

A Book on the Carthusians owned by William Basyng

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The Book

Amongst the Winchester College Muniments is a book published in 1524 in Paris. It is by Bruno (cir1030-1101), the founder of the Carthusian Order of monks. The frontispiece is shown in Figure 1 and a transcript and translation of the title text is as follows, (Bruno1524):

BRVNONIS CARTHVSIANORVM Patriarche sanctissimi Theologi Parisiensis Scholae doctissimi : & Remensis [sic] ecclesiae canonici moratissimi : Opera & Vita post Indicem serie literaria indicanda.

Bruno the most holy Patriarch of the Carthusians, Doctor of Theology of the Paris School and most gentle Canon of the Church in Reims. His works and his life revealed by the series of letters shown

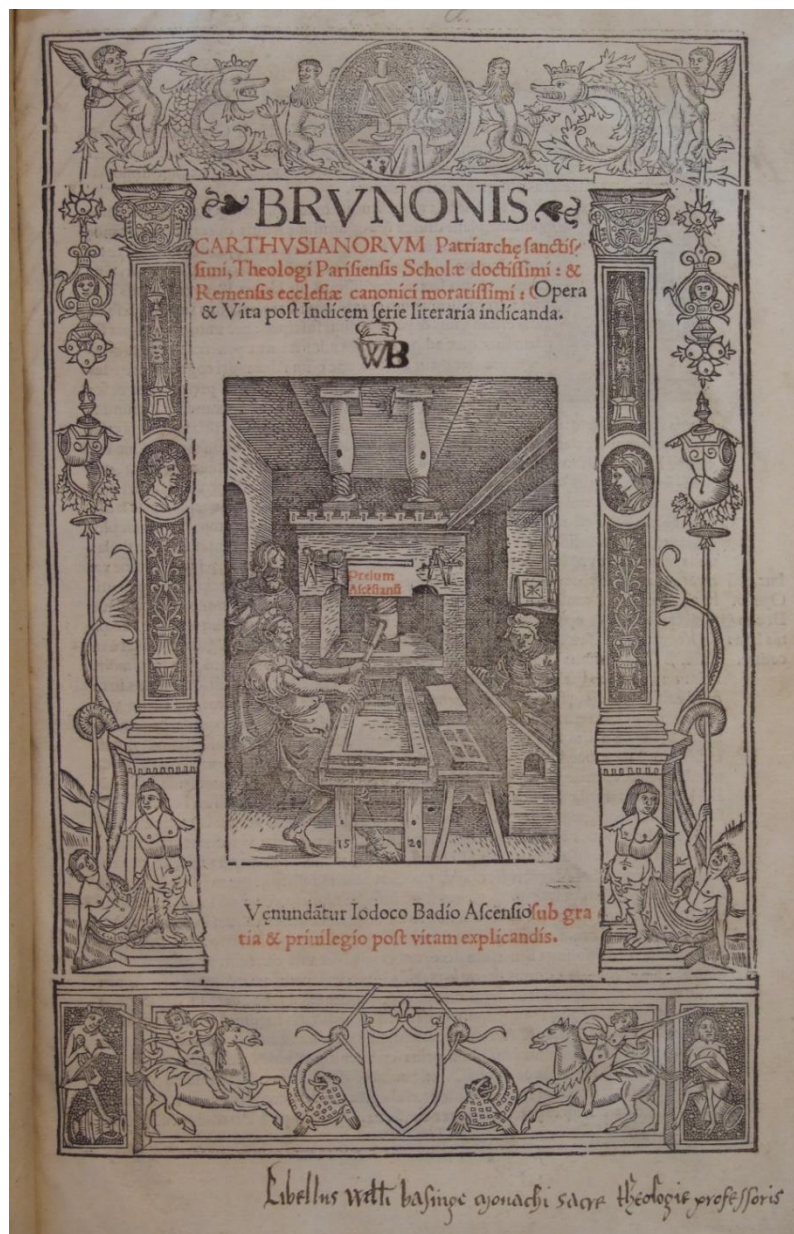


Figure 1 - Frontispiece from *Bruno the Most Holy Patriarch of the Carthusians*

The “Inscriptions”

Firstly, at the bottom of the frontispiece is written, see Figure 2:

Libellus Will[el]mji basinge Monachi sacre theologie professoris

which translates as:

