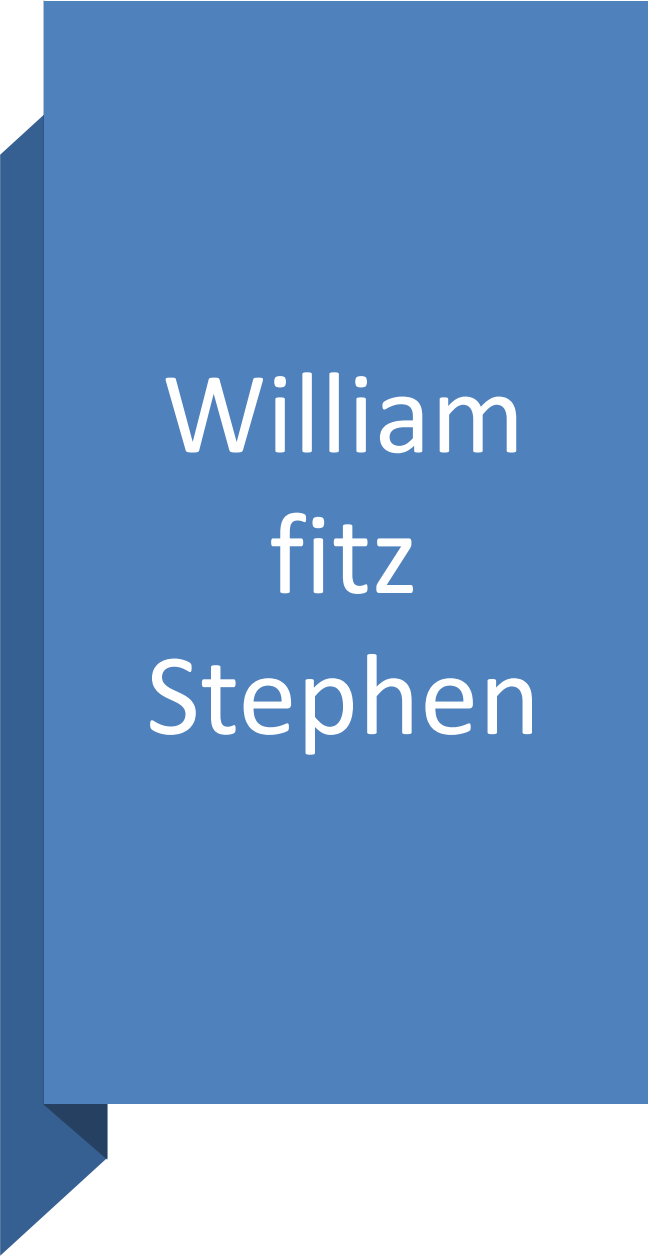


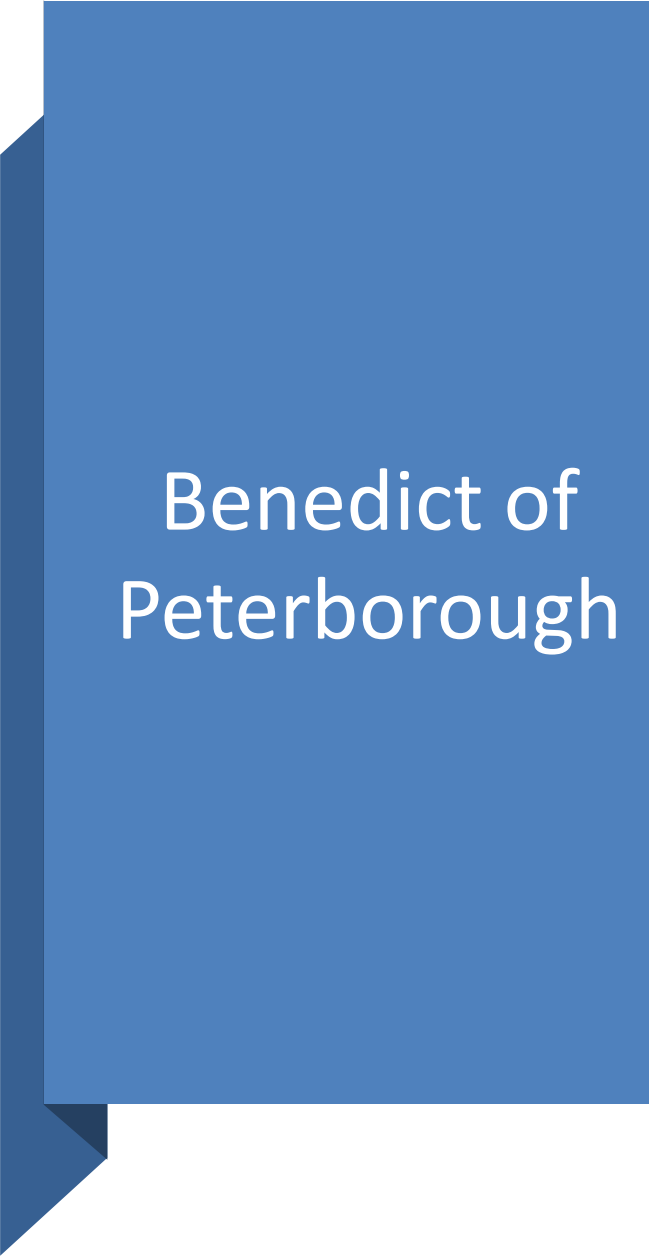
# Becket Session 8

Thomas Becket: Martyr and Saint



# William fitz Stephen

- The Christ-like manner of Thomas's death
- Monks flee and gradually return
- Accompanied by people of the town
- Preparation for burial reveals austerities
- Collection of relics
- Preservation of the place of martyrdom
- Hasty burial in crypt between the altars of St John the Baptist and St Augustine



## Benedict of Peterborough

- Veneration was immediate
- Collection of relics including the blood
- Discovery of austerities

# The first miracle

- The first night
- Man takes home a rag stained with blood and cures his wife of blindness
- 4 January: cure of a blind woman, Britheva, in the same way
- 5 January: William, priest of London, cured of dumbness when he returned home – he had gone to Canterbury as the result of a vision

# The church

- Immediate demand for access to the church and the tomb
- Church officially closed until Easter 1171 and not fully reconciled (by the bishops of Chester and Exeter) until December 1171
- 20 miracles reported by Easter 1171 – not just at the tomb but further afield, e.g. Yorkshire, Oxfordshire



SO

- The first stage was public demand for miracles – the poor and sick of Canterbury
- Tomb with portholes allows access to Thomas's relics

# The attitude of the monks

- More ambiguous – but any misgivings they had would have been played down by the ‘Lives’
- Prior Odo on the point of being replaced by Thomas so was not sympathetic
- Some evidence – e.g. Benedict of Peterborough, Anonymous II, that some monks not impressed
