

The Coat of Arms

Annual Journal of the Heraldry Society



Series 4 Volume 4 Number 238 2021

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The Society was registered in England in 1956 as registered charity no. 241456.

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Printed in Bristol by 4Word Ltd.

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ISSN 0010-003X ISSN 2634-1182 (Online version)

THE COAT OF ARMS

The journal of the Heraldry Society



Fourth Series

Volume IV

2021

Number 238 in the original series started in 1952

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THE ARMS OF THE CISTERCIAN ABBEYS AS DRAWN BY DOM ANSELM BAKER part 4: SOUTH EAST ENGLAND.

MICHAEL CARTER F.S.A, F.R.Hist.Soc.

Abstract

Of the thirteen arms here considered, Baker's presumed source was the illustrations in Tanner's Notitia Monastica, published in 1744, which accounts for eight of the examples. He wrongly ascribed to Medmenham Abbey the arms of Mendham, likely based on a piece of misinformation in Tanner. Of the remaining four which do not occur in Tanner, two have been ascribed the arms of the founders, and another is based on the Robertsbridge Abbey seal which was readily available to Baker. Curiously, for Coggleshall Abbey he eschewed Tanner's correct record in favour of an erroneous fabrication based on the arms of the founder. Taking the sources of inspiration for the arms of these abbeys; five were arms of founders, three are likely examples of canting, one is based on the dedicatory saint, and one might relate to a miraculous object kept at the abbey concerned.

Warden Abbey, Bedfordshire: Azure three pears vert (sic)

Walter Espec founded the abbey in 1136 as a daughter house of his earlier foundation at Rievaulx (Yorkshire). With an income in 1535 of £389, it was a moderately wealthy house.¹

Multiple sources attest to the use of heraldry by the monastery and its abbots.² These include the three morses now at the British Museum, which are among the finest examples of late medieval monastic metalwork to survive from anywhere in England.³ All three have heraldic decoration. One has the arms of the abbey (*Azure three pears or*; the tinctures given by Dom Baker are incorrect⁴), which flank an image of the Virgin and Child. These are canting arms, referring to a variety of pears (warden pears) for which the abbey was famous. The arms are documented as painted on a corbel in the now demolished fourteenth-century transept of Bedford Parish Church. They are also given as the arms of the abbey in an early sixteenth-century heraldic source, with a variation of the arms, incorporating a crosier, ornamented the counter seal of the abbey, appearing on its surrender deed of 1538.⁵

¹ 'Houses of Cistercian Monks: The abbey of Warden', in *VCH Bedford*, vol. I, pp. 361–366.

² One reference which Dom Anselm would definitely have seen was Thomas Tanner, *Notitia Monastica* (London, 1744) p. xlv no.2 where the pears are golden.

³ British Museum, MLA 53, 67, 1–3. For a detailed analysis and discussion of their heraldry and significance, see the articles by M. Carter, 'Cracking the Code: The Warden Abbey Morses', *Antiquaries Journal*, vol. 91 (2011), 175–93 and 'Morse Decorated with the Crucifixion and the Monogram of Abbot Walter Clifton of Warden Abbey', *British Art Studies*, vol. 6 (2017).

⁴ Presumably Baker felt that this was in error since it broke the prohibition of placing metal on metal.

⁵ Carter, 'Cracking the Code', 177; CA L10 64v.

THE COAT OF ARMS

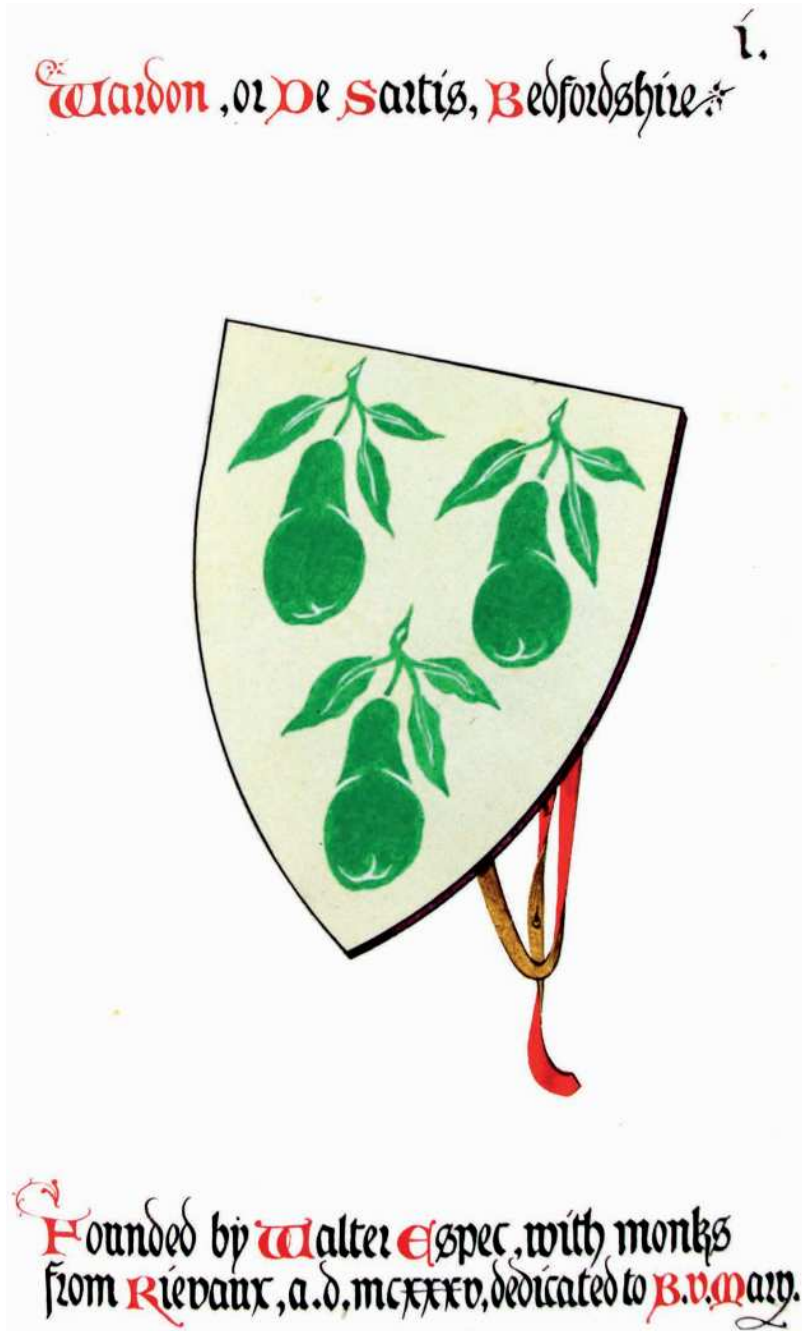


Figure 1: Warden Abbey, Bedfordshire. All illustrations are by Dom Anselm Baker. The photographs taken by Paul A. Fox and reproduced with the gracious permission of the Abbot and Community of Mount St Bernard's Abbey, Leicestershire.

