Postgraduate/Distance Learning
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Module code: HPMS7006 Module title: Thomas Becket	Student ID number: 2017656	Educational support needs: ~~Yes~~/No
Module tutor: Janet Burton Assignment due date: 7th May 2023		
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Visual Source Commentary: panels 7 and 8 of Canterbury Cathedral window sVII

Figure 1: sVII, panels 7 (left) and 8 (right)[1]

The ambulatory windows of Christ Church Cathedral, Canterbury's Trinity Chapel (originally called the Chapel of St. Thomas) are a unique vitreous retelling of the miracles ascribed to St. Thomas Becket.[2] This commentary focuses on the two lower-most fan-shaped panels (numbers

[1] All images of the stained glass are reproduced courtesy of the Chapter of Canterbury. Particular thanks to Leonie Seliger.

[2] Benedict of Peterborough, '*Miracula S. Thomae'*, in *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket V. II*, ed. J. G. Robertson (London: Longman, 1876), pp. 21-281, and William of Canterbury, '*Miracula S. Thomae'*, in *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket V. I*, ed. J. G. Robertson (London: Longman, 1875), pp. 1-137. Benedict is the principal source for panels 7 and 8; for Rachel Koopmans' suggestion that this is the case for a majority of the miracle windows (not universally agreed) see Rachel Koopmans, 'Kentish Pilgrims in Canterbury Cathedral's Miracle Windows', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 80 (2017), pp. 1-27, (p. 2).

7 and 8) from sVII, the most western window on the chapel's south side.[3] It will principally consider what their design can tell the historian about why and for whom the panels were created, and how this reflects an evolving relationship between both a religious elite and the laity, and between the chapter and Becket's cult.

Panels 7 and 8 depict part of the story of James, son of the earl of Clare, a 'parallel' miracle included in both Benedict and William's collections.[4] Panel 7 (left) shows a woman kneeling before an altar, holding a coiled wax taper and attended by three sorrowful companions.[5] Panel 8 (right) depicts the same woman kneeling before an altar, this time in prayer; she has two companions, one of whom is notably shorter in stature.[6] Both panels feature what has long been supposed to be a depiction of Becket's shrine. The panels remain *in-situ*, allowing for a more total viewing experience than can be achieved for much medieval art, abstracted as it is 'not just from the time but also from the physical space and affiliations that originally gave it meaning'.[7] The position of these panels makes immediately clear the prominence of the glass within the Trinity Chapel, and its proximity to Becket's shrine.

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[3] See Appendix I for a plan of the cathedral showing the position of the chapel.

[4] Rachel Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate: Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 148. The miracle collection references for James' story are: Benedict, *Miracula*, 4.94, pp. 255-57 and William, *Miracula*, 2.30, pp. 332-34. See Appendix II for window sVII with assumed James panels described.

[5] The taper and the mother's figure are restorations; Koopmans suggests she would originally have been holding a relic, Rachel Koopmans, 'Visions, Reliquaries, and the Image of "Becket's Shrine" in the Miracle Windows of Canterbury Cathedral', *Gesta*, 54(1) (2015), pp. 37-57, (p. 50). Whether there are two or three companions is unclear on account of restoration issues; there appear to be three heads but perhaps only two bodies.

[6] The shorter figure appears to be an adult, but the restoration is misleading. The original figure would have represented James' brother, hence the shorter stature of a child, Madeline H. Caviness, *The Windows of Christ Church Cathedral Canterbury* (London: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 1981), p.214.

[7] Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England 1350-1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 4-5. On the significance of stained glass, an 'architectural art', being viewed *in-situ* see Richard Marks, *Stained Glass in England in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 51.

These panels can tell us a great deal about the period in which they were made, including how stained glass was produced and functioned, how people dressed, and what objects they used looked like. They also demonstrate that deliberate design choices were made to ensure the panels were as widely legible as possible, and thus assist us in speculating as to the priorities and concerns of the monk-patrons. Applying theories of material culture, we can consider their 'intrinsic meaning', the *weltanschauung* of the early thirteenth century, beliefs expressed 'consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly' by those involved in their creation and use.[8] Viewed diachronically, across the period of their lives, they can also tell us much about differing attitudes towards stained glass, including the Victorian propensity to replace rather than restore.

