

## SHORTER CONTRIBUTION

THE CHARGES OF THE BURY ST EDMUNDS ABBEY  
SHRINE-KEEPERS

by DAVID SHERLOCK

TWO SHORT PASSAGES in Harley manuscripts in the British Library survive for the *onera* or charges of the abbey shrine-keepers and are published here as an appendix to the longer and more informative shrine-keepers' annual accounts in the last volume of the *Proceedings*.<sup>1</sup> The first is on folio 44 of Harley 1005, a volume which contains the longer *consuetudines* or customary of the abbey on folios 102–19, published by Antonia Gransden in 1973.<sup>2</sup> But Gransden did not include folio 44, nor mention the even shorter list of charges which occupy barely a quarter of folio 22 in Harley 3977. Neither of these has hitherto been published. The two provide the only other surviving details for the shrine-keepers, who, as seen in the two annual accounts, managed much else besides the actual shrine of St Edmund. Given their numerous duties revealed in the accounts, and given the importance of the shrine of St Edmund, there must once have been a much longer list of shrine-keeper duties, something like the twenty-two sided manuscript of the customary for the shrine of St Thomas of Canterbury.<sup>3</sup>

It has to be said that the two Harley MSS *onera* are difficult to understand and tell us almost nothing about the shrine itself and its observance.<sup>4</sup> However, we do have here the only reference to the shrine-keepers' beds near the shrine of St Edmund, in accordance with the customs of Bury confirmed by Pope Alexander IV in 1256, in which all the monks were to live communally except for two who were day and night to guard the body of Edmund, one to guard the treasury, and one, the clock.<sup>5</sup> The clock-keeper is mentioned here and the scaffolders for the organ, as they are in the annual accounts; also the guardian of the crypt and of St Robert's chapel. One other point worthy of mention is the astonishing amount of candle wax specified. The abbey may have had its own apiary at Freckenham, but the annual accounts show that abbey rents were often paid in wax. As an example of wax consumption, the fourteenth-century Pinchbeck Register lists 186 pounds of wax required for candles of various sizes placed throughout the church at the feast of St Edmund, not to mention in the refectory and elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

*A relic of St Robert the martyr*

My note also provides an opportunity to draw attention to a recently discovered relic of St Robert. In 2021 a paper on a fourteenth-century reliquary found at Douai Abbey was published by Marian Campbell and Michaela Zöschg in *The Burlington Magazine*.<sup>7</sup> The reliquary is probably English and there are good reasons for linking it with the abbey of Bury St Edmunds, not least because one of the relics it contains is a piece of coloured fabric headed *De Sancto Roberto Mar[tiris]*. For the benefit of historians of Bury the relic is illustrated (Fig. 138). It is yet another piece of evidence for the association of the cult of the boy-saint Robert with that of the young King Edmund, which may have lasted from the date of the alleged martyrdom of Robert in 1181 almost to the dissolution of the abbey. Robert is mentioned in

the first of the *onera* published here; his chapel is mentioned in the shrine-keepers' accounts for 1520/21 and for 1524/25; whilst a guild of St Robert is mentioned in the accounts for 1520/21.<sup>8</sup> These are four new references to him, in addition to the relic.<sup>9</sup>



FIG. 138 – A relic of St Robert, part of the reliquary recently published by Campbell and Zöschg in 2021 (© Douai Abbey and *The Burlington Magazine*).



BRITISH LIBRARY, HARLEY MS 1005 (KNOWN AS THE *LIBER ALBUS*)

Folio 44r., one side of a folio which is approximately 5 x 9 inches, written in two columns in a rough, late fourteenth-century hand.<sup>10</sup>

