

Acknowledgement

CHAS is very grateful to Steve O'Hanlon, a volunteer guide at St Augustine's Abbey and a member of the Canterbury Commemoration Society, for allowing us to make this article available.

Steve has researched and uncovered the remarkable story of Peter de Dene, and it is hoped that in due course he will be able to present a lecture on his findings to CHAS and the CCS.

This is the story of **Peter de Dene** – the strangest monk in the life of St. Augustine’s Abbey

Introduction

Peter de Dene (c.1265 – 1334 +) was a distinguished ecclesiastical lawyer, and at one time counsel to the abbey, to which he was a generous benefactor^[1]. The kitchen, chapter house, Fyndon gate, and the brewhouse and bakehouse were built or rebuilt between 1300 and 1320, plus the re-roofing of the dormitory and additions to the infirmary, all at his expense^[2-p.394]. Dene pursued a career in the Church, holding the position of canon at York, London and Wells. He also attended several parliaments during the time of Kings Edward I and II, demonstrating his position at the apex of early 14th century political life^[3]. In 1322, however, he backed the Duke of Lancaster in his failed attempt to depose Edward II, and afterwards took sanctuary in St. Augustine’s Abbey to prevent his own execution. He brought with him a great many valuables for safekeeping, which he bequeathed to the monastery, but was to keep personal possession of during his lifetime^[2-p.464]. He lived separately from the monks, having his own house within the grounds, and his attendance at church services and chapter meetings was entirely optional. By 1330 Dene, believing that his life was no longer in danger, applied for release from the abbey, but this was denied by Abbot Bourne, so Dene escaped^[3]. He was discovered in hiding at Bishopsbourne and taken back to St. Augustine’s, where he was kept imprisoned^[2-p.466/7]. He appealed to the pope, and his cause was taken up by the prior of Christchurch priory, but without success. Dene remained at the abbey until at least 1334^[4], aged in his late sixties, but what happened after that is unknown.

Career in politics and the Church

Peter de Dene was born, about the year 1265, within the diocese of Chichester^[3]; his name suggests that he came from one of the villages called Dean in Sussex, of which, perhaps, East Dean near Eastbourne is the most likely. His was a noble family whose wealth provided him with a first-class education.

By the late 1280s he had begun to acquire benefices in Sussex, and William Thorne, the late 14th century chronicler of St. Augustine’s, described him as *“a priest from the Chichester diocese”* and *“a man of great ability”*^[2-page 466/7].

As well as his work in the church he had also trained as a lawyer and was a Doctor of Civil and canon law; by 1295 his reputation was such that he was summoned to Parliament at Westminster, where he was a senior justice until at least 1307^[3]. He was at Edward I’s court at Carlisle in 1296^[3], where the king held his parliament in the castle for three months while directing military operations against the Scots.

By 1297 he was one of the Council of Prince Edward, afterwards Edward II^[3].

In 1302 he and William Greenfield, then Canon of York, were summoned as two of the King’s clerks to appear before Chancellor Langton to advise on arduous affairs of the King^[5]; the same year Peter de Dene is recorded as *“going beyond seas on the king’s affairs.”*^[3]

This all demonstrates that Peter de Dean was at the centre of the royal court and given a trusted position by both kings Edward I and II.

But, despite this elevated social position, there may have been an earlier hiccup. A.H. Davis, who translated William Thorne's chronicles (published 1934), provides this footnote on page 399:

"There are some curious particulars of a Peter Dene in Winchelsey's Register (Canterbury and York Society) A.D. 1298 (pp. 207 and 304). He was parkkeeper to the earl of Warenne and was excommunicated by the archbishop (Robert Winchelsey) for poaching in the archbishop's 'chase' at S. Malling. His humble apology with 'shedding of tears on bended knees' followed by another poaching episode the very next year, in which though not personally taking part he was considered the prime mover as a son of iniquity 'filius malignitatis', rather resembles the conduct of the P.D. in the abbey. The latter was such a pronounced pluralist in his clerical career that he may easily have been a parkkeeper in his younger days, and his position as legal adviser of St. Augustine's would make it natural for him to try to get one back on the archbishop. The genuine P.D. was two years later pronounced excommunicate and irregular and disqualified from holding any benefice, because he had 'intruded' into the church of East Langmer (also in Sussex)." [2-page 399]

This pluralism included the position of canon in the cathedral churches of York, London and Wells, and also in the collegiate churches of Southwell and Wimborne, of the York and Salisbury dioceses [3].

During the 1290s Peter de Dene had developed a strong relationship with St. Augustine's Abbey. Thorne tells us that *"in the time of the lord abbot Thomas Fyndon (1283 – 1309) (Peter de Dene) acted as a protector and a valiant assistant of this monastery"*. [2-page 463]

In regard to Dene's legal representation of St. Augustine's, William Thorne gave the following account relating to the year 1300:

"In the same year a pension of £10 a year was granted to Master Peter de Denne. When this pension was granted to him, he made a promise in the chapter house and bound himself by an oath of fidelity that he would all the days of his life preserve fealty in every way to our church, and would be ready faithfully to conduct the causes and business of this church when they should be brought to his notice throughout the realm of England, and especially in all cases undertaken – or to be undertaken – between the archbishop of Canterbury, the prior and archdeacon of the same place, and us." [2-page 348]

By representing the abbey in disputes with the archbishop and Christ Church priory he would be able, as A.H. Davis suggested, *"to get one back on the archbishop"* following the embarrassment of his earlier poaching episodes and excommunication.

