THE SAINT OF NEWINGTON; WHO WAS ROBERT LE BOUSER?

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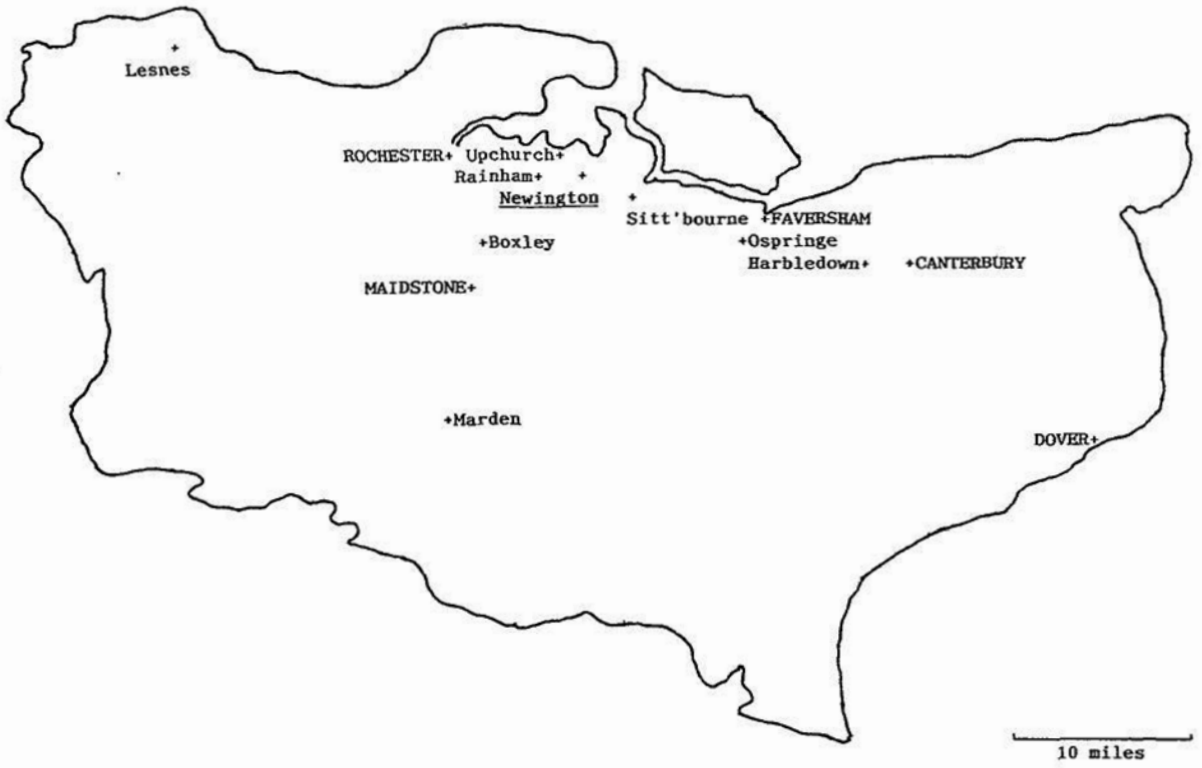
In the handsome church of St Mary at Newington, near Sittingbourne, stand the remains of a monument to which an interesting story, and something of an historical riddle, are attached. John Newman describes it thus: 'What looks like a tomb-chest in the S. Chapel is the pedestal of a Shrine of St Robert le Bouser, erected *c.* 1350. On each side four deep pointed-trefoiled recesses, one of which runs right through the stone. On top a thick slab of local marble'.[1] The function of such recesses around a shrine, which can be seen on many of the few surviving English medieval shrine bases, such as St Werburga's in Chester Cathedral, was to enable suppliants to crouch as near as possible to the saint. The unusual passage pierced right through the Newington example presumably represented an extension of this idea; it was locally believed that pilgrims would crawl through it, thus achieving an even greater intimacy with the holy relics preserved in the tomb. The author of a guide to Newington parish church likened the shrine to the well-known example at Whitchurch Canonicorum in Dorset, but in that example the front of the shrine is pierced by three apertures, not large enough to admit a person, in which 'Visitors still leave prayer requests and coins'.[2]

The shrine of Robert le Bouser originally stood in a chapel on the high road, Watling Street, which connected London with Canterbury and Dover. Every local shrine landscape had its own characteristics; certainly the northern and eastern Kentish area was influenced to a high degree by this road, and by Canterbury. Alan Everitt suggested that Canterbury, long before Becket, was 'not simply the political capital of the Kentish kingdom and the seat of the archbishop, but the focal point of a whole galaxy of indigenous cults and local devotional customs'. Of these he thought that the cult of Archbishop Robert Winchelsey (d. 1315) was perhaps the last to appear.[3] Winchelsey, a prominent figure in the affairs of the nation, was briefly a serious candidate for canonisation, and the miracles that were collected in



Map 1. Location of Kentish places mentioned in the text.

