

## **The Paisley Abbey Rentals, c.1460-1550: An Initial Investigation**

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the potential uses of a neglected source for the history of Paisley abbey, the rental book from 1460-1550. It begins by exploring the importance of Paisley Abbey in medieval Scotland, its relations with the Cluniac order, and the wider context of accounting studies of Scotland's religious houses. The paper then examines the rental book itself, its key features, and its history from 1550 to its appearance in the Advocates Library in the early nineteenth century. Finally, the paper suggests a number of potential avenues to explore using the rentals.

### **Introduction**

Paisley is rightly proud of its medieval and industrial past (Metcalf, 1902, 1909, 1912) from which a rich physical and documentary heritage survive. Among a number of striking monuments which Paisley is fortunate to have inherited, including the Council Chambers (designed by William Young and constructed 1882-8), the Coats Memorial Church (designed by Hippolyte Jean Blanc and constructed 1885-94), the Coats Observatory (designed by John Honeyman and constructed 1881-3), the Museum and Library (designed by John Honeyman and opened in 1871), to say nothing of its range of educational, industrial, medical commercial and residential buildings (Close *et al.*, 2016). Paisley Abbey, founded in the seventh decade of the twelfth century is the oldest and perhaps the best known within Scotland and beyond. Its architectural glories are well documented (see for example Fawcett, 2000; Close *et al.*, 2016 and Howell, 1929). The nave of the abbey church continued in use as the parish church of Paisley and was refurbished and restored on several occasions with the rebuilding of the chancel ultimately accomplished by Sir Robert Lorimer after the First World War. Following this restoration, the Abbey church was rededicated in 1928 (Malden, 2000, p. 19).

However, the architectural merits and curiosities of Paisley Abbey are not the focus of the present paper. In addition to the physical remains of the conventual buildings, there have survived from Paisley Abbey two particularly rich documentary sources. The first is a sixteenth century cartulary (sometimes referred to as 'the register') containing copies of royal papal and episcopal charters granting and confirming the possessions, rights and obligations of the house (Davis, 1958, p. 136). A transcript of this cartulary was made in 1696 and is in the Advocates Library, Edinburgh as well as the original cartulary. The register was published in 1832 by the

Maitland Club (Innes, 1832), and is a well-known source. It has been used by historians for many years, including recently by Scott (2000) in the published papers of the Renfrewshire Local History Forum's Conference held in 1999 (Malden, 2000). The second source is the Paisley Abbey rental book, which comprises a series of lists of rents due from tenants on abbey lands to the abbey covering the period 1460-1550. This second manuscript is the subject of the present paper. Hitherto it has been somewhat neglected: a Latin transcript was included by Lees as an appendix in his monumental *The Abbey of Paisley from its Foundation to its Dissolution with Notices of the Subsequent History of the Church and an Appendix of Illustrative Documents* published in 1878 (Lees, 1878, pp. lvi-clxxviii), but no English translation has been published. Although Lees' transcript was included as a microfiche in the volume referred to earlier (Malden, 2000), the rental book itself was not the subject of any study at the Conference. Thus, the case for presenting a paper on the Paisley Abbey rental book at the conference *Paisley's Industrial and Cultural Heritage*, held in 2018, was self-evident.

The remainder of this paper is organized into three main parts. First, some context is provided against which the commissioning, writing and maintaining of the rental records must be understood. This context includes three elements: some specifics on the foundation, development and history of Paisley Abbey; some considerations of the Cluniac background of the abbey; and, an outline of medieval monastic accounting and financial management reporting procedures in which the Paisley Abbey rentals would have played an important contributory role. The second main part of this paper focuses on the Paisley Abbey Rental book in detail: first summarising its physical characteristics; secondly examining the circumstances of its creation and its rationale; thirdly attempting to rebuild the itinerary which the rentals followed after the dissolution of the house in the sixteenth century. The final part of this paper summarises the existing state of knowledge regarding the rentals and identifies a number of potentially fruitful questions and area of research to be pursued in the future.

### **The Foundation and Growth of Paisley Abbey**

The importance of Paisley Abbey and its abbots is illustrated by the regular recurrence of its name in general histories of Scotland (Duncan, 2000; Nicholson, 1997). Its importance relative to other Cluniac houses in the British Isles is indicated by its first position in a list of English and Scottish foundations compiled in 1405, where it is described as 'first and foremost' (Duckett, 1890, p. 37). The religious community was initially established as a priory by Walter

Fitz Alan, steward to David I, who brought a prior and twelve monks from the Shropshire Cluniac house of Much Wenlock to Renfrew. The house was later transferred to Paisley sometime before 1177 (Anon, 1876, p. 26; Barrow, 2000, p. 3). Subsequently of course the Stewards or Stewarts ascended the Scottish throne after David II (1329-71) son of Robert I (1306-29) died without issue leaving the throne to the son, Robert II (1371-90) of his half-sister Marjory who had married Walter the Steward. Paisley Abbey has been described as ‘the favourite religious house of the Stewarts’ (Boardman, 2003, p. 212).

