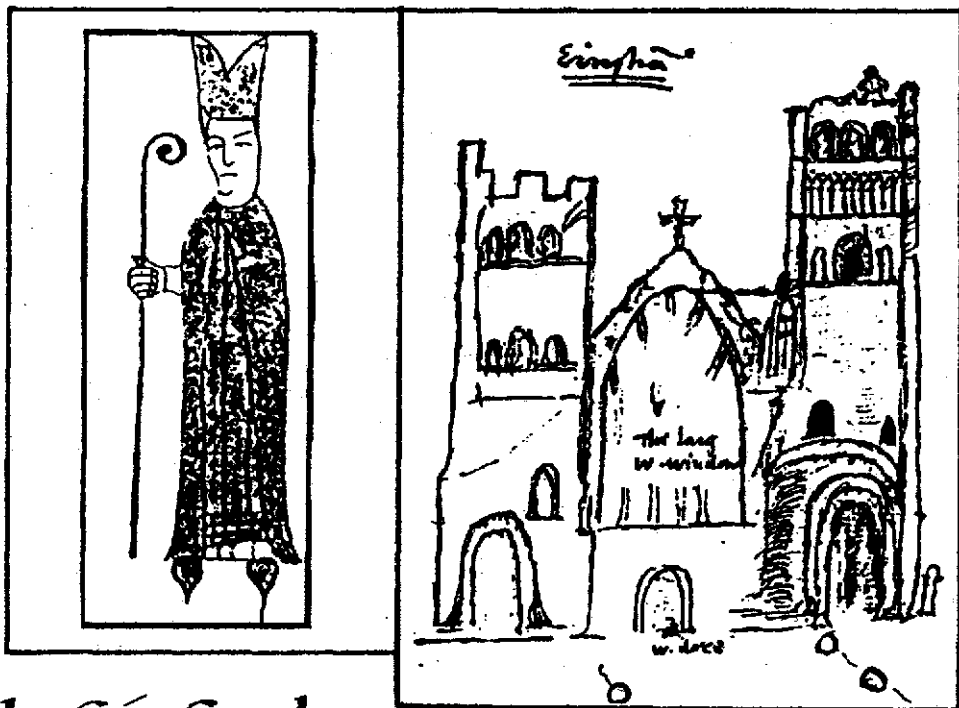


ST HUGH & Eynsham Abbey



by *Eric Gordon*

The story of Hugh's election as
Bishop of Lincoln at Eynsham Abbey

A.D. 1186.

Front cover

The two drawings are reproduced by courtesy of the Curator
of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

The figure of St. Hugh is from a 14th. century calendar in
MS.Rawl.D.939.

The west towers of Eynsham abbey are from Wood's 1657
drawing of the ruins in MS.Wood.E.1.

Frontispiece

Bishop Hugh and his famous swan:
bronze by Arthur Fleischmann, F.R.B.S.

At Buckden Towers, near Huntingdon, formerly a manor of the
bishops of Lincoln: Hugh's body rested there, on the way
from London to Lincoln.

By courtesy of the sculptor, and of the Father Superior of
the Claretian brothers, now at Buckden.

ST HUGH
& Eynsham Abbey

*The story of Hugh's election as
Bishop of Lincoln at Eynsham Abbey
A.D. 1186.*

by

Eric Gordon

sometime Bishop of Sodor and Man

FOREWORD

by

Sir Walter Oakeshott

sometime Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford

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FOREWORD

The selection at Eynsham (with Henry II himself presiding) of Hugh to be Bishop of Lincoln, eight hundred years ago, was nationally important. Conflict between King and Church had led, sixteen years before, to the murder of Becket by Henry's knights, in Canterbury Cathedral. AS part of his penance, Henry had founded monasteries, over one of which (Witham in Somerset) he appointed Hugh, a Carthusian monk from France, to preside. It was a brilliant choice. Hugh was admired, trusted, and loved. Everyone, including Henry himself, knew that his integrity was beyond question. Hugh took steps to see that the actual election was made by the canons of Lincoln, technically their right, and an example of that sensitivity that was one of his characteristics as an administrator. Saintliness did not exclude practical achievements - like the building of a great new choir, soon to be superseded by the Angel choir; an example of what often happened in that age of wonderful buildings, the inspiration to go even one better. We cannot doubt that, for all his Carthusian austerity, he would have approved. Not often have saints been great administrators. But that huge diocese seems to have been run more effectively than any other.

