With a vacancy in the coveted archbishopric of York in 1140, several candidates, Henry de Sully and William Fitzherbert included, vied for the title. Henry's election was quashed, due in part to his conflicting duties as Abbot of Fécamp. A lengthy and bitter contest ensued, with accusations of impropriety lodged against the remaining candidate, William, by the Cistercian luminary Bernard of Clairvaux, in correspondence with successive popes. Among other things, Bernard accused William of simony and unchaste living. When Bernard died in August 1153, the cloud over William's candidacy lifted, and in December, he finally secured his archiepiscopal title. As fate would have it, less than a month after his triumphal return to York, William himself died, reputedly from poison in his chalice.
William's death marked a new beginning for York Minster, with regard to both its physical footprint and its reputation vis-à-vis its great rival to the south, Canterbury. During the tenure of William's successor, Roger de Pont L'Évêque, York Minster was rebuilt. Roger, however, caught the ire of Canterbury's Thomas Becket after having the audacity to crown Henry the Young King, heir apparent to Henry II, in York in 1170, a privilege normally reserved for Canterbury. Becket, in turn, excommunicated Roger, but soon after met his own earthly end. By 1173, Becket was canonized—a rival saint for a rival city—as was William's old nemesis, Bernard of Clairvaux, a year later. Perhaps not coincidentally, within a few years miracles began to be reported in York, centered around the tomb of the now Blessed William, a site of popular veneration by the 1170s. From 1177 onwards, miracles at William's tomb gathered pace. According to one such miracle story, the focal point of this essay, William healed the hand of a woman condemned to death after undergoing trial by hot iron. In some instances by means of holy oil oozing from his tomb, William reportedly healed the blind and deaf, the crippled and maimed, and even a woman experiencing digestive difficulties after inadvertently swallowing a frog baked into Eucharistic bread (panem vitae)—an ordeal, no doubt, all its own, albeit of the amphibian variety. By 1180, toward the end of Roger's time as archbishop, a cult had formed around William's memory as York consciously developed a new civic order, visually represented in the city's infrastructure by a chapel dedicated to William on a new bridge over the river Ouse, the site of his first miracle in 1154.

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5 Christopher Norton, St William of York (York: 2006), 150 ff.
7 For the Latin accounts of these miracles and others, see Raine, Historians, vol. 2, 531–43.
8 On the development of William's cult, see Sarah Rees Jones, Cities and Their Saints in England, circa 1150–1300: The Development of Bourgeois Values in the Cults of Saint William