



*Westminster Abbey, King Stephen,
and the Failure to Canonize King
Edward in 1139*

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Abstract: In 1139, Pope Innocent II denied Westminster Abbey's request to obtain canonization for King Edward (reigned 1042–1066), later known as “the Confessor.” Modern scholars usually explain this failure in relation to the disruption of the early years of King Stephen's reign, 1135–1154, when he and Empress Matilda clashed over who should wear England's crown. While the contemporary political situation was an important influence on Pope Innocent's decision, other factors were equally significant, in particular the fragility of Westminster Abbey's own position within the kingdom. Although established as the site of English coronations, Westminster was yet to assert itself as the kingdom's premier royal church, and its financial position was challenged by competition from London. The Abbey's attempt to obtain Edward's canonization was central to its campaign, headed by Osbert of Clare, to secure its political and financial position. Westminster's weakness caused the Abbey to tie the canonization request to Stephen's fortunes, which ultimately did not help the cause, when shifting papal politics strengthened Innocent's independence and correspondingly weakened his support for the king. The intersection of these factors, rather than the civil conflict alone, resulted in the denial of the canonization request in 1139.

Keywords: Westminster Abbey; Osbert of Clare; Edward the Confessor; King Stephen; canonization; Pope Innocent II



On 9 December 1139, Pope Innocent II denied Westminster Abbey's request to canonize Edward, the last king of the Anglo-Saxon royal line. Westminster's prior, Osbert of Clare (c.1090–c.1158) had presented the canonization petition in Rome.² He must have been astonished by Innocent's decision as conditions had appeared favourable when Osbert left for Rome in autumn 1139. Royal support had seemed secured both directly, by the personal support of the king and his brother Bishop Henry of Winchester,

¹ I wish to thank: Dr Kathleen Neal and Prof. Constant Mews for helpfully guiding me through the writing of this article and the review process; Samuel Baudinette, Margaret Coffey, Julia Smart, Bernard Keo, Eugenia Pacitti, and Jennifer Lord for reading and commenting on various drafts; and the anonymous reviewers, whose insightful comments and suggestions greatly improved this article. I also acknowledge the support provided by a Monash University Honours Publication Award (2014) and an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship during the writing of this article.

² For Osbert's dates, see: Frank Barlow, “Clare, Osbert of (d. in or after 1158),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/5442. For the petition and denial, see: E. W. Williamson, ed., *The Letters of Osbert of Clare, Prior of Westminster* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Sandpiper Books, 1998), nos 14-19.

and indirectly, through the installation in 1138 of King Stephen's illegitimate son Gervase as Westminster's abbot (born c.1110; deposed c.1157).³ Stephen had enjoyed a good relationship with Innocent, obtaining papal recognition after claiming the English throne in December 1135 ahead of his predecessor Henry I's nominated heir Empress Matilda. Yet Innocent had denied Westminster's request citing minimal support from the English Church as a whole. Frank Barlow has explained the canonization's curious failure in terms of the contemporary political situation in England, with little reference to the papacy in 1139, or Westminster's position within the kingdom.⁴ This article reviews that argument, positing that the situation was more complicated. While the dispute between Stephen and Matilda did contribute to Innocent's decision, Westminster's place in England was also an important factor. It had not yet established itself as England's premier royal church, and the canonization was intended to boost the Abbey's place within the realm, not bolster Stephen's cause. Its failure in 1139 reflected the intersection of the weakness of Stephen's rule, the still fragile status of Westminster Abbey's position within the kingdom, and changing attitudes within the Papal Curia.

Analysed in context, I argue that the canonization petition reflected Westminster's desire to strengthen its standing within England. Westminster needed to be more than just a place of coronation if it was to gain popular support within the kingdom. The Abbey's as-yet-uncertain relationship with the monarchy meant that it could not rely on royal largesse to fill its coffers, nor did the Abbey possess saints' relics to serve as a focus for pilgrimage, and therefore income. The lack of a saint's shrine meant that Westminster could not compete with various rival churches, for example St Paul's Cathedral and Reading Abbey, which respectively possessed the shrine of St Erkenwald and the important relic of the hand of St James the Great. If Westminster could successfully assert King Edward's sanctity, it could overtake St Paul's as London's prime pilgrimage destination, and the pilgrims' donations would ensure the Abbey's financial security and its position as England's premier royal church.

Westminster Abbey in the Early Twelfth Century

Although Westminster had achieved a degree of royal favour following the Norman Conquest, this had not developed into a regular or special relationship.⁵ There were signs in the early twelfth century that the Abbey's status was faltering. Yet earlier royal links had been

³ For Gervase's birth date, see: Edmund King, "Stephen (c.1092-1154)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/26365.

⁴ Frank Barlow, *Edward the Confessor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 276; Frank Barlow, "Appendix D: The Development of the Cult of King Edward," in *The Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster Attributed to a Monk of Saint-Bertin*, ed. and trans. Frank Barlow, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 160.

⁵ For a detailed examination of Westminster's relationships with the monarchy, see: Emma Mason, "Westminster Abbey and the Monarchy between the Reigns of William I and John (1066-1216)," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 41, no. 2 (1990): 199-216.

encouraging for the community. King Edward, later known as “the Confessor,” had rescued the small religious house from obscurity, and his initiative had made it possible to consider Westminster as a royal church. He funded the building of a new, larger church, where he was interred in January 1066, and lavishly endowed the Abbey with adornments and lands.⁶ The need of Harold Godwinson (reigned January–October 1066) and William the Conqueror (reigned 1066–1087) to secure their status as King Edward’s successors in 1066 had seen them crowned at Westminster, Edward’s burial church. William’s two sons and Stephen followed their example, thereby establishing Westminster’s place as England’s coronation church. Until the early years of Henry I’s reign, Westminster was a regular venue for Christmas and Pentecost celebrations, when English kings wore their crowns.⁷ William the Conqueror and his sons held more of these feasts at Westminster than at any other royal site, such as Gloucester or Winchester.⁸ This appeared to strengthen Westminster’s royal links and demonstrated its importance as a royal residence, but it seems that no ceremonies were held at the Abbey between 1109 and 1121, and after this date no more great celebrations are known to have been held there by Henry I.⁹ This decrease in royal activity may be related to Henry I’s foundation of Reading Abbey in 1121, which was built not only as his mausoleum but also as a “family memorial.”¹⁰ Although William the Conqueror had founded and favoured churches elsewhere, such as Battle Abbey, he still held Westminster in great veneration as Edward’s burial church.¹¹ After Reading’s foundation in June 1121, royal support for Westminster appeared to lessen, as King Henry issued eight extant charters for Westminster, in comparison to thirteen for Reading.¹² King Stephen continued to support Reading, issuing twenty-two charters for it, in comparison to twelve for Westminster.¹³ Stephen’s rivals, Empress Matilda and her son Henry of Anjou, also issued fifteen charters for Reading.¹⁴ Westminster may have been worried that

⁶ *Life of King Edward*, 66-71; Osbert of Clare, “Vita beati Eadwardi regis Anglorum,” ed. Marc Bloch, in “La vie de S. Édouard le Confesseur par Osbert de Clare,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 41 (1923): 105-106.

⁷ Martin Biddle, “Seasonal Festivals and Residence: Winchester, Westminster and Gloucester in the Tenth to Twelfth Centuries,” in *Anglo-Norman Studies VIII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1985*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1986), 51-72.

⁸ Biddle, “Seasonal Festivals,” 54.

⁹ See Biddle, “Seasonal Festivals,” Appendix C.

¹⁰ For Reading’s foundation, see: Ron Baxter, *The Royal Abbey of Reading* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016), chapter 1. I hope to investigate the so-far-unexamined relationship between Reading and Westminster Abbeys in the future.

¹¹ David Bates, ed., *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum: The Acta of William I (1066-1087)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), no. 139.

¹² Westminster: Charles Johnson and H. A. Cronne, eds., *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum 1066-1154, Volume 2: Regesta Henrici Primi, 1100-1135* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), nos 1377, 1383, 1416, 1758, 1879-1880, 1882-1883. Reading: Johnson and Cronne, *Regesta Regum*, nos 1418, 1423, 1506, 1757, 1789, 1796-1797, 1864-1865; and B. R. Kemp, ed., *Reading Abbey Cartularies: British Library Manuscripts, Egerton 3031, Harley 1708, and Cotton Vespasian E XXV*, vol. 1 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1986), nos 7, 308.

¹³ Reading: H. A. Cronne and R. H. C. Davis, *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum 1066-1154, Volume 3: Regesta Regis Stephani ac Mathildis Imperatricis ac Gaufridi et Henrici Ducum Normannorum 1135-1154* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), nos 675-696. Westminster: Cronne and Davis, *Regesta Regum*, nos 925-927, 930-938.

¹⁴ Cronne and Davis, *Regesta Regum*, nos 697-711.

