

## Retirement Arrangements and the Laity at Religious Houses in Pre-Reformation Devon\*

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Most of us would probably think of retirement planning as a modern phenomenon; however, concerns about retirement were also very real to people of the late Middle Ages and the early modern period. They, too, sought ways to ensure that they would be able to lead reasonably comfortable lives once they had reached a point when they could no longer work. Peasant parents might sometimes strike maintenance agreements with adult children or other individuals who would be taking over their landholdings; wealthy widows might be able to rely on the income from their dower lands or the jointures arranged at the time of their marriages.<sup>1</sup> Infirm members of the secular clergy could sometimes retire from their parishes with pensions.<sup>2</sup> Another option for a wide range of individuals of different economic backgrounds was to obtain an annuity from or a corrody at a religious house. An annuity was an annual monetary payment, whereas a corrody was an annual allowance in kind—what Barbara Harvey has called a “bundle of privileges” or a “bundle of consumables”—providing for the food, shelter, and often

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1 For retirement arrangements among the peasantry, see Clark, “The Quest for Security” and “Some Aspects of Social Security.” For dowers and jointures, see Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*.

2 Rosenthal, *Old Age in Late Medieval England*, 109-12. See also Orme, “Sufferings of the Clergy.”

clothes of the corrodian.<sup>3</sup> Both annuities and corrodies could be purchased from or freely given by a monastery.

Despite the renewed interest in the state of the Church in England on the eve of the Reformation,<sup>4</sup> there have been until recently relatively few studies of the connections between the religious houses of England and the laity in the early sixteenth century.<sup>5</sup> An aspect of this topic which has received particularly little attention is the issue of corrodies at religious houses in the years leading up to the dissolution of the monasteries. While there have been examinations of the practice of selling or granting corrodies to the laity in the twelfth to fifteenth centuries,<sup>6</sup> there is still much that is not known about those who held corrodies at religious houses in England in the later period. Who were these corrodians, and what did they expect from their retirement arrangements with religious houses? How involved were the religious houses in granting or selling corrodies, and did the extent of this involvement change over time? Barbara Harvey, in perhaps the most substantial recent investigation of this topic, concluded that the extensive granting or selling of corrodies was a feature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when monasteries offered such arrangements to lay people in possession of alienated monastic lands which the religious houses wished to regain. The late thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries witnessed an intensification of royal attempts to foist retiring Crown servants on religious houses as corrodians; the number of such corrodians seems to have decreased once the religious houses started to develop more convincing excuses for not acceding to such requests, with the result that in time the Crown tended to seek corrodies only at houses that were royal foundations.<sup>7</sup> As a result of these trends, according to Harvey,

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3 Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, 179-81. Pat Thane has grouped corrodies into four categories: those imposed on a religious house by a king making arrangements for a retired servant; those given by a religious house to its own servants or friends; those granted by religious houses in exchange for real property; and those sold by the religious to lay people for cash. Thane, *Old Age in English History*, 81-83.

4 For example, Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* and *The Voices of Morebath*, as well as French, *The People of the Parish*, and Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England*.

5 Some notable exceptions have been the essays in *The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England*, edited by James Clark, and several papers in *Monasteries and Society in Medieval England*, edited by Benjamin Thompson. See also Rushton, "Monastic Charitable Provision"; Cross, "Monasticism and Society"; and Thompson, "Monasteries and their Patrons."

6 For example, Harper, "A Note on Corrodies in the Fourteenth Century"; Usilton, "Edward I's Exploitation of the Corrody System"; Little and Stone, "Corrodies at the Carmelite Friary of Lynn."

7 Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, 189. An example of this trend can be seen at Durham Priory, which, during the reign of Edward III (1327-77), frequently had to receive retired Crown servants as corrodians. By the time of Prior Wessington (1416-46), however, the Crown had stopped making these requests of a house that was an episcopal rather than a royal foundation. See Dobson, *Durham Priory*, 167.

“it is in fact quite unusual to uncover a grant [of a corrody] in monastic sources in the half century or so before the dissolution”<sup>8</sup>; Harvey discovered that of the twenty corrodies purchased by lay people from the monks of Westminster Abbey in the period 1400-1540, only one was bought after 1500.<sup>9</sup> This is consistent with the relatively modest number of corrodians at other English religious houses in this period: David Knowles, in his analysis of a group of forty-seven English houses suppressed in 1536, found that at the time of dissolution there were twenty-nine corrodians to three hundred monks—fewer than one corrodian to ten religious.<sup>10</sup>

It is the aim of this essay to address some of these issues by studying in some detail the records of corrodies that were granted or sold by—or imposed on—religious houses in the county of Devon. The period in question is the reign of King Henry VIII up to the dissolution of the last monasteries in Devon in 1539, with the earliest corrody dating from 1512 and the last from 1538. Close examination of these records can shed some light on the connections between religious houses and the people who sought their aid in making retirement plans. This study will suggest that corrodies, even at this point in English monastic history, were still appealing to a wide range of couples and individuals who were connected with the houses in a variety of ways. Whether they were married couples, single male teachers, or servants of the Crown, corrodies were useful to them as a means of rendering their retirement years more secure and comfortable.

The religious houses of Devon are a somewhat challenging group of monasteries to study since the survival rate of documents from these houses is not very high.<sup>11</sup> However, all is not bleak. A body of documents that contains much information on retirement arrangements in the pre-Reformation era but which has previously been little consulted for this purpose is the E 315 class at the National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office) in Kew. Volumes 91-105 of E 315 are the Miscellaneous Books of the Court of Augmentations. Between the years 1536 and 1554, this Court was charged with dealing with the business that arose from the dissolution of the monasteries in England, a process that started in 1536 and, in Devon, concluded in 1539. The Miscellaneous Books contain a wealth of information about people who had been granted

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8 Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, 188.

