



**Friends
of
Reading
Abbey**

Sidelights on the History of Reading Abbey

READING ABBEY'S FINANCIAL CRISES IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

Paper given by Professor Brian Kemp to the Friends of Reading Abbey Spring Lecture, 30 March 2012

Editor's Notes

Professor Brian Kemp, 1940-2019, was in the History Department at Reading University from 1964 to 2002, having completed his PhD on Reading Abbey under Dr Cecil Slade, and was active in promoting the study of Reading Abbey, including publishing transcriptions and translations of the Abbey's cartularies and other medieval documents. He was co-founder of the Friends of Reading Abbey in 1986, a body set up to promote awareness of the abbey's importance, to encourage interest in and understanding of its history and architecture, and to support the conservation of the Abbey ruins.

This is the text of the public Spring Lecture given to the Friends of Reading Abbey at Reading Town Hall on 30 March 2012. The title of the lecture was *Reading Abbey and the Case of the Forged Jewish Bonds*, but the lecture had a wider content, addressing the abbey's financial difficulties in the second half of the Thirteenth Century, of which this case was one of a number. Details of these cases can be found in the first volume of the Reading Abbey Cartularies transcribed by Brian, B.R. Kemp (ed.), *Reading Abbey Cartularies*, Vol. 1, published by the Royal Historical Society in 1986, in particular entries 230-234 (pp. 188-200).

The second volume of Cartularies was published in 1988: B.R. Kemp (ed.), *Reading Abbey Cartularies*, Vol. 2, Royal Historical Society, 1988.

Brian was assiduous in writing out the text of his talks, and this paper is a modern transcription of his typed talk. It follows Brian's wording, including his hand-written updates of the typed text, with three exceptions. Firstly, I have added my own sub-headings to separate the different subjects covered by the talk. Secondly, I have broken up Brian's longer paragraphs. And thirdly, in a small number of cases where words were missing, I have added my own words [in square brackets]. The text was not footnoted, but I have added footnotes to cross-refer the text to entries in the Cartularies, as well as to explain certain things. Occasionally Brian had added his own hand-written notes to the margin, which I have included in the footnotes. At the end I have included the text of two sets of notes, the second hand-written, which were included in the manilla file containing the text of the talk. The first of these relates to cases covered in the talk; the second does not, directly, and did not have a title, but it is an expansion on payments made by Leominster Priory to Reading Abbey up to and including 1255, which are mentioned in the third set of Reading Abbey Annals which was published in 2018, B.R. Kemp (ed.) *Reading Abbey Records – a new miscellany*, Berkshire Record Society, Vol. 25, Reading, pp.44-45; whilst not mentioned in the text of the talk, Brian would appear to have considered it relevant to the Abbey's financial situation at that time.

John Painter, Secretary, Friends of Reading Abbey, March 2023.

TEXT OF TALK

Introduction

In the year 1290 Reading Abbey brought an action in the king's court against Gilbert Pincent and Thomas Hikon over three forged bonds, sealed with counterfeits of the abbey's seal, in which the abbot and convent were alleged to be bound to certain Jews in money, goods and chattels to the value of £3,000. This extraordinary case of the forged Jewish bonds occurred at a most interesting time in the abbey's history, for it came barely a year after the abbey had been restored to solvency after a period of serious indebtedness, but it also occurred, by coincidence I think, at an equally interesting moment in the history of the Jews in England, since it was in 1290 that Edward I ordered the general expulsion of all Jews from England.

I should like to explore with you this evening certain sidelights which are chiefly concerned with the background and consequences of the abbey's insolvency in the second half of the thirteenth century, an insolvency whose first signs became apparent in the mid-thirteenth century and which continued to recur as a problem into the early fourteenth century.

The Abbey's Insolvency

At first sight it seems strange that an abbey as richly endowed as Reading should fall seriously into debt, but in truth there are many good reasons why this should have been the case. Not only can one pin-point several aspects of Reading Abbey's own affairs in the thirteenth century which could have led to financial difficulties, but by comparison with other religious houses we can see that Reading's experiences were not unique, for many other abbeys and houses of religion were suffering from cash-flow problems at this time.

