

LIONEL GREEN traces some more Merton connections:

RALPH DE CAHAIGNS (d.1174) AND THE KEYNES' BENEFICENCE

Some of the possessions of Merton priory came from the Maminot family who had received them from William the Conqueror as part of their reward for supporting him in England.

Land in *Peckham* which had belonged to Hugh Maminot was given at the request of his wife Emma to Ralph de Cahaigns on his marriage to their daughter Alice. Ralph then gave the land to Merton priory at his wife's desire. Both Emma and Alice were buried in "the church belonging to the convent" at Merton.¹

Other properties that came to Ralph from the Maminot family included the manors of Coombe, East Lulworth and Tarrant (all in Dorset), Somerford (Glos.) and Barton (Camb.), the churches of which he gave to Merton Priory about 1173.

On the death of his grandfather, Ralph took possession of the Cahaigns inheritance, which included a cell (church and estate) at Cahaigns in Normandy. The manors of Flore and Greatworth (Northants.) went to his brother Hugh, but even the churches of these two manors were given to Merton.

The name of Ralph de Cahaigns was entered in the annals of Merton,² and the name of Keynes is kept alive today in the villages of Coombe Keynes, Tarrant Kaines³ (Dorset), Somerford Kaynes (Glos.), Ashton Keynes, Poole Keynes (Wilts.), Horsted Keynes (Sussex) and Milton Keynes (Bucks.).

Barton south-west of Cambridge.

In 1202 a collateral descendant of the Cahaigns claimed that the right of presentation of the priest of Barton did not belong to the priory.⁴ The prior maintained that the present incumbent, Eborad, had been there for 30 years, having been presented by Ralph de Cahaigns. William de Caham (d.1217) argued that his grandfather Hugh (brother of Ralph) had presented Savaric, who had died. It would seem that when Savaric was too old to perform his duties, he put his son Eborad into the office, and when his father died the son continued to act.⁵

Apparently Savaric was priest at Barton for 40 years, with William de Caham acting as patron, and the right of presentation descended to Elias, his son, and from Elias to Roese and Maud his daughters.

Following the death of William de Caham in 1217, the prior of Merton sought to settle the matter, and sued Alan de Berton and Roese his wife, and Maud, sister of Roese. The prior produced a charter of Ralph's granting the advowson to take effect after the death of Hugh his son, the rector thereof, and also charters of William de Cahaigns (d.1222), grandson of Ralph, who came to court and warranted the charters.

Greatworth, Northamptonshire.

The church here was also given to Merton priory by Ralph, but, in order to placate a descendant of the family, the priory ceded the church to William de Caham about 1203. The cartulary records that the canons of Merton, "moved by the affection which we have for our dear friend William de Kaaines (Caham), son of Richard, grant to him and his heirs" the advowson of the church of Tureworth (Greatworth) so that when a vacancy occurred, he, or they, should present to them a suitable person whom they would present to the bishop of Lincoln.⁶ On his death in 1217 his widow Gunnora renounced the right of presentation.⁷

Cahaigns, Normandy.

This church, or cell, between Caen and Vire, was also given to Merton priory by Ralph. Some land in Cahaigns belonged to the church, and about 1150 a homicide caused the lessee to be disinherited. The chaplain, William Postell, took a female relative of the lessee, who gave birth to four daughters, and he continued to take an annual rent for the land. Robert de Curwandun⁷, a relative, sued the parson at the court of Ralph, which ruled that the land belonged to the church, and this was confirmed in the king's court.

Heinous behaviour was rife, as Ralph de Grenvil, a knight, whose wife was ill, had an affair with one of the daughters of Postell, which produced two sons. The woman was excommunicated for adultery and died. The sons of the dead mother, Robert and Ralph, later brought a plea before Henry II for the inheritance from their father, and claimed right of patronage of the church at Cahaigns. A further action in the king's court led to a fine payable by all parties, including the canons of Merton.

