

# The Hermits and Anchorites of Oxfordshire

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## SUMMARY

*Since the publication of Rotha Clay's Hermits and Anchorites of England in 1914, very little of the basic historical and topographical research which would be needed to bring our knowledge of the solitary vocations in the Middle Ages up to date has been carried out. The present survey identifies 37 sites in Oxfordshire which were associated with solitaries (as against the 23 recorded by Clay) between the 12th and 16th centuries. The documentary evidence for each site is listed and analysed. The introduction attempts to place the solitaries of Oxfordshire in context, relating the pattern of eremitic and anchoritic activity in the county to the broader national picture, and illustrating how the evidence from the Oxfordshire sites fits in with historical developments within the vocations.*

In his introduction to the monastic history of the county, H.E. Salter wrote, 'The religious houses of Oxfordshire were not remarkable for wealth, antiquity or learning'.<sup>1</sup> The same might be said of the men and women pursuing solitary vocations in the county. None of the recorded sites in Oxfordshire could boast the antiquity of a Farne Island or a Guy's Cliff; neither could they number among their occupants saints like Godric of Finchale or Wulfric of Haselbury, nor mystics like Richard Rolle or Julian of Norwich. Twelfth-century tradition had it that St. Frideswide, on her way with her companions to found her monastery at Oxford, spent some time in seclusion at Binsey, where a holy well sprang up in answer to her prayers.<sup>2</sup> Although the legend, if true, would confer both antiquity and sanctity on an Oxfordshire site, there is (as ever with hagiographical accounts) some suspicion that, as the abbot of Dorchester remarked to an inquest of 1224, 'there are written in chronicles not only things which have been seen, but which have only been heard'.<sup>3</sup>

In her *Hermits and Anchorites of England*,<sup>4</sup> Rotha Clay recorded some 778 sites associated with solitaries distributed among the 39 counties of England, giving a mean of just under 20 sites per county.<sup>5</sup> Statistically, therefore, the figure of 23 she arrives at for Oxfordshire is near to typical. Closer examination, however, reveals that the figures are somewhat skewed by the large numbers of solitaries attracted to two large counties, Norfolk and Yorkshire. In

<sup>1</sup> *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 64. The definition of 'Oxfordshire' and all other county boundaries observed in the present study are those in force prior to 1974.

<sup>2</sup> Two 12th-century lives of the saint are edited by J. Blair, 'Saint Frideswide Reconsidered', *Oxoniensia*, lii (1988), 71-127. Only one of the texts has the Binsey interlude, and the terms in which it is described (*Hic... hominum vitare frequentiam sperabat*: ed. cit. 110) are too vague for it to be counted among the documented sites which form the basis of the present study.

<sup>3</sup> *Abbas... dicit quod in cronis scribuntur non solum que videntur, sed et que audiuntur*: C. Horstman (ed.), *Nova Legenda Angliae* (1901-2), 120. He reported in support of his version of events the testimony of Matthew the anchorite of Holywell, Oxford (number 23 in the List of Sites below). For doubts over the veracity of the lives of Frideswide, see Blair, 'Saint Frideswide', 83-5. The association of the saint with Binsey may be due to the possible presence there of a retreat-house belonging to the monastery bearing her name: *ibid.* 92. Some four centuries later, the lady Edith Lancelene, prior to her foundation of Godstow (c. 1133), spent time at Binsey, where 'muche holy lyfe she ledde'. See A. Clark (ed.), *The English Register of Godstow Nunnery* (Early English Text Soc. orig. ser. cxxix-cxxx, cxlii), i, 26. As with Frideswide, this does not really qualify her for inclusion as a hermit or anchorite.

<sup>4</sup> Published London, 1914. I am currently preparing a revised edition.

<sup>5</sup> Clay, *Hermits and Anchorites*, 203-63. These figures do not include the 15 unidentified sites (pp. 262-3).

fact, in a league table of counties supporting the solitary vocation, Oxfordshire would be placed tenth – ninth, if Clay's decision to include London sites in Middlesex is reversed.<sup>6</sup> Oxford is fifth among English towns, its total of nine sites lying close behind York (10) and King's (Bishop's) Lynn (12), but still some way short of London (21) and Norwich (33).<sup>7</sup>

The present survey draws upon Clay's own notes for the revised edition of her book, together with other sources not known to her or published subsequently, to give a revised total for Oxfordshire of 37 sites, 20 of them hermitages and 16 anchorholds.<sup>8</sup> The remaining site (in Oxford) was home to a hermit in the 15th century, but an anchorite in the 16th.<sup>9</sup> The total for Oxford now stands at 12 with, in addition to that just mentioned, three sites occupied by hermits and eight by anchorites. As was usual, all the county's hermits were male while, again in accordance with evidence from the rest of the country, the majority of the enclosed solitaries were female (eight of the twelve whose sex is indicated).<sup>10</sup> The table below shows the numbers of hermits and anchorites in the county by century:<sup>11</sup>

Century	Hermits	Anchorites
12th	3	1
13th	5	14
14th	5	0
15th	5	0
16th	2	2

It will be seen that, while the level of hermit activity remained fairly constant throughout the Middle Ages, the 13th century saw a boom in the anchoritic vocation, after which the strictest of solitary vocations was all but ignored in the county. A similar pattern is found in Sussex, Worcestershire and Hampshire.<sup>12</sup> Confirming the consistency of the appeal of the eremitic life, the hermitages at Bicester (no. 2) and South Bridge, Oxford (no. 32), were occupied from the mid 14th century for the succeeding century and a half, the Bicester hermitage receiving a new incumbent just a few years before the Dissolution.

<sup>6</sup> Behind Yorkshire, Norfolk, Kent, Lincolnshire, [Middlesex.] Northamptonshire, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Cambridgeshire. 21 of the 33 sites in Middlesex are found in the City of London. Miss Clay had decided, in the second edition of her book, to list London sites separately.

<sup>7</sup> I have followed Clay in observing a somewhat generous definition of 'Oxford' which follows the post-medieval Ridgen Boundary and incorporates such outlying parts as Holywell and St. Giles in addition to the medieval Liberty. For the boundaries of Oxford, see *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 260-83.

<sup>8</sup> For a breakdown of these figures, see the List of Sites. There is no reason to believe that further investigation of other counties will not increase their tally by a similar proportion.

<sup>9</sup> No. 22 in the List of Sites below. Subsequent references will be given in the text.

<sup>10</sup> Female hermits have been identified only in Norwich: N.P. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich* (1984), 60, 202. Female outnumbered male recluses throughout the period: see A.K. Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (1985), 20. At Islip (no. 14) an anchoress appears to have been succeeded by a male anchorite, though the change of gender may represent no more than a clerical error.

<sup>11</sup> Sites where solitaries are recorded in more than one century are counted only on their first appearance in the records. Nos. 22 (first a hermitage and later an anchorite's cell) and 35 (where there were two hermits) have, however, been counted twice. Nos. 1 and 24 are at present undatable and have been excluded. No. 23 is included in the 13th century, which is the date of the record, although it refers to an earlier anchorite who may have belonged to the end of the 12th.

<sup>12</sup> Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, 36.

## HERMITS

The archetypal hermits were the desert fathers who, following models like St. Anthony and Paul of Thebes, fled the world to find solitude in the deserts of the East, where they practised an asceticism which was frequently prodigious in its severity. In the West, solitaries were drawn to more temperate wildernesses: the ocean and, most of all, the forest.<sup>13</sup> Rural Oxfordshire, dominated by the vast forest of Wychwood, had its share of woodland solitaries. That the dangers of the northern forest were no less real than those of the eastern desert appears from the murder of a hermit in Wychwood about the beginning of the 13th century (no. 37). Indeed, two of the four identified forest hermitages (nos. 7, 18) seem soon to have been converted into dependencies of established religious houses, and later abandoned, while a third (no. 17) had already at its first appearance in the record been subsumed into Deerhurst Priory. Although the fourth Wychwood site, probably at Newhill Plain in the heart of the forest (no. 21), had similarly passed to the Cistercians of Bruern by the reign of John, the spirit of the hermit-pioneer appears to have been revived in the person of Simon Kirton, who in 1403 received licence to enclose two crofts pertaining to his chapel, and whose successor in the hermitage, at his death in 1458, was able to leave money and livestock to friends and family, as well as to a Dominican of Oxford (perhaps his confessor) and his patron the abbot of Bruern.

The majority of later medieval hermits, by contrast, and to the dismay of many contemporary commentators, eschewed the wilderness altogether, in favour of the performance of what would today be accounted public works.<sup>14</sup> Thus in the 1350s Nicholas Jurdan, evidently a hermit of some independent means, having left Kirtlington for Bicester, set about acquiring land and timber with a view to the foundation of a hospital 'for poor and infirm persons' in the town. In spite of ambitious designs, however (he obtained licence to acquire lands and rents to the value of 100s. per annum towards his sustenance), there is no evidence that the plan reached fruition (no. 2).<sup>15</sup> Most hermits had a humbler role. The duty of the 15th-century hermit of Tetsworth was 'to stay in the hermitage and labour with his hands for the maintenance of the highway between Stokenchurch and Hereford Brugge, which has long been a nuisance for lack thereof' and to pray for the king and queen, their ancestors and successors, and the members of the Gild of St. Christopher of Thame responsible for the hermitage's foundation (no. 34). While he was to be allowed to acquire lands and rents to a value of 40s. per annum, the more usual recourse of these labourer-hermits was (as Wood puts it) 'to require the goodwill and favour of passengers that came that way and of other neighbouring villages' (no. 20).

It was a largely unstructured life, and open (as critics were quick to point out) to abuse: Langland wrote of a 'Religion saunz rule and resonable obedience'.<sup>16</sup> By the end of the Middle Ages, however, the episcopate was taking a more active role in the supervision of the vocation, and men started to make professions before the bishop according to a rule or order taking its name from one of the proto-hermits, St. Paul (no. 9) or St. Anthony (no. 33). By this date therefore, the title 'hermit' was given *ad hominem*, rather than being applied *de facto* to the incumbent of an endowed hermitage. It is consequently often difficult to tie a particular hermit down to a particular site. Brief 'rules' detailing the duties of such

<sup>13</sup> J. Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. A. Goldhammer (1985), 50-2.

<sup>14</sup> Among critics of this kind of eremitism, the best known is William Langland. See particularly *Piers Plowman: the C-Text*, ed. D. Pearsall (1994), ix, 187-218 (pp. 169-70). I discuss this passage in detail in my 'Langland and Hermits', *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, xi (1997).

<sup>15</sup> Jurdan had his own seal, which he appended (along with that of the deanery of Bicester) to his quitclaim of what sounds like a fairly substantial property in Kirtlington to the abbey of Aulnay (no. 16).

<sup>16</sup> B-Text, xiii, 284-5 (ed. A.V.C. Schmidt, *The Vision of Piers Plowman* (1987), 156).