Reading was becoming the monarchy's preferred religious house. Although Westminster had established itself as the place of royal coronation, it was not considered to be a royal church, as demonstrated by the dearth of regular royal donations and decrease of ceremonial crown-wearings.¹⁵

In the 1130s Westminster made a concerted effort to gain broad social recognition as England's premier royal church. Simultaneously, this was an attempt to turn royal attention towards the Abbey, perhaps modelled on St Denis, which had a long-established close relationship to the French monarchy through its status as royal burial church and the place where the royal insignia were kept.¹⁶ Osbert of Clare spearheaded a campaign to promote Westminster as the centre of Edward's cult. It included the canonization petition, the production of a *Vita* of Edward, and involvement in a number of forgeries in the Abbey's favour. As a royal saint, Edward's canonization would have helped to create widespread social recognition for the Abbey, and thereby secured its financial position and ecclesiastical independence. Additionally, by establishing a link between Edward and the Abbey, Osbert's efforts created an image of Westminster as a royal church.

Although Osbert was a key figure in the canonization project, little is known about him. Born in or near Clare in Suffolk by about 1090, he had an Anglo-Saxon name. His kinship with Bishop Æthelwold of Carlisle confirms that Osbert possessed English blood.¹⁷ He was prior by 1121 when Herbert, previously Westminster's almoner, became abbot, imposed by Henry I.¹⁸ Osbert, who represented an English faction within the Abbey, may well have been a candidate for the abbacy, as he was sent into exile following Herbert's appointment.¹⁹ He clashed with Herbert, for example, over financial issues at the Abbey.²⁰ Osbert wrote to Herbert from exile, admonishing him on such matters.²¹ Part of Osbert's exile was spent at Ely, where he encountered the cult of the Anglo-Saxon princess Saint Etheldreda.²² His

¹⁵ Mason, "Westminster Abbey and the Monarchy," 201; Emma Mason, *Westminster Abbey and its People, c.1050-c.1216* (Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 1996), 151-153.

¹⁶ The similarities and possible connections between Westminster Abbey's campaign and Abbot Suger's to promote St Denis have been noted. See Bernhard W. Scholz, "Two Forged Charters from the Abbey of Westminster and their Relationship with St Denis," *English Historical Review* 76 (July 1961): 466-478.

¹⁷ For Osbert's life see J. Armitage Robinson, "A Sketch of Osbert's Career," in Williamson, *Letters of Osbert*, 1-20; Barlow, "Clare, Osbert of?"; and Brian Briggs, "The Life and Works of Osbert of Clare" (D.Phil thesis, University of St Andrews, 2005), 1-36. In *Letters of Osbert*, no. 9, Osbert claimed to be Æthelwold's *consanguineus*, "kinsman."

¹⁸ Barlow, "Clare, Osbert of?."

¹⁹ Robinson, "Sketch," 3-5. The dates of Osbert's first exile from Westminster are problematic and rest on internal evidence from his letters. J. A. Robinson, "Sketch," 2, believed that Osbert was exiled by 1123, arguing that Osbert, describing himself as *proscriptus*, had written to Hugh of Amiens before Hugh became Abbot of Reading in that year (*Letters of Osbert*, no. 1). Briggs, "Life and Works," 8-10, however, demonstrated that Robinson misidentified the letter's recipient, thus questioning the date of the letter and Osbert's exile.

²⁰ H. G. Richardson and G. O. Sayles, *The Government of Mediaeval England from the Conquest to Magna Carta* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963), 413. For Herbert's abbacy, see: Mason, *Westminster Abbey and its People*, 33-36.

²¹ *Letters of Osbert*, no. 2.

²² *Letters of Osbert*, no. 1.

friendship with Abbot Anselm of Bury, the nephew of St Anselm, likewise suggests that Osbert spent time at Bury St Edmunds,²³ where the cult of the English King-Saint Edmund likely inspired Osbert's campaign for King Edward's canonization. The surviving sources, particularly Osbert's letters, suggest that he was a vigorous reformer who championed free election and had Westminster's best interests at heart.

Osbert's tenaciousness facilitated his return to Westminster. To end his exile, Osbert wrote to his kinsman Bishop Æthelwold in the second half of 1133 to obtain royal support, and had returned to Westminster by 1134.²⁴ Osbert's return at this time could indicate that the monks knew him to be a stern advocate of their rights, which had recently been encroached upon, revealing the Abbey's fragile position. On 29 June 1133, Gilbert the Universal, bishop of London (1128–1134) had celebrated the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul at Westminster, appropriating the mass offerings.²⁵ Westminster consequently sent a delegation to Pope Innocent II to complain.²⁶ In the bull Innocent subsequently issued on 30 September 1133, Westminster was received *tamquam sancte Romane ecclesie specialem filiam* ("as a special daughter of the Holy Roman Church"), placed under papal protection, and exempted not only from the Bishop of London's authority, but from other ecclesiastical and secular authorities as well.²⁷ Shortly after this, Osbert returned to Westminster as prior and began his promotional campaign.

Osbert's return signified a brief ascendancy of Westminster's Anglo-Saxon monks following a series of Bec-centred abbacies.²⁸ The last English abbot, Edwin, died in 1068. Two Normans succeeded him: Geoffrey (deposed in 1075) and Vitalis, upon whose death in 1085 Gilbert Crispin, a former monk of Bec, was appointed. Crispin had spent several years in Canterbury with Archbishop Lanfranc prior to his abbatial appointment and would have brought to Westminster Lanfranc's "Customs of Bec"—which were unsympathetic to English religious practices—and his attitude to reform.²⁹ Abbot Herbert, Crispin's successor, may have been a monk at Bec too before entering Westminster.³⁰ Contrastingly, Osbert represented

²³ Robinson, "Sketch," 11.

²⁴ Robinson, "Sketch," 11; *Letters of Osbert*, 205. Æthelwold witnessed a royal charter as bishop in June 1133 (Johnson and Cronne, *Regesta Regum*, no. 1764), and was consecrated in early August 1133 (John of Hexham, "Historia XXV Annorum," ed. Thomas Arnold, *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, vol. 2 (London, 1885), 285). *Letters of Osbert*, no. 9 indicates that Æthelwold had not been bishop for very long. Osbert appears in a Westminster charter early in 1134 (Emma Mason, ed., *Westminster Abbey Charters, 1066-c.1214* (London: London Record Society, 1988), no. 249).

²⁵ Walther Holtzmann, ed., *Papsturkunden in England*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1930-1), no. 17.

²⁶ Holtzmann, *Papsturkunden*, no. 17; Bernhard W. Scholz, "The Canonization of Edward the Confessor," *Speculum* 36, no. 1 (January 1961): 40.

²⁷ Holtzmann, *Papsturkunden*, no. 17.

²⁸ See: Mason, *Westminster Abbey and its People*, 22-34, for the abbots between 1068 and 1117.

²⁹ J. Armitage Robinson, *Gilbert Crispin, Abbot of Westminster: A Study of the Abbey under Norman Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 19, 28; Sally N. Vaughn, *The Abbey of Bec and the Anglo-Norman State 1034-1136* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1981), 25.

³⁰ Robinson, *Gilbert Crispin*, 31.

English tradition. The devotions he wished to develop, such as the cults of St Anne and the Immaculate Conception, were all markedly Anglo-Saxon.³¹ Osbert's activism in favour of English religious practices seemingly contributed to his first exile, and his campaign to promote Edward's canonization therefore fits neatly with his other Anglo-Saxon interests.

Promoting Westminster: Sanctity and Forgery

Osbert's plans capitalised on developing contemporary views of Edward. There are indications that Edward's tomb had become a place of sanctuary, revealing a "popular awareness" of his holiness and connection to legal processes.³² Seven abbatial writs from the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries refer to fugitives seeking asylum at Edward's tomb.³³ Four of these writs date to before the canonization petition and the other three date to Gervase's abbacy (1138–c.1157).³⁴ Edward's reputation as a lawgiver and Solomon-like ruler also increased throughout the twelfth century, evidenced by the *Leges Edwardi Confessoris* ("Laws of Edward the Confessor"), which were almost certainly composed during Stephen's reign.³⁵ It has even been posited that Osbert could have contributed to the creation of this image of Edward in the *Leges*.³⁶ Furthermore, there is evidence for a small Edwardian cult at Westminster before 1138–1139. Osbert was cured of a fever while praying at Edward's grave and preached to crowds who attended the services commemorating Edward's anniversary.³⁷ Although an anonymous *Vita* of Edward, hinting at his sanctity, was written shortly after his death, it appears that no one had seriously considered him to be a saint before Osbert's campaign began.³⁸ Westminster possessed a copy of this *Vita*, which became a main source for Osbert's *Vita* of Edward.³⁹ Why then did the campaign for Edward's canonization become so active in the late 1130s?

