

Hugh of Avallon/Lincoln, (c. 35-1200) Bishop of Lincoln

Hugh of Lincoln was born in Burgundy, France, at the castle of Avallon. He joined the Augustinian canons with his widowed father, but at the age of 25 he attempted to transfer to the stricter Carthusian order. After some confusion this was accomplished. In 1180 he was assigned as prior of Witham Friary, the first Carthusian House in England. It was here that he made his annual retreat after becoming a bishop.

The canons of Lincoln had not had a bishop for sixteen years until Henry II nominated Hugh, who declined until he could obtain the approval of his superior at La Grande Chartreuse. The new bishop then began a number of reforms and was also known for his personal attention to the needs of lepers and his protection of the oppressed.

Bishop Hugh was present at the coronation of Richard I (the Lion-Heart) in 1188; he later angered the king by refusing (as spokesman for the barons) to raise money for wars outside of England. Told that the King thirsted for money, Bishop Hugh said: "If he is thus thirsty, I will not be the water to quench his thirst." He also accused Richard of infidelity to his wife and encroachment upon the Church's rights. He was in France at the time of the king's death and was present at King John's coronation in 1199.



Above: St. Mary Church Witham. Some believe that it incorporates part of the chapel or a small portion of Hugh's Witham Friary.

Right: Bishop Hugh's white linen stole still preserved at the Carthusian Charter-house in West Sussex.



The three kings of England with whom Bishop Hugh contended during his lifetime: Henry II, Richard I and John I.



Bishop Hugh died of an unknown illness after returning from France. King John himself assisted in carrying his coffin to the grave in Lincoln Cathedral. Pope Honorius III canonized the bishop—the first Carthusian to be canonized—in 1220. A magnificent shrine was erected to contain his relics in the south transept of the Cathedral. Second only as a pilgrimage site to that of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury the agents of Henry VIII demolished it in 1540.



Apparently during the translation of the relics in 1280 the head became detached from the body. It was placed in a jeweled casket on a plinth of elaborately carved stone. Eventually, only the plinth remained. In 1989 on the 800th anniversary of anniversary of the Bishop Hugh's arrival at Lincoln, the Dean and Chapter commissioned a canopy for the head shrine base; it is made of bronze coated stainless steel and its lines are described as "reminiscent of St. Hugh's swan."

Below: Artist's reconstruction of the original shrine from Stukeley's *Itinerarium Curiosum*, 1724, and the new 1989 canopy in place over the old pedestal.



St. Hugh rebuilt Lincoln Cathedral after damages caused by the great earthquake of 1185. The four bays of the choir are from this period and are architecturally noteworthy. Much of the building we see today is from the 16th century. The western spires were removed in 1807 for safety reasons.

"St. Hugh was one of the first promoters, if not designers, of our Early English style of architecture."
Wall, J. Charles, *Shrines of British Saints* (1905)

Saint Hugh's Swan



"The Swan of Stowe." The swan would follow Saint Hugh about, and was his constant companion while he was at his manor in Stowe, even guarding him while he slept.