

THE ABBOT  
AND THE RULE

MICHELLE STILL

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## **About the book**

St Albans was one of the greatest Benedictine abbeys of medieval England, and the early 14th century was a period during which the concerns of the community and the role of the abbot emerge particularly clearly. Yet the history of the abbey during this period has received little attention since general surveys undertaken over eighty years ago, and the manorial history by Levett in 1938. Basing herself on the unique and relatively unexploited *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*, Michelle Still examines the position of St Albans in both the secular and monastic worlds, with a focus on the period 1290–1349. The study includes discussion of the role of the abbot as a feudal landlord, a provider of education (at the abbey's grammar school), and a dispenser of charity. In conclusion, she notes the pivotal importance of the personality and influence of the abbot of St Albans in ensuring the strict observance of the Rule of St Benedict in an age when traditional monasticism was increasingly challenged. Through the detailed study of this one abbey, this book makes an important contribution to the overall picture of monastic life in medieval England.



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## The Abbot and the Rule

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# The Abbot and the Rule

Religious life at St Albans, 1290–1349

Michelle Still

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2002 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Still, Michelle

The Abbot and the Rule: Religious Life at St Albans, 1290–1349 (Church, Faith and Culture in the Medieval West)

1. St Albans Abbey—History. 2. St Albans (England)—Church history. I. Title.

271'.00942585

US Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Still, Michelle

The Abbot and the Rule: Religious Life at St Albans, 1290–1349 / Michelle Still  
p. cm. — (Church, Faith and Culture in the Medieval West)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. St Albans Abbey. 2. Monasticism and religious orders—England—St Albans—History—Middle Ages, 600–1500. 3. Monastic and religious life—England—St Albans—History—Middle Ages, 600–1500. I. Title. II. Series.

BX2596.S3S75 2002

271'.009425'85—dc21

2001053584

ISBN 13: 978-0-7546-0521-8 (hbk)

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# Acknowledgements

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the help and support of many individuals and organisations. My thanks in the first place go to the University of Leeds for awarding me a Scholarship without which my Ph.D. and consequently this book could not have been undertaken. I am deeply grateful to my supervisors at Leeds, Wendy Childs and John Taylor. I have been privileged to enjoy the resources of the Brotherton Library and the vital assistance of its staff, always willingly given. Amongst the many other libraries and staff, my thanks are owed to the British Library, the Public Record Office, the Cambridge University Library, the Hertfordshire County Record Office and Local Studies Library, and the City of St Albans' Public Library. Special mention must also be made of the assistance provided at the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Albans, and in particular by David and Jane Kelsall and David Preest. For their advice in preparing the text for publication, I would like to thank in particular Professor Barrie Dobson and Brenda Bolton. Finally, my thanks to those who have had to live with me while completing this: Helen, Tom and above all, for his unfailing patience and great support, my husband Ben Still.



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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In his *Mirror of the Church*, composed in the early years of the thirteenth century, Gerald of Wales mounted a specific attack on the great monastery of St Albans, rebuking it for its overweening pride and opulence.<sup>1</sup> What particularly upset Gerald was the abbey's seemingly arrogant attitude towards no less a figure than its own bishop, Hugh of Lincoln (1186–1200).<sup>2</sup> Gerald recounts how, following his consecration in London in 1186, the saintly Hugh was making his way back to Lincoln for his enthronement when the monks of St Albans took it upon themselves to refuse him his right to celebrate Mass in the abbey church in order to safeguard their cherished exemption privilege. Bishop Hugh's retribution was swift. Excommunicating both the monastery and the monks, he ordered that their churches should be placed under interdict with the result that the community was unable to buy or sell or obtain food and lodgings anywhere within the seven shires of the vast diocese of Lincoln.<sup>3</sup> According to Gerald, the community at St Albans was soon brought to heel and sought their bishop's pardon. The attitude of the monks is, of course, understandable as they felt that right was on their side. In the course of the twelfth century, they had sought and obtained a variety of privileges and exemptions which had made St Albans one of the three most important abbeys in England. The pre-eminence of their house, according to Gerald, owed much to the English pope, Adrian IV (1154–59), whose favour towards the monks was such that he had not only granted them everything that they asked for but much more besides.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Giraldus Cambrensis, Opera*, ed., J.S. Brewer and J.F. Dimock, RS 21, (London 1861–91), *Distinctio II*, cap. xxx, 94–8.

<sup>2</sup> *Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis: The Life of St Hugh of Lincoln*, ed., D L. Douie and D.H. Farmer, 2 vols., (Oxford, 1985); H. Mayr-Harting, *St Hugh of Lincoln*, (Oxford, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> *Giraldus Cambrensis, Opera*, 95.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 96.

Certainly, as a result of these and other papal privileges, St Albans was able to claim with justification from the mid-twelfth century to be the premier Benedictine monastery of all England. It is, therefore, surprising that St Albans has attracted relatively little scholarly interest from antiquarians and historians alike and most particularly for the period covered by this book. Following the briefest of references in Dugdale,<sup>5</sup> and Tanner,<sup>6</sup> it was not until 1795 that Peter Newcome, local antiquarian and Rector of Shenley, published his account of the abbey's history from its foundation to the Dissolution.<sup>7</sup> This scholarly work includes plans of the abbey, values for its property and a history of the principal events during each abbacy. Newcome's initiative for St Albans was continued by such nineteenth-century architects and clerks of works at the abbey as James Neale,<sup>8</sup> John Chapple,<sup>9</sup> and Henry Nicholson<sup>10</sup> who was Rector of the abbey from 1835–66 before it acquired cathedral status.<sup>11</sup> While two wider scholarly surveys of this period were undertaken in the second decade of the twentieth century, Galbraith's beginning at 1300<sup>12</sup> and Williams's offering a broad local perspective,<sup>13</sup> more recent articles have tended to concentrate on the tenth,<sup>14</sup> eleventh,<sup>15</sup> twelfth<sup>16</sup> and sixteenth<sup>17</sup> centuries.

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<sup>5</sup> W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed., J. Caley, H. Ellis, B. Bandinel, 6 vols., (London, 1817–30).

<sup>6</sup> T. Tanner, *Notitia Monastica or A Short History of the Religious Houses in England and Wales*, (London, 1695), 88.

<sup>7</sup> P. Newcome, *The History of the Ancient and Royal Foundation called the Abbey of St Albans*, (London, 1795).

<sup>8</sup> J. Neale, *The Abbey Church of St Alban, Herts*, (London, 1877).

<sup>9</sup> J. Chapple, *A Short History of the Abbey Church of St Alban*, (St Albans, 1882).

<sup>10</sup> H.J.B. Nicholson, *The Abbey of St Alban: some extracts from its early history and a description of its conventual church*, (London, 1887).

<sup>11</sup> For further details of the work of these nineteenth-century architects and antiquarians see: E. Roberts, *The Hill of the Martyr: An Architectural History of St Albans Abbey*, (Dunstable, 1993), 179–229.

