

40 “Dover’s Martyr”

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CONTRIBUTED

The 2nd of August 1995 marks the 700th anniversary of the brutal Martyrdom of this Benedictine Monk in St. Martin’s Priory, Dover. Part of the site is now occupied by Dover College. In the 13th century the Priory would also have included what we know today as Effingham Street and Saxon Street.

On the 2nd of August 1295 a fleet of French ships landed at Dover and raided the town. A party of French seized and sacked St. Martin’s Priory. All the monks, except Thomas, hid. However Thomas was not to be distracted from the daily routine of a siesta at midday. When his fellow monks came out of hiding they found that Thomas had been brutally murdered.

The funeral of Thomas took place the next day and his fellow monks set up a shrine to him. The shrine became a place of pilgrimage and apparently a number of miracles were attributed to Thomas. It is thought that these related to events at sea.

Thomas has never officially been canonised, despite an attempt sponsored by Richard II and Joan of Kent, widow of the Black Prince. Pope Urban VI issued a Bull in 1382 and this was given to the Bishops of London and Rochester. They in turn passed it to the Priors of Christchurch and St. Gregory’s of Canterbury. At this point matters progressed no further. It is thought that the Church in Canterbury did not want to recognise a rival saint to their own St. Thomas a Becket.

As Thomas has not been canonised his official title is “Blessed” hence the inverted commas when his name is prefixed with “St.”

In St. Andrew’s Church, Buckland there is an altar dedicated to “St.” Thomas. There is mention of a Church at Buckland in the Domesday Book and part of the existing church building is believed to date from about 1180. At the time of the events described the Church was under the patronage of St. Martin’s Priory. It is therefore reasonable to assume that “St.” Thomas would have known about St. Andrew’s and it is quite conceivable that he may have worshipped in the Church at some time. Some 200 years after his martyrdom Sir Thomas Riche, an incumbent of St. Andrew’s, left eight pence to the altar of the Blessed Thomas de la Hale, in the Priory Church.

It is hoped that the 2nd of August will be kept as his feast day in the years to come, just as the monks of the Priory used to do, with a trout supper. Perhaps there will also be a more tangible acknowledgement locally of “DOVER’S MARTYR”.

EDITOR: *There is to be a commemorative service at 7.30 pm at St. Andrew’s Church on 2nd August 1995, to mark the occasion of the 700th anniversary of this event. A welcome will be extended to all members of the Dover Society who wish to attend.*