

THE LIGHT FROM THE EAST: ENGLAND'S LOST PATRON SAINT: ST EDMUND

Dedicated to St Edmund and all the Bright Spirits of Old England
Who Bring Comfort and Growing Hope That all the Wrong Shall Yet Be Made Right.

by Fr Andrew Phillips



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To Saint Edmund

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FOREWORD

IT is a sad fact, illustrative of our long disdain and neglect of St Edmund¹, formerly much revered as the Patron Saint of England, that to this day there exists no Life of the Saint which is readable, reliable and accessible to the modern reader.

True, there is the Life written in Ramsey by St Abbo of Fleury over a thousand years ago in c. 985. Written in Latin but translated shortly afterwards into Old English by that most orthodox monk Ælfric, it is based on an eyewitness account. We think it reliable, but it is not accessible and it covers only a short period of the Saint's life. True, a great many mediæval chroniclers wrote of St Edmund, among them – Hermann of Bury St Edmunds, Symeon of Durham, Geoffrey Gaimar, Geoffrey of Wells, William of Malmesbury, Osbert of Clare, Florence of Worcester, Jocelin of Brakelond, William of Ramsey, Henry of Huntingdon, Ingulf of Crowland, Matthew Paris, Roger of Wendover, Denis Piramus, Richard of Cirencester and John Lydgate. Unfortunately, however much we may trust the early mediæval authors the fact is that those who wrote after the eleventh century watershed in Western history were largely fiction-writers. As Professor Dorothy Whitelock noted regarding St Edmund: 'It is clear that a great deal of what appears in our sources after Abbo is invention...' ²). And in any case these old writings are now virtually inaccessible and their unreliable contents too redolent of the mediæval imagination to be readable today.

Something similar might be said of nineteenth-century works such as Mackinlay's 1893 book, *St Edmund, King and Martyr*, a curiously old-fashioned, polemical, uncritical and sometimes downright incorrect book, but which does bring together a great many interesting texts and reflections. The works of Lord Francis Hervey, though very useful and of considerable scholarship, are now rarely to be found and are in any case too academic to be of general interest. Moreover they suffer from their author's insistence on his pet theories, ingenious perhaps but, as they say, too clever by half. A more recent 1970 book on St Edmund by a former Roman Catholic priest of Bury St Edmunds, Fr Bryan Houghton, has great merit, but is now out of print. However, it is not a Life, rather a refutation of the pernicious hobby-horses of scholars such as Hervey, James and Clarke, and above all a heartfelt petition for the return of St Edmund's relics to Bury St Edmunds. In 1984 J. M. Matten published a booklet called *The Cult of St Edmund*. Although a convenient little collection of texts, it suffers from relying on the speculations of Hervey and Clarke and the mistakes of Mackinlay and is in no way a Life. Apart from these works and the scholarly and helpful editing and printing of the primary sources in mediæval Chronicles and Lives, especially by Arnold and Hervey, all that remain are a few inadequate pamphlets and paragraphs which have been printed for the curious in guidebooks and elsewhere over the years.

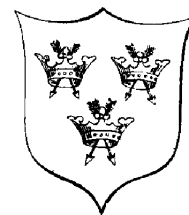
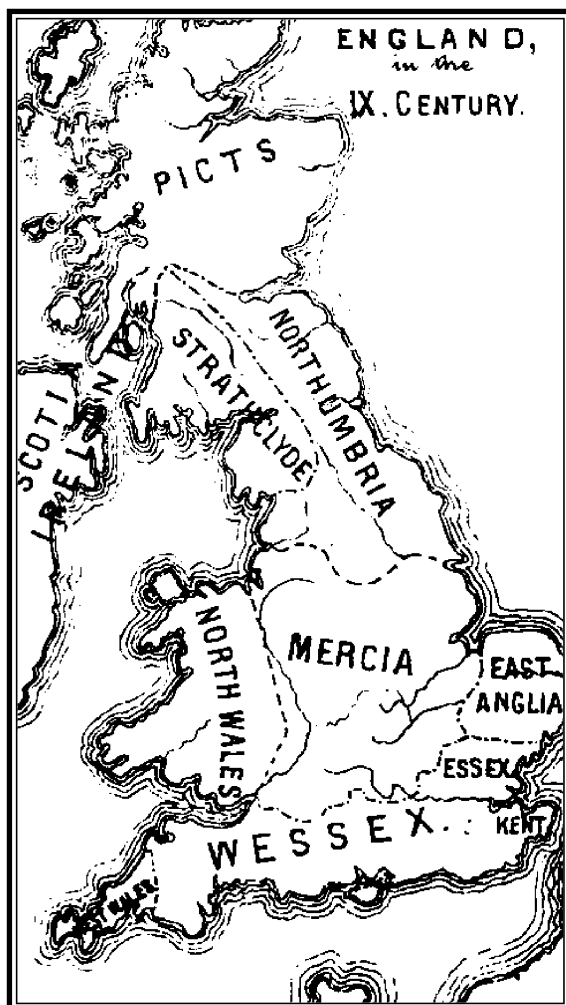
Thus, when over forty-five years ago the present author first read St Abbo's *Life of Edmund*, the King so little known yet so often heard of during childhood days in North

Essex and Suffolk, there began a collection of 'Edmundiana'. And then, more recently, when he expressed his regret at the absence of a Life, it was suggested that he write one himself: this present offering is the modest result.

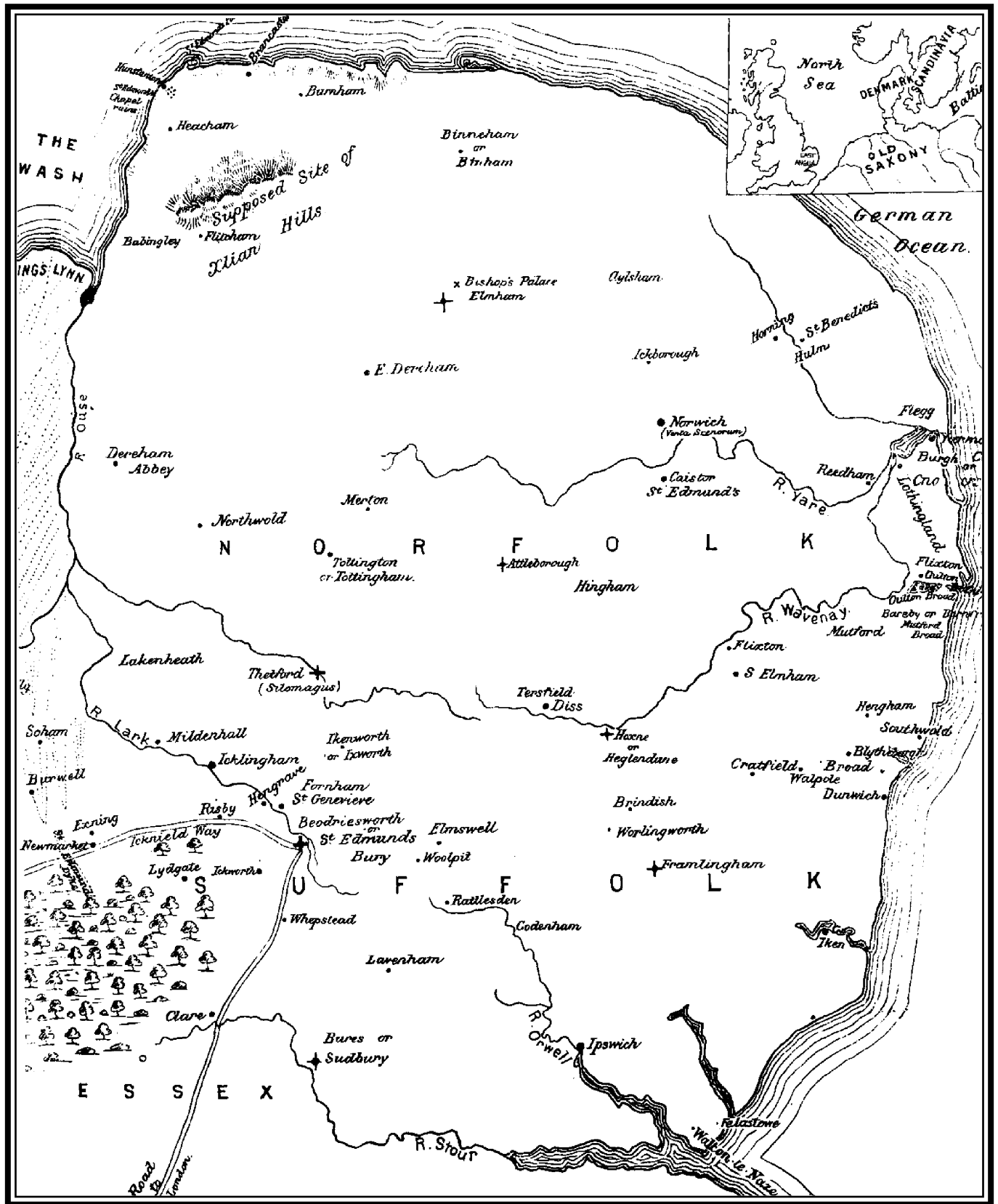
It is the writer's hope that this Life will be readable, reliable and accessible. For those who wish to read of variants and learned speculations, they are here, in the footnotes. But for those, on the other hand, who wish to read the Life of St Edmund, King and Martyr, England's lost Patron Saint, a story true, or as factually true as it can at present be, then it too is here. And if the reader feels that we have done our best to present this story, then the author will have achieved his aim.

Notes

1. Correctly 'Eadmund', but we shall throughout use the common form, as also for other Old English names.
2. Whitelock, *Fact and Fiction in the Legend of St Edmund*, p. 233.



East Anglia.



A Map of East Anglia

Prologue: SEVEN KINGDOMS AND EAST ANGLIA

Let us worship the King of kings, glorious in His soldier Edmund; through whom He has made wonderful His Church and given joy to the court of heaven.

Hymn at Matins for the Feast of St. Edmund.

THE first England of our history, that which is often called ‘Saxon England’, or more exactly ‘Old England’, began not as one Kingdom but as Seven Kingdoms, known as ‘The Heptarchy’. These Seven Kingdoms were founded within a few years of the coming of our forebears, the Germanic Jutes, Saxons and Angles who came respectively from Denmark, Northern Germany and Southern Denmark in the fifth century. Their immigration both followed and preceded the collapse of the Imperial Roman Britannia which had been populated by weakly Romanized Celts or Britons. The names of the Seven Kingdoms were: Kent, Essex, Sussex, Wessex, Mercia, Northumbria and East Anglia.

Kent was mainly peopled by the smallest tribe of the three, the Jutes, who moving down the coasts of Northern Europe had probably crossed into England from the mouth of the Rhine, or even perhaps from the shores of Gaul, now Northern France.

Essex, Sussex and Wessex were mostly peopled by the Northern German Saxons from the area of Hamburg, who had settled respectively in the East (Essex), in the South (Sussex) and the West (Wessex).

To the North, there were few Saxons (hence no ‘Northsex or ‘Norsex’). As a result, Mercia, Northumbria and East Anglia were peopled by the majority group of Germanic settlers, the Angles, from Angeln, a territory still to be found today on the eastern neck of the Danish peninsula. Such was the importance of the Angles among these closely-related Germanic peoples that they all came very swiftly to give themselves a common name, the ‘Englisc’, in Latin ‘*Angli*’.

