The Beginnings of Newstead-by-Stamford Priory

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Founding a hospital was a common outlet for pious impulses in the early thirteenth century. Yet because these houses were on the whole small and their constitutions were often altered, their early history is often obscure. Many hospitals followed the Augustinian rule: several made the but slight transition to more formal adoption of the common life and became priories within the order proper. 1 Such a house was the hospital, and later priory, of St Mary at Newstead-by-Stamford, which began life allegedly in the late twelfth century as a hospital for the poor and sick, becoming a small priory for six canons in the mid-thirteenth century, 2 but where one, nonetheless, the general chapter of the order was held on at least two occasions, in 1340 and 1362. 3 For the early history of the house recourse has normally been had to the text of three charters printed in Dugdale's Monasticon 4 from originals of which were said in the seventeenth century to be in the possession of John Vincent, gentleman. 5 These can be supplemented by a series of references in the episcopal records at Lincoln recording the institution of three Masters of the Hospital and that of the first recorded prior in 1247.

Masters of Newstead-by-Stamford:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Instituted</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walter capellanus</td>
<td>12256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam of Herefeld, canon of Missenden</td>
<td>12267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter, canon of Wymondley</td>
<td>12328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter de Crek, first prior</td>
<td>12479</td>
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The house seems to have had an uneventful life before dissolution in 1536. At visitation on 20 May 1525 all was reported well with the Prior and three canons. 10 Nonetheless at about this time a document concerned with Newstead's very early days was transcribed into Bishop Longland's memoranda register. 11 It is the purpose of this short paper to draw attention to this document, of which a transcription and translation appear in the appendix, and to comment briefly upon its nature.

It was usual at visitation for the head of a religious institution to display the documents associated with the foundation of his house. In the memoranda register it is noted that the prior and canons 'say they have no other foundation but this', and, significantly, at an earlier visitation in the fifteenth century their predecessors had not been able to produce an acceptable foundation charter at all. 12 Hence this document may have been enregistered to cope with this deficiency: beginning life as a hospital Newstead had no proper foundation charter at all. There are two main issues to be considered: was this document issued earlier than the other charters, and does what it tells us about the nature of Newstead in its earliest days suggest that it is genuine?

The salient points in the three charters printed in the Monasticon are as follows. The first, a charter of William de Albiny and his wife Agatha Trussæ but like the one printed below, records the establishment of the hospital in the chapel of St Mary 'super Wyssæ', under its Master Adam, and with the consent of Bishop Hugh of Lincoln and Archdeacon Robert of Lincol by, for the maintenance of seven poor, its endowment in the form of arable, pasture and personal tithes (all enumerated) and certain regulations about the Mastership. He is to be a priest and a regular canon, as is his assistant: they must both live according to the rule. The second charter of this, the 'founder', clearly slightly later in date, increases the charitable provision to thirteen beds and defines the staff under the Master as two priests, one deacon and a clerk. The third charter was issued by Walter the heir and refers to a prior and canons: it would seem therefore to date from c. 1247. 13 Because Adam the Master is mentioned it is reasonable to date the first charter to the period 1226 x 32: it appears to be a common enough example of the practise whereby a layman would apply for episcopal license to regularise his personal charity. 14 The charter registered in 1525 associated Walter as Master with William de Albiny and Agatha Trussæ but, not Adam of Herefeld. This Walter must be the earliest known Master, and not Walter the canon of Wymondley: the charter clearly comes from an early stage in the hospital's development as only seven fraters are mentioned. It perhaps dates from 1225 x 6, that is before William de Albiny approached the bishop and the house became more structured according to the precepts of the common life. It seems to be the earliest regulation of allowances for the staff and inmates. It was usual for officials to be supplied with food and clothing. 15 At Newstead the Master was to receive his clothes and shoes from the general income of the hospital, but his assistants' stipend for these purposes was tied to a specific rent, that of Ralph Wake in Chalfont which is not specified in the arrangement put before the bishop in 1226 x 32. The inmates did well: their clothing and food allowances compared favourably with those at Sherburn (Co. Durham), a hospital on a much larger scale, where the inmates received a loaf weighing five marks daily, a gallon of beer, meat three times a week and eggs, herrings and cheese on other days. 16 There seems to be no reason to doubt the authenticity of this document.