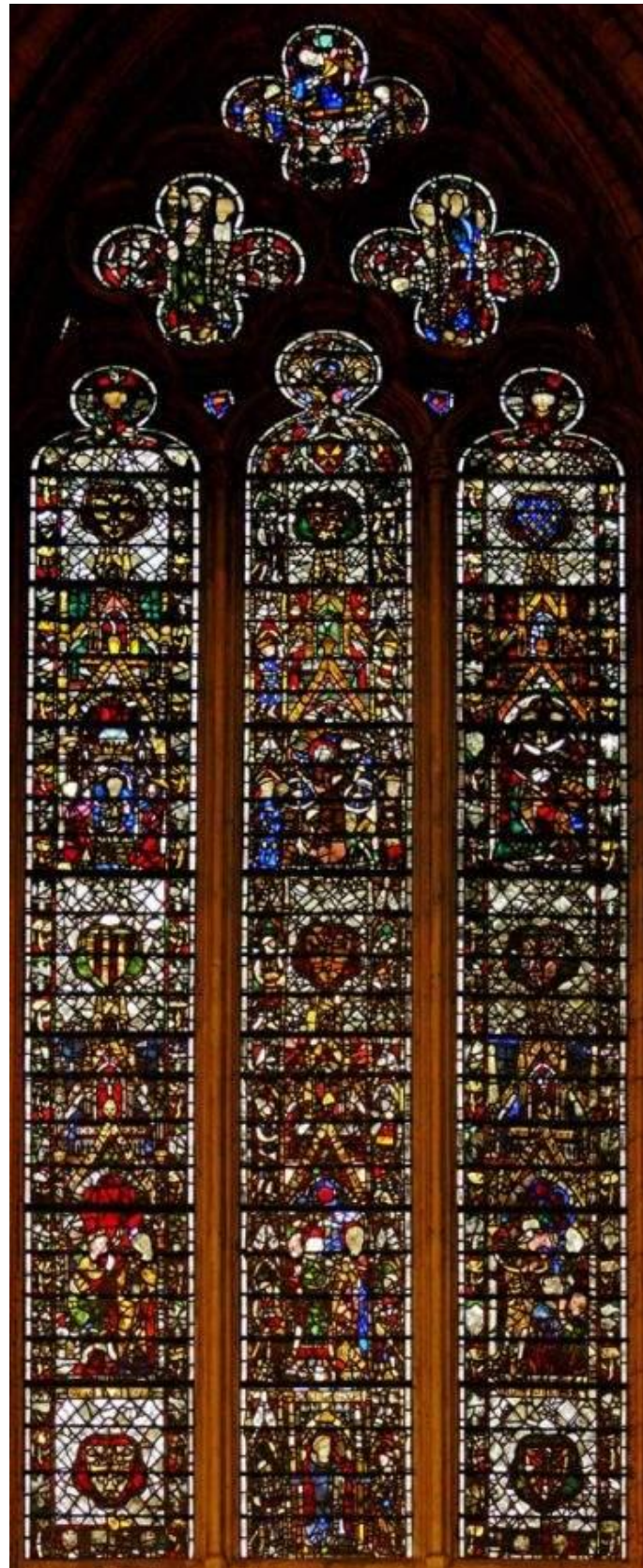
Peter Dene had taken a very prominent part in the affairs of the Diocese of York, where he was domestic chaplain and chancellor to the Archbishop of York and acted more than once as Archbishop Greenfield's Vicar-general [5].

It is interesting to note that he incurred the whole-hearted dislike of the monks of St. Mary's, York, a Benedictine monastery, who described him as *"a dreadful snake."* In the recently printed Chronicle of the Abbey the account of Greenfield's visitation of St. Mary's relates how the archbishop visited the house *"cum serpente diro Magistro"* (with the cruel master serpent) Petro de Dene and three other canons [5].

