



THE EASTERN ORTHODOX No 136: June 2021

ST JOHN'S RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Military Road, Colchester, Essex CO1 2AN

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The Church of St John of Shanghai, built in 1855, is the largest Russian Orthodox church building in the British Isles, and is attended by 4,000 Orthodox of 24 nationalities, with over 110 baptisms per year. It is a parish of the East of England Orthodox Church Trust (Charity No. 1081707), part of the Local Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church. We care for Orthodox of all nationalities in Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and beyond.

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Timetable of Services / Расписание Богослужений

Saturday 5 June

5.30: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

Sunday 6 June: Sunday of the Man Born Blind / Неделя о слепом

9.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная Литургия

Wednesday 9 June

5.30 pm: Vigil for the Ascension/ Всенощное бдение накануне праздника Вознесения Господня

Thursday 10 June: Ascension Day / Вознесение Господне

9.00 am: Hours and Divine Liturgy / Часы и Божественная Литургия

Saturday 12 June

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

Sunday 13 June: The Holy Fathers of the First Universal Council / Свв. отцов I - ого Вселенского Собора

9.00: Hours and Liturgy / Часы и Божественная литургия

Saturday 19 June

5.30 pm: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

Sunday 20 June: Pentecost – Whitsun – The Feast of the Holy Trinity / Пятидесятница – День Св. Троицы - Сошествие Св. Духа на апостолов

9.00 am: Hours and Liturgy. Vespers with the Kneeling Prayers / Часы и Божественная Литургия. Вечерня с коленопреклонными молитвами

Saturday 26 June

5.30: Vigil / Всенощное бдение

Sunday 27 June: All Saints / Всех святых

9.00 am: Hours and Liturgy / Часы и Божественная Литургия

Monday 28 June: Beginning of the Apostles' Fast / Начало Петрова поста

Date for Your Diary / Важная Дата

Patronal Feast: Saturday 3 July

Престольный праздник: Суббота 3 июля

Baptisms in May

9 May: Ionel Agachi
9 May: Nicolae Podaru
9 May: Medeea Ilinca Gherendi
9 May: Nicolas Lungu
9 May: Casian Ocroteala
9 May: Sofia Caraghin
14 May: Gabriel Bnimzei
14 May: Theodore Rares Hulub
15 May: Liviu Anghel
16 May: Teodor Gutu
20 May: Maria Vechiu
22 May: Maria Cioima
22 May: Ivan Bogdaniuc
22 May: Amalia Blackburn
23 May: Nadiia Thalia Everitt
27 May: Adam Florin Istrate
29 May: Sophia Olaru
29 May: Teodor Ione3scu
29 May: Ioana Sophia Florea
29 May: Gabriel Leho
30 May: Eva Ciobanu

Weddings in May

16 May: Dumitru Luca and Galina Luca
23 May: Ion Scobiola and Irina Scobiola

Church News

Confessions

Please remember that we do not give confessions after the Epistle (Apostle). Please either come earlier on Sundays or else make an appointment with one of the priests at another time. Otherwise you will not be able to take communion if you have not had confession in the last two weeks.

THE LOCAL SAINTS OF EASTERN ENGLAND

**Part 1: Sts. Cyneburgh and Cyneswith, Abbesses of Castor
(March 6/19) and Holy Passion-Bearer Fremund, Prince of
Mercia (May 11/24)**

[Dmitry Lapa](#)

Historically, the eastern part of England was occupied by the early English kingdom of East Anglia which corresponded to what is now Suffolk, Norfolk and the eastern parts of Cambridgeshire, the kingdom of Essex, the minor kingdom of Lindsey, in what is now

Lincolnshire, and the eastern part of the kingdom of Mercia (now called the East Midlands). A considerable area of the region was called the Fens, which comprised the marshland around the Wash from Lincolnshire in the north to Cambridge in the south and Peterborough in the west (these areas were drained in the seventeenth century). Christianity was introduced here in the Roman era, and eastern England produced such celebrated figures as Sts. Botolph of Icanho (Iken), [Etheldreda \(Audrey\) of Ely](#), [Guthlac of Crowland](#), [Edmund the Martyr](#) and [Walstan of Bawburgh](#). The great missionaries, Burgundian [Felix of Dunwich](#) and Irish [Fursey](#), preached here.

It is home to such important church centers as Bedford, Bury St Edmunds, Chelmsford, Crowland, Ely, Lincoln, Norwich, Peterborough, St. Albans, Thorney, Walsingham and Waltham. So many churches were founded in this region that Norfolk is regarded as the area with the highest concentration of churches in the world! Eastern England is flat and low-lying, famous for its long coastline and diverse water ways in the Broads national park. In the Middle Ages its chief industry was wool, and today it is famous for farming and as a center of learning, with the world-famous Cambridge University. The landscapes of East Anglia attracted outstanding painters such as Thomas Churchyard, Thomas Gainsborough, John Constable and Alfred Munnings, as well as writers and poets. This land is rich in its ancient holy places. Let us mention several locally venerated early saints of eastern England.

