



## Henry III: History Masterclass 2019 teachers' notes

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### Follow-up questions

1. To what extent was a focus on soft power a consequence of Magna Carta?
2. Was Christian piety the most important reason for the rebuilding of Westminster Abbey in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century?
3. John and Henry III had very different relationships with the Church. What impact did this have on their reigns?
4. Professor David Carpenter refers to Henry III as 'simplex'. To what extent would you agree with this statement based on his choices?
5. Does it matter that Henry III turned to French Gothic architecture when building a national church in England? Give your reasons.
6. To what extent would you agree that the 'development of Parliament' was Henry III's greatest legacy?
7. What brought about the revival of queenship in the 13<sup>th</sup> century?

### Transcript

#### **Speaker:**

Professor David Carpenter

#### **Chair:**

The Reverend Anthony Ball

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**The Reverend Anthony Ball**

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Welcome back, and I hope you enjoyed the visit around the Abbey and were able to both experience and learn some new things. I'm here, really, at this moment, to introduce Professor David Carpenter to you; one of the leading lights, and perhaps the leading light, in the United Kingdom, on Henry III. He also does research on the Magna Carta, a copy of which we have in the Abbey collection...

**Professor David Carpenter**

[Referring to slide] I've shamelessly given you the front cover of my book on Magna Carta, and this one...

**The Reverend Anthony Ball**

...and you have, in front of you. So, Professor Carpenter once lived here. His father was, in fact, the Dean of Westminster, so this was part, technically, of their house, although I don't think they were using it at the time, and before that, lived in the house that I live in. So, that's a wonderful connection that's going to take us right back to Henry III. Professor Carpenter.

**Professor David Carpenter**

Well, thank you very much, and this morning, of course, you've all been around one of the most famous churches in the world. I was going to say 'the' most famous, but perhaps that's a bit contentious, but certainly one of the most famous churches in the world; the most famous church in England, at any rate, the coronation church, where all coronations have taken place since 1066, the Norman Conquest, the church in which large numbers of our medieval and early-modern kings and queens are buried. And yet, if I was to ask you, 'Who is responsible for this church? Who paid for it all? Who had a major input into its design? Who urged on its building?' Well, I'm sure you know the answer to that, but I'm sure if we went out into the streets and asked, just around here, you know, pointed to the Abbey and said, 'Who actually built this place?' No one would know. I say, 'built', I think we can perhaps be more exact. He built, in the way I've just said, the really essential part of it. So, you can forget the great towers at the end, which are the most conspicuous things, they're actually centuries later, 18th century, you can forget Henry VII's Chapel there [referring to slide], but all of this, really, really vital bit of the church he built, and of course, it's down here, underneath the lantern here, that the coronations took place.

So, who is responsible for it? And the answer is this man [referring to slide], King Henry III, who was the son of King John, and he reigned from 1216 to 1272. And here he is, he was only nine when he came to the throne in 1216, here he is, rather anxiously, being crowned as a little boy, and here he is, many years later, on his tomb in Westminster Abbey, a wonderful, wonderful gilt bronze effigy, looking a little bit worried, don't you think? With a slightly, sort of, furrowed brow, and he had quite a lot to worry about in the later stages of his life. So, as I've said, he was the son of one of the most notorious kings of England, that's King John, and there's King John, [referring to slide] looking black and rather evil, on his tomb in Worcester Cathedral.

So, Henry reigns for fifty-six years, from 1216 to 1272. He started the Abbey in 1245. I'll come back to that, and why. So, just very briefly, what are some of the characteristics of this long, long reign? First of all, it's a long period of peace. Peace. Henry brought peace to England, after the very turbulent reign of his father, which ended in a terrible civil war, and because of that period of peace, all sorts of, if you like, good things happened; there was a huge expansion in the money supply in England. So, that's my little collection of Henry III silver pennies [referring to slide]. That was the only currency, silver penny, two

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hundred and forty of those, then, in the pound. Whereas my colleagues at King's College London, who work on earlier periods, Anglo-Saxon periods, they have one or two pathetic Anglo-Saxon coins, whereas I've acquired this quite large hoard of Henry III silver pennies. In fact, that's only a portion of what I have. You can all get them on eBay, by the way. If you go on eBay and put in, 'Henry III silver pennies' you can get... probably, actually, I'm starting, now, one of these obsessions, aren't I? That this is going to change somebody's life, and they'll become obsessed with collecting Henry III silver pennies. But you can get them for about thirty or forty pounds. Actually, just quickly, how much are they worth? One of those would be enough to buy food for a day, and you were allowed to cut them into quarters, so a quarter of those would buy a loaf of bread, so it gives you some idea of value. Now, the long period of peace also sees some of the great churches of England built, and here's Salisbury Cathedral [*referring to slide*] which, apart from the spire, was all built in the reign of Henry III. It also sees a revival of queenship. Queens have not been important in English politics and affairs since, you know, sixty years before Henry's reign, and here's Henry III's queen [*referring to slide*], Eleanor of Provence; she actually played a very important part in the politics of his reign.