Some of the reasons why Reading Abbey might have been feeling financial strain can be briefly mentioned: royal patronage rights of hospitality at the abbey, putting up servants, horses, etc; maintenance of the abbey's buildings and new works after more than 200 years since the foundation; consolidation of its estates by purchase of parcels of land or even whole manors (e.g. in 1270 the manor of Sheffield in Burghfield was bought from William of Huntercombe for £121 7s 2d)¹; maintenance of the abbey's alms and charitable obligations, especially its two hospitals of St John Baptist and St Mary Magdalen; rising legal costs in defence of its possessions and rights; royal and papal taxation, and so on.

All of these aspects of the abbey's affairs must have led cumulatively to a considerable drain on its resources, and the situation was made worse by the drying-up of large-scale gifts to the abbey of manors and churches in free alms without secular obligation. As is well known, the great bulk of the abbey's endowment came in the twelfth century and particularly from the royal family. The last major royal acquisition came in 1205 in the reign of King John, when, at that king's request, Robert Bardolf conveyed to the monks the most important manor in Hoo (Kent), but even this was not entirely a new gift but a translation into land of an annual render of 40 marks originally given by Henry II at the abbey's dedication in 1164 – but a very welcome translation all the same².

When we find the abbey acquiring large estates in the thirteenth century, it is either by purchase, as I have said, or by undertaking a specific obligation like providing a corrody³, which encumbered the estate, at least for a time. For example, in 1270 the manor of Ufton Nervet was acquired from John Neyrnut, at an annual payment of 20s to the overlord, Henry de Pinkney, and on condition of providing a corrody for John Neyrnut covering all his needs in food and clothing for life⁴. Again, and also in 1270, Reading received from Matilda Peche, lady of Frilsham (Berks.) a messuage, 3 virgates of land, 4 acres of wood and 5s rent in Frilsham (not a large property) at the cost of establishing a chantry of daily intercession for herself, her father and mother, her two deceased

¹ Cartularies, Vol. I, entries 759 to 760 (pp. 64-65)

² Cartularies, Vol. I, entries 398 to 401 (pp. 322-325)

³ A corrody was an arrangement to provide support for maintenance to a named person by a religious house

⁴ Cartularies, Vol. II, entry 1193 (pp. 304-305)

husbands and others for ever. The charter from Matilda Peche in the Reading cartularies does not give these details; we only know them from the fortunate survival of the text of the abbot and convent's grant to her of this chantry, which is preserved in the family's cartulary, the Rideware cartulary. In other words, then, the abbey's financial difficulties were not likely to be solved by the receipt of large new gifts of lands, etc., without attendant obligations⁵.

I think it highly likely, too, that the abbey's internal management may not have encouraged the monks to take adequate steps against overspending. Although the abbey's properties were held in common – and there was expressly no division between the abbot, on the one hand, and the convent, on the other – the possessions of the monastery were divided up for administrative purposes into what were called 'obediences', or departments, each under a senior monk, an 'obedientary', who was given a particular responsibility in the monastery and the income of certain properties with which to discharge it: e.g. the almoner, chamberlain, infirmarian, cellarer, etc. This was fine in theory, but the system lacked any central control, at least in the early days, and it appears that Reading Abbey suffered from similar problems found in other religious houses of the time and not requiring the obedientaries to produce annual accounts of their income and expenditure for a central audit. Although most of Reading's domestic financial papers are lost, it is probably significant that the earliest surviving obedientary account that we have is the account of the almoner for 1376. There were no doubt earlier accounts which have not survived, but probably none before the late 13th or early 14th centuries, since, to judge from changes introduced in other houses at this time, it was most likely that Reading established, or was obliged to establish, a system of centralised annual audit of accounts. Before that time, and in the time about which I am mainly speaking, there was no such central or regular control over how or to what extent the various departments of the abbey were becoming encumbered by debt.