Venerable Cyneburgh and Cyneswith, Abbesses of Castor

Commemorated March 6/19

The mid-seventh century was a time of dynastic intermarriage in England—a practice that contributed to the spread of Christianity in the kingdoms where paganism still persisted. Mercia in central England was ruled by the ferocious pagan Penda for about thirty years, while Northumbria (then divided into Deira and Bernicia) in the north had already become a beacon of Christianity. At that time, St. Cyneburgh (Kyneburga), one of Penda's daughters, was given in marriage to the young King Alhfrith of Deira (655—664, the southern part of Northumbria), who reigned under his powerful father, King Oswiu of Bernicia (642—670), as a sub-ruler. She was mentioned by the Venerable Bede in his History of the English Church and People: “The Middle Angles, under their Prince Peada, the son of King Penda, received the faith and sacraments of the truth. Being an excellent youth, and most worthy of the title, he was elevated by his father to the throne of that nation, and came to Oswy, king of the Northumbrians, requesting the king's his daughter Elfieda in marriage. But he could not obtain his desire unless he would embrace the Christian faith along with the nation he governed. When he heard the preaching of truth..., he declared that he would willingly become a Christian, even though he should be refused the virgin; being prevailed on to receive the faith by King Oswy's son Aifrid, who was his relation and friend, and had married his sister Cyneherga (Cyneburgh), the daughter of King Penda” (b. III, ch. XI). Apart from in Bede, St. Cyneburgh is mentioned in a number of later hagiographies, chronicles and documents.

After marrying Alhfrith, Queen Cyneburgh became a devout Christian. She may have been introduced to and instructed in the true faith by the Irish St. Finan of Lindisfarne and Sts. Wilfrid and Benedict Biscop (proponents of the so-called “Roman customs”). These were very troubled times. In 655, her father Penda invaded Bernicia with a large army. Later the same year both Oswiu and Alhfrith won a decisive victory over Penda at Cock Beck, at which Penda was killed. The relations between Alhfrith and his father were strained too.

While Oswiu adhered to Irish customs (especially in the observance of Pascha), Alhfrith stuck to Roman practices. After the Synod of Whitby in 664, Alhfrith disappeared from historical records. He may have been killed in a rebellion against his father, or deposed and replaced with King Ecgfrith. It is not known if Alhfrith and St. Cyneburgh had children.

In the 660s, after her husband's death (or even earlier by mutual consent), after losing her father and going through other trials (her brother Peada had been treacherously murdered too), St. Cyneburgh retired from court to what is now Castor in Cambridgeshire by the border with Northamptonshire, in the easternmost part of her father's kingdom. There she took the veil and became the first abbess of Castor Monastery, choosing the Mother of God as its Patroness. By that time Christianity had been introduced into Mercia, which then was ruled by the converted King Wulfhere, another son of Penda. According to tradition, assisted by her brother, Cyneburgh herself founded Castor Monastery—a double community for monks and nuns. Castor stood on the ruins of a huge Roman praetorium (the central headquarters of the Roman administration of this region) by the River Nene, and probably had an early Roman church. Castor was conveniently situated by the intersection of some Roman roads. Archeological excavations showed that there was an earlier villa on the site that was later used by the Angles. Castor monks and nuns used materials from those sites to build their church. The world's oldest known Christian communion plate and chalices were discovered a mile from Castor in 1975. Scientists date them to the fourth century A.D. They are kept at the British Museum.



Peterborough Cathedral, Cambridgeshire

Together with her brother Wulfhere, St. Cyneburgh was one of the signatories of the founding charter of Peterborough Abbey of Sts. Peter, Paul and Andrew in Mercia (it was first named Medeshamstede; now it is Peterborough Cathedral in Cambridgeshire) in 664. Though she was much esteemed in her lifetime, few facts of her abbacy survive. A later legend has it that once the saint was pursued by two (or three according to another version) “villains”—soldiers with shields—when she was on a mission. St. Cyneburgh prayed and accidentally spilled the contents of a basket she was holding in her hands as she ran. The contents turned into a carpet of flowers in front of her and thorn bushes behind her, thus blocking the bandits’ way to her. Perhaps it is an allusion to her warrior father and her ex-husband (or even father-in-law), who would have been very reluctant to let her become a handmaid of Christ; the flowers might symbolize the saint’s virtues or the prosperity of her church. The hagiographer John of Tynemouth in the fourteenth century referred to Castor Monastery as to “Dormundescestre”, which was locally called “Kyneburgecastrum”.



*St. Cyneburgh as depicted on a capital of the church in Castor with two warriors pursuing her, Cambs
(provided by Dr. Avril Lumley-Prior)*

St. Cyneburgh reposed in about 680 in Castor and was succeeded by her younger sister St. Cyneswith, another saintly daughter of Penda about whom little is known. The tenth century Kentish Royal Legend claims that St. Cyneswith was betrothed to an East Anglian prince, but inspired by a vision of the Mother of God, extricated herself from the arrangement, took monastic vows and persuaded her ex-fiancé to do the same. After serving as the second abbess of Castor, St. Cyneswith died later in the seventh century and was succeeded by their kinswoman, St. Tibba, who shares their feast-day (March 6/19). We will speak in more detail about St. Tibba in another article.

