

Wall, Charles J., Shrines of British Saints. Methuen & Co. London, 1905.  
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### CHAPTER III

#### SHRINES OF VIRGINS AND MATRONS

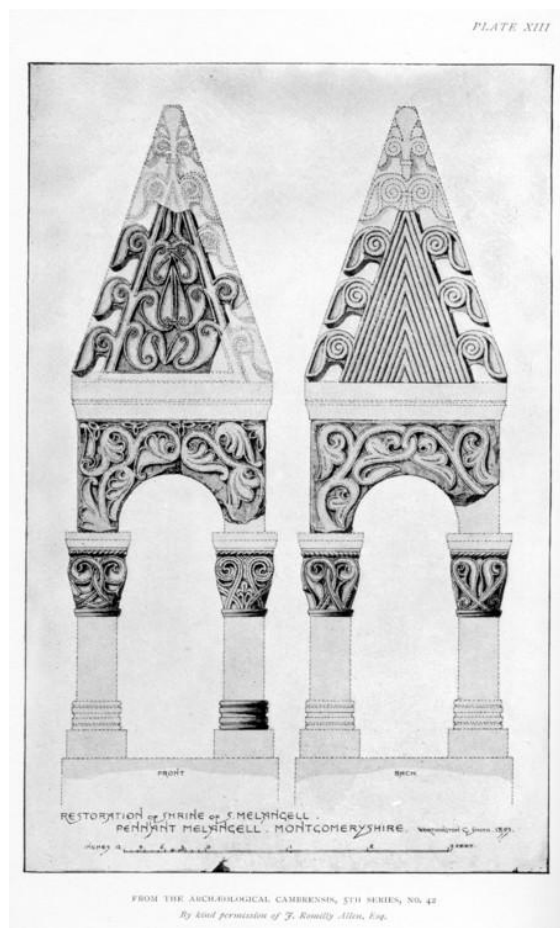


Illustration: Melangel, Montgomeryshire

The proto-martyr of Britain claimed first attention, and with him a priest, inseparably associated in life and in death and in the contiguity of their shrines beneath one roof. But women ever proved themselves strong in the faith of Christ ; first to realize that the promise of a Messiah was to be fulfilled ; great in self-denial and perseverance from that day when, at the foot of the Cross, they boldly clung to their Saviour, ignoring the derision of the world ; the first at the sepulchre ; and first, too, through those days of terrible persecution when their blood freely flowed in the arena.

The virgins and matrons of Britain ever showed exemplary devotion to Christianity, in fusing their fervour into the hearts of Britain's sons.

Women shall, with the exception of Sts. Alban and Amphibalus, retain in these pages that precedence bequeathed to them by the Mother of our Lord, and which was made so impressive a feature in the chivalric legends of that ideal of Christian courts—the legendary court of King Arthur.

A contemporary of the proto-martyr, St. Helen, was of legendary but quite fictitious British birth. By her marriage with Constantius Chlorus she became the mother of Constantine the Great. With him, and through his imperial power, she was the first to encourage the building and beautifying of shrines, and was herself diligent

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in such works. St. Helen died at Rome, and her ashes were enclosed in a porphyry urn, said to be the largest and richest in the world, which shrine is now preserved in a gallery of the Lateran. Notker, abbot of Hautvilliers, in the diocese of Rheims, in 1095 wrote an account of the translation, in the year 849, of the relics of this saint from Rome to that abbey, with all the attendant pomp.

The shrines erected to the honour of the women saints of the British Isles, though not so numerous as those to prelates and kings, were numbered among the most popular in the land.

### ST. MELANGELL

The remains of the shrine of St. Melangell have recently been discovered at Pennant Melangell, county Montgomery, in Wales. A large number of sculptured fragments are built into the walls of the church and the lych-gate, from which Mr. Worthington G. Smith has made a conjectural restoration of her shrine. Four beautifully sculptured capitals of Celtic workmanship were found, in addition to various slabs enriched with graceful foliated scrolls in low relief. The whole structure, as restored, is over 8 feet in height. This was the monument above the grave of the saint, and possibly beneath the stone vault stood one of those exquisite coffers of enameled copper containing certain relics of the noble Irish maiden.

At the east end of the church is a small rectangular chapel still called "Cell-y-Bedd," the Cell of the Grave, in which the shrine formerly stood.

## ST. MARGARET

Passing from the land of the Welsh to that of the Picts, we find the royal St. Margaret of Scotland had a magnificent shrine in the abbey church of Dunfermline, a resort

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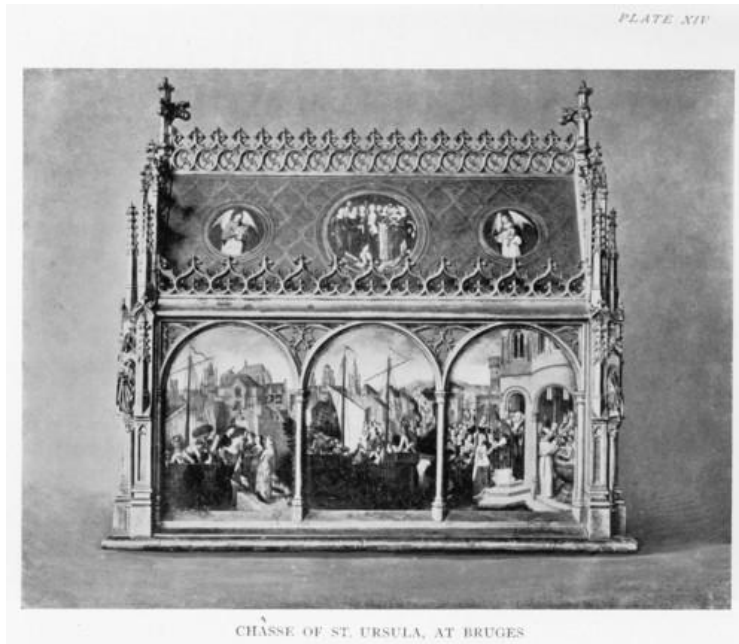