1319 with this in mind show him ministering to a clientele which came from as far afield as York and Herefordshire. Following a normal pattern, interest in him, as measured by offerings at his tomb, died down after fifty years or so, but 'the pennies continued to trickle into Winchelsey's pyx after that'.[4] At this later stage, such devotees as he had were surely either local people who perhaps preserved some tradition of the good archbishop, or pilgrims who piously acknowledged the claims of shrines other than Becket's or Our Lady in the crypt.

In 1295 Winchelsey escorted two cardinals, who were en route to negotiate with the king in London, from Harbledown on the outskirts of Canterbury as far as Ospringe, near Faversham, and on the following day as far as Newington.[5] Newington is often mentioned as a stopping-place on Watling Street. It was conveniently sited to serve as a halt between the crossing of the Medway at Rochester and the Maison Dieu at Ospringe, and chancery enrolments show that kings sometimes paused there, at least for long enough to witness letters. Jack Ravenglass may have been right to speculate that the stop for refreshment that Chaucer's pilgrims made, or at least that the Pardoner wanted to make 'at this alestake', somewhere between Rochester and Sittingbourne, was at Newington. He remarks that Newington stood also on a well-used by-way: 'It is...at this point that the former greenway comes close to Watling Street, passing through the village of Newington, and this might well have been a route chosen by the pilgrims in preference to the Roman road'.[6] Certainly at least one client of St Thomas Becket, much earlier, was able to find food and accommodation there, as we shall see.

The main road, the *strata publica*, was royal land, and for a stretch between Newington and Sittingbourne it was lined with woods known as 'the Chestnuts' (*Chastiners*); Edward I from time to time gave presents of trees from this source.[7] It was therefore to the king that the abbot of Lesnes, some time in 1350, applied for the grant of a small plot of land (20 by 14 ft) by this highway on which to erect a chapel in honour of the Virgin Mary and Holy Cross 'at the cross where Robert le Bouser was killed'. Edward III made the grant in mortmain, 'out of charity', on 28 October 1350.[8] The chapel was built, and in 1472 was valued at 40*s*., when it was called the 'chapel of Robert Purser, worker of miracles'.[9] However, it soon fell into decay, and early in the sixteenth century the tomb was brought into the church of St Mary at Newington.

It is from here that the fullest evidence for the veneration of 'St Robert' comes. In 1502 Alice Sayer of Newington made the following bequest in her will: 'To the light of Our Lady in St Robert's

Chapel. a taper of 2lbs of wax. To the increase of the same Light. a cow for ever'. She wished to be buried in the chapel beside her husband Sampson Sayer. In 1516 Isabel Diggis also wished to be buried beside her husband in the chapel of 'St Robarde'. In 1504 William at Wood of Upchurch, near Newington, said in his will that another William at Wood, perhaps his son, and Thomas Rider, had promised 'to go pilgrimage for me to our Lady of Walsingham, to the Rood of Rest, to the Rood of Grace of Boxley, and to St Robert of Newenton parish, and they shall have for their labours ten shillings and four bushels of wheat'.[10] Clearly, a story which had begun over 150 years earlier was remembered locally, in however garbled a form.

Edward III's grant to the abbot of Lesnes in 1350 gives no guidance as to when Robert le Bouser died or who he was. We know rather more about the cross at Newington near which he apparently died, for this was hallowed by association with a much more illustrious saint, Thomas Becket, murdered on 29 December 1170. Benedict of Peterborough, the author of one of the two major collections of Becket's miracles, says that it was built, no one knew by whom, when Becket's miracles first began (*a primis miraculorum diebus*). On his return from exile in 1170, the Archbishop stopped at Newingon on his way to London, and there and then performed the confirmation of local children, in an unusually reverential manner according to Benedict, descending from his horse as few other bishops, if any, would have done. Not only at Newington, but at two other places where Becket did likewise, wooden crosses were erected and became sites of miracles and foci of pilgrimage in their own right. 'The place where the cross stands', Benedict states with reference to Newington, 'is holy ground'.[11]

A number of miracles subsequently took place there. A blind girl from Southwell, a woman of Woolwich who had been blind for ten years, a small boy blind from birth, Eldith from Staffordshire and Hedewic, a skinner from Gloucestershire, all received their sight; Eliza Dunton recovered from heart disease and Leuric, from Barking in Suffolk, regained the use of a hand. Some cures were effected only partially at Newington, and completed when the sufferer reached Canterbury, but one man, who had been suffering from a hernia for over seven years, received his cure at Newington on the way back. Another, who had recovered his sight at Rochester en route, paused at Newington to do reverence to the cross where the martyr's feet had stood. The small son of a skinner of Northampton whose right foot was irremovably bent over his left was brought there by his mother and put to rights '*in loco sancto*'. When two lame girls from Boxley, near Maidstone, were brought to Newington, the elder promptly received

her cure and was brought into the church with the bells ringing, while her sister reproached the martyr for leaving her out. Moved by pity, the saint 'visited' her on the following day as she slept. There were many other miracles, says Benedict, but he has reported the well-attested ones. The picture he gives is of suppliants clustered around the cross, frequently sleeping on the spot for one or more nights, and furnishing an audience for any marvel that should occur.[12]