St. Cyneburgh was greatly venerated in and around Castor and Peterborough and is mentioned in several early calendars. She was revered as a learned, courageous and

influential royal lady who abandoned the world and devoted herself to the service of Christ, bringing many of her fellow countrymen to Him. She should not be confused with another princess and queen of the same name, who was the wife of St. Oswald of Northumbria. There was also another saint with this name who lived in Gloucestershire.



The Hedda Stone at Peterborough Cathedral, Cambridgeshire (provided by Dr. Avril Lumley-Prior)

Abbot Aelfsige of Peterborough translated the relics of Sts. Cyneburgh, Cyneswith and Tibba to Peterborough Monastery in 963 after Castor Monastery had been destroyed by Vikings. In about 1016, these relics were translated to Thorney Monastery in Cambridgeshire, but were restored to Peterborough in the reign of Henry I. St. Cyneburgh is still commemorated at Peterborough Cathedral, where a chapel is dedicated to Sts. Cyneburgh, Cyneswith and Tibba (in the south transept where their shrine stood until the Reformation) and where she is immortalized by a statue on the west front. The Anglican Peterborough Cathedral, which is about 900 years old, is one of the finest Norman and Gothic cathedrals in England. It once housed a vast collection of relics, some of which were even linked to the apostles and Christ. This monastery kept an arm of the holy King Oswald of Northumbria, and this relic was considered so precious that a watchtower was built in the twelfth century from which monks guarded it. The watchtower and St. Oswald's Chapel still stand in the cathedral. It also preserves the "Hedda stone"—possibly a grave marker of St. Hedda, Abbot of Peterborough, who was slain by Vikings in 870. It is made of a solid stone in the form of a reliquary but without a cavity for relics. The cathedral can boast of its painted ceiling in the nave, the grave of Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife, among other things.

Two villages, one in Norfolk and the other in West Yorkshire, are named Kimberley, probably after St. Cyneburgh. "Lady Conyburrow's Way"—a Roman track in a field near

Castor, the scene of the miracle with flowers—bears her name. The holy spring near Toddington, known as Kimberwell, in Bedfordshire, is connected with her.

Today Castor is a large village four miles from Peterborough. The parish at its church, successor to the monastery's original church, has been doing much to preserve the memory of its ancient saints and heritage. This Anglican Church is dedicated to "St. Kyneburgha"—the only church to bear her name. Its royal foundress is commemorated annually by the parish on March 6, and in July both the church and the village hold the "St. Kyneburgha Festival". Monastic life was never resumed at Castor after the tenth century. The Normans rebuilt the original church, which was solemnly consecrated in 1124, extended in a later age and remained a place of great importance throughout the centuries. From the late seventh century up to the Reformation, Castor was a great center of pilgrimage. There is an opinion that small fragments of the royal saints' relics remained at Castor after the major relics had been translated to Peterborough, and that wall paintings depicting scenes from St. Cyneburgh's Life were created in the north aisle in the fourteenth century for pilgrims. During the Civil War this church was vandalized by Cromwellian soldiers for supporting Charles I, but it was later restored.



St. Kyneburgha's (Cyneburgh's) Church in Castor, Cambs (provided by Dr. Avril Lumley-Prior)

The church stands on a hillside where the upper courtyard of the Roman praetorium was. Its imposing Norman tower with the Early English spire is very high and a local landmark. At least until the 1530s the church was dedicated to Sts. Cyneburgh, Cyneswith and Tibba.



St. Mark's carving, probably fragment of St. Cyneburgh's former shrine, in Castor Church, Cambs (kindly provided by Dr. Avril Lumley-Prior)

A carving of the Apostle Mark, believed to be a fragment of St. Cyneburgh's and Cyneswith's shrine. The eighth-century carving is of fine craftsmanship and in surprisingly good condition. It was found under the chancel floor in 1924. Now it is to the right of the north aisle altar.

Passion-Bearer Fremund, Prince of Mercia

Commemorated May 11/24

Though the name of St. Fremund appears in three Middle English calendars, no pre-Norman sources or chronicles mention him. We find the first account of this saint in a work by the monk and hagiographer William Ramsey of Crowland in 1220; this story was repeated by the chronicler and hagiographer John of Tynemouth in about 1366. There were the metrical Lives of Sts. Edmund and Fremund written by the poet and hagiographer from Suffolk John Lydgate (c. 1370–1451) in the style of Geoffrey Chaucer. These versions are regarded as doubtful by scholars. But from them we can infer that St. Fremund lived in the ninth century, was related to the eighth-century King Offa of Mercia and at the same time to St. Edmund the Martyr, King of East Anglia. Fremund chose the life of a hermit, living with two companions, having a very frugal diet, praying and performing miracles. As a potential claimant to the throne, in about 870 he was treacherously slain while standing in prayer by his apostate relative Oswi. It was done with the help of the very Viking army that had put King Edmund to death. According to other versions, St. Fremund was forced to fight with the invading