Illustration: Plate XVI Châsse of St. Ursula

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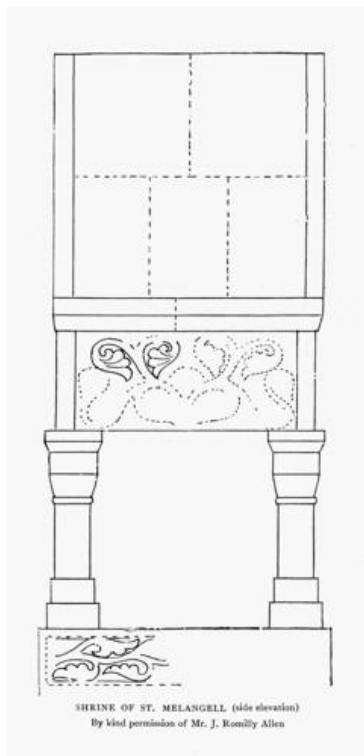


Illustration: Shrine of St. Melangell

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of countless pilgrims. In its shadow many of the royal line of Scotland found a tomb. At the Reformation her relics were privately removed to escape a sacrilegious mob who gave vent to their lust of destruction under the cloak of religion. The head of St. Margaret was carried to Edinburgh to Queen Mary Stuart, but after her flight into England it was taken to Antwerp by a Benedictine monk in 1597, who afterwards gave it to the college—afterwards the mitred abbey—of Douay, in which church it is enshrined in a silver reliquary. The rest of her relics were taken to Spain, where King Philip II built a chapel in the Escorial Palace in her honour, which contains her shrine. In the same shrine are enclosed the bones of her husband, King Malcom, whose name is enrolled among the saints in some of the Scottish calendars.

#### ST. URSULA

Of all the shrines fabricated for the relics of English saints—and for a woman—the ch<sup>â</sup>sse of St. Ursula stands pre-eminent. It is not a high marble structure or a bejeweled coffer, but a feretory of wood, the panels of which are decorated with the wonderful miniature paintings of Hans Memling illustrating scenes in the life and passion of the British Virgin.

Through being made and kept in a foreign country, this beautiful shrine has been preserved through all vicissitudes. St. Ursula and her companions—

whatever their number may have been—fled from the importunities of a British prince, seeking shelter, and receiving the crown of martyrdom in an alien land. The brethren of the Hospital of St John in Bruges, gave directions for the making of her chässe in 1480, and it was finished in 1486.

The scenes depicted in the side panels are : the landing of St. Ursula at Cologne, in the background of which

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Illustration: Plate XV Shrine of St. Ursula

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certain buildings of that city are represented ; the quay at Basle ; the Pope receiving the saint at the door of a church ; the Pope accompanying the virgins on their return to Basle ; the assault of the barbarians on the virgins and their escort on the banks of the Rhine ; and the martyrdom. On one of the gabled ends St. Ursula throws her protecting mantle around some of her companions, and in the other she receives the veneration of two nuns. On either side of the roof are three medallions illustrating the coronation of the Virgin and the apotheosis of St. Ursula with four attendant angels (see Plates XIV and XV).

ST. LEWINNA

Of the shrine of another British saint—St. Lewinna—who was martyred between the years 680-690, we have no description of either form or decoration, but from a remarkable account of spoliation there is no doubt that it was a feretory of wood.

St. Lewinna had been buried in the church of St. Andrew, somewhere in Sussex, probably in the town of Lewes. Her reputation became so great that her bones were taken up and enshrined in a chest, and the miracles attributed to her were recorded on scrolls of parchment which were fixed to the walls.

There was in the monastery of Berques, in Flanders, near Dunkirk, a monk named Balgerus, who had made frequent voyages to England for the sake of obtaining relics. In the year 1058 this monk—as is related by Drogo, a contemporary and fellow-monk of Balgerus—again shipped for England ; but a storm drove them past Dover, their intended port, until at last they found refuge in a harbour which, from his description, was evidently Newhaven. Balgerus made his way to St Andrew's, where, after service, he examined everything in the church

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and heard of the fame of St. Lewinna, by which he was inflamed with the wish to take away some relic of the saint's body. Drawing aside the parish priest he is reported to have said, "Ask what you please, and give me the relics of so great a virgin, either a bone or some other portion, which may do honour to my own monastery." The priest was exceedingly angry at such insolence and told him that he who could make such a proposition was a dishonest man. The monk was confused at the reproof and tried to pass it off as a joke. "I am in sport," he replied, "I did not speak seriously ; all I really want of you is to allow me to hear Mass and to pray here at my leisure while I stay." The unsuspecting Saxon priest made answer, "The church is open to everyone, the door will not be shut on your account" —a lesson yet to be learnt by many English clergy.

Then follows a curious description of the gradual development of the schemes of Balgerus, to obtain by theft that which he failed to purchase.

Drago describes how Balgerus, while chanting and praying, glanced obliquely at the coveted shrine ; from looking he came to handling it. He then discovered a way of opening the chest—quite accidentally—by drawing out the iron nails in a certain manner, so as to disclose to view the bones wrapped in a red cloth. Alarmed at this own temerity, guilt making him a coward, he replaced everything and resumed his *prayers that heaven would direct him when and how to carry off these relics*.

