

BERNARD (died 1148), bishop of S. Davids

Name: Bernard
Date of death: 1148
Gender: Male
Occupation: bishop of S. Davids
Area of activity: Religion
Author: John Edward Lloyd

A Norman cleric of unknown origin, who began life as a chaplain of queen Matilda and later became her chancellor. On the death of [bishop Wilfre or Wilfrid](#) in 1115, Henry I determined to end the succession of Welsh bishops in this diocese and to complete his subjugation of South Wales by the appointment of an outsider. Representatives of the 'clas' of S. Davids were summoned to London and there, on 18 September, required to elect Bernard. He was ordained priest at Southwark on the same day, made the usual profession of obedience to Canterbury, and received from the king a confirmation of the rights and privileges of the see. On the 19th he was consecrated in Westminster abbey by archbishop Ralph, six bishops assisting. The queen and her son William were also present.

In many respects, the new prelate was not unfitted for his station. He was a well-read scholar, with social gifts and courtly experience. But it was inevitable that his election should be badly received in Wales; the Llanbadarn chronicler records how keenly this insult to the native clergy was resented by them. Nor did Bernard show any great desire to identify himself with the people of his charge. For many years, he is still the assiduous courtier and indefatigable traveller. He was at the council of Reims in 1119 and at its successor in 1131, in Rome in 1123 and 1129, in Normandy in 1119, 1126, and 1129. He was at the consecration of bishops at Canterbury, Lambeth, and Abingdon, and witnessed at various places a large number of grants to religious bodies. These activities are attested by contemporary records; what he did in his diocese rests, for the most part, on later evidence or on conjecture. The chronicle of Battle abbey is good authority for his ejection in 1125 of that house from the churches of Carmarthen, to make room for a convent of Austin canons of his own foundation, and a Welsh annalist tells how in 1144 he gave land at (Little) Trefgarn in Deugleddeu to Cistercian monks, the first of that order to settle in west Wales. But it is [Giraldus Cambrensis](#), writing nearly a century later, who describes his reform of the cathedral chapter by the substitution of secular canons, drawing fixed incomes, for the *claswyr* on the British model, who consumed revenues of the Church as a community. That he established the four archdeaconries of the diocese is a likely inference from the facts; it is less certain that a 'dedication' of the cathedral in 1131 implies a rebuilding of the fabric. And, before he can be credited with securing the canonization of [S. David](#), it has to be established that the event took place in his time.

He was, however, an energetic champion of the rights of his see, playing a prominent part in two major conflicts. The first arose out of the attempt of bishop Urban of Llandaff to annex to his diocese the regions of Ystrad Yw, Gower, Kidwelly, and Cantref Bychan, and thus to extend its boundary from the Tawe to the Towy. Having received no support in the Council of Westminster in 1127, Urban appealed to the Holy See, and in 1128 secured from Honorius II, in the absence of opposition, a provisional award in his favour. This was confirmed on a second visit to Rome by Urban in 1129, but a few days afterwards Bernard appeared and obtained postponement of the whole matter for eighteen months. When 1130 came, there was a new pope. Innocent II at first favoured the Llandaff claim, and it was to have been settled at the Council of Reims in 1131. But Urban, now growing old, pleaded illness as a reason for his absence, and, with Bernard ready to argue his own case, began to lose his advantage. The matter was still open, however, and remained so until the death of the bishop of Llandaff in the summer of 1133, while in attendance once more upon the pope. It was never reopened. Successful in this encounter, Bernard had a more difficult task in the second. This was a struggle, against Canterbury, to secure his recognition as the metropolitan of Wales. Disappointed in his hopes of promotion elsewhere, he fell back upon this claim and reckoned upon the support of his good friend the king, going so far, says [Giraldus](#), as sometimes to have the archiepiscopal cross borne before him in his journeys through Wales. There is no evidence that Henry gave him any countenance, nor was the situation much altered by the king's death in 1135. According to Henry of Huntingdon, he actually received from the pope the pall which signaled his victory, but forthwith lost it. When this happened, there is no telling; it may have been during the troubles of the civil war, when Bernard, as was to be expected, took the side of Matilda. At any rate, his strenuous toil for the honour of his see, attested by the Llanbadarn chronicle, had carried him no further in 1144 than a promise from Lucius II that legates going to England would investigate and report. It was not until June, 1147, that a partial solution was reached. At Meaux, near Paris, Eugenius III declared against Bernard's personal claim, since there was good evidence that at his consecration he had professed obedience to Canterbury, but held over the question of the status of S. Davids. This was to be discussed in October 1148, but in the meantime Bernard died. Thirty-three years had altered the attitude of the Llanbadarn chronicler, who records the death with expressions of high appreciation.

Author

Sir John Edward Lloyd, (1861 - 1947)

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Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Bernard \(bishop of St Davids\)](#)

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