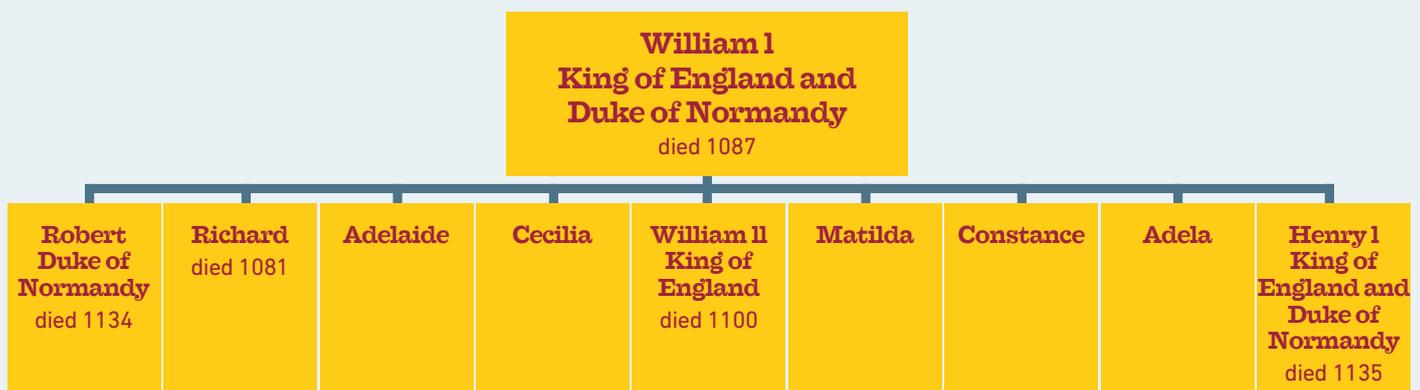


Who was Henry I?

Henry had two older brothers – Robert and William. When their father, King William I (William the Conqueror), died, Henry's older brother, Robert, inherited the title of Duke of Normandy, and William became King of England.

As the youngest brother, Henry grew up without major lands or political power, but took every opportunity to improve his position. He snatched the English crown as soon as William II died – killed in a hunting accident in the New Forest in 1100 – and fought Robert to become Duke of Normandy in 1106.

Find out more about Henry's family in the Bayeux Tapestry Gallery



Links with Cluny

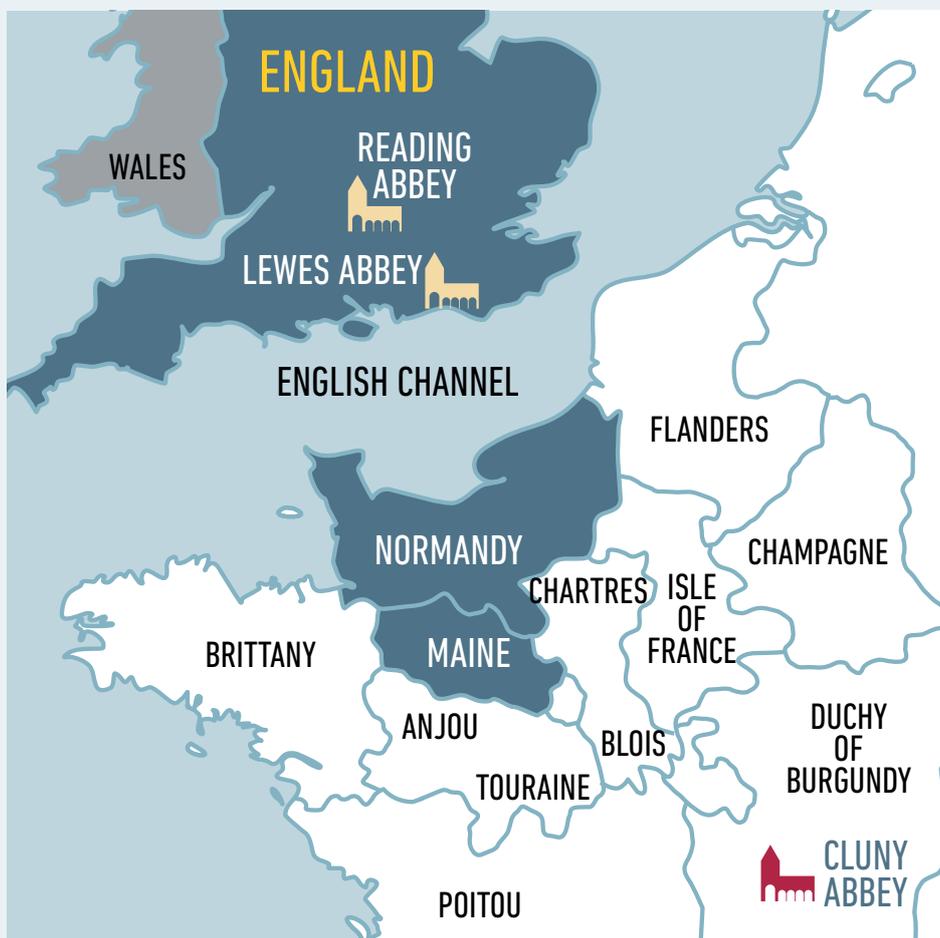
Reading Abbey was set up with the help of monks from Cluny Abbey in France. Many other members of Henry's family had made gifts to Cluny or founded Cluniac monasteries so this was a natural choice for him.