The following day the doorkeeper (aedituus) told him that he was going elsewhere, and would leave the church to his care, hoping that he would stay until the evening. "Go away, my friend," said Balgerus, "where you please ; I will remain on guard to keep things as anxiously as yourself." Thus finding himself alone he approached the shrine more boldly and tried to lift it up, but he could

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neither move nor raise it, it seemed to be rooted to the spot. A sudden horror seized him. Surely this was a sign of divine displeasure, for previously he could move it with ease. He renewed his prayers and began to chant through the whole Psalter until the fourth hour of the day, when he thought he would try again. He took a leathern strap and placing it round his neck fastened the two ends round the shrine. He then ejaculated, "Accept me, O venerable virgin, as your perpetual servant ; only suffer yourself to be moved and carried to where you may be exalted to greater honour." He again applied his trembling hand, and the chest at once moved. Delighted with his success he solemnly adjured the saint not to allow herself to be stolen unless his faithful theft was destined to be undetected ; he then continued to the end of the Psalter, when he quietly fell asleep.

In this sleep St. Lewinna appeared to him and told him to take her as his companion.

Before he was fully awake he thought he heard a noise, and imagined it was the return of the doorkeeper ; but after searching all over the church and finding no one, his courage returned, and he proceeded to open the chest and wrap the bones in a linen cloth he had with him. In so doing so a few small bones fell through a hole in the cloth, and although he picked them up three times they again fell. By this the saint clearly indicated that some of her relics should be left in that place where she had been martyred and buried.

Balgerus carried off as many of the bones as the saint permitted to his inn, and placing them in a box sent it down to a ship, but remained himself to disarm suspicion. During the night a storm arose, which, although in harbor, threatened the safety of the vessel. The sailors thought it was caused by the presence of the stolen relics, and suggested casting them into the sea.

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In the meanwhile, says Drogo, our faithful thief—nay, our good robber—passed a troubled night, until the saint in a vision comforted him with promises of a fair voyage. In the early morning he returned to the ship and they put to sea.

Later in the day the monk heard the sailors complain of the hard and dry bread which was their only food, and he suggested that while they were only coasting he should land and buy some fish. He landed in a small boat and made his purchase, but as the boat was returning he saw the wind fill the sails of the vessel, and to his mortification it sailed away with his precious relics. "Farewell! farewell!" he piteously cried, "I am clearly unworthy to accompany you, my pious virgin, but may you have a prosperous voyage."

In course of time Balgerus reached his monastery at Bergue, wherein he found that although the ship had arrived the relics had been given to the care of the captain of another vessel, and it was only with great difficulty that he regained them.

At length the relics were brought to their intended resting-place, and a feretrum adorned with gold and silver was prepared, into which Bishop Bovo



translated them. First washing them with the choicest wines he then wrapped them in two cloths.

The chest was securely nailed down on every side “lest any fraud might possibly be practiced, and any portion of the relics taken away.”

Among the many miracles recorded was one at Lieswege, where some of the wood scraped off the saint’s shrine and mixed with wine effected a cure.

Bergue rejoiced in the possession of these relics until the year 1522 when the shrine was destroyed and the relics burnt, only one rib bone being saved.

Shorn of its fabulous accretions this account of an

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audacious robbery, condoned by the ecclesiastical superiors of the thief, who in the eyes of his fellow-brethren became a hero, is but one of many similar deeds. Foreigners must not receive the sole blame ; such thefts were common among the “religious” of the country. Such acts influenced the locality of a shrine and were largely responsible for the increase in the number of reliquaries.

#### ST. ETHELDREDA

Mid the ranks of sainted women one family—of whom St. Ethedreda is the most revered representative—shed a halo from the dreary fenland throughout England, and the reputation of Ely, in this respect, equalled Glastonbury.

After the death of the Abbess Etheldreda in 679 she was buried, by her own desire, in a wooden coffin in the common cemetery at Ely, among the graves of the nuns. Sixteen years after, her sister Sexburga, who had succeeded in the rule of the convent, determined to take up St. Etheldreda’s bones, place them in a stone coffin and translate them into the church.

Some of the monks were accordingly sent in a boat to find a stone large enough for the purpose, as there was nothing available on the isle. When they reached the abandoned Roman city of Grantchester, near Cambridge, they found, outside the ruined walls, a white marble coffin most beautifully wrought, and covered with a lid of the same kind of stone. Concluding that God had prospered their journey by placing this in their way, they returned thanks to Him and conveyed it back to the monastery, where it was received as “a divine gift.”

A pavilion was erected over the grave for the exhumation, and when the wooden coffin was opened the body of the saint was found to be as free from corruption as though she had but just died.

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The marble sarcophagus proved to be the required size in every respect ; the place for the head particularly is mentioned by Bede as being shaped to a nicety. This translation took place on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 695. The sarcophagus was not buried in the earth, but was raised above the pavement of the church.



In 870 the devastating Danes invaded Ely, and supposing the marble chest to contain treasure, one of them with repeated blows cracked the stone cover, when—according to the *Liber Eliensis*—his eyes immediately started out of their sockets. No one else dared to touch it and the dust of the saint remained undisturbed.

When Canute, the king, visited Ely, his queen Emma gave a purple cloth worked with gold and set with jewels, to adorn the shrine—a wonderful piece of work for those days. Thomas the chronicler, a monk of Ely, declares that none other could be found in the kingdom of the English of such richness or beauty of workmanship.

