

# Introduction: Remembering English Saints in 2020

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The Association of English Cathedrals designated 2020 a national ‘Year of Cathedrals, Year of Pilgrimage’, with the intention of encouraging greater public recognition of the enduring spiritual and historical importance of these iconic buildings as places of worship.<sup>1</sup> There are forty-two Anglican cathedrals in the United Kingdom, many of which are medieval structures. The anniversary years 2019 and 2020 have been important for many of these buildings and for the saints’ cults associated with them. In Lichfield, 2019 marked the 1,350th anniversary of Chad’s consecration as bishop of Mercia. The year 2020 is a special year of pilgrimage for Durham cathedral, coinciding with the launch of six new northern saints’ trails inspired by the lives of Aidan, Cuthbert, Oswald, Wilfrid, Hild and Bede. In Canterbury, 2020 marks the 800th anniversary of the Translation of St Thomas Becket, and the 850th anniversary of Becket’s martyrdom. As Becket was a Londoner by birth, his anniversaries are also being commemorated in the English capital by special events and exhibitions. In Lincoln, 2020 is the 800th anniversary of the canonisation of Hugh of Avalon, bishop of Lincoln. In Hereford, 2020 marks the 750th anniversary of the canonisation of Thomas Cantilupe, bishop of Hereford. At Salisbury, 2020 is the 800th anniversary of the laying of the cathedral’s first foundation stone, following its transfer from Old Sarum. While not a medieval cathedral, Bury St Edmunds, the abbey dedicated to St Edmund king and martyr, is marking 1,000 years since its foundation by King Cnut. Although the

<sup>1</sup> For the Association of English Cathedrals’ initiatives, see [www.englishcathedrals.co.uk/latest-news/2020-year-cathedrals-year-pilgrimage/](http://www.englishcathedrals.co.uk/latest-news/2020-year-cathedrals-year-pilgrimage/). There is also a social media campaign. See, for example, @engcathedrals #YearofCathedrals #YearofPilgrimage. The ‘Year’ had its early origins in meetings between representatives from Canterbury and Lincoln to discuss the anniversaries of St Thomas Becket and St Hugh of Avalon. The membership of this group rapidly expanded to include representatives from the Association of English Cathedrals, as well as Cardiff, Hereford, London, Southwell, York (The University’s Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture), the British Pilgrimage Trust and other national bodies.

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arrival of COVID-19 has necessitated the postponement and rescheduling of many planned activities, the articles within this Special Issue of *History* offer a celebration in print of the lives and afterlives of some of England's most important, but also, in some cases, curiously neglected medieval saints and their cults.

In the Middle Ages, 'people found the key to the meaning and purpose of their lives' through Christian teachings and practices.<sup>2</sup> The Bible informed people's perceptions of the universe and their place within it, while liturgical celebrations helped to mark the passage of time. From Late Antiquity onward, the lives (and afterlives) of saints, exceptionally holy and virtuous Christians who went to heaven when they died, offered inspiration, spiritual succour and the promise of divine aid for the living. The veneration of saints was integral to the religious lives of the clergy and the laity. Sanctity was usually identified by, and associated with, 'public veneration after the person's death'.<sup>3</sup> Thereafter, the places, physical remains and objects associated with the holy man or woman in question acquired cultic significance. In the early Middle Ages, local bishops played a role in investigating and upholding or dismissing claims regarding an individual's sanctity. From the late twelfth century onward, however, sole authority to canonise an individual came to be vested in the papacy, after careful scrutiny of a body of evidence for a virtuous life and for the performance of posthumous miracles.<sup>4</sup> Such was the popularity of the cult of saints in England throughout the medieval period that images of saints adorned chapels, churches and cathedrals right up until the Reformation in the sixteenth century. The veneration of their relics in the hope of securing a miraculous cure or another form of supernatural assistance provided an important impetus for pilgrimage to sites associated with them and for other devotional activities.<sup>5</sup> The extent to which this was swept away at the Reformation is also the subject of debate.<sup>6</sup>

Since the 1970s, there has been an explosion of scholarship on medieval saints and sanctity. The work of Robert Bartlett, Peter Brown, John Crook, Eamon Duffy, Ronald C. Finucane, Patrick Geary and André Vauchez has offered new insights into the development of saints' cults, the evolving architectural settings of saints' shrines, and the influence of saints, relics and miracles on lay spirituality and popular beliefs

<sup>2</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven, CT and London, 1992), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the definitions of saintliness and sanctity, see Anneke B. Mulder Bakker, 'The invention of saintliness: texts and contexts', in Bakker (ed.), *The Invention of Saintliness* (London, 2002), pp. 3–24, at pp. 3–4.