Cluny was the most important abbey in Europe at this time, and had dependent priories* in France, Spain and Italy, and at Lewes in England. The Cluniacs used the power of beautiful music and lavishly decorated buildings to intensify their religious experience.

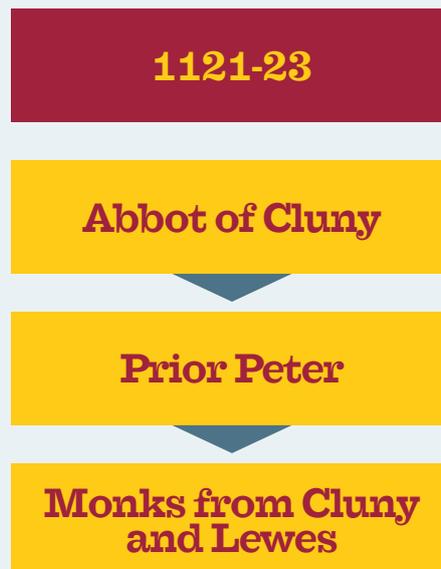
While other monasteries were supervised by the local bishop, the Cluniac priors answered only to the Abbot of Cluny. He in turn answered only to the Pope (head of the Catholic Church).

By the 1220s, Reading Abbey was seen as part of the larger Benedictine Order, founded by St. Benedict in Italy in about AD 530, with no strong links to Cluny.

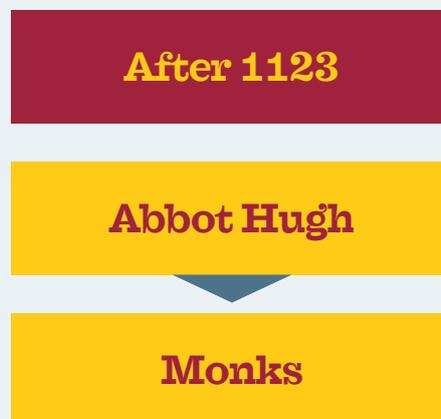
***Priory** – a religious house, less important than an abbey, run by a prior