At the building of the new choir by Abbot Richard, it became necessary to remove the shrine, and—on the feast of the former translation—in 1106, with great pomp the marble shrine, the disused coffin of some old Roman magnate, consecrated by over four centuries of pilgrimages, was solemnly moved to a position behind the high altar. At the same time were translated the bodies of St. Etheldreda's sainted relatives and successors. The shrine of her sister, St. Sexburga, was placed eastward, at her feet; St. Ermenilda, her niece, on the south side and St. Werburga—the daughter of St. Ermenilda—on the north side.<sup>1</sup> Thus was St. Etheldreda surrounded by a fitting escort of saints of her own family.

The relics of the three latter saints were found in various states. The bones of St. Sexburga were discovered wrapped in silk, and the dust of her body laid in

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Illustration: Plate XVI The Translation of St. Etheldreda

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a separate cloth of fine linen. These had been placed by Abbot Ethelwold of Abingdon in two wooden coffers, and both enclosed in one stone monument. The relics of St. Ermenilda were in an open grave beneath the pavement, without any covering but the flagstones ; and the body of St. Werburga, together with her vestures, was found quite perfect, "indeed her body appeared as fair as though she had been but just dead."<sup>2</sup>

Now they were gathered around their kinswoman, whose "white marble sarcophagus" was considered so sacred, second only to the relics themselves. Of this Roman coffin we have, in all probability, a faithful representation. In the possession of the Society of Antiquaries is a fourteenth or early fifteenth century painted panel which, about a hundred years ago, was found doing duty as a cupboard door in a cottage at Ely, and had at one time evidently formed a portion of an altar-piece or retable in the conventual church. Four scenes in the life of St. Etheldreda are depicted, the last representing the placing of her body in the marble coffin, the sculptures on it being quite consistent with Roman design of the time of the occupation of Britain.

Around this coffin was built the outer case of the shrine, the decoration of which, from the wealth of jewels and the art displayed in this construction, must have made a gorgeous monument.

"Near the east end of the church is the shrine in which is enclosed the marble coffin containing the body of the Holy Virgin St. Etheldreda, towards her proper altar, where she now remains entire and uncorrupted in her tomb, prepared for her, as we believe, by angelic hands, as Bede, the learned writer of the English history, informs us. The part of this shrine which faces the altar is of silver, adorned with prominent figures, excellently gilt ; round the glory are seven beryls and chrystals,

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two onyxes, and two Alemandine stones, and twenty-six pearls ; on the crown of the glory are one amethyst, two cornelians [sic], six pearls, and eight transparent stones ; and on the four angles of the crown, four large chrystals ; and in the circumference, nine chrystals ; and in the corner towards the south is fixed an ornament of gold, with one topaz, three emeralds, and three sardines. The crown of the upper image are seven precious stones and eleven pearls. There is also one pommel, which supports a crucifix of copper, well gilt, and adorned with twelve chrystals.

"The left side of the shrine is of silver, well gilt, adorned with sixteen figures in relief, fourscore and fourteen large chrystals, and with one hundred and forty-nine small chrystals and transparent stones.

“The east end of the shrine is also of silver, gilt in different parts, ornamented with images in relief, among which are two figures of lions, composed of chrystal, and set with thirty-two chrystals, three transparent stones, and eight emeralds, and seven middling nuts (*modiscis nuscis*) ; there is also one glory, which belongs to the frontal of the altar.

“In the south part are sixteen figures of silver without gilding, and the under moulding or border of silver gilt. In this compartment are twenty-six chrystals, and in this part is another round piece of copper, which also supports a crucifix of copper well covered over with gold ; and before the altar is a table of silver gilt, and adorned with raised figures. This was made, by the Abbot Theodwyn, of the money found at Winteworth, after the death of Abbot Thurstan, on which, round the glory, are two chalcedonies and twelve stones, between chrystals and beryls, and eight stones and sixteen pearls are wanting, and round the glory are four figures of angels of ivory ; and in the inmost silver border of this table are wanting twenty-eight stones. This table Bishop Nigellus broke, and also the shrine of S. Etheldreda [sic], at the instigation of those who were enemies to the peace and welfare of the Church, and took away all the gold and silver that was on them, and embezzled it.”<sup>3</sup>

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This defacement is also referred to by the author of *Anglia Sacra* :—

“Toward the end of the year 1144 Bishop Nigell was fined 300 marks by the king, and had to surrender his son as a hostage until the fine was paid.

“To raise this money the bishop almost entirely stripped the shrine of S. Etheldreda, on which he had before laid great contributions. The silver he now took from it amounted to 124 marks, besides which, and the silver and gold which he tore from the table of the altar, or reredos as it is now commonly called, valued at 70 marks, he took two silver images and many other things from the various altars.”<sup>4</sup>

The monks who did the Bishop’s wicked bidding were said to have been afflicted with various ailments in consequence—one of them with a severe attack of gout.

The restoration was shortly taken in hand, for we find that—

“Bishop Geoffry Ridel in 1179 very elegantly repaired with silver the two sides and part of the covering of the shrine ; and Bishop Geoffry de Burgh in 1225 cause a great part of the silver of the shrine to be gilt, probably those parts restored by Ridel, and gave a very large and valuable piece of plate for an ornament on the upper part of it.”<sup>5</sup>

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of September, 1252, the present church was dedicated, and into the presbytery, east of the high altar, St. Etheldreda and her three companions

were again translated, together with the reputed relics of St. Alban,<sup>6</sup> in the presence of King Henry II and his sons.

