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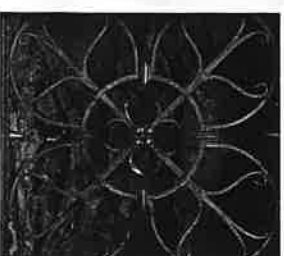
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ENGLISH MEDIEVAL SHRINES



John Crook

cathedral collections, though an imperfect match for the width of the Purbeck niches, also derives from the 1476 shrine.

In the long term it is the author's hope that the shrine may be reassembled in its original position in the retrochoir, thus bringing to eight the list of saints' shrines that have been put together again in modern times.⁹⁷

THE CULT OF ST DUNSTAN AT GLASTONBURY

In 1508 another new shrine was set up in the abbey church at Glastonbury, allegedly containing the bones of St Dunstan. The monks of Glastonbury had long claimed that the relics had been brought from Canterbury in 1012, though the assertion was later refuted by Eadmer.⁹⁸ The new shrine was set up in a conspicuous position, and its inauguration attracted a large number of people, both clerics and laity, including the nobility. Needless to say, Canterbury still laid claim to the relics, and Archbishop Warham was appalled by the proceedings at Glastonbury.⁹⁹ In order to settle the matter, he ordered an investigation of Dunstan's alleged tomb, and on 20 April 1508, after the church had been closed, a select band of brothers began their search. Their excavations continued throughout the night. Then a little before daybreak they came across a stone *feretrum* measuring about 7ft. by 1ft. 6ins. (2135 × 457mm) containing a coffer (*arca*) clad in lead, studded with nails, and bound with iron straps.

Needless to say, a full set of bones was discovered in the tomb at Canterbury with a lead plate on its chest stating that it was the archbishop. The monks of Glastonbury were sceptical and were summoned by Warham to proffer evidence for their claim. Something of a climb-down ensued, and eventually, thanks to Warham's influence, part of Dunstan's skull remained on permanent display in the cathedral as a manifestation of his presence there.

The final shrine of St Dunstan was the last important monument related to the cult of saints for which there is evidence. Within thirty years Henry VIII's commissioners had begun their onslaught on the medieval shrines of England.

THE FATE OF SHRINES AT THE REFORMATION

The English Reformation is one of the most fascinating episodes in the religious history of our island, with its interplay of orthodoxy and heterodoxy and its rapidly changing definitions of what was heretical. These changes were closely linked to the personalities of the time: men such as Sir Thomas More, Thomas Cranmer, Thomas Cromwell, above all, Henry VIII and, indeed, his queens. Such was the initially somewhat flexible mould in which a new church was formed. The subject has generated a vast literature, but in this chapter the Reformation is examined simply from the point of view of the cult of saints, more particularly those saints who were venerated through their relics (the veneration of images, though they were also the subject of pilgrimage, falls outside the scope of this book). A key element in the reform of the Church of England was the purging of 'superstition', and the cult of saints was an easy target, expressing itself as it did in physical objects and unambiguous human activities such as pilgrimage, lighting of candles, and offerings made at shrines. Before looking at the fate of individual shrines and relic cults, let us take a broad view of changing attitudes to relic cults during the two decades leading up to the key year of 1538. These attitudes evolved quickly, and clergy and laity alike were obliged continually to modify their professed views in order to steer the narrow course between conservatism and reform. When one considers that the king himself eventually retreated from the progressive views that in 1540 would ultimately lead to the execution of Thomas Cromwell, it is evident that they had to choose their path carefully.

For the general picture, all researchers in this field are indebted to Eamon Duffy.¹ He focuses more on images than shrines, and we have already noted his view that by the sixteenth century images had become the more widespread vehicle for saints' cults. This may well be true of parish churches, but perhaps not of the ancient cult centres that are the subject of this book.

⁹⁷ The others are the shrines of SS. Alban, Amphibalus, Frideswide, Wærburh, Eadburh, Birinus, and Melangell.

⁹⁸ R. Sharpe, 'Eadmer's Letter to the monks of Glastonbury concerning St Dunstan's disputed remains', in *The Archaeology and History of Glastonbury Abbey, Essays in honour of the ninetieth birthday of C. A. Ralegh Radford*, ed. L. Abrams and J. P. Carley (Woodbridge, 1991), 205–15 (a translation into English of Eadmer's text, from *Memorials of St Dunstan*, 412–22).

⁹⁹ The proceedings are known from Warham's correspondence.

The evidence that he deploys to such good effect in his masterly survey of the cults of the late middle ages demonstrates equally well that relic cults were still active right up to the fateful year of 1538, which saw the almost total annihilation of saintly relics. Whereas images could be re-erected after the demise of Cromwell, and again during the short-lived Catholic revival under Queen Mary, relics—with a few exceptional survivals—had largely vanished for ever.

At the start of Henry VIII's reign, those who expressed doubts about the efficacy of pilgrimage or the veneration of saints and relics were condemned as 'Lollards', which by then was a catch-all term for heretics. In 1509, for example, Elizabeth Sampson of Aldermanbury appeared before Archbishop Warham (1503–32) accused of saying that 'It was better to give Alms at home to poor people than to go on Pilgrimages; and that Images were but Stocks and Stones.'² Two years later Archbishop Warham tried six men and four women, mainly from Tenterden, accused of Lollardy. Amongst other accusations they were said to have maintained 'That Pilgrimages to holy and devout Places be not profitable, neither Meritorious for man's soul'. Most of those accused abjured and 'were enjoined to carry a Faggot in Procession and to wear on their Cloaths the Representation of one in flames, as a publick Confession that they had deserved to be burnt'; but four men and one woman were actually burnt at the stake.³ It is a cruel irony that by the late 1530s such opinions would become orthodox, but not before Latimer's friend and mentor the Cambridge reformer Thomas Bilney, fellow of Trinity Hall, had been burned at Norwich on 19 August 1531. Amongst the charges levelled against him were that throughout the 1520s he had preached against the value of pilgrimages and the veneration of saints and images; people would do better to 'stay at home and give much alms'. So late as 1535 Robert Vaws, the parson of Over Wallop (Hants), was indicted for 'refusing to allow his parishioners to maintain lights before images in the parish church, saying that such activities were 'but pomp and pride, and the saints shall do us no good'. He added that 'The saints which they buy of the carvers were not set up for sacrifice, but to be laymen's books'.⁴ Yet at the same time Friar Arthur, a Canterbury friar, was accused of preaching against those 'new preachers' whose sermons discouraged pilgrimage: it was better to give a penny to St Thomas's shrine than a noble (a gold coin worth 6s 8d) to the poor, because one activity was spiritual, the other corporeal. Evidently preachers had to be fully abreast of the latest orthodoxies if they were to keep out of trouble. The problem in 1535 was second-guessing the attitude of the king and his vicegerent Thomas Cromwell: a point made by the Lord Chancellor, Sir Thomas Audley, discussing William Marshall's recently published translation of Bucer's *Das*

einigerlei Bild, whose main thrust was against the 'worship of images'.⁵ Although the book claimed to be printed with royal licence, Audley commented that, 'It were good that preachers and people abstained from opinions of such things until the King has put a final order by the report of those appointed for searching and ordering the laws of the Church'.