The book of the monk William Basinge Professor of Sacred Theology

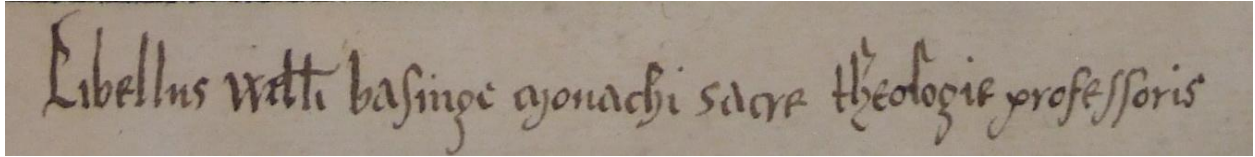


Figure 2 - Text showing William Basyng was the owner of the book

Secondly, just below the title text is a drawing of a “religious” hat above the written capital letters “WB”, see Figure 3. The hat is of the style of a Cardinal but is probably that of a Prior. The WB is almost certainly the initials of William Basinge, the last Prior of St Swithun’s Priory before the Reformation.



Figure 3 - “religious” hat and the initials of William Basyng

When were the “Inscriptions” written ?

The first “inscription” was written after 28 January 1529 when he was the Almoner and titled Doctor of Divinity, see the list of key events in the life of William Basyng listed below. He was first titled Professor of Sacred Theology on 15 November 1532 when he was serving as a chaplain in Bishop Richard Fox’s chantry chapel. The fact that the title of Prior is not used may indicate that this was written before 8 May 1536.

As for the second “inscription”, it is unlikely that such a “religious” hat would have been used by William Basyng before he was Prior, and hence this was probably drawn after 8 May 1536.

They may not have been written at the same time and they give no clue as to when William Basyng obtained the book. We can only say that it was at some point after 1524 when the book was published.

The use of the surname Basyng in both “illustrations” means that the latest date they were written was 14 November 1539, when the Monastery of St Swithun’s was surrendered and William Basyng, Prior became William Kyngesmylle, Guardian.

Key Events in the Life of William Basyng

See also (Greatrex1997):

- by 1513 Dec 24 Professed, i.e. took his monastic vows, (1)
- 1521 Mar 30 Ordained deacon, Lady Chapel, Winchester Cathedral, (2)
- 1522 Sep 20 Ordained priest, Lady Chapel, Winchester Cathedral, (3) (as William Kyngesmylle)
- by 1523 Sep 29 Celebrated First Mass, (4)
- 1522/23 Student at Oxford, (4)
- 1524 Dec 02 Student at Oxford, (5)
- 1524 Date that the Carthusian Book was Published in Paris
- 1526 Apr 17 Admitted Bachelor of Theology, (Boase1885I), pg.132, (Emden1974), pg.031
- 1526 Jun 01 Admitted Bachelor of Theology after 12 years of study in logic, philosophy and theology, i.e. since about 1514, (Emden1974), pg.031
- 1529 Jan 28 Disposed Doctor of Divinity, (Boase1885I), pg.132

1529 May 20	Almoner and Doctor of Theology, (6)
1531 Jul 18	Almoner, (7)
by 1532 Nov 15	Professor of Sacred Theology and serving as chaplain in Bishop Fox's chantry chapel, (8)
by 1534 Nov 16	Hordarian, (9)
1535 Dec 24	Professor of Sacred Theology, (1)
1536 Mar 10	Hordarian, (10)
1536 Mar 16	Prior Henry Broke resigns, (11)
by 1536 May 08	William Basyng first reference as Prior, (12)
1539 Nov 14	Surrender of St Swithun's Priory as Guardian and as William Kyngesmylle, (13)

Why was William Basyng interested in the Carthusians ?

It is easy to accept that William Basyng, having spent 12 years as a student, would have studied the Rules of all of the Monastic Orders, including his own Benedictines as well as the Carthusians. But around this time events occurred which resulted in the deaths of a group of Carthusians. A summary of the Order and these events follows, for more details see (Bernard2005), pp.160-172.

The Carthusian Order

The Carthusian Order, also called the Order of St. Bruno, is a Roman Catholic religious order of enclosed monastics. The order was founded by Saint Bruno of Cologne in 1084 and includes both monks and nuns. The order has its own Rule, called the Statutes, rather than the Rule of St Benedict.

The name Carthusian is derived from the Chartreuse Mountains; Saint Bruno built his first hermitage in the valley of these mountains in the French Alps. The word Charterhouse, which is the English name for a Carthusian monastery, is derived from the same source.

