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St Thomas Becket and Medieval London

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Abstract
Thomas Becket was born in London, and throughout his life had a close if chequered relationship with the city. After his death, while his body lay in its shrine at Canterbury, the citizens of London made great efforts to reclaim his memory for themselves by seeding his commemoration throughout the city. He was swiftly adopted as London's patron saint, the 'Light of Londoners', and the strength of devotion to him was made manifest in such construction programmes as the first stone London Bridge, the hospital on his birth site and the city-wide waterworks. By comparison with Canterbury's focus on Becket's martyrdom, London fostered a dynamic and vibrant cult based upon his birth and rebirth, centralising this element of the cult in their pageants and giving genesis to central elements of the wider Becket *mythos* such as the 'Saracen mother' story. The purpose of this article is to fill a lacuna in the historiography of both the saint and the city, and provide an overview of the importance of St Thomas Becket to medieval Londoners, and of London to the cult of St Thomas.

St Thomas Becket had a long-standing and central role as London's patron saint, although this aspect of his afterlife has received curiously little attention in modern scholarship. While St Thomas features prominently in many studies of London sites with which he was particularly associated, notably London Bridge or the Hospital of St Thomas of Acre, he is largely absent from more general studies of the medieval city. Furthermore, while all studies of the cult of St Thomas acknowledge his shrine and the site of his martyrdom at Canterbury, few recognise the existence of his second major cultic centre in London, the city of his birth. The purpose of this article is to give an overview of the importance of St Thomas Becket to medieval Londoners, and of London to St Thomas. It will trace developments in the cult broadly chronologically, and attempt to show how the relationship between the city and the saint changed over time: to show in broad terms how St Thomas of Canterbury was presented, represented and re-presented to, and by, medieval Londoners. This study is bookended by two important texts: the 1173–4 prologue to the *Life* of St Thomas

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by William FitzStephen and the 1419 city custumal, the *Liber albus*, of John Carpenter. These two texts exemplify the status of St Thomas's cult within the city and his place as patron saint. By looking in turn at St Thomas's patronage of the rebuilding of London in stone, the long-standing devotion of the citizens to their patron saint and the inventive ceremonial based around the civic cult, this study brings St Thomas's central place within the medieval city into clearer focus.

Thomas had a close but chequered relationship with the city during his lifetime. He was born on 21 December *c*.1120, in a large townhouse on Cheapside adjoining the small, first-floor church of St Mary Colechurch where he may have been baptised.[1] His parents, Gilbert Becket and Matilda, were moderately wealthy Norman merchants and property owners. Gilbert acted as sheriff of London sometime in the 1130s. Thomas's education included time spent at a London grammar school, and his first job, in 1143, was as a clerk to the London financier Osbert Huitdeniers. Through connections made in London he was able to get a position in the household of Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury, during which time he enjoyed the living of St Mary-le-Strand and held the prebend of Reculversland in St Paul's cathedral, both positions in which it was expected that the holder would be absent.[2] His personal seal was probably acquired around this time, and he continued to use it occasionally throughout his life alongside his official seals. It was an antique gem inscribed with a figure possibly representing Mercury, to which Thomas had added the legend 'Sigillum Thome Lund' (The Seal of Thomas of London).[3] It has been suggested that Thomas's London connections may also have been a factor in Henry II's choice of him as Chancellor, and certainly his background in the financier classes of London would have made him attractive to a young king in need of money.[4] After his enthronement as archbishop of Canterbury it was, however, the bishop of London, Gilbert Foliot, who proved his most implacable opponent. Their antagonistic relationship came to a head on Ascension Day 1169 when Thomas excommunicated Gilbert in St Paul's cathedral, causing a near-riot among the Londoners assembled there for worship.[5] According to Thomas's supporters, Gilbert was utilising the conflict to promote the supposedly historic claims of London to be raised not just to an archbishopric but, over Canterbury, to the primal see of England.[6] It was an optimistic claim, though not without merit, and it

[1] F. Barlow, *Thomas Becket* (London, 1986), pp. 10–15, 281.
[2] Ibid., p. 36; C. Brooke and G. Keir, *London, 800–1216: The Shaping of a City* (London, 1975), p. 344; A. Morey and C. Brooke, *Gilbert Foliot and his Letters* (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 193–4.
[3] Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, p. 38; E. Hallam and A. Prescott, *The British Inheritance: A Treasury of Historic Documents* (Berkeley, 1999), p. 8; TNA, E 40/4913.
[4] W. L. Warren, *Henry II* (London, 1973), pp. 56–7; E. Amt, *The Accession of Henry II in England* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 94–102.
[5] A. Duggan (ed.) *The Correspondence of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury 1162–1170*, 2 vols (Oxford, 2000), I, pp. 901–9.
[6] Morey and Brooke, *Gilbert Foliot*, pp. 98–9, 151–62.

took Thomas's martyrdom finally to settle the question of Canterbury's pre-eminence within the country.

After Thomas's death in 1170, pilgrims flowed from London to Canterbury in great numbers. In the Canterbury miracle collections from the first decade of the cult, London was second only to the county of Kent in terms of the origins of pilgrims to St Thomas's shrine.[7] One of the earliest miracles was effected on a dumb priest of London who just eight nights after the martyrdom received a vision to go to Canterbury to be cured.[8] In another early miracle, Gilbert the shoemaker was cured of a fistula by the application of St Thomas's water and, in thanks, walked the fifty miles from London to Canterbury in a day. City life suggests itself in the cure of the Londoners Matilda and Roger's sickly illegitimate child, conceived after a prolonged session at a wine tavern – a commodity associated with Thomas's birth neighbourhood – and healed after Matilda's tearful repentance of her loose living.[9] Particularly effective in promoting the early cult in the city appears to have been the miracle which occurred to Solomon, a Londoner nearly 100 years old and blind for around six years, who prayed at his home to the martyr and, while being led to church the following day, received back his sight. The performance of this miracle on the streets of the city, together with the man's loud declaration that it was thanks to 'our new martyr', meant that, according to Benedict of Peterborough, there were crowds of witnesses who turned their devotions to St Thomas. The numbers were apparently so great that a London metal-caster called Augustine had the task of melting down the used *ampullae* which had been used to carry St Thomas's Water back to the city so they could be re-cast as further cultic items sacred to St Thomas.[10] The penetration of St Thomas's cult into the religious life of London was both swift and deep, and even at this early stage there appears to have been a recognised production of devotional items to the saint, which might normally be considered as Canterbury 'pilgrim souvenirs' within the city.