A little more than a year would pass before Convocation issued the Ten Articles in July 1536. The members' minds must have been focused by the forceful sermon preached by Latimer at the opening of Convocation, and the sarcastic response drawn up by the more conservative clergy in the form of a list of 'erroneous opinions' worthy of reformation.⁶ They challenged the view that 'images, as well of the crucifix as of other saints, are to be put out of the church, and the reliques of saints in no wise to be revered', or that 'saints are not to be invocated or honoured; and that they understand not, nor know nothing of our petition, nor can be mediators or intercessors betwixt us and God'. Some of the erroneous propositions were parodied: thus some of the reformers were claimed to have held that 'our lady was no better than another woman, and like a bag of pepper or saffron when the spice is out; and that she can do no more with Christ than another sinful woman'; 'it is much available to pray unto saints, as to hurl a stone against the wind; and that saints have no more power to help a man, than a man's wife hath to help her husband'; 'holy water is more savoury to make sauce with than the other, because it is mixed with salt; which is also a very good medicine for an horse with a galled back; yea, if there be put an onion thereunto, it is a good sauce for a gibbet of mutton'.⁷ The Ten Articles proposed a conservative, softly-softly approach: images would be permitted, provided the people were instructed that the saints they represented were 'representers of vertue and good example ... kindlers and stirrers of mens minds ... [which] make men oft to remember and lament their sins and offences, but censuring of images must cease, and people must not be allowed to kneel before images or offer to them'.⁸ No mention was made of relic cults, however.

These conservative rulings were expanded in the first Injunctions of August 1536, formulated by Thomas Cromwell in the name of the king, and the proper use of relics was spelled out more clearly. The clergy were directed not to set forth or extol any images, relics, or miracles for any superstition or lucre, nor allure the people by any enticement to the pilgrimage of the saint; they should be instructed that 'it shall profit more their soul's health, if they do bestow that on the poor and needy, which they would have bestowed upon the said images or relics'.⁹

⁵ As Duffy discusses, *Stripping of the Altars*, 386. Bucer's book had been written in 1530 to justify the destruction of all images at Strasbourg.

⁶ *Concilia magne Britanniae et Hiberniae*, ed. David Wilkins, iii (London, 1737), 804–7, discussed by Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 392–4.

⁷ Wilkins, *Concilia*, iii, 84–7, items 22, 39–41, 63.

⁸ *Ibid.*, iii, 817–23.

⁹ *First Royal Injunctions of Henry VIII, 1536*, in *Visitation Articles*, ed. Freyre, ii, 1–11, at

² Gilbert Burnet, *The History of the Reformation* (London, 1679), i, 29.

³ *Ibid.*, 27–8.

Within two years Cromwell was inveighing more strongly against relic cults, in the second Royal Injunctions of 1538. The faithful should not 'repose their trust and affiance in any other works devised by men's phantasies besides Scripture; as in wandering to pilgrimages, offering or money, candles, or tapers to images or relics, or kissing or licking the same'.¹⁰ These injunctions were relayed by diocesan bishops, often with a slant which reflected the degree to which they espoused the new ideas. Eamon Duffy has perceptively analysed the conservative 'spin' which Edward Lee, archbishop of York, could put on the Injunctions, comparing them with the injunctions of the reformist bishop Nicholas Shaxton of Salisbury (1535-9).¹¹ Regarding images, Shaxton decreed that the people should no longer be allowed 'to kneel to them, nor worship them, nor offer candles, oats, cake-bread, cheese, wool, or any other such things to them' and the priest should 'instruct and teach them, how they ought and may use them; that is to say, only to behold, or look upon them, as one looketh upon a book'.¹² Shaxton's injunctions are particularly revealing in that he apparently had first-hand experience of cults of dubious relics within his diocese: 'namely of stinking boots, mucky combs, ragged rochets, rotten girdles, pyld purses, great bullocks' horns, locks of hair, and filthy rags, gobbetts of wood, under the name of parcels of the holy cross, and such pelfry beyond estimation'.¹³ These holy objects were to be brought to his episcopal manor of Ramsbury, together with any available documentation, so that the bishop could examine their authenticity: the bishop promised to return any authentic relics, and to provide instructions as to how such true relics should be used, 'that is to say, as memorials of them whose relics they be, in whom and by whom Almighty God did work all that ever they virtuously wrought; and therefore only he ought in them all to be glorified, lauded, and praised'. In these dealings Shaxton seems to have shown himself more reticent than Henry VIII's commissioners, who at that very time were destroying shrines and disposing of relics with little evident concern whether or not they were authentic.

Shaxton's views were apparently shared by the mayor and corporation of his city. Early in June 1537 they realised that the annual feast of St Osmund would soon be coming round again. Osmund was one of those saints affected by the Act for the abrogation of certain holydays' which had been issued by Cromwell and Convocation in mid-July the previous year.¹⁴ In an alleged attempt to increase agricultural production hitherto lost 'through the superstitious observance of the said holydayes in not taking thopportunitye of good and serene wheather, offered upon the same in time

of harvest, all holy days between 1 July and 29 September became normal working days, and the feast of the Translation of St Osmund (16 July) fell within this period. Yet the saint's shrine still stood in the Trinity chapel of Salisbury Cathedral. Foreseeing trouble, the mayor and his brethren sought the advice of the vicar general, drawing a parallel with the cult of Edward the Confessor, a saint with whom Cromwell was presumably more familiar:

It has been the custom upon the even of St. Osmunde, 15 July, which saint lies in the cathedral church as St. Edward does in Westminster, to keep a solemn watch like that kept in London on midsummer even, and to keep the morrow as a holiday. Now that St. Osmund's day is commanded not to be kept they beg to know that is to be done as regards the said watch.¹⁵

Salisbury, though, seems to have been conservative, despite Shaxton's best efforts. In August 1538 the town's vice-bailiff, John Goodall, denounced to Cromwell 'the privy practices of certain priets in Sarum, who in confession forbid white meats in Lent, the reading of the New Testament in English, and the company of those of the new learning'. The same month a rumour had arisen that Henry VIII had seen an angel (according to some, the spirit of Jane Seymour) asking him to go on pilgrimage to St Michael's Mount.¹⁶

The following year (15 April 1539), the mayor and his 'brethren' again denounced practices in Salisbury Cathedral, and even Shaxton seems to have been worried:

John Goodall, the vice-bayly, about 3 p.m., seeing the people kneeling and kissing an image of Christ standing on an altar on the north side of the choir, wherein, unknown to him, was the Sacrament, told one of the priests to take it away, it being the King's commandment that no such kissing of images should be suffered, but only creeping to the cross and kissing it on Good Friday and 'Estryn morow' which both were passed, for it was 3 p.m. The priests being not over ready to take it away, and the people fast pressing to kiss it, Goodall commanded his servant to take it down. This was done in obedience to the King's proclamations, but they interpret it as dishonour to the Sacrament and against the King's proclamation that all laudable ceremonies should be kept until otherwise ordered. They exaggerate the thing so far that they gather thereof that Goodall has a heretical opinion of the Sacrament, and con[d]emns the King's proclamation, though he has done more to set forth the injunctions and things contained in the proclamation than all of them.¹⁷

¹⁰ 'Second Royal Injunctions of Henry VIII, 1538'; *ibid.*, ii, 34-43, at 37.

¹¹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 414-15.

