CHAPTER TWO

EPISCOPAL SUPPORT FOR THE NEW FOUNDATION:
DONATIONS TO PLYMPTON PRIORY FROM THE
BISHOPS OF EXETER AND THEIR CIRCLE

The material success of a religious house in the Middle Ages was largely
dependent on the generosity of its patrons and benefactors in the early
years of its existence, when enthusiasm for the establishment of a new
foundation was most likely to result in significant donations. After the
foundation of Plympton Priory in 1121 by Bishop William Warelwast,
the canons witnessed widespread interest in this new Augustinian house
amongst the lay elite of Devon and members of the diocesan hierarchy.
The bishops of Exeter continued to show their support to Plympton
Priory in the twelfth century by granting the canons substantial gifts
of land, churches, and money. Bishop William Warelwast, the founder
and first patron, was especially conscientious in attending to his duty
to provide for the economic well-being of his foundation. Although we
have the texts of only two episcopal donation charters for Plympton,
from these and from other episcopal acta and confirmation charters we
can obtain some impression of the relations between the canons of
Plympton and the bishops, deans, and canons of Exeter in the twelfth
century.

Shortly after the foundation of the priory, in 1124, William Warel-
wast, “burning with the zeal of charity and following in the footsteps
of the holy fathers,” absolved Plympton and all its chapels, especially
Plymstock, from the payment of synodal and paschal dues and all
other episcopal exactions in perpetuity.1 These dues were the standard
payments bishops were entitled to seek from clerics and monasteries

1 “... [Z]elo caritatis accensus et sanctorum patrum vestigia sequens, pro amore Dei
et peccatorum meorum remissione atque pro salute totius capituli mei, ecclesiam sancti
Petri apostolorum principis de Plintonto omnesque capellas sibi pertinentes, nominatim
de Plimestoke ab omni censu synodali, et paschali consuetudine et ab omni exactione
episcopali” (EEAE XI, #20, p. 19). Why Plymstock should be singled out for particular
mention is not clear, unless Bishop William foresaw the later troubles Plympton would
have with Tavistock Abbey, which owned the manor of Plymstock, over this chapel.
Abbot Walter of Tavistock recognized Plympton’s rights to the chapel c. 1164 (MHI II,
p. 500), but a final resolution of this disagreement occurred only in 1429 (Reg Lacy
in their dioceses. The synodal fee was exacted from each person a bishop requested to attend a synod; the amount seems to have varied according to the size of the church or monastery, ranging from a few pence to several shillings. The paschal due likely refers to the fee paid by the clergy on Maundy Thursday for chrism to be used at Easter.

Another type of episcopal exaction was the *cathedraticum*; this was a sum owed to the bishop as he travelled around his diocese inquiring after offenses which would be corrected at the synod. Addleshaw pointed out that twelfth-century bishops remitted such dues and exactions in recognition of the Gregorian Reform’s new conception of the relationship between priest and bishop: the bishop was no longer to require a priest to pay fees for “spiritual things,” as a lord would require services or dues from a vassal. John of Oxford, bishop of Norwich, displayed this attitude between 1198 and 1200 when he absolved all the churches in his diocese from payment of the paschal due (but not the synodal): he anathematized anyone exacting any other due, especially for such things as institutions to benefices, dedications of churches, and the like. Bishop William Warelwast was cautious, however, to ensure that his rights and those of the archdeacon were protected.

This bishop also granted to Plympton Priory the sum of sixty shillings from the prebend of each canon of Exeter Cathedral who died or entered the religious life. Warelwast stipulated that the canons of

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4 Moorman, *Church Life in England*, p. 120.

5 Brett, *English Church*, p. 164. The amount may have been 7d.

4 The *cathedraticum* seems to have been similar in conception to the procuration, a sum owed to the bishop when visitations became common (Brett, *English Church*, pp. 166–7). The procuration was an annual payment offered in lieu of the provision of hospitality to the bishop during his visitation.


