

# THOMAS BECKET AND LYNGSJÖ IN SWEDEN

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## Summary

*The CHAS web site was extended to include Canterbury cathedral pages in August 2012. As a result, we have received a fascinating letter and collection of photographs from Dr Myrtle Ternstrom, an academic who lives in Cheltenham. Her work for the Lundy Field Society was recognised with the award of a British Empire Medal in the Queen's Birthday Honours list in June 2012.*

*The note that follows draws from her letter and images, supplemented with quoted sources.*



Lyngsjö church in Southern Sweden

## THOMAS BECKET AND LYNGSJÖ IN SWEDEN

Lyngsjö church (see image above) can be found in southern Sweden 75 km north east of Malmö. It is a tall, gabled and whitewashed building, standing alone in open countryside some distance from the village of the same name. It was founded at the end of the 12th century, but has been extended and restored at various times since. It is now a simple Lutheran church with 15th century cross-vaults, carved wooden box pews, and an elaborate Renaissance pulpit.

The church possesses a sandstone font showing graphic scenes from the murder of Thomas Becket. The font is 77 cm high and has a bowl diameter of 65 cm. It is datable to 1190 to 1200. The scenes depicted are as follows:

- an interview between Henry II and one of the knights - the text 'HENRICUS REX'
- one knight hurrying away
- two knights are seen attacking the archbishop
- Becket is received into heaven

On the base of the font there are four figures in high relief: a woman suckling two dragons, a lion, a man making a funny face and what appears to be an ibex, together representing the four elements. (The ibex seems odd - could it be an eagle, which would at least reflect a more traditional pattern of lion/woman/man/eagle aligning with fire/earth/air/water as elements?)

This representation of Becket's murder is remarkable on several grounds. The date of the font places it within a generation of the act of the murder itself. It is the oldest image of the murder outside England. The flow of the story action in a series of linked scenes is impressive. The part played by Edward Grim, who was visiting the cathedral on the fateful day, and suffered wounds to his arm when defending Becket, is clearly portrayed. Also, the facial expressions of the figures are particularly distinct and engaging, lending them great charm. The Swedish Historical Museum web site suggests the name of the stone carver 'Tove'.

A better known link between Canterbury, Becket and Sweden is the Becket statue which stands in the cathedral crypt (image below). This has a page in the CHAS Notebook site. Unfortunate wording in the web site of the National History Museum of Sweden has led some to think, erroneously, that this statue is not of Becket at all.

### SOURCES

For background to the representation of Becket in art, and brief references to Lyngsjö, see *St Thomas Becket in Art* by Tancred Borenius (Methuen, 1932); also *Pilgrimage The British Experience from Becket to Bunyan* by Colin Morris and Peter Roberts (eds.) (CUP, 2002)

Useful images and additional information appear at its web site

<http://onceiwasacleverboy.blogspot.co.uk/2012/12/the-cult-of-st-thomas-in-art.html>



Lyngsjö font (A)