<sup>12</sup> V.H. Galbraith, *The Abbey of St Albans from 1300 to the Dissolution of the Monasteries*, (Oxford, 1911).

<sup>13</sup> L.F.R. Williams, *History of the Abbey of St Albans*, (London, 1917).

<sup>14</sup> S. Keynes, 'A Lost Cartulary of St Albans Abbey', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 22, (Cambridge, 1993), 253–79.

<sup>15</sup> P. Taylor, 'The Early St Albans' Endowments and its Chronicles', *Historical Research*, LXVIII, (1995), 119–42.

<sup>16</sup> C.N.L. Brooke, 'St Albans: the Great Abbey', *Cathedral and City: St Albans Ancient and Modern*, ed., R. Runcie, (London, 1977), 43–70; *The St Albans Psalter*; ed., C.R. Dodwell, O. Pächt and F. Wormald, (London, 1960); C.H. Talbot, ed., *The Life of Christina of Markyate, a Twelfth-Century Recluse*, (Oxford, 1959, reprint with corrections, 1987);

Eighty years on, this study of the abbey in the highly significant early fourteenth century sets out to remedy previous neglect of the period. While an account concentrating on St Albans alone may seem myopic to some, the aim is to place the house in a wider context. For it is only through the gradual process of studying individual abbeys that it will ever be possible to draw up a composite picture of monastic life in England. St Albans should thus take its place beside Bury St Edmund's, Christ Church, Canterbury, Durham, Westminster and the other great medieval religious houses. This book is intended as one small piece of the jigsaw, a contribution to our better understanding of the peculiarly medieval institution of monasticism as practised at St Albans in the first half of the fourteenth century. It does not set out to continue the admirable work of Levett<sup>18</sup> by providing either a manorial or an economic history of the abbey, yet such evidence enhances the essential context for this work.

This study of the internal history of the abbey deals with both the organisation of monastic life and with monastic spirituality. Since a monastery has no life apart from the lives of its monks, it is necessary to concentrate on individuals as well as institutions and so the present study focuses in particular on abbots John de Berkhamstede (1290–1301), John de Maryns (1302–08), Hugh de Eversdone (1308–27), Richard de Wallingford (1327–36) and Michael de Mentmore (1336–49). During the abbacies of these five men, considerable developments occurred in English monasticism and the abbots' own concerns emerge with particular clarity. The period 1290–1349 stands out as an era of renewed vitality in which the character of the abbot and his ability to ensure the strict observance of the Rule of St Benedict in accordance with the best practice of the time is revealed. Monastic life in the early fourteenth-century was not merely a feeble forerunner of the later much documented achievements of Abbot Thomas de la Mare (1349–96).<sup>19</sup> Rather, this period stands on its own in

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C.J. Holdsworth, 'Christina of Markyate', *Medieval Women*, Studies in Church History, Subsidia I, ed., D. Baker, (Oxford, 1978), 185–204.

<sup>17</sup> J.G. Clark, 'Reformation and Reaction at St Albans Abbey, 1530–58', *English Historical Review*, CXV, (2000), 297–328.

<sup>18</sup> A.E. Levett, *Studies in Manorial History*, ed., H.M. Cam, M. Coate and L.S. Sutherland, (Oxford, 1938).

<sup>19</sup> The abbacy of Thomas de la Mare has received attention from historians including: D.H. Farmer, *Benedict's Disciples*, (Leominster, 1980); and M.C. Knowles, *Saints and Scholars*, (Cambridge, 1962).



deserving our attention. This is not, of course, to say that there were no serious problems to be faced but, by 1349, the abbey of St Albans was in a more stable condition than it had been at any time in the previous sixty years.

The lives of the monks within the community between 1290 and 1349 also warrant attention because of the range of surviving documentary evidence available. A variety of different categories of document survives to inform us about the internal life at the abbey. This particular study requires more reconstruction than those for other houses such as Durham Priory<sup>20</sup> as the St Albans' manuscripts are highly fragmented, never having been collected together and catalogued as a whole. The major source for this era in St Albans' monastic history is the *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*, a chronicle account which charts the rule of the abbots of the monastery of St Albans from its foundation by Offa in 793 to almost the end of the rule of Thomas de la Mare (d. 1396). The three-volume printed edition of the *Gesta*<sup>21</sup> is taken from the large volume of St Albans' manuscripts contained in BL, Cotton Claudius, E IV.<sup>22</sup> It is divided into three sections, the first copied from the work of the thirteenth-century chronicler, Matthew Paris (c.1200–59) and his anonymous predecessor, perhaps Adam the Cellarer who died c.1170.<sup>23</sup> This first section of the *Gesta* covered the period from 793 to 1255.<sup>24</sup> The second section from 1255, by an early fourteenth-century chronicler, perhaps William Rishanger, takes the history up to the death of Abbot John de Maryns in 1308.<sup>25</sup> In the 1380s, a third section, created from the second, was revised and then continued by Thomas Walsingham, monk and chronicler to the abbey,<sup>26</sup> writing between 1376 and 1422. Walsingham's *Gesta* is a remarkable source for the history of St Albans. Indeed, it is one of the best internal sources for any monastery anywhere. Other contemporary narratives composed within monastic houses were chiefly concerned with their own domestic history. Such typical examples include the later part of the chronicle written at Bury St Edmunds covering the period from the

<sup>20</sup> R.B. Dobson, *Durham Priory, 1400–50*, (Cambridge, 1973).

<sup>21</sup> *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*, ed., H.T. Riley, 3 vols, RS 28, (London, 1867–9).

<sup>22</sup> BL, Cotton Claudius, E IV, folios 98–321.

<sup>23</sup> See R. Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, (Cambridge, 1958), 182–4.

<sup>24</sup> The section covering the years 1195–1255 is translated in R. Vaughan, *The Chronicles of Matthew Paris*, (Stroud, 1984), 13–278. See also J. Taylor, *English Historical Literature in the Fourteenth Century*, (Oxford, 1987), 70; Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, 78–85.

<sup>25</sup> *The St Albans Chronicle, 1406–20*, ed., V.H. Galbraith, (Oxford, 1937), xxxviii.

<sup>26</sup> We know this from a rubric in the manuscript which is printed in *Gesta*, II, 109.

Creation to 1301,<sup>27</sup> the thirteenth-century chronicle of St Mary's abbey, York,<sup>28</sup> and the chronicle of St Augustine's abbey, Canterbury, written by William Thorne and taking the history of that abbey down to 1397.<sup>29</sup> All of these chronicles, including that of Walsingham, combined a domestic history of the house with a description of more general national events and the ways in which these affected the monks of the particular house. Such chronicles, including as they often did (and as does the *Gesta*) transcriptions of the abbey's important charters, papal bulls and other documents, served as a written defence of the monastery's rights and privileges.<sup>30</sup> The *Gesta* of St Albans provides us with much precise detail about the internal religious life of the monastery and its monks in the fourteenth century. Walsingham's chronicle sets out an account of events that took place many years before his own day but also gives a narrative on details that may well have been within his own memory or that of his contemporaries. The *Gesta* serves as the starting point for all aspects of the history of the abbey in the fourteenth century. However, as with most monastic chronicles, the source must remain exactly that, a starting point. Its account of events needs to be supplemented wherever possible by reference to the administrative records of the house and sources from outside the monastery.

