



Miracle Window Research Pack

Understanding the miracle windows and their place in history



The Miracle Windows

Canterbury Cathedral's miracle windows have held a special place in the hearts of many throughout the cathedral's long existence. The unique design of the windows and their pictures impressed pilgrims from the twelfth century right through to the modern world. To this day, they still make people stop with their beauty, the vivid colours and images resonate with many, whether or not they are religious. But why are they there? What do they represent? Why are they so important? This pack is aimed at addressing these questions, so you get a deeper understanding of the windows before you begin work on your storyboards.

Why are they there?

The main reason for their location now is due to a disaster that struck the cathedral soon after Becket's death in December 1170. In 1174, a fire broke out in the city, and the flames and embers in the air hit the cathedral roof, setting it alight. The roof was destroyed, leaving only the outer shell of stone standing. The monks were said to have been distraught. Their cathedral had been plagued by misery over the last four years, beginning with a murder and ending with a fire. However, the monks saw an opportunity to begin anew. Becket's death and subsequent canonisation had thrown the cathedral into the limelight once again, sparking many miracles that drew pilgrims from around the British Isles and Europe in their thousands to this holy site. After the fire, the monks seized the chance to rebuild the cathedral around their martyred archbishop, and make the site stand out among the other cathedrals in England.

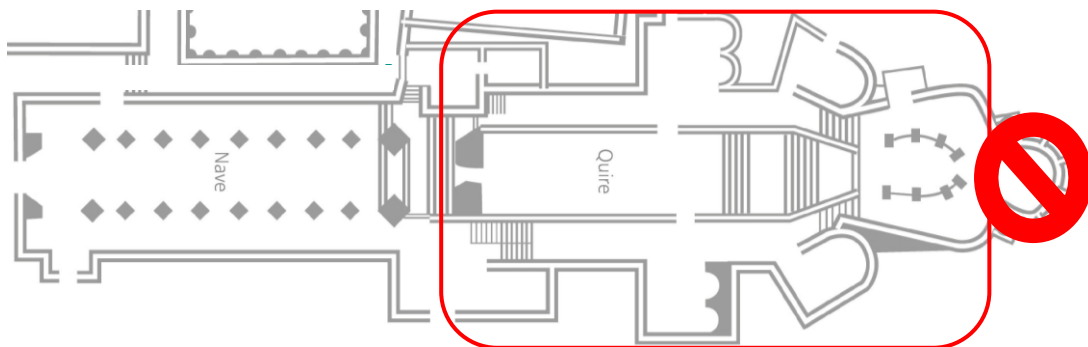
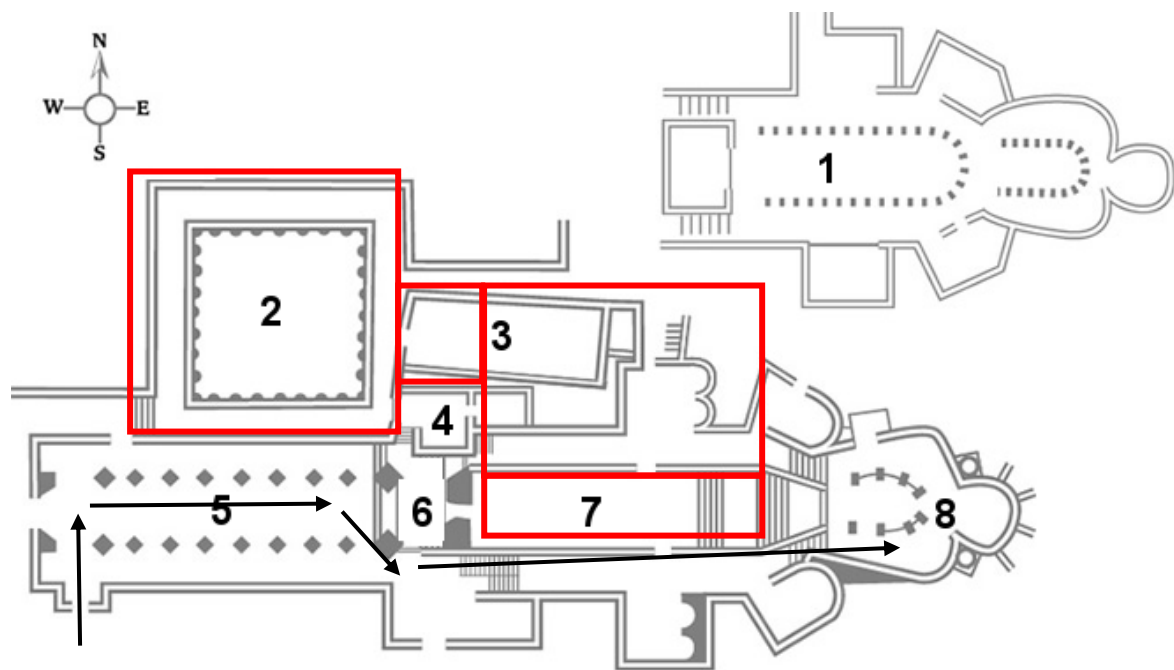