Copies of the early charters of the house are included in the Paisley Register and Lees (1878, pp. 32-4) and Anon (1876, pp. 26-30) provide English translations. The new house’s endowments included lands, churches, fisheries, a mill, a salt pit, tithes, pasturage, forest rights, freedom for tolls, and the right to hold courts, levy fines, hold slaves and punish thieves. Walter’s son Alan continued to increase the endowments of the house founded by his father (Lees, 1878, pp. 54-6). A papal confirmation of the possessions and privileges of the house issued by Pope Honorius III (1216-27) in 1226 gives an indication of the growing possessions of the house which were to include over twenty churches and chapels, land in Aberdeenshire, Ayrshire, Dunbartonshire, Peeblesshire, Renfrewshire, Roxburghshire and Ireland (Bliss, 1893, pp. 106-7; Lees, 1878, p. 161). The monitoring of such diverse types and geographic sources of income would become a major element in the financial management of the house: the complexity of monastic income streams has been noted elsewhere (Dobie, 2015, p. 23).

Monks perceived the lands not just as belonging to the house but belonging to God and/or the particular saints to whom the original donor had made the grant in perpetual alms. Paisley Abbey was dedicated to St. Mary, St. James, St. Mirin and St. Milburga. Religious communities were therefore vigilant in the defence of their possessions and sources of income. Some land was tenanted and the monks had the right to receive rents (in money and/or kind) and services from their tenants, other land was known as demesne and could either be managed directly by the monks using paid labour or labour dues from tenants or could be rented out. In the former case the monastery was entitled to the fluctuating agricultural yields of the land, in the latter case they received a set rent. During the long twelfth century rising grain prices and demand for agricultural produce seems to have encouraged many houses to take more of their land into direct management and the period has been called the era of ‘high farming’ when production focused on supplying the market rather than the consumption needs of the house. However, subsequently in the fourteenth century rising labour costs and falling grain prices

encouraged monasteries to move away from direct management and resume the renting out of their lands again (Duby, 1976, p. 261; Dobie, 2008, pp. 145-6).

An indication of the level of income of the house in 1275 is given in Bagimond's Roll (a valuation carried out for the papacy of all church lands (Dunlop, 1939; Watt, 2001)) which records a value of £2,666 for Paisley Abbey (Lees, 1878, p. 71). At this date (and until 1367) Scottish and English silver pennies were identical in weight and freely interchangeable (Spufford, 1986, p. 211), so it is possible to make some comparisons with English revenue figures for which more plentiful data survives. Thus, the Paisley figure exceeds the £2,000 revenue recorded by Durham Cathedral Priory, a monastic house described as 'abounding in wealth', in the account-roll of its bursar for 1292/3 (Dobie, 2015, p. 132), and comfortably exceeds estimates of revenues for English earls and bishops in the early fourteenth century of around £1,600 (Campbell, 2005, p. 12). This is despite the fact that by this date Paisley Abbey's possessions had been reduced by the foundation of a daughter house at Crossraguel, using the lands given to Paisley by the Earl of Carrick as an endowment. The near 30 years of resistance by Paisley to founding this daughter house – it finally acquiesced in 1265 - gives some indication of the extent of the financial loss this foundation would create (Lees, 1878, pp. 66-7).

Paisley Abbey clearly was - and remained - a very wealthy institution. The abbey was later used as a source of revenue by pluralist clerics and even seculars who held the abbey *in commendam*, and *The Books of Assumption of the Thirds of Benefices*, known as *The Books of Thirds*, compiled in the 1560s valued Paisley Abbey's income at £2,467 19s in money plus income received in kind totalling 72 chalders of meal, 40 chalders of bere [barley], 43 chalders of horsecorn [oats] and 576 stones of cheese. Expressed purely in money terms Paisley Abbey appears to have had the fourth largest income of all the Scottish monastic houses, its £5,600 only exceeded by the monasteries at Arbroath, St Andrews, and Dunfermline (Kirk, 1995, pp. lvi, 527-31).