Aside from their operation within the cult of St. Thomas as an 'emotional stimulus' and 'extensive witness to Becket's sanctity' the miracle windows had a didactic and propagandist purpose, representing the 'culmination of twelfth-century hagiography'.[9] As Rachel Koopmans discusses, the miracle texts (Latin manuscripts inaccessible to most people) were not intended to communicate with the laity, whereas the stained glass is demonstrably designed to do so, the only 'truly propagandist miracle collection created in high medieval England', and itself a 'visual text'.[10] As we shall see, these panels form part of a subjective narrative emphasising the power of Becket's relics to heal and resurrect *outside* the cathedral. In order for such themes

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[8] On 'intrinsic meaning' see Ernst Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 7, and on *weltanschauung*, p. 88. Jules Prown, 'The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?', eds. Stephen Lubar and David Kingery, in *History from Things* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), pp. 1-19, (p. 1). The miracle windows are particularly interesting in this sense as they are created near-contemporaneously with both the miracles themselves and their written recording in the miracle texts.

[9] James H. Hogan, 'Stained Glass', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 88(4560) (1940), pp. 569-585, (p. 570). Helen Barr, 'The Figure in the Canterbury Stained Glass: Chaucerian Beckets', in *Transporting Chaucer*, Helen Barr (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2014), pp. 25-52, (p. 34). Madeline H. Caviness, *The Early Stained Glass of Canterbury Cathedral, circa 1175-1220* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 1977), p. 144.

[10] Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, p. 114 and pp. 130-34. On the notion of visual texts see Richard Howells, *Visual Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), p. 51.

to be effective, however, it was necessary that the windows be legible to as wide a range of people as possible.

St. Gregory's view of images as *libri laicorum* became a medieval 'commonplace', but while Panofsky's theory of iconology suggests that a typical medieval viewer would understand stained glass at the 'secondary' or 'conventional' level, the positioning, typology, and complex Latin textual details of the majority of stained glass would still have made 'reading' them a challenge.[11] Madeleine Caviness likens the Trinity Chapel as a whole to a *libellus* (the highly decorated manuscript of a saint), but the ability of a medieval viewer to understand stained glass should not be presupposed.[12] When the pilgrims in *The Tale of Beryn* consider the miracle windows they cannot agree on what they are seeing, much less what it means, but in panels 7 and 8 the glaziers have worked hard to achieve legibility.[13] Here, knowledge of complex symbols and iconography (a type of visual semiotics so often at work in medieval stained glass) would not have been required to read and understand the windows, what Harris describes as 'legibility without the precondition of literacy'.[14]

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[11] Kathleen Kamerick, 'Art and Moral Vision in Angela of Foligno and Margery Kempe', *Mystics Quarterly*, 21(4) (1995), pp. 148-158, (p. 32). Panoksky, *Studies*, p. 7.

[12] Caviness, *Early Stained Glass*, p. 142. For Michael Camille's interesting work on 'choric' viewing experiences in which illiterate viewers were provided with oral explanations see Michael Camille, 'Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy', *Art History*, 8(1) (1985), pp. 26-49, (p. 32). Camille's suggestion indicates that the ability of a viewer to understand meaning simply because it was conveyed in an image rather than as text was not assumed. On the idea of lay assistants being used in churches to explain complex religious imagery see Koopmans, 'Kentish Pilgrims', p. 27.

[13] 'He bereth a balstaff,' quod the toon, 'and els a rakes ende.' / 'Thow faillest,' quod the Miller, 'thowe hast nat wel thy mynde. / It is a spere, yf thowe canst se, with a prik tofore / To bussh adown his enmy and thurh the sholder bore'. (147-58), 'The Tale of Beryn', in *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth Century Continuations and Additions*, ed. John M. Bowers (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992). Barr, 'Chaucerian Beckets', p. 34.

[14] Anne F. Harris, 'Pilgrimage, Performance, and Stained Glass at Canterbury Cathedral', in *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles* (Texts), eds. S. Blick and R. Tekippe (Boston: Brill, 2005), pp. 243-81, (p. 244). For Harris' interesting discussion of the inscriptions as principally figurative rather than literal see pp. 260-1.