Figure 1: This is the cathedral as it is seen today. The corona chapel did not exist yet and is thus crossed out on the image above. The quire was the area hit by the fire and is circled to show the extent of the area afflicted by the flames. The nave was mostly untouched and was rebuilt in its current style in the fourteenth century. Image taken from:

https://www.canterbury-cathedral.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/readingroom_map.jpg, accessed 04/05/2021.

To do this, they hired the best stone masons and cathedral builders of the time to come in and rebuild the ruined eastern end of the cathedral. This time, they designed the cathedral around a magnificent new shrine which housed the body of the saint. Over the next few decades, the eastern end was rebuilt, continuing even after the master-mason, William of Sens, fell from scaffolding. Construction continued under his protégé William the Englishman, who finished the rebuilding. After its completion in 1220, there was a splendid service which involved moving Becket's tomb shrine from the undercroft up to the new shrine in the Trinity Chapel. This service is known as the Translation of St Thomas Becket.

Obviously the rebuilt cathedral needed new windows. Therefore, throughout the renovations, work began on new stained-glass windows for the northern and southern aisles of the Trinity Chapel, as well for the new Corona Chapel too. These are the areas that would be used by the pilgrims, as they had to stick to these aisles to keep the monks separate from the secular world. The windows provided visual stories which could be used by the monks to highlight different points about the saint. The pilgrims would look up at the stained-glass in awe while waiting to pray at the shrine. To this end, they worked magnificently, as they showed the pilgrims the vast array of miracles that St Thomas had performed and what they could hope for after saying their own prayers.



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| 1. The Crypt | 5. The Nave |
| 2. The Cloister | 6. The Crossing |
| 3. Chapter House | 7. The Quire |
| 4. The Martyrdom | 8. The Trinity Chapel |

Figure 2: The pilgrim's route changed throughout the centuries as different areas were built or changed. The route that pilgrims may have taken after 1220 has been marked down on the map in black. The areas used by monks that were inaccessible to the pilgrims are marked in red. Image taken from: <https://www.canterbury-cathedral.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/map-numbered-1.png>, accessed 04/05/2021.

What do they represent?

The windows were placed in the aisles on the north and south side to represent to pilgrims the sanctity and holiness of the area of the cathedral they had just entered. They represent all sorts of people from different sections of society and all ages. These windows represent the ordinary people of the middle ages who the pilgrims would have been able to relate to. They were and still are a source of hope that the pilgrim's prayers will be answered and that the miracles did exist. This is all shown through the images depicted in the windows, but the colours used in the windows also have various symbolic meanings. These include:

- Blue: purity, heavenly love, holiness
- Red: martyrdom, love (sometimes hate)
- Green: charity, life over death
- Brown: monks clothing (sometimes religious death)
- White: Purity, innocence, holiness
- Gold: Often the same as white

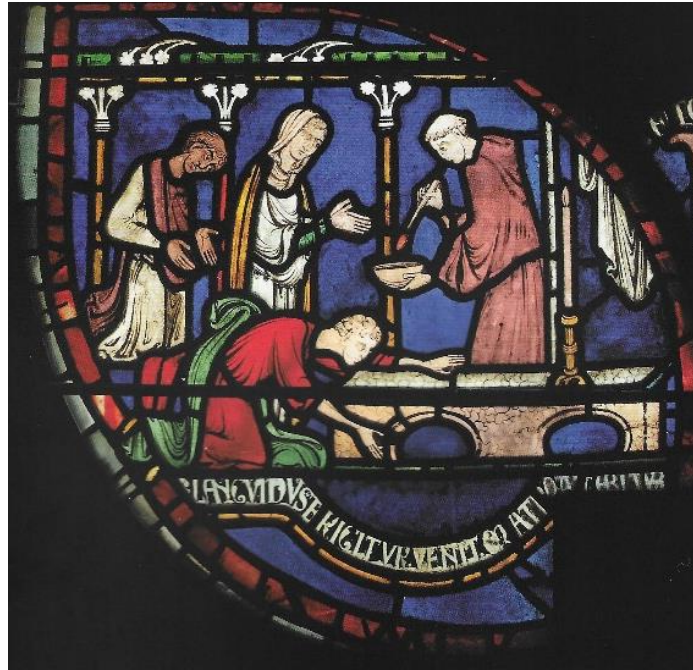
The representations of the miracles were a source of great strength and hope for the pilgrims, some of whom would have been severely ill or even dying. They made the whole eastern end of the cathedral part of Becket's shrine. For the highly devout medieval pilgrims, upon entering the Trinity Chapel it was as though they had stepped into a world dedicated to St Thomas, representing that their pilgrimage had come to a fruitful end.

