bishop Poore also confirmed the same church with other property 'having in mind the honest and pious conduct of the prior and canons of Christchurch and the hospitality they show to all' [713]. The last word of this phrase is especially significant. Unlike almsgiving, which was restricted to those in need, hospitality extended – theoretically, at least – across the social and economic spectrum. However, the position of professed religious was ambivalent. While each took a vow of poverty, their vocation distinguished them from the indigent, and they expected to be received on a different basis to those who sought alms. It may have been to avoid misunderstandings on this score that in 1302 the abbot of Glastonbury and the prior of Christchurch mutually agreed to offer physical and spiritual sustenance (*victualibus et solaciis*) when they, or their respective monks and canons, visited the other's house [1027]. If the canons were alerted to the death of a monk, or *vice versa*, matters were to be dealt with in a way broadly similar to that set out in *De beneficiis*. Absolution was pronounced by the president of the chapter and the Office of the Dead was followed by mass. Every priest was to say a special mass, and each lesser member (*frater* ...

inferioris ordinis) a whole psalm. The name of the deceased was to be written in the martyrologies of both houses. However, nothing was left to chance where Glastonbury Abbey was concerned since it is also named (no. 26) in *Rubrica de mutua obligacione*.

While the agreement with Glastonbury provided for future events, an actual instance of the canons' hospitality is recorded in the register of the Cistercian monastery of Newenham (Devon). When it was founded from Beaulieu in early January 1247, the initial party of 13 monks and four *conversi* (lay brothers) travelled overland from their mother house. The first night of their five-day journey was spent with the canons at Christchurch, and the final night at the Cistercian monastery of Forde (no. 22) (Hockey 1976b, 98–9). Even if arrangements had been made in advance, it was no small undertaking for Christchurch, Forde or the other three houses which played host to them to accommodate a party of this size at the harshest time of the year. More typical, and certainly less demanding for the host houses, were small groups and individuals. The cartulary mentions three lay travellers who probably had occasion to seek hospitality in the priory's name. First, c. 1186–9 land was granted to one Richard, described as the serjeant (*serviens*) of the priory, on the understanding that he and his heirs would at all times be available to ride on the canons' official business [187]. Next, a 1258 corrodial agreement obliged Henry de Elsington 'to work as a courier clerk for life, unless prevented by age or debility. In exchange he was given suitable maintenance and fed at the prior's table' [791], a distinction commensurate with the importance attached to this duty. The priory defrayed the expenses of both men, and provided a horse and a servant for each. Henry was also to be provided with a replacement horse or its value, if needed. Lastly, between 1262 and 1278, the priory quitclaimed to Hervisius le Frank 'and his heirs the service they owe for their tenement ... of carrying the prior's letters throughout Hampshire' [367]. If, as seems probable, it was by messengers like these that obituary *brevia* were carried from house to house, lay and clerical cooperation

was necessary in order for conventual friendships to be maintained successfully.

Christchurch's magnificent priory church, spared at the Dissolution for the benefit of the parish, should not be ignored in this connection. A stranger attending mass at the high altar could not have failed to admire either the setting or the liberal provision of relics (VCHH, vol II, 152). As well as the solemnity of the liturgical occasion, visitors will have noted both the generous proportions of the ongoing building work and the vigour with which it was being carried out. Although the church did not acquire its existing profile until the west tower went up, late in the 15th century, much had been built even before the Austin Canons were installed. By the turn of the 13th century the transepts had been built and the aisles vaulted. The crossing tower was rebuilt later in the century, after the original fell on the nave, and again in the early 15th century after a fall on the quire. The remarkable Jesse reredos which, even deprived of most of its original statuary and colour, remains impressive today, was carved *c.* 1350. By the time the scribe finished his initial compilation in 1372 the clerestory had been completed, the nave roofed, and a start had been made on the Lady Chapel (Pevsner and Lloyd 1967, 167–76; Polk 1994, 14–16). Since the setting in which the priory provided for the souls of its canons, founders, confraternal friends, and guests was memorably lavish, it is no wonder that so many religious houses wished to be associated with it.

