

CRUCIFIXION AND CONVERSION:
KING HENRY III AND THE JEWS IN 1255

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In his historical work, Paul Brand had done much to illuminate the position of the Jews of medieval England. He has written about the government records which reveal their activities, and has edited plea rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews.¹ He has also published an important article about the Jews and the law under Edward I.² In a volume of essays in his honour, I hope it is thus appropriate to offer a study of Henry III and the Jews in 1255. The events of that year had a crucial influence on the relationship between the Jews and the monarchy, and marked a significant stage in the slide towards the eventual expulsion of 1290. Paul Brand has always been very generous in sharing his unrivalled knowledge of medieval legal records with other scholars. How often does one come across the footnote 'I owe this information to Paul Brand', so much so that he almost seems a primary source in himself. Paul has indeed commented most helpfully on a draft of this paper without, of course, knowing its ultimate destination.

The supposed crucifixion in 1255 of a little Christian boy by the Jews of Lincoln was for Jews and Christians alike, although for very different reasons, one of the most shocking events in the reign of King Henry III.³ For the Jews it had appalling consequences. One, named Copin, who confessed to the crime, was hung, having first been tied to the tail of a horse and dragged for a long time through the streets of Lincoln, his body becoming broken and lacerated with stones. A little later, 18 more Jews

¹ Paul Brand, 'The Jewish community of England in the records of English royal government', in *The Jews in Medieval Britain: Historical Literary and Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. Patricia Skinner (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 73–84; Sarah Cohen, ed., revised and with a preface by Paul Brand, *Plea Rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews (1277–1279)* (Jewish Historical Society of England 5) (London, 1992); Paul Brand, ed., *Plea Rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews (1279–1281)* (Jewish Historical Society of England 6) (London, 2005). This volume has a detailed introduction about the Exchequer of the Jews, together with biographies of its justices under Edward I.

² Paul Brand, 'The Jews and the law in England, 1275–1290', *English Historical Review* 115 (2000), 1138–1158.

³ This paper is based on a talk given in January 2010 at a workshop held at Queen Mary, University of London, as part of the AHRC funded project 'Youth, Violence and Cult: the case of William of Norwich': <http://yvc.history.qmul.ac.uk>.

were executed in London. Meanwhile, the body of the 'victim' had been laid to rest by the dean and canons of Lincoln in the cathedral, where it performed miracles and became known as 'Little Saint Hugh'. The episode inspired a contemporary ballad in 367 lines of French verse⁴ and took up no fewer than eight pages in the Burton annals, far more than were given to any other event in the reign of Henry III.⁵ Matthew Paris's account took up three pages and appeared as a continuous narrative from June through till November, instead of being broken up, in his normal fashion, into a series of chronological bulletins interspersed with other information, a good indication of the story's riveting effect.⁶

The events at Lincoln have been the subject of a celebrated article by Gavin Langmuir,⁷ who pointed to factual inaccuracies in the account of Matthew Paris, inaccuracies, that is, over and beyond his belief in the actual crucifixion itself. Paris was clearly wrong, for example, about the actual date of the boy's disappearance.⁸ Langmuir's main concern, however, was not to criticise Paris but to understand how the Jews came to be tried and convicted. As he stressed, this represented the first occasion on which any European ruler had affirmed the truth of such allegations. Even today, it gives one a start, to read in Henry III's own letters references to this 'horrible crime' and to an 'infant lately crucified'.⁹ The whole terrible affair added to the toxic mix of prejudice and profit which was to lead to the eventual expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290. Langmuir

⁴ The ballad was first printed in François Michel, *Hughes de Lincoln* (Paris, 1834), pp. 1–16. I have used the text in Abraham Hume, *Sir Hugh of Lincoln* (London, 1849), pp. 43–54. This also has in parallel text a quaint but sometimes helpful translation into English verse. I will cite it hereafter as *HL*. It is readily available online: *Hugh of Lincoln* (last visited 9 August 2011).

⁵ Henry Richards Luard, ed., *Annales Monastici* [hereafter *AM*], 5 vols, (Rolls Series 36) (London, 1864–69), 1:340–348.

⁶ Matthew Paris, *Matthaei Parisiensis Chronica Majora* [hereafter *CM*], ed. Henry Richards Luard, 7 vols, (Rolls Series 57) (London, 1872–83), 5:516–519. Paris did add some more information under 1256, however (5:546, 552). It is Paris who refers to the confession as coming from 'Copin' whereas the ballad and the Burton annals refer to 'Jopin'. As Paul Brand points out to me, 'Copin' is a recognisably Jewish thirteenth-century first name, whereas 'Jopin' is not. I have followed most later historians in sticking to 'Copin'. There is also an account of the affair in the annals of Waverley Abbey: *AM* 2:346–349.

⁷ Gavin I. Langmuir, 'The knight's tale of young Hugh of Lincoln', *Speculum* 47 (1972), 459–482. Langmuir gives references to previous work on the subject. There is also a full discussion in James William Francis Hill, *Medieval Lincoln* (1948, repr. Stamford, 1990), pp. 224–231. For a good account of the Jews in the reign of Henry III, see Richard Huscroft, *Expulsion: England's Jewish Solution* (Stroud, 2006), chapter 4.

⁸ The nature of Paris's account would repay separate discussion but that cannot be undertaken here.

⁹ *Close Rolls 1254–56*, pp. 142–143, 145.

highlighted the devastating role played in securing Henry III's damning verdict by the king's steward, the knight John of Lexington, who examined Copin and extracted his confession.¹⁰ A central purpose of his article was thus to understand John's role by considering his career and family background, hence the title of the article, 'The knight's tale of young Hugh of Lincoln'.

The aim of this essay is to explore further the circumstances of Henry III's intervention through placing it within the context of the more general events of 1255. By looking at the pressures on Henry, as well as his preoccupations and priorities in that year, we may get a little closer to understanding how and why events developed as they did with such terrible consequences for the Jews.