The historiography of Thomas's cult has noted its rapid international spread and the vibrancy and adaptability of its iconography, while largely accepting that the shrine and the body within Canterbury cathedral was its centre point. The saint is now, as he was for most medieval observers, 'Thomas of Canterbury', with the focus on his martyrdom for the liberties of the Church. Yet this perspective overlooks London's persistent attempts to claim him for itself as 'Thomas of London'. For medieval Londoners, Thomas was not just a pilgrimage destination in Canterbury, he was their saint and his presence was felt throughout the city. It is worth noting that in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century

[7] R. C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London, 1977), p. 164.
[8] J. C. Robertson and J. B. Sheppard (eds), *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, 7 vols (London, 1875–85), II, pp. 42–3.
[9] Robertson and Sheppard, *Materials*, II, p. 95; D. Keene, 'The mercers and their hall before the Great Fire', in J. Imray (ed.), *The Mercers' Hall* (London, 1991), pp. 1–13, at p. 1.
[10] Robertson and Sheppard, *Materials*,II, pp. 104–5; I, pp. 464–5.

lists of the prebendaries of Reculversland in St Paul's, Thomas is named as 'Sanctus Thomas de Lond' and 'Sanctus Thomas London'.[11]

I

The well-known account of London by William FitzStephen, himself a Londoner, is the first attempt to place the cult of Thomas in the city of his birth. In 1173 × 1175, FitzStephen wrote a description of the city and its customs, prefacing it to his *Life* of St Thomas. The description is often considered as a separate entity to the *Life*, with some justification as it is rather long for a scene-setting to the birth and Thomas himself is largely absent. As a number of historians have pointed out, the preface contains no biblical references but classical authors are frequently utilised, and the piece as a whole is an *encomium* to the city in classical style. Thomas only appears at the beginning and end, seemingly 'as a witness to the greatness of London' rather than an obviously integral part of the piece.[12] Yet this argument works better for the piece as it is found in the centuries after its composition, detached from the *Life* and bolstering later medieval civic pride.[13] Michael Staunton shows that FitzStephen's *encomium* needs to be seen in the context of his *Life*, where Thomas's upbringing in London is also described with a wealth of classical references, yet from the point of his consecration onwards the quotations and allusions are overwhelmingly biblical. London thus built on and surpassed the legacy of classical Rome through its Christian faith, just as Thomas was able to build on and surpass his London upbringing through his consecration as archbishop.[14]

Importantly for an understanding of the nature of the cult in London as compared to its manifestation in Canterbury, FitzStephen explains that 'St Thomas may have glorified both these cities: London by the rising and Canterbury by the setting of his sun'.[15] Echoing this, a popular hymn of the late-twelfth century described him as 'Lux Londoniarum' – 'the light of Londoners'.[16] Thomas of Canterbury's story centred on his martyrdom for the liberties of the Church, Thomas of London's on his birth and path to greatness. The 'rising sun' characterising Thomas's relationship with London could be extended to the nature of the city itself at the time FitzStephen was writing. The late twelfth century was

[11] D. Greenway (ed.), *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae: St Paul's London 1000–1300* (London, 1968), pp. 73–4.
[12] C. S. Jaeger, 'Urbs ohne Urbanitas: die Londoner Stadtbeschreibung von William Fitzstephen, eine Adelsutopie', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 45 (2011), pp. 310–16; V. J. Scattergood, 'Misrepresenting the city: genre, intertextuality, and William FitzStephen's description of London (*c*.1173)', in V. J. Scattergood, *Reading the Past: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Dublin, 1996), pp. 18–36.
[13] H. Kleinecke, 'Carleton's book: William FitzStephen's "Description of London" in a late fourteenth-century common-place book', *Historical Research*, 71 (2001), pp. 117–26.
[14] Staunton, *Becket and his Biographers*, pp. 82–3.
[15] Robertson and Sheppard, *Materials*, III, p. 2.
[16] For example, The Burnet Psalter, Aberdeen University Library MS 25, fo. 20v.

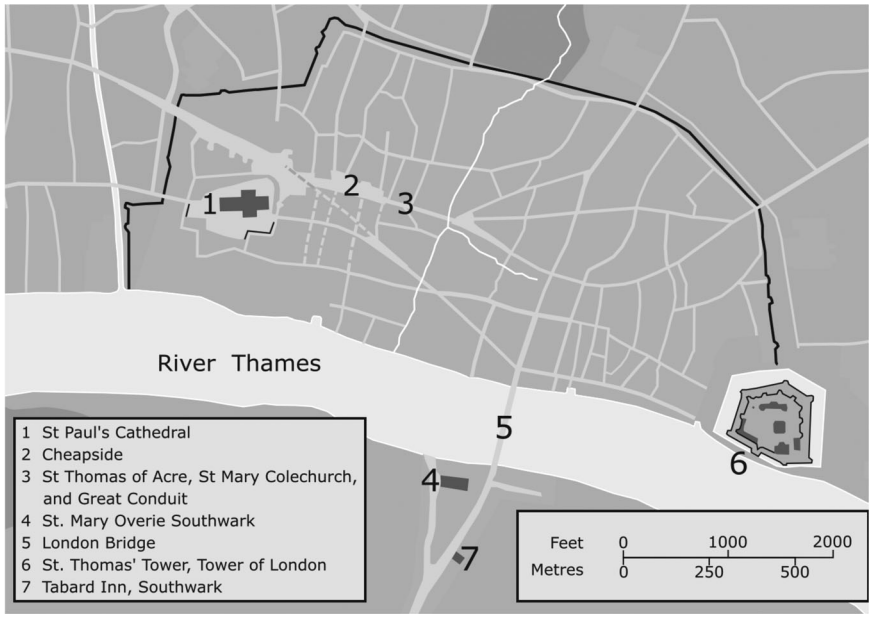

Figure 1 Outline map of medieval London (*c*.1300) showing main sites named within the text.

a period when the city was being rebuilt on stone foundations.[17] In part this was necessary work following fires in the 1130s which destroyed much of the eastern part of the city, including the old wooden London Bridge and many of Gilbert Becket's properties, and set back work on St Paul's cathedral, which had been ongoing since the incineration of the wooden church in a fire of 1087.[18] The city was thus rapidly and noticeably changing from the one in which St Thomas had grown up (Figure 1). The city of his 'rising' was itself rising, both in terms of its importance to the country and physically in its skyline. After his death, Thomas was to stand as protector of this renewed metropolis, joining and even superseding St Paul as the city's patron saint. This is most clearly depicted on the seal of the City of London (Figure 2), the earliest reference to which comes from 1219.[19] The double-sided seal shows St Paul on the obverse and St Thomas on the reverse. St Paul stands with

[17] D. Keene, 'London from the post-Roman period to 1300' in D. Palliser (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, I: *600–1540* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 187–216, at p. 194

[18] D. Keene, 'Fire in London: destruction and reconstruction, A.D. 982–1676', in M. Körner (ed.), *Destruction and Reconstruction of Towns: Destruction by Earthquakes, Fire and Water* (Bern, 1999), pp. 187–211.

[19] E. New, 'The Common Seal and communal identity in medieval London', in S. Solway (ed.), *Medieval Coins and Seals: Constructing Identity, Signifying Power* (Turnhout, 2015), pp. 297–318.