¹² 'Shaxton's Injunctions for Salisbury Diocese, 1538', in *Visitation Articles*, ed. Frere, ii, 53-60, at 57.

¹³ *ibid.* ii, 50-60.

¹⁵ *L & P Henry VIII*, 12.ii (1537), pp. 17-18 (item 52).

¹⁶ *ibid.* 13.ii (1538), p. 22 (item 62).

THE DESTRUCTION OF SHRINES

As noted above, the first, popular attacks on images had occurred in the 1520s, with an increasing spate in the early 1530s. Such activities, which could now be regarded as specifically sanctioned by Henry VIII's Injunctions of 1538, took on an official character, with the destruction of shrines forming an integral part of the dissolution of the major monasteries, so many of which harboured the principal local saints of the realm. Within the larger monasteries there were some who realised what was in store: thus at St Albans as early as August 1536 the keeper of the shrine there, Robert Morton, reported having heard the prior say that 'how the King had pulled down the little houses, he would pull down the great ones'.¹⁸

The *modus operandi* of the commissioners had been established shortly after 1535, when Thomas Cromwell was commissioned to carry out a general visitation of the churches, monastery, and clergy.¹⁹ The earliest list of questions to be put by the commissioners makes no specific reference to relics or relic cults, apart from enquiring whether 'jewels and reliques' had been listed in an inventory, but it is clear from the subsequent reports that the visitation of the monasteries, which would lead to their dissolution within four years, was concerned not only with their internal organisation, income, and worth, but also with their moral state, including activities which went under the general heading of 'superstition'. The glee with which the commissioners would report on the morals of monks and clergy, and on their encouragement of various forms of 'idolatry', suggests that these features were regarded as a convenient justification for the closure, first of the smaller religious houses (with an income of less than £200) in 1536, then of the larger religious houses two years later.

These concerns are apparent in a surviving summary of the findings of two of the commissioners, Dr Richard Layton and Dr Thomas Leigh, in the province of York and the combined diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, and this is followed by another similar record for Norwich diocese. In each case the moral faults (mostly sexual) of the prior, brethren, sisters, etc. are noted, followed by a note on 'superstitions', usually the presence of relics, together with the name of the founder and the value of rents and debts.²⁰ A few examples must suffice. The smaller priories came in for the most censure as regards morals: at Thurgarton ten monks were named as 'sodomites'. This was a catch-all term for most sexual misdemeanours, though some of the monks there admitted to improper relationships with boys. At Garendon five brethren were similarly charged, 'one with ten boys'. Others had sexual relationships with women. They included the prior of Pontefract, James Thwaites, who was accused of fornicating with two married women, and

was apparently the subject of an attempt on his life from his brethren. Nuns were no better, it seems, many being accused of incontinency, and some having given birth, including Margery Shackleby of St Mary's, Chester, who had had a child from a priest (*peperit ex presbytero*). Such evidence of malpractice must have facilitated the closure of the smaller houses in 1536. But it is the astonishing tally of local relic cults that concerns us here: at Repton (where Thomas Rede, the sub-prior, and three others were named as 'sodomites' *per voluntarias pollutiones*, i.e. self-abuse) it was noted that 'a pilgrimage is made to St. Guthlac and his bell, which they put upon people's heads to alleviate headache'. Virgin's milk was found at six of the northern monasteries and the 'girdle of St Mary' at no fewer than eleven of them, the last being regarded as useful for women during their confinement. The major monastic centres contained more plausible relics: it was noted that Durham Cathedral Priory possessed the bodies of St Cuthbert and St Bede, and the Cross of St Margaret (supposed to be good for those lying-in); while at Lichfield Cathedral Priory pilgrims were still drawn to the shrine of St Chad. Perhaps the main point to emerge from this extraordinary list is that of the one hundred and twenty-one northern monasteries enumerated, fifty-five possessed relics of various degrees of plausibility: a useful counterbalance to the impression given by other documents of the Reformation period that by the sixteenth century images of saints outweighed corporeal relics.

During their visitation of the religious houses and churches, the commissioners reported on many other implausible relic cults. In August 1535 Richard Layton sent a bag of relics to Cromwell, including, from Maiden Bradley, 'strange things, such as God's coat, Our Lady's smock, part of God's supper, *pars petre super qua natus erat Jesus in Bethlehem*, Our Lady's red silk girdle from Bruton, and Mary Magdalen's girdle from Ferley [Farleigh].'²¹ The following month, an inventory of the relics at Worcester Cathedral Priory included "'St Oswald's head, An arm of St. Ustian's hede with selver and gyfte". A mitre for St. Oswald's head. An arm of St. Edmund the Bishop, and many other smaller relics.'²² Not to be outdone, four days later, on 11 September another commissioner, Thomas Thacker, reported having confiscated various images from St Mary's, Ipswich, and a relic of the Virgin's milk,²³ and a fortnight later Thomas Leigh reported the veneration at Chertsey of the arm bone of St Blaise, through which they give wine in cases of illness, adding 'there is also an image of St. Faith, before which they place a candle on behalf of sick persons, and hold that if the candle remain lighted till it is consumed, the sick person will recover, but if it goes out he will die'.²⁴ Then in October, Dr Richard Layton, chief of the commissioners sent to Canterbury, was undeterred by a lucky escape from a fire in his chambers at

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11 (1536), pp. 142–4 (item 354).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8 (1535), p. 74 (item 72).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9 (1535), pp. 49–50 (item 168).

²² *Ibid.*, 9 (1535), pp. 99–101 (item 297).

the prior's lodgings at the cathedral priory.²⁵ The following morning he sent for the abbot of St Augustine's, telling him to prepare to give up the shrine of the Apostle to the English, and noting, *en passant*, that 'The prior of Dover and his monks are as bad as others. Sodomites there is none, for they have no lack of women ...'.²⁶ Bury St Edmunds supplied unlikely relics, and John ap Rice wrote to Cromwell in November that he had found 'much superstition' amongst the relics, such as 'the coals that Saint Lawrence was toasted withal, the paring of St. Edmund's nails, S. Thomas of Canterbury penknife and his boots and divers skulls for the headache, pieces of the Holy Cross able to make a whole cross of, other relics for rain, &c.'. ²⁷

Implausible relics were also found in some parish churches. Wisborough Green in Sussex possessed a large number, which 'sage men of the parish claimed had been used and offered unto time out of mind':

A crucifix, the foot silver, the middle a crystal containing a little quantity of Our Lady's milk, with two other bones. Relics of the tomb and vestments of St Thomas of Canterbury; of the hair shirt and bones of St James; of the cloak in which St Thomas the Martyr was martyred, and his blood; of the Holy Sepulchre; of SS Sebastian and Sylvester; of St Peter's beard and hair; of St Giles; of the Mount of Olives; of the stones with which St Stephen was stoned; of the rochet of St Edmund, archbishop of Canterbury; St James' comb. A chymmer of St Thomas of Canterbury.²⁸

