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SOME SAINTS OF EAST ANGLIA

D. H. Farmer

The saints of East Anglia, like those of any particular province in the Middle Ages, enjoyed the approval and the veneration of their compatriots. This can be seen from their presence in the liturgical books, from their images in glass, sculpture and paintings, from the frequent concourse of pilgrims to their shrines. Saints who walked the same streets and enjoyed the same countryside as their clients seemed especially close, but what made them both accessible and powerful as patrons was the presence of their bodies in East Anglian churches. In England as elsewhere the saint's tomb was the starting point for his cult: the tomb became a sacred place. The saint's presence was believed to benefit sufferers from various ailments, but was also frequently terrible to would-be violators of the saint's property or custodians.

Were there any special peculiarities of East Anglian Saints? The main conclusion to emerge from this study of them is that they were remarkably characteristic of English hagiology as a whole. Historical information is sparse; accounts of miracles and visions abound. Here as elsewhere a substantial proportion of saints belonged to the Age of Bede: the pioneering days of English Christianity seemed to be especially productive of Christian heroes. Here too we find cults of Anglo-Saxon kings as martyrs when they died in battle against pagan leaders.

Here also are recorded some who were killed by Vikings, especially in the years 865-70, when the Great Army came to East Anglia and used it as a base from which to attack other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. We find examples of the cults of young boys believed to have been killed by Jews; we find too an Anglo-Saxon patriot, victim of Norman cruelty, venerated temporarily as a martyr. There was a surprising dearth of East Anglian saints in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but an outstanding example of an English Mystic (although not officially canonized) in the fourteenth. Indeed there seems to be not a single example of *papal* canonizations of an East Anglian saint; we are dealing with cults either officially approved by local churches long ago or else with cults which were unofficial. In early days, when procedures were less formal, the presence of a name in a calendar and evidence for the translation and enshrinement of a saint's body were even more important than in the days of the later papal reserve, from the reign of Innocent III onwards. Even then however unofficial cults did in fact sometimes arise and endure for some time, to be either formally approved later or else to perish. The recognition of sainthood in the Middle Ages had in practice some uncertainty and fluidity, but the existence of the important cults is remarkably clear <1>.

The definitive history of medieval East Anglia has not yet been written: its political independence and its geographical extent changed during succeeding

centuries. One of the first Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to be settled, its eastern and northern boundaries were made by the North Sea. Its western boundary was less clear, being formed probably by a series of rivers in the south-west and by the Fenlands in the north-west. These especially formed a land of uncertain extent and jurisdiction, but Eastern Cambridgeshire was part of East Anglia from the earliest times. To the south, Essex was a separate kingdom, bounded by the river Stour. Another river, the Waveney, was the traditional border between the North Folk of Norfolk and the South Folk of Suffolk. For the purposes of this article however East Anglia is defined as the present-day counties of Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.

East Anglia retained its political independence from the sixth century to the late eighth, when it submitted unwillingly to the powerful Offa, king of Mercia. Independence was regained after his death until the arrival of the Vikings' Great Army in the late 860s. It then remained an integral but somewhat untypical part of the Danelaw. It was politically absorbed into the Wessex kingdom by Edward the Elder and Athelstan until the Norman Conquest. Although we know the names of saintly apostles of the earliest conversion to Christianity, there is no record of a single prominent evangelist in the conversion of the Viking settlers. Local and anonymous priests, families and later monasteries were presumably responsible for the gradual penetration of Christian belief and practice throughout the region.

East Anglia's earliest political eminence came in the seventh century with the emergence of Redwald, its powerful king as *bretwalda* of the Anglo-Saxons after the death of Ethelbert of Kent (616). Whereas Ethelbert wholeheartedly supported Christian missionaries and had become a Christian himself, at least from 601, Redwald initially accepted Christianity but reverted to an attempted syncretism. He established a shrine for Christ among those of pagan gods in his chapel, not understanding the Christian commitment to monotheism. He was a valiant soldier who practised the traditional code of hospitality, especially to the exiled Northumbrian prince Edwin. Redwald repeatedly refused to betray him to his enemies, who sought by bribes and violence to capture him. Eventually Redwald helped Edwin, subsequently a Christian, to win his kingdom of Northumbria at the battle of the river Idle on the Border with Mercia <2>.

The cultural level of the East Anglian monarchy was high, as shown by the outstanding treasure of the burial-ship of Sutton Hoo. Of the various candidates for identification as its lost king, Redwald seems on the whole the most likely. The mixture of Christian and pagan finds, the presence of the pair of baptismal spoons, the absence of the king's body are all compatible with this identification. The most important palace of East Anglian kings was at Rendlesham, very close by.

This early predominance of Suffolk over Norfolk is reflected in the story of the conversion. Eorpwald, the son of Redwald, was persuaded by Edwin of Northumbria to become a Christian. Soon afterwards however he died. He was

succeeded by his half-brother Sigebert who, when in exile in Gaul, had become a devout and learned Christian before his accession in 630/1. He and the archbishop of Canterbury Honorius were responsible for the arrival of the Burgundian bishop Felix, who became the apostle of East Anglia. He gave his name to Felixstowe and set up the diocese of Dunwich, where he also founded a school with teachers from Canterbury. He is rightly regarded as an important example of Gaulish influence in England's conversion. As elsewhere in England, Irish monks also helped in this work. Fursa founded a monastery at Burgh Castle in an old Roman fort. But after some years he moved on to northern France, where he first became a hermit and later founded a monastery at Lagny-sur-Marne. He was buried at Péronne in Picardy which became so famous as an Irish monastery that it was called *Perrona Scottorum*. He left in East Anglia his brother Foillan as abbot of his monastery at Monks Soham, where he was buried <3>.

Felix and Sigebert are among the East Anglian saints with Edmund, Etheldreda and Walstan who were most often portrayed on the rood screens which are still in the large and beautiful churches which characterize this area. They were represented in company with the Twelve Apostles or the Four Doctors of the Latin Church. These late medieval churches reflect the wealth of the most fertile province in England, where many merchants, especially in the wool and cloth trades, had flourished and helped to rebuild their parish churches. Many screens have perished, much glass has been destroyed, either through iconoclasts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries or through storm damage and neglect of maintenance. Enough remains however for us to glimpse the former glory of these churches and the local interest in the local saints <4>.