A brief outline first of what seems to have happened. On 31 July 1255 a little Christian boy, named Hugh, disappeared in Lincoln. His mother, a widow called Beatrice, searched for him and was told he was last seen playing with some Jewish boys. She raised the alarm and accused the Jews of capturing her son for the purpose of ritualistic crucifixion.¹¹ The fact that large numbers of Jews had gathered in Lincoln for a wedding gave some credence to the charge. Suspicion hardened to certainty on 29 August when Hugh's body was discovered down a well.¹² His injuries seemed consistent with crucifixion, and a blind woman, who wiped her eyes with the bloodstained fluids from the body, immediately recovered her sight. The dean and chapter of the cathedral claimed the corpse and carried it off for burial beside the recently deceased bishop, Robert Grosseteste, who was himself already revered as a saint. No action, however, had yet been taken against the Jews. This awaited the king, who arrived in Lincoln on 3 October, whereupon his steward, John of Lexington, secured the confession from Copin with the fatal consequences we have seen.

That the belief in kidnap and crucifixion by the Jews spread so rapidly was due, of course, to the widespread conviction that such things did indeed happen. The first known accusation was levelled against the Jews of Norwich in 1144, and led to the creation of 'Saint William of Norwich', whereafter many other supposed killings followed in England and abroad. Between 1144 and the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290, Robert

¹⁰ For Lexington see David Crook, 'Robert of Lexington, Senior Justice of the Bench, 1236-1244' in this volume.

¹¹ The accounts have the mother accusing the Jews only of capturing her son, but it seems certain that she suggested intended crucifixion as the reason.

¹² The dates come from *AM* 1:340, 348.

Stacey has found at least a dozen allegations that Jews murdered Christian children recorded by English chroniclers, hagiographers and royal justices.¹³ That, however, the Lincoln murder was investigated by the king, and its truth affirmed, owed a good deal to the special circumstances of 1255, as we will now see.

At the start of 1255, Henry III had just returned to England after a delightful meeting with the king of France, Louis IX, in Paris. He had set Gascony in order and installed Edward, his son and heir, as its ruler. He was hoping that something might come of a papal grant of the kingdom of Sicily to Edmund, his second son. The problem was money, for Henry needed lots of it both to pay his Gascon debts and to make the Sicilian scheme a reality. To that end a parliament, where Henry intended to appeal for funds, was summoned for Westminster in April. Before it met, we get a first glimpse of the king's religiosity which was to be such a key feature in the events of the year. For in March, Henry left Westminster for the monastery of St Albans.¹⁴ He was not simply staying there en route to somewhere else. Rather, St Albans was his destination for having remained there for six days, he returned to the capital. Clearly he was on a pilgrimage to Saint Alban. Matthew Paris gives a vivid picture of his conduct:

Each day and night, with much light [from candles] and with great devotion, he prayed for himself and his son Edward and his other friends to the blessed Alban as the proto-martyr of his kingdom.

Paris went on to mention the king's gift of two precious palls (called baldskins) and a choral cope decorated with gold. As so often, record evidence supports his testimony, for on 9 March, the king wrote to his treasurer, Philip Lovel, telling him to bring to St Albans an embroidered cope worth £10 so he could offer it at the shrine for himself and his children.¹⁵ Paris

¹³ Robert C. Stacey, "Adam of Bristol" and tales of ritual crucifixion in medieval England', in *Thirteenth Century England XI. Proceedings of the 2005 Gregynog Conference*, ed. Björn Weiler, Janet Burton, Phillipp Schofield and Karen Stöber (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 1–15, at p. 1.

¹⁴ All statements about Henry's itinerary come from the itinerary as worked out in 1923 by Theodore Craib of the Public Record Office, largely from the attestation clauses of royal letters, although I have sometimes checked this against the printed documents themselves. Craib's itinerary is preserved in typescript at TNA. To aid English Heritage's research on Windsor Castle in the 1990s, it was reprinted in a different format as Theodore Craib, *The Itinerary of King Henry III*, ed. and annot. and analysed by Steven Brindley and Stephen Priestley (English Heritage, no date). There are copies of this work at TNA and the Institute of Historical Research in London. Julie Kanter of King's College London has recently completed (2011) a doctoral thesis about the itineraries of the thirteenth-century English kings.

¹⁵ *Close Rolls 1254–56*, p. 52.

concluded his account of the visit by saying that no king, not even Offa, had given as many palls to the church as had King Henry III.¹⁶

If Henry was hoping that Saint Alban's intercession would bring him success at the parliament he was disappointed, for no money was forthcoming, and the whole business was adjourned to another parliament scheduled to meet at Michaelmas.¹⁷ In the meantime, Henry embarked on a tour of some of his favourite residences; in May he was at Marlborough and Clarendon and in June at Woodstock. He then moved on to his Northamptonshire houses at Silverstone, Geddington and King's Cliffe, where there is some rare evidence of him (and Queen Eleanor) actually hunting.¹⁸ It was now mid-July, and according to his normal pattern, Henry would have returned to his southern homes or perhaps gone on pilgrimage to the East Anglian holy sites. Instead, he began a slow journey to the north, a journey which was to end at Wark in Northumberland, near the Anglo-Scottish border. The reason for this expedition was that Henry was hearing some very alarming news about his daughter, Margaret, who was married to King Alexander III of Scotland. Margaret, like Alexander, was in her mid-teens, and she now complained of ill treatment by her governors. She was being kept in the gloomy castle of Edinburgh and denied marital access to her husband. Both Henry and his queen were doting parents, and nothing was more calculated to stir their passions than news like this. They had to go north to sort matters out.¹⁹ As a royal letter put it, Henry 'firmly proposed to go to northern parts for the sake of seeing the king of Scotland and Margaret, his daughter, consort of the foresaid king, whom he has not seen for a long time and wishes to see with the greatest desire of his heart'.²⁰

It was in the course of this northern journey that the events at Lincoln took place. On 31 July, the day of little Hugh's disappearance, Henry was at Nottingham. On 29 August, the day the body was discovered, he was at Newcastle. During this time, his religiosity, which was to play such a large part in the subsequent events, was graphically revealed in a letter he issued on 4 August from Warsop in Nottinghamshire. It was to the Cistercian monks, who were holding their general chapter.