- The monks may also have feared royal reprisals if they were to promote the cult

# Who pushed for official recognition of Thomas's martyrdom and his sanctity?

- (I) Clerks and friends
  - including John of Salisbury who was present at the murder
  - ‘the murder of the champion of the liberty of the church ... in the mother church of the kingdom’ – letter to Peter of Celle, abbot of St Rémi
  - Peter: where the judgement of God showed a martyr it was not necessary to wait for the judgement of men – i.e. there was no hurry

# Who pushed for official recognition?

- (II) the French
  - The French bishops, led by the archbishop of Sens, set the ball rolling
  - 25 January 1171 the archbishop wrote to the pope naming the murderers and put an interdict on Henry's French lands

# Possible grounds for canonization

- *Poenā*: the way in which a saint suffered / died
- *Causa*: the cause for which a martyr died
- *Signa*: the signs of sanctity – i.e. miracles

Thomas's supporters wanted to press for the first two but they were controversial

Alexander waited until after the reconciliation of Henry II at Avranches, May 1172

Papal  
canonisation  
of Thomas:  
'Redolet  
Anglia', 12  
March 1173

- The pope stresses the miracles as the reason for canonisation
- However: in Italy he stressed the first two reasons!



## The development of the cult

- Reconciliation of Henry and his visit and penance in 1174
- Removes any danger
- Gives royal seal of approval
- Fire of 1174 which destroys the east end
- Rebuilding
- New tomb in the Trinity chapel