The most important were those of Bury St. Edmunds and Ely. Edmund and Etheldreda were long dead when the screens were made, but each had a cult which was local, nationwide and remarkably long-lasting. The cults of these saints powerfully aided the development of these towns. Each had a large Benedictine monastery which contained the shrine and was lavishly endowed by royal and other benefactors. But, as will be seen below, there were important differences as well as resemblances between the two most notable monastic foundations of East Anglia.

Ely was founded as a nunnery by Etheldreda, an East Anglian princess, daughter of Anna, king of East Anglia from 634 to 654. Exning (Suffolk) claims to be her birthplace. Although she had claimed to have taken a vow of virginity, she was twice married (probably for political reasons) first to Tondbert, ealdorman of the South Girwas, and later to Egfrith, the young king of Northumbria (670-85). She was considerably older than him; with his growth to manhood he wished to consummate the marriage, but Etheldreda refused. She remained a virgin; St. Wilfrid dissolved the marriage; Etheldreda became a nun. She was a novice under the royal abbess Ebba of Coldingham until in 673 she founded a double monastery on her dowry lands at Ely. These comprised the whole of the Isle of Ely with other properties. As with other English double monasteries, the nuns were more numerous than the

monks, who provided the necessary chaplains and if needed, estate managers and handymen. For her last seven years Etheldreda lived a life of penance: she died in 679 of a tumour on the neck, caused by the plague ^{<5>}.

Ely remained a family monastery for a number of years. Etheldreda was succeeded as abbess by her sister Sexburga, the widow of Erconbert, king of Kent. Sexburga translated the incorrupt body of Etheldreda to a new shrine in 695. This was a stone sarcophagus of Roman workmanship found at Grantchester: witnesses to her incorruption included St. Wilfrid and Etheldreda's doctor Cynefrid. Sexburga died c 700; she was succeeded by her daughter Ermengild, widow of Wulhere of Mercia. She died early in the eighth century and was probably succeeded for a time by her daughter Werburga, who later returned to Mercia to found nunneries at Hanbury (Staffs) and elsewhere. The reigns of these last two abbesses of Ely were short. As Werburg died in Mercia, she was not associated liturgically with the other Ely saints in her family: Etheldreda, Sexburga, Witburga (of whom more below) and Ermenilda. These saints' bodies were translated to more suitable shrines at Ely in 1106: there they remained until the Reformation ^{<6>}.

A century after its destruction by Vikings, Ely was refounded by St. Ethelwold as a monastery for monks only c 970. Although a Wessex man and born at Winchester, whose bishop he became in 963, he surely deserves to be considered an honorary saint of East Anglia. Ely, Peterborough and Thorney were all restored by him with considerable royal help. His policy was to provide monasteries in the Danelaw area, presumably to strengthen both their religious life and their loyalty to the Wessex kings. Austere and intransigent in temperament, Ethelwold was also a craftsman of note as well as the director of the 'Winchester school' of illumination which flourished in his monasteries. Metalwork, music and painting all gained from his patronage and inspiration. He was deeply interested in the cults of the saints. He collected relics from various places to enrich the monasteries he had founded. In the *Liber Eliensis*, a local history in three books compiled in the mid-twelfth century, but making use of much older sources, is a vivid account of a relic-stealing expedition, by the monks of Ely at the expense of the parishioners of East Dereham (Norfolk). It occurs in book II of the work which relates the history of Ely from the reign of Edgar till 1109, when it became a bishopric ^{<7>}.

On 8 July 974 Brithnod, abbot of Ely, with the approval, it was claimed, of King Edgar and Bishop Ethelwold, went to East Dereham by night, having appeased the Almighty with prayers and fasting. The object of their quest was the body of St. Witburga, yet another sister of Etheldreda, who had lived and died as an anchoress at Dereham. There was no disturbance or opposition: they furtively reached the church and removed the body 'as if it were asleep' to their waiting wagons. From there they drove twenty miles to the river Brandun, where they took the body on board a ship, which was equipped both with oars and 'naval armaments' to complete the journey to Ely by water. Meanwhile the parishioners of East Dereham had discovered the theft. Tumult followed as if for invasion or fire. They took to arms and occupied

both banks of the river. But they could only watch helplessly as the boat slipped away with its precious cargo. The Ely monks disembarked at Turbuley; Witburga was reburied beside her sister Etheldreda⁸.

Attitudes towards such expeditions were ambivalent. The Ely chronicler described this one as 'a holy sacrilege and a religious theft', justified, in his view, because the relics would obtain greater honour in their new home and because it would please the two saints concerned if their remains could be re-united. About a century later, in 1093, some Winchester monks, who had accompanied Symeon of Winchester (Walkelin's brothers) to Ely on his appointment as abbot after the rebellion of Hereward the Wake, found themselves unwanted on Symeon's death and decided to return to Winchester. While the Ely monks were otherwise engaged, these Winchester monks removed from the church the head of St. Botulf together with some precious cloths and ornaments. When they were resting at Guildford on their way home, their house was burnt down and the treasure destroyed. This was interpreted as the vengeance of St. Etheldreda⁹.

A claim by the monks of Ely to possess the relics of St. Alban, supposedly translated there under Abbot Frederick in the eleventh century, was naturally refuted by the monks of St. Albans, who possessed the rival set of relics from time immemorial; but the most recent biographer of Matthew Paris thought that there was some validity in the Ely claim¹⁰. Although not so important to them as the relic of their own royal abbesses, those of St. Alban, genuine or not, were celebrated with a special feast throughout the Middle Ages. On the general question of the morality of one house taking the relics of another, some would conclude that nothing succeeds like success. Ely monks were by and large successful; monks of Winchester and the parishioners of East Dereham were not. It would be interesting to have the views of these disappointed parties, but if they were ever written down, they have not survived. In these accounts the particular bias of the *Liber Eliensis* must be borne in mind. Its three books, concerned respectively with the foundation of Ely, its revival under Ethelwold and its development as a diocese, are both the principal monument to the cult of Etheldreda and a vigorous appeal to antiquity and to charter material to establish Ely's property rights. This was necessary to regain losses sustained after the Norman Conquest, not least through the rebellion of Hereward the Wake: the claims implied that Etheldreda was a powerful saint who would defend her property rights against aggressors, whether English or Norman. As in the claim to incorruption, this development is comparable to that of the Cuthbert cult at Durham: the mildest of saints on earth were transformed into powerful and sometimes jealous guardians of their property and of the monastic communities who served at their tombs¹¹.