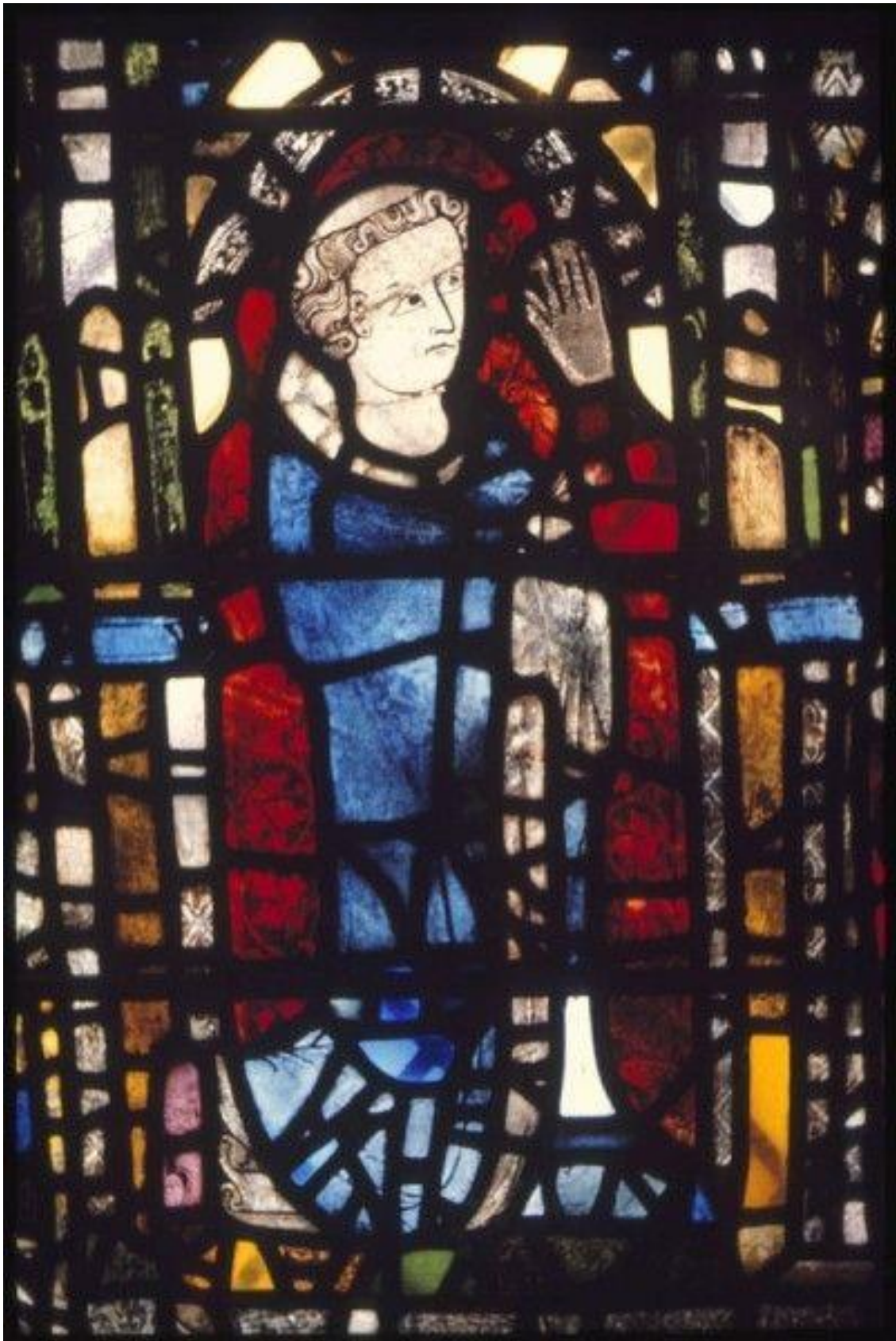
While he was a canon of York Minster, he was the donor of the easternmost window in the North aisle of the Nave. It is the oldest armorial window in England and is known as 'The Peter de Dene window' [6].

The chief portion of the window is occupied with the history of St. Catherine, and on either side are a great many coats of arms of royal, ecclesiastical, and other distinguished personages both in England and on the Continent. Percy, Beauchamp, Mowbray, Warenne, Clifford, and De Ros are among those represented [5].

In the central panel at the bottom of the window Peter de Dene has modestly included a depiction of himself! He is kneeling, wears the tonsure, and is clothed in surplice, blue cope and hood, purple cassock and shoes, and furred amice^[5]



The Peter de Dene window in York Minster, at the north-east of the nave,
with scenes from the Life of St Catherine, 1306/7 ^[7]



Central panel at the bottom of the Peter de Dene window in York Minster,
with Peter kneeling.

Abbot Thomas Fyndon of St. Augustine's died in 1309, and *"during the time of this Thomas (1283 – 1309) the kitchen of the convent was built from its foundations, the roof of the dormitory entirely renewed, a stone torale constructed, the abbot's chapel with a new hall and the great gate, and these principally out of the treasure of Peter of Dene, as well as stalls in the choir and a window at the end; and many other things were done by him."* [2-page 394] One wonders whether the new Fyndon gate, completed c.1305, with all its magnificence and facing toward the cathedral, was an attempt by Dene to upstage Christ Church and another chance *"to get one back on the archbishop"*, Robert Winchelsey, who remained in post until his death in 1313.

The good works at St. Augustine's continued, with Peter de Dene adding to the infirmary in 1312. In that same year, he was received into confraternity as an adopted brother of the convent. William Thorne, writing just 50 years after these events, takes up the story:

"In the same year there were granted to Master Peter of Dene spiritual benefits in return for the temporal benefactions which here follow. Firstly, this same clerk, on many occasions, served us and this monastery laudably, usefully and faithfully; for though, in our cause and our monastery's, he had endured many persecutions and losses, yet for the rights and for the protection of the monastery he had always shown himself a sturdy rock of defence. The same Peter, too, when we were set in the greatest straits, presented us with 200 marks, and he had houses built near the front of the infirmary chapel, on the north side, at no small cost and expense to himself, and these houses to this day bear the name of their founder.....Out of the 200 marks aforesaid, along with 50 marks added by the said Master Peter, the land of Bothsweyn at Sturry was bought, with watermill, meadows, woods, rents and other appurtenances, which are worth in ordinary years 20 marks." [2-page 399-40]