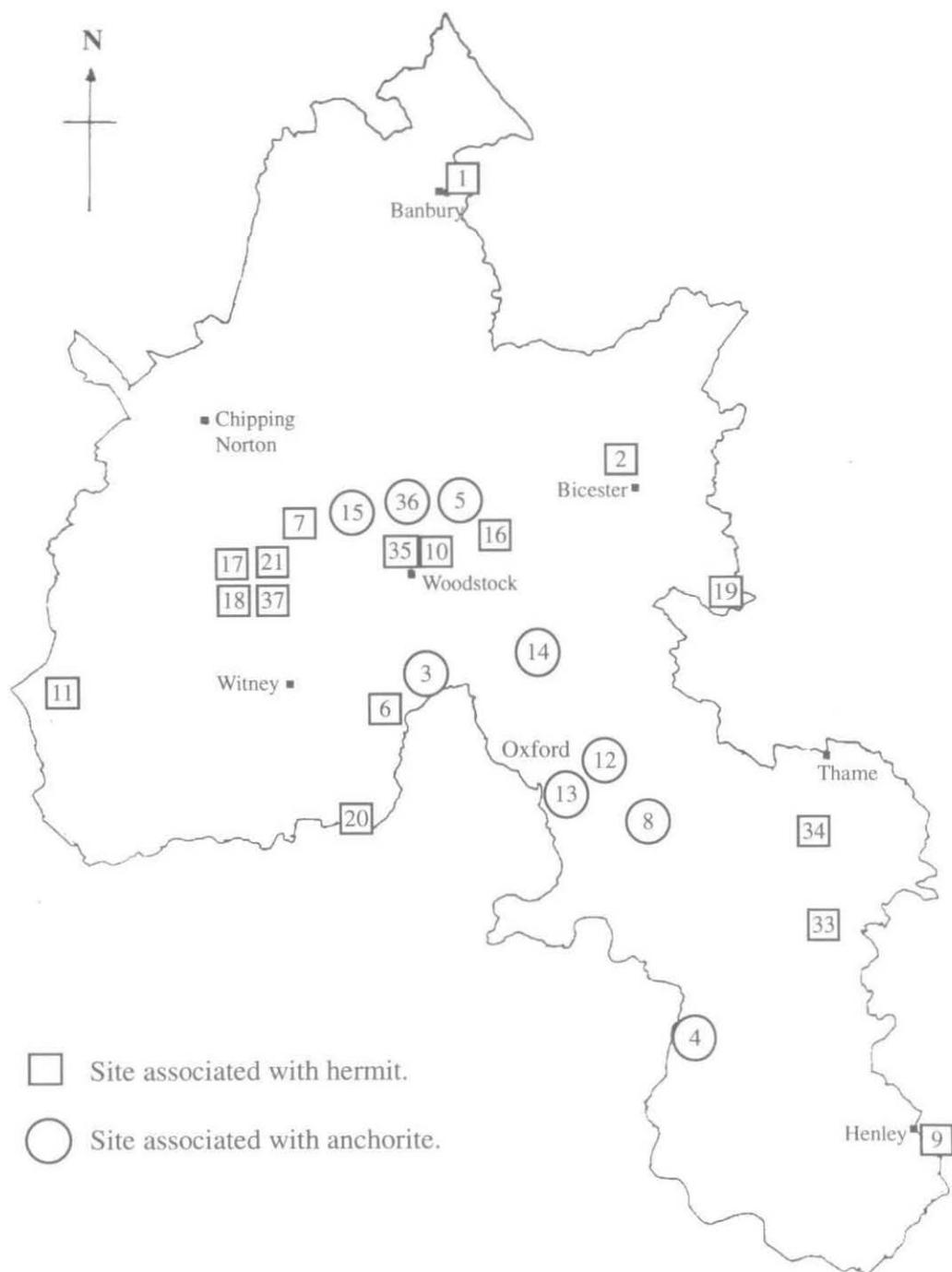


Fig. 1. Oxfordshire sites associated with hermits and anchorites (excluding Oxford). Locations are approximate only. Numbers correspond to those in the List of Sites.

hermits were compiled and are extant among the records of a number of dioceses, though not apparently of the bishops of Lincoln, under whose jurisdiction Oxfordshire lay.<sup>17</sup>

Late medieval hermits of this kind were particularly associated with the building and repair of bridges. Evidence for their activity is extant at Banbury, Henley, Oxford and Newbridge (between Standlake and Kingston Bagpuize) (nos. 1, 9, 20, 31, 32); the *pons Hugonis* in Eynsham may also have been the responsibility of a hermit (no. 6; cf. also \*41 and \*43). In Oxford, the South Bridge (Grandpont) was in the custody of a hermit appointed by the town from the 1360s until at least the end of the 15th century (no. 32). That his work was not seen as incompatible with a religious vocation is evident in the terms of the letters testimonial he was to carry with him:

for as much as it is meritoryous and medfull to do dedes of cherite and to testifie trouth in such maters and causis wherin the consciens of men mygh [*sic*] be brused or enblymyssed for lake of clernesne of trouth: Therfor it is that we shewe unto you by this our instant wrytyng that we have ordeyned and deputed our welbelovyd in Crist John Ferrour, now occupying a Ermyt's rome [*sic*], or his sufficient depute, brynger of this, to receve & take such almes and cheritable gefts as may please you and all people of your benevolence and cherite to geve unto the said John Ferrour or his sufficient depute in this behalf, toward the reparacions of the high wey, brigge & archis sore foundred lying bitwyne the town of Oxford southeward toward Abendon & otherwens, named the South bryge of Oxford; for which yefts doubles [*sic* for doubtless] ye shall do pleaser to Almyghti God and be pertyners aswell of many good prayers dayli said in the town of Oxford as of the forsaid John Ferrours ermyte dayly prayris, and of meny other dayly prayer travelyng bi the forsaid wey in this transitory lif and waylyng world, wherof we shall depart, and then such cheritable dedes and yefts shall conduyte youe and us in the right [hygh] wey, wher fauteth no reparacion, to thendles blis, bi the grace of Almyghti God.<sup>18</sup>

That the work of such bridge-hermits was a suitable focus of lay piety appears also from the sequence of bequests to the East Bridge in Oxford (no. 31) printed by Wood, and numerous similar gifts to other bridges by Oxfordshire testators, ranging from the £4 left in 1501 by Dame Emote Farmer 'Unto the reparacion of the newe brigge of Stanlake' to the bequest of John Huntelow who three years later left 'to the repair of Henley bridge a piece of timber lying at the door of my tenement'.<sup>19</sup> A suggestion that contributions from the faithful could outstrip the cost of the upkeep of the bridge may be found in the fact that the custody of South Bridge in Oxford was not granted but leased to the bridge-hermits for 12*d.* per annum. It is perhaps a sign that business could be lucrative that in 1403 John Merston, burgess and alderman of Oxford, interrupts the sequence of hermits holding the lease (no. 32).

<sup>17</sup> These are discussed briefly by V. Davis, 'The Rule of Saint Paul, the First Hermit, in Late Medieval England', in W. Sheils (ed.), *Monks, Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition* (Studies in Church Hist. xxii), 203-14. She is not aware that hermits could profess to follow rules or orders other than that of St. Paul.

<sup>18</sup> H.E. Salter, *Snappe's Formulary and Other Records* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. lxxx), 255. Salter omits 'hygh' from the final line of this quotation; in the manuscript 'right' is inserted before it, but it has not been cancelled. Cf. Oxfordshire Archives, P6/54D/1. There is obvious play on two kinds of highway, literal and spiritual. For 'rome' (l. 5) Robin Darwall-Smith, in his typescript calendar of these deeds kept at Oxfordshire Archives, suggests 'home' (p. 95); 'robe' might also be possible (though less likely paleographically).

<sup>19</sup> A. Clark (ed.), *Wood's History of the City of Oxford* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. xv, xvii, xxxvii), i, 411 (hereafter 'Wood'); J.R.H. Weaver and A. Beardwood, *Some Oxfordshire Wills* (Oxf. Rec. Soc. xxxix), 71, 84. Although both these last-mentioned bridges had hermitages associated with them, neither will mentions a hermit. On the appeal of bridge-hermits to the faithful, see further E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (1992), 367-8.

## ANCHORITES

If hermits were often self-sufficient, anchorites – in theory at least totally isolated from the world in their walled-up cells – were wholly dependent for their livelihood on the rest of society. Interdependent, it would be more historically appropriate to say, since the vocation was conceived in a symbiotic relationship with the active life, whose exponents would provide the recluse with his or her material necessities, so that he or she might have the leisure to offer prayers for the whole of society.<sup>20</sup> The vulnerability of such an existence is self-evident. It is not difficult to imagine the hardship faced by the anchoress of Wootton in 1263-4 when the quarter of wheat with which she had been provided of the King's gift every year since 1252 fell a year in arrears (no. 36).

Such provision of the necessities of life could be princely, or comparatively meagre – although the ecclesiastical authorities were generally careful to ensure, before an anchorite committed himself to a life of total financial dependence (which they would be obliged to underwrite), that sufficient support had been secured.<sup>21</sup> This would not have been an obstacle for Annora (Eleanor), the recluse of Iffley (no. 13). She was the daughter of William de Braose, rebel baron during the reign of John, and had married Hugh Mortimer by 1210.<sup>22</sup> Her sister Loretta, the widow of the earl of Leicester, had become a recluse in 1221 at Hackington in Kent, where she was to remain for over 40 years.<sup>23</sup> Annora's husband died in November 1227, she remaining childless, and five years later she had emulated the reclusion of her sister. As a widow without children she retained the right to her marriage portion, the Gloucestershire manors of Tetbury and Hampnett (near Northleach), but on becoming an anchoress the lands should by law have reverted to her kin.<sup>24</sup> With royal support, however, she was permitted to take an income for her sustenance from them: at her first appearance as a recluse, she secured an annual income of 100s. from lands forming part of the manor of Tetbury, a grant confirmed by Henry III several times in the next few years. Royal support also took the form of regular gifts of firewood, as well as, in 1239, a robe. At the beginning of 1241 she received three oaks for timber of the king's gift, presumably with a view to repairing or extending her cell, but since the hitherto frequent grants dry up after this, she probably died soon after.

Royal provision was forthcoming, though not on so lavish a scale, elsewhere in the county. Indeed the cluster of sites around the favourite royal manor of Woodstock is probably no coincidence (see Fig. 1). Brother Robert, anchorite at Dornford, was to receive three cartloads of firewood a year for life (no. 5), while the anchoress of nearby Wootton was granted a yearly quarter of wheat (no. 36) – although, as we have already seen, its supply

<sup>20</sup> See Warren, *op. cit.* note 10, *passim*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 72-5. This statement is not in fact borne out by the evidence of Oxfordshire anchorites, none of whom appear in the registers of the bishops of Lincoln. In part this may be because the period of maximum anchoritic activity in the county coincides with the period of minimum (extant) episcopal registration, 13th-century rolls and registers concerning themselves almost exclusively with institutions to benefices and appropriations of churches. Thereafter, the recording of certain kinds of document took place only inconsistently, and it is unclear whether the absence from the record of the later Oxfordshire anchorites should be regarded as a failure of supervision or a failure of registration. For the problems of bishops' registers generally see D.M. Smith, *Guide to Bishops' Registers of England and Wales* (1981), esp. p. ix, and for 13th-century Lincoln, F.N. Davis et al., *Rotuli Ricardi Gravesend, diocesis Lincolnensis* (Canterbury and York Soc. xxxi), p. xxiii.

<sup>22</sup> For Annora, see G.E. Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage* (1910-59), ix, 275; F.M. Powicke, 'Loretta, Countess of Leicester', in *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tail* (1933), 247-72, at 264-5, and more fully, E.J. Dobson, *The Origins of 'Ancren Wisse'* (1976), 305-10.

<sup>23</sup> See Powicke, *op. cit.* note 22, *passim*.

<sup>24</sup> Dobson, *op. cit.* note 22, p. 306; Powicke, *op. cit.* note 22, pp. 252, 265.

may at times have been less than reliable. Support for the anchoritic life was, however, as Ann Warren has shown, present at all levels of society.<sup>25</sup> In Oxfordshire, aristocratic support is in evidence in the 3s. per annum of fixed alms customarily granted by William de Courci, *dapifer* to Henry II, to the recluse of Islip (no. 14).<sup>26</sup> A similar amount was managed by Adam Sage for the sustenance of his niece Joan, anchoress at Kiddington (no. 15). His charter is witnessed by a miller, a doorkeeper and a porter, in addition to five clerks; since he is not given any designation of status, reasons Warren, he too should probably be classed as a yeoman or artisan. As such, his charter of endowment 'stands almost alone in the evidence', support for anchorites among his class normally being confined to one-off testamentary bequests.<sup>27</sup>

Evidence of merchant support is afforded by the will of Nicholas de Weston, burgess of Oxford, proved 18 June 1271.<sup>28</sup> In addition to bequests to the religious houses of Oxford and its environs, and to the five orders of friars then in the town, he left money to nine anchorites – six in Oxfordshire (nos. 4, 12, 25, 27, 28, 29) and three (at Faringdon, Hinksey and Seacourt) then in Berkshire. Given the exhaustiveness of his bequests in other categories, it seems reasonable to assume with Salter 'that this is a complete list of the anchorites of the neighbourhood' at this date.<sup>29</sup> At about the same time his father-in-law, Reginald the Mason of Oxford, bequeathed 12*d.* generally to the anchorites of Oxford.<sup>30</sup> The other group frequently found supporting anchorites is the clergy.<sup>31</sup> Since the most common location of an anchorite's cell was either in the churchyard of, or attached to, the parish church, the local clergy would clearly have had a leading role in the spiritual support of the solitary. This would sometimes run to financial support as well, as is evident in the grant of a rent of 2*s.* 6*d.* made by the rector of St. Ebbe's, Oxford, to Basilia, the anchoress at his church (no. 26).

The university, though, does not appear to have maintained any particular links with local solitaries. Indeed it may be no coincidence that the period of rapid growth of the university coincides with the decline of the anchoritic vocation in Oxford and its environs: after the end of the 13th century, no anchorites are recorded in the town until the 16th century. A possible explanation may be found in the preamble to charitable gifts to the university, which typically states, 'Among other works of piety, it is reckoned pious to relieve the needs of scholars'.<sup>32</sup> As a new and fashionable player in the competition for the charity of the faithful, therefore, the university may have squeezed its more vulnerable rivals out.

