

BECK (or BEK), THOMAS (died 1293), bishop of S. Davids

Name: Thomas Beck
Date of death: 1293
Parent: Walter Bek
Gender: Male
Occupation: bishop of S. Davids
Area of activity: Religion
Author: John Edward Lloyd

The second son of Walter Bek, baron of Eresby, Lincs. In the University of Oxford he attained the degree of master, and in 1269 was elected chancellor. Upon the return of Edward I to England in August 1274, he entered, with his younger brother Antony, afterwards bishop of Durham, the service of the Crown, and by his ability and fidelity won the warm approval of the king. The post which he held, from October 1274 to the end of 1280, was that of keeper, i.e. head, of the wardrobe; he was sometimes styled the king's treasurer. As usual, the Church supplied the emoluments; he appears as archdeacon of Dorset (1275) and later (c. 1280) of Berkshire, and, in January 1280, received from the king the prebend of Castor in Lincoln cathedral.

The gift of a prebend in S. Davids in May 1280 foreshadowed a change of career; there was a vacancy in the see through the death of Richard of Carew, and on 3 June Beck was elected in his stead. On the 17th, the royal assent was signified; consecration was somewhat delayed, but this, it would seem, was in order that it might be a special occasion. On 6 October 1280 there was a distinguished assembly at Lincoln, which included the king and the queen and many of the magnates of the realm. Beck was then consecrated by archbishop Peckham, the other three Welsh bishops being in attendance. There followed the translation of the body of S. Hugh of Avalon to a new shrine, marked by festivities, the cost of which was borne by the new-made prelate.

Beck now gave up civil duties (except for some service in 1280-1 as royal commissioner in Wales), and henceforth was assiduous in his devotion to the interests of his church and diocese. His entry into the latter was made at the beginning of February 1281, when he celebrated mass at Strata Florida. He was enthroned at S. Davids on 1 March. No part of the existing cathedral is attributed to him, but in other respects he showed much activity. In 1287 he strengthened the chapter by the creation of the offices of chancellor, subdean, and succentor. From the Crown he obtained for the episcopal lands the right of free warren, and for the urban centres therein fairs and markets on specified days. When archbishop Peckham, in the course of a tour of Wales, came to S. Davids on 10 July 1284, he entered a formal protest; this attempt to revive an old controversy did not get very far, for Beck was reminded that, at his consecration he had expressly recognized the supremacy of the see of Canterbury. On 26 November 1284, the king and the queen visited their old friend in his cathedral city; it was a costly attention, for a little later he had to seek remission of a debt to the Crown to cover expenses incurred in this and other respects.

The strong castle of Llawhaden, dominating the eastern Cleddau, is of this period and is believed to be his work. He founded two hospitals, one at Llawhaden and another, not far from the cathedral, at Whitwell. Lastly, mention should be made of two colleges which he established in remote parts of the diocese, the one in 1283 at Llangadock (afterwards moved to Abergwili), and the other in 1287 at Llanddewi Brefi.

Beck died 20 April 1293, and was buried at St. Davids. The altar tomb in the north wall of the lady chapel is believed to be his. His career gives the impression of a simple devotion to duty; he was without the ambition and the aggressive temper of his more famous brother.

Author

Sir John Edward Lloyd, (1861 - 1947)

Sources

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Further Reading

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