CHAPTER 1

Church and Economy in the Long Twelfth Century

The ideas of both the church and the economy are in an important sense anachronistic for this period. The concepts of the universal church and of the English church (not the British church) were of course there in the background, but in the foreground what generally mattered most to people were their own individual churches – the church of Christ Church Canterbury, the church of St Augustine’s Canterbury, the church of Bath, the church of Wells, the parish church of Kirklevington, etc. So when I talk about the church, I am usually talking about observable trends or tendencies or mentalities within the churches. Again, for this period it would be absurd to think of an entity called the economy of a country which anybody could perceive as a whole, let alone try to manage. But that does not make it nonsense to observe some widespread economic trends or developments occurring in various parts of the country, not least within the churches, which because of the preservation of their records often give us our best evidence of such developments.

There can be no doubt that the long twelfth century, say from the Norman Conquest of 1066 to Magna Carta of 1215, saw a great rise in population and economic prosperity.1 Within Britain the evidence for this is by far the clearest in England. How do we know about population in twelfth-century England? We do not have censuses; they started only in 1801. We do not have parish registers, which have enabled the Cambridge Institute of Demography to make great strides forward in the study of their subject; they started only in the sixteenth century. For twelfth-century demography we are not in a world of accurate quantitative measurement. Nonetheless we have strong if impressionistic indications that population was rising, of which nobody doubts the validity. They relate partly to evident pressures on land – the assarting (forest clearance for cultivation) and
draining of lands, or the demand for peasant tenancies; partly to the large
numbers of new towns being established and established ones being
enlarged; and partly to the ease with which the new religious orders, like
the Cistercians, Augustinians and Gilbertines, could recruit not only many
monks and nuns but also thousands of lay brothers to act as their labour
force. This rise in population carried on continuously throughout the
thirteenth century, and here we get a new kind of evidence for it, new
because it comes from a type of manorial account which landlords only
began to keep in the thirteenth century, but evidence of pressure on land
totally in line with that of the twelfth century. This evidence is the
writs of entry, showing that landlords could continue to charge peasants a
high price when they entered on a land tenancy.

A neat example of the importance of assarts comes from Peterborough
Abbey. The abbey nearly went broke as a result of the Norman Conquest
and the Norman abbots using its lands to reward their followers, military
and otherwise. It was saved in the twelfth century by the new wealth
acquired from assarting on its lands in Northamptonshire. This process
was already well under way by 1143 when King Stephen granted Peter-
borough freedom from secular impositions for its assarts there. None
of it, however, would have been any good to the abbey if it could not find
tenants for its new holdings.

The Cambridge demographic research has shown that, on its evidence,
the key factor in demographic growth is nuptiality, namely the age at
which people get married. The younger they tend to marry, the greater the
rise in population. We have no evidence for this factor in the twelfth
century. On the Cambridge showing, however, the growth in the means to
feed and care for people once they are born cannot be taken as revealing
the cause of population growth, but it can be seen as a response to and
stimulated by it. In the pages of the Economic History Review during the
1950s, two fine social and economic historians had a debate about
the estates of Glastonbury Abbey, Somerset. Reginald Lennard said that
by 1189 20 Glastonbury manors had peasants occupying some of its
demesnes, i.e. lands which would otherwise have been directly adminis-
tered by the abbey and from which it would directly draw all the profits.
M.M. Postan replied that this was only since the previous Glastonbury
estates survey of 1171, and that therefore there were far more of such peas-
ant holdings than Lennard had thought. Both of them saw this only from
the point of view of the landlord, Postan thus taking the gloomier view of
the Glastonbury Abbey economy. But the situation was obviously good for
peasants who wanted to feed their families. So was all the assarting and
draining of lands in Lincolnshire at the same time, as H.E. Hallam showed; to a great extent, he wrote, this was ‘a small man’s enterprise’. In fact it is now argued that in many twelfth-century villages the pattern and conditions of peasant tenancies did not evolve gradually but were created at a stroke, with an implication that peasants had at least some bargaining power on their side. In this connection, one cannot help observing that in the accounts of miracles of healing collected at saints’ shrines, of which more later and which are so revealing of social ills, there is very little evidence of anything like malnutrition. At his Canterbury shrine, Thomas Becket was far more likely to have to cure you of insomnia or constipation, typical ills not of economic misery but of rising economic opportunities!

One may question whether the spread of peasant holdings on to the demesnes of landlords was such a bad business for landlords either. In the expanding economy of the twelfth century landlords needed labour to meet new consumer demand, whether in the form of labour services due from the tenancies or of money in the form of rents to pay for labour. In the twelfth century landlords often did not try to maximise their profits either by direct management of much of their estates or by drawing up written accounts for their manors. Why this was so is a complex question, but it was so. Perhaps they felt well enough off as it was. Only towards the end of the twelfth century did this seriously begin to change, partly because landlords started to feel the pinch of increasing royal taxation. The point to make here is that while landlords were extensively leasing out, lesser men could profit mightily from the situation. For example, the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds had long leased out its manor of Tilney (Norfolk) for £5 a year. Five pounds represented the annual income of a comfortably off parish priest or the annual salary that a Spanish professor of mathematics would be paid by the king for teaching in the school of Northampton. Around 1190 Abbot Samson of Bury decided to take Tilney back into his own direct administration. The first year he made a profit of £25 out of it, and in the second, not quite so good year, £20. Somebody – it might have been a knightly man or an enterprising merchant or peasant, but in any case somebody too unimportant to be named in the historical record – must have been making a fortune out of that lease.

