

LIONEL GREEN has another instalment of the Merton Priory story to tell in **THE POMEROY BENEFICENCE**

A previous article recounted the beneficence of the Keynes family to Merton (Bulletin No.138 'Ralph de Cahaigns'). Mention was made of the gift to Merton Priory of the church of Kahaynes or Cahaigns in Normandy about 1172. The church or cell, or perhaps a grange at Cahaigns, was 18km from Falaise, Normandy, south of the Vire road. There had been problems over the right of patronage, and about 1180 the priory sought to exchange properties with the Benedictine monastery of St Fromond near Vire. This would have given Merton Stamford Castle plus five churches in the town and other property, but for some unknown reason the exchange never took place.

In 1266 negotiations took place for a revised exchange of properties with the Augustinian abbey of St Mary du Val in Normandy, whereby each gave up a cell to the other "by the will of the patrons of both places".¹

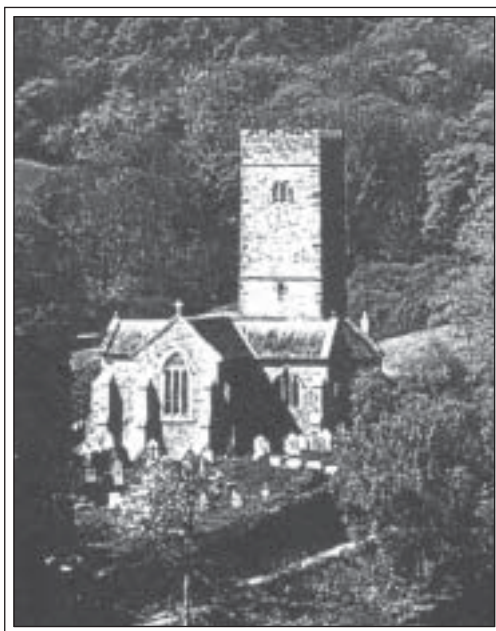
The patron of Val abbey was Henry de Pomeroy (1235-80), and it was an ancestor of his, Gosselin de la Pomeraï (d. c.1139) who "so largely endowed the house of Austin canons of St Mary du Val, that he may be regarded as its true founder" in 1125.²

Ralph de la Pomeraï, Gosselin's father, fought at Hastings and had been a childhood friend of William the Conqueror in Falaise. He took his name from La Pommeraye, 16km west of the town. William rewarded Ralph with 59 manors, mostly in Devon, and it was some of these possessions that Gosselin gave to St Mary du Val. He also founded a small priory at Tregony, Cornwall, before 1125, which became part of the endowment of Val.³

In exchange for the cell of Cahaigns, Normandy, owned by Merton, Val abbey offered theirs of Tregony, Cornwall, and all other Pomeroy estates in England. These included the churches of Berry Pomeroy, Stockleigh Pomeroy, Ashcombe, Buckerell, Clyst St George, Upottery, and St Lawrence, Exeter, all in Devon; the churches of Tregony and Hissy in Cornwall, and the church of Oare in Somerset. There were also the important manors of Berry Pomeroy with demesne lands in Worthy Berry, of Teyne in Christow and the lesser tithes of Smallridge.

Some of these possessions may have been leased to Merton previously, for on 29 August 1259 the priory presented a clergyman to Clyst St George.⁴

The bishop involved with the estates in Devon and Cornwall was Walter Bronescombe, and on 28 June 1266 he issued a licence for the exchange to take place.⁵ Merton made arrangements with the patron of the living of the Pomeroy properties on 22 January 1267. Henry de Pomeroye was granted a charter to hold the demesne lands of Berry at Worthy Berry by the concession of the priory, and the patron was given the right of presenting a clerk to the canonry at Merton.⁶



St Nectan, Ashcombe

On 16 March 1267, the abbot of du Val sent his proctor to effect the exchange. The patron of the Merton cell and all the French possessions involved in the exchange was the Keynes family.⁷ On the part of Merton, the prior granted and confirmed "all land which they possessed in lay fee at Kahaynes and elsewhere in Normandy as well of wood as of plain, and in corn-land, pasturages and commons, but subject to due and accustomed fees and services".⁸ The Merton Cartulary records that on 14 July "it was agreed that for equality of partition the Priory should pay the Abbey thirteen marks sterling per annum at Merton on the feast of St John the Baptist".⁹ An agreement of 16 August 1267 gave the manor of Teyne Canonorum to Merton in frankalmoign, "but is to admit a fit person presented by the family of Pomeroy to pray for their souls etc. and he is to give them [the Merton canons] three acres in Berry to store their fruits [of the field] on".¹⁰ The bishop issued a decree pointing out that the priory had the undertaking to find suitable clergy for the cures of St James and St Kybi¹¹ in Tregony. He ordered that "they shall be entitled to receive for their own use the greater tithes of corn and hay, and all returns and pensions and all tithes of mills".¹²

Although called a priory, Tregony was not a true monastery, but became designated an 'alien' priory because the revenues were sent abroad to the mother house. The buildings often consisted of just a church with no claustral buildings. Accommodation for the few priests would consist of a dormitory and dining area on the upper floor of a two-storied house.

A separate deed provided for three priests to be retained at Tregony to keep up divine services.¹³ Conventual life proved difficult, and on 26 April 1282 bishop Quivil of Exeter agreed that the priory be reduced to a grange and staffed by a single canon.¹⁴

A Nicholas de Tregony became a canon of Merton, and when Gilbert de Ashe died in 1292, he became prior, elected on 28 April and installed on 1 June 1292. He died on 26 September 1295.

On 14 March 1534 Merton priory decided to lease the rectory and lordship of Tregony-Merton to Nicholas Prideaux (d.1560) for 40 years,¹⁵ and later that year, on the feast of the Holy Cross (14 September), he purchased the lordship.

1. *Register of W.Bronescombe* (bishop of Exeter 1258-80) 1889 p.275; A Heales *The Records of Merton Priory* London 1898 p.146
2. E B Powley *The House of de la Pomeroy* 1944 pp.1,9,14
3. *Archives de la France Monastique* xvii 1914 p.133
4. *Register of W.Bronescombe* 1889 s.a.1259 p.125
5. Heales 1898 p.149. Bronescombe was no stranger to Merton. He had been archdeacon of Surrey 1247-57 and stayed at the priory on 15 March 1258 (Heales 1898 p.132) and 25 March 1260 (Heales 1898 p.137)
6. Heales 1898 p.156
7. Ralph de Cahaigne (Kaines, Keynes) was a great benefactor of Merton. He and his wife Alice gave land in Peckham, Kent, and the churches of Coombe Keynes, Dorset, and Somerford Kaynes, Gloucestershire. Both his mother and his wife were buried at Merton Priory, and when he died in 1174 his name was entered in the Annals of Merton. *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 36 (1925) p.42
8. Heales 1898 p.148
9. Heales 1898 p.147
10. *Devon Assoc.: Record and Trans.* 15 (1883) p.440
11. St Kybi was a Cornishman, a cousin of St David, and founded a Celtic monastery in the Roman fort at Holyhead c.540. Cuby (Cornish), Gybi (Welsh), Kebii (Latin)
12. Heales 1898 p.149
13. *Register Collegii Exoniensis* (ed. C W Boase) p.321
14. D Knowles and R N Hadcock *Medieval Religious Houses. England and Wales* 1953 p.161n. The grange was situated on the hill near the castle.
15. *Ancient Deeds* D1226 vol 3 p.552