For an abbey of the size and importance of St Albans one would expect to find a wealth of surviving documentary records, normally including the central records of the community, most notably administrative accounts relating to the various official departments within the monastery, together with the accounts of the almoner, the cellarer and the sacrist. Manorial records would ideally supplement any attempt to gain an idea of the size and the workings of the abbey estates but, sadly, few of these have survived. Correspondence between the abbey and the diocesan bishop, the crown, the pope and other influential figures is also crucial in helping to build up a more complete picture. It is unfortunate that for St Albans many

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<sup>27</sup> *The Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, 1212–1301*, ed. A. Gransden, (London, 1964). See also the earlier chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond, *Jocelin of Brakelond, Chronicle of the Abbey of Bury St Edmund's*, ed., D. Greenway and J. Sayers, (Oxford, 1989).

<sup>28</sup> *Chronicle of St Mary's Abbey, York*, ed., H.E. Craster and M.E. Thornton, (Surtees Society, 1934).

<sup>29</sup> *Chronicle of St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury*, ed., A.H. Davis, (Oxford, 1934).

<sup>30</sup> Glastonbury abbey has a 'cartulary-chronicle' which survives in BL, Additional MS., 22934. See Taylor, *English Historical Literature*, 42–3.

of these categories of records are lacking, whereas similar houses such as Durham, and Westminster<sup>31</sup> possess a wealth of financial records and account rolls of obedientiaries. The patchiness of the surviving records for St Albans means that in this study some topics are inevitably discussed at greater length than others, not necessarily because they are more important but because more material is available. The greatest loss is that the administrative records of the house, and in particular the obedientiary rolls, have not survived. This makes a study of the economic life of the abbey and its estates extremely difficult. Historians of St Albans have, therefore, had to make the most of the records that are extant. Much of the information we have about the relationship between the abbey and its manors comes from the records of the manor courts. Many of these rolls were destroyed during the revolt of 1381,<sup>32</sup> however, the contents of the rolls were copied into court books and several have survived including those for the manors of Codicote,<sup>33</sup> Croxley,<sup>34</sup> Cashio,<sup>35</sup> Barnet,<sup>36</sup> and Park.<sup>37</sup> They were examined in detail in the 1920s by Levett<sup>38</sup>. Whilst these accounts provide some indication of the economy of the lands of St Albans, the records do not allow for a study comparable to those completed for houses such as Westminster.<sup>39</sup>

To gain some indication of the wealth of the abbey, its cells and appropriated churches, we are fortunate to possess the records of three more general valuations. The *Taxatio* of 1291 ordered by Pope Nicholas IV (1288–92), was a country-wide valuation that served as the basis on which possessions held by the clergy were taxed up until the Reformation.<sup>40</sup> A later source from within the abbey is the *Computus* drawn up at the end of Thomas de la Mare's abbacy (1349–96) which provides a total of the

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<sup>31</sup> For Durham see Dobson, *Durham Priory*, and for Westminster; B. Harvey, *Westminster Abbey and its Estates in the Middle Ages*, (Oxford, 1977).

<sup>32</sup> There is no court roll of any St Albans' manor in the Public Record Office earlier than 1381; see A.E. Levett, *Studies in Manorial History*, 76.

<sup>33</sup> BL, Stowe, 849, (1237–1416).

<sup>34</sup> BL, Additional, 6057, (1257–1536).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 40626, (1238–1460).

<sup>36</sup> BL, Additional, 40167, (1246–1537).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 40625, (1237–1460). These court books are registers of or books of extracts from the court rolls, containing everything that could affect disputes and almost everything that was of any permanent value to the abbey administration

<sup>38</sup> Levett, *Studies in Manorial History*, 81.

<sup>39</sup> Harvey, *Westminster Abbey and its Estates*.

<sup>40</sup> *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae, auctoritate P. Nicolai IV, circa a.d. 1291*, ed., T. Astle, S. Ayscough and J. Caley, (Record Commission, 1802).

abbey's property including a list of thirty-seven appropriated churches by this date.<sup>41</sup> The last valuation is the famous *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535<sup>42</sup> which gave the net value of churches and religious houses at this time. All of these sources have their own problems of interpretation, but, at the least, they provide some bases for comparison.

As opposed to chronicle sources for St Albans, the records which have survived are mainly those from outside the abbey walls. Of crucial importance are those records concerning the relationship between abbey and papacy. The abbey of St Albans secured a wealth of privileges and papal decrees which were assiduously recorded in abbey chronicles and manuscripts. Some were printed in Holtzmann's *Papsturkunden in England*.<sup>43</sup> Whilst St Albans remained within the diocese of Lincoln, the fact that it was an exempt house seriously limited the amount of correspondence between the abbot and the bishop. A search of the catalogues<sup>44</sup> for the records of the bishops of Lincoln during the fourteenth century<sup>45</sup> reveals that the records of the deaneries covered by St Albans and its estates have not survived for this period. We are more fortunate that many records, concerning the relationship between the abbey and the crown have survived and are mainly housed in the Public Record Office. There, the Close and Patent Rolls reveal much correspondence from the king to the abbot of St Albans concerning vacancies, exemptions, and legal disputes. The parliamentary writs sent out in this period provide an indication of the role of the abbots of St Albans in national politics, their summons to and possible attendance at parliament.<sup>46</sup> For the abbots's involvement in the wider Benedictine community there are the records

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<sup>41</sup> BL, Cotton Claudius, E IV, folio 342.

<sup>42</sup> *Valor Ecclesiasticus temp. Henrici VIII, auctoritate Regia Institutus*, ed., J. Caley and J. Hunter, (Record Commission, 1810–34).

<sup>43</sup> W. Holtzmann, ed., *Papsturkunden in England*, III, (Göttingen, 1952).

<sup>44</sup> See in particular D. Smith, *Guide to Bishops' Registers of England and Wales*, (London, 1981).

<sup>45</sup> In the first half of the fourteenth century the bishops of Lincoln were John Dalderby (1300–20), Henry Burghersh (1320–40), Thomas Bek (1342–47) and John Gynwell (1347–62), *Ibid*.

<sup>46</sup> The guide to these is F. Palgrave, *Parliamentary Writs*, (Record Commission, London, 1827–34), Volumes I and II.

concerning attendance at the Chapters of English Black Monks.<sup>47</sup> A major source for gifts given to the monastery is the late fourteenth-century *Book of Benefactors*.<sup>48</sup> This catalogue of benefactors and those admitted into the fraternity of the abbey was compiled by Thomas Walsingham no later than 1380. It is a large book, beautifully illustrated with gold lettering and drawings of the major benefactors. The list includes kings, popes, abbots, bishops, nobles and benefactors of lesser rank and continues to the year 1463. Its special value lies in the list of priors,<sup>49</sup> short biographical details of the abbots mentioned<sup>50</sup> and a list of the monks living at the time of the first compilation (c.1380).<sup>51</sup> A similar fifteenth-century register of benefactors is also given in Cambridge University, Corpus Christi College, MS. 7.