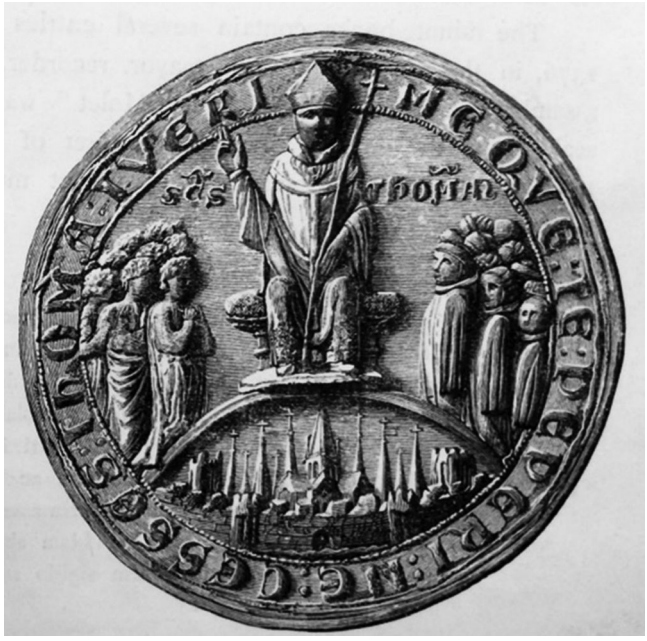

Figure 2 Reverse of the Common Seal of the City of London, late twelfth or early thirteenth century. Reproduced from L. Jewitt and W. H. St John Hope, *The Corporation Plate and Insignia of Office of the Cities and Towns of England and Wales*, II (London, 1895), p. 119.

sword raised over the city as seen from the south, while St Thomas is seated in majesty over the city seen from the north, with laity and clergy supplicating to him on either side.[20] The seal reinforces the link between Thomas's birthplace and his posthumous patronage of city and citizens through the inscription: 'Cease not, Thomas, to protect me who brought you forth.'[21] Particularly notable on both sides of the seal are the tall church spires around the massive central St Paul's cathedral, in which St Thomas had a prominent chapel and altar, all of which were a part of the rebuilding of the city in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.[22] The conjunction of Thomas, citizens, clergy, city, and churches echoes FitzStephen's picture of London's Christian present and future surpassing the glories of classical Rome by these same means. Thomas is not depicted

[20] J. Cherry, 'Imago Castelli: the depiction of castles on medieval seals', *Chateau Gaillard*, 15 (1990), pp. 83–90, at p. 85.
[21] 'Me que te peperi ne cesses Thoma, tueri'; C. Barron, 'The political culture of medieval London', in L. Clark and C. Carpenter (eds), *Political Culture in Late Medieval Britain* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 111–34, at pp. 113–14.
[22] J. Schofield, *St Paul's Cathedral before Wren* (Swindon, 2011), pp. 63–102; A. Thacker, 'The cult of saints and the liturgy', in D. Keene, R. A. Burns and A. Saint (eds), *St Paul's: The Cathedral Church of London 604–2004* (London, 2004), pp. 113–22, at pp. 118, 120.

here in the more common image of his martyrdom, as he is on the seal of the archbishops and city of Canterbury, but in its aftermath: resurrected over the city of his birth.

In terms of the reconstruction of medieval London, Thomas had a particularly material effect on the construction of one of the city's most important structural elements: the first stone London Bridge.[23] As noted above, the wooden bridge had burned down in the 1130s, rendering impassable what was throughout the Middle Ages the only road crossing over the Thames after the bridge at Kingston, twenty miles upriver. There was a need to rebuild the bridge in a more permanent form, not least because much of London's recent prosperity had been founded on its position at the centre of a number of trade and transport networks. To rebuild in stone, however, was an ambitious and expensive project: 'one of the great building enterprises of medieval England'.[24] The extent to which Thomas's cult was integral to the enterprise has hitherto been largely overlooked. The rebuilding began in around 1176 under the financial guidance of Peter, priest of St Mary Colechurch where Thomas had been baptised.[25] The bridge was funded by the charitable bequests of confraternities and guilds founded for the purpose, and a central chapel dedicated to St Thomas was the focus of these charitable activities. Caroline Barron notes that cultic enthusiasm following St Thomas's martyrdom 'presented the opportunity for such an expensive enterprise'.[26] Rather than attempting to attract the vast funds needed for the bridge by positioning it as a secular corporate project, the bridge construction could be marketed as a devotional offering to London's own recently martyred saint with suitably anti-royalist credentials for the independent-minded citizens. As such Peter of Colechurch, associated with the baptismal church of the martyr, which may itself have been an early cultic site in the city, was an ideal project director. Derek Keene notes that there is no evidence of him as a designer or builder, but he was the first of the wardens of the bridge's landed endowment, continuing his relationship with the project for thirty years until his death in 1205, four years before the bridge was completed. He was buried in the central bridge chapel of St Thomas, further indicating that this was built as a primary feature.[27]

The cooperation required for the construction of the bridge was itself an important step in the formation of London's civic identity. The Bridge Trust became the largest single landowner in the city, mainly around St Paul's and the bridge itself, with concentrations of shops along

[23] D. Keene, 'London Bridge and the identity of the medieval city', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 51 (2000), pp. 143–56, at pp. 146–53; B. Watson, T. Brigham and T. Dyson, *London Bridge: 2000 Years of a River Crossing* (London, 2001), pp. 83–155.
[24] Keene, 'London Bridge', p. 146.
[25] D. Keene, 'Peter of Colechurch (d. 1205)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
[26] C. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People, 1200–1500* (Oxford, 2004), p. 50.
[27] Keene, 'London Bridge', p. 146; Watson, Brigham and Dyson, *London Bridge*, p. 83; C. Welch, *History of the Tower Bridge* (London, 1894), pp. 29–33.

Paternoster Row, Old Change, and by the fifteenth century in the parishes of St Audoen and St Nicholas Shambles. In the first half of the thirteenth century, at least, the bridge's income and maintenance were managed by wardens in conjunction with the confraternity of St Thomas and the chaplains of the bridge chapel, where the muniments were stored at that time.[28] The seal of the Bridge Trust showed images of St Thomas on both front and back, in majesty and martyrdom, from the earliest survivals of the late twelfth century through to 1542 when it was changed 'forasmuch as the ymage of Thomas Beckett . . . ys graven therein'.[29] The stone bridge was a clear necessity for the city, but from the 1170s the impetus and devotional focus for the project was its nascent patron saint.

The most intimately cultic site in London was the house reckoned to be the site of Thomas's birth – the former property of Gilbert Becket on Cheapside. It is not clear how early in the cult of St Thomas this site became devotionally important. As far as is known it remained a private house after Thomas's death, in the hands of his sister Agnes, passing to her son or nephew Theobald de Helles, and, by the 1220s, in turn to his son Thomas.[30] The first clear reference to the birth-site is in an undated charter of the first two decades of the thirteenth century. Perhaps in connection with the preparation for the translation of St Thomas's body at Canterbury in 1220, Thomas de Haverell, a former sheriff of London, gave 20s. annually to quit the service due to the capital lord of the fee on 'the land where St Thomas archbishop of Canterbury was born, in the parish of Bl Mary de Colechurch'. This land 'the citizens of London bought in order to build a chapel there in honour of Bl. Thomas the Martyr'.[31] The 'citizens of London' had also acquired properties around St Mary Colechurch by the early thirteenth century, possibly as part of 'a plan to gain control of sites in the city associated with St Thomas'.[32]

Subsequently, in 1227/8, the site of St Thomas's birth was granted by Thomas de Helles to the master and knightly brothers of the Hospital of St Thomas of Acre for the foundation of a hospital. The community was an order of Hospitallers dedicated to St Thomas which had been established in Acre in 1191/2, probably by Ralph de Diceto's chaplain, William, with the support of King Richard as thanks for his safe passage to the Holy Land. The Order never had more than four houses, and its operations in the Holy Land were hindered by the poverty of their foundation. In 1227/8 the order was reorganised as a military order under

[28] Keene, 'London Bridge', p. 148; V. Harding and L. Wright, *London Bridge: Selected Accounts and Rentals 1381–1538*, London Record Society, 31 (1995), p. xvii; Watson, Brigham and Dyson, *London Bridge*, pp. 84, 128.

[29] J. A. McEwan, *Seals in Medieval London 1050–1300*, London Record Society (2016), p. 35.

