

The Royal Abbey of Reading

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Reading Abbey was indeed a royal abbey. It was founded on a lavish scale by one of the greatest of medieval kings, Henry I, in 1121; it contained the tomb of that king and of other members of the royal family; it remained under royal patronage throughout its 418-year existence until its dissolution in 1539; and it was the scene of many important royal and historical events. Its royal history is so rich, in fact, that I must perforce be rather selective in the aspects and topics I chose to focus on today. I shall deal first with the foundation and endowment of the abbey, then look at some of the more significant royal events that took place within its walls, focusing in particular on the reign of King John and the abbey's close relations with that king, and conclude with a consideration of the abbey's most celebrated religious relic, the Hand of St James the Great, to which the term 'royal' can surely be applied in more than one sense.

Foundation and Endowment

The foundation of the abbey of St Mary the Virgin and St John the Evangelist at Reading was begun by King Henry I in the year 1121. He will have had a number of motives for so doing, but among them was no doubt his own advancing years (he was now over 50 years old) and the tragic death by drowning of his only legitimate son and heir, William, in the White Ship Disaster of November 1120, an event which threatened to undermine the future stability of the realm. Although the king did not die for another 15 years, in 1135, his thoughts were turning increasingly to his own death and need for redemption. The new religious house in Reading was founded for the health of his soul and those of his father and mother, King William I and Queen Matilda, his brother, King William II, and his own first wife, Matilda, and it was to be also his mausoleum¹. The king's foundation represented a huge gesture of reparation to the Church and support for the growing reform movement in the Church at large, for its initial endowment included, most importantly, the sites and possessions of three former Anglo-Saxon abbeys, long since defunct, two of women (Reading and Leominster) and one of men (Cholsey), which had been in the hands of the crown since their destruction and which the king was now returning to ecclesiastical possession.

Henry established the new house at Reading on the grandest and most lavish scale. Desiring that it should embody the most impressive forms of monastic life and ritual, carried on in a church and buildings of the most splendid and richly ornamented architecture of the period, Henry chose monks of the Cluniac Order, a reformed branch of the Benedictine Order, founded at Cluny in Burgundy in the early tenth century and much favoured in Henry's Anglo-Norman world. It was renowned for the elaborate liturgical life of the monks and the rich decoration of their architecture, wholly appropriate for a house that was to contain the tomb of the king at Reading. Henry had already acted as benefactor to the great parent abbey of the Order at Cluny, and now, at the king's request, Abbot Pons of Cluny sent eight monks to Reading, including Peter, who was to be their prior. These were joined by several monks from the Cluniac priory of Lewes (Sussex) and the whole party arrived in Reading on 18 June 1121, where, according to an anonymous monk writing a little later in the

¹ The foundation charter also mentions his late son, William, who drowned in the wreck of the White Ship, 1120.

twelfth century, they 'began the observance of the Cluniac Order in the monastery newly established by the king'².

The new house was not an abbey from the start, however, for two years the fledgling community lived under Prior Peter's rule and was, like almost all other houses of the Cluniac order, a priory strictly dependent on the parent abbey at Cluny, but it appears that such an arrangement did not suit Henry I's plans. He felt either from the beginning, or soon came to feel, that, while he wanted to have in his new monastery all the splendours and advantages of the Cluniac observance, he also wanted the house to have full abbatial status, independent and entirely free of any judicial dependence on Cluny. So it was, therefore, that on 15 April 1123 the first abbot was appointed, Hugh of Amiens, hitherto prior of Lewes, and Prior Peter returned to Cluny. The arrangement had clearly taken a while to be arrived at, with what opposition from Cluny (if any) we do not know, but it is perhaps significant that, when King Stephen was founding another Cluniac house at Faversham (Kent) in 1148, he cited the model of Reading to secure independent abbatial status from the outset.

Work on the building of Reading Abbey began almost immediately and despite some upheaval during the so-called 'Anarchy' of Stephen's reign, had advanced sufficiently for its solemn dedication to take place some 40 years later, on 19 April 1164, performed by none other than Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, in the presence of the then king, Henry II, and a great concourse of lords and bishops; this event, occurring in the year when the notorious quarrel between the king and his archbishop was raging, is said to have been the last time the two met at all amicably before the Council of Northampton in October, from which the archbishop fled into exile.