Some of the relics reflected the growth of new cults, popular in the pre-Reformation period, such as St Blaise (Blasius), one of the so-called 'Fourteen Holy Helpers'—a group of early saints whose popularity emerged in the Rhineland in the fourteenth century. Blaise was thought to have been an Armenian bishop, put to death under the emperor Licinius in the early fourth century. As well as the arm bone at Chertsey, another of his bones was allegedly found at the nunnery of Minster-in-Sheppey, where it was 'set in silver and gilt with stones'.²⁹ St Blaise was also venerated by means of numerous images, and in Ashford (Kent) after the prohibition of images of Thomas Becket the parishioners 'transposed' his statue into one of St Blaise by replacing the crozier with a new attribute, a woolcomb, representing the instrument with which St Blaise was allegedly done to death.³⁰

The confiscation of implausible relics from minor religious houses was merely the prelude to the wholesale destruction of relic cults, culminating in the great destruction of shrines in 1538. By the autumn of 1535

Cromwell's purpose was clear, however, and Dr Pedro Ortiz wrote to the empress from Rome telling her that 'The rents of many churches are taken away, and it is said that they will take away images, shrines [*templos*], and the principal temporalities of the Church'. The following months saw the dissolution of the smaller monasteries, several of which possessed saints' cults, such as Bromholme, whose famous rood was confiscated by Richard Southwell early in February 1537.³¹ Another relic cult was at Bridlington, where Cromwell gave orders to the Duke of Norfolk that the shrine of St John should be taken down,³² during the suppression of the monastery Norfolk ordered the removal of its gold decoration, sending it to the king.³³ The same day (5 June 1536) he told Cromwell that he had also asked Henry VIII what should be done with the remaining silver, adding a message to the vicar general which reveals something of Cromwell's character: he would be welcome to lodge at his house in York, where if Cromwell did not 'just to dally with his wife, he [had] a young woman with pretty proper teths'.³⁴

Discontent at this first spoliation of relic cults seems to have been muted. However, during the Pilgrimage of Grace, Robert Aske is reported as having condemned 'the violation of relics by the suppressors, and the unrepentant demeanour of the doers thereof ...'.³⁵ Perhaps in order to counter such popular feelings, as well as linking relic cults with discredited smaller monasteries, Cromwell also orchestrated a powerful propaganda campaign, whipping up popular hostility towards the cult of saints by demonstrating how the people had been deceived by unscrupulous monks. In February 1538 Jeffrey Chamber wrote to Cromwell describing the 'Rood of Grace' at Boxley:

On defacing the late monastery of Boxley and plucking down the images, found, in the Rood of Grace, which has been had in great veneration, certain engines and old wire, with old rotten sticks in the back of the same, which caused the eyes to move and stir in the head thereof, like unto a lively thing, and also the nether lip in likewise to move as though it should speak, which was not a little strange to him and others present.

He had showed it to the people of Maidstone, and intended bringing the image to London.³⁶

The image was first brought to Westminster where its workings were demonstrated to King Henry and his jeering courtiers: 'The King hardly knew whether more to rejoice at the exposure or to grieve at the long deception'.³⁷ A few days later, on 24 February, John Hilsey, the future bishop of Rochester in succession to Fisher (who had been deprived of the bishopric the previous

²⁵ *Memorials of the Cathedral and Priory of Christ in Canterbury*, ed. C. E. Woodruff and W. Danks (London, 1912), 217.

²⁶ *L & P Henry VIII*, 9 (1535), p. 226 (item 669).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9 (1535), p. 261 (item 772).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.ii (1538), p. 36 (item 101).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 10 (1536), pp. 219–20 (item 562).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.i (1530) *ms. A80-1* (item 1057–A). *Cruch 'transposed' is discerned by Duff.*

³¹ *L & P Henry VIII*, 12.i (1537), p. 145 (item 317).

³² *Ibid.*, 12.i (1537), pp. 574–5 (item 1257).

³³ *Ibid.*, 12.ii (1537), p. 12 (item 34).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.ii (1537), pp. 12–13 (item 35).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.i (1537), pp. 2–9 (item 6).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.i (1537) *ms. A80-1* (item 1057–A).

year, and would be executed in [June], preached at London, with the image opposite him; the image was made to perform again: it turned its head around, rolled its eyes, foamed at the mouth, and poured forth tears down its cheeks,³⁸ before being cut to pieces and put in the fire.³⁹ The event was widely reported in numerous surviving letters,⁴⁰ and was described by Charles Wriothesley in his Chronicle, who commented that the monks of Boxley 'had gotten great riches in deceiving the people thinckinge that the sayde image had so moved by the power of God, which now playnlye appeared to the contrary'.⁴¹

Such animated images may not have been uncommon. At St Alban's Abbey the monks seem to have erected an image of the saint near to the shrine. So late as the beginning of the seventeenth century an elderly monk recalled the image: 'one [monk] being placed to govern the wyres, the eyes would move and head nodd according as he liked or disliked the offering, and that being young he had many times crept into the hollow of it ...'⁴²

Another image which attracted attention was the Welsh image of Darvell Gadarn. On 6 April the commissioner Ellis Price wrote to Cromwell asking what should be done with this image, to which people came daily 'somme with the kynne, other with oxen or horsis, and the reste with money'; as many as five or six hundred pilgrims had offered to the image the previous day.⁴³ This image, too, was brought to St Paul's, where it was burned on 22 May. As an additional refinement a heretic friar, Friar Forrest, was slowly roasted alive over the smouldering image.⁴⁴

The public destruction of images may have been a familiar sight during this period, as Bishop Hugh Latimer (1535–9) implies in a letter sent to Cromwell on 13 June 1538 when he urged him to destroy the great miracle-working statue of St Mary at the centre of Worcester Cathedral 'with great noise' (*cum sonitu*).⁴⁵ He added, 'She herself hath been the devil's instrument to bring many, I fear, to eternal fire; now she herself, with her old sister of Walsingham, her young sister of Ipswich, with their other two sisters of Dongcaster [Doncaster] and Penryesse [Penryth], would make a jolly muster in Smithfield. They would not be all day in burning.'⁴⁶ Latimer continued

by urging Cromwell to destroy the shrines of St David, St Wulfstan, and Bishop John of Coutances.

The famous liquefying blood of Hailes, England's answer to St Januarius, was the focus of one of the most active late medieval pilgrim cults. The abbot of Hailes pre-empted its destruction by seeking Cromwell's advice: he was minded to remove this relic, lest he should himself be accused of renewing it with 'drake's blood'.⁴⁷ The way in which the imposture was achieved was described by Lord Herbert:

Another great imposture was at Hailes in Gloucestershire, where the blood of Christ brought from Jerusalem was showed in a chrystal vial, and was said to have this property: That if a man was in a mortal sin, and not absolved, he could not see it. Therefore, every man that came to behold this miracle was forced to continue to make presents till he bribed Heaven to give him the sight of so blessed a relic. This was now discovered to be the blood of a duck renewed every week, and one side of the vial was so thick that there was no seeing through it, but the other was transparent. It was so placed near the altar that anyone in a secret place behind could turn which side he pleased outward.⁴⁸

Although the relic itself had been removed by March 1538,⁴⁹ the shrine which enclosed it was still standing six months later, and Abbot Stephen wrote to Cromwell, asking that it should be taken down, perhaps hoping that he would thereby increase the chances that his abbey would be allowed to remain.⁵⁰ Meanwhile Bishop Hugh Latimer, at Hailes, was subjecting the relic to a detailed examination:

Have been boutling and sifting the blood of Haylles all this forenoon. It was wondrously closely and craftily enclosed and stopped up, and cleaves fast to the bottom of the little glass. It seems to be an unctuous gum and compound of many things. It has a certain unctuous moistness, and though it seem somewhat like blood while it is in the glass, yet when any parcel of the same is taken out it turneth to a yellowness and is cleaving like glue.⁵¹

The monastery of Hailes was dissolved early in January 1539.⁵² The Blood of Hailes was also taken to St Paul's Cross, where Bishop Hilsey again preached, showing the relic to the crowd, and 'affirmed the same to be no bloud, but honie clarified, and coloured with saffron, as it had beene evidentlie proved before the king and his counceill'.⁵³

³⁸ Letter, Nicholas Partridge to Henry Bullinger, in *Original Letters relative to the English Reformation*, ed. H. Robinson, 2 vols., Parker Soc., 23 and 28 (1846–7), ii, 608–10 (letter cclxxix).