9 Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, 188, 200.

10 Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, vol. 3, *The Tudor Age*, 267.

11 Youings, *Devon Monastic Lands*, xxxiii-xxxiv.

corrodies and annuities or who had been appointed to offices by monasteries and were seeking to have these grants and appointments honoured by the Court.<sup>12</sup>

A second important source for corrodies at religious houses in Devon, kept at the Devon Record Office in Exeter, is the manuscript book of George Oliver, who, in the nineteenth century, compiled a great number of documents on the medieval monastic history of Devon and Cornwall for his *Monasticon Dioecesis Exoniensis*. Oliver's manuscript book contains his abstracts of dissolution records which were at that time housed at Powderham Castle near Exeter and were later destroyed in the bombing of Exeter in 1942.<sup>13</sup> The originals of these documents were probably records gathered by officials of the Court of Augmentations who consulted the original monastic sources.<sup>14</sup> Oliver's abstracts act as a useful supplement to the Miscellaneous Books of the Augmentation Office, often containing records of grants that are absent from the Public Record Office documents. Another set of sources consulted in this study is the Receivers' Accounts; these rolls were written up by the officials in charge of disbursing the funds owed to people whom the Court was reimbursing for their loss of corrodies. The Receivers' Accounts for 1544-45 and for 1554-55<sup>15</sup> were consulted to see whether the petitioners were indeed receiving the sums that had been granted them by the court; the accounts also provide an indication of the number of corrodians still alive in 1554-55. In addition, the *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII* were consulted for entries recording royal grants of corrodies at religious houses in the king's patronage.

The surviving records reveal that the corrodians from Devon who appeared before the Court of Augmentations held their corrodies at eight religious houses and one hospital, which constituted half of the religious houses in Devon at the beginning of 1536.<sup>16</sup>

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12 The attitude of the Court of Augmentations concerning the petitions for reimbursement for lost annuities, corrodies, or offices was that the Crown was required by law to honour such arrangements. Consequently, petitions tended to be granted. Richardson, *History of the Court of Augmentations*, 73, 75.

13 The Devon Record Office (hereafter DRO) reference for the manuscript book is Z 19/8/3, but each entry also has its own separate reference. The references for the monastic entries run from DD 22477 to 22994.

14 Youings, *Devon Monastic Lands*, xxxiv.

15 The National Archives (hereafter TNA; includes the Public Record Office) SC 6/HENVIII/7303 and LR 6/4/1.

16 Excluding friaries, cells of other monasteries, and secular colleges, there were sixteen religious houses in Devon before the dissolution of the smaller monasteries in 1536. In addition, there was the "semi-monastic" Hospital of St. John in Exeter, whose prior and brethren lived according to the Rule of St. Augustine. See Snell, *The Suppression of the Religious Foundations*, 123-35. Of course, there may have been more corrodians at these or other religious houses in Devon: with the loss of the original texts of the corrodies, it is impossible to conclude with certainty what the total number of corrodians at Devon

Of the superiors of religious houses in Devon who sold or granted corrodies in the years leading up to the dissolution, the abbot of Tavistock Abbey, the wealthy and ancient Benedictine foundation, was responsible for six. The abbots of Forde Abbey and Buckland Abbey, two reasonably well-off Cistercian houses, granted or sold three and one respectively. The prior of Barnstaple Priory, a small Cluniac institution, distributed four, while the abbot of the Augustinian Hartland Abbey and the prior of St. John's Hospital in Exeter sold or granted one corrody each. The prior of Plympton Priory, a prosperous Augustinian house, granted two corrodies, but each of these was linked to appointments to offices at the Priory. The only nunnery appearing in these records, Polsloe Priory, saw its prioress grant a corrody to two individuals who were to share their offices of chief steward, overseer, and receiver of the priory's manors. In addition, the Crown exercised its right to grant corrodies at two royal foundations, Buckfast Abbey and Tavistock Abbey; for each of these institutions there is evidence of a series of individuals (three at Buckfast, four at Tavistock) successively enjoying retirements arranged for them by the king at these houses.

It would seem that corrodies, while not exactly common at Devon religious houses on the eve of the dissolution, were by no means rare. Indeed, in Devon the ratio of known corrodians to religious—there having been thirty of the former to about one hundred of the latter, for a ratio of one corrodian to between three and four religious—was apparently somewhat high.<sup>17</sup> Despite episcopal concern about religious houses digging themselves into financial holes through the granting and selling of corrodies,<sup>18</sup> it would seem that the appeal of these arrangements to religious houses as rewards for

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monasteries would have been in the 1530s. Moreover, there may also have been some corrodians who were unable to attend the Court of Augmentations to petition for reimbursement.

17 At the time of dissolution, there were twenty-one monks at Tavistock Abbey, fourteen at Forde Abbey, thirteen at Buckland Abbey, and eleven at Buckfast Abbey, as well as nineteen canons at Plympton Priory, fourteen nuns at Polsloe Priory, five canons at Hartland Abbey, and a prior and two priests at St. John's Hospital in Exeter. It is not known how many monks were living at Barnstaple Priory when it was dissolved in 1536, but it seems never to have been a very large house, its complement ranging from six monks in 1279 to three in 1381. Snell, *The Suppression of the Religious Foundations*, 123-31.

18 An early example of such concern was the attempt of John Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter, to place limits on this practice in 1357. Frustrated by the violation of conciliar legislation prohibiting the sale of corrodies by the religious houses of his diocese, he decreed that no corrodies could be sold or granted without his knowledge. See *The Register of John de Grandisson*, edited by F. C. Hingeston-Randolph, 2: 1192. Bishops tended to disapprove of religious houses granting corrodies, as a monastery might find that in exchange for lump sums of cash, it was undertaking a long-term financial obligation that could—depending on how long-lived the corrodian might be—end up costing the house far more than the original purchasing price of the corrody. See Harper, “A Note on Corrodies in the Fourteenth Century,” 96-97.

faithful servants or as sources of income had not entirely diminished by the 1530s. As well, the Crown continued to rely on corrodies at royal foundations to provide respectable retirement accommodation for servants who had earned this consideration.

