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For this 1916 work, Archdeacon E.H. Pearce searched through the extensive archives of Westminster Abbey to provide a list of all the known members of the monastic community until the Dissolution. Over 700 individuals are included, with all the information about them available to the author. While the list is not complete, and the use of other sources would add additional names for the early period, Pearce completed a remarkable achievement. Westminster was a substantial foundation, with an average community of 47 for the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. About half of these, who held some office or function, are naturally better documented than ordinary monks. Scholarship was evidently valued by the abbey, although the majority of the writings evidenced were on the history of the community rather than theological or literary works. Some monks were supported at Oxford, but little is known of the education offered to the remainder.

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Ernest Harold Pearce
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The Monks of Westminster

*Being a Register of the Brethren of the
Convent from the time of the Confessor to the
Dissolution*

ERNEST HAROLD PEARCE



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NOTES AND DOCUMENTS
RELATING TO
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No. 5
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THE
MONKS OF WESTMINSTER

BEING A REGISTER OF THE BRETHERN OF THE CONVENT
FROM THE TIME OF THE CONFESSOR TO THE
DISSOLUTION

WITH LISTS OF THE OBEDIENTIARIES
AND AN INTRODUCTION

BY

E. H. PEARCE, M.A.

CANON AND ARCHDEACON OF WESTMINSTER

Cambridge:
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1916

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H. E. R.

DOMINO ABBATI WESTMŌN
 VIRO DEO DEVOTO ECCLESIE NOSTRE NECESSARIO¹

W. B. C.

DOMINO PRIORI
 PRO SERMONIBVS IN CHORO MAGNIS RECREACIONIBVS DIGNO²

W. H. C.

CELERARIO ET GARDINARIO
 CVIVS ARMATVRA NON POTEST ALICVI APTARI³

R. H. C.

THESAVRARIO
 QVI PICTVRAS APOCALYPSIS IN
 CLAVSTRO INFIRMITORII FIERI FACIT⁴

H. R. G.

QVI EST VLTIMVS NVNC IN CONGREGACIONE⁵
 HASCE ANTECESSORVM NOSTRORVM CEDVLAS
 D D
 SVPPRIOR ET ARCHIDIACONVS

¹ p. 85.

² p. 153.

³ p. 107.

⁴ p. 112.

⁵ p. 126.

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PREFACE

AN effort has been made in this volume to re-people the Convent of St Peter, Westminster, by such an examination of the records as would enable me to cite the authorities for each name included and for each statement about the bearer of the name. The Abbots are in many cases already well known in their character and their work, though much more may yet be done to make the personalities of some of them a living reality to our generation by means of the documents which survive from their time and bear their seal. But the more we know of the Abbots, the more conscious we become that the daily round of conventual doings was from their life “a thing apart,” while to the Prior and monks it was their “whole existence.” The material that survives in the cases of Abbot Walter de Wenlok and Abbot William Colchester shows how small a portion of each year was spent by them at Westminster. The call of the King might send them to foreign parts; the affairs of the Order or the needs of the Convent might take them to Rome or Avignon; when they were in England, they flitted about from property to property,—Laleham, Pyrford, Cleygate, Denham, Islip and Pershore,—with a monk or two in their train to act as seneschal or chaplain; and even if they were at Westminster, they mostly resided outside the precincts at their manor-house of La Neyte. So the daily existence of the Abbey depended on the Prior and his Brethren. It was time, therefore, that these should be brought out of the shadow-land in which they have been allowed to remain.

It needed some courage to undertake such a task, especially as I had had no experience in deciphering mediaeval documents when I came to live in the Abbey five years ago. But certain circumstances encouraged me. My colleagues, and more especially the Dean, were ready to give their favour to another instalment of the Westminster series. Dr Edward Scott, the Keeper of the Muniments, has never tired of allowing a beginner to draw upon his unique experience or to beg for his revision of transcripts made by a prentice hand. I had also before me the volumes already produced by the Dean of Wells, who has shown a constant interest in the continuance of his work. When I had practically completed my list of the later monks (from 1297–8

onwards), he entrusted to me a similar list drawn up by his lamented friend, the Rev. R. B. Rackham, who, if his valuable life had been spared, would have expanded his catalogue into a more adequate Register of our Benedictines than I can hope to produce. But I have been able to test my results in various ways. For instance, the Rev. H. F. Westlake, our Custodian, came upon the names of several Westminster monks in the course of a recent examination of the accounts left by the Guild of the Assumption connected with St Margaret's parish; and I was thankful to find that all of these monks were already on my list.

The Convent was clearly intended to accommodate a Prior and about 50 Brethren. I have recently noted the totals of 152 years, ranging between 1328 and 1534, and find the average number attained by the Prior and Convent to be 46·96, or roughly 47. The highest was 59, about 1400; the lowest was 32, in 1362-3, when the ravages of the Black Death were still felt. In the fourteenth century, the figures for which are by no means complete, the average was 44. In the first quarter of the fifteenth it was 49; afterwards there was a gradual decline,—48 from 1425 to 1475, 46 for the last quarter, and 44 for that portion of the sixteenth century during which the Convent was spared.

In a work which has involved the consultation of thousands of documents I cannot hope, even with the splendid help of the Cambridge Press, to escape many errors, though none of them, I hope, may be grievous. I trust that those who find them will point them out, and will pardon them for the sake of what has resulted from the investigation. Dr Scott has greatly helped in the reading of the proofs, but I must personally accept the responsibility for the indexes, only pleading that they first took shape amid the somewhat unquiet studiousness of an officers' mess and have been finished in circumstances which still compelled the *panni nigri* to yield to arms.

For myself, I can only say that, with these names and these administrative careers before my mind, I find the mediaeval Abbey no longer ghostly and unreal, but flushed with all the signs of a vigorous circulation. I feel a genuine sympathy with Thomas Elfrede who was professed as a monk here under Henry VII's Abbot and died a Prebendary under Edward VI's Dean; and who, when his will was proved, was found to have left directions that he should be buried in some spot which in his youth he had passed daily, as he and his Brethren went their processional round of prayer and praise.

E. H. P.

3 LITTLE CLOISTERS,
On the Feast of St Edward's Translation,
 1916.