TRANSMISSION OF *BREVIA*

The sending of obituary announcements from one house to another was already long established when the mother-house, Merton, was founded in 1114. As early as the 8th century, Boniface invited the abbot of Monte Cassino to join him in a community of prayer, exchanging names of their respective dead. He asked another house to transmit the name of a deceased monk 'to all friends in the neighbourhood' (*omnibus circumquaque amicis*) (McGuire 1988, 113). This may indirectly explain how

Christchurch managed to send news of a death across such a wide area. A single messenger would have taken many weeks to visit all 47 destinations and the priory, like most other Augustinian houses, was never populous and could ill afford prolonged absences. A pragmatic solution would have been to use several couriers and for one house in each area to notify its neighbours once it had received a mortuary bill, so leaving each letter-carrier free to go to a more distant destination. The conditions of Hervisius le Frank's customary service hint at such a relay. If he carried the prior's letters only within Hampshire, as is clear from the quitclaim quoted above, another bearer would be needed to take any communication entrusted to him beyond the county boundary. Lest this be dismissed as a modern solution to a medieval problem, comparison can be made with how things were done by the Augustinians at Barnwell, near Cambridge. The house's 1296 custumal details the practice to be followed when one of its canons died (Clark 1897, 216–19). As at Christchurch the obit was prescribed, alms given, and letters announcing each death carried throughout England (*Brevia debent pro eo portari per omnes fines anglie*). (This last may contain an element of hyperbole, like the similar references in *De beneficiis* and in a 1342 License in Mortmain [920] which also refers to names of the dead being sent throughout England.) But in contrast to Christchurch's 47 names, Barnwell identified only Huntingdon and Colchester as being in relationships of special reciprocal piety. Unidentified others (*plures etiam religiosi*) prayed for their dead canons and vice versa. The procedure by which deaths were notified is set out in detail. The librarian (*armarius*) drew up *brevia* which were copied in the cloisters (Clark 1897, 60–1), implying that multiple copies of each announcement were sent out. The almoner ensured prompt dispatch and received incoming *brevia*, which he passed immediately to the precentor (Clark 1897, 172–7). While it is unlikely that identical procedures applied at Christchurch, the method shows one way of addressing problems which applied to all houses participating in such friendship

networks. A set routine, and multiple copies of *brevia*, were not merely relevant when a canon died at Christchurch but, it might be argued, essential in view of the large number of houses to be notified. The greater the network, the more often those involved needed to attend to these formalities if conventual friendships were to be maintained effectively.

NETWORKS IN ENGLAND

Apart from Bolton-in-Craven and Bury St. Edmunds, all the English houses are located within an area bounded by Merton and its filiates, Bodmin (no. 6), Cirencester (no. 14), St. Gregory's, Canterbury (no. 37) and Christchurch itself. However, the 47 names can also be seen as a number of loosely allied separate networks rather than a single unified whole. Most of the houses can be grouped into clusters, in all but one of which the Black Canons predominate:

- (i) Cornwall and west Devon, where Bodmin, Plympton, Launceston, and Hartland (nos. 6, 11, 13, and 23) were Augustinian and Tavistock (no. 12) was Benedictine;
- (ii) Dorset and Somerset, where Bruton (no. 15) was the sole Augustinian house, Glastonbury, Milton, Shaftesbury, and Sherborne (nos. 26, 28, 32, and 41) were Benedictine, and Forde (no. 22) was Cistercian;
- (iii) Bristol, Gloucestershire, and Wiltshire, where St. Augustines, Bristol, Cirencester, and Bradenstoke (nos. 9, 14, and 47) were Augustinian and Stanley (no. 7) was Cistercian;
- (iv) The Oxford area, where Osney, Goring, St. Frideswide's, Sandleford, and Poughley (nos. 5, 19, 39, 42, and 43) were Augustinian and Littlemore, Godstow, and Abingdon (nos. 20, 21, and 45) were Benedictine;
- (iv) London and Surrey, where Merton, Albury, and Southwark (nos. 1, 29, and 34) were Augustinian and Clerkenwell (no. 18) was a house of Benedictine nuns.

