

The Stephen Langton Trail

Archbishop Stephen Langton, who originated from the tiny village of Langton by Wragby played a key negotiating role between King John and his barons. This Trail has been devised to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta in 1215.



Lincoln, from the River Witham



St Andrew's, Apley



Langton Manor



St Giles, Wragby



Limewoods



It was only in the 1920s that Stephen Langton's birthplace was established with any certainty although it had always been known that he was of Lincolnshire stock. Stephen Langton was perhaps the oldest of three sons of Henry Langton, a minor landowner with great respect for the church, and was born between 1150-1165; his father's house may well have been on the present moated manor site in Langton by Wragby. Of his early life we know little but his education may well have begun in Lincoln. However it is also possible that some of his time may have been spent at

Bullington Priory a mere three miles as the crow flies from his home. As a teenager (along with one of his brothers) Stephen went to Paris to study art and theology. Paris was recognised internationally as a centre of learning so an education in France was not unusual. Gilbert of Sempringham, had done the same thing some eighty years earlier and he was the founder of the Gilbertine order, one of whose priories was at Bullington. Although in his eighties when Stephen was born Gilbert lived until 1189 so it is tempting to speculate that they may have met. Stephen stayed in Paris for twenty-five years, establishing a reputation as a great

scholar. Amongst his many works was the revision of the order of the books in the bible and arranging them into the chapters with which we are familiar today. This meant that by 1207, as the most prominent living English churchman, he was consecrated as Archbishop of Canterbury by Pope Innocent III. This was the culmination of a long-running dispute between the Pope and King John following the death of the previous Archbishop Hubert Walter. Angered by the Pope's decision John refused to allow the new archbishop into England and so Stephen Langton was forced to remain in exile. Innocent III responded to this with an interdict excluding England from the church. An attempt at negotiation in 1209 failed but the king finally gave way by 1213. King John remained in difficulty at home where the barons were unhappy with his heavy taxation and arbitrary use of the law. Archbishop Langton, concerned for the church became involved. He was therefore in the forefront of the campaign to affect some control over the monarchy and became the principal negotiator between the king and his barons. His influence

can therefore be detected, especially the charter's clause confirming ecclesiastical liberties. By 1215 the barons were ready to take their stand against the king. Initially John refused their demands, however, in what amounted to civil war, once they captured London on 17 May 1215 he was left with little option but to meet and agree terms that would limit his power and make him, just as much as his subjects, answerable to the rule of his own laws.

At Runnymede on 15 June 1215 Archbishop Langton was in attendance as one of the King's Commissioners along with Bishop Hugh of Lincoln. In another connection with his home county, Archbishop Langton was appointed by the Pope in 1219 to oversee the canonisation of Hugh of Avalon, an earlier Bishop of Lincoln who had died in 1200. That task he completed in 1220. Archbishop Stephen Langton died on 9th July 1228 and was buried at Canterbury.

PRACTICALITIES

Not everyone will want to walk the full 16.5 miles in one go. It has therefore been divided into three more manageable sections. Despite being so close to Lincoln some of the route does cross quite isolated countryside. Unless a detour is made into Wragby early in Section 1 the only chance of refreshments before Lincoln is the inn at Fiskerton (end of Section 2 / start of Section 3). Plenty of choice once Lincoln is reached. Self-sufficiency is therefore the order of the day - so be prepared! The route uses public rights of way throughout. There is not much public transport access to the trail. Langton by Wragby lies conveniently on the Lincoln -

Horncastle - Skegness bus route (Service 6) with a bus stop only a few yards from the start. Fiskerton too lies on a bus route - the 15/15A services to Short Ferry. Consult the 'lincsbus' and County Council websites. The countryside in between has no services so, unless sections 1 and 2 are done together two cars will be needed for the Apley / Thistle Storr Wood start / finish points; the only other option being a long 'walk in' from the A158 at Langworth. The Ordnance Survey Maps covering the route are Landranger 121 (Lincoln) - which covers the whole route - and Explorers 273 (Lincolnshire Wolds South) and 272 (Lincoln). These latter two are strongly recommended for their greater detail.