

THE LIFE OF GUY OF MERTON



Translated from original documents

INTRODUCTION

The Epistola (Letter) on the Life of Guy of Merton

In 1969, Marvin Colker, the first editor of the Latin text of the *Epistola de vita venerabilis Guidonis Meritonensis ecclesie canonici* ('the letter on the life of the venerable Guy, canon of the church of Merton,' hereafter *The Life of Guy*), noted that *The Life of Guy* had gone largely unnoticed, apart from getting the occasional mention in books about the clergy or the Augustinian order.¹ But *The Life of Guy* is a rich source for anyone interested in the religion and culture of the twelfth century; perhaps a parallel English-Latin version as presented here will stimulate further study.

The Life of Guy survives in a fifteenth-century copy, now in the British Library,² bound together with *De laudibus diuinae sapientiae* by another Augustinian canon, Alexander Nequam of Cirencester Abbey. Nequam's treatise (fos.1r-89r) is followed by a *Speculum Ecclesie*, what the British Library cataloguer described as 'scribbled theological notes' (fos.89v-90v). This is in a more cursive fifteenth-century hand than the book hand of Nequam's treatise, and is a contrast to the formal, and earlier, fifteenth-century hand of *The Life of Guy* (fos.91r-98r). The *Speculum* is written following directly on from Nequam's treatise, suggesting that the two were contemporaneous. *The Life of Guy*, although bound with both, is separate in both style and gathering: it is a quire of eight leaves, ruled with a margin of about 1½ inches (40mm) and either 25 or 26 lines per side. The book is vellum and is 8¾ inches by 5¾ inches (222mm x 146mm), and some bookworms have bored their way through the outer pages.

The book was in the library at Merton Priory until the Dissolution (see figure 2 page 11), when it became the property of Humphrey Lloyd and his brother-in-law John, Lord Lumley (d.1609), and somehow, after 1666, ended up in the British Museum.³

Figure 1 (on facing page):
The first page of *The Life of Guy*, Royal MS.8 E. ix, f.91r
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Front cover:
The Norman font at Bodmin church
photograph by Christopher Moule

Guy of Merton

The Life of Guy was written by a canon Rainald, a contemporary of Guy at Merton. From *The Life of Guy*, we learn that Guy was a canon of Merton, if not at its beginning, then very shortly afterwards. Guy, an Italian, came to Merton after a career as a 'director of schools';⁴ he seems to have had enough of teaching, and to have sought solace in the cloister.⁵ He could not shake off his former career entirely, however: when in the 1120s William Giffard, bishop of Winchester, needed a man of unyielding morality to head up a programme of reform in Taunton, which involved turning the college of secular canons into a regular (Augustinian) priory, he chose Guy. According to the author of the life of Gilbert the Sheriff, William took 'five brothers ... among whom was master Guy, deservedly the most famous among us.'⁶ But either the backsliding canons of Taunton proved too much even for a man of his standing, or the bishop decided that a more pragmatic prior was needed, for Guy returned some while later to Merton – with a great feeling of escape.

Despite this, Guy was not allowed to live out his days in quiet contemplation: after only a short while, we are told (para.12–13), he was sent to re-establish the secular church at Bodmin as an Augustinian priory, this time at the request of another Bishop William – William Warewast, bishop of Exeter. A few months into his priorate, he was riding to Exeter to discuss matters with the bishop when his horse bolted and he was thrown into a pit. His injuries were fatal and he died in Exeter, on the Vigil of the Ascension (para.14). The year of this accident is not given. The *Life* itself was written sometime between 1132 and 1151, as it refers (para.13) to Algar being bishop of Coutances. Geoffrey, sitting by Guy's deathbed, is still only a canon; he was prior of Plympton by 1128,⁷ so Guy's death must therefore have been some time before that, and certainly before 1131, when Algar is known to have been prior of Bodmin.⁸ William Warewast established regular canons at Plympton in 1121 and Launceston in 1127;⁹ it is probable that his foundation at Bodmin was some time between the two, for there are no foundation dates for either Bodmin or Taunton. However, if Rainald can be trusted on the information he does give, then we can work out when Bodmin, at least, was founded. Rainald says that Guy was only back at Merton for a very short period of time between his tenure at Taunton and that at Bodmin. He also says that Guy went to Bodmin in the winter, and on the Ides of May he was dead (para.14), and that Guy died on the Vigil of

the Ascension. The Feast of the Ascension is forty days after Easter Sunday. Easter is a moveable feast, and depends on the lunar calendar: therefore, Easter and the Ascension will be on different dates in different years. The only possible year, where Easter falls on the right day, is 1124, when Easter was 6 April, and therefore the Ascension was 16 May. Guy died on the Vigil of the Ascension, that is, the day before – the 15th, the Ides of May. Bodmin must have been founded in the winter of 1123/4. There is one caveat, however: it is rather a coincidence that Guy died at the Ascension, meaning that his soul could ascend to heaven in the company of Christ himself. But there is no counter-evidence that Rainald invented it, and it was probably one of those lovely serendipities of fate. Certainly 1123/4 would seem a sensible date for Bodmin, leaving plenty of time for Taunton to have been founded in the preceding year or years (c.1120–1123).¹⁰

If we do not know explicitly when Guy died, we have even less information (none) about when he was born. We can presume that he was of some maturity when he entered the convent at Merton, given his career as a 'noted director of schools'. He became a deacon and then priest (apparently at Prior Robert's behest) in a short space of time. Since the minimum age for a priest was 24, and since Guy had already had a senior career, he must have been at least thirty by this point.¹¹ Robert himself was perhaps born round about 1080,¹² and the two were probably near-contemporaries. Colker, in his introduction to the Latin text, posits that Guy 'may be the distinguished philosopher named in a fragmentary chronicle of French history: 'Hoc tempore tam in diuina quam in humana philosophia floruerunt Lanfrancus Cantuariorum episcopus, Guido Langobardus, Maingaudus Teutonicus, Bruno Remensis.'¹³ It would indeed be nice to think so, for this is a stellar line-up. Lanfranc (c.1005–1089) was William the Conqueror's archbishop; Manegold of Lautenbach (c.1030–c.1103) was a notable teacher and author of several scholarly works (and also a regular canon); Bruno of Rheims was Bruno of Cologne, the founder of the Carthusians (c.1030–1101). Nothing is known about Guido Langobardus (Guy the Lombard), but the fact that the others were of the previous generation may suggest that Guido was also of a previous generation and was not our Guy. On the other hand, Lanfranc was about 30 years older than Manegold and Bruno; following this reasoning, Guido could have been 30 years younger. The absence of evidence is frustratingly intriguing. Leaving Guido Langobardus aside, we can nonetheless hazard a guess that our Guy was born at some time between

the 1060s and 1080s, died in 1124, and joined Merton c.1114, having spent some time teaching, probably in his native Italy or else in Paris, the two birthplaces of the university.

Merton Priory had no particular saint whose relics could provide a shrine and miracles or whose life could provide a hagiography. Instead, it had to rely on the exceptional piety of its founder and its canons for its fame and importance. It is hardly surprising, then, that *The Life of Guy* reads like a hagiography. As Colker noted, Guy is described as saintly, and is given a couple of mini-miracles: he cures Prior Robert of an illness that the prior could not shake off (para.11) and he quells storms (para.12) by prayer. When the cloak given to wrap his corpse is discovered to be too short, it grows longer, 'as if by a miracle' ('subito mirum in modum satis', para.15). He died on the Vigil of the Ascension, which gave the opportunity for him to ascend to heaven with Christ: what better proof of a living apostle? Guy's *vita* (life) also shares motifs with the *vitae* of saints from the same period: the life of St Hugh of Lincoln notes that he laid aside the outer cloak of lambswool-lined cloth and wore only a sheepskin and a hair shirt, and he had only a blanket, bolster and skins for his bedding; Guy slept on uncovered straw (para.5), and 'often in winter he wore only his tunic under a thin cape, with no cassock.' (para.9) The life of St Waltheof says that he wept at Mass;¹⁴ Guy could barely get through Mass without weeping (para.6).