The estates of Glastonbury Abbey have already been mentioned. Going back to Somerset, the biography of an anchorite, or recluse, Wulfric, who lived next to the church in the village of Haselbury Plucknett during the second quarter of the twelfth century, gives us an interesting economic setting. Haselbury was situated in one of the richest parts of Somerset both in agrarian and pastoral terms already in the time of Domesday Book.
(1086), and during the twelfth century marshes were being drained on the nearby River Yeo. In the Life of Wulfric new fisheries on this river are also mentioned. Wulfric himself had a full-time ‘boy’ as a servant, he could call on the services of a scribe, and he accumulated sheep, cows and lots of gold, silver and precious clothes, probably by no means all of it other people's. Even an ascetic could flourish materially in a prospering community!

The great expansion of towns is predicated on the rising profitability of agriculture. As Susan Reynolds has said – and she applies this even to sea-ports which engaged in long-distance trade – ‘what provided the basis of most towns’ livelihood was not the cake of overseas commerce but the bread and butter of distribution and marketing for the surrounding region’. Between 1066 and 1215 something over 100 new towns were successfully established in England. A good example of these is Banbury in North Oxfordshire, founded by Bishop Alexander of Lincoln in the 1140s primarily to act as a market for the surpluses of the more southerly estates of his bishopric. The town was laid out in a planned way with burgage tenures on either side of the main street. Burgage tenures usually involved no labour services but only payment of a money rent, parts or the whole of them could be sub-let, and they allowed of unusually free sale or purchase. Hence such tenures were much in demand not only by merchants, bakers and the like, but also by religious houses and country barons and knights, because they were an exceptionally fluid form of investment. It goes without saying, however, that they were in demand only so far as the market was a success.

Of towns which had been Saxon *burhs*, many were only on the threshold of their true development at the time of the Norman Conquest. With Oxford, for example, the initial boost probably came with William the Conqueror’s putting its castle into the hands of Robert d’Oilly. Some destruction of Saxon houses was almost certainly the initial result of the building or enlargement of this castle, but thereafter the greater security which it afforded surely stimulated Oxford’s market, trade and industry. The clearest sign of its twelfth-century growth in prosperity is the large number of stone churches whose existence is attested within a radius of a few hundred yards of its centre, Carfax. These churches are too early to be explained by the rise of the university; the very earliest evidence of scholars in any numbers comes from the 1170s. Another sign is the establishment of Jewish money-dealers in the town from no later than about 1140, with a Jewish quarter in existance by 1180. We meet the Oxford Jews, several of whom we can name, including one Moses the Liberal apparently a patron...
of learning and supporter of scholars, first of all in the records of the royal Exchequer a propos of their financial dealings with Henry II’s government. Some remarkable documents survive, however, recording loans by Jews to Oxford citizens of the 1180s and 1190s. The first specialised Oxford guild was in existence by the 1160s – a guild of shoemakers. Some of the tired old oxen who crossed the ford probably failed to make it much further!

Bristol is another town, originally also an Anglo-Saxon burh, whose rising prosperity can be charted by the number of its Norman churches. They included Earl Robert of Gloucester’s foundation of the Benedictine priory of St James (Robert a natural son of Henry I), and, more important, the Abbey of St Augustine, a house of Augustinian canons founded by Robert Fitz Harding, a wealthy Norman supporter of Henry I’s daughter Matilda against Stephen, and of her son Henry II. Thus Bristol rose on the Angevin cause. Once again, a fine early Norman castle had much to do with its rise. During the twelfth century the import of wine and wood and the export of (Cotswold) wool became big business at the port of Bristol.

But every conurbation needs a secure food supply. London, for instance, besides its vital agrarian hinterland, particularly in Kent, received a regular supply of pickled herrings from Yarmouth. When Henry II’s expedition of 1171 sailed to Ireland (to cut a baron, one of the Clares called Strongbow, down to size), the king’s fleet was provisioned with huge quantities of grain, raised quickly in Somerset by his sheriff in that shire. We are catching a glimpse here of how and from where the city itself was normally fed. Like Oxford, Bristol had a flourishing Jewish community in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; Moses the Liberal, mentioned above, had migrated from Bristol to Oxford before 1177.

Both Oxford and Bristol became cathedral cities only in the 1540s under Henry VIII, both episcopal seats being created out of the two distinguished houses of Augustinian canons which had been dissolved as such in the Dissolution of the Monasteries, St Frideswide’s at Oxford, and St Augustine’s at Bristol. Unlike Oxford, Bristol did not become a notable centre of learning until modern times. Yet strangely enough, the university in Oxford probably owed its rise in part at least to the town’s commercial decline in the thirteenth century. For its food and its trade, Oxford had depended very much on the navigation of the River Thames. It was at the point on the Thames, also, where the road from Southampton to Northampton, much used by the kings in their journeys, crossed the river. Oxford reached its commercial apogee in the late twelfth century. Thereafter the Thames got clogged up with fish weirs and navigation suffered. A clause of Magna Carta (1215, cl. 33) complains about it – a clause very
likely inserted as a result of Oxford pressure, but probably without avail. So the merchants moved out, leaving a lot of cheap run-down property, ideal for scholars to move into.\textsuperscript{22}

For comparison with Bristol and Oxford we may move up to York. Donald Nicholl gives a lively picture of York around 1114, when Thurstan became its Archbishop. He writes of the contribution of the Jews to the life of the city. They came as money-lenders who could advance York’s commercial enterprises, but they could and did also help Christian scholars with their study of the Hebrew Bible. For example, a Yorkshire boy studied Hebrew with them for three years, and copied out 40 psalms in Hebrew script, whose calligraphy was much admired by the Jews themselves. That was Maurice who later became Prior of Kirkham, a house of Augustinian Canons in Yorkshire. Having written of the Scandinavian and Norman elements in the city, and of the establishment after the Norman Conquest of important monastic communities there Nicholl continues\textsuperscript{22a}:

