

## THE ONLY ENGLISH POPE - ADRIAN IV

To be born in England at the beginning of the 12th century was to be born at an exciting time. A whole generation had passed since the Normans had arrived. Henry was secure on the throne, especially following the defeat of his elder brother in Normandy in 1106. The king began to reorganise the finances of the country, with an Exchequer to oversee the correct collection of the king's revenue. To this Exchequer, all the sheriffs of England had to attend twice each year to give an account of their stewardship. The sheriff for the counties of Surrey, Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire was Gilbert the Norman, and he soon made a name for himself in answering without fear all the searching questions when his accounts were examined at the audit. By 1116, Gilbert, founder of Merton Priory, had become the senior sheriff in England<sup>i</sup>, and well known to those in power.

The famous persons of the new generation, as well as the only English pope, included Guy of Merton (teacher); John of Escures, bishop of Rochester, Ailwin, first abbot of Holyrood Abbey, Edinburgh; Thomas Becket; Robert of Merton, his confessor; and John of Salisbury, later bishop of Chartres. All these persons had close connections with Merton Priory, and the last three were present in Canterbury Cathedral on the fateful day in 1170.

One of the clerks in the king's chamber early in the 12th century was a man named Robert de Camera, who lived at Bedmond near Abbots Langley, Hertfordshire, and had a son named Nicholas, born about 1105. Robert gave up his position in the king's chamber and became a monk at St Albans Abbey, with the consent of Nicholas's mother. It was probably at this time that Nicholas was sent to Merton Priory for his early education. The priory attracted scholars from its beginning, for among the first canons was a famous Master Guy, of great reputation for his direction of schools<sup>ii</sup>.

Later Nicholas desired to follow his father and become a monk at St Albans, but the abbot, Richard d' Aubigny (d. 1119), is said to have told him, "Wait, my son, and go to school a little longer till you are better qualified"<sup>iii</sup>. William de Newburgh says that Nicholas left England when he was growing up<sup>iv</sup>, probably around 1120.

Nicholas distinguished himself at Paris<sup>v</sup>. He then served at the church of St James, Melgeil (diocese of Maguelonne), in northern France. This church belonged to the Augustinian abbey of St Rufus, Avignon, where Nicholas took holy orders and became a canon, adopting the Latin name Hastifragus or Breakspeare.

In 1125 Gilbert the Sheriff died, and a friend, John of Escures, bishop of Rochester, came to Merton to officiate at the founder's funeral. In 1134 Robert Pulleyn was made archdeacon of Rochester. Pulleyn had taught at Paris and knew Nicholas when he became a canon of St Rufus. It may have been at the recommendation of these dignitaries at Rochester that Nicholas soon became prior, and finally, in 1137, abbot of St Rufus<sup>vi</sup>.

Robert Pulleyn was elected to be the first English cardinal and chancellor of the Holy Roman Church (1144-47). In September 1146 Pope Eugenius III journeyed to France and met Nicholas. In the following year the pope addressed a bull to the abbot of St Rufus conferring a privilege on his monastery<sup>vii</sup>. In November 1149 Nicholas was invited by the pope to take up residence in Rome and nominated bishop of Albano on 3 December, making him the second English cardinal.

From 1152 to 1154 he acted as papal legate in Scandinavia to great esteem. On 3 December 1154 Pope Anastasius IV died, and on the following day Nicholas was unanimously elected Pope. On Sunday 5 December he was enthroned and crowned at St Peter's as Adrian IV - *Pontifex natione Anglicus*. Adrian was not only the first English pope, but he was an Augustinian canon, and not a Benedictine monk as were most of his predecessors as pope. Pope Adrian was tough, fearless, clear-sighted, full of energy, with an iron will.

In England in 1154 Henry II was newly crowned. He immediately sent John of Salisbury to Rome as his ambassador, and sought permission "to civilise the Irish people and bring them to Rome"<sup>viii</sup>. John and the pope became firm friends, with John becoming virtually the pope's confessor. About 1157 John wrote to the pope on behalf of the canons of Merton, and concluded, "May it profit the brethren of Merton that, when you were in the church of St Rufus, their odour of sweetness reached even to you, as your highness used to tell me, your servant, when we talked together"<sup>ix</sup>.

i Following the death of Hugh de Buckland who had been sheriff from Rufus's time, and sheriff of eight counties. In 1116 Gilbert had been sheriff for 11 years.

ii M L Colker 'The Life of Guy of Merton' in *Mediaeval Studies* XXXI (1969) p252

iii A Kippis *Biographica Britannica* 1778 vol 1

iv Chron. & Memorials *Historia Rerum Anglicarum of William de Newburgh* vol 1 'adolescentiam ingressus'

v D Knowles in an article in *The Month* vol 21 (1959) p89

vi *ibid*

vii R L Poole 'The Early Lives of Robert Pullen and Nicholas Breakspeare' in *Essays in Medieval History to T F Tout* (ed. A G Little and F M Powicke) 1925 p67

viii John of Salisbury *Polyeraticus* Lib. vi and viii

ix W J Millor, H E Butler and C N L Brooke (eds) *Letters of John of Salisbury* vol 1 (1986) No 50 pp87-8. When they "talked together" may have been in the winter of 1150/1 when John and Nicholas (then a cardinal) were together at the Curia at Ferentino. The canons of Merton "illumine our island by the light of their good works ... and serve the welfare of their neighbours with all their might".