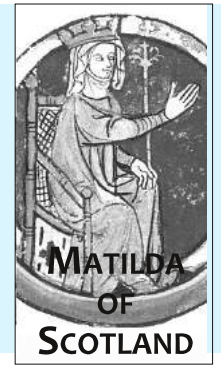




Merton Priory

TEACHER'S INFORMATION PACK No.4

I. MATILDA



Here are some SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUALS, to fit into the KS2 topic: significant individuals and events in British history. It can also cover KS3: religion in medieval life; society, economy and culture, and the relationship between Church and Crown.

Queen (Edith) Matilda

Matilda was called 'bona regina', the 'Good Queen'; she may be the 'fair lady' in *London Bridge is falling down*. Matilda was, along with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the biggest single influence in establishing the popularity of the Augustinian order in England. She was a good friend of Gilbert the Sheriff, and helped him found Merton. Matilda has rather been ignored by the history books (because she's only a queen, not a king!).

Matilda (c.1081-1118) was the daughter of Malcolm III of Scotland and Margaret of Wessex, sister of Edgar Ætheling. Because of her Anglo-Saxon descent, Matilda was actually called Edith; she changed her name to the more Norman Matilda at her coronation. As young children, Matilda and her sister were sent to Romsey Abbey (Hampshire) to be educated; their aunt was Abbess there. Matilda continued her studies at Wilton Abbey (Wiltshire). She rejected several suitors, but was betrothed by her parents to an English nobleman. In 1093, her father was killed in a skirmish with the English, and her mother died shortly afterwards. Her prospects unsure, the nobleman abandoned her (to her relief). We don't know what she did between 1093 and 1100, but in 1100 Henry I succeeded his brother to the throne of England, and one of his first acts was to marry Matilda. They seem to have been genuinely fond of each other, although Matilda did come from Anglo-Saxon royalty, and was therefore useful in uniting Anglo-Saxon and Norman England, and thus giving Henry I more legitimacy (much as Elizabeth of York did to Henry VII centuries later).

Matilda accompanied Henry around England and Normandy, and led his council (curia) and acted as regent when he was away. She was close to Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, and she was a key player in the investiture controversy (too complicated for KS3 history). Highly literate and musical, she was perhaps the leader of taste in England during the period. She founded two hospitals for lepers, and the priory of Holy Trinity Aldgate; she funded the first arched bridge in England (Stratford-le-Bow) and public lavatories at Queenhithe.

Holy Trinity Aldgate was an Augustinian priory. Matilda was particularly attached to the Augustinians (she had been brought up, after all, on the writings of Augustine). She was a close friend to Gilbert the Norman, becoming a surrogate mother after his own died. It is no coincidence, therefore, that his foundation at Merton should be Augustinian; it was her influence that led Gilbert to give the manor of Merton to the Priory. Matilda often visited Merton to see how things were going, bringing her son William to play in the grounds, and both her and William's deaths were deeply felt by the Priory.

Matilda and Henry's other child was a daughter, named after her mother: she would become the Empress Matilda. A project on the Empress Matilda is covered in Counsell and Byrom's KS3 textbook *Medieval Minds*.



Merton Priory

TEACHER'S PACK No.4

II. THOMAS BECKET



THOMAS
BECKET

This topic covers several elements in the KS2 and KS3 History National Curriculum: KS2: significant individuals and events in British history; KS3: the struggle between Church and crown; religion in medieval life; society, economy and culture. Thomas is a topic in textbooks such as 'Medieval Minds' (Pearson).

Thomas Becket (c.1120-1170) was born to a wealthy London merchant, Gilbert Becket, and his wife Matilda. He studied at Merton Priory (around 1130), in London and in Paris. He became secretary to a London banker before joining the household of Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury. Made Archdeacon in 1154, he accompanied the Archbishop on important diplomatic missions. In 1155, he became Chancellor to Henry II, and also quickly became best friends with Henry. Thomas was very rich, and lived an extravagant life. He also led soldiers into battle!

When Theobald died in 1161, Henry appointed Thomas Archbishop, hoping for a 'yes-man', who would help him recover some power lost to the church under Stephen. But Becket stood firm on the rights of the church and clashed horribly with his erstwhile best mate. Henry wanted clerics who committed crimes to be tried in his royal courts, and not to have clerical exemption; Becket opposed this. Thomas fled into exile (in disguise) in 1164, becoming quite monastic abroad; Henry got on without him, and had his son crowned King by the Archbishop of York (a real snub). Thomas and Henry were reconciled in 1170, but then Thomas refused to lift the excommunication of bishops who had taken part in the coronation. Henry, away in Normandy, lost his temper and shouted 'will nobody rid me of this turbulent priest?' Four knights decided that they would, sailed to Canterbury and murdered Becket on his own altar. Becket became a martyr saint, and was much more useful to Canterbury in death than in life. Canterbury became a huge pilgrimage site, bringing loads of tourist money in. Henry II backed down on clerical immunity. He did penance at Thomas' shrine in 1174.