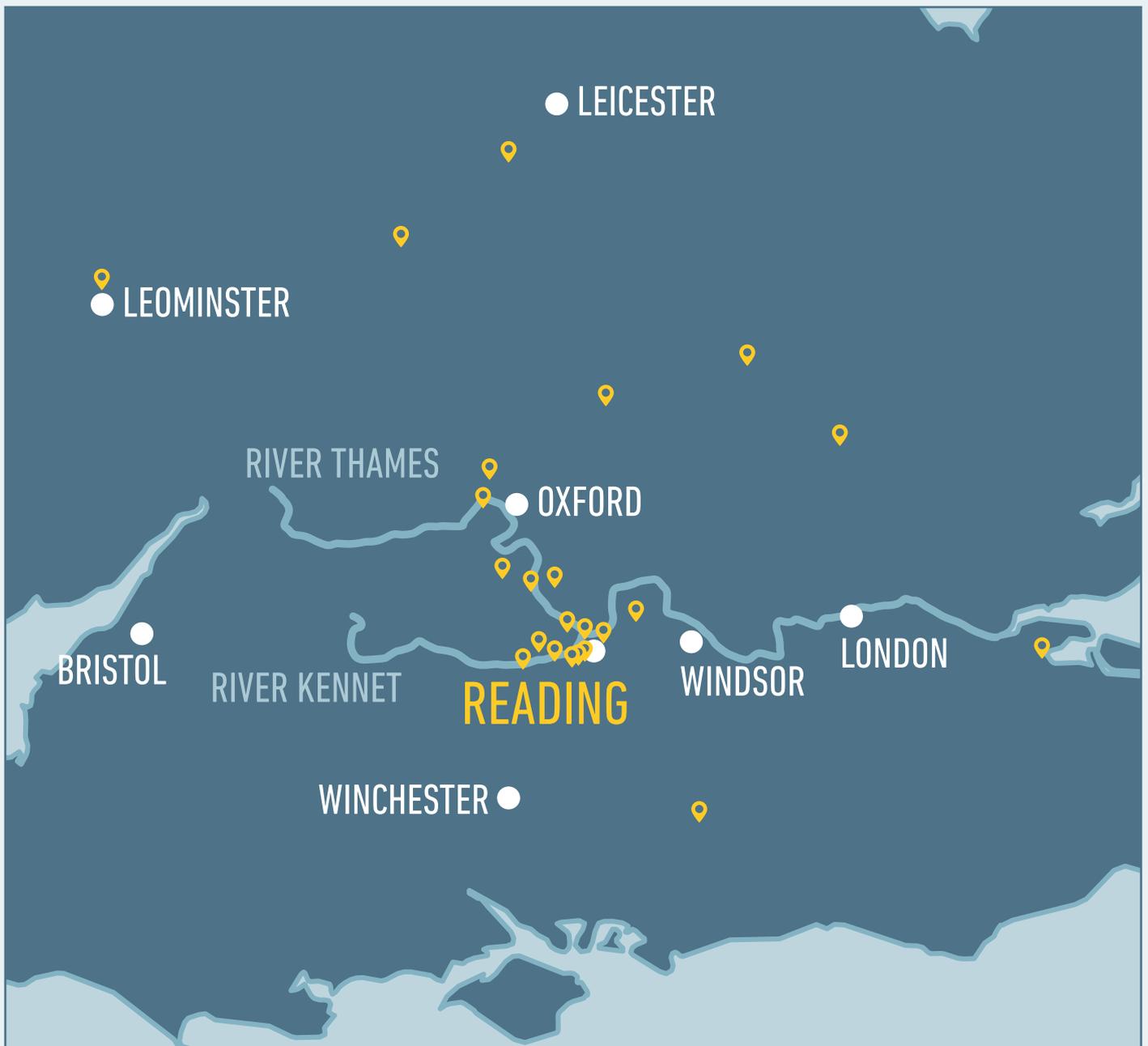
Who were the first monks?



For the first two years the abbey was run by a prior, who supervised the other monks. Prior Peter and seven of the monks came from Cluny Abbey, in France. Others came from the Cluniac monastery at Lewes in Sussex.



In 1123, Peter returned to Cluny, and Hugh, prior of the Lewes monastery, came to Reading and governed the abbey as abbot, independent of Cluny. Hugh was a widely respected scholar, and gave Henry's new foundation even greater status.



The map shows the location of lands owned by the abbey across South East England and the Midlands.

The abbey was granted land all over England. Most was in Berkshire but there was also property in Herefordshire, Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Bedfordshire, Oxfordshire, Sussex and Kent. Reading Abbey also had a priory on the Isle of May in the North Sea off the east coast of Scotland.