Only one of the colleges has any documented connection with a solitary. Merton appears to have 'inherited' an anchoress when it acquired the parish church of St. John the Baptist in 1266.<sup>33</sup> A recluse benefited from the testamentary largess of Nicholas de Weston in 1271; her house had evidently fallen into some disrepair by the 1280s, when the College paid for

<sup>25</sup> Warren, *op. cit.* note 10, pp. 186-279.

<sup>26</sup> For de Courci, see R.W. Eyton, *Court, Household, and Itinerary of King Henry II* (1878), s.n. He died in 1176, whereupon his fixed alms were recorded by the Crown escheators in the Pipe Rolls.

<sup>27</sup> Warren, *op. cit.* note 10, p. 257.

<sup>28</sup> H.E. Salter (ed.), *Cartulary of Osney Abbey* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. lxxxix-xci, xcvi-xcviii, ci), ii, 562-5.

<sup>29</sup> *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 10. He also remembered four bridges, including Fries in Kidlington (no. \*43) and the two Oxford bridges Grandpont and Pettypont (nos. 31, 32), though none of the bequests mentions a hermit.

<sup>30</sup> S.R. Wigram (ed.), *The Cartulary of the Monastery of St. Frideswide at Oxford* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. xxviii, xxxi), i, 276. Noted Warren, *op. cit.* note 10, p. 168. For his relation to Weston, see *Osney Cart.* ii, 564 n. 1.

<sup>31</sup> See Warren, *op. cit.* note 10, pp. 265-79.

<sup>32</sup> T.H. Aston and R. Faith, 'The Endowments of the University and Colleges to circa 1348', in J.I. Catto (ed.), *History of the University of Oxford, i: The Early Oxford Schools*, 265-309.

<sup>33</sup> *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 384.

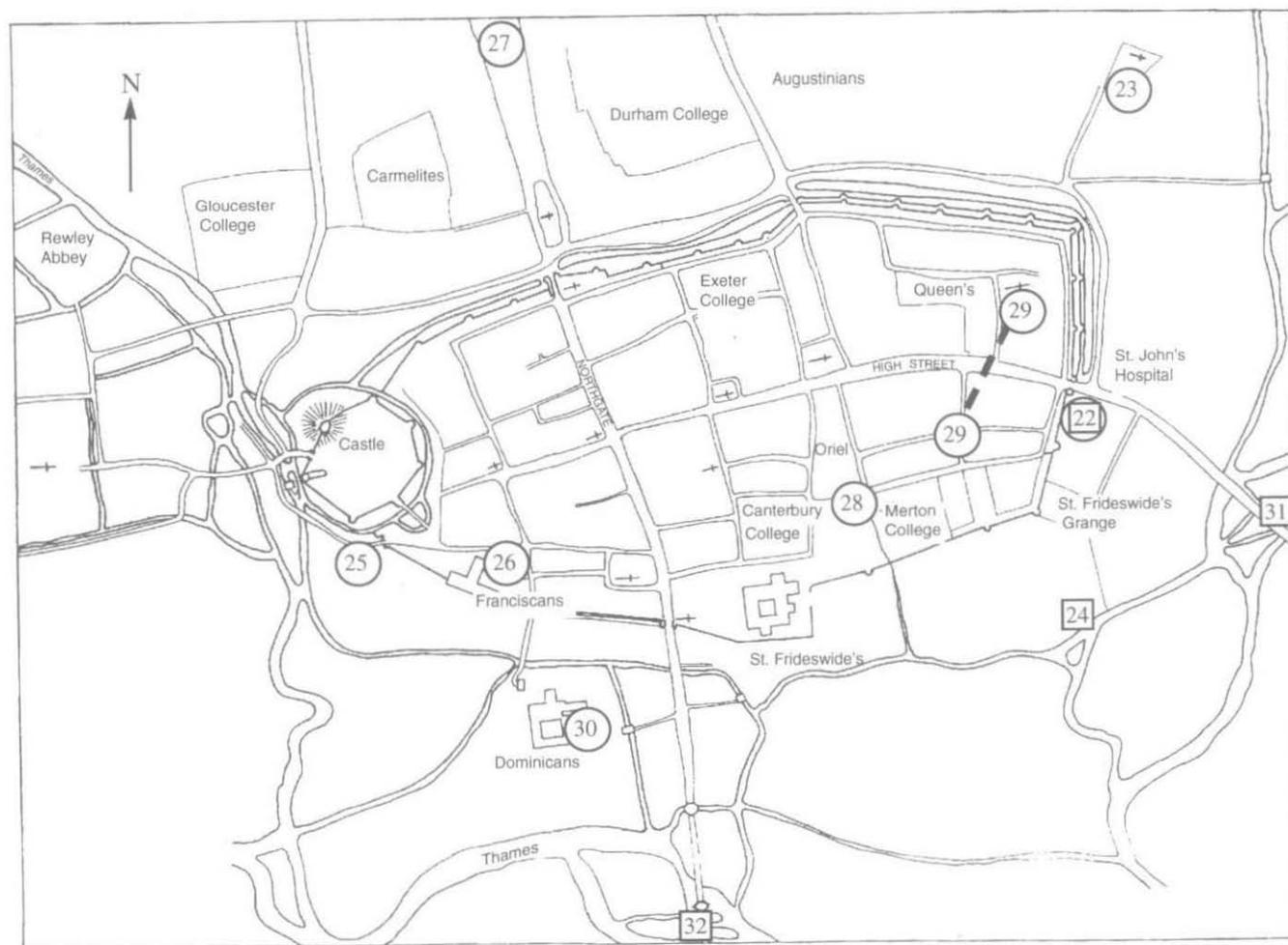


Fig. 2. Oxford sites (nos. 22-32). Based on the map of Oxford *c.* 1375 in *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 30 (reproduced by permission of the General Editor, Victoria County History).

repairs (no. 28). In 1293-4 the door-lock guaranteeing her enclosure was repaired at the college's expense, but soon after, with Merton's new chapel also dedicated to St. John complete, the old church was dismantled and converted into college rooms. Nothing more is heard of a recluse at Merton, and one must assume that, on the death of its incumbent, the anchorite's cell met a similar fate.

The solitary vocation as a whole petered out in the 16th century. Interestingly, hermits and anchorites were not included by name in either the Henrician dissolution of the monasteries or Edward's dissolution of the chantries and other commemorative institutions.<sup>34</sup> There is an indication of uncertainty as to their fate in Dr. London's letter to Cromwell listing the occupants of Oxford friaries, where he asks 'to knowe your pleasur concernyng the Anker of that Howse cum into the Kings hands, whether he schall remayne ther or nott' (no. 30). In the event (whether or not of his own volition) he did not. That appointments were being made to hermitages as late as the 1530s (no. 2; ?no. 1) argues against the vocations' decadence. Within a generation, however, the solitaries were gone. The last representative of the life in Oxfordshire was the hermit John Glass, who appears to have survived the Dissolution unmolested. In 1512 he was the occupant of the Chapel of St. John at Hensington belonging to the Knights Hospitallers. Thirty-four years later, and five years after the suppression of the Hospitallers, he was still there – though he had prudently dropped the title 'hermit' (no. 10).

#### THE SOLITARY LIFE

Documentary sources of the kind employed in the present survey only very rarely give any significant insight into the daily experience of the solitaries whose existence they record. One detail to emerge is that not all hermits and anchorites were in fact solitary. Thus in 1232 Lucian, the servant of Ernald hermit of Low Barrow in Wychwood, was given licence to succeed his master as hermit (no. 18). The record is, however, not clear as to whether the two hermits outside Woodstock who received the alms of Henry III's queen in 1251 were companions in the same hermitage, or occupants of two neighbouring sites (no. 35). Though perhaps startling to a modern observer, comradely solitaries were not unusual, and indeed the various surviving rules for hermits and anchorites recommend the 'solitary' where possible to have a companion of some sort.<sup>35</sup>

We may be equally surprised to find among the beneficiaries of the will of the Wychwood hermit Thomas Wylkys made in 1458 (no. 21) his daughter Hawissia. In fact there are a (relatively small) number of instances from the late Middle Ages of married hermits, and when in 1405 Archbishop Arundel was notified that the hermit Adam Cresseville had contracted and consummated a marriage to a certain Margaret, he, reasoning that the habit of a hermit did not amount to membership of a religious order nor include priest's orders, ruled that Adam should remain in his married state.<sup>36</sup> It is, however, far more probable that Wylkys took up his vocation as a widower.

<sup>34</sup> C.H. Williams (ed.), *English Historical Documents 1485-1558* (1967), 771-7. This is a subject which I hope to treat more fully elsewhere.

<sup>35</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, originally written for three anchoress-sisters, also assumes that an anchoress will have two women servants: *Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses*, trans. H. White (1993), 196. The late-medieval 'Rule of Celestine' for hermits likewise recommends that, if possible, the hermit should have a fellow (*socius*) or a servant. (The rule has been edited by L. Olier, 'Regulae Tres Reclusorum et Eremitarum Angliae Saec. xiii-xiv', *Antonianum*, iii (1928), 151-90 and 299-320, at 312-20; for this recommendation see chapter ix (at 315). I have a parallel-text edition of the rule and its English versions in preparation.)

<sup>36</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, Register of Thomas Arundel vol. II, fol. 438v. Noted by Clay, *Hermits and Anchorites*, 88. See also my 'Langland and Hermits'.

One remaining puzzle is the stable which apparently formed part of the dwelling of the anchoress of St. John the Baptist in Oxford (no. 28). That it was for her own use seems unthinkable, though Aelred of Rievaulx felt it necessary to caution his sister against becoming less like an anchoress than a housewife, seeking pasture and herdsmen for her beasts, and worrying about yields, prices and numbers.<sup>37</sup> It may, however, have served equally well for servants or guests; or if the recluse's cell had not been purpose-built, but adapted out of an existing messuage, the stabling may have formed a part of that. That it was considered worth repairing in 1284-5 suggests either that the anchoress was still using it for something, or perhaps that Merton had found or envisaged a use for it.

Hermits' and anchorites' daily regimen, in fact, tends to be recorded more often in the breach than the observance. Even here, details are usually sketchy. It would be interesting to know for what offence William Raby, hermit of the East Bridge, Oxford, had been cited before the court of the Chancellor of the University before incurring excommunication, just a few months after receiving royal licence to collect pontage for the repair of the bridge (no. 31). Since the remit of ecclesiastical courts like the Chancellor's was so wide, and included so many offences such as defamation, assault and breach of contract not self-evidently ecclesiastical in nature, speculation would perhaps be unwise; the majority of actions in the court seem to have been straightforward cases of debt.<sup>38</sup> The only other evidence of misdemeanour among Oxfordshire solitaires is equally hazy: it is not clear whether the alleged partner of robbers 'who dwells at the hermitage of Eynsham' (no. 6) should be considered a rogue hermit, an impostor, or the opportunist occupant of a vacant site.

Given that so much remains uncertain, E.J. Dobson's identification of Annora, recluse of Iffley, as the original recipient of the French translation of *Ancrene Wisse* and the patroness behind the revised version of the English original is tempting.<sup>39</sup> Since the text represents the most detailed and vivid guide to the solitary life medieval England produced, the desire to locate it in a specific time and place is strong. At a stroke, we would be able to deduce more about (at least the expected) day-to-day existence of one Oxfordshire solitary than the records tell us about all the others combined. Dobson is impressive in his adducing of circumstantial evidence to support his conviction of a connection with Annora, but more recent scholarship has exposed the hypothetical nature of his arguments and questioned a number of his conclusions.<sup>40</sup> He had argued, first, that the text was written by a member of one of the independent congregations of Austin canons. Then, taking into consideration the dialect of the extant manuscripts, he identified the Victorine house of Wigmore as the place of its composition. To this he then added further deductions concerning its author and original audience. Since Annora was married to Hugh Mortimer, lord of Wigmore castle, at precisely the time when *Ancrene Wisse* is assumed to have been written, and moreover the date of the French translation appears very close to the date at which she resolved to become a recluse, Dobson's case seems strong. As he says, 'Nothing could fit more closely: the right sort of woman in the right place at the right time'.<sup>41</sup> Bella Millett has, however, now shown that his initial premise – of Victorine authorship – is unlikely, and as a

<sup>37</sup> *De Institutione Inclusarum*, cap. 3. Ed. C.H. Talbot in *Aelredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia* (Corpus Christianorum Continuatio mediaevalis i), 635-82, at 639.

<sup>38</sup> Excommunication was the routine penalty for contumacy (failure to attend a summons or to comply with the court's ruling). A brief survey of the Chancellor's court is given by Salter, *Snappe's Formulary*, 22-9; see 25-6 for the cases brought there.