The Carthusian Life

A Carthusian Charterhouse might best be described, paradoxically, as a community of hermits. There are no abbeys and each house is headed by a Prior and is populated by choir monks, referred to as hermits, and lay brothers.

Each hermit, that is a monk who was or who would be a priest, had his own living space, called a cell, usually consisting of a small dwelling. Traditionally there was a one-room lower floor for the storage of wood for a stove, a workshop as all monks engaged in some manual labour. A second floor consisted of a small entryway with an image of Mary, the Mother of Jesus as a place of prayer, and a larger room containing a bed, a table for eating meals, a desk for study, a choir stall and kneeler for prayer. Each cell had a highly walled garden, wherein the monk might meditate as well as grow flowers for himself and/or vegetables for the common good of the community, as a form of physical exercise.

The individual cells were organised so that the door of each cell came off a large corridor. Next to the door was a small revolving compartment - called a "turn"- so that meals and other items might be passed in and out of the cell without the hermit having to meet the bearer. Most meals were provided in this manner, which the hermit then ate in the solitude of his cell. There were two meals provided for much of year, lunch and supper. During seasons or days of fasting, just one meal was provided. The hermit made his needs known to the lay brother by means of a note, requesting items such as a fresh loaf of bread, which would be kept in the cell for eating with several meals.

The hermit spent most of his day in the cell; he meditated, prayed the minor hours of the Liturgy of the Hours on his own, ate, studied and wrote (Carthusian monks published scholarly and spiritual works), and worked in his garden or at some manual trade. Unless required by other duties, the Carthusian hermit left his cell daily only for three prayer services in the monastery chapel, including the community Mass, and occasionally for conferences with his superior. Additionally, once a week, the community members took a long walk in the countryside during which they might speak; on Sundays and feast days a community meal was taken in silence. Twice a year there was a day-long community recreation, and the monk might receive an annual visit from immediate family members.

The Carthusians in England

The following list of Charterhouses in England is in the order of their foundation:

Witham Charterhouse, Somerset (1178/79-1539) - founded by Henry II in Witham Friary, Somerset as penance for the murder of St Thomas Becket.

Hinton Priory, Somerset (1222-1539) (founded at Hatherop, Gloucestershire in 1222 but moved to Hinton in 1227.)

Beauvale Charterhouse, Nottinghamshire (1343–1539)

London Charterhouse (1370–1538) - this gave its name to a square and several streets in the City of London, as well as to the Charterhouse public school which used part of its site before moving out to Surrey.

Kingston upon Hull Charterhouse, Hull, East Riding of Yorkshire (1377–1539)

Coventry Charterhouse, Coventry (1381–1539)

Axholme Charterhouse, near Epworth, Lincolnshire (1397–1538)

Mount Grace Priory, North Yorkshire (1398–1539) - this has the best preserved remains of a medieval Charterhouse in England. One of the cells has been reconstructed to illustrate how different the lay-out is to monasteries of most other Christian orders, which are normally designed with communal living in mind.

Richmond Priory (Sheen Priory) Surrey (1414–1539) - this is the only one in the diocese of Winchester

The Carthusian Resistance to the Oath to the Act of Supremacy

The Carthusian “Martyrs” were a group of monks mainly of the London Charterhouse who were put to death between 19 June 1535 and 20 September 1537. The method of execution was hanging, disembowelling while still alive and then quartering. The group also included two monks who were brought to that house from the Charterhouses of Beauvale and Axholme and similarly dealt with. The total of 18 men have been formally recognized by the Catholic Church as martyrs.

Following Henry VIII's decision to divorce Catherine of Aragon, marry Anne Boleyn and break with the Catholic Church in Rome, two Acts of parliament were introduced. Every religious and secular adult in the country was required to swear oaths to these Acts of Succession and Supremacy. This included the monks and lay brothers of the Charterhouses and their refusal to swear to the oath to the Act of Supremacy without conditions led to a sequence of executions, perhaps meant as examples to other religious persons. This started at the same time as the executions of Bishop John Fisher, 22 June 1535, and Sir Thomas More, 6 July 1535, who both also refused to swear to the oath.

A Speculative Conclusion

It is not known exactly when William Basyng acquired this book but certainly between 1524 and 1539. The text including “Professor of Sacred Theology” may have been written after 1529 but certainly after 1532. The drawing of his initials and the “Priors Hat” may surely have been after he was elected Prior in 1536. Both must have been written before 1539 when he reverted to his family name of Kyngesmylle.