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *L & P Henry VIII*, 13.i (1538), p. 239 (item 644); pp. 283–4 (item 754), and *Original Letters*, ed. Robinson, ii, 604–10 (letters cclxxvii–cclxxx).

⁴¹ Wriothesley, *Chronicle*, i, 74.

⁴² James G. Clark, 'Reformation and reaction at St Albans Abbey, 1530–58', *EHR*, cxv no. 461 (April, 2000), 297–328, at 324.

⁴³ *Letters relating to the Suppression*, ed. Wright, 190–1 (item 95).

⁴⁴ Wriothesley, *Chronicle*, i, 80.

⁴⁵ When the garments clothing the statue were removed, 'she' was found to be a huge image of a bishop, 'like a giant, almost ten foot long'. The statue was finally burned in the churchyard in 1560. Quoted in Ute Engel, *Worcester Cathedral: an Architectural History* (Worcester, 2007), 195.

⁴⁶ *L & P Henry VIII*, 13.i (1538), p. 427 (item 1177). *English Monks' Letters: 1st volume to Cromwell* (item 1176).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.i (1538), p. 119 (item 347).

⁴⁸ Wriothesley, *Chronicle*, i, 76.

⁴⁹ *L & P Henry VIII*, 13.i (1538), p. 207–8 (item 564); p. 214 (item 580).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.ii (1538), p. 158 (item 409).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 13.ii (1538), pp. 272–3 (item 709); cf. *ibid.* 273 (item 710).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 15 (1540), p. 8 (item 19). Cf. *Letters relating to the Suppression*, ed. Wright, 236–8 (item 1176).

The dissolution of the major monasteries in 1538 was accompanied by the destruction of almost all of England's premier shrines. Amongst the first was the shrine of St Edmund at Bury St Edmunds, where the commissioners reported to Cromwell as follows:

Pleasith it your lordship to be advertysed, that wee have ben at saynt Edmondes Bury, where we found a riche shryne whiche was very comberous to deface. We have takyn in the seyd monastery in golde and sylver m.m.m.m. markes, and above ...⁵⁴

Having finished their work at Bury, the commissioners announced their intention of continuing to Ely, presumably to take down the shrine of St Ethelthryth.

The most spectacular shrine to be destroyed was that of St Thomas of Canterbury. In April 1538 Nicholas Partridge had received reports at Frankfurt that it was expected that St Thomas would soon be 'performing miracles' at St Paul's Cross,⁵⁵ and within four months the shrine had been demolished. On 8 September John Hussey, secretary to Arthur Plantagenet, Lord Lisle, the English Deputy in Calais, wrote to Lady Lisle that the commissioner for the destruction of the Canterbury shrine, Richard Pollard, 'hath so much ado with St Thomas shrine in offering and praying, that he cannot yet intend to follow worldly causes, but I trust when he hath prayed and received the offering and relics, he will be at leisure'.⁵⁶ According to one report the gold and silver filled twenty-six wagons;⁵⁷ Professor Barrie Dobson has called it 'the greatest collection of earthly treasure ever seen in medieval England'.⁵⁸ Whether the saint's bones were burnt or buried remains a controversial topic to this day; in a lively book on the fate of Becket's body John Butler has convincingly argued that the story of the burning of the bones originated at the Vatican in October 1538 and quickly gained acceptance in Catholic Europe, having 'no independent corroboration in contemporary English documents'.⁵⁹

From Canterbury, Pollard continued to Winchester where, together with Thomas Wriothesley and John Williams, he pulled down St Swithun's final shrine, which had been in existence only since 1476. His letter to Cromwell was written in the cathedral in haste early on Saturday 21 September.

Pleasith your lordship to be advertisid, that this Saturdaye, in the mornyng, aboutes thre of the clok, we made an ende of the shryne

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 144–5 (item 67).

⁵⁵ *Original Letters*, ed. Robinson, ii, 608–10, at 609 (letter cclxxix). *L & P Henry VIII*, 13.1 (1538), pp. 283–4 (item 754).

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 13.ii (1538), p. 119 (item 303). *The Lisle Letters*, ed. M. St. Clare Byrne, 6 vols. (Chicago, 1981), v, no. 1217.

⁵⁷ *L & P Henry VIII*, 13.ii (1538), p. 49 (item 133).

⁵⁸ B. Dobson, 'The Monks of Canterbury in the later middle ages', in *A History of Canterbury Cathedral*, ed. P. Collinson, N. Ramsay, and M. Sparks (Oxford, 1995), 69–153, at 150.

⁵⁹ I. Butler, *The Unsettled Bones of Becket: Saint Edmund and the Shrine of St Ethelthryth* (Turnham, 1995), 100–5; 'chapter 7' (Turnham, 1995), 100–5.

here at Wynchestre. There was in it no pece of gold, ne oon ring, or true stone, but al greate counterfeites. Nevertheles we thinke the sylver alone thereof woll amounte nere to twoo thousande markes.⁶⁰

At Winchester, too, the fate of St Swithun's relics is uncertain. Unlike Becket, the bones of a pre-Conquest saint cannot have been regarded as politically controversial, and it might have been expected that they would have been reburied, as were the remains of St Cuthbert. This is certainly what one contemporary account suggests, thought by Thomas Milman, in his study of the fate of Becket's bones, to have been written by Thomas Derby, clerk to the privy council, in 1539: Milman thought the document was a scheme or plan for a sermon at St. Paul's Cross, to be preached as a public vindication of the late proceedings of king Henry VIII. The passage in question maintains that,

St Swythun and other reliques wherabout abuse of ipocrasy was be layde save, and not, as it is untruey surmitted, brent [burnt], but according to reason collocate secretly, wher ther shal be no cause of superstition giuen by them, as some say that for the like cause the body of Moyses was hyden lest the Jues shuld fall to idolatry.⁶¹

There can have been little local official resistance to the destruction of the shrine of St Osmund of Salisbury, where both the bishop, Nicholas Shaxton, and the mayor and town council were ardent reformers, as we have already noted. Demolition of the monument took some considerable time and was undertaken by the cathedral's workmen: John Sylvester and John Somer received 2s 8d for working for over a week *circa demolicione scrinii sci Osmundi* in January 1539, and later in the year Somer and his workmate continued the task for a further fortnight.⁶²

Salisbury was, of course, a secular cathedral, so the destruction of the shrine did not go hand-in-hand with the spoliation of a monastery prior to its dissolution. So, too, was Chichester Cathedral, where the shrine of St Richard was located on a feretory platform behind the high altar. A special commission was issued by the king on 14 December 1538 to Sir William Goring and William Erneley, to destroy the shrine and bones of 'a certain bishop ... which they call St Richard, which was still the subject of much superstition, and a certain kind of idolatry'; the place where the shrine stood was to be demolished down to the ground, and the main shrine, together with other reliquaries, was to be conveyed to a treasury in the Tower of

⁶⁰ *Letters relating to the Suppression*, ed. Wright, 218.

