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## **Cults of the Saints in medieval Bristol and Gloucestershire**

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## Cults of the Saints in medieval Bristol and Gloucestershire

By BASIL COTTLE

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'As sure as God's in Gloucestershire' has had several origins ascribed to it. A cool one could be that it merely alliterates, like 'silly Suffolk' – *boly* Suffolk – , because the county is the only one that forms an alliterating tag with 'God'. A sour one was old Fuller's; he claimed in 1655 that of all counties it had been 'most pestered with monks', but though the tally of three Cistercian houses is impressive, and the number of mitred abbots formidable, and even giving the title of 'monks' to the Austin Canons, he is exaggerating. And the third interpretation is that the proverb refers to the reputed phial of Our Lord's Blood at Hailes Abbey, by which Chaucer's murderous gamblers swore in the *Pardoner's Tale*, and to which Margery Kempe resorted from Bristol straight after her return from Santiago. Whatever the origin of the saying, it is certain that medieval Gloucestershire had some lively cults of saints both universal and astonishing; I have already (in an article in *Avon Past* for Autumn 1981) considered and even tabulated their occurrence in medieval Bristol, and the commoner ones – which head the lists in every county save probably Cornwall – cannot figure excitingly, but must be mentioned usefully, in this present address.

Two well-known books on English dedications, by Frances Arnold-Foster<sup>1</sup> and Francis Bond,<sup>2</sup> have by diligent counting made it clear that parish churches in the title of St Mary the Virgin far outnumber those of any other saint – indeed, are almost twice as many as any other's. When to her churches are added her free-standing chapels and holy wells, the tally for Gloucestershire and Bristol is even more striking: close on 100, as opposed to the 40 of St Peter and SS Peter and Paul, and the nearly 40 of St Michael. If there were a complete record of all the titles of chapels *in* our churches (and this is far from likely fulfilment), her isolated pre-eminence would be even more vividly seen, since every church had its Lady altar. Her titles also include her various feasts – Redcliffe, for instance, has its patronal festival on the Visitation; and there are odd occurrences like 'St Mary of Malmesbury' at Littleton-on-Severn, which belonged to Malmesbury Abbey. After her, the national order is All Saints, SS Peter, Michael, Andrew, John Baptist, Nicholas, James Major, Paul, and Holy Trinity (to which Triune God *every* church is dedicated, properly speaking); our titles follow in much the same order: SS Peter, Michael, James Major, John Baptist, All Saints, Andrew, Holy Trinity, Lawrence, Nicholas, with the loss of the great St Paul and the promotion of the non-scriptural St Lawrence. St Paul shares a few churches with St Peter; he traditionally had the Dominican Friary at Bristol, and according to a 1391 will St Peter's in the City could be called SS Peter and Paul; they shared a feast day, and the double dedication was probably commoner than is now quoted. The national 'top ten' are thus all scriptural save Nicholas, and in our two counties all save Nicholas and Lawrence; St Lawrence the Deacon was a real person and a brave one, though we need not believe the story of what he said while being roasted on a grid-iron – 'Baste me, I'm done on this side'; St Nicholas, certainly Bishop of Myra in the 4th century, is largely legendary – saving three girls from a life of shame,

three sailors in a storm, and three boys who had been butchered and pickled in a cask, patron saint of sailors, children, pawnbrokers, Russians, thieves, perfumiers, and his inclusion in these lists is the only strongly superstitious matter I have yet had to mention.

I do not think that the incidence of these cosmic saints is so far any evidence of lively local cults; we could be examining Northumberland or Kent, and the imposed preferences of Norman bishops and barons. But our two counties have used over 80 saints as intercessors, and some of these are natives of the region, or quite unknown elsewhere, or chosen with a strange individualism. May we first, however, write off those local claimants to sanctity whose claim is less than seemly? – however much they may have appeared to help their devotees: I refer to St Brenda of the Clifton hospital, St Ivel of the milk products, St Hilliard of the school at Mickleton, and above all St Chloë, who started life as the *sengedlëab* (Old English for ‘singed/burnt clearing’) in Minchinhampton and after a varied career in A.H. Smith’s *Place-Names of Gloucestershire*<sup>3</sup> became Sayntloe in 1609 and St Chloë by 1830. Smith likewise does not encourage us to believe in the field Bury St Lewis in Rodborough (1647) or in St Foyne Ground in North Cerney (1685) – it is simply *sainfoin*, ‘cattle herbage’.

Now there is something more to SS Mary, Michael and Peter than universality: they were great favourites with the Keltic Church even before it was Romanized – witness the many Welsh villages called Llanfair, Llanfihangel and Llanbedr. And much of Gloucestershire is a border area where the survival of purely Keltic saints must be reckoned with. In my 1981 article I considered the status of St Brendan, his sister St Brig, and St Hwyn, Abbot of Bardsey, as eponyms of Brandon Hill, Bristol, of Bristol itself, and of St Ewen’s, Bristol – and confidently rejected them all; the ‘broom-down’ preceded the saint who saw Judas sitting on an iceberg, the city was the ‘place/market at the bridge’, and Ewen was a Norman bishop of Rouen. Bristol, I believe, keeps no Keltic evidence; but eleven miles away, across the Severn and almost under the Severn Bridge, the island of St Twrog, with its hermitage chapel and its light, mysteriously commemorates a Welsh saint. His name is variously spelt *Tyriac/Treudacus/Tauricius/Tryacle* (a good Middle English word for ‘treacle’ or ‘medicine’), *Cyriac* and *Tecla* (two quite different people); but if *Twrog* is correct, then it may honour the saint found by Mary Miller<sup>4</sup> at Bodwrog, Llandwrog and Maentwrog, in Gwynedd, the most distant of the Welsh provinces, where a Twrog is also named as scribe of a gospel-book at Clynnog Fawr in the days of King Cadfan. Not far away, and again down by water, is Lancaut, the church which we are now trying to save and refurbish; the name is a gross anglicization of *Llan + Cewydd*, from the 6th-century Welsh St Cewydd who founded Aberedw and Diserth (the ‘wilderness’ or ‘hermitage’) in Radnorshire and Llangewydd near Bridgend in Glamorgan, and who favoured pretty spots by rivers. Lancaut is St James’s now, and James G. Wood, in a 1936 article in our *Transactions*,<sup>5</sup> argued that dedications near rivers were often to apostolic fishermen like St Peter at Newnham and St Andrew at Alvington and Awre; but the high altar at Newnham was in 1366 dedicated by Bishop Charlton to SS Peter and Paul jointly, and Lancaut can be confidently left with a Welsh eponym.

