

**Simon de Tosny, O.Cist.**

**Abbot of Coggeshall, Essex,**

**and**

**Bishop of Moray**

**(1171 – 1184)**

## Simon de Tosny, (c.1106 – 17 Sept 1184)

**Born:** c.1106 at Flamstead Manor, Hertfordshire.

**Father:** Ralph (Raoul) IV de Tosny, (1079 - 1126), siegneur of Tosny and Conches-en-Ouches, Normandy; hereditary Standard-Bearer of Normandy.

who, in 1103, married ...

**Mother:** Adelisa de Huntingdon, (c.1085 – c.1126), daughter of Waltheof, earl of Northumbria and Judith de Lens, Countess of Huntingdon. Adelisa's dowry lands were the lordship of Wilchamstowe<sup>1</sup> (Walthamstow, Essex). Adelisa died at Flamstead.



Adelisa's sister was Maud, Queen of Scotland.

**Brothers:** (Sir Roger III de Tosny?); Hugh de Tosny.

**Sisters:** Godehildis (Godeheut); ?Margaret; Isabel.

**Died:** 17 September 1184, probably at the Bishop's Manor, Birnie, by Elgin, Morayshire.

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### Career.

**Monk of Melrose** c.1121 (assuming he joined the community aged 15 years)<sup>2</sup>.



For a time, he was under the abbot Saint Waltheof, abbot of Melrose (1148 – 1159). (The abbot was the grandson of Earl Waltheof II of Northumbria; stepson of David I of Scotland; and maternal first cousin of Simon de Tosny),



In 1136 King David I (1124-1153), possibly under the influence of his friend St. [Aelred](#), invited a group of monks from [Rievaulx](#) to settle at the old site at Melrose. A few years later the monks moved to the present site, only two miles up the River Tweed from the old monastery.

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<sup>1</sup> Ingulph 's *Chronicle of Croyland*, p.475.

<sup>2</sup> The minimum age for acceptance into the Cistercian novitiate was 15 years. [J.M. Canivez, *Statuta Generalium Cisterciensis*, (Louvain 1933) i, 31.]

Simon would have been part of the community at this time.

{The abbey church at New Melrose was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary on its completion, on 28 July 1146.}

**Second Abbot of Coggeshall** from before 1167 to 1168.<sup>3</sup> He supervised the transfer of authority to Citeaux<sup>4</sup> and the completion of the building of the abbey church.

Present at the dedication of the High Altar of the abbey church to B.V.M. and St John the Baptist by Gilbert Foliot, Bishop of London, on 15 August 1167.

**Returned to be a Monk of Melrose** 1168<sup>5</sup> - 1171.

{Abbot Joscelin (1170 - 1174) was created bishop of Glasgow in 1175 and so would have been Simon's abbot briefly, after he returned from Coggeshall.}

**Bishop of Moray** 1171 - 1184. Simon was elected bishop of Moray on 23 January 1171. In late twelfth-century Scotland the influence of lay people other than the king in the election of a bishop, was frowned on.<sup>6</sup> His election is supposed to have been the outcome of a meeting of the Chapter of Moray but since we are told that the decision was made at Perth, and it is unlikely that the whole Chapter would have travelled such a distance south, we can be fairly certain that in this 'election' we see the wishes of the King being carried out.

After a delay of just over a year, Simon was consecrated at St Andrew's Cathedral, on 10 February 1172,<sup>7</sup> by Bishop

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<sup>3</sup> Coggeshall Abbey was founded in 1140 by King Stephen and his Queen, Matilda of Boulogne, as a Savignac house. It became a Cistercian house in 1147 when the Savignac Order was absorbed into the Cistercian. The manor of Coggeshall was given by William the Conqueror to Queen Matilda's father, Eustace, Count of Boulogne. Matilda's mother was daughter of King Malcolm III and St Margaret of Scotland.


<sup>4</sup> There is Savignac evidence of the Order not yet being incorporated into the Cistercian Order as late as the early 1160s


<sup>5</sup> Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, Joseph Stevenson (ed.) London: Longman, (1875), 16. "MCLXVIII. *Domnus Simon abbas secundus recessit a Cogeshala et ad Mailros monasterium suum regreditur.*" [https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=bsNCAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=bsNCAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>6</sup> Pope Alexander III wrote: "although for the election of a bishop the favour and assent of the prince should be requested, yet laymen should not be admitted to the election. But the election is to be held by the canons of the cathedral church and the religious men from the city and diocese." [C. Morris, *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050 to 1250*, (Oxford 1989), 224.

<sup>7</sup> A Cistercian abbot had to obtain the permission of the Cistercian Chapter General before accepting an election to a bishopric. These Chapters were held every year at Citeaux around Holy Cross Day (14 September). (In 1157 it was agreed that the abbots of Scotland need attend only once every four years.)