In all these new ‘Englisc’ kingdoms there remained a smaller underclass of Celts or Britons who for various reasons had stayed behind, to be assimilated by intermarriage. However, some of these Celts had preferred to leave, west, south or north. Some of them headed west for what the ‘Englisc’ called ‘Wales’ and ‘Cornwall’ (‘Corn-Wales’, the land of the ‘West Welsh’, who occupied the ‘corn-’ or horn-shaped territory of the South-West) and ‘Cumberland’ in what is now North-West England. Others sailed south across the sea to Armorica, which was renamed ‘Britanny’ or to Galicia in north-western Spain. Yet others headed north into ‘Pictland’, a territory which was then being conquered by invading ‘Scots’ from Ireland. So successful was this latter conquest that

this Pictland would become known as Scotland, the Picts either being assimilated or pushed into the Highlands.

As is indicated by the name 'Cumberland', the British Celts called themselves the 'Cwmry' or confederates, confederates that is, of the Roman Empire. They called the Germanic invaders 'Saxons' or in the North 'Sassenachs', after the name of the first Germanic peoples they had heard of. The Germanic invaders called the Celts 'the Welsh', meaning the 'foreigners'.

Of the Seven Kingdoms of Old England only Sussex, the territory of the South Saxons, approximately corresponded to today's county of the same name.

Kent, peopled mainly by the Jutes, also for a time included Surrey. The latter county, whose name means 'the southern kingdom', then passed to and fro between Wessex and Mercia.

The then Essex, the Kingdom of the East Saxons, was much larger than now. It included their capital, London, then very small, much of what is now called Hertfordshire, as well as Middlesex, the territory of the Middle Saxons, tributary to the East Saxons.

Wessex, the land of the West Saxons, came to correspond to what today we would call the West Country – basically everything west of Middlesex and Sussex as far as Cornwall. Much later this Wessex territory was shared out into six 'shares' or shires – Berkshire, Hampshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire and Devonshire and two areas of settlement called 'Dorset' and 'Somerset'.

As regards Mercia, it corresponds to what today we call the Midlands and spread as far as the 'Marches' (hence the name Mercia) or borderlands with the Celts, the land that still today we call the Welsh Marches. It too was shared out into 'shires'.

Northumbria was simply the land north of the Humber. It would be shared out into 'shires' and 'lands'. At one point this Kingdom spread as far north as Edinburgh, but it never really spread as far west as the Irish Sea. Indeed at first the 'Welsh' were able to travel from North 'Wales' to Scotland without hindrance, for what is now Lancashire and Westmorland were virtually uninhabited and to the north there lay their own Cumberland – the land of the Cwmry. Still today Westmorland and Cumberland are together known as 'Cumbria'.

Finally there was the Kingdom of East Anglia, East England, corresponding to the land of the 'north folk' (Norfolk) and the 'south folk' (Suffolk), all the area east of the Ouse and its tributary the Cam, corresponding to what today we call eastern Cambridgeshire as well as the islands of western Cambridgeshire which emerged from the fens. This easternmost Kingdom of some 5,000 square miles had been the first to be populated by

the Angles of 'Angleland' in today's Northern Germany and Southern Denmark and, relatively speaking, was densely populated. Its southern boundary with the Kingdom of Essex was fixed by the then fast-flowing and virtually impassable River Stour, and its western boundary protected by the then much wider Rivers Ouse and Cam and the East Anglia islands beyond them by the fens. The few miles in between the Cam and the Stour were protected by forest, heathland and four earthworks, among them that known today as the 'Devil's Dyke', situated just to the west of Newmarket. And beyond the lower Cam and Stour there lay a great forest, guarded to the south of the Stour by the strategic border-towns of Sudbury and Bures, and towards its mouth, by marshes. In fact, as we shall see, the only way to invade East Anglia was by sea and next to sail down its rivers.

England then did not yet exist, and the Seven Kingdoms often fought in bitter rivalry against one another. Inevitably, one or another would come out on top. Thus at the end of the sixth century, when Christianity was first brought to the '*Angli*' from Rome by St Augustine, the King of Kent was deemed to be the Overking or 'Bretwalda' (ruler of Britain), and Kent the strongest kingdom. During the first half of the seventh century East Anglia briefly took over, but by the middle of that century Northumbria had taken the lead, to be overtaken by Mercia in the eighth, which in turn was overtaken by Wessex in the ninth. In those centuries it was this Wessex under the saintly Alfred the Great and his successors which saved the land from annihilation by the dreaded Viking Northmen, the Danes. In so doing the first united England was founded and in those heady days the Wessex capital, Winchester, became England's capital.

In 1016 after the death of him whom some would consider to be the last legitimate King of England, Edmund Ironside, England was conquered. First by more or less benevolent Northmen under King Knut (Canute), and then by more or less malevolent 'Northmen' under William of Normandy, the latter of whom made London his capital. But England still survived as an independent country with its own culture and traditions. The Old English civilization which had grown up over the five centuries before the catastrophes of the eleventh century was too well-established to be wholly swept away and much of its essence is still with us today.

We shall now look at the situation not of the Kingdoms of England in those first centuries of our history, but the history of that Kingdom which most concerns us here, East Anglia.

The first to unite the south folk and north folk of East Anglia, then living in Suffolk, Norfolk and what is now eastern Cambridgeshire, reigned in the sixth century. His name was Uffa but we know nothing of him, except that he founded a dynasty or royal house, the Uffings. He was succeeded by his son Tytil who was followed by his son Redwald. In the early seventh century the latter accepted Christianity from his Overlord or Bretwalda, Ethelbert of Kent, but only for political reasons, and he continued to worship Germanic idols. Later he would himself become the Bretwalda of the English

peoples. His insincerity in matters of the Faith was made up for by the sincerity of his sons Earpwald and then Sigebert, also called Sigebert 'the Learned'. The latter, who had lived in exile in Gaul, succeeded to the East Anglian throne in 630 and invited a Bishop from Burgundy, Felix, to come and preach the Gospel, baptize and start monastic life in his East Anglian Kingdom.

Felix set up his see on the Suffolk coast in what is now called Felixstowe¹, which still bears his name, as does the Suffolk village of Flixton. He also founded churches in Suffolk, in the Felixstowe peninsula, and in Norfolk, at Babingley and Shernborne in the north-west and at Loddon and Reedham in the east. Monasteries were founded at Soham (Cambridgeshire), and also perhaps in Ely. In the seventeen years that St Felix laboured in East Anglia, he sowed the seeds of the Faith and earned himself both sainthood and the title 'Apostle of East Anglia'. He was not alone in his work, for Sigebert also welcomed Irish monks to his Kingdom, Fursey, Foillan, Ultan, Goban, Dicul (all later to be deemed saints) and companions who set up a monastery, probably at Burgh Castle in Norfolk. And then came the mysterious St Botulf and his brother Adulf (usually spelt Botolph and Adolph). Together they set up a monastery at 'Icanho', which is in the East of England and has been identified with Iken on the Suffolk coast. Botulf in particular was much venerated in the seventh century and for many centuries after, especially in the Eastern Counties and at Bury St Edmunds, where his relics were translated.

Sigebert himself fell so much in love with monasticism that he built a monastery, 'in honour of the Mother of God on a certain gentle slope towards the east, and washed by the little streams Linnet and Lark'². This was the monastery of Bedricsworth (correctly, Bædericswirde) in Suffolk, now called Bury St Edmunds. Here in 633 Sigebert retired from kingship and the crown passed to his kinsman, Egric. Shortly after, however, in 634, both Egric and Sigebert were slain by the pagan King Penda of Mercia. The monk Sigebert, who had refused to take up arms to defend himself, was to be considered a martyr.

Egric was succeeded by St Sigebert's cousin, the remarkable King Anna, who fought for years with the pagan Penda, making East Anglia into a centre of the Christian Faith. Most of Anna's children were revered as saints. They were St Sethrid and St Ethelburgh, Abbesses in Gaul, St Withburgh, Abbess of Dereham in Norfolk, St Audrey (Etheldreda) and St. Saxburgh, Abbesses of Ely, and also St Jurmin. The latter, possibly Anna's son (though some think a brother or nephew) died as a martyr in c. 653 and was then much venerated at Blythburgh and later Bury St Edmunds. Anna was succeeded by his brother Ethelhere, who married St Herewith, sister of St Hild (Hilda) of Whitby. Ethelhere was in turn followed by his son Aldwulf, who was succeeded by the very cultured King Alfwald, who died in 749. This period saw the weakening of East Anglian power. This culminated, after the reigns of two other kings, Bernred and the long-lived Ethelred, in the martyrdom of an outstanding East Anglian King, Ethelbert.

This young King, brought up at Sigebert's monastery in 'Bedricsworth', was treacherously martyred in 794 at Sutton Walls near Hereford by servants of Offa, King of Mercia. The latter was not only Overking of Britain, but also a semi-Christian tyrant, not so unlike his ancestor, that slayer of Christian kings, Penda of Mercia. The slaying of Ethelbert (also known as Albert or Albright) was much commemorated and twelve churches were dedicated to him in East Anglia and North Essex. In Norwich one of the city gates, containing a chapel dedicated to the Martyr, was called the Ethelbert Gate.

Ethelbert's martyrdom by the power-hungry Mercians marked the eclipse of East Anglian fortunes, the beginning of the end of the Kingdom of East Anglia. For some years on until the decline of Mercia in about 820 East Anglia became something of an under-kingdom of Mercia. This part of East Anglian history is very shadowy but under Mercian domination it is quite possibly that East Anglia had no king for some years after Ethelbert. Coin evidence tells us of two otherwise unknown kings called Athelstan and Ethelwerd. From the writings of Geoffrey of Wells, a Thetford monk who lived in the middle of the twelfth century, we hear of another king called, confusingly, Offa. It is to this Offa of East Anglia and his family that our story now turns.

Notes

1. The word 'stow' or 'stowe' means a holy place' and is often recorded in association with saints. Thus Bury St Edmunds was also called 'St Edmundstowe', Holkham in Norfolk, 'Withburgstow' after St Withburgh, Shaftesbury in Dorset, 'Edwardstow' after St Edward the Martyr, Wistow in Leicestershire, 'Wistanstow' after St Wistan, and West Halton in Lincolnshire, 'Etheldredstow' after St Etheldred or Audrey. To this day Felixstowe and Edwinstowe in Nottinghamshire remain to remind us of St Felix and St Edwin.
2. Mackinlay p. 13

Chapter One: CHILDHOOD OF A KING

Saint Edmund, flower of an illustrious line, from his earliest youth followed Christ with his whole heart.

Hymn at the First Nocturn for the Feast of St Edmund.

THE martyrdom of St Ethelbert and the might of Mercia brought about many changes in East Anglia, including ultimately the exile of certain kinsmen of King Offa of East Anglia. The latter preferred to leave the Kingdom rather than stay under Mercian domination which lasted until about 819. Their exile was not to any of the other English Kingdoms – for they were all more or less dominated by the hated tyranny of Mercia – but to the Frankish kingdom in what is now Germany. Among the exiles to these lands there were also non-East Anglians, temporarily displaced by the overweening might of Mercia. Thus Egbert, the future King of Wessex (802–39), and Eardwulf, future King of Northumbria, went into lengthy exile across the sea at the end of the eighth century. And it is here that we shall now go before returning to East Anglia and the reign of King Offa.

As regards the exiled kinsmen of Offa, the new King of East Anglia, information is scant. However, if we are to trust Geoffrey of Wells, writing his work on the childhood of St Edmund in about 1150, one of these near kinsmen, perhaps a cousin or a nephew, was called Alcmund¹. At some point after King Ethelbert's martyrdom, perhaps even as late as 810, Alcmund left the shores of East Anglia for what is now Northern Germany, to be precise Saxony. This move should not surprise us for three reasons. First of all, a glance at a map shows us that East Anglia is in direct line with Northern Germany. Secondly, the people who dwelt in East Anglia were first cousins to the 'Old' Saxons who had remained in Germany and spoke more or less the same language. And thirdly, English missionaries, such as St Clement (or Willibrord), Apostle of the Frisians, and St Boniface (or Winfrid), Apostle of the Germans, and his many English disciples had been active in Holland and the German lands and elsewhere in Northern Europe for a century before St Ethelbert's martyrdom. Links between Saxony and England were therefore very close². This exile is not unlike that of those who during the Second World War sent their children to Australia, Canada, the United States and elsewhere in the English-speaking world. A few years exile in Saxony after the difficulties of life in a Mercian-occupied East Anglia would not be amiss. But Alcmund received much more than refuge. Since the Old Saxons had only reluctantly been converted to Christianity at the end of the eighth century at Charlemagne's swordpoint, who better to rule them than a Christian of their own race, an English prince, a young kinsman of Offa of East Anglia? Indeed some time in the first half of the ninth century it was this, rule over the territory around the north of Hamburg, in Holstein and Angeln, the homelands of the English, that was asked of Alcmund.

