



Among the photographs in Jeanie White's scrapbook was this view of the Merton and Morden Historical Society's float in the 1953 Coronation Carnival. According to the report in the local paper: "It depicted the Coronation of King Henry the Third and Queen Eleanor, which took place some 700 years ago, actually within the borders of Merton and Morden.

"The Historical Society made quite a pageant of it. There were black-robed monks, bishops, men-at-arms, and the King and Queen on the Throne, all correct costumes of the early Plantagenet period."

Lionel Green, our Vice President, who was one of the "black-robed monks" or Canons of Merton Priory, has also given us some more photographs of the event, including the one below. Lionel is the Canon circled at the back left of the photograph. King Henry III was Norman Black, who is still a member of the Society, though he now lives in Sussex.



## THE CORONATION OF QUEEN ELEANOR

The suggestion that the coronation of Eleanor of Provence, Queen to Henry III, took place at Merton seems to have originated from a misinterpretation of a comment in Alfred Heales' book, *The Records of Merton Priory*, published in 1898. On page 98, Heales' entry for January 20th 1236 reads "King Henry III was married to Eleanor, daughter of Raymund, Count of Provence. When the nuptial ceremonies and festivities were concluded, the King went to Merton."

His next entry, for January 23rd 1236, reads "In these days, King Henry III, for the salvation of his own soul and that of the Queen, and that God might crown a happy beginning by a fortunate end, by giving him a fruitful offspring, at a Council held at Merton, granted and established some good new laws, and ordered them to be forever inviolably observed throughout his kingdom.... The Parliament referred to was held at Merton on Wednesday the morrow after the feast of St. Vincent, in the twentieth year of his reign, at which there were present William, Archbishop of Canterbury, and other his Bishops and Suffragans, and the greater part of the Earls and Barons of England, being there assembled for the Coronation of the King and his Queen Eleanor."

Heales quotes Matthew Paris as one of his sources. When one looks at Matthew Paris's *Chronicles* one realises that, although the Parliament that passed the so called Statute of Merton was held at Merton after the Coronation, the Coronation itself was held at Westminster, not at Merton.

Matthew Paris, a monk of St. Albans from 1217 to 1259, writes at length about the events surrounding the marriage. The following extracts are from *Chronicles of the Age of Chivalry* edited by Elizabeth Hallam (1987).

"On arriving at the borders of France, Eleanor of Provence and her escort ... embarked at the port of Wisant, and had an unexpectedly quick crossing under full sail to the port of Dover. The landing went well, and they hastened to Canterbury, where the king rushed out to embrace the envoys on their arrival.

"Having seen Eleanor and welcomed her, he married her there in Canterbury. On 14th January (1236) Edmund, archbishop of Canterbury, together with the bishops who had accompanied Eleanor of Provence, and other lords, nobles and prelates, performed the marriage ceremony.

"On 19th January, King Henry III came to Westminster, and on the following day, a Sunday, at a ceremony of unparalleled splendour at which the king wore his crown, Eleanor of Provence was crowned queen.

"Such a throng of noble lords and ladies, so many religious, such a multitude of the common people and such a motley swarm of strolling players gathered by invitation at the wedding feast that the city of London could scarcely contain them. The whole place was decked with silks and banners, crowns and draperies, lights and torches, and with some amazing devices and contrivances.

"On that day too the citizens set out from the city of Westminster to discharge the service that belonged to them by ancient right - that of butler to the king at his coronation...

"The royal trumpeters led the way, sounding their trumpets - an amazing sight, rousing wonder and admiration in the beholders.

"The archbishop of Canterbury, by his special right, solemnly performed the coronation rite, assisted by the bishop of London as deacon, with the other bishops placed according to their rank, as were all the abbots.

"Magnates performed the coronation services which were theirs by ancient custom and right. The lord marshal of England, Richard of Clare, earl of Pembroke, carried a rod before the king, clearing the way in the church and the hall, and organizing the royal banquet and guests."

Matthew Paris is not the only source. *The Red Book of the Exchequer* (pp.755-60) also includes a full account of "the coronation of Eleanor, daughter of the Count of Provence, at Westminster."

There seems no doubt that the coronation did not, alas, take place at Merton.

