Alexander Neckam Encyclopedia Article

Alexander Neckam

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1157-1217

English theologian and poet, also known as Nequam, who produced the earliest European account of the compass. He mentioned the magnetic needle in *De utensilibus* (On instruments, c. 1187) and noted its use as an aid to navigation. In *De naturis rerum* (On the nature of things, c. 1190) he presented miscellaneous Greek and Islamic scientific facts that at the time were unknown in Western Europe. Neckam taught theology at Oxford and from 1213 was abbot at Cirencester in Gloucestershire.