And who was St Aldate, with his sole churches at Gloucester and Oxford? Both are near old city gates, and may be a corruption of *Aldgate*, ‘old gate’ in Old English, as Margaret Gelling argues in *The Place-Names of Oxfordshire*.<sup>6</sup> But he is also styled Bishop of Gloucester, assigned to the 6th century, and respelt Eldad;<sup>7</sup> our authority for this is Geoffrey of Monmouth, who though often incredible makes him a member of the choir of St Illtud – and so was St Sampson, whom we must presently examine as our most important Keltic saint. St Briavel, now replaced at his village church by St Mary, has a feasible Keltic name and may have been ‘a British hermit prince in the 6th or 7th century’<sup>8</sup> – the name recurring as S-Briec in Brittany; this is more attractive than the theory that he was the Germanic Ebrulfus, normanized to Évroul.<sup>9</sup> St David had a chapel at Tutshill in 1530<sup>10</sup> and holds a puzzling place at Moreton-in-Marsh; the church,

originally a chapel of ease to Bourton-on-the-Hill, may have borne his name only since the 16th century, and the Revd. C.S. Taylor<sup>11</sup> hardly believed that even the Marys and Michaels are Keltic leftovers, quoting Theodore of Tarsus against the extant 'British and Scots' churches of his time. There remains St Sampson, the most fully fleshed-out of all these Dark Ages figures; much is recorded of him, and little that sounds merely legendary. His mixed Gwent-Dyfed parentage, his training at Llanilltud Fawr ('Llantwit Major'), his mighty church at Cricklade in Wiltshire and his sharing of Milton Abbey in Dorset with SS Mary the Virgin, Michael, James the Great, Katherine and the Keltic Branwaladr (however much this may owe to King Athelstan and his bestowal of relics), his churches in Cornwall and his name on a Scilly island, his patron saint status on Guernsey, and finally his bishopric of Dol and his missionary work in Brittany, where he died in 565, all prepare us for the weighty argument of our member Edward Gilbert. In his articles 'The First Stone Church at Deerhurst' and 'Deerhurst and Armorica',<sup>12</sup> he sees Deerhurst as the 'important monastery of which Sampson was once Abbot' by the Severn, and one of those built by Keltic monks in north-west Gaul, Britain and Ireland from the 4th century to the 7th. It may have been Sampson's of c. 520 or even St German's of c. 470, though it may only have been 7th-century Anglian. Henoc's *Life* of Sampson seems to put the saint's work in east Gloucestershire, not far from Cricklade, but Deerhurst I was invitingly a Breton church, through St German, Bishop of Aleth, and ultimately in the Martinian tradition from Tours; and the pottery of the lowest levels certainly suggests that it was pre-Saxon. But how has St Sampson come to be given the earlier title of Colesbourne church, in the heart of the county? It is now St James the Great (which I do not find until 1743), but is tenuously referred to as St Sampson's because *Colesbourne Sampsonis* was a moiety of the Manor of Colesbourne,<sup>13</sup> wherefore the Victoria County History is satisfied that it was 'St Samson by c. 1140'.<sup>14</sup>

But in what darkest of Dark Ages are we to put St Anne? Non-scripturally the mother of the Blessed Virgin by immaculate conception, and variously married to Joachim, Cleophas and a male Salome, with daughters all called Mary who variously married Joseph, Alphaeus and Zebedee, she was the reputed grandmother of a number of scriptural figures – Jesus; SS James the Less, Simon Zelotes, Jude & Joseph Justus; James the Great and John the Evangelist – no daughters! They are seen as in a nursery in a number of late continental pictures, placidly playing with the implements of their martyrdoms. The Bretons, whose Patron Saint Anne is, believe that she was born in Brittany, gave birth to the Blessed Virgin in Judaea, and was transported back by angels to Porzay, where she died. Our member Jennifer Scherr in her study of Somerset springs and wells<sup>15</sup> gives a model for the treatment of those in Gloucestershire, including the name of Ennis Well in East Dean. She argues that the various St Anne's in the Wood and the other bosky places suggest association with sacred groves also; and the Gloucestershire examples are mostly in or near the royal Forest of Kingswood. In Somerset she finds wells of St Anne/Agnes/Andrew, Queen Anne (at South Cadbury), 'Sunset' Well at Ansford, and others less imaginative, all of them feasibly the breakdown of a spring-goddess called Arnemetia. At Trelech in Gwent the stone-built Virtuous (that is, Efficacious) Well of St Anne is an impressive structure, in which I have seen many pins and pennies glistening. The Gloucestershire instances are fewer and less oddly named, at Hamswell, Horfield and Oldland, where the 1829 church is of St Anne; and at Syston there is recorded a St Anne's Well in 1830,<sup>16</sup> and the church is now of St Anne, though it was perhaps formerly of St Cuthbert, a stray from much farther north.<sup>17</sup> Altogether, I would suggest that the cult of St Anne was far more Keltic than Saxon or universal, and that in Gloucestershire it belongs to a pre-Christian era.