Why are the windows important?

Canterbury Cathedral's miracle windows are significant for many reasons. As well as the spiritual reasons mentioned above, they were also important for the monks and the cathedral community, as well as being highly important for the modern-day historian.

Firstly, let us explore their importance to the monks and cathedral community throughout the middle ages. The monks oversaw the running of the shrine and were tasked with ensuring it was treated properly by the thousands of pilgrims who came to pray at the shrine each year. Their role within the cathedral was one of the upmost importance and this is reflected in the windows themselves on several occasions. For the monks to be included forever in these windows is important, as it signifies the everlasting role of the monks as being the protectors the shrine, as well as Becket's earthly representatives after his death. For the most part, it was the monks who administered the cures for gravely ill pilgrims, as they mixed the blood of St Thomas with water and gave it to them.

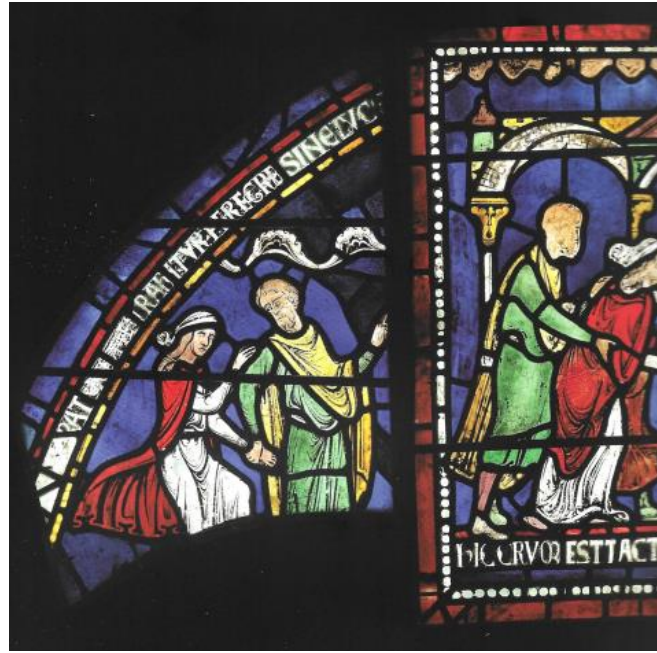
Until the Reformation and the Dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII in the late 1530s, monks who came to be part of the Canterbury community were inspired by these images of how their forebears had cared for St Thomas's cult. The images could teach the new arrivals the importance of their role, even though the events depicted had taken place long ago.



*Figure 3: A pane from window n.II showing a monk mixing blood and water on the right side of the image. Image scanned from: M.A. Michael, *Stained Glass of Canterbury Cathedral*, (London: Scala, 2019), pp. 146-147.*

After the Dissolution of the monasteries the monastic community was disbanded. Henry VIII and his court were intent on destroying the images of saints, especially St Thomas who was all but erased from the cathedral's history, after his shrine was destroyed by the king's men. However, these windows survived. Even during the turbulent centuries that followed, including the puritans and two world wars, the windows survived. This is where their importance to the modern-day world begins.

To this day, the miracle windows are still striking for all those who visit the cathedral. They are a major success with tourists, and modern pilgrims are still influenced and uplifted by the multitude of colours and their significant stories. Tours and talks are focused on the windows, and they still stand in a guard of honour around the Trinity Chapel, watching over the now empty place where St Thomas's shrine used to be. Historians and archaeologists alike use the windows for their unique visual insight into the medieval world of pilgrims and the monastic community. Much the same as the Bayeux Tapestry that follows the story of the Battle of Hastings in 1066, the miracle windows are unique in that they give those that study them a visual aid as to what life was like in the period. They show the clothes the pilgrims wore, the way the monks were able to help those in need, and most importantly they represent everyday people who are all too often forgotten by historians. Their stories should never be forgotten.



*Figure 4: A good example of medieval peasant clothing shown in the miracle windows. This miracle shows the blind Juliana of Rochester being guided by her father to the cathedral and the shrine, where a monk later rubs the blood of the saint into her eyes and she is cured. Image scanned from: M.A. Michael, *Stained Glass in Canterbury Cathedral*, (London: Scala, 2019), pp. 142-143.*

This is where you come in!

The next section is focused on the window that you shall use to create your storyboards. The miracles that you will include are listed out, with pictures of the original windows and bullet points of the key information you need to complete your task.