Although his financial generosity appears to have gained him popularity within the abbey community, all was not well elsewhere. Peter de Dene's pluralism was investigated by a commission in April 1312, instigated by the Archbishop of York; Dene held the parish church of Kirk Ella (Elveley) in the diocese of York at the same time as the church of Embleton in the Durham diocese. In his defence, Dene alleged that he had a papal dispensation to do so, and it appears this was accepted as he received no sanction from this commission.^[8]

His roles within the church were undiminished, and in 1313 Peter de Dene, with the Bishops of Norwich and Ely and the Earl of Pembroke, was sent on a mission to Rome, with counsel to inquire concerning the goods of the Knights Hospitallers.^[3]

Around this time, more money was being bestowed on St. Augustine's and, at his expense, the chapter house, adjoining the northern transept of the church, was also rebuilt. Expansion of the precinct to the north allowed the construction of an outer court with a cellarer's range, brewhouse and bakehouse, and, by 1320, a walled vineyard. Expansion also took place on the eastern side of the abbey where a series of lodgings was added to the infirmary and a new walled cellarer's garden was laid out in the southeastern corner of the precinct.^[5]

He attended seven Parliaments in the reign of Edward II^[5], which demonstrates that he remained in favour with the new king during the early years of his reign. But although Dene had served Edward II in these early years, at some point he had turned against him and sided with the Duke of Lancaster, the king's cousin and most powerful of the 'Lords Ordainers'. Edward had been accused of *"wasting his inheritance and of ruining the kingdom"*, and in 1311 a group of 21 of the most important nobles and bishops issued a total of 40 ordinances, effectively instructing the king how to run the country.^[9]

Edward's disastrous defeat by the Scots at the Battle of Bannockburn (June 24, 1314) further weakened the king's authority and put him at the mercy of Lancaster and the Ordainers, who thereafter effectively ruled England.^[10]

A previous favourite of the king, Piers Gaveston, had been executed by the Ordainers in 1312; but by 1318 a new favourite, Hugh le Despenser, had emerged, incurring the displeasure of the Ordainers.^[10]

The rise of the Despensers brought matters to a head and a decisive battle was fought at Boroughbridge, north-west of York, on 16th March 1322. Divisions had arisen within the Ordainers, however, and Lancaster's army that day was smaller than it needed to be and consequently resulted in his defeat by the king's army.^[9]

Lancaster was taken to Pontefract Castle, where he was beheaded on 22nd March ^[10], and over the next week some thirty of Lancaster's followers were also executed.^[11]

With news of his patron's defeat at Boroughbridge and subsequent execution, Peter de Dene feared his own demise or, at the very least, imprisonment and the loss of all his property. He sought asylum at St. Augustine's and entered the monastery on 30th March, eight days after Lancaster's execution. He became what Boggis described as a "*quasi monk*".^[12-page 92]

Thorne wrote about the situation: "*At length through no fault of his, grievous persecutions having arisen owing to the death of the lord Thomas earl of Lancaster; and he (Peter de Dene), being threatened with arrest, imprisonment, loss of position, the seizure of all his property and even with death, by great nobles and powerful men whom he was not strong enough to resist or protect himself from, having no means of escape or other refuge, overcome by such fear, took the monastic habit under lord Ralph (Bourne), in the 13th year of the aforesaid abbot, and having entered religion, immediately made the profession on the third day*".^[2-page 463/4]

