

= Robert de Bethune =

Robert de Bethune (sometimes Robert de Betun , or Robert de Béthune , or Robert of Bethune ; died 1148) was a medieval Bishop of Hereford . The son of a knight , he became a teacher before becoming a canon , a type of monk , by 1115 . He was elected prior of Llanthony Priory in the middle 1120s , and was named bishop by King Henry I of England in 1130 . As bishop , he was often appointed a judge by the papacy , and was known for the care he took of his diocese .

After Henry 's death in 1135 , Bethune first supported King Stephen , who seized the throne from Henry 's heiress the Empress Matilda , but when Matilda 's forces captured Stephen , Bethune switched sides to support Matilda . When Matilda did not secure the throne , Bethune once more switched back to supporting Stephen . Construction of Hereford Cathedral was completed under Bethune 's episcopate , and consecrated in 1142 and 1148 . Stephen appointed Bethune as one of the English bishops that the king allowed to attend the Council of Rheims in 1148 , and Bethune died there in April 1148 . A hagiography is the only surviving evidence of Bethune 's cathedral chapter 's attempts to promote him as a saint .

= = Early life = =

Bethune was the youngest son of a knight , and was at first educated by his eldest brother , who was named Gunfrid and was a schoolmaster . Although the medieval chronicler Robert de Torigni describes Bethune as Flemish , Bethune 's medieval biographer , William Wyncombe says that he and Bethune grew up in neighbouring villages in Buckinghamshire . It thus is likely that Bethune was born near Wingrave , Buckinghamshire , to a family descended from Flemish settlers . He was a schoolmaster in England , teaching elementary subjects , before he went to study theology under William of Champeaux and Anselm of Laon . He was a canon of Llanthony Priory before 1115 , and was elected prior of that house in the middle 1120s . Before becoming prior , he was entrusted with establishing a cell of the priory at Weobley , which had been established by Hugh de Lacy shortly before Lacy 's death around 1115 .

= = Bishop of Hereford = =

The see of Hereford had been vacant since 1127 , and in 1130 , King Henry I of England took the advice of the local magnates and nominated Bethune to the see . Bethune 's diocesan bishop as prior , Urban , the Bishop of Llandaff , at first refused permission for Bethune 's elevation . However , the archbishop of Canterbury , William of Corbeil , advised that the matter be referred to the papacy . Pope Innocent II ordered that Bethune be allowed to accept the see of Hereford in 1131 . He was consecrated on 28 June 1131 at Rochester . In nominating Bethune , the king is said to have felt that he needed one " godly bishop " around . Most of Henry 's bishops were given their sees as rewards for royal service , and were not particularly noted for piety .

Bethune was known as a strict Augustinian canon , a priest living a monastic life but not a monk . Bethune was often appointed a judge delegate by the papacy to try cases and disputes , which had been referred back to England by the popes . The historian David Knowles said of Bethune that he was a man of wide outlook , with a great desire for reform . He was praised by contemporaries for the care with which he selected men to serve as clergy in his diocese . He also held synods in his diocese , including two during the first year of his episcopate .

= = Stephen 's reign = =

After the accession of King Stephen of England , Bethune supported Stephen and was often at his court . Stephen had seized the throne at King Henry 's death , depriving Henry 's surviving legitimate daughter and heiress , Matilda , of the throne . Matilda is usually known as the " Empress " because of her first marriage to the German Emperor Henry V , who died in 1125 . Bethune accompanied Thurstan , the Archbishop of York , when Thurstan secured a truce between Stephen and the King

of Scots , David shortly after the Battle of the Standard in 1138 . When the Empress Matilda landed in England in September 1139 in pursuit of the throne , one of the local magnates of Hereford , Miles of Gloucester supported Matilda , while Bethune continued to support Stephen . Miles ' hostility drove Bethune from his diocese , and Miles was in control of Hereford in 1140 , leaving Bethune to perform his episcopal duties in Shropshire . During this time , Bethune assisted Theobald of Bec , the new Archbishop of Canterbury , in consecrating Maurice as Bishop of Bangor . Bethune had earlier persuaded the bishop @-@ elect to swear fealty to King Stephen , after Maurice had originally refused . Bethune 's standing as a bishop known for his piety and independence of the king helped persuade Maurice that the homage was canonical .

Sometime after Stephen was captured by the Empress ' forces in 1141 , Bethune switched sides , and he was with the Empress Matilda at Winchester on 4 March 1141 , when Matilda claimed the throne of England . He also was present at the council that proclaimed Matilda " lady of the English " shortly thereafter . His diocese of Hereford was in the center of the lands that Matilda controlled , and he was one of the few bishops who was often in Matilda 's court . However , Matilda was never crowned , being driven from London before her planned coronation could take place . One of her chief supporters was captured in late 1141 , and to secure his release , Matilda released Stephen from captivity , thus prolonging the conflict . Between 1142 and 1148 , England was in a state of civil war , with parts of the country supporting Matilda and parts supporting Stephen .

Welsh raids at the beginning of Stephen 's reign had driven Bethune 's former canons from Llanthony and the bishop gave them refuge at Hereford before establishing them at a new site near Gloucester . The land the canons were settled on had belonged to the diocese , and this led Bethune into conflict with his cathedral chapter , led by their dean , Ralph . Bethune was forced to travel to Pisa to secure an order from Innocent II declaring that the chapter obey their bishop .

Around 1142 , Bethune was involved with a conflict with Miles of Gloucester , who was now the Earl of Hereford , which led to the bishop excommunicating Miles and all the inhabitants of the city of Hereford , and " had the doors of the church blocked with thorns and the crosses taken down and placed on the ground " . This dispute arose over an attempt by Miles to tax the churches in his earldom , which Bethune regarded as unlawful . Miles died in 1143 which ended the dispute over the taxes . Also after his death Bethune was free to leave Empress ' faction and thus returned to supporting Stephen . In 1142 , Hereford Cathedral , which had begun under Robert de Losinga around 1079 , was finally ready for consecration . The work was finally completed in 1148 , and it was once consecrated in that year . The year 1148 also saw the departure of Matilda from England , as her support had dwindled over the previous few years and Stephen was able to secure control of most of England . He was never able to completely remove Matilda 's supporters , however .

King Stephen gave permission for some of England 's bishops , including Bethune , to attend the Council of Rheims in 1148 . Stephen had expelled the papal legates , or representatives , who arrived in England to summon the bishops to Rheims , and after that appointed three of the bishops as representatives of the English Church . These three , Bethune , Hilary of Chichester , and William de Turbeville , were allowed to attend the council . Theobald of Bec was expressly forbidden to attend , but he managed to evade those watching him and arrived in Rheims along with his clerk , Thomas Becket .

= = Death and legacy = =

Bethune died on 16 April 1148 at Rheims just after the close of the Council of Rheims . As his corpse returned to Hereford , miracles were alleged to have taken place along its route . He was buried in Hereford Cathedral .

Bethune 's episcopal acts , or his decisions and other documents relating to his episcopal career , have been published in the English Episcopal Acts series , in the volume relating to the diocese of Hereford . A medieval catalogue of works at Llanthony Priory also recorded that they owned a collection of letters by Bethune , but this has not survived .

A Life , or hagiography , giving his life and miracles , was written about him , by one of the Bethune 's canons , William Wyncombe . It contains few details of Bethune 's life itself . Instead , it is an

attempt by his canons to secure sainthood for Bethune . Although the life describes miracles that took place at Bethune 's tomb , no evidence survives of a formal cult being developed , and he was never canonised . The historian Avram Saltman called him " the model bishop of his time " , because of his care for his diocese and his abilities .