Panels 7 and 8 do not contain complex Biblical referents and are designed to be read left to right. Caviness describes the style of the windows as a whole as 'rapid, short-hand, expressive, and eminently suited to hagiography'.[15] In these panels the artists indicate movement through the painted fabrics, seen for example in the green cloak in panel 8 which indicates rapid recent arrival. The panels are linked through use of the same detailing (for example the green arches, and decoration on the altar cloths). They are surrounded by simplified borders and panels of ornamentation, and contain no text other than single-line *tituli* (inscriptions) below each panel; this suggests that meaning is intended to be communicated without recourse to text.[16] The *tituli* for panels 7 and 8 are damaged and difficult to interpret, but they are clearly narrative in nature and contain no names, thus emphasising the universality of the portrayals.[17] Rather than being heavily inscribed with Latin text, and therefore more likely to have been designed for contemplation by monks, these panels appear to have been designed with a focus on ease of recognition rather than accurate representation, on communication rather than contemplation.[18]

The clear desire to transmit a message to lay viewers is not, however, the sole way in which the panels evidence an increased interest in the lives of lay people. The glass reflects miracle texts which themselves contain a significantly higher proportion of lay miracle recipients than is found in earlier miracle collections, and the transition from 'elite textual' to 'popular visual' is seen not only in the design and content of these panels, but also in their positioning and location.[19] M. F. Hearn has carefully traced the development of the cathedral's re-building

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[15] Caviness, *Early Stained Glass*, p. 142.

[16] Caviness, *Early Stained Glass*, p. 93. Caviness, *Windows*, p. 159.

[17] Panel 7 reads: [AD]ITV[R]…I EC…EFFE[RTUR]…LES (She approaches/goes/returns/arrives to take out). Panel 8 reads: ORABIT SOLA FRATRIS FERT…FRATER (She will pray alone, the brother brings [tidings] of the brother), Koopmans, 'Visions', p. 46.

[18] Madeline H. Caviness, 'Biblical Stories in Windows: Were They Bibles for the Poor?', in *The Bible in the Middle Ages: Its Influence on Literature and Art*, ed. B. S. Levy (Binghamton, New York: Medieval & Renaissance texts and studies, 1992), pp. 103-147, (pp. 109-11). Caviness points to 'generalised physical types', *Windows*, p. 164.

[19] Harris, 'Pilgrimage', p. 260. For Harris' argument that the miracle windows were the 'pivotal factor in the transformation of the culture of Canterbury from elite to popular' see p. 244. On increasing representation of

project (following the fire of 1174) from its early stages when 'no new accommodation' was being made for Becket's cult (rather, there appears to have been a deliberate effort to 'segregate the cult from the monastic sanctuary') to the final design which 'demonstrates a full commitment by the monastic chapter to living in immediate proximity to the cult'.[20] Embodied in the redesign of the eastern end was the creation of a 'pilgrimage itinerary', the consequence of which was to erode the traditional barriers between monk and laity, creating a 'para-liturgical space of pilgrimage' within the Trinity Chapel.[21] The location of panels 7 and 8, at chest height as pilgrims entered the chapel, provides critical evidence for the emphasis placed on both legibility and accessibility; pilgrims were intended to see these scenes at close range and to understand them, and in eschewing the 'esoteric spiritual commentary' of many windows and breaking down the physical barriers between monk and lay person this was achieved.[22]

A fragile medium, glass can often be a challenging source to interpret as a result of the difficulty in separating that which is original, restored, and replaced. After all, 'any holes must be continuously filled' if the window is to protect from the elements.[23] Extensive, sometimes intentionally misleading, restoration ('sad mutilation'), has led to the impossibility of reconstructing the original ordering of the narrative and thus an increased potential for misinterpretation (panels 7 and 8 are not necessarily in their original positions and have both experienced extensive restoration, including several confusing head replacements).[24]

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the laity in miracle collections written between 1140 and 1200 (and Benedict and William's interest in hearing lay people's stories), see Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, p. 4, p. 112.