The canonization petition cannot properly be read in isolation from Westminster's

³¹ For Osbert's interest in St Anne, see: *Letters of Osbert*, nos 12-3; André Wilmart, "Les compositions d'Osbert de Clare on l'honneur de Sainte Anne," *Annales de Bretagne* 37, no. 1-2 (1925-6): 1-33; Kati Ihnat, "Early Evidence for the Cult of Anne in Twelfth-Century England," *Traditio* 69 (2014): 1-44. For Osbert's promotion of the Immaculate Conception, see *Letters of Osbert*, nos 7, 13; Osbert of Clare, "Hodiernae diei mysterium," in *Tractatus de Conceptione Sanctae Mariae*, eds Herbert Thurston and Thomas Slater (Freiburg: Herder, 1904), 65-83.

³² Richard Mortimer, "Edward the Confessor: the Man and the Legend," in *Edward the Confessor: The Man and the Legend*, ed. Richard Mortimer (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), 35.

³³ Mason, "Westminster Abbey and the Monarchy," 202-203; *Westminster Abbey Charters*, nos 238-240, 248, 272-274.

³⁴ *Westminster Abbey Charters*, nos 238-240, 248; 272-274.

³⁵ Bruce R. O'Brien, *God's Peace and King's Peace: The Laws of Edward the Confessor* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 17, 47-48, 194-195; *Life of King Edward*, 6-7, 20-21; Barlow, *Edward*, 178-179.

³⁶ O'Brien, *God's Peace and King's Peace*, 39, 221 n. 32.

³⁷ Ælred of Rievaulx, "The Life of Saint Edward, King and Confessor," ed. Marsha L. Dutton, trans. Jane Patricia Freeland, in *Ælred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works* (Trappist, KT: Cistercian Publications, 2005), 233-237.

³⁸ Barlow, *Edward*, 266; *Life of King Edward*, 126-127. For more information regarding the *Vita's* date, see: Frank Barlow, "Introduction," in *Life of King Edward*, xxix-xxxiii.

³⁹ Barlow, "Introduction," xxxiii-xxxvi, lxxx.

plans to strengthen its position in the city and the kingdom. These included attempts, many of which involved Osbert, to assert the Abbey's independence from the London See, secure its endowment, and promote its royal status during the 1130s. In his *Vita* of Edward, written in 1138, Osbert repeated the story of the Abbey's consecration by St Peter, first found in the monk Sulcard's 1070s history of Westminster Abbey.⁴⁰ The emphasis on the chief apostle in the Abbey's foundation story symbolically placed it ahead of London's cathedral church, dedicated to St Paul. In addition, the Abbey was involved in more concrete attempts to secure its independence. For example, two surviving papal bulls, dated 22 April 1139, indicate that Gervase attended the Second Lateran Council in Rome and petitioned Innocent II regarding Westminster's independence.⁴¹ In one of these bulls, Innocent again granted Westminster papal protection, and admonished anyone who might harass the Abbey.⁴² Innocent stated that he was following and strengthening *exempla predecessorum nostrorum Nicholai atque Leonis Romanorum pontificum* ("the examples of [his] predecessors the Roman pontiffs Nicholas and Leo").⁴³ Nicholas II and Leo IX's bulls were actually twelfth-century forgeries, almost certainly created by Westminster's monks for the trip to the Lateran Council. These symbolic and pragmatic approaches to securing the Abbey's independence were intrinsically linked: both forged bulls appear in Osbert's *Vita* of Edward.⁴⁴ They were all part of Westminster's attempts to ensure independence from London and to promote the Abbey as a royal church.

A lack of written documentation, however, weakened the campaign to procure Edward's canonization. When Edward was eventually declared a saint in 1161, many prelates and other ecclesiastical figures supplied letters of support.⁴⁵ The extant evidence shows that in the late 1130s Osbert and Westminster had only secured the backing of King Stephen; the King's brother Bishop Henry of Winchester, who was also the administrator of the diocese of London, in which Westminster was situated; and the chapter of St Paul's Cathedral.⁴⁶ Henry and St Paul's letters are short and not particularly fervent, although Bishop Henry shows more enthusiasm for Osbert himself. Osbert's correspondence reveals his wide-ranging network, which included the bishops of Worcester and Carlisle, Robert de Sigillo, the future bishop of London, Abbot Anselm of Bury, and other religious figures.⁴⁷ The tumultuous nature of Stephen's reign would have certainly made it difficult for Osbert to gather support for his campaign. As William of Malmesbury put it, England was *intestinis discidiis Anglia quatiebatur*

⁴⁰ Briggs, "Life and Works," 24; Osbert, *Vita*, 83-86; Sulcard of Westminster, "Prologus de Construccione Westmonasterii," ed. Bernhard W. Scholz, "Sulcard of Westminster: 'Prologus de Construccione Westmonasterii,'" *Traditio* 20 (1964): 82-86.

⁴¹ Holtzmann, *Papsturkunden*, nos 20-1. For Gervase's attendance at Lateran II, see: Mason, *Westminster Abbey and its People*, 38.

⁴² Holtzmann, *Papsturkunden*, no. 21.

⁴³ Holtzmann, *Papsturkunden*, no. 21.

⁴⁴ A version of Leo IX's forged bull appears in Osbert, *Vita*, 79-80. The Nicholas II forgery is found on 89-90.

⁴⁵ Barlow, *Edward*, 311-323.

⁴⁶ *Letters of Osbert*, nos 16-18.

⁴⁷ *Letters of Osbert*, nos 1, 5-10, 12-13, 23.

(“shaken by internal strife”).⁴⁸ It is also possible that some letters are no longer extant. Yet Pope Innocent rejected Edward’s canonization because support for it was lacking throughout England.⁴⁹ This suggests that Osbert either had not tapped his network to develop the petition, or his correspondents felt unable to back a cult that was unknown throughout most of the kingdom. Therefore, since Westminster did not have substantial ecclesiastical support for its campaign, it had to rely on royal support, and it was the intersection of Westminster’s weakness with Stephen’s political problems that led to the failure to canonize Edward.

Unlike St Edmund at Bury, Edward was not yet the focus of a popular cult in England. Westminster and Osbert perhaps thought that they had a better chance of quickly expanding Edward’s cult, and by extension the Abbey’s fortunes, if a higher authority affirmed Edward’s sanctity. There was seemingly a perception that papal canonization would not only give Edward’s cult official sanction, but also greater glory. Osbert understood the political and spiritual implications of the fact that no previous English saint had received papal approval. Having a saint’s holiness confirmed by the leader of Christendom, whose prestige was increasing, and recognised internationally, was much more significant than simply obtaining approval locally.⁵⁰ The Pope or his representative’s authority would lend Edward’s cult greater splendour and dignity than other English saints. Thus, in late 1138, Osbert approached the papal legate to England, Cardinal-Bishop Alberic of Ostia, to seek Edward’s canonization.⁵¹ Alberic instead almost certainly advised Osbert to seek Edward’s canonization directly from the Pope.

Papal canonization was becoming increasingly common in the twelfth century, but it was still rare for a king to be declared a saint.⁵² The first occurrence was in 1101 when Pope Paschal II authorised King Cnut IV of Denmark’s cult. Pope Innocent II had canonised at least three non-royal saints by mid-1139: Godehard of Hildesheim at the Council of Rheims in 1131, Hugh of Grenoble at the Council of Pisa in 1135, and Sturm of Fulda at the Second Lateran Council in 1139.⁵³ As Abbot Gervase of Westminster most likely attended the Second Lateran Council, he could have witnessed Sturm’s canonization, which in turn encouraged him to foster Osbert’s efforts. Innocent’s policy of canonizing local saints to win support against his rival Anacletus II (1130–1138) during a period of papal schism appeared to ensure Osbert’s success in Rome. The status of Edward’s burial place, Westminster, would be elevated above all other English shrines, considerably increasing its prestige.

⁴⁸ William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella: The Contemporary History*, ed. Edmund King, and trans. K. R. Potter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 40-41.

⁴⁹ *Letters of Osbert*, no. 19.

⁵⁰ Donald S. Prudlo, *Certain Sainthood: Canonization and the Origins of Papal Infallibility in the Medieval Church* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 15, 29.

⁵¹ *Letters of Osbert*, no. 14. Alberic’s activities in England are discussed further below.

⁵² See: E. W. Kemp, *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church* (Westport CT: Hyperion Press, 1979), 57-81; and Prudlo, *Certain Sainthood*, 13-41, for discussions of the development of papal canonization.

⁵³ Prudlo, *Certain Sainthood*, 27-28. There is some doubt over whether Gerard of Brogne was canonised at Rheims in 1131. See Kemp, *Canonization and Authority*, 75-76.

Westminster's plans were affected by an episcopal vacancy in London. Gilbert the Universal died in August 1134, and it was not until March 1136, soon after King Stephen's accession, that St Paul's chapter is said to have elected Abbot Anselm of Bury.⁵⁴ Since Anselm was Osbert's friend, he and Westminster's monks may have expected the bishop-elect to advocate for them with the papal connections Anselm had acquired while living in Rome as abbot of St Sabas.⁵⁵ The Dean of St Paul's, however, objected to Anselm's election and appealed to Rome, where the election was annulled by Innocent in 1138, with Bishop Henry of Winchester appointed the diocese's administrator. The vacancy then remained unfilled until 1141 when Robert de Sigillo, a former royal official and monk of Reading, was appointed. Although Anselm's deposition was a blow to Westminster's campaign, with the bishopric vacant, Westminster still hoped to gain its ecclesiastical independence while opposition was limited.

