



THE PRELATE IN
ENGLAND AND EUROPE
1300–1560

Edited by MARTIN HEALE

The Prelate in England and Europe

1300–1560

YORK MEDIEVAL PRESS

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The Prelate in England and Europe
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Edited by
Martin Heale



THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

YORK MEDIEVAL PRESS

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First published 2014

A York Medieval Press publication
in association with The Boydell Press
an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK
and of Boydell & Brewer Inc.
668 Mt Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620-2731, USA
website: www.boydellandbrewer.com
and with the
Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York

ISBN 978-1-903153-58-1

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

The publisher has no responsibility for the continued existence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this book, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

This publication is printed on acid-free paper

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume has grown out of a conference on 'The Prelate in Late Medieval and Reformation England', held at the University of Liverpool in September 2011. All the papers delivered at that conference are published below, apart from those given by Natalia Nowakowska and Brigitte Resl. The volume also includes a chapter by Cédric Michon, offered subsequent to the Liverpool conference. I would like to thank the contributors to both the conference and to the volume, all of whom have been stimulating and good-humoured collaborators throughout this project.

I would also like to acknowledge gratefully the work and expert guidance of all those at Boydell & Brewer and York Medieval Press who have been involved with this volume and especially Caroline Palmer, Rohais Houghton and Professor Peter Biller. The Liverpool conference was funded partly by a British Academy Research Development Award, and partly by financial contributions from the department of History of the University of Liverpool and the Liverpool Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, without all of whose generous support the event could not have taken place. This publication has also been made possible by a grant from the Scouloudi Foundation in association with the Institute of Historical Research, acknowledged here with gratitude.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BL	British Library, London
CCR	<i>Calendar of Close Rolls, AD 1227–1509</i> , ed. H. C. Maxwell Lyte <i>et al.</i> , 61 vols. (London, 1902–63)
CFR	<i>Calendar of Fine Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office</i> , 22 vols. (London, 1911–62)
CPL	<i>Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters, 1198–1521</i> , ed. W. H. Bliss <i>et al.</i> , 20 vols. (London and Dublin, 1893–2005)
CPR	<i>Calendar of Patent Rolls, AD 1216–1582</i> , ed. H. C. Maxwell-Lyte <i>et al.</i> , 74 vols. (London, 1901–)
EETS	Early English Text Society
os	original series
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
Emden, BRUO	<i>A Biographical Register of University of Oxford to AD 1500</i> , ed. A. B. Emden, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1957–9)
HRH	<i>Heads of Religious Houses, 940–1540</i> , ed. D. Knowles, C. N. L. Brooke, V. C. M. London and D. M. Smith, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 2001–8)
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
Knowles, RO	D. Knowles, <i>The Religious Orders in England</i> , 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1948–59)
LP	<i>Calendar of the Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII</i> , ed. J. Brewer, J. Gairdner and R. Brodie, 22 vols. (London, 1864–1932)
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i> , ed. H. Kurath, S. Kuhn <i>et al.</i> (Ann Arbor, 1952–99)
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> , online edition (Oxford, 2004–)
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , online edition (Oxford, 2013)
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris, 1878–90)
STC	<i>A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad:</i>

List of Abbreviations

TNA 1475–1640, ed. A. W. Pollard, G. W. Redgrave *et al.*, 3
vols., 2nd edn (London, 1976–91)
The National Archives, London
VCH *Victoria History of the Counties of England*, ed. W. H.
Page *et al.* (Oxford and London, 1900–)

Introduction

The years between the early fourteenth and the mid sixteenth century are of considerable interest in the history of the prelate. In some respects, this era might be regarded as a golden age of prelacy, culminating in the appearance of great ecclesiastical dignitaries across much of Europe, such as Wolsey, d'Amboise, Cisneros, Lang and Jagiellon.¹ In terms of their political weight, their grandeur and their wide-ranging cultural patronage, these early sixteenth-century 'cardinal-ministers' arguably represented a high point in prelatical influence. Nor should they be regarded as wholly distinct from their clerical contemporaries: recent studies of Renaissance cardinals and the early Tudor episcopate indicate that the next rank of senior churchmen were no less concerned to express the importance and dignity of their office.² However, the period c. 1300–c. 1560 also witnessed a developing critique of prelacy – not unconnected with these eye-catching assertions of ecclesiastical status and power – with complaints about senior members of the Church hierarchy a commonplace in the literature and preaching of the day. To these criticisms were added attacks on the very concept of the prelate, which was rejected as unscriptural by John Wyclif and his followers: a critique which would be taken up enthusiastically by sixteenth-century reformers in England and Europe.

¹ S. Gunn and P. Lindley, 'Introduction', in *Cardinal Wolsey. Church, State and Art*, ed. Gunn and Lindley (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 1–53; N. Nowakowska, *Church, State and Dynasty in Renaissance Poland: the Career of Cardinal Fryderyk Jagiellon (1468–1503)* (Aldershot, 2007).

² D. Chambers, 'The Renaissance Cardinalate: from Paolo Cortesi's *De Cardinalatu to the Present*', in *The Possessions of a Cardinal. Politics, Piety, and Art 1450–1700*, ed. M. Hollingsworth and C. Richardson (University Park PA, 2010), pp. 17–24; S. Thurley, 'The Domestic Building Works of Cardinal Wolsey', in *Cardinal Wolsey*, ed. Gunn and Lindley, pp. 76–102 (esp. pp. 96–7); G. Bernard, *The Late Medieval English Church. Vitality and Vulnerability before the Break with Rome* (New Haven, 2012), p. 55.