Guy's conduct is a model for anyone wishing to live the *vita apostolica*, or life of the Apostles – the benchmark for religious conduct in the twelfth century. He leads by example and by preaching, and so could be considered to be a paradigm of Augustinianism. One historian argued that a difference between monks and canons was that while monks reflected on others' behaviour for their own individual spiritual journey, canons learned from others' behaviour *and* consciously taught others through their own – *verbo et exemplo*, by word and by example.¹⁵ Whether that was the case or not (and not every historian agrees), Guy was certainly an example to others: his piety was unquestionable; his humility such that the prior had to insist on promoting him; he preached to his brethren, said the Office and celebrated Mass fervently; he lived in poverty, and looked after the poor of his flock.

With such an exemplary attitude, it is unsurprising that Guy was chosen to convert the lax canons of Taunton. For centuries, many clergy had aimed at the ideal of the Apostolic life, living, as the Apostles did, communally,

with no personal possessions, and in a state of humble poverty and chastity, in order to serve the community well. At various points, clerical life needed reforming, as over time clerics gained possessions, wives and families. The eleventh and twelfth centuries saw one such wave of reform, spurred on by Pope Gregory VII (d.1085), who pushed for an ascetic and righteous Christianity. Clerical marriage was banned, and lay control of the church was limited, if not stopped. Regular orders, that is, groups of people living under a rule (monks, for example), were encouraged. And here we see the rise of the Augustinian order of regular canons. A canon was a cleric (a priest, deacon, sub-deacon or possibly someone in minor orders), and it was increasingly fashionable for canons to collect together under a rule. The rule was not the clear and strict Rule of St Benedict that monks followed – being clerics, they needed something more flexible than this rule allowed. They used the Rule of St Augustine, which was based on a letter that Augustine of Hippo (354–430) wrote about how to live communally. This rule was only a guide, and each foundation of regular canons worked out their own details, or observances. Eventually, by the beginning of the thirteenth century, the regular canons were organised into a formal order, the Order of St Augustine – but even so, they were not quite like the orders of monks. When Gundreda and William de Warenne founded Lewes Priory, they chose the Cluniac order. This meant that the priory was tied to the abbey of Cluny (France) spiritually (they followed the same customs), financially, and governmentally (the prior of Lewes was subordinate to the abbot of Cluny). When Castle Acre Priory was founded from Lewes, it became a daughter-house of Lewes, in a similar way. The Augustinian houses did not generally share the mother-daughter relationship of the monastic orders;¹⁶ instead, they were independent houses under the jurisdiction of the local bishop. Bishops such as William Giffard approved of regular canons: this was an excellent way of ensuring the spiritual continence of their clergy, and that the Divine Office and Mass would be said and celebrated correctly. Various bishops in the early twelfth century founded Augustinian houses, using canons from existing houses to populate or convert them.

The story of Taunton is fairly typical of the period: here we have a college (collection) of secular canons (i.e. not living under a rule), who have fallen into bad habits – property, marriage, comfortable living. The new bishop wishes to reform them, and so converts the house into a regular establishment – by expelling the existing canons, or, as seems to be the

case here, by converting them to Augustinian observances. Despite Guy's apparent failure to improve the morality of the local canons, the regular foundation at Taunton continued, receiving royal confirmation from Henry II.¹⁷

The situation at Bodmin was slightly different. There was a collection of (secular) canons, presided over by one Master Algar (para.13). Algar is described as *procurator* of Bodmin. This means an overseer or proctor; J C Dickinson translated it as 'dean', perhaps following Henry Jenner, who wrote, in an article on the ninth-century Bodmin Gospels, that by the twelfth century, the ancient monastery of Bodmin had evolved into 'a college of clerks ... governed by a dean.'¹⁸ We know that Bishop Warelwast of Exeter was an exponent of the regular canons, converting Plympton and Launceston into houses of Augustinian canons, but the impetus at Bodmin seems, from the text, to have come at least partly from Algar – that is, from the community itself. The desire for regularising the canons at both Colchester and Huntingdon was from within their communities, so there were precedents.¹⁹ Algar was by 1113 a 'clerk' at Bodmin, where he had to stop a fight between a Cornishman and a Frenchman about whether King Arthur lived. This was during the fund-raising visit by the canons of Laon cathedral and their touring-relics of the Blessed Virgin Mary.²⁰ They probably went to Bodmin because of Algar. He had spent time in Laon, as it was one of the intellectual centres of the Anglo-Norman world, and Algar's receptiveness to the reformist Augustinian order may well have come from there.²¹ In any case, the canons of Bodmin seem to have been much more receptive to regular ideals than the ones at Taunton. Algar's fellow at Guy's deathbed was Geoffrey, a canon of Plympton, who became prior of Plympton in 1128. Very little is known about Geoffrey, but the Plympton Annals note the foundation of Merton, and it is likely therefore that canons from Merton (as well as Holy Trinity, Aldgate) populated Plympton, and that Geoffrey was formerly a canon of Merton, which is how he knew Guy.²² Plympton continued to be one of the major religious houses in the south-west for the next few centuries.

Of the author and addressee of *The Life of Guy*, we know not much more than their names. Rainald (Rainaldus in Latin) was clearly a canon of Merton. Radulfus, or Ralph, is described as Guy's son – or, rather, Guy is described as Ralph's father. Colker thought that Ralph was Guy's 'carnal,

rather than spiritual son,' citing 'de uita gloriosi parentis tui' and 'Te ... patrissare cognoui 'honorabilis pater tuus,' 'uenerandi parentis tui,' and the admonition not 'a tam religioso parente degeneres.'²³ This is perfectly possible: Guy had been a director of schools before becoming a canon, and even if he had taken minor orders, he could still have married or, at any rate, sired children; besides, there were plenty of examples of children produced by clergy even in major orders, including Aelred, abbot of Rievaulx, Thurstan, archbishop of York, and Richard Poore, bishop of Salisbury.²⁴ On the other hand, the language is not conclusive: Ralph, described by Rainald also as 'karissime frater' ('most beloved brother'), could have been one of Guy's many spiritual children (even a former student): the use of 'pater' was common enough to mean spiritual father, and there are examples of 'parens' being so used, too.²⁵ Rainald's exhortation to him to follow Guy's example suggests that Ralph was in clerical orders: from the text, Ralph does not seem to have been a canon, at least not at any of the three houses with which Guy was associated. He was probably a secular cleric, which itself may suggest kinship with Guy, for it was common for the next generation, whether sons or nephews, to follow the previous one into the church.²⁶ The reference to St Silvinus (see page 30 note xxxiv) may be significant, and could locate Ralph (or indeed Rainald) to north-eastern Normandy; on the other hand, St Silvinus might have been celebrated widely, but he does not seem to have been celebrated at Merton.²⁷

One more thing needs be said here, and that is about the nature of letters in the twelfth century. Letters were rarely a private affair, for the eyes of the recipient only: they were generally meant to be read by, or read out to, a number of people.²⁸ Fictitious recipients were not unknown – it is just possible (although unlikely) that Ralph did not even exist! The letter was supposed to be a moral exemplar, to encourage canons and other clerics in their moral and spiritual lives, and Rainald signs off by wishing that he himself could imitate the sanctity of Guy. This explains why there was a fifteenth-century copy of it in Merton Priory's library: it was still used then as a reminder to the canons of how to behave.²⁹ Perhaps, indeed, it needed copying because the previous copy had fallen apart through generations of use as an example of the apogee of Augustinian conduct.

Katie Hawks

The Edition and Translation

Merton Priory was one of the most important priories in medieval England. Razed to the ground by Henry VIII, there is little left of its physical structure. Merton's extensive library was scattered, and is largely lost; some manuscripts survive and are to be found in the British Library, the Bodleian, Cambridge University Library, and the libraries of a couple of Oxford and Cambridge colleges, Eton College and the College of Arms. The manuscripts in the College of Arms concern the founder of Merton, Gilbert, sheriff of Surrey, Huntingdon and Cambridge, and in 2019 Merton Historical Society published translations of these texts. British Library Royal MS. 8. E. IX contains the life of one of the priory's founding brethren; this volume presents both a Latin transcription and an English translation of this biography, as a companion piece to the texts concerning Gilbert.