As well as ensuring its independence, the Abbey wished to prove itself equal to its contemporary cross-town rival, St Paul's Cathedral, which possessed the shrine of St Erkenwald, a seventh-century bishop of London. Reading Abbey, which possessed the Hand of St James the Great and many other relics, was another competitor, since it was receiving substantial royal support.⁵⁶ While St Paul's provided a letter supporting Edward's canonization in 1139, it was not particularly effusive, as a new saint would attract pilgrims away from Erkenwald, whose cult was revived at this time.⁵⁷ A rise in miracles attributed to Erkenwald, suggesting an increased rivalry between the two churches, is evident in the *Miracula sancti Erkenwaldi* "Miracles of St Erkenwald" for 1138–1139.⁵⁸ The commissioning and fundraising for a new silver shrine for Erkenwald in 1138, followed by his translation in 1140, reflected the anxiety of the Cathedral's canons. Arcoid, Gilbert the Universal's nephew, compiled the *Miracula* in about 1141, most likely in response to Osbert's activities in support of Edward. St Paul's had reason to regard Westminster as a rival as Osbert had successfully accomplished two other projects: promoting the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and founding a priory at Kilburn. While the rivalry was not explicitly voiced, it is evident from the actions of the two chapters.⁵⁹ If Edward had been canonised by the Pope, Westminster would have surpassed St Paul's and Reading as a pilgrimage centre. It would have also enhanced its status as a royal church by being the location of a King-Saint's shrine.

Other methods were used to create the image of Westminster Abbey as a royal church.

⁵⁴ For details of Anselm's disputed election see William Stubbs, ed., *The Historical Works of Master Ralph de Diceto, Dean of London* (1876; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1:248-252.

⁵⁵ For Anselm's papal ties, see: *Letters of Osbert*, 192-193.

⁵⁶ See: Baxter, *Royal Abbey of Reading*, 48-57 for St James' hand.

⁵⁷ *Letters of Osbert*, no. 18. On the activities at St Paul's concerning St Erkenwald, see Scholz, "Canonization," 40-41; and E. Gordon Whatley, "Introduction," in *The Saint of London: The Life and Miracles of Saint Erkenwald*, ed. and trans. E. Gordon Whatley (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1989), 57-70.

⁵⁸ Arcoid, "Miracula sancti Erkenwaldi," ed. and trans. E. Gordon Whatley, *Saint of London*, 30-51.

⁵⁹ Whatley, *Saint of London*, 66, notes the lack of written contemporary evidence for the rivalry.

Osbert and a group of monks forged, or doctored, documents in which various kings, including Edward, granted lands and legal rights to Westminster, turning Edward into its great patron.⁶⁰ This activity additionally assisted in constructing an idea of Westminster Abbey as a royal church. The forged papal bulls presented to the 1139 Lateran Council formed one part of a larger campaign to produce documentary evidence for Westminster's special status during this period. Forgery was not uncommon in the early twelfth century, particularly during Stephen's reign, as various long-established monasteries dealt with the chaos caused to land tenure by the Norman Conquest and the "shift from oral to written testimony."⁶¹ Westminster "improved" many of William I's charters by adding witnesses to strengthen its right to various lands.⁶² Such forged documents were a tool for Westminster to prove title to its estates, ensure exemption from the bishop of London's authority, and establish the Abbey's royal status.⁶³ Furthermore, if Edward obtained saintly rank, his charters would have an unchallengeable authority.⁶⁴ Hence, the forgeries, the Lateran embassy, and the canonization petition should be seen as integrated aspects of Westminster's strategy to improve its situation in the 1130s.

The language of the forged documents demonstrates Westminster's agenda of ensuring its endowment through restoring a special relationship with the monarchy—of which the canonization attempt was part. The forged charters emphasise Westminster's alleged position as a royal church. Edward's forged Third Charter for the Abbey describes Westminster as the *sedes regia* ("royal seat"), as does King Edgar's (reigned 959–975) forged First Charter, and Stephen's letter, drafted by Osbert, which was sent to Innocent supporting Edward's canonization.⁶⁵ One forged charter particularly links the Abbey and monarchy as it states that Edward had bequeathed his crown and other regalia to Westminster.⁶⁶ Osbert's *Vita* echoes this idea, where Pope Nicholas confirms Westminster as the *repositorium regaliū insignium* ("repository of the royal regalia").⁶⁷ The forgeries thus reveal what Osbert and Westminster thought the royal attitude towards the Abbey and Edward *should* have been rather than the

⁶⁰ Barlow, *Edward*, 273.

⁶¹ Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*. 3rd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 318-328; Bates, *Regesta*, 63, 74. The quote is from Christopher N. L. Brooke, "Approaches to Medieval Forgery," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 3, no. 8 (1968): 384.

⁶² Mason, *Westminster Abbey and its People*, 103-104.

⁶³ Julia Crick, "St Albans, Westminster and some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past," in *Anglo-Norman Studies XXV: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2002*, ed. John Gillingham (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 68-70.

⁶⁴ Barlow, *Edward*, 273.

⁶⁵ Pierre Chaplais, "The Original Charters of Herbert and Gervase, Abbots of Westminster (1121-57)," in *Essays in Medieval Diplomacy and Administration* (London: Hambledon Press, 1981), 94; Hubert Pierquin, ed., *Recueil Général des Chartes Anglo-Saxonnes les Saxons en Angleterre* (Paris: Alphonse Picard and Fils, 1912), 811; A. S. Napier and W. H. Stevenson, eds., *The Cranford Collection of Early Charters and Documents now in the Bodleian Library* (Oxford, 1893), 13; *Letters of Osbert*, no. 17.

⁶⁶ Bates, *Regesta*, no. 290.

⁶⁷ Osbert, *Vita*, 90.

reality.⁶⁸ If Westminster Abbey truly had been an important royal site, there would have been no need to declare it so forcefully in the forgeries.⁶⁹

Several features indicate that the text of the forged charters was copied directly from Osbert's *Vita*. In the forged First and Third Charters of Edward, the narratives of Westminster's re-foundation and the sending of envoys to Rome are very similar to Osbert's *Vita*.⁷⁰ Long passages from the *Vita*, mainly papal letters, were copied verbatim into the charters.⁷¹ Sections of *Vita* text, written in the third person, were imperfectly converted into the first person for the charters.⁷² Tellingly, in a passage of the Third Charter, where Edward is supposedly speaking in the first person, he refers to *suum* ("his") vow when he should refer to *meum* ("my") vow.⁷³ A similar error occurs in the First Charter, where *rege* ("king") is used instead of *me*.⁷⁴ These errors particularly indicate that the charter text was directly copied from Osbert's *Vita* of Edward and demonstrate that the canonization petition and the forgeries were part of the same programme to promote Westminster as a royal site.

Like the forgeries, Osbert's *Vita* connected Westminster with royalty. Osbert used Edward to promote Westminster by weaving him into its history and myth.⁷⁵ Eighteen of the *Vita*'s thirty chapters tie Edward to Westminster.⁷⁶ Furthermore, Westminster was cast as central to Edward's rule. Osbert stressed Edward's regality, describing him wearing his crown and royal regalia while attending services at Westminster, thereby presenting the Abbey as a site of royal ceremony and power.⁷⁷ In one forged charter, William the Conqueror is claimed to have promised his patronage and that crown-wearings would occur at Westminster.⁷⁸ Crown-wearings were a source of revenue and prestige, so it was in Westminster's interests to promote royal visits.⁷⁹ Nine forgeries purport to be granted at Christmas or Pentecost when kings traditionally wore their crowns at Westminster.⁸⁰ As Jennie England has argued, Osbert was crafting a "memory of ceremonial tradition" to create a new ceremonial royal era for

⁶⁸ Emma Mason, "Pro statu et incolumitate regni meī: Royal Monastic Patronage 1066-1154," in *Religion and National Identity: Papers Read at the Nineteenth Summer Meeting and the Twentieth Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Stuart Mews (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), 112.

⁶⁹ Scholz, "Canonization," 46.

⁷⁰ Chaplais, "Original Charters," 93; Jennie England, "Osbert of Clare and the Reforging of Westminster Abbey's Past" (paper presented at the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 7-10 July, 2014); Bloch, "La Vie de S. Édouard," 46; Pierquin, *Recueil Général des Chartes*, 802-815; Osbert, *Vita*, 77-80, 87-91. England's research is included in her University of York PhD thesis, which is due to be submitted in 2018.

⁷¹ Pierquin, *Recueil Général des Chartes*, 802-804, 809-811; Osbert, *Vita*, 77-82, 87-91.