Thomas is seen as standing up for the power and rights of the Church. Henry was unable to get rid of clerical immunity altogether, and agreed to let the Church have independence over appointments. (Even so, civil cases were heard in the royal courts, and the King did have some say over the appointment of bishops.) It was Thomas' death, rather than his career while alive, which brought about these compromises: both Thomas and Henry were too arrogant and stubborn.

Thomas' Significance

Questions of Thomas' significance could be:

- Did Thomas protect the independence of the Church?
- Was Thomas more important dead than alive?

This is a useful website:

<http://ks3historyhelp.weebly.com/thomas-becket-and-henry-ii.html>

And BBC Bitesize is also good:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/ks3/history/middle_ages/thomas_becket_henry_ii/revision/1/

Where does Merton Priory fit in?

Thomas spent some of his formative years at Merton Priory. Its reputation for education was well-established, as were its royal connections. Indeed, Gilbert may have sent his son there partly in order to get good connections. The confidence and status of the Merton canons cannot but have helped form Thomas' view of the importance of the Church. Merton Priory was to become hugely influential in state affairs.

While a site visit could be considered tangential, the setting of the Chapter House would be an ideal place to start the Becket story - or end it (especially for a re-enactment!).

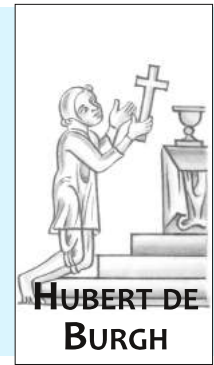
To get to know Thomas better, pupils could experience something of what a novice's schooldays would have been like. Although the boys probably learnt to write a bit later, children could experiment with the Chapter House collection of quills and other mediaeval school materials - although note that the monastic rule calls for pupils who step out of line to be "chastised with stripes" (i.e. whipped)... Pupils could write a diary entry, a day in the life of schoolboy Thomas - and even try to discover the site of the cloisters where the school was based. On the next page are instructions for making a pen.



Merton Priory

TEACHER'S INFORMATION PACK No.4

III. HUBERT DE BURGH



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 medieval 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 Louis 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.

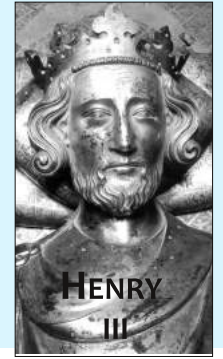
The site of the high altar, where Hubert claimed sanctuary, is now the entrance to Marks & Spencers.



Merton Priory

TEACHER'S INFORMATION PACK No.4

IV. HENRY III



Henry III is a king that no-one learns about, and yet his reign was both interesting and important. The son of King John, he came to the throne when he was a boy of 9, and he stayed on it until his death at the age of 65 in 1272. He was succeeded by his son Edward I, who, like Henry's father, is much better known. Henry and his followers managed to avoid civil war, but it wasn't easy, and the barons and bishops were flexing their political muscle. His reign saw Magna Carta consolidated and the emergence of Parliament as we know it. Henry was very cultured; he responsible for the rebuilding of Westminster Abbey, and for enlarging Windsor Castle. His reign is perfect for the KS3 topics the struggle between Church and crown, Magna Carta and the emergence of Parliament, religion in daily life, and art, architecture and literature. OCR includes his reign in its A level History syllabus.

Henry came to the throne at an inauspicious time. His father's arbitrary rule had pulled his kingdom apart and a civil war erupted. This was won by nobles loyal to the new king, a 9-year-old boy. They formed a regency administration, led by William Marshal; the conciliar nature of government was to set important precedents for later politics, not least the embedding of Magna Carta in English law.

His first years as king were dominated by Hubert de Burgh and Peter des Roches. Hubert set about restoring order after the civil war, which took several years. There was trouble for Henry in France as the French kings continued their assertion of royal power, threatening Henry's territories of Poitou and Gascony. In 1227, Henry took over government personally; in 1230, he led an expedition to France, but it was a failure.

In 1232, Henry sacked Hubert de Burgh and appointed Peter des Roches in his place. This proved a disaster: Peter took revenge on his enemies, causing rebellion by various nobles under Richard Marshal (William's son). Archbishop Edmund of Abingdon restored peace in 1234, and Peter was himself sacked.

Henry believed in kingly power and used the great noble offices of state less. His personality was better suited to conciliar rule: he was too nice, too indecisive, too easily influenced by his friends - and arguably too interested in art and culture.

Devoutly religious, Henry promoted the cult of Edward the Confessor, and was generous in his charity to the poor. He changed the permissive attitude towards the Jews of England, restricting their freedom to worship, extorting money from them, and even arresting and executing some. During the 1240s and 1250s, anti-semitism increased; in Edward I's reign, all Jews would be expelled from England.