More appealing are some of the other miracle stories of Etheldreda. In one she appears not as the cause of disasters to Ely's oppressors, but as the mother of the community. During an epidemic she and her sisters were seen going to the Infirmary by night to bathe and soothe the feverish brows of the monks who were ill. This vision tells something of how in a purely masculine institution the gentle touch of a

woman's hand is missed most in time of illness. The event was commemorated in a sequence by Goscelin, staying at Ely at the time, of which however all trace is lost except the first line<¹²>.

Another vision was the occasion for making a new road to Ely through the Fens. In early days, as when the sound of the monks' chant inspired King Cnut to poetry, Ely was entirely surrounded by water. But in 1109 a farm labourer of Exning had a vision of St. Edmund, who told him to go to Bishop Harvey. In the saint's name he informed the bishop that he was to prepare a road 'so that I can go to my lady Etheldreda'. Why a saint enjoying the Beatific Vision should need a road through East Anglia is not clear; it seems probable that the vision or dream was used (or produced) by interested parties to accomplish a much-needed public service, possibly impeded by bureaucratic delays. However that may be, a monk called John volunteered to do the job; by building small bridges over the streams and by strewing reeds on the paths, he made a causeway through the marshes<¹³>.

A schoolmaster of Dunwich called Ralph was articulate enough to write an account of his own cure. He described his ailments in excellent Latin: a goitre caused general decrepitude and even unconsciousness; visitors found him without voice, sight, hearing or movement. He prayed for deliverance to the Risen Christ, to St. Mary, St. Blaise and other saints before at last remembering St. Etheldreda; when he invoked her, the abscess in his throat burst. This left him with 'temporary paralysis of the legs', which may have been due simply to a prolonged stay in bed. Again he asked Etheldreda's help, which was so effective that he walked all the way from Kentford (Suffolk) to Ely by night. There the monks gave him letters of confraternity<¹⁴>.

Etheldreda was Ely's principal, but not its only saint: her sisters and nieces were included in her cult. Other subsidiary saints of Ely, whose cults never attained the importance of the other four, were Eadnoth and Wendreda. The latter was patroness of March, where her relics were kept until Abbot Elfsin translated them to a rich shrine at Ely. But after the battle of Assandun (1016) they were removed by Danish soldiers; it was said that Cnut gave them to Dorchester. In the same years Eadnoth, in succession monk of Worcester, abbot of Ramsey and bishop of Dorchester (1012), who had been zealous in building churches and endowing monasteries (including the nunnery of Chatteris where his sister Elwin was abbess), was killed while saying Mass at Assandun. His body was brought to Ely on its way to Ramsey. Elfgar, a retired bishop of Elmham, who was staying at Ely at the time, advised burying the body secretly while its guards were drunk. This was done; his body remained at Ely and was greatly honoured<¹⁵>.

Artistic memorials of the cult of Ely saints include the vanished shrines in Ely cathedral. One element of Etheldreda's shrine-altar survives however in the rooms of the Society of Antiquaries. This is a fine painting, once a retable, which depicts the translation of the body of Etheldreda by her sister Sexburga. With the help of dendrochronology, this has been recently dated to about 1300. On the capitals of the

lantern tower of Ely, far from the hand of vandals and iconoclasts, are sculpted scenes from Etheldreda's Life. No comparable manuscript Life survives. Another result of the cult of Etheldreda is a word in the English language, viz. tawdry. This was applied to the trinkets and especially the necklaces which were sold at her fair in Ely. Audrey is the alternative form of her name^{<16>}.

Ely was the principal, but by no means the only centre in Cambridgeshire for the cult of the local saints. Thorney, Peterborough, Ramsey and Crowland all had interesting relic collections: each is mentioned in the *Resting-Places of the Saints*^{<17>}. Crowland, it is true, is situated a few miles outside Cambridgeshire, but it was a border monastery and so deserves at least a short mention here. Its principal saint from the Age of Bede was Guthlac, the hermit of the royal family of Mercia who at the age of about twenty-eight, after a few years in the double monastery of Repton, had moved on to the solitary life in the Fens, living on a site accessible only by boat. There for fifteen years he followed the strict regime of the Desert Fathers, engaging in the 'single combat with the devil' which satisfied both monastic tradition and the ideals of Anglo-Saxon heroism. His solitude was not absolute, insofar as disciples such as Cissa, Bettelin and Tatwin lived close by, while his sister Pega had settled as an anchoress at nearby Peakirk. He was buried at Crowland after a claim that his body was incorrupt (715). An early Life was written in Latin by the monk Felix; vernacular ones followed in prose and verse; his cult spread elsewhere in Mercia; he became, after Cuthbert, pre-Conquest England's most popular hermit saint^{<18>}.

In the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries another cult developed at Crowland of a very different kind. The Anglo-Saxon Waltheof, count of Northampton and Huntingdon, had fought against the Normans energetically both at the Conquest and at the siege of York. He obtained pardon from King William, married William's niece Judith in 1072, but in 1075 joined the rebellion of the Earls, led by Roger of Hereford and Ralph of Norwich and strengthened by Ralph's marriage to Roger's daughter at Exning. The rebellion was a failure: Odo of Bayeux defeated Ralph at Cambridge while St. Wulstan of Worcester held his town for the King and so prevented Roger from crossing the Severn. Waltheof meanwhile had revealed all to Lanfranc, who advised him to throw himself on the king's mercy. William however was unforgiving. He punished the rebels severely. Waltheof was imprisoned, tried for treason and executed at Winchester on 31 May, 1076. A fortnight later, at the request of Judith and with the king's consent, the body was buried at Crowland by abbot Ulfketil. In 1092 his successor Ingulf translated the body into the church. Miracles of healing were claimed, as well as the incorruption of his body. Norman monks derided the miracles and the crowds at the tomb, because Waltheof for them was no saint but a traitor. Ordericus Vitalis recorded some miracles and claimed that Waltheof was devout as well as warlike, had helped to build Crowland abbey, had expiated his faults during his year in prison and had said the Lord's Prayer on the scaffold, whose final petition was uttered by his severed head. William of Malmesbury, of mixed Anglo-Norman blood and sympathy, showed a certain sceptical reserve about this cult, but accepted that the miracles were signs of God's

approval of Waltheof. The political element of the cult was clear from the beginning; it never attained more than a limited local support<¹⁹>.

