

## **LIONEL GREEN, in another chapter in the story of Merton priory, looks at the influence of a powerful man: ROGER OF SALISBURY AND THE AUGUSTINIANS**

Prince Henry, the younger brother of William Rufus, entered a chapel near Caen in Normandy with a party of knights. The priest was commencing mass, but on considering the rank of his congregation and the impatience of youth (Henry was about 22), he performed the service with accommodating rapidity in the Latin tongue so that he finished before his hearers suspected that he had reached the moment of consecration. The gathering declared that “no better chaplain could be found for men whose profession was arms”,<sup>1</sup> and Henry took him into his service as a chaplain.

The priest’s name was Roger and on his succession in 1100, Henry admitted him to the highest office of the state as Chancellor. Two years later he was appointed bishop of Salisbury, and about 1108 he became Justiciar. Following Henry’s success in defeating his brother at Tinchebrai, Normandy, in 1106, the king started to reorganise the governments on both sides of the Channel. The youthful knights who had followed him were used with advantage when he required clerks in his chancery and “new men” as sheriffs in the counties. In 1106 Henry appointed Gilbert the Knight to be sheriff of Surrey, Cambridge and Huntingdon.

Recalling his earlier days at Caen, Roger rebuilt Old Sarum cathedral as a copy of the Abbaye aux Dames, and the stone used was fashioned at Caen and transported by ship and cart to Old Sarum. William of Malmesbury was inspired to say that it appeared to be carved out of a single stone. Roger “beautified it in such a manner that it yields to none in England, but surpasses many, so that he had just cause to say ‘Lord, I have loved the glory of thy house’”.<sup>2</sup> He also built the bishop’s palace and castle, each with its own hall, within the *enceinte* at Old Sarum.

Now “he was second only to the king” said Henry of Huntingdon,<sup>3</sup> and head of the royal administration. Most of the sheriffs were his nominees, and many his protégés.<sup>4</sup> He “acquired a most profound knowledge of the Exchequer, so much so that, as without doubt the rolls themselves made manifest, it flourished mightily under him ...”.<sup>5</sup>

His household included three sons, Roger le Poer, who became Chancellor to King Stephen, Azo of Ramsbury, dean of Salisbury and Ranulf le Poer, later sheriff of Gloucestershire. Nephews included Alexander who was adopted by Roger and appointed archdeacon of Salisbury in 1121, and bishop of Lincoln in 1123, and Nigel, who became bishop of Ely in 1133.

Roger was interested in the new order of Augustinian canons, and materially assisted many foundations. When the founder of Merton, Gilbert the sheriff, sought a royal charter confirming the priory’s rights and endowments in 1121 he approached Roger. The king was holding a Council, and Gilbert invited Prior Robert to accompany him to Winchester. The proposed charter gave the *ville* of Merton to the new foundation and included further liberties which shocked some legal advocates at the court, who were afraid to show it to the king. Gilbert and the prior also dreaded that the king might nullify the whole charter when it was read to him.

Gilbert’s friendship with Roger no doubt began at the Exchequer where Gilbert had become the most senior sheriff in the land and had no trouble in dealing with the grudging officials at the Treasury.

When the king saw the contents he complained that the text reserved no jurisdiction to himself and no provision for service to him. Roger argued that the king reserved everything to himself all the better when he gave freely to God. Henry finally confirmed the royal charter, which required Gilbert to pay 100 pounds of silver and six marks of gold. The church was retained “under the royal hand and protection, as though my own property”, which could be construed as meaning that Merton was a royal foundation. The charter was witnessed by the bishops and nobles of the land attending the Council, and included Alexander, Roger’s nephew, the newly appointed archdeacon of Salisbury. Roger himself confirmed the document with his ‘corroboration’. Subsequently Gilbert was able to use his skill by flattering the treasury collectors and easing the debt.

Roger went to the mountains of Wales to assist a few canons at Llanthony in the 1120s. He was impressed by their strict observance of the Augustinian Rule and urged the king to support them.

About 1123 Roger gave the church of St Sepulchre to St Bartholomew’s priory in London. In 1122 he was instrumental in founding a house for regular canons at St Frideswide, Oxford.<sup>6</sup> The king installed his chaplain Master Guimund as prior.

