Pilgrimages in and around Gloucestershire during medieval times

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GOING ON PILGRIMAGE

When the sees of Worcester and Hereford were created in about 680, Gloucestershire was divided between them. The medieval diocese of Worcester consisted of the present diocese of Worcester, South Warwickshire, Gloucestershire east of the River Severn, and Bristol. The diocese of Hereford included most of Gloucestershire west of the Severn and its tributary the Leadon, stretching down as far as St Tecla’s Island off the Beachley peninsula. In addition, from 1094 the ‘Jurisdiction of St Oswald’s’, which included the Priory of St Oswald, Gloucester, and several adjacent chapels was constituted a peculiar of the archbishopric of York.

Until the creation of the dioceses of Gloucester and Bristol by King Henry VIII the people of Gloucestershire would have looked to their cathedral churches in Worcester and Hereford as well as to the many large religious houses that flourished in the county. These houses owned manors and livings throughout the shire and so, for example, at Tewkesbury Abbey their Feast of the Holy Relics (a stone from Calvary, a bone of St Wulfstan, the blood and hair of St Thomas the martyr and the stake or base into which the Cross of Christ had been fixed), celebrated on 2 July, might attract numerous day pilgrims and several miracles were even reported there. It is within this ecclesiastical setting that we begin our pilgrimage to the shrines of Gloucestershire and the surrounding area, but before looking in more detail at Christian pilgrimage it must be remembered that in contrast to Islam and some of the other faiths, pilgrimage was not an essential duty.

In medieval times the greatest pilgrimage centre outside of England was Jerusalem. Routes were planned and became well worn through usage, with wayside crosses helping to indicate to the pilgrim that he or she was following the appropriate route. Hostels or pilgrim hospitals were to be found at places which were well known for housing the relics of local or international saints and religious orders often provided accommodation.

The crusaders, Knights Templar and Hospitaller, looked after the needs of the pilgrims who were bold enough to undertake a journey abroad, and protected them from attack. For those who could not endure the journey to Jerusalem to bathe in the River Jordan, in the same water in which Jesus was baptised, a safer and shorter pilgrimage could be made to Rome to visit the sites associated with the martyrdom of Ss Peter and Paul, or to Compostela for its association with S James. Chaucer’s wife of Bath before taking the road to Canterbury ‘thrice had she been to Jerusalem; she had passed many a strong stream; at Rome she had been at Bologne (shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary); in Galice at St Jeammes (Compostela) and at Cologne (The Magi); she could much of wandering by the way.’ Naturally only the rich made pilgrimage to such places, the rest for financial or health reasons being content with local shrines or relics. Nevertheless, the destination was not as important as the effort made to reach it. The main concern was to acquire indulgences and pilgrimage was the preferred and honourable way of obtaining these. Some holy sites were ‘permed’, for example, two pilgrimages to St David’s in Wales being considered equivalent to one to Rome and likewise, two visits to Bardsey Island were equal to one to Rome.
Another major purpose of pilgrimage was connected with health, either a thanksgiving for a special cure or recovery, or a pilgrimage made with the hope of obtaining a cure. There were other purposes for which such journeys were undertaken and records show that these included seeking success in a business venture or giving thanks after success; seeking or cementing a loving relationship; seeking a peaceful settlement in times of war; as a way of doing penance for one’s sins or in response to a religious vow that the pilgrim had made and of course, personal, spiritual growth. If anyone was too ill to make a pilgrimage they could pay the expenses for someone else to make it on their behalf. Usually such pilgrimages by proxy were made after death, from money left in a will, to gain special privileges for the deceased in the afterlife.

The ritual associated with pilgrimage was very strictly observed. Pilgrimages were usually made from one’s home town or village. Before setting out, Mass was heard, special prayers were offered for the safe journey and return of the pilgrim, and the scrip/pilgrim pouch and pilgrim staff were blessed. A letter of recommendation and a character reference were often provided by the parish priest and finally the pilgrim was sprinkled with Holy Water. A special, recognisable pilgrim costume entitled the pilgrim to beg alms en route. This costume consisted of a long woollen brown or russet robe, with a cross on the sleeve; a large brimmed hat usually decorated with pilgrim badges of shrines already visited; two days food in the scrip, foot balm, a knife, a flask, a rosary and spare socks. Pilgrims brought back from their pilgrimage, souvenirs, even relics they had bought, and scallop shells as a sign of completion of their journey. Palmers was the special name given to pilgrims who returned with a palm brought from the Holy Land. However, some pilgrims were pious ‘professionals’ with no home base who spent their days wandering from shrine to shrine and many so called ‘pilgrims’ were in fact just men of the road or even criminals.

The heyday of pilgrimage was the 14th century, and as shrines prospered through pilgrim devotion and offerings, so too they attracted more pilgrims. In fact, each church had a relic of one or more saints. Again, it is important to remember that relics means not only the actual
body parts of saints but also things that had touched the person when alive or even since their death. A precedent for this is to be found in Acts Chapter 19 “And God did extraordinary miracles by the hand of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and evil spirits came out of them”. The larger churches would have housed many such relics and it is on record that Canterbury Cathedral had over 400 at one point.

In the geographical area under consideration the major pilgrimage route to Compostela via the Port of Bristol, passed through the length of the county. The Church of St James the Great at Stoke Orchard is an example of a church on the route with its fourteenth century wall paintings comprising of a cycle of the life of St James of Compostela. It is likely that many pilgrims would have called in to places of secondary devotion on their way to Bristol and it has been suggested that the Chapel of St James at Postlip may have been used by pilgrims deviating from the main route to visit Winchcombe or more probably, the Holy Blood at Hailes.

Pilgrimage sites were clearly classed according to the status of the person or relic being venerated. The Holy Blood of Hailes stands in a class of its own, but episcopal saints, holy men and women, royal saints and objects of devotion or sites associated with miraculous happenings would also have been the focus of pilgrimage. With the exception of St Anne’s Well at Brislington, the subject of Holy Wells has been left for consideration on another occasion.

‘AS SURE AS GOD’S IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE’

HAILES ABBEY

THE HOLY BLOOD of HAILES
Hailes – or Hayles – Abbey was founded in 1246 by Richard Earl of Cornwall, the brother of King Henry III (who had been crowned in St Peter’s Abbey, Gloucester). Hailes Abbey Church was completed in 1251 and dedicated in November of that year. Present at this magnificent ceremony were King Henry himself, his queen, Eleanor of Provence, Earl Richard and his second wife Sanchia, sister of queen Eleanor. It is recorded that thirteen bishops said Mass, each at his own altar with Bishop Grosseteste of Lincoln, celebrating at the High Altar. Five years later – 1256 – Earl Richard was elected King of the Romans and he and his wife were crowned at Aix la Chapelle. Richard’s happiness was not to last for his wife, Queen Sanchia died in 1261 and Richard had her body brought back to England to be buried at Hailes.

A sixteenth century document, probably written by a monk of Hailes, tells how while Christ was hanging on the cross, a Jewish convert to Christianity held a small phial to Jesus side and collected some of the blood which flowed from his wounds. Other Jews, who had remained true to their faith, heard about this, reported him and caused him to be arrested. He was locked in a cell outside the city of Jerusalem where he remained for 42 years with only the phial of blood for company. One day, while the Emperors Titus and Vespasian were returning home after sacking the city of Jerusalem, they passed the small cell which housed the Jewish convert. Eager to satisfy their curiosity they made enquiries about the origins of the cell and were told the story of the Jew and the phial of blood. They ordered the cell to be unlocked and to their astonishment they found the Jew still alive and clutching the phial of blood. As the Jew refused to hand over the phial, the Emperors wrenched it from him and immediately the Jew lost both sight and speech and within a few seconds he crumbled into powder, as dead as a stone. The relic of the Holy Blood was taken to Rome, where it remained in an honoured place in the Temple of Peace, until it was captured by the Emperor Charlemagne and taken to Germany.

In the year 1267 Edmund, the second son of Earl Richard, purchased in Germany some of the Holy Blood of Jesus and gave a portion of it to his father’s foundation at Hailes. Edmund was only about seventeen at the time, and he brought the relic himself to be enshrined at Hailes in 1270 for the Festival of the Exaltation of the Cross, September 14th. He arrived at Winchcombe Abbey on 12th September and spent the night there. The following day the relic was taken to Hailes from Winchcombe amidst a long and reverent procession of monks, royal courtiers, and local spectators and pilgrims. A station was made at Rowley Meadow where the relic was welcomed by Abbot Walter and the Hailes monks. A field altar had been erected with an awning of cloth of gold over it, and on this altar the relic of the Precious Blood of Christ was placed and after a sermon had been delivered, all those present were invited to come forward on their knees to venerate the relic. When this long and moving ritual had been completed, young Edmund was handed the sacred relic, the procession reformed and continued the final stage of the journey to Hailes Abbey Church. On arrival there, the relic was offered by Edmund at the High Altar and from that day, the older shrine of St Kenelm at Winchcombe took second place to the veneration of the Precious Blood of Christ, at Hailes.
Earl Richard died shortly afterwards and was buried at Hailes, alongside his wife, Sanchia. He was succeeded by his son Edmund, who set about creating a shrine more worthy of the precious relic for which Hailes had become famous. This shrine was part of new work completed in 1277 which provided an eastern apse with five polygonal chapels, two semi-circular ambulatories and a large structure some eight feet by ten, from which radiated all the rest. This structure was the base of the shrine on which rested for over 250 years, the reliquary containing the Holy Blood of Hailes. The relic was described at the Dissolution of the Monasteries as being ‘contained in a round beryl, very securely stopped and ornamented and bound with silver.’ The shrine, situated in its own chapel behind the High Altar, was dedicated by Godfrey Giffard, Bishop of Worcester in 1277 and probably resembled that of St Edward the Confessor at Westminster, St Alban at St Albans Abbey; St Birinus at Dorchester and St Egwin at Evesham, to name but a few. It would probably have been an ark like structure, with a pitched roof, and around the sides, figures of Saints set beneath ornate canopies.

In 1295, Edmund presented to the Abbey a golden cross containing a portion of the True Cross of Christ, and when he died just five years later in October 1300, his body was brought back to Hailes and buried near his parents, Richard and his queen, Sanchia. King Edward I and many bishops, knights and members of the Royal Household attended his impressive funeral.

Hailes soon became one of the most holy and revered places of pilgrimage in the county if not the country, and was visited by countless numbers of pilgrims from all over England and Wales. Chaucer’s Pardoner’s Tale has the following lines in it:

‘By God’s precious Heart and Passion, by God’s nails, And by the Blood of Christ that is in Hailes...’

and we know that Margery Kemp on her return from Compostella, travelled from Bristol, her landing port, and

‘went forth to the Blood at Hailes and there was shriven with loud cries and boisterous weeping.’

Pilgrims following the route along the Salt Way would have had a breath taking view of the monastery as they approached from the hills above it, filled at one and the same time, with excitement, reverence and awe. On arriving at the Abbey they would have probably entered by the North Transept door, passing behind the High Altar to their right and the other polygonal chapels to their left. As they neared the Chapel of the Holy Blood, and viewed the shrine in all its magnificence, candles gleaming, and offerings made by earlier pilgrims glowing in the light that streamed through the windows, their eyes must have filled with tears as they sank to their knees in deepest reverence. Their spiritual experience on this occasion would most surely have been the most memorable of their lives.
Many miracles were recorded as a result of visits to the shrine, ‘the number of which no man knoweth but God alone, for they be so renewed and increase daily’ and in 1415 the Pope gave the Abbot authority to find two confessors to hear the confessions of the many pilgrims and grant them absolution. According to Leland, ‘God sheweth daily, miracles through the virtue of the Precious Blood.’

The following four miracles were the most frequently reported:

A Lollard priest in Shropshire tried to dissuade his parishioners from making a pilgrimage to Hailes. They insisted on going, but he stayed behind to celebrate Mass. As he uncovered the chalice at Mass he saw that the wine was boiling to the brim. He repented of his decision, set off with haste and joined the pilgrimage. Another Derbyshire priest also refused to go. On opening his missal all the words were obliterated with sprinklings of blood. No matter what he did he couldn’t read the words. So barefoot and shirtless he too made the pilgrimage to Hailes.

A baker from Stone (Stow?) was selling food to pilgrims at Hailes. Not once did he or his family bother to venerate the Holy Blood. They later decided to do so, but their horse and cart bolted while they were still in the church and all their goods were destroyed. However, their children were saved, so they returned once more, this time to give thanks for what they believed to have been a miracle.