William fitz Stephen, compiler of the other major collection of Becket's miracles, adds the story of a dropsical knight, who had been directed by the saint himself to eschew doctors and rely on St Thomas's medicine. He was returning to London from his Canterbury pilgrimage, when he stopped at Newington because he had been shaken up by the jolting of the cart in which he was travelling. After eating, drinking and sleeping well he awoke cured, apart from some residual lameness, which perhaps remained because he had failed to complete the pilgrimage on foot as the martyr had instructed.[13] William also tells of a sick woman called Eva from the neighbourhood of Glastonbury, who called upon Becket, came to Canterbury to seek the completion of her cure, and stopped at Newington, which William describes as 'the place where the saint on his last journey to London confirmed children'. Here, after some prolonged convulsions, she arose fit and well. This was not the end of her story, for a further incident added to the wondrousness of the martyr and the celebrity of the place. Eva fixed two lighted candles to 'the cross' (which had therefore clearly already been erected) and when the wind blew them out God miraculously re-ignited them.[14]

For a place of its size, Newington had acquired a distinguished miraculous record, which it owed to its position on the London-Canterbury route. The dropsical knight's story reveals that it was possible to find board and lodging there, although it is not clear whether he got these at an inn or from some private householder. Newington's associations with Becket were soon to be further strengthened. The manor, at the time of Becket's death, belonged to the justiciar Richard de Lucy, who had been no great friend to the Archbishop; but in 1178 he founded the abbey of Lesnes at what was then called Westwood, and now Erith, as a house of Augustinian canons dedicated to St Thomas. He retired there to die in 1179. The churches of Newington and Marden were among his gifts to his foundation, and thus it was that the abbot of Lesnes, one hundred and seventy years later, was interested in events at Newington.[15]

There is nothing to indicate that, after the excitement of the early years of Becket's cult, Newington witnessed a continued stream of miracles, but it is reasonable to suppose that local tradition, and the

existence of the cross, kept alive the awareness that this was hallowed ground. It seems likely that the reputation of Robert le Bouser, whoever he was, and however he met his death, was coloured by these associations. Business of many kinds might have brought him along the road which led not only to and from Canterbury, but to and from Dover. We have no certain evidence that he was a pilgrim, but violence involving pilgrims and, of course, other travellers, in taverns and elsewhere, was not uncommon. An incident which took place on another major thoroughfare in the later fourteenth century suggests how popular confusion about the status of such a deceased person might possibly arise. In November 1389 the pope awarded an indulgence of four months to all who should go to Horsenden (Bucks) in the diocese of Lincoln and pray for the soul of John Braybrook, who had been murdered by robbers on the high road from London to Oxford. The indulgence was also available at the cross which had been put up at 'Sleepersdene', where the murder took place.[16] There is certainly no indication that the pope, or indeed anyone else, thought John Braybrook was a saint, and it was not uncommon for indulgences to be awarded for prayers for the repose of souls, often on condition of actually going to the grave. It is easy to see, however, that publicising such an indulgence, available at both the tomb of a murder victim and the place of his death, might give rise to confusion, when indulgences were so commonly associated with the shrines of saints.

We have no record of any such indulgence for visitors to the tomb of Robert le Bouser, but there was a well-attested propensity anyway to attribute sanctity to victims of violence, including judicial execution and the alleged atrocities committed by Jews against Christian children.[17] Becket himself was, in a sense, the most illustrious example; but if he had plausible credentials as an authentic martyr, there had been others since who were both more obscure and more questionable. Three examples from the century or so after Becket's death may be cited in illustration.

In 1190 there was a wave of anti-Semitic violence in many parts of England, by way of a preliminary to Richard I's crusade. William of Newburgh tells how Jewish goods were plundered at Stamford fair in Lent. One of the perpetrators made off with his spoils to Northampton, where he was murdered by the person to whom he confided his ill-gotten gains, and his body cast outside the town walls. When it was found and identified, the 'avaricious homicide' took flight, but the 'simple' began to award the honours of a martyr to the dead man and people came from far afield to join in. The clergy were not above encouraging the movement because of the resulting profits, and St Hugh, bishop of Lincoln, had to intervene to quash the devotion.[18]

The same chronicler gives the fullest account of the agitation fomented in London in 1196 by William fitz Osbert, known as Longbeard. William set himself up as the people's champion against the greed and oppression of the richer citizens. When he killed one of a posse sent by the justiciar, Hubert Walter, to arrest him, he took refuge in the church of St Mary le Bow, but his pursuers drove him out by setting fire to the church, and he and several of his associates were executed. A kinsman who was a priest sought to profit by his fate and fabricated miracles; the gibbet on which he had died was spirited away by his followers and the earth around the spot where it had stood, which was deemed to be hallowed by his blood, was excavated to quite a considerable depth by believers. Stern intervention was necessary to put an end to this popular veneration.[19]