Walter Oakeshott

The Old School House
Eynsham



The diocese of Lincoln in St.Hugh's time,
 "spread through 9, or even more, shires"

P R E F A C E

Hugh of Avalon - that is what he is often called. Avalon - not the mystic paradise of Arthurian legend, hit a small town in south-eastern France, near Grenoble, on the edge of the Alps, and then in Imperial Burgundy. Hugh's father was lord of the manor there.

At an early age Hugh became an Augustinian Canon. At 23 he transferred to the more austere and secluded life of a Carthusian monk. Both Orders, as indeed also the Cistercians, were reform-movements, trying to disentangle current monasticism from the world. Carthusians were the strictest, selecting men carefully, disciplining than tightly, making life very frugal, and bidding each monk spend long hours alone in his cell, strenuously engaged in prayer, and study, and meditation. Hugh had gone to their mother-house, the Grande Chartreuse, not far from home, but amongst the wild mountains. There, in due course, he became second-in-command.

Meanwhile King Henry II, as part of his penance in connexion with the assassination of Thomas à Becket, had brought Carthusian to England, giving them land at Witham, in Somerset, near Frampton. Two priors, however, had failed to get the new house going. Now the King wanted Hugh of Avalon. Witham was in the diocese of Bath: so Reginald, bishop of Bath, was in the deputation to the Grande Chartreuse. Their aim was to get Hugh to come, and his superior to let him go. They succeeded. Hugh made the tiresome journey to Witham, showed his powers of leadership there, and soon made the wilting little house to blossom. It is surprising how knowledge of such men as Hugh travelled the roads of Europe in those less communicative days. After about six years the King wanted Hugh of Avalon for the bishopric of Lincoln. It was now 1186.

I am most grateful for the incisive Foreword, which Sir Walter Oakeshott has so kindly contributed to my booklet. His own magnificent work, so recently published, o Winchester Bibles (1984), illustrates Hugh's largeness of heart: the King had purloined a fine Bible from Winchester, and sent it to Hugh at Witham: when Hugh discovered its

rightful owners, he quietly sent it back! The arithmetic of 'Rendering unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's' and 'Unto God the things which are God's' (Luke xx, 25) has never been easy! Hugh had to deal with 3 kings of England, Henry II, Richard I, and John, all difficult, and he managed superbly.

I know of only one translation of the following Eynsham story, and that is in Douie and Farmer's standard work, revised and reissued last year, The Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln. Nothing is likely to equal it. My own small translation of Eynsham's exciting week in 1186 was done before ever I saw Douie and Farmer. The pretext for publishing it on its own is that this is 1986, St. Hugh's special year, and that this particular episode is of peculiar concern to us who have the good fortune to live in Eynsham. I have tried to catch the verve, the excitement, the humour, the personal quality, which characterize the story. Adam, who wrote it, was an Eynsham monk, and may well have been present. 10 years later he was to go off as Hugh's episcopal chaplain, and to spend the last 3 years and 5 days of Hugh's life in close and daily contact with him. Hugh died in 1200, and was canonized in 1220. Speaking as a bishop, and (in medieval terms) one of the 'secular (that is, non-monastic) clergy', I have only one caveat to offer, 'Please take Adam's strictures on secular clergy with a large pinch of salt! They were common monastic talk of the day.'

