

## **Notes on the political significance of the abbey and abbots of Abingdon**

The abbots rarely took political initiatives. They generally tried to keep the trust of the ruling monarch, and served him by offering hospitality, by paying and levying taxes, and by supplying him with soldiers as they were required to do by the conditions on which they held their lands. It seems they were often rather reluctant to make these contributions, and got away with whatever they could. In the time of Henry III, they functioned as 'viscounts', keeping peace and order in the county, and maintained a jail where criminals could be kept pending trial. They sat in the great councils, proto-parliaments, from 1264 and possibly earlier.

There was some difficulty in the time of baronial warfare against Henry III. In 1265 Abbot Richard de Hendred was accused of sending his money and soldiers to Windsor Castle, which was held for the barons' leader Simon de Montfort. He claimed that he had received a letter ordering him to do this, with the threat that if he did not obey his granges would be sealed and the abbey would face starvation. He insisted, rather unconvincingly, that he had taken the letter to come from the king, and that de Montfort must have forged the royal seal - which he was known to have done elsewhere. Henry was not vindictive, and de Hendred seems to have escaped with a fine.

(Source: E.F.Jacob in Paul Vinogradoff, *Oxford Studies in Social and Legal History*, Vol VIII (1925), p. 295.)

The one time when the abbey was seen to take sides was in the Wars of the Roses. In 1467, Edward IV granted a pardon to Abbot Asshenden and the abbey. Mienieke Cox suggests this may have been in respect of Lancastrian sympathies. Asshenden's successor, John Sante, was without doubt a Yorkist. He undertook tasks outside the abbey, as a papal commissioner and as a royal ambassador. He attended Edward IV's funeral in 1483. After the defeat of the Yorkist cause at Bosworth in 1485, Abingdon became a centre of anti-Tudor plotting. The Stafford brothers, partisans of Richard III, took asylum in Culham church but were pulled out and, to Sante's great indignation, the court of King's Bench ruled that asylum could not be granted to 'traitors' who opposed the king. For his part in the rebellion of the pretender Lambert Simnell, Sante was heavily fined. However, he attended Henry VII's coronation and was soon after sent on a diplomatic mission to France. The plotting nonetheless continued, and in 1488 the abbot's manors were confiscated by the king. Once again, Sante was able to return to favour; the manors were returned, and he seems at this point to have given up on the Yorkists.

(Sources: Mienieke Cox, *Medieval Abingdon* (1989), pp.101-7; James Townsend, *A History of Abingdon* (1910), pp. 43-4.)

## **On the Abbey properties in Oxford**

The map in James Bond's paper gives all the info available. The plots marked key in to the two volumes by H.E. Salter in the Oxford Historical Society, with their sketch

maps. Salter's data seems to confirm that the Abbey's Oxford properties had come to it early: mostly by 1279, and almost all the rest by 1349. The Crown Inn in the Cornmarket was given it in 1032 by a certain Ethelwin who lived there; it was being leased out by Abbot Ingulf in the mid-12th century. [Can there be some confusion here with Bishop Aethelwin of Durham, imprisoned in Abingdon after the great rebellion against William of Normandy later in the 11th century?]. A quick addition of the 13th and 14th century rentals cited by Salter gives a total of about £6 per year, some of which went to the Abbey's kitchen, and some to the almoner or the infirmary. Many of the properties were held by several parties with the Abbey sometimes being the 'chief lord' but often one among the others; ownership in the modern sense is hard to work out. There seems especially to have been a lot of joint or switching ownership with St Frideswide's (Mienieke's 'wily canons').

Sources: CJ Bond, 'The Reconstruction of the Medieval Landscape: the estates of Abingdon Abbey' *Landscape History* 1 (1979) 59-75 esp p. 71 and Fig 7; HE Salter, *Survey of Oxford* i (OHS ns 14, 1960) and ii (OHS ns 20, 1969); Mienieke Cox, *The Story of Abingdon Part One* (1986) pp. 159, 192.

MB

10/08/2009