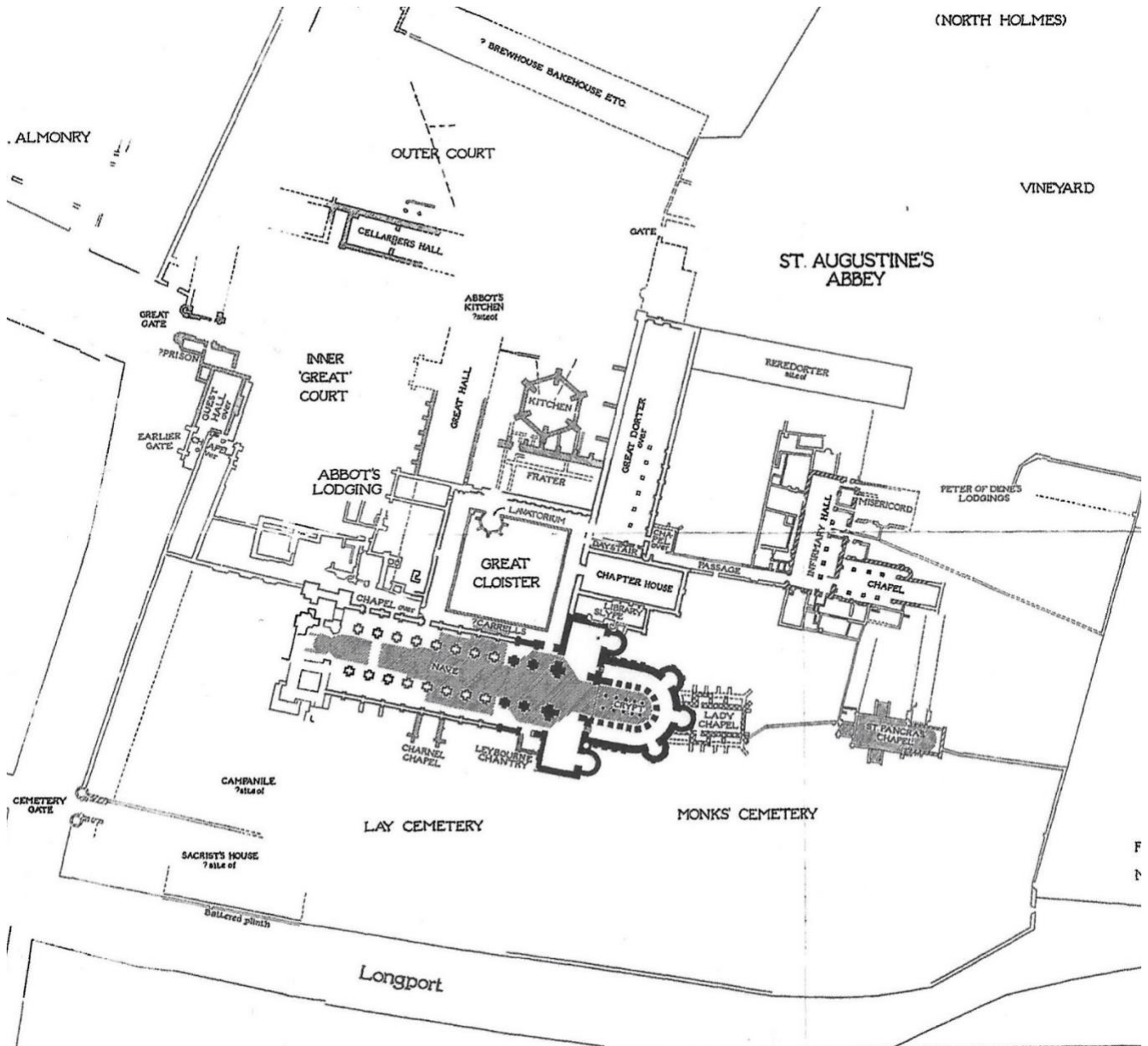
Peter of Dene entered the monastery of St. Augustine under many conditions, qualifications and terms; viz. he kept his houses which he had built within the walls of the monastery and his secular household, and also his property which he was allowed to use as he pleased, and that he was not bound to accompany the monks in church, chapter-house, refectory, dormitory, cloister or elsewhere to say the divine office, or to do anything else; but he was to be free to stay in his own house with his own household, day and night, and have leisure for prayers, meditation, study or other honest pursuits.^[2-page 464]

He made a will in favour of the abbey but was to keep possession of the money and property until his death. This included:

- A number of books, including five volumes of civil law bound in leather, "*the use thereof while I live being specially kept and reserved for me...*"
- 450 marks sterling
- 495 florins of Florence (made in Florence of pure gold and was the European common currency)
- 105 florins *of the lamb* (common gold coins of 13th and 14th centuries)
- 10 florins *de Mas* (common gold coins issued in France)
- All my silver vessels (126) deposited in the monastery, with the exception of two silver spoons^[2-page 436/7]

His life prior to entering St. Augustine's Abbey presents a mixed picture. He had not been averse to breaking the civil law (poaching), and canon law (pluralism), and he had been described as "*a dreadful snake*" by the monks of St. Mary's, York. He displayed a degree of narcissism by portraying himself in one of the panels of a stained-glass window in York Minster; and he had shown disloyalty when turning against his long-time master, Edward II, believing that the Earl of Lancaster would succeed in his rebellion of 1322. He had backed the wrong horse.

Contrasted to this was the generosity that he had shown to the monastery over more than 25 years, with several building projects having been apparently funded by him, and his legal representation in disputes with the archbishop.



St. Augustine's Abbey in the early 14th century.
 Peter de Dene's house is shown to the east of the infirmary.

William Thorne tells us that for the next eight years *“having lived amongst the brethren of this monastery peacefully and quietly, he had been laudably honoured by the same in many ways, for both to monks and seculars he would read the canon laws in public in the schools, thus for days and years sharing his thoughts with the abbot and the seniors as the chief counsellor of the monastery, conducting secret and difficult business for the same, and having free licence to go and to walk, within or without, at suitable times according to the pleasure of his will”*. [2-page 464]

Meanwhile, in 1327 Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March, had staged a coup against the King. Edward II was deposed and his son, Edward III, placed on the throne.^[13] By 1330, on hearing that he was no longer in danger of arrest, Peter de Dene wished to return to *‘the world’*, and applied to Abbot Ralph de Bourne for his release. The Abbot however, who was doubtless loath to lose so valuable an inmate, did not grant his consent, and Peter therefore determined to escape. [12-page 93]

On the feast day of St. Lucia (13th December), John de Bourn (no relation to the abbot), rector of the church of St. Martin, was invited to dinner by brother Gatewick, the infirmarian, and in the middle of dinner de Bourn, rising from the table, pretended that he had some examination duty in the consistory, and he went to Peter de Dene’s chamber and had a talk with him for a long time. [2-page 465]