Remedial Action

In spite of this, however, as I have said, the situation was growing so grave by the middle of the thirteenth century that the monks were becoming aware of it and could not ignore it. Emergency steps were taken. Some time between 1242 and 1245 the abbey sought and obtained from their patron, King Henry III, a letter of request to its tenants to give the abbey an aid, a subsidium, to free the house from its debts (ad domum suam debitis exonerandam). The abbey's tenants clearly did not at first respond to the king's request and he sent another in sterner terms, noting that precis ipsas obaudistis et in nullo in hac parte curastis annuere voluntati⁶. How effective the second request was is unknown, but it is interesting to note that, while taking these steps to help alleviate the abbey's problems, the crown was quite capable at the same time of taking money from the abbey (in 1242 an aid of 100 marks for the king's crossing to Gascony, and in 1244 £100 for the restoration of the abbey's liberties taken into the king's hand for transgressions of the law)⁷.

A further royal request to the abbey's tenants for an aid to discharge its manifold debts came in 1253⁸, but the difficulties were clearly mounting and shortly after the accession of the next king, Edward I, more drastic measures had to be undertaken. On 5 February 1275, Edward I repeated his father's request to the abbey's tenants for financial aid, and on the same day asked the abbey's Sieneese creditors to postpone payment of its debts to them for 3 years, since the abbey sit in magna pecunie summa diversis creditoribus obligata⁹.

Towards the end of February [1275], the king ordered the abbot of Reading, since the abbey was heavily in debt, to remove from the abbey and from Leominster priory all servants and horses with their keepers lodged there by the king or others and to receive no more until the abbey and priory were relieved of their indebtedness¹⁰.

⁵ Cartularies, Vol. II, entry 803 (pp. 96-97)

⁶ Cartularies, Vol. I, entries 62 and 63 (pp. 82-83)

⁷ Cartularies, Vol. I, entries 64 and 65 (pp. 83-84)

⁸ Cartularies Vol. I, entry 70 (p. 88). See also Separate note at the end of this paper concerning payments made by Leominster Priory to Reading Abbey in 1255 and over the preceding 10 years.

⁹ Cartularies, Vol. I, entries 81 and 82 (p. 93)

¹⁰ Cartularies, Vol. I, entry 83 (p. 93)

In December 1275, however, and probably with the abbot's approval, the king took the affairs of Leominster priory under his own wing and committed custody to Roland of Earley, a local knight in Berkshire and one well-disposed towards the abbey, to restore the priory to financial solvency.

It was probably in 1275, too, that Archbishop Kilwardby of Canterbury attempted to put the abbey's own finances in order, but to no avail, since fresh efforts were made by Archbishop Pechem¹¹ in 1281 and by Walter Scammel, bishop of Salisbury, the diocesan bishop, in 1284. Meanwhile, Leominster Priory had clearly not been restored to solvency, since in the following year, on 18 October 1285, the priory was committed for custody to the king's clerk, John of Bruges, possibly because such a one as Roland of Earley had not been sufficiently rigorous in cutting back its expenses.

The crown's policy for dealing with Reading Abbey's financial crisis was clearly moving in the direction of installing a royal clerk to clear up the mess. And this was what was finally done in 1286, probably with the resigned approval of the abbot and monks. That this extreme measure was only reluctantly taken was no doubt owing to the fears of the abbot and convent that it might prejudice the monastery's immunity from royal custody during abbatial vacancies. Reading Abbey was not held by the Crown by feudal service and it had the special privilege, enshrined in Henry I's foundation charter, that in an abbatial vacancy all possessions of the monastery remained in the control of the prior and monks, i.e. by implication they did not pass in any respect into royal custody, 'since the abbot has no revenue of his own but only in common with the brethren'¹².

Accordingly, and to allay these fears, the first move by Edward I was to issue letters patent to the effect that, although he had committed custody of Reading Abbey, with all goods and revenues pertaining to it and to the manor of Leominster, to his clerk, Ralph of Broughton, to relieve the abbey of its indebtedness, this was not to prejudice the abbey's immunity from royal custody in future abbatial vacancies: in other words, it was an emergency measure which was not to be regarded as a precedent. This was on 15th March 1286. The following day, and with the same proviso, the king formally ordered the abbot to admit the said Ralph to custody in order to restore solvency. On 4th May 1286, the sheriff of Berkshire was ordered to give aid to Ralph of Broughton, the king's clerk, in this matter¹³.