Constitutionally, it sees the implantation of a great famous document into English political life, and that's Magna Carta. Now, Magna Carta was conceded by King John, in 1215. It places all kinds of restrictions on what kings can do. It asserts a fundamental principle; the king is subject to the law, and it's resonated down the centuries: the Founding Fathers of the United States of America appealed to Magna Carta; last century, Gandhi and Mandela all referenced Magna Carta as, you know, putting the king below the law so he can't any longer say, 'Off with your head. Into prison.' If he's going to proceed against you, it must proceed by lawful process. Well, the final definitive version of Magna Carta is actually Henry III's, this is 1225 [*referring to slide*]. You might say, 'Why's it got all these blobs all over it?', that's his seal, there, sealing it. So, he doesn't sign it, he seals it. Well, actually, this comes from Durham Cathedral, and unlike the archivists here at Westminster Abbey, who are so careful, the archivists of Durham Cathedral, in the 18th century, knocked a bottle of ink all over it, and so that's what that is.

Also, Henry III's reign is the reign which sees the development of parliament. Parliament, by that name, appears in the 1230s. The great lever of parliamentary power, control over taxation, appears in his reign. So, it's a very important period constitutionally. That's the very first reference to Magna Carta, there [*referring to slide*], a Proclamation of Magna Carta in Henry III's reign.

Well, now, in a way, you quite think all those are good things, but you could say, also, there are bad things in Henry's reign. The rise of the population was exceeding the ability of the land to support it, and large numbers of peasants were starving to death in years of bad harvest. And let's think of this room; of course, I can be a lord, and Canon Ball, here, obviously, can be a bishop, perhaps, but the great majority of you are going to be peasants, two-thirds of you will be peasants, and a proportion of that are peasant smallholders, who are eking out a pretty miserable existence, and as I say, in years of bad harvest, are quite literally starving to death. Also, this is a period when the persecution of the Jews in England reaches a new pitch of intensity, preparing the way for the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290. At the end of Henry's reign, there's also a vicious civil war associated with this person [*referring to slide*], Simon de Montfort. This is his coat of arms, and here is his body being cut into bits, after his defeat and death, at the battle of Evesham, in 1265. So, the long period of peace, in the end, culminates in a period of war.

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In a way, the two sides of the reign are summed up in some of the sculpture in Westminster Abbey. So, on the one hand, here's this beautiful censing angel, in the south transept, which is 1250s, that sort of date. It's, you know, very serene, confident, slightly smiling, and here's another close up of it [*referring to slide*], I've never been able to find a negative of that photograph, it's beautiful isn't it? So, I've had to take it from my own photograph of it. And yet, on the other hand, you get sculpture in the Abbey which seems to sum up some of the agony of the period. Here's someone, I don't know, dead, starving to death, there's a beautiful head on the one hand, horrible head on the other.

Well, now, how does the King, himself... what's his personality? How does he fit into this? Well, I think two things were said about him. One was that he was 'simplex', simplex, Now, this is a very difficult word to actually put into modern terms. Actually, it can be meant as a compliment, often said of very good and pious people, that they were simplex. It means you're straightforward, honest, innocent, but on the other hand, of course, it can mean you're plain stupid. Now, in Henry III's case, when he was called simplex, what I think it meant was that he was naive. He didn't have a, sort of, unlike his father, who was brilliantly intelligent, manipulative, Henry just didn't have that kind of mind. He wasn't stupid, I mean, he could read, he had a beautiful feeling for art and architecture, but he didn't see how to get from A to B, and although he was ambitious, lots of his ambitions were indeed plain stupid. So, that was one thing said about the King. In a way the great revolution, which, in the end, engulfed Henry, from 1258 onwards, wasn't because he was a tyrannical or an evil king, like his father, it was because he was a stupid king; he reduced the kingdom to, sort of, an 'imbecilic' state by his, sort of, plans and projects, which is what his enemies said.

So, that was weakness of the King, but he also had, and this is where we're coming to Westminster Abbey, a great strength, and that is he was widely regarded, in Latin, as a 'Rex Christianissimus'; a most Christian king. He was extremely pious. Now, how do we see that piety? We can see it, one, in his love of divine service. He had a reputation for attending mass, communion, two or three times a day. Also, we can see his piety in his almsgiving, in his feeding of poor people. Every day, at court, Henry III fed one hundred and fifty paupers, gave them a square meal every day, and at periods in his reign, that rose right up, and he was feeding five hundred paupers every day. So, you can imagine his court, here at Westminster, just huge crowds coming to have a free meal at the King's expense. So, you know, whereas today you see these poor people sleeping rough in The Strand, and everything, they wouldn't be there in Henry III's day, they would be down at Westminster, having a good meal. So, his love of divine service. Previous kings, of course, chatted during divine service, played games, and so on. Henry III would not be like that at all, he'd be very much, sort of, at his prayers, gazing at the elevation of the Host, and everything. So, he behaved himself in church, unlike lots of previous kings.

