

# JOHN PECKHAM, PRIOR OF BOXGROVE

By W. D. PECKHAM

Richard Chese was elected Prior of Boxgrove on 4 November, 1485<sup>1</sup>. He presented to Oakhurst's chantry in Chichester Cathedral a clerk instituted 17 June, 1501,<sup>2</sup> and made a grant of next presentation on which a clerk was instituted 12 August, 1504.<sup>3</sup> Thomas Miles, not yet Prior on 1 November, 1513,<sup>4</sup> had succeeded by 15 August, 1517.<sup>5</sup> Between these two John Peccam, in whom, for obvious reasons, I take considerable interest, was Prior; though there is, so far as I know, only one reference to him as such. This, as it stands, is the record of his collation to Donnington vicarage, void by the death of Robert Crawhurst and in Bishop Sherburne's gift, on 17 February, 1510-11.<sup>6</sup> I have, however, no doubt that he is identical with the John Peckam, vicar of Westhampnett (a benefice in the gift of Boxgrove Priory), on whose resignation John Magnet was instituted on 9 November, 1515.<sup>7</sup> These scanty details illustrate how incomplete our existing records are; for there are in existence registers of institutions and collations purporting to be complete from 1503-4. In that year Bishop Fitzjames was translated to Chichester; his Register of institutions and collations begins then and goes down to 1505-6; the record of the administration of the diocese *sede vacante* is in the Archbishop's Register and runs from March, 1506-7 to October, 1508; Bishop Sherburne's Register begins in December, 1508 and continues to February 1535-6. Nevertheless there is no record either of Peckham's institution to Westhampnett, nor of his successor's collation to Donnington. But in 1521, while Magnet was vicar of Westhampnett, Thomas Pende was vicar of Donnington,<sup>8</sup> and continued vicar till his death in about 1523.<sup>9</sup> I originally supposed that Pende succeeded Peckham, but that the collation had not been registered, perhaps because the Bishop had been going about without his secretary. There is, however, another explanation, distinctly disquieting to anyone who would put his trust in Bishops' Registers. For Thomas Pende is described as

<sup>1</sup> Reg. Story I, ff. 84v.-87v.

<sup>2</sup> Reg. Story II, f. 33 r.

<sup>3</sup> Reg. Fitzjames, f. 39 v.

<sup>4</sup> Reg. Sherburne I, f. 8 v.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* f. 127 r; Sussex Record Society, vol. 41, p. 195.

<sup>6</sup> Reg. Sherburne I, f. 23 v.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 11 r.

<sup>8</sup> Reg. Sherburne I, f. 105.

<sup>9</sup> Reg. Sherburne II, f. 65 v.

vicar when, on 1 June, 1509, he was compurgator of a criminous clerk.<sup>1</sup> On the face of it, this implies that Pende held the vicarage twice, neither collation being on record; I now incline to the view that the Registrar, perhaps misled by the Bishop's scrawled notes (and rough notes of the early 16th century, to say nothing of formal Registers, could be shocking scrawls) wrote 'Donnington' for 'Westhampnett' in the record of Peckham's appointment. The respective clergy lists would, on that supposition, read:—

DONNINGTON	Thomas Pende, occurs 1509, died c.1523.
WESTHAMPNETT	Robert Crawhurst died c. 1510-11.
	John Peccam instituted 1510-11, resigned c. 1515.
	John Magnet instituted 1515, occurs 1535-6.

That a regular should hold a secular vicarage at all was clean contrary to the whole principle on which the establishment of vicarages was made; it would be more to the credit of Bishop Sherburne if he only acquiesced, however unwillingly, in the admission, by Papal dispensation, of the Prior of Boxgrove to a living in the gift of the Priory, and was not an active participant in the matter by collating to a vicarage in his own gift. (But what I think that Bishop Sherburne ought to have done is not evidence of what he did.) I have considered the possibility of the Papal Registers throwing light on the matter, but it is not likely; dispensations of this sort were sometimes issued in blank; and even if this particular one had been registered it is unlikely that the secular benefice concerned is specified.