Henry married Eleanor of Provence, and she brought various relatives over (the Savoyards) to assume positions close to the king. After another disastrous campaign against the French king in Poitou in the 1240s, Henry brought various of his step-relatives over (the Poitevins): this caused friction with the English nobility, as lands were given to these new arrivals, and as their behaviour was rather gangsterish.

Henry was determined to go on crusade and gathered an enormous amount of money in preparation, but he had in the end to spend it on putting down a rebellion in Gascony in 1252, possibly caused by the harsh rule of his governor of Gascony, Simon de Montfort. Simon was also Henry's brother-in-law, and Henry fell out with his sister and her husband over this.

Still determined to go on crusade, Henry added to his ambitions by laying claim to Sicily, egged on by the Pope. This was another expensive disaster. It, together with the Poitevins' behaviour, was too much for the baronage, and they rebelled under Simon de Montfort in 1258. Peace was brokered with the Provisions of Oxford, but this peace was fragile and in 1263 war broke out again - Simon winning the Battle of Lewes (1264), but then losing to the Lord Edward at the Battle of Evesham (1265). A more lasting peace was this time achieved, probably because of Henry's son Edward, rather than Henry himself. Edward left for crusade in 1270; Henry, now an old man in his 60s, became ill and died two years later, in 1272. He was buried in Westminster Abbey.

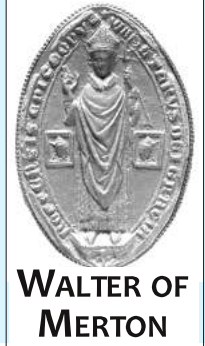
Henry was a frequent visitor to Merton Priory, where he had his own quarters. He and his councillors were benefactors to the Priory.



Merton Priory

TEACHER'S INFORMATION PACK No.4

V. WALTER OF MERTON



WALTER OF
MERTON

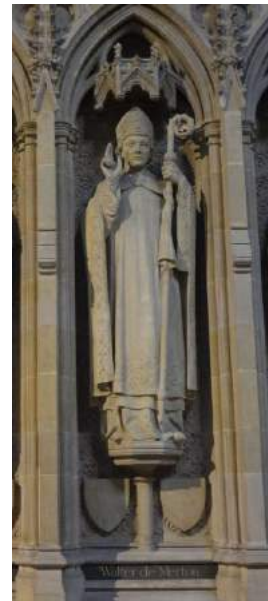
Walter was a leading royal administrator under Henry III and became Bishop of Rochester. He also founded Merton College, Oxford. His first post, however, was as a clerk at Merton Priory. Walter's life and career fit into the KS3 topics the struggle between Church and crown, Magna Carta and the emergence of Parliament, religion in daily life, art, architecture and literature.

Walter de Merton (c.1205-77) was probably educated at the Priory. By 1237 he had taken holy orders, and was working his way up the clerical employment ladder; by the following year he had entered royal service.

In the 1250s, he was an agent for the Bishop of Durham, and was protonotary (chief court clerk) for the Chancery. He helped Henry III organise the delegation for the Treaty of Paris, and helped administer the monies received from the King of France. Henry rewarded Walter by making him a prebendary of St. Paul's Cathedral. Walter held many church positions - they paid for his royal service, since there was no civil service salary back then. Occasionally the Pope would condemn pluralism and simony (having lots of parishes and buying positions), but nothing really was done about this.

In 1261 Henry III appointed Walter his Chancellor. Walter accompanied Henry III to Amiens in 1264, where the King of France was arbitrating between Henry and Simon de Montfort, leader of the rebel barons. But even the King of France failed to settle matters, and Henry and his barons went to war. Walter was sacked as Chancellor.

He was reappointed under the next king, Edward I, in 1272, but was retired, and moved sideways to being Bishop of Rochester in 1274. He died falling from his horse while crossing the Medway in 1277, and was buried in Rochester Cathedral.



A fine 19th-century
statue of
Walter of Merton
from the choir screen
of Rochester Cathedral.

In the 1240s, Walter founded a hospital at Basingstoke, where he was from. Twenty years later he set up a 'house of the scholars of Merton' in nearby Malden. He gave it two manors in Surrey, and at first had Merton Priory administer them.

After his Surrey estates were ransacked by supporters of the barons, he moved his house of scholars to Oxford, and it became an independent college - Merton College, the first of Oxford's colleges. Cambridge's first college, Peterhouse, was based on Merton College: Merton College was based on Merton Priory, so although there's nothing left of Merton Priory physically, perhaps its spirit of learning lives on in Oxford and Cambridge!

Right is Merton College's Chapel.

Above is Walter's seal from the Founder's Statutes of Merton College (1264). It reads QUI TIMET DEUM FACIET BONA, 'Whoever fears God shall do good'. (Image courtesy of the Warden and Fellows of Merton College.)