So, almsgiving, divine service, but above all, the centrepiece of Henry's piety, and this is where we're getting to the Abbey, was his devotion to his sainted predecessor, Edward the Confessor. Now, who was Edward the Confessor? Well, as probably you all know, he was the last Anglo-Saxon king of the true line. He died, here at Westminster, on 5th January 1066. After that, Harold seizes the throne, soon to be chucked off it by William the Conqueror. And here [*referring to slide*], on the Bayeux Tapestry, is the great church which Edward the Confessor built at Westminster. So, Edward the Confessor builds the first great Abbey at Westminster. Here it is, on the Bayeux Tapestry, and actually, this is Edward the Confessor's body being brought to burial in the church, here's the Latin, 'Hic portatur corpus Edwardi': here is borne the body of Edward, it goes on to say, King of England. I like this person here, sort of, putting up this, sort of, weathercock at the end, and this wonderful hand coming down, which I suppose

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is, sort of, hand of God, sort of, helping the burial of the Confessor there. So, Edward the Confessor is brought and buried in the Abbey, in the church he's built, in 1066.

Now, the next great stage in the story comes in 1161, because Edward the Confessor is made a saint. Now, who's responsible for that? It's the monks of Westminster, here, Canon Ball's predecessors, because they were desperate to have a saint, because if you have a saint in your church, all kinds of pilgrims are going to come, they're going to make offerings, it's going to hugely increase your status. Westminster has no saint, and so the monks of Westminster decided to make the best they could of the Confessor, about whom stories were circulating that he'd been a good and pious man, and so, in the 1161, they persuaded the Pope to make him a saint. And then, on 13th October 1163, his body was exhumed and placed in a magnificent shrine, somewhere in this area [*referring to slide*]. So, the Confessor is now a saint, but actually it was all a bit of a flop, because there's very little evidence that anyone took much notice of this sainted king, Edward the Confessor. The kings of England didn't seem to do so; Henry III's father, King John, didn't seem particularly devoted to the Abbey, and that was equally true of Henry III himself, that, as Henry III grew up - remember he's nine in 1216, twenty-nine in 1226 - there's very little evidence that he was particularly attached to the Confessor. Now, all that changes when Henry was in his mid-twenties, sort of, twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight, in the 1230s, and between 1233 and 1238, he suddenly adopted Edward the Confessor as his patron saint. Now, why does he do that? Well, I've written a very long and exhausting, as well as exhaustive, article about this, so I won't bore you with it, but I'll just give you the essence of it; on the one hand it's the monks of Westminster, again. They were desperate to get the King's support, because they'd begun to rebuild the Confessor's Abbey, and they were running out of money. They were also finding all their privileges under, sort of, challenge and so forth, so they want the help of the King. And so, what they do is they explain to Henry III, 'Look, you've got this sainted predecessor, he is a saint of mighty power, he can help you in this life and the next.' And don't forget, the key thing about saints is that they can do both; that if you win their favour, they intercede for you, at God's right hand, and they'll help you in this life, so if you pray to them enough, you know, what you want to do in this life, they will help you, but they will, of course, also get you to the next, they will get you to heaven. And what the monks of Westminster are saying to Henry, in the 1230s, they're explaining this to him. Now, why is he so receptive? The reason for that is that in 1232/3/4, he had suffered a most terrible time, politically: he'd been let down and betrayed by great ministers; he'd been plunged into a civil war; he'd been threatened with deposition, and so he thinks, 'Oh God, all my great ministers have let me down, they've betrayed me. I must now put my trust in an eternal guide, in this great sainted predecessor, and adopt him as my patron saint.' And the great change you can see is actually in where Henry goes, in what's called his itinerary. Now, there were two key dates in the year for anybody who was devoted to Edward the Confessor. The first was 5th of January, which is the anniversary of this death, and the second is 13th of October, which is the anniversary of his translation to his new shrine, in 1163. Now, before 1233, Henry never bothers to be at Westminster on those dates. From 1234/5, onwards, he is always there. So, if you wanted to book in with Henry, you would know that, twice in every year, you know where he is, every year, on 5th January, 13th October. He's going to be here, at Westminster, worshipping at the shrine of the Confessor.

So, how does all this bring us to the Abbey? You see, that again takes us back to the whole nature of how saints work, because, yes, if they like you, if they favour you, they can indeed intervene at God's

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right hand, help you in this life, help you get to the next, but you have to convince them that you really are devoted to them. You have to prove your devotion to your saint. And so, how do you do that? Gifts, offerings at their shrine, that's a very common way. You give jewellery, things to be attached to the shrine, gold, great precious cloth, and so on, but Henry III decides to go much bigger and better than that. The first thing he decided to do, in 1241, was to give the Confessor a new shrine. Remember, he'd been put into this shrine, in 1163, *[referring to slide]*. Here is the shrine that Henry III built for the Confessor. I'll come back to it later, but the body of Edward the Confessor is still there, and this is the base of it, and then, above, this is much later, but Henry built an amazing golden casket to put over the body. So, the first thing is, Henry decides to build a new shrine for the Confessor. And then, in 1245, he decides to go bigger than that. He decides to rebuild the Abbey. Now, you might think the Confessor would be rather upset, because, to do that, what Henry III has got to do is to pull down the church the Confessor, himself, had built, and you might think, certainly you wouldn't be allowed to do it today, with ancient building regulations and so on, but Henry obviously didn't think like that, he thought, 'The Confessor will recognise his church is out of date, and so he's going to be absolutely overjoyed, and I prove my zeal for him in pulling down the church here, and building a magnificent new one in his place.'