Two merchants were captured at sea and imprisoned on Mont St Michel. They had a vision telling them to go to the Holy Blood. They thought it was an hallucination, but after a month they were convinced of the truth of the message, but how could they go? On Christmas Eve they were told by a voice to trust in God’s grace and when they woke, the gates of the prison were open, their chains had fallen off, and they escaped and made their pilgrimage to the Holy Blood at Hailes.

As late as 1533, Hugh Latimer wrote to Thomas Cromwell, that he dwelt within a mile of the Fosse Way at West Kineton, ‘and you would wonder how they come by flocks out of the West Country to many images, Our Lady of Worcester, but chiefly to the Blood of Hailes which they believe the very sight of it puts them in a state of salvation.’ In 1538, the Commissioners, under Hugh Latimer, now Bishop of Worcester, destroyed the shrine and took away the jewels, ornaments and money. On November 24th 1539 one month after the Abbey was surrendered, the Holy Blood of Hailes was destroyed publicly at St Paul’s Cross by John Hilsey, Bishop of Rochester. From that time on, the old saying, ‘as sure as God’s in Gloucestershire’ did not mean quite so much to pilgrims.

No Hailes pilgrim tokens have been found, but a matrix of a beautiful seal was found in 1860 in Yorkshire, with the figure of a monk holding in his right hand the phial holding the sacred blood and in the other the aspersgillium with which he sprinkled with holy water the pilgrims kneeling before the shrine. It bears the legend in Latin, ‘The seal of the brothers of the monastery of the Blessed Mary at Hayles.’
WINCHCOMBE ABBEY

ST KENELM of WINCHCOMBE

St Augustine had arrived in England in 597 and during the next two hundred years several rich devout Anglo Saxon kings and nobles converted to Christianity and founded monasteries. Winchcombe, the capital of the Hwiccans at the time, was one such foundation and its wealth and status were greatly increased by pilgrims who made the journey to St Kenelm’s Well. This well near Winchcombe is famous not only for miraculous powers but also for the events associated with its origin.

According to Leland, ‘the monastery at Winchcombe was set up in the best part of the town and hard by it where the parish church is, was Kynge Kenulph’s palace.’ Kenulf, King of Mercia, had founded Winchcombe Abbey in 789 with 300 monks and it was dedicated in 811 to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The true story of the birth of Kenulf’s son, Kenelm and his early years is difficult to trace, but the most probable and reliable account is as follows. After the death of his first wife, by whom he had two children, Kenulf married the daughter of King Offa, Aelfrhyth. His first son died young, and his daughter Quendrith who was deeply religious, was not at all suited to succeed him. Kenulf was therefore overjoyed when another son was born of his second marriage, and this son he also named Kenelm. It was this second Kenelm who was to provide Winchcombe with its child saint.

Kenulf had Kenelm anointed as his successor at an early age and Quendrith became exceedingly jealous. She was old enough to be his aunt and felt that she was the rightful successor to their father. She therefore set about her attempt to dispose of Kenelm.

One night, Kenelm had a dream, which he shared with his nurse, in which he saw his tutor, Askbert, cut down a tree which fell with a great crash. Kenelm in the dream, made white wings for himself and flew off as a white dove, floating towards heaven. Not many days after this dream, travellers arrived in Winchcombe bringing news that bears had been seen in the
Forest of Clent. A hunting party was arranged and Kenelm begged to be allowed to go. This was Quendrith’s opportunity. Kenulf was away from home, and young Kenelm had been left in her care. She allowed him to accompany the hastily arranged hunting party and off they set towards the Clent Hills. On arrival, one hunting party set off in search of their prey, but young Kenelm lay down to rest. His tutor, Askbert, who had been bribed by Quendrith, began to dig a hole while Kenelm slept, but Kenelm awoke and challenged Askbert about the hole. The tutor was able to give a simple explanation, and it was filled in.

Nevertheless, later that same day, 3rd Nov 821, Kenelm stuck his staff into the ground and it blossomed. He knelt down in awe to pray. As he did so, Askbert cut off his head, which Kenelm caught and held up to offer to God. Immediately his soul in the form of a white dove took flight and soared towards heaven – his dream!

Askbert buried the body and made it appear that the head was still attached to it. The hunters returned, enquired about the King’s son and were told that he had wandered off. A frantic search was made but he could not be found. They all returned to Winchcombe, very fearful, and very sad.

Now the tree that had blossomed for Kenelm had a heavenly light shining constantly above it and cows grazing near it always produced twice the expected quantity of milk. Land made bare as a result of too much grazing during the day was always covered with fresh, lush, green grass the next morning.

Back at Winchcombe, a new successor to King Kenulf had to be chosen and the nobles chose not Quendrith, but her uncle Ceolwulf, Kenulf’s brother. However miraculous events were happening on the other side of the world. While the Pope was celebrating Mass in Rome one morning, a white dove arrived and dropped a message which said, “In Clent in Cowback Kenelm King’s bairn lieth under a thorn bereft of head.” The Pope was naturally puzzled but sent a request to the Archbishop of Canterbury asking him to make enquiries. He in turn ordered the monks of Winchcombe Abbey to go to Clent to search for the boy. The locals there took them to the tree near where the body had been buried. As they searched they found the corpse. The body was taken out of the ground and a spring burst forth. The search party then set off with the body for its return journey to Winchcombe and many miracles were wrought on the way. Eventually they approached the town and stopped on the hillside for a rest at Sudeley. Almost repeating what young Kenelm had done before his death at Clent, the Abbot struck the ground with his staff, but on this occasion, not a tree but a spring of clear fresh water burst forth. So at Clent and Winchcombe we find St Kenelm’s wells, the place where the body first lay buried, and the last places where the body rested. As she saw the body being brought to Winchcombe, Quendrith couldn’t believe her eyes – she started reading a psalm backwards – a sign of witchcraft – and her eyes fell out on to the page of her breviary.

It is often reported that Kenelm was only seven years old at his death, which seems highly unlikely. William of Malmesbury clearly records that Kenulf had consigned his son, Kenelm,
when seven years old to the care of his half-sister, Quendrith, for the purpose of education. He does not say that she murdered him when he was seven.

It is probable that Kenulf had expressed his wish to be buried in his monastery and was in fact buried there although the crypt of the church of St Pancras at Winchcombe between the present church and the west end of the Abbey church has also been identified as the shrine of St Kenelm, buried there with his father. Nevertheless, Leland is quite specific in saying that ‘there lay buried in the east part of the church of the monastery, Kenulphus and Kenelmus, father and son, both Kings of Mercia.’

In 1815 excavations took place in the Abbey grounds. Around the eastern wall of the church, two coffins beneath the site of an altar were found. One was of an adult, the other a child. The larger contained the bones of a man, the smaller one the skull and bones of a child and a very long bladed knife terribly corroded. The relics of the saint and the dust of the King were thrown to the ground and the shrine and coffin were sold and placed in the grounds of Wormington Grange. The coffins are now in the church.

In 1894/5 a Saxon Cross was erected at Winchcombe to mark the centre of the old Abbey tower. The cross bears the following inscription in Saxon capitals: This cross marks the centre of the Tower of the Abbey Church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin and St Kenelm, AD 786. (East side) Here was buried King Kenulf, the founder, and his son, Kenelm, King and Martyr. (West side) (Glos Notes and Queries No 66 1895)

The monks of Winchcombe enlarged the abbey to attract pilgrims, to whom they could minister and from whom they received gifts. In consequence of the wealth he attracted to the monastery, and the miracles which were wrought through his intercession, Kenelm was canonised and the feast of St Kenelm, King and Martyr, was kept on 17th July, the date on which, in 819 the body was returned to the church which his father had built and where it was placed next to his father before the high altar at the east end of the abbey. As it was so laid, the abbey bells rang out without human help.

Kenelm was canonised and his claim to martyrdom – dying innocently at the hands of evil men – was sanctioned by St Dunstan of Canterbury. The earliest document mentioning him as Saint Kenelm is the Hyde Register. By 995 at the monastery of St Benoit-sur-Loire, prayers and Masses were said of Saint Kenelm, and his name appeared in their calendar of major saints. In 1175 Pope Alexander addressed a Bull to the Abbot of Winchcombe, at “The monastery of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Kenelm.”

There were fifteen recorded miracles and William of Malmesbury said that there was no place in England to which more pilgrims travelled than to Winchcombe on Kenelm’s feast day. The former George Hotel, now converted to private domestic accommodation, was built by the Abbey as an inn for pilgrims. A special pilgrim badge is also known to have been struck.

St Kenelm’s Well is near Sudeley. On the west side of the well house is a doorway over which is a sculpture of St Kenelm aged about 7, crowned and seated with sword and sceptre. This
has been copied from a 14th century manuscript. Above the sculpture is the date 819 and below ‘St Kenelmus’. Inside the building is a well and on the walls are these inscriptions:

East side: The well dating from Anglo Saxon times AD819, marks the spot where the body of Kenelm, King and Martyr, rested on the way to interment in Winchcombe Abbey.

A church was erected in the immediate vicinity for pilgrims attracted hither by the wonderful powers of the waters. All that now remains of this edifice, demolished AD 1830 is a window inserted into the adjoining farm house.

In the reign of Queen Elizabeth, Lord Chandos of Sudeley enshrined the holy well by the erection of this conduit house, probably to commemorate one of the Queen’s visits to the castle.

In this Jubilee year of the reign of Queen Victoria, June 20th AD 1887, the sculpture and figure of St Kenelm was added externally and these three legendary tablets placed thereon.

North side:

Oh traveller stay thy weary feet
Drink of this water pure and sweet
It flows for rich and poor the same.
Then go thy way, remember still
The wayside well beneath the hill,
The cup of water in his name.

South side:

Dedication of this building to the memory of the well house, to the three Dent brothers and to the people of Winchcomb. June 20th 1887.

In 1895 Mrs Dent of Sudely Castle donated to St Peter’s Church, Winchcombe, two statues at either side of the interior entrance to the tower, one of King Kenulf and the other of King Henry VI often mistaken for the young King Kenelm the Martyr.
At Romsley, Clent Hills, the 12th century church of St Kenelm is supposedly over the place where the murder took place. It stands at the head of a ravine and a spring flows to the east. A small stone figure of St Kenelm is built into the exterior of the wall and there is a modern one on the Lych Gate. The waters are said to possess healing powers and pilgrims used to flock there. Camden in his travels says that the Reformation destroyed the efficacy of the waters and Kenelmstowe declined.

There are some delightful lines in a Saxon Mss in the Bodleian Library referring to Kenelm’s well. Translated they read:

These men towards Winchcomb his holy body bear,
Before they could it thither bring, very weary they were
So they came to a wood a little east of the town,
And rested though they were so near, upon a high down.
A thirst they were for weariness, so sore there was no end,
For St Kenlem’s love they bade Our Lord some drink send.
A cold well and clear there sprung from the Down
That still is there clear and cold a mile from the town.
Well fair, it is now covered with stone as is right
And I counsel each man thereof to drink, that cometh there truly.
The monks since of Winchcomb have built there beside
A fair chapel of St Kenelm, that men seek wide.

The verses also refer to Clent:

When the letter from the Pope to the Archbishop came,
Of Bishops and Clerks, his counsel thereof he took.
So that in the wood of Klent, that is in the shire of Worcester,
He let seek his holy body and that found truly.
Under the thorn of Cowbacke as the writing said in Rome,
And for the greater miracle of the Cow, the sooner thereto they came.
For the countrymen there beside that understand the circumstance,
Knew well where it was for the miracle was so clear.
Anon as this holy body they took up, a well sprung up there,
In the place that he lay on that is still clear and good.
For there is a well fair enough and ever since hath been
In the place where he lay as you may there see
And they call it St Kenelm’s well that many a man hath sought
That many out of sickness through the water hath been brought.
Two of the least known of the many saints associated with Gloucestershire either through birth, church dedication or visitation are Ss Arild and Kyneburge, both from the Thornbury area. The remains of both of these holy women were enshrined at Gloucester, St Arild in the great Benedictine Abbey of St Peter.

What we know about St Arild comes in the first instance from John Leland’s sixteenth century record that she was a virgin, whom the tyrant Muncius beheaded because she refused to yield to his advances. Who Muncius was we do not know:

“Saynt Arild, virgin, martered at Kinton ny to Thornbury, by one Muncius, a tyrant who cut of heir Heade becawse she would not consent to lye with hym. She was translayted to this monasterye (now Gloucester Cathedral) and had done great miracles.”

Her name shows that she was Saxon and Kinton, nowadays Kington, is a hamlet just west of Thornbury. We can learn a little about the cult which grew up around Arild, from a hymn extant in Hereford Cathedral’s chained Library. This hymn forms part of a book once belonging
to a former Abbot of Gloucester, Thomas de Bredon, 1224-1228, Arild was venerated as being of pure mind and unstained by humans, her only love being Christ himself. The fact that three times she fought the power of sin no doubt refers to three attempts made by Muncius to take her virginity. Verse five of the hymn provides the information that her bones, ‘by whom all Gloucester folk are blest’ were interred in Gloucester Abbey.

