PETER DES ROCHES

An alien in English politics, 1205–1238

NICHOLAS VINCENT
Canterbury, Christ Church College

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INTRODUCTION

This is a book about politics, power and national identity, as reflected in the life of one particular man. For a period of more than thirty years Peter des Roches exercised an influence over the politics of the Plantagenet court greater, arguably, than that of anyone else save King John. His influence will bear comparison to that of Robert Walpole over the Hanoverian court, or of cardinal Richelieu over the Bourbon kings of France. Amongst des Roches' contemporaries, only one other courtier, Hubert de Burgh, commanded the same magnitude of authority, and in Hubert's case, this was an authority restricted to a far narrower span of years.[1] Yet, whereas de Burgh has formed the subject of at least one full-scale study, and whereas many books have been written on the lives of King John and his son, King Henry III, there has to date been no attempt to present a detailed biography of Peter des Roches.

In part, this omission reflects the nature of the sources. Des Roches, so far as we know, was not commemorated by any contemporary biographer in the way that Thomas Becket inspired a host of writers, or William Marshal the epic *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*. He was neither a saint, nor a scholar. Beyond a highly formal series of diocesan statutes, and a collection of one hundred or so charters issued in his capacity as bishop of Winchester, he left behind no corpus of writings – nothing to compare to the letter collections of politician bishops such as Arnulf of Lisieux and Gilbert Foliot, or to the literary output of the scholars Stephen Langton and Robert Grosseteste. As a result, des Roches' biographer is forced to adopt very different methods from those that have been employed so ably by the various modern writers on William Marshal, Langton or Grosseteste. Added to this, Peter des Roches was a Frenchman, whose family origins and whose circle of alien familiars play a crucial part in any assessment of his

[1] For a useful comparison between the careers of des Roches and de Burgh, see F. A. Cazel, 'Intertwined careers: Hubert de Burgh and Peter des Roches', *The Haskins Society Journal I*, ed. R. B. Patterson (Woodbridge 1989), pp. 173–81.

career. Historians of thirteenth-century England have been understandably reluctant to embark upon a study that necessitates almost as wide a reading in the sources from France as it does in those from England. For all of these reasons, the present study is the first to attempt a rounded portrait of bishop Peter, although it is not the very first to provide a detailed study of his administrative activities, an accolade that belongs to James P. Barefield and his survey of the bishop's career to 1216.[2]

In the absence of any contemporary biography, and without a collection of theological or literary works to serve as guide, we are forced to fall back upon the many thousands of references to des Roches, scattered across the writings of medieval chroniclers, the records of central and local government, and the charter collections of England and France. Here the source material is both massive in its extent and disappointingly narrow in its scope. It tells us a great deal about des Roches as landowner, financier and politician. Amongst the chroniclers, most report the suspicions entertained against the bishop and his associates as a result of their alien birth. By collecting the bishop's surviving letters and charters, we can go some way towards reconstructing his activities as diocesan and his role as a patron of the religious. The records of the royal exchequer and chancery, which survive in ever greater numbers after 1200, enable us to say a great deal about des Roches' administrative and political activities at court. Above all, the series of account rolls for the see of Winchester, the so-called Winchester pipe rolls, probably initiated by des Roches, provides a wealth of previously unexploited material, relating to the bishop's network of political associates and allies, the provisioning of his household, the names of his clerks, bailiffs and officials. Yet even here, the emphasis is chiefly upon the manorial economy, with only vague hints as to the destination of the enormous sums released in cash each year to the bishop's exchequer.[3] Of the more human side of Peter des Roches, we know very little. The bishop was a prolific founder of monasteries, and apparently a man of considerable artistic taste, the patron of scholars and poets. He commissioned the building of nearly a dozen abbeys, priories and hospitals. The Winchester pipe rolls reveal his love of luxury, his fondness for wine, spices, jewels and gold, and perhaps above all his devotion to hunting. The expenses of

[2] J. P. Barefield, 'The king's bishop: the career of Peter des Roches in the royal administration 1197–1216', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Johns Hopkins University (Maryland 1967).

