

John Roxton

Assent was given for his election as prior of Dunstable on the 5th of December 1414. This was confirmed by the bishop of Lincoln, John Dalderby, on the 18th of December. From two reports of bishops' visitations, we know something of the priory during his time as prior.

After the visitation of William Gray, bishop of Lincoln 1426-31, he wrote to John Roxton about the faults he found at Dunstable and his instructions for effecting remedies. He issued instructions, which give a clear picture of the errors he found during his visitation.

The prior is instructed to ensure that all the canons retire to bed immediately after Compline. The feasting, drinking and gambling is to stop, upon 'pain of imprisonment for one year' if they continue. The canons are not to entertain family members or friends on the premises. The resources of the priory are for the canons only. No lay person is to be admitted to the cloisters under any circumstances, as they are places of peace and contemplation. All the canons must be present in the priory, unless they have permission and licence from the prior or sub-prior. Meditation must be observed in the cloisters after breakfast and after Vespers. The canons are not allowed to indulge in hunting and hawking. Someone must be found to instruct the novices and canons in 'the elementary sciences' so that the standard of their education can be improved. Alms given to the priory must be used for charitable purposes and not for the upkeep of vestments and furniture. The prior is instructed, upon pain of dismissal, to hold an annual Chapter meeting at which he gives a full account of the priory's administration throughout the year and that a record of this is kept in the 'common chest'. He is further instructed not to sell any of the priory's corses, nor to cut down trees unless it is for the repair of the building or for fuel. He is not to take in novices for money or raise funds in any way which is not approved of by the Augustinian Order. Within three years he must repair and maintain the priory and all its manors, granges, rectories, vicarages and associated buildings and ensure that they are all well stocked now and into the future. He is also to seek out John Beverley, an erstwhile canon of Dunstable and 'bring him back to the fold of the Lord, and that you correct him according to the statutes of your Order, but in brotherly wise and with fatherly pity.'

William of Alnwick, bishop of Lincoln, 1436-1449, wrote a report of his visitation to Dunstable Priory on 24th January 1442. His comments show the shortcomings he found. John Beverley seems to have mended his ways as he delivered the opening address and is described as the 'professor of holy writ.' The young canons do not study, read or meditate but hang around the kitchen and the common hall without permission. One novice brought a boy into the priory, feeding him from the kitchen, and was told to desist. Several canons had beehives, selling the honey and keeping the money for themselves. The sick canons were not properly cared for. The canons received the insufficient sum of two marks yearly for their clothing. They were accustomed to drink after Compline. Some of the canons continued to absent themselves from services or arrive late, despite continual censure. Silence was not always kept when it should be. The prior is criticised for not maintaining the building properly; for selling the priory's goods without permission; for forgiving people without recourse to justice; for not keeping proper accounts for the priory and its possessions; for favouring the laity over the canons; for not fulfilling his teaching role; for not supplying staff to teach the canons and for allowing canons to eat outside the priory. The cook was recorded as being proud and rude and the refectory was too small. The school was reported to be doing well. The bishop set down various punishments and the prior was commissioned to maintain discipline, to issue fines and to order 'bread and water' for any third offence.

The Victorian County History for Bedfordshire, recounts an incident from 1444. Prior John Roxton and some of his canons broke into the 'close and house' of Thomas, of the Friary. They wounded some of the friars, throwing one, Peter Hobard, into a pool of water and despoiling the gardens.

John Roxton resigned in 1473 having been prior for nearly 60 years.