



Welcome to our January Parishscapes Newsletter

We wish everyone a wonderful new year ahead and our Parishscapes project is set to accelerate in 2017 with a lot planned. In this newsletter we thought we would give you some background history to the story of Thomas Becket so hope you find this interesting and informative. In the meantime our main work has been



to continue transcribing and translating the manorial records of Doccombe manor. One group has been working their way through the manorial courts of the reign of Henry VIIIth where some interesting references to Charcoal pits in the woods and tin-mining have emerged. The other group have looked at a number of C17th leases of tenancies, but also of the whole manor

and the woods. They are following this with some interesting biographical work on the men who leased the manor. We also have some stimulating talks and events coming up. We'll keep you posted as we schedule them - look out for a fascinating evening with Professor Nicholas Vincent below. For more up-to-date information and our blog go to <http://www.doccombeparishscapes.co.uk/>

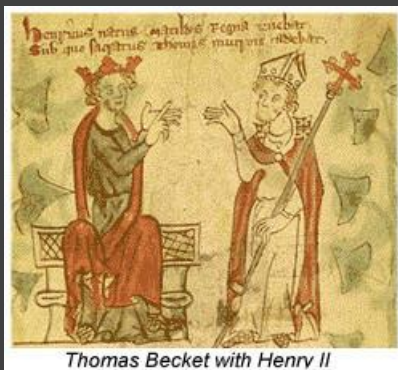
The Story of Thomas Becket

Thomas Becket's death remains one of the most famous stories associated with Medieval England. Becket was a 12th century chancellor and archbishop of Canterbury whose murder resulted in his canonisation. Thomas Becket was born in 1118, the son of a prosperous London merchant. He was well educated first at Merton priory, then in a City of London school, and finally in Paris. Deeply influenced in childhood by his devout mother who died when he was 21, Thomas entered adult life as a city clerk and accountant in the service of the sheriffs. After three



years, he was introduced by his father to the Archbishop, a former abbot of Bec within whose household he became a member. He later became an archdeacon to Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, who sent him on several missions to Rome.

King Henry II asked Archbishop Theobald to advise him on a candidate for the office of Chancellor at court. Theobald put forward Thomas Becket who had demonstrated the brilliance of his mind in Theobald's service. Becket became Henry's Chancellor and his friend and confidant. He was known to be a lover of wine and a good horse rider. His contemporaries described Becket as a *"tall and spare figure with dark hair and a pale face that flushed in excitement."* His memory was extraordinarily tenacious and, though he was neither scholar nor artist, he excelled in argument and repartee and he made himself agreeable to everyone. Like Henry, he was preoccupied with the rights of his office and the crown, and was determined to do the best he could on their behalf. He also acted as Henry's foil, taking on those aspects of kingship that Henry found wearisome. Henry II controlled a lot of France at this time. William the Conqueror had



Thomas Becket with Henry II

been his great-grandfather and he had inherited his French territories as a result. When Henry was in France dealing with troubles there, he left Becket in charge of England so great was his trust in him.

When Theobald died in 1161, Henry made Becket Archbishop of Canterbury. This was the most important religious position in England at the time. Becket did not

want the position because, as chancellor, he already possessed a great deal of power and had an excellent relationship with Henry. In fact, on being offered the position, Becket wrote to Henry "*our friendship will turn to hate.*" However, Henry persuaded Becket and in 1162 he agreed to the appointment. His letter was to be prophetic.

The office of Archbishop changed Becket. He became devout and austere and embraced the constitution of the papacy and its canon law. He transformed himself from a pleasure-loving courtier into a serious, simply dressed cleric. He dropped his luxurious lifestyle; ate bread and drank water, preferred to sleep on the floor and beneath the fine clothes of an archbishop wore a horse hair shirt. He also donated his costly food to the poor.

In 1164, the first sign of a split between Henry and Thomas occurred. Henry hoped that by appointing his trusted friend he might have more of a say in how the Church punished offenders. The king and his archbishop's friendship was put under difficulty when it became obvious that Becket would now support the church in its dissension with the king. Church courts usually gave out lighter punishments to clergymen who had done wrong. Henry believed that this undermined his authority. In 1163 the church court acquitted a Canon accused of murder. Public outcry demanded justice and the Canon was brought before a court of the king. Becket's protest halted this attempt, but the action spurred King Henry to change the laws to extend his courts' jurisdiction over the clergy. He passed a law stating that a royal court would punish any person found guilty in a Church court. Becket refused to agree to this, saying this was punishing them twice and in 1164, Becket was found guilty of treason at the Great Council held in Northampton. Avoiding whatever adverse consequences might arise from this verdict, and knowing of Henry's temper whilst realising the extent of his displeasure, he fled into exile to France and remained there for several years. He was joined by many of his distinguished household and lived ascetically, first at Pontigny Abbey and then, when Henry threatened the monks, at an abbey near Sens.