### **Paisley Abbey and the Wider Cluniac Order**

Despite the Abbot of Paisley being listed as ninth in order of preference after the Abbot of Cluny (Duckett, 1890, p. 2), links with Cluny and the rest of the Cluniac order appear to have been weak. Some of this may have been influenced by the wider political context - periods of warfare with England cannot have encouraged Paisley Abbey to play a full role in the Cluniac

province of England and Scotland, and during the Great Schism of 1378-1418 Scotland acknowledged the Avignon popes, whereas England supported those in Rome. Other records suggest that Paisley remained at 'arm's length' from the Cluniac order throughout most of its existence: in 1219, the status of the priory was enhanced when the monks were given permission to elect an abbot, but this permission was granted not by the abbot of Cluny (who was not even consulted on the issue) but by papal commissioners appointed by Pope Honorius III (Lees, 1878, p. 58). The abbot of Cluny was merely asked to consent to the house's promotion, perhaps encouraged to do so by the threat of the house moving to the Cistercian order (Malden, 2000, p. 27). Such renunciations of original affiliations did occur on occasion: Monk Bretton Priory, a Cluniac cell in Yorkshire, following a dispute with its mother house of Pontefract, appealed to the Archbishop of York to visit Monk Bretton as an independent Benedictine house (an episcopal visitation was an inspection at which the spiritual life of the house and the management of its temporalities were reviewed by the bishop). This Archbishop Wickwane did in 1281, from which date Monk Bretton was considered an independent black monk house (Brown, 1907, pp. 138-40).

Visitation records also point to weak control over the Abbey by the Cluniac order. Each year at a Chapter General, the heads of each Cluniac house assembled and appointed two visitors to visit each house within a particular province (Duckett, 1888). Visitors reports for the province of England and Scotland survive and have been published from 1262, 1275-6, 1279, 1298, 1390 and 1405 (Duckett, 1890), but contain no reference to any Paisley visitation. Dilworth has concluded that 'there is no surviving evidence that Paisley ever actually received a visitation from Cluny or its vicar in England' (Dilworth, 2000, p. 33). Nor were financial ties always maintained - Paisley was supposed to render an annual due of two marks to Cluny but it was noted in 1457 that Paisley had not paid this amount since 1448 (Dilworth, 2000, p. 31), and this irregular pattern of payment may not have been unusual.

### **Records of Paisley Abbey**

The apparent lack of oversight of Paisley by the Cluniac order deprives the historian of a whole class of records that are normally revealing of the state of a monastic institution. The exemption of Cluniac houses, unlike their Benedictine counterparts, from episcopal visitation (Knowles, 1956, p. 105), similarly deprives historians of the visitation articles of enquiry, summaries of findings, and statutes issued by the visiting bishop during and following his inspection of the house which provide a rich source of information on the spiritual and temporal

health of those communities visited (Knowles, 1956, pp. 78-112; 1957, pp. 204-18; 1959, pp. 62-86.).

Unfortunately with the exception of the rentals and the register, further financial and administrative records from Paisley Abbey do not survive. It is most likely that such records did exist in Paisley, but that whatever records were maintained were dispersed and lost after the Reformation. Visitation records of English Cluniac houses do indicate that accounts were kept: for example, in 1262 the visitors were furnished with the written accounts of Thetford Priory; and, at most visitations specific enquiries were made as to the amount of debt with which the house was burdened (Duckett, 1890, p. 12). An early notable Cluniac monk who became Abbot of Glastonbury and Bishop of Winchester, Henry of Blois (c. 1090-1171), has been described as a great administrator and innovator. As Abbot of Glastonbury he is said to have stabilized the house's finances (Knowles, 1963, p. 180, 287-90) and at his cathedral priory of St Swithun's, Winchester he instituted a council of twelve senior monks to audit the accounts rendered by other monk-officials (Harvey, 2002, p. xv; Knowles, 1963, p. 290). Cluny itself encountered financial problems which necessitated major budgetary responses (Duby, 1952), and from Thetford Priory, an English Cluniac house, survives a 'register' which is in fact an incomplete series of monastic accounts relating to the period 1482-1540. It is mainly concerned with expenses which are individually listed and sub-totalled at the bottom of each page of entries. Thus it seems likely that given Paisley Abbey's links with the Cluniac order, although these were at times admittedly remote, that Paisley would have maintained written financial records.