The following is taken from Thorne’s *‘Chronicles of St. Augustine’s Abbey’*: *“Before midnight, discarding his monk’s habit, de Dene went out secretly with a servant boy, William Chanteler, taking with them several items of silver and some money, and they went through his cellar to a door which leads into the cellarer’s garden, the lock of which he had previously broken. They got across to the wall opposite the church of St. Martin, and then threw a stone over that wall. There John de Bourn, rector of St. Martin’s, and George Bourn his brother, and two others, having three horses ready, set two ladders against the abbey wall, and two of them climbed up, sat on the wall and put up another ladder, let it down into the garden for Peter; and he, with the boy, climbed it and got over the wall. Then the four, lifting him, placed him on a horse and conveyed him to George’s house, at Bishopsbourne.”*

De Dene would have been 65 years of age, and we are not told his physical condition, but he was clearly unable to mount the horse unaided.

“When it was realised that he had absconded from the monastery a large search party was sent to retrieve him. After some time it was discovered where he was hiding, in Bishopsbourne; and on the following day William Reculver, who was at that time seneschal of the archbishop as well as doorkeeper of the abbey, acting in his right as bailiff, had the doors broken down “with hue and cry”, and they found Peter in secular clothing with two servant boys. Peter was caught and lifted on horseback, and Reculver, with many others, escorted him to Canterbury; it was intended that Reculver would convey de Dene into the ‘liberty’ of the archbishop as far as Maidstone. But when they reached Oatenhill, a group of monks from St. Augustine’s, including brothers Dagh, Everard, Petit, Salamon and Richard of Canterbury, seized de Dene and conveyed him to the monastery during vespers. Also seized were 111 Florentines, worth 33 marks 3s. 4d., and 6 dishes, 6 saucers, a cup, a water-pot and 6 spoons, all of silver, and 25s. in money, that de Dene and his servants had made off with when they fled the abbey. He was placed ‘in the prison of the infirmary’. The two boys they left at Bishopsborne were taken to Maidstone and put in prison.” [2-pp.465/6]

This was all to the displeasure of the archbishop, Simon Meopham, as immediately afterwards he sent the lords Cobham, Werricus de Valans, and John de Borne together with knights and *“other men and notaries of honourable position”* to the abbot, Ralph Bourne, with a large escort. And as the abbot was ill, they were not allowed to come into his chamber, but they lodged a complaint in these words:

'Whereas Peter of Dene, clerk, was at Borne in the house of George Borne, William Reculver, seneschal of the archbishop, having summoned the Borsholder and the neighbours, broke down the door, and this Peter was conveyed to Canterbury by the aforesaid William, the seneschal; your servants, however, carried away the aforesaid Peter with violence, contrary to the king's peace and the archbishop's liberty, and as for the aforesaid two boys who were in prison in the lord archbishop's manor at Borne, with the dishes and salt cellars and a silver ewer and one hundred and five golden florins, they searched them when their guards fled, and took and carried away the florins and conveyed the said Master Peter to St. Augustine's.' [2- p.467]

The abbot replied that he was perfectly entitled to apprehend Dene and keep him in custody. As to the rest, however, he would gladly give an answer to the archbishop's council within 12 days. When the day came, the abbot was not forewarned, and a large crowd came to St. Augustine's after dinner, wishing to speak with the prior (Stephen of Hawkendon) and the seniors. When the prior came to meet them in the great hall, he said that the abbot was not present, but he would be willing to consult him on the matter and give an answer to the archbishop in a reasonable way; consequently on the day of St. Agnes (January 21st 1331), T. Lincoll, the abbot's seneschal, gave a reply to Lord J. de Cobham and others of the archbishop's council (informing them that de Dene would not be released from the monastery), *"which was not to their pleasure"*. [2-p. 466/7]

Although de Dene had supported Thomas, Earl of Lancaster in his rebellion of 1322, it seems that he may have profited from the demise of his patron. According to William Thorne, Henry of Valans, in 1330/31, had told the prior and brethren of Christ Church that he had seen a commission being signed in the lord king's chancery, made out to the earl of Lancaster (Henry, brother of Thomas, who inherited the title after Thomas was executed), that he was to seize Peter of Dene, in spite of the abbot and convent, and carry him away to answer to him as to the treasures which he had carried away from his brother's treasures and hidden within the monastery. [2-p.467-9] This suggests that at least some of the property brought by de Dene when he entered the abbey had been stolen! And it also suggests that it may not yet have been safe for him to leave the monastery.

