

**Volume 3**

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**Little Jack Horner and the Monastery  
at Glastonbury - Part IV**

**Lead: Beginning in 1536, King Henry VIII of England began to confiscate the once-Catholic monasteries of England. His seizure of Glastonbury was made easier by the treachery of Thomas Horner.**

**Tag: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: Most of the monasteries submitted to this process with little resistance. Henry actually showed some compassion, giving some of the priests he considered unemployable a**

small pension for life, but those who resisted, he crushed ruthlessly. One of those who held out was Richard Whiting, the Abbot of the ancient Cathedral at Glastonbury, near the western coast just south of Bristol. Whiting was eighty and had little to lose, but he tried to placate the King. He sent a Christmas present, the deed to twelve manorial estates which he hid in a Christmas pie. He entrusted this pastry delight to his steward, Thomas Horner, and sent him off to London. Horner was a realist. He knew very well that Whiting's gesture was useless. Henry would have Glastonbury. On the way, the disloyal steward popped open the pie and stole the deed to the rich manorial estate at Mells.

**To get Whiting out of the way, Henry's chief minister, Thomas Cromwell, had the Abbot arrested and thrown into the Tower of London. A case was framed accusing Whiting of trying to prevent the profane hands of the King from touching the monastery's gold sacramental cups. On the jury, which took less than a day to do its work, sat Whiting's steward, Thomas Horner. It is not a surprise then that the Abbot was convicted, hanged, beheaded, drawn and quartered.**

**Persistent legend has it that the treachery of Thomas Horner rewarded by a grateful King, and that his betrayal has been remembered in a**

**famous bit of verse learned by millions of young children over the years.**

**Little Jack Horner  
Sat in a Corner,  
Eating of Christmas Pye;  
He put in his Thumb,  
And pull'd out a Plum,  
And [said] what a good Boy was  
I.**

**This legend may or may not have a basis in fact, but it is reported that the descendants of Thomas Horner, the clever and treacherous steward of Richard Whiting, lived at the rich manor of Mells, well into the twentieth century.**

**At the University of Richmond, this  
is Dan Roberts.**

**Resources**

**Baring-Gould, William Stuart, and Ceil Baring-Gould. *The Annotated Mother Goose: Nursery Rhymes Old and New, Arranged and Explained.* New York, NY: Bramhall House Publishing, 1962.**

**Butler, Lionel and Chris Given-Wilson. *Medieval Monasteries of Great Britain.* London, UK: Joseph Publishing Company, 1979.**

**Gasquet, Francis Aidan, Cardinal. *Henry VIII and the English Monasteries, Seventh Edition.* London, UK: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1920.**

**See also website on nursery rhymes:  
[www.tbdesign.com/jackhorner.html](http://www.tbdesign.com/jackhorner.html)**

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