<sup>39</sup> Dobson, *op. cit.* note 22, pp. 308-11.

<sup>40</sup> Notably B. Millett, 'The Origins of *Ancrene Wisse*: New Answers, New Questions', *Medium Aevum*, lxi (1992), 206-28. The remainder of this paragraph is based on Millett's discussion.

<sup>41</sup> Dobson, *op. cit.* note 22, p. 310.

consequence his pyramid of subsidiary arguments is reduced to the level of largely unfounded speculation. Though she remains 'the right sort of woman... at [approximately] the right time', it seems (regretfully) safest at this stage not to accept as proven Annora's role in the history of the text.

Other sources of memorials of the solitary life available to us include place-name and architectural or archaeological evidence.<sup>42</sup> Oxfordshire is, however, not rich in either. The only relevant place-name is Hermitage Copse and Belt in the parish of Tusmore, but the name is not attested before the mid 19th century when it was part of the Tusmore estate. The reference may be to an 'ornamental hermit' of the type popular in the 18th and 19th centuries, or it may be connected with Tusmore House as a centre of recusancy; there is no evidence for a medieval solitary.<sup>43</sup> Hermitages and anchorholds were rarely very substantial buildings, and few have had the permanence of the impressive cave-dwellings of hermits such as Guy of Warwick or St. Robert of Knaresborough. Dunkin records poignantly his visit to the site of the hermitage of Muswell Hill, Piddington (no. 19), during research for his 1823 history of the county. At the site then occupied by a farmhouse called 'The Hermitage', he learnt that the hermit's chapel, an 'edifice... about fifty feet long, and of a proportionate breadth, having a large window filled with tracery at the east end, and others on the sides', had been used by the then occupant's father as a cart-hovel, until its demolition 'about forty years back'. He comments:

There is now no remnant of antiquity existing on this spot, and nothing but its loneliness can induce the contemplative stranger to believe that it has been the scite [sic] of a religious foundation.<sup>44</sup>

At Iffley, however, there may be traces of the cell inhabited by Annora de Braose. Just below and to the west of the south window in the sanctuary is a blocked opening, apparently a doorway. Immediately before it lies a 13th-century coffin lid (Figs. 3-4).<sup>45</sup> Although in the majority of cases an anchorite's cell was situated (like that of Alice, anchoress of St. Budoc's, Oxford (no. 25)) on the north side of the church, local considerations often dictated otherwise.<sup>46</sup> Although other suggestions have been advanced, it seems most likely that these features are connected with Annora's cell.<sup>47</sup> Through the opening into the chancel she would have been able to observe the sacrament during mass, while at other times engaging in the recommended practice of contemplating the grave in which she would be buried.<sup>48</sup>

There is a similar blocked round-arched doorway at the church of St. Peter, Cassington, where Annora's contemporary Matilda de la More was enclosed (no. 3). Here the opening is on the more usual north side, though rather further east than that at Iffley.<sup>49</sup> There is, however, no suggestive coffin lid, or any other evidence to enable a conclusive identification.

<sup>42</sup> See R. Gilchrist, *Contemplation and Action: The Other Monasticism* (1995), 157-208.

<sup>43</sup> M. Gelling, *The Place-Names of Oxfordshire* (English Place-Name Soc. xxiii-xxiv), 217; *VC.H. Oxon.* vi, 333-8.

<sup>44</sup> J. Dunkin, *Oxfordshire: The History and Antiquities of the Hundreds of Bullington and Ploughley* (1823), ii, 147. To complete the disillusion, I might add that the M40 now passes within a mile of the site.

<sup>45</sup> Noted, with the suggestion that they are connected with Annora, *VC.H. Oxon.* v, 202-3. These features are also noted, but with no suggestion as to their significance, in *Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of Oxford* (R.C.H.M. 1939), 152-4.

<sup>46</sup> Gilchrist, *op. cit.* note 42, pp. 187-90.

<sup>47</sup> See P. Reynolds, *A Stroll in Old Iffley* (1991), 44. Neither of his two alternative explanations – that the opening is a priest's door into an apse now vanished, or a lepers' squint – is especially compelling.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Ancrene Wisse* (trans. White), 58-9; Gilchrist, *op. cit.* note 42, p. 190. Whether Annora was indeed buried in her cell (as was common practice) is unknown.

<sup>49</sup> It is noted in *VC.H. Oxon.* xii, 51, where it is suggested that it 'may have led to a medieval vestry'.



Fig. 3. Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Iffley, from the SE.



Fig. 4. 13th-century coffin lid lying to the south of the chancel, St. Mary the Virgin, Iffley.

Remains of a third anchoress's cell may have been uncovered during archaeological investigations at Merton College in 1922. Excavations in the north-east corner of Mob Quad revealed a small building attached to the south side of the old church of St. John the Baptist, and some medieval pottery of domestic character was found.<sup>50</sup> Suggestions made at the time that this was the cell of the recluse of St. John's (no. 28) are certainly tempting, though similarly not susceptible of proof.<sup>51</sup>

Without doubt the appended list of sites is not complete. Wood, who knew of three hermitages (for one of which (no. 24) he is our only authority), and the Oxford anchorholds of St. Budoc, St. Cross, St. Giles, St. John, St. Peter, and that 'joyning to the Trinityes' (no. 22), says that there were 'severall more [joyning] to monasteryes, but noe memory (as I yet know) of them remaineth'.<sup>52</sup> Although the total of known sites now stands at some four times Wood's figure, I am no nearer finding any evidence of anchorites attached to the county's monasteries. It may be that of them, as of the other sites which doubtless existed, 'noe memory... remaineth'. I prefer to repeat Wood's optimistic 'as I yet know', and thus offer the present survey, like Chaucer's Parson his tale, 'under correccioun'.

### LIST OF SITES

The following is an alphabetical list of recorded sites occupied by hermits and anchorites in the county. In the Oxford entries, churches and chapels precede other sites. Anchorites are designated 'A', hermits 'H'. Where possible, I have indicated whether an anchorite is male ('m') or female ('f'). The date given in bold at the head of each entry is the date of the first document in which the site is identified as a hermitage or anchorhold. I have summarized each document or reference mentioning a hermit or anchorite at the site. The terms used in the records for an anchorite vary between *anachoreta*, *inclusus* (*inclusa*) and *reclusus* (*reclusa*), without any evident distinction in meaning. I translate the first as 'anchorite' and the others as 'recluse'. Place-names (except where their interpretation might be contentious) have been regularized according to modern usage.

Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 34 were identified by Clay in *Hermits and Anchorites*. No. 1 was included in Clay's table of sites for Northamptonshire.<sup>53</sup> Nos. 6, 14, 15, 22, 24, 30, 35, 37 are taken from Basil Cottle's annotated copies of the county lists prepared by Clay for the revised edition of her book. I have supplemented the references for the majority of these sites, and added nos. 8, 10, 11, 16, 33, 36. I have rejected Clay's no. 18 (my no. \*45) and agreed with Clay in assigning nos. \*39 and \*41, included in Salter's brief survey of Oxfordshire solitaries in *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, to Buckinghamshire and Warwickshire respectively. Although nos. \*42 and \*43 have been included among the rejected sites, it is not impossible that further investigation will uphold the conjectures of those advancing them as bridge-hermitages. While I hope I have not missed any references in the printed sources, the only unpublished material I have searched systematically is the sequence of registers of the bishops of Lincoln, which I have consulted on the microfilms published by Harvester Press Microform Publications (1984). I would of course be most glad of any additional references that readers were able to supply, which will be published in a future volume of *Oxoniensia*.

<sup>50</sup> E.M. Jope, 'Mediaeval Pottery from Merton College, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, viii-ix (1943-4), 202-6. The excavations were carried out under the direction of H.W. Garrod. There is a photograph of them in Merton College Library, ref. MCPH/A26, 22 (below).

<sup>51</sup> Miss Clay was alerted to these suggestions by Roger Highfield. I am very grateful to Dr. Highfield for elaborating upon them to me, and providing the reference to the photograph of the excavation given in the preceding note. He has also kindly provided a number of other suggestions regarding my entry for the anchorite of St. John's/Merton.

<sup>52</sup> Wood, ii, 503.

<sup>53</sup> Clay, *Hermits and Anchorites*, 236-7, no. 4.

In the list of sites which follows, works already referred to in the text are cited by short title. In addition, the following abbreviations are used:

<i>C.Ch.R.</i>	<i>Calendar of the Charter Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (6 vols. 1903-27)
<i>Close</i>	<i>Close Rolls of the Reign of Henry III Preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (14 vols. 1902-38) and <i>Calendar of the Close Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (1892-)
<i>C.L.R.</i>	<i>Calendar of Liberate Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office: Henry III</i> (6 vols. 1916-64)
<i>C.P.R.</i>	<i>Calendar of Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office</i> (1891-)
<i>Eynsham Cart.</i>	H.E. Salter (ed.), <i>Eynsham Cartulary</i> (Oxf. Hist. Soc. I-li)
<i>L.A.O.</i>	Lincolnshire Archives Office
<i>Monasticon</i>	W.E. Dugdale et al. (eds.), <i>Monasticon Anglicanum</i> (6 vols. in 8, 1655-1723, repr. 1970)
<i>Mun. Civ. Oxon.</i>	H.E. Salter (ed.), <i>Munimenta Civitatis Oxonie</i> (Oxf. Hist. Soc. lxxi)
<i>P.R.S.</i>	Pipe Roll Soc.
<i>S.M.R.</i>	Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record
<i>St. John's Hosp. Reg.</i>	H.E. Salter (ed.), <i>A Cartulary of the Hospital of St. John the Baptist</i> (Oxf. Hist. Soc. lxvi, lxxiii-lxix)
<i>Survey of Oxford</i>	H.E. Salter, W.A. Pantin and W.T. Mitchell (eds.), <i>Survey of Oxford</i> (Oxf. Hist. Soc. n.s. xiv, xx)
<i>Twyne 23</i>	Bodl. MS. Twyne 23

## 1. Banbury

H

1531

29 Mar. 1531. Will of Nicholas Wodhull of Thenford (d. 1531-2) directed his executors sufficiently to repair the 'Hermitage at the Brigg foot at Banbury' and to place 'an honest man therein to pray for him and his friends'. A. Beesley, *History of Banbury* (1841), 161. Noted *V.C.H. Oxon.* x, 24.

It should be noted that the 'honest man' is not identified as a hermit. It seems reasonable, however, to conjecture an earlier bridge-hermit at this hermitage, charged with the upkeep of Banbury Bridge. Although (as Beesley notes) the hermitage stood at the E. end of the bridge, over the border in Northamptonshire, the bridge is in Oxfordshire. Cf. Oxford: South Bridge (no. 32).

## 2. Bicester: Chapel of St. John the Baptist

H

1352

29 Apr. 1352. Licence from Edward the Black Prince to Sir Roger Lestraunge of Knokyn, who holds of the prince in chief in Bicester, to grant in frankalmoin to Br. Nicholas, hermit, and his successors, a place called 'Neuport' near Bicester, 14 perches in length and 10 in breadth. *Register of Edward the Black Prince Preserved in the Public Record Office* (4 vols. 1930-3), iv, 48.<sup>54</sup>

28 Mar. 1353. Order to Tideman de Lymbergh, farmer of the Black Prince's manor of Beckley, to deliver two oaks fit for timber out of the park of Beckley to Br. Nicholas, as of the prince's gift. *Black Prince's Reg.* iv, 85.

<sup>54</sup>Br. Nicholas is there given as 'friar Nicholas', which is probably to read too much into manuscript *frere*. See P.R.O. E 36/278, f. 33v., and see f. 51 for the succeeding reference.

15 May 1355. Licence for Nicholas Jurdan of Bicester, hermit, warden of the chapel of St. John the Baptist, Bicester, to found a hospital for poor and infirm persons, in honour of God, St. Mary and St. John the Baptist, at Bicester, and to acquire in mortmain lands and rents to a value of 100s. p.a. towards the sustenance of him and his successors and for a chaplain to celebrate divine service for the souls of the king, queen and Prince Edward. *C.P.R. 1354-8*, 218; noted J. Dunkin, *The History and Antiquities of Bicester* (1816), 117.

Jurdan was formerly at Kirtlington: see no. 16.

1399. A terrier of lands belonging to Bicester Priory includes a memorandum that the land called Wowelond belonging to the Lestraunges lies at the end of the vill towards (*erga*) the hermitage. *Ibid.*

1412. Account of Bicester Priory for 13-14 Henry VI includes alms of 4*d.* to the hermit of Bicester. P.R.O. SC 6/956/23.