¹⁶ *CM* 5:489-490.

¹⁷ *CM* 5:493-495.

¹⁸ George James Turner, ed., *Select Pleas of the Forest* (Selden Society 13) (London, 1899), p. 113.

¹⁹ *CM* 5:501-502, 504-507. For Eleanor and Margaret, see Margaret Howell, *Eleanor of Provence: Queenship in Thirteenth Century England* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 102-103.

²⁰ *Close Rolls 1254-56*, p. 216.

'Since', Henry declared, 'the government of kingdoms cannot prosper well nor be happily administered without him in whose disposition are all kingdoms, and by whom all things are governed, we beg you most urgently that, for our state and the state of our queen and our children, you offer beseechingly the devout intercession of prayers to the All Highest that he might deign to direct our acts so mercifully to the praise of his name and the exaltation of the Catholic faith, that having consummated the course of this present life, we may obtain the rewards of eternal happiness'.²¹

Since the king's host at Warsop, from where this letter was issued, was none other than John of Lexington (he was lord of the manor), and since John's brother Stephen of Lexington was the abbot of Clairvaux and thus at the very top of the Cistercian hierarchy, it seems highly likely that John inspired this letter, although the king doubtless believed absolutely in what it said.²² Henry's duty was to rule 'for the exaltation of the Catholic faith'. He had often taken steps to do so. In 1250, in a speech at the Exchequer, he had ordered the assembled sheriffs to take action against anyone 'blaspheming the name of Jesus Christ'.²³ Two years later he had forbidden all bakers from placing on their bread the name of Christ, the signs of the cross and the *Agnus Dei* 'lest by fault of the bakers, or by some other accident, the foresaid signs and the name of the Lord are, *quod absit*, disfigured'.²⁴ Henry was particularly conscious of the danger posed to the faith by the Jews. In the ordinance he issued in January 1253, he enforced and extended regulations separating Jews from Christians. No Jew was to enter or dwell in a church *in vituperium Christi*.²⁵ If the mere presence of a Jew thus insulted Christ, how much greater was the insult involved in the events at Lincoln.

It was not long before Henry, on his northern journey, heard about them. In the narrative of both the ballad and the Burton annals, Hugh's mother, having set Lincoln alight with her accusations against the Jews, had then left the city to put her complaint to the king. Doubtless, in the

²¹ *Close Rolls 1254-56*, pp. 215-216.

²² For Warsop, see David Crook, 'Dynastic conflict in thirteenth-century Laxton', in *Thirteenth Century England XI*, pp. 193-214, at pp. 197-198. John was a benefactor of the Cistercian abbey at Rufford.

²³ Michael T. Clanchy, 'Did Henry III have a policy?', *History* 53 (1968), 215-216.

²⁴ *Close Rolls 1254-56*, p. 249.

²⁵ *Close Rolls 1257-53*, pp. 312-313. For this legislation, see Henry G. Richardson, *The English Jewry under the Angevin Kings* (London, 1960), pp. 191-193 and Brand, 'Jews and the law', pp. 1142 (notes 1 and 3), 1143-1144.

absence as yet of any body, the civic authorities had been reluctant to take action. Langmuir dismisses the story of the mother's expedition as 'very implausible',²⁶ but it is difficult to see why, especially when the account in the Burton annals confirms it. Hugh's mother, the chronicler declared, 'set off for the king in Scotland and flinging herself at his feet, crying and lamenting, made her complaint'.²⁷

The mother's complaint also fits perfectly with Henry's decision to return south via Lincoln, once he had finished his Scottish business. Henry had returned from the north via Lincoln in 1237, but had neglected to do so both in 1244 and 1252, taking the route (by which he had come in 1255) via Nottingham and Northamptonshire. In 1255, by contrast, he had decided by 18 August to go back via Lincoln for, on that day, he ordered wine to be stocked both at Lincoln against his arrival, and also at the places where he would stay from there to Westminster.²⁸ Hugh disappeared on 31 July, which leaves plenty of time for Beatrice's search in the town and northern journey before Henry issued the order on 18 August, this when he was at Newburgh Priory, having spent the previous week at York, some 70-odd miles from Lincoln.

The ballad gives some fascinating detail about Beatrice's meeting with the king, detail which, given the strictly contemporary nature of the poem (Henry is wished a long life) and knowledge of Lincoln topography, should not be lightly dismissed.²⁹

*Quant ele vint devant le rei Henrie
(Qui Deu gard et tenge sa vie!)
A ces piez mult tost chéie
Et pitusement le cria merci:*

*'Sire, si vus pleast oïr: mon fiz fu emblé
Des Jus de Nichole en un vespré
En pernez garde, si vous plect par charité.'*

*Vrai son serment, fist issi:
'Par la pité Deu! C'il est issi
Cum conté as ore ici,
Les Jus murrunt sanz merci.'*

²⁶ Langmuir, 'The knight's tale', p. 466.

²⁷ *AM* 1:342.

²⁸ *Calendar of Liberate Rolls 1251-60*, p. 237.

²⁹ *HL*, pp. 44-45, stanzas 13-16.