The last example is rather later. In 1279 one William de Lay was dragged from sanctuary in the church of Sts Philip and James at Bristol and put to death, evidently at the direction of the constable of Bristol castle. The bishop of Worcester imposed penances on the offenders, but he was disquieted to learn that local people were 'wickedly' going to the tomb of the victim 'next to' the church of Sts Philip and James, 'as to a saint'. The finger of suspicion pointed, in his view, to the priests of the church, and also of the church of Blessed Mary in the Market, 'and others who stirred up scandal and errors in the town of Bristol' and, presumably, stood to profit from the bogus cult. The bishop also wanted to know who had composed and circulated 'a certain libellous song' (libellous of whom, it is not clear), which had been posted up on a board as well as recited in public, but no one seemed able or willing to tell him. The rector of St Mary protested ignorance on this point, but attested that he had heard of miracles performed by William.[20]

All of these unlikely candidates for sanctity had something in their story which may have disposed the populace to interpret their violent ends as martyrdom. This is least clear in the case of the man murdered at Northampton, but it is possible that he was known that he had been involved in anti-Jewish activity at Stamford, and in the atmosphere of 1190 that may have been sufficient to dispose the public in his favour. William fitz Osbert was driven from sanctuary, by doubly impious means if it was true that the justiciar's men set fire to St Mary le Bow. It may also have been widely known that he had been a crusader with Richard the Lionheart, whose favour, we are told, he sought to obtain on behalf of the oppressed citizens of London. As one of a party of Londoners who had set out for the Holy Land, he had received a vision of Becket, who assured them that he, St Edmund and St Nicholas had been divinely appointed protectors of their ship.[21]

Matthew Paris, who gives the most sympathetic account, thought that William might justly claim the title of a martyr because he suffered death in a just cause.[22] William de Lay of Bristol resembled fitz Osbert in that he, too, was seized from sanctuary. His original offence is unspecified, but the circumstances suggest undercurrents of local opposition to authority in the shape of the constable and his henchmen.

There were other, much higher-profile victims of violence who became political 'martyrs' and performed recorded miracles, most notably Simon de Montfort, leader of the baronial opposition to Henry III and killed at the battle of Evesham in 1265, and Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, who enacted a similar role in relation to Edward II and was summarily executed after the battle of Boroughbridge in 1322.[23] Obscure and apparently quite unpolitical murder victims could, however, also qualify, like Simon of Atherfield on the Isle of Wight who was, to all appearances, murdered by his wife and enjoyed a brief cult early in the thirteenth century.[24]

Kent was not without its saints in this category. Thomas de la Hale, a monk of St Martin's Priory at Dover, was killed during a French raid on the town in 1295, and enjoyed a modestly flourishing cult for some while afterwards: Richard II was prepared to press his claims for canonisation on the pope.[25] Closer still to Newington, and possibly more closely analogous to Robert le Bouser, was the cult of William of Perth, of which both the inhabitants of Newington and the canons of Lesnes would surely have been aware. William was a humble baker, murdered at Rochester on his way to the Holy Land in 1201. In 1256 Bishop Laurence sought papal approval for the cult,[26] and William was still receiving offerings in the fourteenth century. Here was a pilgrim who met a violent death on the road to Dover and enjoyed some success himself as the object of pilgrimage; Robert le Bouser may conceivably have represented an attempt to reproduce this success. However, it must be remembered that we do not know for certain either that he was a pilgrim, or that he died by violence, rather than in an accident.

It would also be helpful, of course, if we knew more precisely when he died. It is a reasonable, although not certainly verifiable, hypothesis that he was fairly recently dead when Edward III made his grant in October 1350, and that the ostensible reason for the abbot's request to build the chapel was to re-sanctify hallowed, though not strictly consecrated, ground which had been sullied by bloodshed. There is no indication that the king thought, or had been told, that Robert himself was an object of veneration, but was the abbot of Lesnes perhaps aware that a popular cult had sprung up around the

obscure Robert at Newington? Certainly the form of the surviving shrine-base suggests (although it does not prove) that the inmate of the tomb was regarded from the beginning as a saint. The chapel, however, was unexceptionably dedicated to the Virgin and to Holy Cross. The English authorities, lay and ecclesiastical, were very much alive to the possibility of unlicensed pilgrimage to bogus saints, as the examples cited above indicate. If the tomb or shrine of which the remains now stand in Newington church was built for Robert le Bouser, his body must have been moved into it from some earlier burial-place, and such a translation normally required authorisation. If this shrine attracted a pilgrimage and offerings, however modest, by whose permission or with whose connivance did this all happen? Is it, in fact, possible to discover anything more about Robert le Bouser and his cult ?