CISTERCIAN ABBEYS

The other two morsers are ornamented with a crosier and the initials W C. This can be confidently identified as the monogram of Abbot Walter Clifton, who ruled between c.1377 and c.1397. He was a figure of some importance within the Cistercian Order, as in 1381 and again in 1386, he was empowered by the pope, together with the abbot of Rievaulx, to convene a general chapter of English Cistercian monasteries.⁶ The morsers show close affinities to the contemporary metalwork badge ornamented with the white heart of King Richard II.⁷

Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire: *Azure three bars wavy argent*

A daughter house of Fountains Abbey (Yorkshire), Woburn was founded in 1145. Its patron was Hugh de Bolebec, a wealthy landowner with extensive estates in Bedfordshire and beyond. Bolebec was a supporter of monastic reform and was also patron of Medmenham Abbey (Buckinghamshire; see below), a daughter house of Woburn. Several other prominent local families also made generous grants to Woburn, thus providing a basis for its wealth which endured to the time of its suppression in 1538 when it had an income of a little under £400.⁸

The earliest evidence for the use of the abbey's arms (given above) appears in an early sixteenth-century book of arms.⁹ Their origin is obscure and they are not those of the founding Bolebec family (*Vert a lion rampant argent*) or of any other early benefactor (for instance Fitton and Pirot).¹⁰ Nor can then be assigned to any other family documented in the *Dictionary of British Arms*. Since they are visually suggestive of flowing waters they may be considered as canting arms, since Woburn means 'winding stream'.¹¹

There is scant evidence of the use of heraldry by the abbots of Woburn. However, the personal seal of Abbot William de Wardone (1346-c.1363) is ornamented with the initial W.¹²

⁶ Carter, 'Cracking the Code', 180–84; Carter, 'Morse Decorated with the Crucifixion and the Monogram of Abbot Walter Clifton'.

⁷ Musée des Beaux-Arts, Troyes; M. Campbell, 'Badge of Richard II', in J.J. Alexander and P. Binski ed., *The Age of Chivalry: art in Plantagenet England* (London, 1987), pp. 524.

⁸ 'Houses of Cistercian Monks: The abbey of Woburn', in VCH Bedford, vol.1, pp. 366–370.

⁹ CA MS L10 f.64v; Also in Tanner Notitia p. xlv no.3.

¹⁰ For the arms of Bolebec, see DBA vol.1, p. 139.

¹¹ Eilert Ekwall, *The concise Oxford dictionary of English place-names* (Oxford, 1960), p. 529.

¹² R.H. Ellis, *Catalogue of Seals in the Public Record Office*, vol. 1: *Monastic Seals* (London, 1986), p. 101.

Woburn, Bedfordshire:

ii



Hounded by Rugh, Viscount de Bolebec.
a.d. mcxlv, in honour of the mother of God.

Figure 2: Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire.

Biddlesdon Abbey, Buckinghamshire: *Argent two bars and a canton gules*

Also known as Bittlesden, the abbey was founded in 1147 by Arnold de Bois (or Bosco), seneschal of the earl of Leicester. The monks came from the earl's own foundation at Garendon (Leicestershire). Nothing remains of the abbey's buildings and its history is poorly documented.¹³

Biddlesdon appears to have had multiple heraldic identities, the earliest evidence for which is a fourteenth-century seal. Its base is decorated with a shield carrying the arms *a fesse and a canton*. These were identified by Walter de Grey Birch (1842–1924), keeper of manuscripts at the British Museum, as the arms of the founder.¹⁴ Tanner, however gave the arms as drawn by Baker, which he identified as those of the founder.¹⁵ Medieval sources attest to the use of this shield, with the tinctures given by Dom Baker, as the arms of Bois.¹⁶

Medmenham Abbey, Buckinghamshire: *Or on a fess gules three roundels argent*

One of the smaller Cistercian houses in England, it was founded by Hugh de Bolebec, patron of Woburn (see above) at the turn of the thirteenth century and settled by monks from his earlier foundation. He was so devoted to Medmenham that he took the Cistercian habit as his death approached. However, the monastery never thrived, and at the time of its suppression in 1536 its community consisted of the abbot and a single monk.¹⁷

There is no evidence for the abbey's coat of arms. Those assigned to it by Dom Baker are in fact the arms of Mendham, a Cluniac priory in Suffolk.¹⁸

¹³ 'Houses of Cistercian Monks: The abbey of Biddlesden', in VCH *Buckingham* vol. 1, pp. 365–369.

¹⁴ BM Seals no.2657.

¹⁵ Tanner, *Notitia* p. xlv no.7.

¹⁶ DBA vol. 1, p. 27.

¹⁷ D.M. Robinson, ed., *The Cistercian Abbeys of Britain: far from the concourse of men* (London, 1998) pp. 143–44.

¹⁸ J.A. Goodall, 'Arms of Religious Corporations', in S. Ashley (ed.), *At the Roots of Heraldry: collected papers of John Archibald Goodall*, Harl. Soc., vol. 21 (2018), p. 115. Tanner is probably responsible for the confusion of Medmenham with Mendham as on p. xxix of his *Notitia* under Buckinghamshire he states 'for the arms of Mendham see Madox's *Formulare Anglicanum* (London, 1702) p. 360'.