7 The bishop conceded that “any financial penalties incurred by the priory’s domestic servants are to go to the canons, although jurisdiction and penitential discipline over them are reserved to the bishop and archdeacon” (*EEAE* XI, #20, p. 19).

8 *EEAE* XI, #22, pp. 20–2, 22n. The grant was made on the occasion of the dedication of the new cathedral church in Exeter.
Plympton were to say the same number and sort of services for each cathedral canon as for one of their own brethren. They were also to pray for William and his sins, as he took care to support them in their need.\(^9\) After his death they were to pray for him and his successors just as they would for one of their own, or even more, if they were feeling charitable.\(^10\) In the same charter he gave Plympton a tenement in Exeter, which had previously belonged to Ranulfus de Haga and, after him, to Clarembald.\(^11\)

These gifts were confirmed by the chapter of the cathedral on the same day, July 2, 1133.\(^12\) The chapter’s charter sheds an interesting light on the relations between bishop and chapter at Exeter in the 1120s: the cathedral canons spoke in glowing terms of the bishop’s thoughtfulness. The cathedral canons said that previously the custom at Exeter had been that after the death of a canon, his prebend was simply handed over to another at the will of the bishop, although the chapter could offer advice. Now the bishop had come up with a way to improve this situation, with their approval: upon the death of each canon, his prebend would be paid out to help the poor for a year after his death, for the good of his soul. The Plympton canons were to receive sixty shillings from the prebend, for the salvation of the living and the rest of the dead and for the soul of the dead canon expressly.\(^13\) Several subsequent bishops—Robert Warelwast (Bishop William Warelwast’s nephew), Robert of Chichester, Bartholomew, and John the Chanter—and Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury issued confirmations of this gift, most probably at the solicitation of the priors of Plympton.\(^14\) Robert Warelwast added

\(^{9}\) Ibid., p. 21: “Quo sicut eorum indigencie nostra suffragari curat abundancia, ita et pro nostris et nostrorum offensis precare Deum non desistat religionis eorum cultus et perseverencia.”

\(^{10}\) Ibid.: “Nolo autem vos latere quia et pro me ipso et pro meis successoribus post mortem ecclesia Plimtone annuatim tale obsequium facere suscepit et concessit, quale et ipsa faciet post obitum sui prelati proprii iuxta morem sue institutionis, nisi forte caritas eorum graciam pro gracia quantumlibet adauxeret.”

\(^{11}\) Ibid., pp. 20–2. In Bishop John’s confirmation (EEAE XII, #168, pp. 150–2) this property is referred to as “domum quandam et terram que fuit Clarembaldi in vico australi.” Clarembald was a doctor, royal chaplain, canon of Exeter cathedral, and friend of William Warelwast. See Frances Rose-Troup, ‘Clarembald and the Miracles of Exeter,’ in Exeter Vignettes (Manchester, 1942), p. 9.

\(^{12}\) MDE #8, p. 136; translated by Barlow, EEAE XI, #22, p. 22n.

\(^{13}\) Ibid.: “pro salute vivorum et requie defunctorum et nominatim pro nostri canonici defuncti anima.”

\(^{14}\) EEAE XI, #120, pp. 109–10 and EEAE XII, #166, p. 149.
twenty more shillings to the gift so that the total amount that went to Plympton at the death of each canon was four pounds.\(^{15}\)

It is interesting that both William, the founder of the priory, and the chapter expressed the desire that the canons of Plympton pray for them and for the souls of their dead brethren. What these men expected of the Plympton canons seems to have been little different from what these men might have expected of monks: prayers for the souls of the living and the dead. Bishop William himself stated the belief that the worship in which the canons were engaged would assist in God’s forgiveness of his sins.\(^{16}\) The bishop and the chapter seem to have felt that by their gift and confirmation they were entering into a sort of spiritual confraternity with the Plympton canons, an expectation often stated explicitly in other monastic charters of the period.\(^{17}\) Once again, the evidence suggests that early patrons and benefactors valued the Augustinian canons for their fulfillment of the normal duties of members of the religious orders: ceaseless divine worship and intercessory prayer.

