LIONEL GREEN on SEEKING SANCTUARY AT MERTON

Hubert de Burgh, of Norman-Irish descent, was appointed chamberlain to King John. If we believe Shakespeare's history of this king, de Burgh was castellan of Rouen and responsible for the death of Prince Arthur, grandson of Henry II, who was also a claimant to the throne of England.

His first marriage was to Joan, daughter of William de Redvers, earl of Devon, and his second in 1209 to Beatrice, a daughter of Earl Warenne, but she died in 1214, leaving a son as well as much property. De Burgh's third marriage was to Isabella, King John's divorced wife, who died in 1217. In 1221 he married Margaret of Scotland, a young teenager and sister of the king of Scotland. But it was not until 1227 that Henry III ennobled de Burgh as Earl of Kent.

When the Magna Carta was issued, de Burgh was named a conservator, and appointed Justiciar. Like other royal ministers he had little sympathy with the Charter, being a firm believer in law and order. Stephen Langton, the archbishop, wished to restrict royal power over taxation without the assent of the Great Council, and he reissued Magna Carta in 1217. The forest clauses of the charter were expanded into the Charter of the Forest, which ensured that no man was to lose life or limb for taking royal venison. He also curtailed recent extensions of the royal forest.

It was Hubert de Burgh's continuing and successful defence of Dover against the French invasion in 1216 that made him popular in all strata of society. On the death of William the Marshal in 1219 Hubert de Burgh acted as regent. Stephen Langton regarded himself as a successor of St Thomas Becket, having, like Becket, exiled himself at Pontigny. On 7th July 1220 the body of the saint was translated to a new shrine at Canterbury. It was the single-minded effort of the archbishop that won confirmation of the revised Magna Carta at the Parliament of Oxford in 1223. This was promulgated on 11th February 1225, but did not become part of the constitution until 1297.

The king declared himself of age in 1227 and a redistribution of royal castles took place, with Langton taking over the Tower of London, Canterbury, Windsor and Odiham. De Burgh retained Dover Castle. The death of Langton in 1228 left Hubert de Burgh virtually alone in the administration of the kingdom. To increase royal revenues he declared that in order for the monasteries to retain their privileges they must pay for the renewal of their charters. Thus we find him witnessing an important charter of Merton Priory on 26th March 1227, confirming rights and privileges.[1]

The king now decided to win back lands on the Continent held by France, and at Michaelmas in 1229 assembled a large force at Portsmouth, only to find he did not have enough ships. Hubert de Burgh was blamed, being accused of mismanaging treasury funds. Now the pope began to put pressure on England. He demanded a tenth of all income. The treasury was low, and the king blamed de Burgh. The practice of providing papal nominees to English parish churches was hated by de Burgh, and by 1231 the presentations of benefices were being sold in the papal market, with Italians taking the choicest. Hostility grew and rents were often withheld, resulting in charges being made by the pope against de Burgh for connivance in the revolt. The king charged de Burgh with accumulating treasure and depositing it with the Templars.

On 29th July 1232 de Burgh was dismissed from office and accused of various crimes. Some of the revenue of his lands was used to compensate the alien rectors. A proclamation was issued in London that the king would receive complaints against de Burgh, and a day was fixed for hearing them. This pleased the citizens, who remembered that de Burgh had hanged the leader of a popular riot in 1222. He was allowed to retire to Merton Priory to prepare his defence, until 14th September. The king held a council at Lambeth, but Hubert did not attend and refused to leave the safety of the monastery. This infuriated the king, who ordered the Mayor of London to raise all the citizens who could bear arms, and take de Burgh dead or alive. It was late in the evening when the mayor caused the city bell to be rung out, and the citizens rejoiced when they heard what was required of them.[2] Before it was light as many as 20,000 men set out for Merton brandishing arms and waving banners, and when he was warned de Burgh prostrated himself before the high altar at Merton, barefooted and half clad. The bishop of Chichester pleaded with the king and entreated for two horsemen to overtake the Londoners. The earl of Chester warned the king of the danger of the mob. The king took fright and revoked the order, to the disappointment of the crowd. De Burgh fled from Merton and sought sanctuary at a chapel at Brentwood, Essex. Sanctuary was ignored, and de Burgh was captured and imprisoned in the Tower and tried at the king's court on Cornhill on 10th November 1232. He was later removed to Devizes castle, whence he escaped in November to Chepstow, where Richard Marshall, earl of Pembroke, befriended him.