⁶¹ Henry Salisbury Milman, 'The Vanished Memorials of St. Thomas of Canterbury', *Archaeologia* 53 (1892), 211–28, at 221–2.

⁶² S. Eward, 'St Osmund: the destruction of the shrine', *Salisbury Cathedral News*, 149 (May 1995), 100–5.

London.⁶³ The commissioners worked fast, and within a week an inventory of the shrine and relics had been taken: the saint's bones were found to be in a long coffin containing fifty-seven pieces of silver and gilt.⁶⁴ The lower dais survived the destruction, and Bishop Day (+1556) chose to have his tomb placed on it, on the north side. Day had objected to the 'plucking down' of stone altars in 1550 and was deprived the following year; during the reign of Mary he reinstated the rood screen and may have hoped to restore St Richard's shrine.⁶⁵

Some shrines in secular cathedrals lasted a little longer: the shrine of St Werburgh of Chester seems to have survived until 1539.⁶⁶ Not until 6 June 1540 was the commission issued for the destruction of 'a certain shrine and divers feigned relics and jewels in Lincoln Cathedral, by which simple people are deceived and brought into superstition and idolatry',⁶⁷ perhaps because of the conservative views of Bishop Longland. The commissioners arrived in Lincoln on the 11th, and 2,621 oz. of gold, 4,285 oz. of silver, and a great number of pearls and precious stones were removed from the cathedral. The commissioners noted two shrines: the gold shrine of St Hugh and the silver shrine of Sir John Dalderby, which had been previously listed in an inventory made in 1536.⁶⁸

So effective were the activities of the commissioners, that, with a very few exceptional survivals, discussed below, the vast majority of relics, and their reliquaries and shrines, had perished by 1542: some may have enjoyed a temporary reprieve, like the shrine of St Augustine of Canterbury, which had by special permission been given to the church of Chilham (Kent), but this was short-lived.⁶⁹ The precious metals and jewels from shrines swelled the royal coffers, and the consequence is that examples of English medieval reliquaries are rare indeed. True, Edward VI's articles to parish clergy of 1547 enquired whether their churches still contained 'any misused images, with pilgrimages, clothes, stones, shoes, offerings, kissings, candlesticks, trindles of wax, and other such like: and whether there do remain not delayed and destroyed any shrines, covering of shrines, or any other monument of idolatry, superstition and hypocrisy', but apart from asking whether those

clergy who had formerly spoken in favour of 'feigned relics' had not recanted, relics are hardly mentioned.⁷⁰ Images could subsequently be reinstated during the Catholic revival under Mary, to be removed at the start of Elizabeth's reign, and the survival, retention, or reinstatement of a number of images is attested in the surviving Act Book for the visitation of the northern province,⁷¹ but no mention is made of relics. As far as English churches were concerned, they had vanished from the scene.

SURVIVAL OF MAJOR RELICS

A few major relics, whose authenticity was more or less established, appear to have survived. The most spectacular example is the body of Edward the Confessor, whose high shrine in Westminster Abbey was destroyed in 1536, four years before the surrender of the monastery in January 1540. The saint's body was removed from its opulent *feretrum*, which was melted down, but Henry VIII refrained from annihilating the remains of his royal predecessor; the Confessor was reburied within the church, perhaps on the site of the shrine. The abbey was restored during the reign of Queen Mary, in November 1556, and within four months the diarist Henry Machyn recorded that 'The xx day of Marche [1557] was taken up at Westminster agayn with a hondered lyghtes kyng Edward the confessor in the sam plasse wher ys shryne was, and ytt shalle be sett up agayne as fast as my lord abbot [Abbot Feckenham] can have ytt don ...'⁷² Machyn records that the work was completed by April 1557, when he viewed the shrine 'nuw set up'.⁷³ J. G. O'Neill has shown that the present structure betrays evidence of haste in construction, several elements being wrongly reassembled.⁷⁴ O'Neill suggests, furthermore, that the wooden superstructure or canopy, which originally would have covered the *feretrum*, was not renewed during Abbot Feckenham's time, but that it dated from earlier in the sixteenth century and escaped the destruction of the shrine-base.⁷⁵ In the Marian reconstruction which has survived to this day the canopy serves no practical purpose, for the coffin (presumably provided in 1536) containing the body of the saint was replaced within the monument itself, in the space between the head of the vaulted niches and a new oversailing freestone cornice with a classical moulding which was added for the purposes of the reconstruction.

Another saintly body to survive was that of St Cuthbert, which until 1538 had been enshrined in its Anglo-Saxon light chest within the opulent high shrine, 'exalted with most curious workmanship of fine and costly marble,

⁶³ Wilkins, *Concilia*, iii, 840. Cf. 'The Early statutes of the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity, Chichester, with observations on its constitution and history', ed. M. E. C. Walcott, *Archaeologia*, 45 (1877), 143–234, at 176.

⁶⁴ *L. & P. Henry VIII*, 13.ii (1538), p. 464 (item 1103).

⁶⁵ T. Tatton-Brown, 'Destruction, repair and restoration', in *Chichester Cathedral, an Historical Survey*, ed. M. Hobbs (Chichester, 1994), 143–56, at 143–4.

⁶⁶ R. V. H. Burne, *Chester Cathedral, from its founding by Henry VIII to the Accession of Queen Victoria* (London, 1958), 35.

⁶⁷ *L. & P. Henry VIII*, 15 (1540), pp. 364–5 (item 772).

⁶⁸ W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. T. Caley and H. Ellis, 6 vols. (London, 1817–30), vi, pt iii, pp. 1278–86, item lxviii: 'The register and inventory of all jewels, vestments, and other ornaments to the revery of the cathedral Church of Lincoln belonging, made by Master Henry Lytherland, Treasurer of the same Church, in the year of our Lord God, 1536, 28 Hen VIII (By Patent Doe as fowle Bredde) 1536, 13'.

⁷⁰ Royal Articles of Edward VI, in *Visitation Articles*, ed. Frere, ii, 103–13, at 105.

⁷¹ PRO, State Papers 12/10: *The Royal Visitation of 1559*, ed. C. J. Kitching, Surtees Soc., vol. 187, for 1972 (Gateshead, 1975).

⁷² *The Diary of Henry Machyn*, ed. J. G. Nichols, Camden Soc., o.s., 42 (1848), 130.

⁷³ *ibid.*, 132.

