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Portrait of Cardinal
Guala Bicchieri

Date: 20th century
copy of original

A HISTORY OF ST ANDREW'S IN 100 OBJECTS

Guala Bicchieri (c. 1150–1227) was the papal legate in England from 1216 to 1218, when rebel barons were attempting to force King John from the throne and when the exile of Archbishop Stephen Langton had left the English church without a leader. He was a supporter of King John in the struggle against the barons and their candidate for the English crown, Prince Louis of France. He helped keep the peace between France and England and was instrumental in the reissuing of the Magna Carta. He was the principal guide and mentor of the young successor to John, Henry III. As a reward for his services, on 8 November 1217 the king presented him with the church and living of Chesterton (which provided, it seems, a very large income; prior to Barnwell Priory receiving the manor of Chesterton earlier in King John's reign, it had belonged to the king and, as the titular head of the Chesterton Hundred, channelled considerable local revenues to him).

Cardinal Guala returned to Italy in 1219 after the final defeat of the English rebel barons. Soon after his return to Italy, he founded the Abbey of St Andrew in Vercelli, his home town.

Chesterton's links with Vercelli were revived in the 20th century and continue to this day with regular exchanges and visits.