Lamphey, a lost field-name in Withington, recorded by A.H. Smith<sup>18</sup> for 1586, is a strange twin of the Pembrokeshire place, a Welsh *Llan*-name; if this is not mere coincidence, it completes our meagre total of six Welsh saints' names (whatever *-pbey* masks): Twrog, Cewydd, ?Eldad,

Brifael, David and Sampson. Some of their English successors are as mysterious: I refer particularly to SS Aldwyn, Adelina and Arild; don't worry – we don't have to go right through the alphabet, starting at A. St Aldwyn has not had the title of the church of Coln St Aldwyns since the 13th century, when it became St John Baptist; despite those who would make him St Ealdwine ('old friend' in Anglo-Saxon) the hermit, Smith<sup>19</sup> from his dozen assembled forms shows that he was St Apelwine ('noble friend'), developing as often to *Ail-/Ayl-*, and makes him Bishop of Lindsey from 679, though another of the same name was brother of King Cenwalh of Wessex and was the hermit founder of Athelney in adjacent Somerset. St Adelina or Adeline's church at Little Sodbury replaced in 1859, and partly cannibalized, a church of the same title which was nearer the manor house; this lady – unless she is the male St Apelwine again – keeps her secret, and a Jesuit's explanation reported long ago in our *Transactions*,<sup>20</sup> that the name is a diminutive of St Adela, King Dagobert II's daughter much honoured in Belgium, is not attractive. The first Adelina or Adeline that Miss E.G. Withycombe reports<sup>21</sup> is Adelina Jocolatrix (the comedienne) in 1086; another was niece of St Bernard and Abbess of Poulangy; one of the last must be 'Sweet Adeline', which will have made the name lose face. St Arild, of Oldbury-on-Severn *and* the distant Oldbury-on-the-Hill (a suspicious mix-up) has surely a Saxon female name of the *-bild* 'battle' type, but I should not like to classify racially the tyrant Muncius, who Leland says made her a martyr for purity. D.H. Farmer's *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* makes the bad mistake of equating her with St Alkelda, the Giggleswick saint who has a *keld* 'spring' name.

My friend Mr Michael Riddle, of Oak Farm, Morton, near Thornbury, and churchwarden of Oldbury, has assembled for me all the known facts or theories about St Arild, and they prove to be quite informative: a district in Kington, the scene of her supposed martyrdom, is still called St Arild's; the spring from the nearby hill has long been known as St Arild's Well, and the stones in its resulting stream are red-stained, a phenomenon first attributed to her martyrdom, then more pragmatically to the chalybeate property of the water, and now more accurately to algae. Leland says that her translation to Gloucester Abbey took place after the Conquest, when her remains were laid in the eastern chapel of the crypt. She acquired a literature, too: one of the two Gloucester books which found their way to the safety of the non-monastic Hereford Cathedral at the Dissolution is inscribed 'L'b'Thom' de Bred' Abb'is Glouc'', which dates it 1224–1228, and among its religious and secular material is a Latin poem in her honour, 'In Arildis memoria', and a Collect. A Gloucester kalendar, and Whytford, give her day as 20 July,<sup>22</sup> and a service-book from St Guthlac's, Hereford, a cell of Gloucester Abbey, was early this century found to have a faulty page re-used in the binding with SS Margaret and Arild sharing the day.<sup>23</sup> At the end of *Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle* – an inaccurate title, since he wrote only part of it – an encomium of Gloucester Abbey included this rough rime-royal stanza:

Thes wonderfull workes wrought by power divine  
Be not hid nor palliat, but flourish daylie.  
Witness hereof is Arilde, that blessed Virgine,  
Which martyrizd at Kinton, nigh Thornbury,  
Hither was translated, and in this monastery  
Comprised, and did miracles many one,  
As who so list to looke may find in her legion.

All this is very impressive for a figure so shadowy, but there is more palpable material. In the fifth main tracery light of the east window of Gloucester Cathedral, an iconological display grievously wrecked by iconoclasm, she has been seen, below a clear figure of St Lawrence with his gridiron, as a saint in red with a white mantle, holding a palm and a book, and a fragmentary

inscription *Ar . . . is*, which we hope is 'Arildis'; a scrap of glass with 'Arild' on it has been made out in a quatrefoil on the north side of the same chapel, in the second window, though I cannot see it for myself. So are these two occurrences of the name to be expected? Eminently so, since she was once on that wrecked and naked masterpiece, the Lady Chapel reredos of the late 15th century; fortunately, it is still eloquent, and for us this afternoon really the most vocal document I can quote, since it proclaims in the fist of a semi-literate foreman the 39 saints chosen for this display – saints who would be chopped down from their niches within about 50 years. Every niche save three has a graffito, the name of the saint once inserted there, and the homely spelling could compose a very interesting lecture on phonetics.<sup>24</sup>