The significance of these geographical divisions is, at best, conjectural and it should

also be noted that they do not include the dense concentration in central southern England. In clusters (i) and (iii) the Mertonian filiation of Bodmin and Cirencester is in evidence and (i) in particular is geographically discrete. Cluster (ii) is atypical because the Benedictines are the most numerous order, although this is not surprising since the Augustinians never established themselves in the historic county of Dorset. Clusters (ii), (iv), and (v) are all sited along what appear to be routes, although their significance is unclear. For example, the noted pilgrimage destination of Glastonbury (no. 26) in cluster (ii) undoubtedly led to the movement of travellers. However it is hard to see how this might have directly affected the spread of conventual friendship, even if Christchurch acted as a place of transit for pilgrims travelling by sea. Cluster (iv) covers much of the way from Christchurch to Oxford, where St. Frideswide's (no. 39) was not only a place of pilgrimage but is also claimed to have been connected with the origins of the university (Dickinson 1950, 115, 188–9). Although this route may point to scholarship at Christchurch, corroborative evidence is elusive. After 1339 the larger Augustinian houses were supposed to send at least one canon to a *studium generale* each year, but there is doubt as to how widely this was followed and the date is, in any case, somewhat late for the present purposes (Dobson 1992, 554). Nonetheless, what little is known about Christchurch's library supports the idea of learning at the priory (Webber and Watson 1998, 25–6). Neil Ker's (1964, 51) list of surviving medieval books contains just one entry for Christchurch; 'Cambridge, U.L., Ff.1.31. cEusebius, etc. S. Xiii-xiv'. The corresponding entry in the Cambridge University Manuscript Catalogue also mentions other patristic writers, including Jerome, and the chronicler Sigebert of Gembloux, confirming a level of erudition which is most unlikely to have been acquired locally. While cluster (v) is less extensive than (iv) the houses shown clearly lead from Christchurch to the capital. The location of St. Denys (no. 3), Selborne (no. 44), and perhaps the Nunnaminster at Winchester (no. 17) can be interpreted as a south-western extension of this route. Merton

was doubly significant. In addition to the tie of filiation, Christchurch would have been keen to maintain direct contact with the priory, which has been described as 'perhaps the most influential of the English Augustinian houses, on a par with the noblest continental houses of the order' (Dickinson 1950, 116–17). Either way, the sense of the priory's friendship networks as part of a greater whole is particularly evident in these smaller groupings.

NORMANDY

The 'French' monasteries were too far from one another to be thought of as a cluster of the sort suggested above. As the crow flies Montebourg (no. 10) is nearer to Christchurch than to Lyre (no. 24) or St. Wandrille (no. 25). All three used convenient routes across the Channel to maintain long-standing contacts with England through their dependent priories here. In the south, Montebourg had cells at Appledurcombe (Isle of Wight) and Lodors (Dorset), Lyre at Wareham (Dorset) and Carisbrooke (Isle of Wight), and St. Wandrille at Upavon (Wilts.) (VCHH, vol II, 231–2, 230; VCHD, vol II, 116–8; VCHW, vol III, 396–7). The location of St. Wandrille and Lyre on rivers and Montebourg's site near the coast facilitated the rendering of apport collected by these English cells.

Domesday records a gross income for St. Wandrille of £42 13s. from its English lands, with corresponding figures of £21 for Lyre and £9 for Montebourg (Knowles 1966, 703). The first named began as a Merovingian abbey which fell into disuse before it was reoccupied early in the 11th century. Like other Norman abbeys with similar antecedents, St. Wandrille received few new local endowments when it was re-established, and it has been claimed that without its extensive English revenues it could not have paid its debts (Matthew 1962, 65). In these circumstances it was important for the monks not only to manage their English property carefully but also to maintain amicable relations with neighbours this side of the Channel. Among St. Wandrille's many English assets were a church with a hide of land at Wareham, the church of

Bridport, and property on the Isle of Wight. Christchurch held property in all these places (e.g. Wareham [662–4, 681–5], Bridport [470, 810–15, 1104], and Isle of Wight [405–519a]). The abbey's possessions in the Midlands brought them into contact in 1266 with another house in Christchurch's friendship networks. After they were deprived of the advowson of Towcester (Northants.), the monks of St. Wandrille exchanged their remaining land there for the church of Rogerville near Le Havre. This was held at the time by Bradenstoke (no. 47), the last house named in *Rubrica de mutua obligacione* (Matthew 1962, 102). While there is no evidence that Christchurch played a part in the exchange, this serves as a reminder that the named houses had their own unrecorded friendships.