Danes to defend his land and was either killed in battle, or was victorious but murdered while celebrating by one of his own men who envied him. Beheaded, St. Fremund took his head into his hands, walked away, stopped at a spot where a well immediately gushed forth, washed his wounds and head, and reposed. According to tradition, he may have been killed at Harbury in Warwickshire in central England, and the place where the well appeared was in what is now the town of Southam, two miles from where an ancient holy well still exists. This well was mentioned in a charter of 998. For centuries it healed eye diseases (especially conjunctivitis) and, though very cold, never froze. The well was recently restored. It is located in a beautiful setting alongside the River Itchen, and is a place of pilgrimage.

After his martyrdom, St. Fremund was buried in King Offa's mansion in the village of Offchurch ("Offa's church") in Mercia in Warwickshire (four miles from Southam), where his tomb was visited by many seeking healing and consolation. A church was built in Offchurch in his memory. Today Offchurch is close to the town of Leamington Spa; it has a medieval church dedicated to St. Gregory, but St. Fremund is no longer venerated here.

From time immemorial Fremund was venerated in the hamlet of Prescote ("the priest's cottage") in Oxfordshire, further to the south, where his body was moved from Offchurch after a vision. In 931 his remains were transferred from there to the village of Cropredy in Oxfordshire, where cures continued. In about 1212, a portion of his relics was translated from there to Dunstable Priory in Bedfordshire in eastern England (historically in Mercia), where it attracted pilgrims until the Reformation. His veneration continued in Cropredy, which claimed some of his relics as well.

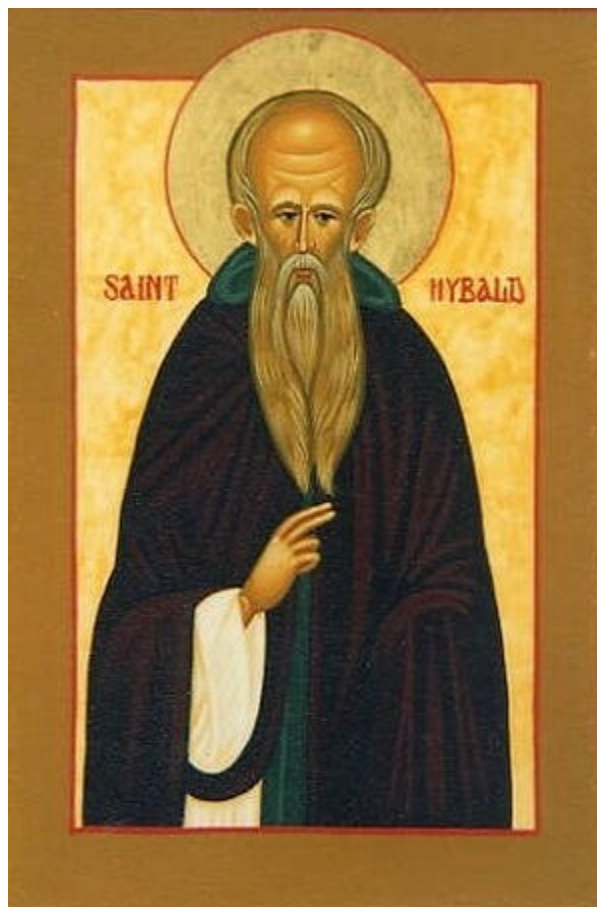
The village of Cropredy in Oxfordshire is famous for the Battle of Cropredy Bridge in 1644. The parish church of St. Mary the Virgin, built in the fourteenth century in the Decorated style, has a south aisle chapel (formerly a chantry chapel) dedicated to St. Fremund. A list of gifts and wills to St. Fremund's chantry dating from the Middle Ages still exists. The village commemorates St. Fremund annually on the Sunday nearest his feast-day, and holds a procession every other year to the church while telling his story in a play to music.

Though St. Fremund's shrine was destroyed at Dunstable Priory during the Reformation, an annual fair in his honor was held until the twentieth century. In the 1960s an Anglican parish church of St. Fremund the Martyr was built in Dunstable.

Dunstable Priory was founded as an Augustinian monastery in the twelfth century by King Henry I. Over its long history it had periods of prosperity—with subsidiary churches and farms as far as the Peak District—and poverty. It had chapels and altars dedicated to the Mother of God, Sts. John the Baptist, Nicholas, James, Fremund, Martin, the Holy Cross and All Angels. In 1290 the body of Queen Consort Eleanor of Castile, King Edward I's beloved wife, stayed at the Priory overnight on its way to Westminster, and to immortalize the event a beautiful cross was erected in the town (ornate crosses appeared in eleven other places where her bier stopped). Many pilgrims travelling to St. Albans to the south to venerate Martyr Alban's relics would stop at Dunstable en route. In 1533 it was at Dunstable Priory that Archbishop Thomas Cranmer annulled Henry VIII's marriage with Catherine of Aragon—an event that directly led to the establishment of the Anglican Church. The Deed of Surrender was signed in 1539, and the monastery ceased to exist. There were plans to establish a new diocese of Dunstable and convert the monastery church into a cathedral, but the idea was soon forgotten.