In the year 1324, robbers broke into the sanctuary and stole from the shrine a large golden cross, which was said to have been the gift of King Edgar, besides many other articles of value. Robert de Bykeling was at that time the custodian of the shrine, and he, following the thieves

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to London, was successful in recovering and restoring the treasures to the church.

Fifty-four years after this, the fourth and fifth bays of the triforium had their roofs removed, and the arcade glazed, by which a flood of light was shed upon the shrines in the middle of the presbytery.

The upper part of Bishop Hotham's tomb is supposed to have been the watching loft for the shrine.

Bishop Goodrich zealously carried out the injunctions of 1541 for the stripping of the church, and the shrines were totally destroyed.

It was not until recent years, when the Rev. Father Lockhart, a Passionist father, restored the desecrated chapel of the bishops of Ely, in Ely Place, London, that certain relics of St. Etheldreda were again enshrined. They now rest in a rectangular reliquary beneath the altar of that church.

#### ST. WERBURGA

In St. Werburga was centred the blood of the chief Saxon kings, but she discarded the fine linen and purple of the court for the coarse conventual habit, in the monastery of Ely. It would seem that she left the seclusion of that isle to found and supervise other religious houses ; but it is difficult to trace the actual facts. There is confusion between the two saints of the same name, or between the records of the life of the same saint. Hagiologists have imagined the patron of Chester and the saint of Ely to be two saints with similar names, whilst others recognize the same individual with shrines to her honour in the two places. Following the latter supposition and the Ely MS., it appears that St Werberga died, and was buried in the churchyard at Dereham. After any years her grave was opened, and her body was found to be as fair as when she had lain on the bier on the day of her

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Illustration: Plate XVII Shrine of St. Werburg

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death, her vestures untouched by decay, her hands crossed upon her bosom, and her little crucifix resting upon her breast. The holy relics were forthwith removed into the church, where the virgin manifested her sanctity by numerous miracles.

Toward the latter part of the ninth century, a part or the whole of these relics were carried to Chester, to escape the marauding Danes ; if the latter, certain portion must have been restored to Dereham after the danger had passed. The relics of St. Werburga at Chester were deposited in a feretory of silver, and the stately church, built specially to contain them, was actually a vast shrine to the honour of the saint.

*“In the Abbay of Chestre she is shryned rychely”*

runs a line in the metrical Life of St. Werburga, by John Bradshaw, a literary monk of Chester.

The repute of St. Werburga was great, her efficacy in working miracles unlimited, and in 1180 we find the feretrum was carried in procession through the

streets of Chester for the purpose of staying a conflagration which threatened to consume the city.

By the mandate of Henry VIII the abbey church was turned into the cathedral of Chester, and in that fane is still standing a part of the structural shrine of St Werburga. Until recently a large portion of this shrine formed part of the bishop's throne ; but when the present wooden throne was erected, the fragments that had been used in the episcopal chair, as well as other scattered pieces, were pieced together with some ingenuity, and re-erected at the west end of the Lady Chapel. The deficiencies were made good with plain stone, so that the remains of the old work can be readily identified. The lower part, with the figures, is ancient, and the portion

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resting on this, as high as the small headless gilded figures, is modern ; but the figures themselves are old, and formerly rested on the ancient base. The niches in front and at the sides of the base are arcaded, vaulted, and surmounted by foliated canopies. The old work is of the early Decorated period ; and the gilded figures—holding scrolls, which probably were originally inscribed with their names—are supposed to represent the royal line of St. Werburga.

The good people of Dereham were devoted to the careful preservation of the relics of St Werburga which were in their midst, when the pious King Edgar, to restore the fallen fortunes of the abbey of Ely, conferred upon it the village and church of Dereham. The abbot Brithnoth was desirous of translating the relics to Ely, but fearful that the inhabitants of Dereham would oppose the loss of their treasure, he decided to obtain it by stealth. He therefore made a visitation to his new possession attended by a number of armed villeins [common servants] ; and after the administration of justice he bade the people to a great feast, at which he “filled them with wine.” At night , when the company were sleeping away the effects of their carousing, the abbot—“God's robber” as he is called—“ready for this holy sacrilege, this faithful theft,” opened the tomb, and taking out the coffin which contained the relics, bore it to a wheeled car which they had provided for that purpose. The servants from Ely surrounded the car, while others formed a rear guard, and thus they took their way to Brandon. In the meanwhile the men of Dereham awoke to discover their loss, and that they had been overreached by the artfulness of their suzerain lord. They roused the country with horn and clamour ; the countryfolk, thinking it was an incursion of the dreaded Danes, assembled with bills and staves. In hot haste they followed the Ely thieves, but did not come in sight of the “Philistines” until the

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relics of St. Werburga were embarked in the boats awaiting them on the Ouse. The pursuers lined both the banks of the river and cast their spears at the lord abbot's party, until at last they had to give up the pursuit as hopeless. The abbot reached Ely in safety, and the relics of that saint who had taken the veil in their

church, whose memory was yet treasured on that swampy isle as one of a family of saints enshrined within their holy precinct, were joyously welcomed to the strains of the *Te Deum*.<sup>7</sup>

Such was the translation on the 8th of July, 974, a day ever afterwards observed as a high festival by the monks of Ely until that convent was dissolved.