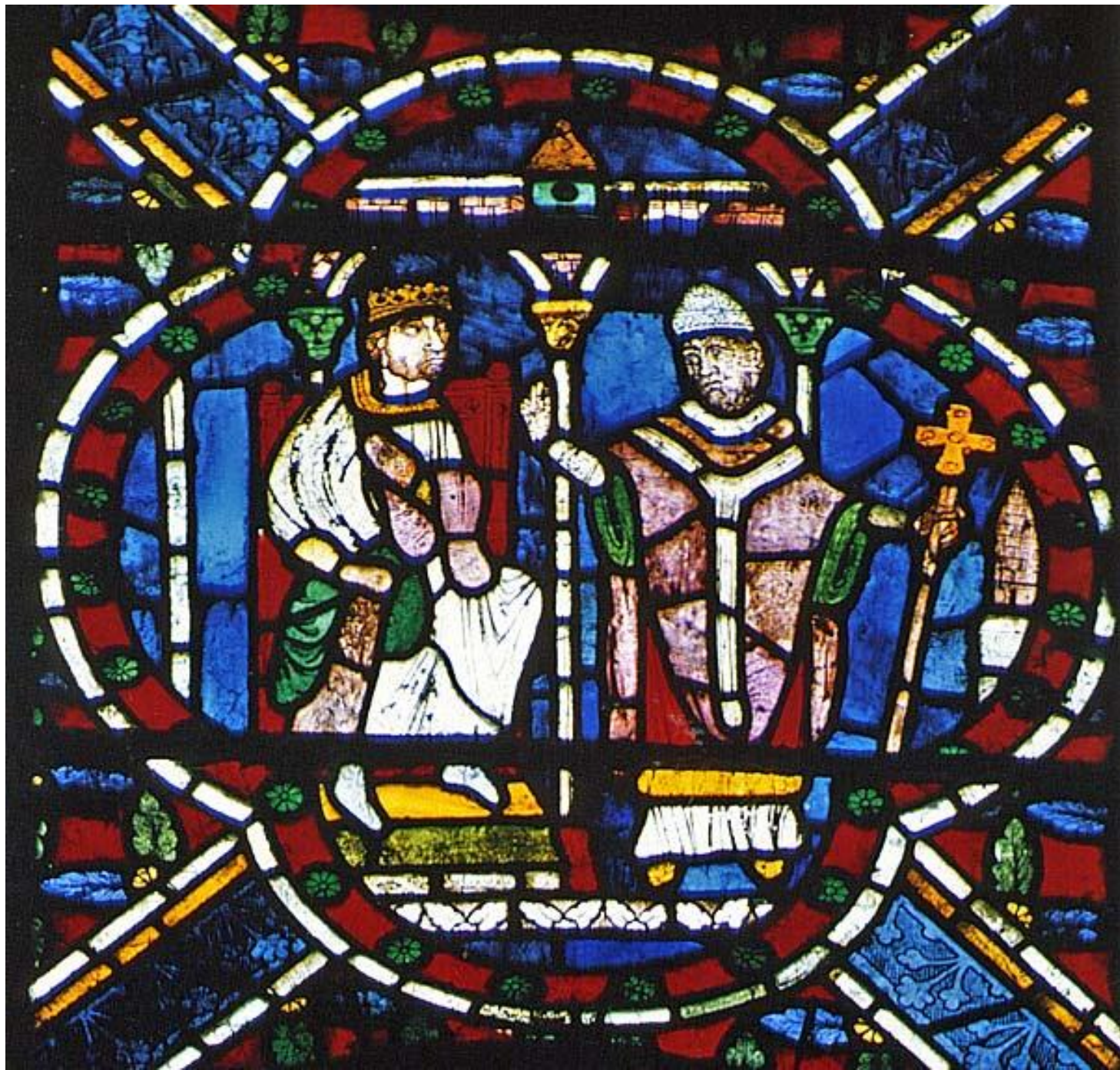


1220

- Body translated to new tomb
- Adds second feast day, 7 July (translation) – in summer
- Development of the ‘cathedral tour’
  - the place of the martyrdom, ‘the altar of the sword’s point’
  - Crypt
  - Trinity chapel
  - New shrine behind the high altar

A blue rectangular graphic with a folded corner effect on the left side, featuring a darker blue shadow. The text "New stained glass" is centered in white.

New stained glass











# What kind of saint was Thomas?

- Vengeful
- Healing
- International – cult spread through European contacts of the royal family; Henry II's daughter, Joan, married William the Good of Sicily (mosaics in Montreale Cathedral)
- Issues were European

# Miracles

- 20 by Easter 1171
- 165 by c. 1180
- 703 in all, the largest number of recorded miracles
- Recorded by two monks, Benedict (from 1171) and then William, who seems to have joined him by May 1172 – pressure of numbers



# Keeping a record

- Benedict begins by recording chronologically
- William organizes by type of miracle and is more interested in elite visitors
- William is recording when the cult has become respectable

## Cult also spread by ...

- Sermons
- Letters
- Relics – the blood allows cures to be effected at a distance



# souvenirs



# The end of the cult

- 1536 Feast of the translation abolished
- 1537 Image of the martyrdom removed from the city seal
- 1538 Shrine dismantled, bones dispersed, treasure to the royal coffers
- 16 Nov 1538 royal proclamation that Thomas was not a saint and martyr but a traitor

# But not of Thomas Becket

Read on in the next  
session....