Richard of St Andrews and (possibly) others. He was the first member of the Cistercian Order to become bishop of a Scottish see.<sup>8</sup>

Attends  King Henry II at York in 1175.<sup>9</sup> Does homage to Henry along with, Richard, epis. St Andrews, Joscelin, epis. Glasgow, Richard, epis. Dunkeld, Christian, epis. Galloway, Andrew, epis. Caithness. (He is named as Simon de Thouni.)

Attended Council of Northampton 1176.<sup>10</sup> The Scottish party (  the King and the same bishops named above) deny the authority of the Archbishop of York as metropolitan in Scotland.

**Died 17 September 1184** in Moray (presumably at the Bishop's Manor at Birnie.) It has always been assumed that he was buried in Birnie church/cathedral.

## Associated Charter Evidence

In the Chartulary of the Augustinian Priory of the Holy Trinity, (Aldgate), London, there is an undated charter of "Alicia de Teonio" which is presumed to be Simon's mother Alice. In the charter it says that her son (Simon's brother) Hugh was buried in the priory. She gives the church of *Welcomstowe* (Walthamstowe) to the priory for the sake of the soul of her late husband Ralph and the safety of her sons Roger and Simon and her daughter Isabelle. To increase the value of the gift she adds half a virgate of land and an acre of pasture. The charter is witnessed by Simon, Isabelle, Moyses presbyter, and Elias clerk, and Richard de Portis<sup>11</sup> and William de Orivals.<sup>12</sup> [Dugdale *Monasticon* Vol 6, pt. 1, p.152 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k133603q/f234.image>] If Simon was born in 1106 then he would have been 'of age' to witness this charter in 1127.<sup>13</sup> His mother is said to have died 'about 1126'. His father died in 1125. Hugh is said to have died 'before 1156' but this evidence shows that he must have been dead before his mother died, i.e. before 1126x1127.

<sup>8</sup> William appointed only two other Cistercians during his long reign – Reinald to Ross in 1195 and Adam, abbot of Melrose, to Caithness in 1213.

<sup>9</sup> Stubbs, W. (ed.) *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbatis*, vol. I, 95.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 111.

<sup>11</sup> Walter de Portes was tenant of Ralph de Tosny at Almely (Elmley?) Worcestershire in 1086 (Domesday Book) and seems to have been a witness to Tosny charters in the 1120s. By 1150 the tenant was named as Richard de Portis.

<sup>12</sup> Orival is a village in Normandy, on the Seine, about 46 km from Tosny.

<sup>13</sup> Assuming that he came of age when he was 21 years of age.

### *Chronicon Anglicanum* of Ralph de Coggeshale.

1167. Simon, at that time abbot of Coggeshall, was present when the high altar of the abbey church was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and St John Baptist, by Gilbert Foliot, bishop of London, on the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. That same day Simon and the bishop celebrated a solemn mass on the altar.<sup>14</sup>

1168. Simon resigned as abbot of Coggeshall and returned to his monastery of Melrose.<sup>15</sup>

1172. Simon, sometime abbot of Coggeshall, is consecrated bishop of Moray on 23 January.<sup>16</sup>

It is most interesting to note that, in the Coggeshall Chronicle, there is no record of the start of Simon's abbacy. Vanessa Traill (Traill (2013), 148) suggests that Simon travelled to Coggeshall c.1148, but she provides no support for this.<sup>17</sup>

### Simon's naming.

Simon is the first member of the family to be found bearing that name and as far as can be determined this was the only occasion that a member of the main Tosny family was given the name Simon.

Even a cursory study of the genealogy of the Tosnys reveals that the male members were regularly named Ralph, Robert and Roger and, indeed, Simon's elder brother was called Roger as was his great-grandfather. The tradition was that the eldest son (and Norman heir) was given one of these three names. It is very interesting to note that Simon's sister was given their great-grandmother's name – Godeheut, wife of Roger (I) de Tosny. It would seem that Simon's father,

<sup>14</sup> Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, Joseph Stevenson (ed.) London: Longman, (1875), 16. "MCLXVII. *Apud Cogeshalam dedicatum est altare magnum in honore gloriosæ Virginis Mariæ et Sancti Johannis Baptistæ, die Assumptionis beatæ Mariæ* {1 November}, *a venerabili Gilberto Foliot, Londoniensi episcopo, qui eadem die super illud altare missam solemniter celebravit, domno Simone de Toni abate ejusdem loci existente.*"

[https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=bsNCAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=bsNCAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed 15/5/2020)

<sup>15</sup> Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, Joseph Stevenson (ed.) London: Longman, (1875), 16.

"MCLXVIII. *Domnus Simon abbas secundus recessit a Cogeshala et ad Mailros monasterium suum regreditur.*"

[https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=bsNCAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=bsNCAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed 15/5/2020)

<sup>16</sup> Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, Joseph Stevenson (ed.) London: Longman, (1875), 17.