[3] N. Vincent, 'The origins of the Winchester Pipe Rolls', *Archives* 21 (1994), pp. 25–42.

hounds, hawks and huntsmen are a constant theme. During his years as bishop several new hunting parks were created on the episcopal estates. Des Roches himself is to be found in 1224, hunting wild pigs in the park at Taunton, and a decade later arranging for the importation of rabbits from Normandy, to stock a new warren.[4] The chronicle of Lanercost claims that he took more delight in the sufferings of wild animals than he did in the salvation of men's souls.[5]

Courtier bishops were expected to be men of imposing physical appearance. A shapely leg was certainly no disadvantage to the ambitious, whilst the squat, the lame and the downright ugly might find themselves passed over in their pursuit of a bishopric, precisely because of their lack of good looks. In des Roches' case, we know little of his outward appearance, save for a highly formalized image on his seal, and a tomb effigy, whose attribution is far from certain, showing a man who would have stood six feet tall from shoes to mitre, fat-cheeked, purse-lipped, long and broad of neck, perhaps rather corpulent and narrow-shouldered, with a peculiar fringe of beard shaved clean below the mouth.[6] Of his psychological make-up we know even less. Even the names of his father and mother remain obscure, whilst we can only guess at his date of birth, probably at some time in the 1160s or early 1170s. Just as a bishop was expected to be handsome, so in general he was required to possess the virtues of grace, elegance and good breeding, At court, wit and polished manners were valued at least as highly as a pious devotion to duty. In this respect, although blessed with great native intelligence, des Roches seems to have been considered something of a rough diamond. Contemporaries were swift to pounce upon his name, Peter des Roches, literally 'Stone of the Rocks' or 'Rocky Stones', to conjure up an image of the man as harsh and unyielding. To the monks of Winchester he is said to have been 'hard as rocks' (*durus ut rupes*), whilst in the 1230s, King Henry III was warned to beware of des Roches and so to steer between the rocks and the stones, the

4 Mss. 19DR, m. 11; 32DR, m. 11d, and see *English Episcopal Acta IX: Winchester 1205–1238*, ed. N. Vincent (Oxford 1994), nos. 191, 251, 283, 322, 343.

5 *Chronicon de Lanercost*, ed. J. Stevenson, Maitland Club (Edinburgh 1839), p. 23.

6 For the effigy, see *Winchester Cathedral: Nine Hundred Years 1093–1993*, ed. J. Crook (Chichester 1993), pp. 102–3, 120n. For the seal, see *Acta*, pp. lx–lxi and plate iv. The roll of the justices in eyre for Hampshire in 1235 carries a very crude drawing of a mitred figure, presumably to be identified as Peter des Roches, next to the entry for the bishop's liberty on the Isle of Wight; JUST1/775, m. 21d. In general, for the qualities expected of courtier bishops, see C. S. Jaeger, 'The courtier bishop in "Vitae" from the tenth to the twelfth century', *Speculum* 58 (1983), pp. 291–325, esp. pp. 298–300.

petrae and the *rupes*.[7] More flatteringly, a poem commissioned by the bishop, before his departure for crusade in 1227, refers to Peter as the rock from which the walls of Jerusalem might be refashioned, whilst the canons of Titchfield, one of the houses founded by des Roches, could describe their establishment as being made 'on a firm rock', *super firmam petram*.[8] To some extent, Peter des Roches lived up to his name. Certainly, contemporaries portrayed him as one of the 'hard men' at the Plantagenet court. Roger of Wendover numbered him amongst the evil councillors, the *consiliarios iniquissimos*, of King John.[9] In some intentionally malicious accounts, he is credited with having fathered a son.[10] Several writers refer to his prowess as a soldier. As Matthew Paris puts it, in youth Peter was better versed in how to lay siege to a castle than in preaching the gospels. In contemporary satire, des Roches became 'the warrior of Winchester, up at the Exchequer, good at finance, slack at the Gospels'.[11] Even at the height of his triumph, at the battle of Lincoln in 1217, the chroniclers mingle respect for his military prowess with a suggestion that he was involved in the seamier professional side of army life: the command of the king's highly unrespectable crossbowmen.[12]

Not surprisingly, to a more recent generation of historians, des Roches has appeared to be a warrior and financier first and foremost, a bishop in little more than name. As one critic writes, 'To Winchester diocese belongs the discredit of having the only bishop who abetted the king in his evil ways, and who, as a foreigner, counselled John to resist the national will ... Bishop Peter's gross neglect of his spiritual obligations brought upon him, even in those lax days, not only the stern rebuke of his metropolitan, but a singularly severe censure from the Roman pontiff.'[13] From the seventeenth century onwards, historians have tended to judge him harshly.[14] To David Hume, the father of British political history, des Roches 'was

7 *AM*, i (Tewkesbury), p. 110; Paris, *CM*, iii, pp. 244–5.