Despite the fact that Reading was an abbey, however, its Cluniac observance was maintained and relations with the Order of Cluny were cordial. Three abbots of Reading in the twelfth century had been priors of Lewes and the third of these, Abbot Hugh II (1186-99) became Abbot Hugh V of Cluny itself in 1199. Even when, from the second quarter of the thirteenth century onwards, Reading was in most quarters treated as an undifferentiated Benedictine abbey (like Gloucester or Westminster, for instance), and the abbot began to attend the general Benedictine chapters in England, the character of its initial observance remained. The abbot's dignity was greatly enhanced in 1191 by Pope Clement III's grant³ of the right to wear pontificals – episcopal vestments including the mitre – on specified occasions, and, when Parliament developed in the later thirteenth century, the abbot of Reading was regularly summoned to attend as a spiritual lord of the realm. The abbey thus became both a mitred and a parliamentary abbey.

Henry I was extremely generous to his new foundation. The scale of his gifts of lands, churches and privileges amounted to a considerable alienation of royal demesne. His foundation charter, which did not come until 1125, conveyed to the abbot and convent the large estates of Reading, Cholesey, and Leominster (Herefordshire), which entailed much more than their mere names would suggest. Reading comprised not only the central manor and little town of Reading, but also extensive and outlying appurtenances at Tilehurst, Theale, Sulhampstead Abbots and Beenham, most of which became separate manors in due course, while Leominster was a huge ancient complex of lands extending over many villages and hamlets, an assemblage so rich that it was able to support a fully conventual dependent priory, founded in 1139, under Reading's control. The charter also conveyed the large and rich manor of Thatcham in the lush valley of the River Kennet west of Reading, and the churches of all these places except Thatcham, in place of which Henry gave the church of Wargrave, east of Reading. In the cases of Reading and Leominster, it was not simply a question of

² As said in B.R. Kemp, *Reading Abbey – An Introduction to the History of the Abbey*, Reading Museum and Art Gallery, Reading, 1968. No reference is given there. The preceding reference is to 'Annales Radingenses', ed. F. Liebermann, in *Ungedruckte Anglo-Normanische Geschichts-quellen* (Strasbourg, 1879)

³ The grant was to the abbot

a single church, but of an ancient minster church with numerous dependent, or formerly dependent, churches or chapels.

This was a rich endowment indeed, but before his death the king added the church of Handborough (Oxfordshire) and (most probably) the Berkshire manors of Bucklebury and Pangbourne and the church of Pangbourne. In addition, he gave a less tangible form of endowment, no less profitable and beneficial to the monks – namely, two annual fairs⁴, judicial and administrative privileges over their lands, and economic exemptions from tolls and customs elsewhere. The foundation charter also decreed that Reading was not to hold its possessions by feudal service, unlike all the other great abbeys founded in England hitherto, but rather the monks were to hold them in free alms and in common, there being no separate endowment of the abbot, a provision which crucially safeguarded the abbey from any measure of royal custody during abbatial vacancies. Finally, the flounder gave the abbey a most significant religious relic, the Hand of the Apostle St James the Great, of which more anon. The lead set by the king was followed by other members of the royal family and by others.

For a time in the twelfth century Reading abbey looked like becoming a royal mausoleum. Henry I had always intended it to be his final resting place, and on 5 January, he having died over a month earlier in eastern Normandy, his body was brought for burial in the abbey, as yet only partially finished, in the centre of the choir before the high altar, and there it was visited on the first anniversary of his death by his second wife, Queen Adeliza, and in 1151 she herself was brought to lie near her royal husband, being entombed between two piers of the north choir arcade. In 1156 Henry II's first born son, William, dying at the age of three, was buried in the abbey, as was Reginald, earl of Cornwall, natural son of Henry I, in 1175. But Reading was not destined to become the normal place for royal burials, being overtaken first by Fontevrault in France and, most spectacularly, by Westminster. In due course a tomb and effigy were raised above the site of Henry I's burial, which we know about only from a stipulation made by Richard II in the 1390s that the monks must have them repaired before he would confirm the abbey's liberties (which they duly did)⁵. The king's tomb remained the focus of reverent devotion in the abbey, particularly at his annual obit, as we learn from a precious thirteenth-century record⁶ of the ritual followed on those occasions⁶.