"MCLXVIII. *Ordinatio domni Simonis, episcopi Muraviensis, decimo calendas Februarii, quondam abbatis de Cogeshala.*"

[https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=bsNCAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=bsNCAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed 15/5/2020)

<sup>17</sup> Traill, V.J. (2013) *The Social & Political Networks of the Anglo-Norman Aristocracy: The Clare, Giffard & Tosny Kin-groups, c.940 to c.1200*, unpublished PhD thesis submitted to the University of Glasgow (2013), 148-149. <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/4341/> (accessed 15/5/2020)

Ralph (III)(iv) de Tosny, had a particular attachment to his children's great-grandparents. Of course, this great-grandfather was the illustrious Roger (I) de Tosny whose famous exploits in Spain were the subject of 'chansons' and it is, perhaps, no great surprise that Simon's father had such an attachment to his memory. Roger I de Tosny was the epitome of the Norman warrior knight. When it came to his younger sons, Ralph (III) (iv) de Tosny chose to name them after other members of the family: Simon was named, it would appear, after his grandmother's father (Simon's great-grandfather) Simon (I) L'Ainé de Montfort; Simon's brother Hugh appears to have been named either after Bishop Hugh (Raoul (I)'s brother), or Hugh de Montfort (Simon de Montfort's brother), or, and this is very likely, Hugh de Grandmesnil - Simon de Tosny's grandfather had been banished from Normandy along with Hugh Grandmesnil and was only allowed to return after Simon de Montfort interceded with the Duke. It is tempting to suggest that the two boys bore names which recognised and, in a sense, paid-back a debt owed by the Tosny family as a consequence of this episode in their family's history. Simon's other sister was named Isabel after their grandmother, Isabel de Montfort.

## Conclusions.

Norman Shead says that: "He [Jocelin, bishop of Glasgow] was the outstanding Scottish bishop of the later twelfth century."<sup>18</sup> I must beg to differ and would offer the following in support of my stance.

From the evidence presented here it becomes obvious that Simon was a man of considerable substance who had strong links to the royal houses of both Scotland and England and the Ducal house of Normandy. His family boasted ancient Anglo-Saxon heritage and they were also related to the most powerful Norman families. His immediate family contained some of the most renowned Norman knights whose prowess was a subject for the *troubadours*. Their military activities were renowned in southern Italy and Moorish Spain and achieved the same level of fame as the accomplishments of 'el Cid.' His family was also known for its skill in building substantial castles on both its Norman and English manors and Simon seems to have carried on this stone-building tradition both at Melrose, Coggeshall and Birnie.

Simon's Norman roots must have recommended him very strongly to the early community at Coggeshall which comprised twelve monks sent over from the mother house at the Abbey of Savigny, near the village of Savigny-le-Vieux, in the Manche region of northern Normandy. They must have been reassured that their

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<sup>18</sup> Shead, N.F. 'Jocelin, abbot of Melrose (1170-1174), and bishop of Glasgow (1175-1199)' in *Innes Review*, vol. 54, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 1-22.

new abbot was 'one of their own' who quite possibly spoke their own dialects fluently and certainly would have understood their Norman habits.

The Order of Savigny is often said to have been taken over by the Cistercian Order, in 1147, as a matter of course, but the truth is that a great deal of controversy took place before the amalgamation was fully accomplished. Even as late as the Cistercian General Council held in 1160, the situation was far from settled. Abbot Simon de Tosny would have been in the midst of all of the turmoil that would have resulted from the change to the Cistercian Order's ways although there is no confirmed record of him having attended any of the Cistercian General Councils. However, the delay of a year between Simon's election and consecration may have been to allow him time to attend the General Council of September 1171 and to gain permission to accept the see of Moray.

Interestingly, there was a significant movement to have one of Simon's abbots at Melrose, Abbot Waltheof, canonised following the discovery on 22 May 1171, that his body lay 'uncorrupted' in his grave. Consequently, the new abbot of Melrose, Jocelin, had arranged a great ceremony in order to have the stone covering Waltheof's grave replaced with a new slab of marble that was more in keeping with the old abbot's sanctity and nobility. A number of abbots were present to witness this event which was performed by Ingeram, bishop of Glasgow.<sup>19</sup> The Chapter General of 1171 authorized the translation of Waltheof's body and it is tempting to suggest that Simon de Tosny had carried the request for this translation to be allowed with him to Citeaux. The *Vita*<sup>20</sup> explicitly states that the Cistercian General Chapter was, like the pope, able to authorize the translation of Abbot Waltheof's body from the chapter house at Melrose to a site near the high altar of the abbey church – in effect, that the power of the General Chapter to decide in this matter was seen as equivalent to that of the papacy. The delegation sent from Melrose to Citeaux must have been an impressive one with high-ranking delegates. It is very likely that Simon, a senior monk, once an abbot of a royal establishment, and now the elect to a bishopric, would have fitted the bill very well! It must be allowed that there is every possibility that Simon travelled to Citeaux at this time.