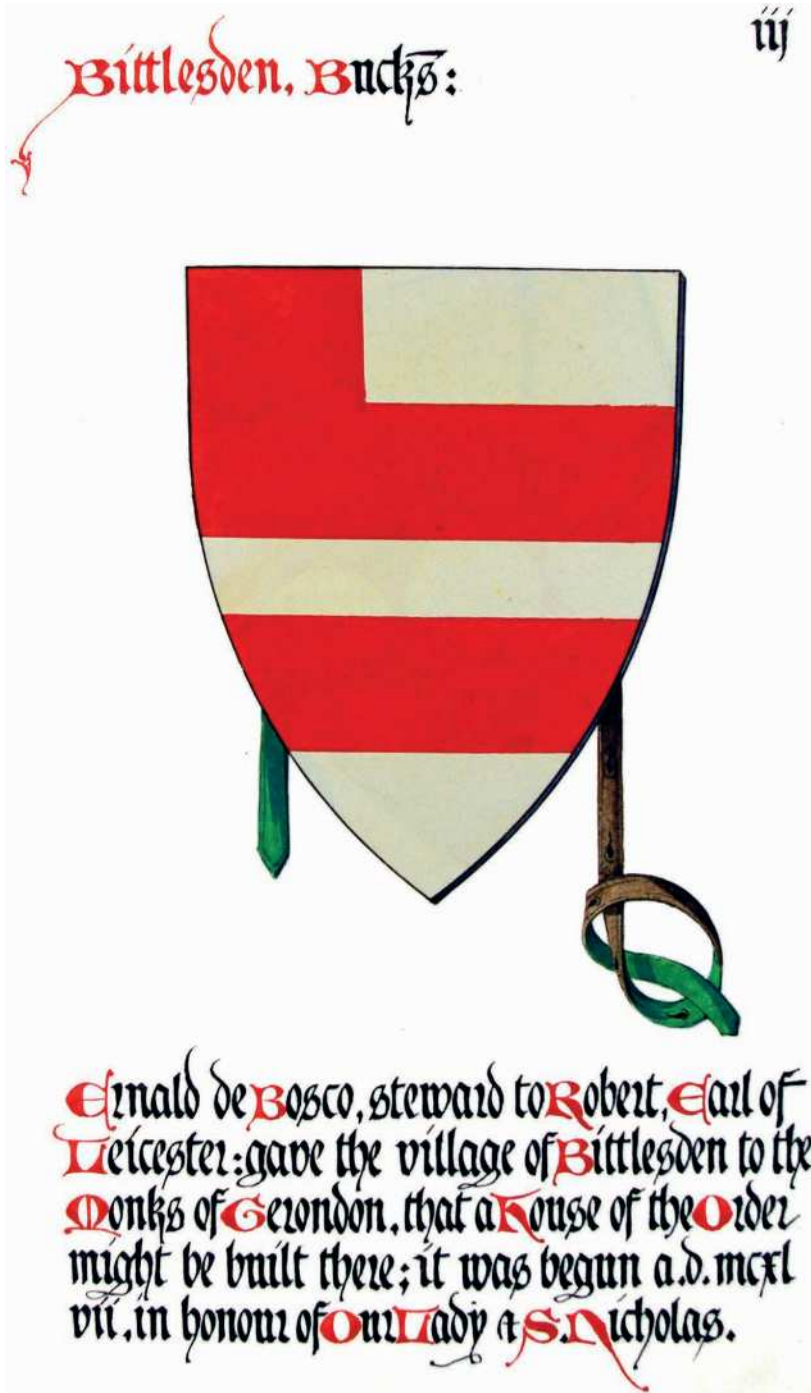


Figure 3: Biddlesdon Abbey, Buckinghamshire

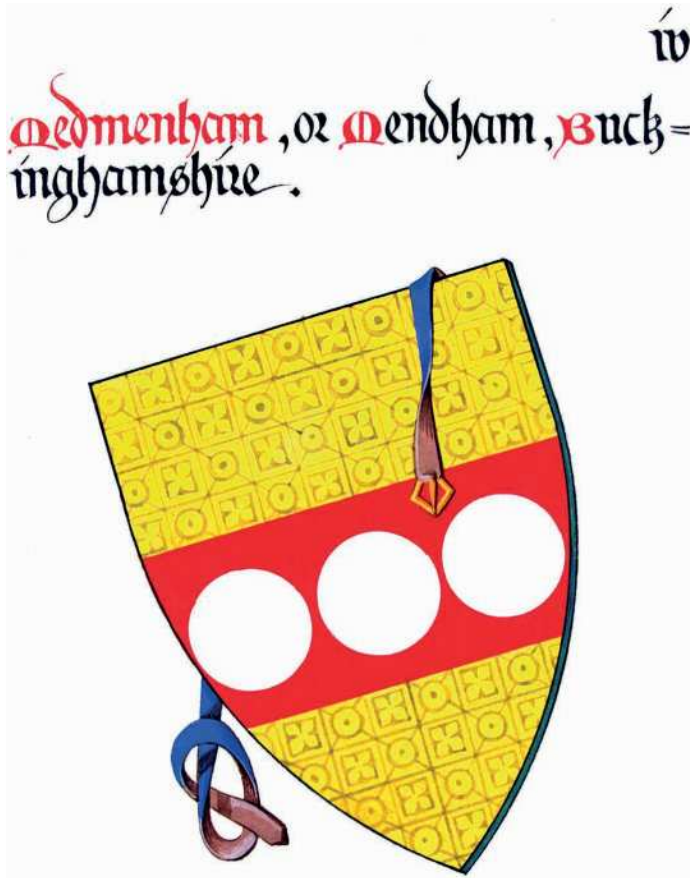


Figure 4: Medmenham Abbey, Buckinghamshire (wrongly attributed).

Robertsbridge Abbey, East Sussex: *The church, with tall central spire and two gables each with cross finials, standing on a bridge of three tall pointed arches and at either end a round crenallated tower.*

The abbey was founded in 1176 by Alured de St Martin as a daughter house of Boxley (Kent). Its original site was close to Salehurst. However, flooding made the site unsustainable and in about 1250 the community moved to new buildings on the south side of the river Rother. The monastery remained on this spot until it was dissolved in 1538.¹⁹

¹⁹ Robinson, *Cistercian Abbeys*, pp. 165–65.

THE COAT OF ARMS



Figure 5: Counter seal of Robertsbridge Abbey
from *Sussex Arch Collections* vol.8 (1856) p.143.

The abbey's arms are not documented in medieval sources. The shield depicted by Dom Baker in fact shows the monastery's counter seal (**Figure 5**), in use between the thirteenth century and the Dissolution.²⁰ Although not drawn by Baker, this also included the letters 'P R' for *Pons Roberti*. This can leave little doubt that the church on the bridge was intended to revoke the name of the monastery.²¹ The monks seem to have taken an interest in heraldry. A fragmentary fourteenth-century register from the abbey is decorated with coats of arms and has proved a useful source for the identification of blazons.²²

²⁰ An illustration of the seal was available to Baker in Rev George Miles Cooper's 'Notices of the Abbey of Robertsbridge', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, vol 8 (London, 1856) p. 143.

²¹ BM Seals no.3912; R.H. Ellis, *Catalogue of Seals* p. 77, illustrated pl. 53, M731.

²² BL MS Additional 28550; DBA, vol. 4, pp. xxvii, 97.