<sup>4</sup> For a useful summary, see Janine Larmon Peterson, *Suspect Saints and Holy Heretics: Disputed Sanctity and Communal Identity in Late Medieval Italy* (Ithaca, NY, 2019), pp. 19–22.

<sup>5</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 155–7.

<sup>6</sup> For example, in relation to the cult of St Thomas Becket. See the summary and references collected in Paul Webster, 'Introduction: the cult of St Thomas Becket: an historiographical pilgrimage', in Paul Webster and Marie-Pierre Gelin (eds), *The Cult of St Thomas Becket in the Plantagenet World, c.1170–c.1220* (Woodbridge, 2016), pp. 1–24, at pp. 21–2.

throughout Latin Christendom.<sup>7</sup> Although the saints included in this Special Issue are all men, it is important to recognise that an important body of literature has also emerged on the cults of biblical female saints in the Middle Ages, arguably the most important of whom was the Virgin Mary, the immaculate mother of Christ.<sup>8</sup> The cults of the Virgin Mary and of St Anne, the Virgin Mary's mother, were also particularly popular among the laity in England during the later Middle Ages.<sup>9</sup> A number of Anglo-Saxon female saints, including St Æthelthryth of Ely, St Edburga of Winchester and St Edith of Wilton, continued to be venerated in Anglo-Norman and Plantagenet England.<sup>10</sup> Even so, the prevalence of patriarchal values within the medieval church may have hindered the canonisation of women. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg's survey of the saints listed in the *Bibliotheca sanctorum* between 500 and 1099, for instance, found that there were 1,942 men venerated as saints in this period compared with 332 women.<sup>11</sup>

Bede is perhaps one of the most famous Northumbrian saints and certainly one of the most well-known writers of the early Middle Ages. His *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*History of the English People*) circulated widely throughout the medieval West and still forms an important basis for much of our knowledge of early Anglo-Saxon male and female saints, and of the process of conversion. Fiona and Richard Gameson's article opens this Special Issue with a fascinating study of the process of composing early medieval hagiography. The Gamesons

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford, 2013); Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, IL, 1981); John Crook, *The Architectural Setting of the Cult of Saints in the Early Christian West, c.300–c.1200* (Oxford, 2000); John Crook, *English Medieval Shrines* (Woodbridge, 2011); Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*; Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (Basingstoke, 1995); Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ, 1978); André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Marina Warner, *Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London, 1976); Luigi Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages: The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Thought of Medieval Latin Theologians* (San Francisco CA, 2005); Miri Rubin, *Emotion and Devotion: The Meaning of Mary in Medieval Religious Cultures* (Budapest, 2009); Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven, CT, 2009); Gary Waller, *The Virgin Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Literature and Popular Culture* (Cambridge, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, NY, 1997); Katherine J. Lewis, 'Pilgrimage and the cult of St Katherine in late medieval England', in Jacqueline Jenkins and Katherine J. Lewis (eds), *St Katherine of Alexandria: Texts and Contexts in Western Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 2003), pp. 37–52; Virginia Nixon, *Mary's Mother: St Anne in Late Medieval Europe* (University Park, PA, 2004); Juliana Dresvina, *A Maid with a Dragon: The Cult of St Margaret of Antioch in Medieval England* (Oxford, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge, 1988), ch. 4; Stephanie Hollis and William Reginald Barnes (eds), *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and Liber Confortatoris* (Turnhout, 2004); Virginia Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695–1615* (University Park, PA, 2007); Paul E. Szarmach (ed.), *Writing Women Saints in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, 'Female sanctity: public and private roles, ca. 500–1100', in Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (eds), *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens, GA, 1988), pp. 102–25, at pp. 104 (table 1).