8 *The Shorter Latin Poems of Master Henry of Avranches relating to England*, ed. J. Cox Russell and J. P. Heironimus, Medieval Academy of America Studies and Documents no. 1 (Cambridge, Mass. 1935), pp. 125–6; *Acta*, no. 67.

9 Paris, *CM*, ii, pp. 532–3.

10 For the probably unfounded allegation that Peter de Rivallis was des Roches' son, see below p. 293.

11 Below p. 57.

12 Below pp. 138–9.

13 J. C. Cox, writing in the *VCH Hampshire*, ii, p. 14.

14 See, for example, *A Short View of the long life and Raigne of Henry the Third, king of England presented to King James 1627*, rep. B. T. J. (Newcastle upon Tyne 1817), pp. 5–6, where Peter is presented as 'an ill man, but gracious with the King ... corrupt and ambitious'.

no less distinguished by his arbitrary principles and violent conduct than by his courage and ability', a judgement echoed by Stubbs, for whom 'Bishop Peter was cunning as well as violent'.[15] And yet, as I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere, in an extended study of the bishop's episcopal administration, it would be wrong to dismiss des Roches as an out-and-out secularist, uninterested in matters spiritual or in the good government of his diocese.[16]

Des Roches' career as diocesan lies beyond the confines of this study, which is devoted to his life in politics. Nonetheless, in essence, he appears to have been a conscientious and extremely competent pastor. Prolonged absences from his diocese forced him to delegate the day-to-day running of the see to suffragan bishops drawn from the Celtic fringe, to the archdeacons, many of whom were des Roches' own kinsmen, and above all to an officer known as the bishop's official, a dignity introduced to the see of Winchester under des Roches, and filled in succession by at least four men, all of whom appear to have been scholars or canon lawyers of no mean ability. His household at Winchester contained a large number of men styling themselves *magister*, some of whom are well known from other sources, as authors, book collectors, scholars or patrons of the arts. As for the bishop himself, although in some respects he may have lagged behind the vanguard of ecclesiastical reform, it would be entirely wrong to regard him as a protector of the old abuses against an up-and-coming generation of enthusiastic promoters of reform. It is true that he may have been lax in his endowment of vicarages. There is no evidence that he conducted visitations of the monastic houses of his see, or that he laid any great stress upon the ordination of the parish clergy to the priesthood. Compared to bishops such as Richard Poer at Salisbury, or Alexander of Stainsby at Coventry, he was commissioned only rarely as a papal judge delegate. Nonetheless, the diocesan legislation that he issued for the see of Winchester contains many of the new measures then being implemented elsewhere in the English church. In several respects, such as the licensing of preachers, the employment of friars and other clergy to hear confessions, the prohibition of rowdy drinking contests, the restriction of business transacted on the Sabbath, it is possible to show that des Roches' legislation was not mere window-dressing, but achieved practical implementation.

[15] D. Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, new edn in 8 vols. (London 1778), ii, pp. 160–1; W. Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England*, 3 vols. (Oxford 1873–8), ii, p. 48.

