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### *Consolidating the Priory estates*

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Slowly land was added; a most important addition was *the gift of Hugh, son of Peter, of the whole part of the Bruer which belongs to his feod of Capell next to the grove of Staverton.* This was possibly the single largest acreage added to the home farm, since it comprised more than a thousand acres of sheepwalks on the 'bruer' or heathland. During the next two centuries monastic exports of wool to Flanders were hugely profitable and the Priory's large flocks shepherded over heaths, marshes and river walls will have helped to fund its ambitious building programme.

Some time in the 13th century the Priory received a benefaction from John de Capel which consolidated their local landholdings. A document in their archives recorded that homage was paid to the Earl of Suffolk for lands which John de Capel formerly held from him. Another document showed that his daughter had subsequently relinquished any claim to the land on payment of two marks yearly. However, in 1341, Thomas Belhomme applied to the Court at Westminster to reclaim property which his grandfather, Thomas Belhomme, had possessed when he died. Canon William de Elyngham attended the Court to defend the Priory's interests. He counterclaimed that Thomas Belhomme was the great grandson of John de Capel who had granted to the canons of Butley in perpetuity *all his messuage with buildings in the town of Capel with land and appurtenances in Capel, Tangham, Wantisden, Butley, Boyton and Laneburgh with all freemen, villeins and villein tenements . . . to the said canons . . . forever.*

The importance of the monastic archive now becomes apparent. Elyngham was able to produce the original charter granting the lands to the Priory: *I, the said John ... will guarantee to the said canons ... all the prenoted land, including all heirs both Christians and Jews, as a measure of eternal mercy...* The phrase, '*heredes tam Christianos quam Judeos*', is so unusual that an explanation is needed. In 1275 Jews, already barred from Heaven by Pope Gregory IX, were barred by an English statute from being '*levant and couchant*' among the general population. By 1290 writs required all Jews to leave England on pain of death. The specific mention of Jewish heirs implies that John's father had married a Jewess and their son had sought to save the souls of his family by means of the gift of his estate.

### *Scandal at the leper hospital*

From time to time scandals impinged on even the apparently calm atmosphere of Butley Priory. One was sufficiently serious to reach the King's Bench during the reign of Edward I and another had to be referred to the Pope's representative.

An unfortunate result of the Crusades was the scourge of leprosy brought to England by returning crusaders. Benefactors set up hospitals to cater for them; Orford as a port had need of two. At West Somerton north of Yarmouth, Ranulph and Bertha founded a hospital for 13 lepers. Ranulph entrusted its management to the priors of his monastery at Butley, and provided a generous endowment in the form of the Manor of West Somerton. Its income was later valued as sufficient for 30 lepers.

However, towards the end of the 13th century there was mounting concern at the way the hospital was mis-managed. Following charges laid at the King's Bench, the king took over direct patronage of the hospital. Prior Thomas had to undertake to maintain as many lepers there as the manor could support, and no longer charge them for admission. The manor's value was £60 7s 9¼d, sufficient to support and maintain at least 13 lepers with a staff of guardian, chaplain and clerk.

SAMPLE

Despite royal supervision, conditions in the hospital continued to be kept hidden from the outside world. Lepers were not allowed out; they were forced to take an oath not to complain, nor to *climb trees to talk to their friends*, while the Prior's guard dog deterred visitors. The building was inadequately maintained and a dovecote in the cloister had collapsed. The Prior proceeded to ignore a court order requiring him to rectify these matters and to admit poor and needy lepers. How far some of the accusations can be taken

seriously is a moot point, but for them to have been made at all suggests that they were not beyond belief. It appears that a separate house within the hospital was used by the Prior and some of the canons for all-night parties with local officials, their staff and womenfolk – all at the lepers'