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The notion of prelacy was therefore increasingly contested during the period covered by this book. The word 'prelate' derives from the past participle of the Latin verb *praeferre*, meaning 'one advanced or brought forward'. Both the Latin *pr(a)elatus* and vernacular equivalents were widely used in the later Middle Ages.³ In its broadest sense, the term could be applied to anyone in a position of authority, such as a high-ranking official, the head of a household, or a confessor;⁴ but *prelatus* and 'prelate' were generally used to denote a churchman of high rank. This might potentially include an archdeacon or the head of a secular college,⁵ and the terms 'lower' or 'inferior prelates' were sometimes applied to middle-ranking ecclesiastics.⁶ Abbesses and prioresses were also occasionally described as prelates.⁷ However, the word 'prelate' was most frequently deployed in the later Middle Ages and sixteenth century to refer to cardinals, archbishops, bishops and male monastic superiors, and it is this common usage that has been adopted in the present collection of essays.

Even within these parameters, 'prelate' remained a versatile term. It was often used as a synonym *either* for an archbishop or bishop, *or* for an abbot or prior. For example, the Council of Oxford (1222) made a number of statutes for 'prelates' which were clearly aimed at the episcopate, but also used the term to refer to monastic superiors, who are on one occasion described as 'prelates of religious houses'.⁸ One reason for the popularity of the word seems to have been its convenience as a generic term for either of these two groups, avoiding the need to specify particular ranks and titles. Therefore, *prelatus* was the favoured word of monastic legislators of orders like the Benedictines and Augustinians which included both abbeys and priories, obviating the need to refer continually to 'abbots and priors'.⁹ It was also used in the statutes of

³ *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources. Fascicule XII*, ed. D. Howlett *et al.* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 2402, 2408; *MED*.

⁴ E.g., *PL* 207, 668(D); *The Babees Book: Early English Meals and Manners*, ed. F. Furnivall, EETS OS 32 (London, 1868), p. 328; *Speculum Sacerdotale*, ed. E. Weatherly, EETS OS 200 (London, 1936), p. 120.

⁵ E.g., *Sermons by Hugh Latimer*, ed. G. Corrie, Parker Society 30 (Cambridge, 1844), p. 44; *Jacob's Well*, ed. A. Brandeis, EETS OS 115 (London, 1900), p. 127; *CPL*, II, 126, V, 385–6.

⁶ E.g., *De Pater Noster of Richard Ermyte: A Late Middle English Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*, ed. F. Aarts (The Hague, 1967), p. 31.

⁷ 'Caxton's Ausgabe de Leg. Von S. Wenefreda', ed. C. Horstmann, *Anglia* 3 (1880), 295–313 (p. 303); Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. T. Bestul, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, 2000), p. 39.

⁸ *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church, II, AD 1205–1313*, ed. F. M. Powicke and C. Cheney, 2 parts (Oxford, 1964), I, 106–25.

⁹ *Documents Illustrating the Activities of the General and Provincial Chapters of the*

Introduction

Benedict XII for the Augustinian, Benedictine and Cistercian orders, alongside *abbas* and *prior*.¹⁰ Perhaps encouraged by its widespread use in ecclesiastical legislation, the term 'prelate' was regularly adopted in later medieval monastic chronicles and customaries to denote heads of individual houses, even though it does not appear in foundational texts like the Rules of Benedict or Augustine.¹¹ When applied to monastic superiors, 'prelate' seems sometimes to have had a subtly different connotation from 'abbot', particularly emphasising the dignity of the office. Convents might be commanded to obey a newly-elected superior as 'their abbot and prelate', and John Wheathampstead was described as 'pastor et praelatus' at the time of his re-election as abbot of St Albans in 1452.¹² To be designated a 'prelate' could also be attractive to heads of religious houses since the title implied a connection, and some degree of equivalence, with the episcopate (see below).

The spread of the term 'prelate' as an alternative to 'bishop' seems to have acquired further impetus in the later fourteenth century with the coinage of the English term *prelacie* – roughly equivalent to the Latin *praelatia* or *praelatura* – to denote the office, functions or authority of a prelate.¹³ This usage was in part the product of a lively debate about the role and power of prelates in late medieval England, which included a strong strain of criticism of those holding and seeking high office in the Church.¹⁴ The terms 'prelate' and 'prelacy' were generally used

English Black Monks 1215–1540, ed. W. A. Pantin, 3 vols., Camden 3rd s. 45, 47 and 54 (1931–7); *Chapters of the Augustinian Canons*, ed. H. Salter, Canterbury and York Society 29 (London, 1922).

¹⁰ *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae, AD 446–1716*, ed. D. Wilkins, 4 vols. (London, 1737), II, 585–613; *Chapters of the Augustinian Canons*, pp. 214–67; *Magnam Bullarium Romanum, a Beato Leone Magno usque ad S.D.N. Benedictum XIII. Tome primus, ad A. B. Leone Magno ad Paulum IV*, ed. L and A. Cherubini, A. Auda and J. Paulus (Luxemburg, 1727), pp. 209–17.