It has even been alleged that the lack of medieval accounting records in Scotland is not perhaps merely a matter of poor survival rates, but a lack of demand for them by medieval Scottish landowners (Duncan, 2000, p. 431). Whether accounting records were widely maintained in medieval Scotland is still a somewhat contested point, but it has been argued that absentee landlords would require accounts from stewards entrusted with the administration of lands in their absence; that ecclesiastical institutions were subject to regulation requiring the preparation of accounts; and, that unlike England where many ecclesiastical institutions continued in a new form after the Reformation (the prior and monks of Durham Cathedral Priory for example were replaced by a dean and chapter who were endowed with the majority of lands held by the former priory; Peterborough Abbey was elevated to cathedral status and likewise the new institution retained many of the lands of the former monastic house) in Scotland most monastic institutions

ceased and thus there was less imperative to preserve administrative records. Additionally many religious houses were attacked and fired during the wars between England and Scotland which may have led to the wholesale destruction of administrative records (Dobie, 2012, p. 8). It is unlikely given the fact that there was a move throughout Europe towards the preparation and retention of increasingly sophisticated archives (Clanchy, 1979) and the increasing consideration of 'business' subjects at universities (Richardson, 1941) that written accounting and administrative records were not prepared in Scotland by ecclesiastical institutions.

Certainly, throughout the period of Paisley Abbey's existence, there was official encouragement to maintain records. The Crown caused exchequer rolls to be prepared: the earliest known date from the 1260s (Stuart and Burnett, 1878; Dickson and Balfour, 1877-1916), although the office of the *camerarius*, (chamberlain), who presided over the exchequer, dates back to the reign of David I (1124-53). It is hard to imagine, given the degree of regulation emanating from the papacy, papal legates and monastic general chapters and church councils that Scottish ecclesiastical institutions did not prepare detailed accounts. In 1238 for example the papal legate Otto, during a visit to England, issued a series of decrees for the black monks which included the requirement that all monastic obedientiaries should render account to their prelate and to the senior monks of the house at least three times each year and should hand over any surpluses generated by their offices to their prelates. Heads of houses were required to render account of the *status* of the house (usually a listing of assets and liabilities) as well as a *ratio* (a listing of receipts and payments). The legate was cautioned by Henry III not to enter Scotland, but one of his relatives travelled north to Scotland and may have been concerned with similar issues (Paris, 2012, vol. 3, pp. 414, 501; Williamson, 1949).

Innocent IV (1245-54) re-issued and strengthened these statutes in 1253, stipulating that monastic officers should render account every three months; that prelates should account twice a year in the spring and in the autumn; and that all the rents due to an abbey should be recorded in duplicate written copies, one to be held by the abbot and the other by the prior (Paris, 2012, vol. 6, pp. 240, 245). The Cistercians too were the subject of papal interest. In 1335, Benedict XII (1335-42) issued *Fulgens sicut stella* which contained a number of important accounting and financial provisions: in each house two bursars were to be appointed to receive all monies who were to render the fullest and faithful account of all receipts and expenses four times in the year (Canivez, 1933, vol. 3, pp. 416-7; Fowler, undated). Accountability was evidently sweeping across all forms of monasticism.

Indeed, in Scotland there are specific examples of the mandatory nature of written accounts: for example, the foundation charter of the collegiate church of Dunbar in 1342 contains the requirement that accounts should be rendered twice each year at Pentecost and Martinmas (Easson, 1939, pp. 93-4) and there is evidence that the episcopacy maintained financial records (Paisey, and Paisey, 2011). At Paisley Abbey, *The Books of Thirds* makes references to 'registers and accounts' maintained by the 'graniter' (a monastic official usually concerned with the receipt, storage and issue of grain); to 'annual accounts'; and to the accounts of the cellarer so there is evidence that a wider accounting system extended beyond the rentals which have survived (Kirk, 1995, pp. 526-31).

It is, however, in general true that there are not extensive financial and administrative monastic records from medieval Scotland, and this has perhaps led to medieval accounting being a somewhat neglected research topic in Scotland (Dobie, 2012), including in general monastic histories (Coulton, 1933; Dilworth, 1995). Despite the promotion of the importance of record keeping, the only accounting record which is known to have survived from Paisley Abbey is the series of rentals relating to the period 1460-1560. Even this can be counted a fortunate survival as of the 70 plus monastic houses listed by Watt and Shead (2001), very few rental or accounting records survive. The *Registrum Nigrum* of Arbroath Abbey is a register of leases dating from between 1288 and c. 1500 with many from the fifteenth century (Davis, 1958, p. 130). From the Cistercian Abbey of Coupar Angus a rental book survives for the period 1443-1538 (Rogers, 1879-80). Coldingham Priory has left a series of accounting records dating from 1311 to 1446, and although these accounts include the total rents received no documents survive dealing specifically with rent (Raine, 1841). The Augustinian abbey of Scone has left a register of rentals 1465-1566 (Davis, 1958, p. 136), and Turnbull mentions additional rentals surviving from Dunfermline Abbey, the bishopric of Moray, the archbishopric of St Andrews and the Abbey and Hospital of St Anthony near Leith (Turnbull, 1842, pp. 5, 11-13). This Paisley rental book is thus a comparatively rare and fortunate survival.