[20] M. F. Hearn, 'Canterbury Cathedral and the Cult of Becket', *The Art Bulletin*, 76(1) (1994), pp. 19-52, (p. 41, p. 45, p. 46). See also pp. 45-7 for his suggestion that Benedict of Peterborough as prior may have been key to design changes, and an excellent summary of the changing plans for the eastern end, detailing four principal stages and linking these with changes in the attitude of the chapter towards Becket's cult.

[21] Hearn, 'Canterbury Cathedral', p. 43. See Appendix I for a plan of the cathedral with likely pilgrimage route marked. Harris, 'Pilgrimage', p. 267.

[22] Caviness, *Early Stained Glass*, p. 106.

[23] Meredith Parson Lillich, 'Reviewed work(s): The Early Stained Glass of Canterbury Cathedral, circa 1175-1220 by Madeline Harrison Caviness', *Speculum*, 54(3) (1979), pp. 555-559, (p. 556).

[24] Bernard Rackham, *The Stained Glass Windows of Canterbury Cathedral* (S.P.C.K: London, 1957), p. 9. For a more positive view of restoration in the south aisle, and in particular the transformational but often

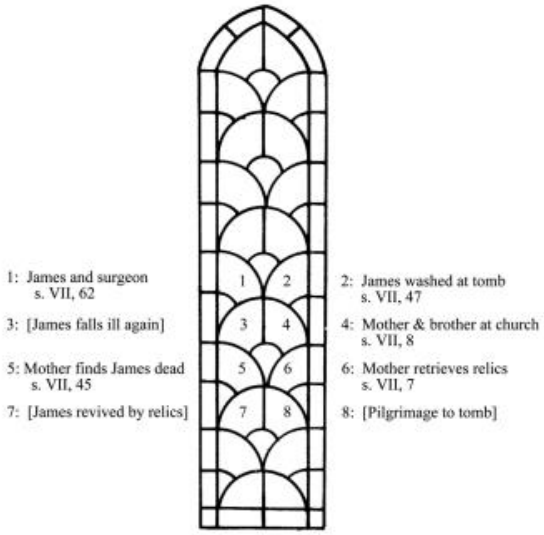

Figure 2: Hypothetical reconstruction of James' story[25]

Difficulties in interpretation are exacerbated by a lack of documentary record, meaning the windows themselves provide most of the information we have on, for example, dating.[26] Since depictions of a shrine in panels 7 and 8 were first linked with Becket's shrine in 1925, scholarship has broadly accepted this view.[27] This has long been supposed to give sVII a *terminus ante quem* of 1220 and a suggested completion date of 1230.[28] Rachel Koopmans'

overlooked or uncredited work of Emily Williams, see Rachel Koopmans, ''An admirable little book written by a lady': Emily Williams and recording and restoration of stained glass in late Victorian England', *Women's History Review*, 27(7) (2018), pp. 1123-1151, (pp. 1138-41). See figure 2 for Koopmans' hypothetical reconstruction of the panels' original position. For the complex restoration history of sVII as a whole see Caviness, *Windows*, pp. 160-1 and p. 209.

[25] Koopmans, 'Visions', p. 52. Koopmans places panels 7 and 8 one above the other and higher up, rather than side-by-side as they now sit, but even if Koopmans is correct the panels would still be relatively low in position compared with much stained glass.

[26] Caviness, *Windows*, p. 3.

[27] A. J. Mason, *A Guide to the Ancient Glass in Canterbury Cathedral* (Canterbury: Goulden, 1925), p. 43. For a succinct summary of sVII's dating (prior to Koopmans' work) see Caviness, *Early Stained Glass*, p. 27. More recent scholarship (see Harris, 'Pilgrimage', p. 264) has questioned the assumption that the shrine should be viewed as a literal depiction, but Koopmans is the first to entirely dissociate the depiction in the glass from Becket's physical shrine.

