

## LIONEL GREEN tells the story of TOOTING BEC

Following the Norman Conquest, William granted the manor of Tooting to a relation, Richard FitzGilbert de Brionne (d.1090), founder of the family of Clare. He was also given 37 other manors in Surrey. The Conqueror probably made the grants to safeguard defences south-west of London, and the name Tooting may refer to this – i.e. a look-out.

The barons who acquired so much of the conquered land were connected by blood and interest with the country from which they came, and it was natural that they should wish to share their wealth with the religious back home. Richard de Brionne offered the manor of Tooting and the church of Streatham to the abbey of Bec-Hellouin in Normandy before 1086.<sup>1</sup> Bec was founded by a monk, Helluin, in 1034, and its fame began with the school opened by Lanfranc in 1045 and continued by Anselm in 1066. It was the most important monastic educational centre in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, sharing its reputation with cathedral schools such as Laon, Orléans and Paris. Bec was constantly called upon to send out monks to other communities, and in a few decades the Norman plantation from Bec produced a large number of minute dependencies scattered over the whole of England.<sup>2</sup>

At the Domesday survey Richard was holding 11 hides in Tooting and five hides in Streatham.<sup>3</sup> When English property came into the possession of Norman abbeys, the monks built cells in England to guard their rights and collect revenues. These became known as ‘alien’ priories, of which Tooting was one.<sup>4</sup> In reality it was a priory only in name, and at best it was only a grange. It never consisted of more than a prior with a companion or two. They would have been Frenchmen, as the very object of their presence tended to exclude English subjects. There were about 140 alien<sup>5</sup> priories, and the loss of revenue during wars with France led the English kings to acts of confiscation.

In 1228 the abbot of Bec demanded a perambulation to settle Tooting’s boundaries, disputed by a certain William, who held land in Mitcham.<sup>6</sup>

Monastic houses in England collected manorial ameracements (fines, dues etc.) and accounted for them at the Exchequer without formality when the relevant royal charter was produced. Henry III changed the practice in 1234 in order to raise money. The right was made dependent upon “express mention” of such a grant in a royal charter. This meant obtaining new charters, with attendant costs. In 1252 Merton Priory and Bec Abbey obtained necessary new charters.<sup>7</sup>

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century the abbot of Bec set up gallows in his manor of Tooting.<sup>8</sup> It was also in the 13<sup>th</sup> century that the fortunes of Bec began to decline.

Bec’s chief priory or cell in England was at Ogbourne St George, Wiltshire, and the prior was known as the abbot’s proctor. In 1291 the temporalities of “Ogbourne in Streatham” was rated at £3 8s 8d (£3.43), which may have been the equivalent of the knight’s fee in Tooting and Streatham. In 1322 Bec claimed the spiritualities of Tooting chapel and Streatham, and tithes from the demesne lands in Tooting, together with two-thirds of the tithes from tenants’ land. It also received 20 shillings (£1) pension from Streatham.<sup>9</sup> Also in 1322 Bec began to give up holdings in England, leasing out as much as possible. The manor of Tooting was leased in 1323 to William Roce, before 1347 to Henry Ingleby, before 1359 to Sir David Wollore.<sup>10</sup>

William Roce of Tooting was the son of Richard Roce or Rouce, the bailiff of the manor of Preston, West Sussex, in 1308, and later bailiff or farmer of Tooting.<sup>11</sup> In 1312-14 Richard took a lease of ten acres of demesne land and two acres of demesne pasture.<sup>12</sup> As early as 1321 his son William had business dealings with the abbot of Bec.<sup>13</sup> In 1323 he received the manor of Tooting on a lease for nine years, paying 20 marks (£13.33) a year.<sup>14</sup> In 1339 he became Knight of the Shire for Surrey.<sup>15</sup>

Tooting Bec was probably now managed from Ogbourne. In 1337, the beginning of the Hundred Years’ War led to the seizure of many alien priories, including Ogbourne in 1394. The prior demised the properties of Tooting Bec to Merton Priory “who already held land in the parish”, and the income was appropriated to the cellarer of Merton.<sup>16</sup> Thus from 13 December 1394 until April 1422 Merton Priory leased the manor from Bec Abbey, managing the Bec estates and presiding over the manorial courts at the priory.<sup>17</sup>

Tooting Bec cell was dissolved in 1425, and in 1441 Henry VI declared it alien, using the property for endowing Eton College. In 1465 Edward IV gave ‘Bec priory’ and the advowson of Streatham church to the fraternity of the chapel of St Mary at All Hallows church by the Tower of London. He also gave them a part of the priory of Ogbourne St George, “both priors alien”.<sup>18</sup> The holdings of both disappeared under the Suppression of Chantries in 1548.<sup>19</sup>

In the late 1440s a Thomas Bent lived in a moated house which may have been the site of the cell. It became known as Bente.

- 1 *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 59 (1962) p.1
- 2 M Chibnall *The English Lands of the Abbey of Bec* (1946) pp.9-10
- 3 J Morris (trans. and ed.) *Domesday Book: Surrey* Phillimore, Chichester (1975) 19: 10,11
- 4 Tooting Bec occupied Upper Tooting, and the remaining part of the (lower) parish is called Tooting Graveney, a small part of which was owned by Merton Priory.
- 5 The Greek word for aliens was *paroikia*, used to describe the early Christians who had to abstain from 'native customs'. It is from this word that the English *parish* is derived.
- 6 *Victoria County History of Surrey* vol. iv p.94
- 7 Close Rolls Henry III Vol.ix (1254-56) p.83; C/60/51 m9; E/368/29 m3; E/368/26 m9<sup>d</sup> ; Calendar of Charter Rolls Vol I (1226-57), pp.381/2, 431
- 8 A Heales *Records of Merton Priory* 1898 p.135
- 9 M Chibnall *op.cit.* p.149
- 10 Exchequer Kings Remembrancer E106 8/16; Calendar of Patent Rolls Edw.III Vol. vii (1345-48) p.228; Close Rolls Edw.III (1354-60) pp.625-6
- 11 M Chibnall *op.cit.* pp.55,66,116
- 12 Tooting Court Rolls (LCC 1909) pp.247-9
- 13 Close Rolls Edw.II Vol.iii (1318-23) p.484
- 14 M Chibnall *op.cit.* p.116
- 15 *Victoria County History of Surrey* vol. i p.433
- 16 *ibid.* vol. iv p.94
- 17 *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 59 (1962) p.1. Tooting Court Rolls (LCC 1909). A new series of court rolls commenced on 13 December 1394 under prior Robert Windsor, to April 1403; Michael Kympton from October 1403 to October 1412; John de Romenev from May 1413 to April 1422.
- 18 J Stow *Survey of London* (1603) (Ed. Kingsford 1908) vol. i p.131
- 19 Under the Chantries Act 37 Henry VIII c4. The king died on 28 January 1547, and Lord Protector Somerset expedited the suppression of chantries in 1548 under Edward VI, in order to raise money for the crown.