## Married Couples

The corrodians of the religious houses of Devon in this period included both single individuals and married couples. Couples were frequently found purchasing corrodies to be enjoyed jointly at monasteries in late medieval England.<sup>19</sup> As Barbara Harvey points out, this practice likely originated as a means of providing some security for the wife if she were to outlive her husband.<sup>20</sup> In practice, corrody documents frequently specified that whoever the surviving spouse might be, whether wife or husband, that person would continue to enjoy the corrody after the other spouse's death. It is not clear from the records whether these married couples had pre-existing relationships with the religious houses which granted them corrodies; it is possible that some of these individuals might have worked for the religious houses or leased land from them, although these details are not mentioned in the records.

Three married couples appear in the records of Devon corrodies. In 1537, Ann Fennell appeared before the Court of Augmentations regarding the cash allowance and corrody she and her late husband, William, had received from Barnstaple Priory.<sup>21</sup> The previous year, the Prior of Barnstaple had arranged for the couple to have a cash allowance of 40s *p.a.* as well as a corrody of eight loaves of conventual-quality bread and five gallons of conventual-quality or "best" ale (presumably per week).<sup>22</sup> As well, they were to have sufficient food "for maintenance" at dinner and at supper every day plus a gown or coat of the sort granted to the priory's servants. It is unclear whether this corrody was sold to the Fennells or was granted to them by the prior in consideration of William's

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19 For example, at the Carmelite Friary in Lynn, Norfolk, of the nine corrodies held between 1367 and 1409, six were granted to married couples. Little and Stone, "Corrodies at the Carmelite Friary of Lynn," 10-14. As well, eighteen married couples appear in the sixty-nine records of corrodies held at Westminster Abbey between the twelfth and early sixteenth centuries; Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, 239-51.

20 Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, 208.

21 TNA E 315/91 ff. 61b-62.

22 "Conventual-quality" bread and ale referred to bread and ale of the quality served to the monks. A conventual-quality loaf of bread might weigh a little over two pounds. In the fifteenth century, the corrodians of Westminster Abbey most likely had a normal allowance of one gallon of the best ale plus one loaf of the best bread per day. Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, 203.

service to the priory. The document states that the prior did so because of “good and faithful service by William.”<sup>23</sup>

In the case of Ralph Bagshawe and his wife Agnes, the corrody was clearly bought and not granted. In 1533 they paid Forde Abbey £20 in return for their corrody, which included residence at a house and garden called “The Lodge.”<sup>24</sup> Since corrody records rarely are this specific about accommodation, one wonders whether Ralph and Agnes were already living in this house and were simply paying rent in advance. They were also to be given eight wagonloads of firewood, four casts<sup>25</sup> of conventual bread, three casts of common bread the same weight as the conventual bread (but less fine), five gallons of conventual ale, and two gallons of small ale per week. They would also have pottage of fish and meat equal to the allowance of two monks per day. In addition, Ralph and Agnes would be able to count on a cash allowance of £5 6s 8d per year. The Court of Augmentations accepted their claim for the cash allowance, but did not compensate the Bagshawes for the loss of the corrody itself. Perhaps their tenancy of “The Lodge” was secured in another document.<sup>26</sup> The lack of reimbursement for the food, firewood, and ale allowance, however, is striking.

The last married couple, William Mychell and his wife Alice, received a corrody from Forde Abbey on the same day as the Bagshawes, and on very similar terms. They, too, secured the tenancy of a house and garden (this one called the “Chantry House”) as well as firewood, bread, ale, and pottage allowances.<sup>27</sup> The bread and ale allotments were slightly different from those assigned to the Bagshawes, however: the Mychells were to have more bread (four batches of convent and four batches of common bread, as well as a batch of coarse brown bread) but less conventual ale (four gallons rather than five).<sup>28</sup> Their record also notes that the bread and ale were to be delivered to William and

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23 TNA E 315/91 ff. 61b-62.

24 TNA E 315/94 ff. 39-40; DRO DD 22782.

25 The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a “cast” as “the quantity of bread or ale made at one time.”

26 On 28 October 1539, a few months after the dissolution of Forde Abbey, Richard Pollard leased the site of this monastery and its properties from the Crown; one of the properties mentioned in the lease is “Little Park cum le Lodge.” Oliver, *Monasticon Dioecesis Exoniensis*, 356.

27 DRO DD 22780.

28 For the sake of comparison, a married couple in fifteenth-century London, Robert Drope and his wife Alice, held a corrody entitling them to seven conventual loaves and seven gallons of conventual ale a week; Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, 250. A fourteenth-century married couple’s corrody at the Carmelite Friary of Lynn, which Little describes as “moderate,” consisted of twelve loaves of white bread, two loaves of bran bread, and eight gallons of beer per week, together with a quart of conventual pottage a day; Little and Stone, “Corrodies at the Carmelite Friary of Lynn,” 11.

Alice or their delegates at the monastery brewhouse or bakehouse, which—together with the expectation that they would be collecting dishes of cooked food—suggests that the “Chauntry House” was not far from the monastic precinct. The record of this corrody does not mention payment, but given the similarities to the one obtained by the Bagshawes in the same year, it would be surprising if money had not changed hands.