⁷² Chaplais, "Original Charters," 93; Pierquin, *Recueil Général des Chartes*, 803, 809; Osbert, *Vita*, 77-78, 87-91.

⁷³ Pierquin, *Recueil Général des Chartes*, 810; Osbert, *Vita*, 89.

⁷⁴ Pierquin, *Recueil Général des Chartes*, 803; Chaplais, "Original Charters," 93; Osbert, *Vita*, 78.

⁷⁵ This paragraph is based on England, "Osbert of Clare."

⁷⁶ Osbert, *Vita*, chapters 5, 7-12, 14, 16, 18-20, 24-26, 28-30.

⁷⁷ Osbert, *Vita*, 75, 98, 116, 121-122.

⁷⁸ Bates, *Regesta*, no. 290.

⁷⁹ Johnson and Cronne, *Regesta Regum*, no. 490; Briggs, "Life and Works," 52-53.

⁸⁰ Briggs, "Life and Works," 52-53; Bates, *Regesta*, nos 301, 303, 305-306, 312, 318-319, 324, 331.

Westminster.⁸¹

Four papal bulls issued by Innocent II in December 1139 show the connection between Osbert's attempt to obtain Edward's canonization and promote Westminster's royal links and the Abbey's wider efforts to secure its endowment. These bulls indicate that Westminster had suffered substantial losses in recent years due to bad management during Herbert's abbacy and the vacancy after his death. In addition, they explicitly and implicitly associate the canonization petition with the Abbey's fragile position. In the first bull, which also denied the canonization, Innocent appointed Bishop Henry of Winchester to ensure the restoration of misappropriated lands to the Abbey.⁸² The second directed Henry to hear Westminster's complaint, give the monks justice, and prevent further injury to them.⁸³ The third requested King David of Scotland to confirm his donation to the Abbey regarding the commemoration of his sister Edith's death.⁸⁴ The fourth, which some scholars regard as a forgery, gave Abbot Gervase clear instructions regarding Westminster's administration.⁸⁵ Although the canonization petition failed, the acquisition of these bulls meant that Osbert's journey was a partial success, since the documents gave Westminster papal authority to help improve its position through safeguarding its estates and income, and preventing further losses.

Westminster Abbey and the Monarchy

Westminster Abbey's uncertain position meant it had to rely on royal backing to bring its campaign to fruition. Initially, Westminster's royal connections, although not yet regularised into a special royal status for the Abbey, seemed to ensure the success of the canonization petition. Abbot Herbert died in September 1136 and in December 1138 Stephen's illegitimate son Gervase was blessed as Westminster's new abbot.⁸⁶ No protests are recorded concerning the appointment, and while Osbert possibly harboured desires for Westminster's abbacy upon Herbert's death, his relationship with Gervase began well. Bernhard Scholz and Frank Barlow interpreted Innocent's fourth bull as an admonishment of the abbot and convent's behaviour, arguing that internal turmoil at Westminster contributed to Innocent's denial of Osbert's request.⁸⁷ Conversely, Emma Mason has said there was no conflict at this time, as Osbert and

⁸¹ England, "Osbert of Clare."

⁸² *Letters of Osbert*, no. 19. For this paragraph see Mason, *Westminster Abbey and its People*, 39-40.

⁸³ *Letters of Osbert*, no. 20.

⁸⁴ Holtzmann, *Papsturkunden*, no. 25. Edith's name was changed to Matilda upon her marriage to King Henry I. She was Empress Matilda's mother.

⁸⁵ Holtzmann, *Papsturkunden*, no. 24. Mason, *Westminster Abbey and its People*, 40-42; and Barbara Harvey, "Abbot Gervase de Blois and the Fee-Farms of Westminster Abbey," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 40

(November 1967): 127-129, regard this bull as a forgery. Chaplais, "Original Charters," 91, accepts it as genuine.

⁸⁶ John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, ed. and trans. P. McGurk (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 3:262-263. For Gervase's tenure as Westminster's abbot, see: Mason, *Westminster Abbey and its People*, 37-51.

⁸⁷ Scholz, "Canonization," 47-48; Barlow, *Edward*, 276-277.

Gervase were collaborating to obtain Edward's canonization, but as argued above, this had not been the case previously.⁸⁸ Osbert doubtless wanted to capitalise on the cooperation of an abbot who also happened to be the king's son, thus doubly improving his chances of pushing forward with his Edwardian agenda. Gervase could secure the support of his father the king and his uncle Bishop Henry of Winchester. These royal links perhaps overshadowed any lingering concerns regarding Gervase's imposition by the king. The monks plausibly believed that Stephen's installation of Gervase showed his concern for the Abbey and its affairs, and that with the king's son as their abbot all their financial woes would disappear.⁸⁹ Although Osbert may have privately regretted the lack of a free election, Gervase's familial connections indicated that royal support for the Abbey would increase, improve its weak position, and help establish Westminster as a royal church.

Westminster conceivably hoped that Stephen would follow and expand on the examples of his Norman predecessors, who had treated Edward with great respect.⁹⁰ Yet Stephen's reign represented something of a break with this practice. William the Conqueror had stressed his familial connection to Edward throughout his reign and William's sons followed this example. Henry I even united the old and new English royal lines by marrying Edward's great-niece, Edith of Scotland. Although not personally devoted to Edward, these rulers understood that associating themselves with the last king of the Anglo-Saxon royal line added legitimacy and authority to their rule. Contrastingly Stephen rarely linked himself to Edward. Deciphering his attitude towards Edward and Westminster is therefore challenging.⁹¹ His marriage to Matilda of Boulogne, Edith of Scotland's niece, connected him to the old royal dynasty, but Stephen never stressed this link.⁹² In 1136 Stephen granted *omnes bonas leges et bonas consuetudines eis concedo quas habuerunt tempore Edwardi regis* ("all the good laws and customs which [his barons and Englishmen] had") during Edward's reign.⁹³ Yet only sixteen of Stephen's approximately 700 genuine charters mention Edward.⁹⁴ William I's *acta*—excluding forgeries—refer to Edward fifty-nine times, William II's twenty-two times, and Henry I's sixty times.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Mason, *Westminster Abbey and its People*, 39.

⁸⁹ Mason, *Westminster Abbey and its People*, 37.

⁹⁰ For a more detailed examination of Edward under the Normans, see: Kyly Walker, "The Widow, the Kings and the Abbey: Using Edward the Confessor, 1066-1163" (Honours thesis, Monash University, 2014), chapter 1.

⁹¹ Mason, "Pro statu," 112.

⁹² Hugh M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation and Identity, 1066-c.1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 144. Ælred of Rievaulx, "The Genealogy of the Kings of the English," in *Ælred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*, 122 and Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969-80), 4:272-275 are two of the few contemporary writers who comment on Matilda of Boulogne's ancestry.

⁹³ Cronne and Davis, *Regesta Regum*, no. 270.

⁹⁴ Cronne and Davis, *Regesta Regum*, nos 4, 99, 144, 169, 246, 261, 288, 717, 760, 936-937, 955, 964, 966, 975.

⁹⁵ William I: Bates, *Regesta*, nos 1-4, 10, 31, 34-36, 38, 60, 66, 80, 82, 98, 117-124, 126, 134, 139, 141, 144, 146, 160, 176, 180, 216, 221-222, 224, 227, 249, 254, 263, 265, 270, 276, 286, 292. William II: H. W. C. Davis and R. J. Whitwell, eds, *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum, Volume 1: Regesta Willelmi Conquestoris et Willelmi Rufi, 1066-1100* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), nos 289, 292-296, 304, 323, 333, 336, 375, 390, 392-394, 429, 436, 439, 444, 455;

This therefore calls Stephen's attitude towards Westminster into question. It can be argued that the appointment of Stephen's illegitimate son Gervase as abbot showed the king's concern and respect for Westminster; it could also be suggested that he was just helping his son.⁹⁶ Only twelve of Stephen's extant genuine charters are for Westminster, despite Gervase's position as abbot, and they do not emphasise Edward or his cult whatsoever.⁹⁷ Contrastingly, as noted above, Stephen issued twenty-two genuine charters in Reading Abbey's favour, twice the number he issued for Westminster, demonstrating his substantial support for his uncle Henry I's foundation.⁹⁸ This explains why Stephen's attitude towards both Edward and Westminster appears ambiguous.