Now, everything I've said so far suggests that Henry is doing this for a very deeply personal reason, he's doing it for his personal success in this life, and his salvation in the next, but I think we've got to think wider than that, because Henry's very aware that he's also making a big political statement, and I think the key thing you've got to think of here is that Westminster is already at the centre of the realm, it's already the capital of England, and it's the place where the exchequer and the law courts are, it's the place where Parliament is meeting more and more. So, everyone is going to see what Henry is doing, and I've just put some images together here *[referring to slide]*. I think it's quite difficult to think of how the Abbey actually dominated Westminster, in the medieval period, because it doesn't seem to anymore. We've got the huge Houses of Parliament, we've got St Margaret's Church, we've got all the buses going around Parliament Square, but if we look here, this is a mock up, this is a sort of reconstruction of the Abbey at the end of the Middle Ages, and you can see, I think, much more, that it's far higher than anything else, it absolutely dominates the scenes. There's a 17th century sketch of it, you can see that too, and actually, this photograph in the 1930s, from this angle, there's Canon Ball's house there, and that used to be my bedroom window, there. So, you know, you absolutely get a feeling here of how absolutely dominant the Abbey was. So, what Henry is doing is he's making a massive public statement, and what he's hoping is that everyone will be awed by the fact that he's built this magnificent new church, and they will think, you know, 'This is a king guided by the Confessor, guided by the hand of God; we've got to do what he wants.' And also, Henry was saying, 'Well, people will show gratitude,' because the Confessor isn't meant just to be a personal saint for the King, Henry wants the Confessor to be England's national saint. He's giving it to the whole of the kingdom, he's offering it to all of you, he's saying, you know, 'Please come and share with me the wonders of the Confessor.' So, those are the two motives for Henry rebuilding the Abbey.

Now, we come on now to the design, and what is the King trying to do? And I think, in general terms, that's completely straightforward; he's trying to build the most magnificent church in the world. The most magnificent church in the world. So, what considerations? How is he going to do that? Well, the first thing I think we've got to think about is what up-to-date, new churches did he know already? And there were a lot in England going up at the time, great cathedrals being built and rebuilt, which he

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would have known very well indeed: Worcester, Lincoln, Ely, and, above all, Salisbury, because one of Henry's palaces was at Clarendon, on the hill above Salisbury. So, this was going up just all the way through Henry's reign [*referring to slide*], and here is the east end, the view looking east at Salisbury Cathedral. And yet, Henry turns his back on all these examples in a decisive and revolutionary way. He knows them and he says, 'They're not good enough for me. I want something completely different.' And if we compare that view, I wish I'd got a split-screen here, but I haven't, to the view of the Abbey, I wonder whether anyone wants to volunteer? Well, what do you think's the major difference? Here's looking to the high altar at Salisbury, here's looking at the high altar at the Abbey. Anyone want to volunteer what the... Canon Ball, go on then...

### **The Reverend Anthony Ball**

I was thinking height and that, kind of...

### **Professor David Carpenter**

Right, you're absolutely right. The first thing, of course, is [it's] dramatically higher. Salisbury is about eighty-four feet high; Westminster abbey is one hundred and four feet. So, twenty feet higher than Salisbury, and it's a far more uplifting, exciting experience. I think that is the first and most important difference, but there are two others. I don't know, anyone else want to have a go? Any other offers here? Well, I think one difference is the windows. These are called clerestory windows, at the top [*referring to slide*]. Salisbury, I wouldn't say they're boring, I've sometimes given offence when I've given this talk at Salisbury. I'd be rude about the Salisbury Magna Carta, which is a different issue altogether, but also, constantly rude about Salisbury Cathedral, so maybe I'm not terribly... no, that's not true, but they take it in good part. But do you see? These are just what are called single lancet windows, and that's true, actually, throughout Salisbury, whereas if we go on to Westminster, you see what we've got are these group lancets with these lovely roses at the top. So, it's a much more sophisticated, and again, I think, a much more beautiful form of window. And the other difference is that, actually, this is a square east end, do you see? It's square, it's flat, whereas at the Abbey, it's rounded isn't it? Again, I think, in a really very, very beautiful way.