1532-3. Letters patent of Edward earl of Derby, appointing to the vacant 'Armytage & Chapell' of St. John the Baptist 'Raynold Sklater, Preiste, to inhabit & dwell ther, soo longe as hee shall contynue Armyte, & make his residence & abydyng ther', and requesting alms for his support. T. Northcote Toller (ed.), *Correspondence of Edward, Third Earl of Derby* (Chetham Soc. n.s. xix), 79-80.

Dunkin notes that Sheep Street in Bicester was formerly known as St. John's Street, and offers this as the location of the hermitage and later hospital (*Bicester*, 115-17). At *V.C.H. Oxon.* vi, 16 the location is identified as the site of one of the present New Buildings.

### 3. Cassington A (f) 1237

21 Aug. 1237. Mandate to Thomas de Langley to supply Matilda de la More, who is to be enclosed at Cassington, with one oak for the building of her dwelling (*ad se hospitandum*), of the king's gift. *Close 1234-7*, 489. Noted *V.C.H. Oxon.* xii, 50; A.K. Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (1985), 159 (incorrectly identifying it as a grant of firewood).

For notes on possible traces of Matilda's cell, see p. 61 above.

### 4. Crowmarsh A 1271

Bequest of 2s. Will of Nicholas de Weston. See p. 57 above.

### 5. Dornford A (m) 1236

2 Mar. 1236. Grant for life to Br. Robert of Dornford of three cartloads of firewood p.a. in the wood of Wootton, by view and livery of the king's bailiff of Woodstock. *C.P.R. 1232-47*, 138. Noted *V.C.H. Oxon.* xi, 218; Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, 157.

The village of Dornford nr. Wootton was deserted during the Tudor period. The site is indicated by the surviving Lower Dornford Farm (SP 449205). K.J. Allison et al., *The Deserted Villages of Oxfordshire* (Leicester Univ. Dept. of Eng. Local Hist. Occas. Papers, xvii, 1965), 37.

### 6. Eynsham H 1241

24 Apr. 1241. Writ to the sheriff of Oxford to bring before the king's justices at Westminster Reynold the forester who dwells at the hermitage of Eynsham and is appealed of partnership with robbers. *C.L.R. 1240-5*, 46.

1241x64. A grant by Amicia widow of Thomas de Lardario to Eynsham Abbey of 2 a. of arable land in the territory of Eynsham of her marriage-portion, including half an acre in 'Mulemore' abutting land held by Hugo Heremita. *Eynsham Cart.* i, 221.

Noted E. Chambers, *Eynsham Under the Monks* (O.R.S. xviii), 106-7, where 'the site at Hamstall now called the Nunnery' is suggested as the location of the hermitage. The site is on the bridleway between Eynsham and South Leigh (SP 412086). There is, however, no evidence that the name is of any antiquity, and I have found nothing to corroborate Chambers's suggestion.

c. 1220. Hugh's bridge (*pons Hugonis*) mentioned in the abutments of a grant of land to Eynsham Abbey could have been (suggests Salter) the work, or at least the charge, of the above Hugo Heremita. *Eynsham Cart.* i, 284. This is, however, unproven.

## 7. Felley (in Wychwood)

H

1139x40

Whereas [Waleran] count of Meulan has been given the forest of Bloxham by King Stephen, but has found Eynsham Abbey to be canonically invested of the hermitage (*herem(itor)io*) of Pheleleie, he grants the same to them. *Eynsham Cart.* i, 52-3; *Monasticon*, iii, 20. For dating see succeeding reference.

1139x40. Confirmation by King Stephen to the church of St. John of the forest of Bloxham and the monks there serving God of 7 a. in the forest of Bloxham. H.A. Cronne and R.H.C. Davis (eds.), *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, iii (1968), 111-12; *Eynsham Cart.* i, 52.

By this date, it appears from the foregoing references, the chapel had passed from a hermitage to a dependent cell of Eynsham. Salter's conjecture (in *Eynsham Cart.* i, p. xiv, repeated *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 67) that 'during the reign of Henry I some Benedictine monk retired to a solitary life in Bloxham wood, and... was joined by others and became their prior' is not unlikely. The chapel is described as the property of Eynsham Abbey, of the gift of the king's predecessors, in 1231 (*Eynsham Cart.* ii, 168; *C.Ch.R.* i, 206), but 'in 1315 it is known by the name of 'la forsaken ho' (i.e. the forsaken hoke or enclosure)'. *Eynsham Cart.* i, p. xiv.

Margaret Gelling identifies Felley as a lost settlement located near Grim's Ditch in the parish of Spelsbury (*Place-Names of Oxfordshire*, 380). In the perambulation of Wychwood of 1300 Felleyshegg lies somewhere between Ditchley and Wootton, perhaps in the region of Glympton Wood (SP 417202) – see J.Y. Akerman, 'A View of the Ancient Limits of the Forest of Wychwood', *Archaeologia*, xxxvii (1857), 424-40 at 424-5 and map facing 425. In 1961 Violet Steed suggested that the priory occupied a site near Spurnell's Well (SP 392201), S. of Ditchley Park ('The Bounds of Wychwood Forest', *Top. Oxon.* vii (1961), and more fully her 'Hermitages and Chapels in Wychwood Forest', *Top. Oxon.* x (1963)), and a Ditchley estate map of 1726 does indeed show 'Fenny Chappel' in this location (Oxfordshire Archives, MS. Dil. I/i/2b; there is a copy in S.M.R. ref. PRN 5398).

## 8. Garsington

A (m)

c. 1210

Master Ralph, anchorite,<sup>55</sup> held 3½ yardlands in Garsington, granted by Peter son of Geoffrey son of Durand and Alice his wife to the abbess and convent of Godstow for a rent of 7s. 8d. *Reg. Godstow*, i, 335; *V.C.H. Oxon.* v, 142.

## 9. Henley

H

1496

19 Dec. 1496. The whole commonalty granted that Reg. Wynche, hermit, should have letters patent under the common seal of the town to beg for alms for the repair of the chapel of St. Anne on the bridge and the highway there, at pleasure. P.M. Briers (ed.), *Henley Borough Records* (O.R.S. xli), 117.

12 Sep. 1505. Memorandum that Richard Andrewson 'hathe payed in clothe for the hermyte' 3s. 4d. *Ibid.* 152.

7 Jan. 1514. Grant by custos and burgesses under the common seal to Thomas Sarre (not identified as a hermit) to collect alms for the sustentation and repair of the chapel of St. Anne on the bridge. *Ibid.* 173.

22 May 1529. Commission from John Longland, bishop of Lincoln to Robert King, abbot of Thame and titular bishop of Rheon, to receive the profession as a hermit (*professionem heremiticam*) of William Brown of Henley, according to the order of St. Paul. L.A.O. Episcopal Register XXVI, f. 169v.

<sup>55</sup> Clark reads 'auctoriste', for which the *Middle English Dictionary* suggests '?A student of authorities'. The manuscript supports Clark's reading (Bodl. MS. Rawl. B 408, f. 53), as does the manuscript of the Latin cartulary (P.R.O. E 164/20, f. 46 (Exchequer Miscellaneous Books): *totam terram quam magister Radulphus auctorista tenuit de nobis in feodo*). The form auctorista is plausible (cf. *canonista*), but unrecorded. The reading of the Latin cartulary (from which the English is derived) is in all probability a misreading of original *anacorista* or perhaps *anchorista*. I have therefore replicated the (unspoken) assumption of the author of the entry in *V.C.H. Oxon.* v that this reference is indeed to an anchorite. It is not impossible, however, that further research will prove us both wrong. I am very grateful to Dr. David Howlett for his advice on *auctorista*.

It seems reasonable to suppose, though no corroboration has been found, that Brown intended to remain in Henley as the bridge-hermit. For Robert King as suffragan of the bishop of Lincoln, see E.B. Fryde et al., *Handbook of British Chronology* (3rd edn. 1986), 287. For another commission to receive a hermit's vow directed to him, see no. 33.

**10. Hensington (in Woodstock) H 1512**

1512. The Chapel of St. John belonging to the Hospitallers, with its garden, was held by John Glass, hermit. *V.C.H. Oxon.* xii, 33.

1546. At the sale of the manor of Hensington to Sir Robert Tyrwhitt jr. and Thomas Kydall, gent., John Glasse held the chapel and garden by copy of court roll for a rent of 2s. p.a. P.R.O. E 318/21/1156, m. 6. Noted *V.C.H. Oxon.* xii, 33, and printed in translation in E. Marshall, *The Early History of Woodstock Manor* (1875), 43-4.

**11. Holwell (in Broadwell) H -1170**

A grant by Hugh de Cundicota to Bruern Abbey of a piece of land called Pailasgare is witnessed by (*inter alia*) Robert *heremita, diaconus de Holawella*. T. Madox (ed.), *Formulare Anglicanum* (1702), 252-3.

Noted *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 10, where the identification of Holwell is made. Henry II confirmed before 1170 grants to Bruern including 'that land of Hugh de Cundicota which was David the priest's together with the piece of land called Pailesgara'. J. Conway Davies (ed.), *Cartae Antiquae, rolls 11-20* (P.R.S. n.s. xxxiii), 185-6. Similar confirmations were issued by Richard (printed from an *inspeximus* in *C.Ch.R.* v, 221-2) and John (*Monasticon*, v, 497). The same confirmations indicate Bruern's holdings in Holwell, and should be added to the evidence offered by A.S.T. Fisher, *The History of Broadwell, Oxfordshire, with Filkins, Kelmscott and Holwell* (1968), 22-3, 118. Holwell was a chapel of ease to Broadwell, and was pulled down in 1845 (*ibid.* 7-8).

**12. Horsepath A 1271**

Bequest of 12*d.* Will of Nicholas de Weston. See p. 57 above.

**13. Iffley A (f) 1232**

28 Sep. 1232. Grant by King Henry III to Annora, widow of Hugh Mortimer, that she might hold 100s. of land with appurtenances in Charlton and Cherington (in Tetbury) which William de Braose her father gave her as a marriage portion for her sustentation in her *reclusagium*, the land to revert after her decease. *C.P.R. 1225-32*, 501. See also *V.C.H. Glos.* xi, 170, 266.

19 Jun. 1233. Mandate to P. de Rivall for the recluse of Iffley to have two oaks (*robora*) from the forest of Shotover for firewood. *Close 1231-4*, 230.

9 May 1234. Mandate to Hugh de Nevill for Annora the recluse of Iffley to have two trees (*fusta*) from the forest of Shotover for firewood. *Ibid.* 421.

16 Aug. 1234. Like to John de Nevill. *Ibid.* 500.

25 Sep. 1234. Mandate to Richard de la Lade and Adam son of William, the king's escheators, to permit the recluse of Iffley to receive 100s. p.a. from the manor of Tetbury which the king has granted to her during pleasure for her maintenance. *C.P.R. 1232-47*, 70.

John de Braose, the heir of Annora's father William de Braose, to whom her marriage portion reverted on her enclosure, had died in 1232 (*V.C.H. Glos.* xi, 264), hence the involvement of the Crown escheators.

4 Nov. 1234. Grant to Annora that the men holding those lands in Charlton and Cherington which formed part of her marriage portion shall be immediately answerable to her, on condition that the lands revert. *Ibid.* 80.

13 Aug. 1235. Mandate to John de Nevill for the recluse of Iffley to have three oaks from the forest of Bernewod' for firewood. *Close 1234-7*, 128.

6 Aug. 1236. Mandate to John de Nevill for the recluse of Iffley to have three trees from the wood of Shotover for firewood. *Ibid.* 299.

?22 Apr. 1238. Like mandate for four oaks. *Close 1237-42*, 44.

26 Jun. 1238. Like mandate for two oaks. *Ibid.* 66.

7 Nov. 1239. Mandate to John Bysset for the recluse of Iffley to have two trees from the forest of Shotover for firewood. *Ibid.* 154.

7 Nov. 1239. Writ to the sheriff of Oxford to cause the recluse of Iffley to have a robe suitable for her. *C.L.R. 1226-40*, 429.

26 Jan. 1241. Mandate to John Bysset for Alienore recluse of Iffley to have three oaks for timber. *Close 1237-42*, 269.

26 Jan. 1241. Mandate to the guardians of the see of Winchester for Alienore to have six quarters of wheat. *Ibid.*

When Annora's sister Loretta became a recluse at Hackington, she handed over her dower lands to the bishop of Winchester and Philip de Albin for three years; Powicke notes the possibility that 'she intended to use the rent which accrued as the endowment of her anchorage' (F.M. Powicke, 'Loretta, Countess of Leicester', in *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait* (1933), 265). This reference might suggest that Annora entered into some kind of similar arrangement with the then bishop, Peter des Roches (d. 1238).

