

Abbess Juliana (circa 1171-1174 to 1199)



Juliana, created by Jack Cholerton, Fine Arts Student, Barton Peveril College, Eastleigh

Juliana was abbess from 1174 and perhaps as early as 1171. However, Henry G D Liveing, in his 1906 publication *Records of Romsey Abbey*, states that there is nothing impossible in the suggestion that Juliana immediately succeeded Lady Mary (Princess Mary de Blois), 1160-1165, a former abbess who had been abducted from Romsey Abbey to marry Matthew of Alsace, the younger son of the Count of Flanders. However, in that case Juliana's rule would have been a long one, extending over nearly forty years, from 1160 until her death in 1199. Very little is known about Juliana herself, other than she signed a couple of deeds and charters. She lived, however, through interesting events.

It was in 1176-7, during her abbacy, that King Henry II brought nuns to Romsey Abbey, from Fontevrault in France, at a cost of £2 8s 6d. The Abbey of Fontevrault, which combined in one establishment a house of monks and a house of nuns, both under an abbess' rule, was situated ten miles south-east of Saumur on the river Loire, and became the last resting place of Henry II and Richard I. About the same time, the King also brought nuns from Fontevrault to the convent at Amesbury and expelled some of the nuns there! The fact that French sisters were brought to Romsey is just one of the many tantalizing fragments of the Abbey's history. Was there some ill will against the Crown smouldering in the convent in consequence of Henry's brutal treatment of Princess Mary (although this occurred sixteen years previously)? Was there a lack of novices coming forward (but this seems hardly likely at so early a date)? Perhaps it was a combination of these two possible causes and we may conclude that the convent had lost something of its reputation and attractiveness through the scandal of Abbess Mary's abduction.

Fascinatingly, the period of Juliana's abbacy has been brought right up to date through a BBC report on Tuesday, 31st March

2020 in which it is reported that ancient air pollution, trapped in Alpine ice, has revealed new details about life and death in late 12th century Britain. In a study, published in the journal *Antiquity*, scientists have found traces of lead, transported on the winds from British mines that operated in the late 1100s, resulting in air pollution that was as bad as during the industrial revolution centuries later.

The pollution sheds light on the assassination of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket, in his cathedral in 1170, just prior to Juliana's abbacy, which was the gruesome outcome of a dispute between King Henry II and the archbishop that made headlines all over Europe.

Now scientists have found physical evidence of the impact of the dispute between Henry and Becket in a 72-metre-long ice core, retrieved from the Colle Gnifetti glacier in the Swiss-Italian Alps - a huge surge in lead in the air and dust captured in the 12th century.

Lead and silver were often mined together and, in this period, mines in the Peak District and in Cumbria were among the most productive in Europe, with lead having many uses at this time, from water pipes to church roofs to stained glass windows.

Henry II was excommunicated by the Pope in the wake of the murder and it is suggested that Henry's attempt at reconciliation is detailed in the ice core by his promise to endow and build a lot of major monastic institutions very quickly and, in doing so, massive amounts of lead were used for the roofing of these major monastic complexes.

Liveing tells us that, although the abbess or abbesses who presided over the convent when the building of the present Norman abbey commenced (circa 1120) are unknown, the transitional building work, from Norman to Early English, was carried out during Juliana's abbacy, the date usually given for it being 1180. This work is found chiefly in the clerestory of the four easternmost bays of the nave (nearest the tower) and in the westernmost of these bays in the triforium, by an increase in the mouldings. This was major work and the church would have been a building site for many years.

Perhaps Romsey Abbey was, at this time, a beneficiary of King Henry's endowments to the monasteries?

Juliana died in February 1199 and was succeeded by Abbess Matilda Patriz or Patric, the sister or half-sister of Walter Walerand, who owned estates at Dene and East Grinstead, near Salisbury.

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- Records of Romsey Abbey by Henry G D Liveing, published in 1906. The full text is available on-line at https://archive.org/stream/cu31924028057226/cu31924028057226_djvu.txt (click on "See other formats" to view text in book form).
- BBC News from 31st March 2020 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-52095694>
- Journal Antiquity published online by Cambridge University Press on 31st March 2020 at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/antiquity/article/alpine-ice-and-the-annual-political-economy-of-the-angevin-empire-from-the-death-of-thomas-becket-to-magna-carta-c-ad-11701216/C01D8EA75B0D2A7DFC8FAFFD7E3BB7C8>