Canterbury Cathedral's miracle windows trace round the eastern end of the cathedral on the northern and southern aisles of the trinity chapel. The miracles depicted in the windows obviously have names, but each whole window also has a name. On the northern side, these are n.IV, n.III, and n.II. On the southern side, these are s.VII and s. II. The 'n.' means north, and the 's.' means south. The letters after either of these are roman numerals. So, VII is 7, IV is 4, III is 3, and so on.

For your storyboards, you will be focusing on n.IV¹

When reading through the miracles below, please keep the following points in mind:

- The outcome of the story: how would you show this on your storyboards?
- Any background figures: these still need to be included in your work; how do they fit into the story?
- Any medieval medicines: do they use the blood of Becket at any stage? How would you represent this in your work?
- Any monks: the monks are obviously an important part of the story, are they seen as helpers for St Thomas?
- The colours: look closely at the colours and how they are used. Are these colours essential to the story? Will you include them in your work?
- Lengthening the story: the miracles in window n.IV consist of two panes (known as panels for they are telling a story), so how will you strengthen the story and make them longer for your work while not drifting away from the miracle story?

The first image is a photo of window n.IV with the panels in their original positions. Study the image hard and remember the stories' positions in the window. Is there any reason for this structure? Will you copy this structure when you come to draw your storyboards?

¹ All the images and information over the following pages (except Etheldreda of Canterbury) have been used from Rachel Koopmans, 'Kentish Pilgrims in Canterbury Cathedral's Miracle Windows', in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 80, (2017), pp. 1-27, available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44841042>, accessed 05/04/2021. Images copyright to Ian Jones, Warburg Institute; Canterbury Cathedral Glass Studio and Rachel Koopmans.

The image of Etheldreda of Canterbury has been used from Gerald Colson, *Every Window Tells a Story: Benedict's and William's Accounts of the Miracles of St Thomas Becket*, (Canterbury: Mickle Print, 2018), p.76. Image copyright to Martin Cox.