¹¹ For a few out of many possible examples, see *Chronicon Abbatiae de Evesham ad annum 1418*, ed. W. D. Macray, Rolls Series 29 (London, 1863), pp. 303, 306; *The Observances in Use at the Augustinian Priory of S. Giles and S. Andrew at Barnwell, Cambridgeshire*, ed. J. Clark (Cambridge, 1897), passim; *The Customary of the Benedictine Abbey of Eynsham in Oxfordshire*, ed. A. Gransden, *Corpus Consuetudinum Monasticarum* 2 (Siegburg, 1963), pp. 131, 140–8.

¹² E.g., *Registrum Thome de Charlton, Episcopi Herefordensis, AD 1327–1344*, ed. W. Capes, Canterbury and York Society 9 (London, 1913), p. 21; *Registrum Abbatiae Johannis Whethamstede, Abbatis Monasterii Sancti Albani*, ed. H. T. Riley, 2 vols., Rolls Series 28.6 (London, 1872–3), I, 20.

¹³ *MED*; *OED*. 'Prelacy' was also used as a collective noun for prelates from around the same date.

¹⁴ See, for example, G. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1961), pp. 241–85; John Gower, *Mirour de l'Omme*, trans. W. Wilson and N. Van Baak (East Lansing, 1992), pp. 253–68; John Gower, 'Vox Clamantis', in

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neutrally in these contexts, but their alliterative possibilities – allowing associations to be made with ‘pride’ and ‘princes’ – no doubt increased their popularity as an alternative to ‘bishop’. For John Wyclif and his followers, there was an even more compelling reason for using ‘prelate’: as Anne Hudson notes in her chapter below, *prelatus* (unlike *episcopus*) did not feature in the Vulgate.¹⁵ Therefore, the adoption of the term ‘prelate’ helped to make the case that contemporary episcopal practices were unscriptural. Wycliffite writings thus gave further impetus to the use of ‘prelate’ and ‘prelacy’ for those drawn into debates about the role and activities of senior churchmen.

Finally, contemporaries also found helpful a generic term for all high-ranking ecclesiastics. This widespread usage of ‘prelate’ reflects the fact that cardinals, bishops and monastic superiors had a good deal in common with one another. They all discharged an important public role, in ecclesiastical¹⁶ and secular government¹⁷ alike. Prelates of all kinds were required to fulfil pastoral and educational functions, teaching and guiding the flocks under their charge.¹⁸ All high-ranking churchmen, both secular and regular, shared the responsibility of maintaining the endowments, privileges and traditions of perpetual institutions, and in discharging this duty faced similar issues and concerns (for example over vacancies).¹⁹ Moreover, all senior ecclesiastics were agents and emblems of the proprietorial Church, as major landowners with large revenues at their disposal: an attribute which brought power and status, but also criticism for perceived ambition and worldliness.²⁰

The Major Latin Works of John Gower, ed. E. Stockton (Seattle, 1962), Book 3 (esp. pp. 113–45).

¹⁵ See below, pp. 277–8.

¹⁶ The papal curia regularly issued mandates ‘to all prelates, secular and regular’ to carry out papal commissions and to collect and pay taxation due to the Apostolic See: e.g., *CPL*, II, 105–8, 118, 126–8, 223.

¹⁷ The writs summoning churchmen to Parliament and Convocation routinely called on ‘prelates’ to attend: F. Palgrave, *The Parliamentary Writs and Writs of Military Summons*, 2 vols. in 4 (London, 1827–34), passim; *Records of Convocation*, ed. G. Bray, 20 vols. (Woodbridge, 2005–6), passim.

¹⁸ For nowe prelatys and grete religious possessioners ben so occupied aboute worldly lordischipis and plea and bysnesse in herte, that thei may not be in devocion of preiynge, and thought of hevenely thingis and of here owene synnys and othere mennys, and studie and prechynge of the gospel, and visitynge and confortynge of pore men in here diocisis and lordischipis’: John Wycliffe, *Select English Works*, ed. T. Arnold, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1869–71), III, 215.

¹⁹ ‘Þe vifte [fifth] was þat bissopriches & abbeies al so þat vacauns were of prelas in þe kinges hond were ido’: *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, ed. W. Wright, Rolls Series 86 (London, 1887), II, 681.

²⁰ E.g., *The English Works of John Wyclif Hitherto Unprinted*, ed. F. Matthew, EETS OS 74 (London, 1880), pp. 160–1; Wycliffe, *Select English Works*, II, 62, III, 157–8.

Introduction

The present collection of essays seeks to explore these various areas of common ground between high-ranking secular and regular ecclesiastics between the fourteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries, focusing mainly on England but including some continental case studies for context. Prelates continued to play a highly significant public role throughout this period. Bishops occupied a range of important government offices in late medieval England, none more prominent than royal chancellor. There were, of course, good practical reasons why senior ecclesiastics took on prominent roles in the royal administration, including their high level of education and the potential for them to be paid in benefices. However, as Gwilym Dodd shows, the clerical hold on the office of chancellor actually strengthened as the later Middle Ages progressed, after experimentation with lay chancellors in the fourteenth century. Dodd argues that the appointment of senior ecclesiastics to high government office could be a source of political stability, while the role of the chancellor in preaching the opening sermon at Parliament and the growth of chancery as a court of equity also seem to have contributed to the clerical monopoly of that office in the fifteenth century.²¹

It was not only bishops who exercised a notable public function in the period covered by this volume. Abbots of major religious houses contributed to secular government, both in Parliament and by serving on royal commissions. Indeed, there is every sign that monastic superiors were becoming more heavily involved in public life in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, serving as Justices of the Peace and taking their responsibilities in Parliament increasingly seriously.²² Cardinals might play an even more prominent role in secular government, especially in a realm like early sixteenth century France where they formed a notable collective presence. Cédric Michon's analysis of the role of French cardinals during the reign of Francis I (1515–47) indicates the breadth of their public activity, including service at court, in regional government and as diplomats, while also fulfilling important ritual and cultural functions. Their political influence was less clear-cut, however, and Michon argues that those cardinals who hailed from the most

See also the plea of John Sharpe in *Annales Monasterii Sancti Albani, a Johanne Amundesham, Monacho (1421–40)*, ed. H. T. Riley, 2 vols., Rolls Series 28.5 (London, 1870–1), I, 453–6, who complained that 'the temporaltes of Bysshoppes, Abbotes, and Priours, that have the name of "Prelates", rechen to the summe of three hundred and thirty-two thousand marke by jere'.

