



# Christ Church

## UNLOCKING CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL: FAMILY/SCHOOL RESOURCES

### A VIRTUAL VISIT ONLINE

#### The Tomb of Lady Elizabeth Montacute



#### **Introduction:**

Inside the Cathedral, there are numerous tombs and monuments, placed there to commemorate those who have died. Only wealthy, or important, people were able to be buried inside. The poorer people were usually buried outside, in the graveyard.

Often, we can tell a great deal about a person from his or her tomb. The lady shown here has been in the Lady Chapel of the Cathedral for nearly seven hundred years.

She is elegantly dressed and we can see traces of the original paint in this photograph. When new, the tomb would have been brightly painted and gilded with real gold leaf.

Because her hands are pressed together in prayer, we can tell that this lady is religious. At her feet, there is a little dog, so we might deduce she liked animals and perhaps even owned the dog.

#### **Background:**

This tomb belongs to Lady Elizabeth who had connections with the royal courts of three kings called Henry: the first, second and third, in fact. She was the daughter of a nobleman Sir Peter de Montfort who lived in Beaudesert Castle, Warwickshire. With her husband, the baron William de Montacute, she raised ten healthy children to adulthood, which was a rare achievement in the days before

hospitals and anti-biotics. It seems that Elizabeth prayed often through St Margaret of Antioch and Saint Frideswide, both of whom were associated with protecting mothers in childbirth. Her children grew up to include a Bishop, an earl, two Abbesses and a Prioress and one of her descendants would be King Edward IV. Sadly, their statues which can be seen in panels around the tomb have been damaged. Perhaps Oliver Cromwell's soldiers thought they were statues of saints, which they had been told to destroy. Two angels, at lady Elizabeth's head, have also been damaged, but one statue of the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus has survived. Interestingly, the face of Lady Elizabeth has not been vandalised. Perhaps the soldiers were superstitious and frightened Lady Elizabeth may have returned to haunt them!



**One of Lady Elizabeth's six daughters, dressed in 14<sup>th</sup> century fashion**

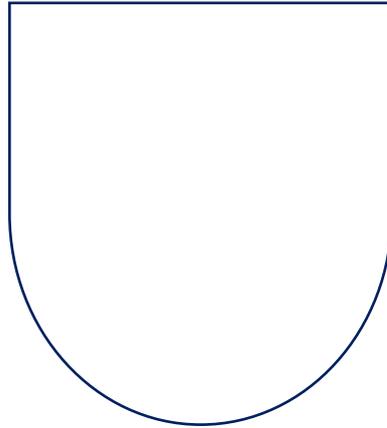
Lady Elizabeth had given money to the Priory for a chantry to be built and for two priests to say mass within the Lady Chapel. She may have paid for the angels which are painted on the ceiling in that chapel. Though they are badly damaged, we can still see their wings and a face or two. When Lady Elizabeth died in 1354, she gave the Priory some land, including the meadows beside the River Thames. She insisted that the meadows should be open to the ordinary people of Oxford each day, between sunrise and sunset. This generous gesture meant she had created the idea of a public park, open for everyone to enjoy. It was the first one of its kind in England!

#### **Things to do at home- a few ideas:**

- Noble families often had **coats of arms**. Lady Elizabeth's tomb features her family heraldry: the Montacute shield (blue and gold diagonal stripes) and the Montfort shield ( a silver lion). Here is the coat of arms belonging to the Queen or King of the United Kingdom. Look at the shield which has been divided into four quarters. Which country does the harp represent?



- Design your own coat of arms or **family shield**. Use your favourite colours and include things you like that would represent your family's interests, jobs and hobbies.



- Find out more about **Christ Church Meadow**.



- Locate it on a map. Find out which animals can still be seen grazing there and why they are a little unusual.
- Learn more about **clothing in Medieval times**. What were the differences between the clothes of poor people and their wealthier employers?
- **Medieval food**: Lady Elizabeth would never have known the taste of chocolate, potatoes or tomatoes. What kinds of food would Lady Elizabeth and her family have eaten?
- Lady Elizabeth was born in a castle. Find out more about **Medieval castles** and how they were defended in times of war. Find out about these castle features:
  - **A keep?**
  - **A moat?**
  - **A solar?**
  - **A dungeon?**
  - **A midden?**
  - **A portcullis?**
 What were they and how were they used?
- Lady Elizabeth has been lying on her tomb with her hands in prayer for nearly seven centuries. Write a **prayer** for your family. What would you like to ask God for?



**A full-length view of Lady Elizabeth, showing the colours with which her tomb would have been painted.**



**Sadly, this photo shows some damage to the Tomb.**

The two angels who hold the cushion under Lady Elizabeth's head were badly damaged by Cromwell's soldiers after the Civil War.

The initials carved onto Lady Elizabeth's bonnet are evidence of an ignorant and selfish tourist many years ago.