Afterwards, the bishops of Worcester and of Norwich came to Canterbury, and a consultation was held with them concerning Peter of Dene; on hearing and learning of his flight, his throwing away the habit and his apostasy, the bishop of Norwich asked what kind of clothing he had on, and the answer was a tunic of black cloth and an amice without cowl. And giving advice he said:

"Guard him safely and let him be induced by all means to put on the habit and be shaved; but if he refuses and cannot be induced, let him be forced; and if he throws off the habit, or tries to tear it up, let his hands be tied to prevent him doing dishonour to the habit and to religion, because, if the sheriff should come for him and find him in secular clothes, he would be at once taken and carried off in spite of you (presumably a reference to the property he had stolen from the earl of Lancaster). And if he finds him in monastic habit and shaved, he will not dare, against your will and objections, to carry him off in any way. And if the king wishes him to appear before him in person, let two discreet brethren be sent with him to explain to him the innocence of the monks, their profession, their state of life and mode of entry, and the honourable character of religion". [2 - p.469-71]

Therefore, on the 28th January, 13 members of the monastery, having been assembled by the prior, went altogether to Peter's chamber and found him lying in bed; they told him that, if he did not willingly put on the regular 'habit' and allow himself to be shaved, he would be compelled to do it against his will and, if necessary, he would be tied. On hearing this, he said, with a sigh,

"I am sure the lord abbot and you will treat me graciously: I will do whatever you advise, and when I get up, if I can stand on my feet, I will put on the cowl, and afterwards allow myself to be shaved, and will do all I can."

De Dene requested that the abbot should visit him personally to give him comfort. When he heard of this, the abbot came and had a talk with him in the Infirmary chapel. The abbot spoke to him of his apostasy, his disgrace and the enormous losses he had brought upon the monastery and on religion by his escape. Afterwards, a public document was drawn up. ^[2 - p.467-9] In this Peter de Dene signed an explicit confession of his crime and a petition for re-admission and was thereupon formally absolved by the Abbot. ^[12 - p.93]

But this was by no means the end of the matter, for Peter still hankered after his freedom, and at last succeeded in getting an appeal conveyed to the Pope. ^[12 - p.93]

Consequently, on 25th December 1331, a bull was presented to the prior of Christ Church, Richard Oxenden. It was long-winded, but this part is interesting: it noted *“that he (Peter de Dene) retained and desired to retain his goods both movable and immovable, to spend, administer and disburse them, as well as to receive and have others and dispose of them according to his own free will, as before...”* It seems that Peter was determined to keep hold of all his property, despite at least some of it having been stolen from Lancaster, and to take it with him if he could leave the abbey; while Abbot Bourne had his own designs on that property and wished it to remain within the monastery.

The bull contained the following charges against the monastery:

- *the abbot sent monks, clergy and laymen, in arms, to capture him and despoil the same of his goods*
- *the prior, clerks and laymen, at the bidding of the abbot, cruelly, outrageously and audaciously laid violent hands on him, and captured him*
- *making private prisons of his houses and other houses of the same monastery, deprived him of his necessary nourishment*
- *do not permit him to confess to a suitable priest, or to hear mass, or to receive the holy eucharist, nay rather, they blocked up the doors and approaches to his house that he might have no means of exit thence nor his friends admittance to the same*
- *And still the same abbot and convent, treating such appeal as nought, keep him thus disgracefully confined to prison, and have appropriated to themselves his aforesaid property, and keep him despoiled of it.*

It did, however, provide some counterbalance when adding: *“but because, on behalf of the said abbot and convent, it has been explained in an opposite way before us that the same Peter, on the testimony of a certain document produced in our presence – which seemed at first sight to be of a public nature – had confessed that he had undergone no violence or danger, and that he was free from them, and that he had made canonical profession as a monk of the aforesaid monastery, and that he had protested that he had no desire to retire from the monastic state, or to attack it”....*

In conclusion it instructed the prior of Christ Church to go to St. Augustine's in person and set Peter de Dene free, while endeavouring to obtain information from him about the events in question. ^[2 - p. 472-4]

The Prior duly went in person to St. Augustine's, on 20th February 1322, and forcing his way into the church, published his monition in the midst of the choir during High Mass.

“We, prior, warn you, lord abbot, on the aforesaid authority, in virtue of the obedience by which you are bound by the apostolic see, that you can produce the said Peter at the said day and place before us, or cause him to be produced, in person, so that, the said Peter being set in a state of liberty, we can (by speech) with him be informed as to these things about which, and in the manner which the aforesaid apostolic letters require.”

“Also, we firmly order you by apostolic authority that you notify these letters and publish them to your convent.” [2 - 474/5]

But this action had no effect and so, on the 22nd day of February, the prior Oxenden came back to the monastery. Oxenden ordered Stephen of Hakendon, the prior of St. Augustine’s, to assemble the convent, so that he could inform them of the apostolic command. And Stephen replied that he wished to consult his brethren, and then retired; and without delay he came back to Oxenden saying that they refused to obey him, as executor of an apostolic order, or as judge, and that they could not assemble the convent at his instructions.