All that was valuable in the magnificent church was plundered and used as building materials. Only the nave of the monastic church survived and was converted into a parish church. Now it is used as an Anglican parish church and known as “the Priory Church of St. Peter.” A gem of Norman architecture, the present church is very large, and we can only imagine how enormous the original edifice was. The Priory’s west front is one of the most splendid in eastern England. The entrance is richly decorated. Among the internal treasures are a fourteenth-century screen, a medieval bell called “Mary” that was rung by the faithful during the Black Death, and numerous memorial brasses. The old Lady Chapel in which Henry VIII’s marriage had been annulled was pulled down, and today a plaque on the lawn beside the church marks the site. A medieval monastic gatehouse partly remains. Today it is a tranquil place surrounded by parkland.

Venerable Hibald, Abbot of Lindsey
Commemorated December 14/27



An icon of St. Hibald of Lindsey (the image kindly provided by Revd. David Eames)

St. Hibald (Hygbald), who reposed in around 690, was a disciple of [St. Chad of Lichfield](#), the Apostle of Mercia, whose example he tried to follow. He may have studied in the Irish tradition at Lindisfarne or Lastingham Monasteries, but this is impossible to prove. He was mentioned in St. Bede’s “History” in connection with St. Chad’s death: “Hygbald, a most holy and continent man, who was an abbot in the province of Lindsey, came out of Britain to

visit him [St. Egbert in Ireland.—Auth.], and whilst these holy men were discoursing of the life of the former fathers, mention was made of the most reverend prelate, Chad, whereupon Egbert said, ‘I know a man in this island, who, when that prelate passed out of this world, saw the soul of his brother Cedd, with a company of angels, descending from heaven, who, having taken his soul with them, returned thither again’” (b. IV, ch. III).

The name of St. Hibald can be found in the Exeter Martyrology and in the medieval *Liber Vitae*—the confraternity “Book of Life” created at Durham Monastery. An early English prayer of confession attributed to him in an eighth or ninth century Worcester prayer book still exists. Hibald was probably the Abbot of the famous Bardney Monastery in Lincolnshire, organizing a missionary base and also living as a hermit. He is venerated in several places of Lincolnshire, notably in the large village of Hibaldstow (“St. Hibald’s holy place” or “burial site”) near the town of Brigg—its name indicates that his grave (or even monastery) may have been there. Pilgrims came to this church to pray to St. Hibald until the Reformation.



St.

*Hibald's Church in Hibaldstow, Lincs (provided by Subdeacon Chad Andrew Lyon,
Antiochian Orthodox Community of St. Hybald, N. Lincolnshire)*

In 1866 it was decided to renovate St. Hibald’s Anglican parish church of Hibaldstow: it was then that an early stone coffin with the remains of a tall man—believed to be his relics—was discovered under its chancel floor. There are no records of a pre-Norman church or monastery on this site; however, the first church on this site was mentioned in 1086. The oldest part of the present building goes back to the thirteenth century—the small church retains the spirit of holiness. A further examination of the remains could give evidence

regarding the authenticity of St. Hibald's relics. After they were discovered, the remains were reburied under the floor of the south wall of the chancel. Though the exact spot is unmarked, near it are a shrine-like structure, a candle stand, a (now unused) censer, a small information board, and an icon of St. Hibald (painted by the late Archimandrite David [Meyrick]).

This Anglican church reads a collect prayer to St. Hibald close to his feast-day. The Hibaldstow church is again visited by pilgrims, notably from the Russian Orthodox community of Sts. Aidan and Chad in Nottingham. There were reports of a lasting fragrance on a cloth that had been put on the ground above what are thought to be his relics.

Other parish churches that bear St. Hibald's name in Lincolnshire are situated in the villages of Ashby-de-la-Launde (its earliest elements are of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) and Scawby (medieval, in the Early English style, largely rebuilt in the nineteenth century). St. Hibald is depicted on the east window of the church of Scawby and probably on a stained glass on its north wall, though the figure in question might instead represent the Apostle Peter or Christ. There was also St. Hibald's Church in the village of Manton in North Lincolnshire, rebuilt in the 1860s, which was converted into a private house not long ago.

Here is a prayer attributed to St. Hibald of Lindsey:

I beseech God, the omnipotent Father, Who created heaven and earth, the sea and all that therein is, Who is blessed God in all and over all forever, that He discharge me of all my sins and misdeeds which I have done from the cradle of my youth until this hour of my life in deeds, in words, in thoughts, in sight, in laughter, in going, in hearing, in touch and smell, willing, unwilling, knowing and unknowing, in spirit and in body, I have committed in folly.