*'Et si tu mentu as
 Sur les Juz de tel trespaz,
 Par seint Edward, ne dutez pas,
 Ke même le jugement tu averas.'*³⁰

What is striking about this testimony is that King Henry does not accept the allegation in any unquestioning way. If the Jews have taken the boy, they deserve to die without mercy, but if the mother is accusing them falsely, then by Saint Edward, she deserves the like judgement. If this is true, then Henry, at this stage, was acting in the vein of previous monarchs, across Europe, who had never endorsed belief in Jewish crucifixion stories. The same was true of the pope who, when it came to stories that the Jews used human blood in their rituals, had gone further and had actually condemned them.³¹ Henry's hesitation was understandable. No body had as yet appeared. There may also have been people close to him who themselves doubted the existence of such rituals. Henry's confessor was quite probably the Dominican friar John of Darlington, and the Dominicans were later to intercede for the Jews imprisoned in the Tower of London. Indeed, John himself was responsible for the release of one of them, probably after converting him to Christianity.³² There was

³⁰ I have made some amendments to the printed text as suggested by Paul Brand. The translation offered by Hume is as follows:

Before King Henrie she appears,
 (May God preserve him many yeares,)
 At his feet she fell with sighs and teares
 And praied his Grace to ease her fears.

'Sire may it please you to heare, my child was stolne away,
 By the Jewes of Lincolne, lately, at close of day,
 For charity's sake, have mercie upon me I pray.'

He replied to her words respecting the youth,
 —They might be sclander or might be truth,—
 'By the pitie of God, an this tale be sooth,
 These Jewes of Lincolne shal die without ruth;

But if the story falshode be,
 The Jewes you wrong most grievouslie,
 Then by Sanct Edouard men shal see,
 Thyself the punishment shalte drie.'

³¹ Langmuir, 'The knight's tale', pp. 464, 479–480. On the other hand, as Langmuir points out, the pope had not specifically condemned the crucifixion libel.

³² *AM* 1:346–348; *Foedera*, 1, i, p. 335 (*CPR* 1247–58, p. 457). The date John became the king's confessor is unknown. Matthew Paris says he was called to the king's councils in 1256, but the fact that a Jew is named after him in the 1255 lists suggests it might have been earlier: *CM* 5:549. That John was the king's confessor depends on the early-fourteenth-

also the king's brother, Richard earl of Cornwall. Early in 1255, in return for a loan, Henry had actually handed custody of the Jews in England to him. This meant he received the financial proceeds previously due to the king, and thus had every reason to maintain the Jews as a going concern.³³ Richard was not with the king on his northern journey, but was in touch with him. He was certainly well informed about events in Lincoln, and perhaps sympathetic towards its Jewry, because two of his agents were Lincoln Jews.³⁴ What is more, Richard actually visited Lincoln during the crisis. We know this from the Burton annals which in the middle of its account suddenly say that 'at that time' Richard came to the city 'for the sake of a pilgrimage to Saint Robert [Grosseteste], in whose presence the divine clemency had deigned to work diverse miracles'.³⁵ The annalist says absolutely nothing about Richard's attitude to the Jewish accusations, then shaking the town, from which one can probably infer that he gave them no support. His scepticism may well have been a factor in shaping Henry's measured response to Beatrice, Hugh's mother, when she came before him. The king's concern to establish the truth may also help to explain another remarkable fact. This is that by 27 August, he had summoned to join him at Lincoln, on his return from the north, none other than Master Rostand, a senior papal diplomat who had come to England in connection with the Sicilian affair. Presumably Henry wanted him to help with the investigation.³⁶ It was typical of Henry, in perplexity, to turn to the papacy for support.

According to the ballad, Beatrice reacted to the king's threat to execute her if her tale was false *mult dulcement*, and appealed to Christ to be the judge.³⁷ It is worth reflecting for a moment on her central role in the affair. In a better cause her conduct would seem wholly admirable. For many at the time, it was wholly admirable. Fired by love for her son, and making, as the ballad put it, *si grant cri*,³⁸ it was she who began the rumour of capture and crucifixion, and it was she, through her dramatic and courageous northern journey, who fixed the king's eye on

century chronicle of Nicholas Trivet, but as Trivet was a Dominican he is a good source: Thomas Hog, ed., *Nicolai Triveti Annales* (London, 1845), pp. 296, 300.

³³ *Foedera*, 1, i, p. 315 (*CPR 1247-58*, pp. 400-401); Noël Denholm-Young, *Richard of Cornwall* (Oxford, 1947), p. 80.

³⁴ *Close Rolls 1254-56*, p. 180.

³⁵ *AM* 1:344.

³⁶ *Close Rolls 1254-56*, p. 129. There appears to be no evidence that Rostand did go to Lincoln.

³⁷ *HL*, p. 45, stanza 17.

³⁸ *HL*, p. 44, stanza 12.

events, and persuaded him to visit Lincoln. Later, Matthew Paris says that with her 'constantly prosecuting her appeal before the king' (now back in the south), God revenged himself on the Jews and 18 were executed in London.³⁹ Later, a Jew was released only after 'the mother of the boy' acknowledged that he was not guilty of the murder.⁴⁰ In all this there is a striking contrast with another accusation of ritual crucifixion made when the mutilated body of a boy was found in London in 1244. This time the accusation failed to gain much traction, despite stories of miracles performed by the body and the canons of St Paul's taking it for burial. The difference may well be that in this case no mother (or father) appeared to own the boy and make a tearful complaint.⁴¹

For Beatrice, and the whole course of subsequent events, the key moment was the discovery of the body with the marks of crucifixion upon it, for this vindicated everything which she had been saying. Ironically, according to the ballad, she was not there to witness her tragic triumph, because she had yet to get back from the king. It was only after Hugh's burial in the cathedral that

*Tost après vint la mère
De la curt, od doleruse chere,
Pur quei le cors ne poeit vere,
De son cher fiz que ele ont chere.*⁴²

That the body, on being found, was thought to bear the marks of crucifixion and to perform miracles, and that it was borne at once by the dean and canons, in ululating procession, to the cathedral, shows that the ferment Beatrice had stirred up had in no whit abated in her absence. It is equally a measure of that ferment, and of the king's concern for what was happening, that he was informed of the discovery absolutely straight away. The body appeared on 29 August. On, or soon after, 1 September, Henry reaffirmed his intention of going to Lincoln, and said he would be there on 23 September. Langmuir thought Henry could not have known about the body by the time of this announcement, but surely the reverse is the case.⁴³

³⁹ *CM* 5:519.