The collect for her feast day 20th July, refers to ‘this place made holy by her death’:

‘Lord God, you have adorned the virginity of St Arild with the high dignity of martyrdom and this place made holy by her death; by her prayers grant us forgiveness and to this place perpetual safety, through Christ Our Lord, Amen.’

When or how her remains were removed to Gloucester is not certain but we do know that her body was buried in the east end of the crypt. At the Dissolution the bones of all crypt burials were gathered together and stored in the central chamber of the south west chapel of the crypt. An 1828 drawing by WH Bartlett shows the chapel piled high with rubble and human remains. Arild’s bones may well have been amongst these which were reinterred in a large grave on the north side of the choir in the 1850s, when FS Waller was restoring the crypt. Canon Bazeley, writing in BGAS Vol 27 p199 says that Adam de Elmeley shares the privilege of having miracles performed at his tomb, with Harold murdered by the Jews 1168, who was buried in the chapel of Sts Edward and Edmund, the central chapel of the crypt, and with St Arild. The Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester testifies to the widespread knowledge of the miracles which pilgrims had experienced on visiting her burial place:
These wonderful works wrought by power divine,
Be not hid nor palliot but flourish daylie.
Witness herin is Arilde, that blessed Virgin,
Which martyrized at Kinton nigh Thornbury.
Hither was translated and in this monasterye
Comprised and did miracles many one.
And who so list to looke may find in her, legion.

Basil Cottle, in his Presidential Address to the BGAS 1988, says that in addition to the Thomas de Bredon book, a service book from St Guthlac’s, Hereford, a cell of Gloucester Abbey, was early in the twentieth century found to have a faulty page re-used in the binding, showing that St Margaret and St Arild shared the same feast day.

In the Lady Chapel of Gloucester Cathedral the east window is composed of many fragments of 14th century glass and in one panel there is depicted what is believed to be St Arild. Looking along the topmost row of panels from left to right, and stopping at the fifth one, the figure of St Lawrence is clearly visible in the upper part of the frame. In the lower part are the remains of a virgin saint in red, under a white mantel with a jewelled border, holding a palm and a book similar to the deacon’s. The blue leaf background is also very similar. A fragment of glass worked into the backing seems to give her name “aris” that is Ar(ild)is. Her name occurs again in a fragment of the second window from the east on the north wall, in the uppermost tracery quatrefoil on the left although this is very difficult to decipher from floor level. (BGAS Vol 43 p209.)

The reredos in the Lady Chapel of the Cathedral has long since been defaced, but the niches which held statues of the saints are clearly visible and fortunately most of them contain the
name, scratched by the masons, of the saint destined for a particular niche. Looking from the north side (left) the first column contains three niches. The middle one of these is incised with the name ‘arild.’ For these names and their stone image to appear in a church as important as this, and in such a prominent position, would seem to indicate a great devotion to the saint. However, there is no known tradition of there having been a shrine there.

Further afield, but still within the county and diocese, there are other references that ensure that her name is not forgotten. Two churches are dedicated to her – Oldbury on Severn and Oldbury on the Hill. Oldbury on Severn is only a matter of a mile distant from Kington, and stands on a mound overlooking the river. St Arild’s church at Oldbury on the Hill is some distance away near Didmarton which is dedicated to St Laurence, appropriately but not intentionally, Arild’s current neighbour in the Lady Chapel east window at Gloucester.

A third reminder of devotion to St Arild is to be found at Oldbury on Severn where a well dedicated in her name still provides water. The stones near the well’s outflow are reddish in colour due to staining with freshwater algae, and this has given rise to the tradition amongst the locals that the water runs red with Arild’s blood.
E.S. Lindley writing for the BGAS in 1951 says that “the map marks ‘St Arild’s’ just beyond (Kington) and that stands for a house of early 17th century appearance. The older edition of the map but not the present one marks St Arild’s Well a little further on and some local tradition of this survives although it is not mentioned in Walters Holy Wells of Gloucestershire.” I have not so far traced the map here referred to.

Vol 27 of the Transactions of the BGAS contains the words of St Arild’s hymn in Latin, In Arildis Memoria. The following is a translation taken from Jane Bradshaw’s text 1998:

O Mother Church today proclaim
The honour of St Arild’s name.
And grant that we may have a share
In that great sound of praise and prayer.

With flesh unstained and pure of mind
Untouched by sin of humankind.
Your mind has turned to Christ above,
On Him alone you fixed your love.

She gave her life to Christ below,
And in His strength she smote the foe.
Three times she fought the power of sin,
And walked with Christ made pure within.

O bride of Christ, O virgin wise,
The world was worthless in your eyes.
You now in heaven’s eternal light
Art clothed in robes of glory bright.
O Maid whose bones in Gloucester rest,
By whom all Gloucester folk are blest.
Help us in sorrow here below
And then the joys of heaven bestow.

O Arild of this holy place,
The guardian and our hope of grace.
O Mother hear your children’s prayer
That we the peace of heaven may share.

Pray now for us to Christ your Lord
Whom by the angels is adored.
That we at last with you may come
To greet him in our heavenly home.

(Tune New Every Morning is the Love)

It was comforting to hear St Arild named among the Saints included in the intercessions at
the enthronement of Michael Perham as Bishop of Gloucester in the Cathedral on Saturday
29th May 2004.
One cannot leave the former St Peter’s Abbey, Gloucester, without mentioning the shrine of Edward II, which was the focus of one of the most popular pilgrimage devotions in the Middle Ages. Edward was reputedly murdered 21st September 1327 at Berkeley Castle. There are many stories surrounding the circumstances of his death and subsequent burial, but suffice to say it seems that the Abbeys of Bristol, Kingswood, and Malmesbury refused to have his body so as not to offend the Queen and her allies. The body was kept at Berkeley hidden during the September and October prior to being taken to Gloucester. The Abbot of Gloucester, Abbot Thokey agreed to accept the body for burial, perhaps because of the popularity which he hoped a royal burial would bring. He sent his own carriage to collect it from Berkeley. On arrival at Gloucester the cortege was met at Southgate by the Canons of Llanthony and the monks of St Oswald’s. The coffin was placed in one of the city churches where it remained for some weeks while burial preparations were finalised. The aged Abbot Thokey mounted on his palfrey was followed by black robed monks. The huge funeral carriage drawn by six black horses, followed behind. A black canvas covered the coffin and a silver casket was made to hold his heart which was sent to his widow.
In December, Queen Isabella, was responsible for arranging an elaborate royal burial service in the Abbey Church at which the Bishop of Llandaff preached, the See of Worcester being vacant at the time. In ‘Death of A King’, the author Roy Haines gives a detailed account of the preparations that had taken place. £700 was made available for the necessary expenses. The King’s candle maker was brought from London and he also brought the Royal hearse with him. On 21st December the funeral procession moved through the city on its way to St Peter’s Abbey. The hearse was surmounted by effigies of the four evangelists and four great golden lions. Below were eight angels holding gold censers and on the sides were the royal arms of England. More than 800 gold leaves were used to cover the hearse. The Queen waited in the crowded Abbey with the young Edward III and some of those whom we now know were responsible for the king’s murder.

This must have been quite an occasion for the citizens of Gloucester, and as soon as Edward’s body was laid to rest, and the wooden image with its gilt crown placed upon it, pilgrims began to arrive at the tomb. Many people already were referring to him as Saint and Martyr, in view of the fact that he was God’s chosen anointed, no matter what his failings had been in the past. Crowds flocked to visit his tomb, to touch it, and to pray for the repose of his soul. No doubt there were those who felt a certain guilt in that they were part of the history that had allowed the murder of their own king. Offerings made at the tomb were believed to prevent God’s anger from descending on the nation. They came in their thousands, humble people but also the rich and the influential. Many came several times – Edward III, his queen Philippa, their son the Black Prince, and Queen Joan of Scotland. In 1378 Richard II came too. Requests were made to Rome to have Edward officially recognised as Saint, but without success but pilgrims continued to venerate his remains in recognition of the violent manner of his death.

The wooden tomb was soon replaced by the beautiful monument we see today, financed by his son Edward III and it became at once a place of religious pilgrimage. It is said that if all the donations made at the tomb during the reign of Edward III were to have been used on the fabric of the church, it could have been rebuilt. Edward himself made an offering of a golden ship in thanksgiving for surviving a possible shipwreck; the Black Prince offered a golden crucifix containing a portion of the True Cross; the Queen of Scots offered a necklace containing a ruby and Queen Philippa a heart and ear of gold. Such offerings were no doubt hung near the tomb as was the custom.

When the tomb was opened in 1855, the body was found to be in a wonderful state of preservation. The following is a contemporary account of the examination carried out in the presence of the Dr Jeune, Canon in residence.

On 2nd October 1855, the tomb of King Edward II was opened by removing the floor on the south side of the tomb, and excavating about two feet, then working under the tomb; and only just below the flooring immediately under the tomb we came first to a wood coffin, quite sound and after removing a portion of this, we came to a leaden one containing the remains of the king; the wood although light as cork, was still very perfect, and the lead one quite entire, and made with a very thick sheet of lead, its shape very peculiar, being square at the
bottom, and rising on each side like an arch, and so turned over the body in an oval or arched form, and seemed to have been made to set nearly close upon the body. The tomb was never known to have been opened before this. It remained open but the space of two hours and was then closed again, without the slightest injury being done to the tomb, the fact of his interment being now 528 years since, it was considered to be in a wonderful state of preservation. Marshall Allen, sub Sacrist. October 3rd 1855, Gloucester Cathedral.

The New Inn at Gloucester was constructed by St Peter’s Abbey between 1430 and 1450 to accommodate the growing numbers of pilgrims visiting the tomb of King Edward II. It replaced an earlier inn on the site, hence the title, ‘new’. Philip Moss, author of ‘Historic Gloucester’ says that it was supposed to be the largest inn in the country, catering for over 200 persons at any one time, housed mostly in dormitory accommodation. The pilgrim in medieval times was often expected to provide his own food to be cooked by the kitchen staff and the row of hooks in the ceiling of the south gallery were used for hanging and storing meat.

The Fleece Hotel in Westgate Street was constructed about 1500, also by the Abbey of St Peter, again to provide shelter for pilgrims to the tomb of King Edward II.

ST. OSWALD’S PRIORY, GLOUCESTER

ST OSWALD

The Kingdom of Mercia in the ninth century was governed by an earldorman named Aethelred at least from 883. He recognised King Alfred as his overlord and married Alfred’s daughter Aethelflaed. Aethelred died 911 and his widow ruled until her death in 918. Gloucester was probably their capital. William of Malmesbury wrote that they founded the Priory of St Peter at Gloucester in the time of King Alfred’s death c 890, but why? This is not yet known but the
priory was a small, not very opulent building on the banks of the Severn outside the walls of the Roman town of Glevum.

The new Priory was originally dedicated to St Peter like the old Minster (present cathedral) but before long it became identified with St Oswald, King and Martyr, who had governed Northumbria 634-642. It was constructed from reused Roman stones, stripped from the ruins of Glevum. The site originally had been a Christian cemetery filled with finely carved memorial crosses and Aethelred’s first church was rectangular with two small chapels north and south and there was a western apse. This church was in fact a monastery housing secular canons who had a pastoral role extending to the Palace at Kingsholm, and there was probably also a school maintained there. It was Aethelred and Aethelflaed who translated the body of St Oswald to Gloucester, where the shrine especially constructed for his remains was the major focus of devotion in one of the chapels until the Dissolution under Henry VIII.

St Oswald was born in 604, the son of Ethelfrith of Northumbria and the 2nd of seven children. He was the brother of St Ebbe the elder and nephew of S Ethelreda. His father was killed when Oswald was 11 years of age and he was educated with another brother, Oswiu on Iona. Contemporary writings say that he had arms of great length and power, bright blue eyes, yellow hair, long face, thin beard, and small lips wearing a kindly smile. He is known to have kept a pet raven for many years and it accompanied him wherever he went.

On the deposition and death of his father he fled to Scotland and converted to Christianity on Iona where he had received his early education. He returned to Northumberland in 634 and was elected King. In 635 he persuaded St Aidan to move from Iona to found a monastery at Lindisfarne in Northumbria. First Aidan had to learn the language of Northumbria and was taught by Oswald himself. Then Aidan obtained Oswald’s permission to found a school and monastery on Lindisfarne and he set about converting Oswald’s subjects to Christianity. Oswald also brought monks from Scotland to help in establishing the religious life in his kingdom and he persuaded his father in law King Cynegils of Wessex to allow St Birinus to evangelise the upper reaches of the River Thames.