The monastery at St Albans deserves our attention not only because of the rich surviving documentary evidence. The abbey is first and foremost distinctive because it holds the relics of the England's first martyr. Following on from its possession of Alban's body, the monastery became the premier Benedictine abbey in the land, enjoying an unprecedented independence from its local bishop and with all the honour and prestige that such status could bring. A modern comprehensive narrative of the history of the monks of the abbey of St Albans from its foundation in 793 to the monastery's dissolution in 1539 has yet to be undertaken. It is the intention of this study in highlighting the first half of the fourteenth century to argue that the monks not only lived through, but also faced squarely up to one of the most challenging eras in their history.

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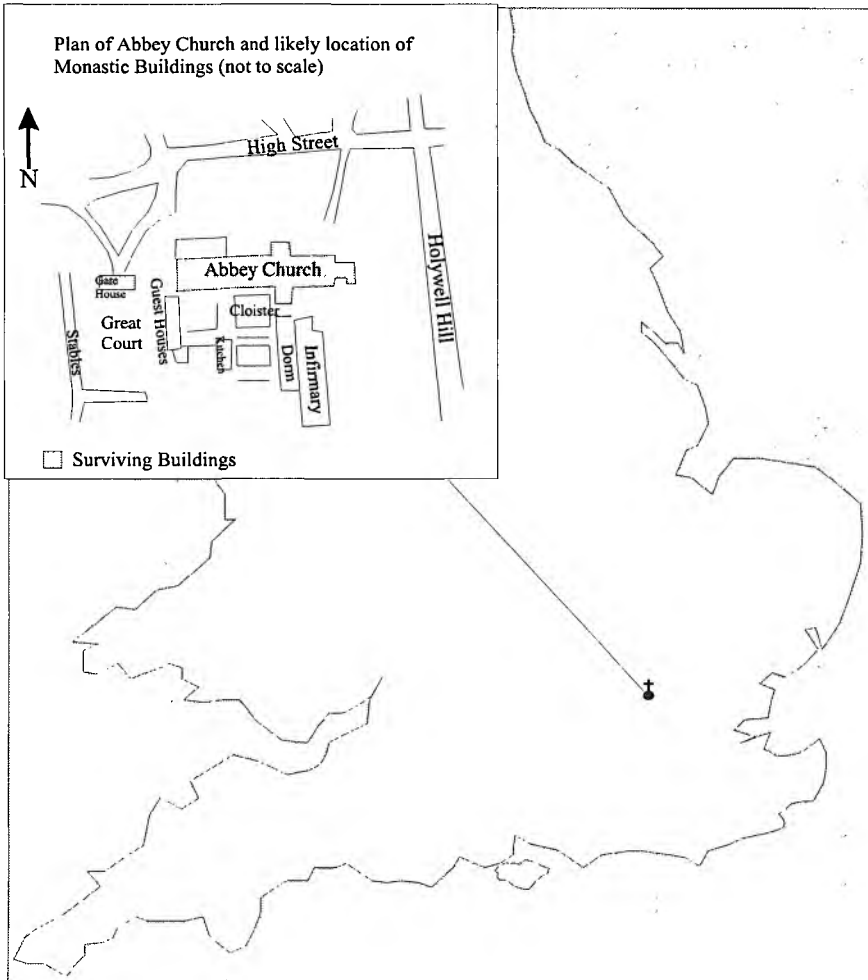
<sup>47</sup> The chief guide is W.A. Pantin, 'General and Provincial Chapters of the English Black Monks, 1215–1540', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fourth Series, X, (1927), 195–257.

<sup>48</sup> BL, Cotton Nero, D VII.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, folio 49.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, folios 11b–48.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, folio 81b.



**Figure 1.1** Map showing the location of St Albans Abbey



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## Chapter 2

# Alban and his Monastery

### The Cult of St Alban

A better understanding of the position of the abbey of St Albans in 1290 can be reached by first examining the development of the cult of Alban at the abbey, the prestige the abbey acquired through privileges and great buildings, and its physical and economic domination of southern Hertfordshire. These will be explored in turn. It was through the cult of St Alban in particular that the monastery received its historical identity. The foundation legend of Alban, protomartyr of England, who died in c.209 or possibly in 254,<sup>1</sup> was written by the monk-chronicler, Roger Wendover, in the first half of the thirteenth century<sup>2</sup> and further elaborated by his more famous continuator, Matthew Paris (c.1200–59). The account of these two authors in the *Chronica Majora*<sup>3</sup> represents the version of the history of the monastery of St Albans which the monks wished to propagate.

Wendover knew that the earliest mention of Alban as protomartyr could be traced back at least to AD 480 and his accuracy is such that much of what he wrote can be corroborated by reference to other earlier sources.

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<sup>1</sup> The basic text is found in *Acta Sanctorum* (Antwerp, 1643– ), June, IV, (1707), 146–70. An easily accessible starting-point for the life of Alban is provided in D.H. Farmer's new edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, (Oxford 1992). See W. Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans', *Antiquity*, XV, (1941), 337–59; *Alban and St Albans: Roman and Medieval Architecture, Art and Archaeology*, ed., M. Henig and P. Lindley, The British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions, XXIV, (Leeds, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Roger Wendover, active 1219–35; *Rogeri de Wendover Chronica*, ed., H.O. Coxe, (London, 1841), 91 and 251–9; V.H. Galbraith, *Roger Wendover and Matthew Paris*, (Glasgow, 1944), 15–21; and Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans', especially 350.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed., H.R. Luard, 7 vols, RS 57, (London, 1872–83), II, 306–8, V, 608–10. R. Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, (Cambridge, 1979); *The Chronicles of Matthew Paris*, (Stroud, 1984).



Constantius of Lyons, in his *Life of Germanus*,<sup>4</sup> bishop of Auxerre, (d. 446), recounts that in 429 Germanus, together with Lupus of Troyes, visited the tomb of Alban and exchanged for earth from that sacred place some relics of both the apostles and several martyrs. Germanus also gave thanks for the successful defeat of the Pelagian heresy.<sup>5</sup> The historian Gildas (c.500–c.70)<sup>6</sup> confirmed Verulamium as the site of Christian martyrdom, suggesting that this event occurred during the persecutions of the Emperor Diocletian (c. 305).<sup>7</sup> Alban, a pagan soldier, sheltered a priest who subsequently converted and baptised him. When other soldiers came in search of this priest, the protomartyr saved his life by dressing in the priest's vestments so that he could escape. Having refused to make sacrifice to the pagan gods, Alban was duly arrested and condemned to death with dramatic consequences. One of the two executioners was subsequently converted to the Christian faith whilst the other's eyes fell out as he beheaded the martyr. A spring or holy well immediately bubbled up at the spot.<sup>8</sup> Bede (673–735), who had completed his *Historia Ecclesiastica* by 731,<sup>9</sup> confirms the location of the site,<sup>10</sup> describes the holiness of the place where Alban was buried and tells of the miraculous cures performed there even in his own day.<sup>11</sup> Recent archaeological evidence has confirmed that the shrine to Alban may well have the strongest claim to continuous use by Christians in Britain.<sup>12</sup> A church was

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<sup>4</sup> The Life of Germanus is printed in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, ed., W. Levison, VII, (1920), 229–83, cf. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, II, 214–17.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. See also, Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans', 337, 344; M. Biddle and B. Kjlbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey: Romano British Cemetery and Anglo-Saxon Monastery', in *Alban and St Albans*, 45–77.