### Chaplains and Teachers

In some cases, the records reveal that religious houses were making retirement provisions for individuals who had served them in various ways. In 1523, Hartland Abbey arranged for a corrody for one Thomas Moreman, who is designated “chaplain,” that is, someone who probably served as a priest in the monastic church or at one of the abbey’s nearby chapels.<sup>29</sup> The monastery may have acted as something of a retirement home for secular clergy of the area: Moreman’s corrody document specifies that he was to have a chamber in the north part of the abbey where John Husband, curate of the parish church in Hartland (Stoke St. Nectan), resided.<sup>30</sup> In this record, no specific amounts are given for food; it is simply stated that Moreman would be able to eat and drink like one of the monks for the rest of his life and that, in case of illness or bodily infirmity, he would have the right to be served his food and drink in his chamber if necessary. This document also acknowledges that corrodies might not be completely secure: it contains the statement that if the obligations to Moreman were not fulfilled to the extent that they ought to be, then he would receive a pension of 40s a year. This indeed is what the Court of Augmentations awarded him when he appeared before this body after the dissolution.

In a case at Forde Abbey, an individual who had served the house in a variety of capacities received a corrody which included accommodation at the abbey. The corrodian’s name was Master William Tyler of Axminster: he had assisted the abbey “in all its affairs, near and far” (in omnibus negociis tam in remotis quam in propinquis), but his role was also to explain passages of Scripture read in the refectory to the monks and to teach the boys of the monastery’s grammar school.<sup>31</sup> The corrody entitled Tyler to a cash allowance of £3 6s 8d as well as one gown made of 4 yards of broadcloth a year

29 Oliver noted that the parish of Hartland—the rectory of which had been appropriated by the abbey—included many such chapels. Oliver, *Monasticon Dioecesis Exoniensis*, 204-5. Two other clerics, Robert Hilrewe and George Maur, obtained corrodies at Barnstaple Priory in 1528 and 1526 respectively (TNA E 315/96, ff. 173-173b; TNA E 315/100, f. 167b).

30 TNA E 315/96 ff. 37-38.

31 TNA E 315/100 ff. 217b-218b; DRO DD 22783.



valued at 5 shillings plus a furnished chamber at the abbey and the same portion of food as one of the monks would have. This arrangement was made in 1537, and two years later Tyler was before the Court of Augmentations asking for the obligation to be fulfilled. He was allowed £3 a year, but as with the case of the Bagshawes, the Court did not see fit to compensate for the loss of food or shelter.

Another educator, John Elyott, appears in the records as a corrodian at Tavistock Abbey. In 1529, the abbot granted Elyott a cash allowance of £3 6s 8d, an allowance of meat, bread, and ale, candles in the winter, four wainloads (wagonloads) of fuel to be carried to his house, and one robe a year.<sup>32</sup> The rationale for granting John Elyott this corrody was that he was daily serving the monastery as organ-master and choir director in the chapel of St. Mary and in the choir of the monastery church. The document also states that he was going to be teaching five choirboys of the chapel and the monastic church. John Elyott may well have been the organist appointed six years previously by the abbey, for a remuneration of £4 a year plus meals and accommodation, to instruct a number of choirboys.<sup>33</sup> As with Forde Abbey's grant of a corrody to William Tyler, who seemed not to be near retirement age but instead likely to serve the monastery for some time in the future, one wonders whether in these situations the religious houses were making the grants as part of what one might now call a "retention strategy." Perhaps by offering these talented men cash allowances and guarantees of food and other provisions—a practice not unknown at other late medieval monasteries<sup>34</sup>—the monks were hoping to make continued service at the monasteries attractive to these individuals. This seems particularly probable in the case of Elyott, since the dissolution of Tavistock Abbey (which ultimately occurred in 1539) must have seemed a remote prospect in 1529. Even in September 1537, when the abbot of Forde granted Master Tyler his corrody, it is certainly possible that both men believed that the abbey would endure for longer than two more years.<sup>35</sup> These grants, then, assured long-term benefits to men

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32 TNA E 315/100 ff. 303b-304; DRO DD 22917.

33 Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, 224. Finberg does not identify the organist or provide a manuscript reference for this information.

34 For example, in the fifteenth century, the song masters and other servants at Durham Priory received corrodies; see Dobson, *Durham Priory*, 167. In the same period, a grammar-school master and a mason who worked at Westminster Abbey obtained corrodies for themselves and their wives; see Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, 200.

35 Youings notes that "at no point"—even in 1539—"did all remaining houses feel equally vulnerable" and that the year 1537 marked "a return to normality" after the dissolution of the smaller houses. Youings, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries*, 60, 63.

who made valued contributions during their working years to the religious houses in which they would one day reside as corrodians.

### Retired Crown Servants

Another type of corrodian who could be found at some English religious houses was the person imposed on the monastery by a king who needed some retirement accommodation for a servant. As has been mentioned above, by the end of the Middle Ages the Crown had largely limited its requests for such corrodies to religious houses which were royal foundations. There is evidence of King Henry VIII exercising this prerogative at two religious houses in Devon, Buckfast Abbey and Tavistock Abbey. Buckfast Abbey, a Cistercian monastery, was the third-wealthiest religious house in Devon according to the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* survey of 1535.<sup>36</sup> The records indicate that a corrody was reserved at the abbey for a servant of the Crown, and as each royally-selected corrodian died, his place was filled by another Crown servant. In 1512, during the reign of Henry VIII, Henry Roper, a yeoman in the household of Queen Catherine, was granted the royal corrody at Buckfast Abbey, succeeding the late Henry Assheton.<sup>37</sup> In 1517, after Roper's death, James Knottysford became the beneficiary of this royal privilege and continued to live in retirement at Buckfast Abbey until the dissolution.<sup>38</sup>

A similar situation prevailed at Tavistock Abbey. From 1300 onwards, this monastery was obliged to house and feed a retired servant of the Crown.<sup>39</sup> In 1514, Anthony Legh or Lygh, who had served Henry VII as a clerk of the kitchen, was in possession of the Crown's corrody at Tavistock; in the same year, Henry Calais, who had been a yeoman usher of the king's chamber in 1511, obtained a grant in reversion of Legh's corrody once Legh died or resigned his claim.<sup>40</sup> In 1518, upon Legh's death, the king granted

36 Holdsworth, "From 1050 to 1307," 40-41. The compilers of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* valued the possessions of Buckfast Abbey at £466.