One Easter he was about to dine with St Aidan when a crowd of poor people came begging alms. He gave them all the food and wealth he had with him and then had the silver dinner service melted down and shared out among the poor. Aidan was so impressed that he grabbed Oswald’s hand and said, “May this hand never perish.” To this day it is still a fully preserved relic in Bamburgh Church. At prayer, according to St Aidan, Oswald always sat upright with open hands, palms facing upwards resting on his knees. He always erected a wooden cross before going into battle and encouraged his soldiers to join him in prayer around it.

Oswald was killed in 642 aged 38, at the battle of Maserfield near Oswestry, by the pagan King Penda of Mercia. William of Malmesbury told how, in his battle against the Mercians, when his guards were put to flight and Oswald himself was actually carrying a forest of darts in his breast, he could not be prevented, by the pain of his wounds or the approach of death,
from praying to God for the souls of his faithful companions. Penda ordered his body to be
dismembered on the battlefield where he was defeated. His arms with his hands and his head
were cut off, and the head fixed on a stake. His pet raven picked up one arm and left it on an
ash tree. Where it then fell to the ground, a Holy Well sprung up.

The rest of the body, was laid to rest in the earth of the battle field, and returned to its native
dust. But the arms and hands remained incorrupt. The head was taken by his brother and
buried at Lindisfarne. One arm was deposited at Bamburgh. Oswald’s relics – the bones of the
body, the flesh having become dust – were later collected from the battlefield by Osthrith,
his niece and wife of King Aethelred I of Mercia. She took the headless and armless remains
of her uncle to Bardney Abbey which she and her husband had founded and enriched. Bede
who died in 735, less than 100 years after Oswald, records that pilgrims began visiting
Oswald’s resting place within a few years of his death. Incidentally, Ostryth herself was
canonised and a cult developed around her shrine at Bardney after her death in 697 although
the date of her feast has not been established.

Initially the monks refused to accept the relics as Oswald was Northumbrian and therefore,
to the monks, an alien king. So his bones were left outside the monastery overnight under a
large awning. Throughout the night a large pillar of light shone from the wagon on which they
lay, directing its beams towards heaven, its glow seen by nearly all the inhabitants of Lincoln.
Next morning the converted monks prayed earnestly that the relics, so dear to God, be placed
in their midst. They were, in a specially made casket, and his banner was hung over his tomb.
Oswald was canonised 50 years later and his feast day since the seventh century has been
kept on 5th August. A feast of translation was kept at Gloucester and Evesham on 8th October.
His collect is :

Lord God Almighty, who so kindled the faith of King Oswald with your spirit, that he set up
the sign of the cross in his kingdom, and turned the people to the light of Christ: grant that
we being freed by the same spirit may always bear our cross before the world, and be found
faithful servants of the Gospel, through....

The relics remained at Bardney for 200 years where his shrine was honoured by King Offa of
Mercia who adorned the tomb with silver, gold, gems and much finery. When the Danes
attacked Bardney, about 870, the monks secreted the relics of Oswald in the straw of their
bed. In 875, during similar raids, the monks from Lindisfarne fled and took with them the body
of St Cuthbert and the head of St Oswald. Eventually the descendents of these monks founded
the monastery at Durham where Oswald’s head and Cuthbert’s body today share the same
tomb. St Cuthbert’s grave was opened in 1899- a large skull and the bones from St Oswald
were inside. The lid on the relic coffin bears the cross of St Cuthbert and the crown of St
Oswald.

In 909 the Mercians attacked these Danish possessions and returned with Oswald’s relics
which had lain ignored for nigh on a hundred years, since Bardney had been destroyed by the
Vikings. According to Bede, the relics consisted of the bones of St Oswald minus the head and
arms. However the precise character of the relics translated to Gloucester is uncertain. Oswald’s head had been taken to Lindisfarne, and Bardney subsequently acquired the rest of the body, but an early twelfth century account says that no more than his left arm and some hair came to Gloucester.

Whatever the relics, when they arrived in Gloucester, with great pomp and ceremony, they were interred in the new Priory Church of St Peter, where an eastern crypt had been prepared for their arrival. The Priory Church of St Peter was then quickly rededicated to St Oswald. For the first century of its existence St Oswald’s was probably the most important church in Gloucester. Reginald of Durham wrote that it was “most ardently extolled and most watchfully cherished by the dwellers there, as the mother and mistress of their city.” Aethelred and his widow Aethelflaed died in 911 and 918 respectively. They were buried in their new church in close proximity to the shrine of St Oswald.

Aelfric’s Lives of the Saints, completed between 992 and 1002, states that Oswald’s relics worked many miracles after his translation to Gloucester, and an early 12th century life of St Oswald also tells of the many miracles worked by the saint, not only at Gloucester. Pieces from his wooden battle cross were known to have healing properties and cures had been reported after splinters from this wooden cross had been soaked in water and the water drunk. After his bones had been washed prior to enshrinement, the water was poured into the ground. From that time on, the soil had healing properties. A horse was cured of fever by sitting on the spot where the water had been poured, and a girl also was healed. A young boy was cured of fever by sitting on the spot where Oswald’s body had fallen in battle.

Archbishop Willibrord related to St Wilfrid stories of miracles wrought in Germany as a result of merely seeing Oswald’s relics. Pilgrims flocked to St Oswald’s shrine and their donations enabled the priory to obtain land and treasures. In the 10th century a tower was added to the church and bells were made by the canons produced in a bell pit on site. Carolyn Heighway gives a vivid description of St Oswald’s at the height of its popularity. “Like any church heavily visited by pilgrims, St Oswald’s would have been full of reliquaries, candlesticks and other gold and silver
embroidered hangings, painted sculptures and frescoes. By 1000 probably there were small spaces with many altars brightly painted carvings of enamel birds, patterns, foliage, everything enhanced by the gleam of gold and silver.” There was a cross wall in the nave, appearing to have been painted with angels flying over a crucifixion scene and this wall acted as the rood screen. The Life of St Mildburg, compiled at the end of the eleventh century records that St Oswald’s was so richly endowed with possessions and so abundantly ornamented that it was commonly called ‘the golden monastery.’ By the 13th century it had eclipsed St Peter’s Abbey.

However, the Priory declined partly due to the fact that their claim to hold the relics of St Oswald had been contested as many abbeys laid claim to hold him, or part of him. The Priory was appropriated by the Archbishop of York and reformed, the secular canons being replaced by Augustinian ones in 1153. The building was enlarged and repaired over the years and the remaining arches are of 12th and 13th centuries. In 1417 the Prior pleaded poverty to the Bishop of Hereford saying that the place was ruinous, and by 1462 it was almost destroyed, diminished and impoverished.

In 1536 the foundation was suppressed by Henry VIII, only seven canons and eight stewards being in residence at that time. The arches of the north aisle were blocked in and the former Priory Church became the parish church of St Catherine in 1548. The building was largely destroyed in the Civil War and eventually demolished in 1653, its stones being used for secular building material. In 1868 a new church was built on the site, but this too was demolished in 1905. The present ruins are the remains of the north arcade of the nave.

St Oswald deserves high honour for he consecrated not only himself to God but all the Northumbrians with him. Bede honours him as the finest example of a Christian King. The fact that he was killed by a pagan added to his martyr cult, a cult which was promoted by St Wilfrid of York, and Oswiu, Oswald’s brother and his daughter Osthryth. His Royal Standard was of purplish red and gold and is the basis of the coat of arms of the present Northumberland.

St Oswald is usually represented in ecclesiastical art as a king wearing a crown, carrying an orb, sceptre, ciborium, and palm branch Somewhere in the representation there is usually to be seen a large wooden cross and of course, the pet raven.

Oswald is revered for his piety, devotion to his kingdom and charity to the poor. At one time he was considered as a suitable candidate to be Patron Saint of England.
ST KYNEBURGH’S CHAPEL, GLOUCESTER

ST CYNIBURGA or KYNEBURGH

The second of the lesser known saints buried at Gloucester whom I mentioned earlier is St Kyneburgh, Cyniburga or Kyneburgh, and she must not be confused with the Kyneburgh who was the founder of the St Peter’s monastery. All that we know of St Kyneburgh comes from a fifteenth century Lectionary in the British Museum – the Lansdowne Mss No 387. This says that the chapel was built and dedicated in her honour by Robert, Bishop of Hereford in 1147. here were placed her bones.

Kyneburgh was descended from a Saxon royal family and was born and lived at Morton, near Thornbury. Her parents arranged her marriage to a neighbouring prince but she wanted to retain and preserve her virginity, so she fled to Gloucester. She secured a job as a maid in a baker’s house and her employer was so inspired by her piety that he adopted her as his daughter. The baker’s wife became jealous of Kyneburgh and killed her. She had her body thrown down a well near South Gate. On returning home the baker called for her, and she responded from the depths of the well. Her body was drawn up but she was truly dead. Soon miracles were wrought there and she became revered as a Saint and Martyr. The relics were surreptitiously removed by the priest in charge, at a later date but were found and restored to their original shrine on April 10th 1390. The ceremony was presided over by Henry, Bishop of Worcester, in the presence of the Abbot of St Peter’s and the Priors of St Oswald’s and Llanthony Secunda.

However, Fosbrooke says a chapel dedicated to St Kyneburgh was founded near the site before the Conquest, which belonged to Llanthony Priory, in which her remains were housed. The chapel lost its independence when it was merged and became the parish of All Saints and St Kyneburgh and lost its title completely when the parish of All Saints and S Owen was formed.
Rudder writing in 1779 says that in the parish of St Owen, the chapel of St Kyneburgh’s was given by earl Milo in 1137 to the Priory of Llanthony. At the time he was writing, there were in the said parish, St Kyneburgh’s Hospital and another charitable institution. Rudder goes on to write, ‘The chapel stood on part of the town wall and upon the dissolution of Llanthony, the chapel was sold by the crown to Thomas Bell, gent, Aug 1, 34th Henry VIII. Thomas Bell was later knighted and gave an almshouse which he built on part of the site of the old chapel, and another chamber at the west end of it, ‘of antient building,’ with some lands belonging to the late dissolved monasteries in this county, for the maintenance of six poor people....’

A portion of the west part of the old chapel, given by the founder to these poor people to perform their public devotions, was granted in the year 1671 to the fraternity of Cordwainers for their common hall. On the south west side of it was a raised stone monument whereon lay the effigy of a young lady, with a coronet on her head. The common tradition is that it was the tomb of one, Maud Kimbroes, who is said to have been drowned in a well on the north part of the chapel, where were visible, the remains of a door supposed to lead to the well. If Kyneburgh and Maud were two different people, they certainly shared much in common in their departure from this world.

The effigy was removed from the Hospital to the little chapel of St Sepulchre or St Mary Magdalene and has been ascribed to St Kyneburgh herself. It was still there in 1903.

KINGSWOOD ABBEY
THE CHAPEL OF ST MARY

We know that King Edward III sent oblations to the chapel of the Virgin at the Cistercian Monastery at Kingswood in Gloucestershire.

In 1319 the Bishop of Worcester conceded to the Abbot of Kingswood the power to hear confessions of any of the bishops’ subjects who came to the Abbey as pilgrims and who wished to confess. In 1364 the Pope referred to the Chapel of St Mary the Virgin built between the two gates of the Cistercian Monastery at Kingswode in which chapel, as it is asserted, miracles are done by her intercession and to which many blind and lame come from England, Wales, France, Ireland and Scotland. The siting of the Chapel was outside the Abbey Church, and therefore accessible to females.

PILGRIMAGES TO THE CATHEDRAL CHURCHES

WORCESTER CATHEDRAL

ST OSWALD of WORCESTER

Oswald, a leader in monastic reform became Bishop of Worcester in 961 upon the recommendation of St Dunstan whom he succeeded. He was also Archbishop of York from 972 holding both sees in plurality, until his death in 992.
Oswald was of a Danish military family. He received his priestly formation in France and came to England as a priest c958. Early biographers describe him as a handsome man, ‘as handsome in person as he was noble by birth,’ and instructed in all the learning of the time. An 11th century life of St Oswald stresses his fine physique, magnificent singing voice, attractive and accessible character and special love of the poor. He was certainly a statesman, and respected as a leader.

When he became Bishop of Worcester he had only recently returned from France where he had greatly valued and respected one of the monks of the community in which he lived, Germanus. Oswald therefore sent for Germanus and delegated him with 12 other monks to found a monastery at Westbury on Trym c962. From there Oswald drew men as required for work in other centres which he was establishing. Within a few years he had settled Deerhurst c970, Ramsey c971, Winchcombe c972, Pershore c972, Evesham c972 and Worcester 974. Germanus himself later became one of the Winchcombe community.

