

Monasteries and the Defence of the South Coast in the Hundred Years War

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Violent transgression of the monastic precinct by foreign raiders is a concept mainly associated in the popular mind with the plunder of the northern abbeys, and especially Lindisfarne, by the Vikings in the eighth and ninth centuries. It is certainly not a phenomenon commonly linked to the late middle ages, even less so with the monasteries of England following the Conquest. Yet, as even the miniscule historiography on the subject reveals, monasteries in border zones were just as prone to the ravages of raiding and war as any lay institution. Indeed, monasteries can act as useful case studies for a more general understanding of the 'civilian' experience of war. As, generally, non-combatants, with obvious stockpiled wealth and little in the way of traditional defensive capabilities, it is unsurprising to find that monasteries in all war-affected areas suffered severely due to opportunistic raiders or armies living off the land. The clear advantage of a study of monasteries in terms of the effects of war on a particular area, however, is that evidence tends to survive to record their experiences, as opposed to the myriad towns, villages, and farmsteads which were plundered without leaving so much as a trace upon the documentary record. Thus, over and above the question of the burden of war on monasteries in a border region, we may glimpse in their situation some of the fears, responses, and experiences of the surrounding lay society.

Studies of Church involvement in the Hundred Years War tend to focus on its operation in ecclesiastical terms, most notably in the use of the sermon for propaganda purposes.¹ Yet this was by no means the full

1 W.R. Jones, 'The English Church and Royal Propaganda during the Hundred Years War', *Journal of British Studies* 19 (1979), 18-30; A.K. McHardy, 'Liturgy and

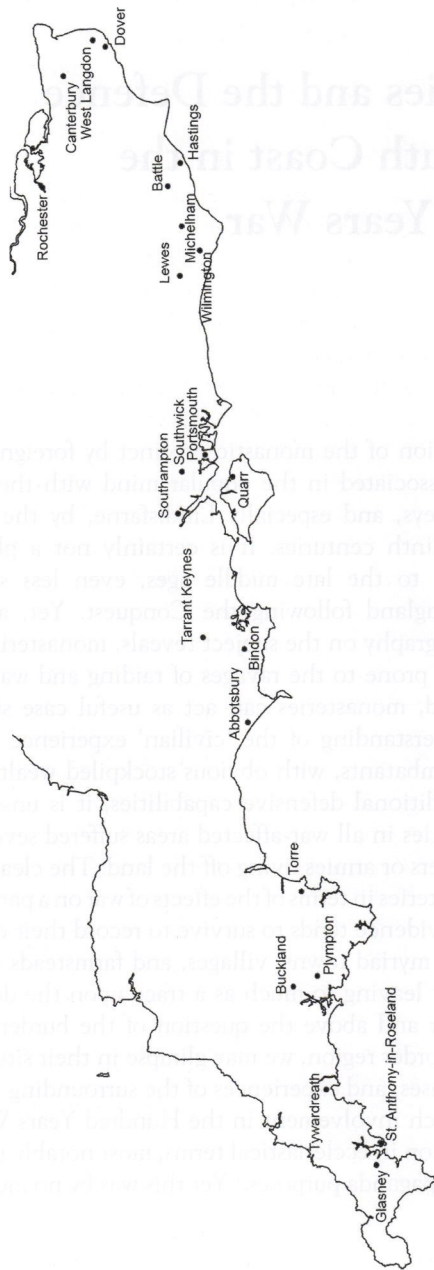


Figure 1: Monastic Houses named in the text.

extent of the Church's participation, willing or unwilling. The key work as regards the effects of war on the Church must be that of Denifle, who set forth in minute detail the various trials and tribulations suffered by the French monks and clergy as a direct consequence of the war with the English.² Since its publication over a century ago, however, the threat that war posed to the Church, and particularly to the tranquillity of monastic life, has rarely been considered by historians.³ A few studies have gone further and looked at the active monastic response to war, focusing especially on the potential utility or fragility of monastic institutions in defensive situations.⁴ Yet there has been no attempt to date to pull these various strands together in order to consider the totality of the monastic experience of, and participation in, war.

This article seeks to place the experiences and actions of the monasteries of the south coast of England within the context of their position on a border during the Hundred Years War. Given the frequent and terrible destruction of the French countryside throughout the war, its effects on the non-combatants of the continent have been far better studied than on those of the English coasts.⁵ Yet we should not dismiss the fears and sufferings of the coastal population of southern England

Propaganda in the Diocese of Lincoln during the Hundred Years War', *Studies in Church History* 18 (1982), pp. 215–26; idem, 'The English Clergy and the Hundred Years War', *Studies in Church History* 20 (1983), pp. 183–8; idem, 'Religious Ritual and Political Persuasion: The Case of England in the Hundred Years War', *International Journal of Moral and Social Studies* 3 (1988), 41–57.

2 H. Denifle, *La Désolation des églises, monastères et hôpitaux en France pendant la guerre de Cent Ans* (Paris, 1897).

3 Exceptions to this are P.G. Mode, *The Influence of the Black Death on the English Monasteries* (Princeton, NJ, 1916), pp. 20–33; M. Jones, 'War and Fourteenth-Century France', in A. Curry and M. Hughes (eds), *Arms, Armies and Fortifications in the Hundred Years War* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 103–20; E. Jamrozak, 'Cistercians and Border Conflicts: Some Comparisons between the Experiences of Scotland and Pomerania', in J. Burton and K. Stöber (eds), *Monasteries and Society in the British Isles* (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 40–50.

4 M. de Smet, 'Heavenly Quiet and the Din of War: Use and Abuse of Religious Buildings for Purposes of Safety, Defence and Strategy' in P. Trio and M. de Smet (eds), *The Use and Abuse of Sacred Places in Late Medieval Towns* (Louvain, 2006), pp. 1–26; E. Searle, *Lordship and Community: Battle Abbey and its Banlieu 1066–1538* (Toronto, 1974), pp. 338–47; S.F. Hockey, *Quarr Abbey and its Lands, 1132–1631* (Leicester, 1969), pp. 131–9.

