

Becket window, Church of St John the Baptist, Penshurst, Kent

The following is Lawrence Lee's description of the window

In general conception the design is intended to suggest a rich tapestry, relying on the colours and shapes of heraldry for its main effect. With this in mind the treatment of the subject matter has been made subordinate to the overall pattern and there is no attempt to make a series of illustrations of historical events.

Nevertheless, the starting point is taken from the tradition that Thomas a'Becket installed a priest in Penshurst in 1170 shortly before his martyrdom in Canterbury; and this suggested the interaction of temporal and spiritual forces, with T.S. Eliot's "Murder in the Cathedral" in mind.

Therefore, in the left hand light the figures may be thought of as kings and queens, barons and knights, with appropriate heraldry of royalty and nobility. The right hand light has figures suggesting ordinary folk who play their part in the drama (in Eliot's play the women of Canterbury form the chorus); the heraldry in this case is derived from ecclesiastical areas.

In the centre Becket is standing before Penshurst Church and buildings reminiscent of Leicester Square (the centre of the village), and behind is a building linking the three lights which may be read as Penshurst Place.. Above this is a foliated cross taken from the carved fragment on a medieval tomb in the Church, with the Agnus Dei (symbol of St John the Baptist) at its centre. At the top is St Thomas on the altar steps at the moment of his martyrdom.

In the tracery lights are an elaborated version of the cross, the White Horse of Kent, and the Pelican in her Piety (charity): there is also a suggestion of Canterbury and oast houses in the background. Mention is also made of the ancient Church of Saint Jacques in Mont-Saint-Aignan near Rouen, which Becket visited in 1135, and with which this parish (Penshurst) formed a link in 1970 as part of its commemoration of its long Christian history.