The answer may well be in the negative. Not all such cases of (apparently) unlicensed devotion came to the notice of the authorities, and even when they did repressive action was not inevitable or invariable. It seems a fair presumption that if Robert had been a person of note we might have been told rather more about him, but tracing individuals of middling or lowly rank in medieval documents is a hazardous business. All but the most unusual names could easily be held by several, even many, different individuals, so the identical name does not guarantee the identical person without a great deal of further corroboration. If his surname denoted his occupation, Robert may have been a purse- or pouch-maker, perhaps from London. This is thought to be the most probable etymology of the word 'bouser' or 'burser' in the fourteenth century.[27] There were certainly at least two pouch-makers called Robert in London in the 1340s, but they both bear other surnames: Robert Neel and Robert le Rede.[28] Tempting as it is to imagine a London pouch-maker murdered on his Canterbury pilgrimage a generation before Chaucer, the circumstantial detail which would identify either of these individuals, or any other contemporary bearer of the same name, as our man is sadly lacking. What is all too clear is that the name was not uncommon.

There is, however, another problem with nomenclature. Not only can many individuals hold the same name, but the same individual's name can be spelt in many different ways. In 1327 a Robert le Bourser is mentioned among the companions of Bartholomew Burghersh, a close associate of the new King Edward III, who was going abroad.[29] Numerous subsequent records of the same individual see him mutate into Robert Bourchier, sometime Chancellor of England, who died of plague in August 1349.[30] He belonged to a family of Essex landholders, and like other members of the family was buried in the

church of Halsted (the remains of some of their monuments survive). His father John, a justice of the King's Bench under Edward II, who survived into the next reign, perhaps dying in 1330, was also occasionally denoted 'le Bouser', and the family surname is spelt in innumerable ways.[31] Whoever was killed at Newington cross, some time before October 1350, it was not the Robert 'Bourchier' who had been Chancellor of England, but it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that it was a member of the same family. If that were so, the name may have meant something to Edward III when he made his grant to the abbot of Lesnes.

Newington, even in the fourteenth century, does not seem to have been a place which hit the headlines very frequently, and it is unlikely that fresh information will be forthcoming; but as one looks in the haystack for this particular needle, a couple of glints of light catch the eye. There is in fact a record of a murdered Robert le Bourser, albeit half a century before the building of the chapel. On October 16 1301 Edward I pardoned Richard Makefeir of 'Reynham', on account of the former's service in Scotland, for the death of Robert le Bourser.[32] There is no indication where the killing had taken place, and the reference would barely attract notice were it not for the possibility that the killer's place of origin might be the Rainham which is only a few miles distant from Newington. If, however, it is to be identified as Rainham in Essex (as the editor of the Patent Roll supposed, on what grounds is not clear), even this remote possibility of a connection would fail.

If it be accepted that the death is likely to have taken place not long before 1350, it is intriguing to discover that there had in fact been a murder at Newington, at some unspecified time before 1345. In February of that year the papal penitentiary commissioned Hamo de Hethe, Bishop of Rochester, to establish whether Richard Rolf, vicar of Newington, was, as he claimed, guiltless of any involvement in a killing which had 'once' (*olim*) taken place in the parish in the course of festivities marking the feast of St Nicholas (6 December). The Bishop responded by asking the rural dean of Sittingbourne to take sworn depositions from trustworthy witnesses at Newington, and himself then personally interviewed the vicar. These enquiries ended by substantiating the vicar's version of events, which was that he had been 'accompanying' (*associavit*) the parish 'bishop', appointed in honour of St Nicholas, when certain 'malefactors' attacked the party, striking and wounding the vicar himself. Probably he, the 'bishop' and his entourage had been conducting a procession around the locality, although this is not made clear; it was not unknown for such festive gatherings to end in violence. The vicar had beaten a prudent

retreat, and claimed that he had had no part by word or deed in the subsequent killing of one of the 'malefactors' by a member of the 'bishop's' party. He said that he had nothing on his conscience, and the terms of the papal penitentiary's directive authorised Bishop Hamo, if he was satisfied of the facts, to declare that 'the aforesaid vicar is not bound by any impediment of irregularity by reason of the aforementioned [events]'.[33]

Unfortunately the victim is not named, nor are we told exactly where in Newington the incident occurred. It might on the face of it seem unlikely that the 'malefactor' should have become the object of a popular cult, but if his death by any chance took place 'at the Cross' the possibility that superstitious reverence for one fated to die at so holy a spot, inextricably mixed with the desire to purify the polluted earth, produced such a result could not be excluded. Nor, of course, do we know the full story behind the incident: local opinion may not have been quite so hostile to the 'malefactors' as the vicar was. This is admittedly speculative, and we certainly cannot be confident that this was the setting for the death of Robert le Bouser. There is, however, another interesting circumstance of possible relevance. We have seen that in other, well-documented cases where victims, and possibly guilty victims, of violence became the object of 'popular' cults, the clergy were often suspected of complicity, for the very good reason that they stood to profit by the resultant offerings. Might such a suspicion attach to the abbot and convent of Lesnes?

