

**PETER HOPKINS comes to the defence of
THE 'GRASPING' MERTON PRIORY**

Looking through some back numbers of *Current Archaeology*, I was interested to find a review of Michael Green's book, *HISTORIC CLAPHAM* in volume 219 (June 2008). The reviewer writes:-

'In around 1190 the advowson [of Clapham church] fell to the grasping Merton Abbey, who milked it for all it was worth – the monks of Merton Abbey grew fat and their sins have now found them out when the archaeologists reported that their skeletons suffered from DISH – a skeletal deformity caused by over eating. Following the martyrdom of Thomas Becket, the monks succeeded in diverting the new pilgrim route so that it ran past their church; but they took the profits and neglected the church, so that in the 18th century it had to be pulled down and a new church built.'

I requested a copy from Morden Library, through the excellent Inter-Library Loan system, and was delighted to discover that they had bought a copy for the library. The words are the reviewer's, but the sentiment is clearly shared with the author. He goes on to say that the priors of Merton were absentee rectors of Clapham, appropriating the tithes and appointing vicars, most of whom were inadequate for the job.

But the facts do not support such an indictment. Although Merton priory was not averse to exploiting all their properties, including the churches that had been appropriated to them, this was not the case in Clapham, where their right of advowson merely entitled them to appoint the parish priest, from whom they took a pension of £1 a year, equivalent to about a tenth of his income from tithes and other sources. The canons did not receive the tithes, they were not responsible for the upkeep of the building, and they did not appoint vicars – Clapham remains a rectory to the present day.

I was embarrassed to see that I had been quoted as a source for information in an earlier chapter, so wrote to the author, pointing out his error. He replied that, although there was no *explicit* evidence that Merton appropriated the tithes, he felt there was sufficient *implicit* evidence to support his case! As there is explicit evidence for all the churches that Merton priory did appropriate, this seems a poor argument, especially as there is plenty of explicit evidence that Clapham church was never appropriated by Merton or any other religious house.

BOOK REVIEW – TUDOR ROSE

Our President, Lionel Green, has told us in the past about Rose Hickman, daughter of wealthy Tudor merchant William Lock, who wrote her memoirs in 1610, at the age of 85. Though based in London, the family held a number of properties in Merton, and Rose spent part of her childhood here to escape the plague. The main part of these memoirs were published in May 1982 in the *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, and Lionel summarised them in his series of articles on the Lock family in our own *Bulletin* between September 1996 and March 1998 (119, 121, 123, 123).

Now novelist Sue Allan, who also spent her childhood in Merton, has based her latest novel on Rose's story, as recounted in her memoirs and other contemporary documents, albeit with the novelist's privilege of filling in the 'missing threads' from her own imagination. In *Tudor Rose*, Sue tells a fascinating story of a family secretly reading banned Protestant literature during the reign of Henry VIII, facing imprisonment for sheltering fellow-believers during Mary's persecutions, later joining other Protestants in exile on the Continent, and then, in Elizabeth's reign, struggling to maintain their Puritan beliefs against the demands of the established church.

Sue has also published a companion volume to her novel, *Lady Rose Hickman – Her Life and Family*, recounting the facts on which the novel is based, which is delightfully illustrated by portraits of Rose and her family, mostly at Gainsborough Old Hall in Lincolnshire, where Rose spend the last 17 years of her life.

Tudor Rose (ISBN 978 1 906070 09 0) costs £9.98 including postage, and *Lady Rose Hickman* (ISBN 978 1 906070 10 6) £11.49, both from Domtom Publishing, Edward House, Marchants Way, Burgess Hill, West Sussex, RH15 8QY.



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