

## Merton Augustinian Priory and The Cross

We all have favourite keepsakes. Maybe a pebble from a trip to the seaside, a favourite piece of jewellery, something exotic from a holiday abroad. They mean a lot to us, but gradually over time they get broken, lost or passed on. The reason for them is not easily forgotten.

So it is for The Cross.

There is a lovely story of how St Helen, Constantine's mother, discovered "The True Cross", and how pieces of it were distributed among European rulers. (\*) Queen Margaret of Scotland is believed to have held a piece, and given part to her son, King David of Scotland, who passed on a fragment to Adeliza of Louvain, when she was Queen of England. The English King died and Adeliza married again, and founded an Augustinian priory in Buckenham, East Anglia, where it is recorded to have held a piece of the True Cross in a beautiful box. This was repeated by King David when he built Holyrood Abbey in 1128, dedicating it to The Holy Rood. There are also two churches cared for by the Canons of Merton dedicated to The Holy Rood, and St Thomas a Becket, who trained at Merton Priory promoted the Doctrine of The Trinity, just as St Augustine of Hippo had done. This is why his remains were moved on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1220 to the Trinity Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral.

In 1139 William de Varennes founded Thetford Augustinian Priory and inaugurated two markets, one on the Feast of The Invention of The Cross and the other on the Feast of The Exaltation of The Cross.

By 1274 (a) Walter de Merton had established Merton College, Oxford, and had chosen the 14th September every year for the administration to be checked. 14th September is the Feast of the Exultation of The Cross.

Just these few facts indicate a doctrinal culture. In the same way for centuries that it was customary for women to wear head coverings in church, so it was customary and part of the culture for people to remember The Cross.

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(\*) This is borne out by historical research.

(a) Walter de Merton took his name from Merton Priory and called his college in Oxford after the priory.