### **The Paisley Rentals**

The Paisley rental book comprises a series of individual rentals from the period 1460 to 1550 (NLS, Adv.MS.15.1.17). The rentals detail the names of the tenants and the rents paid for the four main local lordships held by the Abbey over this period: Paisley, Glen, Kilpatrick and Monkton (Innes, 1851, p. 70; Kirk, 1995, p. 527). The rental book does not consistently

identify the latter two lordships: Kilpatrick lordship is referred to as Lennox in 1521, and Monkton is more often referred to as Frew. It is only by comparing the properties listed under each rental that the correct identification can be made. The earliest extant rentals were drawn up in 1460 for Paisley and Glen lordships, and rentals for Frew (1464) and Kilpatrick (1465) survive from shortly after. The next group of rentals date from 1472, and a further group from 1484. Following this, there are further rentals from 1519 to 1522, and then a final completed rental from 1525. An attempt was clearly made in 1550 to draw up a new rental, with a series of headings of properties set out, but no actual entries were made in it, and the previous rental remained in use until at least 1555. In total, there are over 20 rentals from the period, but only in 1472 and 1525 are there rentals for all four lordships at the same date, both times when Paisley had a new abbot – George Shaw in 1471 and John Hamilton in 1525 (Lees, 1878, appendix pp. i-ii).

The manuscript known as ‘Rental of Paisley Abbey’ is now contained in a single leather-bound volume, approximately 42cm long by 21cm wide. It has a stamp on the front ‘Advocatorum Bibliotheca’, denoting its initial deposit in the Advocates Library in Edinburgh, and the spine reads ‘Rental of Paisley Abbey 15.1.17’. Watermarked pages at the beginning and end of the volume date this binding to 1838 or shortly after, probably related to the process of separating and cataloguing the manuscripts in the Advocates Library at this time. As with other manuscripts in the Advocates Library, it was transferred to the National Library of Scotland in the early twentieth century (HMSO, 1971, pp. 1-2).

There are 114 separate leaves in the volume, meaning a total of 228 folios. 195 folios have at some point been paginated, but erratically: initially blank folios were ignored in the count, but later on (from f. 69) they are not; also, both sides of each leaf are paginated up to folio 27, then only the facing page. Not all the folios apparently regarded as blank are in fact empty - the unnumbered folio between folio 17 and folio 18 includes the beginning of an entry that is not complete. The last few folios of the volume have also not been paginated, possibly because - as noted earlier - the rental in question was not actually completed, and whoever paginated the volume did not consider these outlines of rentals to be sufficiently important. At one point (ff. 182-5), it appears that the folios have been bound out of order, but the pagination here follows the correct order of the rental. It is most likely that the pagination is an attempt to highlight the incorrect binding of the volume at this point, which would date the pagination exercise to sometime after 1838.

It is clear that the manuscript preserved in the Advocates Library was a working document, rather than a formal copy for the record. This allows us to understand how the rentals were used in practice by the Abbey. The last rental in the volume, dated to 1550, is what looks like a proforma for a rental. There is a title for the rental, and a list of places, sometimes including a total sum of money, presumably the rents expected to be received from these places. Between the entry for each place it seems space was left (usually 5-10cm) for the insertion of the details of each tenant, and each person acting as surety. On completion, this would then look like the earlier, finalised, rentals in the manuscript. As tenants died, the rental was updated - often in the margins - with the details of the new tenant, often a relative. This continued until the planned renewal of the rental - for example the rental of 1465 establishes rents for the next five years. It is not clear why the 1525 rental was not renewed in c.1530, and additions and amendments made to it for the next thirty years. The result is a very messy and difficult to use rental, which must have been problematic for the abbot's officers, and somewhat jars with Lees' description of the rental as 'beautifully written and neatly kept' (Lees, 1878, p. 160). Further study of the rentals may help explain why the 1525 rental was in continuous use for thirty years.