Henry meanwhile had seized the properties of the Archbishop and his supporters and had exiled all Thomas' close relatives. It took six years before Becket felt safe enough to return to England. Henry II virtually withdrew England from papal obedience and in 1170 he had his eldest son crowned as co-king by the archbishop of York, Becket's rival. This was a flagrant breach of papal prohibition and of the immemorial right of Canterbury to crown the king. Becket followed by the Pope, excommunicated all responsible. Henry,

fearing an interdict for England, met Becket at Fréteval and it was agreed that Thomas should return to Canterbury and receive back all his possessions. Becket returned in November 1170.

However, Becket and the king soon clashed again. Thomas returned to Canterbury and was received with exuberance, but further excommunications of the hostile royal servants, refusal to lift the excommunication of the archbishop of York and the bishop of London, as well as his ready receipt of tumultuous acclaim by the people infuriated Henry back in Normandy. He was enraged when he found out what Becket had done and is said to have proclaimed "*What sluggards, what cowards have I brought up in my court, who care nothing for their allegiance to their lord. Who will rid me of this meddling priest?*" Four knights heard what Henry shouted. On the 29 December 1170, believing King Henry wished Becket out of the way the four knights sailed to England and then rode to Canterbury to carry out the deed. The knights were Reginald FitzUrse, William de Tracey, Hugh de Morville and Richard le Breton. They confronted Becket in Canterbury Cathedral finding him before the High Altar as he had gone there



to hear Vespers. They drew their swords and began slashing their victim finally splitting his skull and it is recorded that they cracked open his skull spilling his brains onto the cathedral floor apparently crying out; "*Go hence, thou art a prisoner; it is not to be endured that thou shouldst live any longer.*" Becket's last words were said to be an acceptance of death in defense of the church of Christ. After killing him, one of the knights said "*Let*

us away. He will rise no more." Becket's body was left on the cathedral floor. The brutal event sent a tremor throughout Medieval Europe. Within a few days after Thomas' death, his tomb became a destination for pilgrimage.

The death of Becket unnerved the king. He was

horrified when he heard the news believing it was his own words that had been the cause of Becket's death. The knights who had carried out the deed to gain the king's favour fell into disgrace. Becket was canonised by Alexander III in St Peter's Church in the papal palace of Segni in 1173 and Becket became a saint. Hordes of pilgrims transformed Canterbury Cathedral into a shrine still visited to this day. In 1174 in an act of penance, the king wearing sackcloth walked barefoot through the streets of Canterbury while eighty monks flogged him with branches. Henry also spent the night in the martyr's crypt and was thus absolved. St. Thomas continued as a popular cultist figure for the remainder of the Middle Ages.



Becket's assassins fled north to Knaresborough Castle held by Hugh de Morville, where they remained for about a year. Pope Alexander excommunicated the four knights. Seeking forgiveness, the assassins travelled to Rome and were ordered by the Pope to serve as knights in the Holy Lands for a period of fourteen years. Sir William de Tracy was one of the knights and Tracy is purported to have struck the archbishop twice and his last blow was the one that dissected the crown of Becket's head. De Tracey held considerable property in Devonshire and Gloucestershire as well as being lord of the manors of Moretonhampstead in Devon. He was recorded as being stricken with a horrible disease whilst setting out for the Holy Land and by an undated charter, he granted the manor of Doccombe to the chapter of Canterbury *'for the love of God, the salvation of his own soul and his ancestors' souls, and for love of the blessed Thomas, archbishop and martyr, of venerable memory.'* The first witness was the abbot of 'Eufemia,' most likely Santa Eufemia, a monastery some eighteen miles from Cosenza in southern Italy. The grant was confirmed by King Henry II in a charter dated between July and October 1174.

So begins the fascinating story of Doccombe and the documentation currently being uncovered in the Parishscapes project today.

William de Tracy and the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket with Professor Nicholas Vincent

Monday 27th March at 7.30pm, Moretonhampstead Parish Hall

Now you have heard the background to the story of Becket join us for a fascinating evening with Professor Nicholas Vincent.

Professor Vincent has published a dozen books and some hundred academic articles on various aspects of English and European history in the 12th and 13th centuries. He is the leading



authority on the four knights who murdered Becket and his illustrated talk will share with us his research that has led to significant new insights into the life of William de Tracy and his grant of Doccombe to Canterbury. The talk will be in the Parish Hall, Fore St., Moretonhampstead TQ13 8LL on Monday 27th March at 7.30pm. Non-members of the Moretonhampstead History Society are very welcome - £4 on the door and there is no charge for students in full-time education.

Moor than meets the eye
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