<sup>6</sup> The Life and Works of Gildas are printed in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi*, ed., T. Mommsen, XIII, (1896), 3–110.

<sup>7</sup> Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain and Other Documents*, ed. and tr., M. Winterbottom, (London, 1978).

<sup>8</sup> B. Kjlbye-Biddle, 'The Alban Cross', in *Alban and St Albans*, 85–117.

<sup>9</sup> For Bede see *Acta Sanctorum* (Antwerp, 1643– ), May, VI, (1690), 718–23; A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, Volume I, c. 550–1307*, (London, 1974–82), 105–20.

<sup>10</sup> Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, ed., B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, (Oxford, 1969), I, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. See J. Lydgate, *The Life of St Alban and St Amphibal*, ed., J.E. Van Der Westhuizen, (Leiden, 1974), Introduction, 28–30.

<sup>12</sup> M. Biddle, 'Archaeology, Architecture and the Cult of Saints in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Anglo-Saxon Church*, ed., L.A.S. Butler and R.K. Morris, Council for British Archaeology Research Report, 60, (London, 1986), 1–31; D. Rollason, *Saints and*

built on the hill of Alban's martyrdom to the east of the Roman city. Topographical evidence shows that the site lies near to a Roman road and possibly within the bounds of a Romano-British cemetery.<sup>13</sup> Between the death of Bede in 735 and the reign of Offa II (757–96), little or no information about the abbey of St Albans has survived. However, it seems likely that the church at Verulamium which Bede described as being 'of such wonderful workmanship' had fallen into serious disrepair. In 793, Offa, King of Mercia, erected a new church, founded a *cenobium* or monastery, and made the discovery or *inventio* of Alban's bones on 1 August of the same year,<sup>14</sup> supervising their translation to a special shrine.<sup>15</sup> There is no contemporary evidence of Offa's role in the history of the abbey,<sup>16</sup> but this is the tradition that the monks of the community handed down from generation to generation and which was accepted by William of Malmesbury.<sup>17</sup> Offa's actions were supposedly approved by Pope Adrian I (772–95)<sup>18</sup> and the monastery dated its inception from this time.<sup>19</sup>

The late Anglo-Saxon monastery may have been a double community with men and women in separate houses,<sup>20</sup> but almost nothing is known of its eventual transition to a male community, of the life of the monks or of the state of the monastery at this time.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, even the list of these early abbots provided by the thirteenth-century monks is less than reliable.<sup>22</sup> The monastery may well have needed reform in the ninth and early tenth

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*Relics in Anglo-Saxon England*, (Oxford, 1989); Taylor, 'The Early St Albans Endowment and its Chroniclers', especially, 123.

<sup>13</sup> M. Biddle, 'Alban and the Anglo-Saxon Church', in *Cathedral and City*, 21–42, especially 37.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Paris, *Vitae Duorum Offarum*, printed in Matthew Paris, *Historia Major*, ed., W. Wats, (London, 1640), 35–145.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, see Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans', 351.

<sup>16</sup> See Biddle, 'Alban and the Anglo-Saxon Church', 30; J. Crick, 'Offa, Aelfric and the Refoundation of St Albans' in *Alban and St Albans*, 78–84.

<sup>17</sup> William of Malmesbury, *De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum*, ed., N.E.S.A. Hamilton, RS 52, (London, 1870), 316.

<sup>18</sup> This claim in *Gesta*, I, 4, was not substantiated by documentary evidence.

<sup>19</sup> This version is also given in Ibid, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Biddle, 'Alban and the Anglo-Saxon Church', 31.

<sup>22</sup> The dates are unclear between Abbot Willegod, appointed in 793 and Leofstan in 1064; *Gesta*, I, 3–38.

centuries as a result of *secularium prioratus*, Viking raids or simple neglect.<sup>23</sup> In any event, in c.970, St Albans was brought back to strict observance by St Ethelwold (c.912–84).<sup>24</sup> At the Council of Winchester (c.970–3) it was agreed that all such monastic houses in Wessex and Mercia were to adhere to the *Regularis Concordia* or *The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation*.<sup>25</sup> The *Agreement* required the strict and uniform observance of the Rule of St Benedict as practised in the Carolingian abbeys of Benedict of Aniane (d. 821) and as later introduced into the continental monasteries of Cluny (909), Brogne (929), and Fleury (931). How successful was this reformed observance in the case of St Albans we do not know, but by the reign of Edward the Confessor, (1042–66), during the abbacy of Leofstan, we are told in the *Gesta* that it was necessary to cut back the woods and make the road between London and St Albans safer for the pilgrims and other travellers who saw fit to come to the church of St Alban to atone for their sins.<sup>26</sup> By 1066 the house may well have contained sufficient monks to have made it one of the twenty-four larger monasteries which housed about twenty monks each at the Conquest.<sup>27</sup>

After the Conquest, St Albans benefited from a succession of influential abbots who are numbered from this time. The first, Paul de Caen (1077–93), Norman appointee and nephew of Lanfranc of Bec, archbishop of Canterbury, began to build the new church for the monastery reusing brick and stone quarried from Roman Verulamium at the foot of the hill.<sup>28</sup> The

<sup>23</sup> E. John, 'The King and the Monks in the Tenth-Century Reformation', in *Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies*, (Leicester, 1966), 154–80, especially, 154–5.

<sup>24</sup> *The Life of Ethelwold* by Wulfstan is found in M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom, ed. and tr., (Oxford, 1991); *The Life of Ethelwold* by Aelfric is in *Chronicon Monasterii de Abingdon*, ed., J. Stevenson, RS 2, (London, 1858), I, 253–66. See also, B. Yorke, ed., *Bishop Ethelwold: His Career and Influence*, (Woodbridge, 1988), especially the Introduction, 3–5. M.C. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, 2 ed., (Cambridge, 1963), 50–1. For late Anglo-Saxon Benedictine communities in England and the effect of the tenth-century reform see *Tenth Century Studies*, ed., D. Parsons, (London, 1975); A. Gransden, 'Traditionalism and Continuity during the Last Century of Anglo-Saxon Monasticism', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 40, (1989), 159–207.

<sup>25</sup> *Regularis Concordia*, ed., Thomas Symons, (London, 1953).