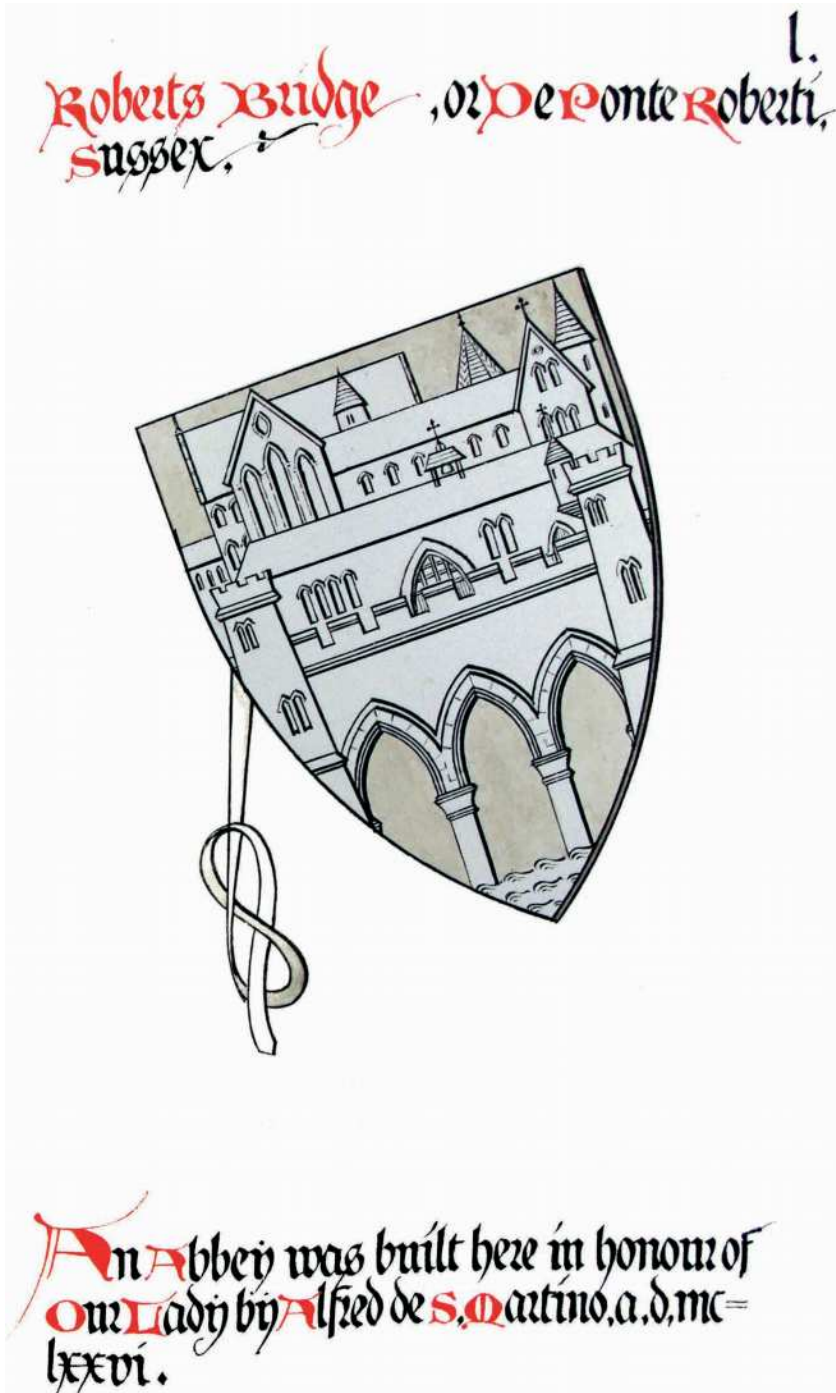


Figure 6: Robertsbridge Abbey, East Sussex.

THE COAT OF ARMS

Coggeshall Abbey, Essex: *Gules two leopards or impaling or three torteaux gules, two and one*

Settled by a community of Savignac monks, Coggeshall was founded in 1140 by King Stephen and Queen Matilda. Together with all other Savignac houses, in 1147 it was absorbed into the Cistercian Order. Despite being a royal foundation, Coggeshall was never a large monastery. In 1291, the temporalities of the abbey were assessed at a little over £131 and in 1535 its income was £251.²³

The diminutive scale of the dormitory range has led to the suggestion that it was built for a maximum of twenty-four monks. Little now remains of the monastery; the finest survival is the early thirteenth-century gatehouse chapel. Architecturally, Coggeshall's main claim to fame is that brick was used as the main building material. The abbey is therefore one of the earliest medieval structures in England for which it is known that brick was manufactured.²⁴

Coggeshall retained its royal associations well into the late Middle Ages. It was required to care for corrodians nominated by the Crown, a burden which contributed to the financial woes of the monastery in the late fourteenth century. More positively, in 1345 King Edward III granted a tun of wine a year to the abbey. This was in reward for the services of a monk chaplain who sang the divine office daily in the abbey church for the King and his family. The grant was confirmed in 1379, 1400 and 1463.²⁵

This enduring connection with the Crown was reflected in the abbey's use of heraldry. A damaged seal appended to its 1538 surrender deed depicts in the left of its base a shield ornamented with the royal arms, quarterly *France modern and England*. The corresponding shield to the right is broken away. However, an impression referred to in Dugdale's *Monasticon* bears a shield with three cocks, arms canting on the name of the monastery.²⁶ That these were indeed arms used by the abbey is supported by the seal of Abbot William (c.1455–c.1469) which is decorated with a cock and the legend GALLVS CANTET ('the cock crows').²⁷

The arms attributed to the abbey by Dom Baker do not have any medieval foundation and are likely a nineteenth-century antiquarian confection. The leopards dexter are fictive arms given to King Stephen. They are impaled with the three torteaux of Boulogne, clearly intended to represent Queen Matilda of Boulogne.²⁸

²³ 'Houses of Cistercian Monks: the abbey of Coggeshall', in VCH Essex, vol.2, pp. 125–129.

²⁴ The surviving buildings and their history are discussed in Robinson, *Cistercian Abbeys*, pp. 88–89. The gatehouse chapel is discussed within its wider content in J. Hall, 'English Cistercian Gatehouse Chapels', *Cîteaux: commenarii cistercienses*, vol. 52 (2001), 61–92. For the use of brick, see J.S. Gardner, 'Coggeshall Abbey and its Early Brickwork', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, vol. 18 (1955), 19–31.

²⁵ 'Houses of Cistercian Monks: the abbey of Coggeshall'.

²⁶ BM Seals no.2972 ; William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum: a new edition*, ed. J. Caley, H. Ellis and B. Bandinel, vol. 5. (London, 1849), p. 452. Three cocks given as the arms of abbey in the DBA vol.2 p. 170, citing BM Seals. Goodall follows Birch and suggests the cocks are canting arms; see 'Arms of Religious Corporations', p. 93. The arms with the three cocks were known in the eighteenth century; see Tanner, *Notitia*, p. xxx. For the etymology of the abbey's name, which supports a pronunciation as 'cock' or 'cox', see A.D. Mills, *A Dictionary of British Place Names* (Oxford, 1991), p. 123.

²⁷ Ellis, *Catalogue of Seals*, p. 25; for this abbot, see D.M Smith, *Heads of Religious Houses England and Wales*, vol. 3: 1377–1540 (Cambridge, 2008), p. 280.

²⁸ For the arms of Boulogne, see Paul.A. Fox, *Great Cloister: a lost Canterbury tale* (Oxford, 2020), pp. 230–31.