[28] Caviness, *Early Stained Glass*, p. 32. Caviness does suggest some work may have been done on sVII c.1207 before the monks were exiled by King John during the Interdict, with the window completed when the monks returned (*Early Stained Glass*, p. 134 and 97); in this case she argues that the depiction might have been based on designs for Becket's shrine rather than the completed version. Caviness' work also makes clear the significance not just of the architectural setting of the miracle windows, but also their political and economic context, her suggestion that continental influences on style may be the result of the monks' exile feeding into the debate around dating and attribution; on this see *Early Stained Glass*, p. 11.

latest research has led to a radical re-reading of these panels, suggesting instead that the images in sVII depict a personal reliquary or *scrinium*, such as might have been found in a parish church.[29] Such reliquaries were once far more numerous than the 'principal' shrines often depicted in medieval images and Koopmans argues for these panels as highlighting the 'importance and ubiquity' of such small, 'personally-owned' reliquaries.[30] If Koopmans is correct panels 7 and 8 provide critical evidence for the appearance and use of personal reliquaries (the gold colour, rectangular panels on the base, and roundels are similar to Limoges enamel reliquaries of the time), and allow for the more concrete dating of sVII to as early as 1213 (and the reconnection of these two panels with James' story).[31] It also highlights the propagandist idea that in siting reliquaries away from Canterbury the designers were emphasising the power of Becket's relics *outside* the cathedral (and simultaneously encouraging a profitable trade in portable relics).[32]

Designed and positioned to be as widely legible as possible, the viewing of panels 7 and 8 of windows sVII by pilgrims would have necessitated the juxtaposition of monks and laity on a much more regular basis. The circulation of oral miracle narratives across lay-religious boundaries formed an intersection which was subsequently given concrete physicality in the passage of pilgrims through Canterbury Cathedral.[33] The intrusion of pilgrims must have been considered, perhaps debated, and then accepted, whether in gradual acknowledgement or active promotion of Becket's growing cult, and amid a growing interest in the religious lives of lay

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[29] Koopmans, 'Visions', p. 51. Koopmans also argues that a medieval viewer, accustomed to seeing such reliquaries (either in their own homes or in parish churches), would have been far less likely to misinterpret the window in such a way, particularly with the original ordering in place.

[30] Ibid., p. 41.

[31] Ibid., p. 46-7. Koopmans discusses the enlarged size of the reliquary as designed for ease of recognition, but also cites this as a likely additional cause of misinterpretation, 'Visions', pp. 48-9.

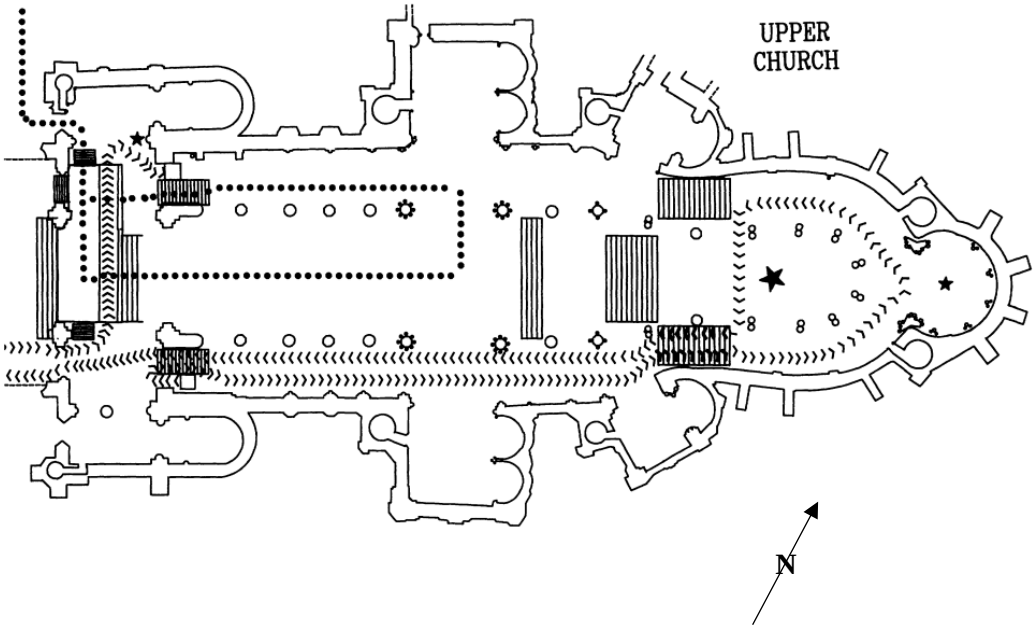
[32] The acceptance of pilgrims is often associated with a desire to cultivate a lucrative pilgrim trade, but as Woodruff demonstrates the cult of Becket was not necessarily hugely profitable for the cathedral, C. E. Woodruff, 'The Financial Aspect of the Cult of St. Thomas of Canterbury', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 44 (1932), pp. 13-32.