It is beyond question that Lesnes was in a poor way in the middle of the fourteenth century. In 1341 Hamo de Hethe deposed the abbot, who was, among other things, 'disobedient, incorrigible and rebellious'.[34] In 1344 the abbot and convent entered into a complicated arrangement with the Bishop and the community of Rochester cathedral, whereby they promised to support a chaplain who would celebrate divine service daily in the cathedral for the good estate of the king and Bishop Hamo, for their souls after their deaths, and for the souls of all Hamo's predecessors as bishop. It transpires that in consideration of these promised benefits Hamo had advanced the abbot the sum of 160 marks sterling.[35] The abbot declared that he had spent the money on 'the uses of our monastery aforesaid, especially in respect of the repair of our church, which has suffered sudden damage, for the defence of our lands against the encroachments of the water of the Thames, not to mention the discharge of debts incurred by reason of obtaining the patronage of the church of Aveley, diocese of London, recently appropriated to us and our monastery, and on account of a deficient harvest and various lawsuits and difficult cases which are weighing gravely upon us.'[36]

In 1349 Hamo visited the abbey again and found it (as he also found the nunnery of Malling) 'destroyed by misgovernment of long duration, to the point that while this world lasts and until the day of judgment it is to be believed they could not be put to rights'.[37] In the 1350s Abbot Richard Gayton (1347-62) makes not infrequent appearances in the Close Rolls acknowledging, on behalf of himself and the convent, debts to individual clergy and also to London tradesmen, some of them substantial. In February 1350 the Abbot acknowledged a debt of £64 to the executors of John de Hatfield, London draper (who had in fact been engaged in property deals with the convent which went back into the incumbency of the previous abbot), and in May he admitted owing £400 to the London goldsmith, John de Hiltoft. This, we note, was not long before Edward III's grant of the plot of land at Newington. Such debts had not been entirely unprecedented in earlier years, but certainly seem to have reached a high point in the early 1350s.[38] It was, of course, in no way uncommon for religious houses to be both over-committed and mismanaged, but it would hardly have been surprising, given the parlous state of the community, if Abbot Richard had been extremely interested in any fresh source of income which offered itself, even if some investment, in this instance the building and furnishing of the chapel, was the necessary preliminary to reaping a return. How profitable such enterprises actually were, in the short or long term, would not be easy to discover, but the Lesnes community was involved in another one only twenty years later. In 1371 the abbot launched a campaign for the redecoration of the chapel of the Virgin at Lesnes itself, and in May and December of that year the pope granted indulgences to those who visited the abbey and gave alms for the refurbishment. It was claimed that miracles had occurred there.[39]

Someone had died at Newington, some time before October 1350, and although that person was not described as a saint to, or by, the king, the chapel which was built as a result (with a perfectly respectable dedication) contained what looks very much like a shrine. Whether the killing which is recorded as having taken place at Newington five or so years earlier had any connection with these later developments it is quite impossible to say. Robert le Bouser may simply have been a pilgrim, passing through Newington on his way to Canterbury; the timing of the abbot's petition to the king would, for example, be consistent with a death in early July 1350 when pilgrims would have been flocking to the feast of Becket's translation, which took place on the seventh of that month. Alternatively, he might have been en route not to Canterbury, but to Rome for the Jubilee of 1350. After initial reluctance to let his subjects leave the kingdom, taking

money and horses with them, Edward III issued a number of licences to Rome-bound pilgrims, which are most numerous in September 1350.[40] No such name as Robert le Bouser's appears among them, but the named pilgrims often took with them a number of (unnamed) servants, nor need we suppose that all such permissions were enrolled, or that everyone who in fact went to Rome did so with permission.[41] The possible local analogy with William of Perth at Rochester, who had also been Rome-bound when he died, together with the timing, makes this a tempting explanation, but yet again substantiation is lacking.

There are then a number of possible contexts for the mysterious Robert le Bouser. If the killing took place some years before 1350, we may imagine a small local cult, perhaps feeding on the anguish created by the great plague of 1348-9, which inspired the hard-pressed abbot of Lesnes to attempt to please God and help the convent's budget in one manouevre, as medieval churchmen so frequently did. If the killing was very recent when Edward III granted the abbot's request, the passage of Rome-bound pilgrims along the Canterbury-Dover road would supply a setting in which the veneration accorded to the murdered Robert would be easy to understand. The location of his death at a site associated with Thomas Becket cannot but have assisted the process. It is beyond question that the veneration of victims of violence was by no means unknown in medieval England, and we should not suppose that we have information about every instance that in fact occurred. The little we know or can guess about Robert le Bouser in fact emphasises the probability that there were many others whose ephemeral cults have passed completely beyond recall. Much, if not most, medieval pilgrimage was local, and some of it was focussed on cults as obscure, and perhaps as ill-founded, as Robert's.

NOTES

[1] J. Newman, *North-East and East Kent* (Harmondsworth, 1983), 3rd ed., *The Buildings of England* series (Gen. Ed. N. Pevsner).