Thorney, like the other East Anglian abbeys, was visited by William of Malmesbury, who was struck by its outstanding beauty and fertility. It was smaller than Ely, but no land was wasted: the apple orchards and vineyards, the beauty and strength of the buildings alike attracted his notice. Its separation from the world, its discouragement of female visitors, its pursuit of study won his approval. He strongly stressed the role of its founder Ethelwold, who had endowed it for twelve monks and enriched it with the relics of saints. These however had such barbarous names that he affected to find them unrepeatable, except for one, namely Benedict Biscop, founder of Wearmouth and Jarrow, whose body had been taken from Northumbria. Their names were Botulf, Adulf, Tancred and Torthred, Hereferth, Cissa and Tova. Botulf was a notable monastic figure in the Age of Bede. An East Anglian, who founded the monastery of Ikenho (Iken, Suffolk), in 654, after some time as chaplain to a convent of nuns (possibly Chelles), one of whose inmates Liobsynde became abbess of Wenlock (Salop), he was of sufficient importance to attract a visit from Ceolfrith who went to Ikenho c 670 before joining Benedict Biscop at Wearmouth. Botulf died in 680; his monastery was destroyed in the Danish invasions. About a century later Ulfkitel, disciple of Ethelwold, collected the relics together with those of Botulf's brother Adulf (of whom virtually nothing is known) and brought them to Thorney. Tancred, Torthred and Tova were hermits at Thorney killed by the Vikings in 870. Cissa, Guthlac's disciple, had provided his biographer Felix with information about the Crowland hermit. Huna had been a monk at Ely under Etheldreda but became a hermit at Huneya in the Fens. Herefrith was probably an East Anglian hermit, commemorated in the Durham *Liber Vitae*<²⁰>.

Ramsey too had its collection of relics. Founded by Oswald (who was of Scandinavian extraction) c 971, it became wealthier than Peterborough by the time of the Domesday survey and enjoyed an income seven times that of either Thorney or Crowland. William of Malmesbury mentions the opulent construction of the abbey by Earl Egelwine. Their most important relic was the body of St. Felix, translated from Monks Soham by this Earl's orders. To these relics of Felix were added those of the legendary Kentish princes Ethelred and Ethelbright, supposedly murdered by King Egbert's counsellor Thunor. Their bodies had been translated to Wakering (Essex), but in the reign of Ethelred the Unready, St. Oswald translated them to Ramsey<²¹>. As at Crowland a new saint, more recent than the time of Bede, was found in the more immediate neighbourhood. This was the hermit Ives, supposedly a retired Persian bishop who settled at the town which later bore his name (its original name was Slep). All we know of him is contained in Goscelin's unsatisfactory Life. Four bodies had been discovered in 1001, one of which had episcopal insignia buried with it. We do not know why or how this one was so confidently asserted to be that of Ives, nor indeed what the evidence was for the unlikely story of his having come from Persia. Anyway, the bodies of all four were

buried at Ramsey and rested there until a light appeared in the sky from Slepe to Ramsey, which was interpreted as meaning that Ives' companions should be returned to Slepe, where a dependency of Ramsey had recently been established. Ives remained at Ramsey, but his companions' shrine at Slepe provided an extra source of revenue there^{<22>}.

Peterborough's antiquity nearly matched that of Ely, as it claimed St. Wilfrid as its founder. Modern archaeologists think it probable that he was responsible for the fine church at Brixworth, founded from Peterborough, which is the largest surviving early Anglo-Saxon church still in use. Peterborough (Medehamstede) claimed to possess a number of relics. It shared those of Botulf with Thorney and Bury, and also claimed the bodies of the Mercian princesses Cyniburga and Cyneswith (from Castor, Northants) together with Tibba, also an anchoress probably of Mercian origin. It had bought for £500 the body of Florentius of Bonneval. A bolder claim was made to possess an arm of St. Oswald of Northumbria: William of Malmesbury was doubtful about this but Hugo Candidus claimed to have seen, touched and washed it. Cyneswith had been reputed to be the friend of Offa, king of the East Saxons, who wished to marry her. But she became a nun instead; he abdicated and ended his days at Rome^{<23>}.

East Anglia's most famous saint was Edmund of Bury, whose cult was encouraged and monastery enriched by Anglo-Saxon, Danish and Norman kings alike. Whatever obscurity there is about some details in his life and death, he was certainly a king, he died a violent death at the hands of the Vikings and the evidence for his cult goes back almost to his death: the oldest witness being a fine series of 2000 surviving coins, dating from c 875-915, inscribed 'Sc Edmund rex'. He was venerated as a martyr, like two of his predecessors, Sigebert and Ethelred^{<24>}.

The cults of Anglo-Saxon royal martyrs who died victims of war or assassination, usually by pagan hands, are an unusual feature of English Christianity. They need to be placed in the context of the surprising absence of martyrs from the first-generation evangelists and of the pagan, heroic ideal of the fighting-man dying in the service of his lord. Christianity could and did offer heroic examples which both fulfilled and transcended this ideal. One can refer to the description of Christ as divine hero in *The Dream of the Rood* or to the firm and very widely diffused cult of St. Oswald of Northumbria. The earlier East Anglian king saints however were rather different from the bellicose Oswald. Sigebert, who, as we have seen, introduced Felix into East Anglia, abdicated and became a monk. According to Bede, he agreed to come out of his monastery to help his countrymen face the dreaded Penda of Mercia in battle, but refused to bear arms or to take any part in the fighting beyond giving moral support. He was killed in the battle and his countrymen heavily defeated (c 636). Ethelbert (d.794) also lost his life to a Mercian king, the powerful Offa, whose policy was to absorb smaller kingdoms under his own direct rule. Ethelbert sought the hand of Offa's daughter AElfthryth in marriage; he visited her at Sutton Walls (Hereford and Worcester) and with this end in view. There however he was

assassinated, but his body was translated to Hereford cathedral where the immense number of cures ensured the continuation of his cult. He was not forgotten in East Anglia however, where eleven churches were dedicated to him. The surviving Lives are not very early, and it is commonly supposed that a lost Old English saga preceded them <²⁵>.