Royal Events

Being a royal abbey and situated conveniently in central southern England, on important road and river routes, Reading frequently played host to the reigning monarch of the day throughout the Middle Ages, but especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It must have been no unusual thing for the people of medieval Reading to see kings and queens and other members of the royal family, to say nothing of nobles, prelates and a host of others, passing through the town or arriving at the Great Gate of the abbey⁷. Equally, the availability of a number of large rooms and other accommodation within the abbey precinct meant that the abbey could be chosen to host large gatherings of national significance, such as church councils and parliaments.

The frequent visits of royalty and other lords meant that from time to time notable events took place within the abbey, among the most striking of which I have chosen to highlight a few examples from across the centuries.

⁴ Henry I granted the abbey the privilege of only one fair, to St Laurence, over the period 10-13 August; a second fair, on the feast of St James (25-28 July), was granted by Henry II in 1164; and a third, on the feast of St Philip and St James the Less 30 April to 3 May), was granted by King John in 1205.

⁵ The instruction was recorded on 25 May 1398 as having happened within the year set by the king. See B.R. Kemp, *Reading Abbey Cartularies I*, Camden Fourth Series 31, Royal Historical Society, London, 1986, p.107.

⁶ B.R. Kemp, *Reading Abbey Records: a new miscellany*, Berkshire Record Society 25, 2018, pp 101-110.

⁷ This was the West or Compter Gate, next to St Laurence's church.

On 17 March 1185 Henry II was present in the abbey to receive Heraclius, patriarch of Jerusalem, and Roger, master of the Hospitallers, a meeting which linked Reading Abbey briefly with the Holy Land and the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem. That kingdom was then in a perilous state under the rule of an ailing king, Baldwin IV, the 'Leper king', riven by internal faction and threatened by the rising power in the region of the infidel leader, Saladin. In a desperate effort to secure aid from the West the patriarch and the masters of the two military orders⁸ had set out on their mission in 1184 and, having achieved little or no success in France, the delegation arrived in England at the end of January 1185, by which time the master of the Temple had died. They met Henry, perhaps the most powerful ruler in western Europe at the time, at Reading in March. According to some reports, they had come to offer the king the Crown of Jerusalem, but, if not quite that in reality, at least some form of lordship, or *dominato*, over the kingdom. The patriarch read letters of exhortation from Pope Lucius III and presented the holy relics they had brought, of the Nativity, Passion and Resurrection of Christ, the keys to the Tower of David and of the Holy Sepulchre, and the banner of the Holy Cross, to all of which the king showed profoundest veneration. Nevertheless, although he and his court were moved by the ambassadors' entreaties, the king postponed a decision until a fuller council of magnates could be summoned, at Clerkenwell, north London, where the offer of the Crown of Jerusalem was declined, since, it was said, the king could not leave his English kingdom and other territories that God had entrusted to him. Although a promise of financial aid was given, the patriarch and his party left disappointed in their main objective. A bare two years later, in 1187, the kingdom of Jerusalem fell to the Moslem forces of Saladin at the Battle of Hattin.