Window n.IV



Panels 56-57

William of Bourne and the vision

Panels 49-50

Goditha of Canterbury

Panels 42-43

Modern replacement

Panels 35-36

Modern replacement

Panels 28-29

William of Dene

Panels 21-22

Saxeua of Dover

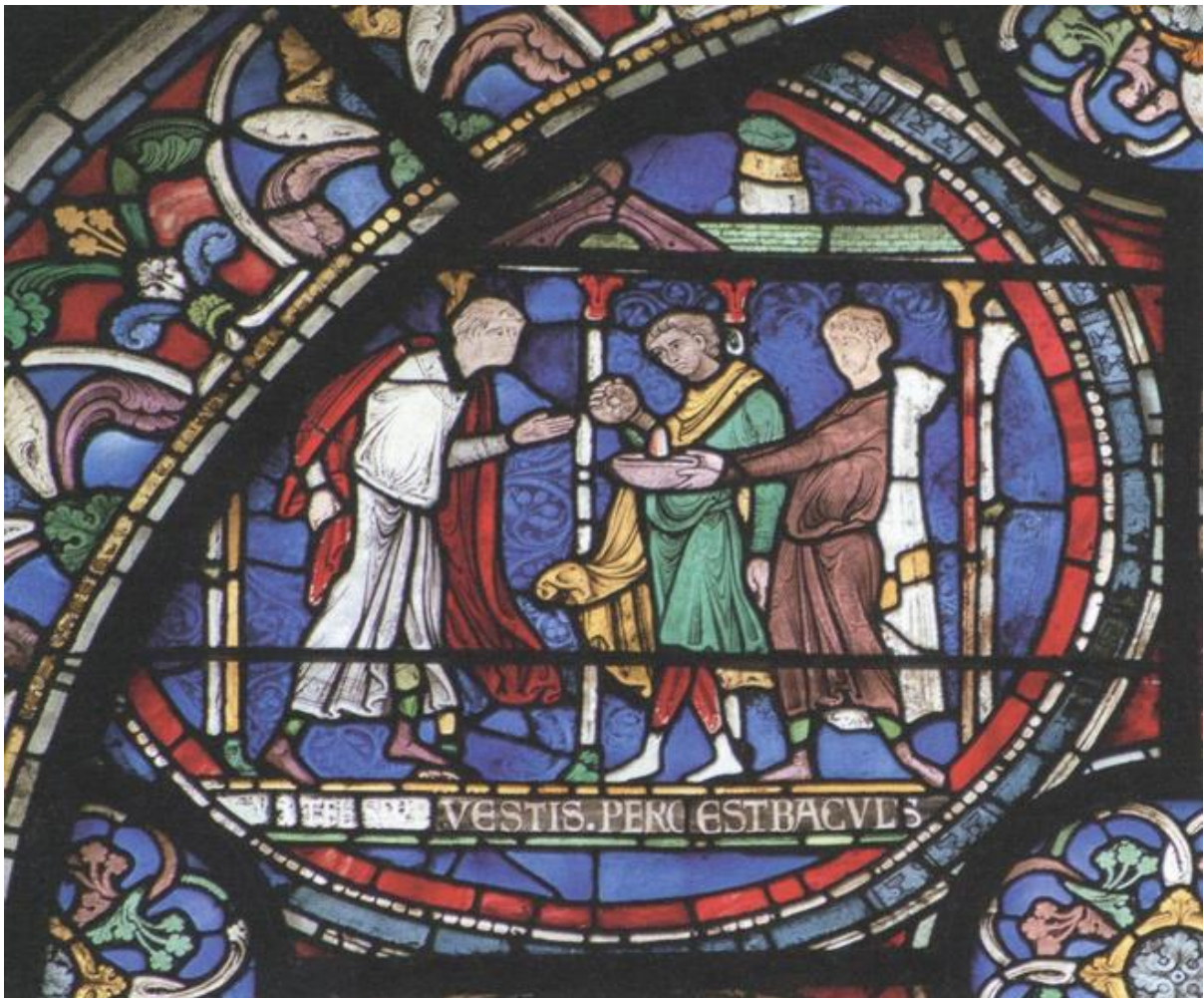
Panels 14-15

Henry of Fordwich

Panels 7-8

Etheldreda of Canterbury

William of Bourne



- William of Bourne was a priest.
- Bourne is located within five miles of Canterbury, just to the south-east of the city, near Bekebourne.
- William was gifted a bottle with some of Becket's blood mixed with water by the monks.
- William gives some of his blood away to help someone in need, but when he looks at the bottle it is still full, as if he never poured any out. This is the miracle in this story.

Task 1: What scene do you think is being portrayed in the window: the monks giving the blood to William, or William giving the blood to someone else? Explain your answer below.

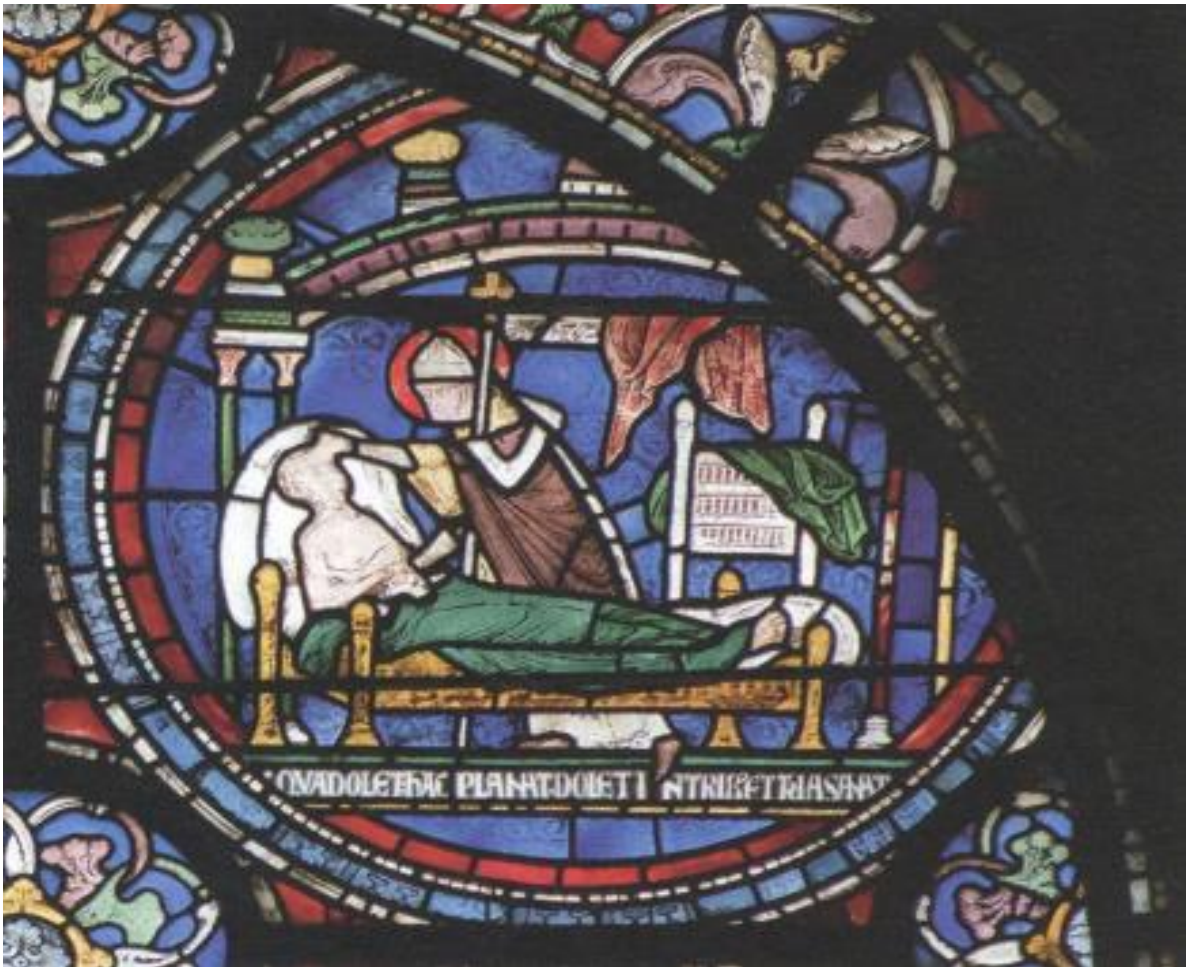
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The Vision