Warelwast also gave Plympton a house and gardens belonging to Ascelin the archdeacon which he granted in free alms, and he consented to Hugh de Saucei’s benefaction of land in Luscacombe.\(^{18}\) He and the chapter were also present when Aluric Fitz Wischi donated land at “Madworthy,” near the leper hospital in Exeter.\(^{19}\) In addition, the bishop gave his permission to his nephew, namesake, and steward to grant land at Stokeley and Ashridge to the priory; this gift was later confirmed by the bishop’s successor, his nephew Robert Warelwast.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{15}\) *EEAE* XII, #166, p. 149. Orme says that this was the basic annual income for a prebend at Exeter Cathedral: Nicholas Orme, *Exeter Cathedral as It Was* (Exeter, 1986), p. 34. The canons of Exeter Cathedral fell into arrears in their payments in the early fifteenth century, but this was resolved in an agreement with the prior and canons of Plympton in 1406 (*Exeter Cathedral Archives, D&C 1362*). A few receipts from the prior of Plympton for moneys received from the dean and chapter have survived (*e.g. Exeter Cathedral Archives, D&C 1371 and 1372*).

\(^{16}\) *EEAE* XI, #22, p. 21: “pro nostris et nostrorum offensis pacare deum non desistat religionis eorum cultus et perseverencia.”


\(^{18}\) *EEAE* XII, #168, pp. 150–2. Hugh de Saucei was a vassal of the earl of Devon. Luscacombe is in present-day Bickington, Teignbridge hundred.

\(^{19}\) *EEAE* XI, #43, p. 41. Barlow points out that the priory granted this land, 1176x1184, to the Hospital of St. John the Baptist in Exeter at the petition of Robert Fitz Gille, archdeacon of Totnes, for an annual rent of half a mark.

\(^{20}\) *EEAE* XI, #42, p. 40. The original owner of the land is not clear: Bishop Robert’s confirmation of 1138 × 1141 states that Robert Bevin quit-claimed the land which
Difficulties arose, however, when William Warelwast (the nephew) gave the land of Stokeley to his wife Aliz, daughter of William de Buz, as dower. Aliz subsequently ran away from her husband with Richard of Flanders and sold Stokeley. The prior of Plympton was able to get back the land, nevertheless, in a settlement: he gave Aliz and her new husband four silver marks to renounce their hold of the land forever, an offer which they accepted. At the same time Robert Bevin quit-claimed all right to the land and, after placing the knife of Robert the Hermit on the altar of the chapel of Saint Faith, swore to this on the Gospels; Prior Geoffrey gave him three silver marks. This time the land remained in the hands of the priory, and at the time of the Dissolution the manor of Stokeley/Priorton was valued at £8 13s 5d.

Bishop William Warelwast was also involved in the donation of land in Cornwall to Plympton Priory, albeit in a roundabout way. The “Registrum” tells us that he gave William of Rouen, for his service, land at Trevilla from the demesne of his manor of Tregear. William of Rouen gave to his brother, Robert de Rouen, three Cornish acres plus three virgates of land—Loe, Lamfloc, and Harcourt—from the manor. After Bishop William’s death in 1137, Robert of Rouen, following the example of the bishop, decided to become a canon at Plympton; he persuaded Bishop Robert Warelwast of Exeter and his nephew John of Rouen to concede this land, which he wished to bring with him to

William Warelwast (the nephew) bought from his father, Ralph (“eam a patre suo Radulfo emerat”) with the consent of his uncle the bishop, and gave to the priory. An account in the “Registrum” notes, however, that Bishop Robert confirmed the gift to the priory of land at Stokeley from William Warelwast II, Bishop Robert’s relative; William had bought this land from Robert Bevin and given it to the church when he became a canon at the priory (“predictae ecclesiae secum eret canonicus dedit”). William II also gave the land of Ashridge with Bishop William’s consent; the bishop had given it to his nephew for his service as steward. See EEAE XI, #42, p. 40n.