Here Alcmund married and, according to the mediæval chroniclers, he and his wife Siwara had two children³. If we are to believe later chroniclers, the elder, Edwold, later returned to England and became an anchorite in the valley of the River Cerne in Dorset. As a nineteenth-century writer put it: 'There beside the silver fountain known as St Augustine's well, secluded from the rest of the world by the lofty chalk hills surrounding his hermitage, he gave himself up to a life of austerity and prayer'⁴. Later, drawn by his holiness, a great monastery would grow up here and this place became known as Cerne Abbas. As regards the second child of the family, he concerns us far more, for he was called Edmund, meaning in Old English, 'blessed protection'. And it is here that our story really begins.

It was, so Geoffrey of Wells tells us, on pilgrimage to Rome that Alcmund was told by a pious woman that she saw 'a great light shining from his breast, a light which would, like the sun, shine from the East to the West'. Returning to Saxony, Edmund, was born to him on Christmas Day 841⁵. Although Edmund grew up in exile, we can imagine that there were close contacts between the kinsfolk of Saxony and East Anglia, all the more so, since by the time Edmund was born, Mercian power had long since gone and East Anglia was reviving under the more benign authority of Wessex, the new star in the English sky. Of Edmund's childhood we can say little in detail, but we can suppose a number of things. First that he was brought up with the knowledge that he was a kinsman of King Offa of East Anglia across the sea. We can assume as well that his father Alcmund, also a King, would have told his son the tales of his royal forebears and the history of East Anglia and of the present power of Wessex. Similarly we can think that there was much toing and froing across the North Sea between the two related countries, involving not only trade but also missionaries and diplomats. Perhaps in childhood Edmund himself visited his royal kinsmen in East Anglia.

From Edmund's earliest life we also have the clear indication that he was brought up in a strict Christian faith. His first biographer, St Abbo of Fleury, wrote in the tenth century that: 'From his earliest youth, he followed Christ wholeheartedly'⁶. In particular the young Edmund learnt a love of the holy name, Jesus, which was to go with him all his life. Presumably Edmund was educated among the English teachers of the time, of whom there were then many in Germanic lands. The child Edmund learned to read, was taught Latin and we are told, began in monastic fashion to learn the Psalter by heart.

Meanwhile in East Anglia itself, King Offa had much served the cause of his Kingdom. He had defended his Kingdom from the Mercians several times, notably in 819, and each time defeated them, later in alliance with his new Overlord King Egbert of Wessex – who we remember had also spent time in exile in the German lands. By 838 Offa had also successfully defended the north of his land from a new foe, Danish raiders who had attempted an incursion from Lincolnshire. After the death of his Overlord, Egbert of Wessex, Offa came under the domination of Ethelwulf of Wessex who was

represented by his son Athelstan. Based in Kent, Athelstan was responsible for the south-east of England and had some authority in East Anglia, especially Suffolk.

King Offa had married, we are told, a certain Bothild. According to the chroniclers, together they had had one son, Fremund. No doubt to the distress of all, the son showed no inclination at all towards kingship, renouncing all worldly honours and becoming a hermit. (Indeed in 866 he was martyred by marauding Danes at the significantly named Offchurch ⁷ in Warwickshire and venerated as a martyr). The King of East Anglia had then no heir. The story as we have it is that about the year 853, Offa, now elderly, in his despair resolved to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This pilgrimage was to take him through Saxony where he could see, probably for the last time, his 'near kinsman', Alcmund, and his family.

Here then in Saxony, if we are to believe the mediæval writers, took place the meeting between Offa and Alcmund and his young son, Edmund. So impressed was Offa by Edmund that even before proceeding to Jerusalem, he decided to make the youthful Edmund his heir. Although this might seem extraordinary, we should remember that Edmund was of the royal house of the Uffings and, though the chroniclers do not mention it, we cannot fail to suspect that Offa had probably gone to Saxony with the deliberate intention of offering the throne to one of Alcmund's sons. After all, nobody would think of going from England to Jerusalem via Saxony, unless he had good reason for going so far out of his way, and we can think that contacts between Offa and Alcmund were longstanding. Indeed we can imagine that the thanes or nobles of East Anglia, much worried about the succession of an elderly King, had for years been urging Offa to go to his kinsman in Saxony in the hope that there he would appoint a successor to the throne. However it may be, we are told that here in Saxony Offa promised Edmund his coronation ring. In the presence of Alcmund and the East Anglian nobles who were accompanying him to the Holy Land, Offa made Edmund his legitimate successor.

Of Offa's pilgrimage, we know little more, other than that he did reach Jerusalem. Presumably he took ship in Italy, and then proceeded to the Imperial Capital, Constantinople, to venerate the True Cross, which had been taken there in the fourth century by the Empress Helen. It would seem that here Offa received a small relic of the True Cross, one which would later be given to Edmund ⁸. It was at this time that Offa fell sick and, we are told, at the monastery of St George in the Dardanelles, he received 'the holy housel' or communion and also unction. Confirming his last will that Prince Edmund, his kinsman's son, succeed him to the East Anglian throne, he departed this life.

The East Anglian nobles hastened back to Saxony and there informed Alcmund of King Offa's death and last will. Reluctantly, for as far as we know in 855 Edmund was only fourteen years old and even by the standards of that time only on the threshold of manhood, Alcmund agreed to send his son to East Anglia together with his elder brother, Edwold, and a company of bodyguards and counsellors. And thus it was that in the year 855, the youthful Edmund set sail for his forebears' Kingdom.

Notes

1. Was he really called Alcmund? Hervey, with some earlier support from Arnold and later from Loomis and Whitelock, put forward the theory that in fact Edmund was not the son of Alcmund, neither was he born in Saxony. According to Hervey, he was born in Sussex, son of a certain Ealhere, brother-in-law of Athelstan, son of King Ethelwulf of Wessex. This theory, however ingenious, contradicts all the ancient authorities and involves twisting the name 'Athelstan' into 'Offa'! Why ever would the mediæval chroniclers have invented the story of Saxony? Surely the basic outline of Geoffrey of Wells is authentic, however much he may then have embroidered around it. This is not to say that he can be believed blindly. Certainly, for example, the names of Offa, Alcmund and Siwara are dubious, as also the details of the pilgrimage to Rome. It is dubious details such as these which led academics like Whitelock to think of Geoffrey's whole narrative as completely fictional – to throw out the proverbial baby with the bath-water. It seems clear from St Abbo, who was closer to the events, that Edmund did live among the 'Old Saxons', i.e. among the Continental Saxons and not the Saxons in England. Thus, despite the sceptics of the 1960s we would accept the basic outline of the story.

Who was Alcmund? Chroniclers call him a 'near kinsman' of Offa – perhaps a cousin, perhaps a nephew – it does not really matter. Was he really called 'Alcmund'? We have no proof to the contrary. How old was Alcmund when he left East Anglia – and when exactly did he leave? We simply do not know.

2. See especially Levison.
3. Was his wife actually called Siwara and did they really have two children? We may well cast doubt on the name 'Siwara', but can put forward no other name and ultimately it is completely immaterial. As regards two children, there also exists another version that there were four. We have preferred the version which to us seems likelier.
4. Mckinlay p. 27.
5. 841 is the only date we have. Tempting though it may be to suggest (as does Houghton) that Edmund was born earlier, perhaps in 831, right in the middle of the Old English Christian age of 597–1066, we have no evidence of this. Boy kings, were by no means exceptional at this time. Thus tenth-century England was ruled successively by four teenage kings, Eadwig, aged 15, Edgar, 16, Edward the Martyr, 15, and Ethelred the Unready, 13.
6. Mackinlay p. 32.
7. The village of Offchurch, meaning Offa's church, was first recorded in 1043. However, its name may indicate that, although in Warwickshire, it had been founded for Fremund by his father, Offa of East Anglia. This could be corroboration that the East Anglian King at this time was called Offa.
8. Houghton, p. 20–21.

Chapter Two: EDMUND'S KINGDOM

And when found to have grown up to youth in grace, the Providence of God raised him up to the throne of a kingdom and established him a defender of the Church, for which he strove even unto the shedding of his blood.

*Hymn at the First Nocturn
for the Feast of St Edmund.*

THUS it was that in 855 ¹ Edmund's ship and its company departed. Skirting the North German coast and the Frisian Islands, where to this day men speak a language most like that of the Old English, they arrived off the Dutch coast. A mere 120 miles across the North Sea lay the East Anglian coast.

According to mediæval chroniclers, the noble company headed not for any great East Anglian port, such as Dunwich, but landed on a headland a mile from Hunstanton in north-west Norfolk, at a site later called 'Maidenburie' or 'Maidenburgh' and later 'Hunstanton St Edmunds' ². Here Edmund was greeted by the Bishop of Norfolk, Hunbert (more correctly Hunbeorht) of Elmham who had been forewarned of Edmund's arrival. This landing-place is now called St Edmund's Point or Head. Later traditions maintained that near Edmund's landing-site springs gushed forth on the cliff-tops, a divine token of Edmund's destiny. Until the nineteenth century at least there were those who visited them and claimed healing from the mysterious qualities of 'St Edmund's Wells' at Old Hunstanton ³. Later Edmund would build a royal residence here and on its site the ruins of a building called St Edmund's chapel still stand today.

From here Edmund and his company, together with those who had greeted him, headed for the Norfolk town of Attleborough. This town, strategically situated in the very centre of East Anglia, then seems to have been regarded as the capital of Norfolk and Offa's chief residence. Here all heard of the events that had befallen Offa and the choice of his kinsman Edmund as heir. With the support of Bishop Hunbert, Edmund claimed the Kingdom for his own.

Within a few weeks Edmund was in Wessex. Since the overthrow of Mercian might in the 820s, Wessex had become by far the strongest of the old Seven Kingdoms, having virtually united all England. Indeed it had all but absorbed the old Kingdoms of Sussex, Kent and Wessex and held Mercia and Northumbria in its sway. Part of East Anglia at least had by 825 also become something of an under-kingdom of Wessex. As we have already mentioned, the south, Suffolk, together with Sussex, Surrey, Kent and Essex, seems to have been more or less controlled not by Offa, but by Athelstan, the eldest son of King Ethelwulf of Wessex, who was based in Kent. Offa himself had probably been

sovereign in Norfolk only, which explains why Edmund had landed near Hunstanton in Norfolk and why Attleborough in Norfolk had become Offa's capital ⁴.

However, by 853 at latest, Athelstan had died, possibly in battle with the Danes in Kent, and King Ethelwulf himself had taken responsibility for the south-east, leaving the Wessex heartland proper to the control of another son, Ethelbald. But Ethelwulf soon saw that in terms of logistics Wessex was unable to control, let alone defend, East Anglia. This is yet another reason why Offa, with the blessing of Wessex, would have gone in search of an heir of East Anglian royal blood in Saxony. An East Anglian, he would have wanted a young man who could draw together the northern and southern halves of his people and re-establish the old Kingdom of East Anglia. And Wessex too would have had vested interests in prompting the elderly King to seek a youthful heir, one able to protect Eastern England from the constant threat of Danish Viking raiders, which Wessex was unable to do itself.