There is a lot of argument about who is in this miracle story. The most convincing idea is that the window shows the story of Richard of Jervaux. It is his story that we will follow on this page.

- Richard was a knight, so was of a higher status than most other people depicted in the miracle windows.
- Jervaux is likely to be Jervaulx, in Yorkshire, and so Richard is the only non-Kentish miracle you will study.
- He had many problems, including having no movement in his fingers, a harsh pain in his lower body, and a bad fever.
- Becket appears in a vision to the man, touches the areas in pain and Richard is healed.
- This window is strange as it looks as though it needs an extra panel to finish the story. Maybe the panel was meant to belong in a different window but was placed in n.IV instead.

As this window is rather unusual, it requires further exploration. The next page covers the alternative possibilities to the man featured, and where the window possibly was meant to be located originally.

Alternative One: Robert of Lilford.

Robert suffered multiple stab wounds. He was close to death when he had a vision that Becket came to him, touched the wounds, and healed him. In the vision Becket then told Robert that in order to be fully cured he must drink some of the water at the shrine.

The problem with this story is that the man who had the vision does not appear to have any stab wounds. As the windows depict the ailments in spectacular fashion in most cases, it is unusual that this is not depicted in a clearer fashion if it was Robert's miracle that they were representing.

Alternative Two: Ansfrid of Dover.

Ansfrid was a sickly boy who had various ailments. These are similar to the ones that are shown in the windows. He is said to have had a vision of Becket who healed his ailments, therefore letting the boy have a prosperous future.

The problem with Ansfrid's story is that the person in the bed appears to have a beard, therefore making it hard to believe this person is supposed to represent a boy.

Wrong window?

All the stories above are ones which could easily be represented over several panels. The fact that the story is represented by one panel in the top right corner of the window is curious. Several historians have looked at this panel, and some believe that it was originally designed for a window on the southern aisle of the trinity chapel. The stories would have continued through several panels below, thus making it clearer as to which story this lone panel is meant to represent. It may have been in such a window but was replaced in the wrong window over several centuries of renovations by accident. As it one of the windows that shows Becket in a vision, it is highly unlikely that the monks designed this panel to be separated from the rest of the story.

Task 2: Think about Richard's story, and in the space below, write down a few ideas of how you can the final scene.

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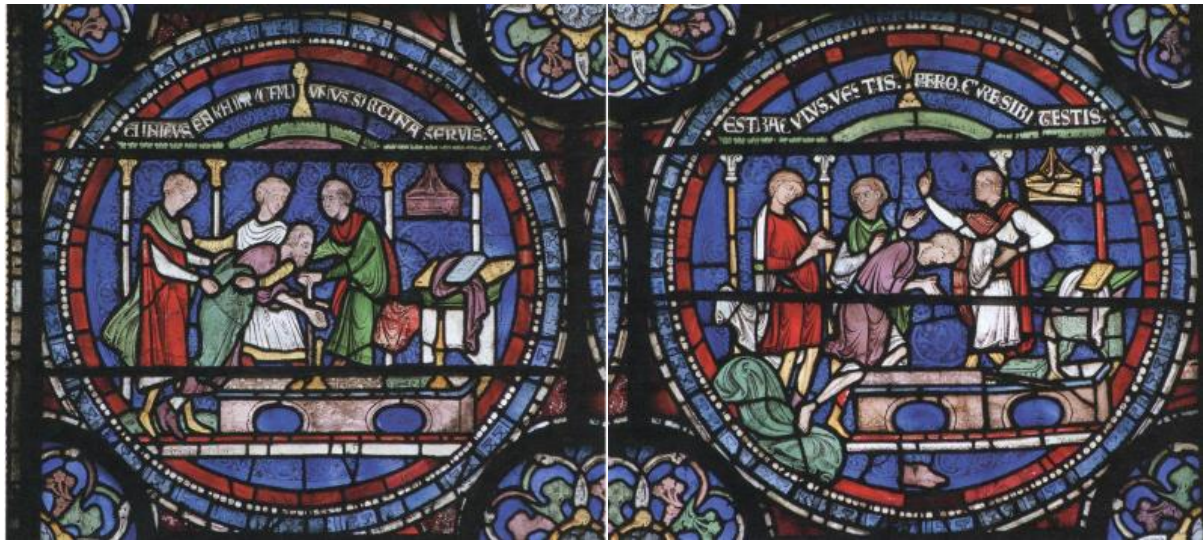
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Goditha of Canterbury