Edmund was different from either of these insofar as he appeared as the champion of East Anglia, and indeed of England against a foreign militant pagan foe, far more terrible than any Anglo-Saxon king. Although Alfred of Wessex rather than Edmund of East Anglia was to provide effective leadership, military skill and organization, Edmund was hailed as another native leader who stood firm against the might of the Great Army which soon afterwards attacked Wessex and nearly prevailed. He was a symbolic as well as a real figure, a king who refused to serve as an underling to a powerful pagan invader. As such, he eventually attained the status of a national patron; with the peace-loving Edward the Confessor, he is portrayed in the Wilton Diptych as a heavenly intercessor and patron for the young Richard II. The developed Legend of Edmund had found artistic expression also in the fine illustrated Life produced at Bury in c 1125 (now at New York, J.P. Morgan Library 736), in the St. Albans Psalter and in the Lydgate manuscript presented to Henry VI when he visited the abbey in 1433. Like many manuscripts of its time, this one radiates the atmosphere of late medieval romance: it seems far indeed from the savage reality of Edmund's death.

As in every hagiographical tradition there is great interest in establishing, if possible, the basic facts from which legend grew. This has been best done by the late Dorothy Whitelock <²⁶>. The oldest Life was written by the eminent Abbo of Fleury when he was staying at Ramsey to help Oswald's young foundation. In this Life he incorporated the memoirs of Edmund's armour-bearer which had been communicated earlier to King Athelstan and retold by St. Dunstan. It was written just over a century after the events it described. An earlier and more primitive layer of fact is represented by Edmund's contemporary Asser and by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The basic story is that Edmund came of Saxon stock and had been a devout Christian from childhood. He became king of the East Angles in 855 at the age of about fourteen. There seems to have been no king in East Anglia since Ethelbert while Mercia was dominant, with the exception of Athelstan c 825 and Ethelweard who ruled c 850. Edmund had independent status: the rising Wessex kings such as Ethelwulf ruled directly, it seems, Essex but not East Anglia. Edmund represented a resurgence of regional independence against overlord kings <²⁷>.

It was his misfortune however to face the Great Army of the Danes. For some years before this East Anglia, exposed geographically to raids across the North Sea, had endured the sackings and the pillage which it is fashionable in some quarters nowadays to ignore. The Great Army of 865 represented a far more serious threat; how serious was soon to be seen when it virtually eliminated East Anglia, Northumbria and western Mercia as effective opponents in a very short time <²⁸>.

One of their leaders was Ingwar, based at Thetford, who defeated and captured Edmund in battle in autumn 869. He offered him his life if he would rule as Ingwar's vassal. Such an undertaking could be considered as a virtual apostacy from the Christian faith: so it would have been regarded in contemporary Francia, then suffering from the same scourge. He refused and was put to death on 20 November. The traditional account, influenced perhaps by Martyrology accounts of other Christian martyrs, tells of his being scourged, shot with arrows and then beheaded. It seems likely that he was in fact 'spread-eagled' according to similar Viking practice elsewhere, as an offering to the gods. The place where he died was Hellesdon (Norfolk) rather than Hoxne. He was buried in a nearby chapel. His body was discovered to be incorrupt in 915 and was removed to Bedricsworth (later called Bury St. Edmunds) in 925 or before. Here King Athelstan founded a college of canons (two priests and four deacons) to guard the shrine. Another translation, this time to London, was caused by the landing of the Danish Thurkill at Ipswich in 1010. Edmund's body remained in the church of St. Gregory (near St. Pauls) for three years, after which it was restored to Bedricsworth. It should be noted that Bury St. Edmunds is neither the birth-place nor the place of death of the saint, but rather the permanent home of his shrine <29>.

Closely associated in the cult of Edmund is that of his family. Alcmund is supposed to have been his father, Fremund and Edwold the hermit of Cerne Abbas his brothers. All three are shadowy figures of whom very little is known. Edwold is the best documented of the three, occurring in Wessex sources. As he lived and died at Cerne, he is really a Wessex saint <30>.

The history of Edmund's cult is to a large extent the history of the Abbey of Bury. It was founded with monks from Ely and St. Benet's, Holme in 1020. Cnut fostered the cult and endowed the abbey generously: it was one example of his policy of reconciliation between Dane and Anglo-Saxon. It can be compared with his generous endowment of Canterbury, with the return there of the relics of St. Alphege, like Edmund a victim of Viking violence. The fine series of Bury charters, due to Danish, Anglo-Saxon and Norman kings, endow land in the first place to St. Edmund who, like other saints, ruled from the tomb. Various claims by East Anglian bishops to exercise jurisdiction in the liberty of St. Edmund, i.e. the town of Bury and most of present-day West Suffolk, came to nothing. By the late twelfth century Bury had become one of the largest and richest abbeys in England, with privileges of exemption second to none, acknowledged by pope and king alike <31>. Unlike Ely, it never became a bishopric but remained simply a large monastery until the Reformation. In a very prominent position in the abbey church, behind the high altar (the usual place for the local saint's shrine) rested the body of Edmund. Much can be gleaned about the shrine from the pages of Jocelin of Brakelond, especially his account of the translation of his body in 1198, necessitated by a fire caused by the carelessness of the custodians of the shrine. There are also interesting pictures of the shrine in the manuscript of Lydgate's Life of St. Edmund.