The manuscript was edited in 1969 by Marvin Colker, and this has been an enormous aid to our new transcription and translation. The manuscript is considerably easier to read than the Gilbert texts – in fact, it is about as easy-to-read as medieval manuscripts get! Most of the text is in one continuous paragraph. The paragraphs in this edition are, therefore, editorial (but hopefully easier to read), and they are numbered for ease of reference (Colker's separation into chapters has not been followed). Folio breaks are marked with a /, and the folio number is given in the margin. All abbreviations have been written out in full. Capital and small letters are unchanged, as are 'v' and 'u', which are used somewhat interchangeably. Punctuation marks have evolved: in the Latin text commas and full-stops represent *puncta*, and semi-colons the *punctus elevatus*; standard modern punctuation is used in the translation. Quotations and allusions are italicised, as they do not automatically leap out at us as they would at medieval readers. Biblical references and Psalm numbering noted on the Latin pages are according to the Vulgate. Also following the Vulgate tradition, references are to Sirach rather than Ecclesiasticus, Canticles (Song of Solomon), and 1, 2 and 3 Kings (1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings). Roman numeral markers within the English text refer to the footnotes on facing Latin pages.

It is difficult to capture an author's voice when translating; Rainald used the literary style of the twelfth century, but his prose is thankfully less complicated than that of some of his contemporaries. Even so, some sentences are very condensed, and others are hard to translate literally;

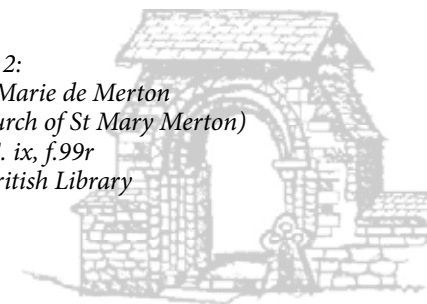
for example, where we in English would use the active voice, Latin uses the passive. In addition, Rainald, like his contemporaries, is very fond of gerunds and gerundives, and superfluous words such as 'ac', 'velut' and 'tunc'. We have tried to balance the original style with readability; this means sometimes having to sacrifice a literal translation.

We are grateful to the British Library for access to the manuscript, as well as permission to reproduce images from the manuscript, and to Christopher Moule for his front-cover photograph of the fine Norman font at Bodmin church. Thanks also go to John 'gloriosus parens' Hawks for his contributions to the translation, and especially to Peter Hopkins, general editor and authority on Merton Priory.

Katie Hawks and Keith Penny



Figure 2:
Liber ecclesie sancte Marie de Merton
(This book belongs to the church of St Mary Merton)
Royal MS.8 E. ix, f.99r
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- 1 M L Colker, 'The Life of Guy of Merton by Rainald of Merton', *Mediaeval Studies*, 31 (1969), pp.250–61. Some extracts were printed by J C Dickinson in his classic book, *The Origins of the Austin Canons and their Introduction into England* (London, 1950).
- 2 British Library, Royal MS 8 E ix, folios 91r–98r.
- 3 http://mlgb3.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/mlgb/book/3962/?search_term=merton%20priory&page_size=500; the British Library catalogue entry is at http://viewer.bl.uk/lamsHViewer/Default.aspx?mdark=ark:/81055/vdc_100000000042.0x000109&ga=2.138379376.1964233420.1572773189-2092001912.1570462821
- 4 Para.2: 'quidam Italicus genere, qui in scolis regendis preclaram famam consecutus fuerat.'
- 5 Para.3: 'Curis secularibus animum impediri semper declinans.' Guy was not the only one to follow this pattern: other Augustinians who had similar mid-life changes include the scholars Alexander Nequam and Robert of Béthune: for Alexander, see A N J Dunning, 'St Frideswide's Priory as a Centre of Learning in Early Oxford', *Mediaeval Studies* 80 (2018), pp.253–96 (available online at <https://andrewdunning.ca/>); for Robert of Béthune, see J Barrow, *The Clergy in the Medieval World* (Cambridge, 2015), pp.115–7.
- 6 P Hopkins and K Penny, ed. and trans., *A Priory Founded: Sheriff Gilbert at Merton* (Merton Historical Society, 2019), I 9.
- 7 A D Fizzard, *Plympton Priory: A House of Augustinian Canons in South-Western England in the Late Middle Ages*, (Brill, 2008), p.102.
- 8 N Orme, *Victoria County History of Cornwall*, vol.ii (2010), p.140; Karen Jankulak, *The Medieval Cult of St Petroc* (Woodbridge, 2000), p.137.
- 9 J Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain 1000–1300* (Cambridge, 1994), p.47.
- 10 See Dickinson, *Origins*, p.118, fn.7; Lionel Green, *Daughter Houses of Merton Priory* (Merton Historical Society, 2002), pp.7–8; M Brett, *The English Church under Henry I* (Oxford, 1975), p.9, fn.4.
- 11 Barrow, *Clergy*, pp.39–41; V Davis, 'Medieval Longevity: The Experience of Members of Religious Orders in Late Medieval England', *Medieval Prosopography*, 19 (1998), pp.112–3.
- 12 Robert died in 1150, having spent 43 years as a canon, and 35 of those years as prior: Hopkins and Penny, *Gilbert*, p.32.
- 13 'In this time there flourished in divine and in human philosophy Lanfranc, bishop [sic] of Canterbury, Guy the Lombard, Manegold the German, Bruno of Rheims.' Colker, *Guy*, p.250, citing *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France* XII (1781) p.3 (now accessible at <https://archive.org/details/recueil-des-historiens-des-gaules-12/page/2/mode/2up>).
- 14 D L Douie and D H Farmer, ed. and trans., *Magna vita Sancti Hugonis: The life of St. Hugh of Lincoln* (Oxford, 1985) ii, p.49; 'Vita S Waldevi auctore Jocelino monacho de Furnesio', *Acta Sanctorum Augusti* I, ed. J Carnandet et al. (Antwerp, 1733), p.264 E (now accessible at https://books.googleusercontent.com/books/content?req=AKW5QaeCffBX3TNr8NO6dZ0zlWobmezUFBBIk29gFbMoY181adfYN5xWjBjSVBEHG1P8yLt-zW5VQ3dUHCKLUhLx-OYXJUJeDz-OLXZoaJHnN2mJYLba4Q6tX_5YJiYv1EZHGB5U_SjESo3bo74LxpYR4gXZ0t1OwsWB4_55AT51tk4036W1-eIAVdOWpZ9QwFhr44b4lYwvxWuGOzyD7qpM1v6l2NzAla4WwhWQ0VLOa23KpI9UQkN3glyKY8xINDWFt3V-eTzx).
- 15 C W Bynum, 'The spirituality of regular canons in the twelfth century', in *Jesus as Mother*, (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 36–47. Cf. Terrie Colk, who argued that, on the contrary, there really was not much of a difference at all between monks and canons, 'Twelfth-century East-Anglian Canons: A Monastic Life?', in *Medieval East Anglia*, ed. C Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 2005), pp.209–224.
- 16 There were exceptions – the orders of Arrouaise and St Victor were regular canons who used the Augustinian rule, but were ordered like Cistercians. Many older Benedictine houses were independent.
- 17 W Page (ed.), *Victoria County History of Somerset*, vol.II, (London, 1911), pp. 141–144: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/som/vol2/pp141-144>.
- 18 Dickinson, *Origins*, p.149; H Jenner, 'The Bodmin Gospels: Presidential Address of the Spring Meeting of the Royal Institution of Cornwall, 23rd May, 1922', *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall* (1923), pp.97–145. He also noted that 'Bodmin' means 'a place of monks'. The Bodmin Gospels themselves are in the British Library. For a history of Bodmin Priory, see Orme, *VCH Cornwall*, pp.139–140.
- 19 Burton, *Monastic Orders*, p.45.
- 20 For the canons of Laon, see <https://archive.org/details/patrologiaecursu156mign/page/492>.
- 21 Orme, *Cornwall*, p.140. He notes that by the 16th century Algar was credited alongside William Warelwast for founding Bodmin.
- 22 Green, *Daughter Houses*, pp.10–1; Dickinson, *Origins*, p.117 fn. 10; F Liebermann, *Ungedrückte anglo-normannische geschichtsquellen* (Strassburg, 1879), p.27.
- 23 Colker, *Guy*, p.251; T D Hardy, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Materials Relating to the History of Great Britain and Ireland to the End of the Reign of Henry VII*, vol.II (Rolls Series; London, 1865), p.139.
- 24 For a discussion of this, see Barrow, *Clergy*, pp.135–49.
- 25 See the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/lexidium>
- 26 Barrow, *Clergy*, pp.115–149.
- 27 Thanks to Andrew Dunning for checking the Merton kalendar, Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 723.
- 28 Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter-collections* (Turnhout, 1976), pp.11–14.
- 29 James Clark wrote that the canons' interest in the house's history was re-awakened in the fifteenth century, and that the life of Guy was rescued from obscurity. But there is no evidence to suggest that their interest in Guy's life was neglected until it was copied out: indeed, a good reason for producing a new copy was that the old one had worn out; J G Clark, 'The Augustinians, History, and Literature in Late Medieval England', in J Burton and K Stöber (eds), *The Regular Canons in the Medieval British Isles* (Turnhout, 2011).

