

## Pilgrims' Accounts from Canterbury Cathedral, historical and contemporary

Quotes are modern-day, unless otherwise dated.

### 1.) London-Canterbury pilgrim

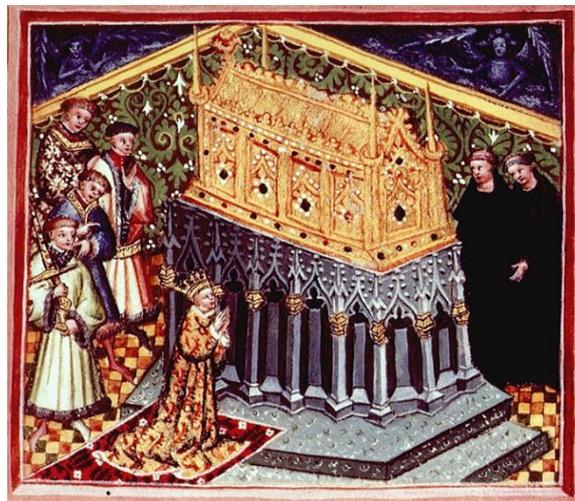
'I lit a candle at the site of Becket's Martyrdom as a mark of having arrived at the end of my pilgrimage. I lit some candles near the crypt for the people whose concerns and anxieties I had been "carrying" on the walk.'

### 2.) A spiritual tourist

'The atmosphere created by the [Cathedral] guide generated a nice bond between us all: a shared experience.'

### 3.) German pilgrim, 15th century

'Canterbury Cathedral is so elegant that almost nothing like it can be found in any other Christian country. This is acknowledged by all pilgrims. In this church was killed the holy Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, who opposed the unjust laws which King Henry had decreed against the rights of the Catholic Church. He was first exiled, and when he was recalled he was decapitated at Vespers while calling upon God. This was done by evil men to satisfy the wicked will of the King.'



The shrine of Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral (British Library)

In the church we saw his tomb and his head. The tomb is constructed of pure gold and is so adorned with gems and splendid offerings that I do not know of its equal. Among other priceless things there is to be seen in it a gemstone which shines at night and which is half the size of a hen's egg. This tomb has been enriched by the gifts of many kings, princes, wealthy merchants and other pious men. The relics were shown to us: first the head of the holy Archbishop Thomas and his tonsure [the shaved part of the top of the head], also the columns in front of the chapel of the Mother of God, at which the saint was accustomed to pray and speak with the Blessed Virgin – a thing which we were told for certain had been seen and heard by many. But more than 300 years have elapsed since these things happened.'

#### 4.) London-Canterbury pilgrim

‘Beginning to walk pilgrimages has opened up for me new kinds of religious conversation with people, for example: hikers, outdoorsy people, people who question religion, you name it. For these people, institutional religion is otherwise fairly meaningless. My own experience as a pilgrim suggests that pilgrimage may enable Christianity to make connections with younger people in a way that church-going doesn’t.’



Early 16<sup>th</sup> century picture of pilgrims on the road to Canterbury (British Library)

#### 5.) The Monks of Canterbury announce a miracle, 1445

‘Alexander Stephenson, born at Aberdeen in Scotland, twenty-four years old, suffered severely with his feet, with vile worms in them. After making a vow at a place of pilgrimage of the Virgin Mary, he made his way to the shrine of the holy martyr Thomas at Canterbury. There, in the full view of men, the saint restored his feet on the second day of May 1445. The next day, the saint permitted Alexander, with the aid of God’s mercy, to step easily on the ground. Alexander departed joyfully, safe and sound. We received full proof of this event, since Alexander then went with the grace of God on pilgrimage to the Holy Blood of Wilsnack [in Germany], in fulfilment of his vow, and then returned to the shrine of the holy martyr Thomas at Canterbury, successfully and on foot. Not wishing to hide the glory of the martyr Thomas, we have published the proof of this miracle in our holy church of Canterbury.’

#### 6.) Canterbury Cathedral Volunteer

‘After I arrived in Canterbury I attended a service at the Cathedral. In the sermon, the canon said “may I ask you to reflect on why you came here this evening? Were you seeking something or were you called to come?” The answer to both these questions was “yes.” Soon after that I received a blessing as a pilgrim. My journey of years rather than miles was recognised as a pilgrimage without question.’

#### 7.) London-Canterbury pilgrim

‘I bought a number of postcards of the Martyrdom Chapel in the Cathedral as mementos of my pilgrimage for myself and to send to the individuals whose burdens the pilgrimage had been designed to help carry, and I treated myself to some lavish books about the cathedral as souvenirs.’