The last confirmed entries in the rental book date from 1555. This is five years after the final rental was planned, and abandoned. The date at which the last rental was drawn up was a problematic time for the abbey (Lees, 1878, pp. 194-205), and it is perhaps not surprising that it was not completed. The abbey however could not continue indefinitely without a correct record of its tenants and dues. It is possible that a new rental was drawn up, and this has been lost. However, it is also possible that the Abbey began to rely on the rental drawn up in the early 1560s and used for *The Books of Thirds* (Kirk, 1995, pp. 527-31). *The Books of Thirds* were created in response to plans by the Scottish Crown to divide up ecclesiastical wealth to support itself, and the new Reformed Church, as well as maintaining support for those clergy (and laity) who had rights to the wealth of the Church in Scotland from before the Reformation (Kirk, 1995). It would seem logical that if Paisley Abbey had to draw up a complete rental and send it to Edinburgh, it would also have kept a copy for itself. What happened to that rental is unclear - the ones in Edinburgh were not kept, and if Paisley Abbey kept a copy for itself, then it has not survived.

One of the more interesting elements within the rental book is a set of rules for tenants of abbey properties. It appears at folio 87 and was drawn up during the abbacy of Robert Shaw (1498-1525). The exact date of these rules is difficult to ascertain, but the handwriting does resemble the script on folio 91, which is dated 1520. This would be consistent with the attribution to Abbot Shaw, and indicate that it was towards the end of his period in office. The rules themselves are in the main fairly predictable for the lease of agricultural lands. Many of the rules require tenants to act responsibly - for example by ensuring that fields are kept clear of corn marigolds, a common weed affecting lighter soils (Bond, Davies & Turner, 2007) - and not to interfere with the work of the abbot's officers and servants, or to oppose him in legal proceedings. Other rules familiar to modern tenants include a prohibition on the subletting of property without the permission of the owner. There are further specific rules for tenants on lands in the lordship of Kilpatrick, possibly in response to the historically difficult relationship between the Abbot and the Earls of Lennox (Lees, 1878, p. 182). Finally, one of the Ten Commandments is also singled out in the tenancy rules - adultery. No others are specifically mentioned, but this is apparently worthy of its own rule. A version of the rules that 'softened the rough Scottish dialect in which they are given' (Lees, 1878, p. 171) was reproduced by Lees but not analysed in any great depth. Comparison with other examples would doubtless be a valuable exercise in understanding the state of landlord-tenant relations in this period.

### **Subsequent History of the Rentals**

It would be helpful to know what happened to the rentals after the Reformation, and how they found their way into the Advocates Library, but nothing is known about them between the final dated reference of 1555 and the rentals appearance in the Advocates Library records in the nineteenth century. By this stage, the rentals were bound into a single volume, but there are a number of indications that the rentals were originally a series of separate manuscripts. The first is that a number of folios (ff. 50-170) are slightly narrower (by around 0.5cm) than the other folios within the volume. The second indicator is the varying condition of the rentals themselves, with folios 137 to 171 in notably poorer condition than the other rentals within the volume. Third, the rentals have not been bound in a chronological sequence, with a rental dated 1464 following one dated 1465, which is clearly unlikely if it had always been a single volume.

There is no indication of when the single volume was first created. One possibility is that this happened when the manuscripts were already in the Advocates Library, but this would appear

to be unlikely. The process of sorting out the manuscripts did not occur until the 1830s, and in 1832, Cosmo Innes - who was in charge of the cataloguing process - refers to 'the old rental book of the abbey'. He gives no indication that the rental book had been recently collected together (Innes, 1832, p. vi). The point is important since, if we are looking for a single volume being added to the Advocates Library holdings, we can use the extant library catalogues to narrow down its acquisition to the early nineteenth century (see below), and this might help to identify the donor of the rental book. If, however, the rentals were still separate manuscripts when acquired, they could have been deposited in the Advocates Library anytime after 1680, when the library was first established (HMSO, 1971, p. 1).

There are a number of early catalogues for the Library, but none of them (covering the period up to 1807) refer to the rental book (NLS, 1742-1807). However, other manuscripts that were subsequently shelved near to the rental book (Adv.15.1.17) or are of a similar type to the rental book, do appear in these early registers. For example, the Acts of the meeting of parliament of 1690 is included in George Mackenzie's 1692 catalogue – this document was to become Adv.MS.15.2.12 (HMSO, 1971, p. 115); and Sir James Balfour's notes on the religious houses at Coupar Angus, Arbroath, and Dryburgh are recorded in part 1 of the 3-part catalogue from the eighteenth century. This is now Adv.MS.33.2.9 (HMSO, 1971, p. 16). So it is most likely that the reason that the rental book is not in the earliest catalogues is that it was not present as a single volume in the Library at the time, and that therefore the volume was accepted after 1807.