Finally, it is interesting to speculate whether William Basyng acquired this book about the Carthusians following the executions of the Charterhouse “Martyrs” and hence to understand their Rule and the reasons some of them resisted to their deaths. Or perhaps it was just an acquisition from his time as a student and particularly after he became Professor of Sacred Theology.

In any case the fact that William Basyng wrote his name and initials in this book gives us much to ponder.

Primary Sources - Collections

These contain Collections of individual Primary Sources, usually bound into volumes.

Hampshire Record Office

(Reg. Fox IV) - *Bishop Richard Fox Register*, Volume IV, 1518-1522, Hampshire Record Office, Reference 21M65/A1/20

(Reg. Fox V) - *Bishop Richard Fox Register*, Volume V, 1522-1534, Hampshire Record Office, Reference 21M65/A1/21

The National Archives

(LPFD X) - Gairdner, James (Editor), *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII.*, Volume X, 1536 Jan 01 to 1536 Jun 30, HMSO, London, (1887)

(LPFD XV) - Gairdner, James and Brodie, R.H. (Editors), *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII.*, Volume XV, 1540 Jan 01 to 1536Aug131, HMSO, London, (1896)

(SP1/102) - *State Papers, Henry VIII: General Series*, Volume 101, 1536 Feb 04 to 1536 Mar 23, The National Archives, Reference SP1/102

Winchester Cathedral Library

(LB II) - *Ledger Book II - 1497-1533*, Winchester Cathedral Library, Reference W53/D/2

(LB III) - *Ledger Book III - 1532-1539*, Winchester Cathedral Library, Reference W53/D/3

(Libellus1535) - *Libellus Willelmi Basyngae Hordarij*, 1535 Dec 24, Winchester Cathedral Library, Reference W52/70

Winchester College Muniments

(Bruno1524) - *Brunonis Carthusianorum Patriarche sanctissime, Theologie Parisiensis Scholae doctriissimi: & Remensis ecclesiae canonici moratissimi: Opera & Vita post Indicem serie literaria indicanda*, Iodoco Badio, Paris, (1524), Winchester College Muniments, Reference C3

Primary Sources - Calendars

These contain summaries of Collections of Primary Sources.

(Coldicott1980) - Coldicott, Diana K. (Editor), *Calendar of Ledger Book II*, (1980), Hampshire Record Office, Reference B3295

(Coldicott1998) - Coldicott, Diana K. (Editor), *Calendar of Ledger Book III*, (1998), Hampshire Record Office, Reference B3383

Secondary Sources

These contain Transcripts and Translations of Primary Sources.

(Ellis1846 3 III) - Ellis, Sir Henry, *Original Letters Illustrative of English History; including Numerous Royal Letters: from Autographs in the British Museum, the State Paper Office, and one or two Other Collections, with Notes and Illustrations*, Third Series, London, (1846)

(Kitchin1889) - Kitchin, G.W. and Madge, F.T. (Editors), *Documents Relating to the Foundation of the Chapter of Winchester: A.D. 1541-1547*, Warren & Sons, Winchester, (1889)

Tertiary Sources

These are books and journal articles which draw on and analyse the Primary and Secondary Sources.

(Boase1885 I) - Boase, Charles William (Editor), *Register of the University of Oxford*, Volume I, 1449-1463, 1505-1571, Oxford Historical Society, Oxford, 1885.

(Emden1974) - Emden, A.B., *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford A.D. 1501 to 1540*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, Oxford, (1974), ISBN 0199510083

(Greatrex1997) - Greatrex, Joan, *Biographical Register of the English Cathedral Priors of the Province of Canterbury: c.1066 to 1540*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, (1997), ISBN 0-19-820424-8

(Bernard2005) - Bernard, G.W., *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, (2005), ISBN 0-300-12271-3

Primary Sources - Individual Documents

Some of these Primary Sources are found in collections these are shown within round brackets and the full reference can be found in one of the sections above.