In 1234 the new archbishop Edmund Rich effected a reconciliation, so that de Burgh was pardoned, and his earldom restored. The death of Langton and the fall of de Burgh enabled the king to indulge his preference

for aliens, and hordes of Poitevins and Bretons were invited to occupy royal castles and fill the judicial and administrative posts of England. He chose Eleanor of Provence to be his queen, and, following the wedding, she came to Merton for the first time.

Hubert de Burgh retired to Banstead; he died "full of days" on 12th May 1243 and was buried at Blackfriars.

1. A.Heales *Records of Merton Priory* 1898 p.89
2. Roger de Wendover *Chronica* vol.iv p.250

BEFORE THE COMPUTER SENT THE BILLS

The following is taken from an article written by David Harries for Thames Water News *and is reproduced by permission. His father, John Harries, used to send out the water rate bills by hand in the early years of the 20th century and it is interesting to compare this procedure with today's computerised print-outs. John Harries's area covered Tooting Bec, Balham, Wandsworth and Clapham, but there is every reason to suppose that in the adjacent areas of Mitcham, Merton and Wimbledon the same arrangements prevailed. (Morden was just a village at that time.)*

Tony Scott

John Harries came to London from Carmarthenshire in the 1890s and obtained a position as a clerk with the Lambeth Water Company. In 1904 this enterprise became part of the Metropolitan Water Board (MWB) and John Harries was appointed a Collector for the Kennington Park District of London. Later, in the 1920s, whilst living at Norbury, he became one of three Collectors based in District 44, covering large areas of Balham, Clapham, Wandsworth and Tooting Bec. He was responsible for compiling the water rate ledgers for the whole of this area and keeping them up-to-date from the electoral roll, plus maintaining a check on any change of occupancy. The District 44 office was at 1 Station Road, Balham, and Mr Harries had to be there in attendance to receive payment from the public every Thursday from 10am to 1pm. The other two Collectors did likewise on two other days. There were no other staff in the office and there was no telephone.

All the office work was done at home in Norbury, where one bedroom was set aside as an office. Again, there was no telephone. It was there that the firm of carriers, Carter Paterson & Co. used to come with their horse-drawn waggon to deliver packages containing thousands of blank water rate demands, together with boxes of MWB envelopes. It was there that John Harries used to calculate, compile and send out the water rate demand twice a year. He had to write the occupier's name, address and the amount of water rate on every demand sent. Having done this he had then to fold each one and insert it into a window envelope. Originally the MWB provided large sheets of postage stamps, each sheet perforated by the printers with the letters "MWB", and each stamp had to be accounted for. Later, the MWB supplied envelopes embossed with a postage stamp. Water rate records were kept in black leather-covered ledgers with marble edging.

Filled envelopes were tied into bundles of 100, and Mr Harries and his son used to take them on the tram from their home in Norbury to the Streatham GPO Sorting Office so that they would be delivered the next day. Streatham was in the London postal area but in the early 1930s Norbury was not.

The first sign of mechanisation to be introduced by the MWB for its Collectors was when Carter Paterson delivered a large wooden box containing hundreds of rubber stamps, each one bearing the name of a particular street in District 44. The chore of writing the street name on every water rate demand became a thing of the past. Further mechanisation came in the form of a hand-operated numbering machine to stamp a serial number on every water rate demand sent out.

John Harries first wrote every letter concerning MWB business in draft form on scrap paper. When satisfied with the draft he then wrote it out again, in longhand, in a correspondence ledger which contained a top leaf marked "Original" and an undersheet marked "Copy". Between these he placed a sheet of carbon paper and underneath the copy sheet he placed a metal sheet to enhance the print due to the carbon paper.

One day in the 1920s John Harries took his son on a nostalgic trip to Lambeth where he started his Water Board service and stopped outside an empty shop. He told his son that in the early 1900s he used to call on a shoemaker who lived there and would never pay his water rate. The man argued that as God supplied the MWB with water free of charge, he didn't see why he should have to pay for it. Eventually the shoe maker agreed a compromise, he would pay his water rate by making a pair of boots for Mr Harries who would then pay his water rate. Shortly after John Harries died in 1948 his son found about ten pairs of Edwardian boots which had never been worn and these were given to charity - a fitting end to an agreement made with the shoemaker nearly half a century earlier.

Postscript: Fifty years ago the MWB office in Mitcham was at the Fair Green, in the same terrace as Lloyds Bank is today. That too was only staffed for a limited number of hours per week. Possibly the staff had the same office arrangements.