So, this, for people coming to the Abbey, knowing the great English cathedrals, was a revolutionary building, and stunningly different, stunningly beautiful. Where do the ideas come from? Well, I think we know that absolutely, and I'm pleased to say this, in an age of Brexit, and nationalism, and so on, the ideas came from France, and from the great French cathedrals of Reims, here [*referring to slide*], Amiens, and Notre-Dame at Paris, and how do they come? It's because we know the name of the master mason, the major architect of the Abbey, and he was Henry of Reims. Now, I don't think that necessarily means he was a Frenchman, but he's certainly someone who had worked at Reims, who knew these great cathedrals, and you can imagine him coming to England, getting to know the King, probably with a notebook, all kinds of drawings, how did they do it at Reims? And Reims is particularly influential because, like the Abbey, it's the French coronation church. So, you know, if you're going to imitate anything, you want to imitate it from Reims. Now, this doesn't mean that the King himself had no input. Here's a lovely drawing of a king [*referring to slide*], by chronicler Matthew Paris. This is actually an early king, King Offa, but you can see him instructing his architects and his builders. And I think it was like that, I think you can imagine Henry, the two Henrys; King Henry and the master mason Henry, putting their heads together and conceiving the design, 'Do you want this? What do you want?' You know,

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‘What should we do? Look, that’s how they do it at Reims, but this is how they do it at Amiens, and it’s out of that.’ And so, Henry has input into the design, and we know, from lots of orders, that he was very, very concerned with architectural detail, nature of painting, and so on. He’s also paying for it all; in the end, Henry contributed about forty to fifty thousand pounds. That’s meaningless isn’t it? But it’s over one year’s income of the whole of the kingdom that he paid for it, and he’s also... we’ve got lots of his orders, urging on the work, you know, getting jolly worried when the masons aren’t being paid, they’ve gone on strike, they’re going away, ‘We must hurry up’ you know, ‘I want it all done by such and time.’ He’s pushing, pushing, pushing to get it all done.

So, I’ve said it all comes from France, so let’s have a look at that in a little bit more detail, although I’m afraid my own photographs of Reims are not terribly good [*referring to slide*]. So, there’s the Abbey again, and let’s compare that to its major exemplar, Reims Cathedral. Sometimes, I’ve been at Reims in the morning, and the Abbey in the evening, and it’s an extraordinary experience, it’s as though you’ve, sort of, walked between two brothers, you know, two sisters, it just... Anyway, here is Reims, as I say, a very poor photograph, but I think you can immediately see, well, there’s a slightly different one, the similarity, the first is, obviously, the windows are the same, aren’t they? Those two lancets, and these lovely roses, so, there. You don’t really get an impression this is higher than the Abbey, I’ll come back to the exact height of Reims and the Abbey in a little bit, but its proportions are almost exactly the same as the Abbey. And then, the other thing you can see here, again, so it’s got the height, it’s got the windows, and also, it’s got the round east end, or apse, here, which you can see, there. So, the design of the Abbey is very, very close, in lots of ways, to the design of Reims. They’re both cathedral churches. The whole structure of the Abbey also depended on France. How is it so high? It’s so high because of these things [*referring to slide*]. It’s a structural technique, it’s taken from France, taken from Reims, it’s these flying buttresses. So, what holds the Abbey up? Why doesn’t it fall down with its great height? It’s because, leaning against the walls, are these flying buttresses, these things pushing in to keep it up, and that all comes from France too. You can see the Abbey here at the side, it’s these things you can see which are keeping it all up. And you can see the same then if we go on to Reims, there’s Reims, exactly the same type of constructional system; flying buttresses holding it all up.

Now, there’s something else too, which probably came from France. There’s just the east ends of the Abbey and Reims [*referring to slide*]. You almost don’t know which is which. Actually, the left is Reims, the right is the Abbey, you could almost switch them around, couldn’t you? Now, the other thing, which I think was so influenced by France, found in the most beautiful vista in the Abbey altogether, is this view up into the south transept, with this cascade of glass and this wonderful rose window here. Beautiful, beautiful, and that too - there’s the outside again, you see the outside of the south transept - that too is very similar, actually, now not Reims, but Notre-Dame, in Paris, and the great rose window, there. So, probably master Henry knew about that, and may have been influenced, but I think, actually, you’ve got to think that master Henry is not someone who is a slavish follower of these examples, he’s perfectly capable of making things up himself, and perhaps that’s something we need... I haven’t time to talk about that now.

So, these are the ways in which the Abbey, in English terms, is a revolutionary church, and everyone is going to be absolutely stunned by it. No one in England has seen anything like this before, and so, Henry’s hope is that, ‘Oh well, the Confessor’s going to be very pleased, but obviously all of you are going to be jolly impressed too.’ So, great, but then, if you had a French architect, if the architect of Reims, or Amiens, Notre-Dame, came to the Abbey, they might, nonetheless, for all I’ve said, have been



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critical, and the fact is that the Abbey, in some ways, is less impressive, for all we've said, than these great French cathedrals. And again, this doesn't quite come out, but the fact is the Abbey is one hundred and four feet, great, but actually, Reims, nonetheless, is twenty feet higher, and perhaps you get slightly the feeling, there, of its height [*referring to slide*]. So, you know, a Frenchman would say, 'Well, okay, all very well, but really, you haven't gone nearly as high as we're going now.' So, what would King Henry and master Henry have said in reply? I think, actually, why the Abbey wasn't as high was for a technical reason, which is that it had to follow the dimensions of the Confessor's church, and that precluded, because of the ratios, going any higher. But I think they wouldn't have pleaded that in defence, they would have said something else which is this: They would have said, 'Okay, yes, but the Abbey is far more magnificent. It's far more magnificent in terms of its decoration than anything in France. It's an opulent church.' And I want to give you a clue here, perhaps again we can ask, let's start with the ceiling. This is what's called the vault [*referring to slide*], and this is looking up to the ceiling of the Abbey, and if you compare that to the ceiling at Reims, what do you think? What's the difference? What would you say? There's the Reims' ceiling, and there's the Abbey's ceiling. Any idea? Anything to say on that?