[2] J. Adair, *The Pilgrims' Way: Shrines and Saints in Britain and Ireland* (London, 1978), 53 (with photograph). Adair discusses and illustrates other examples in both cathedral and parish churches. See also J. C. Wall, *Shrines of British Saints* (London, 1905). For an art-historical discussion of this topic see N. Coldstream, 'English decorated shrine bases', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 129 (1976), 15-34. Cf. the cautionary comments of D. A. Stocker, 'The Tomb and Shrine of Bishop Grosseteste in Lincoln Cathedral' in W. M. Ormrod (Ed.), *England in the Thirteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1984 Harlaxton Symposium* (Woodbridge, 1986), 143-8; 'Pierced chest or chests with arcaded sides were not, in fact, the sole

prerogative of potential or actual saints'. The examples he cites are, however, tombs of thirteenth-century bishops, and it is puzzling to know for whom the Newington tomb was intended if it was not for Robert. The 'tunnel' pierced right through the base is a noteworthy feature. None of the above writers mentions the Newington example.

[3] A. Everitt, *Continuity and Colonisation: the Evolution of Kentish Settlement* (Leicester, 1986), 249, 385 n.51. Winchelsey's miracles are printed in D. Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae ab Anno MCCCL ad annum MDXLV*, 4 vols. (London, 1837), 2, 486-90.

[4] B. Nilsen, *The Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1998), 172.

[5] Gervase of Canterbury, *Opera Historica*, W. Stubbs (Ed.), 2 vols., *Rolls Series*, 73, 2, 312.

[6] J. Ravenglass, *In the Steps of Chaucer's Pilgrims* (London, 1989), 94. See the Introduction to the *Pardoner's Tale* - F. Robinson (Ed.) *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd ed. (London, 1957), 148.

[7] In June 1290 he licensed the constable of Dover Castle to take twelve old lifeless beech-stumps as a gift from the king's wood of '*Chastiners*', for heating purposes (*Calendar of Close Rolls, 1288-96*, 88) and in August 1299 granted his envoy Robert de Rideware 'four of the best chestnut trees near the king's highway from Newenton to Siudingburn', two to be taken from each side of the road (*Calendar of Close Rolls, 1296-1302*, 263).

[8] *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1350-54*, 7.)

[9] Anon., *A Short Guide to the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Newington: The Church among the Orchards* (1968), 4.

[10] A. Duncan (Ed.), *Testamenta Cantiana: East Kent* (London, 1907), 348.

[11] J. A. Robertson (Ed.), *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, 8 vols. *Rolls Series*, 67, 2 164-5.

[12] *Ibid.*, 165-71.

[13] Robertson, *op. cit.* (note 11), 1, 187-8.

[14] *Ibid.*, 310.

[15] For a summary of the history of Lesnes, see Victoria County History, *Kent*, ii, 165-6.

[16] *Calendars of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, 4, 340. 'Sleepersdene' is hard to identify.

[17] A. Vauchez, *La sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du Moyen Age* (Rome, 1981), 174-82; trans., J. Birrell (Cambridge, 1997), 148-56.

[18] R. Hewlett (Ed.), *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, 4 vols., *Rolls Series*, 82, 1, 311-2.

[19] *Ibid.*, 2, 466-73. There are numerous accounts of this episode, which vary considerably in tone and content. Newburgh is hostile, as is Gervase, who mentions the miracles briefly (*op. cit.* note 5, 1, 532-4). Ralph Diceto, who suppresses any mention of miracles, would have it that William himself set fire to St Mary le Bow, paradoxically in order to avoid the death he saw imminent - W. Stubbs (Ed.), *Opera Historica*, 2 vols., *Rolls Series*, 68, 2, 143-4. Roger of Wendover seems to follow Diceto -R. Hewlett (Ed.) *The Flowers of History*, 3 vols., *Rolls Series*, 84, 1, 244. Hoveden is more sympathetic - W. Stubbs (Ed.), *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Hovedene*, 4 vols., *Rolls Series*, 51, 4, 5-6; and is quite clear that St Mary's was set ablaze on Hubert Walter's orders, recording the indignation of the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury to whom the church was appropriated; but he does not mention the miracles. Most sympathetic of all is Matthew Paris, which is the more striking as he here clearly and deliberately rejects Roger of Wendover's account - H. R. Luard (Ed.), *Chronica Majora*, 7 vols., *Rolls Series*, 57, 2, 418-9.

[20] J. W. Bund (Ed.), *Episcopal Registers, Diocese of Worcester: Register of Bishop Godfrey Giffard, September 23rd 1268 to August 15th 1301*, 2 vols. (Worcester, 1902), 110-13.

[21] W. Stubbs (Ed.), *Gesta Henrici Secundi et Ricard Primi*, 2 vols., *Rolls Series*, 49, 2, 116. This story was repeated by Hoveden and thereafter by Wendover and Matthew Paris.