<sup>26</sup> *Gesta*, I, 39.

<sup>27</sup> This view is given in J.C. Russell, 'The Clerical Population of Medieval England', *Traditio*, II, (1944), 177–212, especially 185. He cites Knowles, *The Monastic Order*, 714, but neither give a source for their conclusions.

<sup>28</sup> See C. Brooke, 'St Albans : The Great Abbey' in *Cathedral and City*, 43–70 and especially, 45–55 for Abbot Paul's building programme; T.P. Smith, 'Early recycling: the Anglo-Saxon and Norman Re-use of Roman Bricks with Special Reference to Hertfordshire', *Alban and St Albans*, 111–17.

new Norman church was consecrated by Geoffrey, archbishop of Rouen in the presence of Henry I, his queen, Matilda, and the bishops of London, Durham, Lincoln and Salisbury on 28 December 1115 in the midst of much rejoicing.<sup>29</sup> Abbot Paul is portrayed in the chronicle accounts as an impressive ruler, not only for his building work but also because of his efforts to restore the abbey's reputation. It is claimed that he converted the convent into a model community.<sup>30</sup> Paul's close relationship with his uncle, Lanfranc, cannot fail to be of significance here. The 'monastic constitutions' which Lanfranc gave to Christ Church Canterbury soon after 1070 were aimed at providing uniformity in the observance of the Benedictine rule as practised by the monks in the convent there.<sup>31</sup> That these were copied in other monasteries undoubtedly also included St Albans.<sup>32</sup> Examples of particular reforms instituted at St Albans prescribed the strict enforcement of regulations against meat-eating, the imposition of strict rules with regard to the keeping of silence and reform of the dress code.<sup>33</sup> Abbot Paul also instituted a regime to ensure that the nuns at St Albans were separated from the monks and kept confined to the almonry.<sup>34</sup> Paul is further credited with greatly enriching the abbey's collection of ornaments and books and with founding the scriptorium.<sup>35</sup> The chronicle accounts highlight the prestige of the abbey during Paul's abbacy by listing with pride the many donations made to the community. These included the foundation and endowment of dependent cells at Hertford,<sup>36</sup> Wallingford,<sup>37</sup> Belvoir,<sup>38</sup> Tynemouth<sup>39</sup> and Binham<sup>40</sup> which will be examined in closer detail in Chapter Five.

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<sup>29</sup> *Gesta*, I, 71; Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans', 343.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 59–61.

<sup>31</sup> *The Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc*, ed., M.C. Knowles, (London, 1951).

<sup>32</sup> Brooke, 'St Albans: The Great Abbey', 55–9. See below for further detailed discussion of monastic observance at the abbey.

<sup>33</sup> *Gesta*, I, 59–61.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 57–8.

<sup>36</sup> Hertford was founded by Ralph de Limesi; BL, Lansdowne, 863, folio 157b.

<sup>37</sup> BL, Cotton Nero, D VII, folio 92. See also *Gesta*, I, 55.

<sup>38</sup> Excerpts from the cartulary of Belvoir, now in the possession of the Duke of Rutland are preserved in Bodleian Library, Dodsworth MSS., LV, folio 140; LXVII, folio 203; and in BL, Harley, 2044, folio 96. See also *Gesta*, I, 57.

The high profile of the monastery was maintained during the abbacy of Richard d'Albini (1097–1119), second after the Conquest, who promoted St Albans as a pilgrimage site<sup>41</sup> through the granting by the bishop of Lincoln, of an indulgence to all penitents who came to the martyr's tomb.<sup>42</sup> Richard's rule also witnessed the foundation of the cell at Wymondham in Norfolk.<sup>43</sup> The third abbot, Geoffrey de Gorham (1119–46) specially promoted Alban and on 1 August 1129 had the relics of the martyr translated to a most precious shrine made by the monk-goldsmith, Anketil.<sup>44</sup> Whilst Geoffrey had deliberately chosen the celebration of the *inventio* as the day on which the relics should be translated, he moved any future celebration to 2 August, thus leaving the first day of the month for the commemoration of the Feast of St Peter in Chains.<sup>45</sup> Geoffrey's promotion of the miracle play of St Katharine of Alexandria is also important. Not only was it a demonstration of the early diffusion of the saint's cult and one of the earliest recorded religious plays in England, but Katharine, like Alban, had suffered beheading and Geoffrey ensured that she was commemorated in the calendar of the monastery.<sup>46</sup> It was during Geoffrey's rule that the famous and still surviving *St Albans Psalter* was composed for his friend Christina, anchoress of the nearby cell of Markyate.<sup>47</sup> Geoffrey also supported the hermits Roger of Dunstable and Sigar of Northaw.<sup>48</sup> He was also responsible for the foundation of the

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<sup>39</sup> The cell at Tynemouth was refounded by Robert de Mowbray in 1089–90, BL, Lansdowne, 863, folio 78b. See also *Gesta*, I, 56.

<sup>40</sup> The Register of Binham, written in the first half of the fourteenth century is extant: BL, Cotton Claudius, D XIII. See also *Gesta*, I, 57.

<sup>41</sup> For the role of St Albans see D. Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, (London, 2000), 66–7, 78, 80; G. Egan, 'Pilgrims' Souvenir Badges of St Alban, *Alban and St Albans*, 213–17.

<sup>42</sup> *Gesta*, I, 92.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 67. The Wymondham Cartulary survives as BL, Cotton Titus, C VIII.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>45</sup> Levison, 'St Alban and St Albans', 352.

<sup>46</sup> *Gesta*, I, 75. See L.M. Clopper, 'Miracula and the *Tretise of Miraculis Pleyinge*', *Speculum*, 65, (1990), 878–905; G. Coffman, 'The Miracle Play in England: *Nomenclature*', *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*, 31, (1916), 448–65; Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, 9.

<sup>47</sup> Now in Hildesheim. See *The St Albans Psalter*, ed., C.R. Dodwell, O. Pächt and F. Wormald, (London, 1960); C.J. Holdsworth, 'Christina of Markyate', *Studies in Church History*, Subsidia I, Medieval Women, ed., D. Baker, (Oxford, 1978), 185–204. See also, Brooke, 'St Albans: The Great Abbey', 59–62.

<sup>48</sup> *Gesta*, I, 105; Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, 78.

hospital of St Julian on the road to London<sup>49</sup> and the nunnery at Sopwell,<sup>50</sup> both of which were significant in the first half of the fourteenth century and will be discussed in detail in Chapters Seven and Five respectively.