Henry announced plans for the abbey in 1121, and the first monks arrived shortly afterwards. A few years later, in 1125, Henry issued a formal charter, confirming the abbey's status. The charter has been translated from Latin.

Henry, by the Grace of God, King of England and Duke of the Normans, to his Archbishops, Bishops, Abbots, Earls and Barons, and to all Christian people, present as well as to come, Greeting:

Know ye that three Abbeys in the Kingdom of England, namely Reading, Cholsey and Leominster, have been destroyed on account of their sins, and that for a long time they have been held by laymen, and their lands and possessions alienated.

I, therefore, by the advice of my Bishops and other faithful subjects, have, for the salvation of my soul and of King William my father, of King William my brother, and of William my son, and of Queen Matilda my mother, and of Queen Matilda my wife, and of all my ancestors and successors, built a new monastery at Reading, in honour and in the name of the ever Virgin Mary Mother of God, and of St. John the Evangelist, and have endowed it with the aforesaid Reading, Cholsey and Leominster, with their appurtenances, woods, fields, pastures, meadows and rivers, with their mills and fisheries, with their churches also, and chapels, cemeteries, oblations and tithes, and with a mint and one moneyer at Reading.

I have also granted to the said monastery Thatcham and the Church of Wargrave, to be held as freely and fully by the Abbot and Monks as when they were in my own hands...

And the Abbot and Monks may have entire jurisdiction in cases of assault, thefts and murders, shedding of blood and breaches of the peace, in the same manner as belongs to the royal authority, and of all transgressions. But if the Abbot and Monks shall at any time fail to do justice, the King may compel them, provided that he does not diminish the privileges of the Church of Reading...

We have also ordained, through the foresight of our power in the Church and as King, that at the death of the Abbot of Reading all the possessions of the monastery, wheresoever situated, shall remain free and entire, with all rights and customs, in the hands, and at the disposal, of the prior and monks of the chapter of Reading. This we so ordain and appoint to be observed for ever, inasmuch as the Abbot of Reading has no rents for his own use, but enjoys them in common with his brethren. Whoever shall, by the will of God, and by canonical election, be made Abbot, let him not misuse and bestow the alms of the monastery on his lay kindred, or on other persons, but use them for the entertainment of the poor, of pilgrims or of guests...

I grant and confirm for ever to this monastery of Reading, and to whatever belongs to it, these liberties and immunities, which I commend in God's name to all Kings of England who shall reign after me to keep, so that God may preserve them for ever.

If any person shall wittingly presume to infringe, diminish, or alter this our decree, may the great Judge of all punish and root him out with his posterity, so that he may be left without inheritance in misery and hunger. But whosoever shall preserve the above-mentioned liberties and possessions to the monastery of Reading, may the Most High, Who ruleth over the kingdoms of men, confirm to him all good things, and preserve him for ever.

As decreed by Henry II in 1125.

Witnessed by

Henry, *King of the English and Duke of the Normans*

Adeleidis, *the Queen*

John, *Cardinal priest and Papal Legate*

William, *Archbishop of Canterbury*

Anselm, *Abbot of Bury St. Edmunds*

Warner, *Abbot of Battle*

Boso, *Abbot of Bec*

Gilbert, *Abbot of Seéz*

Richard, *Abbot of Mont St. Michel*

Robert, *Earl of Gloucester*

Turstan, *Archbishop of York*

Geoffrey, *Archbishop of Rouen*

William, *Bishop of Winchester*

William, *Bishop of Exeter*

Bernard, *Bishop of St. David's*

Gyfred, *Bishop of Chichester*

Symon, *Bishop of Worcester*

John, *Bishop of Lisieux*

Odo, *Bishop of Evreux*

Turgis, *Bishop of Avranches*

William, *Earl of Surrey*

Roger, *Earl of Warwick*

Stephen, *Count of Aumarle*

William de Tancarville, *Chamberlain*

Brien fitz Count, *of Wallingford*

Hunfrid de Buhun

Robert de Haia

William fitz Oddo

Hugh Bigot