**Audience Member**

It's much taller.

**Professor David Carpenter**

Well, I don't think it's taller, because I think, actually, this is less tall than Reims, but what would you say... Good to start everyone. What would you say about that?

**Audience Member**

It has a much more complex design.

**Professor David Carpenter**

Brilliant, yeah, I think that's absolutely right, that if you take this [*referring to slide*], it's just so much more patterned, isn't it? You've got these bits of masonry put here to give a, sort of, pattern putting across, and then you've got these very elaborate sculptural bosses here, with, sort of, wonderfully carved, inter-carved and so on. Now, there's nothing like that at Reims at all, isn't it boring? I mean, you've just got these sorts of plain bosses here, you've got no patterning, I mean it may have been painted but there's very little... So, you know, that's the first thing.

Now, if we go on beyond that, let's compare the east end of the Abbey, again, with Reims. Any ideas here about the difference between the two? What would you say? So, there's the Abbey [*referring to slide*], and there's a, sort of, typical bay at Reims. Anyone going to...

**The Reverend Anthony Ball**

You've got all the carving above the arches in the Abbey. Sort of like that's plain stone there.

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## Professor David Carpenter

Brilliant, that's absolutely right, and we haven't coordinated this either.

## The Reverend Anthony Ball

I'm trying to learn.

## Professor David Carpenter

Exactly. If we think about it, the main arches are very heavily carved. There's this funny patterning here, [*referring to slide*] which we'll come and look at what that is, and up here too. And then also, of course, there's this huge use of marble, it's actually from near the Isle of Purbeck, in Dorset, it's called Purbeck Marble, which is used in lots and lots of English cathedrals.

So, there are three things, aren't there: the very elaborate carving of the arches; the patterning, here; and then all this marble. Now, if you go on to Reims, you've just got nothing at all like that, have you? You've just got plain, tedious masonry, there's no marble here, the columns are exactly the same, there's no patterning here, and these arches are much more simple than the arches in the Abbey.

So, Henry would have said, 'This is just so much more magnificent.' This is what, with a close-up, this patterning looks like [*referring to slide*]. What they are is called 'our little roses', so the whole of the Abbey is studied with these little roses, and probably they might once have been very painted too. It shows adaption, because you can find these roses in French cathedrals. Here they are on the west end of Amiens, and there they are in much more detail. But what, at Amiens, is just used, sort of, sporadically, is used everywhere at the Abbey. So, it shows, you know, master Henry probably saying to Henry, 'Gosh, you know, I've got a good idea. At Amiens, they're just using it on the west front, why don't we put it everywhere?' And Henry said, 'Gosh, yes. What a good idea, let's go for it.'

Now, there's one other thing, which quickly I will mention, which sets the Abbey apart, and made it more magnificent than any contemporary church in England and France, and this is that, do you see, here [*referring to slide*], and this is where, it's a wonderful thing at the Abbey, that has happened in the last few years, all this has been open to the public. I don't know whether you went up there, but this is what's called the middle, or the triforium section, and do you see, it's got its own windows, you can see that behind, and actually, all around here, the great galleries, with their own external windows, and you can go up and have a look. Now, at Salisbury, there's nothing like that at all. Look at that, sort of, boring, plain wall, but actually, that's the same in the French cathedrals, because look, look at Reims, equally plain wall there, you can see it again, plain, and it's the same in Amiens, in the earlier bits of Amiens, so there's just nothing there at all. Whereas in the Abbey, you've got these... Sorry, externally the same. That's the middle section, sort of, flat roof, and equally at Reims, that, sort of, you can't really see it, but the middle section is, again, just rather sloping roof, there's nothing there. Well, look at the Abbey. The whole middle section has got its own external windows, and this creates these amazing galleries, and that's a photograph of the actual inside. Well, all of this has now been opened to the public. The Queen's Galleries, as they're called, wonderful thing to have happened at the Abbey. So, why does the King want them? You know, because it's hugely more expensive, isn't it? You can imagine that, whereas the Abbey, you've got to have all of these external walls, these great external windows, at Reims you've got nothing there, and at Salisbury you've just got a sloping roof, so this must have greatly added to the

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cost. I think the answer was that master Henry must have said to Henry, you know, 'Well, do you want this? Do you want this gallery triforium? It's going to add greatly to the cost, lots of the great French churches don't have it anymore, the English churches don't have it.' And of course, Henry said, 'Of course I want it, of course I want it. It's going to make it so much more magnificent.' But I also think he had a purpose, because again, this takes us back to this being a great national church. At coronations, the great services for the feasts of Edward the Confessor, where, I ought to have said, that on these great feast days, Henry doesn't just feed one hundred and fifty, or five hundred paupers, we know, from documentary evidence, he would feed five thousand. On 13th October 1216, he fed five thousand and sixteen paupers on the feast day of Edward the Confessor. So, I think his idea was before they earn their good meal, they're all going to go up there and be there for these great services, and of course, at coronations today, people do indeed go up there. So, you know, Henry is thinking we need space and that's where we're going to put people, up there with, sort of, two-tiered building. The great windows, by the way, come from Amiens, it was another inspiration of master Henry. They're used in a totally different place in Amiens. Sorry, I haven't got an image of that.