It was a wooden structure placed on a base of marble. Made in the shape of a church, encrusted with plates of silver gilt with gold cresting at the top, it had at its west end a relief of Christ in glory called the Majesty. At the four corners were four large candles, which burnt day and night. Between the shrine and the high altar was a platform on which two of the candles burnt and beneath which was stored a certain amount of 'junk' such as flax, thread, candles and assorted utensils. During the night one of the candles, placed on top of another one by the lazy shrine-keepers, fell onto the cloth which covered the platform and started a fire which raged around the feretory and nearly reached the church roof. Fortunately the arrival of the monks for Matins enabled them to put out the fire quite quickly, but considerable damage was done. Although the Majesty was intact, the nails which fixed the metal plates had fallen out and the whole shrine clearly needed repairs. The box which contained Edmund's cup was burnt, but not the cup itself. Fortunately some reliquaries which habitually hung close to the high altar had already been removed for renovation. For the shrine itself a goldsmith was summoned to do the necessary repairs as quickly and as secretly as possible.

In due course Abbot Samson arranged to inspect thoroughly the body of the saint, claimed to be incorrupt. Twelve monks only, dressed in albs, took the coffin out of the feretory and removed its lid. The body filled the coffin and was covered with various silk and linen cloths. Abbot Samson took Edmund's head in his hands, touched the eyes and the prominent nose, then the breast, arms and fingers, between which he placed his own fingers. Due record was left with the names of witnesses and the shrine was sealed as before. Thus it remained until the Reformation, when the shrine was destroyed and the body buried in an unknown place, possibly the intact but sealed crypt <32>.

Suffolk and Cambridgeshire had many saints, Norfolk comparatively few. Norwich, the 'capital' of East Anglia with its fine monastic cathedral, had no sainted bishop or monk in the course of its history. The cult of St. William of Norwich emphasises all the more the absence of a more 'normal' saint: this never attained full status, nor did his shrine occupy an important or prominent place in cathedral. The cult of rustic Walstan of Bawburgh, although of interest to the hagiographical researcher, could scarcely be considered as important as that of St. Edmund of Bury. It more closely resembles that of St Urith of Chittlehampton (Devon), insofar as the objects of both are mythical figures (whose historical existence is doubtful), and both cults were surprisingly long-lived. Offerings at Urith's shrine were extensive enough to pay for the building of the finest church-tower in North Devon, while the chancel at Bawburgh was rebuilt from the proceeds of offerings at Walstan's shrine by Norfolk farmers and labourers. Each cult seemed to be deeply rooted in rural beliefs and to have been supported by countryfolk rather than townsfolk; the former comprised the vast majority of the medieval population.

Once a year on 30 May Walstan's shrine in the north chapel of Bawburgh church was visited by those who worked on the land: 'all mowers and sythe followers',

recorded Bale, 'seek him once in the year.' The Legend, which formerly adorned his tomb, made him the son of a prince, born at Blythburgh (Suffolk), who early in life left home to dedicate himself to living the Gospel in poverty as a farm labourer. This he did, but the farmer for whom he worked was so pleased with him that he wished to make him his heir. Walstan refused, but asked instead for a cow in calf, which was given to him. He died not long after, in a field, praying for the sick and for cattle. The two calves born from this cow took his dead body to Bawburgh church. This happened supposedly in 1016, but the writer claimed the presence of the bishop and the monks of Norwich at his funeral. This is chronologically impossible, as the see of Norwich with its attendant monks was set up only in 1095, serving the whole of East Anglia, continuing the previous see of Thetford, which in its turn had been previously at Elmham. The cult of Walstan shows the veneration of humble country folk for one who had attained holiness through following the same way of life as themselves. If not so famous as Edmund or Etheldreda, he was at least more accessible <33>.

The lack of a saint at Norwich is at first sight surprising. Canonized bishops in the Middle Ages had served the great sees of Canterbury and York, and rural ones like Rochester, Worcester, Chichester and Lincoln. The founder of Norwich, Herbert Losinga, although a man of letters and a notable preacher, seems to have been guilty both of simony and covetousness. From the monastic community of Norwich only in the fourteenth century did two monks emerge with exceptional reputations and unusual services to the Church. Adam Easton, who became a cardinal, took a prominent part in the canonization of St. Bridget of Sweden, but it was his misfortune to live, and to be imprisoned in Rome in the reign of Urban VI in his paranoid period. His colleague, Thomas Brinton, was appointed bishop of Rochester in 1373 by papal provision. Like Easton he was a monk-graduate, like him he was prominent as a preacher. But whereas Easton was a theologian, Brinton was a canonist: he also had a keen sense of social justice, combining attacks on social abuses and on the rich with a conservative defence of ecclesiastical rights and liberties <34>.

If neither of these eminent men attained the status of an unofficial cult or formal canonization, which latter honour was indeed granted to no citizen of East Anglia, mention should be made of two East Anglians who had a certain reputation for sanctity. One was the boy, William of Norwich, the other the mystic usually called Mother Julian of Norwich.

The rise and fall of the cult of William of Norwich has special interest as the first example in England of its kind. The Life of William by Thomas of Monmouth, a monk of Norwich, is the fullest, if not the best known account of such supposed happenings. The ritual murder by Jews of Christian boys each year was the object of a widespread but erroneous belief in medieval England, into which fitted the cults of William of Norwich, Little Hugh of Lincoln (immortalised in the Prioress' Tale in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales) and Robert of Bury (of whom Jocelin of Brakelond wrote a lost *Life*). The privileged position of the Jews under the king's special

protection as well as their successful monopoly of lending money at often exorbitant rates of interest ('usury' was forbidden to Christians) must be borne in mind if the anti-Semitic sentiments and propaganda are to be understood. It must also be remembered that the Jews in the second half of the twelfth century had made large loans to a number of monastic houses, both Benedictine and Cistercian, and reduced some of them to near-ruin in the process. Jocelin of Brakelond vividly described the success of the Jews at the expense of his abbey during the weak rule of the incompetent and aged abbot Hugh: a whole series of loans was undertaken beginning with forty marks, then a hundred pounds and so on until the convent finally owed Benedict the Jew of Norwich the immense sum of twelve hundred pounds, not counting the accumulated interest. So powerful had they become that the Jews actually lived in the abbey with their wives and children in the obedientiaries' offices: they wandered through the abbey church while Mass was being sung. St. Albans too owed 800 marks in 1183, while a few years before, the abbot of Peterborough tried hard to remove the arm of St. Oswald from its reliquary in order to pawn it to the Jews. Cistercian abbeys, as many as nine in number (including Rievaulx, Revesby and Louth Park) owed Aaron the Jew of Lincoln more than 6,400 marks when he died in 1186<35>.

