

BULLETIN



SUMMER 2014

BRITISH PROVINCE OF CARMELITES

OUR LADY OF THE ASSUMPTION

48 No.2

Carmelites Plan a New Foundation!

In the royal Wardrobe Accounts for the 29th year of the reign of King Edward I, whilst the king was in Northampton, there is an interesting entry on 4 January 1301 which reads:

"To brothers Richard of Winchester and Walter Marshall of the Order of Brothers of Mount Carmel going to the Holy Land, from the gift and alms of the Queen [Margaret] to help with their expenses during their travel there, by the hand of the said Richard, at Northampton on 4 January, 5s."

Five shillings or 25p. might not sound very much by our present-day standards and would not get us very far nowadays. However, in the 1300's, one day's pittance or the amount needed to feed and maintain a friar was set at 4d. This is a very useful fact in medieval history as it means that when the king gives alms to one of our Carmelite houses, we can calculate the size of the community. So, for example, whilst the king was staying in Northampton, he gave three days' pittance amounting to 26s. to the Carmelite community there to celebrate the three days before the feast, 21, 22 & 23 December 1301. At a level of 4d. per day, each friar was given 1s. for the three days, and hence the community had a total of 26 friars. So the gift of 5s. from the queen to Richard and Walter to help with their journey to the Holy Land would cover their provisions for just over seven days. Not a great amount but useful.

However, a month later whilst the king was in Nettleham near Lincoln, there is a second entry in the Wardrobe Accounts, dated 9 Feb. 1301, which reads:

"To brother Richard of Winchester and his eleven companions, brothers of the Order of the Brothers of Mount Carmel going to the Holy Land, from the gift and alms of the King to help with their expenses on their journey there, by the hand of the said Richard at Nettleham, 9th day of February 10 marks [£6 13s. 4d.]".

Although brother Walter Marshall is not explicitly mentioned in this second entry, it seems safe to assume that he was one of Richard's eleven unnamed companions. The king's grant of 10 marks is more generous than the queen's but it would only have covered the provisions of the enlarged party for just over 33 days.

Where Richard's new companions have come from we do not know but the increase in the numbers in the party would seem to imply that something serious was being planned. Interestingly the two entries in the Wardrobe Accounts only mention the expenses being incurred on the journey out to the Holy Land. Nothing is stated about any return journey. One possibility therefore is that this party of twelve Carmelites was planning to make a foundation in the Holy Land, probably on Mount Carmel. Such a project was rather optimistic as it was only a decade before that the Moslem forces had re-conquered the Holy Land and expelled the remaining crusader forces. Acre itself fell in 1291.

The Franciscans, who had taken refuge in Cyprus, were seeking to return to the Holy Land but it was not until the years after 1322 that they were able to serve at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and to establish a community in the city. Likewise, the Carmelites were eager to return to Mount Carmel and interestingly the Constitutions promulgated by the general chapter held in Bordeaux in 1294 state that:

“The prior general or his vicar shall collect together the books from the Holy Land which have been dispersed around the various provinces so that, when the Holy Land comes once more into the hands of the Christians, these books can be returned to the Holy Land.”

Unfortunately, the fate of our party of twelve English Carmelites and what happened to them remains unknown. So far no other references to them have been found in the surviving records.

Richard Copsy