Oswald organised his monastic community at Worcester along more formal lines than had been the custom previously. He determined that his clergy serving the Cathedral should live as Benedictine monks, not secular canons. He was not in favour of married priests and despised the comforts of secular life, a fact which he exemplified in his own austere and disciplined lifestyle. He was an able administrator of his two dioceses, an impartial judge, a prolific church builder and a frequent visitor to the parishes within his dioceses.

As Bishop of Worcester, Oswald was responsible for building the new Worcester Cathedral Church dedicated to St Mary and which was completed in 983. An 11th century writer described Oswald, because his new cathedral was not yet finished, preaching to large crowds, standing on 8th century stone tombs. These tombs were still there in the 1040s. As a result of attacks by the Danes in 1041, Oswald’s cathedral was badly damaged. The tombs were demolished and the materials used in building and enlarging the church under Oswald’s successor, Aldulf.

In his lifetime, Oswald was credited with possessing miraculous powers – he could see and exorcise evil spirits who interfered with a labourer’s work. Sometimes he was visited by angels at Mass. In 991 he visited his most loved Abbey at Ramsey, unbeknown to him, for the last time. He then spent the winter at Worcester and began Lent 992 with his usual ascetic practices, washing the feet of twelve poor men each day. As he was completing this task on 29th February, reciting the Gradual Psalms he died. He is thus the only Saint to have his feast once in every four years.

The cult of Oswald began at his death. At his funeral, orphans, widows, pilgrims, and the poor, monks and clerks all flocked to the scene. Later the blind received their sight through Oswald’s prayers and on his feast day demons were expelled and the sick healed. Eleven years later, his miracles prompted a translation of his relics from the humble tomb in which he was first buried, to a rich shrine built by his successor Aldulf. He was thus removed from his burial place to a position not frequented by secular persons and protected from irreverent access – behind
the High Altar, although the greater part of his relics later found their final resting place in York.

Oswald’s reliquary was frequently carried around the city to quell fires and epidemics, and his body was often carried to disasters in the hope of miracles of relief. In the Civil war of 1140 when King Stephen warred against Matilda, daughter of Henry I, Worcester sided with Stephen. Matilda’s men were at Gloucester and moved up to attack Worcester. The clergy there took Oswald’s body to meet the enemy, but on this occasion, the hoped for miracle did not manifest itself – the men of Gloucester took no notice of the clergy nor of the relic of the Saint.

One of his most frequently reported miracles happened on a certain feast day, when a dumb man gained access to his tomb. The saint appeared to him in a vision brandishing his staff as if to drive him away. But in fact he was conferring his blessing upon him and the man was instantly cured.

ST WULFSTAN of WORCESTER and THE BLESSED VIRGIN of WORCESTER.

Wulfstan was born c1008 in Itchington in Warwickshire to wealthy parents. His father was named Athelstan and his mother Wulfgifu, his name, Wulfstan being a combination of both. He was educated first at Evesham and then Peterborough. He was very handsome and had a lithe body, but in later life he came to despise long hair in men as effeminate. Although he remained a virgin all his life, as a young man he was often tempted by flirtatious girls and once he so ‘panted with desire that he had to take flight and lie in a thorny thicket to dampen his ardour’. On one occasion a woman came to him and hung on to his clothes and tried to seduce him. He cursed her as a vessel of Satan and hit her across the cheek. At an early age he entered the household of Britheah, Bishop of Worcester who eventually ordained him to the priesthood, but he lived the life of a religious in a secular habit. He served as schoolmaster, precentor and sacristan and became renowned for his devotion and humility. There were eighteen altars in the old church at Worcester and he daily prostrated himself seven times before each one. He fasted 3 days weekly. The Bishop was so affected by his striking personality and piety that he made him Prior. Every day he fed three poor men and washed their feet – as St Oswald had done.

In 1062 King Edward the Confessor nominated Wulfstan to the See of Worcester, on the recommendation of some visiting Roman Cardinals who had been so impressed by his ministry to the poor, especially children. True to character, Wulfstan needed the gentle persuasion of the Pope and the Archbishop of York before accepting. When William the Conqueror arrived in this country, he summoned Wulfstan to Westminster to discuss his position, as he wanted to replace all the Saxon Bishops with Norman ones. On arriving in London, Wulfstan went to Saint Edward’s tomb and said, “I received this staff and ring from you, to you I return them,” and he placed the ring and staff on the Saint’s tomb. No Norman Bishop could pick them up, only Wulfstan was able to raise them. On seeing this, the Conqueror had no doubt about confirming him as the last Saxon Bishop in England. William
then decreed that Worcester should in future be subject to Canterbury rather than York, and he restored the lands that had been previously taken from the Diocese. Probably due to this generosity on William’s part, Wulfstan worked tirelessly as a reconciler of Saxons and Normans. He was well respected for his princely hospitality which contrasted greatly with his personal frugality. He was canonised a century later.

As Bishop of the Diocese of Worcester, he travelled widely. He was zealous about Visitations to his parishes and whenever he passed a church he went in to pray. He venerated the relics of St Egwin at Evesham and gave the last rites to a monk dying there. He also cured an Evesham woman who was possessed by evil spirits. He seldom slept and used a book as a pillow.

Many miracles were reported during his lifetime. Cures were wrought by water he had blessed or into which he had dipped the relic of a coin holed by the spear of Longinus one of Jesus crucifiers. ‘Cured by St Wulfstan’s water’ became a very much used figure of speech. A leper from Wales was cured, the dead revived, a farmer saved from death after a poisonous sting, a baby drowned in a bath tub was brought to life and a similar happening in Gloucester was researched and verified by the then Archdeacon of Gloucester. Also at Cleeve in Gloucestershire, a man possessed by a spirit had to be bound with raw hides but managed to bite through them. He was very violent and while Wulfstan was staying in the village he was implored to visit the man. He did, and cured him. During his visitations he worked miracles at Kempsey and consecrated the church at Longney. He also dedicated the Abbey Church at Gloucester. He was very popular among British traders especially at Bristol where his preaching had put a stop to the slave trade between this country and Ireland. We see him in a different light however at Blockley, where he caused a sacristan to suffer greatly because he had boxed the ears of a young server who had gone to him with a critical message from Wulfstan over the condition of the furnishings of the altar where he was about to say Mass.

However, his greatest legacy was the magnificent cathedral begun in 1084. This replaced Oswald’s Cathedral, built only 105 years previously but seriously damaged in the Danish attacks. He deeply regretted the necessity of dismantling that building but used much of the stone from Oswald’s building in his new church. The present crypt at Worcester is witness to the work that Wulfstan set in hand.

But age and labour took their toll, and at Pentecost 1094, he was afflicted by a great weakness over his whole body, and lay sick upon his bed. He sent his servants to his friend, Robert, Bishop of Hereford and asked him to come at once. Robert, when he received the message, set off immediately. Wulfstan made his confession and even ‘received the discipline, for so the monks call being beaten with rods on the bare back.’ From that time until the Circumcision of the Lord he seemed sometimes easier; sometimes he took to his bed again.

William of Malmesbury described his last days as follows: “A slow ever present fever was carrying him to the end. The weakness of his body gave new vigour to the mind as if the heat of the distemper could ripen in him whatever was not yet ready for eternal glory. After the
Circumcision, Bishop Robert, and the venerable Abbots Serlo of Gloucester and Gerald of Tewkesbury visited the sick man. There he was absolved by his own right, after having confessed himself as was his wont; and bade them a last farewell. The sickness grew worse, from day to day. Christ was making ready for him the departure which called him to heaven. Meanwhile he did not take holiday from the service of God, and would still be praying often with his lips but always in his heart. Sitting rather than lying he gave his ear to the psalms, his eyes to the Altar for his chair was so placed that he could freely see what was being done in the chapel. Eight days before his death he received Holy Unction from Prior Thomas. Daily thereafter he received the Eucharist to carry him safe on his journey. He breathed forth his last breath a little after midnight on Saturday 19th day of January in the year of the Incarnation of Our Lord, one thousand and ninety-five, the eighth year of the reign of William II, when he had been bishop for thirty-four years, four months and thirteen days. He was in the 87th year of his age and had lived under nine monarchs.

They washed his body which shone with the hope of eternal resurrection, so that all marvelled and worshipped for that it was bright like a jewel, pure and white as milk. Even his nose which in his life stood forth overmuch, minished and grew white after his death to the wonder of the beholders. Try as they might they could not get (the ring) off his fingers and gave up. The knotted joints and unyielding skin and sinews mocked all their skill. The corpse was made ready and carried into the church which he had builded anew. The bier was laid down before the Altar the clerks sitting about it. All that night and the day and night after their prayers and tears went up to God as incense. At that time, Bishop Robert of Hereford was at the king’s court....and at that same hour in which the Saint departed this life, Robert beheld him stand before him, much changed from the Wulfstan he had known in latter years, for his countenance was youthful and ruddy and shone with light as of the stars. He was clad in the vestments of a bishop, holding his staff in his hand and seemed to address the sleeper. He had asked Robert to conduct the funeral, and Robert informed the king and arrived at Worcester in time as the monks had been delaying things until his arrival. And now came the Sunday for the burial. Bishop Robert committed the Saint’s body to the grave, then as if none had mourned before, there began a great weeping and wailing.... waves of people attended, adoring his corpse. The rich praised his sparing use of riches, the poor his bounteous charity. At last they committed the dear, dear father’s bones to the tomb, but his memory was never put out of sight in their hearts.”

Miracles soon took place at Wulfstan’s grave. The Pope sent the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Ely, and the Abbots of Bury St Edmunds and Woburn to make enquiries as to the authenticity of these miracles. He had also become very popular in Ireland, probably encouraged by Archbishop Comyn of Dublin who in 1202 was one of the prelates appointed to present his cause in Rome. All were truly impressed and Wulfstan was subsequently canonised with great solemnity in 1203. This encouraged pilgrimages to his shrine and records used as part of the evidence for canonisation described the cathedral at Worcester as teeming with pilgrims anxious to approach his shrine. People of all classes came. King John had visited his tomb in 1200 before the canonisation and did so again in 1204, a year afterwards.
Thereafter he visited the shrine in every remaining year of his reign. However, in 1216, the year of his death, King John’s forces stormed the city as it had showed support for King Louis of France who supported the English Barons in their conflict with the king. The king therefore fined the monks 300 marks and in order to pay, they had to strip Wulfstan’s shrine of all its silver and gold.

Nevertheless, in his will, King John had left instructions that he wished to be buried at Worcester between St Oswald and St Wulfstan. A new shrine was therefore needed. In 1218, the shrine was completed and Wulfstan’s relics were translated on 7th June by Bishop Silvester to this new shrine near St Oswald. The body had previously been dismembered and parts given to several abbots including that of St Albans who was given a rib. It was at this period that Saint Wulfstan and Saint Oswald were added to the Cathedral’s dedication – St Mary and the Blessed Apostle St Peter and the Holy Confessors, St Oswald and St Wulfstan.

Edward I visited the shrine in 1283 as he had a special devotion to Wulfstan. He made generous donations of money and gifts, to both the shrine of St Wulfstan and of St Oswald. He also asked in 1293 that three weekly masses of St Wulfstan be offered for him until he returned from an expedition to France. In 1294 he passed through Worcester and heard the Mass of St Wulfstan in the Cathedral when he offered a brooch and 11 marks to the shrine and 100 marks to Oswald’s shrine and two altar hangings. ‘Edward prayed, “How can I repay thee blessed Wulfstan for all that by his holy prayers he has conferred upon me?” He later bestowed many more gifts on the shrine visiting it in all, on eight occasions.

Pilgrims to his shrine are recorded from Worcestershire, Shropshire, Herefordshire, Wiltshire, Somerset, Wales and Gloucestershire. A girl from Gloucestershire, blind for 18 years in one eye, was told by Our Lady, to go to St Wulfstan. Her parents were outraged as they saw this as an adverse comment on the merits of Gloucester Abbey which was dedicated to St Peter. However, the girl went of her own accord and was cured of her blindness. Under Henry III there was a gradual lessening of respect for the monastic orders and there were changing ideas about religion. This resulted in a falling off in offerings made at certain shrines. This falling off may also be attributed to the rather harsh penances inflicted upon some of the pilgrims by the guardians of the shrine. There are several recorded incidences of the exorcists raining blows upon the bodies of sufferers in order to release them from the influence of the evil spirits that were believed to have taken control of them. One potter who was suffering from mental illness was tied to an altar and fellow pilgrims were invited to scourge him. The treatment sometimes worked – one boy said he had seen a reluctant demon leaving a man’s body and shaking his fist at St Wulfstan relics in anger!