37 *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, vol. 1, 534-35.

38 *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, vol. 2, 1199; vol. 1, 534-35 (Knottysford's name appears as "Knotteworth" here). Knottysford is mentioned in the section of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* record for Buckfast Abbey in which charges upon the temporal possessions of the monastery are listed; his corrody was valued at £3. Oliver, *Monasticon Dioecesis Exoniensis*, 377. See also TNA E 315/100 ff. 292-93.

39 Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, 2 and 232. Finberg notes that even though an Anglo-Saxon official named Ordulf was technically the founder of the abbey, "in later centuries the abbey was always, and justly, considered as a royal foundation."

40 *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, vol. 1, 1429. Variant spellings of Calais' name are "Calys" and "Calise."

the corrody to John Waleston, steward of his household, but Calais did ultimately succeed him, as he is recorded as having resigned the corrody in 1526.<sup>41</sup> Henry VIII chose John Amadas, yeoman of the Crown, to fill this vacancy in 1526.<sup>42</sup> Fortunately, in this case, the text of the corrody grant survives and describes the details of what Amadas as a royally-appointed corrodian could expect from Tavistock Abbey in his retirement years.<sup>43</sup> By the terms of the agreement, Amadas was to receive daily two loaves of bread, two dishes of food (one containing meat or fish), and six quarts<sup>44</sup> of ale or three shillings. Each Christmas, he was to be given a furred robe of the sort worn by the knights of the abbey or 20s in lieu. Amadas was also allotted a “suitable chamber,” fuel, candles, and stabling and hay for his horse when he was at the abbey, which implies that the corrodian travelled from time to time or had an alternate residence. In 1534, Amadas petitioned Thomas Cromwell, King Henry VIII’s chief secretary, to take Amadas’ son, William, into his service; at the same time, Amadas mentioned his own corrody at Tavistock Abbey “in which he would fain make his son joint patentee.”<sup>45</sup> There is no evidence, however, that Amadas’ son received an official share of his father’s corrody at Tavistock.

The abbot of Tavistock would eventually have cause to regret the presence of John Amadas. In 1536, Amadas found himself in the position of having to decide whether his loyalties lay with the abbot, whose hospitality he had enjoyed for several years, or with Thomas Cromwell, chief architect of the Crown’s dissolution policy. Amadas did not hesitate to choose the latter. The circumstances were as follows: the abbot, John Peryn, had said at dinner one day, “Lo, the king sends about to suppress many houses of religion, which is a piteous case. And so did the cardinal in his time, but what became of him and what end he made for his so doing, I report me unto you: all men know.”<sup>46</sup> The abbot was referring both to the recent decision by the Crown to dissolve the smaller monasteries in the realm, and to the suppression of a number of houses during the period when Cardinal Wolsey had been chancellor in the 1520s. The clear implication of the abbot’s remark was that Wolsey’s actions had been justly punished with his ultimate fall from power and death.

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41 *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, vol. 4, 1232.

42 *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, vol. 4, 1232.

43 TNA E 315/100, ff. 281b-282; DRO DD 22918.

44 The original document states the amount as 3 potells of ale. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (s.v. “pottle”), a potell was equivalent to a two-quart tankard.

45 *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, vol. 7, 46-47.

46 Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, 265.

Amadas, perhaps thinking about his own future if Tavistock Abbey were to be dissolved, decided that Cromwell needed to know about the abbot's statement and, on 30 June 1536, wrote to Cromwell to inform him of it. Cromwell then told the king, and it was decided that Abbot Peryn would be "kept under observation."<sup>47</sup> Perhaps hoping to secure the goodwill of the corrodian, a few months later, on 12 September, the abbot appointed Amadas and his son William to the offices of bailiff of the borough of Tavistock and clerk of the market there, granting them an annuity of 40s.<sup>48</sup> Peryn managed to survive the dissolution of his monastery with a comfortable pension of £100 *p.a.*, having learned a lesson about the value of being circumspect in speech in times of religious and political turmoil. As for John Amadas, three years after his report to Cromwell and a month after the suppression of Tavistock Abbey in 1539, he was petitioning the Court of Augmentations for a pension in lieu of his corrody and back-payments.<sup>49</sup> He was granted £5 for the lost corrody as well as 50s for payments in arrears. His son William was to profit from the dissolution, buying up the site of the Carmelite friary and the property of Plympton Priory in the town of Plymouth.<sup>50</sup>

### Office-Holders

In addition to the couples, clergy, teachers, and Crown servants, there were corrodians who had held positions as administrators of the monastic estates. One must be careful not to assume that the men who held these offices actually performed many duties in exchange for their stipends: by the end of the Middle Ages, the offices of auditor, receiver of rents, and chief steward at religious houses had largely become "honourable and lucrative sinecures" occupied by influential courtiers who might be of assistance to their monastic friends.<sup>51</sup> Appointments of laymen to lesser offices must also be viewed with caution, especially as the dissolution approached. It is often difficult to determine what motivated the superiors of the religious houses when they filled these offices: they may have been choosing individuals who they thought would competently fill vacant posi-

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47 Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, 265.

48 One wonders what was passing through the mind of the abbot as the document was drawn up, as the text reads that the abbot was making this appointment because of the "good counsel" (*pro eorum bono consilio*) that Amadas and his son had provided to the abbey (TNA E 315/100, ff. 225-225b; DRO DD 22920).

