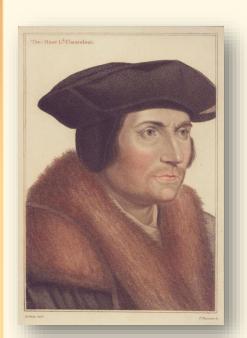# Sir Thomas More

Born in 1478, Sir Thomas More was a lawyer, philosopher, author and statesman who would go on to serve King Henry VIII as Lord Chancellor and Speaker of the House of Commons. However, Thomas's counsel became unwelcome to the King and resulted in his execution. His severed head is St Dunstan's church most well-known relic.

During England's Reformation, Sir Thomas More was one of the few leading men in England who opposed Henry VIII's first divorce from Catherine of Aragon.

King Henry's separation from the Catholic Church and subsequent creation of the Church of England, in which Henry became its head, resulted in considerable tension nationwide. Thomas More could not accept these changes and people listened to him. As he would not take the oath to the king, in 1535 Henry ordered the beheading of his former chancellor on a charge of high treason. Thomas More was executed on Tower Hill on 6th July, the eve of the Translation of Thomas Becket. Both men were killed by a former friend and king called Henry for their loyalty to the Church.

Thomas More was canonised in 1935 by Pope Pius XI and later by the Church of England in 1980.

Following his execution, his head was displayed on a pole as that of a traitor. His daughter, now Margaret Roper, managed to retrieve her father's head and kept it with her in a casket. After her death, More's head and Margaret's coffin were placed in the Roper family vault in St Dunstan's church. However, in about 1597, the Roper vault was enlarged. The head in its casket was set behind iron bars embedded in a wall on the north side of the vault. It was seen as an important relic by many people over the centuries, and pilgrims continue to come from across the world to visit St Dunstan's church.

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