

1

00:00:01.780 --> 00:00:05.520

In the bustling world of medieval England, one saint's story,

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00:00:05.720 --> 00:00:09.580

though filled with controversy and intrigue, has largely faded from memory.

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00:00:10.280 --> 00:00:14.240

This is the life of William fitzHerbert, the man who was to become known as St.

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00:00:14.440 --> 00:00:15.140

William of York.

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00:00:16.101 --> 00:00:19.800

Whilst parts of William's life are lost to history, we're still

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00:00:19.860 --> 00:00:23.680

surrounded by stories of this remarkable man, depicted in

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00:00:23.720 --> 00:00:27.590

John Thornton's incredible St. William window, which dates from the

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00:00:27.620 --> 00:00:28.490

15th century.

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00:00:29.400 --> 00:00:32.940

William was born nearly 1,000 years ago in the 1080s.

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00:00:33.200 --> 00:00:37.000

We can only reconstruct glimpses of his early life, but we

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00:00:37.020 --> 00:00:40.520

know he grew up in Winchester, then a centre of royal power.

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00:00:41.280 --> 00:00:44.830

His father was chamberlain to King Henry I, and one of the most

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00:00:44.880 --> 00:00:46.920

influential figures at court.

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00:00:48.200 --> 00:00:50.900

William was also cousin to the future King Stephen.

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00:00:52.220 --> 00:00:55.660

By 1109, William had risen to become

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00:00:55.760 --> 00:00:59.530

Treasurer of York Minster and Archdeacon of the East Riding,

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00:00:59.769 --> 00:01:02.900

positions he held for more than 30 years.

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00:01:02.940 --> 00:01:06.860

He oversaw the Minster's finances, helped fund major building works,

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00:01:07.260 --> 00:01:11.140

and worked alongside the influential Archbishop Thurstan to defend

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00:01:11.150 --> 00:01:13.780

the province of York's independence from Canterbury.

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00:01:14.460 --> 00:01:18.420

This brought William into the heart of international church power struggles.

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00:01:19.320 --> 00:01:21.720

But not everything went smoothly.

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00:01:21.780 --> 00:01:25.480

In 1119, William's father was implicated in a plot to

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00:01:25.540 --> 00:01:29.500

assassinate the King. Though William himself was not involved, the scandal

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00:01:29.660 --> 00:01:33.530

foreshadows the political intrigue which was to follow William through his

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00:01:33.560 --> 00:01:33.920

life.

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00:01:35.060 --> 00:01:38.670

Then, in 1132, conflict erupted at

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00:01:38.670 --> 00:01:42.520

nearby St. Mary's Abbey in York. A group of monks began

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00:01:42.560 --> 00:01:46.090

to protest that strict monastic ideals were not being

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00:01:46.160 --> 00:01:50.080

followed at this increasingly rich and powerful inner-city abbey.

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00:01:50.980 --> 00:01:54.760

Archbishop Thurstan visited the abbey alongside a group of churchmen,

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00:01:55.060 --> 00:01:57.760

including William, seeking to resolve the conflict.

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00:01:58.000 --> 00:02:01.440

But they found themselves unwelcome, with the reformers throwing

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00:02:01.640 --> 00:02:05.200

insults in a tumult that saw Thurstan's party seeking

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00:02:05.280 --> 00:02:09.060

sanctuary in the church. Eventually, Thurstan settled the

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00:02:09.120 --> 00:02:12.660

dispute by giving a gift of land near Ripon to the reformers,

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00:02:13.040 --> 00:02:16.500

who set out to found Fountains Abbey in late 1132.

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00:02:17.260 --> 00:02:20.940

A few months later, they had joined the Cistercian order, alongside

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00:02:20.980 --> 00:02:24.560

nearby Rievaulx Abbey, and committed to living lives of strict

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00:02:24.700 --> 00:02:26.140

poverty and austerity.

41

00:02:27.040 --> 00:02:30.900

Ultimately, Fountains Abbey was to become the largest and most powerful

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00:02:30.940 --> 00:02:32.620

Cistercian house in the country.

43

00:02:33.640 --> 00:02:37.240

William, who had witnessed these events firsthand alongside

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00:02:37.260 --> 00:02:41.100

Thurstan, must have had little idea how significant these

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00:02:41.140 --> 00:02:43.900

reformers would be in his political battles to come.

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00:02:44.560 --> 00:02:48.400

In 1141, William was elected Archbishop of York by the

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00:02:48.440 --> 00:02:52.360

Canons of the Minster. However, he was to become the only man

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00:02:52.480 --> 00:02:56.140

to be elected to the archbishopric, not once, but twice,

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00:02:56.740 --> 00:03:00.520

an indication of just how bumpy a road William had left to travel.