⁴⁰ *Foedera*, 1, i, p. 335 (*CPR* 1247-58, p. 453).

⁴¹ *CM* 4:377-378.

⁴² *HL*, p. 51, stanza 71.

Then back from the court in a litel space,
Came the mother herself in a dolorous case;
She might not beholde her darling's face
Now laid in his final resting place.

⁴³ Langmuir, 'The knight's tale', p. 477.

Lincoln is only some 150 miles from Newcastle upon Tyne where Henry was on 1 September, and a messenger could easily have covered that distance in three days. What makes it almost certain that the king was acting in the light of the extraordinary news, is that the letter in which he announced his intention of being in Lincoln on 23 September is actually a summons to the abbot of Westminster, the senior judge Roger of Thirkleby, and the household stewards Ralph fitzNicholas and Bertram de Criel to join him there.⁴⁴ Clearly they were wanted to help with the investigations.

In actual fact, Henry was not in Lincoln on 23 September because the Scottish business took much longer to settle than he anticipated, and this raised a terrible prospect for him, namely that he would not reach Westminster in time for the feast of the translation of his patron saint, Edward the Confessor, on 13 October, a feast he always celebrated at the abbey. Henry faced up to this possibility on 13 September when he sent orders from Wark, explaining that 'urgent affairs in Scotland' might make him miss the feast, and giving detailed instructions for its celebration in his absence.⁴⁵ The bishops of Salisbury, Norwich, Bath and Chichester were all to attend with neighbouring abbots and priors; the customary offering of the king, queen and his children, namely 36 gold coins of Murcia, was to be attached to the silver cross on the High Altar; one plate of gold, weighing one ounce, was to be offered during mass 'as if the king was present'; food, as customary, was to be given to paupers filling the two royal halls; and all the processions of London, with candles and other adornments were to come from the city to Westminster.

In the event, Henry finally left Wark on 21 September, having made a crucial decision. He would both get to Westminster by 13 October *and* visit Lincoln along the way.⁴⁶ That Henry, under pressure of time, still decided to go to Lincoln, although it was not on the direct route to Westminster, shows the importance he attached to events there, which brings us to a closer examination of his pre-occupation with the Jews in 1255.

⁴⁴ *Close Rolls 1254-56*, p. 221. The place and date of the issue of the writ is not stated, the record of it just ending *Teste*. However, the next writ above on the roll was witnessed by the king at Newcastle on 1 September. The following writ was witnessed at Wark on 12 September but the summons cannot have been as late as that.

⁴⁵ *Close Rolls 1254-56*, p. 222.

⁴⁶ *Close Rolls 1254-56*, pp. 134-6; CM 5: 513. An additional incentive for getting to Westminster was that Henry was hoping his new daughter-in-law, Eleanor of Castile, would arrive in England in time to attend the feast, although in the event she just missed it.

Having handed their custody over to his brother earlier in the year, Henry, by the time of the Lincoln affair, no longer had a direct financial interest in protecting the Jews, and thus was all the freer to be guided by purely religious motives. As we have seen, he believed that his rule should exalt the Catholic faith, and was very aware of how the faith might be threatened by the Jews. In his ordinance of 1253 he had propounded one solution, namely the separation of the Christian and Jewish communities. He also had another, namely the conversion of Jews to Christianity. The year he intervened at Lincoln, 1255, was also the year when his efforts to care for Jews who had converted reached a climax. The evidence for this lies in some extraordinary material on the Chancery fine rolls. While this has long been known to historians, it has never before been linked to the other events of the year.

The motives and methods of the campaign to convert Jews to Christianity in thirteenth-century England have been brilliantly exposed by Robert Stacey.⁴⁷ It was a movement in which Henry III himself was very much involved. Several *conversi* were baptised in his presence and took the names of leading courtiers, for example John Mansel, John de Plessis and the king's confessor, the friar John of Darlington.⁴⁸ Another *conversus*, who went on to an important career in the royal service, was baptised in Henry's presence and given his name, Henry of Winchester.⁴⁹ The king was very concerned to provide material support for those who had converted and to that end, as early as 1232, he had founded the *Domus Conversorum*, the House for Converted Jews, in what was to become Chancery Lane.

The success of conversion, however, outran the capacity of the *Domus*, which seems to have been about 80 souls,⁵⁰ and so Henry got into the habit of parking individual *conversi* on religious houses throughout the country, asking them to provide either daily food and drink or a daily money pension. When, however Henry got back from Gascony at the end of 1254, he found these arrangements in chaos. That he moved at

⁴⁷ Robert C. Stacey, 'The conversion of the Jews to Christianity in thirteenth-century England', *Speculum* 67 (1992), 263–283. Stacey has also shown how the king's taxation between 1240 and 1260 undermined the finances of the Jews, thus reducing their value to the crown and preparing the way for the expulsion in his '1240–1260: a watershed in Anglo-Jewish relations?', *Historical Research* 61 (1988), 135–150.

⁴⁸ Stacey, 'The conversion of the Jews', pp. 267, 269. Converts called John Mansel, John de Plessis and John of Darlington all appear in the fine roll material mentioned below.

⁴⁹ *Saint Richard of Chichester*, ed. David Jones (Sussex Record Society 79) (Lewes, 1995), pp. 133–134, 209–110; Stacey, 'The conversion of the Jews', pp. 276–277; Brand, 'Jews and the law', pp. 1149–1153.

