

Volume 3

Number 125

**Little Jack Horner and the Plum of
Glastonbury - Part II**

Lead: To get his hands on the monastic lands of Glastonbury Cathedral in 1539, King Henry VIII of England relied on the treachery of the Abbot's assistant, Thomas Horner.

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

Content: To secure his family's lock on the English throne, Henry VIII felt he had to have a male heir. Since his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, had failed to produce a son, he divorced her. To do so meant England had to renounce the jurisdiction of the

Roman Catholic Pope. Henry became the Supreme Head of the Church and then, beginning in 1536, started closing the monasteries, many of which were lingering hotbeds of Catholic sentiment in England.

They were also very wealthy, possessed vast acres of valuable English land. and had been richly endowed over the centuries. Henry and his Chancellor Thomas Cromwell went after the monastic wealth with enthusiasm. One of the richest prizes was the ancient monastic Cathedral at Glastonbury. Also known as Avalon, according to tradition, Glastonbury was the legendary burial site of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere. Its eighty-year-old Abbot, Richard

Whiting, viewed the progressive confiscations with mounting alarm. Legend has it that, hoping to appease the King's anger and deter him from destroying the monastery, at Christmas 1539, Whiting sent a Christmas pie to the King in London. In the pie were hidden the deeds of twelve manorial estates, a gift to Henry from the monastery's considerable fortune. Why the pie? Apparently it was common practice in medieval times to secure and transport valuable items inside pastries. They usually were an effective disguise, thieves being hesitant to explore the jellied contents, and were an excellent method of presentation: in the course of eating out popped the prize. The loaded Glastonbury pie was

dispatched to the King in the trusted hands of Thomas Horner, Abbot Whiting's able steward. On his way to deliver the Christmas pie Horner extracted a plum. Next time: The manor at Mells.

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**

Copyright by Dan Roberts Enterprises, Inc.