Edmund's first move therefore was to go to Wessex in order to obtain the support of King Ethelwulf. Ethelwulf of Wessex (839–58) was the son of King Egbert (802–39), who, it may be recalled, had been in exile like Edmund's father, Alcmund. Edmund must have received Ethelwulf's approval. Ethelwulf was also the father of the future King Alfred and we know that Edmund, accompanied by Bishop Hunbert, attended a meeting in the Wessex capital, Winchester, on 5 November 855, in which all present, including the young Alfred, vowed to fight the ever-increasing menace of the Danes. This was the beginning of a friendship between two young princes, Alfred, then a boy, and Edmund, aged fourteen.

On Edmund's return to Attleborough from Wessex, on Christmas Day 855, East Anglian nobles, headed by Bishop Hunbert, acknowledged Edmund's sovereignty over them. Edmund, however, was as far as we know only fourteen and the East Anglian Kingdom much divided. And despite the seal of Wessex approval, Edmund's authority would appear to have extended only over the Norfolk region around Attleborough. As yet he had no support among the south folk, Suffolk, where East Anglian power was at its weakest. Edmund would have to prove himself and earn the respect of all the people of East Anglia, no doubt suspicious of this youth from Saxony, before he could be accepted as their king and be crowned. This was what he prepared for in the coming year.

Throughout 856 Edmund stayed in Attleborough, becoming acquainted with his Kingdom and its most important nobles, particularly those from the south. Here, we are told, under the direction of Bishop Hunbert, he learnt the whole Psalter by heart. (This Psalter would later be piously kept at Bury St Edmunds until the Reformation.) Edmund also met nobles from all over East Anglia, alarmed at the rumours of new Danish raiding and the resulting depopulation of the defenceless Norfolk coast. The thanes or nobles who had not accompanied Offa to Saxony would have heard from eyewitnesses of how King Offa had chosen his heir, they would have seen the

coronation-ring, and they would already have known, perhaps personally, Alcmund's branch of the East Anglian royal family in Saxon exile. They would already have known that, despite his youth, Edmund indeed was of royal blood and a King's son. All this and the approval of Wessex, together with Edmund's own virtuous character and maturity, was enough to persuade the East Anglians thanes that this was their future King. Towards the end of 856, Edmund made a royal progress throughout East Anglia and received the acclaim of the people. According to a later source ⁵, it would seem that Edmund was elected King at Caistor St Edmund, just to the south of Norwich. Here Edmund had some kind of royal residence and the people came so to love him that after his martyrdom they were to build a church and dedicate it to his memory. Thus it was that in 856, Edmund was to be anointed and crowned King of East Anglia.

This ceremony may have taken place not at Attleborough, but at Bures on the very border of Suffolk and Essex ⁶. This town commanded the strategic crossing-place over the 'fast-flowing' River Stour between East Anglia and the Kingdom of the East Saxons, now very much reduced by subjugation to others more mighty, first Mercia, now Wessex. The possible choice of Bures, at first sight strange, can be explained in three ways. First of all, it was a strategic crossing-point into the very insular Kingdom of East Anglia. Secondly, as the most important border-town of East Anglia, coronation there was a token of East Anglian renewal, an advertisement to the outside world. Thirdly it was a gesture to the 'south folk' – this was no mere princeling from the 'north folk', this was the King of all the people of East Anglia.

To this day there stands in the parish of Bures St Mary, overlooking Bures itself, a thatched church called St Stephen's Chapel or the Barn Chapel. It is said to have been built on the very site of the church where on Christmas Day 856, a Friday, Edmund was crowned. Nearby, local tradition preserves the presence of Edmund in a narrow lane recently renamed 'St Edmund's Lane', and a mile or so to the north on the Sudbury Road, on a hill known as 'St Edmund's Hill'. We can suppose that Edmund once rode along both of them. It was here then on this hill at Bures St Mary, with one of the most splendid views in Suffolk overlooking the Stour Valley, that Edmund was anointed and then crowned King of East Anglia by the Bishop of Norfolk, Hunbert of Elmham and, we suppose, the Bishop of Suffolk, Ethelwald of Dunwich.

In accordance with the coronation ceremony of the time, here the young King made his vows: 'In the name of the Holy Trinity, in all the days of my life let the Church of God and all Christian folk be held in peace, honour and reverence. Let all rapine and all manner of iniquity be forbidden to all my subjects. May justice and mercy be observed in all judgements, that the Great and Merciful God may of His Everlasting Mercy forgive us all' ⁷. The crowning itself was preceded with the words: 'May God crown thee with the crown of glory, with the honour of justice, with the power of strength, that by our blessing with strong faith and abundant fruit of good works, thou mayst obtain the crown of the everlasting Kingdom, by the gift of grace of Him Whose Kingdom remains for ever and ever' ⁸.

With Edmund's reign begins a new age in the history of East Anglia. Ruling from various places, such as the strategically placed Reedham in Norfolk where King Edmund held court, the image we have of him is that of a devout and humble sovereign, utterly dedicated to the defence and well-being of his people, so devoted indeed that he remained a virgin, never marrying. Edmund was swift to put right the injustices that had accumulated during the distant Athelstan's reign in Suffolk and the elderly Offa's absence. 'Edmund the blessed, King of the East Angles, was wise and honourable, and ever glorified by his noble conduct before Almighty God. He was humble and devout, and continued so steadfast that he would not yield to shameful sins, nor in any way did he bend aside his conduct, but was ever mindful of the true teaching.... He was bountiful to the poor and to widows even like a father and benignly led his people ever to righteousness, and controlled the violent, and lived happily in the true faith'⁹. So reads the authoritative *Life of St Edmund* written in the tenth century by St Abbo of Fleury, who concluded: 'He was raised up by God to be the defender of His Church'.

It was into this world that in 865 the storm broke. The storm consisted not this time of Danish Viking marauding as had happened several times since the end of the eighth century and which Offa of East Anglia had already had occasion to repel, but a full-scale Danish Invasion¹⁰. This was led by a certain Ingvar, also called 'Ivar the Boneless', and his brothers Halfdan and Ubba, probably sons of the notorious Viking raider, Ragnar Lothbrok. In the late summer of 865 their Danish Army, some twenty-thousand strong, landed in East Anglia, probably on the almost undefendable Suffolk coast – according to one tradition, at Orford, which they destroyed. Edmund, then aged nearly twenty-four, had been King for nine years. But there was little he could do except organise a kind of resistance movement to withstand the attacks.

We know nothing factual of this period, though there are anecdotes from the Middle Ages. One concerns a Danish siege of Edmund's fortress at Framlingham, where Edmund was betrayed and escaped only by pretending not to be the King. Another time, completely surrounded somewhere near the mouth of the Waveney, Edmund escaped by an unknown ford. On another occasion Edmund, besieged in one of the round towers for which East Anglia is famous, was again victorious through a ruse. However it may be, we are left with the impression that the Danes found East Anglia very convenient. It was a small, weak Kingdom, not far from the coasts of Frisia where they were based. It had grain and horses – all they needed to steal in order to capture the far richer prize of Northumbria. The latter, the furthest from the centre of English power in Wessex, appeared to them to be a ripe fruit ready to fall. Indeed by the autumn of 866 the Danes were in Kings Lynn in Norfolk, stole harvest and horses and then in October rode north. By 1 November York had already fallen.

The following year, 867, on 21 March the Danes defeated the combined Northumbrian attempt to retake York. The Northumbrians left two kings, Osbert and Alla, dead – it was the beginning of the Danelaw, permanent Danish settlement of the north-eastern half of England. The Danes next turned their attention to Mercia and in the same year

captured Nottingham. However Burghred, the King of Mercia, who was closely allied to his brother-in-law Ethelred, King of Wessex ¹¹, appealed for help. Within a year, in October 868, help appeared in the form of a large army led by Ethelred himself, together with his younger brother Alfred and also Edmund, the two young princes who had first met some eleven years before in Winchester. The appearance of such an army caused the Danes to return to Northumbria without fighting. Here they sacked the monasteries of Lindisfarne, Tynemouth, Coldingham, Wearmouth, Jarrow and Whitby, slaughtering and plundering, as at Coldingham, where they martyred St Ebbe the Younger and all her community. Little wonder that St Abbo, writing the *Life of St Edmund* in about 985, called them ‘the soldiers of Antichrist’.

During this whole period Edmund seems to have been desperately busy organising some sort of adequate defence, a real army, to protect East Anglia against the Danes. In 865 he had been caught unawares. With the Danes now permanently based in York and Northumbria, he knew that they could threaten both Mercia, as they did in 867 and 868, and also East Anglia. It may be that at this time Edmund rebuilt or improved the four great earthworks to the south-west of his Kingdom, Brent Dyke, Bran Dyke, Fleam Dyke and the Devil’s Dyke on Newmarket Heath. Although it is now believed that these fortifications date back before Edmund, perhaps to about the year AD500 when the Britons may have built them as a defence against the invading Germanic peoples, there is no reason why Edmund should not have re-used and refortified them. The fact is that a stretch of the Devil’s Dyke is known as ‘St Edmund’s Ditch’ and at the northern end at the former port of Reach, near Wicken Fen, there is an area called ‘St Edmund’s Fen’. Both place names suggest that Edmund was active here, perhaps hoping to forestall enemy incursions into his Kingdom at this strategic place.

Indeed the Danes did reappear in East Anglia – in 869 ¹². It would seem that Ingvar and Ubba had split their army of twenty thousand into two. One army rode and marched from the north, on the way sacking Bardney monastery in Lincolnshire and then setting on the east Mercian monasteries at Thorney, Peterborough and Ramsey, at Peterborough martyring some eighty-five monks, including Abbot Hedda. From here they pushed down to the dykes of the south-west, ready for the onslaught on East Anglia itself. Meanwhile, probably on 26 August 869, the second army, ‘rowing into East Anglia’ as St Abbo puts it, attacked Crowland monastery by river. Here they slaughtered eighty-one monks, among them the elderly Abbot Theodore. ‘The Danish chief Osketyl burst into the choir and, seizing the venerable Abbot by his white locks, struck off his head at the foot of the altar’ ¹³. From here in September they sailed on to plunder the other fenland East Anglian monasteries at Ely and then Soham, martyring a great many: ‘The intrepid virgins of Christ, the daughters of the noblest Saxon families of England, were sacrificed to the cruellest of heathen tortures, and the flames soon devoured every building within the Isle of Ely’ ¹⁴.

Meanwhile the first army, having reached the dykes near Newmarket, met little opposition, for Edmund had already been outflanked by the second army which was in

Soham, and so had decided to stand and fight elsewhere. As a result, from Newmarket this first army was able to push on to Thetford where it set up winter quarters. And it was here at Thetford in the late autumn of 869 that a pitched battle took place between it and Edmund's forces. For seven hours battle raged with much bloodshed. Edmund was victorious, but at great cost. Having buried his dead and lamented the fate of the unbaptised Danes, he learnt that another army was now marching on him – the troops from Soham. Outmatched, Edmund retreated towards 'Hægildun', a locality in the present parish of Hoxne in the very north of Suffolk, then a considerable administrative centre with a church dedicated to St Ethelbert the Martyr ¹⁵.