So this is an Eynsham tale, produced here by Eynsham residents, and offered with Eynsham pride. Its publication would have been impossible without the enthusiasm of Dr. Brian Atkins, who has set it all up for the printer, as also without the backing of the Eynsham History Group, under whose aegis it goes forth. To them all, as also to my wife, who bears with what St. Paul might call my 'oft infirmities', and with the moans and groans with which even this tiny work comes to birth, I owe an immeasurable debt. Thanks for each illustration is expressed elsewhere, but it would be less than gracious not to repeat it here: their presence adds an extra dimension of joy to a fascinating story.

Eric Gordon
Cobden
Eynsham
March 1986.

THE STORY

(from the Latin of Vita S.Hugonis Lincolniensis,
ed.J.F.Dimock, Rolls Series 37, London, 1864, pp.102-109)

BOOK III: chapter 1

Of Hugh's election as bishop, and of the wide extent of the diocese of Lincoln.

After the preferment of that godly man, Walter, bishop of Lincoln, to the archbishopric of Rouen, Henry II, King of England, held a council at Eynsham. It went on for almost 8 days without a break: it dealt with sundry matters of state: the bishops and magnates of the land were there. In that same abbey, as guests during the council, there were Baldwin, of holy memory*, archbishop of Canterbury, and some of his suffragans. Day by day the King arrived there in the morning, and at the close of the discussion returned to his palace at Woodstock. During the council at Eynsham the elections of certain bishops and abbots were held. The canons of Lincoln had also come down to elect their bishop, or perhaps rather to receive their bishop, chosen from on high.

Now at that time some of the leading figures of that church, not a few of them in fact, were bound up with the intrigues and values of palaces. They were famed in matters secular, mighty in their store of worldly learning, not to say worldly riches. A number of them were of the opinion that no bishopric, howsoever ample, was too great for greatness like theirs. And stall wonder, since they were loaded up with ampler revenues than any bishopric, however huge. Some of them indeed, whether for the sake of the good work of a bishop (as the apostle would have it), or for the sake of the glory, honour and power of a bishop (as worldly ambition might judge), would by no means have refused to be bishops, if there had been someone there to compel them.

But the Lord was holding the King's heart in his hand, and bending it where he willed: and the archbishop of Canterbury, and some other men of God, were in agreement: but especially Reginald, bishop of Bath, was pressing hard: and thus the King strove to see that an

* Before the Life of St.Hugh had been written, Archbishop Baldwin had gone to the Holy Land on the Third Crusade and there died.

adequate pastor was provided for the care of so many of the Lord's sheep. For that diocese contains 8 archdeaconries, and is spread through 9, or even more, shires: it embraces very great cities, and countless people: and it is hard to find another diocese which is larger or more populous. What is more, that splendid see had only recently been empty for about 18 years, 2½ of them since the last bishop had been translated, and 15 of them before he had been consecrated. That field of the Lord had lain uncultivated for so many years that it was small wonder that it was sick with the brambles of wickedness, dense and rank with seeds of abuse.

Now the King was aware that the blame for such great ill was being laid at his own door: for it was obvious that he had himself caused the harmful vacancy. So he strove with all his might to make good the long neglect of cultivation by the appointment of a vigorous and outstanding cultivator now.

Meanwhile those canons were struggling on in vain: they could not agree on a choice: it was commonly said that each one of them, deep down in his heart, was only wanting his own elevation. Many counselled them, and indeed pressed the case, that they should try to get hold of the prior of Witham as their pastor. His goodness, they said, was beyond compare. He was a man of holiness. His common sense, his approachability, his devotion to monasticism, were lauded to the skies. It was said indeed that every excellence of character, the very fourfoldness of all virtues, was compacted together in that one nun. No one, cried many with a single voice, could be more worthy of that high-priesthood than he.

