

WINCHESTER REGISTERS: JOHN DE PONTISSARA

Something of the career of the last medieval rector of Morden is recorded in the bishop's Register, transcribed and published by Surrey Record Society as *Regestrum Johannis de Pontissara Episcopi Wyntoniensis* Vol. I (1913).

No. I. p.7 [fo. 1 b.]

A.D. 1283

[July 25. Confirmation by special favour to Gerard de Staunden of the commenda of the Church of Morden promised him by Bp. Nicholas before pluralities had been made illegal by the Council of Lyons.]

MORDEN— John, by divine permission bishop of Winchester, to the beloved son Master Gerard de Staunden, priest, greetings, etc. Recounting your merits and the merits of your men, we are induced to do a special favour for you. Hence it is that we have approved and accepted the *commendam* of the church of Morden in our diocese that has formerly been made to you canonically by Nicholas, of good memory, our predecessor, before the Council of Lyons, as you assert, confirming by apostolic authority, just as it had been duly made. In testimony of which matter, etc. Dated at Esher the 8th kalend of August [25 July], the year of grace 1283, in the second year of our consecration.

No. I. pp.8-9 [fo. 1 b.]

A.D. 1283

[Sept. 9. Ratification of Gerard de Standon's appointment to Morden above mentioned, the original grant of the late Bishop, Nicholas of Ely, being recited from his Register.]

MORDEN— J., by grace of God, etc, to the beloved son Master Gerard de Standon, rector of the church of Morden, greetings, etc. Recounting your merits and those of your men, we are induced to do a special favour for you. Hence it is that Nicholas, of good memory, our predecessor, formerly caused the said church of Morden of our diocese to be commended to you canonically before the Council of Lyons, forever, just as we have more fully seen is contained in his letter that was completed about this and registered in his register, the tenor of which is, as follows: N., by grace of God bishop of Winchester, to the beloved son in Christ Master Gerard de Standon, clerk, greetings, etc. Whereas the religious men the abbot and convent of Westminster, the true patrons of the church of Morden, canonically presented you for us to the same church, vacant by the death of Master William de Brokesburn, formerly the rector of the same, we, attending to the benefit of the same church and the exigency of your merits, and in addition wishing to do a special favour for you, commend the same church with its appurtenances to you by pontifical authority, for you to possess forever. In testimony of which matter, etc. Dated at Southwark the 11th kalend of September [22 August] in the year of grace 1273. Indeed, we confirm the aforesaid *commendam* that has been thus duly made, approved and accepted by ordinary authority. In testimony of which matter, etc. Dated at Esher the 5th Ide of September [9 September] in the year of grace 1283.

In later centuries the term *commendam* was used of benefices held *in commendam*, literally 'in trust'. A vacant benefice could be held, and its revenues enjoyed, by a priest, or even a layman, until an incumbent was appointed. Although it was officially a temporary appointment, in reality it was long term. The practice was only abolished in 1836, by which time it had become mainly restricted to benefices retained by a bishop or other church dignitary to supplement his income. The reference here to the Council of Lyons, held in 1274 under Pope Gregory X, which forbade clergy from holding more than one benefice (a practice known as pluralities), indicates that Morden was not the only benefice that Gerard held, though the confirmation in 1283, nine years after the Council's ruling, seems somewhat belated. Gerard held this 'temporary' appointment for at least 28 years, until his resignation from the rectory of Morden in 1301.