5 N. Wright, *Knights and Peasants: The Hundred Years War in the French Countryside* (Woodbridge, 1998); C.J. Rogers, 'By Fire and Sword: Bellum Hostile and "Civilians" in the Hundred Years War' in M. Grimsley and C.J. Rogers (eds), *Civilians in the Path of War* (Nebraska, 2002), pp. 33–78; C.T. Allmand, 'The War and the Non-combatant', in K. Fowler (ed.), *The Hundred Years War* (London, 1971), pp. 163–83.

as trivial. As this article shows, the threat and reality of sea-borne attack rendered the entire south coast, from Cornwall to Kent as an active border after the fashion of the Welsh and Scottish Marches.⁶ The threat of violence and invasion was keenly felt and raiding was opportunistic and destructive. As Thomas of Walsingham lamented in 1380:

whenever the rogues on those boats perceived that a place lacked protection they disembarked and time after time took booty with impunity. Sometimes they even set fire to the towns and burnt them down, but if they saw an armed man coming on to the scene, they made for the sea in great haste.⁷

Sporadic raiding terrified the populations of the southern coastal regions. Yet it also creates a problem for the modern historian. The chroniclers fail to mention anything but the largest and most destructive raids, although there is plenty of circumstantial evidence of raiding and the fear of raiding at times when the chroniclers are silent. Is this silence an accurate reflection of the low level of danger posed to settlements on the south coast, or does it reflect the chroniclers' preoccupation with grand set-piece events? The monastic evidence certainly indicates the latter. Fear of coastal raiding was at its height in the 1330s and 1340s and again in the 1360s and 1370s, although attacks on private initiative could occur at any time throughout the fourteenth century.⁸ The fifteenth century, especially from the reign of Henry V when the English were stationed on both sides of the Channel, saw the threat of raiding vastly reduced, and as such this paper is largely restricted to the period of the Hundred Years War up to 1396.

I The Cost of War

Perhaps the only aspect of the war that touched every house in England was its financial cost. The question of the Crown's power to

6 Some parts of the eastern seaboard were also targeted, and, for example, the abbot of Wendling in Norfolk could complain of impoverishment because of the war in 1345. *Collectanea Anglo-Premonstratensia*, ed. F. Gasquet, Camden Society 3rd series, 6, 10, 12 (1904-6), III, pp. 12-13. For purposes of space this paper is restricted to the southern coastal counties.

7 *The St. Albans Chronicle: the Chronica maiora of Thomas Walsingham*, eds J. Taylor, W.R. Childs, and L. Watkiss 2 vols (Oxford, 2003-11), I, p. 373.

8 A general overview of the chronology of French raiding can be found in E. Searle and R. Burghart, 'The Defense of England and the Peasants' Revolt', *Viator* 3 (1972), 370-88.

tax the clergy had been effectively settled in the late 1290s. A theory prevailed amongst the laity that, as non-combatants, the clergy were duty-bound to bear some of the costs of the wars of the realm, and in purely practical terms there were few weapons in the clerical armoury that could fight off royal requests for money.⁹ From the point of view of the Crown, the pressures of war on an already strained royal budget could only be effectively relieved by taxation, both lay and clerical. As part of Convocation, the monasteries were included in the regular tenths imposed on the clergy throughout the period. The clerical subsidy was hardly an invention of the fourteenth century, but from around the start of the Hundred Years War it became a regular, rather than an extraordinary, solution to royal budgetary problems. Of the 63 years between 1334 and 1397 Convocation approved a grant to the Crown, normally of a tenth, for 32 of those. This conceals some periods of particularly heavy taxation, mostly coinciding with the intensification of the war effort in 1334–47 and 1369–88.¹⁰ Furthermore monastic prelates were frequently deputised to collect both lay and clerical subsidies, a role which consumed both time and money and occasionally, when the taxes were resisted, presented the threat of bodily harm.¹¹ The stepping-up of financial demands upon the clergy was also one of the longer-lasting effects of the war on the English Church. Through most of the fourteenth century clerical taxation was a response to the circumstances of the war, but by the fifteenth century, and more specifically from the 28-year truce of 1396, it had become routine.¹²

The taxatory aspect of the monastic contribution to the war affected all English houses indiscriminately. More pertinent to the particular situation of the monasteries of the south coast was the financial impact of repairs and lost revenue due to French ravaging of the coast, and of the costs of arranging for the defence of the house and its locality

9 P. Heath, *Church and Realm 1272–1461* (London, 1988), pp. 45–52, 62–3.

10 Lists of convocations and grants for the fourteenth century are in D.B. Weske, *Convocation of the Clergy* (London, 1937), pp. 234–70. Grants were made (of a tenth except where noted) in 1334, 1335, 1336, 1337 (for three years on spiritualities), 1338 (after the lapse of the three years), 1339, 1344 (for three years), 1346 (for two years), 1351 (for two years), 1356, 1359, 1369 (for three years), 1371 (£50,000), 1373, 1376 (subsidy), 1377 (poll tax), 1379 (subsidy according to status), 1380 (poll tax), 1383 (moeity), 1384 (moeity and tenth), 1385, 1386, 1387 (moeity and tenth), 1388, 1391 (moeity), 1394 (moeity), 1394, 1396, 1397.

11 McHardy, 'English Clergy', p. 172.

12 A.K. McHardy, 'Clerical Taxation in Fifteenth-Century England' in R.B. Dobson (ed.), *The Church, Politics and Patronage* (Gloucester, 1984), p. 173.

against such attacks. The normal governmental response to monastic petitions alleging financial problems as a result of the war was either to relieve them temporarily of the burden of taxation or to grant their requests for other sources of income. The apparent willingness of the Crown to accede to petitions on these grounds perhaps indicates a recognition of the role played by the monasteries of the south coast, as subsequent sections of this essay will reveal. Thus in 1371 Quarr Abbey was excused the triennial tenth on account of the cost of defending the Isle of Wight, which had been part of the abbot's responsibilities since the 1340s. This exemption may be related to particular works on the abbey's (and the island's) defences that had been underway since 1365 but were apparently facing stiff resistance and even sabotage from the local inhabitants.¹³

Impoverishment due to the destruction of monastic land and property by the French and their allies was a common complaint. Following the well-documented raids on Portsmouth and Southampton in 1338 numerous houses in the area experienced financial difficulties due to the loss of rent.¹⁴ The priory of St Denys was granted relief from the tenth due to the destruction of their tenements and of a number of churches in which they held pensions, while the prior of Southwick was also excused the tenth in 1340 'from the time of the burning of the priory' and for three years in 1342 as 'his houses and other buildings in Portsmouth and elsewhere, in the rents whereof a great part of his living consists, are burned by certain enemies of France'.¹⁵ In 1343 and 1345 the master and brethren of the hospital of St. Mary Magdalen in Portsmouth claimed to be so impoverished by 'frequent attacks' by foreign enemies that they had neither income nor accommodation, while in 1340 the hospital of St Nicholas in Portsmouth was exempted from finding a man-at-arms for the Isle of Wight because of the loss of revenue occasioned by the burning of its manors and property.¹⁶ The hospital of St Julian in Southampton was so badly affected that the Crown had to intervene to collect due rents, when that failed, the

13 *Calendar of Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office* (London, 1891-) [hereafter CPR], 1364-7, pp. 168, 253, 1370-4, p. 29.

