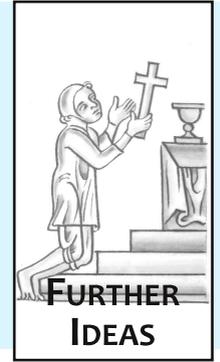




Merton Priory

TEACHER'S PACK No.10

LESSON IDEAS



As well as those National Curriculum topics already covered, the KS3 History list includes the the following:

The Norman Conquest

Merton Priory was founded by Gilbert the Norman, Sheriff of Surrey. He had been given the manor of Merton by Henry I. Merton Priory's foundation could be a good way of looking at continuity and change following the Norman Conquest - as one of many Norman religious foundations, for example.

Magna Carta and the emergence of Parliament

This has been touched on in the Hubert de Burgh topic. Merton Priory was where John stayed on his way to Runnymede; he issued his barons letters of safe conduct from there. Stephen Langton was a visitor and friend to the Priory. King John refused to recognise him as Archbishop of Canterbury, and in 1212, Richard de Merton, one of Merton's canons, was part of a delegation sent to the Pope to try to lift the resulting papal interdict against England, forbidding the public to attend mass (and putting their souls in peril). Langton was an author of Magna Carta. Merton Priory kept its influence throughout Henry III's reign, and the Provisions, or Statute, of Merton is noted as the first parliamentary statute. It, like Magna Carta, limited the king's power in favour of his barons' power.

The Black Death and its social and economic impact

The Black Death hit London and its surroundings hard. Merton Priory seems to have escaped its ravages, although plague claimed the lives of two priors in the 1360s.

The Black Death did mean that the market became weighted in favour of labourers rather than landlords, and the court case from 1348 between the Prior and some of the Priory's tenants may be no coincidence. This case could become a starting point for an enquiry. The text below is taken from the Victoria County History (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/surrey/vol4/pp64-68>)

"About 1348 litigation arose concerning the customs of the manor. Stephen in the Hale, John Jakes, Richard Est and other men of the Prior of Merton complained of his unscrupulous exaction of services and customs... The men alleged they held only by fealty and rent; but the prior exacted one day's forced labour a week, and compelled their services for mending a ditch called Le Brok, shearing the prior's sheep for two days..., mowing his meadows for a day and a half..., each man also having to find three men for three days to carry the prior's hay, and for three half-days to take the grain, for nothing... To all these and other allegations the prior could only aver the men were his serfs, a charge they denied, and to prevent them from prosecuting the suit he tried to impoverish them by heavily distraining them by their goods and chattels."

The English Reformation and Counter Reformation

Merton Priory is a good focus for work on the Reformation. Dissolved in 1538, its stones became the building blocks for Nonsuch Palace, and its canons were pensioned off; presumably, being also priests, they found employment elsewhere. The *Valor Ecclesiasticus* tallied Merton's income at £935, making it one of the richest foundations in the land, without taking into account its assets. Further details of the dissolution and destruction of Merton Priory can be found in Lionel Green's book, *A Priory Revealed*.