⁷⁴ J. G. O'Neill and L. E. Tanner, 'The Shrine of St. Edward the Confessor', *Archaeologia*.

all limned and guilted with gold.⁷⁶ This stood on the feretory platform behind the high altar. The body was violently removed from the shrine (during which one of the leg bones is supposed to have been broken), was stored in the vestry (or perhaps in the cloister garth), and in 1542 was buried in a new grave cut into the feretory platform, in exactly the place where the shrine had stood. The lining of the grave incorporated fragments of the plinth of the final shrine which were removed in 1899 and which until recently stood on the feretory pavement. There is little evidence to support the charming legend that the body was reburied elsewhere in the cathedral in a place known only to three Benedictines who continue to pass the secret down the generations; the objects found with the remains of the body are sufficient proof of its authenticity. Similar traditions existed at Hereford, and have been suggested at Canterbury in the complex arguments over the fate of Becket's bones. Better authenticated are the remains of St Chad of Lichfield, claimed by the Roman Catholic cathedral in Birmingham since its consecration in 1841. The documentation for the movements of the relics since the Reformation was printed and discussed by John Hewitt in 1876.⁷⁷

It is possible that the reliquary of St Augustine escaped immediate destruction. When the commissioners visited Chilham Church in 1543 they discovered that the incumbent, Dr Willoughby, still retained an object called 'St Austin's shrine' which had been taken thither on the destruction of the abbey.⁷⁸ Dr Willoughby, a participant in the conspiracy against Cranmer of 1543, had evidently retained the relic hoping for better times.⁷⁹ But even the relics of the first archbishop of Canterbury met their end.

SURVIVAL OF INDIVIDUAL RELICS

In view of all this activity, it is surprising that any relics survived the activities of the various commissioners. But there were undoubtedly some individuals whose belief in the efficacy of relics was powerful enough to overcome their fear of royal retribution. Most of the accounts which have come down to us concern the unfortunate individuals who happened to be caught. In 1539, for example, Sir John Rogke, a priest of Reading, was accused of possessing 'a relic named St. Anastasius' hand, knowing that his Majesty had sent visitors to the said abbey to put down such idolatry'.⁸⁰ At around the same time a north-country beggar was accused of retaining relics from Tynemouth Priory. He had described to one of the witnesses against him how he had watched the commissioners roughly casting aside the bones from which they had stripped the gold and silver; they gave him some bones,

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covered with silver, inviting him to strip it off in order to decorate his dagger; but he seems to have retained the relics in their adorned state, as well as other bones that they had cast away.⁸¹ Relics were still available as late as 1547, when Thomas Monday, a London parson, and Thurston Hickman, a former monk of the Charterhouse, were sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered for treason because they had attempted to smuggle various relics to John Foxe, another Charterhouse monk who had become a parish priest but then had fled to Louvain to become a monk again. The relics included the left arm of John Houghton, the martyred last prior of the Charterhouse, and 'other baggage that they called reliques'.⁸²

When the shrine of St Thomas Cantilupe of Hereford was about to be destroyed in around 1538, relics of that saint were removed for safekeeping. Their fate has been chronicled by Dom Illtud Barrett.⁸³ After the Reformation a custodian of the relics was appointed, the first known of whom was the Revd William Ely, ordained during the reign of Queen Mary; and as late as the mid-seventeenth century the relics were carried through the streets of Hereford in order to avert the plague. At around that time several of the relics, which had been dispersed during the Commonwealth period, were transferred to the relative safety of the Continent; an arm bone, for example, eventually found its way to Bruges. The saint's head was translated c. 1670 to the English Benedictine house which had been founded at Lamspring, in the diocese of Hildesheim, Germany. After the suppression of that monastery by the Prussian government in 1803 the relic was lost for nearly eighty years, until it was rediscovered in 1881, languishing at the top of a cupboard behind the high altar reredos of the former abbey church, by a monk of Downside, Dom Gilbert Dolan. The relic is now preserved in the Latin chapel of the abbey church of Downside. A tibia of St Thomas is now venerated at Stonyhurst College, having been preserved until 1835 at Holywell in North Wales.

Another relic which appears to have been illegally concealed was the shrine and bones of St Eanswyth of Folkestone. As we have seen,⁸⁴ the lead coffer and relics appear to have been crammed, perhaps hastily, into a cavity in the north wall of the chancel of the abbey church, where they were discovered some three hundred and fifty years later. Walling up treasures was one way of evading their confiscation, and in September 1538 the commissioners reported from Glastonbury that 'we have dayly fownde and tryede oute bothe money and plate byde and muryde up in walls, vaultis, and other secrette placis as well by thabbot as other of the convent'.⁸⁵ The

⁷⁶ *The Rites of Durham*, ed. J. T. Fowles, Surtees Soc., 107, for 1902 (Durham, 1903), 3-4.

⁷⁷ J. Hewitt, 'The Keeper of St Chad's Head in Lichfield Cathedral', *Arch. J.*, 33 (1876), 71-82, at 73-8.

⁷⁸ *L. & P. Henry VIII*, 18.ii (1543), item 546, see also p. 319, item xi.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.ii (1539), p. 281 (item 750).

⁸¹ Wrothesley, *Chronicle*, i, 184-5.

⁸² The Relics of St Thomas Cantilupe, in Jancey, *Thomas Cantilupe*, 181-5, drawing on Father John Morris, 'English Relics', *The Month*, 44 (Jan-April 1882), 112-26, and E. Horne, in *The Clergy Review*, 38 (1907) 91, 104.

abbot of Glastonbury was hanged, drawn and quartered for treason, including this accusation, soon after.

An admittedly unlikely relic that was discovered immured within a former monastery precinct is the so-called 'Hand of St James' at Reading Abbey.⁸⁶ The small, mummified hand was discovered by a workman digging in the abbey ruins, and eventually found its way to the Roman Catholic church of St Peter, Marlow, where it is preserved in a glass and brass casket. Needless to say, the authenticity of the relic is dubious, and it is hardly surprising that in 1960, when a pilgrimage to venerate the relic was planned, the Catholic bishop of Northampton 'positively [forbade] the public veneration of the relic'. Quite apart from the question of the primary authenticity of the relic displayed at Reading since the twelfth century as one of its principal holy treasures, there is no way of telling whether the surviving hand is the relic still attested there at the dissolution. 'Saynt James hande' was near the top of an 'Inventorye off the Relyques off the howse off Redyng' compiled at Reading Abbey by Dr John London on 18 September 1538, who told Cromwell that he had 'lok[yd] them upp behind the high awtler' and had the key in his keeping.⁸⁷ It might therefore be thought improbable that the commissioner should have mislaid such an important relic. However, another hand, that of St Anastasius, was also listed by Dr London, and yet, as we have seen, was illegally retained by Sir John Rogke, so such appropriation was evidently possible. The small size of the relic has suggested to some people that the hand might be that of Henry I's second wife, Queen Adeliza, who was also buried at Reading.⁸⁸

But the most fascinating account of the illegal retention of relics concerns the so-called 'foot of St Philip' in St Swithun's Priory, Winchester, which by 1585 had reached the abbey of St Andrew, Bruges.⁶⁹ The abbot hoped to offer the relic to a bearer of the same name, Philip II of Spain, and the documentation relating to its authentication has survived in the Spanish national archive at Simancas, providing a valuable insight into the way relics could be preserved, despite the best efforts of the reformers.

According to the *Annales Wintonienses*, the relic had been brought to the priory by Bishop Peter des Roches in 1231: *Obtulit [episcopus] pedem Sancti Philippi*.⁹⁰ It is likely therefore that the warrior prelate brought it back from his crusade to the Holy Land in 1227–31. On the eve of the dissolution the foot was normally kept in the ‘sacristy’ (almost certainly, the walled-off area in the south transept known as the ‘Treasury of Henry of Blois’); there it was

⁸⁶ The story of the relic is discussed by the Revd Brian Taylor, 'The Hand of St James', *Berks. Archaeol. Jnl.*, 75 (1994-7), 97-102, to whom I am indebted for the details here given.