14 J. Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Trial By Battle* (London, 1999), pp. 226, 238; C. Platt, *Medieval Southampton* (London, 1973), p. 112; M. Hughes, 'The Fourteenth-Century French Raids on Hampshire and the Isle of Wight', in Curry and Hughes, *Arms, Armies and Fortifications*, pp. 121-44.

15 *Calendar of Close Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office: Edward III*, 14 vols (London, 1896-1913) [hereafter CCR] 1339-41, pp. 104, 332, 479; CPR, 1340-3, p. 579.

16 CPR, 1340-3, p. 575, 1345-8, p. 209; CCR, 1339-41, pp. 637-8.

house was granted to the Queen's new hall at Oxford in 1344. In 1347 it was noted that the hospital itself, as well as 'its charters of liberties and other muniments [had] been burned by certain alien enemies'. In 1385 the prior of St Denys again complained that the house's possessions had been burned by the French, leaving them in debt, and in 1405 stated that 'a great part of their lands, rents and possessions within the town of Southampton and elsewhere are waste and their charters and muniments are torn and burned by the French'.¹⁷

These losses were not specifically related to the monastic identities of the institutions; they suffered as landlords and as institutions in or around a target of attack. Other sources attest to the level of destruction in Portsmouth and Southampton, so there is no reason to doubt the severity of their losses, or to suggest anything more than mild exaggeration in their petitions. Similarly when the canons of Holy Trinity Hastings stated that they lost three churches and other houses in a raid on the port in 1339, it is clear from a number of other sources that the destruction indicated by their petition did actually occur.¹⁸ Yet a number of monastic petitions provide the only evidence of raiding in a particular area and, without the kind of corroboration given by the chronicles to the raids on major ports, there is a temptation to dismiss many or all of their claims. When submitting petitions, it was always in the interest of the house to exaggerate the expense incurred or the damage sustained. Yet the very terms in which the petitions are framed indicate that the houses regarded themselves, and were considered to be, vulnerable.

An otherwise unnoticed attack on Dorset in or before 1348 is preserved in the travails of two monastic houses. Bindon Abbey was said to be so burdened with debt and depressed due to frequent raiding by foreigners 'coming upon them unawares', as well as by the hospitality they extended to other mariners, that it faced ruin. It was placed in the custody of Hugh Courtenay, Earl of Devon.¹⁹ Similarly, the king granted a licence to the abbess and convent of Tarrant Keynes to cut down 200 acres of under-wood in their demesne 'on their petition setting forth that their house and possessions in the county of Dorset

17 CPR, 1343-5, p. 215, 1381-5, p. 556, 1401-5, p. 26; *Calendar of Charter Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office*, 6 vols (London, 1903-27) [hereafter CChR], 1341-7, p. 70; *The Cartulary of the Priory of St Denys near Southampton*, ed. E.O. Blake 2 vols (Southampton Records Series, 24-5, 1981), I, p. xi.

18 CCR, 1339-41, p. 333; Sumption, *Trial by Battle*, p. 263; *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker de Swynbroke*, ed. E.M. Thompson (Oxford, 1889), p. 63.

19 CPR, 1348-50, p. 52.

had been burned and destroyed by an invasion of the king's enemies in those parts'.²⁰ The houses are around ten miles from each other and both around five miles from Poole, so their complaint is believable, and they may have experienced the collateral damage of a raid on that port. Also in 1348, the inhabitants of (East) Budleigh, in Devon, complained that their port had been attacked and men and ships carried off, while the abbey of Torre, further along the coast in Devon, successfully petitioned for a suit being pursued against the house to be halted as 'the abbey being situated on the sea coast has sustained expenses and intolerable charges for the defence of those parts'.²¹ The locations of the houses and lands filing these petitions fits the noted French pattern of attacking isolated and generally defenceless coastal areas.

Like the nuns of Tarrant Keynes, a few houses sought other sources of income to make up for damage to their property. In 1386 the Benedictine monks of Abbotsbury, near Weymouth in Dorset, complained to Urban VI that, as their house was situated on the coast, they were frequently invaded by Spaniards, Normans, and Bretons, and garrisoned by the king's forces, and that the expense was threatening the continuation of religious services at the house. This may be seen as so much hyperbole, as the monks were attempting to acquire the advowson of Tolpuddle church, but the repetition of the 'great cost which they daily incur for defence against hostile attack' in the letter patent suggests that the monks' position was perilous to some degree.²² Similarly, in 1338 the prior of Plympton petitioned John Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter, to appropriate their church of Newton St. Cyres to pay for the repairs to their cell of St. Anthony-in-Roseland in the Falmouth estuary, which had been damaged in a French raid.²³ In 1391, Lewes Priory was granted a particularly generous papal dispensation to appropriate its churches of West Hoathly, Patcham, and Ditchling with its chapel of Wivelsfield. They had numerous complaints, not least that the prior had been captured and the priory had paid his ransom, and that their servants and crops had been carried off by raiders from the sea.²⁴

20 CPR, 1348–50, p. 127.

21 *Rotuli Parliamentorum, ut et petitiones et placita in Parlamento*, ed. Thomas Astle, Richard Blyke et al., 6 vols (London, 1767–77), II, p. 213; CPR, 1348–50, p. 206; Trinity College Dublin, MS 524 Torre Abbey Cartulary, f. 93r–v.

22 CPR, 1385–9, p. 47; *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters* (London, 1893–) [hereafter CPL] 1396–1404, p. 77.

23 *The Register of John de Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter*, ed. F.C. Hingeston-Randolph, 3 vols (London, 1894–9), II, p. 872.

24 CPL, 1362–1404, p. 396

A more specifically monastic problem, as the monks of Bindon and Abbotsbury complained, was that proximity to a port also brought the burden of hospitality for passing soldiers and mariners. In 1341 St. Martin's Dover complained that the corn and victuals of the house had gone towards maintaining English mariners who had come to the port.²⁵ In 1347, Netley Abbey on Southampton Water, to the southeast of the town, was taken into the custody of Walter de Maunay because the frequent attentions of both friendly and enemy mariners had depleted its resources to the point where debts could not be paid.²⁶ In 1448 Premonstratensian St Radegund's, near Dover, was excused a debt of £80 to the king because various lords and their armed retinues had been staying there for a month or more at a time waiting for their passage across the Channel.²⁷ The king had apparently commanded that the abbey provide this hospitality and, as a house of small to moderate wealth only four miles from one of the main embarkation points for France, it comes as no real surprise to discover that the canons there were struggling to bear the burden of a constant through passage of troops. The dispossessed civilian casualties of coastal raiding could also be a drain on monastic hospitality and finances. In 1368–73 and 1380–84 the almoner of Battle was purchasing extra food to distribute among the large numbers of war-affected needy who had come to the abbey.²⁸ It is difficult, due to the lack of similar documents from other houses, to assess how numerous these seekers of monastic refuge were, but occasional orders to citizens not to flee war-affected areas under penalty of distraint, and the lack of other provision for the dispossessed, may suggest that this was episodically widespread.²⁹

