Ipswich Priory

Augustinian priory of St Peter and St Paul

County of Suffolk: Diocese of Norwich
In existence in 1133, perhaps as secular canons

Gervase of Canterbury’s list of religious houses of the late twelfth century includes two priories of black canons in Ipswich, SS. Peter and Paul, and Holy Trinity (W. Stubbs, RS 73 (1879–80), ii. 427). The writ of Henry I constitutes the first evidence for the existence of any church of canons at Ipswich. The wording, ‘my canons of my alms at Ipswich’, indicates that King Henry was himself a key figure. The only act of Stephen for canons at Ipswich is another writ in nearly identical words, inspected at the same time in 1337, and printed by Cronne and Davis under the heading of Holy Trinity priory, Ipswich. When the charters were inspected, the draftsman did not specify which of the two priories had requested the inspeximus, and in the margin of the roll the copyist has written only ‘pro priore et canonicos de Gippewico de confirmacione’. The wording of the charters only became ambiguous when a second priory was founded in Ipswich, but there is no certain evidence to determine which was founded first.

Dugdale, ii. 295b–296a, printed a charter of King John and a deed, both in favour of Holy Trinity, Ipswich, and Tanner’s Notitia monastica (1744), 518b, entered ‘Pat 11 Ed. 3 p. 2 m. 17’ in a list of documents for the same house; Monasticon, vi. 447–8, brings together the data of Dugdale and Tanner. This inspeximus has therefore usually
been taken to derive from the priory of Holy Trinity, situated at the north gate of Ipswich. Tanner extracted from John’s charter that Holy Trinity existed before the death of Earl Hugh Bigod in 1177, and among its first donors was one Norman fitz Eadnoth. J. C. Cox repeated this view (VCH Suff, ii. 103). On the basis of the two writs of Henry I and Stephen, however, Knowles and Hadcock dated the foundation of the priory of Holy Trinity to c. 1133 (Religious Houses, 161). Its origin may be presumed to lie in the church of the Holy Trinity that existed in Ipswich in 1086 (DB, ii. 290v; § 1. 122d). This church was given to the Poitevin abbey of Charroux by King Henry in or soon after 1102 (000, not in Regesta), whose charter also confirmed to the abbey two manors given to the monks by Roger the Poitevin in the time of William Rufus. The gift of the church in Ipswich has been interpreted as compensation to the abbey for lands given by Roger out of the honour of Eye, which King Henry restored to Robert Malet after Roger’s forfeit in 1102. It is not apparent how long the monks of Charroux continued to hold the church in Ipswich, but at some point it was certainly relinquished.¹ There is no secure evidence as to when the church became one of regular canons. One charter of King Henry II, explicitly in favour of the church of the Holy Trinity and its canons, and datable to 1156 × 1162, survives through an inspeximus of 1331 in favour of the prior and canons of Holy Trinity (H2/1350; CalCh, iv. 215–16); this confirms gifts of land by several early donors, Alan fitz Eadgar, Hervey of Dodnash, Earl Hugh Bigod, Robert de Vere, and three concanonici, Fulk, Ernald, and Norman fitz Eadnoth, and other small donors. Henry II’s charter served as precedent for that of King John, dated 11 January 1204 (Monasticon, vi. 448; RChart, 116). Hugh Bigod was created earl of Norfolk in 1140; the sons of Hervey of Dodnash disputed the founding of Dodnash priory in Suffolk in 1188–9; so there is no reason to think that these donations go back to Henry I’s time. The fact that three concanonici are benefactors suggests that Holy Trinity was an example of an existing minster church that adopted the Augustinian rule. The priory church and conventual buildings were rebuilt after a fire in Richard I’s reign by John of Oxford, bishop of Norwich from 1175 to 1200 (Bartholomew Cotton, Liber de archiepiscopis et episcopis Angliae, ed. H. R. Luard, RS 16 (1859), 393). In 1194 the priory was granted to the bishop by King Richard (Dodwell, Norwich Cathedral Charters, i. 46, no. 81).

