

## **The Only English Pope.**

By Kyle Paisley

Although several medieval chroniclers speak about a 'Pope Joan' (John Anglicus), it is generally accepted that Pope Adrian IV was the first English pope.

Nicholas Breakspear was born in Bedmond, Hertfordshire, but spent most of his life away from his native land. He went to Paris, and later became a canon regular of the cloister of St Rufus monastery near Arles. He was prior and abbot of the same monastery.

In December 1152, Breakspear was created a cardinal by Pope Eugene III. He was dispatched to Scandinavia, where for three years (1152 to 1154) he worked at establishing an archbishopric in Norway. His fellow-laborer was another Englishman, Henry, Bishop of

Finland. Success in Scandinavia led to his being dubbed 'Apostle of the North' when he returned to Rome. On the 4th December 1154, Nicholas ascended the Papal throne; though some argue that the date of his induction was Sunday 5th December. From the off, he busied himself fighting opposition and attempting to extend the jurisdiction of the Papacy.

Reacting to the disorder within Rome that led to the murder of a cardinal, Hadrian, as he is also known, placed the city under interdict. No European pope, before or after, ever took this step, although some imposed the same restriction on other Italian cities. Hadrian and Frederick I (Barbarossa) worked together to procure the execution of Arnold of Brescia, the leader of the rebellion in Rome.

In the same year, 1155, Pope Adrian encouraged the invasion of Southern Italy. However, his faith in the Byzantine Emperor Manuel Comnenus was disappointed. The emperor's troops couldn't shift the Sicilian Normans, and after three years of bitter fighting the Byzantine army left Southern Italy. A certain King William forced a number of concessions from Adrian. This fired the opposition of Frederick who claimed lordship over some of the

lands his former ally was giving to the Sicilian monarch. The pope responded by forming a league with the Lombards against the emperor.

1155 was notable in the reign of this English pope for yet another reason. Three years after the Synod of Kells had granted the Primacy of Ireland to the Archdiocese of Armagh, Adrian IV published a Bull titled *Laudabiliter*, in

which he encouraged King Henry II of England to invade Ireland and to pursue religious and general reforms throughout the island.

“Strive to imbue that people with good morals...that the church may there be adorned...and the things which pertain to the honour of God and to salvation be so ordered that you may merit to obtain an abundant and lasting reward from God, and on earth a name glorious throughout the ages,” wrote Adrian.

The Bull is also reputed to be his response to an appeal by John Salisbury, secretary to the Archbishop of Canterbury, for Rome to restore Canterbury’s jurisdiction over the Irish bishops. To this end the Irish were painted in the most unflattering light, and worthy of a firm, correcting hand. Gerald of Wales perpetuated the exaggeration in his *Expugnatio*

*Hibernica* ('The Conquest of Ireland'), in which he commended Henry's intention "to enlarge the boundaries of the Church" and "to expound the truth of the Christian faith to ignorant and barbarous peoples."

While some have disputed the authenticity of *Laudabiliter*, most authorities agree that it was issued by Rome, or at least something like it was issued. If it wasn't a forgery itself, it was certainly based on one – the Donation of Constantine. The Donation, which Adrian took as a 'ground' for his authority, had been contested for well over one hundred years, although the Italian Catholic priest, Lorenzo Valla, is credited with first exposing it with solid philological arguments (1439-40).

In the end of the day, Adrian might well have regretted his rise to power – at least for personal reasons. According to

the medieval historian William of Newburgh, Pope Adrian told John of Salisbury that his office was a thorny one, beset on all sides with sharp pricks. He said he wished he had never left England to enter upon such difficult paths (Polycraticus, Bk. IV, xxviii).

I dare say that not a few Irish and not a few English would agree, bearing in mind the centuries-long religious-political division and dispute in these Islands! Feelings about Henry II will be no warmer for his greed for personal advancement. An ambitious English pope and an ambitious English king - some combination!

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