II Defending the Coast

The damage caused by French raiding parties had the potential to be disastrous for those affected. While the raids themselves appear, from the meagre evidence, to have been sporadic and opportunistic, and it is probable that a great deal of them have left no trace on the historical record, it is clear that the perception of the threat was widespread. The possibility of a French invasion was keenly felt, particularly prior to the

25 CCR, 1341–3, p. 342.

26 CPR, 1345–8, pp. 445–6.

27 CPR, 1446–52, p. 203.

28 Searle, *Lordship and Community*, p. 343.

29 CCR, 1339–41, pp. 101, 237, 1369–74, p. 276, 1374–7, p. 406; H.J. Hewitt, *The Organization of War under Edward III, 1338–62* (Manchester, 1966), pp. 9–10.

battle of Sluys in 1340 and after the battle of La Rochelle in 1372.³⁰ As major landowners along the south coast, the monasteries were included in the general response to the defence of the realm against such attacks. Indeed, we might see their participation, along with tax collecting and other administrative duties, as evidence of their continued participation in public life. Responses of abbots and their houses to the attempts to organise an effective coastal defence were mainly positive, although the extent of individual involvement could vary widely, depending largely on the situation and size of the house and the character of the abbot.

At the outbreak of the war key to the defence of the realm was a somewhat antiquated system based around the keepers of the 'maritime lands' – a strip extending six leagues in from the sea shore. All men living within these lands were ordered to array and repel invasion, while lords with lands there were ordered to reside at their coastal manors, preferably in force of arms. Inland counties were linked to coastal counties in their obligations to supply men for the defence of the realm.³¹ In 1337 all men of religion in Hampshire, Dorset, Somerset, and Devon were exempted from supplying men or finances to the defence of the maritime lands, although this exemption was probably only local and certainly did not last very long.³² Between 1338 and 1340 a vast number of monastic houses were included in the arrays of the maritime lands, either being required to repair to the coast or to send men-at-arms and archers. The abbots of Abingdon, Romsey, Hyde, and Beaulieu, all of which had lands by the coast, were instructed to send their men to garrison Southampton, while the abbots of St Augustine's Canterbury, Faversham, and Battle and the priors of Dover, Christ Church Canterbury and Rochester were all instructed to arm themselves and their servants in Kent.³³ In Dorset alone in 1338, the abbots of Sherborne, Cerne, Bindon, Abbotsbury and Milton, and the priors of Wareham, Cranborne, Frampton, Loders and Horton were ordered to go to their lands on the coast to repel invasion.³⁴

30 Although the importance of both battles has been called into question. C.F. Richmond, 'The War at Sea', in K. Fowler (ed.), *The Hundred Years War* (London, 1971), pp. 96–9; J.W. Sherbourne, 'The Battle of La Rochelle and the War at Sea 1372–75', in C.T. Allmand (ed.), *War, Politics and Culture in Fourteenth-Century England* (London, 1994), pp. 41–54.

31 Hewitt, *Organisation of War*, pp. 4–21.

32 CCR, 1337–9, p. 179.

33 CCR, 1337–9, pp. 413–14, 542.

34 T. Rymer, *Fœdera, conventiones, litteræ, et cujuscunque generis acta publica*, 4 vols (London, 1816–69), II, p. 1079; *Treaty Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office*, 2 vols (London, 1955–72), II, p. 309.

The monasteries of the south coast were not exempt, therefore, from the defence of their region. Some were more involved than others. As the major monastic institution on the Isle of Wight, the abbot of Quarr was directly involved in its defence from around 1346. He was made a custodian of the island, with two lay men, in 1351, and repeatedly ordered, with others, to oversee commissions of array, while in 1372 and 1375 he was specifically ordered to defend the coast against all possible attacks.³⁵ Similarly, from the 1330s the abbot of Battle was the principal arrayer and defender of the coast from the Romney Marshes to Pevensey.³⁶

From 1369 the keepers of the maritime lands were replaced by arrayers, and all the clergy were instructed to form themselves in regular military arrays to be directed whenever the coast was threatened. The usual monastic contribution to this muster was probably performed by proxy with the monastery limited to 'finding' men to fill their allocated places. At an array of the Cornish clergy in 1372 the prior of St Michael's Mount was required to provide three men-at-arms, and the heads of Tywardreath, Bodmin, St. Germans, and Launceston six men-at-arms and six archers each, although the prelates could also be represented by procurators.³⁷ There is certainly no evidence of monks having taken their places in the ranks of the clerical militia, although our knowledge of the practical composition of these is largely limited to writs of array. Nonetheless, abbots occasionally participated as administrators, such as the abbot of St Osyth who surveyed the array of Colchester archdeaconry in 1386.³⁸

Occasional instructions to heads of houses to organise the defence of their lands by the coast were still issued. In 1377 the bishop of Exeter and the abbot of Buckfast were ordered to defend their lands near Dartmouth against the threat of French invasion, while the heads of Plympton, Buckland, Tavistock, and Modbury were to do the same at Plymouth. As part of a much larger number of local knights and gentry in 1383 the abbot of Tavistock and the priors of Plympton, Launceston,

35 Hockey, *Quarr Abbey*, pp. 135–9; Rymer, *Foedera*, III (i), p. 239, III (ii), p. 220, 944; CPR, 1367–70, p. 189; 1370–4, p. 29; CCR, 1369–74, p. 151.

36 Searle, *Lordship and Community*, pp. 338–40.

37 *Register of Thomas de Brantyngham, Bishop of Exeter*, ed. F.C. Hingeston-Randolph, 2 vols (London, 1901–6), I, pp. 271–2.

38 B. McNab, 'Obligations of the Church in English Society: Military Arrays of the Clergy 1369–1418' in W.C. Jordan, B. McNab, T.F. Ruiz (eds), *Order and Innovation in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Joseph Strayer* (Princeton, NJ, 1976), pp. 293–311.

and Bodmin were to aid in the defence of the Devon coast against a feared French invasion.³⁹ In 1385 the abbot of Bury St Edmunds was instructed to assemble a force and go to the Suffolk coast, specifically to Elmswell, which was easier to defend than his manor of Worlingworth, 'as heretofore used to be done by him and his predecessors in time of war'. In the same year the bishop of Winchester was ordered to gather 'all abbots, priors, men of religion and other ecclesiastical persons of his diocese' to resist an invasion of the Isle of Wight.⁴⁰ Again, most of the regular religious were presumably represented by proxies.