\textit{It can be seen that the community of some eight or nine thousand souls at York which now had Thurstan as its pastor embraced a variety of races and cultures such as few modern communities of a similar size could equal . . . Around the cathedral centred the life of the archbishop’s familia and his canons, the intellectuals, the music master and the master of the schools; around the mint dwelt the goldsmiths and metal-workers; along the wharves traders berthed their ships from the East Riding, from Ireland and Germany and the shores about the North Sea.}

One of the most revealing signs, or indeed consequences, for English religious life, of rising economic prosperity in the twelfth century, is the large number of recluses. There have always been hermits, anchorites and reclusive holy persons, male and female, in the Christian religion and not only in the Christian religion. But they appear to be extraordinarily numerous in twelfth-century England. When the Cistercian abbot, John of Ford, was writing his Life of Wulfric of Haselbury in the 1180s, some thirty years after that Somerset anchorite had died, he uncovered a whole network of recluses in South Somerset and Dorset who had known him (this way of life was a good recipe for longevity!), including several women – Matilda of Wareham, Odolina of Crewkerne and Aldida of Sturminster Newton. Much earlier, c. 1115–20, when the celebrated Christina of Markyate was looking to establish herself in a hermitage, she ran into a whole network of male and female recluses in Eastern England. The pipe rolls (the royal Exchequer accounts) show that in 1162–63 Henry II was paying out sums of money in various parts of the country to support at
least six recluses. This year is not chosen quite at random, for it was the first year that the king’s redoubtable clerical opponent, Thomas Becket, was Archbishop of Canterbury. In 1169 when Nigel, Bishop of Ely and Royal Treasurer, died, and the revenues of the bishopric of Ely fell into the king’s hands, and its accounts are recorded in the pipe roll, we see again that the bishop had been supporting half a dozen more such individuals.23 The evidence goes on and on. The famous ones, like Wulfric of Haselbury or Christina of Markyate, were famous because lives of them were written. There was, however, perhaps an element of chance in who was written up or even in whose lives have survived (at least four manuscripts of the Life of Wulfric have survived, but only one for Christina of Markyate and that by a lucky chance). We should not assume that all the others were lesser in way of life or influence.

One might have imagined that the life of a recluse might have seemed the ideal route out of poverty into an existence which may have been ascetic but was certainly not poor. But where we know anything the very reverse was the case. Christina of Markyate’s background was that of the well-to-do Anglo-Danish upper class of Huntingdon, and she became a recluse to escape a marriage to an eligible Huntingdon bachelor.24 Wulfric of Haselbury was born into a modest English family in Compton Martin, on the other side of Somerset from Haselbury Plucknett, but he became a parish priest at a period when the material possibilities for that profession were rising, and as a priest he followed the hounds and hunted with falcons while, ‘amidst the captives of worldly vanity, he awaited the moment of his calling’ (i.e. his conversion to a truly religious way of life).25 Matilda of Wareham had made a living as a cushion- or quilt-maker before she became a recluse.26 Godric of Finchale (Co. Durham) had started as a small pedlar in the villages of East Anglia and became a top merchant, building his fortune on long-distance trading journeys to Denmark, Flanders and Scotland (suggesting that towns like Aberdeen, St Andrews and Dundee, growing in the twelfth century, were being drawn into the English urban boom) before throwing it all in to establish himself as a hermit on the banks of the River Wear.27 His Life was written by Reginald, a monk of Durham. Robert of Knaresborough in Yorkshire (ob. 1218) came from an upper-class family in York, of which his brother became mayor, while his mother was a York money-lender.28 The latter is a striking example of how twelfth-century women could make careers for themselves, especially in towns; perhaps her opportunity came after the 1190 pogrom of Jews at York, or perhaps she was a member of the rival economic establishment that was part responsible for it.
None of this ought really to surprise us. Any materially expanding, upwardly mobile society generates people who become disgusted with the rat race and want to opt out of the competition for money, status (Godric was said little by little to have been able to keep the company of city merchants), and husbands. Peter Brown, explaining the background from which the Holy Men of Late Antiquity in the East Mediterranean arose, has pointed out that these men were not oppressed peasants. Their malaise was more subtle. ‘Late Roman Egypt was a land of vigorous villages where tensions sprang quite as much from the disruptive effects of new wealth and new opportunities as from the immemorial depredations of the tax-collector.’ One may even say something similar of Galilee in the first century AD. Nobody could suppose that Peter gave up everything to follow Jesus because his fishing business was doing badly, when it was employing staff, when there were salt pans on the shores of Lake Galilee, and when new markets for preserved fish were opening up because of the Roman occupation of Palestine, and indeed across the Roman Empire.

It will already have become abundantly clear that the church was a beneficiary on a large scale of the expanding wealth of twelfth-century England. At the time of the Norman Conquest and of Domesday Book (1086) there were many hugely wealthy churches whose endowments often went back centuries, and hugely wealthy churchmen. All the same, the twelfth-century church saw something akin to an economic miracle if we think of the development of cathedrals with their organisation of dean, precentor, treasurer and schoolmaster/chancellor, and prebends (i.e. lands or churches allocated to the support of each canon); of the impositions on abbeys to help finance the royal government; of the establishment of archdeaconries as officials in every diocese; of the vast increase in the numbers of parish churches and their endowments; of the new orders of monks or canons and nuns, and the new hospitals and schools which were endowed; of the innumerable and often spectacular cathedrals, abbeys and parish churches which were built. Much of the wealth to do all this was the wealth of the churches, or the bishops, themselves; but much of it was lay wealth. We shall be returning to all this when we come to cathedrals and monasteries and parish churches, and their impact on societies.