The first reference to a volume of Paisley Abbey rentals is in a manuscript list dating from c.1828. This can be dated from the watermark on the page referring to the rentals, and this may have been part of the cataloguing process from the 1830s (NLS, Adv. MS.FR216). The c.1828 manuscript list shows the rental book alongside some apparently completely unrelated manuscripts: a couple of documents relating to the Act of Union, and to Ireland, apparently presented by Lord Glenbervie, and a memo about the University of Cambridge beneath it, written by John Scott. It is not clear why the rental book is listed alongside these documents, nor what the c.1828 list was used for - there are no shelf marks, so it was not a formal catalogue, although it could have been the first stage in a cataloguing process. Greater understanding of the c.1828 manuscript list might help identify the circumstances in which the rentals were acquired by the Advocates Library.

The next time we see the rental book is in a formal catalogue of manuscripts, drawn up in 1839 (Adv.MS.FR189). This time it has a shelf mark (which it still has today). The 1839 list is a catalogue of chartularies, and not a complete catalogue of manuscripts in the Advocates Library. In fact, the item with the shelf mark closest to the Paisley rentals under the new catalogue (Adv.MS.15.1.16) is a copy of Joinville's *Life of the medieval French King St Louis* (HMSO, 1971, p. 11), which has no obvious connection to the Paisley rentals. Adv.MS.15.1.18 is more closely related, being notes on the charters of the Priory of St Andrews, but again there is no other obvious connection with the Paisley rental book (HMSO, 1971, p. 14). It may be that further enquiries about how the shelf mark system in the Advocates Library worked will help to explain the class mark attached to the Paisley rental book.

### **Use of the Paisley Rentals**

The cataloguing project for manuscripts in the Advocates Library seems to have been the time when it became recognised as a valuable source. Accounts of Paisley prior to the late 1830s do not refer to the rentals. These include works such as Crawford's *General Description of the Shire of Renfrew* (first published in 1710 and expanded by Robertson in 1818), and Chalmers' *Caledonia* (originally published in 1807-24), which makes extensive use of the 1561/2 *Books of Thirds*, but does not mention the Paisley rentals. The absence of any reference to the Paisley rentals in these works would fit with an accession date to the Advocates Library of 1807-28, and probably towards the end of that period.

Cosmo Innes, who led the cataloguing of the manuscripts at the Advocates Library, seems to be the first to refer to it in a published volume, in his transcription of the Register of Paisley Abbey of 1832 (Innes, 1832, p. vi). Innes notes that the rentals cover the period 1460 to 1529, rather than the actual end date of 1555. Innes may have ignored the 1550 rental as being incomplete, but there is nothing that survives that would support an end date of 1529. It may simply have been an error. But Innes clearly recognised the value of the rental book, stating that the volume was 'of great statistical importance and much local interest' (Innes, 1832, p. vi note h).

Subsequently Mackie, in his *Historical Description of the Abbey and Town of Paisley* (1835), certainly intended to use the rental book to update a list of abbots that was last compiled by Crawford. As he rather surprisingly notes at p. 170, however:

A list of the Abbots was intended to have formed a part of the History of the Abbey, and has been delayed till the very last in expectation of being able to present a corrected list by comparing Crawford's with the Rental Book of Paisley, in the Advocates' Library. This, however, the author has been unable to procure, the Rental Book having been lent out to a member of the Faculty who is at present on the Continent.

Turnbull also referred to the rentals in his *Fragmenta Scoto-Monastica* of 1842, intended as a catalogue of source material suitable for a comprehensive ecclesiastical history of Scotland (Turnbull, 1842, p. 12). His information is near identical to the Advocates Library listing of c.1839, completed three years before his work was published, and is probably based on it (NLS, Adv. MS. FR189, p. 55).

Innes was the first to use the rentals, in his *Origines Parochiales Scotiae* (Innes, 1851, p. 70). Innes compared the list of church endowments in the 1525 rental and the 1561 Books of Assumption, to the original foundation charter of the Abbey to demonstrate that the Abbey had managed to hold on to most of its original religious endowments by the Reformation. He does not do the same for the temporal possessions of the abbey, although clearly that would be a valuable exercise. To date, Cameron Lees' chapter on monastic economics, which is largely based on the Paisley rental book, is the most extensive use of it. Lees' approach is largely descriptive, and notable for its insistence on the benevolent attitude of the abbey towards its tenants, using evidence cited from the rentals (Lees, 1878, pp. 159-73).

