

**LIONEL GREEN tells the strange story (which has Merton connections) of
THE ARCHBISHOPRIC OF YORK 1139-1154**

Thurstan was a successful and energetic archbishop who had welcomed the Cistercians to Yorkshire at Rievaulx and Fountains in 1132. After serving for a quarter of a century he wished to resign in 1139, and had in mind to stand down in favour of his brother Ewan, bishop of Evreux. Thurstan sent Richard, the second abbot of Fountains, to Rome to attend the second Lateran Council and to obtain from Innocent II permission for Ewan's election to the primacy.

Ewan was a good and popular choice, as he was "ranked amongst the most learned men of his day".¹ He had been a favourite of Henry I, and at his death accompanied the king's body from Normandy to Reading in December 1135.

Ewan the elect came to Merton to await the decision of the pope, and took the habit of a canon of Merton, but died on 2 July 1139 "in the college of the canons of Merton where he was buried".² England was denied the services of an eminent man as archbishop of York. Seven months later, on 6 February 1140, Thurstan also died, and this is the story of how the Church suffered to find a suitable successor. Although "a small beginning, the strife came to involve almost every person of importance in England, and many on the continent, and lasted in its ramifications for some twenty years".³

Waldef prior of Kirkham (Augustinian) was a favoured candidate but was vetoed by king Stephen on political grounds, as he was a stepson of king David of Scotland.⁴ Henry de Sully, abbot of Fécamp, was then put forward with the support of the pope's legate Henry of Winchester, but Sully was reluctant to leave his abbey, and Innocent II refused to allow him to hold two offices.

The king wished to put forward his nephew William Fitzherbert, treasurer of York, "an amiable and generous person, though unused to exertion of any kind".⁵ A majority elected him archbishop in January 1141, but the leaders of the newly founded Cistercian houses, who had a programme of reform, were not prepared to co-operate unreservedly with king Stephen or his brother Henry of Winchester, the pope's legate. The priors of Augustinian monasteries in the north also resisted the decision. Robert Biseth, prior of Hexham, was so disgusted that he resigned office and proceeded to Clairvaux to become a novice there.⁶ Fitzherbert went to the king at Lincoln for confirmation of the temporalities (lay possessions) of his see, but on 2 February 1141 Stephen was taken prisoner at the battle of Lincoln. All turned to the pope for directions, but Bernard of Clairvaux wrote to him supporting the minority view. The pope refused Fitzherbert the pallium⁷ and requested all to appear before him on 7 March 1143. The matter was referred to Henry of Winchester and Robert of Hereford as judge-delegates. This resulted in William Fitzherbert being consecrated archbishop on 26 September 1143. Two days previously Innocent II had died at Rome, and the legateship of Henry of Winchester expired at that date. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote to the new pope Celestine II criticising Henry of Winchester, suggesting that the bishop's protégé, the archbishop of York, was an idol set up in the temple of God,⁸ and "an incubus upon the Church, twice intruded into the see, once by the king, now by the legate".⁹ William could not exercise full jurisdiction without receiving the pallium, and Celestine died within six months on 8 March 1144. His successor Lucius II was favourable towards Henry of Winchester but did not renew his legateship. He dispatched Imar of Tusculum to England bearing the pallium for William. When he arrived in England, Lucius had died on 15 February 1145, and the legate returned to Rome with the pallium for further instructions.

William proceeded to Rome to ask for the pallium, but Eugenius III, the new pope, decided to suspend him for a time. William was disgusted and decided to join the court of his kinsman Roger, king of Sicily.

Early in 1147 the pope issued letters authorising a fresh election on 24 July. King Stephen, having been denied his choice, nominated a clerk on the staff of Henry, bishop of Winchester. This was Hilary, who had probably studied under Abelard, and was dean of the college of priests at Christchurch (Twytenham), Hampshire.

Another candidate was Henry Murdac, the third abbot of Fountains. Both candidates went to Rome, where Eugenius decided in favour of Murdac. The pope consecrated Hilary as bishop of Chichester on 3 August 1147, and Murdac as archbishop on 7 December.

At the Council of Rheims in March 1148 William Fitzherbert was once more declared to be deposed. He returned to England, and stayed with his uncle Henry of Winchester.

Hilary, still dean of Christchurch, in 1149 introduced canons from Merton priory for the college to become an Augustinian priory, the eighth daughter house of Merton.

Bernard of Clairvaux died on 20 August 1153 and the northern province became vacant once more on 14 October 1153 when Murdac died.

William Fitzherbert set out once more for Rome. The pope, now Anastasius IV, was friendly and felt that his appointment would simplify matters both at Rome and in England. William was duly elected archbishop again, and returned to York in May 1154 to claim his seat. We will never know if he would have been an ideal choice, as he died on 8 June 1154, some suggesting that he was poisoned.