[16] See the introduction to *Acta, passim.*

Branded a secularist by his critics, des Roches and his chancery clerks appear to have gone out of their way to dispel this reputation, resorting to direct scriptural quotation in the bishop's charters in a way that may well be unique amongst the churchmen of his day. The *arengas*, or solemn preambles to his charters, rehearse whole passages of the gospels and the Epistles of St Paul, besides tags from writers such as St Jerome and St Gregory the Great, in what may well amount to a deliberate display of pious learning. Most striking of all, des Roches was a patron of the religious orders on a scale otherwise unprecedented at the courts of either King John or Henry III. In all, he founded, or assisted in the foundation of, nearly a dozen abbeys, priories, friaries and hospitals. His greatest enthusiasm appears to have been reserved for the orders of Prémontré and Cîteaux, for whom he established houses at Halesowen, Titchfield, Netley, and at La Clarté Dieu in France. However, he did not neglect the needs of the new urban communities, helping to establish hospitals at Portsmouth and Southwark, introducing the Dominican friars to Winchester, and assisting in the refoundation of yet another hospital, at Acre, during his time on crusade. He is to be ranked as one of the leading 'building-bishops' of his day. At Winchester, he not only continued the work on the cathedral Lady Chapel begun by his predecessor, but did much to foster the cult of the cathedral's Anglo-Saxon saints, Birinus, Swithun and Aethelwold.[17] There is an irony to this, since in popular legend des Roches has been presented as the very embodiment of alien, French influence at the English court. It is the nature of this alien influence and of the workings of the bishop's circle of alien familiars, that provides the present study with one of its two principal themes.

Beginning with the thirteenth century chroniclers, des Roches has been described, quite correctly, as the central figure amongst a group of aliens at the courts of King John and Henry III. Although, as we shall see, the chroniclers misrepresent the precise geographical origins of many of these 'aliens', including those of des Roches, they were undoubtedly right to point to the political significance of des Roches and his fellow Frenchmen. To the English chroniclers, and above all to the two great historians who wrote at St Albans Abbey, Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris, the 'aliens' were by definition a baleful influence upon the court. The very word 'alien', literally 'a stranger', was invested with a whole series of pejorative meanings, derived in no

[17] Below pp. 81, 244–7.

small part from the Vulgate translation of the Bible, and in particular from such books as Deuteronomy, Jeremiah and Maccabees, where 'alien' is a term associated with the worship of strange gods, and the subjection of the people of Israel to the yoke of foreign rule. Supported by the vast material resources of the see of Winchester, des Roches served as an important patron of aliens both at court and within his own episcopal establishment. His household functioned as a magnet, attracting Frenchmen, both laymen and clerks, from across the Channel. Such men were to have a decisive influence upon the course of English politics. In 1215, 1224, and again between 1232 and 1234, they were to be involved in major political crises in which 'the aliens' appear to have been opposed and ultimately defeated by the native English baronage. And yet, as I hope to demonstrate, the opposition to des Roches and his alien supporters represents more than an outburst of crude xenophobia. As Huw Ridgeway has observed, in writing of the alien courtiers of the 1240s and 1250s, contemporaries were capable of drawing sophisticated distinctions between the various non-English outsiders gathered together at the court of Henry III, between the natives of Savoy, Poitou, Gascony, Normandy and the other provinces of France. Various of these aliens were attacked with a crudely Francophobic rhetoric, but in reality such attacks took place within the context of subtle political rivalry at court, between the aliens themselves as much as between aliens and Englishmen.[18] As most historians now recognize, it would be entirely wrong to write of thirteenth-century England in the language of nineteenth-century nationalism. Between 1066 and 1204 England was governed as part of a cross-Channel, Anglo-French lordship. Thereafter, it was to take many years, arguably several centuries, for the patterns of this cross-Channel lordship to break down. It is one of the principal fascinations of des Roches' career, that it enables us to observe the opening stages of this collapse. Even by the time of des Roches' death in 1238, the situation was by no means resolved. England was not yet an insular nation state. There were many at court, above all the king himself, who continued to press for the reconquest of the lands lost to France in 1204 and for the greater consolidation of Plantagenet lordship over Gascony and Poitou. Such

[18] H. Ridgeway, 'King Henry III and the "aliens"', in *Thirteenth Century England II*, ed. P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (Woodbridge 1988), pp. 81–92; 'Foreign favourites and Henry III's problems of patronage, 1247–1258', *EHR* 104 (1989), pp. 590–610; and see more recently, D. A. Carpenter, 'King Henry III's statute against aliens: July 1263', *EHR* 107 (1992), pp. 925–44.

reconquest and consolidation served, at least to begin with, as a guiding principle behind the style of government favoured by the alien, Peter des Roches.