Now, although we have no details, it appears that Ralph of Broughton did his work well, but even so it took the best part of three years. At any rate, on 10th January 1290, the king sent from Gascony an order to him stating that, since the king had learned that the abbey was now restored to solvency, he should relinquish control of the house once more to the abbot and convent. We also have a personal note from the chancellor, Robert Burnell, to Ralph of Broughton, urging him to free himself from the responsibility as quickly as honourably possible, his work being done, as the king did not wish him to tarry in Reading longer on this account. Quite what this alludes to is not clear, but in any event the main point for us is that by early 1289 the abbey's financial affairs had been put on at least a reasonable footing¹⁴.

As I have said, there are many reasons why the abbey should have fallen into debt at this time in the second half of the thirteenth century, but it is possible that particularly bad management or lack of oversight from the abbot may have led the Crown eventually to intervene in the way that it did. The abbot during the most critical years was Robert of Burgate, whose election was confirmed by the king, Henry III, on 15th July, 1269, and who resigned at his monks' insistence on 26th October 1290. He was succeeded by the chamberlain, William of Sutton, who became Abbot William I, and who appears to have been far more business-like while chamberlain than the abbot himself. For instance, during the period of royal custody, in January 1287, it was William of Sutton the chamberlain, not the abbot, who reached agreement with the Sienese merchants as to the total of the abbey's

¹¹ John Peckham, Archbishop 1279-1292. In the Cartulary index, Brian spells his name 'Pecham'

¹² Cartulary Vol. 1, p. 34. From the Abbey's foundation charter, 1125: "... quia abbas Radingensis non habet proprios redditus sed communes cum fratibus."

¹³ Cartularies, Vol. I, entries 92 to 95 (pp. 96-98)

¹⁴ Cartularies, Vol. I, entries 98 and 99 (pp. 98-99)

debts to them and obtained quittance that they had all been paid¹⁵. William did not become chamberlain until after 9th February, 1284, when a certain John was in office, so sloppiness in the abbey's affairs, which dates from just before this time, cannot be laid at William's door. In fact, I think it possible that William was made chamberlain after the Crown took over in 1286 because of his financial abilities.

The Case of the Crusading Tenth, 1274-80¹⁶

A notable case of slackness in attending to the abbey's finances to which I have referred arose in connection with the abbey's contribution to the crusading tenth of 1274. The story throws light on how monasteries coped (or not) with the paraphernalia of papal collection and accounting and is worth telling in some detail for that reason.

At the Second Council of Lyon in 1274 Pope Gregory X announced a crusade to free the Holy Land from the infidel and decreed a sexennial tenth on ecclesiastical incomes throughout the Church. The decree Pro zelo fidei was made on 18th May 1274. It laid on all monasteries, with certain specified exemptions, the obligation to pay to the papal collectors a tenth of their income each year for six years. We may imagine the anxiety this must have caused in Reading Abbey with its mounting financial difficulties, but still the tax had to be paid. Moreover, in spite of the abbey's problems, we know that the tax was paid in full, but as a result of confusion, for which the abbot and convent were not entirely at fault, it appeared at the end of the six years that the abbey had not paid all that was due and was liable still to find £370.

The problem arose in this way. On 8th December, 1279, the abbot and convent issued letters obligatory to the papal collectors to the effect that £370 18s 11d of their contribution to the papal tax was deposited in the abbey and could be taken by the papal collectors when required. It was the failure of the abbey to obtain the restoration of these letters when the money was taken that led to the later confusion and their apparent liability still to pay this sum. Incidentally, the letters obligatory contain valuable evidence about the reliquary of St Philip's head and other liturgical objects and books in the abbey's possession, which would otherwise be unknown to us. As security for the payment of the sum of money when the papal collectors required it, the abbot and convent placed in the custody of the prior, sacrist and another senior monk, under the chief collector's seal, a golden casket enriched with precious stones given to the abbey by King John to contain the head of St Philip (which that king had also given), along with a gold chalice and three precious bibles, two in two volumes and one in three volumes, the condition being that, if the sum of money was not repaid, these precious items could be pawned to merchants and others to raise the required sum. To repeat, these letters were dated 8th December 1279.

