

### Joan of Leeds and the priory of St Clement in York, 1300-1324.

*Provided here is some background information on the state of the priory of St Clement in York at the time of Joan of Leeds. All references are from the registers of Archbishop William Greenfield and Archbishop William Melton, except where stated. References to further reading are provided at the end.*

- 1300 Certain men came to the priory gate leading a saddled horse. Cecily, a nun, met them and throwing off her habit rode with them to Darlington where she lived with Gregory de Thornton for three years or more (VCH 3, 129)

### Alice Waleys and Joan Saxton: the problem of lay women living in the precinct.

- 1310: After a visitation the demolition was ordered of the private house of Alice Waleys (a lay woman), built within the convent precinct. Also, all girls older than 12 and all secular women except servants & washer women were also prohibited from living in the precinct. (Since 13 was the canonical age for profession as a nun the intention was clearly to allow younger lay girls to board but not those the same age as the nuns).
- 1310: Joan Saxton, a nun, was ordered to live within the close at all times but not to hold any office. She was allowed to walk in the orchards and talk with other nuns and to receive friends and family as guests twice per year, but only in the presence of other nuns. She was forbidden any further contact with Alice Waleys who was to leave the convent.
- 1312: Joan Saxton was entrusted with the care of Christiana Cayli, aged nine, who was a boarder in the convent.
- 1315: the archbishop permitted Margaret Meynell to live in the convent for one year, subject to her good behaviour.
- 1317: after a visitation the archbishop forbade any intercourse with any woman who had not been professed as a nun, as this might arouse evil suspicions. Nor were secular women or children to sleep in the dormitory with the nuns.

### Alice of Leeds and Joan of Leeds.

- 1313: a commission was established to try John, son of Ralph the Hosier of York, a priest, for the crimes of incontinence and incest (check?) with Alice of Leeds, a nun.
- 1318: officials report Joan of Leeds of faking her own death in order to run away and live a life of 'carnal lust' in Beverley.
- 1318: a couple of weeks later brother John, a papal penitentiary, write to the archbishop saying he has been approached by Joan of Leeds with her version of her story. She says that she had been entered into the convent under age (the canonical age for profession as a nun was 13) and that she had never been fully professed as a nun).

### The Prioress.

1315: Constance Basy, daughter of a wealthy York citizen and former MP, was elected prioress, but died in 1316. (Death was the most common cause for the election of a new prioress).

1316: Basy's death was followed by a disputed election for her successor that divided the nuns into two factions; supporters of Agnes de Methelay and Beatrice de Brandsby. Each candidate was elected as prioress by the rival factions. The Dean and Chapter of York Minster (acting for the archbishop) annulled the election and admitted Agnes de Methelay as prioress.

1324: Agnes de Methelay resigned as prioress. It was said to be a 'free' resignation but no other reasons were given. Archbishop Melton allowed the nuns to choose a successor provided that their chosen candidate possessed appropriate qualities.

### *Further Reading*

Registers of the Archbishops of York at the Borthwick Institute for Archives:

[https://archbishopsregisters.york.ac.uk/home\\_page/index](https://archbishopsregisters.york.ac.uk/home_page/index) (please note that this is a work in progress and that not all items cited above are yet online in the English summaries. All items are available as high quality manuscript images).

*The Register of William Greenfield, 1306-1315.* Brown, W. and Hamilton Thompson, A. (eds.), 1931, 1934, 1938. 1-5 (Surtees Society, vols. 145, 149, 153)

*The Register of William Melton, 1317-1340.* Published in sections (not yet complete) by the Canterbury and York Society. <https://www-users.york.ac.uk/~cf13/>

R. B. Dobson and Sara Donaghey, *The History of Clementhorpe Nunnery, The Archaeology of York 2/1* (York, 1984)

Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries, c. 1275-1535* (Cambridge, 1922)

VCH: *The Victoria History of the County of York*, volume 3, ed. W. Page (London, 1974)