- (1) 1535 Dec 24 - Introduction to the Little Book of William Basyng the Hordarian - St Swithun's Priory**
 Primary - *Introduction*, fl.001r in (Libellus1535)
 Transcript - WCL - W52-70 - Introduction - 1535 Dec 24 - Transcript
 Translation - WCL - W52-70 - Introduction - 1535 Dec 24 - Translation
- (2) 1521 Mar 30 - William Basyng ordained Deacon - Lady Chapel, Winchester Cathedral**
 Primary - (Reg. Fox IV), fl.071v
 Transcript - HRO - 21M65-A1-20 - Register of Richard Fox-Vol IV - 1518-1522 - Transcript
- (3) 1522 Sep 20 - William Kyngismyll ordained Priest - Lady Chapel, Winchester Cathedral**
 Primary - (Reg. Fox V), fl.030r
 Transcript - HRO - 21M65-A1-21 - Register of Richard Fox-Vol V - 1522-1534 - Transcript
- (4) 1522 Sep 29 to 1523 Sep 29 - St Swithun's Priory - Compotus Roll - Almoner - William Manydowne**
 Primary - *Compotus Roll - Almoner - William Manydowne - 1522 Sep 29 to 1523 Sep 29*, mm.001r-002v, Winchester Cathedral Library, Reference W53/12/22
 Transcript - WCL - W53-12-22 - Compotus Roll - Almoner - William Manydowne - 1522 Sep 29 to 1523 Sep 29 - Transcript
 Translation - WCL - W53-12-22 - Compotus Roll - Almoner - William Manydowne - 1522 Sep 29 to 1523 Sep 29 - Translation
- (5) 1524 Dec 02 - William Basyng - Student at Oxford - Henry Broke elected Prior**
 Primary - (Reg. Fox V), fl.077v
 Transcript - HRO - 21M65-A1-21 - Register of Richard Fox-Vol V - 1522-1534 - Transcript
- (6) 1529 May 20 - Grant Lease Henry Broke to William Lacy - William Basyng Almoner**
 Primary - (LB II), Item 222, ff.124r-125r
 Calendar - (Caldicott1980), Item 222
- (7) 1531 Jul 18 - Appointment of Proctors before Archbishop Wareham - William Basyng Almoner**
 Primary - (LB II), Item 170, fl. 085v
 Calendar - (Caldicott1980), Item 170
- (8) 1532 Nov 15 - Visitation of Chantry Chapel of Bishop Richard Fox - William Basyng Chaplain**
 Primary - *Visitation of Chantry Chapel of Richard Fox* - 1532 Nov 15, ff.002r-003r, Corpus Christi College Oxford, Reference A1-Cap 2-Evid 4
 Transcript - CCO - A1-Cap 2-Evid 4 - Visitation of Chantry Chapel of Richard Fox - 1532 Nov 15 - Transcript
 Translation - CCO - A1-Cap 2-Evid 4 - Visitation of Chantry Chapel of Richard Fox - 1532 Nov 15 - Translation
- (9) 1534 Nov 16 - Grant Lease Henry Broke to Nicholas Parson - William Basyng Hordarian**
 Primary - (LB III), Item 219, ff.058r-058v
 Transcript - WCL - Ledger Book III-Item 219 - Grant Lease Henry Broke to Nicholas Parson - 1534 Nov 16 - Transcript
 Calendar - (Caldicott1998), Item 219
- (10) 1536 Mar 10 - Grant Lease Henry Broke to John Cooke - William Basyng Hordarian**
 Primary - (LB III), Item 115, fl.027r
 Transcript - WCL - Ledger Book III-Item 115 - Grant Lease Henry Broke to John Cooke - 1536 Mar 10 - Transcript
 Calendar - (Caldicott1998), Item 115
- (11) 1536 Mar 16 - Thomas Parry to Thomas Cromwell**
 Primary - (SP1/102), ff. 213r-214v
 Transcript - TNA - SP1-102-Vol X-Item 480 - Thomas Parry to Thomas Cromwell - 1536 Mar 16 - Transcript
 Secondary - (Ellis1846 3 III), Item CCCXLVI, pp.235-236
 Calendar - (LPFD X), Item 480, pg.195
- (12) 1536 May 08 - Grant Lease William Basyng to William Gobell - William Basyng Prior**
 Primary - (LB III), Item 205, fl.052v
 Calendar - (Caldicott1998), Item 205
- (13) 1539 Nov 14 - St Swithun's Priory Surrender**
 Primary - *St Swithun's Priory Surrender* - 1535 Nov 14, pp.001-010, in *Surrender Documents*, The National Archives, Reference E315/494
 Transcript - TNA - E315-494-Vol XV-Item 139(1) - St Swithun's Priory Surrender - 1539 Nov 14 - Transcript
 Calendar - *Surrender of Monasteries* - 1540 Nov 14, Item 139, pp.047-049, in (LPFD XV)