Perhaps the most likely time for Peckham's succession as Prior is the episcopate of Richard Fitzjames. We have fairly complete records of the institutions and collations of the period; but the *Registrum Commune*, in which the confirmation by the Bishop of the election of a Benedictine Prior would have been entered, is missing. Peckham's name occurs in no episcopal record as that of a monk of the Priory; nor have I ever encountered his (and my) surname as occurring in the neighbourhood of Chichester before his appearance. (The collation, in 1280, to Tangmere rectory of Nicholas de Pecham by Archbishop John Pecham is an apparent, not a real, exception.) I infer that on the avoidance of the headship (probably by Richard Chese) an outsider was brought in, no monk of the Priory being thought fit for it. Nominally, of course, the Prior was elected by the monks (as the Bishop of Chichester still is by the Canons), actually they could not disregard either the 'recommendations' of the patron or, say, a very broad hint from the Bishop that if So-and-so was elected he would certainly find some ground for quashing the election. If he was an outsider, the most likely place for Peckham to have been professed in was Battle Abbey. He may have been

<sup>1</sup> Reg. Sherburne I, f. 121 v.

known as Peckham before entering religion—the Peckhams of Framfield, for instance, seem to go back to the 14th century;<sup>1</sup> or he may originally have been known by some other surname, may have been a native of East or West Peckham, near Maidstone, and have been known in religion by the place of his nativity. As will be seen, there is evidence, though very slender, to support this view.

In about December, 1633 the visiting Herald called on Henry Peckham, lord of the manor of Easthampnett (in Boxgrove parish), who had, it appears, been claiming the right to bear coat armour. Henry Peckham furnished<sup>2</sup> the usual particulars, his issue (two daughters<sup>3</sup>), his father Henry, his grandfather Edward, and their wives. So far the pedigree went when originally recorded; later, perhaps only a few minutes later, it was carried two generations higher, by adding Henry Peckham's great-, and great-great-, grandfathers, both named John, and some collateral relations, Richard, son of the elder John, and Robert and Richard, his son and grandson; but the wives of these, and the issue of Richard the younger, are not named. I surmise that, in the course of conversation, these cousins (who may be described as the Cocking-Compton branch of the family) were mentioned, and the pedigree carried higher to show their relation. There seem to be two distinct issues; had Henry Peckham the right, as a cadet of their family, to bear the arms of the Kent Peckhams and was the pedigree that he furnished correct? Myself, I believe the pedigree correct, and the claim groundless. It should be noted that he makes no attempt to identify his ultimate ancestor John with any of the Yaldham Peckhams, and that the time when they branched off, if they did, is one when ample information about the Kent family is available.

Wherever the pedigree can be checked it receives confirmation; I quote two cases. When John [younger] son of Edward Peckham was baptized at Boxgrove in 1676-7, Richard Peckham of Cocking stood sponsor, so the relation with the Cocking family was not vamped up for the Herald's benefit; the marriage of Edward Peckham to Grace Samburne 'of Berks.', interesting for both the Peckham and the Samborne pedigrees, stated at the Visitation, has never been traced; it is at least likely that it was that solemnized at Compton, Sussex, on 19 April, 1563 between, according to the parish register, John Peckham and Grace Samborne, and that the parish clerk who made the entry (in those days neither parties nor witnesses signed the Register) confused the two sons of the John Peckham who stands at the head of the pedigree.

<sup>1</sup> Sussex Record Society, vol. 10, pp. 39, 198, 307.

<sup>2</sup> MS. Coll. Arms, C 27, f. 59 v.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth, the younger, was baptized at St. Peter North St, Chichester, on 12 November, 1633; his son John was baptized there on 11 December, 1634; these facts fix the date of the pedigree.