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid. Perhaps the knife of Robert the Hermit was considered a holy relic? Placing a knife on the altar to signify the offering of a gift was not uncommon in the twelfth century. See Vivian H. Galbraith, ‘Monastic Foundation Charters of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries,’ Cambridge Historical Journal 4 (1934), 211–2 and Michael T. Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066–1307 (Cambridge, MA, 1979), pp. 205–7.
23 MDE #28, pp. 145–9. Bishop John the Chanter confirmed Bishop Robert I’s charter, 1188 × 1191 (EEAE XII, #167, p. 150). Ashridge and Stokeley (also known as Priorton) are in Sandford, Crediton hundred.
25 Ibid. Barlow notes that Trevella manor, with the church of St. Feock (Lamfloc), was part of the episcopal manor of Tregear, and that Loe and Harcourt are in the same parish.
the priory. John of Rouen returned the land into the hands of the bishop and quit his claim to the land; in return, the bishop released him and his heirs from the payment of a third part of a knight’s fee, and Prior Geoffrey gave him six silver marks and the hauberk of his uncle Robert.

One of the most significant gifts from Bishop William Warelwast to the priory was the church of St. Kew in Cornwall. As was mentioned in Chapter One, according to “Cornish tradition,” this church belonged to Plympton in Anglo-Saxon times; by the time of the Domesday Book, however, it was in royal hands. It was one of the churches given to Bishop William Warelwast by Henry I in the controversial documents discussed above. The church at St. Kew was evidently some kind of small minster whose prebends were to revert to Plympton Priory as the secular canons died. A confirmation charter of Bishop John the Chanter of Exeter states that the episcopal donation consisted of the church of Landeho (St. Kew) together with its lands, tithes, liberties, and all appurtenances, so that with the death of the clerics their prebends would fall to the canons of Plympton. While there is no surviving charter regarding William Warelwast’s granting of St. Kew to Plympton, the canons of Plympton did possess such a document in the 1260s when Bishop Bronescombe challenged Plympton Priory’s right to the church. Bronescombe also noted at that time that the dean and chapter of Exeter had confirmed the donation, as had subsequent bishops of Exeter. Given the later troubles Plympton was to have in asserting its right to this church, Bishop William’s gift was something of a mixed blessing.

26 Ibid. A fragment of the confirmation charter from the “Registrum de Plympton” is printed in EEA XI, #44, p. 42. It states that the donation was made at St. Germans in Cornwall “per cu[l]tellum super altare sancti Michaelis.”
28 EEA XII, #168, p. 151: “…ecclesiam de Landeho cum terris, decimis, libertatibus, et omnibus pertinenciis, ita ut decedentibus eiusdem ecclesie clericis prebende eorum in ecclesie vestre usus et vestros cedant.” The lands attached to St. Kew were known as the manor of Lanowe Seynt by 1535, when it was valued at £11 9s 3d (MDE #28, p. 147).
30 Ibid.
31 This matter will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five. The value of the church of St. Kew was £20 in 1535, according to the Valor Ecclesiasticus (MDE #28, p. 149).
Episcopal generosity to Plympton Priory may also have inspired other members of the diocesan administration to make benefactions to the canons. Ascelin, the archdeacon whose house and gardens in Exeter were bought by William Warelwast and given to Plympton, also granted the priory land in his own right, a half virgate and half ferling of land in Sampford Spiney, of the fee lands of the earl of Devon. Another archdeacon was a good friend to Plympton some decades later: Robert Fitz Gille, archdeacon of Totnes (c. 1170–Jan. 1186), brother of John of Salisbury and seemingly a physician. The “Registrum de Plympton” contains an obituary notice and account of the gifts of Robert: while he lived, he rebuilt the refectory and the infirmary and gave a golden chalice with gems, a chasuble, and a cope decorated with gold thread, a missal, two lectionaries, the Pentateuch, and, to Prior Martin, a collection of Decretal letters. Like William Warelwast I, William Warelwast II, and Robert of Rouen, Robert Fitz Gille retired to the priory and became a canon. When he was in extremis, he bequeathed all his books to the priory, including the Epistles of St. Paul, a Psalter, and Gratian’s Decretum, except his medical texts. He was buried in the conventual church, having left the priory ten silver marks and his palfrey in addition to the other treasures this “ever most tender lover” bequeathed to the canons. As well, on the day before he died, Robert had asked the canons of Plympton to provide on the anniversary of his death six shillings’ worth of wine, food, and other comforts for the poor, for the salvation of himself and the canons. They complied with this request: the writer of the obituary urged future brothers to attend to the wishes of one from whose generosity they benefitted.