Noted Powicke, 'Loretta, Countess of Leicester'; Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, 165-6; *V.C.H. Oxon.* v, 202-3. For the suggestion that there may be traces of Annora's cell at the church of St. Mary the Virgin, Iffley, see p. 61 above, and Figs. 3-4.

#### 14. Islip

A (f/m)

1187-8

1187-8. Account of William Rufus for the 5 manors of the honour of William de Curci record payment of 3s. to the recluse (*inclusa*) of Islip. *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the 34th year of the Reign of King Henry II AD 1187-1188* (P.R.S. xxxviii), 4.

1188-9. The same account for the year to Richard's accession records payment of 2s. 3d. in fixed alms to the recluse (*inclusus*) of Islip. J. Hunter (ed.), *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the 1st year of the Reign of King Richard* (1844), 7.

Noted Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, 187. For William de C(o)urci, see p. 57 n. 26 above. The pipe rolls clearly read dative *includere* and *incluso*, respectively. See P.R.O. E 372/34, rot. 1 m. 2; E 372/35, rot. 1 m. 2. The discrepancy could be a straightforward clerical error, or a new anchorite may have taken up residence.

#### 15. Kiddington

A (f)

1236x38

Grant by Adam Sage to Joan his niece (*Iohanne nepti mee*), who has devoted herself to service of God in the *recluserium* at Kiddington, of 3s. p.a. for her sustentation as long as she lives out of his lands in the parish of St. Thomas nr. Oseney. *Oseney Cart.* ii, 483. Noted Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, 256-7.

#### 16. Kirtlington

H

1341

25 Dec. 1341. Quitclaim by Nicholas Jurdan of Kirtlington, hermit, to Aulnay Abbey of a store house (?) (*domo stouata*)<sup>56</sup> next to the lane of Jurdan Taillour together with the curtilage adjoining the same house. St. John's Coll. Mun. xx.i(59).

Mentioned as one of two 'obscure individuals' of Kirtlington at *V.C.H. Oxon.* vi, 221. He is noted, and a reproduction of his charter (incorrectly dated to 1338) printed, in V.S. Humphries, *Kirtlington: An Oxfordshire Village* (1986), 13-14. The church of Kirtlington was given by Jurdan and Lucy de Sai to Aulnay Abbey in Normandy which they founded in 1131. The abbot of Aulnay held three carucates in Kirtlington in 1341-2 (*V.C.H. Oxon.* vi, 224, 228). Nicholas Jurdan was later to move to Bicester (no. 2).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *stowo*: R. E. Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List* (1965), s.v. *stowagium*. The modifier could be *stonata*, thus 'a house of stone', but the word is not otherwise known. My thanks again to David Howlett.

**17. Locksley (in Wychwood) H 1337**

20 Sep. 1337. Grant to Roger son of Robert Salomon, chaplain, of the custody of the hermitage, in the king's gift by reason of the temporalities of the priory of Deerhurst being in his hands. *C.P.R. 1334-8*, 524.

Deerhurst was an alien priory of the Benedictine order, dependent on St. Denis (Paris). In common with the other alien priories it was confiscated by the Crown in 1337 and restored in 1361 (*V.C.H. Glos.* ii, 103-5). It is not clear that the incumbent was by this date a hermit. I have been unable to locate the site. It is similarly 'only a name' to Steed ('Hermitages and Chapels').

**18. Low Barrow (nr. Leafield) H 1232**

24 Sep. 1232. Henry III grants to Lucian de Luuebir that, when Ernald hermit of Luuebir', whose servant the said Lucian is, dies, he may succeed him and dwell in the hermitage of Luuebir' of the king's licence as the said Ernald dwells there. Mandate to Thomas de Langley to permit the same. *Close 1231-4*, 106 (where Luuebur' is given as Lunebur').

4 May 1270. Gift by Henry III to hospital of St. John the Baptist, Lechlade, of the hermitage of Lovebyri within the king's forest of Wychwood. *C.Ch.R.* ii, 139.

30 Jan. 1300. An inquisition by Bishop Giffard of Worcester as to the state of Lechlade Hospital heard that the prior (amongst numerous abuses) had alienated the hermitage of Louebury in Wychwood. J.W. Willis Bund (ed.), *Episcopal Registers, Diocese of Worcester: Register of Godfrey Giffard*, ii (Worcs. Hist. Soc. xv), 537.

Noted Steed, 'Hermitages and Chapels'. The identification of the site of this hermitage with Low Barrow nr. Leafield is made by V.J. Watney, *Cornbury and the Forest of Wychwood* (1910), 19. For abuses at Lechlade Hospital in the late 13th and 14th centuries, see *V.C.H. Glos.* ii, 125.

**19. Muswell Hill (in Piddington) H c. 1152**

Confirmation by Joan de Pedintona, widow of Guy de Rihale, of the latter's grant to Missenden Abbey (Bucks.) of the hermitage built and inhabited by Ralph the hermit and of the chapel in honour of the Holy Cross founded there by the same. H.E. Salter (ed.), *Boarstall Cartulary* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. lxxxviii), 100-1.

12th c. A series of confirmations of the above grant by Alberic earl of Damartin (third husband of Joan); Simon de Gerardmulin (her second husband); Bishop Robert de Chesney of Lincoln; Robert archdeacon of Oxford; Malcolm king of Scotland (as lord of Huntingdon), and William his successor. *Boarstall Cart.* 101-4; J.G. Jenkins (ed.), *Cartulary of Missenden Abbey* (Bucks. Rec. Soc. ii, x, xii), iii, 64-8. The latter also has a confirmation of Henry II (1155x66) at i, 17-18, and two papal confirmations at iii, 218, 220.

c. 1160. A surrender by the abbot and convent of Missenden to prior and convent of St. Frideswide of all rights claimed at Piddington under the gift of Alberic earl of Damartin and Joan his wife is witnessed by (*inter alia*) Ralph the hermit. *Cart. St. Frideswide*, ii, 96-7.

1222x38. Grant by John Briseopot to the chapel of the Holy Cross of the hermitage of Muswell and to the canons of Missenden serving God in the said chapel of all the rent and service which Hugh de Gornay gave him. *Missenden Cart.* i, 209.

By the date of this final reference, therefore, Muswell was no longer a hermit-chapel. It was granted by Missenden Abbey to John de Plesssets c. 1240, and thereafter was served by a stipendiary priest as an appendage of the manor of Muswell. There is no subsequent record of a hermit at the chapel (Dunkin, *Oxfordshire*, ii, 145). The chapel was also subsequently the subject of disputes between Missenden and the rector of Ambrosden in 1231 (W.H. Bliss (ed.), *Cal. of Entries in Papal Regs. relating to Gt. Brit. and Ireland. Papal Letters*, i (1893), 125), and between Missenden and St. Frideswide's, finally resolved in the latter's favour in the later 14th century (*Monasticon*, ii, 135-6n).

## 20. Newbridge (in Standlake)

H

c. 1434

Thomas Gascoigne records the pious sayings of William of Cornwall, hermit of Newbridge c. 1434, when he felt himself tempted to sin:

*O peccatum! quanta solvam pro te, si te recipiam, et tibi consenciam; solvam pro te, et patiar pro te peccato, si tibi consenciam, carenciam gratiae Dei et gloriae aeternae, et plura poenalia patiar pro te: nolo ergo, O peccatum! solvere tot et tanta pro te habendo, tot enim mala et poenalia solvam pro te peccato, et tot mala sustinebo pro te, si tibi consenciam; nolo ergo, O peccatum! habere te nec emere te tam magno et tam caro pretio.*

J.E.T. Rogers (ed.), *Loci e libro veritatum* (1881), 105-6.

After 1462. Wood, following Twyne, who based his information on a MS. belonging to Richard Feteplace of Besselsleigh, says there was a hermitage 'at Stanlake at the end of the towne there next to Newbridge, being an old stone building and now a common inn (called the Checquer) for travellers between Gloucestershire and London. Of which hermit I find that (when that bridg had bin repaired with the larg legacy of one John Golofre esquire deceased, and after that about the 2<sup>d</sup> of Edward IV [1462] fallen into decay, and thereby severall complaints put up by the men of Kingston and Stanlake) the hermit at length, called Thomas Briggess, being moved with a good intent obtained a license to require the goodwill and favour of passengers that came that way and of other neighbouring villages towards the reparation of it againe'. Wood, ii, 499.

Noted *V.C.H. Oxon.* xiii, 174, 178-9. Despite Wood's closing assertion, no record of such a licence has been found (cf. *V.C.H. Oxon.* xiii, 174 n.60). The Chequers Inn afterwards gave way to a farmstead known as Manor Farm, all buildings of which were demolished c. 1889. A sketch of the farmstead in 1873 at *V.C.H. Oxon.* xiii, 179 includes a building of two storeys with a large chimney and a pointed doorway which (it is suggested) is 'perhaps part of the hermitage itself'.

## 21. Newhill (in Wychwood)

H

1254

1254. Mandate to the justice of the forest to inquire whether the abbot of Bruern should have housebote and haybote in the forest of Wychwood for the upkeep of the buildings of his hermitage (*domos heremitagii sui*) of Ewelme (*le Euuelme*) where King John assigned two chaplains to celebrate divine service perpetually for the souls of the king's ancestors. *Close 1253-4*, 29.

25 Sep. 1403. Licence for Simon Kirton, hermit of the chapel of Newelme, to enclose two crofts called 'Newelmecrofts' pertaining to the chapel with hedges and ditches. *C.P.R. 1401-5*, 260.

1411. Symon Kyrtten, *capeallanus commorans in wychwod forest per triginta annos* is named as one of five *personas honestas sancte conversationis & vite* testifying to the trustworthiness of a vision of St. Ursula vouchsafed to John Burry, hermit of Guy's Cliff (Warwicks.) in 1411. Frater T., *Incipit Epistola ad virgines Christi universas super hystoria noua vndecim milium virginum celitus nuper reuelata* (?Cologne, 1482), sig. e4v. Among the *venerabiles viri* adding their testimony was the abbot of Bruern.

23 Sep. 1458. Will of Thomas Wylkys, hermit, leaving his body to be buried in the chapel of Newelme; money bequests to his daughter and sister, and a horse and a cow to two others; 3s. 4d. each to Richard Wodward of the Dominicans of Oxford and the abbot of Bruern, and the same sum for the repair of the chapel of Newelme; and a vestment to the chapel of Feilde (Leafield). A.W. Gibbons, *Early Lincoln Wills* (1888), 193.

'Feilde' or 'le Feilde' is the usual medieval form of Leafield (*Place-Names of Oxfordshire*, 361). The text actually reads *capelle de de feilde* (L.A.O. Episcopal Register XX, f. 46v.), which may be, rather than dittography, a misreading of original *de le feilde*.

1535. The abbot and convent of Bruern held the chapel commonly called Nwellms Heremytage in the forest of Wychwood, with several houses and buildings, two enclosures (*clausis*) and other lands pertaining to the chapel. Value 26s. 8d. *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, ii, 201, 265; *Monasticon*, v, 498.

References for 1403 and 1458 noted *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 10. Gelling identifies the site with a stream known as Ewelme Pill near Filkins (*Place-Names of Oxfordshire*, 320). This, however, is not in the forest of Wychwood, which in the perambulation of 1300 extended no further S. than Cogges near Witney (Akerman, 'Forest of Wychwood'). Newhill Plain is a clearing in the forest of Wychwood immediately to the SW. of Cornbury Park (SP 338172). It occurs as Newwell Plain in 1822 (*Place-Names of Oxfordshire*, 389). The identification is also made by Steed, 'Hermitages and Chapels'.

**22. Oxford: Holy Trinity** **H** **1471**  
**A** **16th c.**

12 Sep. 1471. Draft letters patent of John Dobbis, mayor of Oxford, that he has conferred the chapel of the Holy Trinity by the East Gate with its lands and rents on Robert Alrede, hermit, for the term of his life, for the maintenance of the chapel and of a priest to celebrate divine service therein for the mayor and burgesses and the brothers and sisters of the fraternity of the chapel. H.E. Salter (ed.), *Snappe's Formulary* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. lxxx), 222-3. Noted *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 151-2.

The chapel of the Holy Trinity outside the East Gate had been acquired as their Oxford headquarters by the Trinitarians *temp.* Edward I. In 1313 they had licence to remove within the town walls, on condition that they maintain a chantry in the chapel for their founders and benefactors. The order in Oxford was wiped out by the Black Death and the chapel was subsequently in the hands of the minister of the Trinitarians of Hounslow, who in 1447 leased it to the mayor and commonalty of Oxford. On 4 Dec. 1452 the town granted it to Robert Kelyngton, chaplain, for life. The Trinitarians resumed the premises on 28 Oct. 1488, when they returned to Oxford, and from this date they appear once more to have been based outside the walls. There is no other record of a fraternity at the chapel. See *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 151-2; iv, 302; *C.P.R. 1307-13*, 86; *Mun. Civ. Oxon.* 214-15; *Snappe's Formulary*, 218-19; *Survey of Oxford*, i, 197.