#### ST. OSANA

From an account given by Giraldus Cambrensis of an extraordinary miracle which is said to have occurred at Howden, in Yorkshire, we gain some idea of the design of the shrine of St. Osana, the sister of King Osred. There, it is said, the mistress of the parish priest sat down on the tomb of St. Osana, which projected like a wooden seat. To her chagrin and shame, when she wished to rise, she found herself immovably fixed on the shrine, from which she was not released by the invisible power until she had received a severe chastisement for her immorality.

From this it would appear that a projecting base, the height of a bench, was provided for the pilgrims, similar to that remaining at St. David's shrine (page 92), and only found in the older types which were influenced by the British or Celtic church.

#### ST. FRIDESWIDE

St. Frideswide, of royal blood, built the church in Oxford, about 727, in which she was afterwards laid to

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rest. This church is found to have terminated at the east end of three apses, somewhat in the same way as the plans of most of the Greek churches ; and it is supposed that her first grave was in the chapel formed by the southern apse.

In the massacre of St. Brice's day in 1002, by which King Ethelred hoped to exterminate the Danes, this church was partly burnt,<sup>8</sup> but so great had become the reputation of the saint that the king made a vow to rebuild it, which, as can be seen from his charter, was accomplished in two years' time.

Ethelred appears to have left the body of St. Frideswide undisturbed, for it is stated that when he repaired and enlarged the old building, the tomb of the saint, which before was on the south side of the church, thereupon stood in the middle.

Then came a Norman restoration, and in the year 1180 the relics of St. Frideswide were translated "from an obscure to a more honourable place in the church" by the prior Phillip, who wrote a book, *De Miraculis St. Frideswyde*.

Anthony à Wood thus describes this translation :—

"After they were meet, and enjoined fasting and prayers were past, as also those ceremonies that are used at such times was with all decency



performed, then those bishops that were appointed, accompanied with Alexio, the Pope's legate for Scotland, went to the place where she was buried, and opening the sepulchre took out with great devotion the remainder of her body that was left after it had rested there four hundred and eighty years, and with the sweet odours and spices imaginable, to the great rejoicing of the multitude there present, mingled them amongst her bones and laid them up in a rich gilt coffer, made and consecrated for that purpose, and placed it on the north side of the quire, somewhat distant from the ground, and enclosed it with a partition from the sight hereafter of the vulgar."

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At this solemnity the king, bishops, and nobles were present ; then were wrought many miracles both on clergy and laity.

From the chartulary of St. Frideswide's we gather that a new shrine was being prepared about the year 1269.

(No. 347.) "John of Elsefend grants to the Prior and Convent of St. Frideswide a messuage at Oxford in St. John's Street on the north, between the land of St John's Hospital and that of Walter of Lacheford, which messuage he specially gives and assigns to the fabric of the new shrine of St. Frideswide, rendering yearly to the Prior and Canons *7d.* (*3½d.* at Michaelmas and *3½d.* on Palm Sunday), and to St. John's Church *1½d.* at Christmas for every service. For this grant the said Prior and Convent have given him beforehand three and a half marks of silver."

(No. 348.) "Geoffrey, goldsmith, of Oxford, promises and grants to the Prior and Convent of St. Frideswide the annual rent of *12d.*, to be paid to the shrine of said Holy Virgin, namely, *6d.* at Easter and *6d.* at Michaelmas."

This indenture is witnessed by John of Coleshulle, mayor, and others, which John was only once mayor of Oxford, and that was in 1269.

In 1289, on the Sunday next after the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin—September 11th—Prior Robert de Ewelme again translated the relics with all due honour into a new and more precious shrine, erected on the same site as the old one, which had been in preparation for several years. The Oseney Chronicle says it was placed near the place where the old one stood.

The coffer of precious metals, or feretory, which contained the relics is entirely lost ; but some remains of the marble shrine on which the feretory rested have recently been discovered and pieced together.

A the former shrine, in 1264, King Henry III had worshipped ; to the last came Edward I ; and in 1518,

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shortly before its destruction, Catherine of Aragon made a pilgrimage.

Twice a year, at mid-Lent and on Ascension Day, the Chancellor, and principal members of the University, and the scholars, came to the shrine in solemn procession to offer their gifts. When the shrine was destroyed in 1538 all the offerings were conveyed into the King's treasury, but the relics of the saint were rescued by some of the faithful and carefully preserved until better times.

In the meantime Catherine, the wife of Peter Martyr, a foreign Protestant, who had been appointed to the chair of Regius Professor of Theology, had died, and was buried near the site on which the shrine had stood.

During the reign of Queen Mary, Cardinal Pole sent letters to Dr. Marshall, Dean of Christ Church, to restore the devotion to St. Frideswide (November 7th, 1556). The dean then had the body of Catherine Cathie, or Dampmartin, the nun who had violated her vows and become the wife of Peter Martyr, exhumed and buried in the dunghill next to his stable, where it remained about five years ; and the relics of St. Frideswide were again exalted, though it does not appear that any attempt was made to rebuild her shrine.

As a counter-act to these proceedings Queen Elizabeth commissioned Archbishop Parker and Bishop Grindal of London to inquire into the matter, and they in turn issued instructions to the authorities of Christ Church to remove the scandal caused by this treatment of Catherine's body. To remedy one evil they committed the greater one of sacrilege. James Calphill, the sub-dean, caused his servants to dig for Catherine's bones. When found the flesh had nearly perished and the bones were disjointed. These were brought within the church, and the 11th of January was appointed for the people to assemble for a great

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function. On that day an oration was made in praise of Catherine, mingled with scoffs at St. Frideswide, whose relics, preserved in two silken bags, were then mixed with the bones of Catherine. After this gruesome proceeding, Calphill sent a letter to Bishop Grindal, in which he states that the bones of the Protestant Catherine were so mingled with those of the saint that they could not be distinguished the one from the other, and placed in the same coffin.

