

History- Lesson 2 of an enquiry of 4 lessons

Peter's Pence

Enquiry: How powerful was the Pope?

Mr Olivey



Saint Peter

Some people consider Saint Peter to be the first ever Pope, because he led the early Christian Church in Rome until his death in 64 AD. After his death, Peter was **canonised** (made a saint). Many medieval Christians believed that Peter stood beside God and Jesus in heaven. This meant that Saint Peter was one of the most important saints that there was from 800-1100.

The idea of paying money to Saint Peter became popular centuries after his death. **Pilgrims** (travellers making religious journeys) came from all over Europe to give gifts to the Church and the Pope in Rome. Some of these pilgrims were ordinary people. Others, like Offa of Mercia in the 700s, were European kings. Their gifts of gold and silver made medieval popes rich and powerful.



Alfred the Great and Edgar the Peaceful

After Offa of Mercia's gift of several gold **dinars**, 'English' kings like Alfred and Edgar continued to send money to Rome in the 800s and 900s. Alfred visited Rome as a boy in the 850s and was a Christian king; he devoted eight hours each day to studying the bible and praying. Unsurprisingly, he also sent lots of coins to the Pope.

By the time Edgar was king in 959, every **household** in England had to pay a penny to the Pope once a year - this became known as Peter's Pence. Priests collected this money from people up and down the land.



Law codes and coin hoards

Historians know about Peter's Pence because of two kinds of source: **law codes** and **coin hoards**. The 'Romgescot' law code stated that Peter's Pence '*shall be collected early in the morning on Saint Peter's Day after midsummer. If anyone neglects it, he is to pay 60 shillings.*' Edgar the Peaceful made Peter's Pence part of English law; every household had to pay. If anyone failed to pay their penny, they had to pay a huge fine to the king and the pope.

The other evidence that historians have about the importance of Peter's Pence are the Anglo-Saxon coin hoards that have been found in Rome. The number of these coins that have been found shows the pope had over *all* Anglo-Saxons - ordinary people and kings. They chose to send their treasure to Rome.



The power of Peter's Pence

Last lesson, the story of Pope Leo III and Charlemagne showed a rather weak pope who needed the support of a strong king. Yet Peter's Pence tells us a very different story about the power of the pope. English kings *chose* to send gold and silver to Rome. This shows us that, in some areas of life, medieval popes did have enormous power. The promise of heaven and pleasing Saint Peter pulled treasures into Rome from medieval Europe.

With this money, the pope could build new churches and cathedrals and train more priests. The wealth that flowed into Rome allowed priests to flow out of the city and into Europe.



Glossary

Canonised - when someone is made a saint after they have died.

Pilgrims - some who makes a religious journey called a pilgrimage.

Dinars - gold coins used in the medieval arabic world with an Islamic inscription on one side.

Household - all the people who live in one house.

Law code - a written document that explains the laws of the land.

Coin hoard - a large number of coins from the same time found in the same place.



Comprehension Questions

1. Who was Saint Peter?
2. What did medieval pilgrims bring to the Pope in Rome?
3. How much money did Edgar the Peaceful make every household in England pay to the Pope?
4. What evidence do historians have about the existence and importance of Peter's Pence?
5. In what ways does Peter's Pence show the power of the Pope?