Roger supported Serlo, former dean of the Sarum cathedral chapter and canon of Merton priory, as the first prior of Cirencester abbey in 1131. He gave rich endowments but retained a life interest in the properties. He also encouraged the foundation of a daughter house of Cirencester at Bradenstoke in his own diocese. Serlo’s brother became the first prior.

1. "could say mass fitly for hunting men" William de Newburgh *Historia Rerum* (R.S.82) R Howlett 1885) I.c.6.
2. William of Malmesbury *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (trans. J A Giles) ii 484
3. Henry of Huntingdon *Historia Anglorum* (T Arnold 1879) v 245: *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* s.a. 1122 (Whitelock 1961) p251
4. W L Warren *Henry II* 1973 p15
5. Dialogus de Scaccaria (C Johnson et al 1950), quoted in *English Historical Documents* 1042-1189 II 1953
6. William of Malmesbury *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* (R.S.52) (N E S A Hamilton 1870) p316

## SURREY HISTORY CENTRE

The striking new Centre has replaced the cramped old Surrey County Record Office at County Hall in Kingston and the Guildford Muniment Room. For the staff the convenience of working in purpose-built premises must be a wonderful improvement, and for the public the space, comfort and lay-out should outweigh the relative remoteness (for Mertonians) of its location.

On 14 March our party converged on Woking, mostly by train, in rather miserable weather. After a friendly welcome we were divided into two groups, with meticulous head-counts for the sake of security, for our behind-the-scenes tour.



Once through the security door we first saw the Holding/Sorting Room, where on arrival any new item is assessed. The decision is taken whether or not to keep it. Duplicates are often passed to libraries, and material more appropriate to another record office is routed there. The intriguingly labelled Disaster Control Cabinet holds hard hats, boots, torches etc, so that staff can, properly equipped, rescue objects from the scene of fire, flood or other catastrophe. So far, apparently, the cabinet's contents have not been needed.

Things to be added to the collection are immediately given accession numbers and entered onto the computer. Then they have to be treated. Drying (unheated), cleaning and pest control are carried out at this stage. Any insects are killed by blast-freezing the clingwrapped item to -30°C, in two phases, to allow any eggs to hatch between freezing. Every page of a book or surface of a document is dusted with a soft brush, and a bottle-type brush is used for book-spines.

Packing is the next stage, in acid-free materials, such as transparent pockets and folders, and then special cardboard boxes, secured with archivally safe cotton tape - always tied at the side. Rust is very destructive, so brass is used for all fastenings.

Conservation and repair work goes on upstairs. Light-boxes and even a light-wall, big enough to accommodate a 12-foot map, are an important aid for this meticulous work. Starch paste, safe and removable, is used for repairs. Paper is mended with paper and Japanese tissue, in sandwich form; parchment is repaired with sheepskin; seals with beeswax and pigment.

Then, in the core of the building, we saw the two strongrooms, where temperature and humidity are at optimum levels for safe storage of paper, photographs, lantern slides, maps and so forth. The atmosphere is mainly an argon/nitrogen mix, with only 6% oxygen, which minimises oxidation but will support life if anyone is accidentally locked in.

Opening off the foyer at one end is the Heather D Hawker Room, where members of the public have access to computer screens, books, fiche- and film-readers and modern maps, including the 25" series, and can order items from the collection, for study. At the other end of the foyer is a smaller room used for themed exhibitions.

Many aspects of Surrey's history are referred to in the specially commissioned tapestry that hangs above the reception desk. In a reminder that the county is not and never has been just a back garden to London, it incorporates images from prehistory to the present time as diverse as Nonsuch and the Woking mosque, Roman roads and Brooklands motor-racing, Magna Carta and the worldwide web. Two glass panels designed by Martin Donlin explore other themes - texts, maps, the names of the hundreds, the plan of a Lutyens house and symbols from mythology.



This was a fascinating visit, conducted by informed and enthusiastic guides, and much appreciated by us all.

The Centre is at 130 Goldsworth Road, Woking GU21 1ND tel: 01483 594594, open Tuesday - Saturday. If you do not have a CARN card already you need to take identification with you. The staff are most welcoming and helpful.

JG