Royal support for Edward's canonization was not very fervent. While Marc Bloch argued that Stephen and his brother, Bishop Henry of Winchester, were actively involved in, even the initiators of, the canonization petition, other scholars rightly argue that they were not.⁹⁹ The evidence supports the conclusion that Westminster, led by Osbert, was the driving force, with Stephen and his brother simply responding to their initiative. Osbert almost certainly drafted the supporting letter that Stephen sent to the Pope, and the fact that Osbert had to solicit Henry's support indicates that Henry himself was not committed to the campaign.¹⁰⁰ Henry was administering the diocese of London at the time, and therefore would presumably not espouse a cause that would harm St Paul's Cathedral or its canons.¹⁰¹ Accordingly, as previously noted, Henry's supporting letter to Pope Innocent is brief and apathetic regarding Edward's holiness.¹⁰² One argument for Stephen's lack of interest is that Innocent's denial of Edward's canonization was not addressed to the king.¹⁰³ Yet at this time, bulls of canonization were normally addressed to local religious figures, such as Abbot Gervase and Westminster's monks, whom the saint's cult would affect most.¹⁰⁴ Stephen favoured the request because it would benefit Gervase, honour England's kings, and increase the

Johnson and Cronne, *Regesta Regum*, 401 no. 348a; 403 no. 377a. Henry I: Johnson and Cronne, *Regesta Regum*, nos 493, 495, 499, 522, 538, 546, 579, 595, 605, 627, 644, 656, 658, 661, 663, 667-669, 728, 732, 745, 774, 798, 840, 885, 892, 899, 918, 930, 937, 969, 1046, 1055, 1068, 1072, 1079, 1091, 1105, 1112-1113, 1148, 1240, 1247-1251, 1361, 1380, 1388, 1412, 1414-1415, 1420, 1467, 1597, 1756, 1818; *The Charters of William II and Henry I*, <https://actswilliam2henry1.wordpress.com/>, accessed 1 March 2018, Abingdon Abbey 29, Fawsley Church 3-4. The figures for Henry I and William II will surely increase, once the promised new editions of their *Acta* are published.

⁹⁶ Mason, "Pro statu," 112.

⁹⁷ Mason, "Westminster Abbey and the Monarchy," 212; Mason, "Pro statu," 112-113; Cronne and Davis, *Regesta Regum*, nos 925-927, 930-938.

⁹⁸ Cronne and Davis, *Regesta Regum*, nos 675-678, 680-696.

⁹⁹ Bloch, "La Vie de S. Edouard," 12-13; Scholz, "Canonization," 41-42; Barlow, *Edward*, 275; Mason, "Pro statu," 112.

¹⁰⁰ Robinson, "Sketch," 18; Scholz, "Canonization," 42; *Letters of Osbert*, nos 15, 17.

¹⁰¹ Ralph de Diceto, *Historical Works*, 1:252.

¹⁰² *Letters of Osbert*, no. 16; Briggs, "Life and Works," 82.

¹⁰³ Scholz, "Canonization," 45; *Letters of Osbert*, no. 19.

¹⁰⁴ Prudlo, *Certain Sainthood*, 37.

monarchy's status.¹⁰⁵ Edward's canonization would have enhanced Stephen's claim to rule—which was much weaker than his Norman predecessors due to Empress Matilda's claim to the throne—and consolidated his right to the kingdom by placing himself under a holy ancestor's protection.¹⁰⁶ Edward could act as a “national patron saint” symbolising the union of the Normans and Anglo-Saxons.¹⁰⁷ It might consequently seem surprising that Stephen did not support the campaign more vigorously. Yet the canonization's purpose was not to serve Stephen, but to promote Westminster Abbey's place as England's premier royal church.

If Westminster had initially developed their plans with Empress Matilda in mind, this could help explain Stephen's lukewarm support for the canonization petition and the Abbey itself.¹⁰⁸ Ultimately, Matilda was Henry I's nominated heir, and she had a closer kinship tie to Edward than Stephen. When Stephen took the throne, Westminster could have adapted an existing plan, which was based on the presumption that Matilda would rule as England's queen. Osbert and Westminster were engaged in constructing a type of royal church that Matilda would have recognised. Her first husband, Emperor Henry V, was buried in Speyer Cathedral, an imperial foundation and mausoleum, which may have influenced the Abbey's construction in the eleventh century.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, Westminster Abbey was about to host Matilda's coronation in June 1141, when she was forced to flee London.¹¹⁰ If she had permanently ousted Stephen, the Abbey may have again pushed for Edward's canonization, with a more sympathetic and enthusiastic royal patron behind it. Matilda could use her own contacts in Rome to advocate on Westminster's behalf.¹¹¹ With Stephen's restoration in November 1141 Westminster most likely deferred any plans to revive the canonization campaign until a more auspicious time.

As it turned out, 1138–1139 was not a good time for Westminster to secure royal support. Stephen spent most of 1138–1139 traversing England to besiege his enemies.¹¹² He was constantly travelling and was troubled by many anxieties.¹¹³ His attention was diverted from ecclesiastical matters, and the turbulent political situation made securing broad support

¹⁰⁵ Bloch, “La Vie de S. Édouard,” 41; Mason, “*Pro statu*,” 112; Barlow, *Edward*, 275.

¹⁰⁶ Emma Mason, “The Site of King Making and Consecration: Westminster Abbey and the Crown in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries,” in *The Church and Sovereignty c.590–1918: Essays in Honour of Michael Wilks*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 73; and Domenic Pezzini, “Aelred of Rievaulx's *Vita Sancti Edwardi Regis et Confessoris*: Its Genesis and Radiation,” *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses* 60 (2009): 32.

¹⁰⁷ Pezzini, “Aelred of Rievaulx's *Vita*,” 34.

¹⁰⁸ With thanks to Reviewer A for suggesting this line of thought.

¹⁰⁹ Mason, *Westminster Abbey and Its People*, 15.

¹¹⁰ K. R. Potter, ed. and trans., *Gesta Stephani* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 124–125; William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, 96–99; John of Worcester, *Chronicle*, 296–299.

¹¹¹ For Matilda's papal links, see: John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 85.

¹¹² For details, see: *Gesta Stephani*, 46–87; William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, 40–59; John of Worcester, *Chronicle*, 234–269. Edmund King, *King Stephen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 82–114, examines the events of 1138–1139 in some detail.

¹¹³ *Gesta Stephani*, 68–69.

for the canonization petition both unlikely and difficult to achieve. Earl Robert of Gloucester's renunciation of homage to Stephen in favour of his half-sister, Empress Matilda, was one serious problem.¹¹⁴ An upsurge in conflict with King David of Scotland, Empress Matilda's uncle, culminating in the Battle of the Standard on 22 August 1138, resulted in the papal legate Alberic of Ostia's intervention to negotiate a truce.¹¹⁵ Empress Matilda's arrival in England on 30 September 1139 likewise influenced Innocent's decision not to canonise Edward.¹¹⁶ Stephen's political problems, the papacy's attitude to English issues, and Westminster's canonization petition now began to intersect.

Stephen's actions towards the Church had an impact on Westminster's hopes as well. As several scholars have argued, the incident now widely known as "The Arrest of the Bishops" in June 1139 was an important influence on Innocent's decision not to canonise Edward.¹¹⁷ Some barons incited Stephen to turn against Bishop Roger of Salisbury and his nephews, Bishops Alexander of Lincoln and Nigel of Ely.¹¹⁸ Roger had been instrumental in obtaining the throne for Stephen in 1135.¹¹⁹ The three bishops were accused of plotting against Stephen in favour of the Empress, fortifying their castles, and gathering riches to this end. They were invited to Stephen's court at Oxford, and following a brawl involving their men, Stephen ordered their arrest on or around 24 June 1139. Roger and Alexander were taken, along with Roger's son, but Nigel managed to escape and fortified Devizes castle against Stephen. Stephen besieged Devizes, taking with him his captives, who were treated harshly, and Nigel yielded within a few days. The three bishops surrendered their castles to Stephen. It must have seemed to England's ecclesiastical leaders that Stephen had broken his earlier promises to protect the Church. For Westminster, this was a very unfortunate time for Stephen to attack, as the Abbey's frail position meant that it was depending on royal support for the canonization petition to succeed.

Stephen relied on Rome's support for his actions against the bishops. His brother Bishop Henry, previously one of Stephen's strongest adherents, and several other bishops were incensed at the treatment of their episcopal colleagues. The brothers' conflict did not bode well for Westminster, as both men supported the canonization petition. Henry, who had been

¹¹⁴ John of Worcester, *Chronicle*, 248-249; Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6:514-517.

¹¹⁵ The most thorough account of David's activities in Northern England appears in Richard of Hexham, "De Gestis Regis Stephani et Bello Standardii," ed. Richard Howlett, *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I* (London, 1886), 3:151-171; *Gesta Stephani*, 52-55.

¹¹⁶ Robinson, "Sketch," 18; Bloch, "La Vie de S. Édouard," 14; Barlow, *Edward*, 276; Kemp, *Canonization and Authority*, 77. See David Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen 1135-1154* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 108n1 for reasons why William of Malmesbury's date for Matilda's arrival is to be preferred (*Historia Novella*, 58-59).

¹¹⁷ Robinson, "Sketch," 18; Bloch, "La Vie de S. Édouard," 14; Barlow, *Edward*, 276; Kemp, *Canonization and Authority*, 77.

¹¹⁸ The arrest of the bishops and subsequent Council of Winchester are detailed in King, *King Stephen*, 107-114; *Gesta Stephani*, 72-81; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. Diana E. Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 718-723; John of Worcester, *Chronicle*, 244-249, 266-267; and William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, 44-61.