The account of Alban's martyrdom composed by Geoffrey of Monmouth in c.1139 gave rise to the later legend of St Amphibalus,<sup>51</sup> for Geoffrey had claimed that he was the same priest given shelter by Alban.<sup>52</sup> This derived from Geoffrey's mistranslation of Gildas's '*sancti abbatis amphibalo*', whereby he converted the word *amphibalus* or 'cloak' into a name.<sup>53</sup> From this, the story was elaborated, given fresh impetus by an 'in-house life' of St Amphibalus written by the monk, William, during the abbacy of Simon (1167–83)<sup>54</sup> and by the supposed discovery in 1178 of the relics of this new saint by a group of monks from St Albans. The *Gesta* describes how a certain Robert of Redbourn had a vision of the protomartyr who showed him where the body of Amphibalus was to be found and instructed him that his companion was to be treated with all due honour. Consequently, the bodies of Amphibalus and nine companions were discovered at Redbourn and translated to the monastery church.<sup>55</sup> Amphibalus was thus established as part of the official Alban martyrology and strongly promoted, perhaps in direct response to the surge of pilgrims visiting Becket's shrine at Canterbury following the archbishop's murder on 29 December 1170.<sup>56</sup> A version of the Amphibalus legend was composed by Ralph of Dunstable, monk of St Albans, shortly after the 'discovery',<sup>57</sup> while Matthew Paris included the story in the *Chronica Majora* and in his poem *Vie de Seint Auban* composed sometime between

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<sup>49</sup> *Gesta*, I, 77–8.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 80–2.

<sup>51</sup> *Historia Regum Britanniae*, V, ed., A. Griscom, (New York, 1929).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 367.

<sup>53</sup> Lydgate, *The Life of St Alban and St Amphibal*, 35.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 36–9.

<sup>55</sup> *Gesta*, I, 192–3.

<sup>56</sup> For Thomas Becket see *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, ed., J.C. Robertson and J. B. Sheppard, 7 vols., RS 67, (London, 1875–85). For the defence and promotion of Alban following the cult of Becket see Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, 58.

<sup>57</sup> BL, Cotton Claudius, E IV, folios 47–58.

1236–50.<sup>58</sup> The legend of Amphibalus became so significant for the monks of St Albans that in 1195 they founded a priory at Redbourn on the site where his remains were believed to have been discovered and set up a shrine for him in the abbey.<sup>59</sup> Although Amphibalus is now accepted as a figure invented by the twelfth-century monks of St Albans to embellish the story of St Alban, Redbourn, along with Tynemouth Priory in Northumbria, which had the relics of St Oswin<sup>60</sup> and had become a dependent cell of St Albans in c.1089–90,<sup>61</sup> was to prove a most valuable tool in promoting the position of the abbey as a centre of medieval pilgrimage.<sup>62</sup>

As for Alban himself, at some time after 1170, Simon, the sixth abbot (1167–83), perhaps also in response to the events at Canterbury, enclosed Alban's shrine in a feretory of gold and silver suitable to attract the admiration of pilgrims and visitors to the monastery.<sup>63</sup> Almost a century later, Matthew Paris records that in the octave of the feast of St Stephen 1257, during a necessary restoration of the church, workmen discovered a hollow space beneath the floor of the east end containing a shallow tomb of stone with marble columns and a leaden inscription. This read: *In hoc Mausoleo inventum est venerabile corpus Sancti Albani protomartyris Anglorum*.<sup>64</sup> The monks of St Albans were keen to use this discovery to promote the abbey as a place of pilgrimage.<sup>65</sup> They were aided in this task when an indulgence of thirty days was granted to all visitors to the tomb by both the Bishop of Bangor and the Bishop of York.<sup>66</sup> Royal pilgrimage played an increasingly important role in the promotion of St Albans. King Henry III's (1216–72) visits to the abbey between 1244 and 1258 are chronicled by Matthew Paris.<sup>67</sup> Throughout his reign Henry associated

<sup>58</sup> *Chronica Majora*, I, 148–54. See the Introduction to *The Life of Saint Alban and Saint Amphibal*, 38.

<sup>59</sup> *Gesta*, I, 211; *Chronica Majora*, II, 301–8.

<sup>60</sup> Dugdale, *Monasticon*, III, 302; H.E. Craster, *A History of Northumberland*, (London, 1907), VIII, 39; M.C. Knowles and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales*, (London, 1971), 78.

<sup>61</sup> Matthew Paris, *Historia Major*, ed., W. Wats, (London, 1684), 13.

<sup>62</sup> Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, 80.

<sup>63</sup> ...qua ipso tempore nullam vidimus nobiliorem..., *Gesta*, I, 189

<sup>64</sup> *Historia Major*, 809. See also N. Coldstream, 'The Shrine of St Alban', *The Abbey Link*, XXVI, (St Albans, 1987), 3.

<sup>65</sup> Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, 78; *Chronica Majora*, V, 608–9.

<sup>66</sup> *Chronica Majora*, V, 608–9, 617.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, IV, 402; V, 319–20, 489, 574; See Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, 120–21.

himself with those cults such as that at St Albans and at other centres of pilgrimage like Bury and Walsingham which would enhance his royal prestige and power.<sup>68</sup> In return those places he visited benefited significantly from this royal patronage. St Albans' status as a centre of medieval pilgrimage was aided by Henry's visits. One visit was particularly significant. In March 1257, on his visit after the discovery of the tomb, Henry arrived with gifts including a silver chalice and six silk hangings one of which was to cover the shrine.<sup>69</sup> Edward I (1272–1307) was also a frequent visitor to the abbey<sup>70</sup> and the financial burden that this placed on the hosts will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four below. Nevertheless the support offered by the royal family in promoting St Albans as a place of pilgrimage was significant. Never slow to seize an opportunity, during the abbacy of John de Hertford (1235–60) the monks built a new hall to house the many royal and other guests who arrived at the abbey on pilgrimage and other business.<sup>71</sup> Thus, by the end of the thirteenth century, the monks of St Albans possessed in their midst the protomartyr of all England with a newly discovered tomb or *memoria*, a wonderfully enriched shrine and a living tradition which they could promote to the full to attract visitors, pilgrims, wealth and prestige to the abbey.

### **Papal Privileges**

Building on their possession of the saint's body and associated cult, the abbey of St Albans was deeply concerned to establish itself as the premier Benedictine house of all England. The monastery therefore sought all possible privileges and immunities for itself, and fought off any attempt to diminish the importance of these.<sup>72</sup> Matthew Paris claims that these privileges dated back to the reign of Offa II (757–96) when the king visited

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<sup>68</sup> Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, 122.

<sup>69</sup> *Chronica Majora*, V, 617–18; Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, 121.

<sup>70</sup> Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, 126–7.

<sup>71</sup> *Gesta*, I, 314. See also Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, 225.

<sup>72</sup> For the importance attached to papal privileges see M.C. Knowles, 'The Growth of Exemption: Essays in Monastic History IV', *Downside Review*, 59, (1932), 201–31, 396–436, and Jane Sayers, 'Papal Privileges for St Albans Abbey and its Dependencies', in *The Study of Medieval Records*, ed., D.A. Bullough and R.L. Storey, (Oxford, 1971), 57–84.