[30] D. Keene and V. Harding, *Historical Gazetteer of London Before the Great Fire: Cheapside* (London, 1987), St Mary Colechurch 105/18 and n. 6; A. J. Forey, 'The military order of St Thomas of Acre', *English Historical Review*, 92 (1977), pp. 481–503, at pp. 485–7.

[31] 'quam terram cives London emerent ad faciendum unam capellam ibidem in honorem beati Thome martyris', Mercers Hall Archives, Register of Writings I, fo. 108r–v.

[32] Keene and Harding, *Historical Gazetteer*, 105/0.

the Teutonic Rule by Peter des Roches, bishop of Winchester, while he was in the Holy Land.[33] The date of the hospital's foundation has hinged on the brothers being called 'milites' in the foundation charter. Peter des Roches landed in the Holy Land in October 1227, while Eustace de Fauconberg, bishop of London and the first witness to the charter, died in October 1228. The date of des Roches's reformation of the Order as a military one is itself dependent on the foundation charter, as his reforms did not receive papal confirmation until 1236. As Nicholas Vincent notes, the news would have to have travelled back to England 'very quickly' in order for the foundation of the hospital to have taken place within a year of the reformation of the Order.[34]

It is easier to explicate the sequence of events around the foundation of the hospital in London if we see Thomas de Helles as a symbolic grantee of the site in the form of a living relative of St Thomas rather than the principal actor. Instead, Peter des Roches may have played that role. He had a long-standing devotion to St Thomas. As bishop of Winchester he oversaw the rebuilding of the hospital dedicated to St Thomas in Southwark after a fire had devastated it in 1212, and he visited Canterbury cathedral on his way to the Holy Land in 1227. Furthermore, the fee in which St Thomas's birthplace, which was to become the hospital, sat was held by the Marmion family. Robert Marmion was the ward of Peter des Roches between 1219 and 1221. Des Roches's control of St Thomas's birthplace, through this wardship, probably coincided with the purchase of quitclaim by Thomas de Haverell of the site, noted above, and as the fee was only held in custody at this time would account for why the lord of the fee is unnamed in de Haverell's charter. The importance of des Roches and the Marmions to the foundation is shown in the early post-foundation history of the hospital. Robert Marmion's son Philip was also a ward of des Roches from 1233, and subsequently a donor to the hospital.[35] Des Roches's importance to the foundation of the hospital can also be seen in the witness list of the foundation charter, comprised almost entirely of London clergy, as Eustace de Fauconberg, bishop of London, had been one of des Roches's *familiares* at Winchester prior to his elevation.[36] Eustace was also, as bishop of London, the tenurial lord of Thomas de Helles in the manor of Helles, Stepney.[37]

In the light of this network of clergy in the foundation of a community at Acre dedicated to St Thomas, the foundation of the hospital looks less like the personal devotional act of a minor knight and more like a corporate and ecclesiastical enterprise focused on the patronage of Peter des Roches. Rather than seeing the quitclaim of Thomas de Haverell as

[33] Forey, 'Military order', pp. 481–2, 486–8.
[34] N. Vincent, *Peter des Roches: An Alien in English Politics, 1205–1238* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 248–9.
[35] Vincent, *Peter des Roches*, pp. 82, 249, 361; Forey, 'Military order', p. 490. My thanks to Paul Webster for suggesting the importance of des Roches to the foundation process.
[36] N. Vincent (ed.), *English Episcopal Acta IX: Winchester 1205–1238* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 193–5.
[37] T. F. T. Baker (ed.), *A History of the County of Middlesex*, XI: *Stepney, Bethnal Green* (London, 1998), p. 34.

an abortive attempt at a foundation of a new community, it appears to be an early stage in a longer process of foundation. This is particularly so if, as seems likely, it was granted at a time when Peter des Roches held the wardship of the fee, who was thus involved not only in the reorganisation of the Order to which the site was granted but from the outset in the grant of the site itself. It is thus notable that the citizens of London were explicitly mentioned at this point, highlighting their involvement from the start. With the birth site in his hands, des Roches set the wheels in motion for a shrine church for which, following his interests in the Holy Land, he eventually provided an appropriate order of Hospitallers. The grant by Thomas de Helles was far more a symbolic involvement of the family of St Thomas than an endowment, although the hospital sought to highlight this particular aspect of its foundation throughout its history. Certainly Thomas de Helles was not wealthy enough to sustain a community of religious through his own income, and the earliest grants of land were not recorded until the 1230s.[38] Presumably the Hospitallers used St Mary Colechurch up to that point. Thus the seemingly personal nature of the foundation charter itself hides a much more corporate undertaking.

Perhaps because of its later success as the home of the Mercers the medieval hospital has been seen as small and penurious, a judgment seemingly confirmed by the fall of the house into administration under poor management, first in the early fourteenth and again in the early sixteenth centuries. Yet the hospital held a fairly substantial property portfolio around Cheapside, including the appropriation of St Mary Colechurch, with other lands in Stratford, Wapping, Stepney and Doncaster. Lands administered on behalf of the order in Ireland and Cyprus probably brought no income to the house.[39] An early sixteenth-century statement of accounts shows that the hospital had an annual income, at a low point in the house's fortunes when many of its lands had been mortgaged, of £230 from its London properties and £171 from those elsewhere, making it one of the richest hospitals in England. If anything, the hospital was a victim of its own popularity, spending in the same year £24 9s on bread, £34 7s on ale and beer, and £112 1s 8d on hospitality, not including staffing and stipends.[40] The difficulties experienced by the house do not appear to have been the result of a lack of interest on the part of Londoners as to its function, symbolism or existence. The hospital certainly had a central position in the life of the city. While the wider civic ceremonial that was associated with the hospital in the later Middle Ages will be discussed below, we should note that by the fourteenth century the bell for Prime at St Thomas's was the signal to open the city's wicket gates each morning, and that for Vespers regulated the closing of Cheapside's markets.[41] The difficulties of founding a house in the centre

[38] Keene and Harding, *Historical Gazetteer*, 105/18.
[39] Forey, 'Military order', pp. 490–1.
[40] TNA, E 135/2/57, fo. 2r–v.
[41] Forey, 'Military order', p. 502.

of London in the early thirteenth century, at a time when substantial landed endowments were difficult to elicit even with the patronage of Peter des Roches, with resources adequate to the attention that St Thomas's celebrated birthplace would inevitably attract, would seem to be more at the root of the hospital's problems.