²¹ See below, pp. 17–49.

²² M. Heale, 'The Abbot and Public Life in Late Medieval England', in *Churchmen and Urban Government in Late Medieval Italy, c.1200–c.1450*, ed. F. Andrews with M. A. Pincelli (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 331–47.

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important aristocratic families of the realm were in practice accorded the least power by the French Crown.²³

The prominence of late medieval prelates in public life did not go unchallenged. Both the 1340s and the 1370s to '80s saw deliberate moves to exclude clerics from the office of royal chancellor. In the 1340s, there were concerns that leading churchmen would place ecclesiastical interests ahead of their loyalty to the Crown, following the acrimonious dispute between Edward III and Archbishop Stratford.²⁴ This accusation retained its currency and, in time, became one of the prime Lollard charges against prelates. In her discussion of a little-known Wycliffite tract of the later fourteenth century, Anne Hudson shows how the oath to the pope, sworn by incoming archbishops, was used to argue that prelates owed their primary loyalty to the papacy and were therefore unfit servants of the Crown. This charge was part of a wider Wycliffite critique of clerics holding secular office, on the grounds that no one can serve two masters.²⁵

A rather more common late-medieval criticism of prelates in government and politics, however, was that they were too subservient to the Crown. Preachers such as Thomas Brinton and John Bromyard vociferously attacked high-ranking churchmen for failing to defend the rights of the Church, a response Brinton attributed to a fear of displeasing the powerful, and to self-interest: 'because they covet great offices, or aspire to be translated to richer bishoprics'.²⁶ The essays in this collection provide some support for the conclusion that fifteenth- and sixteenth-century prelates were more likely to uphold than to challenge the interests of the Crown. Michon finds little indication that Francis I's cardinals acted in concert to advance the interests of the Church or to oppose royal intervention in ecclesiastical affairs. Benjamin Thompson, meanwhile, argues that English bishops largely accepted the royal and lay patronal viewpoint towards the confiscation and re-allocation of alien priory property in late medieval England – i.e., 'that, as kings and nobles had founded churches, they could reorganize them and reassign their property if they were not fulfilling their founders' purposes' – and in a number of cases sought to profit from this windfall themselves.²⁷

²³ See below, pp. 76–97.

²⁴ See below, pp. 26–8; R. M. Haines, *Archbishop John Stratford: Political Revolutionary and Champion of the Liberties of the English Church ca.1275/80–1348* (Toronto, 1986), pp. 278–327.

²⁵ See below, pp. 277–93; cf. A. Hudson, 'Hermofodrita or Ambidexter: Wycliffite Views on Clerks in Secular Office', in *Lollardy and the Gentry in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. M. Aston and C. Richmond (Stroud, 1997), pp. 41–51.

²⁶ Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, pp. 246, 581–2.

²⁷ See below, pp. 76–97, 50–75.

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This is not to say that high-ranking churchmen were unmindful of ecclesiastical rights and prerogatives. As Thompson shows, English bishops consistently and staunchly defended the continued ecclesiastical possession of alien priory property. This endeavour may even have extended to Lancastrian bishops taking the initiative in the foundation of Eton and King's College, Cambridge, in order to ensure that remaining alien priory endowments were not lost to the king's lay supporters.²⁸ Late medieval bishops might also respond collectively to perceived attacks on episcopal endowments, such as the royal attempts to confiscate the temporalities of Bishop Lisle of Ely in the mid-1350s and those of Bishop Wykeham of Winchester in the late 1370s.²⁹ Yet this concern to preserve ecclesiastical property did not necessarily generate a unified response, as more narrow institutional interests could readily intervene. The confiscation of alien priory possessions was one such instance, with English and French prelates sometimes finding themselves in fierce and prolonged competition with one another over these properties.

This determination to preserve and extend the endowments under their charge was another common attribute of prelates of all kinds. Abbots and bishops faced powerful institutional expectations that they should defend the property and rights of their monastery or see at all costs. Late-medieval monastic chronicles and *Gesta Abbatum* recorded at length the benefactions and legal battles of individual superiors as an example to future superiors, and strongly criticized those who were perceived to have failed in this duty.³⁰ Accordingly, it proved difficult for many fifteenth-century French abbots to surrender their claims to their English dependencies and properties in return for compensation, despite the obvious weakness of their position.³¹ Wholehearted defence of institutional interests, however, might not endear prelates to their neighbours and rivals. It was a not-uncommon complaint in late medieval literature that monastic superiors placed the defence and augmentation of their endowments before justice and care for the poor; and according to the anonymous author of the early-fourteenth-century poem *The Simonie*, prelates were 'ablent [blinded] wid coveytise, and mihte noht se þe treuþe / For mist. / Pheih dradden more here lond to lese [lose], þan love of Jhesu Crist.'³²

²⁸ See below, pp. 69–72.