The three big niches do not carry these clues, but are thought to have housed the Virgin and Child, in the centre of the seventeen upright divisions, St Peter in the fourth from the left, and St Paul in the fourth from the right, the double dedication of the Abbey. Some of the others make quite plain reading: *arilda* as clear as any, *dorete* (St Dorothy), *apollonie* (who had all her teeth extracted), *blesius* (who is Bishop Blaise), *jacobe* (St James the Great or Less), *miachel*, *euangeliste* (short for St John the Divine), *lisbete*, *gabereel*, *baptiste*, *barbele* (who is Barbara), *brigida*, *steuen*, *kenele* (St Kenelm, of whom I must tell you much more), *annis* (a frequent form of St Agnes), *katrine*, *margarete*, *thomas*, *adrianus*. Slightly more difficult, moving from left to right again, we have *luci* (rather than St Lucy with her eyes on a plate, this is probably King Lucius, whose body, says Geoffrey of Monmouth, was buried in Gloucester), *geronte* (Geraint, Keltic king and martyr in Devon, or even the father of St Eldad/Aldate), *ismaele* (a 6th-century Welsh bishop, patron of St Ishmael's in Pembrokeshire), *hodulphe* (the relics of St Odulf were at Evesham Abbey), *Keneburga*. We should pause at St Kyneburg, whose name means 'royal city'; she is said to have been a Saxon royal virgin, who fled from her parents in Thornbury to Gloucester, took service with a baker who adopted her as his daughter for her saintliness, incurred his wife's jealousy, and was by her murdered and flung into a well by the south gate. In 1147 the canons of Llanthony Secunda opened a new chapel of St Kyneburg to house her relics; it disappeared, merged in the parish of All Saints and St Kyneburg, and lost its identity fully in the parish of All Saints and St Owen. Proceeding along the wall, we find *ozolde*, a delightful demotic version of St Oswald, King of Northumbria, buried at St Oswald's Priory in Gloucester, which in part remains today, and *bottope* is not a very good try at St Botolf. Three of the graffiti are illegible; seven are puzzling, but can be worked out: *S bilifr* seems to contain an *S* for *Saint* or *Sanctus*, and the rest may be a reduced form of 'Wilfred', with a *b* for a *w*. The writer will do this again, with *benefreda* for St Winifred and *?elkbin* for, possibly, St Egwin, Bishop of Worcester, who founded Pershore Abbey: but every student of medieval paleography will know how often *w* resembles *lk*, and I could believe that this is a version of St Ewin, the Ewen/Owen of Bristol and Gloucester, especially as the supposed *b* is nothing like the other twelve *bs* of the graffiti. Then *bon . . .* may be all that remains of St Boniface, though he has no dedications in Gloucestershire, and his cult belongs from Devon to Germany; *efrede* is a bad spelling, perhaps, of one of the four ladies with names like Elfreda – an abbess of Whitby, or a sister of one of the SS Edburga, or a niece of King Athelstan, or an abbess of Romsey. This leaves two: *a . . . atiu . . .* may be Adatius, for Aldate again; and, an interesting thought, *-eerolt* could conceivably be the little lad Harold of Gloucester, in an anti-semitic fable murdered by Jews, and here shown symmetrically on the reredos with poor Arild.

There is a marked contrast between the sober, scriptural saints of the side-altars of Gloucester Abbey and the more exotic invocations at Cirencester and Tewkesbury. The thoroughly orthodox title at Gloucester as SS Peter and Paul was depersonalized at the Reformation to the Holy Trinity, but even before that time the altars were simply of SS Mary, John, Andrew, Stephen, Paul, the Salutation, and the Kings Edmund and Edward; King Edward II, whose

murdered body lay there, was also treated as a kind of saint and certainly brought a profitable pilgrimage to the Abbey. But Tewkesbury, in a way that looks bookish, launched out into SS Eustace, Margaret of Scotland, Faith, back to the native SS Edward, Edmund and Dunstan, and even a cult of young Prince Edward, killed at Tewkesbury in the Roses. Cirencester church numbered among its altars one to St Edmund and the Holy Name of Jesus, and in its fine but unfortunate glass was an odd assortment – surely lost on ordinary parishioners – of SS John of Beverley, William of York, Zita, Bathildis, Ursula, Edmund Rich, the four Latin Doctors, and St Erasmus, who also figured in a mural there and who survives in alabaster in St Nicholas Church Museum in Bristol, his mitre still on his head while tormentors wind his bowels out on a windlass.

This medieval obsession with horrific martyrdoms, particularly of girls, is seen in many titles of our counties' churches; very often, the Roman Catholic church has now jettisoned these saints, deemed by recent popes to have never existed or to have had their feats and torments impossibly prolonged. Such is the universal favourite St Katherine of Alexandria, who would preserve you from hell if you remembered her in your hour of death, and thus has half-a-dozen of our churches and more chapels within churches. St Margaret of Antioch, swallowed by a dragon, is as rich in churches, had the now fragmentary chantry chapel at Stowe Grange near St Briavels, and shares with 'St' Sepulchre (the Holy Sepulchre) the leper chapel at Wotton, Gloucester. St Cecilia had a chapel in Cirencester, remembered at 'Cecily Hill'. The mysterious martyr St Faith, good enough for a crypt chapel at St Paul's in London, was at Farmcote and in Tewkesbury Abbey. Sir Thomas More didn't think much of the reverence paid to St White/Wite/Candida, at whose shrine cakes or cheese were offered; but at least the shrine at Whitchurch Canonicorum in Dorset remains – the only complete one apart from the Confessor's at Westminster. Her identity is impenetrable; Christine Waters, in her booklet *Who Was St Wite?* (1980), rather adds candidates for our choice. There was a hermitage chapel of St Candida at 'Edlond' near Flaxley in 1517, called by 1530 SS Candida and Radegund, the latter a well-authenticated and securely dated Queen of the Franks and Abbess of Poitiers, once with a Radigons Lane in Berkeley named after her,<sup>25</sup> and a very strange partner in this double dedication; but St White alone protects the comprehensive school at Cinderford.