There is no suggestion that these defensive responsibilities, most heavily weighing on the monasteries closest to the coast but shared by houses all over the country, were regularly evaded or even complained about on a wide scale. Given the dangers associated with French attacks, it is perhaps understandable that houses would willingly contribute to the organisation of their own safety. Some prelates were, however, more enthusiastic in the enactment of their duties than others. Under Admiral Jean de Vienne the sustained French and Castilian raiding of 1377 was the worst, according to one chronicle, since the late 1330s, and gave rise to some of the most heroic instances of monastic involvement in the defence of the coast.⁴¹ Various chroniclers give different chronologies, although it is generally accepted that the first action occurred on 29 June, when the French took Rye.⁴² The abbot of Battle, Hamo de Offington, called a council to decide a course of action. Meanwhile, one of Hamo's servants captured one of the raiders, who was personally interrogated by the abbot as to the purpose of the French mission. The abbot then assembled a force at nearby Winchelsea, on seeing which the French decided to cut their losses and plundered and burned Rye, before leaving on their ships.

In July, the fleet attacked Rottingdean. Prior John de Cariloco of Lewes, around seven miles to the north-east, met the raiders with a small force but was overcome and captured along with a number of knights and gentry. The prior was held hostage for over a year, before being ransomed for 7000 nobles (£2333). This was more than double the income of the priory, as stated in 1391, and the cost of his ransom was one of the reasons for which the monks claimed poverty, along

39 CCR, 1374-7, pp. 497-8, 1381-5, pp. 269-70.

40 *Calendar of the close rolls preserved in the Public Record Office: Richard II*, 6 vols (London, 1914-27), 1381-5, pp. 542, 551-2, 555-6.

41 *Vita Ricardi Secundi*, ed. G.B. Stow (Pennsylvania, 1977), p. 47.

42 J. Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Divided Houses* (London, 2009), pp. 281-6.

with the capture of their labourers and burning of their crops by the raiders.⁴³

After returning to Harfleur in late July, the fleet occupied the Isle of Wight on 21 August although, perhaps surprisingly given the abbot's defensive role, there is no mention of the abbey of Quarr. When the French left, however, they once again confronted the abbot of Battle in their attempts to raid Winchelsea. The abbot had been caught out in the defence of Rye but this time round had occupied the town and, after the failure of negotiations, successfully held it against the attackers. Walsingham notes that, while the concentration of the abbot's resources in Winchelsea allowed him to drive off the French, it did have the unfortunate side-effect of allowing some of the raiders to slip off and burn Hastings without facing any resistance. It is also notable that in this instance the abbot's religious side is emphasised. He threatened the French with eternal damnation if they attempted to take the town, refused to allow single combat to decide the town's fate as, as a religious man, he could not concede to such demands, and is specifically stated not to have come for a fight, but to preserve peace.⁴⁴ The abbot's pacific intentions are perhaps undermined somewhat by the listing in the abbey's accounts for 1381-2 of his personal crossbow and hauberk.⁴⁵

The final noted monastic participation in the raids of 1377 was at Folkestone, where William Thorne's chronicle of St. Augustine's Canterbury details a raid on St Eanswythe's Day (31 August).⁴⁶ According to Thorne, the town was partially destroyed by fire when:

Abbot Michael [Pecham], who, although a religious, was laudably active in the defence of his country, with a strong body of his own

43 *St. Albans Chronicle*, I, pp. 133, 165; CPL, 1362-1404, p. 396; *La Chronique du Bon Duc Loys de Bourbon*, ed. A.-M. Chazaud (Paris, 1867), pp. 71-2. This last account credits the prior of Lewes with the defence of Rye, although the details indicate that Rottingdean must be meant.

44 *St. Albans Chronicle*, I, p. 163.

45 Searle, *Lordship and Community*, p. 342.

46 On this date, Russell and others follow C. de la Roncière, *Histoire de la Marine Française* 6 vols (Paris, 1909-32), II, p. 55, who, though citing Thorne, incorrectly places the raid on 20th July (perhaps confusing St. Eanswythe with St. Etheldreda?); P.E. Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 239-40; Searle and Burghart, 'The Defense of England', pp. 380-1. The raid was noted in the chronicles of St Augustine's, Canterbury, so almost certainly means St Eanswythe's festal day as celebrated at the abbey, rather than the feast of her translation celebrated at Folkestone (12th September); F. Wormald, *English Benedictine Kalendars after AD 1100*, 2 vols (London, 1939-46), I, p. 38.

men and other valiant men whom he had specially kept with him, hastened to meet their invasion in battle and compelled them to take refuge in their ships. Then the pirates, making sail for Dover and anchoring there, stayed three days and put forth all their efforts day and night to destroy all they could on land. When the aforesaid abbot was the first again to come to the assistance of the above named people with no small army of warlike men, and the enemy thereupon began to retreat, he, having restored safety to the land, retired honourably, with his men, the last of all.⁴⁷

From the start to the end of the 1377 raids the French and Spanish fleet had thus been confronted by somewhat ragtag defence forces personally commanded by monastic prelates, with varying results. Such action on the part of the religious contravened the fourth canon of the 1268 Council of London forbidding clergy to bear arms or shed blood, although abbot Hamo's pacific response to the French at Winchelsea suggests that this rule was not completely forgotten.⁴⁸ At no point do the chroniclers explicitly state that the abbots or priors personally fought, although it is strongly intimated in the capture of the prior of Lewes, the late withdrawal of the abbot of St Augustine's, and the personal armaments of abbot Hamo. Regarding the latter, in 1380 when Winchelsea was once again attacked the French put the abbot to flight and captured one of his fellow monks who had followed his abbot's lead, donned armour, and joined the fight.⁴⁹ When the abbot died in 1383, the notice in the Westminster Chronicle stated that 'beneath his monkish habit he was a soldier of mark and a stout defender of home, neighbours, and coast against the attacks of pirates'.⁵⁰ Indeed, it may have been Hamo's example that Abbot Nicholas Litlington of Westminster was following when in 1386 he and two fellow monks, John Canterbury and John Burgh, donned armour, took up arms, and made for the coast in response to a threatened French invasion. Litlington's effectiveness in battle is questionable, as he must have been in his seventies at the time, although John Canterbury was a man

47 *William Thorne's Chronicle of St Augustine's Abbey Canterbury*, ed. A.H. Davis (Oxford, 1934), p. 609.

48 *Councils and Synods, with other Documents relating to the English Church*. Vol. 2 AD 1205-1313, eds. F.M. Powicke and C.R. Cheney, 2 vols (Oxford, 1964), II, pp. 751-2.

49 *St Albans Chronicle*, I, pp. 372-5.