Peter Hopkins

**PETER HOPKINS has discovered more evidence relating to**

## **THE CORONATION OF QUEEN ELEANOR**

In June 1996 I contributed an article to *Bulletin* 118 about the coronation of Queen Eleanor of Provence, wife of Henry III, where I cited evidence from Matthew Paris's *Chronicles* and from *The Red Book of the Exchequer*, showing that the coronation took place at Westminster and not at Merton as had so often been claimed. What I failed to notice at that time was that these two sources differed as to the date of the coronation. Matthew Paris gave Sunday 20 January 1236, the wedding having taken place at Canterbury on 14 January, whereas *The Red Book* said the coronation was on 'the Sunday before the Purification', which would have been Sunday 27 January. Both were written by contemporaries of the events, Matthew Paris being a monk at St Albans 1217-1259, with access to many documents, while *The Red Book* was compiled by a clerk who died in 1246.

Lionel Green accepted the later date in his article on the Statute of Merton in *Bulletin* 138 (June 2001), placing the wedding at Canterbury on 20 January, so that the Council at Merton fell between these two events. He suggested that the coronation was delayed due to flooding at Westminster, citing John Stow's 1598 *Survey of London*. However, I recently came across the published edition of *The Close Rolls of Henry III* on Internet Archive. Every entry on the Close Rolls gives the date and place it was executed, so I decided to check where Henry was on these various dates. Henry was at Reading until 10 January, at Rochester on 13 January, and at Canterbury on 14 and 15 January, just as Matthew Paris says. On 18 January he was back at Rochester, and on 20 January he was at Westminster, again just as Matthew Paris said. But the second entry on the Close Rolls for 20 January begins: '*Sciatis quod ad petitionem dilecti nobis A. regine nostre, die coronationis nostre et sue...*', which I hope translates as: 'Know that at the petition of our beloved Alionore our queen on the day of our coronation and hers'. Also on Internet Archive are Thomas Rymer's 16 volumes of *Foedera*, published between 1704 and 1713; a transcription of 'all the leagues, treaties, alliances, capitulations, and confederacies, which have at any time been made between the Crown of England and any other kingdoms, princes and states'. One document in volume I is Henry III's letter to the bishop of Auxerre in 1236, informing him that he had married Eleanor 'on the Monday the morrow of the octave of Epiphany' at Canterbury, and that she was crowned at Westminster on the following Sunday (*Dominica sequenti*). Epiphany is 6 January (Twelfth Night) so the octave was 13 January, and the morrow the following day, 14 January, which in 1236 was a Monday. The following Sunday was 20 January, the date given in Matthew Paris's *Chronicles* and in the Close Rolls.

So Matthew Paris was right all along. The wedding was at Canterbury on 14 January, the coronation at Westminster on 20 January, and then the nobles and prelates headed to Merton for the great Council which agreed the Statute of Merton on Wednesday 23 January. The Statute, which is more correctly entitled the Provisions of Merton, begins: 'It was Provided in the Court of our Lord the King, holden at Merton on Wednesday the Morrow after the Feast of St Vincent, the 20<sup>th</sup> year of the Reign of King Henry the Son of King John, before William Archbishop of Canterbury, and other his Bishops and Suffragans and before the greater part of the Earls and Barons of England there being assembled, for the Coronation of the said King, and Helianor the Queen, about which they were all called; where it was treated for the Commonwealth of the Realm upon the Articles underwritten ...'. It is easy to understand that people have interpreted this as meaning that the coronation took place at Merton, but the phrase 'there being assembled for the Coronation ... about which they were all called', only means that the nobles who had been summoned to the coronation at Westminster moved on to Merton straight afterwards. The Close Rolls show that Henry was at Merton from Monday 21 January to 28 January, and at Guildford by 30 January.

*Matthew Paris's sketch of Henry III and Eleanor in the margin of his chronicle, from BL Royal 14 C. vii*

Matthew Paris mentions the flooding immediately after his detailed description of the coronation, before he discusses the Council at Merton, but he dates the Westminster flood to February: 'About the same time, for two months and more, namely, in January, February, and part of March, such deluges of rain fell as had never been seen before in the memory of any one. About the feast of St Scholastica [10 February], when the moon was new, the sea became so swollen by the river torrents which fell into it, that all the rivers, especially those which fell into the sea, rendered the fords impassable, overflowing their banks, hiding the bridges from sight, carrying away mills and dams, and overwhelming the cultivated lands, crops, meadows, and marshes. Amongst other unusual occurrences, the river Thames overflowed its usual bounds, and entered the grand palace at Westminster, where it spread and covered the whole area, so that small boats could float there, and people went to their apartments on horseback. The water also forcing its way into the cellars could with difficulty be drained off.' [*Matthew Paris's English History* trans. J A Giles I (London: Bohn 1852) pp.10-11]