Lyre held little land in England, but the monastery had been granted an unusual amount of ecclesiastical revenue. Included in this were 48 churches (of which six were on the Isle of Wight), 11 chapels, and the tithes of 40 seigniorial demesne lands (Hockey 1976a, xx). Like St. Wandrille and Christchurch it also held property in Wareham. Among its other assets was an unspecified right to the chaplaincy of Wilton Castle, to reach which by the most direct route involved passing through Christchurch. Here again, the priory's hospitality had the potential to bring about and sustain friendship. Lyre's affairs throughout the south and west were administered by the half-dozen monks at Carisbrooke, whose other function was to serve the religious needs of the adjacent castle. Christchurch had regular dealings with this small house in its preceptory capacity. For example, an annual rent of 4s. due to Lyre for land at Apse was to be paid there and power of distraint was expressly reserved to the cell, not the mother-house [519]. The limited nature of Carisbrooke's functions and its small monastic population, like those of Cranborne and Horton mentioned above, meant that it could not have reciprocated the pieties which the priory expected for its deceased canons. This also applied to the three Benedictines at St. Sauveur-le-Vicomte's cell at Ellingham, which was both the closest and smallest of all the priory's monastic neighbours.

The Christchurch connections of Lyre and St. Wandrille seem tenuous in comparison with those of Montebourg. Although its Domesday holdings were less than those of the other two, this abbey's English possessions increased rapidly, and eventually included property on the Isle of Wight as well as in Devon and Dorset. The monastery held the church at Fleet, where the manor belonged to Christchurch [43, 44, 49, 488 etc.]. The priory also paid Montebourg an annual pension of 20s., which had been imposed on papal authority in settlement of the monastery's persistent, though ultimately unsuccessful, claims to tithes belonging to the priory in the manor of Thorley on the Isle of Wight [415]. Two features of the resolution of this dispute are relevant here. First, the papal mandate was transmitted through the prior of Poughley (no. 43), another named house. Second, Montebourg's decimal acquisitiveness was no obstacle to its enjoyment of the obituary benefits available at Christchurch. This was unusual since, as has already been noted, except for Breamore and Quarr, houses in dispute with Christchurch did not usually become friends.

These three cases invite the question, why were a nearby Augustinian priory, a Cistercian abbey on the Isle of Wight, and a French Benedictine monastery treated differently from other houses whose interests ran counter to those of the priory? The answer lies with the de Redvers family, whose importance to Christchurch is specifically recorded in the cartulary [975], and to whom several more links in the chain of conventual friendship can also be traced.

THE DE REDVERS INFLUENCE

Richard de Redvers rose to prominence in Normandy in the later 11th century due to his support on both sides of the Channel for Prince Henry, who succeeded to the English throne as Henry I. Out of the estates in the Cotentin peninsula with which this loyalty was rewarded, Richard made generous endowments to Montebourg, where he was buried in 1107 (Hockey 1970, 4). This monastery's cells at Loders and Appledurcombe were both established on

manors belonging to him (VCHD, vol II, 116; VCHH, vol II, 231–2). Also in England, his son Baldwin I (d. 1155) founded the Augustinian priory at Plympton (no. 11) in 1121. Then, jointly with Hugh, his uncle, he established Breamore between 1127 and 1132, and in the latter year he installed the Cistercians at Quarr. By the time he endowed Christchurch 20 years later [1–8], he had been created Earl of Devon and the family were Lords of the Isle of Wight. Baldwin was, therefore, not merely a great magnate close to the Crown but also directly responsible for four of the houses named in *Rubrica de mutua obligacione* with a fifth established by his father. But the family's influence did not end with the founding of these five houses [976]. His descendants and successors added to the holdings of Christchurch and were prominent in the affairs of all the houses the family had brought into being. The family's charters are also recorded in the cartularies of several other named houses; Launceston, Southwark, Tavistock, Sandford, and Lyre all received de Redvers land (Bearman 1994, 43–7). But the Christchurch cartulary offers no evidence of contact with Montebourg's cell at Loders and mentions Appledurcombe just once, in connection with the payment of tithes [1184]. Although these small houses owed their existence to the family, both underwent the difficulties experienced by all alien priories during the French wars in the 14th century.