- This window gives a unique insight into the lives of women in medieval Canterbury, as it shows them helping another woman receive aid.
- On the first panel there are five women who are shown helping Goditha into the cathedral.
- Goditha is clearly ill in the first panel, hunched over in severe pain. In the next panel the same woman is having her leg bathed, showing that there was a problem with her leg as well.
- Goditha was cared for by the monks for a while, and in the second panel it is clear to see the water and Becket's blood are being mixed to bathe her leg.
- She was cured by the blood and left the cathedral with her female companions, who had witnessed the miracle.
- The original copy of this story was written by a monk called Benedict of Peterborough. It shows that the miracle of Goditha was one of the first to occur, very soon after Becket's death.

William of Dene



- William of Dene is the first medieval panel in window n.IV to contain images of St Thomas's tomb shrine.
- William was a knight who was very old, as can be seen by his long beard which the monks included to show his great age.
- William lived in Canterbury.
- He suffered from paralysis which is why he is being escorted to Becket's tomb shrine in the first panel on the left-hand side.
- He prayed at the tomb shrine of St Thomas and soon feeling began to creep back into his legs and feet.
- In the right-hand panel, William is seen standing by himself, once again praying at the tomb shrine giving thanks to Becket who had healed him.

Task 3: Using the space below, write down any ways which you think you could include Becket's tomb shrine within your storyboards. How would this link to him being a superhero in your work?

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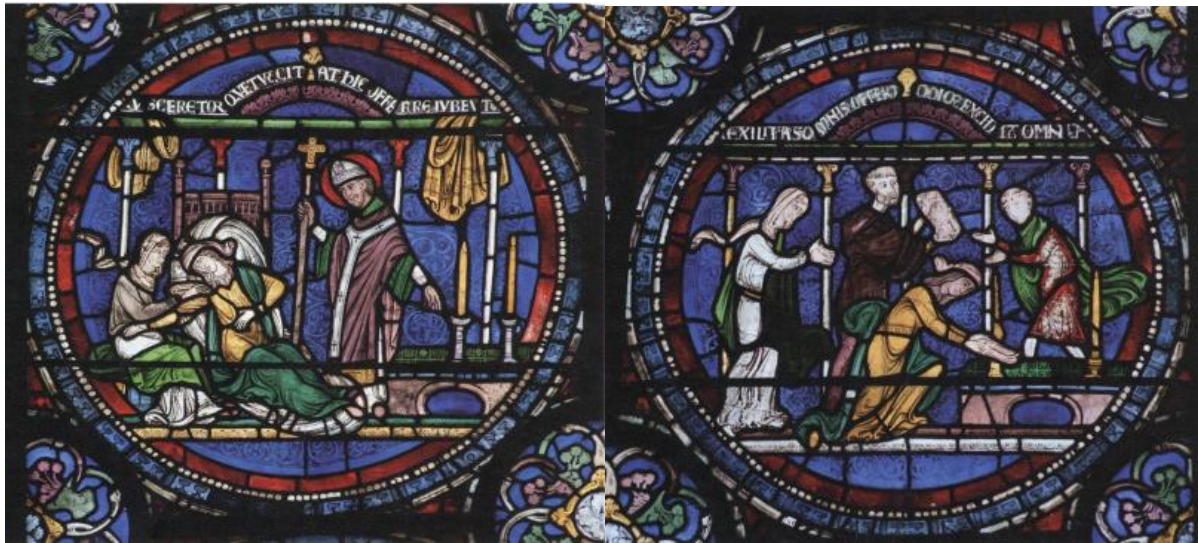
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Saxeva of Dover



- Once again, women are at the centre of this miracle window. This is unusual as the women rarely feature in the historical writings of the medieval world. Here, a woman is the centrepiece of the story.
- Saxeva suffered from pain in the lower part of her stomach and soreness in her arm.
- Becket appeared in a vision to Saxeva and told her that if she left a candle at his tomb shrine as a donation, he would heal her pain. The vision of Becket is clearly seen in the left-hand panel, and he appears to be pointing at a candle on his tomb shrine.
- In the right-hand panel, Saxeva makes an offering to the tomb shrine of St Thomas. It is likely that this is the candle.
- Once the candle was placed at the shrine and lit by the monks, Saxeva was cured.