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provide a detailed analysis of the *Vita Bedae*, an anonymous work of hagiography, based on its oldest extant manuscript, Durham Cathedral Library MS, B.II.35. They assess the evidence for this text's probable composition at Jarrow in the late eleventh century, against the backdrop of Jarrow's refoundation in 1073, and the presence of 'new monks' from Jarrow and Wearmouth at Durham in 1083. An analysis of the *Vita's* structure and content follows, identifying not only the sources upon which its author drew, but also the approaches he adopted in crafting his portrayal of Bede from a rather slender base of underlying knowledge. By employing rhetoric and scriptural allusion, by praising Bede's scholarship and contextualising his piety within that of the monastic community at Jarrow, and by reinterpreting his death as that of a Christian martyr, the Gamesons show how the author of the *Vita* produced a full and elaborate account of Bede's life, albeit one of limited historical accuracy.

The next two articles focus on the inception and development of the cults of two important Anglo-Saxon saints about whom Bede wrote: St Chad at Lichfield and St Wilfrid at Ripon. In the late 660s, Chad, a former abbot of Lastingham and bishop of the Northumbrians, was sent by Theodore of Tarsus, archbishop of Canterbury, to become bishop of the Mercians. He successfully established a cathedral at Lichfield, and after his death in 672 he was buried in the church of St Mary. His remains were then translated to the new church of St Peter in 700 during the episcopate of Bishop Headda.<sup>12</sup> Ian Styler's article examines the origins of St Chad's cult and its later geographical reach within the British Isles between the seventh century and the English Reformation. Styler argues that, although the appeal of St Chad's cult was regional in nature, it remained important for pilgrims within the Midlands and the north of England in the eighth century and later. This was, in no small measure, due to the qualities of 'chastity, humility and diligence' which St Chad had demonstrated in life. Lastingham, where a holy well was dedicated to St Chad and which was associated with an important episode in St Chad's adult life, became another focus for his cult. It was at Lichfield, however, that St Chad's cult was most actively cultivated between c.670 and c.730, and at which a new shrine was constructed to house his body prior to his translation in 700, from which pilgrims were able to collect 'healing dust'. The findings of Styler's research indicate that interest in St Chad's cult was maintained in the following centuries through further 'translations of his relics' and the production and circulation of later texts of his *Life*, most notably in connection with the consecration of the new cathedral at Lichfield and the accompanying translation and separation of St Chad's relics in 1148 to facilitate the creation of a 'portable reliquary'. In the fourteenth century, Bishop Walter Langton

<sup>12</sup> For a useful summary, see Michele P. Brown, 'The Lichfield angel and the manuscript context: Lichfield as a centre of insular art', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 160/1 (2007), pp. 8–19, at pp. 11–12. See also now Andrew Sargent, *Lichfield and the Lands of St Chad: Creating Community in Early Medieval Mercia* (Hatfield, 2020).

helped to reinvigorate spiritual interest in St Chad by including the saint in a new chronicle and by commissioning a new monument, or shrine.