The church was not only a beneficiary of expanding wealth in the twelfth century; it was also a creator of it. First of all in attitudes. Do changes in attitudes affect economic realities or do economic changes affect attitudes? Probably it is both ways round. Whatever the case, sentiment (to use the language of the stockbrokers), sentiment about humankind, became more optimistic from around 1100. The most obvious sign of it is that the devil,
who had cramped people’s style (including economic style) and caused pessimism about the possibilities of human nature, started to get driven out of human affairs, and not abolished of course, but pushed down into hell. The great breakthrough here came with the *Cur Deus Homo* of St Anselm, written in the 1090s after he had become archbishop of Canterbury. *Why had God become Man?* Not everyone found Anselm’s answer to this question satisfactory, but in one important point he laid down a marker. God had not become man in order that, in this death, Christ could ‘buy’ the devil out of his rights over human beings, rights created by sin, because, Anselm maintained, the devil had never had any rightful dominion over men and women. Incidentally, many of Anselm’s own trusted correspondents were women. A little later, in the 1120s, a group of English Benedictine abbots whom we shall come to in a later chapter, were very keen to press for the idea and the liturgical celebration of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the idea that Mary as the mother of God had been preserved from original sin at the moment of conception. This notion that a human being could in principle be sinless was strongly opposed by monks of the Cistercian order, who saw themselves as in many ways rivals of the traditional Benedictines. But as we shall also see later, the Cistercians themselves had in other respects very optimistic ideas about the moral and material improvability of the human condition.

As the twelfth century went on, phenomena which had previously been regarded as demonic, such as ghostly apparitions, came to be regarded as in a sort of natural category, namely of marvels. Of course in visions of hell or the after life, such as the *Vision of Thurkill*, the devil still held sway in his own dominion. But stories of revenants, or generally troubled and guilt-ridden persons appearing in the world from the afterlife, for instance, were increasingly absorbed into concepts of the natural world. Walter Map, in his *Courtiers’ Trifles* (early 1180s), an entertaining book full of legends, wonders and gossip – ‘a rough inventory of the mental furniture of a learned and witty twelfth-century clerk’, as Christopher Brooke calls it – describes a *prodigium* which makes the point. A knight of Northumberland had a visitation from his long dead father, who wanted to be absolved by a priest from his sin of withholding tithes. The knight at first thought it was the devil, but he was mistaken.

During the twelfth century, disease itself – and this had an important bearing on life expectancy and material well-being – came to be seen increasingly as having natural rather than diabolical causes. Revenants, or apparitions of the walking dead, which were widely thought to spread disease, are again a case in point. Robert Bartlett has said that the explanation
of that phenomenon had to be made in some way to fit Christian tenets; and referring to the *History of English Affairs*, written by the Yorkshire Augustinian Canon, William of Newburgh, in the 1190s, he adds:

William of Newburgh manages a neat combination of Christian metaphysics and naturalism by describing the reanimation of the corpses as ‘the work of Satan’ but by attributing the spread of disease to the contaminated air that the corpses created. Indeed, describing a case at Berwick, he writes that ‘the simpler folk feared that they might be attacked and beaten by the lifeless monster, while the more thoughtful were concerned that the air might be infected and corrupted from the wanderings of the plague-bringing corpse, with subsequent sickness and death’.37

One may note here the assumption that the more educated you were, the more likely you were to explain disease in a natural or positivist way.

Another interesting example of the natural explanation of disease is found in Walter Daniel’s *Life of Ailred of Rievaulx*, written not long after Ailred’s death in 1167. Walter Daniel was not the greatest brain nor the least neurotic psyche in twelfth-century Britain, but he was an educated man and he was interested in medicine. He tells an extraordinary tale about how Ailred encountered a man who had swallowed a little frog in his drinking water which had grown inside him, eaten away his entrails, and made him look a horrifying figure with drawn face, bloodshot eyes, and dimmed pupils. Now kings are powerless to eject frogs from their bellies (says Walter with his rare capacity to hit some irrelevant nail on the head), but Ailred, ‘dismounting from his horse’, inserted two fingers into the man’s mouth, uttered a prayer (the nearest we get to any implication of the miraculous), and lo and behold, the frog climbed onto his fingers and departed. Then out came a lot of horrible pus and glutinous humours and the man was cured.38 ‘A likely story’, one might say; but a story driven by the natural.

The practical interest in health and health care taken by the church, though also by the lay aristocracy, is a notable feature of the twelfth century. At the time of the Norman Conquest a distinguished doctor, Baldwin, who came from Chartres, was Abbot of Bury St Edmunds.39 An even more famous doctor, Faritius, a Tuscan from Arezzo, became Abbot of Abingdon under Henry I, the king believing that he was often curable only by Faritius’s antidotes. The queen also trusted him above all other doctors. It was said that he would have been elected Archbishop of Canterbury in 1114 had it not been thought inappropriate that one who
spent so much time examining women’s urine should occupy that position. Later on Henry I had another remarkable foreigner, the Spanish Jew Petrus Alphonsi, as his personal physician.

