

**The Impact of the Black Death (1348-1349) on the Clergy:
Was the Winchester Diocese atypical?**

The Black Death was one of the most devastating pandemics in human history. In 1347 the Black Death swept into Europe, reaching England in 1348. During 1348 and 1349 it ravaged towns and countryside alike causing widespread disruption and death. It is estimated by historians that up to half the population died. This paper considers the impact of the Black Death on the clergy of the Winchester diocese. At the time of the Black Death, the Winchester Diocese was one of the most important in England. Its bishop during 1348-1349, William Edington, was a powerful royal official who governed a broad area that stretched from Southwark to Somerset and from Oxford to the Isle of Wight. The registers of Bishop Edington are a chronological record of the churches administration of the diocese, especially as regards the disposition of the clergy and as such they have provided the main source of evidence for this paper.

The Bishop's registers have been used to collect data on the numbers of deaths and vacant benefices during the Black Death years of 1346-1352. The data collected have enabled an analysis to be made of the impact of the Black Death on priest mortality. Likewise, the impact of the Black Death on exchanges of and resignations from benefices, the problems of licences/dispensations for absence as well as pluralism are analysed. In addition, an analysis of Bishop Edington's regular ordinations throughout the Black Death years, has enabled his effectiveness in providing clerical replenishment and pastoral support during the same period to be explored and assessed in this paper.

A comparison made with other known studies completed for other diocese for the Black Death years, for example, Davis's (1989) study of the Medieval diocese of Coventry and Litchfield, Lomas's (1989) study of the Black Death in County Durham and Dohar's (1995) study of the Diocese of Hereford in the Fourteenth Century, has enabled an analysis of the impact of the Black Death on the Winchester clergy within a wider context to be outlined.

Finally, as a conclusion to this paper, the immediate effects and the long term effects of the Black Death are discussed. In this way, the impact of the Black Death on the clergy of the Winchester diocese is clearly shown and an effective

contribution made to the growing volume of evidence on this aspect of medieval history.