The spot where the relics of "The Lady" (as St. Frideswide was locally called) are now supposed to rest together with Catherine—"the married nun and the virgin saint," as Froude says—is marked by a brass placed in the pavement of the Lady Chapel by Canon Bright.

The marble structure of the thirteenth-century shrine on which the feretory rested has recently been largely reconstructed, far beyond the most optimistic anticipation ; it proves to have been one of the great shrines, of similar design to that of St Thomas Cantilupe at Hereford, and not unlike the shrines of St. Edward at Westminster or of St. Edmund at Bury.

In 1875, a square well was discovered outside the west end of Christ Church Cathedral, and among the stones with which it was lined were found many pieces of beautifully worked marble of the latter part of the thirteenth century. They had certainly formed part of a richly ornamented high tomb, and it

was suggested that they might have belonged to that shrine of St Frideswide which was built in 1259—a surmise which had proved correct.

The well had been sunk after Cardinal Wolsey had destroyed the five western bays of the priory church to make room for his great quadrangle—Tom Quad—and the fragments of the shrine were taken from their sacred use at an opportune moment to be utilized in the formation of

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the well. These apparently uninteresting details become valuable as showing that the structure formed the shrine up to that date, and that the watch chamber was not—as some writers have asserted—used for that purpose ; while if it had lost interest by ceasing to be the shrine, it would not have been doomed by the commissioners of Henry VIII and the other spared.

The fragments of marble plinths and sculptured spandrels thus recovered were carefully preserved in the church, while search was made for other pieces.

Another length of plinth with moulded quatrefoils enclosing two queens' heads was found in use as a step, fortunately laid with the carved part on the under side ; and Mr. Francis, the senior verger, afterwards found a corner spandrel in the east wall of the cathedral cemetery.

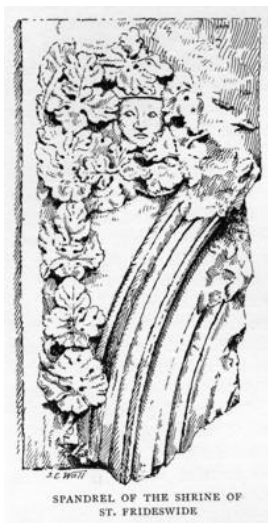


Illustration: Spandrel of the Shrine of St. Frideswide

These pieces, with some smaller fragments which had been found during the restoration of the cathedral, were brought together, and although far from perfect, the base of the shrine was, in 1890, restored sufficiently to convey an accurate knowledge of its original appearance.

From the measurements of two perfect spandrels and a

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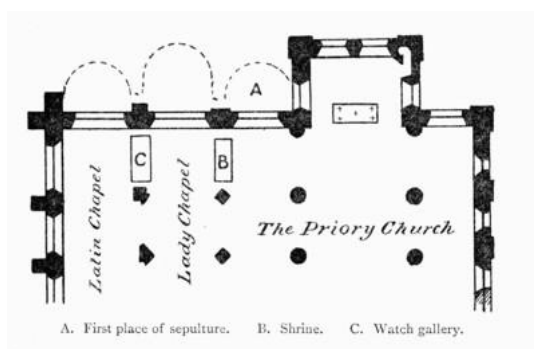


Illustration: Plate XVIII Shrine of St. Frideswide

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complete length of the plinth, it was found that the total length had been nearly 7 feet, the width 3 feet 6 inches, and the height about 6 feet. At either side had been two trefoiled arches, each 3 feet wide, and a single arch at each end.

The position of this shrine in former times is not positively known. Wood could glean nothing from the chapter in his time, but though it probably stood on the north side of the high altar of the priory church, which would also be the south of the nave of the Lady Chapel,



### Illustration: The Priory Church

and here it has been re-erected, for other evidence tends to confirm his decision. The shrine is short compared with its width, which would be accounted for if it stood beneath the arch of the arcade separating the nave of the Lady Chapel and its southern aisle ; this should also explain the absence of the centre shaft of the half pillar against the east wall, which thus allowed a passage for the pilgrims.

On a Bath stone step, five inches in height, the original fragments of Forest marble have been built, the vacant places being filled with blue-stone which will be removed as other pieces of the shrine may be found, and the arches are supported by square stone pillars with plain capitals

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and bases, so that they may not be mistaken for any part of the original monument.

The moulding of the arches indicate a very early Decorated style, and the spandrels are filled with foliage very closely imitating nature.

On the north side the centre spandrel is sculptured with oak foliage, acorns, and cups, while some of the acorns are represented as having fallen from the cups into the label below. Among the leaves is a defaced human head. The half-spandrel to the east has ivy leaves and berries, amidst which is a linnet, but without its head ; and the half-spandrel to the west is carved with maple leaves and pods.

On the south side the central spandrel has sycamore leaves and pods, while those at either side have celandine and columbine, a female head appearing in the latter.

At the east end of the shrine are the fig and vine ; and to the west end white bryony and hawthorn with their berries.

The foliated cusps have oak leaves and acorns and hogsweed. The labels terminate in bosses of oak leaves and water crow's-foot.

The mutilated face in the centre of the north side is in a conventual wimple, and is probably intended for St. Frideswide, while the two faces on the south side represent the two nuns Katherine and Cicely, who accompanied the saint when she fled from Oxford to escape the objectionable attentions of Algar of Leicester.