Under this king many hospitals were established at English towns – London, Colchester, Norwich, Newcastle, Barnstaple and others. True, twelfth-century hospitals had much broader charitable purposes than simply to care for the sick, as is illustrated by the foundation of St Bartholomew’s Smithfield, which made special provision for children whose mothers had died in childbirth. Others were established to receive pilgrims. But there is much evidence that a primary concern of hospitals was to look after the sick. True again, many hospitals were founded as leper hospitals, with the idea of isolating lepers. Henry I’s own queen, Matilda, founded the leper hospital of St Giles, Holborn. The twelfth century developed this zeal for identifying and isolating minorities, such as heretics, Jews and lepers, rather in the way that the scholastics of that century were developing the method of breaking down a question into its subdivisions and then examining each of these separately. However, in the case of lepers, this still meant care for the sick, for once founded their hospitals were continually enlarged and protected, and by none more assiduously than churchmen. Roger of Pont l’Evêque, Archbishop of York, who was not everyone’s favourite in his time and who actually had a reputation for meanness, issued a string of documents during his episcopate (1154–81) for the protection of St Peter’s/St Leonard’s Hospital York and for the enlargement of its resources. Admittedly the latter was mostly to be done with other people’s money, but at least it showed his concern. In the 1180s Bishop Seffrid II of Chichester granted from his own resources to St Mary’s Hospital for eight ‘lepers’ outside the gate of Chichester eight woollen tunics each Christmas, eight linen tunics at Easter and a bacon or ham at Christmas (pig-farming was altogether fairly big business in twelfth-century England). When the Third Lateran Council of 1179 ordered that where possible, ‘lepers’ should live a common life with their own church and cemetery, it was ordering something that was already being done on a wide scale, but here Bishop Seffrid was building on it perhaps under its immediate impact. One may wonder how good people were at diagnosing leprosy as distinct from other forms of external illness (just as church courts often lumped all kinds of confused people with real heretics). But there are strong grounds for thinking that leprosy could be and generally was distinguished from other skin illnesses. It remains the case on the other hand that many hospitals were for the sick generally. St Mary’s Hospital, Chichester, for instance, was explicitly stated to be for
lepers, whereas the York hospital was stated to be for receiving the poor and curing the sick.⁴⁹

Pursuing further the subject of health care, so obviously an important aspect of explaining twelfth-century material well-being, this century saw growing numbers of men described in the documentary sources as medicus, or doctor, so much so that it has been seen as the first age of the English medical profession. We should not get over-excited about this. Sometimes the term could have meant little more than a village healer. Even when it indicated some practical knowledge of surgery or medical text books, the person in question was not necessarily a full-time doctor, any more than the person called in a royal record of 1199 Master William the Poet necessarily spent his time doing nothing but writing poetry (particularly if he were the William of Blois who was to become Bishop of Lincoln in 1203!).⁵⁰ Nonetheless when every salutary caution has been borne in mind, we do appear to have the embryonic beginnings of a medical profession in England during the second half of the twelfth century. Talbot and Hammond listed 98 doctors for this half century, and that number could almost certainly be at least doubled by an exhaustive scouring of the sources.⁵¹ Most of the 98 seem to be men of substance (three in Oxford), some are known to have owned medical books, and 31 are given the title of master (magister), which was not always recorded when it might have been. A magister was a person of education and trained intellect, whose medicine, even if secondary in his professional life, was unlikely to have been mere folk healing. In addition we now know that knowledge of medicine as taught at the famous medical school of Salerno in South Italy was starting to reach England before 1200.⁵² Its reception shows a more positivist approach to the subject.

When later on we speak of people’s search for healing at the saints’ shrines at churches, we shall of course be talking about supernatural rather than scientific medicine. It is important to remember that the search for supernatural or ‘folk’ healing, which if it causes people to feel healed is in itself conducive to better health in society, did not collapse in face of a more positivist approach to medicine, any more than Lourdes has collapsed because of modern medicine. Twelfth-century men and women could move fluidly between the two kinds, treating one as now an alternative, now as an extension, of the other.⁵³ They felt that within the area of health care, their possibilities of choice (if allusion to a modern mantra can be forgiven) were being enlarged. In 1200, when the body of St Hugh of Lincoln was being carried back from London, where he had died, to Lincoln, it rested one night at Biggleswade (Beds), where in the evening a
man broke his arm in the crush around the bier. He was in great pain and was told that if he could hang on, in the morning his arm could be set by doctors – not a bad indication of the availability of practical medicine at the time. However in the night he received a healing vision from the saintly bishop himself.54

One of the marks of economic growth in the twelfth century was the development of specialised production. We have already mentioned shoes at Oxford, to which we could add that there were two goldsmiths among the leading 63 citizens there in 1191.55 In York the market for cutlery gave rise to specialised production there.56 It even seems that there was a commercialised market for devotional objets d’art. A sculptor and painter came to Godric of Finchale because he could not sell his work at St Cuthbert’s fair in Durham. Godric prophesied good sales for him – after the poor man had given him a golden cross, a rather steep consultant’s fee one might think – and it worked.57 Miracle or no, this story suggests that by the later twelfth century art was more a matter of the market and less an exclusive matter for patron and artist than one might think. Similarly, toys could be bought commercially. When Gilbert of Sempringham thought that his followers needed cheering up, while they were in London to answer charges of the king’s justices (1160s), he bought them some spinning tops.58 The fact that the recluse, Matilda of Wareham, could earn a living making cushions or quilts again points to an increase in profitable specialised production.

The churches played an important role in stimulating specialised production and the development of specialised skills. When the bishopric of Chichester with its revenues, and its financial commitments too, fell into the king’s hands in 1169, its accounts show that one mark a year (two-thirds of a pound) was being paid to a glazier for the upkeep of the cathedral glass.59 One mark a year would have been a significant proportion of a craftsman’s annual wage. Although we sometimes think of monks devotedly labouring in their cloisters to produce their manuscripts, the rich abbey of St Albans already in the first half of the century was employing professional scribes – not monks nor necessarily clergy at all – for this purpose.60 At the same time Westminster Abbey, who felt that they had many rights and properties which they lacked the documentary evidence to prove, were employing skilled professional forgers to make good the deficiency.61 At Norwich Cathedral Priory, when the dubious and antisemitic cult of ‘Little’ St William got going in the second half of the century, the boy saint always wanted candles in gratitude for cures at this shrine. He gave nasty dreams to people who failed to give them.62
His shrine helped to pay the Norwich electricity bill, so to speak; and it also gave the city’s chandlers profitable business.  

