

Robert Winchelsey, born between 1240 and 1247 in Old Winchelsea, was beyond all other things, a scholar. As a youth he travelled to the University of Paris in order to study the arts, and in 1267 became the head of what was the faculty of arts. Although it is unclear as to when Winchelsey made his way back to England, by 1272 he was the rector of Wood Eaton Oxfordshire. As this church was in close proximity to Oxford, he began his long study of theology there. The roots of his long standing beliefs about the necessity of protecting ecclesial rights most likely found themselves develop and grow here, and by 1288 he was the chancellor of Oxford. Developing personal links with the members of the priory of Canterbury, that along with the respect the voters in Canterbury had for his formidable education, cemented the election for the position archbishop in February 12th, 1293. The lack of a Pope in Rome delayed his confirmation to 1295, whereupon he returned to the full rights of his position. As soon as this, his opposition to King Edward I was evident. Swearing fealty to him only for the temporalities, and not the spiritualities. He quickly became known for refusing the king to tax clergies more than one tenth of their revenue, and under Pope Boniface VIII he was known as a protector of Canterbury's papal privileges. Most notable of these defenses was his support of the Clericis Laicos in 1297, which affirmed that clergies did not have to pay tax to the secular powers. At the time King Edward the I was needing money for defense against the French, and for the new talk of uprisings in Scotland and so in his fury, declared that any cleric who refused to pay was an outlaw and that their land was to be seized. Winchelsey, after encouraging each royal clerk and clergy to decide for themselves on what to do, refused to make any contribution and his lands were seized. Upon their return in 1297, he still refused to pay the tax. This refusal for cooperation with the King's treasury led to tensions between him and Walter Langton, head of the treasury. In 1301 Winchelsey supported Pope Boniface VIII's claim to be the protector of Scotland, which does not necessarily speak to his position on the war for independence but

does imply some sort of opposition to England's war against their northern neighbour. Known throughout his life as a man who placed principals over people, this resulted in Winchelsey having a reputation of a cold and calculating man. Evidence against this is found in his sponsorship of impoverished students attending Oxford as well as many testimonials to his generosity in terms of poor clergymen and priests. Winchelsey's actions throughout his life demonstrate a profound respect for the traditions of the church, the independence of the church from national legal matters and above all the determination to fight, and not bend, for what he believed to be for the betterment of the Catholic community.

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