Notes

1. Others suggest that Edmund arrived in 854, being crowned therefore in 855. We have preferred the later dates of his coming in 855 and his coronation in 856, which are supported by a greater number of authorities.
2. Camden, a very late authority, suggests King's Lynn as the landing-site and that only then did Edmund make for Hunstanton.
3. Mackinlay p. 285
4. Lydgate, as quoted by Mackinlay p. 36–37.
5. Denis Piramus.
6. Mackinlay, following later writers, Camden, Leyland and Hearn, insists Sudbury and not Bures. His insistence is incomprehensible, contradicting the far more ancient authorities.
7. Mackinlay p. 63
8. Mackinlay p. 65–66
9. Skeat p. 314–16
10. Why did the Danes invade? The mediæval imagination suggested that it was either jealousy (Geoffrey of Wells) or else (Roger of Wendover, followed by Matthew Paris) a revenge attack by Ingvar, Halfdan and Ubba for the alleged murder of their father, Ragnar Lothbrok by Beorn, King Edmund's huntsman. Believing Beorn's slanders that Edmund had been responsible for the murder, they attacked East Anglia. This is all probably mediæval romance. In reality we can think that what the Danes really wanted was land and wealth, a far likelier motivation for the twenty-thousand strong Danish Army.
11. The author's distant ancestor, his 41 times great grandfather.
12. Again some say that the Danish onslaught on East Anglia and Edmund's subsequent martyrdom took place in 870 and not 869. We have preferred the earlier and now generally accepted date which is supported by far more authorities such as Stenton, Farmer and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as edited by Garmonsway.
13. Mackinlay p. 110–11

14. Mackinlay p. 112
15. 'Hægilisdun', whose whereabouts have been so much disputed in recent times, can now definitely be identified with a disappeared 'Hægilisdun' in the parish of Hoxne (pronounced Hoxen), and neither with Hellesdon just outside Norwich, nor the Hellesden field-name in Bradfield St Clare in Suffolk, nor anywhere else. Not only on account of time-honoured local tradition and ancient authorities but also on account of the extraordinary research of the late Mrs Margaret Carey Evans (See Bibliography).

Chapter Three: EDMUND'S MARTYRDOM

The cruel king Ingvar ordered that Edmund be banished or beheaded, if they could not bend him to their laws or otherwise subdue him.

*Hymn at the First Nocturn
for the Feast of St Edmund.*

THUS Edmund headed for Hægilisdun by Hoxne with his much depleted army. Some twenty miles east of Thetford near the source of the River Ouse, it was situated on a spur of land between the River Waveney and one of its tributaries, now called the Goldbrook.

He must have realised that the situation was critical. Although he had been victorious, the flower of his army had perished and here now, twenty miles distant was a fresh army, some ten thousand strong. Ingvar must have realised this, for he offered peace – at a price. A messenger came from Thetford with the offer, an offer which included the Christian Edmund becoming an under-king to the heathen Danes and losing half the riches of the Kingdom. Edmund listened to the bullying threats of the messenger, and then took counsel.

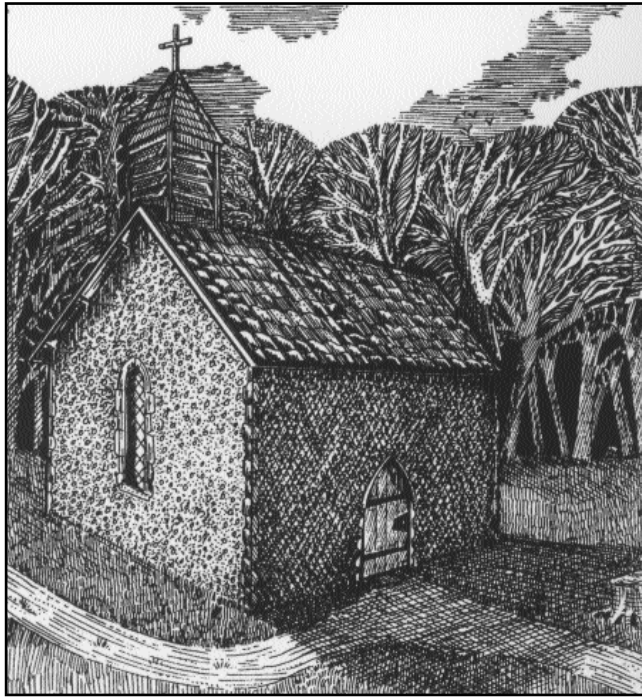
We are told that his Bishop, perhaps Hunbert who would now be a very old man ¹, advised Edmund to accept the conditions. The Danes were too powerful, already they held nearly half the country and most of East Anglia. The only other solution was flight, probably to Wessex, perhaps across the Suffolk-Essex border at Bures, where nearly thirteen years before Edmund had been crowned and had taken his solemn vows of Christian kingship. Edmund would follow neither of his Bishop's counsels. His earliest Life makes it clear that he would neither see himself become the puppet ruler of heathen, nor would he flee from possible martyrdom. His reply to the messenger was, we are told: 'I shall not submit to a heathen master for the love of earthly life; first you must accept our holy faith. King Edmund the Christian prefers to hold his banner high in the court of the Eternal King' ². 'I have vowed to live under Christ, to live under Christ alone, to reign under Christ alone' ³. It would also seem that Edmund saw the possibility that in his own death, his Kingdom might find some measure of peace: 'It is needful that I alone should die for my people, and that the whole nation should not perish' ⁴. With such words ringing in his ears, Ingvar's herald departed and Edmund readied himself for the inevitable.

Ingvar and Ubba, strengthened by new forces, now advanced on Hoxne. They surrounded Edmund, who was at prayer in the chapel of his residence there – a chapel appropriately dedicated to his forebear, St Ethelbert the Martyr. 'When Ingvar came, Edmund the king stood within his hall mindful of the Saviour, and cast aside his arms,

wishing to imitate Christ, Who forbade Peter to use arms. Then those wicked men bound Edmund and shamefully insulted him, beating him with clubs'⁵. The heathen, we are told, tried to make Edmund renounce his Faith: 'Living or dead, nothing shall separate me from the love of Christ. Christ's Faith was his mighty shield'⁶. 'Then they led the faithful King to an earth-fast tree and bound him to it tightly. Afterwards they scourged him for a long time, and ever he called with true faith, on Christ the Saviour. And because of his faith and his calling on Christ to help him the heathen became furious. They shot at him with arrows as if for their pleasure until he bristled with them, even as Sebastian. When Ingvar the wicked seaman saw that the noble king would not deny Christ but called upon Him with steadfast faith, he ordered men to behead him'. (Gaimar, a later chronicler, recalls the name of the heathen who did this – one 'Coran Colbe'). 'Meanwhile he was still calling on Christ, but the heathen dragged the saint away to slay him and struck off his head with a single blow. His soul departed joyfully to Christ'⁷. His last words were 'Jesus! Jesus!'. It was Monday 20 November 869. Edmund was not yet twenty-eight years old; he had reigned for less than thirteen years. Thus he exchanged an earthly crown for a heavenly one, exchanging Kingdom for Martyrdom.

So reads the Life of St Edmund, as dictated to St Abbo in c. 985 by the then Archbishop of Canterbury St Dunstan, who had heard it in his youth from St Edmund's aged sword-bearer, a secret eyewitness of the event. After the slaying of the King at Hægilisdun in the parish of Hoxne, the Danes returned to their ships⁸, flinging into thick brambles the head, which they had taken 'that it might not be buried'. The story continues: 'Then some time after they had gone, country-folk came. and were very sore at heart, especially because they had not the head with the body'. Warned by the armour-bearer, they began to look for the head in the brambles thereabouts, but without success. According to later tradition some forty days later, on 30 December 869, their search was rewarded. In their desperation they cried out, 'Where art thou?' Incredibly they received an answer, which to them sounded like, 'Here, here, here'. Following the sounds they found a grey wolf guarding the head between its paws: 'They were astonished at the wolf's guardianship, and carried the holy head home with them, thanking the Almighty for all His wonders; but the wolf followed forth with the head, as if he were tame, and then turned back again into the wood'⁹. Symbolically the wolf had been converted by St Edmund's sacrifice, just as the sea-wolves, the Danes, would also be converted by their victim¹⁰. 'Then the country folk laid the head by the holy body, and buried him with haste as best they could, and full soon built a church over him'¹¹.

Some 200 years later another larger church was built in honour of St Edmund on the site of his martyrdom at 'Hægilisdun'. By c. 1130 this 'Great Chapel' had become a Priory, becoming known as Hoxne Priory, now Abbey Farm in Cross Street in the parish of Hoxne. Nearby there was a holy well or pool of St Edmund¹².



The site where Edmund's head was found, where the Saint was buried, has recently been discovered together with the foundations of a mediæval chapel, built on the site of the first church of the burial of St Edmund, (see photograph below). This place, called in the Middle Ages 'Sutwode', the south wood, was and is about a mile to the south-west of 'Hægildun'. It is near the hamlet of South Green, which in the Middle Ages was recorded as 'Suddon' and first appears as 'Suthtun' in the work of Archdeacon Hermann of Bury St Edmunds in c. 1097. A Mediæval chapel here is recorded in the Middle Ages as 'the fair chapelle' and 'the

ABOVE LEFT

An artist's impression of the mediæval chapel on the site where St Edmund was first buried.

BOTTOM RIGHT

*Chapel revealed – the ground plan with members of the 'dig' team.
Picture by Suffolk County Council*



chapel in the wood', in 'South Wood', and is sited in a field called 'Chapel Piece'. Built before 1300, according to archæologists it measured 28' by 16', had foundations five feet deep and was of flint-rubble construction bonded with mortar. It had a green glazed peg tiled roof and a yellow tiled floor. The bronze bearing of a bell and some fragments of ancient glass have recently been found there. It seems that a doorway stood to the south and in the centre there was a depression¹². In 1509 a will records that it contained an 'image' of St Edmund before which a lamp and tapers were kept alight¹³. Situated as we have said about a mile to the south-west of the place of Edmund's martyrdom at Hægildun, this chapel is near Rasebridge, a bridge over the River Goldbrook. Folklore, recorded as late as 1712, told that Edmund was beheaded near this bridge¹⁴. This would seem to be a confusion – this was not the scene of the beheading, which occurred at Hægildun, but the site where Edmund's head was found, which was then buried there together with the rest of the body¹⁵.

Notes

1. Although Bishop Hunbert's last signature was in 845, it is certain that he lived until after Edmund's coronation, perhaps even outliving him. According to Symeon of Durham, he was actually martyred together with St Edmund.
2. Houghton p. 28
3. Mackinlay p. 118
4. Mackinlay p. 124
5. Skeat p. 320–22
6. Mackinlay p. 126–7
7. Skeat p. 322
8. Yet another indication that all this occurred at Hoxne, near where the Rivers Ouse, Waveney and Goldbrook run. We should not forget that most of our rivers at this time were far wider and deeper than today when, owing to excessive pumping, many have become little more than streams.
9. Houghton makes the ingenious but possible suggestion that the wolf was in fact Edmund's personal wolfhound, perhaps an English deerhound, which he would have used in hunting (Note St Abbo's words 'as if he were tame'). The peasants of the time could easily have confused a wolf and such a ninth century hound. For those of a sceptical turn of mind, the 'Here, here, here' the peasant-folk heard coming from the mouth of the Saint's head could have been the moaning of the hound, lamenting its dead master. Mackinlay (p. 144) relates that in the nineteenth century a stone chest was found in the ruins of Bury St Edmund's Abbey – it contained the bones of a 'wolf'. Could this have been the remains of St Edmund's wolfhound, buried at Bury St Edmunds after its death to watch over its master's body, in death as in life?
10. Bordier p. 62. See Skeat (p. 316): 'And Ingvar suddenly, like a wolf, stalked over the land ...'