¹¹⁹ Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 700-701.

appointed papal legate in March but kept it secret until this time, held a Council at Winchester, which began on 29 August 1139. Stephen's treatment of the arrested bishops would be discussed, and a punishment, if necessary, decided. The issues concerned were the rights of bishops to control castles, especially during war, and the monarchy's right to subject Churchmen to judgment in secular courts.¹²⁰ Stephen's advocates argued that he had acted correctly and were supported by Archbishop Hugh of Rouen. William of Malmesbury states that some of the bishops wished to appeal to Rome, but Stephen's advocate retaliated that if they left England, they might not be able to return, adding that Stephen would appeal to Rome himself.¹²¹ Stephen must have believed that Innocent would uphold his actions, and the Council ended in a stalemate on 1 September.

The timing of the increased political and ecclesiastical conflict was especially unfortunate for Westminster's campaign, since the Abbey's weakness meant it needed royal support to secure Edward's canonization. Osbert left England shortly after the Winchester Council concluded. The exact date is unknown and historians have put forward various propositions.¹²² Since the journey from England to Rome usually took seven weeks, mid-September 1139 appears to be the most realistic date.¹²³ Osbert's letter to Bishop Henry refers to him as papal legate, therefore Osbert must have left after the Council of Winchester when Henry revealed this appointment.¹²⁴ If, as Edmund King suggests, some English abbots were present at the Council of Winchester, then Gervase probably attended, perhaps with Osbert in his retinue.¹²⁵ Osbert and Gervase may have used the opportunity to obtain Stephen and Henry's written support for Edward's canonization. Additionally, it would make sense if Osbert departed before Empress Matilda and Robert of Gloucester's arrival in England at the end of September became known, as their presence strengthened the divisions within England. If Osbert departed in mid-September, he would have arrived in Rome in late October or early November, leaving him four to five weeks in Rome to canvass support at the Curia for his petition.

Despite Westminster's strategic attempts to build royal links, Stephen's connection to the canonization petition did not guarantee success by December 1139. Since Westminster and Edward's cult were not prominent in England, the Abbey had relied on royal backing to secure the canonization, which failed. Innocent II's letter to Abbot Gervase and Westminster's chapter, dated 9 December 1139, stated that he would have canonized Edward if more support

¹²⁰ Edmund King, "Introduction," in William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, 1.

¹²¹ William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, 58-59.

¹²² Bloch, "La Vie de S. Édouard," 14; and J. A. Robinson, "Sketch," 18, imply that he left before the bishops' arrest. Scholz, "Canonization," 43-44, argues for after the end of August 1139. Barlow, *Edward*, 276 and "Appendix D," 160 is non-committal. Mason, *Westminster Abbey and its People*, 39, states that Osbert left in late autumn. Briggs, "Life and Works," 83-84, argues for a late September or early October departure.

¹²³ Reginald L. Poole, *Studies in Chronology and History*, ed. Austin L. Poole (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), 263-264 established the time required for the journey between southern England and Rome.

¹²⁴ *Letters of Osbert*, no. 15.

¹²⁵ King, *King Stephen*, 111.

had been provided.¹²⁶ Westminster had only received written support from Stephen, his brother Bishop Henry of Winchester, and the canons of St Paul's Cathedral.¹²⁷ Innocent added that since such a petition *debeat fieri ad honorem et profectum totius regni, ab omni regno pariter debet postulari* ("should be made for the honour and benefit of the whole kingdom, equally it should be demanded by the whole kingdom"), and if further testimonies were provided, he would not hesitate to canonise Edward.¹²⁸

The Papal Response

One reason Westminster had relied on royal support was because the Pope, who would decide whether Edward should become a saint, appeared to favour Stephen. Stephen had become king in circumstances that made ecclesiastical allies necessary. He had seized the English throne upon his uncle Henry I's death in December 1135, disinheriting Henry's chosen successor, his only surviving legitimate child, Empress Matilda. Henry's barons and churchmen, including Stephen, had sworn oaths to ensure Matilda's succession.¹²⁹ Thus Stephen's assumption of the throne caused serious divisions within England. Consequently, Stephen had a history of close relations with Innocent II, so from Westminster's perspective, Stephen's support appeared to ensure the canonization petition's success. As Jean Truax has convincingly argued, the support of Stephen's mother, Adela, and his elder brother, Count Theobald IV of Blois, for the cause of Church reform and Innocent's papacy during a schism was a key factor in obtaining papal support for Stephen's rule.¹³⁰ One version of Innocent's letter accepting Stephen as king stated that Theobald had helped convince the Pope to support Stephen, thus demonstrating that Stephen's brother had the Pope's ear.¹³¹ So Stephen's familial ties to the papacy possibly caused Westminster to believe that Pope Innocent would help a cause linked to Stephen as a favour to his family.

Since Stephen required powerful ecclesiastical allies, shortly after his coronation he sent envoys to Innocent in Pisa, requesting papal confirmation of his position as king of England. The Church had been in schism since 1130, and Innocent was himself seeking recognition against a rival claimant to the Papacy, Anacletus II, who held Rome. In early 1136 Stephen's ambassadors obtained a papal letter approving and confirming his coronation, which was widely circulated in England: it had reached as far north as Hexham within the year.¹³² Papal

¹²⁶ *Letters of Osbert*, no. 19.

¹²⁷ *Letters of Osbert*, nos 16-18.

¹²⁸ *Letters of Osbert*, no. 19.

¹²⁹ William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, 8-9.

¹³⁰ Jean A. Truax, "All Roads Lead to Chartres: The House of Blois, the Papacy, and the Anglo-Norman Succession of 1135," in *Anglo-Norman Studies XXXI: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2008*, ed. C. P. Lewis (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), 118-34.

¹³¹ Richard of Hexham, *De Gestis*, 147.

¹³² "Innocentii II Pontificis Romani Epistolæ et Privilegia," ed. J-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 179 (Paris, 1899), cols. 301-302; Richard of Hexham, *De Gestis*, 147-148; Crouch, *Reign of King Stephen*, 45.

approval gave Stephen's position greater strength but likewise meant that he was indebted to Innocent and the Church.¹³³ Innocent's letter stated that during his coronation Stephen had promised reverence and obedience to St Peter.¹³⁴ This promise hints that Innocent expected Stephen to follow his mother and brother's examples and support reform in England. In response to Innocent's letter, Stephen issued a charter at Oxford during Easter 1136, which included several items respecting the Church's freedom.¹³⁵ Witnessed by two archbishops and twelve bishops, the charter stated that simony would be abolished, bishops would control Church jurisdiction and property, ecclesiastical possessions would be restored as they were at William the Conqueror's death in 1087, and vacant dioceses would not be taken into royal control. Furthermore, the charter recognised, albeit indirectly, the freedom of canonical elections.¹³⁶ Stephen's early commitment to Church reform thus indicated that Innocent's faith in him had been repaid. This in turn could have suggested to Westminster that any scheme Stephen favoured would meet with Innocent's approval. Nevertheless, that the assistance of Stephen's brother, Count Theobald, was not invoked to canvass the Papacy on Westminster's behalf again shows Stephen's lack of interest in Osbert's scheme.¹³⁷

A papal legate's arrival in England in summer 1138 indicates that Pope Innocent had decided to pay closer attention to the English situation. Following the death of Anacletus II in Rome on 25 January 1138, Innocent settled the schism and asserted his authority in Rome. This provided Innocent with an opportunity to ensure Stephen had kept his promises to the Church by sending the newly consecrated Cardinal-Bishop Alberic of Ostia as his legate to England and Scotland.¹³⁸ Alberic held a general Council of the English Church at Westminster in December 1138.¹³⁹ Osbert of Clare probably presented his *Vita* of Edward to Alberic during this Council, asking Alberic to canonise Edward.¹⁴⁰ Yet it appears that Alberic instead advised Osbert to present his request at Rome in person, with the English Church's support and evidence of Edward's miracles and saintliness.¹⁴¹ Alberic possibly saw Edward as a potential political unifier and asked Osbert to secure and present broader support. Alberic's main task, though, was to arrange the appointment of a new archbishop of Canterbury.¹⁴² Alberic worked

¹³³ Z. N. Brooke, *The English Church and the Papacy from the Conquest to the Reign of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 176.

¹³⁴ Christopher Holdsworth, "The Church," in *The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign*, ed. Edmund King (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 209; *Innocentii II Epistolae et Privilegia*, col. 302.

¹³⁵ Cronne and Davis, *Regesta Regum*, no. 271.

¹³⁶ Z. N. Brooke, *The English Church*, 176.

¹³⁷ See: King, *King Stephen*, 315-316, for a summary of Count Theobald's involvement in English affairs.

¹³⁸ John of Worcester, *Chronicle*, 236-237, 244-245.

¹³⁹ Detailed accounts of the Council appear in: John of Worcester, *Chronicle*, 260-263; and Richard of Hexham, *De Gestis*, 172-176.