Another major civic undertaking in the century after St Thomas's death was the construction, in the 1230s or 1240s, of what became known as the Great Conduit, the terminus of a city-wide water system directly outside the hospital and St Mary Colechurch. Derek Keene noted that the siting of the Great Conduit at the east end of Cheapside, rather than at a more practical central site, suggests that it was connected to the Hospital of St Thomas, which was being constructed at that time and was thus a 'distinctly civic' enterprise linked to the city's patron saint. The Great Conduit was never able to provide water to more than a tiny percentage of the citizens, but had a 'profound religious and symbolic significance'. It certainly became both a landmark in the city and a station on numerous later medieval civic pageants.[42] We might go further than this, and see the siting and construction of the conduit in terms of St Thomas's long-standing association with blessed water.[43] Moreover, a widespread story of the later Middle Ages stated that a spring in Canterbury cathedral had changed colour on Thomas's death from milk to blood-red five times.[44] It is tempting to think that the filling of the conduit with wine on coronation feasts and at other major royal and civic events, perhaps most notably in 1273 for the accession of Edward I and in 1415 for the return of Henry V from Agincourt, would have been a recognisable echo of this early Thomasine water miracle.[45]

One further aspect of St Thomas' patronage of London in the thirteenth century is his association with the Tower of London. On the night of St George's Day 1241, as Matthew Paris records, St Thomas appeared to a priest in a vision standing by the newly rebuilt walls of the Tower and striking them down with his crozier. A clerk accompanying the saintly archbishop explained that 'St Thomas the martyr, a Londoner, considered that these walls were an insult and prejudicial to Londoners, so irreparably destroyed them.' Had St Thomas not done it, the clerk continued, his recently deceased successor St Edmund of Abingdon would have. That morning the citizens awoke to find the walls collapsed.[46] Henry III's extension of the Tower's outer defensive walls had doubled its

[42] D. Keene, 'Issues of water in medieval London', *Urban History*, 28/2 (2001), pp. 161–79, at pp. 176–8.
[43] A. A. Jordan, 'The "Water of Thomas Becket": water as medium, metaphor, and relic', in C. Kosso and A. Scott (eds), *The Nature and Function of Water, Baths, Bathing and Hygiene from Antiquity through the Renaissance* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 479–500.
[44] British Library MS Harley 636, fo. 143v.
[45] D. Lewis, '"For the poor to drink and the rich to dress their meat": The first London water conduit', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 55 (2004), pp. 39–68, at pp. 51–2.
[46] H. R. Luard (ed.), *Matthaei Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani Chronica Majora*, 7 vols (London, 1872–83), IV, pp. 93–4.

size at a time when he was in conflict with the barons of the city, and the Tower 'had always been intended less to protect London than to control it'.[47] The mention of St Edmund as the anti-royalist saint *du jour* is thus easily explicable.[48] Matthew Paris noted some of the Londoners' fears in his account of the Becket vision, particularly that the prison was so big that even if several of the leading citizens should dare to fight for the liberty of the city, there were enough cells to place them all in solitary confinement.[49] The vision took place exactly a year after an earthquake had damaged the walls and a gatehouse, as Matthew Paris had also recorded, and there is firm supporting archaeological and documentary evidence for the rebuilding of the walls following a collapse in 1240/1, so the vision represents, or at least echoes, a genuine historical event.[50] Thomas's involvement here reinforces his paramount status as defender of the city and its liberties, even over and above the new and potentially more popularly vibrant cult of St Edmund.

Following the accession of Edward I to the throne, between 1275 and 1279 a new water gate was constructed on a grand scale with royal lodgings on the first floor, and such luxuries as tiled floors, opening windows with coloured glass, and painted statues on the riverside walls.[51] The name now attached to this impressive building is St Thomas's Tower, which has prompted some speculation that it was named after a chapel dedicated to St Thomas of Canterbury in an attempt to appease him and prevent a recurrence of the destruction of 1240/1.[52] The medieval names of the individual towers are notoriously mutable, and St Thomas's tower was variously known as *magna/nova camera super/versus Tamisie* in Edward I's time, and later commonly as the Watergate. The tower was stated to be divided into a hall and a chamber as early as 1278, and in 1339 and 1344–5 the chamber was *camera sancti Thome martiris*.[53] Parnell thought that the chamber commonly said to be St Thomas's chapel or oratory was too small to have that function, given Edward I's opulence in devotion, but the 1339 accounts show that a chamber was being introduced between St Thomas's chamber and the king's hall, which may have reduced the size of the former.[54] The name St Thomas's Tower for the whole structure is recorded in 1531.[55] The earliest instance of the

[47] D. Carpenter, 'Henry III and the Tower of London', *London Journal*, 19/2 (1994), pp. 95–107, at p. 95.
[48] J. Creamer, 'St Edmund of Canterbury and Henry III in the shadow of Thomas Becket', in J. Burton, P. Schofield, and B. Weiler (eds), *Thirteenth Century England XIV: Proceedings of the Aberystwyth and Lampeter Conference, 2011* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 129–39, at p. 131.
[49] Luard, *Matthaei Parisiensis*, IV, p. 95.
[50] G. Keevill, *The Tower of London Moat: Archaeological Excavations 1995–9* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 75–8.
[51] S. Thurley, 'Royal lodgings at the Tower of London 1216–1327', *Architectural History*, 38 (1995), pp. 47–8; G. Parnell, *The Tower of London* (London, 1993) pp. 36–57, at pp. 38–9.
[52] K. J. Mears, *The Tower of London: 900 Years of English History* (London, 1988), p. 35.
[53] R. A. Brown, H. M. Colvin and A. J. Taylor, *The History of the King's Works: The Middle Ages*, 2 vols (London, 1963), II, pp. 718–26.
[54] Parnell, *Tower of London*, pp. 39–40.
[55] J. Bayley, *The History and Antiquities of the Tower of London* (London, 1821), I, Appendix p. xiii.

name now more commonly attached to the water gate – Traitors' Gate – is first recorded in Anthonis van den Wyngaerde's map of *c.*1544, surely indicating not just the route taken by traitors to the crown, but a pointed renaming of a tower dedicated to the sainted royal antagonist.[56]

II

While these Thomas-associated sites were clearly civically important, whether they were popular devotional sites is less easy to trace. Indeed, the extent to which St Thomas inspired popular devotion among Londoners, particularly in the later Middle Ages, has been called into question. The frequent use of St Thomas's name and connections throughout the period as a measure to elicit donations or influence petitions indicates that he was at least thought to retain some place in the Londoners' affections. The cult would also have received a boost following the command of the 1398 Convocation that Tuesdays were to be held sacred to St Thomas throughout the province of Canterbury, and that weekly memorials were to be celebrated.[57] In 1458 a generous indulgence of seven years and seven quarantines was granted to the Hospital of St Thomas of Acre for anyone visiting or offering there in the octaves of the Translation or Martyrdom, Easter, or on Tuesdays in Lent, 'because the said St. Thomas was born on the spot where the church . . . was built' and because Tuesdays were sacred to him.[58]

The hospital, as the site of St Thomas' birth, was the most obvious devotional focal point in the city. Yet we lack the detailed financial records and accounts of offerings that would allow us to gauge its popularity. Even with such accounts it would be impossible to tell whether the income was from 'pilgrims' or represented civic devotion. Keene and Harding suggest that the Hospital of St Thomas of Acre was largely maintained through cash donations and offerings rather than from its landed endowment. From 1249 the hospital had burial rights for the brothers, the familiars of the house, pilgrims, and others who wished to be buried there.[59] The known burials from the mid-fourteenth century onwards include some of the most prominent citizens and the earls of Ormond who claimed, probably erroneously, descent from St Thomas. A number of these were interred in the hospital church in magnificent tombs, which would have given it both an added centrality to the devotional life of medieval London and a useful source of revenue.[60] The church