Venerable Pandwina, Nun of Eltisley
Commemorated August 26/September 8



Depiction of St. Pandonia on the Eltisley village sign, Cambs (provided by Nichola Donald)

St. Pandwina (Pandonia) lived in the ninth century and was venerated in the village of Eltisley in Cambridgeshire (close to the town of St. Neots), where the Anglican parish church is dedicated to her and [St. John the Baptist](#). Her early Life, by Priest Richard of Eltisley, was lost, but she was mentioned by the traveler and antiquarian John Leland and other late authors. Her name can be found in an early Flemish litany. According to tradition, Pandwina, of noble Irish descent, fled her native land to avoid an undesirable marriage and settled in England to devote her life to Christ. Since her relative was prioress of a convent at or near Eltisley (the now deserted village of Papley is also suggested), she obtained permission to live there as a nun. After living the holy life of an anchoress at Eltisley, St. Pandwina reposed in about 904. Some historians, however, call her a virgin and martyr.

There were numerous reports of cures through her relics. St. Pandwina's holy well at the Eltisley convent was famous for healing properties. Her first grave was beside the well, which was used for centuries. The convent was closed right after the Norman Conquest (or was transferred to Hinchbrook). There is a record of the translation of her relics to the Eltisley church in 1344. Her relics and the original well are long gone, and there are currently no memorials to this saint inside the Eltisley church. But the holy maiden is featured on the village sign of Eltisley by her church as a nun with a cross.

The present church is over 800 years old. It has been dedicated to St. Pandwina at least since the thirteenth century, and the name of St. John the Baptist was added later. There are several water features adjacent to the churchyard, which are fed by the source of St. Pandwina's well. Eltisley is in southwest Cambridgeshire, some ten miles from Cambridge.

In 1623, Oliver Cromwell's sister, Jane, was married in this church. This event is symbolic for the history of this holy place, which suffered from "reformers" and Puritans. The most notorious post-Reformation example is the rector Robert Palmer, who was responsible for the destruction of St. Pandwina's well and the effacing of statues inside the church.

Venerable Pega, anchoress of Peakirk

Commemorated January 8/21

St. Pega was one of the heroic holy women who made history in England before the Norman Conquest. Born in the early 670s in the Mercian royal family, the holy virgin Pega was [St. Guthlac of Crowland](#)'s sister, and like him she decided to devote herself to the service of Christ in chastity, prayer and holiness. Most of what we know about her comes from the Life of St. Guthlac written by Monk Felix in the eighth century, one of the two Old English poems dedicated to Guthlac (from the ninth century), and an eleventh-century Old English version of his Life.

At first St. Pega lived close to her holy brother on the isle of Crowland (then spelled Croyland) in the fenland, and took care of him. But after one incident, when she advised him to eat more so as not to emaciate himself, he thought that she was being guided by a demon and he asked her to leave him. According to tradition, St. Pega made herself a humble hermitage a few miles away from Guthlac and lived there as an anchoress. When Guthlac realized that his death was near, he invited her through a messenger to arrange his funeral. St. Pega sailed down the Welland River to him, curing a blind man on her way. From her brother Pega she inherited a Psalter and a scourge for banishing demons, which she later presented to Crowland. A year after St. Guthlac's repose, in 715, St. Pega organized the exhumation of his relics in the presence of clergy, and they were found to be intact. According to tradition, testified to by the monk and chronicler Orderic Vitalis (c. 1075–1142), St. Pega later made a pilgrimage to Rome, where she reposed in about 719, and her relics were enshrined in a Roman church, becoming famous for their miraculous power. St. Pega is mentioned in one early litany. The chronicler John of Worcester in the twelfth century praised St. Pega, and considered St. Guthlac as something close to her subordinate.

Though there are no records to confirm this, tradition connects St. Pega with the village of Peakirk ("Pega's church"—the name was obviously given by Danes who pronounced it "kirk", not "church") in what is now Cambridgeshire, six miles southwest of Crowland and six miles northwest of the city of Peterborough. Its proximity to Crowland and its name indicate that St. Pega's hermitage must have been in Peakirk. To preserve her holy memory, her cell might have been occupied by a succession of hermits. This site may have developed into a small monastery in the tenth century and united with Crowland in 1048, becoming its possession, as some chroniclers claimed. But it is more likely that it was used as a minster before the Norman Conquest. The supposed site of St. Pega's hermitage is now occupied by a

cottage 150 meters from the church, and a community of Anglican nuns once lived there. Pilgrims feel the presence of Divine grace on this spot.

The area where Guthlac and Pega struggled for Christ was the endless and dangerous fenland, with a complex river system and occasional isles inhabited by bandits and demons, and accessible by boat at certain times of the year. It is thanks to Sts. Guthlac, Pega and less known ascetics (Sts. Boda of Bodsey; Eadwin of Higney; Godric and Throcken of Throckenholt; Huna of Honey Farm, just outside Chatteris; Tancred, Torthred and Tova of Thorney; and unnamed hermits on the isle of Eye near Peterborough) that all the evil spirits were driven away and this land became Christian and blessed by their prayers. St. Pega was commemorated at Crowland Abbey on her feast until the Reformation. A chapel dedicated to her at Crowland Abbey precincts was mentioned in 1434.)