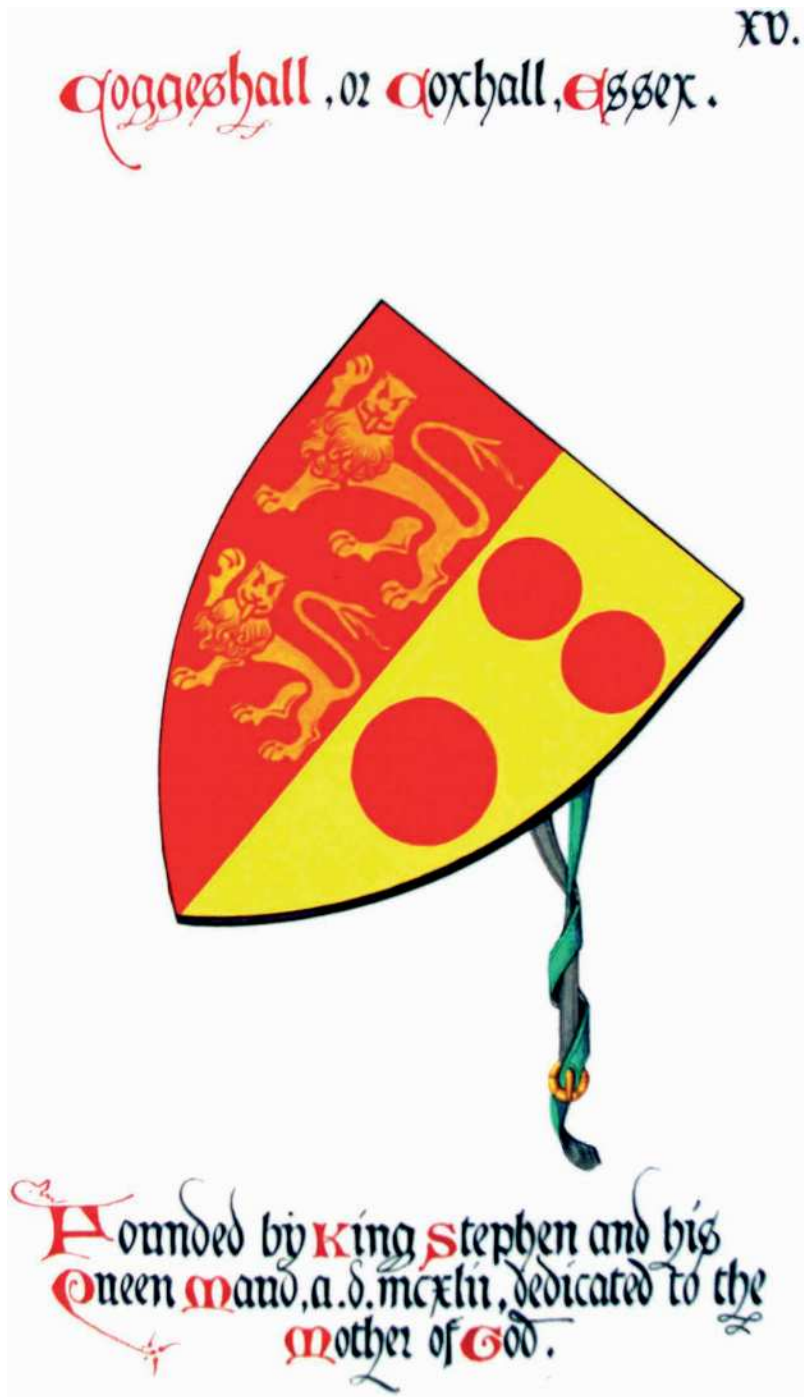


Figure 7: Coggeshall Abbey, Essex.

Stratford Langthorne Abbey, Essex: *Or three chevrons gules and over all a crosier bendwise argent.*

William de Montfitchet founded the abbey in 1135 for a community of Savignanc monks; in 1147, together with all other houses of that congregation, it was absorbed into the larger Cistercian Order.²⁹ The arms used by the abbey, are recorded in an early sixteenth-century heraldic source,³⁰ which might have been slightly in error since they are the reverse tinctures of those of the founder's family, *Gules three chevrons or*.³¹

Montfitchet was generous to his foundation, his grants providing the basis for the abbey's wealth for rest of the Middle Ages. In 1291, the income derived from its temporalities amounted to the considerable sum of £209 and in 1535 the abbey was valued at £511, making it one of the richer Cistercian houses in England.³²

The abbey was located in what is now the east London suburb of West Ham. Nothing now remains of its buildings, but the plan of the church has been partially uncovered by excavations.³³ The documentary sources are plentiful and show that Humphrey de Bohun, earl of Hereford and Essex, who died in 1336, was buried in its church. The aristocratic ladies Margaret de Vere and Margaret Pole, countess of Salisbury (d. 1541) are known to have had lodgings within the abbey's precincts.³⁴

The abbey's wealth and proximity to London ensured that it occupied a prominent position in ecclesiastical and secular affairs, the influence of its abbot extending beyond the precincts of his own monastery.³⁵ Heraldic evidence for this is provided by the presence of what is likely to have been the abbey's shield among the arms of Cistercian monasteries which decorated the chapel of St Bernard's College (now St John's), the Cistercian *studium* at Oxford, where there was much building activity in the years around 1500. These shields are no longer extant. However, they were recorded in the seventeenth century by the antiquary Antony à Wood, who stated that one of these shields was emblazoned with three chevrons, plausibly identifiable as the arms of Stratford Langthorne.³⁶

²⁹ For the history of the abbey, see 'Houses of Cistercian Monks: the abbey of Stratford Langthorne', in VCH Essex, vol.2, pp. 129–133.

³⁰ CA Ms L10 f.64v; Tanner, *Notitia* p. xlv no.48.

³¹ DBA vol. 2, pp. 516,519. *Or three chevrons gules* being the arms of the family of Clare.

³² D. Knowles and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses England and Wales* (London, 1953), p. 116. The abbey was suppressed on 18 March 1538, the abbot and fourteen monks signing the surrender deed.

³³ For what is known of the buildings, see Robinson, *Cistercian Abbeys*, pp. 180–81. The east end of the church and monastic cemetery were excavated as part of the Jubilee Line Extension Project, the results and finds reported in B. Barber, S. Chew, T. Dyson and B. White, *The Cistercian Abbey of St Mary Stratford Langthorne, Essex*, MoLAS Monograph, 18 (London, 2004).

³⁴ Barber et al, *Cistercian Abbey of St Mary Stratford*, pp. 103, 71.

³⁵ For instances, see VCH Essex, op.cit.

³⁶ W.H. Stevenson and H.E. Salter, *The Early History of St John's College* (Oxford, 1939), p. 58. For the involvement, not always enthusiastically, of the abbot of Stratford in the endowment, construction and furnishing of the college, see pp. 19, 27, 62, 65, 81.



Figure 8: Stratford Langthorne Abbey, Essex.