Towards the Dissolution the Oxford house of the Trinitarians was inhabited only by 'a priest, an anchorite, & other poore scholars who lived by alms from colledges'. Wood, ii, 487. At the Dissolution, Wood says elsewhere, 'an old priest and an anchorite lived... there and afterwards died at the same place'. Wood, ii, 482.

**23. Oxford: Holywell (St. Cross)** **A (m)** **1224**

An inquiry ordered by Pope Honorius III and held by Archbishop Stephen Langton in 1224 into the competing claims of Dorchester and Winchester to possess the relics of St. Birinus heard the testimony of the abbot of the former house that, at the time of the first finding of the body claimed as Birinus's (perhaps a generation earlier),<sup>57</sup> Matthew *inclusus* of Holywell received a divine message as to its genuineness. *Nova Legenda Angliae*, i, 118-22. Noted Wood ii, 503; *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 9.

2 Aug. 1236. Mandate from King Henry III to Ponce de Pontibus not to place any impediment to the *reclusorium* he has caused to be built at the church of Holywell. *Close 1234-7*, 296.

Ponce was rector of St. Peter in the East, of which Holywell was a dependent chapel (*V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 71, 376). The patronage of St. Peter's had escheated to the Crown in 1200 on the death of John of Oxford, bishop of Norwich, and was granted by Henry III to Merton College in 1266 (*V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 398).

**24. Oxford: Our Lady in the Wall** **H** **?**

Wood describes 'A cell, or rather an hermitage, formerly standing at the further end of St. Frideswyde's grove neare their Grange, or (to explaine it better) at the hether end of Milham Bridge next to the city and opposite to the south-east corner of the city wall where Merton College mount now is', adding that 'It belonged to St. Frideswyde's Priory, being by them first founded, and the hermits or religious people thereof had sustenance administered them for the most part from the Grange'. Wood, ii, 500.

The name 'Our Lady in the Wall' according to Wood derived from a statue of the Virgin in a niche in the wall. It was near St. Edmund's Well, which was located 'on the south side of S. Clement's Church and neare to the ford or water called Mill Ford or Cowley Ford' (Wood, i, 288). Wood continues: 'It was frequented by severall people that came for the sake of this statu and St. Edmund's Well; and was standing till St. Frideswyde's Priory was involved into Cardnall Wolsey's Colledge. And then 'twas made use off by the workmen to lay their tolls [*sc.* tools] in when they squared their timber for that purpose in that place adjoyning called now Timber Yard'. Wood, ii, 502.

<sup>57</sup> One of the canons examined related the finding of the body as he had often heard it from another canon (presumably dead, since his testimony was not taken in person), named William (*Nova Legenda Angliae*, i, 120).

Despite Wood's assertion, I have found no reference to the hermitage in the cartulary of St. Frideswide's, nor indeed in any other authority. St. Edmund's Well is mentioned in 1290 and 1304, when the bishop of Lincoln instructed the archdeacon of Oxford 'to put a stop to the veneration shown by certain people in Oxford to a well in the parish of St. Clement, commonly called the well of St. Edmund' (*V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 17). The association of a hermitage with a holy well was not uncommon.

**25. Oxford: St. Budoc's** **A (f)** **1242**

10 Mar. 1242. Intimation to Bishop Robert Grosseteste of Lincoln that, yielding to the prayers of Alice, the bearer, who has made a vow to serve God in some solitary place, the king (Henry III) has granted that she may build herself a *recluserium* on the N. side of the church of St. Budoc, where she may serve God and the Virgin for life. *C.P.R. 1232-47*, 275; Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, 116. Noted *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 9; iv, 71.

1271. Bequest of 3s. Will of Nicholas de Weston. See p. 57 above.

The church of St. Budoc, then in ruins and the site almost deserted, was granted in 1265 to the Friars of the Sack (*V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 376). They received 10s. in Weston's will.

**26. Oxford: St. Ebbe's** **A (f)** **1210x1225**

A rent of 2s. 6d. granted to Simon rector of St. Ebbe's was granted by him to St. John's Hospital, Oxford, with the condition that it be paid to Basilia, anchoress of St. Ebbe's, as long as she lived. *St. John's Hospital Reg.* ii, 244. Noted *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 71; Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, 266.

**27. Oxford: St. Giles** **A** **1271**

Bequest of 12d. Will of Nicholas de Weston. See p. 57 above.

**28. Oxford: St. John the Baptist** **A (f)** **-1271 (c. 1270)**

c. 1270. An Oseney Abbey rental includes receipt of 32d. from the inclusa of St. John's. *Oseney Cart.* iii, 113.

In the rental of c. 1280, this rent was received from Roger Harang (*ibid.* iii, 119). The property stood on the corner of Northgate St. (now Cornmarket) and Cheyney Lane (Survey of Oxford, i, 21, and Map NE 1, tenement no. 9). This is of course some distance from the church of St. John the Baptist, and the identification with the recluse of the succeeding references may not be regarded as absolutely certain. Salter notes how many of the properties listed in the Oseney rental were sublet (*Oseney Cart.* iii, 102); this is perhaps the easiest explanation in this case. For examples of recluses receiving rent money see nos. 16, 26.

1271. Bequest of 12d. Will of Nicholas de Weston. See p. 57 above.

1284-5. The account of John chaplain of Merton College includes payment of 2s. 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for the repair of the stable (*stabulum*) in the house of the recluse (*incluse*) and of the wall of the same. J.R.L. Highfield (ed.), *Early Rolls of Merton College, Oxford* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. n.s. xviii), 293.

1288-9. The account of the first bursar of Merton includes payment of 13d. for the repair of the house of the recluse (*reclus*). *Ibid.* 223.

1289-90. The account of Walter Cuddington includes payment of 2d. for the mending of (*inter alia*) one lock in the anchorite's door; and 12d. paid as wages for 3 $\frac{1}{2}$  days to the two men who made (*fecerunt*) the anchorite's wall. *Ibid.* 301.

Cuddington was a fellow and kin to the founder of Merton. During the period 1289-1311 he also acted as overseer of the works for the expansion of the college, and in particular the building of the chapel. *V.C.H. Oxon.* iii, 99-100.

1293-4. The account of the same includes payment of  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for mending the lock to the anchorite's door. *Ibid.* 328.

This is probably the old church of St. John, rather than Merton College chapel. There is no evidence that the latter was begun before 1289; the choir was finished by 1294. In 1293 Merton chapel and the old church stood side by side; the latter had however been converted into rooms by 1306. P.S. Allen and H.W. Garrod

(eds.), *Merton Muniments* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. lxxxvi), 7 n.6; *V.C.H. Oxon.* iii, 100. Probably the building work on the new chapel provided the stimulus and opportunity for repairs to the cell associated with the existing church. For possible remains of the cell, see p. 63 above.

**29. Oxford: St. Peter in the East** **A (f)** **1227**

1227. Grant by the Hospital of St. John the Baptist to Geoffrey Malin alias Picot and Mabilla his wife of a message between the land of the anchorite and that of Picot. *St. John's Hospital Reg.* i, 364; *Survey of Oxford*, i, 157.

1270. Surrender by Roger Kokerel and Isabella his wife to the Hospital of St. John of land between Maiden Hall and the land of the anchorite. *Survey of Oxford*, i, 159.

1271. Bequest of 12*d.* Will of Nicholas de Weston. See p. 57 above.

1272. Grant by Simon Excambiator to the proctors of the mass of St. Mary of land between the land of the anchorite and that which was once of the abbess of Godstow. *Survey of Oxford*, i, 158.

c. 1287; 1293. Rent of 4*d.* paid to the Hospital of St. John for the house which belonged to the recluse (*que fuit incluse*). *Ibid.*

c. 1302; 1325; 1346; 1356. Similar rent paid for the house of the *inclusa*. *Ibid.*

This house is tenement no. 223 on Map SE IV in *Survey of Oxford*. It is not clear whether the anchorite lived here, or whether she was attached to the church of St. Peter, and merely received the rent as an endowment (cf. nos. 16, 26, 28). Both possible sites have been indicated on Fig. 2.

**30. Oxford: Blackfriars** **A (m)** **1538**

8 Jul. 1538. Letter of Dr. John London to Cromwell concerning the Oxford houses of friars, notes that at Blackfriars, 'Ther be butt x. Fryers, being Prests, besid the Anker wich ys a well disposyd man', and asks 'to knowe your pleasur concernyng the Anker of that Howse cum into the Kings hands, whether he schall remayne ther or nott. He byldyd the Howse owt of the grounde and wolde fayne end hys liff ther if it be the Kings Graces pleasur and yowr Lordeschips'. H. Ellis, *Original Letters Illustrative of Eng. Hist.* 3rd ser. (1846), iii, 217, 220; calendared *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, xiii(i), 499-500.

31 Aug. 1538. London reports that all had surrendered their habits and asked for capacities, and encloses a list of their names. The 'Anker' is named as William Dingle. *Letters and Papers*, xiii(ii), 92.

**31. Oxford: East Bridge (Pettypont)** **H** **1358**

30 Nov. 1321.<sup>58</sup> Hugo Rose of Hedington elected *custos*. Twyne 23, 317; Wood, i, 411.

Note that Rose is not identified as a hermit.

6 Jul. 1358.<sup>59</sup> The rolls of the mayor's court record the grant during pleasure to Nicholas Wadekyns, hermit, of the custody of Pettypont outside the East Gate by letters patent sealed with the seal of the mayor's office. Twyne 23, 340; Wood, i, 411.

<sup>58</sup> 30 Nov. 1321 was a Monday. Salter, citing Twyne, dates this document Friday 27 Nov.: *Mun. Civ. Oxon.* p. xlv, and also his *Records of Mediaeval Oxford: Coroners' Inquests, the Walls of Oxford, etc.* (1912), 63. The manuscript is not extant, and Salter has presumably assumed an error on Twyne's part, given that the mayor's court was held weekly on Friday, and the court of Husteng on Monday (see his *Medieval Oxford* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. c), 51). At the end of his copy of the document, however, Twyne has the following note: *Nota hic Curiam Maioris oxon' habentam die lune, ac tamen non vocatur illic Hustengum.*

<sup>59</sup> Following Twyne's *die (veneris) proxim' post festum S. Swythuni*. Salter, however, dates this document 27 Jul. 1358, citing Twyne as his authority: *Coroners' Inquests*, 63; *Mun. Civ. Oxon.* xlv. Even were one to assume that it is the feast of the translation of St. Swithin (15 July) which is intended (and there seems no good reason to do so), the following Friday would only be the 20th, still a week earlier than Salter's date – which would appear, therefore, to be an error.

14 Jun. 1376. Grant of pontage for one year to William de Raby, hermit, for the repair of the bridge called 'Le Petypont' by Oxford, which is broken down. *C.P.R.* 1374-7, 280.

13 Oct. 1376. Writ of signification of excommunication of William Raby, hermit, from the Chancellor of the University. *Snappe's Formulary*, 29-30.

Pettypont was on the site of the present Magdalen Bridge. Wood gives a list of bequests to the bridge dating between 1349 and 1451 (i, 411). None mentions the hermit.

### 32. Oxford: South Bridge (Grandpont) H 1363-4

23 Aug. 1325. The rolls of the mayor's court record the appointment of John de Brehulle *in officium custodiae de Grantpond*, Richard de Brugewauter to serve under him. Twyne 23, 320.

16 May 1343. The rolls of the mayor's court record the election in succession to John Siluestre deceased of John le Harpou of Hedyndon as *custos* of the bridge of Grandpont. Twyne 23, 322.

These two references were originally noted by Wood in his account of Pettypont (no. 31). Noticing his error, Wood crossed them through, but did not add them to his description of the South Bridge. Wood, i, 411 n. 2. Neither appointee is identified as a hermit.

1363-4. The Oxford chamberlains' accounts record payment of 13s. 4d. to the hermit of Grandpont for the repair of the South Bridge. *Mun. Civ. Oxon.* 271.

28 Feb. 1365. Summary of deed by which the town appoints John Bray of Shyplake to be the hermit of the South Bridge and grants to him a piece of land in Swyneshull opposite the chapel of St. Nicholas, *vocatam S. Nicholas yerde*, for a rent of 12d. p.a., he to maintain and repair the said bridge. *Ibid.* 141.

