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ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY EAST CLANDON, SURREY

St. Thomas Becket - South Wall, Westernmost Window (o.88m x 1.93m) 2009



THE BRIEF

The Friends of St. Thomas of Canterbury, East Clendon, requested a figurative representation of the martyrdom of St. Thomas in Canterbury Cathedral.

THE WINDOW

The subject of the window appears to be the moment immediately before the martyrdom of St. Thomas Becket, the patron Saint of this church. Whilst the murder took place in Canterbury Cathedral in 1170, the scene in the window is set in the Trinity Chapel of the Cathedral, which was only built about thirty years after the death of St. Thomas. The stained glass which can be seen in the right light depicts the miracles attributed to him.

In the small tracery lights at the top are four angels holding shields bearing some of the emblems of Christ's passion - the spear, the sponge, the crown of thorns, the dice and the nails. These refer to the suffering about to be endured by Thomas, and to the intensely spiritual nature of his sacrifice. This is balanced by the redness of his vestments, reminding us that blood is about to be spilled.

Helen Whittaker

STAINED GLASS
& SCULPTURE

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Detail: Angel holding the
Crown of Thorns

Near the top of the left light a feather drifting down from the wing of an angel, creates a link between heaven and earth, and floats past a startled group of birds in the darkness. These are choughs, or 'beckits' as they are known in heraldry. St. Thomas had three of these birds on his coat of arms, and they came to symbolise his resistance to the King. The flickering lights at the left hand side are candles, lit for the soul of St. Thomas who can be seen raising his eyes to heaven.

There are several accounts of the murder of Thomas Becket, including one by his squire, Grim of Cambridge, who was wounded in the attack. Grim describes how Thomas "could not be freed away from the pillar", so Thomas is pressed against the mullion in the centre of the window, which simultaneously represents a column in the cathedral.

In the right light we see four knights entering the cathedral. Their leader, Reginald FitzUrse, has his sword raised and his shadow is cast menacingly across the floor.

Accounts vary as to the number of knights actually involved in the murder. FitzUrse was the leader who struck the first blow, and other men involved were named as William de Tracy, Robert de Broc, Hugh de Morville and Richard Le Breton. However, some versions suggest that de Morville did not participate directly in the attack, but kept the gathering crowds at bay until the deed had been done. Hugh of Horsea, a clerk in holy orders known as the 'evil deacon', also participated in the murder – and apparently delighted in it. His head can be seen by the column next to the last knight on the right.

The inscription at the base of the right light is arranged to resemble the carving on a ledger stone. It reads; *Thomas of Canterbury, Martyr and Saint*. The lettering has been designed by Charles Smith FRSA.

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