

FOUNTAINS ABBEY 1455-1458

Edited by C. E. McGee

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Introduction

Fountains Abbey, the Abbey of St. Mary of Fountains, was founded in 1132 by a small group of dissident Benedictine monks from St. Mary's, York. Under the direction of Thurstan, Archbishop of York, who gave them land in the valley of the River Skell about 3.5 miles southwest of Ripon, they soon adopted the stricter Cistercian rule. By the end of the 12th century the monks, assisted by lay brothers who did much of the necessary physical labour for the community, developed Fountains into one of the most prosperous and powerful monasteries in England. The abbey thrived by raising sheep for the wool trade, cattle and horses, mining lead, quarrying stone, and renting parcels of land on their growing number of endowed properties. After a serious decline in the late 13th- and early 14th-century, Fountains gradually recovered its prosperity, influence, and numbers. By the mid-15th-century, when we have records of performance activity at the abbey, the house was wealthy enough to attract a steady stream of performers: minstrels,¹ boy bishops ('*episcopo puerili*'), fools ('*stultus*'), story-tellers ('*fabulatori*'), and players ('*lusoribus*'). Many of these troupes were under the patronage of powerful northern lords (whose minstrels and players appear in the mid-15th-century accounts of the city of York); others are identified by their association with a place: Ripon, York, Beverley, Boston, Durham, Topcliffe, and Thirsk. The last Fountains Abbey record suggests that a Corpus Christi play was performed, but we have no other information to shed light on the implications of the entry.

We are grateful to the late professors John Wasson and Barbara Palmer for their initial transcription of the records and description of the manuscripts.

¹ Regarding problems with terminology and translation, see Barbara Palmer, "Early English Northern Entertainment: Patterns and Peculiarities," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 34 (1995): 167-82 (especially 171-73); her "Corpus Christi 'Cycles' in Yorkshire: The Surviving Records," *Comparative Drama* 27:2 (1993): 218-31; Abigail Ann Young, "Minstrels and minstrelsy: household retainers or instrumentalists," *REED Newsletter* 20:1 (1995): 11-17; and her "Plays and Players: the Latin terms for performance," *REED Newsletter* 9:2 (1984): 56-62.

Records

1455-6 BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON
Liber Propter Servos
f 12

...
In dona Ministrall domine de haryngton¹— xij d.

...

f 15

...
Ministrallis domini Ponyng² in donis in parte — xij d.

...

1456-7
Bursar's Account
p 31 (*Gifts*)

WEST YORKSHIRE ARCHIVE SERVICE, LEEDS

...
¶ Ministraulo domini Iohannis hutham³ — vj d.

...

¶ Ministraulis domini de Clyfford⁴ — ij x.

...

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...
¶ Ministral domini de Egremont⁵ — xij d.

...

¶ lusoribus nostris propriis in panno &c⁶ — iiij s. iiij d.

...

¶ Minstral Radulphi eshton⁷ — vj d.

...

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...
¶ vni stulto Comitis sarum⁸ — iiij d.

...

¶ vni ministraulo vocato Thyrkeld — vj d.

...

¶ diuersis ministraulis in nativitate domini⁹ — xx d.

¶ lusoribus domini Willelmi plumpton¹⁰ — xij d.

...

¶ Episcopo puerili de Ripon — iiij s. iiij d.

...

¶ Ministraulo domini de Clyfforth — viij d.

...

¶ Ministraulo Baronis de grastoke¹¹ — vj d.

...

¶ Cuidam Minstraulo — x d.

...

¶ Ministraullo de bostan — viij d.

¶ Ministraulis domini principis¹² & dominorum penbruke¹³ & Warwyke¹⁴ — vj s viij d.

¶ vni stulto domini Sarum — iiij d.

¶ vni ministraullo dunelmensis — iiij d.

...

¶ Ministraullo domini Northfolchie¹⁵ — xij d.

...

¶ *Ministralis domini fitz hugh*¹⁶ — xij d.
¶ vni stulto — xij d.

¶ *Minstraulis domini Egremund* — xij d.

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<¶ *Minstrallo*> *domini Iohannis Nevell*¹⁷ — viij d.
<¶ *Ministra*>llo *domini Thomae haryngton* — vj d.
<¶ vn>e stulto — iiij d.

<¶>duobus *Minstraulis domini de Clyfforth* — xxij d.

¶ *Ministraullo domini Sarum* — x d.

¶ *Minstraulis domini Northumbrie*¹⁸ & *domini Thomae haryngton* — ij s.

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Bursar's Account

p 99 (*Gifts*)

¶ *Ministraulo ceco*¹⁹ — vj d.
¶ Gilde *Crucifixi de Rypon* — xij d.
¶ *lusoribus de Topclyfe* — iiij d.
¶ *Minstraulis Thome haryngton* — viij d.

¶ *Minstrallo Willelmi plumpton* — viij d.
¶ *Episcopo puerili de Ripon* — iij s. iiij d.
¶ *Minstrallo Roberti Danby* — viij d.
¶ vni stulto de bellalanda²⁰ — iiij d.
¶ *lusoribus de Thyrske* — xij d.
¶ *Minstrallo domini Northumbrie* — viij d.
¶ *Minstrallo Roberti Roos*²¹ — vj d.
¶ *Minstrallo Roberti laton* — vj d.

¶ vni fabulatori Ignoto — vj d.

¶ *Minstrallo Willelmi Evyrs*²² — viij d.