I shall say more about King John and Reading Abbey later, but I should like to mention here one very significant event towards the end of his reign, as his authority was crumbling and the realm was drifting towards civil war. In May 1215, as a prelude to their military campaign against John, his barons issued a *diffidatio*, a defiance of the king, that is a formal renunciation of allegiance and, in effect, a declaration of war; this was made at Brackley (Northamptonshire), whence they returned to Northampton, but, and this seems only to be known from a hitherto unpublished set of Reading annals which I am shortly to edit⁹ – the barons' defiance was presented formally to the king at Reading Abbey by their envoy, a certain Geoffrey the canon, chaplain of Robert FitzWalter who was the leader of the rebellious barons and called by them 'Marshal of the army of the Lord and Holy Church'. This Geoffrey has not been certainly identified, but, since Robert FitzWalter's base was at Dunmow in Essex and he was patron of the priory of Augustinian canons there, there is a possibility, perhaps a strong one, that Geoffrey was a canon of that house. The evidence of these Reading annals fits with the known movements of John in early May. The barons' defiance is said to have been made at Brackley on 6 May; John is known to have been at Reading from 3 to 6 May, moving to London by 8 May, so he could well have received the defiance by the hand of Geoffrey the canon while he was in the abbey. Assuming that this was so, we can imagine the effect of this blow, not only upon the king, but also upon the monastic community, with whom, as we shall see, the king was on good terms. Events would move swiftly thereafter, culminating in the famous meeting at Runnymede in June 1215 and the granting of Magna Carta.

A very grand and joyous royal event took place in the abbey on 19 May 1359, and was to have far-reaching consequences for the future of England and the crown. On that day King Edward III's third son¹⁰, John of Gaunt, earl of Richmond, was married to his cousin, Blanche, daughter and co-heir with her sister, of Henry, duke of Lancaster, the greatest lord in the kingdom after the king, in a ceremony attended by a great number of lords and followed by three days of jousting. The importance of this marriage it would be difficult to exaggerate. John of Gaunt's father-in-law died of the plague in 1361 and so did his elder daughter, Matilda, in 1362, all of which meant that the entire Lancastrian inheritance now came to Blanche, whom John of Gaunt had so recently married, and through her to him with the titles of earl of Lancaster, Derby, Leicester and Lincoln. To cap it all, Edward III created his son Duke of Lancaster in parliament in November 1362; but there

⁸ The Hospitallars and the Templars.

⁹ Kemp, *Reading Abbey Records*, pp. 8-9 and 25.

¹⁰ Third son surviving to adulthood; he was in fact the fourth son.

is, of course, even more, for it was the couple's eldest son and heir¹¹, Henry 'Bolingbroke' who in 1399 would usurp the throne of his cousin, Richard II, to become the first monarch of the House of Lancaster in England.

It is curious how, time and again, the abbey witnessed events of profound national significance. The same was true, a little over a hundred years after John of Gaunt's marriage, when, during Michaelmas 1464, the hitherto secret marriage of the Yorkist king, Edward IV, to the Lady Elizabeth Woodville was made public, another marriage charged with immense significance for the realm. Earlier in the year 1464 negotiations had been proceeding between Edward IV and King Louis XI of France, largely at the instigation of, and in line with the policy of, Richard Neville, earl of Warwick (the 'Kingmaker'), with a view to concluding a final peace between the two long-warring kingdoms. The negotiators proposed a marriage between a princess of France and Edward IV of England, but, while the English mission was in France, Edward secretly married Elizabeth Woodville on 1 May 1464, a marriage of love, apparently, but fraught with all manner of political difficulties. It was kept secret until it could be concealed no longer, namely, at a great council in Reading at Michaelmas to discuss and, hopefully, finalise the terms of a peace, when Warwick and the other lords learnt the extraordinary truth. Everyone put on a brave face, and on Michaelmas Day itself (29 September) Elizabeth Woodville was conducted into a chapel of the abbey by Warwick and the king's brother, the duke of Clarence, and honoured as queen of England; more jousting and feasting ensued. Although Elizabeth's two sons by Edward, the future boy-king, Edward V, and his brother, the duke of York, were to perish in the Tower in 1483, her daughter, Elizabeth, was to marry the first Tudor king, Henry VII, and by him to be ancestor to future kings and reigning queens of England and Scotland, and then of the United Kingdom.

King John and Reading Abbey

Some of the most interesting 'royalty-related' events at Reading occurred in the reign of King John (1199-1216). I should now like to focus on these for a few minutes, because they seem to me so interesting and the story I have to tell may surprise you. The bald fact is that, both before he ascended to the throne and even more after, John maintained good and mutually beneficial relations with the monks of Reading. This may seem an almost inexplicable assertion in the light of the generally evil reputation which continues to surround John, stimulated in particular by the vindictive tirades of the St Albans chroniclers and others, but the evidence from Reading Abbey shows that he was perfectly capable of a sustained friendship with, and even devotion to, the religious.