²⁹ See below, pp. 30–2, 17–21.

³⁰ E.g., *Chronica Monasterii Sancti Albani: Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*, ed. H. T. Riley, 3 vols., Rolls Series 28.4 (London, 1867–9).

³¹ See below, pp. 50–75.

³² E.g., *Rymes of Robyn Hode*, ed. R. B. Dobson and J. Taylor (London, 1976), pp. 71–112; *Mum and the Sothsegger. Edited from the Manuscripts Camb. Univ. Ll. iv. 14 and Brit. Mus. Add. 41666*, ed. M. Day and R. Steele, EETS OS 199 (London,

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As James G. Clark's chapter indicates, a notable proportion of the reading of late medieval and sixteenth-century English abbots – including archival, legal and historical texts – was geared towards the preservation and careful management of their house's endowment.³³ Late-medieval superiors might also pick up the pen themselves for similar ends: the prime goal of Abbot Wolfgang Marius's sixteenth-century chronicle of his abbey of Aldersbach, in Bavaria, was the defence of the house's properties and rights.³⁴ But, as Clark shows, the intellectual activities of late-medieval superiors were considerably broader than this. Some acquired sizeable personal collections of books, and there is evidence that heads of houses remained actively committed to claustral instruction, for example through the presentation of books to the convent and the direction of the monastery's liturgy.³⁵

The academically-trained prelate was an increasingly familiar figure in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England and Europe, and high-ranking ecclesiastics were heavily engaged in the promotion of learning throughout this period.³⁶ One of the most interesting educational initiatives of the fifteenth-century episcopate was the foundation of two public libraries by Bishop John Carpenter of Worcester, re-examined here by Wendy Scase.³⁷ Her study of the Carnary Library at Worcester challenges some recent assessments of Carpenter's foundations. In particular, she questions the reliability of the surviving sixteenth-century ordinances for the library, and provides evidence for rejecting the suggestion that some of the extant books in the Worcester Cathedral collection were once part of the Carnary Library's holdings. Scase, moreover, suggests new lines of enquiry by raising the possibility of scribal activity at the Carnary Library.

Carpenter's use of his library foundations to promote preaching and education was part of a wider endeavour among fifteenth-century English bishops to place learning at the heart of their pastoral activities.

1936), p. 43; *The Simonie: A Parallel Text Edition*, ed. D. Embree and E. Urquhart, Middle English Texts 24 (Heidelberg, 1991), p. 106.

³³ See below, pp. 101–26.

³⁴ See below, pp. 252–3; cf. the intellectual activities of Prior John Wessington of Durham, as outlined in R. B. Dobson, *Durham Priory 1400–1450* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 378–86.

³⁵ See below, pp. 101–26; and cf. the example of Abbot Arnold von Monnikendam of Altenberg in the Rhineland, pp. 251–2.

³⁶ E.g., H. Jewell, 'English Bishops as Educational Benefactors in the Later Fifteenth Century', in *The Church, Politics and Patronage*, ed. R. B. Dobson (Gloucester, 1984), pp. 146–67; J. Rosenthal, 'Lancastrian Bishops and Educational Reform' in *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society*, ed. C. M. Barron and C. Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 1985), pp. 199–211.

³⁷ See below, pp. 127–41.

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Although there were frequent criticisms of late-medieval bishops for failing in their duty to preach – a charge advanced by Wycliffites and senior churchmen alike³⁸ – a number of prelates rose to this challenge. Felicity Heal's study of the use of printing by Tudor bishops highlights the endeavours of some prelates – beginning with John Alcock of Ely in the late fifteenth century – to reach a wider audience for their preaching through this new technology. As Heal shows, print also proved an increasingly popular tool of episcopal government over the sixteenth century, with the publication of proclamations, visitation articles and injunctions used to bring instruction and conformity to dioceses.³⁹

Another central element of prelacy which united abbots and bishops was the wealth which they controlled. The relatively large size of the country's dioceses meant that the bishops of England were considerably better endowed than many of their continental counterparts. According to the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, eleven English bishops drew net revenues of more than £1,000 per year, a level of income also enjoyed by twenty-three English monasteries, and a handful of the richest sees and abbeys had annual receipts in excess of £3,000.⁴⁰ No dimension of prelates' activities was more prone to criticism and a greater cause of unease than their spending of the large resources at their disposal. The theme of prelatical avarice and luxurious living was a commonplace in late medieval preaching and literature. John Bromyard bemoaned how high-ranking churchmen chased after worldly wealth; Thomas Brinton inveighed against prelates for seeking promotions and desiring to live 'in ease and delicacies'; and Thomas Wimbledon criticized the sumptuously adorned palaces, fat palfreys and hunting dogs which prelates provided for themselves out of the revenues of their offices.⁴¹ Lollard critiques of ecclesiastical wealth – following Wyclif's conclusion that 'all the priests of Christ: the pope, cardinals, bishops, abbots, priors or their subjects are held to follow Christ in evangelical poverty' – went one stage further and advocated the confiscation of prelates' property.⁴² These calls for

³⁸ See, for example, Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, pp. 246–7.

³⁹ See below pp. 142–69.

⁴⁰ F. Heal, *Of Prelates and Princes: A Study of the Economic and Social Position of the Tudor Episcopate* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 54; Knowles, *RO*, III, 473.