Amongst modern historians, no one has written of these matters with greater sensitivity than Michael Clanchy. It is Clanchy's contention that under John and Henry III, a new style of 'Poitevin Government' came to be adopted at the Plantagenet court, replacing the 'Angevin Kingship' of Henry II, described in a classic study by J. E. A. Jolliffe. To Clanchy, it is Peter des Roches and his kinsman, Peter de Rivallis, who served as the principal protagonists of 'Poitevin Government' into the 1230s. The present study will suggest significant revisions to Clanchy's thesis, arguing for a far greater degree of continuity between the lordship of Henry II and that of Henry III. Neither des Roches nor de Rivallis was a Poitevin by birth. The aliens they sponsored at court were drawn from Normandy and Brittany, from Anjou, Maine and from their own native Touraine, the heartlands of the old Plantagenet dominion lost in 1204, not principally from Poitou. To this extent, I find it impossible to accept the argument that des Roches was the sponsor of a new style of 'Poitevin Government'. On the contrary, he was in many ways a reactionary who looked back to the heyday of twelfth-century Plantagenet lordship. Nonetheless, for all that a closer investigation may require amendments to the picture painted by Clanchy, the basic pattern that he traces remains unchanged. Amongst historians, he is one of the few to appreciate the full significance attached to France and the ideas of cross-Channel lordship by both John and Henry III. But for a desire to reconquer the lands lost in 1204, and but for the belief that such reconquest was feasible, indeed that it was all but inevitable, the course of English political history would have taken a very different direction. Had John not embarked upon his Poitevin expedition in 1214, or had Henry III not devoted vast financial resources to the support of alliances in Britanny and Poitou after 1230, it is improbable that the political crises of 1215 or of 1232–4 would ever have come into being. In this way, there might have been no Magna Carta, no civil war in 1215 or 1233, and none of the significant changes in English government brought about, at least in part, in reaction to the policies espoused by Peter des Roches.

This in turn carries us on to the second main preoccupation of this book: the role of des Roches in the government of England. Although we may be inadequately supplied with information about des Roches the man, des Roches the king's minister is to be found at

work wherever we turn in the Chancery and Exchequer records between 1200 and 1238. As a baron of the Exchequer, as a leading figure within the *camera regis*, as *de facto* chancellor in 1213, Justiciar and regent in 1214–15, guardian of the infant Henry III after 1216, and as *eminence grise* behind the regime that held power between 1232 and 1234, his influence is stamped across a very broad canvas. Clearly he was a skilful financier, administrator and diplomat. But competence alone would not have sufficed to keep him in power. Above all else, he was a courtier of genius, working amongst the intrigues and suspicions that attend royal courts at all times in history, capable of securing and maintaining the confidence of the king. When outsiders required admittance to royal favour, when difficult decisions had to be made, when the king required counsel, it was des Roches who was called upon to act as mediator, hatchet-man or adviser. To this extent, the biographer's task is made all the more difficult, since often it is impossible to distinguish the decisions that were made by des Roches alone, or the policies that he himself espoused, from those decisions and policies in which he merely reflected the temper and interests of the king. Government was not the work of faceless bureaucrats or administrative departments, but an expression of the king's own will. No courtier was autonomous, not even such an influential courtier as des Roches. All served the king. All, to a greater or lesser extent, were dependent upon royal favour. No one was invulnerable from intrigue or the loss of the king's support.

From his first appearance at court through to 1216, des Roches functioned as one of the closest advisers, indeed to all intents and purposes as one of the closest friends of King John. So far as we can establish, he enthusiastically endorsed the king's style of government, even to the extent of remaining at court, at the risk of ecclesiastical censure, throughout the five years of papal Interdict, when virtually every other bishop went into exile abroad. As a royal counsellor, he must take at least some of the responsibility for the harshness of John's government, for the stringent levying of taxes and scutages, for the exploitation of the English Jewry and the estates of exiled churchmen, for the denial and sale of justice. As Justiciar and regent during the king's expedition to Poitou in 1214, he was to be blamed for much of the rancour that invaded relations between John and the English baronage. Thereafter, he appears to have done his best to ensure that the settlement agreed at Runnymede, embodied in Magna Carta, was stifled at birth. It would seem that in his appreciation of royal power, he looked back to the halcyon days before 1215, when the king's will,