**Epistola de vita venerabilis Guidonis
Meritonensis ecclesie canonici.
Dilecto suo Radulfo, suus Rainaldus.**

1. Petisti, charissime frater et obnixe petisti; quatinus de vita gloriosi parentis tui uel breuiter aliqua tibi transscriberem. Petitioni tue quamuis pie tamen assensum prebere diu distuli, tum multis occupationibus prepeditus; tum potius materie magnitudinem viribus mee possibilitatis nimis preponderare perpendens. Sed quoniam quas imperitia denegat interdum vires caritas sumministrare solet; uitam ipsius saltem summam perstringere temptabo tuoque desiderio prout poteroⁱ satisfacere curabo.

2. Igitur in primordio quo fratres apud Meritonam ad regulariter viuendum secundum institutionem egregii doctoris Augustini congregabantur; quidam Italicus genere qui in scolis regendis preclaram famam consecutus fuerat nomine Guido, ad conuersionem inter ceteros uenit. Dicitur non potest quam humiliter ut susciperetur expetiit, cum quanta deuotione religionis habitum suscepit. Totum enim negotium illud quo ad militiam Christi nouicii promouentur; magnis gemitibus multisque lacrimis et suspiriis prosequabatur. Nam dum ad confessionem
f.91v ut mos est prelato faciendam/ uenisset; tanto dolore affectus est ut loqui vix posset, sic sibi vehementer indignans; ut semetipsum per capillos traheret, caput ad parietem allideret, ex doloris uehementia quam ueraciter ad deum conuerteretur insinuans.

3. Tandem conuentui sociatus; non *ut plerique solent*ⁱⁱ quos *scientia secularis inflat*ⁱⁱⁱ minutas consuetudines monasterii dedignabatur addiscere; sed uelut ab ore dei prolatas diligenter inuestigare et obseruare satagebat. Et quoniam, ut scriptum est *qui modica spernit, paulatim decidit*,^{iv} ita e contrario per minimorum custodiam preceptorum fit progressus ad summa virtutum; sic vir venerabilis implendis maioribus institutis operam dabat; ut non minorem diligentiam minimis obseruandis adhiberet. Verbi gratia. Si quando uel ante capitulum vel

i MS 'petero'.

ii Horace, *Satires* 1.6. (Colker's 'tu' should be 'ut'.)

iii 1 Corinthians 8:1.

iv Sirach 19:1.

**Letter concerning the life of the venerable Guy,
canon of the church of Merton.
To his beloved Ralph, from Rainald.**

1. Dearest brother, you have asked, and with some persistence, that I should give you a brief account of the life of your distinguished parent. Though your request was entirely reasonable, I have nonetheless had to put off fulfilling it for some while, both because I have been hindered by a good deal of business, and rather more because the great wealth of material would outweigh my powers. But since friendship is accustomed to supply the powers that sometimes want of skill denies, I will at least try to touch upon a summary of his life, and satisfy your wishes, insofar as I can.ⁱ

2. And so, at the very beginning when the brothers came together at Merton to live under the rule of the most venerable doctor Augustine, a certain Italian, who had achieved no little fame for his direction of schools,¹ Guy by name, came as a convert with the others. It is impossible to express how humbly he sought to be received, and how devotedly he took up the religious habit.² For he pursued the whole process by which novices are advanced into the army of Christ with many great groans and many tears and sighs. And when he came to making confession before the prior, as the custom is, he was so overcome by sorrow that he could scarcely speak, and so vehemently upset with himself that he pulled out his hair and dashed his head against a wall, demonstrating from this vehemence of sorrow how truly he was turning to God.

3. At last he joined the convent proper; he was not, *as many are*,ⁱⁱ one of those whom worldly *knowledge puffed up*;ⁱⁱⁱ he did not disdain to learn about even the minutest customs of the monastery, but was diligent in searching out and observing them as if they had issued from the mouth of God. And seeing that, as it is written, *he who despises small things shall gradually fall*,^{iv} so, on the contrary, by taking care over the smallest instructions, he rose to be supreme in all virtues. Just as this venerable man devoted himself to the more important customs, so he did not treat the smaller observances with any less diligence. For example, when in front of the Chapter, or

1 'Schools' here means the collection of scholars under a master, which later in the twelfth century would become universities.

2 The habit was the dress of monks or canons. 'Religious' here could have its standard meaning or could mean 'monastic'.

alibi locorum ubi nobis moris est inclinare transisset et non inclinasset, licet iam longius processisset, ilico reuertebatur et tam deuote quam humiliter inclinabat. Amator claustrum erat in tantum, ut cum eum exire causa rationabilis uel necessitas compulisset; quantocius redire festinaret. Curis secularibus animum impediri semper declinans, lectionibus etenim et meditationibus totus deditus erat, non solum *stultiloquia uel scurrilia* sed etiam *ociosa uerba*^v deuitans. Quando fratrum colloquiis intererat./

f.92r

4. Sermones suos iuxta apostolum semper *in gratia sale sapientie condiebat*,^{vi} locutiones certis horis in claustris a patribus non ad destitutionem sed morum instructionem institutas perpendens. In ecclesia diuinis laudibus cum ceteris assistens, quando ut se habet humana miseria corde vagabatur; in semet reuersus sibi que multum indignans; interdum *dentibus stridebat*,^{vii} uel carnem unguibus discerpebat; uel pectus pugno percutiebat; uelut hoc modo mentem stabiliorem reddere posset. Precipue vii Psalmis^{viii} quando in conuentu dicebantur interesse uolebat, dicens quod qui peccatorem se recognoscit; his psalmis qui specialiter pro peccatis instituti sunt, occurrere debeat. Sic enim minuta peccata paruasque negligentias deflebat; acsi omnium criminum reus esset.

5. Quid referam quod suimet ex toto contemptor extiterit, qui nullam corporis curam gerebat, immo uelut hostem infestissimum carnem suam persequebatur, et nisi patris nostri prudentia refragaretur, eandem miro spiritus feruore ieiuniorum et escarum abstinencia funditus consumpsisset. In lectulo dum super uestimenta sua quiescere putaretur; subtus in solo stramento uolutabatur; iuxta illud de Canticis; circuiens f.92v *et querens quem diligebat anima sua*.^{ix} Et in eius/ amorem suspirans; *lauabat per singulas noctes lectum suum, lacrimis suis stratum suum rigabat*.^x Maxime tamen post matutinas usque ad lucem in sacris uigiliis excubare solebat. Quid plura? Tam religiose in omni

v Matthew 12:36; Rule of St Benedict, VI; Rule of St Augustine.

vi Colossians 4:6. Cf. Aelred of Rievaulx, whose prayers were salted with wisdom: F M Powicke (ed. and trans.), *Aelred of Rievaulx and his biographer Walter Daniel* (Manchester, 1922), p.20.

vii Psalm 36:12; Mark 9:17; Acts 7:54.

viii Psalms 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, 142.

ix Canticles 3:1.

x Psalm 6:7.

elsewhere, in places where according to our customs we should bow, if he had passed by and had not bowed, he immediately turned back and bowed with as much devotion as humility, although he had already gone further along his way. He so loved the monastery that, when reasonable cause or necessity required him to leave it, he hurried back again as soon as possible. He always turned away from involving his soul with worldly cares, for he gave himself totally to reading and meditation, avoiding not only *foolish or scurrilous speech* but also *idle words*^v when conversing with the brothers.