We have lost the only English parish church of St Barbara, at Ashton-under-Hill, to Worcestershire in 1931; the other comings and goings along our once tattered boundaries have concerned the commoner and often more estimable saints – one St Nicholas swapped for another, the same with SS John Baptist and James, and movements of SS Mary, Michael and Peter, and All Saints, and the post-scriptural SS Helen and Swithun. But nothing can compensate for this loss of the absurd St Barbara and her tower, her bathroom with its three Trinitarian windows, and her cruel father who pursued her to death and was struck by lightning – wherefore she protects us in thunderstorms (which seems illogical) and patronizes men who make loud bangs: pyrotechnicians, and (with reconciling grace) even gunners and sappers, whom the British Army can never reconcile. She was, however, a good example of how one dedication doesn't make a cult; the parish belonged to the French monastery of Ste-Barbe-en-Auge, and they simply imposed the name. In a few other instances, these transfers of title have been supposed: St Oswald at Compton Abdale belonged to St Oswald's Priory, Gloucester; Condicote derived its St Nicholas from Oddington, on which it partly depended, and its residents have been called 'Condicote sailors' because the patron of mariners was here so far from the sea; St Peter at Duntisbourne Abbots belonged to St Peter's Abbey at Gloucester; St Martin at Horsley was a cell of S-Martin at Troarn in Normandy; St Mary at Kempsford belonged to St Mary's Collegiate Church, Leicester; Holy Trinity at Minchinhampton belonged to the nuns of La Trinité, the Abbaye aux Dames at Caen.

Some dedications may have the taint of politics. The planting of St Werburgh, twice, at Bristol may be an assertion of Mercian supremacy, as it possibly is when she reaches Kent, Devon and Cornwall; from Bristol, too, our colonists after 1170 acclimatized her in Dublin, and their neighbours took over St Ewen, too, in his spelling *Audoen*. Likewise, Thomas Kerslake, in an early article in our *Transactions*,<sup>26</sup> suggests that Offa 'planted his standard under the name of' St Helen at Clifford Chambers (now ceded to Warwickshire) and in the south of the county at Alveston. But the five churches of St Swithun, Bishop of Winchester, and his chapel at Gaunts Earthcott, sound like Wessex propaganda after his much-publicized translation in 971; he is said to stand 28th for frequency in England, and reached Scandinavia, though his widest fame now concerns our favourite topic of conversation.

I must omit, for reasons of time, some middle-order saints whose achievements may be well known to you, worthy vessels who worked on manfully or womanfully, without sensationalism. The Middle Ages, of course, faced with a good, credible saint, would not leave well alone: when Scripture details *no* death of an Apostle save St James the Great, slain by the sword in Jerusalem, they invented gory martyrdoms for all twelve save St John, and even he was traditionally given two trial runs, a poisoned cup and an abortive scalding in oil outside the Latin Gate in Rome: St John's College, Cambridge, is still dedicated to St John *ante Portam Latinam*. Worse, they contrived to give each one a different means of martyrdom, so that each could be identified in effigy by his attribute – St Simon Zelotes fondling the saw with which he will be sawn in half, as on the modern pulpit at St Mary Redcliffe, St Jude brandishing the fuller's club for pounding him to death. St Bartholomew, a hazy figure in the Bible, has half-a-dozen dedications in our two counties, but his popularity is often ascribed to the huge proliferation of his relics, since when he was flayed alive a lot of bits of skin were made available.

St Mary Magdalen, 'last at His cross and earliest at His grave', is well represented, I am glad to say, and there are good figures for the likeable St Leonard, who looked after captives; St Martin, who shared his cloak with a beggar and thus with Christ; St Giles, who sheltered a hind and was pierced by its arrow; St George, whom no one can now believe in, but who remains an excellent symbol; St Thomas Becket, vulgarly called 'à Beckett', whose bravery condones the faults in his personality; and St Edward, a dedication which is at times ambiguously to the boy king murdered at Corfe or to the Confessor. At Stow-on-the-Wold, for instance, its name of *Edwardesstow* in 1086 is proof that the Confessor is not the eponym, since he was not canonized until 1161; even so, there is no certainty that this refers to the little boy martyr (he was in fact 15 or 16, and religion had nothing to do with the killing), or a brother of St Edmund, or a local hermit of the same name.<sup>27</sup>

A couple of other Anglo-Saxon names are equivocal. St Giles at Coberley, pronounced Cubberley, was 'formerly St Cuthbert', say our *Transactions* of 1895–7.<sup>28</sup> It is not impossible that this Northumbrian saint should be culted so far south – after all, he has the magnificent parish church at Wells; but A.H. Smith will have none of it, and his forms certainly suggest nothing but the clearing of an owner called Cuthbert. St Ethelbert at Little Dean will be the King of the East Angles, murdered at Sutton Walls in Herefordshire in 794 and sharing Hereford Cathedral with St Mary, rather than the converted King of Kent. The saint at Ebrington is wholly doubtful: some say it is the female Saint Eadburga ('blessed city') of Bicester, or she of Minster-in-Thanel, or she of Repton in Mercia, or she of Winchester, whose relics reached Pershore. None sounds very likely, and the place-name experts Ekwall and Smith give the place a male possessor Eadbeorht ('blessed bright'). Others ascribe it to St Ethelburga, one of at least three, but the early forms of the village-name will not sustain this; the locals give little help by pronouncing it yúbbutun.