⁵⁰ Stacey, 'The conversion of the Jews', p. 267 and note 22.

once to restore them shows their importance in his mind. Thus on 20 January 1255, in a standard letter designed to be sent to many houses, he explained that as a result of the war in Gascony and other arduous affairs touching his state and that of his queen, he had been unable to make proper provision as yet 'for the state of the *conversi*'. He therefore asked each house to provide a *conversus* with victuals and other necessities for two years, although if he (or she) was not content with this daily dole, then the house could choose to give a pension of one and a half pence a day instead.⁵¹ All told around 160 *conversi* were listed in the roll as being equipped with this or some equivalent letter, some (around 25) going back to houses where they had already been established, the rest setting out apparently for entirely new homes, the total number of houses involved being around 140.⁵² The majority of the bearers were single men and women but there were also some family groups, husbands and wives, and mothers and daughters. Over 70 of the 160 converts were women. What is striking in our context is the number of converts from Lincoln: one man, Roger, and no fewer than five women: Alice, Matilda, Susannah the widow of John, and Mary with her daughter. How lucky they were to escape what was to come.

Henry, in his letter, had been careful to imply that this was a temporary arrangement until he made proper provision. His wording shows he was making a request, not issuing an order, but he made it very clear that he expected his prayers to be heard, in which case the houses would benefit from his reciprocal grace and favour. There were to be no excuses making it necessary for him to solicit again. In most cases this did the trick, but some 30 *conversi* were turned away, including Roger of Lincoln from Louth Park and Mary of Lincoln and her daughter from Kirkstead. The king sent the rejects back (this time apparently successfully) with further standard-form letters in which he expressed his anger and astonishment, but gave the houses a second chance to prove their devotion. He hoped the present delay would be wholly expiated by their subsequent actions, which would then deserve thanks and fitting reward. The letter

⁵¹ *CFR 1254-55*, no. 53 available on www.finerollshenry3.org.uk.

⁵² There are five overlapping lists of the beneficiaries: *CFR 1254-55*, nos 54, 124, 125, 203, 981. The most recent analysis of them is to be found in Joan Greatrex, 'Monastic charity for Jewish converts: the requisition of corrodies by Henry III', in *Christianity and Judaism*, ed. Diana Wood (Ecclesiastical History Society, Studies in Church History) (Oxford, 1992), pp. 133-143. See also Stacey, 'The conversion of the Jews', p. 269. I have attempted some analysis of the lists myself which explains any differences with Greatrex's findings.

also contained a reproach so rueful, undignified and inconsequential that one feels it must have come direct from the king himself. For, Henry said, 'we presume without doubt from this [refusal] that if we had been absent in parts across the sea, these same prayers would have had little or no effect with you, especially since you have refused to admit them when we are present'.⁵³ Henry had, of course, just returned from overseas, and hence presumably this line of thought, but it was hardly very kingly to reflect on how much worse the response would have been had he again been abroad.

The first of the letters for the rejected converts was issued on 6 February, and others followed as more met with refusal. The whole issue of the Jews was thus very much in Henry's mind, and helps to explain the determination with which he investigated the Lincoln affair. That does not mean he had yet decided that the Jews were guilty. Indeed, when he stopped briefly at York on his way south, he may well have heard some sceptical words on that subject both from Richard of Cornwall and a Lincoln Jew, for it was there that Hagin of Lincoln, Richard's 'attorney', informed the king, on Richard's behalf, about the poverty of Aaron of York and sought a consequent concession.⁵⁴ It would be strange if Hagin was not also questioned about events in Lincoln.⁵⁵ When, however, Henry eventually arrived in the city on 3 October, he was, we may be sure, hit with a great wave of emotion and certainty over what had happened. The atmosphere must have been electric. Doubtless, the mother Beatrice flung herself once more at Henry's feet; the previously blind woman proclaimed her miraculous recovery of sight; and the dean and chapter showed off the place of honour in the cathedral where they had laid to rest the boy who was already becoming 'Little Saint Hugh'.

There was also one other extraordinary twist, at least if the ballad can be believed. Just what advice Henry's converts would have given him about the allegations we do not know. Would those from Lincoln have said they knew nothing of such terrible rituals? Perhaps they did. And yet,

⁵³ CFR 1254–55, no. 123. The Latin is *presumentes ex hoc indubitanter quod si absentes essemus in partibus transmarinis, eedem preces parum vel nullum penes vos optinerent effectum maxime cum in presentia nostra illas admittere recusaveritis*. The *presumentes ex hoc* has been written over the deleted word *sperantes*. I would like to thank Lesley Boatwright for help with the translation of this passage. For the image, see http://www.finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/fimages/C60_52/m13d.html.

⁵⁴ *Close Rolls 1254–56*, p. 140.

⁵⁵ Hagin, however, acquired possessions of some of the executed Jews: *Calendar of Charter Rolls 1226–57*, p. 460; Hill, *Medieval Lincoln*, pp. 227–228.

according to the ballad, it was actually a convert, after finding the body, who helped reveal that it had been crucified. Because of the dirt which covered the corpse, this was not initially clear, and it was the convert who stood forth and advised that it be washed, and then

*Je crei ben que ert trové
Coment l'enfant pené.*⁵⁶

Did the convert, then, also come before the king, explain his role in the affair, and assure him, with all his inside knowledge, that yes the Jews did indeed commit such crimes? Given Henry's respect for such men and concern for their welfare, this was evidence which would have been very hard to resist, whatever his earlier hesitations.⁵⁷ And there was one other crucial factor. Because of the necessity of getting to Westminster by 13 October for the Confessor's feast, Henry was in a hurry. Leaving the queen behind (Eleanor was ill),⁵⁸ he had come down from Wark making little more than overnight stops on the way, and after arriving in Lincoln on 3 October, he was off again on the sixth.⁵⁹ He could give just three days to the city. Henry thus needed a quick result, just the kind of situation which has led to miscarriages of justice in murder trials through the ages. The first step was to arrest all the male Jews, or those who could be caught, and then came the examination.⁶⁰ Here there was a man, thanks to his combination of learning and local knowledge, supremely fitted for the task, namely, as Langmuir showed, the king's steward John of Lexington.⁶¹ John had accompanied the king from the north and had indeed been pretty constantly at court since the spring.⁶² He was a literate knight, a *miles litteratus*, learned in both canon and Roman law, and

⁵⁶ *HL*, pp. 50–51, stanzas 64–66.