¹⁴⁰ Barlow, "Clare, Osbert of."

¹⁴¹ Osbert, *Vita*, 66; Scholz, "Canonization," 39-40.

¹⁴² For what follows regarding Innocent II and Alberic of Ostia's involvement in this election, see: Marjorie Chibnall, "Innocent II and the Canterbury election of 1138," in *Mediævalia Christiana, XI^e-XIII^e siècles: Hommage à Raymonde Foreville de ses amis, ses collègues et ses anciens élèves*, ed. Colomon Étienne Viola (Brussels: Editions

with Stephen to find a suitable candidate, instructing Canterbury's monks to elect someone whom Stephen would approve of, and to send representatives to the Council.¹⁴³ Alberic must have known whom Stephen would not accept. Perhaps a verbal message listing acceptable candidates was sent to Canterbury with Alberic's letter. The monks chose Abbot Theobald of Bec, whose candidature was pleasing to all parties. Contemporary chronicles note that Theobald had Stephen's support.¹⁴⁴ Twelve months prior to Innocent's denial of the canonization request, Stephen's actions indicated his continued commitment to the Church and reform.

Nevertheless, the Church hierarchy was divided over Stephen's claim to the English throne. Although Innocent continued to support Stephen's cause at the 1139 Lateran Council, some of the cardinals favoured Empress Matilda. John of Salisbury, writing in the 1160s, described the heated debate between Stephen and Matilda's representatives, which ended in uproar, with Bishop Ulger of Angers calling Stephen an oath-breaking usurper and Archdeacon Arnulf of Sées labelling Matilda a bastard.¹⁴⁵ Innocent apparently declined to pronounce judgment on the case and instead *receptis muneribus regis Stephani, ei familiaribus litteris regnum Anglie confirmavit et ducatum Normannie* ("accepted King Stephen's gifts and in friendly letters confirmed his occupation of the kingdom of England and duchy of Normandy").¹⁴⁶ As Frank Barlow noted these claims against Stephen contributed to Innocent's denial of Edward's canonization about eight months later.¹⁴⁷ Yet Abbot Gervase and Osbert probably believed that Innocent's actions at the Lateran showed his continued favour towards Stephen, and therefore it was Stephen's support alone that would secure Edward's canonization. Members of the Curia, however, had begun to question Stephen's position. John of Salisbury stated that Innocent acted against the advice of certain cardinals, particularly Guy of Castello who was later elected Pope as Celestine II (1143–1144), demonstrating that there were serious divisions within the Papal Curia regarding the English situation. Guy appears to have had a strong relationship with Matilda, as John said Guy was elected Pope with *favore imperatricis* ("the Empress' favour").¹⁴⁸ Marjorie Chibnall suggested that Matilda remained in contact with the cardinals who opposed Innocent in the hope of a more favourable result in the future.¹⁴⁹ Matilda's experiences at the court of her first husband, the German Emperor Henry V, made

Universitaires, 1989), 237-245. Also see: King, *King Stephen*, 94-101.

¹⁴³ Dorothy Whitelock, Martin Brett, and C. N. L Brooke, eds, *Councils and Synods with other documents relating to the English Church, Volume 1: A.D. 871-1204, Part 2, 1066-1204* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 772-773.

¹⁴⁴ Dorothy Whitelock, David C. Douglas, and Susie I. Tucker, trans, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961), 201; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 718-719.

¹⁴⁵ John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, 83-85.

¹⁴⁶ John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, 85.

¹⁴⁷ Barlow, *Edward*, 276.

¹⁴⁸ John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, 85.

¹⁴⁹ Marjorie Chibnall, "The Empress Matilda and Church Reform," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 38 (1988): 121.

her well aware of papal power.¹⁵⁰ Innocent's denial of the canonization could be interpreted as placating her supporters in the Curia. While Innocent's actions at the Second Lateran Council reaffirmed his support for Stephen, it was not long before Stephen's relationship with the Church began deteriorating.

The Pope's opinion on the arrest of the bishops is unknown, but it cannot have endeared Stephen to him and it almost certainly affected Westminster's canonization petition. Innocent was at war with King Roger II of Sicily in July 1139.¹⁵¹ Even if the English bishops could have obtained papal guidance before the Winchester Council, Innocent was preoccupied with the Sicilian war, and therefore unable to adjudicate or intervene in this case.¹⁵² Three months after the Council of Winchester ended, Innocent denied Osbert of Clare's request to canonise King Edward. Such a short timespan between the Council of Winchester and the rejection of the canonization indicates that Stephen's actions did influence Innocent's decision. Because of Stephen's actions, Innocent was potentially less predisposed to support Stephen, and therefore Westminster's cause, than previously.

Irrespective of the reasons for their approach, Westminster's fragility had necessitated tying the canonization attempt to the king, and by December 1139, Stephen's position in England had changed dramatically, as had the papacy's attitude. Scholars have acknowledged that Innocent could have been encouraged to withhold the canonization due to Stephen's conflict with the Church and weakened political position within England.¹⁵³ Innocent's decision not to canonise Edward, however, was an important moment in the development of his papal authority as well. By early December 1139 Innocent would have known of Matilda's arrival in England and of the forces supporting her claim to the throne. He must have questioned not only Stephen's commitment to the Church but also his position as England's king. Coupled with what Innocent had heard at the Lateran Council in April, Stephen's position would have looked decidedly shaky to a Pope located in faraway Rome. In contrast, the whole of Western Europe had recently recognised Innocent's authority and he had come to an agreement with Roger of Sicily too, who had supported Innocent's late rival, Anacletus II. Innocent was thus newly in a position where it was possible to say "no" to any of his supporters who misbehaved towards the Church. In early 1136, with the Papacy in schism, Innocent had required the king of England's support, and had accepted Stephen's coronation in return. In late 1139, Innocent and Stephen's positions were reversed: Stephen's rival for the

¹⁵⁰ Chibnall, "Reform," 120-121.

¹⁵¹ See: I. S. Robinson, *The Papacy 1073-1198: Continuity and Innovation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 384-386.

¹⁵² Philipp Jaffé, ed., *Regesta Pontificum Romanorum: ab condita ecclesia ad annum post Christum natum MCXCVIII*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., revised by G. Wattenbach, S. Loewenfeld, F. Kaltenbrunner and P. Ewald (Leipzig, 1885), calendars only one document (no. 8043, where Innocent recognises Roger as king) between 19 July and the beginning of October in 1139.

¹⁵³ See, for example: J. A. Robinson, "Sketch," 18; Bloch, "La Vie de S. Édouard," 14; Kemp, *Canonization and Authority*, 77; Barlow, *Edward*, 276-277 and "Appendix D," 160-161.

throne was present in England while Innocent's rivals were dead. Now firmly placed on the papal throne, Innocent could afford to deny a request intimately connected to Stephen, unafraid that he would recognise another Pope. Hence Osbert's petition gave Innocent the opportunity to assert papal authority by denying Edward's canonization.

Conclusion

Osbert's campaign to establish Westminster Abbey as a royal church and gain Edward's canonization was not well timed. Due to its own weakness and lack of support within England, Westminster had essentially relied on royal backing and the papacy's support for King Stephen. Although the canonization request was Westminster's project, Stephen was intimately connected to it, through his supporting letter and his illegitimate son's position as abbot. Linking the petition to Stephen, whose relationship with the Church and position in England had deteriorated significantly by the time Innocent made his decision, ensured that Edward would not be canonised in 1139. Innocent's official reasons for not canonizing Edward demonstrate the fragility of Stephen's position. The Pope stated that Edward's canonization should be requested by *all* of England. As England was divided in December 1139 Innocent's use of *totius regni* ("whole kingdom") could mean that he was trying to provoke a reconciliation between Stephen and Empress Matilda. Maybe Innocent hoped that Abbot Gervase and Westminster's monks could help bring peace to England. If Osbert had convinced Innocent of Westminster's place as England's premier royal church, the Curia perhaps believed that Westminster could help negotiate between Stephen and Matilda. Innocent could then canonise Edward as a reward if peace was achieved.

The prevailing assumption regarding the canonization's denial has been that Stephen's dramatic political and ecclesiastical difficulties caused the failure of something that was guaranteed to succeed. It was the intersection, however, of Westminster's fundamental failure to secure widespread support, Stephen's political problems and lack of commitment, and changing attitudes within the Curia in 1139 that resulted in the denial of the canonization request. If Westminster's place in the kingdom had not been so frail, royal support would have been less crucial to the Abbey's cause. Indeed, if the monastery had held a stronger position, such reliance on the king would have been unnecessary. Similarly, if Stephen's hold on the throne was firmer, and his reign less tumultuous, the Pope may have been more inclined to canonize Edward. Yet although the canonization was denied, Osbert did successfully establish a link between Edward, Westminster, and the idea of a royal church, which the Abbey finally capitalised on during the reign of Henry III (1216–1272).