Under Bishop Hugh Latimer, appointed to Worcester as Bishop in 1535, things changed even more. In 1540 Henry VIII got rid of the relics, and Latimer got rid of the statue of the Virgin from the Lady Chapel. However, as the monastery was also a cathedral it was spared destruction but in 1550, the commissioners of Edward VI defaced all that could lead to superstition. The tombs of Oswald and Wulfstan were destroyed but the tomb of King John was moved to the new presbytery when it was built. The original site of Oswald’s and
Wulfstan’s shrines was in the middle of the present choir, halfway between the east opening to the tower and the entrance to the sanctuary.

In 1973, a pewter ampulla – a small container for carrying holy water from a sacred place – was discovered in Dublin, dropped presumably by a medieval pilgrim who had been to the shrine of St Wulfstan. One side of the ampulla has a standing figure of a bishop in mitre, alb and chasuble with his right hand raised in blessing and in his left hand, a crozier. The reversed inscription reads: IN HONORE SANTE VVLSTANI. The height of the crozier emphasises its importance and reminds one of the occasion when it was stuck into the shrine of Saint Edward the Confessor and nobody but Wulfstan could pull it out.

On the other side of the ampulla is the Blessed Virgin Mary with the inscription IN HONORE SANTE MARIE, which reminds us of the venerated statue of her which graced the High Altar in the Cathedral from 1200. By c1480 she had surpassed Wulfstan as Worcester’s main focus of pilgrimage but up to then, a dual cult existed side by side, some pilgrims claiming that they had been summoned to Wulfstan’s tomb by Our Lady herself. Other pilgrims claimed to have seen her in a vision as they venerated his tomb. One Irish monk recovered his speech at the tomb after having witnessed St Wulfstan kneeling at the virgin’s feet and interceding on his behalf. This statue was the same one as that referred to by Bishop Latimer when he wrote about the vast numbers of pilgrims passing along the Fosse Way on their way to the Holy Blood of Hailes.
ST ETHELBERT of HEREFORD

Ethelbert was king of the East Angles and died in 794. Ethelbert’s fame as a ruler spread throughout the known world, and he was respected not only as a brave soldier but also as a devout and handsome young man. Being unmarried he was one of the most eligible princes in Europe, and his intended marriage to Offa’s daughter would have cemented peace between the two kingdoms.

In early part of the last decade of 8th century the young king Ethelbert came to Offa king of Mercia to seek his daughter’s hand in marriage. Offa refused, had him assassinated and his body thrown into the River Lugg. It was later miraculously recovered and given burial at the site of the Saxon Cathedral at Hereford where a cult developed at his shrine. The Anglo Saxon Chronicle gives death as 794, and a very brief description of how it happened: ‘This year, Offa king of the Mercians commanded that the head of king Ethelbert of the East Saxons be struck off.’

In the 12th century the earliest life of the Saint was compiled at Westminster and gives many more details. Ethelbert’s father was named Aethelred, his mother Leofruna. Ethelbert was born in 779 and had a Christian upbringing. He is reported to have been a very serious child, with the one desire to please Jesus above all else. He succeeded his father when he was 14, and decided against marriage. Nevertheless, he was later persuaded to marry so as to have an heir. He was reminded about Offa’s daughter Alftorthytha, but Ethelbert’s mother distrusted Offa and feared that his would be a bad union. However, Ethelbert went to see the girl. Several weather omens on the journey to the girl were encountered, and Ethelbert’s mother prayed that God’s will would be done, but at the same time, despairing that he would ever return. But Ethelbert prayed and soon the storms abated. Eventually he reached Mercia, and lodged in Sutton, where one night he had a dream and a vision. He saw his palace in ruins and his mother coming to him. Above her he saw a great beam of light dripping blood and himself changed to a bird which flew on high to where he could hear singing from the throne of the Trinity.

On the next day, he asked Oswald, his counsellor what this meant. Oswald told him all would be well. On arrival at Offa’s palace, at Marden, he made gifts to Offa but Offa’s mind had been poisoned by his wife, that Ethelbert was hostile, intending to invade his land. Ethelbert went to see the daughter, but she said to her mother that Ethelbert was more attractive than her father. This angered the mother and she set in motion the process for his assassination. She bribed an official to lure Ethelbert into the palace, leaving his sword outside, and accompanied by a few nobles he entered the king’s room. The doors were shut, Ethelbert was bound and beaten and then with his own sword, he was beheaded by the official, Winbertus.

Offa’s daughter was overwrought and entered the service of God as an anchorite at Croyland. Offa had the body thrown into the river, but was informed that a column of light perpetually shone near the place, proving that Ethelbert had entered the heavenly places. Offa was so filled with remorse that he mourned deeply and shut himself away for three days without food. He then sought absolution from the Pope who ordered, according to some legends, that
Offa pay for Ethelbert’s canonisation process. He was also instructed to build a church at Marden where Ethelbert’s body lay, then build a stone church at Hereford and transfer the body there. All this Offa did. When the body was removed from Marden a spring rose where the body had lain. This can be seen today in a small room dedicated to the saint at the west end of Marden church. This well was recognised as being miraculous shortly after its appearance. Even when flooded by the muddy waters from the River Lugg, the well water remained clear. Within a very short while, it was also claimed to have healing properties, and from the beginning of the ninth century it was focus for pilgrimage, and it is reasonable to surmise that the present thirteenth century church at Marden was built to such large proportions for such a small community, in order to cater for the many pilgrims visiting the Holy Well of St Ethelbert.

One legend which surrounds the story of Ethelbert’s transfer to Hereford relates how one of Offa’s officials found the body, as a result of a vision, the head severed, soiled with mud but with a bright light shining from it. He washed it, wrapped it in cloth and placed it on an oxcart but when they reached Lyde the head fell from the cart. A blind man stumbled on the head, lifted it up, recognised Ethelbert in faith, and prayed “Pity me and give me my sight.” He cradled the head and immediately his sight was restored. He followed the cart, caught up with it at Shelwick, and retold the story of what had happened. The official rejoiced in the miracle and took the body to the place he had been told about in his vision, Fernley, (Hereford). Just before reaching Fernley, the cortege again stopped for rest and another spring appeared where Ethelbert’s body had laid. This is now known as St Ethelbert’s Well at Castle Green in Hereford. This leaves the question as to whether Ethelbert was first buried in what was to become the cathedral or, as has been suggested, ‘within the graveyard of the religious community that had just recently been founded by Guthlac on Castle Green, and which was eventually to receive relics of St Guthlac himself.’

Whatever the answer to that question, we know that Ethelbert’s body was transferred to the church at Hereford, and an elaborate monument was built over his grave and on the site of the church there soon arose the first Cathedral of Hereford. Above Ethelbert’s tomb there was often seen a ‘holy’ light shining and an investigation on behalf of the king, Egbert, recorded that the sick were healed there and the feeble minded were cured by coming to the place.

His tomb certainly was a major site of pilgrimage but the Danes attacked Hereford c1050 and the church and shrine of St Ethelbert were burned. The form of the shrine is unknown, cathedral records not providing any clues, although Florence of Worcester writing c1055, says that the shrine erected in his honour was rich and important and a true focus for his veneration. Fortunately, the head of Ethelbert had been taken and buried at Westminster but William of Malmesbury thought the relics might still have been at Hereford. Only fragments of the shrine remain today.

William of Malmesbury quoted St Dunstan as an authority for the cult of St Ethelbert as well as the witness of miracles. Ethelbert is the joint titular of the Cathedral with The Virgin Mary.
He was titular of the church at Marden, and still is at Little Dean, and eleven others in East Anglia. His cult flourished in mediaeval England and Hereford was reckoned only second to Canterbury as a pilgrimage centre.

Ethelbert had no known links with Hereford prior to his visit in 794. AE Housman is probably correct when he wrote that his attraction lay not in his sacrifice of his life as a witness to the faith but in the fact that every written account of him bears witness to his extraordinary piety and purity. Florence of Worcester, writing in the early twelfth century had already voiced this opinion when he explained that a martyr is not necessarily one who dies for the faith, but one who dies as the innocent victim of evil.

In the 11th century, work began on a new Cathedral. There developed a renewed interest in Ethelbert and William of Malmesbury writing in 1141 says that God had declared the sanctity of Ethelbert by signs so evident that the Episcopal See was then consecrated in his name. The middle years of the 12th century was the time of the real interest in Ethelbert but as there were no relics the cult was brought about by deliberate effort rather than popular devotion.

In 1295, the St Paul’s Cathedral list of relics mentions the wooden portable feretory of St Ethelbert, plated with silver and adorned with precious stones, coins and rings. The Cathedral also claimed to have the head of St Ethelbert in a silver gilt chef, having a crown thickly studded with jewels and also the separate jawbone of Ethelbert still holding four teeth in a silver gilt case encrusted with precious stones and crystals.

Hereford Cathedral received a tooth of St Ethelbert in 1220, and his cult survived most of the 13th century, but by 1295 Thomas of Cantelupe had overtaken him in veneration. Many fragments of evidence remain in the Cathedral to show devotion to St Ethelbert – a brass once inlaid on Thomas of Cantelupe’s tomb, a 14th century stained window glass, and a 15th century stone carving. A well in the vicinity of the Cathedral also bears his name.

Hereford, before the Reformation, had its own Use or Liturgy. The following is a translation of part of the Sequence in the Hereford Missal for the feast of St Ethelbert, May 20th.

Lift we now on high our voice
And in Christ our Lord rejoice,
Who his saints upraiseth;
By whose will the king once slain,
Ethelbert in heaven doth reign
And His glory praiseth.

Thou O king with grace divine,
Didst a bright example shine,
When a monarch reigning.
Thee no carnal sin defiled,
Pure thou wert as purest child.
Unto death remaining.

As a sun thou didst illume,
Britain’s land else sunk in gloom,
Waiting for the morning.
By thy birth the east was blest,
By thy holy death the west.
Both alike adoring.

Mighty in life ere thou wast slain,
Mighty in death thou dost remain.
O king by God elected.
O may thy constant intercession
For our, and for the world’s transgression
Be evermore accepted.

ST THOMAS CANTELUPE of HEREFORD
Thomas de Cantelupe was born about 1218 at Hambledon in Buckinghamshire and died in Italy, at Orvieto on 25th August 1282. His parents were William and Millicent and like the parents of many of the saints mentioned so far, they were quite well off. His uncle was Walter de Cantelupe. He brought presents for the needy as well as bringing his blessing and the love of God and that is what people wanted and believed in. A contemporary said he had the face of an angel and he wept when he celebrated Mass. He was renowned for his self-denial, he
was efficient, conscientious, of outstanding sanctity and able to inspire devotion. One tale says that when celebrating Mass at Wallingford, birds flew to the window at the sound of his voice. When he was silent they flew away again, when he began to sing they came back. In the minds of his people he was, without doubt, a saint and the last Englishman to be canonised before the Reformation.

**ST GUTHLAC’S MONASTERY, HEREFORD**

**ST GUTHLAC of CROWLAND**

In addition to the Cathedral Church in Hereford there was a more ancient monastic foundation of St Guthlac which was situated in what later became the outer ward of the castle. St Guthlac’s may have been a British foundation and it has been argued that St Ethelbert’s relics may even have been placed ‘within the graveyard on Castle Green, in the area which was eventually to receive relics of St Guthlac.’ (Whitehead) before being moved to the new Cathedral.

St Guthlac, the hermit of Crowland, was a friend of King Aethelbald of Mercia who succeeded peaceably to the throne in 716 two years after the death of Guthlac. It has been suggested that he founded the church in honour of his friend and mentor but this is unlikely as the site is much older and the dedication could be as late as the tenth century when St Guthlac’s cult became more widespread. At some point St Guthlac’s in Hereford received relics of its patron but there is no surviving evidence of their translation. However, there is evidence that St Guthlac’s was considered to be of equal standing with the Cathedral in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Gradually the church was enveloped by the castle but when the latter was savagely attacked in 1140 the wooden shrine containing the relics of St Guthlac was left undisturbed. Sadly the shrine was accidentally destroyed by a fire during the reign of King Edward I (1239-1307). The fire destroyed ‘the wooden shrine which covered the saint’s remains’.