the royal *vis* and *voluntas*, held absolute sway. This is all the more significant given that it was to des Roches that John entrusted the upbringing of the future King Henry III. Henry appears to have been in the bishop's care from at least 1212, from the age of only five or six. His education remained the bishop's charge even after John's death, so that from 1216 until at least 1221, it was des Roches who enjoyed day-to-day custody of the king and a correspondingly exalted place in the ruling minority council. The significance of this for the future development of the reign can hardly be exaggerated. Much of Henry's character; his affection for the memory of his father; his taste for luxury; his patronage of building and the arts; his piety; his attachment to the idea of reconquest in France; even perhaps his petulance and his exalted conception of the responsibilities and powers of kingship, may well have been moulded under instruction from des Roches. The bishop cast a very long shadow. Yet, meanwhile, his relations with the other members of the minority council had deteriorated to such an extent, undermined by his personal profiteering and by his support for a volatile and mistrusted group of fellow aliens, that in 1221 he was supplanted by the Englishman, Hubert de Burgh, as the king's personal guardian. Three years later, with the backing of the English bishops, de Burgh was able to eject des Roches and his fellow aliens from court.

For the first time in his career, des Roches found himself excluded from the king's inner counsels. Instead, he sought consolation in adventures overseas, participating in the crusade of the emperor Frederick II. Here, as during the Interdict of John's reign, he risked papal and ecclesiastical censure through his support for a secular ruler against the pope. Des Roches may well have looked upon the emperor Frederick as the very model of sovereignty; rich and powerful, determined to get his own way regardless of the cost, disdainful of the carping of critics in church or state, bolstered by a conception of kingship in which the king enjoyed absolute supremacy. Certainly, when the bishop returned to England in 1231 he was to be criticized for looking with too much longing upon the emperor's style of government.

Thus far, des Roches' biography can be written as but one aspect of a wider history whose basic pattern has been described elsewhere, most recently and most ably in the works of J. C. Holt on the reign of King John, and David Carpenter on the minority of Henry III. But at this point, for the years 1231–4, the biographer is forced to broaden his approach, painting in not only the figure of des Roches,

but the wider background to the development of court politics. The years in question witnessed momentous events: the fall of Hubert de Burgh and the return of Peter des Roches to a leading place in government; a series of changes in financial administration; the pouring of vast sums of money into alliances with Brittany and Poitou; the rejection of many of the policies of de Burgh, overturning the landed settlement put in place since 1224, in the process challenging the very basis of tenure by royal charter; and at the end of all this a civil war, as significant in its way as the better-known wars of 1215–17 and 1264–5. In 1234 des Roches was to be brought low by a coalition between the church and the English baronage, headed by the earl of Pembroke, Richard Marshal. And yet the bishop's regime of 1232–4 has never before been studied in any detail. Historians, including David Hume, Stubbs, and more recently Sir Maurice Powicke, have been content to rely upon the accounts provided by the chronicler Roger of Wendover. As a result, not even the basic chronology of the period has been established with any accuracy. Much misunderstanding has grown up around the nature of the financial experiments attempted by des Roches, and over the part played by aliens in the bishop's regime. Just as it would be inconceivable to write a biography of Peter des Roches that excluded his activities after 1231, in many ways the most crucial phase of his career, so it is impossible to attempt a history of the regime of 1232–4 without taking into account the bishop's previous experience in government. The policies that des Roches espoused after 1232 appear to represent a quite deliberate harking back to the reign of King John. For a brief few years, ended by the bishop's fall in 1234, King Henry III was to be accused of acting in much the same way that his father had acted before 1215, governing by arbitrary royal will, overturning royal charters, denying many of the liberties guaranteed to his subjects by Magna Carta. Powicke entitled his chapter on these events 'Henry III's lesson in kingship'; an apt description, since it was through the failure of the regime of 1232–4, and through the concerted resistance from church and baronage that this regime inspired, that Henry was to be persuaded to adopt very different methods from those of his father for the next twenty years of his reign. Magna Carta had been issued as long ago as 1215, and Henry III came of age in the late 1220s, but it is arguable that not until 1234 and the removal of des Roches from power, did the full implications of the Charter become apparent. Not until then did the king take over the reins of government, previously held on his

behalf by the veterans Hubert de Burgh and Peter des Roches, the one-time servants of his father.