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32 MDE #3, p. 135 (For the identification of “Sandford” as Sampford Spiney, see PND, pt. 1, p. 238). Barlow notes that Ascelin may have been one of the first territorial archdeacons in the Diocese of Exeter; he seems to have died either in 1122 or 1132. See EEAE XII, appendix 2, p. 306n.
34 Ibid., 109.
35 Ibid., 99, 109. The “Registrum” states that the names of the books were recorded in their catalogue, now sadly lost.
36 His other bequests included ten silver spoons “desiderans eos semper talibus velle et posse uti,” a silver cup and silver bowl “appendentes tres marcas et dimidiam et eo amplius,” his mazer cup, a silver bowl to be used in the conventual church.
38 Ibid., 109; “…eius tam benignae liberalitatis participes, idem exaudire et pro suo tempore exsolvere.”
Bishop John the Chanter also confirmed, 1188 × 1191, to Plympton Priory its long-standing right to present to the archdeacon of Totnes a priest to be instituted to the rural deanery of Plympton.\textsuperscript{39} Gilbert Basset, archdeacon of Totnes (1190–1207), recognized this right as well.\textsuperscript{40} The main role of the rural dean was to “supervise…a group of parochial clergy”: the dean was meant to oversee the moral behaviour of the clergy, visit sick vicars and curates, and preside over monthly rural-decanal meetings.\textsuperscript{41} In England the rural deans were usually appointed by the bishop, but in the diocese of Exeter the practice was for the incumbents of the benefices in a deanery to elect the rural deans each year.\textsuperscript{42} Plympton Priory’s right to appoint the rural deans for its district is an example of the interconnectedness between the canons and the diocesan hierarchy in Devon.

The close ties between Plympton Priory and the episcopal circle continued throughout the twelfth century. William Warelwast was not the only bishop of Exeter who was generous and helpful to the priory in the first eight decades after its foundation. Bishop John’s confirmation charter of 1186 × 1188 lists the priory’s spiritualities and temporalities which were gifts of the bishops or were confirmed by them.\textsuperscript{43} For example, Bishop Bartholomew gave his consent when Ancatillus, priest of Exeter Cathedral bought land belonging to the episcopal fee in South Street, Exeter from the heirs of Algarus Bula and donated it