FUN FACT!

The candle that is being laid by Saxeva in the right-hand panel is known as a 'trindle.' A trindle is a rope candle made from a wick and beeswax which is coiled up like a ball of wool or like a rope. The rope candle shown here would be laid on the tomb shrine and after 1220 at the shrine in the Trinity Chapel. Monks used large numbers of candles at the shrine and liked to receive gifts of candles from pilgrims. The monks would bless these candles in the name of those who left them. Sometimes pilgrims left candles to thank St Thomas for a miracle, while others gave candles in the hope of receiving miracles. For example, the candle might be the length of the pilgrim's foot if they had an injured foot. Every three years, the town of Dover gave a very long rope candle on a large reel which was said to be the length of the circumference of Dover.

Henry of Fordwich



- Henry was from Fordwich, a small town close to Sturry, near Canterbury.
- Henry's miracle in window n.IV is the only one that deals with mental illness.
- Henry was said to be mad. The medieval world had little understanding of mental illness, so those who suffered from this were often outcasts and some had very unpleasant lives.
- Obviously mental illness is difficult to portray in stained glass, so for the pilgrims to understand Henry's ailment, the monks chose to show him with his hands tied behind his back while being beaten, representing his insanity.
- He was led to the cathedral by his friends, where they found a monk who was able to help Henry.
- The monk sat with Henry at the tomb shrine, where they both prayed, and Henry was cured. In the right-hand panel Henry is no longer tied up, while he and his friends give thanks to Becket for curing his madness.

Task 4: People in the middle ages struggled to understand those with mental illnesses and it is still a sensitive issue today. Your task either as a class, in groups, or by yourselves, is to bring attention to the ways that medieval people treated mental illness and how this treatment can be shown in your storyboards.

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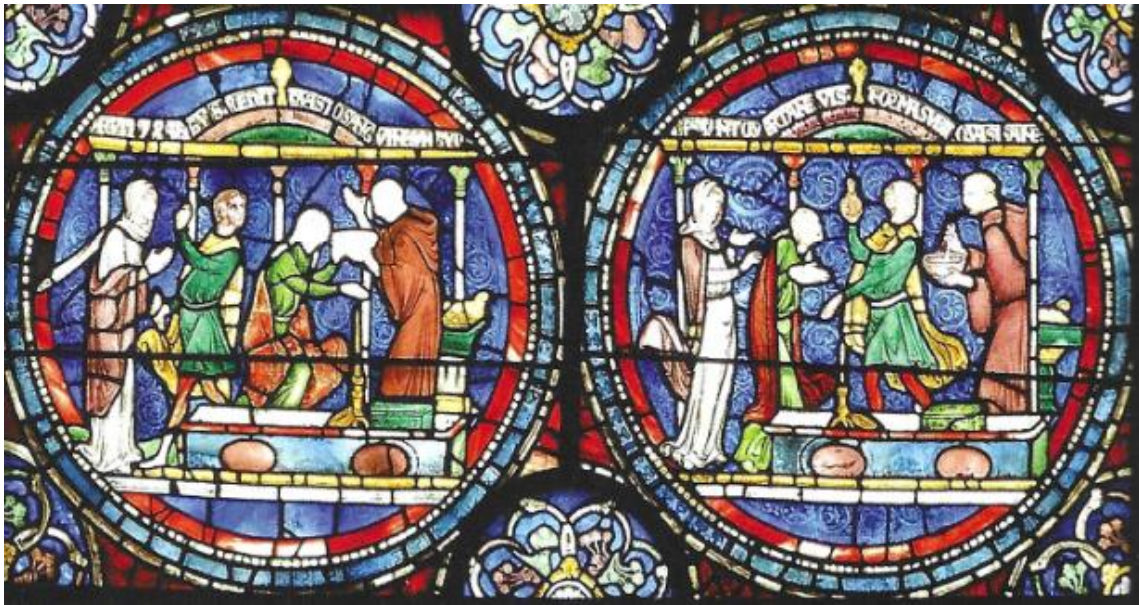
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Etheldreda of Canterbury



- Etheldreda was a woman from Canterbury who suffered from a bad fever and illness.
- She travelled to the tomb shrine of St Thomas, which you can see both two panels.
- In the left-hand panel, Etheldreda can be seen drinking the blood of St Thomas mixed with water from a bowl.
- After drinking all the contents of the bowl, she was cured.
- The miracle of Etheldreda shows a medieval woman and her companion treated equally at the tomb shrine.

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