50 *The Westminster Chronicle 1381-1394*, eds. L.C. Hector and B.F. Harvey (Oxford, 1982), pp. 34-5.

of such size that his armour could not be sold for want of an equally-proportioned buyer.⁵¹

It was not just individual character that led Hamo de Offington, John de Cariloco, Michael Pecham, and Nicholas Litlyngton to take the fight to the enemy personally, unlike any other English abbots to our knowledge. In the first three cases, their situation as heads of the large houses of Battle, Lewes, and St. Augustine's placed them in a position of responsibility for defence – they were extremely powerful landowners able to assemble large groups of local men to aid them. They were also in the right place at the right time; the closest major houses to Winchelsea, Rye, Rottingdean, and Folkestone when they were attacked. The abbot of Battle was responsible for the defence of the area, and the prior of Lewes' intervention was apparently only necessary due to the absence of the arrayer, Richard FitzAlan, Earl of Arundel.⁵² With the keeper of the castle away, the largest local landowner present – the prior – naturally took command.

Furthermore, the pitched battles and standoffs of 1377 and 1380 were highly unusual in the pattern of French raiding. Indeed, their departure from the normal tactic of opportunistic raiding and plunder probably accounts for their inclusion, at some length, in the chronicles. They provided the set-piece opportunities for individuals to feature as heroes in the chronicles, and it may be particularly revealing in this context that the abbot of Quarr is not mentioned as having a personal role in the defence of the Isle of Wight despite his official status in that capacity. The standard pattern of sporadic raiding features much less prominently, if at all, in the sources, and the lack of recorded proactive monastic involvement in defence outside the 1377–80 period is more a reflection of the source material than necessarily a fair indication of the situation. Generally monastic prelates, as major local landowners, would be expected to furnish men and play a role in the defence of their lands, and the lands of their neighbours and tenants. There is little to suggest that they shirked their defensive duties, even if some were performed by proxy, and even became personally involved when necessary. The overall picture of the monastic role in coastal defence in this period is thus one of full and mainly willing participation.

51 N. Saul, *Richard II* (London, 1997), pp. 155–6; B.F. Harvey, 'Nicholas Litlyngton', in H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 60 vols (Oxford, 2004), XXXIV, p. 14; Westminster Abbey Muniments, 5446, Book 1, f. 87.

52 Sumption, *Divided Houses*, pp. 281–2.

III Defending the Precinct

Besides arranging for the defence of their local area, many monastic prelates on the south coast, especially those with houses sited particularly close to the sea shore, found it expedient to arrange for the defence of the cloister itself. The sacred nature of the monastic precinct provided little or no protection against the ravages of war, and, as large, wealthy, and normally unprotected institutions, monasteries were an excellent target for the opportunistic coastal raids of the fourteenth century. Indeed, the contributions of monasteries to the domestic war effort, as noted above, may have provided some justification for considering them a target as providers of 'aid and countenance' to the state.⁵³ Proximity to a major port also heightened the danger of being razed along with the town during or accompanying a raid. Any house in the general vicinity of a port or visible from the sea could be vulnerable to opportunistic raids from foreign enemies, either as part of a general harrying of the locality or as an alternative to attacking a well-defended town. According to a letter of 1338 in Bishop Grandisson's register, the proximity of Tywardreath Priory to the sea exposed the convent to raids by pirates and, as such, they were given temporary permission to remove to another site, distant from the sea, when this threat arose.⁵⁴ It must also have suffered, however, from its proximity to the major port of Fowey and, as its guest-hall was said in 1339 to be ruined, the house may have been caught up in the same attacks that had damaged Plympton's cell of St Anthony-in-Roseland, near Falmouth, that year.⁵⁵

While it might be expected that the typical monastic response to danger would be to flee to safety, Tywardreath's request for a temporary withdrawal from their site was actually highly unusual. Most other houses under threat from coastal raiding stood firm, and some made an attempt at fortification. In this respect monasteries were following the lay initiative, as this period saw the move to defensibility of lay settlements and buildings, both castles and gentry residences, all along the coast.⁵⁶ The south-east saw perhaps the largest number of these works, although most southern coastal regions witnessed similar programmes. In the course of the fourteenth century in the

53 M.H. Keen, *The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages* (London, 1965), pp. 190–2.

54 Reg. Grandisson, II, pp. 870–1.

55 Reg. Grandisson, II, p. 899.

56 A. Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales, 1300–1500: Southern England* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 269, 283–7, 454–7.

West Country, for example, defences were constructed at Dartmouth, Kingswear, Powderham, and Berry Pomeroy, and the castles at Totnes, Plymouth and Trematon were refurbished.⁵⁷

The purpose of these new fortifications, both lay and ecclesiastical, has been the subject of some debate. The fourteenth century saw an explosion in royal grants of licences to crenellate (to construct battlements and defensive structures) mainly to the gentry and lower nobility, to the extent that they have been dismissed as more of a status symbol, and indication of royal favour, than a means of defence.⁵⁸ This theory has much to commend it for the vast majority of inland properties that did not lie in a border region. Yet we should not lose sight of the fact that for those residences facing the threat of violence defensive reinforcement was also, if not primarily, a practical response to local circumstances.

A number of licences to crenellate were granted to ecclesiastical institutions in this period. Following much the same line of argument that he had applied to the lay grants, Coulson largely dismissed ecclesiastical licences as being desired for 'the extra *cachet* of royal recognition', rather than for any truly defensive purpose. To support this he claimed that, unlike those on the continent, no monastery in England, with the exception of Tynemouth Priory, was fortified to the extent that it could withstand a full-scale attack.⁵⁹ Thus, for Coulson, the 'fortification' of a monastery in England served no practical purpose – it was only for show. However, while the statement that no English monastery, Tynemouth excepted, could hold out against a concerted attack is broadly true (although Lindisfarne Priory was also very heavily fortified), this perhaps misses the crucial point.⁶⁰ The main threat to monasteries in England, and especially along the south coast, was sporadic raiding, as opposed to the large standing armies that ravaged the continent. Indeed, maintaining impenetrable defences was not worth the inconvenience and expense, given the nature of

57 R.A. Higham, 'Public and Private Defence in the Medieval South West: Town, Castle and Fort' in idem. (ed.), *Security and Defence in South-West England before 1800* (Exeter 1987), pp. 41–6.

58 C. Coulson, 'Structural Symbolism in Medieval Castle Architecture', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 132 (1979), 73–90; idem., 'Freedom to Crenellate by Licence', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 38 (1994), 91–7.

59 C. Coulson, 'Hierarchism in Conventual Crenellation: An Essay in the Sociology and Metaphysics of Medieval Fortification', *Medieval Archaeology* 26 (1984), pp. 83, 91–2.

