

John de Stratford and the Becket Chantry Chapel

Holy Trinity's medieval Becket Chantry Chapel was built in 1331 by John de Stratford for the offering of prayers in perpetuity for himself, the souls of his parents, brother, deceased English kings and Bishops of Worcester and Winchester *and all the departed faithful*.



Chancel window, Guild Chapel, Stratford-upon-Avon



Until Shakespeare achieved fame, de Stratford was without question the town's most celebrated son. He served the ill-fated Edward II, and rose from Rector of Holy Trinity to become Archbishop of Canterbury in 1333, during the reign of Edward III. Like Thomas Becket, he challenged royal authority, but unlike Becket, he survived, concentrating his final years on spiritual duties as Archbishop, until his death in 1348. He is buried at Canterbury Cathedral, close to the site of Becket's shrine.



Marble effigy of John de Stratford on his tomb in Canterbury Cathedral

The Holy Trinity Chapel attracted so many pilgrims from Stratford and further afield, that John's kinsman Ralph de Stratford founded the ecclesiastical college in 1353, to provide accommodation for the increased number of priests required to serve the chapel.



John and Ralph de Stratford kneeling before the altar of the Becket chantry chapel. Window in Holy Trinity Church

Eventually the College became so powerful and wealthy that it took control of the whole church, collecting the tithe money and appointing its priests. It thrived until the 1538 edict of Henry VIII de-canonised Becket, followed in 1547 by Edward VI's Chantries Act, which abolished all chantries and colleges.



Drawing of the College by Robert Bell Wheler, 1806



The labours of John de Stratford in building the Becket Chapel. In the American Window, St. Peter's Chapel (Background: John de Stratford's crest as Archbishop)