

SAINTE JOHN THE BAPTIST, PENSURST

THE BECKET WINDOW

Lawrence Lee was formerly Head of the Department of Stained Glass at the Royal College of Art, which has been responsible, among other commissions, for the Nine Windows of Coventry Cathedral. He has been designing and making stained glass since 1946, and in addition to work in many Parish Churches throughout the country, has windows in Southwark Cathedral, The Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, Magdalen College School, Glasgow University Chapel, and the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul, Montreal. He moved to Penshurst in 1962 and at his new home on Smarts Hill he converted an old stable into a complete stained glass studio.

This window was presented to our Church through the kindness of many parishioners, who were sensitive to our good fortune in having Mr. Lee among us, and through the generosity of Mr. Lee himself. It was dedicated by the Lord Bishop of Rochester on Sunday, 2nd August 1970.

A.B.C.

In general conception the design is intended to suggest a rich tapestry, relying on the colours and shapes of heraldry for its main effort. 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 interaction of temporal and spiritual forces with, inevitably, T.S. Eliot's "Murder in the Cathedral" in mind.

Therefore, in the left hand light the figures may be thought of as kings, 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; the heraldry in this case is derived from ecclesiastical arms.

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

In the tracery lights are an elaborated version of the cross, the White Horse of Kent, and the symbol of charity (the Pelican in her piety); 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 1155 and with which this parish formed a link in 1970 as part of its commemorations of its long Christian history.

L.L.