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THE WAY WE WERE

LOCAL HISTORY: King's 1162 plan to install friend as new

How Thomas Beckett and Henry II fell out

Way We Were

Richard West
Founder of the Chaucer Education Project
vie.tcep.org.uk



IN 1161, when Theobald of Bec died, King Henry II had a plan to obtain future supremacy over the defiant bishops: he would appoint his friend Lord Chancellor Thomas Becket to be the next Archbishop of Canterbury.

However, Thomas Becket took his new role seriously, increasingly bringing him in to conflict with the King.

On January 30 1164, just over nine years after Henry II succeeded to the throne, he enacted what would become known as the Constitutions of Clarendon, named after Clarendon Palace where discussions were held between Becket and the King.

The Constitutions were a set of legislative procedures which Archbishop Becket was asked to sign to establish the king's rights; with repercussions if he refused.

The circumstances occurring after the ultimatum was made to the archbishop and of his refusal to sign the Constitutions of Clarendon, began to initiate the events which would eventually lead to him being murdered in Canterbury Cathedral on December 29, 1170 and which subsequently led to the penance by King Henry II at the cathedral to the bishops and monks of Canterbury on July 12, 1174.

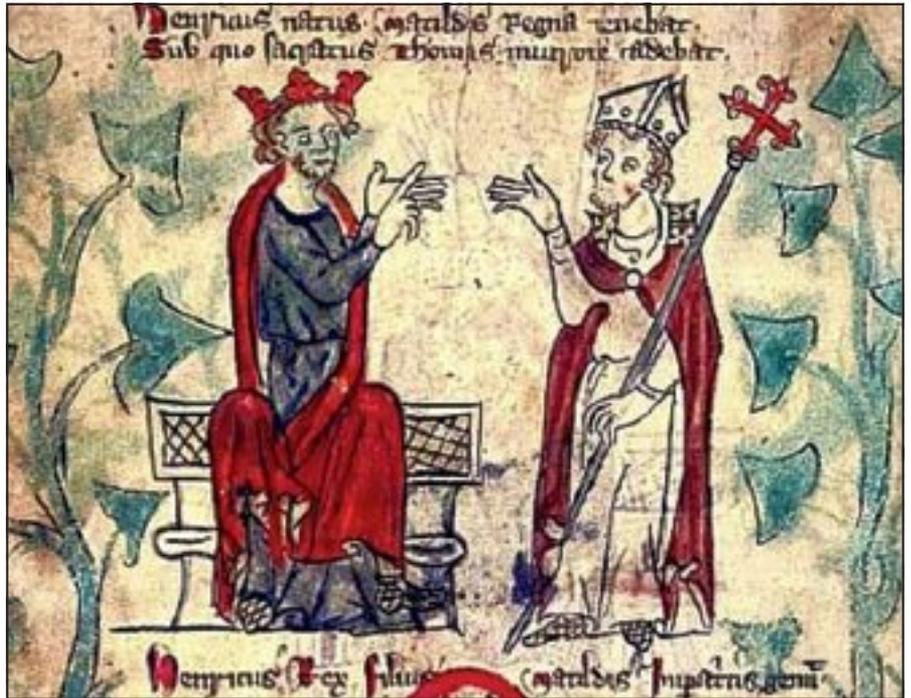
Thomas Becket was born in Cheapside, London, probably in 1120, on December 21, the feast day of Saint Thomas the Apostle. Thomas was the son of Gilbert and Matilda Becket. Gilbert was a wealthy Norman from Rouen who dealt in city rents and properties.

Ultimatum

When he was ten years old, Thomas was sent as a student to Merton Priory in England and later attended a grammar school in London. Sometime after he began his schooling, his father suffered financially, through it seems the great fire of 1133 starting in his house and burning down so much of the city that his properties were seriously diminished and he was reduced to comparative poverty.

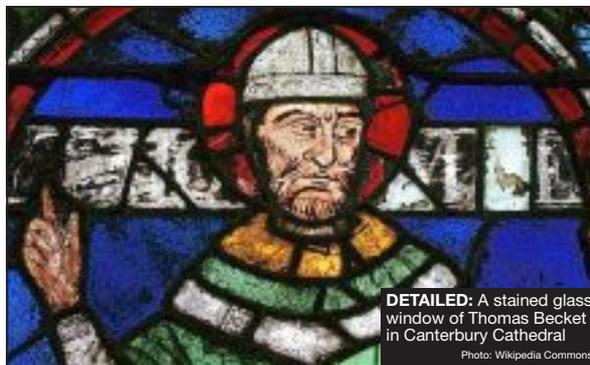
About the year 1140, Gilbert Becket first secured a place for his son in the business of a relative, Osbert Huitdeniers (whose surname in English is Eightpence) as sheriff's clerk, giving him his first taste of royal administration. Later, he acquired a position in the household of Theobald of Bec, who by then had been appointed Archbishop of Canterbury.