11. Skeat, p. 326
12. Midgley, p. 32. This depression in the centre of the chapel could indicate the site of the original ninth-century grave. According to Midgley a post-hole was also found. In personal correspondence Mr Robert Carr, the archæologist responsible for the excavation, informed the author that the work had yet to be analysed and written up. We eagerly await his report.
13. Evans, *Hoxne and St Edmund*, pp. 17–19
14. Note Rasebridge, and not the present bridge over the Goldbrook which is a Victorian monument. A more recent version of this folk-tale says that Edmund was seen hiding under it by a newly married couple who saw his golden spurs. They then betrayed him to the Danes. As a result, Edmund is said to have laid a curse on all newly-wed couples or couples about to be wed who cross this bridge. To this day many couples who marry in Hoxne still ‘go about’, i.e. avoid passing over this bridge, as it is ‘unlucky’. The fabulous nature of this story can pass without further comment.
15. We are all deeply indebted for the information contained in these last two paragraphs to the late Mrs Margaret Carey Evans. See especially her *Hoxne and St Edmund*, pp. 25–26.

CHAPTER FOUR: Sainthood of a King

Hail, King of the Angles,
Soldier of the King of Angels,
O Edmund, Flower of Martyrs,
Like unto the rose and the lily!
Pour forth prayers to the Lord
For the salvation of the faithful.

*Hymn at Vespers
for the Feast of St Edmund.*

WE now leave the scenes of Edmund's martyrdom and return to the events of 870. Having ravaged the now kingless East Anglians, at the very end of 870, the Danes left Thetford for Reading. But here the Danes met with the army of Wessex, led by King Ethelred and Prince Alfred, shortly to succeed his brother Ethelred as King, and the Danes were defeated. Within a year Ingvar was dead and Ubba had fled the country. English resistance suddenly began to meet with success. Had men been inspired by the knowledge of Edmund's martyrdom? Perhaps. As one writer put it: 'The blood of their holy victim pursued them' ¹. Of course they later returned with reinforcements and forced Alfred, now King, back into Somerset. In the decisive year of 878, Ubba, returning to Devon, was killed with some 800 of his men in a resounding English victory on Countisbury Hill. The tide was turning.

In that same year at Aller in Somerset, the new Danish leader, Guthrum, accepted baptism, taking a new name, Athelstan, and was acknowledged dependent sovereign over East Anglia. His godfather was King Alfred, that very King who in 855 had met Edmund as a boy and who had fought side by side with him at Nottingham in 868. This was the miracle of Edmund's sacrifice, that within nine years the 'sea-wolves' who had martyred him were accepting the Christian Faith. Miraculously, the first Christian King of East Anglia after St Edmund was this Danish Athelstan – the blood of martyrs had indeed triumphed over enmity, both spiritual and racial. True, in 901 after this Athelstan's death and burial at Hadleigh in Suffolk, when Alfred had been succeeded by his son Edward the Elder, Danes from Northumbria endangered East Anglia again. However, the result was that East Anglia was soon united to the rest of England and the miracle of English national unity began in earnest.

Meanwhile, the lowly wooden chapel at Sutton near Hægilisdun in the parish of Hoxne, where Edmund's remains had been buried, witnessed miracles. 'Wonders were often worked at his burial-place, at the bede-house (chapel) where he was buried. A certain widow who was called Oswyn dwelt near the saint's burial place in prayer and fasting for many years after. Every year (on Holy Thursday) she would cut the hair and nails of the saint with sobriety and love and keep them in a shrine as relics on the altar' ². At

night some of the faithful would notice a column of light hovering over the shrine from evening until dawn. Then, according to William of Malmesbury, writing in the twelfth century, one night a blind man and a boy who led him came plodding through the woods. Lost, they spied a lowly building, which they were glad to enter for the night. But once inside, they stumbled onto the grave and realised that this building contained a tomb. Nevertheless they decided to stay. Hardly had they fallen asleep when they awoke, a column of light shining before them. At dawn the blind man awoke and for the first time in his life he saw day break. The miracle was noised abroad – a man blind from birth had regained his sight.

Already by 895 King Alfred had minted coins bearing the image of ‘St Edmund the King’. Other coins had also been struck, through the ironies of Providence, by Danes, styling Edmund ‘Saint’. But it was not until 902, according to some traditions, that the Bishop of London who was responsible for war-torn East Anglia resolved to move the body of St. Edmund to a more worthy place, to Bedricsworth. This had been a royal and monastic centre not only since its foundation by another martyred King of East Anglia, St Sigebert, but also since King Ethelbert the Martyr’s patronage of its monastery. Moreover, and quite extraordinarily, it also lay and lies exactly at the centre of a cross drawn over the four counties of Eastern England, Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex. Although the church and monastery dedicated to the Mother of God had been destroyed by the Danish heathen, there still lived there priests who could care for the relics of Edmund. In preparation they built a church there with oak walls and a thatched roof. Inside this lofty and spacious building was hung the costliest tapestry that could be found.

The Bishop with his clergy proceeded the twenty-five miles to Sutton by Hoxne to fetch the relics. On opening the coffin, they were amazed for they saw not bones and dust, but their martyred King Edmund, his body incorrupt as if asleep and his head united with his body – only a threadlike seam around the neck bore witness to his beheading. The arrow wounds had also healed. ‘With tears and prayers the devout multitude carried the body to the shrine in the new church, there to await in the same peaceful sleep the joys of the resurrection. In this manner took place the first translation of St Edmund, it would seem thirty three years after his burial ³.

Later history did not forget the site of Edmund’s martyrdom. Between c. 950 and c. 1050 Hoxne and its associated Sutton and Hægildun, meaning ‘Hægel’s dun’ – a ‘dun’ being a small hill or rise ⁴ – became the seat of the Bishops of Suffolk. This was no doubt due to the prestige of the site as that of St Edmund’s martyrdom. Seekers after cures and blessings continued to come in pilgrimage to Haegildun and, as we have already mentioned, on the site of the Saint’s martyrdom a Priory was founded. Then to the south-west towards Sutton, on the site where Edmund’s head had been found and the Saint interred in a lowly wooden chapel, a stone chapel was built. Here the Saint was revered until the Reformation, after which he passed into local folklore. And by this time Hoxne itself had lost its importance, becoming no more than a large,

sprawling parish, made up of various hamlets, Cross Street (formerly Hægildun) and South Green (formerly Sutton and then South Wood) among them.

As regards the church at Bedricsworth we are told that it was enriched with gold and silver in the saint's honour. Indeed such was the veneration of the Royal Martyr Edmund at Bedricsworth, that the town was variously called 'St Edmundstowe', 'Edmundston' and 'Kingston'. In 929 Alfred the Great's eldest grandson, King Athelstan of England, came with the future St Dunstan of Canterbury on pilgrimage to the shrine. It was here that Dunstan, then about twenty years old, heard the story of Edmund's martyrdom as related by Edmund's elderly armour-bearer – the story which Dunstan would later tell St Abbo some three years before his own death in 988.

At that time in 'Edmundston' there were four priests, Leofric, Alfric, Bomfield and Ailmund, who cared for the relics, helped by two deacons, Kenelm and Leofric. Later their numbers would increase to fourteen priests and five deacons. In 945 they were given land in the generous charter, the first of many, of another grandson of Alfred the Great, King Edmund. The latter had clearly received his name in honour of the Saint, to whom he had a special devotion. From this time a number of miracles are recorded of the saint. Thus one night thieves broke into the church to steal the treasures given by the people. However they were fearstruck by the force of the saint and then discovered in the morning, transfixed.

It was in about 950 that the relics were transferred by the then Bishop of London, who had responsibility for East Anglia. This was Bishop Theodred (942–51) who was probably himself from Suffolk. He translated the relics from their original shrine in Bedricsworth to a new shrine. The body was found to be still whole and incorrupt⁵. Later, in about 980, a certain Leofstan, an arrogant and disbelieving man, visited the shrine and demanded that he be shown the saint's body to see if it were truly incorrupt, which of course it was. Leofstan was struck down, raving and roaring for his unbelief and pride. His father, Alfgar, a godly man, disinherited his son who died 'an evil death'⁶.

Seeing that the married priests who were then in charge of the relics were lax, in 990 Athelstan, Bishop of East Anglia, decided to make a monk responsible for the relics. He chose the monk Ailwin, son of Oswy and Leoflede, pious patrons of the shrine of St Audrey in Ely. Ailwin was a disciple of St. Wolfeius, a hermit of the monastery of St Benet Hulme in Norfolk. A man utterly devoted to the veneration of St Edmund, with whom he spoke as if face to face, Ailwin took the greatest care of the relics, which he found incorrupt.

When twenty years later in 1010 new Danish invasions began, it was Ailwin who, fearing the worst, decided to take the relics to London for safekeeping. He set off, taking the relics on a litter. Reaching the Essex border, probably at Bures, he stopped at the house of a certain priest Edbert, father of Abbot Alfwin of Ramsey. Then he

headed for the Colchester-London road. Miraculously entering London, he was greeted by clergy and people, who took the coffin of the great Eastern King, defender of his people against the Danes, on their shoulders through the Aldgate into the City, amid eighteen recorded miracles of healing: to the blind he gave sight, to the deaf hearing, to the dumb speech, the crippled and paralysed regained the use of their limbs and lepers were made clean. Truly, this was the Light from the East.

For three years the relics were kept in the church of St Gregory the Great close to St Paul's Cathedral. It was now that Edmund truly became a national saint, the symbol of patriotic resistance, the defender of English Christendom, such as Alfred the Great had conceived, and his relics in London were associated with many miracles. Indeed after their departure, which was much resisted by Ælfhun, Bishop of London, a church dedicated to St Edmund the Martyr was built nearby in what is now Lombard Street. From this time one may truly consider that St Edmund became England's Patron Saint.

In 1013 when Ailwin thought the danger over, he returned the relics to 'St Edmundstowe'. Taking the old Essex road, he arrived in Stapleford. Here the local lord was healed of an illness by the relics and consequently the village was presented to St Edmundstowe – hence its present name, Stapleford Abbotts. Then he proceeded to Greensted where the remains of the wooden church in which the relics rested still stand. Next he proceeded through Chelmsford to Braintree and Clare in Suffolk and then home.

At this time, however, in 1013, England was unexpectedly attacked again by a particularly brutal Dane. This was Sven, or Sweyn Forkbeard, one who had killed his own father in order to get to the throne. His onslaught on the country caused England's foolish King, Ethelred 'the Unready' to flee to Normandy in January 1014. The victorious Sweyn decided to ransom England with a huge tax. When Ailwin heard of the tax, applicable also to St Edmundstowe, which by special privilege had never been taxed before, Ailwin was much perturbed. St Edmund appeared to him in a dream, 'shining and glorious, in robes as white as snow', and told him to go to Sweyn with a warning not to tax St Edmund's shrine for, 'I am a terrible defender of my own'. Ailwin duly did so and was of course dismissed as a fool by a livid Sweyn. The night after, that of 2–3 February 1014, Sweyn died, shouting in delirium that Edmund had struck him with a spear. Thus for the second time Edmund had delivered his country from a tyrannical Northman. Archdeacon Hermann of Bury, writing in 1095, commented, quoting Psalm 109: 'The Lord hath broken kings in the day of His wrath. He shall crush their heads in the land of the many'.

In thanksgiving for deliverance from Sweyn, the people of St Edmund's lands began paying a voluntary tax to the shrine. This came to fourpence a year on every carucate of ploughland they possessed, hence this tax was called a 'Carucagium'. Supposed to be perpetual, in fact after the Conquest in 1096 it was more or less stolen by the new Norman Bishop of Norwich, the Italian simoniac Herbert de Losinga. Partly as a result

of Sweyn's death, Edmund's reputation as a 'defender of his own' so grew that when much later in 1294 Edward I wanted to tax the Saint's town, it is said that he too was threatened by the Saint and had to abandon his intentions.

Sweyn was succeeded by his son, Knut, better known to English history as Canute. He was opposed by another Edmund, Edmund Ironside, who no doubt also bore his name in honour of Edmund the Martyr. He was the great-great-great-grandson of Alfred, but unfortunately died suddenly in Oxford in 1016, probably poisoned, before he could win England back from Canute.