The next we hear of the matter is in a letter, dated 2nd March 1284, by the principal papal collector, John of Darlington, the archbishop of Dublin, to James Sabellus, cardinal deacon of St Mary in Cosmedin (later Pope Honorius IV), in which he stated that the abbey had paid its share of the tax in full and that the letters obligatory had been sent in error to the Curia with the final account of the sexennial tenth, but that the letters should be disregarded since the abbey was not still liable in the amount of £370. Now, although the archbishop of Dublin cannot be exonerated of his part of the blame in not returning the abbey's obligatory letters when the sum on deposit was taken by the collectors (he was to die before the month was out), equally the abbot and convent ought to have made sure that the letters were returned to them on that occasion. It must indicate some slackness and failure in close attention to financial detail that they did not.

Unfortunately for the abbey, the papal Curia would not accept the archbishop of Dublin's assurance with regard to its full payment of the tax, and the matter was not finally cleared up until July, 1286, that is, after the abbey's affairs had been taken over by the king's clerk, Ralph of Broughton, when a full enquiry was carried out by Geoffrey of Vezzano, clerk of the papal chamber, nuncio and executor of business touching the sexennial tenth

¹⁵ Cartularies, Vol. I, entry 233 (p. 195)

¹⁶ Cartularies, Vol. I, entries 230 to 232 (pp. 188-195)

in England. The report of his investigation is long and detailed, and reveals how, when and where the various elements of the abbey's contributions to the tax were paid to the different sub-collectors in different parts of England. He concluded that the abbey was not still liable to the £370, since the archbishop of Dublin's account of what had happened appeared to be true, and that settled the matter. The abbey had finally come out of this episode successfully, but I need only to remind you of how great a sum £370 was in the later thirteenth century for you to realise the heavy financial loss that the monks might have incurred.

The Case of the Forged Jewish Bonds¹⁷

And so I come back finally to the fascinating story of the forged Jewish bonds with which I began. It is an incident which is worth going into in detail, since not only is it interesting in itself but it also gives intriguing insights into how the abbey's affairs were conducted. We get a rare glimpse of how the monks of the abbey would react when faced with a problem of this kind.

Briefly, what the episode involved was this. A Jew known as Josce of Newbury (actually of Devizes) forged three bonds apparently in the name of the abbot and convent obligating them to various Jews in the sum of £3,000, but this was not known to the monks when the matter was first brought to their attention. According to the evidence in court of William of Sutton, the chamberlain, Gilbert Pincent came to him on 25th July, 1288, saying that the abbey was heavily in debt to the Jews, but that he (Gilbert) could help the abbey to clear itself of this obligation if he was given 40 marks for his pains. The chamberlain refused to pay the sum, but still (perhaps) no doubt to put pressure on him, Gilbert showed him the transcripts of two of the bonds.

For some reason, nothing more is recorded as happening for about eighteen months, but then, on 3rd January, 1290, the chamberlain, William of Sutton, went to Wallingford to the house of Alice, widow of Alexander de Eastaus, where the said Gilbert Pincent and Thomas Hikon, the other man sued by the abbey later in the year, met him. Thomas took out of his pocket a deed-box (pixis) in which were sealed two bonds with counterfeit seals, which corresponded exactly with the transcriptions Gilbert had shown the chamberlain previously. The chamberlain asked if he had more deeds, upon which Thomas, prompted by Gilbert, acknowledged that he had one more, which he then went home to fetch and which he duly showed William the chamberlain in the said Alice's lodging house (hospitium). The chamberlain naturally wanted to gain possession of these deeds, but the others refused and the chamberlain returned to Reading.

The texts of the total of three bonds are recorded in the court proceedings and clearly show that, if the monks could not prove them false, they would involve the abbey in devastating losses at a time when it had only the previous year been restored to some kind of solvency. In fact, they are to our eyes clearly forgeries, and no doubt they appeared so also to the monks, but proving it in court might be difficult.