4. Following the Apostle, his sermons were always *in grace seasoned with salt*,^{vi} and he considered the readings from the Fathers at certain times in the cloisters not a desertion from customs but instruction in them. When in church, taking his place at divine service with the others, if his heart wandered (such is human wretchedness), he would be greatly angered on returning to himself; he *gnashed his teeth*^{vii} or tore his flesh with his fingernails or beat his breast with his fist, to restore his mind to a more stable state. He particularly wanted to be present when the seven penitential Psalms^{viii} were said by the convent, saying that whoever recognised himself as a sinner ought to attend to these Psalms, which were specially instituted for sins. Thus he lamented his own trifling sins and little omissions as if guilty of all crimes.

5. What can I say that will stand out about this man who wholly despised himself, who had no care for the body, who indeed persecuted his flesh as if it were a dreadful enemy? And unless he had been stopped by the wisdom of our father prior, his spirit would have completely eaten up that same flesh through his wonderfully fervent fasting and abstaining from food. While he was thought to be resting upon the bedclothes on his bed, he was in fact tossing and turning with only straw below, as it says in the Song of Songs, going about and *seeking whom my soul loves*.^{ix} And, sighing for his love, *every night he washed his bed and watered his couch with tears*.^x He was especially accustomed to keep watch in holy vigils from after Matins until daybreak. What more? He conducted himself

conuersione^{xi} se habebat; [ut]^{xii} etiam his, qui ante se ad conuersionem venerant, exemplo esset.

6. Cernens pater monasterii dominus Robertus virum ad omnem perfectionem uirtutum gradibus tendere; ad sacros illum ordines festinauit prouehere, et de clerico usque ad diaconatus officium se indignum reclamantem promoueri fecit. In quo sacro officio quam strenue minisrauerit, uerbis expleri non potest. Adhuc nostrorum quidam maxime dominus supprior Robertus memorare solent; cum quanta deuotione cerei consecrationem in sabbato sancto persoluerit; asserentes nunquam ut sibi uisum est alicui officio deuotius peracto se interfuisse; omnibus circum astantibus miro compunctionis affectu permotis. Nimirum que legebat uel cantabat cum tanta deuotione cum tanto feruore tam instanter proferebat; ut vere per os ipsius spiritus sanctus uerba proferre videretur. Psalmis etiam quos dicebat quasi deum ut dici solet pede teneret; totus insistebat. Postea presbiterii gradum suscipere uix compulsus, hoc etiam sacrosanctum officium/ ^{f.93r} tam deuote prosecutus est; ut sicut cuidam familiari suo post multum temporis humiliter confessus est, nunquam nisi bis missam sine lacrimis celebrauerit. Cerneret dum ad hoc sacrum misterium celebrandum se prepararet, lacrimis suffundi; et quodam modo subito in virum alterum commutari, ut spiritu dei totum illum agi dubitare minime posses.

7. Interea uenerabilis wintoniensis episcopus Guillelmus, quamdam ecclesiam suam in Tantonensi territorio suo secundum regularem canonicorum institutionem informari desiderans; patrem nostrum dominum Robertum conuenit, et ut sibi prefatum virum ad hoc opus concederet, humilibus precibus expetiit. Quem licet nobis ualde necessarium tamen quia sciebat apostoli preceptum ut *non que nostra sunt sed que aliorum querere debeamus*,^{xiii} ad instituendam prefatam ecclesiam cum paucis fratribus nostris direxit. Quo uir uenerabilis cum peruenisset et cum fratribus qui secum venerant secundum morem ecclesie nostre regulariter uiueret; quidam canonicorum qui in eadem ecclesia seculariter antea vixerant ad conuersionem venire ceperunt. In

xi G Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1996), p.15 notes that 'conuersatio' could mean 'moral conduct or behaviour, or even simply way of life'.

xii There is a gap here; Colker's 'ut' has been followed.

xiii 1 Corinthians 10:24.

so devoutly^{xi} that^{xii} he served as an example to those who had come to conversion before he had.

6. The lord Robert, father of the monastery, discerning that this man was gradually directing himself towards the perfect accomplishment of all virtues, hastened to raise him to holy orders, and advanced him from clerk to the office of deacon, despite his indignant protests of unworthiness. It is impossible to describe how actively he served in this sacred office. Some of our brothers, especially our lord the sub-prior Robert, used to remember how much devotion he gave to the blessing of the paschal candle on Holy Saturday, asserting, as it seemed to them, that never had any ceremony been celebrated among them with such devotion, with all those standing in attendance being moved by a feeling of sorrow for sin. Whether he was reading or chanting, he did so with such devotion, such fervour, that the Holy Spirit himself seemed to reveal the words through his mouth. He also entered totally into the Psalms, which he spoke as though he held God by the foot, as the saying goes. Afterwards, he reluctantly accepted the step up to the priesthood, and he followed this sacred office so devotedly that, as he confessed humbly to a friend within the house a while later, he only twice celebrated Mass without tears. You would notice tears well up as he prepared himself for the celebration of the sacred mystery, and in this way became such a different man that you cannot doubt that he was completely moved by the spirit of God.

7. Meanwhile, William, venerable bishop of Winchester, desiring that his church in the district of Taunton should follow the rule of the regular canons, met our lord prior Robert, and with humble prayers arranged that he should grant him the aforesaid man for this work. Although Guy was very much a dear friend to us, the prior, because he knew the Apostle's dictum that we *should not seek our own advantage, but that of others*,^{xiii} sent him with a few brothers to re-establish the church there. When that venerable man arrived, with the brothers who accompanied him, he lived according to the rule and our church's observances; some of the secular canons who already lived there began to be converted.

quibus erudiendis licet plurimum laborauerit; tamen parum proficere potuit, quoniam eorum mores in mala consuetudine inueterati; f.93v nouellam sancte conuersionis/ gratiam aspirare non ualebant, quia nec ad hoc niti sicut opus est omnino uolebant. Unde nimis anxiiabatur; quod fructum quem desiderabat non faciebat.

8. Tamen quamdiu in loco illo commoratus est; quod ad susceptum pastoris officium pertinet, que dicenda erant dicebat, nec a verbis viuendo dissentiebat; sed sicut in Christo coram Christo uerba Christi loquebatur; sic Christo fauente quecumque precipiebat; prior ut erat nomine, ita et opere prior implere satagebat. Ad hec cultor pauperem erat in tantum; ut quicquid rationabiliter poterat, eisdem impendere summo studio procuraret. Frequenter ad mensam sedens, que sibi apponebantur infirmis et indigentibus reseruari faciebat, pane solummodo et aqua contentus. Cum autem aliquis uel illi compatiendo quia nichil boni corpusculo suo uel in cibis uel aliis uite necessariis conferret, conquereretur quod omnes pene bonos cibos sibi allatos pauperibus et infirmis offerendos reseruaret, non opus esse ut ita faceret, cum de cellario de coquina potestatem haberet accipere sicut magister que pauperibus erogaret; humiliter respondebat.

f.94r 'Et de penu et undecunque rationabiliter possunt que *Christi membris*^{xiv} indigentibus largiantur sumenda non ambigo. Tamen quod ori proprio subtrahitur; Christo fore magis gratum estimo. Ego cum/ uoluerim, bonas escas habere potero. Pauper et infirmus hinc penuria inde doloribus vexatur; quid putas, quomodo attendit et considerat, unde aliquid boni sibi ueniat? Ego miserrimus deuorarem quod aliquam illi conferre valeat consolationem? Absit ut meam *putridam carnem ad opus vermium*^{xv} incrassare debeam; et preciosum *membrum Christi* coram me fame mori videam. Esto. Saluari desideramus; et laborare nolumus. Quem uero sanctorum absque labore ad requiem peruenisse legimus? Veracis testatoris uerba sunt, quod difficile immo impossibile, sit ut de deliciis ad delicias transeamus, ut in hoc seculo et etiam in future beati simus.^{xvi}

xiv 1 Corinthians 6:15; Ephesians 5:30.

xv Sirach 19:3

xvi cf. Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25.

Although he laboured very hard in their education, he nonetheless could only get so far, on account of their way of life, ingrained with bad habits; they could not aspire to the new grace of a holy way of life because they did not wholly wish to make the necessary effort. As a result, he was most vexed, because he could not produce the fruit that he desired.

