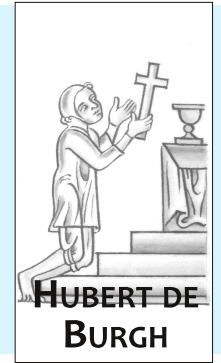




Merton Priory

TEACHER'S PACK No.7

LESSON IDEAS



This topic covers several elements in the KS2 and KS3 History National Curriculum:

KS2: significant individuals & events in British history

KS3: Magna Carta & the emergence of Parliament; religion in mediaeval life; society, economy & culture.

A site visit would be a good start to this topic, as it's unbelievable that such events took place...at a supermarket, and getting pupils to imagine the Priory would be an excellent exercise.

Hubert de Burgh (d.1243) came from gentry stock, but an unimportant family. He entered the household of Prince John in the 1190s, becoming his Chamberlain in 1198, and continuing in this office when Prince John became King John in 1199. He married the daughter of the Earl of Devon in 1200. He was given lots of diplomatic missions and lots of castles. He lost lots of them, however, when he was captured in France in 1205, and held captive for two years: he returned to find John had given his lands to other people. Still, he kept serving the King, and was given other lands. Hubert encouraged John to sign Magna Carta in 1215, and in that year, John made him Justiciar - a sort-of mediaeval prime minister.

Hubert defended England from the French in 1216 and 1217, driving them from English shores, and forcing the Dauphin to meet for peace talks at Merton Priory. Hubert's second wife (1217) was John's divorced first wife, Isabella of Gloucester. John died in 1216; Hubert became one of the inner circle of ruling barons under William Marshal, the Regent. William died in 1219, and Hubert took over. He married, for a third time, Margaret, sister of the King of Scotland. In 1227, Henry III came of age, and created Hubert Earl of Kent and Justiciar for Life. Hubert reissued Magna Carta in 1216, 1217 and 1225, and thus made it firmly part of the English Constitution.

But Hubert had a few political failures and in 1232 his rivals, Peter des Roches and Peter des Rivaux, got the upper hand. Accused of wrongdoing, Hubert was stripped of his office and threatened with imprisonment. He fled to Merton Priory, seeking sanctuary. Henry ordered the City of London to haul Hubert out; 20,000 men clamoured at the gates of the Priory. But Henry changed his mind, and the mob was disbanded. Promised safe conduct, Hubert left Merton, but was captured by the King and imprisoned in Devizes Castle. He escaped the next year, and in 1234, Edmund Rich, Archbishop of Canterbury - and occasional guest of Merton - effected a reconciliation with the King. Hubert retired from politics. He died in Surrey in 1243, and was buried at Blackfriars, Holborn.

Sanctuary

The in-fighting in the court of Henry III, and Hubert's prostration on the high altar at Merton with a mob of angry Londoners outside would make a fantastic film. As a basis for lessons, it throws up these questions:

1) *What is sanctuary?*

England was a Christian country, and God was the maker and ruler of all things. His holy shrines were inviolable, and consequently they were like the 'home' in a game of 'it'. This is why the murder of Becket was so abominable. Even criminals could seek sanctuary. While anyone was at the altar or in the church, they could not be touched (rather like Julian Assange and the Ecuadorian Embassy). In fact, the reason that Henry III called on Londoners to recover Hubert was that he did not want his men to break the rules of sanctuary - perhaps fearing another Becket episode.

2) *Why did Hubert flee to Merton?*

Merton was not in London, but was a short sail from Westminster up and across the Thames. It was also on Stane Street, a major road. Hubert knew Merton well from his official business there, for example, the 1217 peace talks - and one can surmise that he was on very good terms with the canons there. After all, Hubert feared for his life, and needed friends.

The site of the high altar, where Hubert claimed sanctuary, is now the entrance to Marks & Spencers.