49 DRO DD 22918.

50 Youings, *Devon Monastic Lands*, 94.

51 Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, vol. 2, *The End of the Middle Ages*, 285.

tions, or they may have been assisting a friend or relative in need of the income attached to the position. An example of the latter tendency probably occurred at Ulverscroft Priory in Leicestershire in March 1538: the prior of Ulverscroft appointed the gentleman Richard Standish to the office of bailiff and surveyor of the priory lands for life, even though such an office had never before existed.<sup>52</sup>

In Devon, two individuals who benefited from their ties to a religious house were Robert and Edmund Weston, priests and friends of the nuns of Polsloe Priory. In 1513, Robert Weston had been vicar of one of the priory's appropriated churches, and a Richard Weston, also a cleric and probably a relative, leased some of the priory's lands and one of its rectories in the 1530s.<sup>53</sup> In 1533, the prioress appointed Robert and Edmund jointly to the position of steward at Polsloe and overseer of and receiver for all their estates in Devon and Somerset.<sup>54</sup> Along with these offices—which they would presumably share—the Westons were to have accommodation on the Priory grounds in a chamber of the sort occupied by the chief steward plus allowances of food for themselves and a servant as well as pasturage, hay, and fodder for two horses. In addition, the Westons were to receive a cash allowance of 53s 4d. The document recording this particular corrody also reflects the uncertainty of the times: the prioress included a statement that if Robert and Edmund Weston could no longer serve in these positions for some reason, such as an act of Parliament or a decision by the king and his council, then the prioress still wished the Westons to stay on as special advisors and receivers of their rents.<sup>55</sup>

John Howe, the prior of Plympton, granted corrodies linked to offices to two individuals, Richard Fortescue and Nicholas Slannyng. He appointed Fortescue to the position of surveyor of the priory's lands in October 1537 (a year and a half before the priory's dissolution),<sup>56</sup> and Slannyng to the office of bailiff of the Great Erle Grange in September 1538 (about six months before the priory's demise).<sup>57</sup> Prior Howe may well have been optimistic to the very end that the priory would survive and that these men would serve in these positions for long periods. An alternate scenario is that the prior, seeing the writing on the wall and knowing that the Court of Augmentations was already

52 Youngs, *Dissolution of the Monasteries*, 59, 171-72.

53 Oliver, *Monasticon Dioecesis Exoniensis*, 164.

54 TNA E 315/96 ff. 83b-84b. Robert Weston appears in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* as the receiver for Polsloe Priory, for which he was receiving £2 13s 4d in 1535; Oliver, *Monasticon Dioecesis Exoniensis*, 168.

55 TNA E 315/96 ff. 83b-84b.

56 DRO DD 22881. In addition to the corrody, Fortescue was to receive 4 marks *p.a.*

57 DRO DD 22900. The prior granted Slannyng an annuity of 40s as well. After Slannyng's death, the office was to pass to his son Nicholas.

compensating those who had held corrodies at the now-dissolved smaller religious houses, decided to reward past friendship in this way. Or possibly the prior hoped that Fortescue and Slannyng might be able to use their connections—Fortescue and Slannyng were both names of prominent families in Devon<sup>58</sup>—to forestall Plympton's dissolution or be helpful after the priory had been suppressed.<sup>59</sup> The Court of Augmentations records reveal that religious houses in Devon granted numerous annuities to men of influence and appointed them to various offices in the final months before their dissolution, probably for these very reasons. An indication that Prior Howe of Plympton was thinking along these lines is his appointment of John Tregonwell as chief steward of the priory on 8 January 1539.<sup>60</sup> Tregonwell was one of the royal visitors who arrived in the West Country in that same month to obtain the surrenders of the remaining religious houses, including that of Plympton Priory on 1 March.<sup>61</sup>

The records of the appointments to offices which provided corrodies as benefits have more in common with the text of the corrody of John Amadas than with those of the allowances given to the married couples. The records for Fortescue and Slannyng state that they would be provided with meat and drink when they were at Plympton Priory, which suggests that these men were unlikely to reside there on a more or less permanent basis but were probably occasional visitors. The prior granted Fortescue the right to lodge with two of his servants at the priory whenever he was at Plympton; in addition, Fortescue would receive a livery coat or 20s in lieu each year.<sup>62</sup> Slannyng—who was granted a clothing allowance as well—must have been particularly concerned with providing for his horse, as Prior Howe conceded 4s a year for the annual shoeing of the horse as well as 2s a year for oats and hay. This was not all: the steward of Plympton Priory was also to assign grass for the horse; if this was not forthcoming, Slannyng was to be provided with 5s a year in lieu. Corrodies specifying arrangements for equine

58 Youings, *Devon Monastic Lands*, xxvii-xxviii.

59 Youings says that “it should be possible by a careful analysis of all the surviving evidence, to detect the approximate moment at which a particular abbot or prior or abess saw dissolution by the Crown as a distinct possibility and either began desperately to build up vested interests in the continuance of his or her house, or to secure friends who would ensure the best possible terms for the governor and, if he or she cared for them and had not fallen out with them too badly, his or her community.” Youings, *Dissolution of the Monasteries*, 59-60.

60 TNA E 315/96 ff. 56-56b.

61 Snell, *The Suppression of the Religious Foundations*, 63.

62 Livery coats, gowns, or robes of the sort worn by squires or officials of the monastery are frequently mentioned in texts of corrodies. See Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, 202-203, 247-49, 251; Harper, “A Note on Corrodies,” 96; and Usilton, “Edward I's Exploitation of the Corrody System,” 223.

care had a long history, dating back at least to the reign of Edward I (1272-1307), when monasteries which provided corrodies for royal retainers found that they might well be obligated to care for the horses of the corrodians as well as those of the corrodians' servants.<sup>63</sup> Given the status of individuals like Slannynge and Amadas, it should not be surprising that much attention was paid to the needs of their horses. For these men, their corrodies probably served more as assurances of specific forms of monastic hospitality, to be enjoyed occasionally, rather than as guarantees of security in their years of infirmity. In the case of Slannynge, who was able to enjoy these privileges for only a few months before the dissolution of the priory, the prior's grant must have seemed little else than the promise of an income which the Crown would soon be obliged to honour.