At first, when they heard all this, you could see something like a shiver of horror spread amongst those men. And small wonder, for these men felt for fleshly things. Even in the cause of God, they sought after the things of men rather than those of God. In the end they began to argue that that man's practice of religion, his ways of worship, and his manner of speech, were clean contrary to their own, and utterly unfamiliar. And they were even laughing him to scorn. Fortunately for them, however, this laughter of theirs was met with laughter, wholesome laughter, by the wiser of those present. And they themselves (to the great glory of all the holy church of God, as well as of their own church) suddenly changed their minds, and at length with one accord elected the man whom at first they had childishly despised. And so the man chosen by the Lord from all eternity was at God's appointed time chosen also by men. Those who knew him gave thanks: those who knew nothing about him marvelled: and one and all conjoined in high-sounding praise to God the Lord.

Chapter 2

Of Hugh's definition of the places in which the election of a bishop ought and ought not to be held. And how he set aside his own election, because it had not been held in the chapter-house at Lincoln.

So then the clergy were asking for this man, and the King approved, and the magnates and the bishops acclaimed the choice: very soon his election was confirmed by the archbishop. Meanwhile the man himself was tucked away in his monastery. He was completely unaware of what was being settled about him in that faraway council. But from that very place where the election was held some of the senior electors were sent off to him. In hope they were already his sons and his clergy. They carried with them the mandate of the lord archbishop, as well as letters from the King. Coming to him, they gave an account of his call to higher office. He heard them out, and examined the letters they had brought. These said that he should present himself, with all speed, to the King and the archbishop, and there deal with the business of his consecration. Here is the reply which he gave forthwith to what he heard and read.

"It is not surprising that the lord archbishop, or even our lord the King, would be glad to see someone like me advanced to higher office, though I am unworthy of such an honour, and far unequal to so great a burden. For who can doubt that it would please our lord the King to see men, whom he has himself brought here from distant parts for the advancement of religion, flourish and prosper in his kingdom? And it is just so with the lord archbishop of Canterbury: he is now almost alone amongst the bishops of this land in favouring the religious habit: who can be ignorant of his prayer for men trained and disciplined in the regular life as colleagues in his pastoral office and ministry?

"But neither their prayers nor their desires should prevail to warp your judgement. Yours is the duty to elect your ruler freely. And, what is more, it is you who will have to put up with his disciplines and his character. Except therefore when some disastrous difference or division occurs, the election of a ruler of a church ought to be held in the chapter-house of that sane church, and not in a royal palace, nor yet an episcopal council. So be quite clear about my humble opinion. You are to know that I hold that whatever has been done about this particular election is utterly null and void. Consider

as undone whatever a certain section of your assembly is thought to have achieved in this matter. Wend your way back to your own church, going with the blessing of God. Supported there by the counsel and aid of the Holy Spirit, set in motion a solemn and canonical election of your pastor. And, that you may do this worthily, hold before your eyes the will, the grace, the favour, not of the King, nor yet of a bishop, nor of any man soever, but of God Almighty alone. Carry back no message from this small. man. Go therefore, and may the good angel of the Lord keep you company".

He persisted in this way of thinking. For such a business no manner of argument could induce him to present himself, either to the King or the archbishop. So they went back with all speed to those who had sent them. They were wondrously inspired by all that they had heard from him and seen around him. And not they only, but all that heard, were astounded, and mightily made glad. And one and all they praised and magnified his integrity of mind, his wisdom exceeding strong, his lively counsel, and his zeal for the liberty of the church.

Chapter 3

HOW he was unwilling to agree to his election without the authority of the prior of the Grande Chartreuse, even after he had been duly elected in the chapter-house of Lincoln.