Simon was the first Cistercian to be elected to a bishopric in Scotland and this does much to demonstrate extent of the favour shown by the throne towards him.

Simon de Tosny was a firm ally of the Scottish King and he acted as one of the 'standard bearers' of the Scottish Church in its battle against the See of York's attempts to place Scotland under its metropolitanical 'cloak'. The parallel here with

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<sup>19</sup> *Vita Waldevi*, 234-5.

<sup>20</sup> 'donec auctoritate summi Pontificis, vel consensus et concessu capitula Cisterciensis aliud sanciretur'. *Vita Waldevi* AASS, §275F; *Vita Weldevi*, 343.

his family's hereditary role as Standard Bearers of Normandy is striking. Simon was, therefore, a key player in ensuring that the Scottish Church maintained its independence.

I would suggest that the fact that he moved back to Melrose Abbey, after the completion of the abbey church at Coggeshall, demonstrates a great measure of humility. He had achieved his goal in seeing that the community was well founded and provided for and so he then retired to engage again in the endless battle which is the life of even the most simple of monks – a life which appears to have been of greater importance to him than that of being abbot of a flourishing royal monastery.

Simon had a long life (if we accept the dates given above). He is sometimes pushed into 'the long grass' by historians, but this is very much because there is much less written evidence available for these times than for later bishops of Moray. The Church in Scotland, and the people of Moray in particular, should share a measure of guilt in the fact that so little attention is paid to this man and that he lies with no grave known other than to God. Time after time we find that his name is misspelled and corrupted and this has tended to detract from his 'fame'. We should stop and take a moment to realise that he represented one of the most important Norman families – who bore the proud name of 'de Tosny' and were linked to royalty by marriage on several occasions. He was no non-descript Norman cleric who happened to inherit a noble bishopric. This man was one of the giants of the Church whose achievements north and south of 'the border' were astonishing.

"Was he a saint?" No, not in the strict sense of the term, but there is a suggestion of saintliness. Alyce Jordan (Jordan 2017, 186) records the traditional tale that: "Simon de Tosny, a former monk at the Scottish monastery of Melrose and later bishop of Moray, had effected a miraculous cure employing the water of St Thomas."<sup>21</sup>

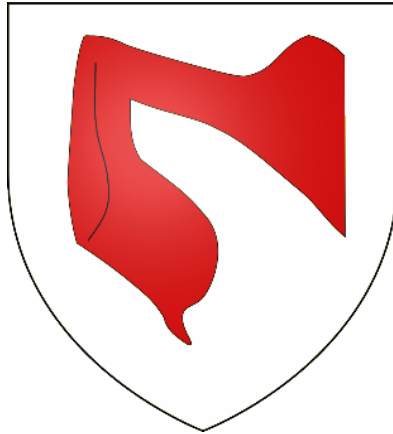
I must beg to be allowed to place Simon at least alongside his brother Cistercian - Jocelin, bishop of Glasgow. Contrasted against the remote and challenging hardness that the early bishops encountered and endured in Moray, I would even suggest that Simon's achievements might be considered to rank a little higher than Jocelin's! Certainly, I don't think it can be doubted that Simon was on more than equal terms when it came to the traditional Cistercian attribute of 'humility'.

This man was truly one of the most remarkable to be entrusted with the care of the diocese of Moray.

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<sup>21</sup> Jordan, Alyce A. (2017) *Postcolonising the Medieval Image*, Abingdon: Routledge. The so-called "water of St Thomas" is supposed to have been a 'tincture' made with water and a drop of the martyr's blood.





*Figure 1: The Ancient Arms of Tosny*

Blazon: *Argent, à maunch, gules.*

'On a silver background, a sleeve, in red.'

(I would suggest that the *sleeve* represents the outstretched arm of a standard-bearer.)

## Appendix.

In an interesting piece of 'ecclesiastical serendipity', Bishop Simon de Tosny's great-grandfather, Roger (I) (ii) de Tosny and two of his sons (Helebert and Helinand) were killed in battle fighting Roger 'de Barbe' Beaumont in (1039/40). This Roger de Beaumont was the great-great-grandfather of the Roger Beaumont who, in April 1189, was elected Bishop of St Andrews. Roger was consecrated by Simon de Tosny's successor and the then Bishop of Aberdeen. Also, Bishop Roger's aunt, Margaret de Beaumont, married Ralph (IV) (v) de Tosny, Simon's nephew.

Roger de Beaumont was appointed Chancellor of Scotland in 1170, one year before Simon de Tosny was appointed Bishop of Moray. It is possible that there is a link here.

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