⁸⁷ BL, Cotton MS Cleopatra E. iv, fos. 264-5 (formerly fos. 223-4), quoted in *Letters relating to the Suppression*, ed. Wright, 226.

⁸⁸ Taylor, 'Hand of St James'.

⁴⁹ The fascinating story was published by Peter Bogan, 'Dom Thomas Figg and the foot of St Philip', *Winchester Cathedral Record*, 61 (1992), 22–6, reporting on research by the Revd Dr

listed with other relics preserved in the sacristy, and itemised as 'sacyncte philyps Fote coveredd with plate of gold & with stones'.⁹¹ Nearly fifty years later, Thomas Figg, an elderly English monk living in exile at Bruges, shed light on how the relic had reached Belgium, and his account is worth quoting extensively for the exceptional insight it also gives into the methods of the commissioners:

He had been educated from boyhood in the said monastery or Winchester, and in due course had been appointed and instituted one of the three custodians [*custodes*], who had in their care the relics of the saints of the same monastery, and he was officially a custodian at the time when his highness King Philip of Spain took Mary Queen of England to wife in the same monastery, where for a long time previously the aforesaid foot of St Philip the Apostle had been kept in the vestry enclosed in a silver-gilt reliquary decorated with precious stones, valued together in common estimation £100 sterling. Once a year, namely on the actual Feast of St Philip, it was solemnly and reverently carried to the high altar, lying on a cushion of red silk with two tapers lit, to be venerated by the people. The witness most often carried it like this. But in the time of Henry VIII, of England, the king, motivated by hatred of saints, who were no longer to be revered or invoked, decreed that the holy places were not even to be called by their names, and on that account the name of the Most Holy Trinity was imposed on the said monastery. But at Henry's death, and in the reign of the aforesaid Queen Mary, wife of his Highness Philip, king of Spain, the original name of St Swithun was restored to the said monastery. King Henry, proceeding from one impious and outrageous deed to another, one day ordered the said church and monastery to be plundered of its silver, jewels, relics and all its goods by certain commissioners sent to this end. No-one was allowed to enter the church with these commissioners apart from the senior custodian, who was allowed into the vestry, and was compelled to open the chests of ornaments and repositories of jewels. He watched the commissioners frenziedly taking, stealing and violently carrying off gold and silver, and indeed throwing the relics of saints on the ground to be burned. From these relics the senior custodian secretly picked up and carried away the said foot of St Philip the Apostle, faithfully looking after it until his death. First, however, he had drawn up his will, appointing William Benyan, a layman, as executor, to whom he entrusted the said foot for safe-keeping. Before that same executor in due course died, he gave custody of the foot to his wife Margaret, who was acquainted with and well known by the witness [Thomas Figg], to whom moreover she sent the foot without request or demand. The witness knew and recognised that it was the foot of St Philip and accepted it with joy,

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keeping it faithfully in a certain casket. When he fled from England for fear of the heretics he left the foot with a young man called Ambrose Edmunds (who subsequently died in prison for his Catholic faith) so that might send it on to him at the first available opportunity. In this way the witness received the foot in these parts [i.e. at Bruges] eighteen years ago.

The story was complicated by the involvement of another English refugee, Lady Anne Hungerford, a prominent figure amongst the exiled Catholic community in Bruges, and further documents are concerned with charting the movements of the relic until it was finally delivered to the abbot of St Andrews, Bruges. From there, once it had been properly authenticated by order of Philip II's secretary, the relic eventually reached the Escorial in 1592.

SURVIVAL OF SHRINES

As well as secreting relics, some cathedral and church authorities appear to have attempted to preserve fragments of demolished shrines, perhaps in the hope that one day they might be reconstructed. The shrine of St Alban, for example, was broken into over two thousand fragments in 1539, which were used in the construction of a wall separating the former feretory area from the Lady chapel, which was converted into a school. That so many of the pieces were used in a single archaeological context could suggest that those who treated them thus hoped in fact that they might one day be reassembled, and indeed in 1847 (the first discovery of some elements) and more particularly in 1872, they were retrieved and put together like a jigsaw when the shrine was first reassembled. Likewise at Oxford, the remains of the shrine of St Frideswide were discovered in the lining of a well.

By the time of the Elizabethan visitation of 1559, relics, reliquaries, and shrines had disappeared for ever from the great majority of churches and cathedrals. On the other hand, a number of images had been reinstated during the reign of Queen Mary. Images still stood, for example, in the church of Rotheborne,⁹² and an image of Our Lady at Beynton had 'byn used for pilgrymage'.⁹³ At Doncaster images had survived in the vestry, and were described as 'not destroyed'.⁹⁴ One or two parishioners had retained images: at Chester, it was said of Mistress Dutton, of St Peter's church that she 'kepith secretly a Roodde, too pictures and a masse booke, and of Peter Fleicher that he 'hath certyn ymages whiche he kepithe secretlye';⁹⁵ and at Bridlington the images were also 'secretly kepte'.⁹⁶ Those at Osmotherley church had been 'conveyed awaye' but the parishioners did not know by whom.⁹⁷

⁹² PRO, State Papers 12/10, fo. 109v, *The Royal Visitation of 1559*, ed. Kitching, 73.

⁹³ *ibid.*, fo. 100v, p. 69.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, fo. 97v, p. 67.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, fos. 134r and 135r, p. 85.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, fo. 100v, p. 69.

EPILOGUE ENGLISH SHRINES TODAY

A new interest in shrines is evident today, not just as historical vestiges of the religious practices of the past, but as focuses of spiritual activity, where pilgrims can reflect, pray, or light votive candles, a practice that would have been viewed with disgust a century ago. When John Chaple laboriously reconstructed the shrine of St Alban in 1872 it was a personal research project, led by antiquarian considerations, and the monument was principally a tourist attraction for many years. The same could be said of the shrine of St Frideswide, fragments of which were discovered in 1875 and pieced together. The reconstruction of the shrine of St Birinus at Dorchester in 1964 remained something of a curiosity.

Things were very different when the St Albans shrine was again rebuilt in 1990–3 in honour of the twelfth centenary of the foundation of King Offa's abbey church. The dedication service was held on 6 May 1993 in the presence of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, and the Very Revd Peter Moore introduced the prayers of rehallowing with the following words:

From the time of Constantine and Gregory of Tours the use of candles at shrines has been an established custom. Though this holy, thoughtful use degenerated, it is our intention now to encourage a return to the hope and prayer of the first pilgrims, whose faith shone in the light of their candles, as token and reminder of him who is the Light of the World.

The initiative proved a success, and St Alban is now firmly at the centre of the abbey's campaign to raise its profile by setting England's proto-martyr at the forefront of that great church's life. According to a publicity leaflet, 'We want to draw and welcome increasing numbers of worshippers and visitors to the national shrine of Britain's first Christian martyr'.¹ Thus Alban has been established as the *persona* of the abbey, just as Swithun of Winchester represented the priory there at the time of the monastic reforms of the tenth century.