The titles of our destroyed chapels often recall saints with local or topical vogues but from the

European kalendar: St Maurice, the chief figure in the martyred Theban Legion, at Newport,<sup>29</sup> founded c. 1340 by the Berkeleys, in whose family the Christian name ran; St Clement (who died lashed to an anchor) at the port of Bristol, with an inland bridge, *Clementbrugge*, at Cirencester;<sup>30</sup> St Vincent, perhaps through the Spanish trade, in the Avon Gorge; St Lambert, perhaps from the Low Countries trade, on the Downs at Bristol; St Blaise, the woolworkers' saint, outside Bristol; St Pancras, the Sicilian boy-martyr and an object of special devotion to St Augustine of Canterbury, at a Marshfield well<sup>31</sup> and at the lost royal chapel at Winchcombe; St Anthony (presumably the first of his name, the Egyptian desert hermit) in wells at East Dean and Wick, and at a cross in Newent,<sup>32</sup> where Rudder also supposed St Hilary on the strength of 'St Tilly's Nap'.<sup>33</sup> A.H. Smith cautiously accepts St Leger at Thornbury from 'Ludgareswell',<sup>34</sup> since the early form of his name was Leodegar on the Continent.

St Benedict was doubtfully culted at Benedict's Pool in Beckford,<sup>35</sup> and St Augustine in wells and other features at Down Ampney, Longney and Arlingham,<sup>36</sup> though *not* – as so often repeated – at Aust. Among the insular saints, there was near Bristol St Milburga, second Abbess of Wenlock, who is another Mercian presence like St Werburgh; these two suggest that St Edith at the lost *St Edewellane* in Bristol, and perhaps *Edith bull* in Thornbury,<sup>37</sup> was she of Polesworth rather than she of Wilton. There was a St Eanswith's Well at Cold Ashton;<sup>38</sup> she was a princess, the granddaughter of King Ethelbert of Kent, and she founded the (probably) first English nunnery, at Folkestone. But her name makes less sense here than that of the Hwiccian King Eanfrith, a Christian before 680, whose daughter Ebba became Queen of pagan Sussex, converted her husband,<sup>39</sup> and was remembered at Ebs Cross in Hawkesbury.<sup>40</sup> One of the SS Edward named a well at Maugersbury,<sup>41</sup> and one had a chapel in Bristol Castle; the Anglo-Saxon St Aldhelm had a well at Pucklechurch, but so had St Brigid of Kildare,<sup>42</sup> though the tangle of *bridewell* and *bridewell* is, for *me*, always suspicious; St Chad, again from distant Mercia, occurs at Twynning and Prestbury in Chad Well and Chaddeswell,<sup>43</sup> and St Oswald, King of Northumbria, at Oswald's Tump in Marshfield.<sup>44</sup> The odder cults involve in Bristol St Jordan on College Green, whose ethnic stock is hard to fix, and the Three Kings of Cologne, unique in England, at the top of Christmas Steps, though Holy Scripture makes them neither kings nor three, and certainly doesn't bury them in Cologne. The churches of Stinchcombe and nearby Stonehouse are both of St Cyriac, the little boy martyred with his mother St Julietta, supposedly in Tarsus. I find it hard to believe in St Tabitha (or Dorcas) at Tibbiwell St in Painswick,<sup>45</sup> though the name Tabitha's has stuck; and downright astonishing are the two intrusions of St Robert (surely not he of Knaresborough? – the only one who counted for anything in England), in Forthampton and Tewkesbury.<sup>46</sup> Multiple dedications hardly occur, but Westbury-on-Trym reflects its long history, and its monastic and collegiate and near-cathedral status, in its invocation of SS Peter, Paul and Mary, the Holy Apostles, and the Holy Trinity.

I have kept until last the two most sensational saints in our counties. One is the boy king St Kenelm of Winchcombe, with two churches, Alderley and Sapperton, and seven others outside our bounds: in Worcestershire, at Romsley (where he was murdered), Clifton-on-Teme, and Upton Snodsbury; in Oxfordshire, at Enstone and Minster Lovell; in Gwent, at Rockfield; and as far away as Dorset, at Hinton Parva. His fame, and certainly his sentimental attraction, were obviously great, though the story is a grave and salutary one, too, since it concerns the plight of a country and of its little King when a boy succeeds to the throne. We – and the helpless lads – had suffered times of trouble at the accession of young Edward the Martyr and, according to legend, of Kenelm; for this *is* indeed legend. Kenelm did not outlive or succeed his father Kenulf, but died in 811, when he was not a tiny boy but fifteen or sixteen; and his father was still signing charters in 821. His 'wicked' sister Quendriht, who compassed his death and was promiscuous, was actually by 824 abbess of one of the places in Kent called 'Minster', and perhaps even of

Winchcombe, which sounds out of character. In brief, the whole pathetic story is a fiction, but one to be eagerly seized on in a superstitious age.