\textsuperscript{39} The episcopal confirmation was acknowledged in a privilege from Pope Celestine III (\textit{EEAE XII}, #169, p. 152).
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.; \textit{MDE} #15, pp. 138–9.
\textsuperscript{41} Alexander Hamilton Thompson, ‘Diocesan Organization in the Middle Ages: Archdeacons and Rural Deans,’ \textit{Proceedings of the British Academy} 29 (1943), 185–6. While these were the duties of the rural deans in theory, Hamilton Thompson found little evidence of such activities in the episcopal registers, where for the most part the rural deans appeared as recipients of standard commissions of inquiry.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Reg Grandisson II}, p. 713n. That the incumbents were not always conscientious about fulfilling this responsibility is shown by an entry in Bishop Thomas Brantingham’s register for 1390: he sent out a tersely-worded mandate ordering the incumbents of the Archdeaconry of Cornwall to hurry up and elect their rural deans (\textit{Reg Brantyngham II}, p. 706). In 1333, an aggrieved Bishop Grandisson complained that some rural deans in the diocese had placed others “minus ydoneos, viles pauperes, levis opinionis” in their offices (presumably for a fee) and that they had handed them their seals of office. Bishop Grandisson declared that in the future rural deans had to exercise their duties themselves, unless they were incapacitated, and keep the seals in their possession. Offenders had to pay 100s towards the re-building of the cathedral (\textit{Reg Grandisson II}, pp. 712–3).
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{EEAE XII}, #168, pp. 150–2. Bishop Bartholomew also confirmed the priory’s possessions (\textit{EEAE XI}, #118, pp. 107–8).
to Plympton Priory. There are no surviving records of benefactions to Plympton Priory by Bishop Bartholomew, but he seems to have had a close relationship with it: during a court case in the 1160s concerning some married clergy in the archdeaconry of Barnstaple, Bartholomew sent a canon of Plympton to the Curia in Rome to represent him. The most important gifts from bishops of Exeter were undoubtedly the spiritualities: the confirmation charter lists fourteen churches given to the priory either by the bishops or with their approval. Indeed, it is only possible to identify definitely three churches which came directly from the bishops of Exeter: St. Kew, St. Anthony-in-Roseland, and St. Just-in-Roseland, all in Cornwall. Bishop Robert I of Exeter (1138–55) gave the latter two to the priory “with all lands, tithes, liberties, and belongings.” Unfortunately, we do not know the identities of donors of two churches, Bridestowe in Devon and Maker in Cornwall, of

44 Ibid. The land in South Street also included a house which Algarus had built on it. In return, the canons of Plympton had to pay 2s to the bishop of Exeter at each of the four terms of the year. The bishops were similarly businesslike about land which the canons bought from Wimundus the goldsmith and his heirs with the consent of Bishop Bartholomew: the canons were to give the bishop four pence a year for it.

45 Adrian Morey, *Bartholomew of Exeter: Bishop and Canonist* (Cambridge, 1937), p. 93. Another indication of this relationship—and of the status of Plympton Priory in the diocese—was that during the negotiations that resulted in Bartholomew’s elevation to the see of Exeter, John of Salisbury wrote Bartholomew that he should come to Canterbury, accompanied by the abbot of Tavistock and the prior of Plympton (ibid., p. 13).

46 This church became a cell of Plympton. Leland said in his *Itinerary* that two canons had resided there (*MDE*, p. 134). St. Anthony’s also had a dependent chapel, St. Gerrans. The manor of St. Anthony, also known as Burdowhoe, was valued at £9 in the *Valor*; the total in the Ministers’ Accounts is £11 3s 10d (*MDE* #28, p. 147 and #30, p. 150). Little is known of this cell, other than what appears in two mentions in the episcopal registers: on October 3, 1259, Bishop Bronescombe dedicated the church, and in 1338 the French burnt down the cell during a raid on Cornwall (*Reg. Bronescombe* I, #144, p. 44, and *Reg. Grandisson* II, p. 872).

47 A dispute arose between the prior of Plympton and John le Sor over the patronage of the church of St. Just in the 1180s; this dispute is discussed in detail in Chapter Four. A memorandum in the “Registrum” states that Bishop Leofric (1046 × 1072) had appointed his brother Odmer to oversee his lands in Cornwall, including the episcopal manor of Tregear, of which St. Just-in-Roseland was part; Odmer’s son was Osbert Sor, who was father of a John Sor (*EEAE XI*, #1, pp. 1–2n).

48 *MDE* #3, p. 135.