John's interest in the abbey can be traced back to the early years of the reign of his brother, Richard I (1189-99), and seems to have been aroused particularly by the abbey's principal relic, the Hand of St James, which I shall say more about later. Suffice it to say here that in 1189 the previous small shrine, or reliquary, which housed the Hand (but not the relic itself) was taken by Richard I in his fund-raising preparations for the Third Crusade. What pressure, if any, Richard had put on the abbot and convent to agree to this sacrifice on their part is not known, but the act evidently affected John, at that time count of Mortain and earl of Gloucester, for his gifts to the abbey began shortly afterward. In 1191 he gave a gold cup worth 5 marks (£3 6s 8p), but in the following year, 1192, he made a grant of one mark of gold annually, to be received by the monks at his own private exchequer from himself and his heirs for ever, stating in his charter that he was stimulated to make the grant by the Hand of Blessed James the Apostle contained in the abbey church¹². By another act he specified that the payment was to provide a [new] housing for the Hand. In 1200 after his accession to the throne he confirmed the annual payment to be made at the royal exchequer, making it quite clear in his new charter, if any further proof were needed, that the grant was an act of reparation for his brother's having removed the earlier reliquary: the grant was made *intuit manus Jacobi apostoli quam Ricardus rex frater noster in itinere peregrinationis sue denudavit*¹³.

¹¹ In fact their youngest, but only surviving, son.

¹² Kemp, *Reading Abbey Cartularies I*, pp. 68-69.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 71-72

A highly significant example of the king's devotion to the relic occurred early in his reign. In May 1200 John had the Hand taken to Les Anderlys in Normandy to be one of the holy relics upon which King Philip II of France would swear to maintain peace with the English king in the Treaty of Le Goulet, John clearly wanting to ensure the Hand's beneficent influence on the proceedings¹⁴.

In 1205, the king presented the abbey part of the head, or skull, of St Philip the Apostle, whose relics had arrived in Western Europe after the sack of Constantinople in the previous year, during the Fourth Crusade; and he made this gift the occasion for the grant of an annual fair in Reading of four days' duration, lasting from the vigil of SS Philip and James the less (1 May) to the second day after the feast inclusive – an early summer fair, of enormous value to the economy not only of the abbey but also of the town of Reading. We know from a later source that John also gave a valuable reliquary to contain St Philip's head, described as 'a golden casket enriched with precious stones' (*unam capsulam auream lapidibus preciosis ornatum*)¹⁵.

There is a good deal of evidence testifying to the confidence and trust the king placed in the Reading community¹⁶. The friendship he had maintained with the monks stood John in very good stead in the later years of his reign, when he needed as many reliable supporters as he could find. In the late autumn of 1214, after the disastrous Battle of Bouvines¹⁷ – disastrous from John's point of view – and at a time when the clouds were gathering ominously around his throne at him, he sent a delegation headed by Simon, abbot of Reading, to the cities of Ghent and Ypres to collect the large sums of money which these cities owed the king or which he had deposited in their keeping, ordering the Cinque Port of Dover to provide a ship to convey the mission across the Channel and allowing the considerable sum of £40 for the abbot's expenses. Extra light is apparently thrown on this mission by the unpublished third set of Reading annals, which say that the destination was also France and the imprisoned earl of Salisbury, the king's half-brother (captured at Bouvines), presumably to make contact with him on the king's behalf and to treat for his release¹⁸.

The most compelling indications of John's close relations with the Reading monks come, however, in the early summer of 1215, in the weeks before the granting of Magna Carta on 15 June. In the fevered atmosphere of mistrust and crisis of May and early June, the king stayed mostly in, or close to, the Thames Valley, moving chiefly between three places where he could feel completely safe: Windsor Castle, his north Hampshire castle of Odiham (at North Warnborough) and Reading Abbey. As we saw earlier, he was at Reading to receive the barons' *diffidatio* in early May. Most significantly, he spent the vigil and feast of the Ascension (28 May) in the abbey, a day of the most supreme importance to John, since it was the feast-day on which he had been anointed and crowned king in 1199; he will have attended High Mass of the feast in the abbey church, celebrated with all the magnificence of the Cluniac observance, and perhaps sought the help of the Almighty in the impending crisis with the barons; at least he will have received solace from association with the monks, whose interests he had done so much to foster.