[56] H. Colvin and S. Foister (eds), *The Panorama of London circa 1544 by Anthonis van den Wyngaerde*, London Topographical Society 151 (1996), p. 37.
[57] D. Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae* (London, 1737), III, p. 234.
[58] J. A. Twemlow (ed.), *Calendar of Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, XI: *1455–1464* (London, 1921), pp. 515–16.
[59] Mercers' Hall Archives, Register of Writings 1, fo. 2r.
[60] Keene and Harding, *Historical Gazetteer*, 105/18; A. Sutton, 'The Hospital of St Thomas of Acre of London: the search for patronage, liturgical improvement, and a school, under Master John Neel, 1420–63', in C. Burgess and M. Heale (eds), *The Late Medieval English College and its Context* (York,

itself was arranged in such a fashion as to appeal to popular devotion. The north side appears to have been particularly associated with St Thomas, with a recorded stained glass cycle in the north aisle windows, and from will evidence his altar was on the northern side of the nave rather than being the high altar.[61] This may have been a remembrance of the superposition of the church on the former domestic building of Thomas's birth, recognising that the domestic quarters at the rear, to the north, would have been the precise location of the nativity. Yet its position in the nave would also have made it more publicly visible and thus potentially a pilgrimage attraction. At the Reformation a text explicating Thomas's birth at the site was one of the cultic items removed from the church.[62]

The hospital also made much of its apparent foundation by the family of St Thomas in order to encourage devotions. In petitions seeking to alleviate their 'poverty', from the fourteenth century the Master and brethren emphasised their foundation by Thomas's 'kin and relations', a claim repeated throughout the fifteenth century along with the false assertion that the founder, Thomas de Helles, was the husband of St Thomas's sister Agnes.[63] In 1466, Václav Šašek, the Bohemian chronicler, records that he went to 'the church where St Thomas was born, the tombs of his mother and sister are there'.[64] This is the only medieval record of a pilgrim-style visit to the hospital, or of the attractions within, and it is not entirely clear what Šašek actually saw. Neither Thomas's mother nor his sister could feasibly have been interred there, so this may be an imaginative reattribution of some civic or noble tombs. A similar desire to aggregate popular meaning to the site can be seen in the claim, first appearing in 1400, that St Mary Colechurch was also the baptismal church of St Edmund of Bury. There was no historical truth to this, and, as Keene and Harding point out, the only link between London and St Edmund is that his relics rested there for three years in the eleventh century.[65] Yet St Edmund was a very popular saint in medieval London, and his feast one of five along with SS. Thomas, Paul, Erkenwald and Katherine regularly declared a solemnity throughout London diocese according to the Use of St Paul's.[66] That Thomas and Edmund's purported baptism occurs in the licence to found a fraternity to St Katherine in the church shows the extent to which these liturgically important saints were grouped at this civically important site, and perhaps creating complementary centres

2008), pp. 199–210, at pp. 206–10; J. Watney, *Some Account of the Hospital of St Thomas of Acon* (London, 1892), pp. 174–6.

[61] Sutton, 'Hospital of St Thomas', p. 201; TNA, E 135/2/57, fo. 32v; Keene and Harding, *Historical Gazetteer*, 105/18.

[62] Keene and Harding, *Historical Gazetteer*, 105/18.

[63] C. Given-Wilson (ed.), *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, 16 vols (Woodbridge, 2005), I, p. 288; V. p. 74; *Calendar of Papal Registers*, XII: *1458–71*, pp. 32–4; Forey, 'Military order', pp. 485, 495.

[64] M. Letts (ed.), *The Travels of Leo of Rozmital* (Cambridge, 1957), p. 51.

[65] Keene and Harding, *Historical Gazetteer*, 105/0.

[66] Thacker, 'Cult of saints', p. 118.

for Paul/Erkenwald and Thomas/Edmund/Katherine at either end of Cheapside. The lack of any written evidence for St Edmund's purported baptism should tell us more about the vast and dynamic oral hinterland of devotion behind the surviving hagiography, and the desire to attach popular saints together, than cause us to dismiss these claims as merely erroneous.

More than pilgrimage to St Thomas's cultic sites within the city, however, pilgrimage to Canterbury continued to be an important part of the religious life of the city. As exemplified in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, London was also a gathering-place for pilgrims from all over the country. By the 1390s, horses could be hired at Southwark as part of a two-stage relay to Canterbury, with an overnight stay at Rochester, at a shilling per stage making 4s for the return journey. The horses were branded to prevent pilgrims from taking them off-course or misappropriating them.[67] A more leisurely ride on the same route could take four days each way, as Chaucer's pilgrims are shown to have done, and similarly four days for those who went on foot. Anyone coming from north of the Thames would have made use of the road networks to travel along the best-kept highways to London, and across London Bridge with its chapel of St Thomas. With the exception of the *Canterbury Tales* there are frustratingly few written accounts of London's pilgrims to Canterbury, but they do appear on occasion and in such manner as suggests a well-trodden and popular pilgrimage route. In 1420, the monks of Canterbury affixed a poster to the doors of St Paul's detailing the various indulgences that could be gained by a pilgrimage to Canterbury for the Feast of the Translation, and of the places that could be visited in the cathedral to gain absolution, and the miracles that had taken place there.[68] A 1451 miracle story in a sixteenth-century compilation from Canterbury cathedral tells how a woman from the outskirts of London who was coming to Canterbury on pilgrimage to St Thomas, 'as is commonly the case', had a fishbone stuck in her throat while eating on the journey and prayed to St Blaise, whose relics the cathedral also possessed, switching the object of her journey when she was cured.[69]

The best evidence for London's pilgrims are the many pilgrim badges of St Thomas which have been discovered in London particularly along the foreshore of the Thames.[70] It is tempting to see St Thomas's bridge chapel as the natural start and end point of pilgrimage from the city, and, following Brian Spencer, the deposits of pilgrim souvenirs as evidence of the practice of ritual deposition of pilgrim signs in the river at the end of the journey 'as a propitiatory gesture'.[71] More recent studies of London's river finds have cast much doubt on this theory, as the nature

[67] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, 1391–6* (London, 1905), pp. 712–13.
[68] R. Foreville, *Le Jubilé de Saint Thomas Becket du XIIIe au XVe siècle: Étude et Documents* (Paris, 1958), p. 137.
[69] Lambeth Palace Library MS 159, fo. 105v.
[70] B. Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges* (London, 1998), pp. 37–133.
[71] Ibid., p. 18.

of the river flow and the disposal of medieval household rubbish on or near the foreshore make contexts for deposition at the very least difficult, and more realistically impossible, to ascertain. Furthermore a substantial number of finds were located upstream of the bridge.[72] The discovery of so many pilgrim badges in a 'battered and fragmentary' state, often missing their pins, and in the context of other, non-pilgrimage related clothing accessories such as buttons and pins, surely points to the idea that these are either accidental depositions, caused by the breaking of the pin when boarding a ferry, for example, or purposeful discarding of broken badges.[73] In Spencer's earlier analysis of the finds from the Trig Lane excavations, upstream from the Bridge, he claimed instead that 'most Canterbury pilgrims might keep their *ampullae* for the remainder of their lives', although as each generation would be expected to go on pilgrimage and return with their own souvenir this attachment would not last much longer than the lifespan of the pilgrim, hence the disposal of these items.[74] Clearly some pilgrim souvenirs were devotedly kept, while others since at least the time when Augustine the metal-caster was melting them down in the 1170s were recycled or discarded altogether once they were broken, surpassed by a newer souvenir, or had ceased to serve their purpose. In the late fifteenth century the children of Miles Freebridge, of Aldermanbury in London, were playing with a badge of St Thomas when the infant child choked on it and had to be rescued by the intercession of the late King Henry VI. In this account the souvenirs are explicitly said to be retained as a 'sign and memory' of the saint and his shrine, the contemplation of which should draw the pilgrim back for a return visit.[75]

The bridge chapel itself appears to have anticipated that numbers of pilgrims would be passing through around the feasts of St Thomas, suggesting it formed an important start and end point for London's pilgrims to Canterbury. For Derek Keene the construction of the bridge 'was the most powerful symbol of the connection between London and Canterbury'.[76] In the 1350 inventory of the chapel's goods a piece of the True Cross, a ring with a tooth of St Richard [of Chichester?], and a purse containing diverse relics were noted to stand on the altar of St Thomas 'for pilgrims'.[77] Occasional receipts of offerings show that on

[72] J. Lee, 'Medieval pilgrims' badges in rivers: the curious history of a non-theory', *Journal of Medieval Art Historiography*, 11 (2014), pp. 1–11; H. Forsyth and G. Egan, *Toys, Trifles and Trinkets: Base Metal Miniatures from London 1200–1800* (London, 2005), pp. 20–5; Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs*, p. 25, fig. 14.