Rome and obtained from Adrian I (772–95) the right to construct a monastery and seek privileges for it.<sup>73</sup> St Albans also claimed to have received from the pope its right to call itself a ‘special daughter of the Roman Church’, a monastery exempt, *nullo medio*, and responsible to the pope alone.<sup>74</sup> No documentary evidence is given by Matthew Paris to support this claim and it has therefore generally been dismissed by historians of St Albans.<sup>75</sup> This privilege, if genuine, required further substantiation by the twelfth century when memory of the supposed grant of Pope Adrian had faded. Indeed, it was the twelfth-century privileges which gave to St Albans so much of its power and prestige. The papal privileges which St Albans acquired are set out in Holtzmann’s *Papsturkunden in England*<sup>76</sup> and many of these have also survived in a recently rediscovered cartulary now known as Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS. 7965–73, folios 178–216. On 25 November 1122, in the bull *Religione ac pietate*, Calixtus II (1119–24) singled out for special commemoration the feast of St Alban. The pope granted an indulgence of twelve days to all who visited the abbey at this time.<sup>77</sup> and his privilege was confirmed in 1156 by Adrian IV (1154–59).<sup>78</sup> In a further solemn privilege, *Ad hoc nos*, also of November 1122, Calixtus took the abbey under papal protection and confirmed its possessions.<sup>79</sup> On 19 October 1143, in *Offici nostri nos*, Celestine II (1143–44) confirmed Calixtus II’s bull and placed the house under the protection of St Peter.<sup>80</sup> The abbey was to pay one ounce of gold every year to Rome for this privilege and in return was granted *episcopalia* confirming the right of the abbot to wear episcopal vestments.<sup>81</sup>

A succession of popes throughout the rest of the twelfth century built on the foundations laid by these privileges and recognised, confirmed and enhanced the status of St Albans as the first amongst all the abbeys of England. On 2 August 1147, in *Pie postulatio voluntatis*, Eugenius III

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<sup>73</sup> *Gesta*, I, 4.

<sup>74</sup> *Chronica Majora*, I, 359.

<sup>75</sup> See Taylor’s comments in ‘The Early St Albans’ Endowments’ 124

<sup>76</sup> W. Holtzmann, ed., *Papsturkunden in England*, III, (Gottingen, 1952).

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 130–31. The twelfth-century privileges granted to St Albans are discussed in Sayers, ‘Papal Privileges for St Albans’, 57–84.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 240.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 128–9.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 166–7.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*.

(1145–53) specifically listed the dependencies of St Albans.<sup>82</sup> These included eight of the dependent cells belonging to the abbey,<sup>83</sup> churches including the church of Eversden, Appleton and Stanford, and lands which later formed the Liberty of St Albans.<sup>84</sup> As Gerald of Wales had indicated, Adrian IV (1154–59) had a special relationship with St Albans.<sup>85</sup> A native of the lands of the abbey, where his father, Robert of the Chamber, had retired to serve as a monk, the young Nicholas Breakspear had been refused entrance to the novitiate at the abbey. Instead he became an Augustinian canon and eventually rose to the highest position in the church. Matthew Paris, as always seeing the legacy of Adrian IV through the eyes of a monk of St Albans, claimed that Adrian never forgot his father's abbey and 'so loved the Church of the Blessed Alban that whatever the monks sought from him was granted without difficulty'.<sup>86</sup> To illustrate his point Matthew records one journey to Rome of the abbot Robert de Gorham (1151–67). Robert, fired by the possibility of regaining the ancient dignities of the Church, not only of England but also of St Albans, set out with spectacular gifts worth, in his estimation, 140 marks, not including five copes, three most precious mitres, sandals and other highly desirable goods.<sup>87</sup> Adrian was not then in Rome and Abbot Robert had to travel to Benevento to find him. There the pope received the abbot and his delegation of bishops sent by King Henry II with 'unaccustomed honour'.<sup>88</sup> Matthew Paris provides a highly imaginative reconstruction of the discussion which ensued between the pope and Abbot Robert. Robert produced with a flourish the gold, silver and precious metals, the three mitres and sandals which had been made by Christina, the anchoress of the cell of Markyate, near to St Albans.<sup>89</sup> Yet all that Adrian would accept

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 197–200.

<sup>83</sup> These were listed as the cells of Tynemouth, Binham, Wymondham, Wallingford, Hertford, Belvoir, Hatfield, and Modri (later Beadlow), Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> For Nicholas Breakspear, later Pope Adrian IV and his connections with St Albans see R.W. Southern, 'Pope Adrian IV', in *Medieval Humanism and Other Essays*, (Oxford, 1970), 234–52.

<sup>86</sup> *Gesta*, I, 125. This story is accepted by William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, ed., R. Howlett, RS 82, (London, 1884), I, 109–12.

<sup>87</sup> *Gesta*, I, 126–7.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>89</sup> See C.J. Holdsworth, 'Christina of Markyate', 185–204.

were the mitres and Christina's sandals, saying 'I refuse to take your gifts for when I fled to your monastery and requested the monastic habit, you refused to receive me'. Matthew Paris records a most diplomatic reply from the abbot who said: 'the reason we were not able to accept you was that the will of God opposed it and His wisdom has directed your life to another path'. This appears to have mollified Adrian who replied 'elegantly and politely' and invited the abbot to make his request for, as he said, 'it is not possible for the Blessed Alban to refuse his citizens of St Albans anything'.<sup>90</sup>

As a result of this special relationship between the pope and his 'home abbey' Adrian IV demonstrated his support for the monastery by granting no fewer than seventeen bulls of which two, *Incomprehensibilis* and *Religiosam vitam elegantibus*, were of particular importance. The first, *Incomprehensibilis*,<sup>91</sup> issued on 5 February 1156 and addressed to Abbot Robert and his monks, secured the independence of the monastery from the bishop of Lincoln. We have already seen that the monastery lay within the extreme south-west corner of this diocese and that the authority of its bishop seemed remote. *Incomprehensibilis* took the abbey and all its possessions into papal protection and empowered the abbot to invite any bishop of his choice to conduct ordinations and consecrations. Henceforth, he was allowed to 'receive the chrism, holy oil, consecration of altars or basilicas, the blessing of abbots, and the ordination of monks or clerics from whichever Catholic bishop you prefer, who, supported by our authority may boldly grant what is requested and not deny what you have asked for'.<sup>92</sup> The practical results of this provision were to ensure that the abbot of St Albans and his monks could neither be forced to attend a diocesan synod nor be compelled to obey the decrees of the bishop of Lincoln. The abbey was thus removed from the bishop's powers of visitation, excommunication and imposition of the sentence of interdict. The pope also ensured that the monks serving in the abbey's dependent cells were free from subjection to their diocesan bishops 'as if they were staying within the body of the monastery'... 'so that the monks shall always remain in the power of their abbot'.<sup>93</sup> In recognition of the privileges received from the Holy See and granted by *Incomprehensibilis*, the community was to pay one ounce of gold annually to the papacy.

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<sup>90</sup> *Gesta*, I, 127.

<sup>91</sup> Holtzmann, *Papsturkunden in England*, III, 100, 234–8.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 236.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 237, '...quatinus monachi semper in abbatum suorum potestate permaneant...'.