But perhaps the highest recognition of the abbey's loyalty to the king came later in the year, when Pope Innocent III, now fully in support of John against his rebellious barons, passed a sentence of excommunication upon them and a sentence of suppression upon those bishops who connived at their enterprise, and he appointed as executors of the bull the papal legate, Pandulf, Peter des Roches, bishop of Winchester, and

¹⁴ Kemp, *Reading Abbey Records*, p. 17.

¹⁵ Kemp, *Reading Abbey Cartularies I*, pp73-74 and 188-190.

¹⁶ A further example of king John's relationship with Reading Abbey, not mentioned by Kemp, can be found in S Church, *King John, England, Magna Carta and the Making of a Tyrant*, Macmillan, London, 2015, p. 155, where he states that when the interdict was declared by the Pope in 1208, the king ordered books to be sent from Reading Abbey, which were delivered to him by the Abbey Sacrist.

¹⁷ Fought on 27 July 1214, near to the town of Bouvines, in Flanders. It was the concluding battle of the Anglo-French war of 1213-14.

¹⁸ BR Kemp, *Reading Abbey Records: a new miscellany*, Berkshire Record Society Volume 25, 2018, p. 25. The earl of Salisbury was William Longespée (died 1226).

Simon, abbot of Reading¹⁹. The papal legate was an obvious choice, and the bishop of Winchester had remained steadfastly with John throughout his difficulties during the Interdict and the king's excommunication. The fact that abbot Simon was made the third of the trio indicates that he was considered acceptable for this highly charged responsibility, not only by the pope, but also by the king, who may well have suggested him for the task. It certainly allied the abbot firmly and publicly with the king's cause.

The Hand of St James

As we have seen, a very significant element in King John's regard for Reading was the Hand of St James, and I will conclude my lecture today with some observations on this relic. By the end of the twelfth century, the monks had amassed a total of more than 240 religious relics; the list in the late twelfth-century cartulary gives that number, but adds 'also many other relics whose labels are missing' (*mule etiam alie reliquie quarum scripta desunt*). The list contains a number of very impressive relics, but the most important was undoubtedly the Hand of St James, which appears in the list as 'the Hand of St James with flesh and bones', along with 'the cloth in which the Hand was wrapped' and 'a part of the cloth in which the Hand of St James was wrapped'²⁰. St James was one of the apostles closest to Christ. He was one of the three apostles privileged to witness the Transfiguration and the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, and was the first apostle to be martyred for the Faith, being put to the sword by King Herod Agrippa in AD44.

The Reading relic was given to the abbey by the founder, Henry I. It had been brought to England by his daughter, Matilda, on the death of her first husband, the Emperor Henry V, in 1125, when she re-joined her father in Normandy before coming to England in 1126. The Hand had formed part of the German royal treasury since 1072, when it had been acquired by Henry IV of Germany from Italy, where it can be traced back to 640. It is difficult, therefore, to establish a link between this relic and the Spanish 'body' of the saint at Compostela, the goal of the highly popular pilgrimage.

The precise date when the Hand came to Reading is also difficult to establish²¹, but the evidence we have, though beset by problems and the odd blind alley, suggests strongly that Henry I gave it to the abbey, with his daughter's consent, in 1133 on the occasion of what turned out to be his last crossing from England to Normandy. It did not rest there long undisturbed, however, for in 1136, most probably at the time of Henry I's own funeral in the abbey, the relic was removed by the new king Stephen's brother, Henry of Blois, bishop of Winchester, a renowned (not to say notorious) collector of relics. He kept hold of it until 1155, the first year of the reign of Henry I's grandson, Henry II, who ordered its return to Reading. Thereafter it remained in the abbey until the Dissolution, apart from one or two brief excursions that we know about, the most important being the visit to Normandy in 1200 which I mentioned earlier²².