William of Norwich was killed in 1144, but his Life was written only in 1169. He was but twelve years of age and was most likely the victim of the kind of unprovoked attack on children, frequently fatal, of which there are only too many examples in our own day. His body was discovered in a wood unburied, whence it was removed, first to the monks' chapter-house, then to the Martyrs' Chapel (later called the Jesus Chapel) in Norwich cathedral. There seems to have been no evidence to connect his death with alleged Jewish ritual practices or to identify his killer as a Jew. This was nevertheless asserted in the Life on the authority of the boy's uncle Godwin. This claimed that he was an apprentice to a Norwich skinner, who was abducted by a strange man who promised he would become the archdeacon's kitchen boy. Instead he was gagged, shaved, lacerated with a crown of thorns and crucified. But in twelfth-century Norwich there had been doubts and reservations about William and this story from inside the monastic community. This was why the cult never attained any official status, although cures were claimed. By 1314 offerings at the shrine were worth only £1.1-5; by 1343 they had dropped to only fourpence. It is indeed difficult to think of the cult flourishing in the Norwich of Adam Easton and Thomas Brinton <36>.

They belonged, as did the recluse Julian of Norwich (c.1342-c.1416) to another world. This was the world of centralization and organization in the Church, of universities and scholasticism and of the Friars who contributed powerfully to both; of the rise of the literate layman and in particular of the English Mystics, of whom indeed Julian herself is in some ways the most impressive example of all. By the time that she was enclosed in her anchorhold at the church of St. Julian in Norwich, this town had become the second in England in terms of size and population. In religious terms it was provided with the cathedral and the four churches of the four Orders

of Friars, three colleges of secular priests and an immense number of other churches, many of which survive in our own day. Some of these were built for the needs of particular guilds of merchants and craftsmen, which flourished in this important trading-centre with strong links with Germany and the Low Countries. A town of such size would not have existed in the time of Herbert of Losinga, still less in that of Felix and Etheldreda.

As a girl Julian could have heard the cathedral sermons of Easton or Brinton. She seems to have become a nun in her early years, possibly at Carrow, whose Benedictine nuns were the patrons of the living at St. Julian's. Her writings however give us very few biographical clues and most of the details of her life are more or less well-informed conjecture. However, thanks to the admirable labours of her two most recent editors, it seems certain that she was well educated, knew Latin well and had read widely in Latin and vernacular spiritual classics. The former included Augustine and Gregory, the latter the *Cloud of Unknowing* and the *Scale of Perfection*. She also used Chaucer's *Boethius* and learned the skills of rhetoric which she applied to philosophical and theological data. Her book, of which two recensions survive, is 'a great monument to the Western monastic traditions of *lectio divina* of which she was heiress; the learning she had inherited began and continued in the loving, prayerful study and memorization of sacred Scripture' <3>.

The Revelations which she received at the age of thirty were recorded in the short version in 1373. Twenty years later, in 1393 she rewrote her account in the longer, more calm and profound account. It is possible but unproved that the short version circulated in her own lifetime. The long version survives only through the labours of English recusant Benedictine nuns and their directors Dom Augustine Baker and Dom Serenus Cressy at Cambrai in the seventeenth century. The latter published the first printed edition in 1670.

In choosing the life of a recluse Julian was following in the footsteps of other earlier East Anglian saints: Guthlac and Pega, Witburga and Tova. In her very probable earlier choice of a cenobitic monastic life she was at one with Etheldreda, Ethelwold and countless monks of Ely and Bury. It seems likely that she experienced her revelations before becoming a recluse. But whereas the holiness of the earlier saints must remain unproved but probable, that of Julian faces us in every page of her writings. She has however never been canonized nor her cause begun. Too little perhaps is known of her life and she has lacked a powerful corporate body like a Religious Order or a group of bishops to further her cause.

The quality and content of her writing has always been highly regarded; so too has the balance and sanity of her personality. This was revealed also when the devout but neurotic Margery Kempe of King's Lynn visited Julian at Norwich to consult her about taking a vow of chastity although she was a married woman. Julian, according to Margery, had a reputation for discerning truth from falsehood in the matter of visions and revelations. Julian told Margery 'to be obedient to the will of God, to

carry out with all her powers whatever he might put into her soul if it were not contrary to his glory and the profit of her fellow Christians, for if it were, it could not be the prompting of a good spirit ... the Holy Spirit never inspires anything contrary to love, for if he did, he would be in opposition to his own self, for he is all love.' At the end of their meeting, after further discourse had shown Julian's deeply scriptural learning, she ended on a note of optimism and encouragement: 'Put all your trust in God and do not fear what the world will say, for the more sorrow and shame you receive in the world, the more is your merit in the sight of God.' Whereas Margery seemed too preoccupied with herself, Julian radiated the peace of the unselfconscious mystic, whose attention was fixed on Divine mysteries, which were infinitely more important than the recipient, who should be humble and anonymous<38>.

The doctrinal content of the Showings is both orthodox and attractive. They reveal her contemplation of the deep meaning of Christ's crucifixion, with precious insights into the mystery of the Holy Trinity and the problems of sin and suffering. Perhaps her most original thought is on the Motherhood of God, seen not as a substitute for his Fatherhood but as its complement, representing the totality of love. In this she owed much to the earlier work of William of Saint-Thierry, but she developed the idea in a different way. She also wrote in admirable terms of the role of Mary in the Redemption. Her choice of the vernacular shows that she had in mind the spiritual needs of her compatriots and presumably the people of East Anglia in particular.