[33] On the circulation of oral miracle narratives see Koopmans, *Wonderful to Relate*, p. 17.

people.[34] Panels 7 and 8 allow us to understand how significant Becket's cult became to the cathedral chapter, and some of the ways in which their messages about his miracles were transmitted as widely as possible.

[34] Koopmans discusses the wider trend towards a greater interest in the lay religious experience in *Wonderful to Relate*, p. 115.

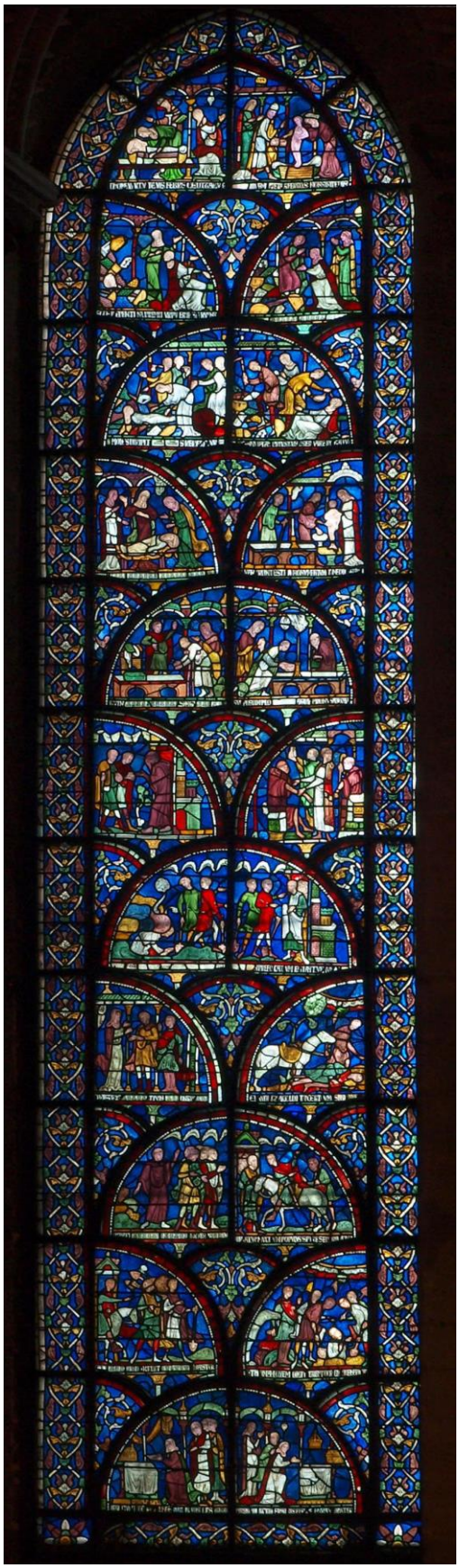
Appendix I: Canterbury Cathedral showing suggested pilgrimage itinerary



>>>>>>>>> = pilgrim's path

Image source: M. F. Hearn, 'Canterbury Cathedral and the Cult of Becket', *The Art Bulletin*, 76(1) (1994), pp. 19-52, (p. 46).

Appendix II: a description of the remaining James panels in their current positions



Panel 62: Cure of James, son of the earl of Clare (1)
James, suffering from a hernia, is held naked before a doctor; there is a basin for possible blood from an incision, although his parents refuse the treatment.

Panel 45: Cure of James, son of the earl of Clare (5)
James lies on a bier following his death, his mother's arms are outstretched in despair.

Panel 47: Cure of James, son of the earl of Clare (2)
The boy James is presented at Becket's tomb and cured of his hernia by washing with the water of St. Thomas.

Panel 7: Cure of James, son of the earl of Clare (6)
James' mother retrieves relics from her reliquary in order to attempt his resurrection using them.

Panel 8: Cure of James, son of the earl of Clare (4)
James' mother prays before an altar as his brother (the shorter figure in green) informs her that James has died.

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