[73] B. Spencer, 'King Henry of Windsor and the London pilgrim', in J. Bird, H. Chapman and J. Clark (eds), *Collectanea Londiniensa* (London, 1978), pp. 235–64, at p. 261; Forsyth and Egan, *Toys, Trifles and Trinkets*, p. 24.

[74] B. Spencer, 'Pilgrim souvenirs from the medieval waterfront excavations at Trig Lane, London, 1974–76', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 33 (1982), pp. 304–23, at pp. 307, 321 n. 3.

[75] P. Grosjean (ed.), *Henrici VI Angliae regis miracula postuma; ex codice musei Britannici regio 13. c. viii* (Brussels, 1935), pp. 204–5.

[76] Keene, 'Peter of Colechurch'.

[77] Welch, *Tower Bridge*, p. 261.

St Thomas's translation feast and other feasts in the year the boxes in the chapel accrued 26s 2d in 1461–2 and 15s 4d in 1501–2.[78] These sums are far from large, but there was a decline in cash offerings generally from the late fifteenth century. In 1504–5 the total of offerings at the Martyrdom Chapel in Canterbury, one of the most important cultic sites for St Thomas, was only £3 11s 9d, just over four and a half times what had been offered at the Bridge a few years earlier.[79]

III

One of the more exotic aspects of St Thomas's medieval cult was also most likely of London provenance: the story of his 'Saracen' mother. According to this tale, Gilbert Becket 'took the cross' and journeyed from London to Jerusalem where he was captured by the Emir. The Emir's daughter fell in love with Gilbert and, after he escaped, she found her way to a ship bound for England. On arriving in the kingdom she had no means of communication other than to say 'London, London', and by good fortune made her way to Gilbert's house where, surrounded by a curious and disorderly crowd, she was recognised by his serving-man. Gilbert's house is said to have been in one of the better-known and more frequented parts of the city, where a hospital had been constructed in honour of St Thomas. She fell down in a faint, and Gilbert's servant conducted her to the house of a friendly widow in the neighbourhood. Gilbert went to consult the bishop of London at St Paul's where six bishops had gathered 'to discuss difficult matters of church and state'. The bishop of Chichester prophesied her saintly son, and the bishops agreed she should be baptised and Gilbert should wed her. She was baptised in St Paul's by the six bishops, married Gilbert, and shortly after gave birth to Thomas.[80]

Although in form it is a fairly simple folktale it was of particular importance to Londoners as it expanded the previously unexciting London 'nativity story'. The narrative of the exotic besotted princess was common in twelfth- and thirteenth-century romance, but it is unusual to find it attached to a saint's life.[81] We should take seriously the suggestion that the foundation of the Hospital of St Thomas of Acre on the site of his birth gave rise to a folk-etymological story to explain the Middle Eastern toponym.[82] The prominence of London in the story, exemplified in the princess's only English word being 'London' and the geographical familiarity with the city which allows all the action to take place along the Cheapside-St Paul's axis, acknowledging this as the busiest street, also suggest a London provenance. The earliest version of the story appears as an interpolation in the *Life* of St Thomas by Edward Grim in the compilation of St Thomas's hagiography known as *Quadrilogus*

[78] Harding and Wright, *London Bridge*, pp. 123, 149.
[79] Canterbury Cathedral Archives, DCC Lit MS C 11, fos 38r–40r.
[80] Robertson and Sheppard, *Materials*, II, pp. 453–8.
[81] D. Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven, 1977), pp. 136–77.
[82] P. A. Brown, *The Development of the Legend of Thomas Becket* (Philadelphia, 1930), pp. 65–7.

I.[83] While the circumstances of the composition of *Quadrilogus I* are obscure, the earliest surviving manuscript versions date from the mid-thirteenth century.[84] The hospital occurs in all the earliest versions, and thus gives a *terminus post quem* of *c*.1228 for the interpolation of the story into Edward Grim's *Life*, and probably around a decade later as the hospital was stated to be built. The reference to the meeting of the six bishops, and the singling out of the bishop of Chichester (changed to the more prominent see of Winchester in the later medieval English versions) gives a possible dating context of *c*.1240. Between 1237 and 1241 there were a notable series of church councils, many convening at St Paul's, which discussed 'difficult matters of church and state' and pronounced on the royal infringement of church liberties.[85] The bishop of Chichester at this time was Ralph de Neville (d. 1244), a prominent resident of London with his palace on Chancery Lane, and, as St Thomas had been, chancellor. Neville found himself in conflict with the king's wishes and was deprived of the great seal in 1236 or 1238, against his will and to popular disapproval, and was also prevented by royal decree from promotion to the see of Winchester. He was hailed by reformers as a model chancellor who had been chosen 'by the common counsel of the kingdom' while Henry III was in his minority, a custom which they sought to introduce permanently. As David Carpenter suggests 'when the reformers [of 1244] looked back over past chancellors, they can . . . have thought of only one man, that was Ralph de Neville'.[86] In this light it would appear that the meeting of the bishops and the prophesising of the bishop of Chichester introduce some contemporary political commentary into an otherwise somewhat generic tale. Matters of church and state thus bookend Thomas's life, and include a clear nod to a well-respected chancellor who prophesises the birth of his predecessor in the role. Given these contemporary references it seems plausible to assign a date of *c*.1240 to the recording of the tale.

The story became an important part of the medieval Becket *mythos*, translated into the popular Middle English prose and verse legendaries of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and a prominent episode portrayed in the later medieval pageants.[87] Lawrence Warner has demonstrated its

[83] A. Duggan, *Thomas Becket: A Textual History of his Letters* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 205, 2232; A. Duggan, 'The Lyell version of the *Quadrilogus* life of St Thomas of Canterbury', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 112 (1994), pp. 105–38, at pp. 106–7, 112–13.

[84] Oxford, University College MS 96; BL, Harley MS 978.

[85] R. L. Storey, 'The First Convocation, 1257?', in P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (eds), *Thirteenth Century England III: Proceedings of the Newcastle Upon Tyne Conference 1989* (Woodbridge, 1991), pp.151–9, at pp. 152–4.

[86] D. A. Carpenter, 'Chancellor Ralph de Neville and Plans of Political Reform, 1215–1258', in P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd, *Thirteenth Century England II: Proceedings of the Newcastle Upon Tyne Conference 1987* (Woodbridge, 1988), pp. 69–80.