*Left-hand column*

Onera Feretrariorum Sancti Edmundi

In ecclesia ad Feretrum  
 summus serviens unus clericus  
 et unus garcifer sive  
 pagettus. Hostiarius viridi  
 (5) ostii. Et sunt iiij<sup>or</sup>.  
 Ista sunt onera in quibus feretrarii  
 tenentur servientibus suis  
 et monialibus et anachori-  
 tis secundum registrum domini Abbatis.  
 (10) Summus serviens capiet omni  
 die sabbate per annum vjd.  
 et ultra ad robam vjs viijd.  
 Ad festum Sancti Michelis iijd.  
 et ad natalem Domini iijd. In  
 (15) die carneprivii jd. Ad Pascham  
 jd. Ad le hokeday jd.  
 Ad drunenkeford jd.  
 ad festum Sancti Michelis c[ere] viij  
 candelas.  
 (20) Item clericus feretri omni die sabbati  
 per annum iijd. Item pagettus  
 omni die sabbati per annum iijd.  
 Set quando summus serviens accipit  
 ijd ad oblaciones isti  
 (25) duo scilicet clericus et pagettus tantum  
 intra se. Et quando serviens  
 capit jd, isti duo tantum  
 intra se. Set garcio sive  
 pagettus prope lectum unius  
 (30) feretrarii capit c[ere] viij  
 candelas ad festum Michelis. Et custos viri-  
 dis ostii prope lectum alterius  
 feretrarii c[ere] viij candelas ad festum  
 Michelis.  
 Elemosinarius capiet omni die  
 (35) sabbati de feretro pro elemosina  
 vjd. Feretrarius pro eodem  
 vjd. Item moniales omni

*Translation*

Charges of the Shrine-keepers of St Edmund

In the church at the Shrine  
 The head server, one clerk  
 and one boy-server or  
 page boy. The keeper of the green  
 door.<sup>11</sup> And there are [*these*] four.  
 These are the charges in which the shrine-keepers  
 are bound to their servants  
 and to the nuns and the anchorites  
 according to the register of the lord Abbot.<sup>12</sup>  
 The head server takes every  
 Saturday in the year 6d.  
 and in addition for [*bis*] robe 6s 8d.  
 On the feast of St Michael 3d.  
 and at Christmas 3d. On  
 Ash Wednesday 1d. At Easter  
 1d. On Hock Day 1d.<sup>13</sup>  
 At 'drunenkeford' 1d.<sup>14</sup>  
 At the feast of St Michael wax [*for*] eight  
 candles.  
 Item, the clerk of the shrine [*receives*] every  
 Saturday in the year 3d. Item, the page boy  
 [*receives*] every Saturday in the year 3d.  
 But when the head server receives  
 2d for offerings these  
 two, i.e. the cleric and the page boy, [*receive*]  
 as much between them. And when the server  
 takes 1d these two [*take*] as much  
 between them. But the boy-server or  
 page boy<sup>15</sup> near the bed of one of the  
 shrine-keepers takes wax [*for*] eight  
 candles at the feast of [*St*] Michael. And the  
 guardian of the green  
 door near the bed of the other  
 shrine-keeper [*takes*] wax for eight candles  
 at the feast of [*St*] Michael.  
 The almoner takes every  
 Saturday from the shrine for alms-giving  
 7d. The shrine-keeper [*takes*] for the same  
 6d. Item, the nuns [*take*] every

*Right-hand column*

die sabbati vjd. Item ad  
 anachoritorum infra libertatem  
 omne unamque earum iij<sup>or</sup>  
 candelar' de quadrante. Et ijd pro  
 (5) quosdem tantum in octavo Sancti  
 Michelis. Et pro alios omnium  
 ebdomidarum per annum. Item succentor ad  
 processionem  
 in vigiliis v[*igiliarum*] principalium post  
 complentum in parvis can-  
 delis jlb cere. Item carpentarius  
 et steirarii  
 (10) in maioribus organis ad usus iijd  
 ad missam  
 iijd sed pro minoribus [*organis*] ijd.  
 Subscripti obedientiarii  
 non debent visitari in denariis  
 a custodibus feretri Sancti  
 (15) Edmundi ad festum Sancti Michelis  
 [*line illeg.*]  
 de nova die quietatione  
 visitantur in clarorum [?] ijli.  
 Celerarius ijli cerei  
 (20) Socius eius ijli.  
 Subcelerarius ijli.  
 Coquinarius ijli.  
 Elemosinarius ijli.  
 Camerarius ijli.  
 (25) <Hostilarius ijli.> [*crossed through*]  
 Hospitalarius ijli.  
 Pitanciarus ijli.  
 Infirmarius ijli.  
 Sacrista non visitatur  
 (30) <visitatu> [*crossed through*] in cera nec  
 in denariis hac vice. Custos  
 cripte et Sancti Roberti et horlogiarius  
 visitantur in denariis et hoc  
 de nova ordinat [*blank*]  
 (35) [*illeg.*]  
 <*crossed through*> in cera nec  
 [2 *more lines illeg.*]