⁴¹ Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, pp. 246–50, 279. Cf. John Gower's repeated attacks on the alleged preoccupation of fourteenth-century cardinals and bishops with wealth, honour and luxury: Gower, *Mirour de l'Omme*, pp. 253–68; Gower, 'Vox Clamantis', pp. 113–45; *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G. Macaulay, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1899–1902), II, 455.

⁴² John Wyclif, *Opera Minora*, ed. F. Matthew and J. Loserth (London, 1913), p. 20; cf. A. Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*. (Oxford and New York, 1988), pp. 334–46.

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disendowment were widely aired in the years around 1400,⁴³ and would be re-asserted more forcefully – and with greater effect – in the sixteenth century.

The resources at the disposal of individual English bishops are well illustrated by their wills and inventories. However, as Christopher Woolgar shows in his chapter on bishops' treasure, these possessions cannot be understood simply in terms of 'ownership'. Many episcopal treasures were held in trust, and – like those of abbots – were to be passed on to their successors after death. Episcopal possessions, moreover, fulfilled various functions: they were used for liturgical, commemorative or devotional purposes, and they signalled connections with others.⁴⁴ The possession and display of episcopal treasures was an important means of expressing identity and authority, a function also served by bishops' seals and tombs. As Elizabeth A. New argues below, bishops used these latter media to project publicly the dignity of their office and 'to foster the idea of episcopal lineage and authority across the ages'. The stylistic and iconographical similarities between bishops' seals and tombs, demonstrated here by New, shed light on the ways in which episcopal identity was created and expressed in a range of media.⁴⁵

These contemporary perceptions of ecclesiastical possessions and display suggest that late-medieval and sixteenth-century attitudes towards Church property were more nuanced than the anticlerical writings of the period – and some modern historical writing on the subject – would imply. It is apparent that a range of views about ecclesiastical wealth and display were current in late-medieval England and Europe. Reginald Pecock, citing Augustine of Hippo, argued that wealth could be used for both good and evil, and that what mattered was that 'oonli good men and weel proued men in vertues be takun in to preesthode and into prelatie, wherynne ben riche possessious'.⁴⁶ Aristotelian ideas about the moral value of wealth and the need for expenditure to reflect the status and dignity of the spender were also widely accepted in late medieval and Renaissance Europe.⁴⁷ Indeed, the view that buildings, households, trains of attendants, dress and other forms of display should be proportionate to the particular rank of

⁴³ M. Aston, 'Caim's Castles': Poverty, Politics and Disendowment', in *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester, 1984), pp. 45–81.

⁴⁴ See below, pp. 173–90.

⁴⁵ See below, pp. 191–214.

⁴⁶ Reginald Pecock, *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, ed. C. Babington, 2 vols., Rolls Series 19 (London, 1860), II, 327–31.

⁴⁷ See below, pp. 272–6; cf. S. Rigby, *Wisdom and Chivalry. Chaucer's Knight's Tale and Medieval Political Theory* (Leiden, 2009).

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the dignitary was a commonplace in this period in secular and ecclesiastical spheres alike.⁴⁸

Monastic historians have often written disapprovingly about ecclesiastical display as a sign of worldliness, contrasting late-medieval spending on abbatial dignity and lifestyle with an earlier age of monastic austerity. Such conclusions have been particularly prevalent in the historiography of the Cistercian order. However, as Michael Carter shows, abbatial spending on the dignity of the office did not contravene the late-medieval statutes of the white monks and was embraced most vigorously by those, like Marmaduke Huby, who were considered by contemporaries to be monastic reformers. Emilia Jamroziak's chapter indicates that closely parallel trends can be found in the Cistercian monasteries of central Europe.⁴⁹ Moreover, as Martin Heale contends, these arguments for abbatial spending and display were largely accepted by late-medieval monastic communities. As long as their expenditure on buildings, households, vestments and plate was proportionate to their available income and directed to the longer-term welfare and repute of the monastery, it was generally supported by convents.⁵⁰ Indeed, late-medieval superiors who carried out works of this kind were considered benefactors to their monastery and were enthusiastically commemorated by their communities.⁵¹

Moreover, there are signs that abbots were increasingly modelling themselves on bishops in late-medieval and early-sixteenth-century England and Europe. This emulation took a number of forms. Perhaps most obviously, an increasing number of monastic superiors sought to acquire a papal indult to wear the insignia of a bishop, the *pontificalia*, a privilege to which was generally added the right to give solemn benediction after mass, vespers and matins.⁵² Since the standard representation of the bishop was a figure with mitre and crosier shown in an attitude of benediction,⁵³ the acquisition of these privileges – and the ability of mitred abbots to depict themselves in a similar manner – was

⁴⁸ See, for example, *Annales Monastici*, ed. H. Luard, 5 vols., Rolls Series 36 (London, 1864–9), III, 186; L. Hodges, *Chaucer and Clothing. Clerical and Academic Costume in the General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 15–16.

⁴⁹ See below, pp. 215–39, 240–57.

⁵⁰ See below, pp. 261–76.

⁵¹ See the chapters by Michael Carter and Emilia Jamroziak below for examples.

⁵² For a fuller discussion of this theme, see M. Heale, 'Mitres and Arms. Aspects of the Self-Representation of the Monastic Superior in Late Medieval England', in *Self-Representation of Medieval Religious Communities. The British Isles in Context*, ed. A. Müller and K. Stöber, *Vita Regularis Abhandlungen* 40 (Berlin, 2009), pp. 99–122.