Joyce Hill focuses on St Wilfrid's role in establishing 'a Roman-style cathedral' at Ripon, drawing on the two narrative sources for his life – Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*History of the English People*) and Stephen of Ripon's early eighth-century *Vita Wilfridi* (*Life of Wilfrid*) – alongside place-name and archaeological evidence. Hill argues that Ripon's foundation, first as a monastery which followed Celtic Christian 'traditions', and later as a community which followed Roman practices, is best understood within the context of the changing ecclesiastical and royal politics in Northumbria. Hill argues that, in giving Ripon to Wilfrid shortly after Wilfrid's return from his first visit to Rome in 660–3, Alhfrith, sub-king of Deira, sought to reinforce his power-base in Deira, at the expense of his father King Oswiu's authority, and promoted Roman traditions. Hill also analyses the evidence for Wilfrid's exposure to Roman practices and Roman ecclesiastical architecture. She considers the probable influence on Wilfrid, during his time in Kent, of the Roman religious observances followed at Canterbury in the years after St Augustine's mission, and of the architectural setting of the great churches of Christ Church and of St Peter and St Paul's monastery (now St Augustine's abbey), which were built in the style of Roman basilicas. His visits to Rome and to Lyon provided Wilfrid with further, formative experiences of Roman Christian architecture and practices. During Wilfrid's trip to Francia for his consecration, his position as bishop of Ripon was usurped, when King Oswiu appointed Chad to Ripon in Wilfrid's place. In 669, Theodore of Tarsus, archbishop of Canterbury, removed Chad and restored Wilfrid to his episcopal see, paving the way for Wilfrid to embark upon a highly ambitious 'building programme' at Ripon, which essentially resulted in the construction of a cathedral that carefully and deliberately followed Roman models. Roman influences were also at work in shaping Wilfrid's decision to adopt the Benedictine Rule for his community at Ripon. Hill suggests that the Rule served an important function in distinguishing the monastery at Ripon from other religious communities that followed mixed rules and Celtic Christian traditions.

Tim Tatton-Brown's article on Osmund (d. 1099), bishop of Salisbury, looks at the physical impact of the development of St Osmund's cult, in the late twelfth century, on the remodelling of the fabric of Salisbury cathedral in the Middle Ages. Tatton-Brown argues, for instance, that an intricate, 'geometric pavement' was laid in the 'rebuilt east end of Old Sarum cathedral' in the late twelfth century, most probably in connection with St Osmund's shrine and coinciding with the recording of miracles associated with this saint. The pavement was made not only from marble, but also from purple and green porphyry, materials utilised elsewhere, at Canterbury and Westminster, for other visually magnificent shrines. Tatton-Brown suggests that the pavement was installed at the same time as Salisbury's famous Purbeck marble 'tomb-shrine' was built to house

St Osmund's remains. After the move to New Salisbury, the bodies of Bishop Osmund, Bishop Roger le Poer (d. 1139) and Bishop Jocelin de Bohun (d. 1184) were all translated to the new cathedral on 14 June 1226. Although the process to secure Osmund's canonisation was initiated in 1228, it stalled in the 1230s, after which his shrine remained an 'unofficial shrine' on the south-west side of the Trinity Chapel until he was eventually canonised in the fifteenth century. In 1457, after his canonisation, St Osmund's body was translated, yet again, to another fine, new shrine, located in the centre of the Trinity Chapel, where it remained until its destruction at the Reformation.

The veneration of the cult of St Edmund (d. 869), king and martyr, by England's later Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman and Plantagenet kings is the focus of Paul Webster's article. Webster argues that, by associating themselves with St Edmund's cult, these rulers sought not only 'to sustain a religious aura linked to saintly predecessors', but also to benefit from intercessionary activities undertaken at his shrine on their behalf. Patronage of St Edmund's cult took various forms. It was expressed through material support for building projects and the protection of the abbey church's rights by Æthelstan and Cnut. St Edmund was also honoured via royal visits to Bury St Edmunds by William I and Matilda of Flanders, and their successors, during which prayers and offerings were made to the saint. English kings and their close kin also fostered, and utilised, their association with St Edmund by 'staging . . . major events of national and (or) dynastic significance on the saint's feast day, or by using items associated with the saint on such occasions'. A good case in point was in 1376, when St Edmund's feast day (20 November) was chosen for the inauguration of the Black Prince's son and heir, the future Richard II, as prince of Wales, duke of Cornwall and earl of Chester. Personal devotion to St Edmund, on the part of Henry III and his successors, was also articulated by the incorporation of his shrine at Bury St Edmunds into royal pilgrimage, by his veneration at Bury and other religious sites, and by the commissioning of sculptures, images and other items depicting St Edmund to aid individual kings' spiritual practices. St Edmund's aid was also solicited by rulers, including Edward I, Edward III and Richard II, for assistance on military campaigns. St Edmund's cult was one that endured throughout the Middle Ages, thanks in part, Webster suggests, to its adaptability.