⁵⁷ For the role of converts in the London case of 1244, see *CM* 4:377–378.

⁵⁸ *Foedera*, 1, i, p. 328 (*CPR* 1247–58, p. 425). *Calendar of Liberate Rolls 1251–60*, p. 240; *Close Rolls 1254–56*, p. 142. Queen Margaret was allowed to stay with her mother until she recovered and set off for the south.

⁵⁹ He had time, however, according to Matthew Paris, to lay violent hands, as a forced loan, on money deposited for safe keeping in Durham Cathedral: *CM* 5:507–508. But see *CPR* 1247–58, p. 423 and *Calendar of Liberate Rolls 1251–60*, p. 261 which suggest a different interpretation.

⁶⁰ *AM* 1:344–345. The ballad seems to put the arrest on the day before the king's arrival: *HL*, pp. 51–52, stanzas 72–75.

⁶¹ Langmuir, 'The knight's tale', pp. 474–477.

⁶² This is shown by his witnessing of royal charters: Marc Morris, ed., *The Royal Charter Witness Lists of Henry III*, 2 vols, (List and Index Society 291, 292) (Kew, 2001), 2:96–99. Matthew Paris's major mistake was to think Lexington had examined Copin before the king's arrival which plainly he did not: *CM* 5:518.

also, as steward of the king's household, one of the judges of the court *coram rege*. Furthermore, he came from a very distinguished family whose ancestral home at Laxton was only 15 miles from Lincoln.⁶³ One brother, Robert, had been a senior royal judge, another, Stephen, as we have seen, was abbot of Clairvaux, while a third, Henry, was at this very time bishop of Lincoln. In addition, three of John's nephews were canons of the cathedral, and thus quite possibly participants in the procession which had borne Hugh's body to its resting place.⁶⁴

What arguments and insinuations John brought to bear to extract Copin's confession we do not know, but doubtless the key factor, mentioned by both Matthew Paris and the Burton annalist, was the promise of his life. Langmuir thought it quite possible that John did not believe the confession, and was simply seizing the chance to add a new saint to his brother's cathedral.⁶⁵ Yet one wonders about this because John and his brother had actually good reasons for playing down the whole affair. Lincoln already had a recent saint in Hugh of Avalon, who had died in 1200, and was well on its way to another with Grosseteste. Both these were former bishops of the diocese whose sanctification boosted episcopal authority, which would hardly be the case with 'Little Saint Hugh'.⁶⁶ There was also the danger that, lying there beside him, Hugh would overshadow Grosseteste and thus obstruct his path to official canonisation. The dean and canons of Lincoln, often in conflict with their bishop, might perhaps have looked at things differently, but, in this case, the dean, Richard of Gravesend, had been a Grosseteste protégé and was soon to follow Henry of Lexington as bishop. John himself, if he inspired Henry's letter to the Cistercians on 4 August, believed as strongly as his master in the need to 'exalt the Catholic faith'. Faced with the evidence of the body and the miracles, and enveloped by the tide of emotion which was sweeping through the city, he might well have believed that a gross assault had been made on the faith at Lincoln. What is certain is that John, as Matthew Paris put it even

⁶³ For Laxton, John and his family, see Crook, 'Dynastic conflict in thirteenth-century Laxton', in *Thirteenth Century England XI*, pp. 194-198.

⁶⁴ Langmuir, 'The knight's tale', p. 472. The evidence for these canonries is slightly later than 1255, however.

⁶⁵ Langmuir, 'The knight's tale', pp. 477, 481. Langmuir, however, adds that John must have wanted to believe the fantasy. He also notes that he had provided Matthew Paris with information about a miracle: *CM* 5:383-384.

⁶⁶ The potential conflict between cults like that of William of Norwich and 'Little Saint Hugh' emerged at the workshop referred to in note 3 above.

before the Lincoln affair, was 'a man of great authority and knowledge'.⁶⁷ Any confession he obtained was bound to carry credibility.

According to the Burton annals, Copin's testimony was written down and read out before the king.⁶⁸ According to the ballad, more dramatic, but not necessarily less believable, the Jews were brought bound into the king's presence, and there Copin recited his confession which was then put in writing.⁶⁹ After that, Henry's reaction seems rather an anti-climax:

*Pur la pité Jhésu Crist!
Mult meafist que l'occist.*⁷⁰

Matthew Paris, however, again perfectly believable, now has the king making another decisive intervention: he overruled John's promise of mercy, and determined that Copin should die. Indeed, as 'a blasphemer and murderer he deserved to die many times over'.⁷¹ For one, as we have seen, with a horror of blasphemy and an urgent concern to promote the Christian faith, this verdict was understandable. So Copin suffered his excruciating fate, his body, or what was left of it, ending (another local detail provided by the ballad) on Lincoln's gallows hill at Canwick.⁷² As for the rest of the accused, they seem to have been offered a trial by an all-Christian jury, something 18 of them refused to accept, demanding a mixture of Jews as well.⁷³ What was to be done, however, could be left to the future. Leaving the Jews imprisoned in Lincoln castle, Henry was off: Sempringham (6 October), Stamford (7 October), Peterborough (8 October), Huntingdon (9 October), Royston (10 October), Hertford (11 October); and thus at Westminster in time for the feast of the Confessor's translation on 13 October.

The rest of the tragic story is quickly told. In October, the constable of Lincoln Castle was ordered to despatch all the Jews 'taken for the child lately crucified' to the king at Westminster, from where they were sent to

⁶⁷ *CM* 5:384.

⁶⁸ *AM* 1:345.

⁶⁹ *HL*, pp. 52-54.

⁷⁰ *HL*, p. 53, stanza 87.

By the pitie of Jhesus Christ, I trowe,
Much ill did the infant's murder do.

⁷¹ *CM* 5:518. The quotation is Paris's comment not Henry's direct speech.

