The Death of Whiting, Abbot of Glastonbury; The End of the Religious Orders in England; And the Beginnings of the Society of Jesus

Glastonbury is a place in the western part of England that is regarded, according to tradition and the authority of ancient writers, as that which Joseph of Arimathea (he who buried Christ our Lord, was cast out of his homeland by the Jews, and came to Britain with several companions in the reign of Emperor Nero) received from King Arviragus in the year of our Lord 50, in order to erect a chapel to the God of heaven. So says Gildas, a renowned Christian British author, known as “the wise” on account of his deep learning, who wrote eleven hundred years ago, and all of the later annals of England confirm this. The place was exalted after Lucius, king of the Britons, was washed with the water of holy baptism there. And Inas, the wise and pious prince of the West Saxons [Vestanglos], the first to make the kingdom of England a tributary of the

---

1 Sander, De origine ac progressu, 197–205.
4 The word “holy” (santo) is omitted beginning with the 1595 edition.
5 Glastonbury was supposedly the site of Lucius’s baptism, c.185. Alan Smith, “Lucius of Britain: Alleged King and Church Founder,” Folklore 90, no. 1 (1979): 29–36, here 29.
Roman pontiff, erected a palatial monastery there around the year of our Lord 740, which many subsequent kings expanded, enriched, and ennobled, calling the spot the first land of the saints.

The abbot of this monastery was one Whiting, a man respected for his advanced age, saintly life, and exemplary holiness (which he preserved in the midst of copious worldly wealth). Now, in his monastery, and in all others in England at the time, all the religious lived in common, diligently attended services, and strictly maintained their seclusion. Cloistered in his monastery Whiting had a community of one hundred religious, and in separate houses roughly three hundred servants and domestics, many of them the sons of gentlemen and knights, whom he later sponsored and supported at university. He offered hospitality to every pilgrim, welcoming them with open arms; once, he hosted five hundred guests—and their horses—in his house, all at the same time. Every Wednesday and Friday he unfailingly distributed bountiful alms to the poor, who flocked there from throughout the region. In those days, the incomes of the richest monasteries and abbeys throughout England were spent on these and similar works. Well, to return to Whiting, since he refused to sign the document the king had sent to all the monasteries, and a treatise against the king’s divorce had been surreptitiously found among his papers (which the king’s minions had themselves planted in said papers when they rifled through them in secret, hoping to achieve their end by this artifice), by various lies and tricks he was dragged to London by a sizable force, and then made to return to his house. When they were drawing near, a priest approached the litter

6 “Moreover, king Ine builded the monasterie of Glastenburie, where Ioseph of Arimathea in times past builded an oratorie or chappell (as before is recited) when he with other christians came into this land in the daies of Aruiragus, & taught the gospell heere to the Britains, conuerting manie of them to the faith.” Holinshed, Chronicles, 1:639.

7 In point of fact, Richard Whiting was criticized in a 1538 visitation for his rather lordly lifestyle. Doggett, “Whiting, Richard,” in ODNB, 58:733.


9 “He also maintained the tradition of hospitality to all, with the abbey feeding the poor of the neighbourhood twice weekly. His abbacy coincided with a period of general decline for the Benedictines, yet at Glastonbury the number of monks rose from forty-six to fifty-four. During the 1530s, moreover, there was an increase in the number of monks who went from Glastonbury to Gloucester College at Oxford.” Dogget, “Whiting, Richard,” in ODNB, 58:733.

10 Whiting was convicted of only two specific charges: possession of a book against Henry’s divorce and having withheld various treasures from royal commissioners. Ibid.