The small, pretty village of Peakirk is famous for its medieval Anglican parish church—the only church dedicated to St. Pega. This parish commemorates her, arranging St. Pega’s patronal festival (since 2017) and singing a hymn to her on the first Sunday of the calendar New Year close to her feast. In this church St. Pega is represented on the early twentieth-century east window (next to the Mother of God), depicted as surrounded by swamps with swans flying by, and alone on another window in the north aisle.



Images of St. Pega and the Mother of God on the east window of the church in Peakirk, Cambs (kindly provided by Dr. Avril Lumley-Prior)

This church has some fourteenth-century wall paintings of national importance in its nave and aisles, discovered under plaster in about 1950. Some of them depict: three hunting kings in magnificent garments meeting three skeletons who say: "As we are, so you shall be"; a pair of women gossiping as Satan sits on their shoulders, pushing their heads together; St. Christopher; St. Longinus piercing Jesus' side and being healed from blindness; and scenes related to the Passion and Burial of Christ. A curious treasure of the church is the "heart stone", previously thought to be a fragment of a reliquary that once contained St. Pega's heart, which had allegedly been sent from Rome back to her homeland. This thirteenth-century carved stone is displayed in the south aisle. After the Reformation, radicals broke half of this sculpture and its upper portion was lost. It is more likely that it was part of a stone coffin lid, carved with a body, the hands clasped together in prayer on its chest. Thus, it is a grave marker, like at the church in Hambleton, Rutland, or in Yaxley, Cambridgeshire, where a genuine human heart was found once the stone had been removed from the wall.

The earliest parts of St. Pega's Church are late Saxon. It was first mentioned by the chronicler Hugh Candidus of Peterborough in about 1146. In the middle ages, St. Pega's was considered important, though it was dedicated to "All Hallows", while the present dedication is post-Reformation. The church is little yet has a holy atmosphere, and pilgrims are now visiting it once more. It consists of an aisled nave, a chancel and a north chapel having a stained-glass window of St. Guthlac.

One of the parish churches of Peterborough is dedicated to St. John the Baptist. This church has a large collection of stained-glass windows, some of which are 150 years old. Among the saints depicted on them are Sts. Aidan, Alban, Augustine, Bede, Bega, Boniface, Etheldreda, George the Victorious, Guthlac and Pega (in the south aisle).



Guthlac Roll 15 (Pega is boarding a boat heading for Crowland; facsimile; provided by Dr. Avril Lumley-Prior)

There is a twelfth-century gem called the Guthlac Roll, depicting the Life of St. Guthlac in eighteen roundels on parchment, two of which depict St. Pega (as sailing to Guthlac before his repose and arranging for the opening of his relics). The original is kept in the British Library, but there are copies at Crowland Abbey and St. Pega's Church.

Saint Wendreda of March

Though an obscure, early saint, her church in the pretty market town of March in Cambridgeshire receives many tourists from around the world every year. According to tradition, Wendreda (Wyntdryth) may have been a relative of St. Etheldreda of Ely and her other holy royal sisters, and was the foundress and first abbess in the seventh century of a convent in what is now March. Like Ely, at that time March was an isle surrounded by marshland—an isolated and dangerous place. According to folk tradition, Wendreda studied the medicinal properties of herbs and springs and used to treat sick people, performing miracles.

Nothing remains of the early church on the site of the supposed convent in March, but the place is dominated by a magnificent fourteenth-century Anglican parish church dedicated to St. Wendreda. Her remains were moved from March in the tenth century and brought by

Abbot Elsin of Ely to the monastery church of Ely (now Ely Cathedral). Her relics were enshrined in gold alongside St. Etheldreda's. Interestingly, in the early eleventh century her relics were taken by King Edmund Ironside to a battle against Canute (the future Danish king of England who would convert to Christianity and support the Church) who captured them and later gave them to Canterbury Cathedral. Though the allegation that Canute converted to the faith thanks to St. Wendreda's intercession is an exaggeration, the king did erect a church in Ashingdon in Essex where he had won that fateful battle, and the church is still standing to this day.

In the fourteenth century, St. Wendreda's relics were returned from Canterbury to March, where veneration continued until the Reformation. Though under Henry VIII her shrine was smashed, there are no records of the destruction of her relics. Some years ago, a local historian, bell-ringer and author of over 120 books, Trevor Bevis (1930–2021), supposed that St. Wendreda's relics were hidden by the faithful of March during the Reformation. He noticed a stone slab in the wall of the south aisle beside St. Wendreda's stained glass image, on which the faded "S" inscription is still legible. "S" may indicate "Saint" or "Sanctus" and serve as a marker at her secret burial site, since the parishioners valued the wonderworking abbess. But only further research can shed light on this.