Archbishop Theobald entrusted Becket with several important missions to Rome and also sent him to



NEVER FORGET: King Henry II and Archbishop Thomas Becket

Photo: Peter of Langtoft, Chronicle of England.



DETAILED: A stained glass window of Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral

Photo: Wikipedia Commons

Bologna and Auxerre to study canon law.

In 1154, Archbishop Theobald named Becket as Archdeacon of Canterbury. Other ecclesiastical offices held by him included a number of benefices, prebends at Lincoln Cathedral and St. Paul's Cathedral, and the office of Provost of Beverley. His efficiency in those posts led to Archbishop Theobald recommending

him to the king for the vacant post of Lord Chancellor, to which he was appointed in January 1155.

Becket's election to the post of Archbishop of Canterbury was confirmed on May 23, 1162 by a royal council of bishops and noblemen.

The King might have hoped that Becket would continue to put the royal government first, rather than the church, but instead he began leading a

life of abstinence and dedication to his role of leading the church.

Thomas Becket was ordained a priest on June 2 1162 in Canterbury. On the following day, he was consecrated archbishop by Henry of Blois, the Bishop of Winchester and the other suffragan bishops of Canterbury.

Rift

A rift grew between Henry II and Becket, as the archbishop resigned his chancellorship soon after taking up his new office.

This led to a series of conflicts with the king, including about the jurisdiction of secular courts over English clergymen, which accelerated hostility between the pair.

Attempts by the king to influence the other bishops against Thomas Becket began in Westminster in October 1163, when Henry sought approval of the traditional rights of the royal government with regard to the church.

In due course, this led to the Constitutions of Clarendon, the set of legislative procedures, enacted by King Henry II at Clarendon Palace, which Archbishop Thomas Becket

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Archbishop of Canterbury backfired



BEAUTIFUL: Canterbury Cathedral

Photo: Richard West



DAMAGE: Some of the destruction caused by the Baedeker Blitz

Credit: British Pathe/YouTube

It's 74 years since Canterbury felt the full force of the Luftwaffe

SEVENTY-FOUR years ago last week Canterbury suffered the worst night in its long history, thanks to a massive air raid by the Luftwaffe.

While everywhere in the UK, particularly in the South East, was targeted in a series of raids during the Second World War, Canterbury was a specific target on June 1, 1942.

The so-called Baedeker Blitz was an initiative designed to

target specific places of historical and cultural significance in the UK, and was named after a German tourist handbook listing such sites.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of civilians and emergency services, Canterbury Cathedral was largely spared, but as this picture shows, the city did not escape unharmed.

Further raids took place on June 2 and June 6. In total, 1,637

civilians were killed, and 1,760 were injured, and over 50,000 houses were destroyed in the raids, which also struck Exeter, Bath, Norwich and York.



See video of Canterbury just after the war ended at

canterburytimes.co.uk



LOOKING BACK: Great Seal of King Henry II

Photo: Wikipedia Commons

refused to sign.

As Lord Chancellor, Becket enforced the king's traditional sources of revenue extracted from all landowners, including churches and bishoprics.

The king even sent his son Henry to live in Thomas's household, it being the custom then for noble children to be fostered out

to other noble houses. The younger Henry was reported to have said Thomas Becket showed him more fatherly love in a day than his father did in his entire life.

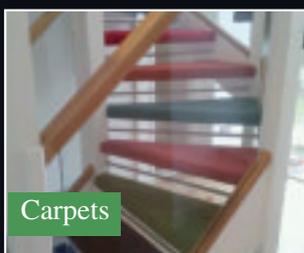
An emotional attachment to Becket as a foster father might have been one of the reasons the younger Henry subsequently turned against his father.

Previous Way We Were articles from The Chaucer Education Project, including the first edition of this article, are available to access online under Latest Articles, in the right-hand column of The Chaucer Education Project's virtual learning environment website: chaucer.university.



OLD TIMES: Canterbury in the 1940s, after the Blitz

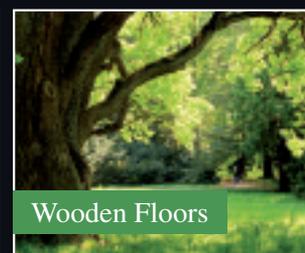
Credit: Canterbury Remembering it as it was



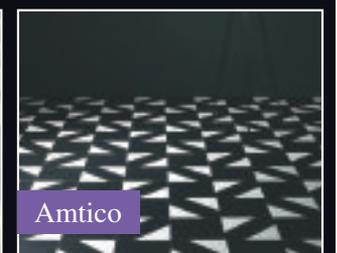
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