Saturday 6d. Item to  
 the anchorites within the liberty  
 to each and every one of them four  
 farthing-candles. And 2d. for  
 those then within the octave of St  
 Michael. And for some others of every  
 week in the year. Item, the succentor for  
 the procession  
 at the vigils of the five principal [*feasts*] after  
 compline in small candles  
 1lb of wax. Item, the carpenter  
 and the scaffolders  
 for the use of the greater organ 3d  
 at Mass  
 3d, but for the lesser organ 2d.  
 The obedientiaries written below<sup>16</sup>  
 ought not to be paid in cash  
 by the custodians of the shrine of St  
 Edmund at the feast of St Michael  
 on a new day of exemption  
 dues cleared [?] £2.  
 Cellarer 2lb wax  
 His colleague 2lb.  
 Subcellarer 2lb.  
 Kitchener 2lb.  
 Almoner 2lb.  
 Chamberlain 2lb.  
 <Guest master 2lb.>  
 Hospitaler 2lb.  
 Pittancer 2lb.  
 Infirmarer 2lb.  
 The sacrist is not paid  
 <paid> in wax nor  
 in cash at this time. The guardian  
 of the crypt and [*of the chapel*] of St Robert,<sup>17</sup> and  
 the clock-keeper  
 are paid in cash,<sup>18</sup> and this  
 by a new [?] ordinance  
 <?> in wax nor

## BRITISH LIBRARY, HARLEY MS 3977

Folio 22r., occupying about a quarter of a page measuring 12 x 8 inches, ruled and in two columns, in neat fourteenth-century writing. The first three lines are in red ink, also used throughout for initial letters and new paragraphs. It is a digest of the previous one and probably once part of the abbot's customary.<sup>19</sup>

*Left-hand column*

De feretro

Ista sunt onera in quibus Feretrarii tenentur

servientibus suis et monialibus et  
Anachoritis.

Elemosinarius capiet omni die sabbati  
(5) vijd.

Summus serviens omni die sabbati per annum  
vjd. Et ad robam dimidium marci. Ad  
festum Sancti Michaeli iij d. Et ad natale  
domini iij d. In die carni privium  
(10) jd. Ad pascha jd. A le Hokeday  
jd.

Ad drunnerkeford jd. Ad festum  
Sancti Michaelis C candelas et vij.

Clerico feretri omni die sabbati per annum

(15) iijd. Et tantum cuilibet garcifero. Sed  
qui summus serviens acciperit iijd ad oblationem.  
Et isti duo intra se tenent. Et qui  
jd. Et isti duo intra se tenent. Sed garciferus

prope lectum cuiusdam feretrarii c candelas

(20) et vij. Custos viridi hostii C candelas

et vij.

Moniales debent habere omni die sabbati  
per annum vjd.

Anachorite infra libertatem unaqueque  
(25) earum iij<sup>or</sup> candelas et ijd.

*Translation*

Concerning the shrine

These are the charges in which the shrine-  
keepers are bound  
to their servants and the nuns and  
anchorites.

The almoner takes every Saturday  
7d.

The head server [*takes*] every Saturday in the year  
6d. And for his robe half a mark. At  
the feast of St Michael 3d. And at Christmas  
3d. On Ash Wednesday

1d. At Easter 1d. On Hock Day  
1d.

At 'drunnerkeford' 1d.<sup>20</sup> At the feast  
of St Michael 100 candles and seven.

To the clerk of the shrine is paid every Saturday  
in the year

3d. And the same amount to each boy-server. But  
the head server receives 3d at the offering.

And these two [*take*] as much between them.

1d. And these two [*take*] as much between them  
[*sic*]. But the boy-server

near the bed of a shrine-keeper [*has*] 100  
candles

and seven. The guardian of the green door [*has*] 100  
candles  
and seven.

The nuns should have every Saturday  
in the year 6d.

The anchorites within the liberty [*to*] each of them  
four candles and 2d.