In Julian's life and writings, the fruit of twenty years' pondering of the meaning of an experience which had brought her close to death, we may glimpse the kind of reality and inner strivings of earlier, and less articulate East Anglian saints. A saint is a person completely identified with Christ, centred in God and full of compassion to others. Whether an apostle, a monk or a martyr, whether layman, cleric or nun, it is the love of God, according to Julian, which makes sense of all the rest. At the very end of her work she wrote:

So I was taught that love is Our Lord's meaning. And I saw very certainly in this and in everything that before God made us he loved us, which love has never abated and never will be. And in this love he has done all his works and in this love he has made all things profitable to us, and in this love our life is everlasting. In our creation we had beginning, but the love in which he created us was in him from without beginning. In this love we have our beginning, and all this shall we see in God without end <39>.

It is surely not a coincidence that the known number of hermits and recluses increased significantly in the years after Julian's death.

NOTES

1. Cf. E. W. Kemp, *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church*, Oxford 1948, pp. 107-40.
2. Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica (HE)*, ii, 15-16; his main source of information about East Anglia was the otherwise unknown Abbot Esi. His Kentish correspondents Albinus and Nothelm, also gave him East Anglian information, presumably insofar as it concerned Canterbury.
3. Bede, *HE*, *ibid.* and iii, 19-20. By an oversight there is no article SIGEBERT in the *Oxford Dictionary of Saints (ODS)*; this will be made good in the second edition.
4. The most notorious iconoclast of the seventeenth century, William Dowsing, was an East Anglian (1596-1679). He kept a diary of his own destructions, which included the stained glass at Lavenham, Clare, Warbleswick and elsewhere. See *DNB*, s.v.
5. Bede, *HE*, iv, 19-20; Eddius is surprisingly reticent, although he had plenty to say about Egfrith's second wife (cc.24, 39); see my article 'St. Wilfrid', in *St. Wilfrid at Hexham*, ed. D.P. Kirby, Newcastle 1974, pp.35-39.
6. Bede, *HE*, iv, 19; see also *ODS*, s.v.
7. Cf. *Tenth Century Studies*, ed. D. Parsons, Chichester 1975, pp. 15-19, 123 ff, 169 ff; *Liber Eliensis (LE)*, ed. E.O. Blake, Camden third series, London 1962, Introduction; E. Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, Cambridge 1951, *passim*.
8. *LE*, 120-3.
9. *LE*, 221-2.
10. R. Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, Cambridge 1958, pp. 198-204.
11. *LE*, Introduction; see also A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in the Middle Ages*, London 1974, pp. 280-86.
12. *LE*, 213-6.
13. *LE*, 265-6.
14. *LE*, 270-74.

15. *LE*, 145-48.
16. *ODS*, s.v. ETHELDREDA
17. See D.W. Rollason, 'Lists of saints' resting-places in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 7, 1978, 61-93.
18. *ODS*, s.v. GUTHLAC and references.
19. Ordericus Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. M. Chibnall, II, 319-23, 344-51; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum (GP)*, ed. N.E. Hamilton, Rolls Series 1870, 321.
20. *GP*, 326-28; see also C. Clark, 'Notes on a Life of Three Thorney Saints', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 69, 1979, 45-52; for another identification see A.E.B. Owen, 'Herefrith of Louth', *Lincs. History and Archaeology* 15, 1980, 15-19.
21. *GP*, 318-20.
22. Goscelin's *Life of Ivo* is in *PL* 155, 84 ff.
23. For Peterborough see *GP* 317-18 and *The Peterborough Chronicle of Hugo Candidus*, ed. W.T. Mellows and A. Bell, Oxford 1949, 149-68. This passage also lists the whole Peterborough relic collection: the more sensational items include parts of Christ's manger and swaddling clothes, parts of the five loaves with which he fed the Five Thousand, part of the rod of Aaron and some of the bones of Symeon, who received Christ in the Temple.
24. See the St. Edmund commemorative issue of *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, 31, part 3 (1969) and A. Gransden, 'The Legends and traditions concerning the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds,' *EHR*, 394, 1985, 1-24. This study was published after the present paper was in the press.
25. Bede, *HE*, iii, 118; M.R. James, 'Two Lives of St. Ethelbert, King and Martyr', *English Historical Review*, 32, 1917, 214-44; R.M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, London 1952, 106-8.
26. 'Fact and Fiction in the Legend of St. Edmund', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, 31, part 3, 1969, 217-33; see also the more recent study in the same journal by R. Gem and L. Keen, 'Late Anglo-Saxon Finds from the Site of St. Edmund's Abbey', 35, part 1, 1981, 1-30.
27. Abbo's Life of Edmund is in *Memorials of St. Edmund's Abbey*, ed. T. Arnold, Rolls Series 1890, I, 3-209.

28. See the admirable study and comments of N.P. Brooks, 'England in the Ninth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, 29, 1979, 1-20; J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Vikings in Francia*, Reading, Stenton Lecture 1974.

29. Cf *The Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond*, ed. H.E. Butler, London 1949, Introduction.

30. *ODS*, s.v. FREMUND and EDWOLD.

31. D.C. Douglas, *Feudal Documents from the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds*, Oxford 1932, *passim*; see also D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, 2nd ed. Cambridge 1963, pp. 307-12, 579-83, 590-91.

32. Jocelin, 106-16.

33. *ODS*, s.v. URITH and WALSTAN. For the origins of the Norwich diocese see the admirable study by B. Dodwell, 'The Foundation of Norwich Cathedral', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, 7, 1957, 1-18.

34. Cf. W.A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century*, Cambridge 1955, pp. 175-85; D. Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, Cambridge 1955, II, 56-60.

35. See Jocelin, 1-6, 10; D. Knowles, *Monastic Order in England*, pp. 353-4, 696-7.

36. See. A. Jessopp and M.R. James, *St. William of Norwich*, Cambridge 1896; M.D. Anderson, *A Saint at Stake*, London 1964; C. Roth, *The Ritual Libel Murder and the Jew*, London 1935.

37. E. Colledge and J. Walsh, *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, 2 vols., Toronto 1978. The conclusions of this excellent critical edition are resumed in their more accessible volume *Julian of Norwich, Showings* (Classics of Western Spirituality), New York 1978.

38. *The Book of Marjorie Kempe*, ed. S.B. Meech and H.E. Allen, Early English Text Society, London 1940, pp. 43-44.

39. *Showings*, c. 86.