[22] Luard, *op. cit.* (note 19), 419: 'Et sic Willelmus dictus Barbatus vel Barba pro assertione veritatis et pro causa pauperum tuenda morti traditur a concivibus suis ignominiose. Unde cum constet causam martyrem facere, inter martyres videtur merito computandus'.

[23] For surveys of this theme, see J. C. Russell, 'The canonization of opposition to the king in Angevin England' in *Anniversary Essays in Medieval History by students of Charles Homer Haskins* (Boston, 1929), 279-90; and J. Thielmann, 'Political canonization and political symbolism in Medieval England', *Journal of British Studies*, 29 (1990), 241-66. On Simon de Montfort, see more recently C. Valente, 'Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, and the utility of sanctity in thirteenth-century England', *Journal of Medieval History*, 21 (1995), 27-49; and J. Maddicott, 'Follower, leader, pilgrim, saint: Robert de Vere, Earl of Oxford, at the shrine of Simon de Montfort, 1273', *English Historical Review*, 109 (1994), 641-53.

[24] N. Vincent, 'Simon of Atherfield (d, 1211), a martyr to his wife', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 113 (1995), 349-61.

[25] P. Grosjean, 'Thomas de la Hale, moine et martyr a Douvres en 1295', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 72 (1954), 167-91.

[26] The words used by the Rochester chronicler Edmund of Haddenham are 'transfretavit ad curiam Romanum, ubi impetravit canonizationem B. Willelmi martyris, qui in ecclesia Roffensi requiescit' (H. Wharton, *Anglia Sacra*, 1, 350.) Bishop Walter de Merton was honourably buried *juxta sepulchrum sancti Willelmi* in 1278 (*ibid.*, 352).

[27] G. Fransson, *Middle English Surnames of Occupation 1100-1359* (Lund, 1935), 127. Later it took on the meaning of 'treasurer', still familiar to us as in the form of 'bursar'. Later still, the word 'bouser' could mean a heavy drinker, but although the verb 'to bous' was current in the fourteenth century, the first example of 'bouser' with this meaning recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* occurs in 1611.

[28] A. H. Thomas (Ed.), *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London at the Guildhall* (Cambridge, 1926-32), 159, 211.

[29] *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1327-30*, 60.

[30] See the summary of his career in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, as also that of his father John, mentioned below.

[31] Conducting research into 'The Origin of the Surname Bowser' in 1926, C. l'Estrange Ewen traced several forms of the name including 'Boursier', 'Bousser' and 'Bourgchier'. He concluded that the most probable derivation was from '*bursarius*' (= pouchmaker), which is attested also in France and the Low Countries, but that in some instances there had been confusion with archaic forms of 'butcher'. The name displays a tendency to become 'Bowser', but some holders may have become 'Purser' instead. This report was printed as a chapter in Sir A. Wagner, *The Family of Bowser: Genealogical Researches with particular reference to Bowser of Yorkshire from medieval times* (Glasgow, 1966), 39-43.

[32] *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1292-1301*, 614.

[33] C. Johnson (Ed.), *Registrum Hamonis Hethe Diocesis Roffensis, AD 1319-1352*, 2 vols., *Canterbury and York Society*, 48, (1991), 2, 748-51.

[34] William of Dene, *Historia Roffensis*, in *Anglia Sacra*, 1, 374: 'repertus fuisset inobediens, incorrigibilis & rebellis'.

[35] Johnson, *op. cit.* (note 33), 2, 639-42.

[36] *Ibid.*, 642: quas exposuimus et convertimus in utilitatem monasterii nostri antedeicti presertim circa reparacionem ecclesie nostre, casu repentino dirute, defensionem terrarum nostrarum contra fluminus impetum aque Thamisie, necnon gravium exoneracionem debitorum quibus occasione perquiscionis patronatus ecclesie de Elvethele Londoniensis diocesis nuper nobis et nostro monasterio appropriate, ac pretextu deficientis annone variarumque licium et causarum arduarum nobis multipliciter incumbencium urgebamur'.

[37] William of Dene, in *Anglia Sacra*, 1, 377: 'ita destructa per malam diutinam custodiam quod durante isto saeculo usque ad diem judicii creditur ea non posse repari'.

[38] *Calendar of Close Rolls, 1349-54*, 201, 224. The debt to John de Hiltoft was cancelled on payment. Other debts are recorded on pp. 396, 479, 481 (100 marks to Stephen de Cavendish, draper of London, on 16 May 1352), 523 (£400 to Richard of Barking, draper, 16 January 1353), and 617 (£60 to John de Chichester, goldsmith, 20 December 1353).

[39] *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, 4, 163, 165.

[40] D. Webb, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in the Medieval West* (London, 1999), 181-2. The licences are mostly in the Close Rolls, but a few also appear in the Patent Rolls.

[41] In November 1350, Richard Spicer of Bristol was pardoned for having gone to Rome without the royal permission (*Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1350-54*, 19).