

HENRY II AND GLENSTAL CASTLE

BY ANDREW NUGENT

A recent visit to Fontevraud Abbey in the Loire Country, where Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine lie buried, set me wondering why Sir Matthew Barrington chose this unlikely pair to adorn the front door of Glenstal Castle, Co. Limerick.

The flag tower of the castle bears an inscription in which the architect of the first phase of the building commemorates himself: *Bardwell me fecit*. The date is added, 1839, but cut so as to look like 1139. There is no clue here. In 1839, Henry and Eleanor still had ten years to wait before their arrival at Glenstal, and in 1139 Henry was only six and, so far as we know, doing nothing in particular. He did not become King of England until 1154. The vital clue, I believe, is to be found in another date, inscribed above Henry's head at the Glenstal entrance. The inscription reads:

+ Anno ab incarnatione Domini
MCLV

Did something happen in precisely 1155 to give Henry and his Queen a *pied-à-terre* in Ireland? Indeed it did!

Nicholas Beakspear, the only Englishman ever to become Pope, ascended the papal throne as Adrian IV in the same year as Henry became King of England, 1154. Neither of them lost any time. In 1155, the Pope obligingly granted Ireland to Henry "as an inheritance" on condition that he should reduce to order the Irish church and state. (The mysterious Bull, *Laudabiliter*, if it ever existed, dates from the following year, 1156).

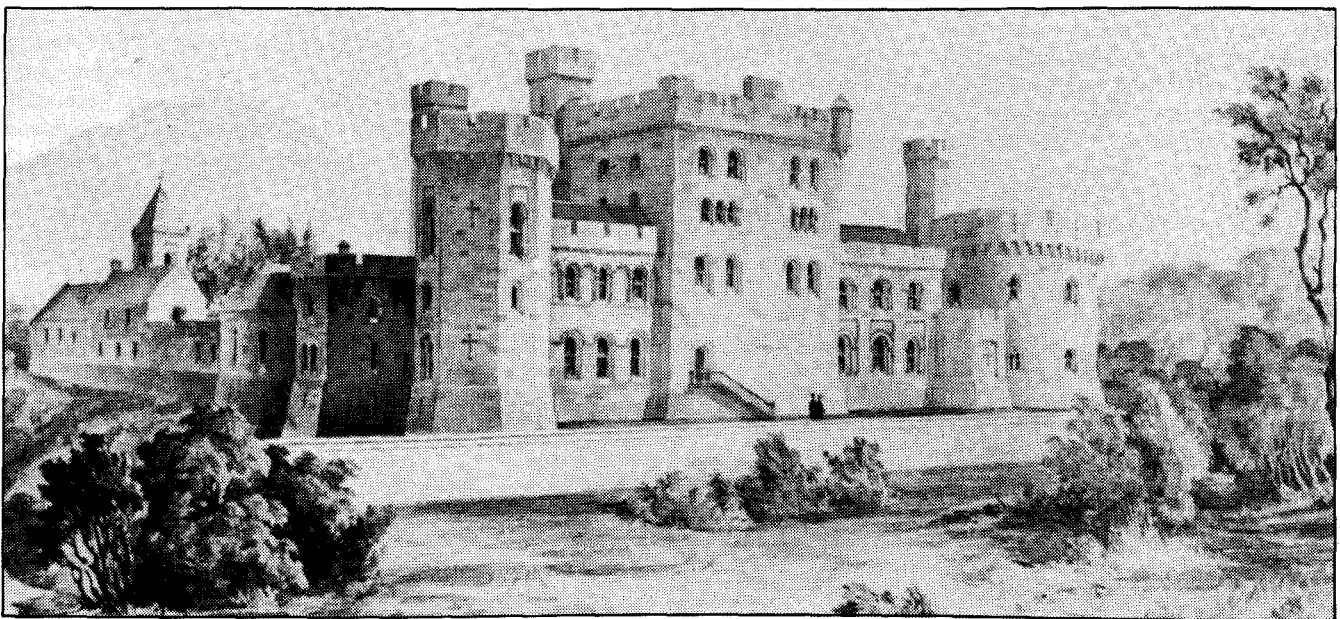
According to Sir Matthew's harmless fantasy (or that of one of his numerous architects), the year is 1155 and Henry and Eleanor are

gloriously reigning in Murroe, courtesy of His Holiness Pope Adrian IV. Loyal subjects of either or both, and their successors, please note!

It is worth adding that the Benedictines, who now occupy Glenstal, probably inherit some share of the royal and pontifical benediction. As a matter of history, the order played a prominent role in reducing the Irish church to what Henry and Adrian would have regarded as suitable order.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mark Tierney and John Cornforth, "Glenstal Castle, Co. Limerick", *Country Life*, 3 October, 1974 (available in offprint at Glenstal).
Mark Tierney O.S.B., *Glenstal Abbey, a Historical Guide*, Glenstal Publications, 1990.



William Bardwell's perspective of Glenstal from the south-west, 1838.