Innes was also the first to call for a full transcript to be made of the rental book, when the Register was published in 1832 (Innes, 1832, p. vi), and a transcript was subsequently published as an appendix to Lees' history of Paisley Abbey (Lees, 1878, pp. lvi-clxxviii). This probably explains the existence of a manuscript transcript of the rentals, held by the Local History Collection at Paisley Museum, and dating to the nineteenth century (Renfrewshire Local Studies Library MSS 726.7 REN 1). It certainly has some intriguing similarities to the published transcript that suggest that it was the source of Lees' edition, including common mistakes that are not otherwise obviously explained. However, a comparison between it and a sample of Lees' own handwriting, from his book of sermons held in the National Library of Scotland (NLS, MS.3240) suggests that the rental transcript was not completed by Lees himself. It is also possible that someone else, between 1832 and 1878, thought that Paisley should have a transcript of a document that is an important source for the history of the abbey and town of Paisley in the late medieval period.

## **Future Research Possibilities**

The rentals of Paisley Abbey were an important element in the financial control of the revenue of the house, but they are also revealing of the wider social and economic history of Paisley and south-west Scotland at the time. Future research could therefore pursue a number of avenues, and some of them are discussed here.

Perhaps most obvious is to develop our understanding of the subsequent history of the rentals. It is not known who acquired the manuscripts after the Reformation, or indeed when, or why. It is not clear whether the rentals were always grouped together, or whether they had become dispersed in a wider collection. It is not known when they were first bound together. It is also not known who donated the manuscripts. These questions are important because they will help to establish why these rentals survived when so many from other monastic houses did not. This in turn will help determine how far we can generalise about monastic finances based on the Paisley rentals. It may be possible to infer something from the other manuscripts that the rentals were catalogued alongside: were they grouped together because they had a shared background, or ownership? We may also be able to learn something about how the process of cataloguing the manuscripts in the Advocates Library took place, from the surviving records of that process, and this might help to establish what records were donated alongside the rentals, and therefore who might have donated them.

A second area to examine would be to compare the rental values themselves. This could be both within the rentals themselves, for example whether the rents for specific properties changed over the period 1460-1550, and whether this can be linked to known economic trends at the time, and also how the total value of rents revealed by the surviving rentals compares to external records, such as papal and royal taxation records and *The Books of Thirds*. This will help to answer another key question: the comprehensiveness of the rentals as a record of properties rented out by the Abbey. Clearly, the less comprehensive the surviving rentals are, the less useful they are to the historian.

Looking in more detail at the rentals, we might be able to compare the measures and commodity values of the rentals with those in Gemmill and Mayhew's 1995 study of prices, money, weights and measures in medieval Scotland. We might also be able to analyse changes in the number and size of individual holdings over time, which could tell us something about

changing patterns of economic activity over the period: were lands being consolidated, or fragmented, and what might explain this? The rentals cover a critical period in the urban development of Paisley, and may help to provide some economic context to the raising of Paisley to burgh status in 1490. We might also compare holdings listed in the register with those in the rentals. This could tell us whether donations of land had survived intact, or whether some portions had been lost or given away. We could also compare the Paisley rentals with other Scottish rentals and leases from the abbeys of Arbroath, Coupar Angus and Scone. This might tell us about how widespread accounting practices were in Scottish monasteries, or whether accounting techniques were being adapted for local circumstances.

From a more social perspective, we could examine the role of tenants and their sureties: who were the people who rented land from the Abbey, and who acted as their surety? What connections existed between (for example) family groups? It should be possible to detail personal information as an index or database, and re-sort that information to provide more detail on individuals. It is also possible to look at the continuity of holdings over time, as they passed from father to son, or occasionally to widow or daughter: did these patterns change over time? What was the most common transfer after the death of a tenant?

Finally, we could look at the list of tenancy rules from the early sixteenth century. This could be compared with other monastic examples (if any exist), to see how far the approach to managing tenants had become regularised. We could compare monastic rules with 'secular' rules to understand if the management of tenants was different between the two. We could also examine the rules in the light of the relations with the Earls of Lennox, to understand how far the Abbey sought to co-opt its tenants in its attempt to preserve its lands. We could also use the Paisley rules to explore tenancy in a more longitudinal sense, to look at the developing contract between landlords and tenants and how that has evolved over the centuries.

## **Conclusion**

Paisley Abbey was clearly an important part of the economic, religious, and political life of medieval and early modern Scotland. However, its surviving records have not been fully exploited. The rental book provides an opportunity for a more granular analysis of the workings of the abbey, and in particular how it sought to fund the work of the Abbey itself through the economic exploitation of land. In addition, the rental book covers a particularly important period for the town of Paisley, including its achievement of burgh status in 1490.

Finally, the rentals could tell us something about the impact of the Reformation on the Abbey itself, and Paisley in general. The neglect of the rentals from Paisley represents (to date) a missed opportunity for a more detailed understanding of this crucial part of Paisley's, and Scotland's, history.

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