Tidings of this were carried to the notice of the chapter of Lincoln. And the whole college was the more thankful that its elect had already shown an earnest of his future vigour, and firstfruits of his great qualities. And those who before were grumbling that they had been badly led, not to say manipulated, into electing as their ruler and lord a man whose savage nature, and harsh and rustic ways, they dreaded, now turned right about. They had discovered the strength of his goodness and wisdom. They made haste to hold a new election, and to choose him again, and to beg earnestly that he would deign to undertake to minister to their pastoral care. Messengers were sent again, more in number than the first, with letters from the chapter, as well as from King and archbishop. Everyone thought that the business was now settled. He could have no other excuse for delay. Representatives therefore, fully instructed, light of heart, and joyful, came to him. Now that blessed man had foreseen from long ago that at some or other time God would lead him to the office of a bishop: he was sad therefore that what could not be avoided was at last happening: and with all that was in him he wanted it not to happen too quickly.

So he looked at the letters which the messengers brought, and listened to what they had to say, and spoke as follows:

"It is very remarkable that men as wise as you, and so cultured, should so such want a rustic and uncultured man like me, and be at pains to take from me the solitude and quiet, which have been my familiar friends from my youth up, and labour to plunge me into public gatherings and tangled business, things which are quite foreign to my experience. Since it is plain, however, that the arguments I have put forward cannot prevail to make you change your minds, know this for certain. The goal for which you strive is not in my power to assist. I cannot conceal from you that I am a man set under another's authority. You are to know that I am a monk, subject to the decisions of my prior, and bound to obedience until my dying day. In all places and at all times I am tied to the bidding of him who sent me to these lands. The care of this house has been entrusted to me by my superior. There can be no excuse for me to set it aside and undertake the governance of any other house or church whatsoever. My lord of Canterbury is indeed primate and head of the English church, subject only to the supreme pontiff: but in matters of this kind another stands between us. Either, therefore, you must desist from pressing this request upon me, or you must undertake the wearisome and burdensome journey to the Grande Chartreuse. For without the direct command of our prior no man shall put so heavy a load upon my shoulders".

Chapter 4

Haw representatives were sent off to the Grande Chartreuse, to request that Hugh should be granted to the church which had invited

Having received this response, and seeing that nothing whatever would make him change his mind, they went back to him. They were sad because they had not done the business for which they came: but they were glad, because they had no small evidence of the outstanding determination and the sterling qualities of their future pastor. So then (to cut a long story short) distinguished representatives were sent, with all haste, to the Grande Chartreuse. Arrived there, they presented the petition of the church of Lincoln, and the King's plea, and the archbishop's counsel: they did so both in word and in writing. As was due, they were honourably received, and favourably heard to the end. Then they hurried back, bringing to Hugh the command of the prior and the brethren that from now on he should give canonical obedience to my lord of Canterbury, and in the present matter obey him humbly. He should set aside all hesitation and delay, and accept that yoke which the Lord God was clearly laying upon him ...



Seal of Witham priory, Somerset: 15th century form.
The mitred figure at prayer is thought to represent St.Hugh.
(V.C.H., Somerset, vol.II, p.128)

Inscription:

S[igillum]: CO[mmun]E: DOMUS: BE[ate] MARIE: DE WITHAM
ORDINIS CARTHUS[iensis]

(Common seal of the House of Blessed Mary of Witham of the
Carthusian Order)

Drawing from R.C.Hoare, Monastic Remains ...Witham... (1824),
in M. McGarvie, Witham Friary -1981.

Reproduced by courtesy of M. McGarvie.

EYNESHAM HISTORY GROUP

Founded 1959

The E.H.G. exists primarily to encourage studies in, and to promote knowledge of the history of the village and parish of Eynsham, Oxon, by means of regular meetings (normally at least ten), with invited speakers, during the winter and spring; and occasional outings during the summer.

New members are welcome.

The current subscription is £2.50 per annum (excluding the Record).
For further details, please apply to the Secretary,
Mrs L. Wright, Charfield, Cassington Road, Eynsham.

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1. Swinford Toll Bridge, 1769-1969. by E.de Villiers. 32pp. 1969.
(out of print)
2. Eynsham: some interesting and notable dates in the history of our village. 4pp. 1977 (reprint). 15p.
3. St.Hugh and Eynsham Abbey: by Eric Gordon. 12pp. 1986. 50p.

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