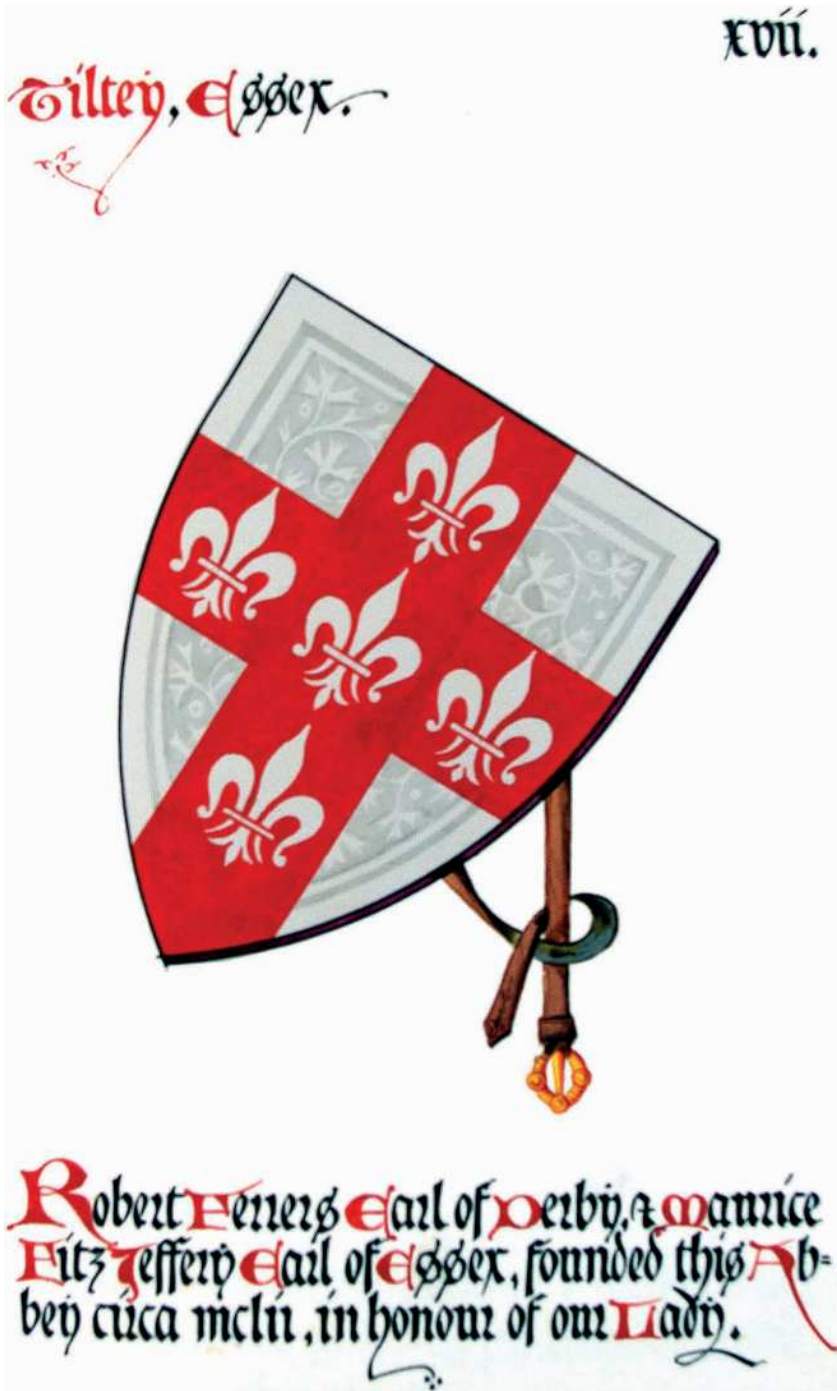


Figure 9: Tilty Abbey, Essex.

Tilty Abbey, Essex: *Argent on a cross gules five fleurs de lis argent*

A daughter house of Warden Abbey (Bedfordshire), Tilty was founded in 1153 by Maurice FitzJeoffrey and his overlord, Robert de Ferrers, earl of Derby. The monks discharged their spiritual responsibilities to their founders well into the late Middle Ages. In 1322, rents from recently acquired properties in London were used to support a monk to sing the divine office for the souls of the abbey's donors.³⁷

The abbey's arms, recorded in an early sixteenth-century source,³⁸ are not, however, taken from those founders or other benefactor, and instead reflect the religious identity of the monks.³⁹ Like all Cistercian monasteries, the abbey was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Featuring prominently on the arms are fleur de lis, one of the Virgin's best-known symbols in art. The abbey's seal matrix survives at St John's College, Cambridge. It conforms to the pattern for Cistercian seals mandated in 1335 by Pope Benedict XII.⁴⁰ Circular in shape, it depicts the seated Virgin and Child. She holds a sceptre with the fleur de lis.⁴¹

In 1535, the abbey's income was assessed at £167, well below the £200 threshold for a lesser monastery. Its fate sealed, it was dissolved in 1536, the contents of the church, abbot's chamber and claustral buildings inventoried and sold, their modest nature and value reflecting the status of the monastery.⁴²

Sawtry Abbey, Huntingdonshire: *Argent two bars gules fretty or*

The abbey was a daughter house of Warden Abbey (Bedfordshire), founded by Simon de Senlis, earl of Huntingdon, in 1147.⁴³ The only medieval evidence for abbey's arms occurs in an early sixteenth-century book of arms, which gives the shield noted above.⁴⁴ John Speed (1551/52–1639), the early modern cartographer, identified these arms as those of Simon de Senlis.⁴⁵ Medieval evidence for this is lacking, instead showing that the arms were used by Clopton and also, in the mid-fourteenth century, by one Thomas de Marshall.⁴⁶ It has not been possible to establish a connection between these families and Sawtry.

The abbey was dissolved as one of the lesser monasteries in 1536. An inventory of its possessions taken at this time lists a fustian cloth 'to be before the abbott' and was

³⁷ 'Houses of Cistercian Monks: the abbey of Tilty', in VCH Essex vol. 2, pp. 134–136..

³⁸ CAMs L10 f.66; Tanner, *Notitia*, p. xlv no.49.

³⁹ Those of FitzJeoffrey are *Vair an escutcheon quarterly or and gules*, whereas the arms of Ferrers are *Vairy or and gules*; see DBA vol. 3, p. 265 and vol. 4, p. 451.

⁴⁰ For seals of this type, see T.A. Heslop, 'Cistercian Seals in England and Wales', in C. Norton and D. Park, ed., *Cistercian Art and Architecture in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 278–283.

⁴¹ BM Seals no.4192.

⁴² See the articles by R.C. Fowler, 'Inventories of Essex Monasteries in 1536', *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society* (TEAS), vol. 9 (1903), 287–89 and 'Essex Monastic Inventories, TEAS vol. 10 (1904), 14–15.

⁴³ 'Houses of Cistercian Monks: the abbey of Sawtry', in VCH Hunts vol. 1, pp. 391–392.

⁴⁴ CAMs L10 f.65; Tanner, *Notitia*, p. xlv no.65.

⁴⁵ Goodall, 'Arms of Religious Corporations', pp. 77, 125.

⁴⁶ DBA vol. 1, p. 22.



Figure 10: Sawtry Abbey, Huntingdonshire.

CISTERCIAN ABBEYS

decorated with 'dyverse armes' and sold to the Thomas Legh, commissioner for the dissolving of the monasteries, for 6*d*.⁴⁷

Boxley Abbey, Kent: *argent a bend sinister of three lozenges and on a canton gules a crosier palewise or.*

The monastery was founded in 1143 or 1146 by William of Ypres for a colony of monks from the great abbey of Clairvaux in France.⁴⁸ Boxley is most famous for its Rood of Grace, an animated sculpture of Christ Crucified. This was a focus of veneration from the middle of the fourteenth century until well into the sixteenth century,⁴⁹ in 1510, the young Henry VIII prayed before and made an offering to the image.⁵⁰ Despite this, the image was soon to become a *cause celebre* of the evangelical cause. In January 1538 the abbey was dissolved, the Rood of Grace denounced as a fraud in a fiery sermon by Bishop John Hinsley of Rochester, a leading reformer.⁵¹

The abbey's arms are well attested, having in 1410 been placed in Bay 13 of the Great Cloister of Canterbury Cathedral, they also survive on two corbels on the sides of a still extant doorway at Boxley.⁵² The tinctures were recorded in an early sixteenth-century source which was picked up by Tanner.⁵³ Their significance is unclear.⁵⁴ The combination of argent and gules in ecclesiastical heraldry is a reminder of the body and blood of Christ, and so the lozenges might be a visual allusion to the wounds of Christ, and to the abbey's great crowd puller, the Rood of Grace.⁵⁵ They are not the arms attributed to the founder, nor those of any of the Kentish families who favoured the abbey with bequests and requests for burial.⁵⁶

There is, however, evidence that the abbey was among the religious houses that had multiple heraldic identities, and embraced the use of imagery that punned on its name. In 1336, the abbey was using a seal ornamented with box-trees.⁵⁷ It was still using this

⁴⁷ M.E.C. Walcott, 'Inventories and Valuations of Religious Houses at the Time of the Dissolution, from the Public Records Office', *Archaeologia*, 43 (1871), p. 239.

⁴⁸ For a summary of the abbey's history, see 'Houses of Cistercian Monks: the abbey of Boxley', in VCH Kent vol. 2, pp. 153–155.