8. Nevertheless, like a true pastor, for as long as he remained in that place he said those things which had to be said, and he lived up to his words. Just as he spoke the words of Christ in Christ, and in the presence of Christ, he taught whatever favoured Christ. Thus in name he was the prior and so he first took trouble to fulfil the title through his labour. To this end, he was such a supporter of the poor that he took great care to spend on them whatever he reasonably could. Often, he reserved for the infirm and indigent that which had been served up at his own table, contenting himself with just bread and water. Somebody else, feeling sorry for him, because he would not accept that anything was good for his own frail body, whether in food or other necessities of life, complained that he reserved for the poor and infirm almost all of the good food given to him; this was not necessary when he, as master, had the power to order from the kitchen store what he could allocate to the poor. He humbly replied:

'I have no doubt that what is granted for consumption by the needy *members of Christ*^{xiv} can be reasonably obtained from the provisions or wherever. However, I reckon that what is taken from one's own mouth will be more pleasing to Christ. I can have good food when I wish. The poor and infirm are tormented by the woes of need. What do you think? Do they take note and consider where something good for them comes from? Am I not most wretched, in eating that which otherwise could bring them consolation? God forbid that I let my *putrid flesh fatten worms*^{xv} and look upon a precious *member of Christ* dying of hunger in front of me. Indeed, we want salvation, but we do not wish to work for it. Which saints, in truth, do we read of who reached their eternal rest without effort? They are the words of a true witness, because it is difficult, nay impossible, that we should pass from pleasure to pleasure in this world if we are to be blessed in the next.^{xvi}

9. Hinc *ieiuniis, escarum abstinentia, magnis vigiliis, nimiis etiam frigoribus* corpus macerabat,^{xvii} tanto amplius; quanta non sicut apud nos supra se habebat, qui equi dei supra modum interdum currentis habenas restringeret.^{xviii} Nimiis inquam frigoribus corpusculum affligebat; qui sepius in hyeme sine pellicea sola tunica sub tenui cappa uestitus erat.^{xix} Quicquid habere poterat, maxime quod ad altare ex fidelium oblationibus veniebat; in usus pauperum expendebat, inde cappas inde tunicas et sotulares ad opus eorum emens. Que cum deficerent; ad perticam^{xx} in dormitorium ibat et nunc pelliceam nunc tunicam pie rapiens; petenti pauperi secreto porrigebat. Nec hoc^{f.94v} ita facie/bat, ut fratres expoliaret; quibus abundanter necessaria semper procurabat.

10. Tantonenses adhuc illum bonum priorem appellant; qui vere *pater orphanorum et uir viduarum erat*,^{xxi} qui pauperum et infirmorum curam tam sollicite gerebat, quibus dum impenderet quicquid poterat; nunquam tamen eis satis erat. Diuitibus uero non bene placebat, quoniam res pauperum in usus eorum prodige sicut quidam faciunt expendere nullo modo volebat. Quibus tamen quod opus erat impendebat, totum studium totaque deuotio ipsius erga pauperes existerat. Hinc putant quidam auribus domini episcopi wintoniensis insusurratum, illum prioratum dignum non fore; qui hospites suscipere nesciret, potentes per quos ecclesia crescere habebat sicut dignum erat non honoraret. Vir autem dei qui soli deo placere querebat oneri prelationem semper habebat; quia animarum lucrum quod sitiebat sicut vellet non inueniebat. Unde litteris multisque legationibus ut ad dilectum locum de quo exierat reuerteretur dominum priorem interpellauit.

11. Tandem desiderium consecutus, ubi ad nos reuersus est; non ut quidam de prioratu depositi solent contristabatur, sed tanquam

xvii 2 Corinthians 11:27.

xviii No source for this expression has yet been found.

xix For a canon's normal dress, see J Willis Clark, *The observances in use at the Augustinian priory of S. Giles and S. Andrew at Barnwell, Cambridgeshire* (Cambridge, 1897), pp.196–7.

xx A *pertica*, literally 'rod' or 'perch', was a hanging rail. P Eames, 'Furniture in England, France and the Netherlands from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century', *Furniture History* 13 (1977), pp.49–50. All clothing was held in common.

xxi Psalm 67:6.

9. He mortified his body *in hunger and thirst, in many fastings, in long vigils, in extreme cold*;^{xvii} he did this the more as he had no one above himself, as at our house, who could rein in this horse of God^{xviii} when it ran beyond moderation. He afflicted his body with extreme cold, as I said, for often in winter he wore only his tunic under a thin cape, with no cassock.^{xix} Whatever he could have had, especially what came to the altar with the offerings of the faithful, he spent on the needs of the poor, buying capes or tunics or shoes for their use. When he did not have enough, he would go to the dormitory clothes-rail,^{xx} piously taking here a mantle, there a tunic, which he would offer in secret to the poor who were asking for clothes. But he did not do this so that the brethren would go short – he always generously procured their necessities.

10. The people of Taunton still talk of him as a dear, good prior. He was indeed a *father to orphans and a protector of widows*;^{xxi} he bore the care of the poor and infirm with great solicitude. But while he devoted himself and did whatever he could for them, nothing satisfied them. Neither, indeed, did he please the rich, because he would not in any way (as some did) wastefully consume the things of the poor for the enjoyments of the rich. However, because he did what was needed, his total effort and whole devotion to the poor stood out. Here, they think that rumours reached the ears of the lord bishop of Winchester that he was not worthy to be prior, because he did not know how to receive guests, or give appropriate honour to the mighty, through whom the Church had to grow. This man of God sought, in fact, to please God alone, and always found high office a burden because he could not, as he wished, find that gain of souls for which he thirsted. He bombarded the lord prior with many letters and envoys, asking that he leave there and return to his favourite place.

11. At last he got his desire, and returned to us, not mourning his removal from the office of prior as others do, but, as if liberated from a burdensome

ab ergastulo graui liberatus, uel sicut auis de laqueo venantium ereptus^{xxii} letabatur exultabat, deoque gratias agebat; nobisque post modicum temporis quia cor suum, quod se diu dereliquerat, iam inuenisset, gaudens f.95r indicauit. Ac uelut tunc/ primo ad conuersionem accederet, que retrogesserat paruipendens; ad summa toto studio ferebatur. Dumque illi suscipiendarum confessionum nostrarum cura commissa fuisset; ita se nostris miseriis compatiendo ac miserando contemperabat; ut pene nullus de peccato suo siue de aliqua temptatione tristis ad eum accederet; qui non ab eo consolatus reuerteretur. Habebat sane magnam gratiam in verbo consolationis; omnem etiam infirmitatem ferre sciebat, unde uelut peritus medicus animarum uulneribus medicandis oportunitate et diligentiam modis omnibus impendebat. Cuius etiam sanctitatis uirtutem dominus prior in semetipso expertus est. Nam cum grauissimam incurisset egritudinem et se posse conualescere desperasset; euocans illum ad se; rogauit ut in ecclesiam iret, ac pro se deum deprecaretur, mox ut fudit precem; sensit infirmitas alleuiationem.

12. Audiui apud Tantonam eundem constitutum, pro ingruentibus tempestatibus aliisque necessitatibus frequenter orare rogatum, orasse[t]; statimque petitionis effectum subsecutum. Non ista commemorauit quod virum sanctum miracula facere affectatum putauerim; tanquam ex hoc sue sanctitatis ostentationem quesierit, cum iactantiam uelut pestem maximam semper abhorruerit; sed ut ostenderem quam magne fidei extitit quod totus pietatis uisceribus affluebat, qui proximorum necessitatibus quibuscumque modis poterat f.95v sub/uenire paratus erat.^{xxiii} Semper autem animarum lucrum querebat. Vnde inter nos positus, tanquam bonus pater omnes nos instruebat *exhortabatur*,^{xxiv} et uelut pia *nutrix fouebat* et *consolabatur*;^{xxv} donec iterum nobis preripitur et ad instituendam Bothminensem ecclesiam transmittitur.