A most intriguing possible example of economic specialisation is presented to us by Farne Island off the coast of Northumberland. In the twelfth century the powerful Durham Cathedral Priory were keen to monastise and take under their control the previous sites of hermitages such as Godric’s at Finchale or that on the Farne Islands. One motive for this may have been to establish centres where their monks who were so disposed could live a more contemplative life than was possible in the bustling Cathedral Priory itself, where moreover the liturgical schedule was a heavy one. But another motive was undoubtedly economic. During the time of Bartholomew as hermit on Farne Island, this clearly had to do with its eider ducks, which were stringently guarded by the Durham monks. Bartholomew was a Durham monk who arrived on the island 1149–53 and died there in 1193. This is what his Life, written by Geoffrey of Coldingham, another monk of Durham, had to say about the eider ducks:

For ages this island has offered an abode to certain birds, whose name and type has persisted miraculously. In the nesting season they gather there. They soon obtain the grace of such tameness from the holiness of the place, or rather from those who have sanctified the place by their way of life [i.e. the hermits who live or have lived there under Durham sponsorship], that they do not abhor being seen or being in contact with humans. They love quiet, and yet are not disturbed by noise. Nests are prepared everywhere far from the inhabitants. No one presumes to harm them or to touch their eggs without permission. The brethren [i.e. there were presumably other hermits besides Bartholomew] serve some of these eggs to themselves or their visitors. The birds are not troubled by their use as food. They seek food in the sea with their males. Their chicks, as soon as they are hatched, follow on, their mothers going ahead, and having once entered their native waters do not return to their nests. Their mothers also, forgetting the soft bed which had been theirs, recover their pristine rapport with the sea.  

Now given that we know of the existence of such a person as a cushion- or quilt-maker in twelfth-century England (i.e. Matilda of Wareham) it seems clear that the real economic interest of Durham here was not the eiders’ eggs but their soft beds, that is eider down. An eider duck produces at least twice as much down as is necessary to accommodate her eggs and herself, and she will willingly step aside to allow a human being to take half of it. Thus harmony with nature and profitable business may be satisfactorily combined.
It would be a mistake to see specialisation in the twelfth century only in terms of production of consumer goods, and not also of professional skills, as the case of scribes and glaziers already imply. If the century may be called the first age of the medical profession, it was also the first age of the engineering profession. The reason was advances in warfare. Twelfth-century warfare was not primarily a matter of open battles, but of castle-building and siege warfare. The Italians took the lead here. If the crusaders needed to besiege a fortress out in Palestine, the Genoese could lay on a siege for them in all its aspects – mercenaries, siege engines, siege platforms, ships from which operations could be conducted. In the 1150s, the Holy Roman/German Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, depended on Italian engineers for his military efforts to master the cities of Northern Italy, as the cities of Northern Italy did to resist him. In Britain, where castle warfare was of paramount importance, a leaf was taken out of the Italian book. Engineers were employed to do clever things (ad facienda ingenia), particularly ballistic clever things, in attacks on castles, as well as to destroy enemy castles. When Henry II in 1176 ordered baronial castles to be destroyed, the royal justices who went into East Anglia, for instance, to supervise such demolitions took a qualified and well-paid engineer, an Englishman called Ailnoth, with them. This was the age when the crossbowmen, the arblasters or arbalistarii, vital both in besieging and in resisting sieges, came into their own. For example, in the 1150s a crossbowman called Walter had a landed holding of some significance in Suffolk, while in the 1140s another called Odo appears quite high up in a witness list to a document of Bishop William of Norwich. A number of crossbowmen may originally have come from Wales, always a source of supply for skilled soldiers in the twelfth century.

By 1200 a whole class of knightly men, and probably also a little below knightly level, had come to be seen as professional administrators. They were used as such by Richard I’s government, headed by his chief minister who was also Archbishop of Canterbury, Hubert Walter (we shall return to him later). Men of this middling level of society, or many of them, rose to be useful as professionals, in large part at least because they were needed as jurors in numbers all over England to execute Henry II’s legal reforms and new legal processes. Thus under Hubert Walter there were to be three knights in each shire to be keepers of the pleas of the crown (i.e. to assess and keep a record of any action, event or death, from which the king might be owed money). This was the origin of the coroner’s office. Under a royal edict of 1195 for the pursuit of criminals, all men above the age of 15 were to be drafted into a sort of communal police force for keeping the
king’s peace, and supervising this draft were knights appointed (*milites assignati*) to the task. When in 1198 the king’s government proposed a new carucage or land tax, a knight in each shire, accompanied by a clerk to keep a record, was to assess the value of the land to be taxed. It is very likely that similar men to these (and one has to remember how mobile English society was and how easily men could rise into this knightly class by wealth and ability) were employed by the great landholders and the great churches to administer and do the accounting for their estates and manors when they began to shift markedly from leasing to direct management around 1200. Was, for instance, the obviously efficient leaseholder of Tilney left unemployed when Abbot Samson of Bury St Edmunds took this manor back into the abbey’s direct management? One may doubt it.

Professional surveys – of estates and assets – were a developing feature of Henry II’s government. The royal example spread. In 1185, just when emphasis on direct management of their estates by great landholders was coming to be in vogue, the Order of Templars held an inquest of their lands, widely scattered in England, and of their donors. The record survives. The Templars were a crusading order and a military mainstay of the Christian crusading state in Palestine. They held lands throughout the West to enable them to perform their function. The mid-1180s was a critical time for them because of the threat of the Muslim, Saladin. In fact the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem fell to Saladin after the Battle of Hattin (1187). Hence the Templars needed help and needed to know what their assets and who their friends and donors were. The administrative centre of the Templars in England was the Old Temple, Holborn, London, but they also had regional administrative units, or preceptories; and it was clearly the preceptors, professional estates stewards who were themselves Knights Templars and came largely from middling or knightly families, who conducted the 1185 survey. The survey may sound dryly tenurial, but in fact, whether one is interested in blacksmiths or goldsmiths, doctors or bakers, piglets or cart-horses, boon works or labour services, it is riveting.