49 In 1086 the manor of Bridestowe was held by Ralph of Pomeroy from Baldwin the Sheriff (*DB: D* #16, 7). In 1242–43, Bridestowe appeared in the Book of Fees as belonging to the Honour of Okehampton (*BF*, p. 756). Baldwin the Sheriff was lord of the Honour of Okehampton; it is possible that one of his d’Avranches or Avenel descendent made the gift of the church of Bridestowe. See Chapter Three for other gifts of this family to Plympton Priory.

50 In 1086, the manor of Maker was held by Robert, Count of Mortain (*DB: C*, #5, 2, 14). After the confiscation of these estates in the time of Count William, Maker...
which Plympton came into possession between the times of Henry II’s confirmation charter (1158) and Bishop John’s charter (1186 × 1191).

Another church mentioned in Bishop John’s confirmation charter of 1186 × 1191 was that of St. Mawgan-in-Pydar in Cornwall. In 1086 the bishops of Exeter held the manor of Lanherne, on which the church of St. Mawgan-in-Pydar was located. Possibly, then, this was another episcopal gift to the priory. By c. 1265 the manor of Lanherne had passed by marriage into the hands of the Arundell family. The lords of Lanherne also obtained the advowson of the church of St. Mawgan-in-Pydar some time in the early fourteenth century, although the priory continued to receive a pension of two marks. A peculiar wrinkle in this transference is the fact that in 1279 the prior of Plympton and Guy de Nunant made a joint presentation to the church of St. Mawgan-in-Pydar. As the main branch of the Nunants had died out by 1206, this Guy must have been a descendant of a cadet line; he was also involved in a presentation to a church belonging to the Lanherne estates, Phillack, around the same time. It may be possible that the priory was originally entitled only to a moiety of the advowson of St. Mawgan, and members of the Nunant family owned the other half. Whatever the original arrangement may have been, the canons ceased to play any role in the selection of a priest for this parish once the Arundells acquired the advowson of St. Mawgan-in-Pydar.

The flow of churches from bishops to the Augustinian canons has often been interpreted to mean that the bishops expected them to undertake pastoral duties. This contention has been considered to be especially true of those priories which had been refounded from secular colleges. For example, Janet Burton in her recent survey of English monasticism stated: “It may be assumed that bishops who placed regular canons in the ancient minster churches intended them to fulfil the same pastoral
and parochial functions as their predecessors...” and “churchmen seem actively to have promoted the establishment of regular canons in their dioceses in order to place the care of parishes in their hands.”56 Since we unfortunately do not have a surviving example of an episcopal charter granting a church to the Plympton canons in this period, we cannot state with certainty the intentions or motivations of the bishops of Exeter in this case. However, from Warelwast’s comments in his two grants to Plympton and from the remarks of the cathedral canons in their confirmation charter of 1133, the characteristics of the canons on which these men focus pertain to the traditional monastic responsibilities of prayer and intercession. The spiritual benefits that the canons of Plympton could provide for their benefactors were emphasized in these documents, not the pastoral benefits to the community.

Whatever the motivations of the donors might have been, the result of their interest in the new Augustinian house at Plympton was a significant contribution to the financial well-being of the priory. The founder, Bishop William Warelwast, understood the need of a generous endowment for a new monastic house, and subsequent twelfth-century bishops of Exeter displayed, to varying degrees, an interest in assisting his foundation. The involvement of the bishops of Exeter influenced other clerics in the diocese, such as Robert Fitz Gille, to make benefactions; the dean and chapter of Exeter Cathedral also demonstrated a willingness to confirm the episcopal donations. However, as will be seen in the next chapter, the support of the bishops of Exeter and the ecclesiastical elite of the diocese was only partially responsible for the creation of a sizeable endowment for Plympton Priory; just as important, if not more so, were the benefactions granted to the canons of Plympton by the members of the barony of Devon and their tenants.

56 Burton, Monastic and Religious Orders, pp. 47–8. Burton does note, however, that the nature of the sources for this period makes it impossible to tell whether the canons did indeed serve the churches they were given.