13. Magister enim Algarus, nunc Constantiensis ecclesie presul, tunc autem illius loci procurator; tum per se tum per exoniensem episcopum eundem venerabilem virum ad prioratum prefate ecclesie licet cum difficultate, tandem impetrauit. Verum non multo post vitam finiuit.

xxii Exodus 6:6–7; Psalm 90:3.

xxiii cf. 1 John 3:17; Colossians 3:12.

xxiv cf. Acts 2:40

xxv cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:7; also ‘consolabatur’ Tobit 1:19 and ‘consolabatur Paulus,’ Acts 27:9.

place of slavery, or as a bird freed from the snare of the hunters,^{xxii} he rejoiced, exulted and gave thanks to God. He joyfully said to us shortly afterwards that he had now found his heart again, which for a long time had deserted him. And then, just as he was when he first approached conversion, and giving little weight to what he had been doing, he was brought with all devotion to the highest things. When the care of hearing confessions had been entrusted to him, he treated us wretches moderately, with compassion and pity, so that hardly anyone who came to him grieved by sin or any other temptation went away without being consoled by him. He had a great gift of grace in his words of consolation, for he understood all weaknesses, so that, like an expert physician, he expended great care in healing wounded souls, using all means at the right moments. Our lord prior tested his saintly virtues, for when he was struck down with a grave illness and despaired of being able to recover, he called Guy to him, and asked that he should go into the church and pray to God for him: as soon as his prayers went up, the prior felt his illness lifted.

12. I heard that when he was at Taunton, he was appointed to pray during the storms that assailed them and often asked to pray for other necessities; as soon as he prayed, his prayers were answered. I have not recorded these things because I thought that this holy man was moved to perform these miracles to seek a display of his own sanctity; he always abhorred boastfulness as if it were the greatest of plagues. But I hope I can show with what great faith he stood out, because holiness flowed from his innermost being, and he was ready to come to the aid of those nearest him in whatever ways he could.^{xxiii} He was always seeking to gain souls. Thus, once set among us, he taught and *encouraged*^{xxiv} us all like a good father and, like a holy *nurse he cherished* and *comforted*^{xxv} us, until shortly afterwards he was again snatched from us and despatched to re-establish the church at Bodmin.

13. For Master Algar, now bishop of Coutances, then dean of that place, on his own account and also through the Bishop of Exeter, at length and with difficulty obtained that venerable man as the prior of the church. In truth, his life ended not long after that. For it was in wintertime that

Erat enim tempus hyemale quando illuc missus est et in estate proxima mense maio idus maii uiam *uniuerse carnis ingressus est*,^{xxvi} prius tamen in ecclesia Bothminensi quam regebat, religione fundata, magistro quoque Algar aliisque quam plurimis canonicis effectis, et in *sancta conuersione*^{xxvii} per eius institutionem plurimum roboratis.

14. Circa finem uero causa extitit qua Exoniensem episcopum adire debebat. Quo itinere equo cui presidebat in preceps ruente contigit ut in foueam quandam corruens, grauissimam circa intestinorum loca lesionem incurreret. Unde quibusdam visum est quod hac de causa celerius ad extrema peruenerit. Ad exoniam uero perductus; lecto prosternitur, morbo de die in diem semper ingrauescente. Venerat ad f.96r visendum eum/ vir religiosus magister Gaufridus; tunc canonicus de Plintona, nunc autem in eodem loco prioris officio fungens. Affuit et magister Algarus; uterque ad obsequendum in omnibus infirmo tam sedulus quam deuotus. Qui leticia pariter ac mesticia vehementer afficiebantur. Hinc gaudentes quod illum in tanta deuotione ad exitum properare cernerent, inde contristati quod tam dilecti presentia destituebantur. Siquidem testati sunt nobis, quod aliquem in infirmitate sua deuotius se habentem nunquam viderint. Accusabat enim se sine intermissione de peccatis suis, lapsum quo in foueam ceciderat sepe commemorans; et cum lacrimis dicens, 'In foueam cecidi.'^{xxviii} Heu heu, ego captiuus.' Hoc enim uerbum, quando se accusabat, semper in ore habebat, 'ego captiuus in quam profundum puteum inferni propter nimia peccata mea precipitandus sum. O Christe, miserere serui tui, quia licet aliter vixi quam debui, tamen *in te domine speraui, non confundar in eternum, sed in tua, non mea, iusticia libera me et eripe me.*'^{xxix} Multum de confessione loquebatur; quia nescio si aliquis purius illo delicta sua confitebatur. De fide quoque sancte Trinitatis tam perfecte tamque profunde disserebat ut prefati docti viri in stuporem conuerterentur.

xxvi cf. Hebrews 4:10; Joshua 23:14; 3 Kings 2:2.

xxvii cf. Tobit 14:17.

xxviii cf. Matthew 12:11, 'et si ceciderit haec sabbatis in foveam nonne tenebit' ('and if the same [sheep] falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it?'), and Psalm 7:16, 'Lacum aperuit, et effodit eum; et incidit in foveam quam fecit' ('He has opened a hole and dug it out: he falls into the pit he has made'). 'Cecidi in foveam' was a phrase that St Bernard (or Pseudo-St Bernard) liked: 'Liber de modo bene vivendi ad sororem', in *Sancti Bernardi Opera Omnia*, vol.ii, ed. J Mabillon (Paris, 1839), pp.1689, 1762.

xxix Psalm 70:1-2; *Te deum laudamus*.

he was sent there, and in the following May, on the Ides,³ he *entered the way of all flesh*^{xxvi} – but only after establishing religious life in the church which he ruled at Bodmin; many other canons were brought together by Master Algar and much strengthened in *holy living*^{xxvii} through his way of life.

14. Shortly before the end of his life, matters arose which he had to discuss with the bishop of Exeter. On his way there, his horse dashed wildly, and it happened that he fell into a pit and incurred a very serious injury in the intestinal area. Certain people saw that this would hasten his end. So he was brought to Exeter, and laid on a bed, his health growing worse day by day. That pious man, Master Geoffrey, then a canon of Plympton, and now its prior, came to see him, and Master Algar was also there; both attended to all his infirmities assiduously and devotedly. They were struck with both joy and overwhelming sorrow: rejoicing, because they could with great devotion help him approach his death, and saddened that they would be bereft of such a delightful presence. Indeed they testified to us that they had never seen anyone so faithfully in control of himself during an illness. For without ceasing he accused himself of his sins, often remembering that he had fallen into a pit, and weeping said, 'Into a pit I have fallen.'^{xxviii} Alas, alas, I am a captive.' He always had this word in his mouth when he accused himself. 'I am captive in the deep infernal pit; I am cast down on account of my over-many sins. Oh, Christ, have mercy upon your servant, because I have lived other than I ought; yet *I have hoped in you, O Lord; let me not be put to everlasting shame; but set me free in your, not my, righteousness, and deliver me.*'^{xxix} He spoke much about confession, although I know of no one who confessed his sins more purely. He also expounded the faith of the Holy Trinity so perfectly and profoundly that the aforesaid learned men were left speechless in awe.⁴

3 May 15th.

4 For a discussion of the Trinity in twelfth-century thought, see F Robb, *Intellectual Tradition and Misunderstanding: the Development of Academic Theology on the Trinity in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (PhD. thesis, London 1993): <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1349804/1/492704.pdf>

f.96v **15.** *Appropinquante uero hora*^{xxx} mortis eius; iam membris/
 premortuis, uelut in extasim raptus, diu iacuit immobilis. Expergefactus autem; cepit inquirere que dies esset. Responsum est
 vigiliam esse ascensionis dominice. Tunc ab intimo cordis longa trahens
 suspiria; in hanc *uocem exultationis*^{xxxi} erupit, ‘Hodie dies est redemptionis
 mee.’ Et tamquam in gaudio tante solennitatis aliquandiu repausans,
 subiecit, ‘Hodie dies est misericordie dei.’ Iterumque uelut in consideratione
 tante misericordie paululum respirans; ita conclusit, ‘Dies gaudii mei.’
 Erat autem inter nonam et uesperam cum hec uerba proferret. Sicque
 totus in amorem Christi suspensus, usque ad confinium diei et noctis quo
 spiritum exalauit per interuallum uerba dulcia ad gloriosam ascensionem
 pertinentia proferebat, ita ut cum loqui uix posset; *ascendens in altum*^{xxxii}
 sepius reuolueret. Curabat corpus satis diligenter magister Gaufridus,
 quoniam magister Algarus solummodo lacrimis et gemitibus uacabat,
 non de salute defuncti male sentiendo; sed quod sibi tam dulcis
 subtrahebatur amicus ingemiscendo, nec *dolori modum imponere*^{xxxiii}
 preualendo. Cum uero corpus secundum consuetudinem vestiretur;
 cappam, qua super induendum et totum obuoluendum erat, nimis
 f.97r curtam, id est usque circa genua pertingentem/ inuenerunt. Unde
 turbati dum de alia querenda tractarent; subito mirum in modum
 satis et supra quam necesse erat longa reperta est, uehementer super hoc
 stupentibus qui aderant deoque gratias agentibus qui et huic miraculo
 fidele postmodum testimonium perhibuerunt.