It is supposed that the various kind of foliage so delicately sculptured on the shrine commemorate certain episodes in the life of the saint. The flight into the oak woods of Abingdon, the seclusion in the ivy-clad cottage of the swineherd, and her residence at Thornberie (no Binsey).

The maple, bryony, celandine, columbine, and water crow's-foot, which all have healing properties and are to

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be found included in the old herbals, allude to the nursing of the sick to which St. Frideswide was devoted, for she had learnt the art of healing from her aunt, the Abbess of New Minster.

The quatrefoils of the plinth still contain the heads of four crowned queens on the south side, and of two saints on the north. At the angles are the heads of Edward III and a bishop, and in the centre of the west end foliage is arranged in the form of a cross.

But the traces of colour and gilding which are still visible, the shrine must have presented a rich and gorgeous appearance—a fitting throne for the support of the relics of so famed a saint; and, as far as can be determined, differing in some respects from any other of the premier shrines of England.

### ST. EANSWYTHE

The parish church of Folkestone is dedicated to St. Mary and St. Eanswythe. The latter was the daughter of Eadbald, king of Kent, and therefore the grand-daughter of St. Ethelbert, who gave St. Augustine the opportunity to spread the tidings of great joy which he had braved the perils of travel to propagate. Eanswythe, one of his converts, died at the early age of twenty-six years.

Local tradition asserted that her relics were still in the church in which pilgrims had formerly knelt around her shrine; but it was accepted only as of legendary worth, until in 1885, while workmen were engaged in preparing the walls of the sanctuary for the introduction of alabaster decoration, a niche was opened out in the south wall, and it was found to contain a leaden reliquary.

It was on the 17th of June that this coffer, with the Saxon maiden's relics, was again brought to light, after being safely preserved for three centuries and a half behind the protecting plaster.

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The leaden coffer is about 14 inches long, 9 inches wide, and 8 inches high without the lid. The cover had not originally been designed for this purpose, but was only a rough fragment of lead taken from some other vessel.

The outer service of the casket is ornamented with lozenges formed by beaded or dotted lines, and near the top the lozenges are crossed by a horizontal line of similar dots.



Illustration: Reliquary of St. Eanswythe

In the interior were a number of bones, which were said by experts to be those of a young woman. One jaw-bone was almost perfect, with two double teeth still in position. Other teeth which were lying loose in the coffer were in perfect condition, and serve to confirm the genuineness of the discovery.

A new niche, lined with alabaster, was provided in the wall of the sanctuary for this twelfth-century reliquary, enclosed by a brass grille and a solid brass door.

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## ST. CANDIDA

Another recent discovery of a similar nature has been made in Dorsetshire.

In various ecclesiastical calendars a certain saint—or saints—obscurely known as White, Candidus, or Candida, is to be found.

Apparently there were five saints of that name, and the head reliquary of the one has already been noticed as the earliest *chef* extant (p. 6).

One known by that name was venerated in the border neighbourhood of Somerset and Dorset, especially at Whitechurch-Canonicorum, the church of which is placed under the twofold invocation of St. Candida and the Holy Cross ; but whether St. Candida derived her name from the place, or Whitechurch was called after the saint is not likely ever to be known. It has been suggested that this individual was one of the companions of St. Boniface, but the name being in the feminine form, that idea must be dismissed and her identity remain unknown.

During the winter of 1899-1900 certain movement of the walls and pavement of the north transept of the fane at Whitechurch caused an ancient fracture in a twelfth-century coffin of Portland stone to considerably widen. This sarcophagus was locally attributed to St. Candida, and the necessary readjustment of the western end, in order to close the opening, was the means of confirming the truth of the legend.

On April 18th, 1900, the broken end of the coffin was removed from under the covering slab of Purbeck marble, when it was found that the interior



was rectangular, the inside measurements being 6 feet 2 inches long, 1 foot 6 ½ inches wide, and 9 inches deep.

Within this chest was a leaden reliquary lying on one of its edges and tilted against the north side of the coffin.

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Between this chest and the south side of the coffin lay many fragments of bones mingled with the dust of bones, wood, and lead. The larger fragments were reverently collected into a clean linen cloth, and the reliquary was carefully drawn out.

The leaden box measured feet 5 inches long, 8 inches wide, and 8 inches high. On one side of it was an inscription cast into the lead in letters varying from five-eighths to seven-eighths of an inch in height :—

@ HIC. REQESCT. RELIQU. SCE. WITE.

This inscription is 14 3/8ths inches in length, and on one end of the reliquary a portion of it is repeated :—

CT. RELIQU. SCE. W.

The reliquary has at some time received very rough usage, and is greatly damaged by having been violently torn open. By the incrustation of oxide on the jagged edges it is probable that it received this treatment in the sixteenth century.

Within were a large number of bones, which were not disturbed, but a thigh-bone with lay uppermost was found to be 13 7/8 inches long. Two teeth (one molar and one incisor), quite sound, but considerably worn, were among the *débris* in the coffin.

The bones appeared to be those of a small woman about 40 years of age, and if so they would agree with the sex indicated by the inscription.

The cloth containing the larger fragments of bone was laid within the reliquary, and a second cloth was drawn over all the contents, which were then replaced and the broken end of the stone coffin securely fixed with cement.

~Footnotes:

1. *Lib. Elien.* MS., lib. ii. cap. 144.
2. *Anglia Sacra.*
3. *Bentham's MSS.*
4. *Anglia Sacra*, I 622-6
5. *Ibid.* ; see St. Alban.
6. *Harl. MSS.*, 258.
7. *Liber Eliensis*, 164-7.
8. William of Malmesbury.

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