Where did the greatest development of professionalism and professional elitism occur in twelfth-century English society? Undoubtedly amongst the clergy. But that must await a later chapter when we consider the parish clergy.

The accumulation of wealth and the development of organisation had some good results for social and spiritual welfare. Many parish churches were endowed and there was a great expansion of schools (under church control), even in places like Dunstable and Huntingdon. There were also some less good results, most of all the frenetic careerism to which it led.
There had of course always been careerism in the church, and it was not necessarily for the worse. Pope Gregory the Great in his *Pastoral Care* of the 590s had contrasted laudable ambition, where the motive to do a good job for one’s neighbour’s sake outstripped the love of prestige, with laudable lack of ambition or desire to lead a secluded and contemplative life. But two things made careerism show its less attractive face rather often. One was indeed the love of prestige, particularly as bishops were normally appointed by the king’s influence except in Stephen’s reign when Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury often had the leading voice, and hence to be appointed a bishop was to prove that one had arrived politically. Walter Map in his satirical *Courtiers’ Trifles* wrote of how he could not control his own household, who would side with guests outstaying their welcome, so putting himself to great expense, and saying to him, ‘don’t be too anxious; trust in the Lord; it is common talk that they will make you a bishop!’ Walter had indeed no need to be anxious financially. He was canon and prebendary in two cathedrals; in 1196–97 he received the plum archdeaconry of Oxford. But he died still only an archdeacon in 1209 or 1210.

The other thing which made careerism show its less attractive side, notwithstanding that there had always been careerists in the church, was that wealth and organisation had greatly expanded the opportunities for it. Now there were not only bishoprics, and in the monastic world abbacies and priorships, but also cathedral dignities (deanships, precentorships, chancellorships, etc.) and prebends, canonries in collegiate churches, and perhaps above all archdeaconries. The pattern of cathedral dignities and prebends (i.e. individual shares in the endowments for the canons) developed in England after the Norman Conquest and in some cathedrals only after 1100. Archdeacons, hardly known in England before 1066, were a feature of the church introduced after the Norman Conquest, seemingly from Normandy by Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury. By about 1100 most archdeacons were territorial, i.e. they were Archdeacon of Bedford, or Archdeacon of Wiltshire or Archdeacon of Oxford. In the enforcement of church discipline over clergy and laity they were the bishops’ right-hand officers, and not infrequently their nephews. And they generally became very rich. When the learned and clever John of Salisbury wrote his satirical moralising work on politics, the *Policraticus* in the 1150s, he made an overblown attack on ambition, writ large in church and secular affairs, and on its sister vice of avarice. Quite a lot of what he wrote was clearly targeted on archdeacons. Then in 1164–66 he wrote to his old friend Nicholas of Sigillo, formerly a royal clerk, who had talked down archdeacons,
congratulating him on now becoming Archdeacon of Huntingdon by appointment of the Bishop of Lincoln. His letter was witty, and expresses what was to become a well-worn question: can an archdeacon be saved?

‘I seem to remember’, he began, ‘that there was a race of men known in the Church of God by the title of archdeacons, for whom you used to lament, my discerning friend, that every road to salvation was closed. They love gifts, you used to say, and follow after rewards. They are inclined to outrage, rejoice in false accusation, turn the sins of the people into food and drink, live by plunder so that a host is not safe with his guest. The most eminent of them preach the Law of God but do it not. Such and such like qualities your pious compassion used to bewail in the most wretched state of the men. Your friends, and all good men, must thank God and the Bishop of Lincoln, who have opened your eyes and revealed to you a path by which this race of men can not merely obtain salvation, but add to it the loftier aureole, etc., etc. It is the Lord’s doing; it is He who has opened the blindness of your eyes, laid bare the truth, and made you change your baleful view on the case of archdeacons.’

The new archdeacon is much more likely to have enjoyed than been embarrassed by this letter from one of the wits of the twelfth century.

The last word in this chapter concerns the recluse, Christina of Markyate, and her relationship with Abbot Geoffrey of St Albans (1119–46). It is relevant to a chapter on economic aspects of the church, because Abbot Geoffrey is an example of how expanding prosperity, refined administration and economic specialisation, and of course the advances of law, legalism and law courts which went with them, were already, in the first half of the twelfth century, affecting the conduct of, and the concept of how to be, a good churchman. Christina was born into upper-class Huntingdon c. 1096–98, from which she fled around 1115 into a life of celibacy to avoid an arranged marriage, and after quite an Aeneid, she finally settled into her hermitage at Markyate (Herts), a few miles north of St Albans Abbey and under its sponsorship. The Life of Christina of Markyate was written by an anonymous monk of St Albans in the 1150s, soon after her death. At times this work verges on the prurient, and the impressions it gives are not always accurate, for instance in exaggerating the permanency of the rift between Christina and her parents. But if one takes it for what it is, the life of a female hermit as seen from the point of view of a great abbey, it is a work of great historical value. Christina's friendship with Abbot Geoffrey began in the mid-1120s.
Abbot Geoffrey came from Maine, a county to the south of Normandy and effectively a part of it. He was appointed to be schoolmaster of St Albans, but he did not come quickly enough (he did not come tempestive, as the St Albans Chronicle says), so that by the time he arrived the post had gone to someone else, and he had to be content with the lesser (but still desirable) schoolmastership of nearby Dunstable. The shock waves of frenetic careerism even reached down to schoolmasterships. But St Albans must have retained a high opinion of him, for they were willing to lend him some valuable copes (a nice example of the importance of ecclesiastical embroidery to black-monk ritualism) in order to put on a school play about St Catherine (a nice example of St Albans’ interest in religious drama, of which we know from other sources). The night after the play his house burned down, and the copes were destroyed. Having nothing with which to compensate the abbey except his own person, he offered himself as a monk.82