20 Jan. 1377. Lease by town to John Leper for 12d. p.a. of the place called 'le Briggewrightes place' opposite the chapel of St. Nicholas, he to collect alms for the repair of the bridge. *Ibid.* 154.

1392-3. Oxford chamberlains' accounts record payment to Abingdon Abbey of 8d. for rent of the dwelling-house of the hermit of Grandpont. Twyne 23, 239.

10 Nov. 1399. Letters patent of mayor, bailiffs and aldermen of Oxford that they have appointed William Cardon, hermit, to be the warden of South Bridge, and licensing him to collect alms for the repair of the bridge. *Mun. Civ. Oxon.* 177.

1399-1400. Oxford chamberlains' accounts record payment of 12d. for the chapel of St. Nicholas on Grandpont and the hermitage there. Twyne 23, 239.

14 Sep. 1403. Lease to John Merston, burgess and alderman of Oxford, for 12d. p.a. of the place *super Grauntpont iuxta capellam sancti Nicholai vocatam vulgariter le Hermylage*, he to keep the bridge in repair. *Mun. Civ. Oxon.* 179.

n.d. (late 15th c.). Draft letters patent of Richard Hewis, mayor of Oxford, licensing John Ferrour, hermit, 'or his sufficient depute in this behalf' to collect alms 'toward the reparacions of the high wey, brigge & archis sore foundred... named the South bryge of Oxford'. *Snappe's Formulary*, 255. Hewis was mayor 1489-90, 1490-1, 1495-6; the letters are dated April. Quoted more fully above, p. 55.

South Bridge or Grandpont corresponds with the present Folly Bridge. The statement by Wood (following Twyne) that the hermit dwelt in (rather than by) the chapel of St. Nicholas, which belonged to Abingdon Abbey, is (as the leases of 1377 and 1403 make clear) mistaken. See Wood, i, 421, ii, 498-500; *Mun. Civ. Oxon.* p. xliii. The probable site of the chapel of St. Nicholas was discovered during the building of the Grandpont estate west of Abingdon Road in 1900, in a field south of White House Road (*Oxford Times*, 10 Feb. 1900, 8; see S.M.R. PRN 6341). For post-medieval leases of the property, which retained the name 'hermitage', see H.E. Salter (ed.), *Oxford City Properties* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. lxxxiii), 99-101.

Although the bridge was in Oxford, and the hermit was subject to the town, the hermitage itself was in Berkshire. Cf. no. 1. For a picture of the bridge c. 1500, see A.J. Butler, 'The College Estates and the Advowsons held by the College', Monograph vi in *Brasenose College Quatercentenary Monographs*, i (Oxf. Hist. Soc. lii), facing 28.

**33. Shirburn** **H** **1529**

12 May 1529. Commission from John Longland bishop of Lincoln to Robert King, abbot of Thame and titular bishop of Rheon, to receive the vow and profession of Dom. William Shirborn', priest, as a hermit of the order of St. Anthony. L.A.O. Episcopal Register XXVI, fol. 169v.

King received a similar commission to receive the profession (this time according to the order of St. Paul) of William Brown of Henley ten days later (no. 9). As with Brown, there is no guarantee that Dom. William intended to remain in Shirburn once made a hermit; as noted above (p. 53), by this date episcopal confirmation of the title 'hermit' was more important than residence in an established hermitage. Although he is called priest, I have found no record of his ordination in the registers of Bishop Longland or his predecessors.

**34. Tetsworth** **H** **1447**

12 Dec. 1447. Licence to John Stafford archbishop of Canterbury, William Alnwick bishop of Lincoln, Humphrey duke of Buckingham, William marquis and earl of Suffolk, William Lovell kt., Ralph Cromwell kt., Ralph de Sudeley kt., Drew Barenteyn, and Richard Quatremayns esq. and Sibyl his wife to found a gild and chantry of St. Christopher in the parish church of Thame; and for a hermitage at Tetsworth with a chapel of St. John the Baptist; and to ordain a hermit to stay in the hermitage and labour with his hands for the maintenance of the highway between Stokenchurch and Hereford Brugge, which has long been a nuisance for lack thereof, to pray for the king and queen and their ancestors and successors, and the brothers and sisters of the gild; the hermit is to be allowed to acquire in mortmain lands and rents to the value of 40s. p.a. *C.P.R. 1446-52*, 180-1.

The gild, but not the hermitage, is noted *V.C.H. Oxon.* vii, 203-4.

**35. Woodstock** **H (2)** **1251**

5 Feb. 1251. The queen of her private bounty granted 3s. to the two hermits outside Woodstock. P.R.O. E 101/349/8 (Exchequer: Various Accounts).

**36. Wootton** **A (f)** **1252**

4 Feb. 1252. Writ to Stephen Bauzan, keeper of the king's manor of Wootton, to deliver a quarter of wheat p.a. of the king's gift to the recluse of Wootton, as long as he is keeper. *C.L.R. 1251-60*, 24.

1262. Mandate to Agnes Bauzan, keeper of the manor of Wootton, to the same effect. *Close 1261-4*, 55.

1264. Whereas the quarter of wheat due to the recluse of Wootton is a year in arrears, mandate to the bailiff of Wootton to supply the same, with the current year's quarter. *Close 1264-8*, 9-10.

Noted *V.C.H. Oxon.* xi, 218; Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, 157.

**37. 'in Wychwood'** **H** **1204**

3 Aug. 1204. Summons to Richard Pugil, who is suspected of the death of the hermit and of the manslaughter of two boys in the forest of Wychwood and of other crimes, and has fled. *Curia Regis Rolls... Preserved in the Public Record Office (1922-)*, iii, 145.

**Sites Rejected****\*38. Basings** **H** **1147-8**

1147-8. Confirmation by King Stephen to Gloucester Abbey of (*inter alia*) the chapel of St. John the Baptist in the forest of Basing. *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, iii, 131-3, where the document is exposed as a forgery and assigned to this date; printed as genuine in W.H. Hart (ed.), *Historia et Cartularium Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae* (Rolls Series xxxiii), i, 222-5.

1147x68. Confirmation by Robert de Chesney bishop of Lincoln to Gloucester Abbey of the place which is called Acres in the hermitage (*heremitorio*) of Basings. *Historia et Cartularium*, ii, 169.

Clay, Unidentified, no. 1.

For other confirmations of the same, see *Historia et Cartularium*, i, 228, 352. Clay suggests Oxfordshire or Buckinghamshire (the bishop's confirmation is addressed to the archdeacons of Oxford and Buckingham). Basings has now been identified as the old name for Ankerwyke (in Wraysbury, Bucks.), and in this hermitage may be found the long-suspected eremitic origins of the priory of Benedictine nuns founded here. See J.E.B. Gover et al., *The Place-Names of Surrey* (Eng. Place-Name Soc. xi), p. xl. The documents are entered in the Wraysbury section of the cartulary.

**\*39. Finmere** **H** **1228**

13 Feb. 1228. Mandate to Hugh de Neville to take into the king's hands the hermitage of Finmere, causing divine service to be celebrated therein until the king shall provide otherwise; and William monk of Bradwell is enjoined to return to his monastery and stay there. *Close 1227-31*, 19-20. Noted apparently as Oxfordshire, *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 10.

This is Finmere in Quainton (Bucks.), not Finmere in Oxfordshire. For further references, see Clay, Buckinghamshire, no. 4.

**\*40. 'Hampton'** **H** **1340**

11 Apr. 1340. Indulgence of 40 days granted by Henry Burghersh bishop of Lincoln to all who give of their goods to Brother John de Hampton', hermit. L.A.O. Episcopal Register V, f. 579v.

There is nothing in the register to locate this hermit more precisely; presumably he carried the original of the indulgence with him, rendering any such information superfluous. He may have been from one of the Oxfordshire Hamptons (Gay or Poyle), but I have not been able to find any evidence which would confirm (or deny) this.

**\*41. Iffley** **H** **c. 1230**

'There may have been a bridge-hermit in the early 13th century living on alms and mending roads and causeways'. *V.C.H. Oxon.* v, 199.

*V.C.H.* cites *Mun. Civ. Oxon.* pp. xlii-xlv (which is in fact a general discussion of the phenomenon of bridge-hermits referring only to Oxford's South and East Bridges), and Ralph *pontarius*, whose house is mentioned c. 1230. This Ralph might have been a hermit, but no record has yet come to light which identifies him as such.

**\*42. 'Kibbeclive'** **H** **1205x21**

Wiger, a canon of Oseney, with the consent of his superiors, retired to live a solitary life 'at a place called Kibbeclive'. *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 10.

This is Gibcliff (afterwards Guy's Cliffe) in Warwickshire, where there was a well-established hermitage (Clay, Warwickshire, no. 6, including this reference). For the spelling 'Kibbeclive', see *The Place-Names of Warwickshire* (Eng. Place-Name Soc. xiii), 264-5.

**\*43. Kidlington** **H** **12th c.**

A bridge-hermit is conjectured by Salter responsible for the bridge or causeway over Kingsbridge brook and adjacent marshy ground at Fries, Kidlington. *Oseney Cart.* iv, 105-6. Noted *V.C.H. Oxon.* xii, 182.

The charters cited by Salter show that there was a bridge and a chapel at Fries before c. 1200, as well as a messuage formerly held by Adam *pontarius*. It is not difficult to see why Salter thought there might have been a bridge-hermit, but without a positive identification the site must be rejected as unproven.

**\*44. 'Mosehuda'** **H** **1141x59**

Grant by Geoffrey hermit of Mosehud' to the Knights Templar of his house of Mosehude with all its possessions. Witnesses: Peter prior of Malmesbury, James canon of Cirencester, Richard of Meisi (?Meysey). A.M. Leys (ed.), *The Sandford Cartulary* (Oxf. Rec. Soc. xix, xxii), ii, 28.

Clay, Unidentified, no. 12.

Peter Moraunt was appointed abbot of Malmesbury 1141 and died 1158 or 1159. *V.C.H. Wilts.* iii, 217, 230. Leys is unable to identify the site, but notes that 'all the three witnesses suggest that it was near Cirencester'

(*Sandford Cartulary*, ii, 228 n. 3). It is, however, included in the section of the cartulary headed Ingeflod and Templeton. This is Inglewood in Kintbury, Berks., and Templeton is the part of Inglewood held by the Templars (as Leys herself notes: *Sandford Cartulary*, 228 nn. 1-2), which is certainly nearer than Cirencester to their preceptory of Sandford. Whichever location is correct, there is nothing to place it in Oxfordshire.

**\*45. Oxford: in a church**

**A (f)**

**c. 1194**

The visionary career of Edmund, the monk of Eynsham, began c. 1194 when, while praying in a certain church (*in quadam ecclesia*) in Oxford, he heard a voice telling him to go to Bishop Hugh of Lincoln. While in the church, he was counselled as to the divine origin of the voice by a 'certain very pious virgin' (*uirgo quedam religiosa ualde*). D.L. Douie and D.H. Farmer (eds.), *Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis* (1985), ii, 85-92.

Salter calls this woman a recluse (*Eynsham Cart.* ii, 273; *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 9). Her circumstances, as described in the *Magna Vita*, are, however, though undoubtedly pious, not as rigorous as those required of an anchoress. She 'served God day and night by prayer and fasting, and in cold and nakedness, and rarely (*rarisime*) left the church, being almost always in its precincts (*ab eius uero atris nunquam pene recedebat*). When I heard the voice she had been praying as was her custom in a remote corner of the church (*in remoto ecclesie angulo*)' (trans. Douie and Farmer, 89). Salter himself notes the apparent laxity of this regime compared with other recluses (*V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 9-10), but holds back from the conclusion that it might most easily be explained by the fact that the woman was not one of their number.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My chief debt in the preparation of the present survey is naturally to the Clay-Cottle papers, now Bristol University Library D.M. 1590/1-IV. I owe my knowledge of them to Ian Doyle, and very generous access to them to Nick Lee of Bristol University Library. Research for the article has been made possible by a Post-Doctoral Fellowship from the British Academy. For assistance with specific entries, I am grateful to M.Y. Ashcroft, Roger Highfield, David Howlett, Michael Reed, M.G.A. Vale. I received much technical assistance with the maps from Jane McBretney. I am grateful also to the staff of the Bodleian Library, the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies, Oxfordshire Archives, and the Public Record Office. I am particularly grateful to Elizabeth Leggatt of the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies for her assistance in guiding me through the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record, and for alerting me to Mrs. Steed's essays in *Top. Oxon.* Finally, no acknowledgement of debts would be complete without mention of the Rev. H.E. Salter, whose scholarship I have called upon for virtually every entry, and who was one of Miss Clay's most faithful correspondents.

*The Society is grateful to the Greening Lamborn Trust for a grant towards publication of this paper.*