Now, can I come on, just finally then, to say a little bit about the effect of the Abbey, and what we're meant to think, and a little bit about the sculpture. So, this is the view you get now [*referring to slide*], as then, as you come in through the main entrance, through the Great North Door, and you look at this, as I say, probably the most beautiful feature of the Abbey, this wonderful cascade of glass, and underneath, the rose window. And underneath it, you've got two of the most beautiful pieces of medieval sculpture in the world; these lovely censing angels here. But also, we've got a, now, rather headless figure there, and this rather bizarre figure stretching out its arm. Now, what's the point? We go into the Abbey, and we immediately look up, our eyes carry up, and we focus on... We've got to put his head back, it must have been awful mustn't it, when it fell off? I hope no one was underneath. But what is all this about? Why are they so prominent? You can see a little bit closer, here. So, there's the headless figure, and there's this thing, and here's another photo, a bit dark, but I think you can get the impression quite well closer up. So, it's a beseeching arm isn't it, and then, here, well, what this is, it's the most significant moment, in a way, in Edward the Confessor's life. So, this is all about the Confessor, and there's a real message here, what is it? So, this is the Confessor, and if we could put his head back, he would doubtless be crowned and everything. And who is this? Well, Edward the Confessor thought that he was simply a poor pilgrim, and the story is that, late in Edward the Confessor's life - you can see his pilgrim stick there - this pilgrim comes to Edward the Confessor, and says, 'Look, I'm going on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, can you give me some money to help me on my way?' And Edward the Confessor has no money, as royalty, indeed, rarely carry money around, and so, what he does is he takes a ring off his finger, and if this arm was still here I'm sure it would be stretching out with a ring, and here is this pilgrim, that's why he's reaching out this beseeching arm to receive the ring. So, what's all this about? Well, I suppose, at one level, it's just the importance of almsgiving, and I think that's important - Lovely figure here, isn't it? Pity it's lost its head too. Mercifully, the two censing angels on either side are still perfectly preserved - but I think it's more than just almsgiving here, because the key thing is the sequel, and everyone would know what this story leads on to. A little bit later, out in the Holy Land, this guy meets two other English pilgrims, and he says to them, 'Look, I met your king recently. I want you to take the ring he gave me back to him with this message. What is the message? It is that I'm not actually a poor pilgrim at all. I am St John the Evangelist, the disciple whom Christ loved, and I want you to give him, the King, this message, which is that he's going to die soon, but not to worry because I am going to conduct him up to heaven.' And so, in the illustrations of the life of Edward the Confessor, the next

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scene after this is always of St Peter standing there with the keys, and St John shepherding the Confessor into Christ's presence.

So, you see, the point is, this whole episode, is the guarantee that the Confessor is indeed a sainted mighty power at God's right hand. This is the proof, and that's why this is the scene, more than any other, that Henry III has depicted in the Abbey, and in his palaces and chapels everywhere, this is the most important scene of all, the Confessor and the pilgrim, because the bringing back of the ring - in some things the whole episode is called the 'bringing back of the ring' - and of course, it's the bringing back of the ring with the message that, you know, tells the Confessor that he is indeed going to heaven.

So, what happens at the Abbey is, therefore, you come in and you look up at this scene, [*referring to slide*] and you think, immediately, 'Oh God, yes, the Confessor is this saint of mighty power.' And then you hurry on, over the splendid pavement, with its prophecy of the end of the world, and the date of the universe, which I haven't really had time to talk about, to the high altar, with Christ holding the world, in a way, in his saving hands, there's the world, and you see Christ saving miracles, and then, above it, you get to the shrine of the Confessor, and you go and you pray in these niches, here, and let us hope you are cured of any ailment you have, and you do indeed get success in this life, and are helped to the next.