The first bond, which like the other two is not dated, was to a certain A. Sancte, Jew of Winchester, in 400 quarters of wheat or 200 marks in lieu, to be paid over at Michaelmas, 1276, in return for an advance of money to the abbey. The second was to Jacob the Jew of Oxford, son of Master Moses of London, in £300 sterling and other valuables allegedly deposited for custody in the abbey's treasury, which money and valuables the abbot and convent would conceal from the king and queen and not release to any but Jacob or his wife or a messenger bearing these letters. The third bond was to the same Jacob the Jew of Oxford in 100 sacks of wool, or £1,000 in lieu, to be paid over half at Michaelmas, 1277, and half at Easter 1278, in return for a sum of money advanced to the abbey ad negocium et comodum conventus.¹⁸

What makes these bonds particularly suspect is that, in the first and third, i.e. those involving repayment of loans, all the abbey's lands and chattels were alleged to be mortgaged in order to raise the loans and, moreover, in the event of default of payment not only to the sheriff of Berkshire and Oxfordshire, who might be required to distrain on the abbey, but also the king would receive part of the financial penalties imposed on the monks. In

¹⁷ Cartularies, Vol. I, entry 234 (pp. 195-200)

¹⁸ Handwritten margin note: Jacob the Jew (+1276-77) [ie. Jacob died between those dates].

a clumsy way the forger was seeking to give the sheriff and the king a vested interest, as it were, in proving the bonds genuine.

We left the chamberlain William of Sutton returning to Reading empty-handed after seeing the three bonds in Alice's house at Wallingford. He must have reported the matter to the abbot and an anxious discussion must have taken place, for about a week later, on 11th January, 1290, another monk, Alan, with Peter the clerk rode over to Wallingford on the abbot's instruction [to meet] with the said Gilbert, and there they were shown the bonds in the Jew's presence, presumably Josce of Newbury. At Gilbert's suggestion Alan brought one of the bonds back to Reading to show the abbot, having given surety for its return, and, as we learn from Alan's and Peter's evidence on oath, he returned the bond at Wallingford on the following Sunday, 15th January.

Having heard the evidence from the abbey's side, the justices in 1290 then examined Gilbert Pincet and Thomas Hikon, the accused. Thomas Hikon declared on oath that very early in the year, though he could not remember the exact date, a certain Josce of Newbury, a Jew, came to Alice's house in Wallingford and handed to him, Thomas, an unsealed deed-box in which were three bonds. He, Thomas, handed them to William of Sutton and John Gerrard, monks of Reading, who took copies of them and returned them to him in the box, which he duly returned to the said Josce. On Wednesday in the following week Josce came again to Wallingford to the house of William de la Wyke and spoke with Alan, the abbot's chaplain, showing him the said bonds so that he might advise the abbot concerning them. Alan wished to take them away with him, but the Jew refused, handing him only one bond to take away on condition that it was returned the following Sunday. When Thomas Hikon was asked by the justices whether he had received anything from the Jew for this business he replied not, but had acted out of favour of the abbot, who was his lord and of whom he held¹⁹. Gilbert Pincet's evidence agreed in the main with Thomas Hikon's, but there was clearly some discrepancy between the accounts of this episode provided by the monks, on the one hand, and by the accused, on the other.

What precisely happened on each occasion will probably never be known with certainty, but what is clear is that an unsavoury and rather nasty attempt had been made to swindle the abbey of a large sum of money. In the event, the Jew of Newbury, Josce, was brought to justice and condemned for the forgery, and Gilbert and Thomas were apparently exonerated. The timing of the whole episode was, however, not accidental, for, given that the abbey was heavily in debt in these years, as we have seen, it was *prima facie* likely that the monks had borrowed money on a considerable scale from the Jews. The fact that the abbey was insolvent would have been well known in Berkshire and presumably inspired the Jew to try to capitalize on the abbey's embarrassment to his own direct or indirect advantage.

The role of Gilbert Pincet and Thomas Hikon in the affair is not entirely clear, for, although they appear to have been acquitted of the forgery themselves, and although they both declared on oath that they did not know the bonds to be false, nevertheless Gilbert Pincet certainly sought to profit from bringing the matter to the chamberlain's notice in 1288. The Pincet family were prominent in and around Reading at this time (their name survives in that of the former Pincet's Farm²⁰). If our Gilbert Pincet is the same Gilbert Pincet who witnessed many charters to the abbey and was a juror for Reading hundred in 1269, it would seem unlikely that he would have become involved in an affair which he knew to be fraudulent, but our Gilbert may have been another member of the family, perhaps a son of the juror.