⁴⁹ Sculptures of this type were found across medieval Europe; see K. Kopania, *Animated Sculptures of the Crucified Christ in the Religious Culture of the Latin West* (Warsaw, 2010), with discussion of the Rood of Grace at pp. 284–85.

⁵⁰ G.W. Bernard, *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the remaking of the English Church* (London, 2007), p. 233.

⁵¹ The use of the Rood of Grace to further the case of the reformers is discussed by P. Marshall, 'The Rood of Boxley, the Blood of Hailes and the Defence of the Henrician Church', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 46 (1995), 689–96.

⁵² F.C. Elliston Erwood, 'A note on the arms of Boxley Abbey', *Archaeologia Cantiana* vol. 68 (1954) pp. 214–6.

⁵³ CAMs LA 10 f. 65; Tanner, *Notitia*, p. xlv no. 55.

⁵⁴ An origin eluded John A. Goodall and also the editors of the *DBA*; see Goodall, 'Arms of Religious Corporations', p. 85, *DBA* vol. 1, p. 366.

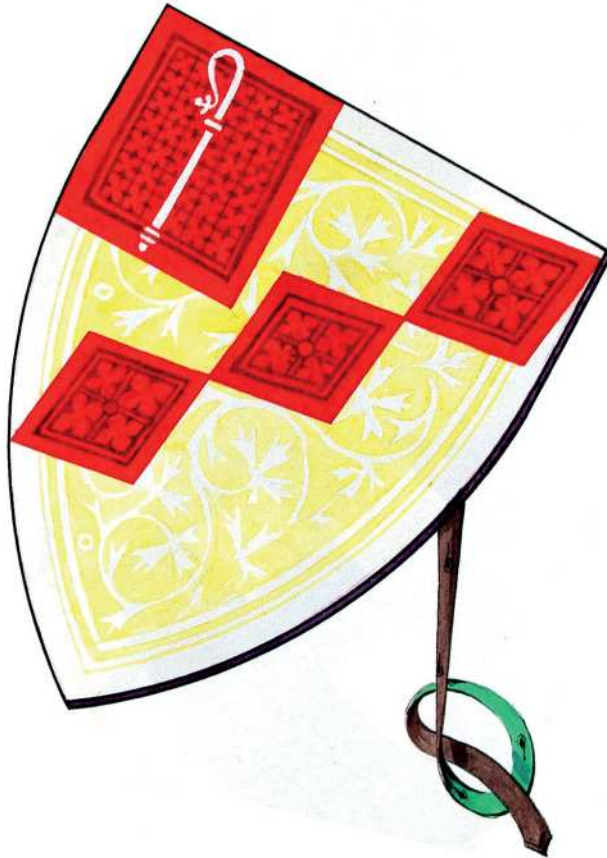
⁵⁵ Fox, *Great Cloister*, op.cit., p. 146. Editor's note: they were possibly placed in Canterbury at the behest of John de Fremingham, who founded a chantry at Boxley, and whose personal arms occur in the adjacent bay.

⁵⁶ For such bequests and burials, see by E. Eastlake, 'Redressing the Balance: Boxley 1146–1538. A Lesser Cistercian House in Southern England', unpublished University of Winchester PhD thesis, 2014, esp. pp. 67–71, 149.

⁵⁷ BM Seals no. 2691.

XXV.

Boxley, Kent.



Founded by William Ipre Earl of Kent
a.d. mclvi, dedicated to the Mother of God,
colonised by monks from Claravalle.

Figure 11: Boxley Abbey, Kent.

imagery at the time of its dissolution, the Court of Augmentations account noting a set of velvet vestments embroidered with silk ‘boxtres’.⁵⁸ There were extensive building works at Boxley in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, including the rebuilding of the cloister, and renovations to the church and dormitory.⁵⁹ Tangible evidence that the late medieval Boxley was ornamented with heraldry is provided by the heraldic corbels, and by floor-tiles discovered during excavation of the site.⁶⁰

St Mary of Graces, Middlesex: *Quarterly France ancient and England*

Also called the New Abbey or Eastminster, St Mary of Graces (usually shortened to St Mary Graces) was founded in 1350 by King Edward III. It was the last medieval Cistercian foundation in England. Located close to the Tower of London on the site of a plague cemetery, it is a rare example of an urban Cistercian abbey.⁶¹ Doubtless because of its royal connections (which was sustained by later monks), the abbey’s church became a favoured location for aristocratic burials.⁶²

Evidence for the abbey’s coat of arms is derived almost entirely from its seals.⁶³ These show that, like so many religious houses, St Mary Graces had multiple heraldic identities. A consistent theme, however, was the use of heraldry closely related to that of the royal founder and his heirs. The seals also show that, as befitted their ecclesiastical and social status, the abbots of this large and wealthy monastery were using personal arms.⁶⁴

The arms attributed to the abbey by Dom Baker are those of the founder. They occur in the base of a seal used by the abbey between 1364 and 1534. This same seal carries an image of the Virgin and Child. In a niche to the left is a king, doubtless Edward III, kneeling in adoration of Virgin. To the right are two monks, one offering a book to the Virgin.

⁵⁸ M. Carter, ‘The Late Monastery of Boxley in the Countie of Kent: Court of Augmentations accounts for the dissolving of Boxley Abbey’, *Archaeologia Cantiana*, vol. 142 (2021), pp. 176–87.

⁵⁹ Robinson, ‘Cistercian Abbeys’, pp. 73–74, D.M. Robinson and S. Harrison, ‘Cistercian Cloisters in England and Wales Part 1. Essay’, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, vol. 159 (2006), 149, 169–70.

⁶⁰ P.J. Tester, ‘Excavations at Boxley Abbey’, *Archaeologia Cantiana*, vol. 88 (1973), 139, 147–8.

⁶¹ ‘Cistercian Monks: Eastminster, New Abbey’, in *VCH London, vol. 1*, pp. 461–464. For a more recent discussion of the abbey’s history and significance, see E. Jamrozak, ‘St Mary Graces: a Cistercian house in late medieval London’, in P. Trio and M. de Smet ed., *The Use and Abuse of Sacred Spaces in Late Medieval Towns* (Leuven, 2006), pp. 153–64.

⁶² Important information for which is provided by heraldic visitations in 1530 and 1533; see A.R. Wagner, *Heralds and Heraldry in the Middle Ages: an inquiry into the growth of the armorial function of heralds* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 143–44 and C.L. Kingford ed., *A Survey of London by John Stow: reprinted from the text of 1603* (Oxford, 1908), pp. 287–88. Burials at the abbey are also discussed in I. Grainger and C. Phillpotts, *The Cistercian Abbey of St Mary Graces, East Smithfield, London*, MOLA Monograph, 44 (London, 2011), pp. 106–110 and C. Steer, ‘Burial and Commemoration in Medieval London, c. 1140–1540’, unpublished University of London PhD, 2013, pp. 33, 51, 52, 94, 235, 247, 293, 295, 296.

⁶³ For the seals below, see BM Seals no.3553; Ellis, *Catalogue of Seals in the Public Records Office*, Monastic seals, vol. 1, p. 57, Goodall, ‘Arms of Religious Corporations’, pp. 112–13.