It is possible that relics of St Guthlac reached Hereford at an early date but what they consisted of is not now known. In the twelfth century Crowland claimed to possess the saint’s remains yet in the thirteenth century Hereford claimed to have the body. To confuse matters further Glastonbury was said to have a ‘great part’ of the saint as well. Whether the relics of St Guthlac were authentic or not it seems to be undeniable ‘that Hereford had a special place in the development of the cult of St Guthlac’ (Whitehead).
Evesham lies within the medieval Diocese of Worcester which had been founded by King Ethelred of Mercia. Egwin, who himself was of royal blood, was the third Bishop of the Diocese succeeding Bosel and Ostfor. Egwin was born in the country of the Wiccians, of Christian parents and had been well educated as a child. He was assiduous in his studies, though quiet and reflective. He was a good student and was eventually ordained priest. In 693 the see of Worcester became vacant on the death of Ostfor and Egwin was nominated as his replacement. He reluctantly accepted the appointment but in spite of the prestige of such a position he insisted on continuing his pastoral ministry and his preaching to the poor. Contemporary writings about Egwin describe him as a gentle, affable, much loved pastor, who was father to the fatherless and comforter to the afflicted.
These qualities and his humility endeared him to his people but they also knew that when the law of God was challenged, he could be a very severe and unyielding pastor. Although initially popular with rich and poor alike, neither was happy when his enthusiasm for the teachings of the Gospel saw him challenge the immorality of the time. He championed the sanctity of Christian marriage and the chastity of the priesthood. Some people said they were made to feel guilty by his teaching and in order to get their revenge, they slandered him, and complained about him to the King and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Their complaints were heard and for a time Egwin was banished from his see. Eventually, he was summoned to Rome by the Pope to vindicate himself. In order to express his humility, before leaving, he locked his feet in chains, threw the key into the Avon and walked to Rome. On arrival in the city the bells rang out loud and clear without the help of human hands. One day, while celebrating Mass in the city his servant went to buy some fish in the market and on gutting it, found the key inside to unloose the chains around Egwin’s feet.

In his appearance before the Pope, the latter refused to allow Egwin to prostrate himself at his feet but rather asked for the Saint’s blessing. He celebrated the liturgy with him and had many private conversations with him. Soon Egwin returned to England laden with honours and he was restored to his see. King Ethelred received him with love, and having repented for his treatment of Egwin, appointed him tutor to his young princes and proclaimed himself ready to do whatever the Saint asked of him.
Egwin was fond of peace and quiet and frequently sought seclusion at a favourite spot on the banks of the Avon at Hethomme, the place where he had in fact thrown the key to his chains in the river. There was a small chapel there which the King gave him together with some land. This became Egwin’s private retreat, and he soon brought a flock there and appointed some herdsman to look after it.

One swineherd by the name of Eof was startled one day by the appearance of the Blessed Virgin Mary as he tended his pigs on the banks of the river Avon. He had been searching for a sow that had strayed into the bushes to farrow and suddenly, there appeared to him three beautiful maidens one of whom was holding a book and singing in a most sweet and heavenly voice. Eof hurried to tell the Bishop Egwin what he had seen and after much prayer and fasting, Egwin himself went to the woods where he too saw the maidens, one of whom was beautiful beyond compare. In one hand she held a book and in the other a shining cross. She blessed Egwin, saying, “Behold this is the place I have chosen,” and the Bishop interpreted this to mean that she had indicated the site for the building of a church. Egwin gained support from the king, Ethelred, and the church was started in 702. By 708 the new church was almost complete. Ethelred had given most of his fortune to endow it and in 704 had renounced his crown in favour of his son Kenred, and took the habit at the monastery at Bardney.

Egwin made a second journey to Rome, this time in company with King Kenred and King Offa in order to share with the Pope details of his vision at Evesham. One of Egwin’s most frequently reported miracles took place during this journey. Crossing the Alps, the three travellers were dying of thirst and begged Egwin to do something about it. He knelt down to pray for water, and from where he knelt, a spring of fresh water oozed forth.

On his return from this second visit to Rome, in 709, Egwin learnt by means of a vision, of the death of Saint Aldhelm, Abbot of Malmesbury and Bishop of Sherbourne. Apart from being close friends, they also had other things in common. Aldhelm had first become an Abbot and then a bishop. Egwin was first a Bishop and later the Abbot of Evesham. Egwin made haste to Doulting in Somerset, where Aldhelm had died, to meet Aldhelm body and accompanied it to Malmesbury where he conducted the funeral in Aldhelm’s Abbey Church.

On his return to Evesham, Egwin gathered together the important and influential people of the area and presented for their information, the permission from the Pope to consecrate the Abbey church there and informing them that it was from thenceforward, to be free of all episcopal authority. The new Abbey church at Evesham was consecrated by Wilfrid, Bishop of York, in the presence of many Bishops, clerics and nobility, on November 1st 709. Egwin soon gathered monks around him, from where it is not known, and in 710 he retired to the monastery himself, took the habit and was elected first Abbot – but he retained his authority as Bishop of Worcester.

As time passed, Egwin became increasingly ill and spent his last days in prayer, often experiencing visions of Angels and Saints. He never forgot the needs of the poor and prayed for them constantly and ordered alms to be provided for them. He had always worn the hair
shirt and now added fasting and sleeping in dust and ashes to his discipline. Just prior to his departure from this life, he called his monks to him, blessed them and ‘breathed forth his soul on December 30th 717.’

His burial took place at his favourite chosen spot in Evesham and his tomb was marked with an epitaph in Latin of which the following is a rough translation.

Near this rude stone concealed lies man of highest worth,  
In narrow coffin closed while high extolled o’er earth  
By truthful fame swift-winged. A man of gentle race,  
Great were the deeds he wrought, his manners full of grace.

Here builid he the Church by men now Evesham highyt,  
Enriching it with lands ennobled as he might  
With freedom much. The same, who then did rule this land,  
All way approved; thereto each noble set his hand;

And eke who reigned in Rome at Peter’s lofty throne,  
The Lord Pope did confirm, and sealed with seal his own.  
This life he laid aside that day in Capricorn  
For now the thirteenth time the wintry sun was born.

The monks built the first shrine which was richly adorned but it was later plundered by the Danes. In 960 the Abbey Church fell to the ground but the relics were unharmed. In 1014 Elfward, a monk of Ramsey was made Abbot of Evesham. On a sea voyage to Flanders in 1039 he was in danger of shipwreck. He vowed to promote the veneration of St Egwin and promised the saint that he would make a silver shrine for his relics and also see to it that his cult was more widely celebrated by the faithful. He duly completed the new shrine for the saint, the original having been plundered by the Danes as was noted above. In his official capacity and by pontifical authority he commanded all the people to flock to the festivities of the translation of the relics on 10th September 1039, which became the Saint’s secondary feast.

Before the coming of the Normans it was said that the monastery was so often lit up by the miracles of this holy man, that it was rare for the sun to go down on a Saturday without some sick person in the grip of infirmity or trouble, having obtained relief through St Egwin. The Chronicle of the Abbey of Evesham gives this account of miracles worked at his shrine:

‘If you had been there you would have seen now one, now two, often more invalids coming for the sake of their health, approaching the altar or being brought by others, flinging themselves on the ground, pouring forth prayers, groaning, all alike hoping for their health. You would have seen some blind, others lame, some deaf, others mute, many lepers or paralytics or people painfully bound with irons, or besieged by some other infirmity. There were demoniacs too in this pitiful assembly, but often the Divine grace, through the merits of St Egwin, was present illuminating the blind, raising up the lame, restoring hearing to the
deaf and speech to the mute, cleansing the leprous, healing the paralysed and not failing to
cure the other sick. Through the merits of St Egwin, many who were fettered in irons in
expiation of their crimes were miraculously liberated. For when a certain person who was
suffering thus, devoutly sought the protection of St Egwin and begged for the mercy of God
and his saints, by spending the night frequently at the tomb of St Egwin, one day the
Almighty gloriously displayed his pity and cut the iron form the sufferer.

At that time the feast of St Egwin was celebrated most honourably with the utmost
reverence, and crowds of people flocked to it; the immense pomp, the pilgrims, the
abundant joy were equally remarkable.’

In 1044 Abbot Maurice was elected Abbot and designed and ordered a new shrine made of
silver and gems, three of which shone so brightly that their glow lit up the church at night.
There were also small sculptured figures around the sides but soon after completion, the
shrine was plundered by a noble lady who was keen to secure some of the saints relics for her
own devotion.

The first Norman Abbot, Walter, was sceptical about the validity of Evesham’s saints. How
could the people of England be defeated by the French with so many saints to intercede for
them? Perhaps they weren’t so holy after all. He decided to test the relics by fire. He was
impressed when the bones did not even change colour. So impressed was he in fact that he
organised a fund raising tour to Oxford in 1077 – where miracles were performed – and
London and Winchester.

In 1160 the final shrine was completed and sixty years later, the then Prior had to restore it
after it had been damaged when the tower collapsed upon it. It was he who also made a
pedestal for the shrine to rest upon.

Egwin was a miracle worker without doubt. He ministered to both physical and spiritual
problems long after his death. His fame had grown to the point that crowds came to Evesham
to seek remedies for both body and soul and many miracles were wrought there. Pilgrims
flocked there from all over the land.

The Antiquaries Journal 51 (1971) reported the discovery of an ampulla from Evesham which
was discovered in Lancashire bearing the images of St Egwin and St Edwin, Saint and king,
although there was no known cult of the latter at Evesham.

At the Reformation, the shrine was destroyed and the relics thrown to the four winds,
suffering the same fate as the relics of many similar holy men and women.
Over the centuries, Evesham Abbey gained a collection of other major relics which were enshrined in the Abbey Church. These included the relics of St Credan, who was the eighth abbot of Evesham at the time of King Offa. He was regarded as of super eminent holiness, but we have no details of his actions. A shrine was erected to house his relics which were put to an ordeal by fire in 1077 and emerged unscathed and at the translation which followed soon afterwards, they seemed to shine like gold. His feast was celebrated the nineteenth of August. When the church tower collapsed in 1207, his shrine, like that of St Egwin, survived unharmed. His name is found in two litanies from Evesham.

St Wulsey was a hermit who in early youth occupied a solitary cell near Crowland Abbey. So many came to seek his advice that he moved to Evesham in search of greater peace and tranquility. A small cell and chapel were built for him in the Abbey precincts, where he lived for seventy five years. He was an adviser to St Edward the Confessor, influencing him in his decision to erect Westminster Abbey. His feast was kept on February 27th.

St Wistan was the son of the sub king Wimund of the Wiccii. He renounced the world and on the death of his father appointed his mother, Alfreda, to act as regent. His cousin Berfert wanted to marry Alfreda. Wistan knew this was incestuous and both he and his mother rejected the proposal. Alfreda and her son Wistan arranged a meeting with Berfert to discuss the situation but on his approach, the young prince was treacherously slain together with three of his companions. The murder took place in 850 at Wistanstowe which was either in Leicestershire or Shropshire. Wistan’s body was buried in the royal monastery of Repton, with those of his father and grandfather. In 1019, the abbot of Evesham petitioned King Canute to allow his relics to be transferred to Evesham where a shrine was constructed for them and a feast kept in their honour. Wistan’s miracles were the subject of suspicion and were verified twice over. Abbot Walter of Cerisy, subjected them to an ordeal by fire from which they emerged unscathed and later, Baldwin, Archbishop of Canterbury sent a commission to Wistanstowe to examine the supposed miracle of ‘hair’ growing on the ground each year on his feast day, on the spot where the martyr had fallen.
St Odulf was a missionary to the Frisians and spent his life among them making his base at Stavoren where he built a church and monastery. He died in 855 in Utrecht on twelfth June. The majority of his relics were obtained for the Abbey in the eleventh century, by the Bishop of London who was also Abbot of Evesham. He purchased them for 100 marks from Viking pirates who claimed to have stolen them and he enshrined them at Evesham where a solemn feast was kept in their honour on the twelfth June. The saint would appear to have resisted attempts to move his relics to Winchcombe or to disperse them. When they were carried away from Evesham, their weight increased so as to make them too heavy to be borne and they were then returned to their Evesham shrine. Queen Edith had earlier attempted to take some of the relics for her private collection, but was struck blind when she did so. These instances seemed to indicate that St Odulf wished to remain in his adopted home. However conflicting accounts from Frisia and Utrecht would seem to challenge the authenticity of these Evesham Chronicle claims.

SIMON de MONTFORT

The chronicles reveal a widespread understanding of the death of Simon de Montfort under Henry III at the battle of Evesham, as martyrdom. Simon de Montfort had paused at Evesham in August 1265 to hear Mass in the Abbey but was surprised and trapped by Henry III’s son Edward I. Simon’s forces were annihilated. Simon’s dismembered remains were buried in the Abbey where they came to form the focus of a cult of St Simon de Montfort, unofficial Saint. At his tomb they knelt and applied to their heads a cord which had been used to measure his bones, which proved to have miraculous properties. Pilgrims also found healing in the waters of Earl’s Well or Martyr’s Fountain, a spring in Battlewell Ravine where he had fallen. Many people saw a great and obvious similarity between him and Thomas Becket. He was seen as a fighter for the peace of the country, the reform of the realm and the defence of mother church. Enormous stress was laid on the holiness of his life and it is regarded as highly significant that he wore a hair shirt next to his flesh. Grave and religious men asserted that they would visit his tomb to pray to God as willingly as they would go to Jerusalem to do the same. However, the fact that crowds flocked to Evesham and experienced miracles do not necessarily tell us why he was regarded as a saint. One chronicler said that pilgrims came by night for fear of his enemies. Their offerings certainly helped to pay for additions to the Abbey. But were pilgrims displaying solidarity with the cause for which he died or belief in his personal holiness or both?