The conviction of Josce of Newbury took place in the latter part of the year 1290²¹. It was also in the latter half of 1290, on 26th October, that the abbot, Robert of Burgate, resigned and was replaced a month later by the very same chamberlain, William of Sutton, who had taken so prominent a part in the affair of the forged Jewish bonds. Moreover, the abbey's share of the crusading tenth had been solved in 1286, and the abbey's debt to

¹⁹ Presumably he held his property from the abbot.

²⁰ And also in Pincets Lane, running north of the A4 Bath Road from Calcot towards Little Heath in Tilehurst, and passing Pincet's Manor and Pincet's Hill House.

²¹ Handwritten margin note: Jewish Conspiracy against Osney abbey, 1290

the Sieneſe merchants cleared in 1287. The financial affairs of the monastery ſeemed now to have been placed on a more ſecure footing and, as we have ſeen, the royal cuſtody was withdrawn in 1289.

When William of Sutton was elected abbot, Edward I directed him to do homage to the king's treaſurer, preſumably at Weſtmiſter, and not to travel for this purpoſe to the king wherever he happened to be, in order to ſpare the abbey unneceſſary expenſe²².

Deſpite all theſe favourable ſigns, however, it is clear that the abbey's financial ſtate was not ſound and, when the next abbot, Nicholas of Whaplode, was appointed following William of Sutton's death in 1305, it was found that the abbey was in debt to the huge ſum of £1,227 7s 8d. The new abbot immediately inſtituted a policy of retrenchment which eventually brought the abbey to a period of comparative proſperity, but that is another ſtory.

FINISH OF TALK

²² Handwritten margin note: See alſo documents concerning the abbot's bleſſing by the Bp [Biſhop] at Ramſbury and not Salisbury (Salisbury Chapter Muniments, Preſs II, Box 1/6 and 7

Notes included with the text of the Talk in Brian's file

The crusading tenth

18 May, 1274	the decree <i>Pro zelo fidei</i>
8 December, 1279	the abbey issues letters obligatory to the papal collectors
2 March, 1284	principal collector, the archbishop of Dublin, writes to Cardinal James Sabellus
July 1286	enquiry by Geoffrey of Vezzano, clerk of the papal chamber

The case of the forged bonds

1288	
25 July	Gilbert Pincent visits William of Sutton, chamberlain of Reading Abbey
1290	
3 January	William of Sutton visits house of Alice in Wallingford
15 January	Alan goes to Wallingford

Separate Note – no heading – concerning Payments by Leominster Priory to Reading Abbey

[The third set of Reading Abbey Annals was published in 2018:

B Kemp (ed.), *Reading Abbey Records – a new miscellany*, Berkshire Record Society, Vol. 25, 2018, Reading
The Leominster reference is on pp. 44-45]

This is possibly related to a curious passage in the unpublished third set of Reading abbey annals, under the year 1255, which tells of the visit to Reading of Hubert, prior ('dean') of Leominster, the daughter house of the abbey in Herefordshire, who gave (?paid) a total of over £400 to different departments of the abbey, in addition to £818 given to the convent over the preceding ten years. What exactly all this means is obscure, but it is possible that it points to a regularising of the financial relationship between the parent house and its daughter, or perhaps to an extra contribution from the dependent house in the worsening financial situation in general.

1255

Dean/Prior Hubert of Leominster to Reading

Chamber	300 marks ²³				
Infirmary	200 "				
Brothers	<u>300</u> "	each			
	600	2 x <u>600</u>	<u>1200</u>	= £400	
		3	3		

	£	s	d
Kitchen	9	7	1 ½
	<u>400</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
	409	7	1 ½
+ Over previous	<u>818</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
10 years	1,227	7	1 ½

Copyright: Friends of Reading Abbey, 2023

²³ A mark was worth a third of a pound sterling – ie 6s 8d (now 33⅓p). Hence the division by 3.