

# *Pilgrim Wax Votives*



## **Pilgrims bring votive gifts to Bishop Lacy's Tomb**

Edmund Lacy (or Lacey) was Bishop of Exeter from 1420-1455. He was a hardworking bishop who honoured his duties to his cathedral and diocese with care. He was interested in spiritual, intellectual and musical matters and held a reputation for holy living. Lacy was in his 80s when he died but had not enjoyed good health for some time, being afflicted with a painful leg condition.



After his death, he was buried in the north side of the Cathedral and his altar tomb, now sadly missing its brass effigy, is still in the north quire aisle. The tomb became a suite for many visitors/pilgrims to come and visit. Healing miracles came to be associated with Lacy and his tomb was, for some decades, the focus of an unofficial cult with pilgrims travelling there to offer donations and their prayers. It was believed that in death the bishop was much closer to God than the humble person, therefore by praying to Lacy, one's prayers were more likely to be heard or

processed by God. You can see the smooth worn top and sides of the tombstone where over





the years many hands have caressed the stone in hopeful prayer.

In 1943, during war damage repair work, one of the stonemasons discovered several wax figures tucked away in the crestring above the tomb where they might have been bundled for safety at some point. The finest of these objects is the figure of a woman with long hair and full dress (about 20cm tall) and with hands clasped in an attitude of prayer. There are also fragments of human legs, faces, fingers, feet and shoes, as well as those of horses, pigs and cattle. These figures are believed to be a very rare British survival of the once common wax votive offerings (a votive is an offering for a favour or wish granted - it could be a homemade gift or candle etc.) which pilgrims would have bought at or very near the Cathedral and then, most likely, hung around the canopy of Lacy's tomb as prayers were offered. Had his cult not been suppressed in the 1530s, Lacy may even have become a saint.

The wax figures themselves are cared for in the Cathedral Library & Archives as they are - perhaps not surprisingly given their age - now so fragile that it is not currently possible to put them on public view. We do however have replicas for you to see. The tomb itself is quite understated for its importance. Visitors to the Cathedral and to Lacy's tomb should be sure to look around and imagine it 500 or so years ago, with pilgrims visiting and hanging up their hopeful little beeswax figures.