### Single Men

The Court of Augmentations records contain information on a number of single men whose connections to the religious houses granting them the corrodies are not exactly clear. Several of these may have been servants of the monasteries; their names are not those of prominent Devon families, and the justification provided for giving them corrodies is usually that they rendered good service to the religious house making the grant. The records do not mention that these men purchased the corrodies, but that does not mean that money did not change hands at some point. It is also possible that some of these individuals were friends, associates, or relatives of the superiors of the religious houses. Shulamith Shahar has wondered why such men would choose to live their retirement years in religious houses rather than with offspring,<sup>64</sup> speculating that they may have been childless or may simply have preferred not to share a home with their adult children. Perhaps, too, in the case of lower-status servants, the retirement arrangements their monastic employers granted them were more comfortable or congenial than what their own offspring could provide. Even men of higher status may have looked forward to spending their declining years in the company of friends at a religious house rather than in the household of a son or daughter and their family.

One such man, Richard Morthe, had some sort of close connection to St. John's Hospital in Exeter. In 1536, the prior granted him a generous corrody that included a

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63 Usilton, "Edward I's Exploitation of the Corrody System," 227. Usilton offers the example of Winchcombe Abbey, which had to arrange for lodging and robes for a John de Yatinden and his groom and give John 26s 8d towards the care and feeding of his horse.

64 Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages*, 125.

cash allowance of 40s a year, a chamber in the hospital with six cartloads of firewood (presumably per week), along with food and drink.<sup>65</sup> As in the case of Thomas Moreman at Tavistock, the prior included the provision that if Morthē were to become so ill that he could not go to the hospital refectory, he would be able to have the food or drink delivered to him in his room. Morthē was also given the option, however, of not living in the hospital at all and instead living elsewhere in the city of Exeter. That Morthē may have been a personal friend of the prior of the hospital is suggested by the fact that included in his corrody was the right to use a horse of the prior and convent so that he could go riding with the prior. Perhaps, too, the hospital was in debt to Morthē: two years earlier, the prior had granted him an annuity of 22s as well as an almshouse and the right to any profits to be derived from it, in exchange for which Richard would “have in mind and pray spiritually” for the souls of the hospital’s founders every day.<sup>66</sup> In addition, the hospital would secure these promises to Morthē by giving him £20. One suspects there was more to this transaction than the granting of an annuity, an almshouse, and £20 just so that Richard Morthē would be attentive about his prayers. As Harvey points out, sometimes grants of corrodies masked repayments of loans to the religious houses;<sup>67</sup> this may be the explanation for the generous concessions made by the Hospital of St. John to Richard Morthē.<sup>68</sup>

Other single male corrodians were recipients of food, drink, and cash allowances in varying amounts. William Dawkin, who obtained his corrody from Barnstaple Priory, may well have been a tenant of the monastery: in 1545, when George Rolle purchased property which had belonged to the dissolved priory, a William Dawkyns appears in the record as a renter of a tenement in the town of Barnstaple.<sup>69</sup> Dawkin may have bought his corrody from Barnstaple Priory, as the specificity of the amounts—seven loaves of conventual bread a week, five gallons of good conventual ale a week, 4d for seven fish or meat dishes a week—brings to mind the corrodies of the married couples who either probably or definitely purchased similar allowances. However, given that the document

65 TNA E 315/100 ff. 274b-275b; DRO DD 22592.

66 TNA E 315/95 ff. 79b-80.

67 Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, 185.

68 The rationale for the grant of the corrody in 1536 was that Morthē had directed various major benefits and considerations the monks’ way (pro diversis et magnis consideracionibus et beneficiis nobis ante hoc tempora). Morthē also seems to have been useful to the Cistercian abbey of Dunkeswell. In November 1538, three and a half months before the house was suppressed, the abbot granted him an annuity of 20s in consideration of “good and sundry paynes taken in diverse our affairs and for recompense partly thereof.” TNA E 315/100, ff. 225b-226, and DRO DD 22763.

69 TNA E 315/94 ff. 195b-196; Youings, *Devon Monastic Lands*, 69.



states that the prior granted him the corrody for good and agreeable service (*pro bono et gratuito servicio*), Dawkin may have been a servant to the priory as well as a tenant. A similar case is that of Philip Williams, whose tenancy of a tenement adjoining the Guild Hall in Tavistock was confirmed by John Peryn, Abbot of Tavistock Abbey, in the autumn of 1537; Williams received, in addition, an annuity of 26s 8d and the right to take meat and drink at the monastery in health and in sickness.<sup>70</sup> This grant was made “in recompense and satisfaction of his good and trewe service to us in tyme past done.” Exactly the same phrase—with the concluding addition of “and in times to come”—appears in the records for William Hamlyn and Ralph Hockyn, who may have been servants of Tavistock Abbey as well. In September and October of 1537, John Peryn arranged for these men to have annuities of 26s 8d each as well as livery coats to be distributed at Easter; in addition, they were entitled, like Williams, to have meat and drink at the abbey whether they were well or ill.<sup>71</sup> The lack of precision about the food and drink allowances and the late dates of these grants suggest that the Abbot of Tavistock was trying to secure in uncertain times the futures of men who had served the monastery. Raising ready cash by selling corrodies was probably not uppermost in his mind.