¶ *Minstrallis domini de Egremuth* — xij d.

¶ *Minstrallis Beuerlaci* — xvj d.
¶ *Minstrallis domini de Arundale*²³ — xvj d.

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¶ *Minstraulis domini Northumbrie* — iij s. iiij d.

¶ *Minstraulo domini de beaumont*²⁴ — xij d.
¶ *Minstraulo domini ffythugh* — viij d.

¶ *Minstraulis Eborum* — xx d.
¶ *Minstraulo domini grastoke* — viij d.

...
¶ *Minstraulo domini Northumbrie* — viij d.
¶ *Minstraulo domini de Clyfforth* — xvj d.

...
¶ *Cuidam Minstrallo* — vj d.

...
¶ *vni stulto* — ij d.

...
¶ *Minstraulis domini Regis in parte* — iij s. iiij d.

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...
¶ *ffabulatori comini Comitis Sarum* — xij d.

...
¶ *lusoribus Comitis Westmorland*²⁵ — ij s.
¶ *Episcopo puerili eboraci quia non in primo compo*^{to} — vj s. viij d.

...
¶ *Minstrallis domini Regis*²⁶ — vj s. viij d.
¶ *Item pueris eorundem*²⁷ — xvij d.

...
¶ *Minstrallo domini Comitis Northumbrie* — xij d.

...
¶ *Minstrallis eborum* — ij s.

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...
¶ *Diuersis Minstrallis per dominum Abbate*²⁸ — ij s. iiij d.

...
¶ *lusoribus quibusdam*²⁹ — ij s. iiij d.
¶ *Episcopo puerili Eboraci* — vj s. viij d.
¶ *lusoribus de Rypon* — ij s.
¶ *Minstrallis tribus* — xxij d.

...
¶ *vni stulto vocat salamon* — iiij d.

...

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...
¶ *Minstrallis domini Sarum* — ij s.

...
¶ *duobus Minstrallis* — xvij d.

...
¶ *Minstrallo Comitis Sarum* — xij d.

...
¶ *Ministraulis domini Regis in parte* — vij s. iiij d.

...

p 156 (Various expenses)

...
¶ *In conduccione lud' corporis christi per Thomam barbor* — vj s. j d.

...

Document Descriptions

1455-6 Liber Propter Seruos

London, BL Additional MS 40,011A; 1452-59; Latin; paper; 125 folios; 215mm x 140mm; heavily repaired but many leaves fragmentary and all margins damaged; modern board and leather cover. The book is a compilation of receipts and expenses for the manors held by Fountains. The date on the final page is torn away after "millesimo," but internal dates range from 1452 to 1459.

1456-9 Bursar's Accounts

Leeds, West Yorkshire Archive Service, MS WYAS Leeds: WYL 150/5497; 1456-59; Latin; paper; 78 leaves numbered in pencil by pages, 1-156; 285mm x 210mm; originally with vellum cover, fragments of which remain; repaired and rebound in board and leather in 1958 by Edward Lambert; fragile, with portions of all leaves torn away. The margin of p 34 has been torn away. but J. T. Fowler was able to read it when he saw the manuscript; we include what he supplies in *Memorials of the Abbey of St. Mary of Fountains: Vol. III*, Surtees Society 130 (1918; Durham 2008), pp. 18-19. For his transcription of the Bursar's accounts, which include the paymens to performers, see pp. 16-19 and 59-62.

Notes

¹ **Sir Thomas Harrington of Hornby, Lancashire (ca 1400-1460)**

² Henry Percy, 3rd Earl of Northumberland (1421-1461)

³ Sir John Hotham (1411-1461)

⁴ John, 9th Baron Clifford (1435-1461)

⁵ Thomas Percy, 1st Baron Egremont (1422-1460)

⁶ Fountain Abbey's 'own players in bread'

⁷ perhaps Radulphus Assheton of Lancashire

⁸ the fool of Richard Neville, 5th Earl of Salisbury (1400-1460^a)

⁹ minstrels at Christmas

¹⁰ Sir William Plumpton (1404-1480)

¹¹ Ralph de Graystock, 5th Baron Graystock (ca 1414-1487)

¹² Edward, Prince of Wales (1453-1471)

¹³ Jasper Tudor, Earl of Pembroke (1431-1495)

¹⁴ Richard Neville, 16th Earl of Warwick (1428-1471)

¹⁵ John Howard, 1st Duke of Norfolk (ca 1425-1485)

¹⁶ Sir Henry Fitzhugh, 5th Baronet Fitzhugh of Ravensworth (1424-1472)

¹⁷ John Neville, 1st Marquess of Montague (ca 1431-1471)

¹⁸ Henry Percy, 3rd Earl of Northumberland (1421-1461)

¹⁹ a blind minstrel

²⁰ perhaps the Cistercian Abbey of St. Mary, Byland ['bellalanda'], North Yorkshire

²¹ perhaps the Sir Robert Roos whose minstrel received a reward from York in 1446

²² perhaps Sir William Evers, whose minstrel was rewarded by York in 1448

²³ William FitzAlan, 16th Earl of Arundel (1417-1487)

²⁴ John Beaumont, 1st Viscount Beaumont (ca 1409-1460)

²⁵ Ralph Neville, 2nd Earl of Westmorland (1406-1484)

²⁶ King Henry VI

²⁷ the boys of the King's minstrels

²⁸ John Greenwell, abbot from 1442-1471

²⁹ the King's players