⁷² *HL*, p. 54.

⁷³ Thomas Stapleton, ed., *Cronica Maiorum et Vicecomitum Londoniarum* (Camden Society 34) (London, 1846), p. 23.

the Tower.⁷⁴ Next month (on 22 November), with Hugh's mother actively prosecuting her suit, all 92 were brought back to Westminster. The 18 Jews who, at Lincoln, had not wished to place themselves on a jury of Christians without Jews were immediately drawn through London and hanged on a specially constructed gallows, their refusal being presumably taken as a confession of guilt. The remaining 74 Jews were returned to the Tower.⁷⁵

There were now some signs of the persecution being relaxed. According to the Burton annalist, the Dominican friars intervened strenuously for the Jews. According to Paris, the Franciscans did the same. Both chroniclers reported the story that the mendicants were motivated by money, although Paris, in some troubled reflections, acknowledged that their inspiration might have been pious.⁷⁶ In December, one of the Jews in the Tower, after intercession by a Castilian envoy in England, was released and restored to his property. John of Lexington's inquiry, it was said, had shown he was accused only of *ex post facto* consent to the crime. He had also put himself on a jury before the king's justices at Westminster, and the boy's mother had acknowledged he was not guilty. Then in January 1256, another Jew was pardoned, this time at the instance of John of Darlington. Since the Jew in question is described as 'John the convert', it would seem likely that he had been converted by Darlington and taken his name.⁷⁷

There were still, however, legal proceedings. January 1256, a jury of 24 knights living close to Lincoln, and 24 burgesses from the city, was summoned to Westminster to certify the justices 'concerning the death of Hugh son of Beatrice, whom the Jews crucified and handed to death, as it is said', the Jews in the Tower having agreed to stand by their verdict.⁷⁸ The 'as it is said' sticks out here and it is a great pity that no record survives of the resulting proceedings, if there were any. Both Matthew Paris and the Burton annalist say the Jews were convicted, but this would make

⁷⁴ *Close Rolls 1254-56*, p. 145.

⁷⁵ *Cronica Maiorum*, p. 23; *CM* 5:519. It is noticeable that Paris is now better informed than the Burton annalist who places the executions after Christmas: *AM* 1:346.

⁷⁶ *AM* 1:346-348; *CM* 5:546.

⁷⁷ *Foedera*, 1, i, p. 335 (*CPR 1247-58*, pp. 453, 457). See Stacey, 'The conversion of the Jews', p. 272. The reference in December to John of Lexington's inquiry is the last mention of him in connection with the affair. The last royal charter he attests is one at Lincoln on 4 October (*The Royal Charter Witness Lists of Henry III*, 2:98), a point I owe to David Crook. Lexington was dead by early 1257.

⁷⁸ Walter Waddington Shirley, ed., *Royal and other Historical Letters of the Reign of Henry III*, 2 vols, (Rolls Series 27) (London, 1862-66), 2:110.

the subsequent events almost inconceivable, for there were no more executions. Instead, in May 1256, the remaining Jews were released after the intervention of the Earl of Cornwall, something even he could hardly have achieved had their guilt been established.⁷⁹ Interestingly, the chronicle of Paris's fellow St Albans monk, John of Wallingford, also ascribes the release to Henry of Bath, the senior judge of the court *coram rege*, which could point in the direction of an acquittal.⁸⁰ Richard himself had clearly a financial motive in protecting the Jews (as both Paris and the Burton annalist pointed out) but quite probably never believed the accusations even after the finding of the body and the so-called confession.⁸¹

The eventual release of the Jews, formally acquitted or not, shows that relations between Christians and Jews were not fixedly prejudiced. Indeed, reading between the lines of the Lincoln affair, the same point appears. Little Hugh was said to have been playing with Jewish boys. According to the ballad, his body was actually disposed of by a former nurse of one of the Jews who passed for a Christian.⁸² When the Jews were arrested, their women and children were left untouched 'out of pity'.⁸³ The same close relations between Jews and Christians, as Robert Stacey has shown, also stand out in the tale of the ritual crucifixion of Adam of Bristol, which was probably written soon after the Lincoln affair.⁸⁴ If Henry III himself gave official sanction to the crucifixion myth, he did so only in extraordinary circumstances which did away with what may earlier have been a more measured approach to the affair. Had he enjoyed more time, if he had not been under such pressure 'to get a result', then the affair might well have taken a less atrocious path.

One sequel.⁸⁵ In November 1256, a year after the execution of its Jews, the dean and canons of Lincoln sought permission to lengthen their church

⁷⁹ *AM* 1:348; *CM* 5:546, 552.

⁸⁰ Richard Vaughan, 'The chronicle of John of Wallingford', *English Historical Review* 73 (1958), 66–77, at 74. Some doubt seems later to be expressed even in respect of those executed for the crime, for example *Close Rolls 1256–59*, pp. 236–237.

⁸¹ Richard, however, did profit from the possessions of the executed Jews: *Close Rolls 1254–56*, pp. 241, 285.

⁸² For Christian nurses employed by Jews, see Brand, 'Jews and the law', p. 1145 and note 2 and Hannah Meyer, *Female moneylending and wet-nursing in Jewish-Christian relations in thirteenth-century England* (unpublished University of Cambridge Ph. D thesis, 2009), esp. chapter 7.

⁸³ *HL*, p. 48, stanzas 44, 47; p. 52, stanza 74; p. 53, stanza 85.

⁸⁴ Stacey, 'Adam of Bristol', pp. 11–12.

⁸⁵ The following link was made by Paul Binski at the workshop mentioned in note 3.

to the east.⁸⁶ This was the beginning of the angel choir of the cathedral. Truly, in Lincoln, the barbarity and beauty of this age lived together. Perhaps indeed they were connected, for was it with help from offerings at the shrine of 'Little Saint Hugh' that the canons hoped to construct their wonderful new building?

⁸⁶ *CPR* 1247-58, p. 506.