The friendship between Christina and Geoffrey became a close one, vividly described in the Life. As a mystic, Christina perceived Geoffrey’s wrong actions in the community of monks and reproached him for them. She had visions of him when his visits were about to occur. He always came to consult her and seek her blessing before he embarked on a journey. As head of a large business corporation, i.e. the abbey, he was a tenant-in-chief of the king and thus necessarily involved in royal politics. Before one of his journeys to court, it is he who came out with one of the classic statements of how untrustworthy King Stephen was, when he said to Christina, ‘I am going to court, but of my return I know nothing.’83 Of course such a friendship was impossible ‘without the malicious wagging of many tongues’.84 The anonymous monk adamantly denied that the gossip had any foundation, and this is eminently believable for the author does not evade Christina’s sexual temptations and fantasies when they were at issue. There was, for instance, a cleric of standing for whom she had conceived a passion (probably c. 1123) and who ‘behaved in so scandalous a manner that I cannot make it known, lest I pollute the wax by writing it, or the air by saying it!’ But, he adds with a fascinating piece of psychology, only one thing brought her respite; in the actual presence of this cleric, her passion abated. ‘In his absence she used to be so inwardly inflamed that she thought that the clothes which clung to her body might be set on fire.’85 The whole narrative is already an example of what Caroline Walker Bynum, writing about later medieval religion, has called the new freedom to face up to the body, the new concern to give full significance to flesh – to matter, body and sensual response.86 It is because of the openness of a
narrative like this that the denial of a sexual element in the friendship of Christina and Geoffrey seems entirely believable.

Geoffrey was a good, hard-working abbot. He organised the finances of the abbey; he rebuilt the shrine of St Alban, but also distributed part of the abbey’s wealth to the poor and founded the Hospital of St Julien outside the town on the London road; he believed that a monastery prayed on its belly and assigned specific cheeses to the kitchen; he drew up new regulations for the infirmary. He is emphatically not an example of how wealth may corrupt the higher clergy. No, the point that has to be made about him is a quite different one. Geoffrey’s whole spiritual life and vision and inspiration are represented as being based on the prophetic powers and prayer of Christina. ‘Their affection was mutual’, says the Life, ‘but different according to their modes of holiness. He supported her materially; she commended him to God more earnestly in her prayers.’ That was the division of labour between them. There is a graphic illustration of this in the now well-known initial letter to Psalm 105 of the St Albans Psalter, showing Christina praying to Christ for a group of monks standing behind her, headed apparently by Abbot Geoffrey [see Plate 5]. When we look back at the great bishops and abbots of the tenth century, things are very different. These were the great Adelsheilige, nobleman saints like Ethelwold of Winchester, Dunstan of Canterbury and Oswald of Worcester. They ran their own spiritual engines and their external works were a manifestation, or an extension, of their inner driving force. They did not administer; they ruled. And they ruled with sometimes spectacular manipulation of supernatural power. Here in twelfth-century Markyate/St Albans, however, we have the split between spiritual power and ecclesiastical authority.

A similar theme had already been struck when Anselm became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093. When he wanted to resist his appointment, on the grounds that he had shunned worldly affairs since he became a monk and did not wish to become entangled in business now, the bishops, who had been royal chaplains almost to a man before they became bishops, said to him in effect, ‘You pray to God for us, and we shall look after your worldly affairs for you’. One hears echoes of this theme – you be the spiritual one; we’ll take care of external affairs – down the twelfth century. For example, some time just before 1150 the Augustinian Canons of Lanthony got agitated about challenges to their rights in Prestbury church (Glos). The Canons who leaned to the contemplative side of their order, had at the time just lost their great patron, Robert of Bethune, Bishop of Hereford (1130–48) and previously their prior. They appealed to a friend of Bishop Robert, Bishop Hilary of Chichester (1147–69), for
help. Hilary wrote back a brisk letter (he was a canon lawyer rather than a theologian), ending:

_We exhort you not to be easily moved by such things but always to be intent on the divine service to which you are bound. For we and other friends of your late father, as has been given to us from above [almost as if this division of labour were of supernatural origin!] will be vigilant for you and will direct your worldly affairs (negotia), which were entrusted to us, freely as if they were our own._

Hilary often ended his letters and documents with the work _valete_, farewell. This one he unusually and rather pointedly ends, ‘Farewell and pray for us’!

Although it does not strictly belong to the subject matter of this chapter, it would seem false to avoid the question of how significant was the fact that the relationship between Geoffrey and Christina was that between a man and a woman. On the one hand there are grounds for believing that it was not sexual; on the other hand it did not pass without giving some scandal at the time. Perhaps Henrietta Leyser has struck the right note in setting it in the context of twelfth-century devotional fashions which stressed special relationships between holy women and Christ. In the case of Geoffrey and Christina it would be absurd to deny that gender played any role, but as Leyser’s point implies, twelfth-century religion was increasingly stressing inner spiritual experience as against external ritual, even amongst the most ritualistic of monasteries like St Albans. Men as priests were the only external mediators between God and humankind. But where interiority rises and the more validity attaches to inner human religious experience, the less relevant does gender become. The most striking feature of the story of Christina of Markyate as told in her _Life_ is the high value placed by a community of men on the religious or prophetic experiences of a woman.