⁵³ See Elizabeth A. New's discussion of this point below, pp. 192–3, 200.

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an ideal way for monastic superiors to associate themselves with the episcopate. By the early 1500s, papal grants of the *pontificalia* to monastic superiors commonly included an alluring package of episcopal privileges, including promoting clerks to minor orders, blessing vestments, ornaments and altars, reconciling churches and cemeteries within their jurisdiction, and granting indulgences.⁵⁴ The provision by many superiors of sizeable residences akin to bishops' palaces and their acquisition of personal coats of arms also indicate their desire to equate themselves to the episcopate. The growing number of English abbots and priors who sought and attained promotion as either a suffragan or a diocesan bishop in later fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century England is another indication of the allure of the figure of the bishop to monastic superiors.⁵⁵

In this respect, abbots and priors can be said to have become more prelatial over the period covered by this book. This could potentially bring advantages to religious houses. As Heale argues, abbatial spending and display were always expected to be fruitful to the monastery in attracting patronage and the friendship of the powerful. On the other hand, it left monastic superiors increasingly open to criticism by those who opposed contemporary expressions of prelacy. It is significant that, whereas most late-medieval attacks on prelates from both Lollard and 'orthodox' critics primarily targeted bishops and cardinals, William Tyndale's early-sixteenth-century *The Practyse of Prelates* devoted considerable space to an attack on monastic superiors alongside his critique of the episcopate. For Tyndale, abbots, priors, archbishops, bishops, cardinals and legates alike were 'monstres . . . disgised with miters crores and hattes with crosses pillers & pollaxes', all animated by greed, power and status.⁵⁶

There is good reason to conclude, therefore, that cardinals, bishops and abbots were becoming increasingly alike over the period covered by this book. The considerable common ground between high-ranking churchmen of all kinds – both in terms of their activities (public, educational, cultural) and in terms of how they viewed and presented themselves as prelates and were perceived by others – suggests that there is

⁵⁴ E.g., *CPL*, XIX, 344–5, XX, 343–51, 492–3.

⁵⁵ *Handbook of British Chronology*, ed. E. Fryde *et al.*, 3rd edn (London, 1986), pp. 284–8; R. B. Dobson, 'English and Welsh Monastic Bishops: the Final Century, 1433–1533', in *Monasteries and Society in Medieval Britain*, ed. B. Thompson (Stamford, 1999), pp. 348–67. These efforts of monastic heads to identify themselves with secular prelates were noted, not always favourably, by the episcopate: e.g., *CPL*, IX, 57.

⁵⁶ William Tyndale, *The Practyse of Prelates* (Antwerp, 1530); William Tyndale, *The Obedie[n]ce of a Christen Man* (Antwerp, 1528), fol. 84r.

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value in studying them in juxtaposition. Despite continuing scholarly interest in the higher clergy in medieval and early modern Europe, as evinced by a number of recent publications and conferences,⁵⁷ this common ground has rarely been explored. It is hoped that the present volume, with its focus on prelates and prelacy in England and beyond between *c.* 1300 and *c.* 1560, does something to fill this gap and to suggest avenues for future research.

⁵⁷ Most notably, *Abbatat et abbés dans l'ordre de Prémontré*, ed. D.-M. Dauzet and M. Plouvier (Turnhout, 2005); *The Bishop Reformed. Studies of Episcopal Power and Culture in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. J. Ott and A. T. Jones (Aldershot, 2007); and recent conferences in Lille in 2011 ('Évêques et cardinaux princiers et curiaux (XIVe–début XVIe siècle). Des acteurs du pouvoir') and London in 2013 ('Power Manifest: Structures and Concepts of Ecclesiastical Authority, *c.* 1100–*c.* 1500').

Part I

Prelates and Power

The Clerical Chancellors of Late Medieval England

Gwilym Dodd

Introduction

In September 1376, just two months after Edward III's unpopular courtiers had been humiliated in the Good Parliament, the great and good of the realm were summoned to attend a meeting of the royal council to participate in what must have seemed to be a distinctly peculiar affair.¹ The meeting had been called to allow the 'victims' of the Good Parliament, foremost among whom was John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, to exact their revenge on William Wykeham, bishop of Winchester. As Thomas Walsingham put it, in his own inimitable style,

the duke disgorged the devilish venom pent up within him, and discharged the stings of his malice against the bishop . . . he was looking for a knot in a bulrush, and an opportunity to harm him in any way or by whatever means he could.²

The peculiar quality of these proceedings lay in the fact that the accusations levelled against Wykeham did not concern his more recent participation in the tumultuous events of the Good Parliament, where he had taken an active role in the trial of the disgraced courtiers and had also been appointed as a member of the reform council. Instead, they related to misconduct which he had committed over five years previously when he had been serving as chancellor.³ 'At last', Walsingham continued, 'among the many charges that [Gaunt] laid, falsely it is said, he successfully pinned one upon [the bishop], of being disloyal to the king during the time he had held the office of chancellor.' This was the claim that

¹ CCR, 1377–81, p. 36.

² *The St Albans Chronicle: The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham*, ed. J. Taylor, W. R. Childs and L. Watkiss, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2002–11), I, 61. For a general account of this episode, see V. Davis, *William Wykeham: A Life* (London, 2007), pp. 64–7.

³ The charges were recorded in *The Anonimale Chronicle 1333–81*, ed. V. H. Galbraith (Manchester, 1927), pp. 96–8.

