

## Richard de Morins

c 1161-1242

Richard was probably born in Lincolnshire and became a lawyer in English church (canon) law and also civil law. It is likely that he graduated from Paris in the late 1180s, where he also lectured. While there, he wrote one book, *Summa Questionum*, which was a Question and Answer manual, based on his lectures. He then became Archdeacon of Bologna and taught law at the University there until about 1198. He became recognised as the pioneer of scientific judicial procedure and wrote a further seven books including commentaries on papal decrees. His writings contained pithy summaries of laws and decrees, with biblical quotations to support them. He wrote commentaries on 1,912 papal decrees. In them, the pope sometimes addresses the reader directly, at other times in the third person. There is a concluding poem. This was the zenith of his academic career. On his return to England he became a canon at Merton Priory and part of the entourage of Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury. In 1202 King John visited Merton Priory and head hunted Richard to become Prior of Dunstable. At the time Richard was still a deacon. He was ordained prior on the Ember Saturday and celebrated his first mass on St Michael's Day, 29<sup>th</sup> September.

He is also referred to as Richard de Mores. He was a papal judge delegate and was involved in 48 cases during his time at Dunstable. His fellow judges were usually neighbouring clerics, not necessarily Augustinians. Sometimes the papal legate nominated him, on other occasions the plaintiffs asked for him because of his good reputation. He held his own court in Dunstable but also travelled through surrounding counties, going as far as Staffordshire. Eight of his suits concerned St Fridewide's in Oxford. Many cases were to do with disputed property or tithes. Twenty-two cases ended in composition, a negotiated settlement or agreement by all the parties. Some of these settlements were only valid during the lifetime of one or more of the litigants. In the other cases, a judgement was handed down.

Richard appeared on behalf of Dunstable priory in 1214, 1222 and 1227. He was the most active delegate judge in Canterbury province during his time at Dunstable. It was generally the rule that no participant in a case should travel for more than two days to attend.

Soon after 1202, Richard began compiling the *Annals of Dunstable*. As with most medieval annals, they begin with the birth of Christ and then record the early history of Christianity. From 1202 onwards the annals record events in Dunstable, England and the rest of the known world. At the beginning of February 1203, prior Richard journeyed to Rome. On his successful return home about the time of the feast of St James, he brought with him one legate, namely the abbot of Casamario, who wanted to make an agreement between the kings of England and France. When French opposition prevented the agreement, the abbot as he left England, placed France under an interdict.

In 1206, Richard, our prior, on the authority of John, cardinal deacon and legate of the Apostolic See, was appointed visitor to all the religious houses in the bishopric of Lincoln, with the exception of the Templars, the Hospitallers, the Cistercians and the Praemonstratensians (white canons). In 1207 altars were dedicated to St. Mary, St. Fremund, St. Nicholas and St. James. Fremund was a Saxon saint, reputedly a son of King Offa, who fought against the invading Danes. His bones had been buried in several places before they came to the church of Cropredy in Oxfordshire. There are many stories of miraculous healings associated with his remains. In about 1205, King John gave permission for de Morins to translate to bones of St. Fremund to Dunstable Priory. This encouraged pilgrims to come on to Dunstable from St. Albans and was a shot in the arm for the prosperity of the town. It was also at this time that the Priory was endowed with many sheep farms, especially in Derbyshire. The income from this industry was for the provision of hospitality to the many pilgrims

who came to the shrine of St. Fremund or who passed through on their way to St Alban's shrine. It also provided money for tending the poor and the sick. He preached crusade in 1212 against the Cathar community of southern France. They had offended the pope by their heretical views.

Richard attended the Fourth Lateran Council. This was convoked by Pope Innocent III and assembled in Rome in November 1215. It was attended by 71 patriarchs and metropolitans, 412 bishops and 900 abbots and priors. The Council attempted to establish the pope as the head of all Christianity and persuade the Eastern Church to accept Roman dogma. It also laid plans for the recovery of the Holy Lands. On his way back from the Council, Richard spent a whole year in Paris at the theological schools.

In 1213 there was a dispute at Bury St. Edmunds concerning the election of Hugh of Northwold as abbot. Until 1215, his appointment was opposed by the sacristans and King John. Hugh's appointment was approved of by the cellarers and by the pope, who convened a triumvirate, headed by Richard de Morins, to investigate and quash the rebellion. This was made easier by Master Nicholas, currently a member of the group in favour of the election. Nicholas was a cellarer at Bury St. Edmunds until 1220, but had previously been a canon at Dunstable. He gave Richard useful information concerning the squabble between the two parties. With his help, Richard was more easily able to resolve the situation, to the pope's satisfaction. Hugh was a witness at Runnymede, as he was there to petition the king for approval of his appointment at Bury St. Edmunds. Nicholas became abbot's chaplain in 1222 and Hugh became bishop of Ely in 1229. Nicholas wrote a full account of the dispute in the 1220s. Richard de Morins was often appointed by Innocent III as a judge delegate.

In 1217 de Morins was involved in the disputed election to the abbacy of Shaftsbury and the case shows the care taken to get to the truth of any dispute. The sacrist, A, appealed to Rome because one section of the nuns had elected J, not her. The legate, Guala, refused to confirm A and appointed the abbots of Bindon and Cerne to investigate. A was then alleged to have renounced her election and appeal, so de Morins and two other clerics examined A's case. She said she had been coerced to withdraw. As J shortly afterwards gave up her claim, three other clerics were appointed to investigate J. They were told that if J's claim to the abbacy was true, A should be told not to contest their verdict; if not, the whole matter was to be referred back to the original two abbots.

In 1219 and subsequent years Richard de Morins held his court at Dunstable. He and his fellow judges heard cases for the crown, settled disputes on inheritance, decided cases against alleged escaped prisoners, decided on causes of death and whether widows' claims on their dowry money were justified. In 1222 he was a judge in the dispute between the bishop of London and the abbot of Westminster. During the next year he was an Augustinian visitor in the Province of York. In 1228 he was made visitor for his Order in Litchfield and Lincoln Dioceses. In 1235 he was a counsellor in the disputed election at St. Albans following the death of the abbot, William of Trumpington. He was involved, in 1239, in the question of the Archbishop of Canterbury's right to visit religious houses that were under the supervision of bishops in his own Province.

Richard was one of the Commissioners appointed to assess how much money the Crown should repay Lincoln diocese after King John's actions. Very little of this money was ever repaid. Richard de Morins died in post on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1242, aged about 80. He was still working for the prosperity of his priory. His successor, Geoffrey of Barton, was left to complete the deals, which Richard had started. Dunstable Priory was at its most prosperous and famous during the leadership of Richard de Morins.

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