## NOTES

- 1 Sherlock 2020.
- 2 See Sherlock 2020; Gransden 1973.
- 3 See Jenkins 2022.
- 4 I am grateful to Henry Summerson for suggesting that *onera* should be translated as charges rather than duties since what the texts are about are payments for work done; they say very little about what the various officers and obedientiaries actually did. I am also grateful to him for help with palaeography.
- 5 Gransden 1973, 63.
- 6 Sherlock 2020, 591, 595, 601 and 603; Harvey 1925, 397–8.
- 7 See Campbell and Zöschg 2012, 315–23. They discuss the relic of St Robert on 318. I am grateful to Julian Luxford for drawing my attention to this publication, and to Marian Campbell and Abbot Geoffrey of Douai for help in obtaining permission to publish the photograph.
- 8 Sherlock 2020.
- 9 See also under note 17 below and Sherlock 2020 notes 43, 44, 58 and 127. In addition to St Robert's messuage in Spicer Row there was another messuage called St Robert's Hall in Hatter Street in 1542 (Breen 2000, 16). See Copinger-Hill 1933 for an article on Robert. He was never formally canonised.
- 10 See Thomson 1980, 42, no. 1293, item 9; and Dugdale 1821, 122, item 12.
- 11 The green door is thought by James (James 1895, 160 and 179) to have been between the vestry and the choir on the north side. See also Gransden 1973, 12–13 and Dugdale 1821, 162, quoting a source naming amongst other officials a *custos viridis ostii*. The green door might be the precursor of the 'green baize door' in a house where it separated the servants' quarters from that of the family.
- 12 The nuns, here and in line 37, were from St George's Priory, Thetford, ten miles away. See Sherlock 2020, 608, n. 71; an anchorite was a recluse, probably an aging monk or nun, living in a cell near the abbey. Harley MS 3977, f. 78 names over 40 anchorages within the Liberty of St Edmund. See Gransden 2007, 117 and n. 127.
- 13 'Hokeday', or 'Hock Day' was the name given to the second Tuesday after Easter Sunday. It was a festival day on which no work would be done and, together with Michaelmas, it divided the rural year into halves and was a day on which rents and other payments were traditionally made.
- 14 I cannot find this word in a dictionary. It is likely to relate to some activity peculiar only to Bury Abbey. The spelling transcribed in Harley 3977, line 12, is the more legible. The ending *ford* suggests a fordable place. There is no festival between Easter and the feast of St Michael, 29 September, which suggests itself. There I am grateful to Keith Briggs and Henry Summerson for trying to identify the word.
- 15 On boy-server or page boy see Sherlock 2020, n. 54.
- 16 See Thomson 1982 for a full list of the abbey's obedientiaries. The list here is more or less complete except of course for the prior, the refectorer and the shrine-keepers. Thomas Tottington occurs as the cellarer's *socius* in 1294, but the post is otherwise unknown. Thomson (Thomson 1982, 101) gives the reference to *socius* as Gransden 1964, 153 which I cannot find.
- 17 The *custodes feretri et criptae et sancti Roberti* are also mentioned under *De Collacione* (Concerning meal times) in the abbey customary (Gransden 1973, 46) and in the statutes drawn up by the prior and convent in the early fourteenth century in Harley MS 3977, f. 52r. (Gransden 1973, xxxix and 109). On St Robert see third paragraph of introduction.
- 18 In the customary the monk serving as clock-keeper received seven *ulnas* per week (Gransden 1973, 59 and 2007, 96, n. 13, which she translates as 'seven ells of candles'). The clock might still be the water-clock described by Jocelin of Brakelond in 1198 (Butler 1949, 107); but Bury Abbey could well have had a mechanical clock by the beginning of the fourteenth century, like those at Norwich and Ely (North 2005, 153–4). One of the earliest references in Europe to a mechanically chiming clock is c.1307 in Dante's *Paradiso* 10, lines 139–44, *come orologio, che ne chiami nell' ora... tin tin sonando con sì dolce nota... così vid' io la gloriosa ruota muoversi*.
- 19 See Gransden 1973, xxxviii; Thomson 1980, 145, no. 1294, item 9; and Dugdale 1821, 25, item 29.
- 20 See note 13 above.

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