¹ C. P. Lewis, ‘The king and Eye: a study in Anglo-Norman politics’, EHR 104 (1989), 569–89, published the evidence for the connexion with Charroux but did not question the received opinion that Holy Trinity was refounded c. 1133 (p. 581).
A better case can be made for supposing that the act of Henry I derives from the church of St Peter and St Paul at the south gate of Ipswich. The only entry for this in *Monasticon*, vi. 599–600, reprints the data collected by Tanner, *Notitia Monastica*, 520–21, who says that the church was founded at the end of Henry II’s reign or the beginning of Richard I’s. Cox follows this (VCH *Suff.*, ii. 102), and so do Knowles & Hadcock, *Religious Houses*, 161, both repeating Tanner’s reference to Weever’s *Funeral Monuments*, 752. In 1932 C. R. Cheney printed a visitation by Bishop William (Bodl. MS Suffolk Rolls 19), which is endorsed, ‘Visitacio sancti Petri Gippeswici’, which he dated to the time of Bishop William Airmyn, 1327–1336. Without hesitation, however, he cited our inspeximus of 1337 as belonging to St Peter’s, ‘A visitation of St Peter’s priory, Ipswich’, *EHR* 47 (1932), 268–72 (at 269n). He was well aware that its charter of Henry I pushed back the date of foundation from what he found in Cox. The church of St Peter at Ipswich was referred to in 1086, when Aeschere held it with one acre (*DB*, ii. 290v, § 1. 122f), and the half-hundred of Ipswich swore that Wihtgar the priest had held the church in 1066 ‘to which belonged, then and now, six carucates of land as a manor’ (ib. 392v–393r, § 25. 52). This church had certainly become a priory of canons regular by c. 1198, when Bishop John of Oxford confirmed the gift of a pension of six marks by Ernald de Coleville and his wife, to ‘the church of the apostles Peter and Paul and the canons’ (*EEA* 6 Norwich 1070–1214, 199–200, no. 247). From the time of Henry III there is evidence that the Crown exercised patronage at St Peter’s, an important fact that distinguishes it from Holy Trinity: for every election from 1225 onwards the royal assent is documented (*Heads*, ii. 396). What is more, the documents always refer to nominees simply as sub-prior of Ipswich or canon of Ipswich, while similar records in the fourteenth century are explicit in referring to canons of Holy Trinity, Ipswich (*Heads*, ii. 295–6).

Cardinal Wolsey dissolved the priory of St Peter and St Paul in 1528, and many original deeds from the muniments ended up in ‘the Cardinal’s bundle’ in the Treasury of Receipt, now among Ancient

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2 J. Weever, *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (London, 1631), 752, says only that Wolsey’s college in Ipswich took the place of ‘a small monastery of blacke Canons, founded by Thomas de Lacy and Alice his wife, and dedicated to the honour of Saint Peter and Saint Paul’.

3 Cheney was unaware that the engrossment of the inspeximus is endorsed to say that the charters were shown at the time of Bishop William’s visitation on St Lawrence’s day, 10 August 1432.
Deeds, Series A (E40). No early royal acts for Ipswich priory have been found among these. A cartulary compiled in the late thirteenth century survives from St Peter’s, listed as Davis 500, once in the Public Library of Lexington (KY), now in Ipswich, Suffolk RO, HD 226/1; no early royal acts were copied.

The writ of Henry I clearly supposes that by 1133 the canons of Ipswich had a corporate existence under royal patronage, and that they already held ‘churches, lands, and tithes’, though it does not explicitly show that they lived as regulars. There is nothing to indicate when or why King Henry involved himself in the foundation to the extent that the canons should be considered to enjoy the king’s alms. The pipe rolls show no payment of a pension from the county farm.