The saga ends with a formal letter, written for archbishop Theobald of Canterbury by John of Salisbury, acquainting the new pope Adrian IV with the facts. Did Adrian, a child of the cloister at Merton, ever realise it began at Merton?

PS Miraculous cures were reported at William's tomb behind the high altar at York, and in 1227, after due enquiry, he was canonised by Honorius III.

1 *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis* (ed. and trans. M. Chibnall) 1969-80 vi 174/5;

2 *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis* (ed. and trans. F Forester) 1853-56 iv 29

3 D Knowles *The Historian and Character and other essays* CUP 1963 p.76; 4 *ibid.* p.80; 5 *ibid.* p.82; 6 *ibid.* p.81;

7 A woollen mantle with pendants front and back, the symbol of authority of a metropolitan; 8 Knowles *op.cit.* p.36; 9 *ibid.* p.87

THE WANDLE IN LITERATURE – an occasional series

3. Three weeks in the life of Leigh Hunt

In his good-humoured autobiography, of which the final version was published in the year of his death, the essayist, editor, journalist and poet Leigh Hunt (1784-1859) wrote of an idyllic summer holiday at Merton when he was a boy of 12 or 13, including a vivid encounter by the Wandle:

“My aunt¹ took a country-house at Merton,² in Surrey, where I passed three of the happiest weeks of my life. It was the custom of our school,³ in those days, to allow us only one set of unbroken holidays during the whole time we were there – I mean, holidays in which we remained away from school by night as well as by day. The period was always in August... I read, walked, had a garden and orchard to run in; and fields that I could have rolled in, to have my will of them.

“My father accompanied me to Wimbledon to see Horne Tooke,⁴ who patted me on the head...

“My cousins had the celebrated Dr Callcott⁵ for a music-master ... When he came down to Merton, he let me ride his horse. What days were those! Instead of being roused against my will by a bell, I jumped up with the lark, and strolled ‘out of bounds’ ...

“My strolls about the fields with a book were full of happiness: only my dress⁶ used to get me stared at by the villagers. Walking one day by the little River Wandle, I came upon one of the loveliest girls I ever beheld, standing in the water with bare legs, washing some linen. She turned as she was stooping, and showed a blooming oval face with blue eyes, on either side of which flowed a profusion of flaxen locks. With the exception of the colour of the hair, it was like Raphael's own head turned into a peasant girl's. The eyes were full of gentle astonishment at the sight of me; and mine must have wondered no less. However, I was prepared for such wonders. It was only one of my poetical visions realized, and I expected to find the world full of them. What she thought of my blue skirts and yellow stockings is not so clear. She did not however taunt me with my ‘petticoats’, as the girls in the streets of London would do, making me blush, as I thought they ought to have done instead. My beauty in the brook was too gentle and diffident; at least I thought so, and my own heart did not contradict me...

“I had no drawback on my felicity at Merton [except missing a friend, and a recurrence of fear of the dark] ... Samuel [his aunt's black footman] ... had his bed removed accordingly into my room. He used to entertain me at night with stories of Barbados and the Negroes; and in a few days I was reassured and happy.

“It was then ... that I fell in love with my cousin Fan... Fanny was a lass of fifteen, with little laughing eyes, and a mouth like a plum. I was then ... not more than thirteen, if so old... My cousin was about to be married to a handsome young fellow of three-and-twenty. I thought nothing of this, for nothing could be more innocent than my intentions... I thought everyone must love Fanny Dayrell... It was enough for me to be with her as long as I could; to gaze on her with delight as she floated hither and thither; and to sit on the stiles in the neighbouring fields ...”

Judith Goodman

1 Mrs Dayrell, whose home was in the West Indies

2 This was Spring House, an early 18th-century house on the north side of Kingston Road, almost opposite Church Lane. It survived until the 1930s, when it was replaced by a block of flats of the same name. John Wallace's *Spring House* (1996) is a detailed history of buildings and occupants. The previous occupant had been London bookseller James Lackington [see *Bulletin* 149].

3 Hunt was a pupil at Christ's Hospital, then in Newgate Street. He entered in 1791.

4 John Horne Tooke (1736-1812) was a radical politician, who at the time of Hunt's visit, was living at Chester House, Common West Side, Wimbledon. The house survives, and bears a plaque commemorating his residence there. Horne Tooke was also the author of *Diversions of Purley*

5 John Wall Callcott (1766-1821). He was a composer of glees. In 1787 he submitted 100 entries for the annual competition of the Noblemen and Gentlemen's Catch Club. His *Musical Grammar* appeared in 1806.

6 The school was also known as the Bluecoat School, as the boys wore (and still do) long blue coats and yellow stockings.

Letters and contributions for the Bulletin should be sent to the Hon. Editor. The views expressed in this Bulletin are those of the contributors concerned and not necessarily those of the Society or its Officers.