60 C.J. Brooke, *Safe Sanctuaries: Security and Defence in Anglo-Scottish Border Churches 1296–1603* (Edinburgh, 2000), pp. 73–5.

the threat. In 1385 Lindisfarne asked the king's permission to take down their perimeter walls as they could no longer take the strain of garrisoning them.⁶¹ Other work, notably by Higham, has emphasised the defensive purpose of crenellation licences, whether as a deterrent against particular local tensions or, especially in the south and south-west, the threat from France.⁶²

In monastic terms, we may illustrate this through a brief survey of crenellation licences. Between 1336 and 1388, twenty monastic houses were granted licences.⁶³ Eight of the houses were Benedictine, five Augustinian, three Premonstratensian, two Cistercian, and one Cluniac. As to the extent of the licences, eight were general, or stated that the whole site was covered by the licence; six were for the church or belfry; three for chambers or houses in the precinct; two for walls; and one was for a gatehouse. More importantly, in terms of geographical spread, five were in the northern counties of Yorkshire and Lancashire (Bridlington, Drax, Guisborough, Selby, and Whalley); three were in the Welsh Marches (Chester St. Werburgh's, Winchcombe, and Worcester); one in East Anglia (Langley); one, Thornton, on the shore by the Humber; and ten were in the southern or south-western coastal counties (Battle, Buckland, Lewes, Quarr, Rochester cathedral priory, St. Albans, Shaftesbury, Torre, Waltham, West Langdon). They are also chronologically grouped during periods of increased threat: eight in 1337–48 and nine in 1365–88, with only St Albans, Lewes and Drax in the intervening period. Thus, with the exception of St. Albans and possibly Shaftesbury, the fortification of these houses can easily be seen as a practical response to the threat from external forces, either Scottish, Welsh, or French. Even St. Albans' licence can be seen in the light of licences granted to Abingdon and Peterborough earlier in the century against a background of the rising threat and occasional reality of conflict between the abbeys and their boroughs.⁶⁴

The physical form that these crenellation licences took is an even more vexed question, not least because a number of the houses concerned have left no physical remains. Thus at West Langdon almost nothing survives to indicate an attempt at fortification, while at Buckland only

61 Not only was the plea of the monks rejected, but they were sent another two cannon and an artillery expert, Brooke, *Safe Sanctuaries*, p. 75.

62 Higham, 'Public and Private Defence', pp. 27–50.

63 Coulson, 'Hierarchism in Conventual Crenellation', 94–5; Trinity College Dublin, MS 524, f. 93r contains a letter patent of 1348 for Torre to crenellate which was, unusually, not enrolled and was thus missed from Coulson's list.

64 Coulson, 'Hierarchism in Conventual Crenellation', 84–90.

a short length of the perimeter wall may be linked to the licence.⁶⁵ Parts of the precinct walls survive to indicate the defensive measures taken at Lewes and Quarr, although the latter is supposed to contain the earliest surviving gunports in Britain.⁶⁶ The rather unremarkable 'Prior's Gate' at Rochester may be mid fourteenth-century, but it does show that the walls of the priory were around five metres high and two metres thick at that point. Battle's mid fourteenth-century gatehouse, which still stands, is impressive and certainly incorporates militaristic elements, including a portcullis and, apparently, murder holes.⁶⁷ Torre's surviving gatehouse is of the late fourteenth century and, while not as substantial as that at Battle, is notably atypical of monastic gatehouses in its solidity and lack of ornamentation.⁶⁸ The windows of the corner turrets and upper floors appear to have been intended from the start as hand cannon loops; a highly unusual feature for a monastic gatehouse. Torre's gatehouse is also an inner portal, within the monastic precinct and attached to the south-west corner, nearest to the sea shore. The gun-loops are mainly positioned to provide a field of view southward and eastward across the face of the south range. This inner gatehouse was therefore the defensive structure for the seaward side of the abbey, and, due to its proximity to the cloister, may have been intended as a potentially defensible shelter during raids, in effect a monastic peel tower.

Numerous other monastic sites along the south coast display evidence of defensive building for which no crenellation licence survives. The post-Dissolution destruction of many sites may hide a picture of widespread defensive works, only some of which were covered by licence, similar to many secular dwellings in the region. St Martin's Dover was said to have been building not only walls but war engines and armour for the defence of the town and priory in 1341.⁶⁹ Michelham Priory, near Pevensey, appears to have added a moat and substantial gatehouse in the fourteenth century, and it is hard to see these changes as part of anything other than a move

65 G.W. Copeland, 'Some Problems of Buckland Abbey', *Devonshire Association Report and Transactions*, 85 (1953), p. 51

66 D.F. Renn, 'The Earliest Gunports in Britain?' *The Archaeological Journal* 125 (1968), 301-3.

67 Emery, *Southern England*, pp. 306-7.

68 For a more specific discussion of the defences at Torre, see J.C. Jenkins, 'Torre Abbey: Locality, Community, and Society in Medieval Devon' (unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2010), pp. 202-6.

69 CCR, 1341-3, p. 342.

towards defensibility, especially given the location of the house.⁷⁰ Similarly, Wilmington Priory, less than four miles to the south-west of Michelham, had defences consisting of a three-storey drum tower and a portcullised gatehouse. At the other end of the coast, Glasney College, near Penryn in the Falmouth estuary, was described by Leland in the 1530s as being 'stronly wallid and incastelatid, having 3. strong towers and gunnes at the but of the creke'.⁷¹ Almost all physical evidence of Glasney has since disappeared, so it is impossible to date these defences. Yet, given the college's position by the coast and near a major port, it would not be surprising if some of these features had been in place in the fourteenth century.

Referring to the gunports at Quarr, Emery claims that such defences 'offered gesture rather than meaningful protection'.⁷² The same might be said of the loops in the Torre gatehouse, not least because hand cannon in the late fourteenth century were clumsy weapons, relying more on noise, light, and smoke to frighten the enemy than any destructive capabilities.⁷³ Indeed, the utility of the gatehouses at Torre and Battle, and the drum tower at Wilmington, can be called into serious question. At best they would have provided a bolt-hole for some of the community in times of danger, while offering little to no active defensive resistance to raiders. Yet despite the serious, and well-chronicled, attacks on the Isle of Wight and Lewes in 1377, there is no mention, or indication, that the walls of Quarr Abbey or Lewes Priory were breached. Indeed, despite a long list of war-related complaints in 1391, the monks of Lewes did not suggest that their precinct had been targeted in the raiding, and although it is dangerous to argue from silence, the utility of visible defensive structures may be revealed in the lack of complaints about the destruction of the monastic cloister submitted by defended houses.