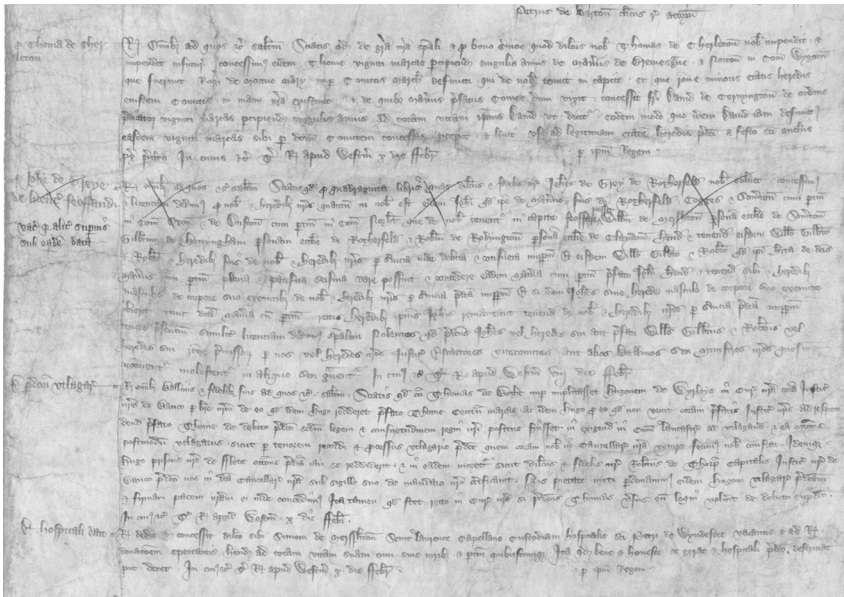


Fig. 1 TNA, C 66/277 m. 29: grant of a licence to Sir John Grey of Rotherfield by William Wykeham in 1368.

This document shows, where the entry is crossed out, the substitution of the sum of £80 for £40 in the grant of a licence to Sir John Grey of Rotherfield by William Wykeham in 1368. A ‘neat’ record of this grant was written up on the next membrane.

Wykeham, at numerous times, but in particular on one notable occasion in February 1368, had ‘reduced and erased’ (‘minuer et araser’) the records of chancery (i.e., the chancery rolls) in favour of his friend, John Grey of Rotherfield, so that the latter had only to pay £40 instead of £80 to obtain a licence for an enfeoffment. When Wykeham was to rebut this accusation, he did not deny that the rolls had been altered (for they most certainly had – as figure 1 shows), but maintained instead that the change had in no way advantaged him, but had been done for charity (‘pur almoigne’), for the original entry, he asserted, had been incorrectly recorded on the rolls and was therefore ‘against conscience’.⁴ But this was not all, for he then went on to say,

... and on this matter I am not required to respond by law, for at this time I was chancellor, the second person in England after the king,

⁴ Ibid., p. 99. For the licence issued by Wykeham to Grey, see *CPR, 1367–70*, pp. 81 and 82.

the which office is of such authority that whoever is chancellor is not bound to account for his acts, for they are fully permissible.

The bishop, however, was given short shrift by Sir William Skipworth, a justice of the common bench, who retorted: 'Lord Bishop, the law is such that every officer of the king in whatever office he holds, who has the goods of the king in his hands, is held to account for his acts, whether he is the chancellor, treasurer or anyone else.' In November 1376, the bishop was duly found guilty, fined the improbable sum of 940,000 marks (a fine that was no doubt a reflection of the bishop's considerable wealth), had his temporalities confiscated and was banished from political life.⁵

The reason this episode has been cited at length is because it introduces a number of themes that are central to an exploration of the chancellor's office in the late Middle Ages and the way it was shaped by the clergy who dominated appointments to the office. There is, in the first place, the quite startling assertion by Wykeham that as chancellor he considered himself to be the most important individual in the kingdom apart from the king himself, and that the authority which the office wielded was such as to place him virtually above the law.⁶ Wykeham's statement took the view of the chancellor as the king's 'right hand man' to the most extreme of positions; that is to say, that as the main representative of the royal will, and specifically as custodian of the Great Seal and head of royal chancery, the principal writing office of the Crown, the chancellor enjoyed the same immunity as the king in relation to questions of accountability and the law. One suspects that what really lay behind this statement was the assertion that only the king could hold a chancellor accountable for his actions, because the authority invested in his office emanated wholly and exclusively from the sovereign. In response, Skipworth articulated an alternative viewpoint: namely, that *all* royal ministers, including chancellors, could be held to account and brought to

⁵ He was pardoned a year later, when Richard II came to the throne: *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, ed. C. Given-Wilson *et al.* (Woodbridge, 2005; hereafter *PROME*), parliament of October 1377, item 99. For the pardon, see *CPR, 1377-81*, pp. 10, 87, printed in full in *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, 6 vols. (London, 1787), III, 387-9.

⁶ Interestingly, Thomas Arundel made a similar assertion to Henry IV in 1405, though in this instance he did so solely on the basis of his position as archbishop of Canterbury (the chancellor at this time was Thomas Langley, Dean of York): 'Sire, I am your spiritual father and the second person of your realm, and you should accept no man's counsel sooner than mine, if it be good': *English Historical Documents, Volume IV, 1327-1485*, ed. A. R. Myers (London, 1969), no. 92. See also *An English Chronicle 1377-1461: A New Edition*, ed. W. Marx (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 36-7.