Canute obviously took St Edmund seriously. Indeed in 1020 this former drunkard and murderer decided to found a great and richly endowed monastery in the Borough of St Edmunds, St Edmundsbury, as St Edmundstowe now became, in expiation for his father's crimes. Symbolically, Canute offered his crown to St Edmund, buying it back with gifts of land, and acknowledging the Saint as Conqueror and Lord of the Danes. Later, other English Kings would do the same. From this time on the monastery of St Edmund became richer and richer. By 1044 its 'liberty' or patrimony came to include a third of Suffolk, including all of West Suffolk. Canute in particular promised chastisement to any who took from it. Pilgrims began to come in great numbers and pilgrims ways developed, especially the road to Newmarket and the London road, as taken by Ailwin when he had returned to St Edmundstowe in 1013. Later, pilgrims brought in a pious custom of kneeling as soon as they caught sight of the monastery and then walking the last mile to it barefoot.

In 1020 the first Abbot of the monastery was Ælfric. As for Ailwin, in 1021 he became Bishop of Elmham, the old see of Bishop Hunbert. By 1032 the monks in Bury St Edmunds had built a new cruciform stone church. Measuring some two hundred feet in length and one hundred feet from transept to transept, alongside it stood a circular tomb chapel for the relics. On 18 October 1032 the then Archbishop of Canterbury, St Ethelnoth, dedicated this church in honour of the Saviour, Our Lady and St Edmund. The relics of St Edmund were transferred with great ceremony in the presence of King Canute himself and the aged Bishop Ailwin. At this time the relics were all intact and St Edmund was still wearing the reliquary of the True Cross, obtained by King Offa in Constantinople nearly 300 years before.

The next verification of the relics occurs in 1050 when a pious woman, Ælfgeth, recovered her speech thanks to St Edmund. In gratitude she worked around the shrine, cleaning and scrubbing the floor. St Edmund appeared to her three times in dreams and told her that the wooden lid of his coffin was decaying. Although at first the new Abbot, Leofstan, would not believe her, he eventually gave in. On examining the relics which gave off a wonderful perfume, he found that woodworm was indeed destroying the coffin lid. The relics themselves, however, were in perfect condition. When this Abbot Leofstan died, he shared a tomb with the widow Oswyn and Bishop Ailwin at Edmund's feet.

After the Conquest of 1066 even the Norman rulers with their new-style Faith continued to venerate the English St Edmund. Notably in 1095 the old English cruciform church was unfortunately destroyed and a typically vast Norman Abbey church was built in its stead by the French Abbot Baldwin. It would stand until the Dissolution in 1539. In 1095 the relics were moved to their new shrine in this new church, together with the relics of St Jurmin and St Botulf. At this time the relics were once more verified and miracles took place. After a fire in 1198 under Abbot Samson, according to the Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond, the relics were again verified – for the seventh time – and found intact. At this time William of Malmesbury recorded that there were five bodies of Saints in England which remained entirely incorrupt, their joints supple, the flesh unwasted and lying as if asleep. They were St Audrey in Ely, St Werburgh in Chester, St Alphege in Canterbury, St Cuthbert in Durham and St Edmund. As St Abbo had written two centuries before:

‘The English nation is not bereft of the Saints of the Lord, since in the English land lie such saints as this holy king and the blessed Cuthbert and Saint Audrey in Ely’⁷.

But this verification of 1198 would be the last time in the relics’ extraordinary destiny that they would be recorded incorrupt.

Less than twenty years later England found itself in the grip of civil war, a result of the tyranny of King John. Already, most significantly, at Bury St Edmunds on the very feast-day of St Edmund in 1214, the barons together with Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, had plotted against John. The latter’s incompetence was such that he had even seen himself and his Kingdom put under interdict by the Pope for four long years. The plotters were successful, forcing John to sign the Magna Carta seven months later in 1215 at Runnymede. But when the hated King died a year later, two claimants to the throne appeared. One was John’s son, a boy, Henry III. The other claimant was Louis VIII of France, whose wife, Blanche of Castille, was the grand-daughter of Henry II. The land was divided. Thus it was, probably in June or July 1217, that Louis sent a company of knights on to Bury St Edmunds and, presumably with the secret complicity of monks favourable to Louis’ cause, stole the relics of England’s Patron Saint, St Edmund. By September, however, before Louis could make use of his possession of the relics of the National Saint, his cause had been lost. He was obliged to return to France – but he took with him the huge sum of 10,000 marks and the relics of St Edmund. And by 1219 these relics had been placed in the Cathedral of Toulouse in south-western France, where they were to stay until our own century⁸.

It can hardly be a coincidence that it was from this period after the theft, the thirteenth century on, that St Edmund was gradually ‘lost’ as England’s Patron Saint, replaced by St George. Indeed by the middle of the fourteenth century, St Edmund seems to have been effaced as Patron. Despite the Kings of England who continued to go to Bury St Edmunds on pilgrimage, the Patron-Saint of Old England, St Edmund, had been displaced by the Patron-Saint of a New England, St George. Moreover miracles worked

by Saint Edmund seemed to become less and less frequent. Indeed most recorded miracles seemed to have occurred very early, if we are to judge by the accounts of those who received healing, mainly in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries. As one writer remarked, the last recorded miracle in Bury St Edmunds occurred in c. 1200⁹.

The further we move into the twelfth century and beyond, the more it seems as if the grace from St Edmund's tomb were 'drying up', or rather, as if there were a dying out of the sincere veneration of the right faith to win grace. As St Abbo had put it in 985: 'Christ showeth to men where the true faith is, since He worketh such miracles through His saints'¹⁰. Thus, apart from the miracles already related, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries only, we hear of healings of a Lord Leofstan, of Osgod, master of Edward the Confessor's horse, a blind girl Lyeveva, Brichtiva, house-keeper of Odo a priest, a London merchant Deorman, an Essex woman Ælfweve, a Bury townsman Wolmar, many simple unnamed folk, and then many cases of chastisement of Normans who attempted to seize land or goods which belonged to St Edmund. Such cases include Bishop Herfast of Thetford, William Fitzasketil, Robert de Curzun, his successor William, Gyrenew de Mouneyn, Roger Bigot, Eustace, son of King Stephen, the Knights Ranulf and Yvo and the thief Henry of Essex¹¹. It often seems as if Edmund were protecting simple and humble English peasant-folk against their corrupt Norman masters. We cannot help remembering that the Normans themselves were Danes in origin and we recall St Edmund's words to King Sweyn: 'I am a terrible defender of my own .

Presuming that the theft of St Edmund's relics in 1217 had taken place secretly, certain later monks of Bury, probably a select few, must nevertheless have discovered that the relics had been removed. Of course when the discovery was made, as at some point during the Middle Ages it must have been, especially as word must have got round that Toulouse now laid claim to the relics, no Abbot was going to admit the fact. This was after all the Western Middle Ages, when the Church had become a State and religion was hopelessly confused with politics and economics from the head of Western Christendom down. The result was that principles like honesty came second and the fraud of letting a nation venerate an empty shrine came first. (The result being, of course, the popular revolts of the Middle Ages, starting already in the eleventh century, leading to the Reformation). But as regards the simple monks and pious pilgrims, their faith was no doubt such that they would refuse to believe in the possibility of theft; in any case they were in a holy place, whether the relics were there or not.

Proof that the Abbots at least passed down the secret that the shrine was empty, comes in 1400 when Abbot Cratfield 'took' £30 from the shrine to defray the costs of a papal election. He would hardly have done so had he thought that the shrine contained the relics of the Saint¹². Certainly in 1193 his predecessor Abbot Samson had categorically refused to take anything from the shrine to help pay for Richard the Lionheart's ransom. Even when in 1465 a great fire took place in the Abbey Church, no inspection of the relics occurred; the Abbot, and perhaps others, must have known that there were no

relics in the shrine to be inspected. And as regards the Dissolution of 1539, there is absolutely no mention of any relics of St Edmund, merely of his shrine, 'whiche was very comberous to deface'¹³. (It was at this time that Henry VIII had St Edmund's name removed from the litanies of the Saints venerated in England). In other words between 1198 and 1539, for a period of 341 years the shrine was never opened. And this in spite of fire and two revolts of the townspeople against the Norman Abbey, in 1327 when the Abbey was attacked and burnt, and in 1379–81 when three monks were beheaded. When we compare this with the very regular inspections of the relics up until the eleventh century, then surely it is clear that at least the Abbots knew that the relics had been removed.

Meanwhile in Toulouse St Edmund had become one of the Patrons of the town. His relics, deposited in a Cathedral rich with relics from Apostolic times, lay relatively neglected (perhaps also on account of their sacrilegious theft). However, they were mentioned in a breviary, probably written in 1443. Later they were listed in inventories in 1489, 1504 and 1515, and in 1575 a Cathedral fresco of St Edmund, painted some two hundred years before, was restored. After this the relics were verified and catalogued in 1644, following the intercessions of St Edmund during the plague in Toulouse some years before. On this occasion a new silver reliquary was provided for the relics and a canon of the Cathedral, Pierre de Caseneuve, wrote a Life of the Saint. At this date the relics were no longer incorrupt. Given their general mistreatment and the number of sacrilegious hands they had been through since their theft, this is hardly surprising. Nevertheless they were still there, apart from three small bones, which had probably been removed and distributed, perhaps to Bordeaux and Dijon in France¹⁴. The relics in Toulouse were authenticated yet again in 1804 and 1807.

For the next event we must return to the humble village of Hoxne. It was here in a field by Abbey Farm, the former Hoxne Priory, on a calm summer's evening in August 1848 that the sole surviving witness of Edmund's martyrdom, the oak-tree to which by local tradition Edmund had been tied before being shot at, fell by its own weight. The rings in its twenty feet girth were counted and it was found to be over a thousand years old. When the trunk was sawn up, embedded in a black knot that had grown around it, in the very heart of the tree about five feet from ground level, what seemed to be a small arrow-head was found. Experts considered this to be unquestionable proof of the ancient local tradition that this was indeed St Edmund's Oak. Wood from the oak was variously used, notably for a screen in Hoxne church showing St Edmund's cruel martyrdom, for a wooden-bound Bible, a prayer-book for Greensted church in Essex and a table and chest. In 1879 a stone cross, since renewed, was erected on the site of the oak.

Meanwhile before this, in 1867, 1872 and 1874, the Archbishop of Toulouse had distributed four small portions of the relics of St Edmund to various English Roman Catholic communities, including to the Roman Catholic church in Bury St. Edmunds¹⁵. Perhaps with this in mind, in 1901 Cardinal Vaughan of the then reviving Roman

Catholic Church in England asked the Archbishop of Toulouse for the return of the relics of England's former Patron Saint. Ideally they could be deposited in the altar of Westminster Cathedral which was then being built. Eventually the Archbishop of Toulouse agreed to the request, but only in part, as he wished to keep the head-relic. Thus it was that on 25 July 1901 the body-relics of St Edmund the Martyr arrived at Newhaven and were temporarily deposited in the Catholic church in Arundel, awaiting the completion of Westminster Cathedral.

It was at this point that a number of academics raised objections that these relics were not authentic. Amazingly, Cardinal Vaughan caved in to their attacks – probably unwilling to own up to the fraud on the part of the Roman Catholic Abbots of Bury St Edmunds during the Middle Ages. In France, however, the Archbishop of Toulouse set up a scientific commission to verify the head-relic which he had kept – the commission fully accepted its authenticity. Thus in Toulouse and in those places where the distributions of 1867, 1872 and 1874 had taken place, the relics were accepted as authentic, in Arundel, they were not! Astonishingly and almost inexplicably, this is how the situation remains to this day.