⁶⁴ This subject is considered in some detail by M. Heale, ‘Mitres and Arms: aspects of the self-representation of the monastic superior in late medieval England’, in A. Müller and K. Stöber ed., *Self-Representation of Medieval Religious Communities: the British Isles in context* (Berlin, 2009), pp. 99–124.



Figure 12: St Mary of Graces.

CISTERCIAN ABBEYS

The seal of Abbot William of Wardon (1360–1411/12) carries an image of a standing abbot flanked on either side by shields. These are emblazoned (L) *quarterly France and England*, (R) *England*.⁶⁵ Paschal Gylot was abbot between c.1420 and c.1423.⁶⁶ His personal seal was decorated with three sets of arms: *Quarterly England and France*; city of *London*; and, *Per pale*, dexter *Per fesse*, in chief *a lion's face*, in base *a fleur de lis*, sinister, *A pastoral staff in pale*. The lion's face is plausibly a reference to the royal founder, the fleur de lis to the Virgin. That these third arms were institutional rather than personal is suggested by their occurrence among the arms of Cistercians abbey's that were recorded in the seventeenth century as decorating the chapel of St John's College, Oxford. This was completed in the early years of the sixteenth century and was to serve St Bernard's College, the Cistercian house of studies at the university.⁶⁷

The seal of Abbot John Pecche (ruled, c.1425–c.1436)⁶⁸ is decorated with *a leopard's face over a crosier*, elements found in the third shield on the seal of Abbot Gylot. In 1516 Henry Moore was elected to the abbacy. He ruled until the dissolution of the abbey in 1539.⁶⁹ His personal seal was ornamented with two shields: *Quarterly, England and France* and a damaged shield. To its right of the second shield is a crosier. It has been suggested that the defaced portion may have been a personal coat.⁷⁰

Rewley Abbey, Oxfordshire: *Argent a lion gules crowned or a border sable bezanty*

Earl Edmund of Cornwall was the founder of Rewley Abbey, its site on the outskirts of medieval Oxford. His Father, Earl Richard, King of the Romans, who died in 1272, had intended to found a college of secular priests to sing for his soul. Edmund replaced this with six Cistercian monks, trusting the efficacy of their prayers to secure his father's place in paradise. The Cornwalls were enthusiastic patrons of the Cistercians. Earl Richard founded Hailes Abbey (Gloucestershire), where his bones were buried (his heart by interred in the Franciscan church, Oxford, beneath a 'noble pyramid) and in 1270 Edmund presented the abbey with its famous relic of the Holy Blood.⁷¹

Rewley, founded in 1281, was colonized by monks from Thame (Oxfordshire). It was not only a Cistercian monastery but also served as the Order's *studium* at Oxford University. However, its location, close to where the city's railway station now stands, was considered too remote from the main nucleus of the university and its collegiate role ceased in the late fourteenth century. Nothing now remains of the buildings of Rewley,

⁶⁵ For this abbot, see D.M. Smith and V.C.M. London, *The Heads of Religious Houses England and Wales*, vol. 2: 1216–1377 (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 290–91.

⁶⁶ Details of this abbot can be found in Smith, *Heads of Religious Houses*, vol. 3, p. 307.

⁶⁷ Stevenson and Salter, *The Early History of St John's College* p. 57.

⁶⁸ His dates and known occurrences in documents can be found in Smith, *Heads of Religious Houses*, vol. 3, p. 308.

⁶⁹ Smith, *Heads of Religious Houses*, vol. 3, pp. 307–08.

⁷⁰ A suggestion made by Ellis, *Catalogue of Seals*, p. 57.

⁷¹ For a recent discussion of patron of the Cistercians by the earls of Cornwall, see M. Carter, 'Abbots and Aristocrats: patronage, art and architecture at Hailes Abbey, c.1300–1539', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, vol. 171 (2018), 154–75.



Figure 13: Rewley Abbey, Oxfordshire.

but its site has been partially excavated.⁷² Memory of its contribution to the intellectual life of the university is perpetuated by Rewley House, which now houses Oxford's Department of Continuing Education.

The arms attributed to the abbey by Dom Baker are those of the Earls of Cornwall. Their is sound evidence for their use by the monastery. Its seal was ornamented with two shields, the first bearing *an eagle displayed*, the arms of Earl Richard as King of the Romans, the second *a lion rampant crowned within a bordure bezanty*, the arms of the earldom.⁷³ A drawing of the abbey's ruins made in 1720 provides further evidence for the use of both these shields. It depicts a doorway arch, either side of which are angels holding shields: to the left the arms of Richard as Kings of the Romans and to the right the arms of the earldom.⁷⁴ The abbey continued to assert its royal associations through the use of heraldry into the fourteenth century. A seal affixed to a document dated 1363 is ornamented with a shield carrying the arms *Quarterly France modern and England with a label of three points*.⁷⁵ This is a strikingly early usage of France modern.

Thame Abbey, Oxfordshire: *Sable on a chief argent two crosiers issuant for the chief*

A daughter house of Waverley Abbey (Surrey), the history of Thame can be traced back to 1137 and the monastery at Otley founded by a group of local tenants on land provided by Robert le Gait. Both the endowments and site were inadequate. Salvation came in the person of Bishop Alexander of Lincoln (1123–43), who at some point between 1139 and 1142 provided the struggling community with a new home at Thame Park.⁷⁶

A visitation of the monastery in 1526 found much to criticise.⁷⁷ In 1529, Dr Robert King, then abbot of Bruern, was installed as abbot of Thame. An antiquarian source records a shield with his arms (or rebus) among the medieval glass at Bruern.⁷⁸ King set about refurbishing the abbatial apartments at Thame, which are remarkable for their early Renaissance work.⁷⁹ The decoration of the Abbot's parlour includes much heraldry, including the arms attributed to the abbey by Dom Baker, Abbot King's initials and monogram and the shields of numerous prominent families.⁸⁰

⁷² J. Munby, A. Simmonds, R. Taylor, D.R.P. Wilkinson, *From Studium to Station: Rewley Abbey and Rewley Road Station*, Oxford, Oxford Archaeology Occasional Paper, 16 (Oxford, 2007).

⁷³ Goodall, 'Arms of Religious Corporations', p. 122. The arms of the earldom, differenced by a crosier, were used by Hailes Abbey.

⁷⁴ Illustrated in Munby et al., *From Studium to Station*, p. 17.

⁷⁵ Ellis, *Catalogue of Seals*, p. 76.

⁷⁶ 'Houses of Cistercian Monks: the abbey of Bruern', in *VCH Oxford*, vol.2, pp. 79–81.

⁷⁷ G.G. Perry, 'Visitation of the Monastery of Thame', *English Historical Review*, vol. 3 (12), 704–22.

⁷⁸ Richard d'Apice and Paul.A.Fox, 'Heraldic Glass at Bruern Abbey in 1574: an interpretation of the record of Lee's Gatherings of Oxfordshire', *CoA*, no. 237 (2020) pp. 171–189. The arms are reported in Tanner, *Notitia*, p. xlvi no.141.

⁷⁹ A. Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales*, vol. 3: *Southern England* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 180–83.

⁸⁰ W.H. Godfrey, 'The Abbot's Parlour at Thame Park', *Archaeological Journal*, vol. 86 (1929), 59–68 with a description and discussion of the heraldry at 60–67.



Figure 14: Thame Abbey, Oxfordshire.