The two articles by John Jenkins and Louise Wilkinson examine the reception of St Thomas Becket's cult in London, the place of Becket's birth *c.*1120, and in Canterbury, the location of Becket's martyrdom in 1170. Jenkins considers Becket's prominence in the spiritual life of the medieval city as London's patron saint. He analyses the development and endurance of St Thomas's cult in medieval London, through the miracles performed on Londoners which were attributed to Becket, and the readiness of Londoners to claim Becket for themselves by associating the city firmly with Becket's 'rising' as a saint. Jenkins's research also underlines the physical impact which Becket's cult left on the medieval



cityscape; the construction of a chapel dedicated to him was an integral part of the rebuilding of London bridge in stone, which began in the late 1170s. Locations in London which were associated with St Thomas acquired cultic significance. The purported house of his birth, for instance, became the site of a new Hospital of St Thomas of Acre. This community was established, Jenkins argues, as a ‘corporate undertaking’, with the backing of Peter des Roches, bishop of Winchester, and the ‘symbolic involvement’ of Becket’s kin in the person of Thomas de Helles. Popular devotion to St Thomas found expression in the pilgrimages embarked upon by Londoners to Canterbury and in the incorporation of Becket into civic ceremonies and rituals in later medieval London. Wilkinson’s article shifts the focus to look at elite patronage of the cult of St Thomas of Canterbury, or St Thomas the Martyr, at Becket’s shrine in Canterbury, in the thirteenth century. After considering St Thomas’s relevance and appeal for the individual English churchmen who were canonised in the thirteenth century, Wilkinson considers evidence for the patronage of St Thomas’s shrine and of the other places associated with him in Canterbury cathedral by members of the royal family, and by courtiers and lay aristocrats during the reigns of King Henry III (r. 1216–72) and King Edward I (r. 1272–1307). Wilkinson argues that, despite the attraction of Becket’s cult for opponents of the crown, especially during the First and Second Barons’ Wars of 1215–17 and 1263–7, the cult of St Thomas ‘remained harnessed to the medieval English monarchy’, thanks to Becket’s deliberate inclusion in regular and, at times, special acts of commemoration and veneration, and by the circulation of *Lives* and other objects associated with him in royal and aristocratic circles.

Ian Bass draws this Special Issue to a close by looking at ‘the contents and value’ of the miracle collection associated with Thomas Cantilupe (d. 1282), bishop of Hereford. The miracle collection is preserved in a fourteenth-century manuscript, Oxford, Exeter College MS 158, and in Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Cod. Lat. 4015. It is second only to that of Thomas Becket in terms of its size for a medieval English saint. On Cantilupe’s death at the papal court in 1282, his body was brought back for burial to Hereford cathedral, where it rested initially in the Lady Chapel, before his remains were translated by Bishop Richard de Swinfield to a new tomb in the north transept. In 1306, the pope appointed a commission to inquire into Cantilupe’s ‘life, death and miracles’, which draw on the testimonies of more than 200 people. After a series of delays, Cantilupe was canonised in April 1320. Bass’s article incorporates a detailed breakdown of the 461 miraculous cures which were attributed to Cantilupe, scrutinising their dating and the geographical location of their recipients. He has identified a proliferation in the number of miracles for the year 1287–8, the first year of Cantilupe’s cult. The year 1290 was another ‘boom year’ for Cantilupe miracles, fuelled, Bass argues, by the promise of a papal indulgence of a year and forty days for visitors to Hereford cathedral on specific feast days. Intriguingly, Bass’s analysis of the recipients of Cantilupe’s miracles reveals a male-dominated cult, and

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one where the testimonies of male witnesses were more common than those of women, reflecting ‘the inherent biases’ of the period and, perhaps, Cantilupe’s preference for avoiding women in life.

Taken together these articles demonstrate the vibrancy of religious devotion to saints in the Middle Ages, and the importance of these cults not just for the religious men and women having the task of caring for and maintaining their shrines, but also for rulers, aristocrats, the clergy, and urban and rural communities who came into contact with the cults during their lives. The fact that 2020 has been recognised, nationally, as a significant anniversary year for so many English saints and cathedrals highlights their continuing relevance in the twenty-first century for all of us, whether believers, scholars, tourists, or seekers after heritage.