[87] R. Mills, 'Translation, Conversion and Becket's "Heathen" Mother', in H. Blurton and J. Wogan-Browne (eds), *Rethinking the South English Legendaries* (Manchester, 2011), pp. 381–402; R. Mills. 'Invisible translation, language difference and the scandal of Becket's mother', in E. Campbell and R. Mills (eds), *Rethinking Medieval Translation: Ethics, Politics, Theory* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 125–46.

vitality in later medieval London, appearing in sermons and, he argues, as inspiration for Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, itself supposedly aimed at the mercantile communities around St Thomas of Acre.[88] Thomas's parents, one real, one mythical, became cultic objects in their own right. In some later retellings of the nativity story, the site of the Hospital of St Thomas of Acre was the birthplace of Gilbert Becket as well.[89] In the later Middle Ages Gilbert and his princess-bride were believed to be buried in the Pardon Churchyard of St Paul's, in a chapel founded by Gilbert and subsequently dedicated to his son. In the fifteenth century this was the focus of major civic ritual which will be discussed below, but in terms of the antiquity of this belief the evidence is lacking. The archaeological remains are of a chapel no earlier than Dean More's foundation to St Thomas and St Anne in the 1420s, and it is quite possible that the association of the Pardon Churchyard with the parents of St Thomas arose at a similar time to the construction of the chapel.[90]

Also *c*.1420, coinciding with the Jubilee celebrations of the Translation at Canterbury, John Carpenter the common clerk of London was compiling the book of London's customs and rituals known as the *Liber albus*.[91] His description of the rites surrounding the annual installation of the mayor make clear the primacy of St Thomas in civic ceremonial. On 29 October, the day after the mayor's oathtaking at the Guildhall, following a similar oathtaking at Westminster, the new mayor would hold a feast at his house. The mayor, his livery and the aldermen would then gather at the Hospital of St Thomas of Acre and process to St Paul's. In the nave of the cathedral they prayed to Bishop William (1051–75), who was said to have obtained liberties for the city. They then moved to the churchyard 'where the bodies of the parents of St Thomas lie' and prayed. Then returning up Cheapside, by torchlight if it was dark, they each made an offering of a penny at the Hospital of St Thomas before retiring. Similar processions were held on All Saints (1 November), St Stephen's (26 December), and St John the Evangelist (27 December), when they gathered at the hospital after a feast, heard vespers at St Paul's, and returned to the hospital. On the Feasts of Holy Innocents (28 December, the day before the Martyrdom of St Thomas), the Circumcision (1 January), Epiphany (6 January) and Purification (2 February) the mayor and aldermen celebrated vespers in the hospital.[92]

There is much in this that is recognisable from earlier known civic rituals. Cheapside was prominent as a processional route from the late

[88] L. Warner, 'Becket and the hopping bishops', *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 17 (2003), pp. 107–34; L. Warner, 'Adventurous Custance: St Thomas of Acre and Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*', in L. L. Howes, *Place, Space, and Landscape in Medieval Narrative* (Knoxville, 2007), pp. 43–55.

[89] R. Hamer and V. Russell, *Supplementary Lives in Some Manuscripts of the Gilte Legende* (Oxford, 2000), p. 285.

[90] Schofield, *St Paul's Cathedral*, pp. 170–1; C. M. Barron and M. Rousseau, 'Cathedral, city, and state 1300–1540', in Keene, Burns and Saint (eds), *St Paul's*, pp. 33–44, at pp. 35–6.

[91] Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 185.

[92] H. T. Riley (ed.), *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis: Liber albus, Liber custumarum, et Liber Horn*, 3 vols (London, 1859–62), I, pp. 26–8.

thirteenth century, although Carpenter explicitly states the role of the Hospital of St Thomas of Acre for the first time. The importance of St Thomas's parents, implied by the popularity of Thomas's nativity story from the mid-thirteenth century, is also brought to the fore. Gilbert's role as sheriff is not mentioned but would add significance to the mayoral pageantry. The installation of the mayor on 29 October was, as Caroline Barron suggests, 'the most important in the civic year when the whole city was en fête' accompanied by a 'carnival atmosphere' throughout the fifteenth century.[93] St Thomas and his family were at the very heart of this. Aside from the main mayoral installation, the concentration of civic activity after Christmas is particularly remarkable. In the celebrations around Christmastide the mayor and aldermen, in their liveries, visited the birthplace of the city's patron saint five times. Amy Appleford noted the cluster of celebrations around the feast of St Thomas, but we must surely see links being formed between the birth of Christ and that of the city's own saint, at the place of his birth, and in the season of his own birth and martyrdom.[94] In the city's fifteenth-century ritual we can see the London-centred character of the cult as home to the saint's 'rising', as William FitzStephen had written two and a half centuries ago.

However, we should be wary of extending the rituals of the fifteenth century back, merely because they appear to be so fully developed. It has been the habit of historians to take Carpenter at his word that these ceremonies were 'ancient', yet there is much in his account that is recorded for the first time.[95] Carpenter was, of course, capable of constructing new cultic associations within the city, but even if his compilation reflected current thinking on what was 'ancient' this may itself have had a rather more recent generation. Anne Sutton argues for the mastership of John Neel (1420–63) as a defining period in the history of the hospital, particularly thanks to his relationships with the Earls of Ormond and with John Carpenter. Yet Neel was clearly making his mark before he was master and almost certainly influenced ideas about the centrality of the Hospital to civic ritual before attaining the mastership.[96] Amy Appleford suggests that disputes between the city and St Paul's over access to the cathedral precincts were an important factor in Carpenter's commissioning of a *Dance of Death* series for the Pardon Churchyard in the early 1430s.[97] We might consider the inclusion of St Thomas's parents' graves in the major civic ritual of the year as another, earlier gambit in this contest. In this respect, the *Liber albus* is the earliest statement of Gilbert Becket and his wife being buried in the Pardon Churchyard. Although there are many earlier wills which reference the site, none make the association with St Thomas's parents – a notable omission. It should

[93] Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 152.
[94] A. Appleford, *Learning to Die in London, 1380–1540* (Philadelphia, 2015), p. 86.
[95] Ibid., pp. 84–7; Sutton, 'Hospital of St Thomas', p. 200.
[96] Sutton, 'Hospital of St Thomas', pp. 201–2.
[97] Appleford, *Learning to Die*, p. 87.

not be discounted that this was a relatively new aspect of the cult and shows, once again, how Londoners adapted their patron saint to new circumstances.

IV

Thomas, son of Gilbert Becket, found opportunity in a London which was growing yet unstable in the mid-twelfth century. He came from the type of middle-class family, with disposable wealth and civic pride, who would after his shocking martyrdom turn their funds to the promotion of his cult in both London and Canterbury, and for them he was 'Lux Londoniarum'. In the building of the first stone London Bridge, the nascent city commonality found a saint and a project to rally around. The foundation of the Hospital of St Thomas of Acre on the site of the martyr's birthplace, and the erection of the Great Conduit at its doorstep, created a civic processional axis between the city's two patron saints – St Paul to St Thomas. St Thomas protected the city, and in turn the citizens went to his Canterbury shrine in droves. London produced its own cultic tales, not least the nativity story of Gilbert and the Emir's daughter, and kept Thomas's memory alive through association with the popular saints *du jour*. In the 1420s, around the time of St Thomas's Jubilee, the creativity which London had long shown in its adaptation of Thomas's cult was magnificently exemplified in a recapitulation of Thomas's importance as the city's patron, and London's importance as the city of his birth, brought together in the most important civic ritual of the year. While Canterbury may have held St Thomas's bones, a dynamic, flourishing and creative cult existed at the heart of the city of his birth.