When King John lost the dukedom of Normandy in 1203, descendants of the daughters of William Postell complained to the French king that Merton priory had deprived them of their rights. The case was heard in the court of the Count of Boulogne, who at the instance of Robert de Geldeford, canon of Merton, sent his seneschal Peter Leschaut. No adversary to the canons appeared, and the claim was dismissed. Henry, bishop of Bayeux (1164-1205), had written to the prior informing him that a jury had established that William Postell was a deacon, son of Hervey a priest, son of Ambobert a priest.⁸ The bishop also mentioned that the estate involved "the old iron mine" in his deanery.

Whilst all the litigation over the church at Cahaigns continued, Merton priory sought an arrangement with a monastery in Normandy to exchange foreign properties in each others' countries. An agreement was drawn up for the church at Cahaigns to be transferred to the abbey of St Fromond. In return, Merton priory would receive the tithes of Stamford castle and five churches in the town, as well as two churches further north in Lincolnshire.⁹ Pope Lucius III (d.1185) had issued indulgence, and King John confirmed the charter in 1200,¹⁰ but the exchange was never put into effect.

Merton priory continued to hold the cell at Cahaigns until 1267, when a fresh exchange took place. This gave Merton the possession of two tourist attractions of today, viz. a church in Somerset which after 600 years became the setting of a shooting in R.D.Blackmore's *Lorna Doone* (1869), and what is claimed to be the highest waterfall in England.¹¹ This exchange of properties will be the subject of a further article.

1. BL Cott. Cleop. C VII 20
2. *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 36 (1925) p.42
3. Now Tarrant Crawford
4. A.Heales *The Records of Merton Priory* London 1898 p.58
5. *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 63 (1922) p.189
6. Heales *op.cit.* p.53 but with the name Talworth Surrey given in error; *SxAC op.cit.* 63 (1922) p.192
7. Heales *op.cit.* p.94; BL Cott.Cleop. C VII 20 No.248 fol.cxx
8. *SxAC op.cit.* 63 (1922) pp.191/2; Heales *op.cit.* p.56
9. St John the Baptist, St Paul, St Michael Cornstall, St George, All Saints in the Market (with a pension of two silver marks), and the churches of All Saints, Saxby and St Andrew, Bonby
10. Charter Rolls 17th Feb 1200 I John m.25: *SxAC op.cit.* 63 (1922) p.192

11. A small competition for members (excluding Committee members please), to mark the Society's 50th birthday. Can you identify these two sites? Answers, with name and address, by post to Lionel Green

The sender of the first correct pair of answers opened on 1 August will receive Society publication(s) of his/her choice up to value £12. (Don't forget the new publications.)

FOOTNOTE by PETER HOPKINS

The scandalous activities of chaplain William Postell have frequently been attributed to a more local parish, rather than across the Channel in Normandy. Manning and Bray, in their *History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey* (1804), mistakenly identified Cahaigns as Cheam! This error was repeated by Heales in his *Records of Merton Priory* (1898) and, more recently, by C J Marshall in his *A History of the Old Villages of Cheam and Sutton* (1936) p11. Hopefully future historians of Cheam will set the record straight. Thank you, Lionel.

FROM THE POSTBAG

Reading
Berkshire
21st March 2001

Dear Editor

My sister, Jeanette White (née Want), who lives in Nelson, New Zealand, has asked me to pass on her congratulations to the Society for its Fiftieth Birthday. Unfortunately she is unable to write to you herself.

Both she and my mother were founder members, my mother also being an early committee member. At 9 years old I became the youngest member shortly after.

Jeanette says she had fun helping to arrange the Pageant and was very involved with the plays. As a family we looked forward to the Rambles, which were ably led by Arthur Turner.

We wish the Society every success in its activities for the next 50 years.

With best wishes

Hilary Nethersole

[Mrs Nethersole, still a member, enclosed a photocopy of an article in *The Nelson Mail* of 2 December 1995 about her sister, Jeanette White, whose second book on the history of South Street in Nelson had just been published. Jeanette's scrapbook of MHS events was displayed at our anniversary exhibition. We congratulate both sisters on their enduring enthusiasm for local history.

JGJ