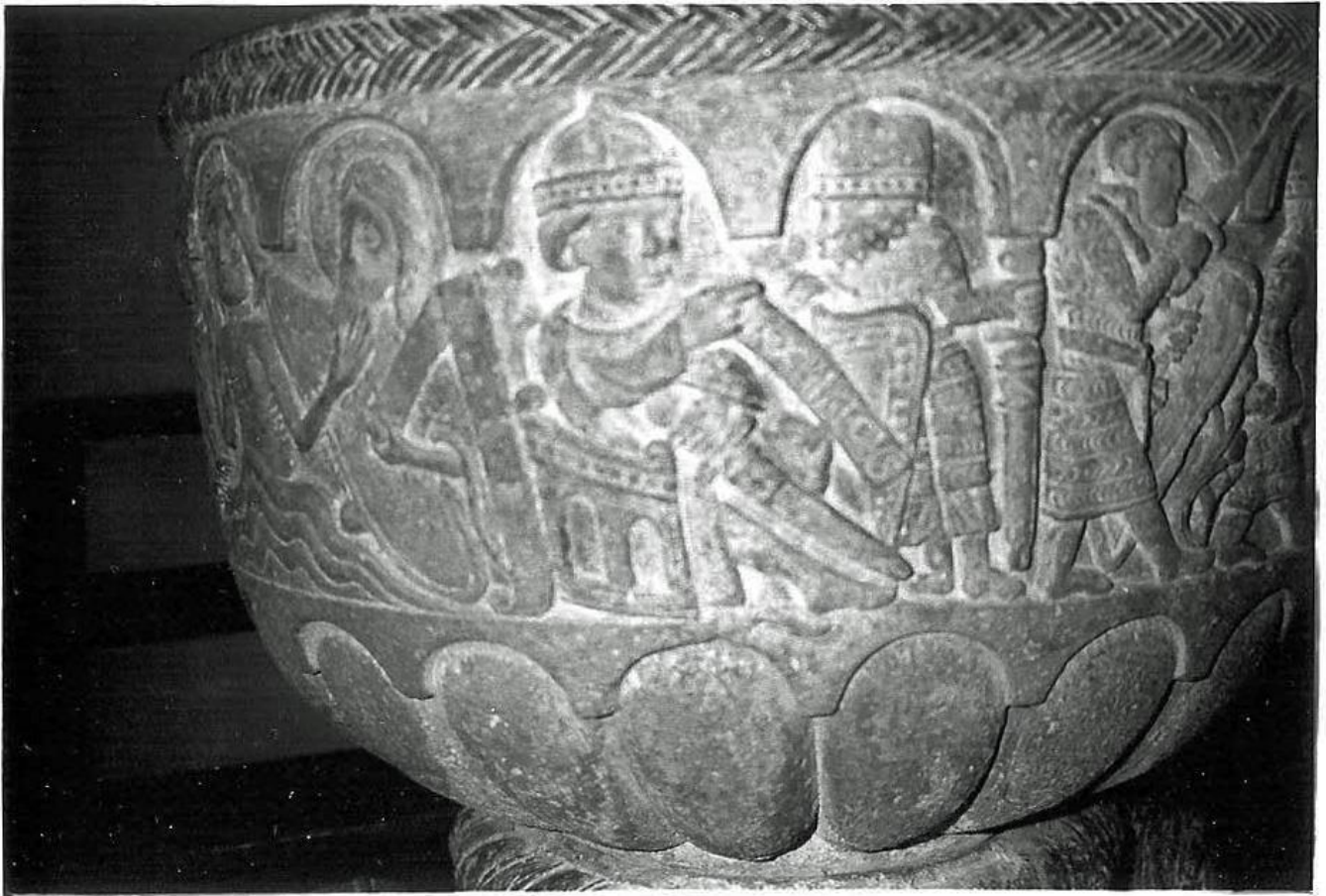
Note (left to right on font bowl): Henry II speaking with a knight; one knight hurrying away; two knights with swords; the slain Becket; Edward Grim receiving a wound on his arm

Font base: lion on left; man pulling a funny face on right



Lyngsjö font (B)

Note (left to right on font bowl): two knights with swords; the slain Becket; Edward Grim receiving a wound on his arm; dove of the Holy Spirit with chalice and paten (small plate); scene in heaven



Lyngsjö font (C)

Note (left to right on font bowl): scene in heaven; Henry II speaking with a knight; one knight hurrying away



Lyngsjö font (D)

Note (left to right on font bowl): the slain Becket; Edward Grim receiving a wound on his arm; dove of the Holy Spirit with chalice and paten (small plate); scene in heaven

Font base: man pulling a funny face on left; central figure of woman suckling two dragons; ibex (or eagle) head facing right



Statue of Becket in Canterbury cathedral crypt

*see CHAS Notebook site for details*