Writ ordering that the king’s canons of Ipswich should hold their possessions in peace, and that any plea against them should be heard only by the bishop of Norwich, Richard Basset, and Aubrey de Vere. May × July 1133


CHANCERY ENGROSSMENT: Norfolk RO, Hare 6105, 228X2, inspeximus dated 24 July 1337, reciting acts of Henry I and Stephen, with about half the great seal in white wax still attached; described by A. J. Horwood in HMC 3rd Rept (1872), Appendix, 251, then in the possession of Sir Thomas Hare, Bt (d. 1880), of Stow Bardolf Hall (Norfolk). An endorsement records, ‘Iste carte exhibebantur tempore uisitationis Willelmi Norwic’ episcopi anno Domini m⁺ccc⁺ tricesimo ii°, uidelicet die sancti Laurencii’.

PRINTED: CalPat 1334–1338, 476.
CALENDAR: Farrer 709; Regesta 1783.

H(enricus) rex Angl(orum) episcopo de Norwich’ et Ricardo archid(iacono) et Ricardo Bass(et) et Alberico de Ver et ministris eorum salutem. Precipio quod canonici mei de elemosina mea de Gipeswich’ habeant et teneant ecclesias suas et omnes terras suas et decimas et omnia sua de quocunque teneant bene et honorifice et in pace ne super hoc breue meum aliquis faciat eis inde iniuriam uel contumeliam.
Et si quis uersus eos quicquam clamauerit quod ecclesie sue datum sit in elemosinam, non placitent inde nisi coram episcopo de Norwich’ et Ric(ardo) Bass(et) et A(lberico) de Ver desicicut canonici mei sunt et de me clamant tenendum. T(este) Ric(ardo) Bass(et). Apud Burnam.

Henry king of the English to the bishop of Norwich and Richard the archdeacon and Richard Basset and Aubrey de Vere and their officials greeting. I command that my canons of my alms at Ipswich shall have and hold their churches and all their lands and tithes and all their property, of whomsoever they hold, well and honourably and in peace, so that upon this my writ no one shall cause them any injury or contumely in this matter. And if anyone shall claim against them anything that was given to their church in alms, they shall not plead in this matter except before the bishop of Norwich and Richard Basset and Aubrey de Vere, on the grounds that they are my canons and claim to hold of me. Witness Richard Basset. At Westbourne.

DATE: From the place date and witness, May × July 1133.
ADDRESS: Everard, bishop of Norwich, and Richard Beaufeu, archdeacon of Suffolk until nominated bishop of Avranches in 1134 (Fasti, ii. 67), alongside Richard Basset and Aubrey de Vere, sheriffs, who rendered account for the farm of Surrey, Cambridgeshire, and Huntingdonshire (PR 31 Henry I, 43), Essex and Hertfordshire (ib. 52), Northamptonshire and Leicestershire (ib. 81), Norfolk and Suffolk (ib. 90), and Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire (ib. 100), and at the same time acted as king’s justices in these shires.
WITNESS: Richard Basset, sheriff and king’s justice.
PLACE: Westbourne, Hants. Richard Basset and Aubrey de Vere were both in attendance on the king when he was waiting at Westbourne to cross to Normandy, but the evidence allows that he may have been there for some weeks, from late May until July 1133 (0000, Regesta 1784 for the bishop of Lincoln).
CONTEXT: A writ in exactly the same terms was obtained from King Stephen early in the reign (Ste/416, attributed in Regesta to Holy Trinity priory); it was presented for inspection at the same time as Henry I’s in 1337. The only difference in wording is that the names of the king’s justices before whom the plea should be heard are replaced with the general ‘coram mea iusticia dominica’. Authenticity is not in doubt, but the act may provide evidence for something nowhere explicit: while pleading before the local justice is referred to in several acts as having happened, this is unique in addressing the bishop and the justices and in requiring that any plea be heard before them. It is also unique in adding the phrase ‘et ministris eorum’ in any context other than after sheriffs. There is no reason to think that justices had a staff of ministri, and every reason to think that the role of Richard Basset and Aubrey de Vere merged the responsibilities of sheriff and justice. The substitution of ‘mea iusticia dominica’ in Stephen’s renewal appears to emphasise that side of their role, but the inclusion of ministri emphasises the shrieval aspect.