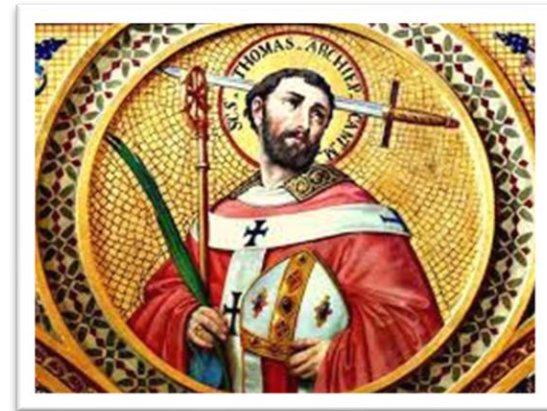


## St Thomas Becket

1119–1170

Thomas Becket (also called Thomas of London) was born in Cheapside, London, to middle-class parents of Norman descent. As a youth he enjoyed hunting with his father. At the age of ten, he was sent to the newly founded Merton Augustinian Priory just outside of London, where he received a thorough education in the liberal arts. At the age of twenty, he spent time studying in Paris, but due to financial difficulties, his father helped him find a job as a clerk for a family member. When Thomas was around the age of twenty-two, Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury hired him as a clerk. Thomas soon became the archbishop's most trusted assistant. He was sent to Rome on several important diplomatic missions and to Bologna and Auxerre for studies in civil and canon law. In 1154, when Thomas was around the age of thirty-five, the archbishop ordained him as a deacon and appointed him as the Archdeacon of Canterbury.



### The miracles of St Thomas Becket

Brother William and Prior Benedict, two monks from Canterbury, were appointed to keep a book which documented the miracles that took place whilst the visitors were at Thomas Becket's tomb. There were more than 700 miracles recorded which ranged from the cure of leprosy, blindness, paralysis to that of epilepsy.

1. One of the miracles which can be seen in the Trinity Chapel's windows is the cure of Petronella of Polesworth. Petronella was a nun who suffered from epilepsy and travelled down from North Warwickshire to Canterbury to visit the tomb of St. Thomas. The nun can be viewed sitting by St. Thomas' tomb, bathing her feet in the saint's holy water.



Petronella left Canterbury not knowing whether or not she had been cured.

2. Another miracle demonstrated in the windows of the Trinity Chapel is the cure of Richard Sunieve. In Geoffrey Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales', Richard Sunieve was Sir Henry Fitzherbert's herdsman until he contracted leprosy.

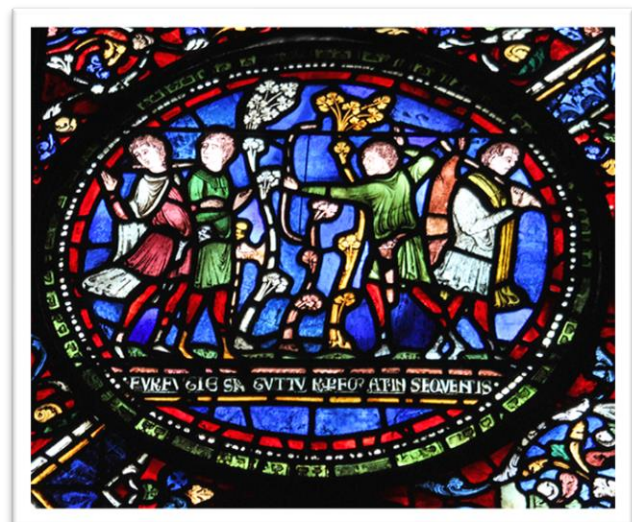
The window in the Trinity Chapel shows Richard stooping with his arms outstretched, touching the side and top of St. Thomas' tomb. It was believed that the closer the proximity of the pilgrim and the saint, the more powerful and quicker the cure. In the background, the Canterbury monks can be seen mixing the saint's blood with water. The next panel shows Richard cured and offering gold coins to show his gratitude.

3. Henry was a young man who was suffering from a mental illness. The left panel shows two caretakers dragging him to St. Thomas Becket's tomb. This was due to Henry shouting, raging and becoming violent after attacking his friends on the way to the Cathedral.



#### 4. The Arrow and the Forester

In the south ambulatory, we see the story of Adam the Forester, as told to William of Canterbury, and set in four medallions, or roundels. In the first scene below, Adam (far left) is shot in the neck by an arrow from the bow of a desperate poacher. The forester's job was to protect the king's forest from poachers—and the penalty for poaching was death. Another poacher (far right) absconds



with a deer thrown over his shoulder. Following scenes in the set depict Adam in bed surrounded by friends in the king's castle. He drinks Canterbury water containing the blood of the saint, and lo and behold, his lethal piercing is miraculously healed. In a concluding roundel, Adam offers thanks at Becket's tomb.

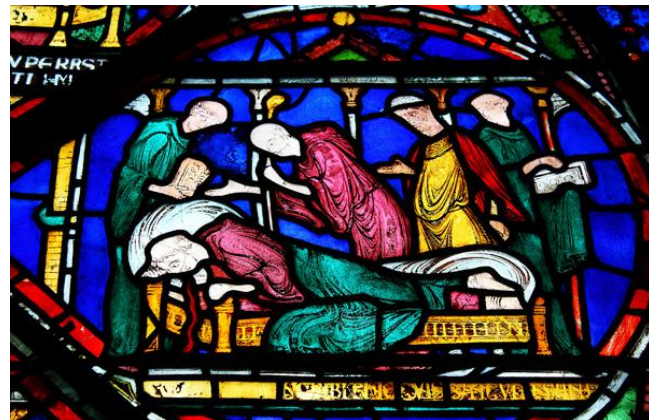
## 5. The Case of the Bleeding Monk

Benedict may have recorded this strange case of Hugh of Jervaulx who was a cellarer—a monk assigned the provisioning of a monastery. The first teardrop-shaped scene (at left in the photo) reveals a layman physician unsuccessfully tending to Hugh, who lies ill in bed as the Abbot of Jervaulx observes.



observes. As medieval visual culture expert M. A. Michael explains, “The ineffectiveness of surgeons and physicians is a theme in the miracles of St. Thomas.” Thus, the next scene (at top) portrays the Abbot stepping in to bless Hugh who drinks the holy water of St. Thomas.

In the third scene, blood pours from Hugh's nose, rendered as a long red ribbon flowing to the floor, as he lay face down on his bed submitting to the “therapy.” At this point, one might wonder if the cure could be worse than the disease, but Hugh is nevertheless healed—another testament to the power of St. Thomas Becket.



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