The first English form is in verse, in the *South English Legendary*, a probable friars' compilation at Gloucester about 1300, for pulpit delivery and correspondingly simple and forceful. The model for the *Legendary* was the Latin *Legenda Aurea* of c.1267, and many think that the *Kenelm*,<sup>47</sup> which was not included in this foreign Latin compilation but comes from an earlier Latin source, turns out the best of them all. From its beginning in Gloucester, the English stories of saints developed to the state called the *Gilte Legende* of 1438, in prose, with a French translation by Jehan de Vignay from the Latin to help it, and claiming to be written by a 'synfulle wrecche'; as a summing-up of his prose style, that is a good appraisal. Thereafter Caxton Englished it again, from the first Latin version, in his *Golden Legend*. At this point I want to acknowledge my indebtedness for the whole *Kenelm* theme to my friend and student of two years ago, Mr Hugh Chevallier MA, who has produced the only edition of the *Gilte Legende* version and examined the tradition in great detail. Of the three manuscripts, he has rejected one for its many inaccuracies, and one for its frequent adoption of the *lectio facilior*, and has used the late 15th-century Lambeth MS.72, on vellum, in a good hand, with red and blue decoration. His work also amplifies E.S. Hartland's essay on St *Kenelm* in our *Transactions* of 1916.<sup>48</sup>

From the start, the story reeks of invention. The history of so recent a time as 821 could surely have been checked; but we are assured that *Kenelm* became King of Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, Derbyshire, Cheshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Herefordshire, Nottinghamshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Leicestershire and Lincolnshire, that the Bishop of Worcester was bishop of all of them, that they were all called 'the March of Wales', and that Winchcombe was the capital of them all! His sweet younger sister was called Dornemylde and the murderous one Quyndrede, but even these are deviations from the norm, which gives one a *-bild* name and the other a *-thrit* name, quite unconnected with 'mild' and 'dread'. The elder at once gave him a 'strong poison' to drink, but 'Our Lord didn't want him to be so easily martyred', and it had no effect. His tutor, Askebert, is uniquely called his 'ruler' in the *Gilte Legende*, and Quendrit at once plotted with him, offering riches and his will with her if he would dispatch the little King. *Kenelm*, in all the versions, dreamt of a tree by his bed, so tall that it reached the stars, and beautiful with blossoms and fruit, lamps and burning wax, so he climbed up to the topmost bough and surveyed the pride of this world. In the *Legendary* he then saw 'one of his closest friends, whom he most trusted', hacking the tree to the ground, whereat *Kenelm* felt 'full hev'y' (very depressed) and changed into a little bird (he had never seen a prettier one) and flew up into heaven. When he awoke in his bed at Winchcombe he told his dear old nurse Wolveve about it (her name is suspect – it is very like that of the monk Wulfwine, who wrote the Latin *Vita*). She was 'full hev'y', and expounded his dream as dangerous, indeed fatal. Askebert now proposed a hunting expedition as a diversion for the boy, and they rode off to the Clent Hills in Worcestershire. *Kenelm* grew 'hev'y' again, and lay down to sleep; Askebert intended that he shouldn't leave there, and began to dig a pit, whereat *Kenelm* awoke and told him that he laboured in vain, because it was God's will for him to die in another place, but 'take this little stick, and where you pitch it firmly in the earth, there must I be martyred'. On they trudged, and found a place where the stick stuck in the ground and burst into leaf as an ash-tree, a secret spot between two hills in a deep valley.

Hugh Chevallier interestingly compares the beheading scene in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: each victim is invited to amuse himself with a pleasant pastime, each is quite alone with his adversary, each is led like a sinner to his judgment, each implores his companion not to delay the fatal blow. *Kenelm*, in fact, speaks as Christ to Judas in *John* 13.27: 'What thou dost, do quickly'. He began to sing *Te Deum*, and at the verse about the holy army of martyrs Askebert cut off his

head, and a white dove issued from him. The tutor drew the body into the valley (*Gilte Legende* says he 'threw' it), and buried the head with it. He returned to Quendrieth, who was delighted, took over the realm, and charged that no man should mention her brother's name, on pain of death. She then became a harlot, ruled corruptly, and was hated; the body was left alone, and seemingly forgotten, but God willed that a dumb beast 'should bear him company and do him comfort'. A widow had a white cow, which used to pasture in Clent with her sisters, but she took to leaving them every morning and spent the day in the wood kneeling at the grave; yet at the evening milking she was fatter and more milch than her sisters. The locals, thinking this prophetic, called the spot Cowbatch; and meanwhile, as the Pope was singing mass at St Peter's, a white dove flew in and deposited a 'little writ' on the high altar, inscribed in golden letters. Alas! – the Pope could not read English, but after a proclamation to people of all nations in the city, some English visitors deciphered its alliterating couplet:

'In Clent Cowbatch, Kenelm king's bairn  
Lies under a hawthorn, deprived of his head',

a tag in quite well remembered Anglo-Saxon. The Pope was stirred, instituted a feast of St Kenelm at Rome (he didn't, by the way), and alerted the English hierarchy. The cow guided the search-party, and as they exhumed the body a lovely spring gushed up on the spot – at Romsley – and the men of Gloucestershire began to take Kenelm home; but the men of Worcestershire felt that *they* had the right to keep the body. The contending parties met at a lost *Pireford* 'ford at the peartree', north of the then county boundary, and an ugly scene might have developed, but they agreed to sleep on it, and whoever woke first could take the body; in the *Legendary* all the Winchcombe men woke together and first, whereas in the *Legende* the Abbot of Winchcombe won, and off they set, getting a five-mile lead before their rivals awoke. On a hill (or in a wood) just to the east of Winchcombe, which must mean that they were up on Sudeley Hill, they were smitten with a raging thirst, they prayed (says the *Legendary*), and the Abbot stuck his crozier in the ground (says the *Legende*), and another lovely spring, 'clear and cold, half a mile from the town', gushed out and refreshed them, and so they reached the Abbey. Here our two English sources bifurcate: the *Legende* says that 'anon (which means *at once*) the bells began to ring without any help of man's hand. And then this wicked queen Dame Quendrieth asked what all that ringing meant'. When it was explained, 'she said in great scorn, "That is as true as that both my eyes fall out upon this book", and anon they fell out of her head both at once', as can still be seen (no longer, though) on the Psalter where she was reading *Deus, laudem* – that is, Psalm 109, the cursing and excommunicating psalm. But the *Legendary* has her sitting in a solar at St Peter's Church by the Abbey gate, ostentatiously reading her Psalter and looking out of the window. When she sees the cortège, she asks her men to find out the reason for it, and when they tell her she reads her Psalter like mad (backwards, some say) to curse her brother and his escort; but when the cursing ended at verse 19, 'out burst both her eyes, And fell down on her Psalter, as many men witnessed'. After a nasty death, she was slung 'into the foulest mire that was then in all the country', whereas her brother was nobly enshrined in the Abbey founded (but not really) by his father.