To which was replied: *‘We, Richard (de Oxenden), prior of the church of Canterbury, warn you, the abbot and convent, that you do produce in person Peter of Dene – whom you are detaining in your monastery against his will – before us, on the morrow, in the body of your church, so that, he being set in a state of liberty, we can (by speech) with him inform ourselves on the matters whereon the apostolic letters require it...’* [2 - p.475-7]

The next morning Oxenden, accompanied by the provost of Wyngham and others, some of them monks of Christ Church, came in large numbers to the monastery of St. Augustine. *“And having come to the door by which he was to pass into the church, he found it shut so that there was no entrance except by one small wicket. It had also been strengthened on either side by stout iron chains put across, and on the inner side was protected by a number of guards. And Oxenden and certain of those with him, to whom the guards of the said gate were willing to give admittance, entered by the same wicket successively one by one; and about two hundred men remained outside the gate. When they had at last gained entrance Oxenden, sitting in the body of the church on the south side began in a loud voice to issue a proclamation that the abbot and convent should produce Master Peter of Dene so that, being set in a state of liberty, he could obtain information (in speech) with the same”.* [2 - p.477 – 78]

Stephen of Hakendon, the prior of St. Augustine’s, with eight other monks, and also a large crowd of clergy and laity, brought Peter into the presence of Oxenden, and stood him at such a distance that he and Peter could not have conversation together except in the hearing of the monks of the abbey and of their supporters, who were standing almost in a circle around Peter. Then Oxenden began to read the apostolic letters, but the monks and clergy of the abbot loudly objected to such reading, and, by their shouting, strove to prevent the aforesaid letters being read there; but finally with great difficulty they were read. [2 - p.478]

And afterwards he warned all the monks, clergy and laymen of the said monastery, who are present in large numbers, to retire and remove themselves apart. But they shouted down such warnings and did not obey them but continued to stand by the aforesaid Peter. And brother Salamon of Ripple replied to such warnings, *‘Trufeles* (rubbish), *trufeles, trufeles’*, even saying, *‘We refuse to obey him, as neither are we bound to do.’* [2 - p.478]

The abbot’s party questioned the bull, arguing that it was a forgery and *“not in the usual style of the Roman court and was suspicious in many respects on account of the erasures and other defects it contained; they would willingly obey the bull, if it could ever be made evident that it was genuine, but now it was a fraud and a forgery and was in many respects suspicious, on account of erasures in many places, both in another hand and in different ink. They seized the aforesaid Peter and carried him off. And the prior, seeing that the said Peter was not produced again, waited till the next day”.* [2 - p.479]

In the morning the prior again visited the monastery, and when he had come to the cemetery gate, he found it open, but protected by a number of guards who were standing in large numbers on either side, shoulder to shoulder, to a great distance, so that there was no entrance possible for him, except by passing through the guards. And when at last he had taken his place in the body of the church, he gave orders that the proclamations be made. After these

proclamations Stephen of Hakendon, prior of the monastery, and others in great numbers, brought Peter to the presence of Oxenden and set him in a place a little nearer. And then the Christ Church prior ordered everyone, except six persons of his council, to leave; and then Hakendon said that if they removed themselves they wished to have two notaries to take down the conversation. ^[2 - p.479]

After some argument, Peter said, *“in a state of excitement”*, that he wished to have his own prior and Salamon and two notaries and asked them to stay with him. Oxenden, under threat of excommunication, warned them to retire, but they said they would not retire except at the orders of Peter. Eventually, at his request, they did retire, so that some of them were standing 14, others 16, others 20 feet distant from him. When they had to some extent withdrawn, Oxenden asked whether he was truly a monk, and whether it was his desire to stay in the same monastery. And he, in a high voice, replied that he was a true monk and that he wished to stay in the aforesaid monastery and he added *‘I am in a state of liberty, and am a monk canonically “professed” in this monastery, which I wish to be known to you and to all others, and if I should sit with you until night-fall you will not get any other statement out of me.’* ^[2 - p.479-80]

And he spoke many insulting words against the council of prior Oxenden, saying that they had done him many wrongs and had given him evil advice in the proceedings. And one of them said in a humble voice:

‘Master Peter, you cannot say that we have done you harm, because we have laboured for no other purpose than that you might be placed in such a position as to be able, without fear, to express your wishes and restore you to your former liberty and give you free leave to go to the court of Rome to conduct your own business.’ ^[2 - p.480]

And Peter replied that he was free and in a state of liberty; and that if he were young and strong in body, he would willingly go to the Roman court. And when he was asked the same, ‘For what purpose?’ he answered in a loud voice, *‘that (it would be) to complain of the wrong wickedly done to him by the said prior and his council.’* When they heard this, Oxenden and his assistants immediately withdrew therefrom, empty-handed. ^[2 - p.480]

Prior Oxenden and his entourage had come to the abbey successively on 20th, 22nd, 23rd, and 24th February. They were ultimately unsuccessful, but it hadn’t been for the want of trying.

Both Page and Boggis concluded that Peter de Dene must have been forcibly detained (in the infirmary or some other more secure place) and impersonated by someone else, but nothing more could be done for him; and the abbot and monks received pardon from the king for what they had done. ^{[1][12]}

Prior Oxenden was by no means satisfied, and for many months afterwards continued to urge his fellow-commissioner, William de Renham, to come down from London to settle the business, and he also wrote to beg the assistance of the Dean of Arches and others. His fellow-commissioner however appeared to be altogether unwilling to take any further steps; and three years after the attempted escape, the case seems to have died a natural death, for we hear nothing more of this extraordinary episode. ^[12 - p.91-95]

In February 1334, following the death of Abbot Ralph Bourne, Peter was one of the monks who elected the new abbot (Thomas Poucyn).^[1] So we know he was still in St. Augustine’s at that time, aged 68 or 69, but that is the last that he was heard of. He no doubt died in the abbey and was buried in the monks’ cemetery, where his remains will still lie.

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