The most interesting aspect of this document is that it is what the prior and canons in 1525 considered the nearest they had to a foundation charter. This appears to emphasize that the change from hospital to priory was no great issue. Indeed it seems to have been some doubt about the precise status of the house. In Round's calendar of the Belvoir cartulary a charter, dated 7 December 1239, whereby the monks of Belvoir, as corporate rectors of Uffington, the parish in which the hospital lay, remitted tithes on Newstead's lands, is listed as referring explicitly to the prior and canons of Newstead, not the master and brothers. 17 Given the insistence on the master and his assistant following the rule in Vincent's earlier charter this is not really surprising. After Walter 'i' the other masters were indeed canons. If they, and their assistants lived according to the precepts of the rule, it was but a slight shift of emphasis to turn the house into a priory proper: fraters could become canonici very easily.

Only in a few cases is there anything very definite known as to the nature of the transition, though what evidence there is suggests that the readjustment was slight... the conversion merely meant increasing the number of clergy and ministers and enlarging the common fund at the expense of that devoted to hospitality... 18

The foundation of Newstead looks like piegy 'on the cheap'. It is possible that a pre-existing bridge chapel was adapted for the purposes of the house. Vincent's earlier
charter mentions that the hospital 'was founded in honour of blessed Mary the virgin at the Wass bridge' ('fundatum est in honore beate Mariae semper virginis ad pontem de Wass'), the place 'in which the chapel of the blessed Mary stands with all the land surrounding it' ('locum in quo capella beate Mariea sita est, cum tota curia adiacente...') is a key element in the endowment, implying that the chapel already existed. There appears to be little or no evidence for Newstead before the 1220s: on what the accession of Miss Clay that the hospital was founded in the twelfth century was based is not entirely clear. It seems unlikely that the monks of Belvoir, who had long held Uffington church, would neither, on the one hand, find it necessary to come to an agreement over tithes over some forty or fifty years of the hospital's existence, nor, on the other, record it in their cartulary, which contains many twelfth century charters. William de Albini's piety found its first expression in provision for the poor and infirm. It was but a short step to create a full priory. Newstead always remained small: its income in 1535 was only £38, and at its largest only seems to have held a prior and six canons. In a later period William might have settled for a chantry. It is nonetheless interesting that it is a sixteenth century episcopal register which sheds further light on his foundation.

Notes
3. VCH Lincoln, II, 176.
5. Of Castor, Northamptonshire, Vincent's charters were given to Ralph Sheldon in 1670 - The life and times of Anthony Wood, antiquary, of Oxford 1632-1685, ed. A. Clark, 5 vols, Oxford Historical Society 1891-1900, III, 102. Sheldon is known to have bequeathed his genealogical manuscripts to the College of Arms (DNE), but no further trace of these charters now seems to exist: it is therefore not possible to say whether Dugdale printed all the Newstead charters then known. The third charter was cited as being in the Belvoir cartulary; it does not seem to be in Round's calendar of Belvoir Castle Additional MS 105 (HMC Rutland, IV, 105-7), or in the extracts from it made by Roger Dodsworth between 1640 and 1650 (Bodl. MS Dodow 67 [SC 5009] ff. 201-205r, MS Dodow 78 [SC 5019] f. 70): fragments of another earlier cartulary, now Belvoir Castle Additional MS 98 are known to exist (ibid., 173). Another possible source for Belvoir material is the martyrologium of that house (Cambridge, Trinity College MS 0.9.25), in the preliminary leaves of which are miscellaneous copies of 13th and 14th century documents relating to the privileges of the priory (M. R. James, A descriptive catalogue of the western manuscripts in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge III, Cambridge 1902, 465), but it seems unlikely that this was the source for the Monasticon.
8. Ibid., 202.
9. Rotuli Roberti Grossisteo episcopi Lincolniensis a.d. MCCXXXV-MCCCLIII, ed. F. N. Davis, Canterbury and York Society 1913 and Lincoln Record Society 1914, 88. This entry records an inadequacy in the process of selection by the frater: Grossesteo therefore quashed the election, though by grace he let Adam be installed nonetheless. Free election was unusual in a hospital: it was one of the privileges explicitly granted to the house in the third charter printed in the Monasticon.
11. LSAO, Register XXVI ff. 122v-123r.
15. Ibid., 152.
16. Cf. ibid, 167-8. Sherburn's founder was a bishop: it had sixty-five inmates - Knowles and Hadcock, Medieval religious houses, 391.
17. HMC Rutland, IV, 145.
18. Dickinson, Origins, 147. The frater had elected the prior in 1247 - Rotuli Grossesteo, 88.
19. Monasticon, VI, 562.
21. Margin. The document is immediately followed by the statement 'they say they have no nother fundation butt this' and attestations as to the veracity of the transcription.
APPENDIX

Copy of the foundation of the priory of Newstead, collated with a private charter and enregistered as follows:

[1225 x 6]

LAO Register XXVI ff. 12v-123r.

