

St Luke's Farnworth



Sanctuary Knockers also known as Hagodays

by Geoffrey Poole

Also called a sanctuary ring, a sanctuary knocker was a metal ring attached to the door of a church. A fugitive from the law had only to touch the knocker in order to claim the right of sanctuary- We have such knockers on both the south and north doors. This is similar to those of St Luke's church.



This allowed him to stay in the church, free from prosecution, for a period of time, usually 40 days. The most famous sanctuary knocker in Britain is that at Durham Cathedral, see below which is quite ornately carved, with a lion's face, but a sanctuary knocker could equally well be a simple iron ring, usually set on a round iron plate affixed to the door. The right of sanctuary was abolished by law in the early 17th century.



The knocker found at Durham cathedral

The Sanctuaries or Asylums were places to which either the Church or the Sovereign had given the right of sheltering those who claimed protection, and from which no one could be forcibly taken without sacrilege. At first this privilege was not intended to shelter the wicked from justice, but as a refuge for the innocent and oppressed, and to give a man an asylum till he could have a fair hearing. The only people to whom this protection was denied were apostates and heretics, for they had deserted the Faith which made the Sanctuary sacred ; but as time went on, murderers and traitors also sought and obtained shelter within the sacred spots, and the Sanctuaries of Mediaeval Christendom.

In Roman times other places besides Churches were allowed this privilege — the statue of the Emperor, his standard in the camp, and the graves of the dead were all considered sacred, and in later times the cross by the highway, hospitals, and even some schools were added to the places to which a fugitive might flee for safety. We are told by Geoffrey of Monmouth that in the time of the Druids asylum was allowed in their sacred groves, and the rather mythical King Lucius (a.d. 180) is said to have conferred it upon the Church of Winchester, but it is not till a.d. 633 that Pope Boniface V. confirmed and authorised



Sanctuaries, and he is generally considered as the founder of Sanctuary, as it afterwards prevailed so extensively in the West.

In 1378 two English knights named Shackle and Hawle took Sanctuary at Westminster, and fled to the Choir just at the time of the celebration of High Mass ; the Deacon was reading the Gospel of the day, when suddenly the clash of arms was heard, and the pursuers regarding neither time or place burst in upon the Service. One of the knights escaped unhurt, but the other named Hawle was pierced with twelve wounds, and sank dead in front of the Prior's stall ; he was regarded as a martyr to the injured rights of the abbey and obtained the unusual honour of being buried within its walls. The abbey was shut up for four months, and parliament was suspended lest its assembly should be polluted by sitting within desecrated precincts, and the whole case was heard by the King himself. The abbot William of Colchester pronounced the the excommunication of the two chief assailants and the payment by them of £200 by way of penance.

This tremendous uproar took place in the early days of Richard II. 1 The Sanctuary of Westminster occupied a very prominent situation, and though few of the actual buildings remain, a part is still called " the Broad Sanctuary." There are few more romantic stories in English History than the one which relates how Elizabeth Woodville Queen of Edward IV. with her three daughters, her mother and Lady Scrope came and knocked at the great door of the Sanctuary of Westminster, and having registered themselves as Sanctuary women took up their abode within its sacred walls. Soon afterwards the Queen gave birth to a son, the future King of England ; there was no one to tend the little Prince but a nurse who happened to be within the walls, and he was baptised by the sub-prior, with the abbot as his godfather, and the Duchess of Bedford and Lady Scrope as his godmothers.

A few years passed away and the Queen again sought the shelter of the abbey ; the little King was not with her, but hoping to keep her other son the Duke of York, she carried 1 Walsingham's *Historia Anglicana*, Vol. II. p, 375 et seq. Master of the Rolls Series, 140 Transactions for the Year 1889-90. him into the Sanctuary. The Lord Protector however had determined to get possession of the boy, and not daring to violate the Sanctuary, he held a Council at which it was decided that it might be a protection for men and women, but could



not be so for children, as they could not commit a crime for which it was required, and that he might take his nephew from thence if he pleased, this he accordingly did, but with the Queen's consent. Sanctuaries continued in full power till the Reformation and this right was abolished in 1623, however the sentiment is still felt to be relevant and of course our church should be a place of sanctuary.

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