The single men were generally compensated well by the Court of Augmentations for their loss of corrodies. The annual sums granted by the Court to seven of the eight single men exceeded the cash allowances specified in the original documents, apparently taking into account that they would no longer be receiving food, drink, and clothing from the religious houses. Of this group, only Philip Williams was granted nothing but the cash allowance by the Court. Overall, it seems that the Court of Augmentations was not consistent in the extent to which petitioners were granted cash in lieu of a corrody, in part possibly because of the difficulty of determining the value of items which were hard to quantify, such as the equivalent of a monk’s weekly meat allowance. Alternatively, the officials of the Court may simply have had some latitude in this area and chose not to establish a formal policy.

Because of the existence of the Receivers’ Accounts, it is possible to track whether the petitioners to the Court did indeed obtain the annuities owed to them in lieu of their corrodies, and for how long they were paid. Two sets of the accounts have been sampled for this study, one set dating from five years after the last monastery in Devon was

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70 TNA E 315/100 ff. 234b-235 and DRO DD 22921. Two other possible servants of Tavistock Abbey, William Gelly/Gille and Edmund Growden, received corrodies in 1536 and 1537 respectively (TNA E 315/96 ff. 92b-93 and E 315/96, ff. 106-106b).

71 For Hamlyn: TNA E 315/96 ff. 155-155b; for Hockyn: TNA E 315/98 ff. 108-108b and DRO DD 22927.

dissolved, and another from 15 years after the last suppression in that county.<sup>72</sup> The accounts indicate that the Crown officials were distributing the sums the Court of Augmentations had awarded and that most of these petitioners were still collecting their annuities in 1544-45. Only two of the single men (Williams and Fortescue) and one married couple (the Mychells) are absent, presumably having either died or left the region. Moreman the chaplain and the single man William Gelly/Gille seem to have died or moved on by 1544-45, as their names and the amounts of their annuities are crossed out in the Receivers' Accounts of those years.

By the 1550s, there were few left on the account rolls: some examples are Ralph Bagshawe, now a widower, Master William Tyler, and William Dawkin. Ralph Bagshawe, who had paid £20 for a corrody for himself and his wife at Forde Abbey in 1533, must have been delighted with their decision to make these retirement arrangements. Even though the Court of Augmentations had not fully compensated them for their corrody, the Bagshawes were still entitled to the cash allowance of £5 6s 8d a year. By 1554, Ralph Bagshawe would have received £74 13s 6d from the Crown, a substantial return on an initial investment of £20 made in 1540. Indeed, if the Bagshawes had received their cash allowance for each year from 1534 to 1538, they would have already obtained more money from Forde Abbey by the time of its suppression—£26 13s 4d—than they had originally had to pay for the corrody. Such large cash payments, in addition to the obligation to provide housing and the allowances of bread, ale, and cooked meals, were clearly financially draining for Forde Abbey.

In the cases of people who held corrodies at religious houses in Devon, the impact of the closing of the houses would have varied according to the type of retirement arrangements they had had with the monks, nuns, or canons. For some corrodians, the allowances of food and drink they received may have merely supplemented already adequate diets; for others, the allowances must have represented a substantial portion of their daily food consumption. The married couples and some of the single men clearly entered into these retirement arrangements out of concern for the establishment of a stable

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72 The first set of Receivers' Accounts, TNA SC 6/HENVIII/7303, covers the year from Michaelmas 1544 to Michaelmas 1545 (36 and 37 Henry VIII). The payments to corrodians are listed with payments to other annuitants on membranes 12 and 13 (fronts and dorses) of this roll. The second set of Receivers' Accounts, LR 6/4/1, pertains to July 1554 to July 1555 (1 and 2 Philip and Mary). The corrodians appear on the dorse of membrane 15 and the front of membrane 16. The Receivers' Accounts for 1544-45 were selected because almost all the lay petitioners had appeared before the Court of Augmentations by this point; the accounts for 1554-55 were chosen in order to determine how many corrodians had disappeared from the rolls in the course of ten years.

allowance covering the necessities of life: food, drink, clothing, and shelter. In the case of certain individuals, there would have been an expectation that the religious houses would have served as their retirement homes. For people like the chaplain and the grammar-teacher, the corrodies were likely much more than just a “bundle of privileges”: they offered security in community during their declining years. For people like John Amadas and Nicholas Slannyngge, however, it probably did not make much difference whether they were staying as guests at religious houses and keeping their horses in monastic stables or receiving cash from Crown officials to pay for the same privileges elsewhere. As long as the Court of Augmentations granted them their petitions and reimbursed them for their lost corrodies, they were probably relatively content.

One must be cautious when drawing larger conclusions from these records, given the relatively small number of known corrodians at the religious houses of Devon in this period. It does appear, however, that there were more lay people involved in making retirement arrangements at religious houses in this county than one might have thought given the relative paucity of corrodians at institutions in other counties studied by Harvey and Knowles. One explanation may be that there was a greater conservatism regarding this practice in Devon, and that an inclination towards corrodies endured there longer than in other parts of England. Still, one must not forget that seven of the thirty known corrodians were chosen by the Crown to live out their years at Tavistock Abbey or Buckfast Abbey; whatever views the heads of these houses might have had about corrodies would have been irrelevant given their obligation to submit to the wishes of their royal patron in these matters. Moreover, certain monastic superiors such as John Peryn, abbot of Tavistock, Robert Thorn, prior of Barnstaple, and Thomas Charde, abbot of Forde, tended to be more interested than others in making use of corrodies either to add to their houses’ treasuries or simply to reward loyal servants who were advanced in years. Further study of the records of the Court of Augmentations should reveal whether these findings are anomalous, or whether other religious houses in counties throughout England entered into retirement arrangements with lay people to the same extent as did the religious houses in Devon. Such studies should help in the quest to understand more fully the ties between the laity and the religious in England in the years leading up to the dissolution of the monasteries.

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