The final arrival of the relic in the abbey in 1155 was followed by the first real signs of a cult of St James's Hand in Reading. The monks began to exploit their possession of the apostolic relic by promoting a pilgrimage, with the powerful aid of a clutch of indulgences for the feast of St James (25 July) granted by a number of English and Welsh archbishops and bishops, and by the grant of an annual fair of St James by King Henry II²³. Finally, between 1173 and 1181, papal backing for the cult was secured in the form of an exhortation from Pope Alexander III to all the faithful of the province of Canterbury to visit Reading on the

¹⁹ 1213-1226

²⁰ British Library, Egerton 3031. Published in R Baxter, *The Royal Abbey of Reading*, Boydell, Woodbridge, 2016, Appendix A.

²¹ For a more detailed review of the evidence concerning the Hand's arrival at Reading, see Kemp, *Reading Abbey Records*, pp. 53-59.

²² *Ibid*, pp. 58-59. In addition to 1200, Kemp identifies two miracles – XIV and XXVI – where the text refers to the Hand being taken to king Henry II and then returned to Reading, in the latter case to provide a protective blessing for the king before he put to sea.

²³ Granted between 1163 -65, Kemp suggests 1164. See Kemp, *Reading Abbey Cartularies I*, pp. 56-57.

feast of St James, in order to avail themselves of the indulgence established by the glorious martyr, blessed Thomas (i.e., Becket), with the advice of his suffragans, when with them he dedicated the abbey²⁴.

This link with the recently canonised Thomas Becket served only to assist the growth of the Reading cult. The account of miracles worked by the Hand survives in a manuscript of about 1200, now in Gloucester Cathedral Library, and was clearly produced to publicise the virtues of the Reading relic more widely. I regret that I have not time today to explore these accounts in more detail, so fascinating is the light they throw on contemporary life and religious practice²⁵.

A number of important consequences flowed from the rise of the cult in the second half of the twelfth century. The name of St James came to be added to those of St Mary the Virgin and St John the Evangelist as tutelary saints of the abbey. In due course the abbey adopted as its heraldic arms three scallop shells, the scallop being particularly associated with St James of Compostela from the end of the twelfth century. And in the thirteenth century allusions to St James and his Hand began to appear on the abbey's seals. The multiple production and widespread dissemination of these seals had the effect of establishing these symbolic images of St James and his Hand as part of what we might now call the corporate identity of the abbey.

END

Notes

This is a transcription of the paper given by Professor Brian Kemp to the XXII Reynard Colloquium, at the University of Reading, in 2017. It clearly cross-referred to translations of four Latin texts which were published subsequently by Prof. Kemp in 2018 in *Reading Abbey Records: a new miscellany*, Berkshire Record Society Vol. 25. This was to be his last publication.

Its content is as written by Prof. Kemp, including his generous use of punctuation, except in three respects. The first is, to facilitate ease of reading, some very long paragraphs have been broken up, and sub-headings have been introduced to reflect the four topics identified in the opening paragraph. And secondly, footnotes have been added.

The third is that the original paper included at the foot of its final page two handwritten annotations, 'David I of Scotland' and 'Priory of the Isle of May in Scotland'. These have not been added, as it is not clear what point was intended to be made here. However, King David I was the youngest brother of King Henry I's first wife, Edith / Matilda of Scotland, and therefore Henry I's brother-in-law. In the 1140s he granted to Reading Abbey the lands, churches and rights at May and Rindalgros in Fife for the foundation of a second (after Leominster) dependent priory on the Isle of May, in the Firth of Forth. This priory remained under the control of Reading Abbey until the reign of Edward I in the late thirteenth century, when the Scottish wars of independence made it impossible for this connection to continue. See BR Kemp, *Reading Abbey – An Introduction to the History of the Abbey*, Reading Museum and Art Gallery, Reading, 1968, p.17.

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²⁴ Ibid, p. 133.

²⁵ The Gloucester document was subsequently translated and published in Kemp, *Reading Abbey Records*, pp. 53-100.