Even after death, members of the family were celebrated in prayer both at Christchurch and in the other houses with which they were connected. Baldwin's nephew, William de Vernon and his son Baldwin II were buried at the priory. Baldwin III, the sixth Earl of Devon, was buried at Breamore, which also held the mortal remains of his wealthy daughter Isabella de Fortibus, the Countess of Aumale (Hockey 1970, 103; James 2007, 174). Effectively the last of the de Redvers line, Isabella died in November 1293 at Stockwell, Kent, when returning from a journey to Canterbury. The priors of Christchurch and Breamore and the abbot of Quarr were all present at her deathbed, where they were appointed joint executors of her will (Hockey 1970, 113). A friend was indeed special whose imminent demise could bring three

important religious men together at the same time, and at some distance from their respective houses. The occasion typifies the esteem in which the de Redvers were held by all who benefited from their munificence.

LATER EXPANSION OF THE FRIENDSHIPS

The 47 names show that Christchurch's reputation for obituary piety extended as far as Gloucestershire, Sussex, Kent, Surrey, London, Suffolk, and even the West Riding of Yorkshire, all counties in which the priory held no property. But this represents less than the full extent of the canons' friendships. More than a century after the scribe finished his compilation, at least one more house was circulating news of its dead to Christchurch and several more may, in fact, have been reciprocating the spiritual benefits afforded by the priory. All are marked alphabetically on the map apart from Bury St. Edmunds (no. 38) which, alone among this group, also appears in *Rubrica de mutua obligatione*. British Library MS Additional 46411 is a mortuary bill from the Premonstratensian priory of West Dereham ('a'). Originally made for Prior Wygenhale who died c. 1459, it was later re-used for others, the last of whom was John Wysbech (died 1503). Endorsed *tituli* record the nine houses to which the bill was taken, of which the first is Christchurch (Colvin 1951, 261). Titchfield ('b') on the western side of Southampton Water, which is never mentioned in any capacity in the cartulary, is included. The other named houses followed the same three rules noted above: Drax, Yorks. ('c') and St. James, Northampton ('d') were Augustinian, Louth Park, Lincs. ('e'), Kirkstall, Yorks. ('f'), and Merevale, Warwicks. ('g') were all Cistercian, and Worcester Cathedral Priory ('h') was Benedictine. Unlike all but two of the houses named in *Rubrica de mutua obligatione*, only Titchfield and Christchurch itself were south of the Cirencester-Godstow-Clerkenwell line noted above. If all nine houses which appear on this bill maintained reciprocity with West Dereham and Christchurch, the total number of houses involved in the obituary mutualities will have swelled to more than 50 (even allowing

for the early demise of Selborne and Sandleford). It is not clear how long this expansion of Christchurch's friendship networks had been in existence.

CONCLUSION

The scribe responsible for the initial compilation of the Christchurch cartulary called his book '*Speculum Prioris*', that is, 'The Prior's Looking-Glass' (Hanna 2007, 3). The analogy is no less appropriate for being a commonplace of medieval writing, since a mirror reflects more than just the image of the beholder. Looking through the eyes of Christchurch, this discussion has glimpsed other actual or potential friendship networks; St. Wandrille's dealings with Bradenstoke, Poughley's contacts with Montebourg, Barnwell's relationships with Huntingdon and Colchester, West Dereham's connections across the country, and the substantial presence of Merton have all been noted. Loss of evidence, however, means that far more will probably never be identified. Although few such networks were as extensive as those described here, the cohesiveness they promoted between what might otherwise be thought of as disparate communities was an important, if easily overlooked, feature of conventual life. Located as it was on the south coast, Christchurch may have been on the geographical margins of England, but these ties of friendship honoured the ambitions of the founder and other benefactors by positioning the priory as an important, central religious presence.

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