To all the sons of holy mother church to whom this present writing comes William de Albiny, Agatha Trussebut his wife, Walter, Master of the hospital of St Mary on the Gwash and the brothers serving God there send greeting. Know that we, by common counsel and assent have decreed and ordained statutes for the hospital as follows. The Master for the time being shall collect livery and shoe money from the goods of the hospital, also the two canons living with the Master shall receive one mark for their livery and shoe money from the rent of Ralph Wake of Chalfont by the hand of the Master in two instalments, half a mark at Purification and half a mark at St Peter in chains. The seven brothers lying in the infirmary, while permanently resident, shall receive each year for their livery and shoe money two marks of the rent of the aforesaid Ralph Wake of Chalfont on the same days by the hand of the Master or Infirmarer, together with the bequests made for them, according to the dispositions of the said Master and Infirmarer as seems properly expedient. Besides this each of the seven brothers shall receive every day one loaf made with salted flour or sieved flour and sprinkled with spice weighing fifty shillings and for them all to drink freely daily five gallons of ale. Besides this concerning the seven brothers, each pair daily shall receive for lunch a respectable dish of meat and drink and for dinner a ‘rolish’ according to what the resources of the house can afford. In Lent each day each pair of brothers shall receive five herrings or six eggs together with his drink allowance, if not, four herrings at lunch time and for dinner according to propriety in a regular house. Should any of the seven be so sick that the aforesaid food is not good for him, the Infirmarer, with the Master’s knowledge, shall obtain what is fitting for him. If the resources of the house should be enlarged, both the allowances for the canons and brothers and the charitable funds should benefit. To preserve all the above for posterity intact, and for greater security the present writing has been prepared in the form of a cograph and been sealed by both parties. Witnesses: Robert de Ros the younger, Teobald the alien, Alexander de Poynton, Ralph of Tinhampton, Odelin de Albiny, Roger Binni, Thomas de Hoyymb, Robert de Hotot, Martin de Talinton.

Latin text:

Universis sancte matris ecclesiae fillis ad quos presens scriptum pervenerit Willelmus de Albiny et Agatha Trussebut uxor eius et Walterus magister hospitalis beate Marie super Wassy et fratres ibidem deo servientes salutem. Noveritis nos de communi consilio et assensu nostro decrevisse et statuisse dictum hospitale ut subscriptum est videlicet quod magister eiusdem loci qui pro tempore fuerit percipiati rationabiliter vestimentum et calciamentum de bonis ipsius hospitalis duo vero canonici ibidem cum magistro commorantibus ad eorum vestimentum et calciamentum unam marcam percipient videlicet de redditu Radulphi de Vaca de Chalfount per manum dicti magistri singulius annis ad duos terminos scilicet ad purificacionem beate Marie dimidiam marcam et ad vincula sancti Petri dimidiam marcam. [f. 123r] Septem vero fratres in infirmario iacentes ad eorum vestimentum et calciamentum de redditu dicti Radulphi de Vaca de Chalfount ad supradictos terminos per manum dicti magistri aut infirmarii totaliter pro tempore custodientes singulis annis duas marcas percipient scilicet cum testimoniiis sibi legatis secundum dispositiones dictorum magistri et infirmarii prout ut decentes. Preterea singuli septem fratres predicti singulius diebus unum panem farinento factum cum sacio aut cum cribo et de poudre quinquaginta solidorum percipient et ad potandum eorum dies singulius diebus quinque lagene cervite libere. Preterea de dictis septem fratribus bini et bini singulis diebus unum feculum racionabile de carne cum potagio ad prandum percipient. Ad cenum vero companogam secundum quod facultas domus suppedit. Quod si fuerint dies jejunii bini et bini singulis diebus quinque allocia vel sex ova pro tempore una cum potagio percipient. Et si non fuit dies jejunii bini et bini singulis diebus iii-ior allocia cum potagio ad prandum percipient. Ad cenum vero secundum quod in domo exiterit. Preterea quod si aliquis dictorum septem fratribus tali infirmato detinuetur et cibis predictis uti non possit infrinmarius pro tempore per visum magistri secundum quod expediet et decet ei cibum inveniet. Preterea si facultas domus crevit, ut in terris redditis et rebus alis crescent munera canonico cum fratrum et augeantur opera charitatis et pietatis. Et ut hec omnia supradicta inpostoribus illis permaneant ad maiorem securitatem presens scriptum in modum cirographi consititur et sigillis utrisque partes confirmatur. Huius testibus: domino Roberto de Ros minori, Teobaldo Alleni, Alexandro de Poynton, Radulpho de Tinhamonta, Odelin de Albiny, Rogero Binni, Thomas de Hoyymb, Roberto de Hotot, Martino de Talinton.