Notes

1. Mackinlay p. 147
2. Skeat p. 326–8
3. Mackinlay p. 153, following the Bury Life.
4. Ekwall
5. Mackinlay p. 156
6. Mackinlay p. 158
7. Skeat p. 332
8. It has been suggested that the Toulouse claim was entirely spurious and that St Edmund's relics remained at Bury until the Reformation when they were burnt and then buried in the grounds. This theory has now been discredited. Why ever should a provincial town in France have laid claim to St Edmund's relics if they did not really possess them? Even the ultramontanist Mackinlay, following Roger of Wendover, accepts the Toulouse claim, therefore by implication admitting that during the Middle Ages at least some of the higher Catholic clergy at Bury St Edmunds were dishonest. The argument seems to have been clinched, however by the inspired and much ignored work of Bordier. The Anti-Toulouse School has surely been demolished by Bordier and later, under Bordier's influence, Houghton, a priest for whom faith counted more than expediency. If there are any relics of the Saint buried in the Abbey grounds, they can only be ashes of secondary relics, such as are listed in Mackinlay pp. 255–263. These include parings from the Saint's nails taken by Oswyn, the Saint's shirt, drinking-cup and sword.
9. Thompson, p. 47

10. Skeat p. 334
11. Mackinlay p. 270–306
12. Mackinlay p. 232
13. Houghton p. 70
14. Mackinlay p. 256
15. Bordier p. 98–9



*A line draft of the Icon of St Edmund, King and Martyr, which is venerated in the Orthodox Church of St Felix and St Edmund in Felixstowe.
(Iconographer: Helen McIlldowie-Daltrey)*

EPILOGUE: One Kingdom And Anglia

Exult, O Holy Church of all the English people; behold to Thee it is given to praise the illustrious king and most invincible martyr Edmund, who triumphing over the princes of this world, went up to heaven with great victory. O Holy Father Edmund, hearken to those who pray unto thee.

*Hymn at the Magnificat
for the Feast of St Edmund.*

AND so we come to the end of our story. Eleven and a half centuries and more have passed since it began. But a Saint's Life does not end when his life ends, for the Life carries on after bodily death. Down all the years men and women have not ceased to call on St Edmund and the holiness and brightness he has brought have always been with us, in ways seen and unseen.

Alfred was the first to find inspiration in St Edmund, the Light from the East, the gift born on Christmas Day, the defender of England, the founder of a national conscience, the worker of the miracle of the combined revival of Christianity and English patriotism, the miracle of national unity worked by the Church. Alfred's own grandson bore his name, a name which that Edmund then passed on to his great-grandson, Edmund Ironside, for many the last legitimate King of Old England. St Edmund became a national hero and his name, meaning 'blessed protection', became a reality as he was adopted as England's Patron Saint, 'a terrible defender of his own'. He was a most popular Saint, over sixty churches in twenty-four different counties were dedicated to him. All down the Middle Ages kings came to worship at his shrine, even after his relics were stolen – an act of Providence which would then keep them in safety elsewhere. Both after the First Reformation of the Norman Conquest, when men became less sincere and righteous in their faith and piety and miracles fewer, and also after the Second Reformation in the sixteenth century, when Edmund's very name was erased from the litanies of the land, there were those, as we have seen, who kept St Edmund in their hearts and minds.

The Life of St Edmund is not without parallel outside England. His family was rejected and, as it appears, went into exile, where Edmund was born and grew up. Having come into his own Kingdom which he ruled with mercy and truth, his enemies, the enemies of the Cross, part of which he carried on him, took him. He had put away his own sword and he readied himself to die as a sacrifice for his people. As he called with his last breath on the name of Christ, they martyred him in a cruel crucifixion, that nevertheless brought inner light to his soul and resurrection to his Kingdom and the whole land. An earthly kingdom exchanged for the heavenly kingdom, a crown of man for a crown of God.

Thirty-three years later his remains were transferred to a town at the very crossways of Eastern England, a town which ever after has been known by the name of the Saint. His standard and that of his town became a figure of three gold crowns on an azure ground with two arrows through each crown, 'saltierwise', diagonally: one crown for his Kingship, one crown for his Purity and one crown for his Martyrdom. As Lydgate put it – 'Martyr, Mayde and Kyng'. Three crowns at the Cross. The standard which his Eastern Kingdom then took as its own was the Standard of Our Lord, the red cross of sacrificial blood on the white background of purity, the red of Edmund's rose and the white of his lily, but with, in the centre, three gold crowns on an azure ground. And this Light from the East, like the sun, then spread to the West, to Wessex, whence came the rebirth of the whole English nation.

Although they have done their best to lose Edmund, he will not go away from us, he is still with us. In Hoxne in 1991, on Chapel Piece, they uncovered the chapel built where St Edmund's head had been found and his earthly remains buried 1122 years before in 869. She who was responsible for the find after twenty years of seeking, the late Mrs. Margaret Carey Evans, spoke thus: 'You know the way Edmund comes and goes in English history? Well, the first miracle associated with him is said to have been a white light from the sky. I've seen that light. It was years ago ... It was only there for a few minutes ... It came out of the sky and we could see where it landed. The light landed where in the end we found the chapel' ¹.

St Edmund is still with us, the National Saint and Patron of that Anglia which is for now part of One Kingdom. And inasmuch as we are still part of that Anglia, 'Anglians' or 'Englisc', as our forebears would have put it, Edmund is not lost for us, he is still our Patron Saint.

And in this we are strengthened by the words of an ancient prophecy from Old England: 'After Blessed Edmund has thrice blown his horn, leaving Bedricsworth, he shall return to Hoxne' ². Now St Edmund first entered 'Bedricsworth', as Bury St Edmunds was then known, in 902. Returning from London, he entered for the second time in 1013. On both occasions his entrance was celebrated by a great gathering of people and with great ceremony, in other words 'with sound of horn'. Although the Saint's relics returned to England nearly one hundred years ago, despite the strivings of men, for some humanly inexplicable, mystical reason, the time has not yet come for their return to his town, for we have not yet become worthy to find again that which we have lost, the Faith of this Saint of God and all the heritage of Old English culture and civilisation he bears in him. For he will not return to us until we have returned to him and all that he stands for.

When will his third entrance be? And when, after this, will St Edmund return to Hoxne? When will the Saint come home, once more to defend his own? When will his miracle be repeated and the blind see the day break?

Only the history of the future can give us the answers to these mysteries.

St Edmund's Tide, 1996

Notes:

1. The *Sunday Telegraph Review*, 24 October 1993.
2. Thompson, p. 48–9. The prophecy must surely be Old English on account of its mentioning the old name of Bury St Edmunds, Bedricsworth.

APPENDIX I

AT the beginning of each chapter we have quoted the first hymns of the liturgical office in honour of St Edmund, written in c. 985 by St Abbo of Fleury, the author of St Edmund's Life. We are now including the next hymns of this office from the Nocturn lessons. As part of the liturgical heritage of the first millennium of English Christianity, this seems to us to be of great interest. These hymns are taken with some minor changes to the translation from Mackinlay p. 331–7.

From the First Nocturn.

I Edmund, a boy of saintly cast of mind, came of an ancient race of kings. The heavenly King fashioned him that he might bring him into heaven as his co-heir. The grace of the Holy Ghost enlightened his childhood, for the spirit of the Lord Jesus within him was pleasing to Him.

II Transcendent was our glory and great was our safety, for the prince of God, Edmund, was raised up to the throne of the kingdom. Since in the temple of God he shone forth even as a column of light. His life, glorious in its virtues, stood out by its holiness and was adorned with godliness.

III The holy soldier of Christ, Edmund, full of the Holy Ghost, spoke to the king: Thy friendship bends not my will, and thy threats and torments make me not afraid. For it is glorious to die for the Lord. Fire and sword are sweet to me above honey and the honeycomb.

The Second Nocturn.

Hymn: Edmund indeed did speak, but it was the Holy Ghost speaking through his lips: Threats of banishment make me not afraid, and a king's friendship moves me not. It is pleasant to die for God; behold let it be given to me to become a sacrifice to God.

Hymn: Bound with chains, he is piteously mocked and tied to a tree, he is marked by scourges; then for Christ he joyfully embraces the many ways of death.

Hymn: In proportion to the glory of the reward, so grew the pain; as a target he is set and covered over with darts; and he embraces a thousand deaths, while he prays to Christ with countenance serene.

IV The holy one of God grows bolder as the pain grows more; set as a target, he is buried under a shower of arrows. And through all the martyr stands unconquered and the soldier victorious. Streams of blood flow from every limb, nor is there any more place for a wound.

V Ingvar orders the martyr who still breathes but confesses Christ to be beheaded. And so Edmund consummates his martyrdom and rejoicing goes to God. Severed from the body, the head most holy answers words of prayer.

VI The people devoted to God set out to seek the head parted from the body but living still. Shedding tears, they said: Alas, good shepherd, alas, kind father Edmund, where art thou? The Lord has heard the cry of the poor and He has received the groans of His servants.

The Third Nocturn.

Hymn: Having dismissed the guard, the tyrant decreed that the champion of God Edmund should be beheaded; and so he sang forth his hymn to God and rejoicing brought his soul to heaven.

Hymn: O invincible martyr! O Edmund, indomitable witness! This day freed thee from the earth, and with triumph led thee into the court of heaven; intercede in heaven for us who on earth sigh to thee.

Hymn: The people devoted to God set out to seek the head parted from the body but living still. Shedding tears they said: Alas, good shepherd, alas, kind father Edmund, where art thou?

VII The head of the martyr uttered words. Behold the one whom you seek, it says, behold me now your patron with God. The kind father had compassion on his beloved, whom he consoled with kind words.

VIII Wondrous was the hand of God on him. For there lay a wolf watching with sorrow over the martyr. From joy at the wonder, the hearts of the people burst forth into tears.

IX O invincible martyr! O Edmund indomitable witness! This day freed thee from the earth and with triumph led thee into the court of heaven: intercede in heaven for us who on earth sigh to thee. Shining before the throne of God in thy illustrious robe, we pray thee, O loving father, intercede in heaven for us who on earth sigh to thee. O martyr, our souls rise up to thee in our affliction. Groaning for our past offences, our souls mourn for their sins. O Edmund, King and Martyr, our hope, graciously receive the vows of thy servants. To us who on earth send forth deep sighs to thee, grant the joys of heaven.

APPENDIX II

On Edmund the Martyred King

Men become devils and all dreams overthrown,
Shadows of moonlit trees and faces unknown.
Hope itself, with Edmund's England, here lies slain.
Be warned: He will haunt you and come back again.

Bury King Edmund beneath the arrow shower.
Bury King Edmund beneath the fading hour.
Bury King Edmund beneath the stubble ground.
Bury King Edmund beneath the forest mound.

Bury King Edmund beneath the failing light.
Bury King Edmund beneath the thick of night.
Bury King Edmund beneath the stars that stand.
Bury King Edmund beneath his gentle land.

Bury King Edmund beneath the autumn bough.
Bury King Edmund beneath the snow and plough.

Edmund's spirit is in little market towns,
Where we'd live as simple souls and win our crowns.
As a Saint, Edmund has shone forth through our tears,
Edmund's prayed for us through all the clouded years.

Bury King Edmund beneath the spring green born.
Bury King Edmund beneath the standing corn.

Bury King Edmund beneath the hearts that cower.
Bury King Edmund beneath the lust for power.
Bury King Edmund beneath the greed for gold.
Bury King Edmund beneath the mind grown cold.

Bury King Edmund beneath the old faith lost.
Bury King Edmund beneath the darkness crossed.
Bury King Edmund beneath Empire that lied.
Bury King Edmund beneath the proud mind's pride.

We who are Edmund's people know only this:
There's no help but in Edmund and his God's bliss
And on the last day he will rise from his grave:
Edmund the Martyred King, risen bright to save.

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