16. Disponebat magister Algarus ad Bothminensem ecclesiam corpus
 deferre. At Exonienses canonici nullo modo consentire uoluerunt,
 immo eiusdem corporis exequias tanquam sancti et a Deo sibi concessi
 cum omni honorificentia celebrare statuerunt. Aderat dies dominice
 ascensionis, cum ex diuersis partibus tantus conuenit populus;
 quantus in Exonia ciuitate nunquam antea simul conuenisse visus est,
 mirantibus plurimis et ueraciter affirmantibus ad uiri Dei obsequium
 diuinitatis instinctu tantam excitatam fuisse multitudinem. Baiulabant
 feretrum maiores illius ecclesie persone, totumque officium cum
 tanta ueneratione persoluebatur, quantam in illa ciuitate uel exequiis

xxx Matthew 26:45.

xxxi Isaiah 48:20.

xxxii Ephesians 4:8.

xxxiii Colker gives this as Virgil, *Aeneid* II.619 but it is actually Pliny, *Letters* IX.13.

15. When *the hour* of his death *was at hand*,^{xxx} his limbs were paralysed,⁵
 and for a long time he lay still, as if carried away in a trance. But suddenly
 he awoke, and began to ask what day it was. They replied that it was the
 Vigil of the Ascension. Then, drawing deep breaths from the bottom
 of his heart, he burst out in a *voice of exultation*,^{xxxi} ‘Today is the day
 of my redemption.’ Pausing a little as if amid the great rejoicing of the
 festival, he added, ‘Today is the day of God’s mercy,’ and again, taking
 a little breath, as if thinking on some great mercy, he ended with, ‘the
 day of my rejoicing.’ It was between Nones and evening that he said
 these words. Thus wholly bathed in the love of Christ, through which
 he breathed out his spirit until twilight, at intervals he offered up sweet
 words concerning the glorious Ascension, so that when he could hardly
 speak, he might reflect on them more often, *ascending on high*.^{xxxii} Master
 Geoffrey carefully looked after the body, because Master Algar, dissolved
 in tears, was rendered incapable by grief, not because he felt badly about
 the condition of the deceased, but because such a dear friend had been
 taken away: he was not strong enough to *put a limit on his grief*.^{xxxiii} Now,
 when the body was being dressed according to custom, they found that
 the cloak that was to cover him and wrap him up completely was too
 short, reaching only to his knees. During the hubbub of the search for a
 new cloak, it was suddenly and wonderfully found to be long enough, and
 more. Those who were present were astonished and gave thanks to God,
 and soon after bore witness to this miracle of faith.

16. Master Algar was preparing to have the body brought to the church
 of Bodmin, but the canons of Exeter would by no means consent to this;
 rather, they stood out for celebrating the funeral rites of his body with all
 honour as if saints were granted to them by God. It was on the day of the
 Ascension of Our Lord: a large crowd gathered from various quarters,
 such as had never before been seen amassed in the city of Exeter. Many
 people marvelled, and truly affirmed that it was divine inspiration that
 had roused so great a crowd to be at the funeral of a man of God. The
 more important personages of the church carried the bier, performing the
 whole office with great reverence, such that no one remembered anything

5 Literally ‘already dead’ (*membris premortuis*).

episcopi uel alterius cuiuslibet persone defuncte exhibitam fuisse nullus exoniensium recordatur. Quid multa? In honorabili loco claustrisui, in precioso sarcophago de petra preciso corpus uenerandum reposuerunt; omnibus qui aderant tam clericis quam laicis una proclamantibus quod f.97v veraciter ea die cum Christo/ celos ascendit.

17. Ecce, karissime frater, qualiter honorabilis pater tuus in presentis uite stadio cucurrit, quomodo cursu legitime consummato ad brauium feliciter peruenit.^{xxxiv} Te uero quoniam patrissare cognoui; multo tibi libentius vitam ipsius vtrumque descripsi quatinus perpendas non tam laudabile si religiose uiuere contendas; quam detestabile si quod absit male uiuendo a tam religioso parente degeneres. Noueris tamen ut promisi summatim ista perstricta; quoniam mirabilem illius feruorem, lacrimarum abundantiam sincerissimam religionem omnimodam puritatem et veritatem, ex quarum fiducia nullam formidabat personam, quin libere diceret quod ei dicendum sentiebat, aliaque quam plurima dei dona, que in eo florere conspeximus, puto uerbis ad plenum explicari non posse. Siquidem huiusmodi bona spiritualia; ex uisu, auditu, cohabitatione, colloctione multo magis intelliguntur; quam ullis uerbis valeant insinuari.

18. Michi uero pro tantillo labore aliquid rependi desidero. Ut quoniam inter horas canonicas ista scribebam, sepe dum ipsis horis instare deberem, de his dictandis potius cogitabam; te suppliciter orante, non solum huius verum etiam omnium culparum mearum veniam f.98r consequar, insuper hanc gratiam tuis precibus/ obtineam, quatinus sepe memorati semperque uenerandi parentis tui sanctitatis imitator in presenti, et in future beatitudinis particeps existam. Amen.

xxxiv cf. 1 Corinthians 9:24; 2 Timothy 2:5; 2 Timothy 4:7–8; however, the source for this particular quotation seems to be the matins antiphon for the feast of St Silvinus (17th February): 'In stadio uite breuis/ hic cucurrit legitime/ ut brauium immortalis/ digne possit percipere.' This antiphon survives in a 15th-century manuscript from the abbey of St Bertin in St Omer. G M Dreves, *Analecta Hymnica* 18 (Leipzig, 1894), p.235–6. St Silvinus (d.718) was an Irish missionary who worked in the area around St Omer. Merton later on swapped several parishes with the Abbey of St Mary de Valle (St Omer); it is possible that Merton had connections with this part of Normandy: F C Hingeston-Randolph, *The registers of Walter Bronescombe and Peter Quivil, Bishops of Exeter* (1889), p.379.

like it happening in Exeter, not at the funerals of bishops or of anyone else of that city. What more? They, with due reverence, laid his body in a place of honour in the cloister⁶ in a costly carved stone coffin, and everyone who was there, whether cleric or layman, with one voice said that he truly ascended that day to heaven with Christ.

17. See, dearest brother, how your honourable father *ran the race of the present life*, and how, *having completed the course by the rules*, he happily *gained the prize*.^{xxxiv} Since I know that you indeed take after your father, I have the more gladly described to you his life, so that you may consider not so much how laudable it would be for you to strive to live a religious life, but how detestable it would be if, because he is gone, you fell away from such a pious parent by loose living. You will know, however, that I have promised to touch on these things but lightly: his wonderful enthusiasm, the abundance of his tears, the tremendous sincerity of his religion, his purity and truth in all things, from the assurance of which he feared no one and freely said what he felt should be said, and the other many gifts of God which we saw blossom in him – I think it is not possible to find sufficient words to describe all these things. The good things of the spiritual life are observed best of all in this way, by seeing and hearing, living and conversing, more than they can be conveyed by any words.

18. I wrote these things in between the canonical hours (and often, while I should have been concentrating on those hours, I was thinking rather more about this composition),⁷ and so I do indeed ask for something by way of recompense for this modest work: that by your humble prayer I may gain forgiveness, not only for this one fault, but for all my others. Moreover, I ask that through your prayers I may obtain this grace, that by virtue of being a disciple of the saintliness of your parent, a man often remembered and ever to be revered, I may partake of his blessedness, now and in the future. Amen.

6 This would seem to be the cloister of Exeter Cathedral, but cf. Nicholas Orme's comments: *Victoria County History: Cornwall*, vol.2 (London, 2010), p.140.

7 The Latin is 'dictandis', literally 'to be dictated'. Letters were normally written by a scribe, dictated by the author: G Constable, 'Letters and Letter-collections', *Typologie des sources du Moyen Age occidental* 17 (Turnhout, 1976), p.42.