

ADAM HORSLEY – RECTOR OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST. A STAMFORD 14TH CENTURY CLERIC

From 1369 to 1385, Adam Horsley was the rector of St John the Baptist Church in Stamford. Not the building we see today, which dates from the middle of the 15th century, but an earlier structure whose origin is uncertain, on what was the boundary of the original Danish Burg and the post Norman Conquest growth towards the town's Castle. The patronage of the church had been controlled by the Priory of St Fromonde in Normandy, an alien priory, but it had been appropriated by Edward III, and was therefore in the hands of the Crown when Adam was granted the living in 1369.

Adam Horsley was a King's Clerk, an exchequer clerk, and a controller of the great pipe roll from 1375 to 1382. He was then appointed as foreign apposer of the exchequer from 1382 to 1385, a post that audited sheriffs' accounts. In 1377 an English clerical poll tax assessment took place and he was described as 'not resident', unique in the arch deaneries of Lincoln, Leicester and Stowe. If Adam visited his parish, it was probably only when the Royal Court passed through the town. And although Richard II visited Stamford in 1377, when he held a council of war in the town, there is no evidence that Adam was in attendance.

In the 1380s Horsley was in correspondence with an Augustinian canon, Walter Hilton, who was his spiritual counsellor, it seems that Horsley had a troubled conscience. A letter from Walter Hilton titled "*On the Usefulness and Prerogatives of Religion*", addressed to Adam and probably written in 1384, has survived these last six hundred years appearing in print before the Reformation. In the early 1380s, Hilton turned away from the world and became a solitary, as he is described in his earliest extant work, a Latin letter "*On the Image of Sin*".

In October 1383 Adam sat in the Westminster Parliament, a tax raising parliament, in the sixth year and already the tenth parliament of the reign of Richard II. When the King had turned sixteen, he became more settled in his own choices, all be it fatal to his reign and ultimately his life. Finally in March 1385 Adam resigned both his living in Stamford and ceased working for the Crown. Shortly after, he entered Beauvale Priory (also known as Beauvale Charterhouse) which was a Carthusian monastery in Nottinghamshire.

In 1385, Joan, the Fair Maid of Kent died, she had been the wife of the Black Prince and was mother of Richard II, and was buried in Stamford, however, by the time of her death Adam was no longer the Rector of St John's.

Although the date of Adam's death has not survived these last six hundred years, it seems that this occurred within a few years of him entering the monastery.

Chris Hunt
January 2023

Notes.

An apposer is an archaic term for an examiner or a person who asks questions, historically referring to an officer in the English Court of Exchequer who audited sheriffs' accounts. It describes someone whose specific duty was to put questions to test knowledge,