For all of these reasons, the present study can be divided into two complimentary but distinct sections: a biography of Peter des Roches to 1231, concentrating upon the bishop's circle of alien patronage, his work as administrator, courtier and crusader; and a second section, providing a detailed treatment of the regime that held power between 1232 and 1234, with a brief coda carrying des Roches to his death in 1238. Given the nature of the material, such a division is unavoidable, though perhaps to be regretted. Between 1232 and 1234, des Roches himself becomes little more than a brooding presence in the wings, overshadowed by his circle of friends and associates and by the personalities who opposed him, most notably by Richard Marshal. Contemporaries agreed that it was des Roches who after 1232 controlled the course of English politics. From 1233 hardly a single royal charter was issued that he did not witness. The king was very rarely out of his sight, and yet in writing of these events we are faced more than ever with the difficulty of distinguishing between the initiatives sponsored by des Roches himself, and those that were the responsibility of the king. It was Henry III who ordered the seizure of estates, who repudiated various of his own charters, who promoted and deposed officials. Albeit that the king might never have acted in this way but for the advice and guidance of des Roches, it was nonetheless Henry who ruled. To this extent, the biography of des Roches becomes only one aspect of a history of the king and his court.

Various suggestions have been made as to how this treatment might be altered. J. C. Holt, for example, suggested that I play down the role of des Roches after 1231, John Maddicott that I lend it even greater emphasis. Michael Clanchy suggested that I should write two separate books, on Peter des Roches, and on court politics in the 1230s. To Clanchy my portrait of King Henry III appears inconsistent, at one and the same time crediting him with a taste for greater personal authority, and yet allowing for his subservience to the policies urged on him by des Roches. Here I must beg to disagree. As Henry was to demonstrate time and time again after 1234, a high conception of his own personal dignity and power could go hand in hand with subservience on a day-to-day basis to whichever group of courtiers succeeded in persuading the king of its competence to govern in his name. Henry was to become notorious for the way in which he veered between the advice offered by various leading

ministers; before 1234 by des Roches and Hubert de Burgh; later by such men as Richard of Cornwall, Thomas of Savoy, William de Raleigh, Simon de Montfort and William de Valence. In every case, Henry patronized and depended upon the advice of a chief minister, only to reject him at a later stage amidst acrimony and mutual recriminations. Dependence and petulance, government on the advice of others, and the exercise of the royal will, go hand in hand throughout the reign. In my treatment of the relations between Henry and des Roches, only David Carpenter expressed himself entirely satisfied with the balance that I strike. To him, as to all the others who have offered comment, particularly Michael Clanchy, I am indebted for many corrections in point of detail and emphasis. The responsibility for dividing the present study as I have done, remains entirely my own. The shoddy workman blames his tools, and the shoddy historian his sources. The sources for the life of Peter des Roches are richer than those for most twelfth-century kings, and yet I would suggest that they leave the biographer no choice but to attempt a detailed narrative of the events of 1232–4, without entirely resolving the question of who governed England during those years, des Roches or the king.

In this way, the present study is based around two chief preoccupations: the question of alien influence at the Plantagenet court, and the question of government and lordship, placing particular emphasis upon the events of the early 1230s. Perhaps, given the lack of more personal detail, any biography of des Roches is bound to degenerate into a mere 'life and times'. And yet, by the end, I hope to achieve something considerably more than a combination of narrative and life story. By examining the career of Peter des Roches, I believe that it is possible to obtain a far clearer understanding of why the breach that occurred in 1204 between England and the Plantagenet lands in France was never healed. At the same time, it may become easier to comprehend the significance of many of the changes brought about in royal government after 1215. Above all, I hope that an entire group of courtiers – not just des Roches, but all the many aliens who accompanied him into exile after 1204 – may at long last receive the attention that they so richly deserve. To date, historians have looked at des Roches and the aliens through the distorting lenses fashioned in the 1230s by the chroniclers, Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris. The time has come to dust off the telescope and to take a closer look.