Miracles experienced between 1274 and 1279 (he was killed 1265) show 198 cures involving 333 persons and 273 place names, many from Worcestershire and a substantial number from Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Warwickshire. Twenty or more cures were for addresses in Kent and Northamptonshire. However, the cult abated after about six years – by 1280 at the latest although Edward 11 wrote in 1324 that “bogus miracles are still taking place.” He was obviously trying to disprove the belief that through miracles, God was supporting Simon’s cause. While it lasted it was a political rather than a religious cult.
St Edburga of Winchester was always the principal focus of veneration at Pershore. She was the daughter of King Edward the Elder of Wessex and his third wife. As a child he gave her the choice between playing with toys or a Bible and chalice. She chose the latter. When she grew up she became a nun at St Mary’s Abbey, Winchester. She was distinguished for her gentleness and humility and never became Abbess. She used to take the nuns’ sandals from their bedside while they slept and clean them and return them un noticed. On her death in 960, before she was forty, she was buried in a simple grave within the walls of the Abbey Church. The nuns found they could never close a window overlooking her grave and became convinced of her sanctity. Miracles were reported at the grave and the Abbess called upon Bishop Aethelwold to help in the transfer of her body to a costly new shrine before the high altar. It was later covered in precious metals and decorated with topaz. Her original burial site has been in the southern apse at the Abbey, where recent excavations have revealed a probable location.

By the mid 970s Earl Aegelward of Dorset persuaded Bishop Aethelwold at great price, to translate a major portion of her relics to Pershore, founded in 972, which became dedicated to The Blessed Virgin Mary, Ss Peter and Paul and St Edburga. The lady was eventually enshrined in St Edburga’s Chapel in the South Transept and this was greatly extended eastwards around 1300 to accommodate the vast number of pilgrims visiting her remains and where many miracles were wrought. Her name was revered there even after the Norman Conquest when the memory of so many local saints was suppressed. Throughout the rest of the Middle Ages her shrine continued to be a popular place of pilgrimage but both shrines disappeared during the Dissolution.

At Pershore the lady was enshrined in St Edburga’s Chapel, originally in the South Transept, but this was greatly extended eastwards in the 1300s, in order to accommodate the vast numbers of pilgrims to her shrine, where many miracles were wrought. Her shrine disappeared during the Reformation.
Just over the Oxfordshire border is the town of Bampton with its Anglo-Saxon Minster church. St Beornwald is variously described as a ‘Confessor’ or as a ‘priest and martyr’. His remains were enshrined here from about the 950’s or earlier until the time of the Reformation. The Feast of his Disposition is 21st December. During the fourteenth century a gabled recess was created in the north transept which may form part of the shrine and close by is a monumental brass showing a figure holding a crozier. This brass was probably added during the early fifteenth century.
It is suggested that Beornwald died sometime between the mid seventh century and the mid tenth century and that he was head of the Minster community. There is evidence of devotion to him in the eleventh century when his name is included in lists and in litanies. In 1349 there is a reference to people flocking to Bampton on his feast to make offerings and to hear divine service. In 1292 the Church was simply dedicated to St John the Baptist but by 1335 it was the Church of St John the Baptist and St Beornwald and by 1521 simply St Beornwald.
WILTSHIRE

MALMESBURY ABBEY
ST ALDHELM of MALMESBURY

Aldhelm, Abbot of Malmesbury and later Bishop of Sherborne was born c639, son of the Wessex Royal Family. He studied at Canterbury and founded several monasteries. He was ordained priest and appointed Abbot of Malmesbury in 673. His life was one of much reading and frequent, fervent prayer. He ate as little as possible, never went beyond the monastic enclosure unless forced to, he had no use for money, and if any came his way he at once spent it on the poor. If he was tempted by the sins of the flesh, he stood all night in the icy fountain near the monastery reciting the psalms. His life, his writing on virginity, his poetry and ‘his acts concerning the British and Saxon churches called forth great veneration from all the inhabitants of South West England.’

He was growing old and feeble when he was also appointed Bishop of Sherborne in 705. After only four years as Bishop, the stress of travelling his see and the vast amount of administration took its toll. Feeling death was near he had himself carried into the wooden church at Doulting where he hoped to breathe his final breath. His friend, Bishop Egwin of Worcester was sent for and ordered the body to be taken to Malmesbury. The cortege was accompanied by crowds both in front and behind the bier, all pressing to be as near as possible so that they might touch the coffin. All were greatly soothed in their sorrow, by the beauty of the lifeless corpse, its grace and its shapelessness. Crowds gazed on the dreamless face which soothed their sorrow. Stone crosses were built at seven mile intervals between Doulting and Malmesbury to mark the way of the funeral procession as his body was brought to his old monastery at Malmesbury for burial. St Egwin presided at the Requiem.

William of Malmesbury quotes the words of Bishop Egwin as follows:

“Learning by revelation that the religious Bishop Aldhelm had migrated to the Lord, I called together the brethren and the attendants and opened to them the departure of the ever to be venerated father. With all haste I reached the spot where the sacred body lay, about 50 miles beyond the monastery of Meldun (Malmesbury). Thence I took it to the place of sepulture and buried it with all honour ordering the erection of the sign of the holy cross at each place where the body rested on the journey.”

A shrine, William says, had been prepared for the saint by King Ethelwulf c855, the father of King Alfred, but had lain unused. King Ethelwulf fixed a pediment of crystal to the shrine on which the name of the saint could be read in letters of gold. The shrine was adorned with plates of silver gilt on which were shown the marvels with which the saint was in his lifetime concerned –, the Beam, the Boy and the Chasuble. William of Malmesbury says that these scenes were shown in raised metal on the back of the shrine, the front showing panels occupied by figures in solid silver. About 955 the monks raised the bones of Aldhelm from the sarcophagus and laid them in the restored silver shrine. However for over 200 years his body had lain in St Michael’s Chapel and it was not until c955 that the body was exhumed and his relics placed in the superb shrine behind the High Altar, provided one hundred years
previously by King Ethelwulf. The abbey building which we see today is not the one over which Aldhelm ruled, but rests upon the same foundations.

The miracle of the beam happened at Malmesbury itself, when Aldhelm was building the Abbey Church. When the roof was reached, all the beams were cut to the exact length, apart from the last one which was too short. The workmen told the Saint. “Moving his lips in silent prayer and making a slight effort with his arms, he brought the shortened beam to the same length as the rest. When put in place it fitted perfectly. This beam survived two fires, and only succumbed at last to decay and age. Another building miracle happened near Wareham, Dorset, where the church that Aldhelm built was without a roof – and even in William of Malmesbury’s time, no matter how heavily it rained, it never rained inside the church. No matter how often builders tried to roof the church they never succeeded.

Of the other miracles, the accounts given by William of Malmesbury and Faritius, a contemporary of Aldhelm, differ in detail but not in substance. Once, while in Rome visiting the Pope, Aldhelm had celebrated Mass and thinking the server was behind him, he threw the chasuble over his head and behind his back. There was no one there to catch it but miraculously a ray of sunlight shone through the window, caught the chasuble and held it suspended in the empty air. William of Malmesbury said that that chasuble was still at Malmesbury to that very day. It was of most delicate dyed scarlet, with black scrolls containing representations of peacocks. Its length suggests that its wearer was a very tall man.

While in Rome, rumours spread that a child born to a woman had in fact been fathered by the Pope and that the mother was secretly a nun. The gossip spread by the Pope’s enemies, posed a real danger to the Papacy. Aldhelm summoned the child who was only nine days old, baptise him and asked him who his father was. The child answered in a loud clear voice that Pope Sergius was pure and undefiled and certainly not his father.

During the Danish invasions, St Dunstan foresaw the possible dangers to the shrine and removed the bones to a tomb of stone set up higher in the church, wrapping the bones first in a glistening white napkin and then in a very precious scarlet robe. He added a portion of the ashes taken from the original sarcophagus where all the flesh had turned to dust, and added these to the new burial place. With these relics he placed a phial of purest sweet smelling balsam, leaving the silver shrine in its original position, thus saving the bones of the saint. The Danes arrived, made straight for the silver shrine and as one attempted to dislodge one of the precious stones, he was struck blind. The Danes fled and thus Malmesbury was saved from pillage, unlike any other monastery in the region. Years later, Abbot Serlo of Gloucester and another abbot after fasting three days before Pentecost, examined the stone tomb to see if it still contained the bones of St Aldhelm and found them still there as the monks had always said. They sent for the Bishop of Salisbury who with all due solemnity, replaced them in the silver shrine.

In later years, when Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury heard of the miracles wrought by Aldhelm, he ordered that he was to be reverenced as a saint throughout the whole of England.
A girl from Pucklechurch with a spinal disease, a dumb man from Calne and a blind woman also from Calne were cured at Aldhelm’s shrine. His fame spread far and wide and a troop of cavalry was necessary to preserve order among the enormous crowds who thronged to his shrine on special occasions. “After carrying the shrine in procession, it was so positioned across the doors of the Abbey that it could only be approached by people who prostrated themselves, and there they strove, emboldened by faith, to obtain a sum of many vows from the saint, for the outlay of a penny or a half. Suppliants came from Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Lincolnshire.

Various tales of signs and miracles hung around his memory and his shrine where the wonderful chasuble was shown. Around his tomb was also enshrined the head of St Ouen in a costly reliquary; the relics of St Patern; the cross which King Athelstan wore round his neck in battle; the sword which an angel placed in the king’s hands amid the fury of battle; a portion of the crown of thorns form Calvary and a fragment of the holy cross set in thick opaque crystal. But at the Dissolution, the shrine went the way of all shrines. Holy Wells are associated with the saint at Doulting and also at Pucklechurch in Gloucestershire where the ‘water is esteemed very good for the eyes, and for their virtue in diet drinks’ (Atkyns).

SOMERSET

BRISLINGTON

ST ANNE’S WELL

St Anne’s Well at Brislington two miles from Bristol, is on the southern side of the River Avon, in St Anne’s Wood. The Holy Well has an inscription placed above it: This Holy Well was associated with the Chapel of St Anne, which stood about 300 yards to the NW; throughout
the Middle Ages, pilgrimages were made here, and especially by the sailors of Bristol, Henry VII visited this spot in state in 1485 and hither his queen came in 1502. The chapel, dating from about 1392, was destroyed with Keynsham Abbey to which it belonged, in 1539 by Henry VIII.

The chapel to which the inscription alludes was described by William of Worcester (1415 – 1482): The building was 58 feet by 15 feet by 80 feet high, with colossal square candles renewed yearly at the Pentecoste, that touched the roof nearly and cost £5 each. Thirteen others burned before the image of St Anne paid for by the Guild of weavers and cordwainers. There were also thirty two models of ships and boats, 20 shillings each, for receiving and containing offerings and sometimes to burn incense in. It was founded by a certain Lord de la Warr of Brislington.

Important people made pilgrimages which no doubt considerably enriched the Abbey of Keynsham. In 1508 the Duke of Buckingham wrote in his diary, “My Lord’s and my young Lady’s oblation to St Anne in the Wood, seven shillings and four pence.”

Leland writing in 1542 describes the place: At two miles above Bristow, was a commune trajectus by ferry bote where was a chapel of St Anne on the same side of the Avon that Bath standeth on and here was great pilgrimages to St Anne.

Seafarers were amongst the major beneficiaries of St Anne’s protection. The popular chapel in the woods at Brislington had been awarded so it was recorded in 1463, indulgences by the Pope which had by then lapsed and visits had fallen off due to the poor condition of the building. (See Bristol Past and Present pp 123/4)

**St TECLA (or St Twrog)**

On Chapel Rock, just off the southern tip of the Beachley Peninsula, and only accessible at low tide, are the remains of the medieval chapel of St Twrog – one wall with an arched opening survives. It is said that when the Welsh Bishops crossed the Severn to meet Augustine, they called at St Tecla’s Island to consult its eponymous virgin and hermit. If Tecla was murdered in AD 47 as some suggest, the Bishops would have been 550 years too late! It is also claimed that there was a holy well on the island.
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