So, that's, in a way, what the Abbey is all about. It's private but it's also very public. How successful was Henry? Well, the great day, of which we've got the seven hundred and fiftieth anniversary coming up this year, was the 13th October 1269, because, if we whizz back to the start [*referring to slide*], on the 13th October 1269, Henry does consecrate the church he has built, and he translates the Confessor. On the 13th October 1269, the new church is consecrated, the Confessor is taken to his new shrine in a really wonderful service. So, let's just quickly look about... Well, we can see from here, actually. So, how much has Henry built? He has built all of this, all of this, down to around here, and the Confessor's body is put here. Well, we'll whizz back again, while I'm talking, and you can see the shrine. So, Henry has achieved that. On the other hand, I think he would have been slightly disappointed in that, of course, he hadn't finished it; the church's nave, the great western towers, which I'm sure he projected, he would have been very disappointed with his son, who didn't finish the Abbey, didn't go on with it, and so, Henry would have been disappointed about that. He would also have been disappointed that he failed to make Edward the Confessor England's national saint, and here I have a last question for you. Why? Who does become England's national saint? Anyone know that? Remember, in Henry V, what does Henry V, in Shakespeare's Henry V, shout out? He doesn't shout out, 'God for Harry and Edward the Confessor.' Does he? He shouts out, 'God for Harry and Saint George.' So, it's George who becomes England's national saint, and I wonder if we get some idea of why that was? Unfortunately, I would much prefer if Edward the Confessor had been our national saint. So, here's the typical picture scene of Edward the Confessor [*referring to slide*], actually from the tiles in the Chapter House, the same scene isn't it? Edward the Confessor, here, giving his ring to the pilgrim, but compare that to the typical scene of St George, rescuing fair maiden from distress by killing the dragon. Well, I'm afraid, for the, sort of, [sensual] athletic English male, there was no contest. Clearly, St George is a far more glamorous and impressive saint than Edward the Confessor is. And so, Henry failed to make Edward the Confessor England's national saint.

In some ways too, he failed in the immediate politics, because, as I've said, the aim was for, you know, people coming to Parliament to attend the feasts of the Confessor, and then listen to what the King

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wanted to happen, and fall in with his wishes, but it very rarely worked like that, and 13th October 1269 is the great day, the greatest day of Henry's life when, finally, the Abbey is consecrated, when the Confessor's body is taken and put in this new shrine here, and later of course, Henry, four years later, is buried here, that's his tomb where Henry's body is still there, I should have told you stories about that, but you can ask me about Henry's body if you want, later on. So, Henry must have thought, 'Gosh, now, the great Parliament meets the next day. Surely, they're all going to agree to vote me this tax I want. And of course, they didn't at all. They all attend the feast day of Edward the Confessor, they're very impressed, no doubt they went to Henry's feast afterwards, and then the next day, they said, 'Well, I'm sorry, but no, we're not going to grant you any money.' And so, people perfectly capable of thinking, 'Well, yes, a good and pious king, and he's given us Edward the Confessor, and he's built the Abbey, and all the rest of it, but that doesn't mean to say we agree with what he wants us to do.' And so, it's what you might call 'soft power', isn't it? I mean, to use a, sort of, cliché phrase, but Henry was a master of soft power, or a huge amount of his effort went into soft power, and yet, it actually proved just how soft soft power actually is. So, you know, Henry would have been disappointed, I think, in the immediate politics. On the other hand, to be fair about soft power, it's very hard to know just how really impressive it was. I mean, although Henry suffered a civil war, towards the end of his reign, there was never any effort to depose him, like there had been an effort to depose his notorious father. His personal rule lasted for twenty-five years. You know, it's perfectly possible that, actually, because Henry was a good and pious man, because he was building Westminster Abbey, I mean, things might have been far worse if he hadn't done those good things. It's very, very hard to calculate, that's one of the problems of trying to assess how impressive soft power is.

So, at the end, what do we think? Well, of course, I must end on a positive note, which is that, of course, Henry did hugely succeed in that he has built this very, very great church, it goes on becoming England's national church, lots of the medieval kings are buried there, Henry's buried there, there's his son [*referring to slide*], Edward III is over there, Henry V here, they all gather round. So, in that sense, he has created this wonderful home for all kinds of ceremonies down the ages. He has created what is still Britain's, I think we should say, national church, and one of the most wonderful churches in Europe, and the world. So, I think we can all be pleased. Thank you very much.

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### Professor David Carpenter biography

David Carpenter is Professor of Medieval History at King's College London and one of the leading authorities on 13<sup>th</sup> century social, political, economic British history. He has written widely on these subjects and makes frequent appearances on radio and television programmes, discussing medieval history.

David Carpenter read History at Christ Church, Oxford. He lectured there and also at St Hilda's College Oxford, the University of Aberdeen, and Queen Mary College, University of London before joining King's College London. His research interests include Henry III, Magna Carta, Westminster Abbey and Medieval Scotland. He led the AHRC funded Henry III Fine Rolls Project, which has transformed understanding of the importance of Henry III's reign and has made these important, rich documents freely available in English translation, the first medieval source to be treated in this way.

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### Selection of books by Professor David Carpenter

*The Battles of Lewes and Evesham* (1987)

*The Minority of Henry III* (1990)

*The Reign of Henry III* (1996)

*The Struggle for Mastery: Britain 1066–1284* (2004)

*Magna Carta* (2015)

### Context of the event

The Westminster Abbey Learning Department's annual History Masterclass offers 16+ students a 'taster' of university-level History as well as an enriching and informative experience. A themed guided tour of the Abbey is followed by a lecture from a distinguished historian speaking on the same theme. The question and answer session after the lecture provides a rare opportunity for students to quiz the historian behind the textbook.

In 2019, the theme for the Masterclass was Henry III and the speaker was Professor David Carpenter. The theme was chosen to mark the 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the rebuilding of Westminster Abbey.

In 2020, the theme for the Masterclass was Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots. The speaker was Dr John Guy.

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