While most of the abbeys in a border position in England, such as those on the south coast, could only be described as 'sub-fortified' and would have easily succumbed to a fully armed invasion force, we should also note that the expense and disruption of erecting and manning strong defences, as at Lindisfarne, was a serious obstacle for

70 Emery, *Southern England*, pp. 271, 284, 308–9.

71 Leland's *Itinerary in England and Wales*, ed. L. Toulmin Smith, 5 vols (London, 1964), I, p. 197.

72 Emery, *Southern England*, p. 292, n. 73.

73 M.H. Keen, 'The Changing Scene: Guns, Gunpowder, and Permanent Armies', in *idem.*, *Medieval Warfare: A History* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 278–80.

most monastic communities.⁷⁴ It was also simply unnecessary for most, given that its primary purpose was to deter any would-be raiders from pillaging the abbey precinct. In this light, and given the oft-repeated theories of Coulson regarding the function of monastic defences, it is worth summarising that chronologically and geographically monastic crenellation licences coincide notably with periods and areas of increased threats of attack, and that the form this attack usually, although not always, took was sporadic and opportunistic raiding. There was no need for a monastery to provide itself with anything more expensive to build and maintain than a deterrent to anything but the most determined of seaborne attackers.

IV Conclusion

In terms of the Hundred Years War, the monastic and civilian experiences in England have hitherto received little scholarly attention. This deficit is almost certainly the result of the contemporary chroniclers' general indifference to these facets of the war, and the somewhat disparate and piecemeal evidence that has to be collated in order to throw light on the subject. Yet the functions and experiences of monasteries and their superiors, as outlined above, invite us to reconsider our preconceptions of the nature of monastic and civilian life on the south coast throughout the fourteenth century. Of course, opportunistic raiding by both foreign and domestic pirates could and did occur at any time, and on any coast, but the evidence clearly points to a marked increase in both the fear and reality of destructive attacks from the Channel between the 1330s and 1390s. In many instances the monastic experience of these attacks, as noted in the first section, provide the only evidence of the extent of the destruction, and thus serve as the prime indicator of the otherwise unrecorded civilian experience of war. Yet their sacred and institutional nature may have also placed the monasteries in a position of vulnerability. Religious houses were often set in isolation from lay settlements, extremely visible thanks to their tall church towers, known to all Christians as repositories of plate and other valuables, and supposedly debarred by the law of the Church from arming themselves or shedding blood. In times of peace they relied on a projection of their obvious sanctity, typified

74 The term 'sub-fortified' is Coulson's, who states that this encompassed most noble households and below (in fact, anything not capable of withstanding a full-scale siege). Coulson, 'Hierarchism in Conventual Crenellation', 75.

by their detachment from and rejection of the world, to deter would-be attackers. Indeed, inland monastic defences are more likely to feature an excess of saintly images than battlements. Yet in times of actual conflict, where the houses were seen as supporters of and accessories in war, not least through their financing and propagandising roles, their sacred nature rendered them extremely profitable targets for exactly the type of sporadic coastal raiding employed by the French and their allies in the fourteenth century.

It is this problem that monastic superiors and communities were reacting to when, as shown in the second and third parts of this article, they acted in a manner that we might consider to be particularly irreligious. All the inmates of the houses featured above had, as a condition of their profession, forsaken violence and embraced a life of contemplation. That monks' tempers could flare and blood could be spilt in the heat of the moment is clear to anyone who has studied medieval ecclesiastical history. Yet the actions of the monasteries in this case are not in this vein. Religious houses all along the south coast were fortifying their precincts and monastic superiors were personally taking charge of local commissions of array and the erection of defences, as well as arming themselves and their monks and, on occasion, leading the local militia into battle. In the light of these sober, calculated, and occasionally obligatory actions we should ask serious questions about the implications for our understanding of the medieval mindset as regards what was expected of the monasteries and what the monks themselves believed their role to be. It is perhaps particularly revealing that the superiors who did personally take the fight to the enemy were not only from some of the largest and most conspicuous houses in the country – Westminster, Battle, Lewes, and St Augustine's Canterbury – but apparently faced no ecclesiastical censure for their actions, and the author of the Westminster Chronicle had no problem juxtaposing the 'monkish habit' of Hamo de Offington with his abilities as 'a soldier of mark'!

In this obituary of the abbot of Battle we see a bald statement of the dual public and private roles of the monastic superior at this time, roles which were to a certain extent reflected in the function of their houses as both places of worship and fortified elements of a coastal defence. These roles equated broadly to the position of the monasteries as ecclesiastical institutions and wealthy landholders. Houses were still expected to perform their religious duties – they offered a place of sanctuary to dispossessed locals; hospitality to passing mariners and soldiers; and the normal complaint after a destructive raid was that the loss of income or fear of further raiding was threatening the

performance of religious service at the house – their very *raison d'être*. More actively, but still in their ecclesiastical role, the monasteries were expected to be positive in advertising the war effort. As landholders, however, they were expected to bear a share, often more than a fair share, of the cost of defending the nation. The superior, as the outward face of the corporation and usually by this point living apart from his community, took on the particularly public roles of commissioner of array and the organisation of local defences in much the same way that he would be expected to act as a tax collector or justice of the peace, if required.⁷⁵ A lay lord would be expected personally to lead the defence if required, and some monastic superiors at least took the opportunity to exercise this function as well. This may have been largely due to the personality of the individual, yet this action was not censured by the (monastic) chroniclers, but instead presented in tones that married their secular and sacred roles. When Hamo de Offington leads a militia against the French he claims to be acting only to preserve peace, while Michael Pecham is in the same breath called 'a religious' and 'laudably active in the defence of his country'.

It is not clear whether this active involvement in the war effort made the monasteries more open to attack, or, perhaps more likely, they were always vulnerable but their secular role gave a valid ideological justification for attacking them, but many found it necessary to fortify themselves for the first time during this period. We might see this as purely private initiative on the part of the monasteries, rather than fitting into a more public scheme of coastal defence. Yet if we consider the very nature of coastal defence and the organisation of local militia in this period was rudimentary and mainly aimed at plugging gaps and deterring landing parties, rather than providing any sort of resistance to a full-fledged invasion, and that the heads of the houses applying for crenellation licences were partly responsible for the coastal defence, then even the 'sub-fortified' nature of monastic defences can be thought of as part of the monasteries' public duty to the defence of their area. We should not, therefore, see the monasteries as passive victims of the war, nor as collateral damage, but as mostly full and active participants in the defence of themselves, their localities, and the south coast.

75 For an overview of the public roles of medieval monastic prelates see M. Heale, 'The Abbot and Public Life in Late Medieval England', in F. Andrews (ed.), *Religion and Public Life in Late Medieval Italy* (forthcoming, 2013).