Today, the reason for the great popularity of St. Wendreda's Church is not the saint and her spiritual feats, but the splendid 120 timber carvings of angels on the ceiling, created in about 1500—one of the last devotional masterpieces to be produced in pre-Reformation England. Such an extraordinary assembly of angels (and nineteen canopied saints and martyrs) became possible due to the church's fine double hammer-beam roof. Some angels hold musical instruments, and some carry figures of saints. The font is of the twelfth century and even predates the church, as is often the case. In the west end of the nave is a memorial to a true hero: the twenty-one-year-old Jim Hocking, an Australian Royal Air Force trainee pilot who at the cost of his own life saved the town of March from destruction by the Nazis during the Second World War. Though the other treasures were destroyed by the "reformers", the angels miraculously survived and continue to adorn this holy place, attracting multitudes of guests.

The saintly foundress is not forgotten in this church: her small wooden effigy can be seen on the far-left corner of the ceiling by the chancel arch, though barely noticeable because of the fluttering angels. She is featured as an abbess with doves by her feet, and a similar figure of St. Etheldreda in front of her. The church has a very tall steeple, and visitors are allowed to climb the bell-tower on certain days of the year to admire the surroundings (Ely Cathedral is visible on a clear day). The church is built of a mixture of stone, flint and brick.

Perhaps there is another link with this saint: at the village of Exning in Suffolk, which is believed to be the birthplace of St. Etheldreda. The village has the very ancient holy well of St. Mindred, the waters of which used to heal both men and animals (it was good for wens and boils). Some believe that St. Mindred is a corruption of "Wendred", making our saint its

patroness. According to tradition, its foundress used this well for healing, though we will never know if it was St. Wendreda or a local ascetic St. Mindred of whom nothing is known. The well is now in a private area and inaccessible to the public; until recently its waters were used by horses of the Newmarket racecourse.)

Lastly, a fine bas-relief depicting the translation of St. Wendreda's relics from March to Ely was created in the 1960s for a public house, and it now hangs in the March Museum. One of numerous beautiful stained-glass windows at St. Edmund's Church in Fritton, Norfolk, reportedly depicts St. Wendreda. This saint is commemorated in Ely Cathedral.

St. Wendreda is regarded by some as the patron-saint of March.

* * *

Of the numerous local saints of eastern England let us also mention:

- Sts. Aldwyn and Ethelwin (or Elwin; eighth century; both are feasted on May 3). St. Bede mentioned them in his "History": "The holy men, Ethelwin and Aldwin, the first of whom was bishop in the province of Lindsey, the other abbot of the monastery of Peartaneu" (b. III, ch. XI). They were brothers. Tradition connects St. Aldwyn with Partney Monastery in Lincolnshire; the village of Coln St. Aldwyn in Gloucestershire is named after him. St. Ethelwin was the second bishop of Lindsey, but later moved with St. Egbert to Ireland where he reposed;
- St. Ivo (Ives; feast: April 24), was reputedly a Persian (or possibly Syrian) bishop who moved to England to live as a hermit near Huntingdon. In 1001, after a peasant had a vision, four bodies were dug out at the village of Slepe (later St. Ives), one of which had a bishop's insignia. The relics were translated to Ramsey Abbey in Cambridgeshire, and numerous healing miracles followed. A century later a supernatural light that extended from Ramsey to Slepe indicated that the bodies of St. Ivo's companions should be transferred back to Slepe and have a separate shrine. St. Ivo is the patron of the market town of St. Ives (named after him) in Cambridgeshire.
- St. Jurmin († c. 654; feast: February 23) was the son or a nephew of Anna, the pious King of East Anglia. Nothing is known of him except that while still very young, he was slain together with his father at the Battle of Bulcamp by King Penda of Mercia, and is venerated as a martyr. At first both were buried at the church of Blythburgh, and in 1095 St. Jurmin's relics were translated to Bury St. Edmunds Monastery, where his veneration gradually died out. Today the village of Blythburgh in Suffolk has the fifteenth-century Holy Trinity Church—one of the most beautiful and richly decorated churches in eastern England, nicknamed "the cathedral of the marshes", which was admired by the composer Benjamin Britten. The site of St. Jurmin's grave was forgotten. The church was damaged many times in its history: by a lightning, a storm, and, according to legend, by the devil and the mysterious "Black Shuck" dog (marks of "the devil's fingers" are visible on its door), but restored each time. There was the Augustinian Blythburgh Priory in the village, the ruins of which remain.
- St. Wolfeius (eleventh century; feast: December 9) was, according to the historian William of Worcester, the first hermit at St. Benet Holme. A monastery in honor of St. Benedict, St. Benet's at Holme (or Hulme), was founded on the River Bure in Norfolk (the nearest village is Ludham) in the ninth century. It was among the richest in

England. Apart from St. Wolfeius, this site produced some martyrs killed by the Danes. The abbey was closed under Henry VIII, and only its picturesque ruins still remain in a meadow, in a secluded site by the river.

All the local saints of Eastern England, pray to God for us!

* * *

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