Nearly everything in the story is suspect. I think even Chaucer had his tongue firmly in his cheek when he let Chaunticleer, the vain and obstinate cockerel in *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, summarize the plot in support of the significance of dreams, in argument with his leading hen: the nurse 'told him to guard himself well against treason. But he was no more than seven years old, and therefore set little store by any dream, so holy was his heart. By God, I had rather than my shirt that you had read his legend, as *I* have'. Mr S.R. Bassett, in a fine article in *The*

*Antiquaries Journal* for 1985,<sup>49</sup> argues that a translation of the relics of St Kenelm (and perhaps of his father) from a free-standing mausoleum, the lost chapel of St Pancras, to the new Winchcombe Abbey built about 969 could have led to a confusion with the boy-martyr of Sicily and built up the cult of a boy-king. Thus a story that began with a Latin *Passio* and *Vita*, worked up by Florence of Worcester in the late 11th century without any mention of the cow and the couplet, and by William of Malmesbury with emphasis on the pilgrimage and the miracles, turned elaborately into perhaps the best of the *Legendary* series. Even Milton mentioned him in his *History of Britain*.

Of his cult-sites in Gloucestershire he has retained the churches of Sapperton (where his body rested) and Alderley, but has totally lost the Abbey of SS Mary and Kenelm at Winchcombe, and a chapel-of-ease at Alkerton, near Frocester, where Alkerton Fair, granted in 1304, lasted from the vigil to the morrow of his feast-day. Coln St Dennis church, which was certainly not St Dennis's but belonged to the Abbey of S-Denis, is now and since 1856 St James's, but was St Katherine's in a 13th-century register, St Dennis's in the ununderstanding 18th century, and even St Kenelm's, says the *Victoria County History*.<sup>50</sup> A cottage at Sudeley, newly fronted in 1838 but with a Perpendicular window in the rear wing, was probably his 'Chapel', and his 'Well' there is a 19th-century stone pumphouse, and the little statue given the slightly wrong date 819. I believe that no medieval pictures or figures of him remain in his county.

The last saint whom I would put forward as a cult-figure is the strangest of them all. This crucifix (FIG.1) is in our priests' vestry with a label, dated 'Easter 1931', and bearing the following statement: 'Remains of a stone Crucifix, c. 1350, coloured and gilt. It was discovered about 1870 during alterations at St Mary-le-Port, Bristol, and is said to have been broken up by the Rector. Perhaps it formed part of the central panel of an altarpiece. It was apparently sawn off its original background. For many years it was in the vestry room of St Mary's Tyndall's Park, and had been attached to a slab of slate together with other fragments. About four years ago it was offered to the Bristol Museum but refused; when it was given to the Rector of Christ-Church City, Bristol'. I can find no other mention of it: all the records of St Mary-le-Port were destroyed in the bombing of the church, save for (in the City Record Office) transcripts of Bishop's Registers down merely to 1858, some irrelevant records from 1746 to 1903, and, to our purpose, some Faculties including one dated 11 September 1875 for reflooring, reheating (with apparatus at the north-east corner) and other makings-good; Mr Barnes the architect had produced his plans at a vestry meeting on 16 July 1875. Now St-Mary-le-Port was traditionally very 'low', and St Mary's Tyndall's Park – its foundation stone laid in 1870, and its consecration as recent as 30 June 1874 – was already known as very 'high'. It presumably welcomed a crucifix which the older church deemed idolatrous, and sheltered it in its mutilated state. But – *was* it a crucifix in the usual sense?

It is now tentatively accepted that the north chapel newly built at St Mary-le-Port by 1578 was in the name of Mayden Uncumbre, our version of the more usual St Wilgefort.<sup>51</sup> She was – or, rather, certainly was *not* – a septuplet daughter of the King of Portugal and secretly determined on a celibate life. Her father intended her to marry the King of Sicily, but when he came wooing, magnetized by her great beauty, she prayed to be rendered unattractive to men and was promptly given a fine moustache and beard. Her suitor departed, and her father had her crucified. It was not only the Reformers who would find the story distasteful; Sir Thomas More was scornful of the cult, saying that our unhappily married women would offer a peck of oats at her image, and then she would 'uncumber' them of their husbands. This fearsome feminist St Wilgefort had an altar at Old St Paul's in London, a winsome (save for the whiskers) statue in Henry VII's Chapel at Westminster Abbey, and near us altars at Chew Stoke and St Mary-le-Port, in the former chapel where the new boiler was to be in 1875, and where we can guess that they found the cross in their digging, hidden by conservative parishioners from the

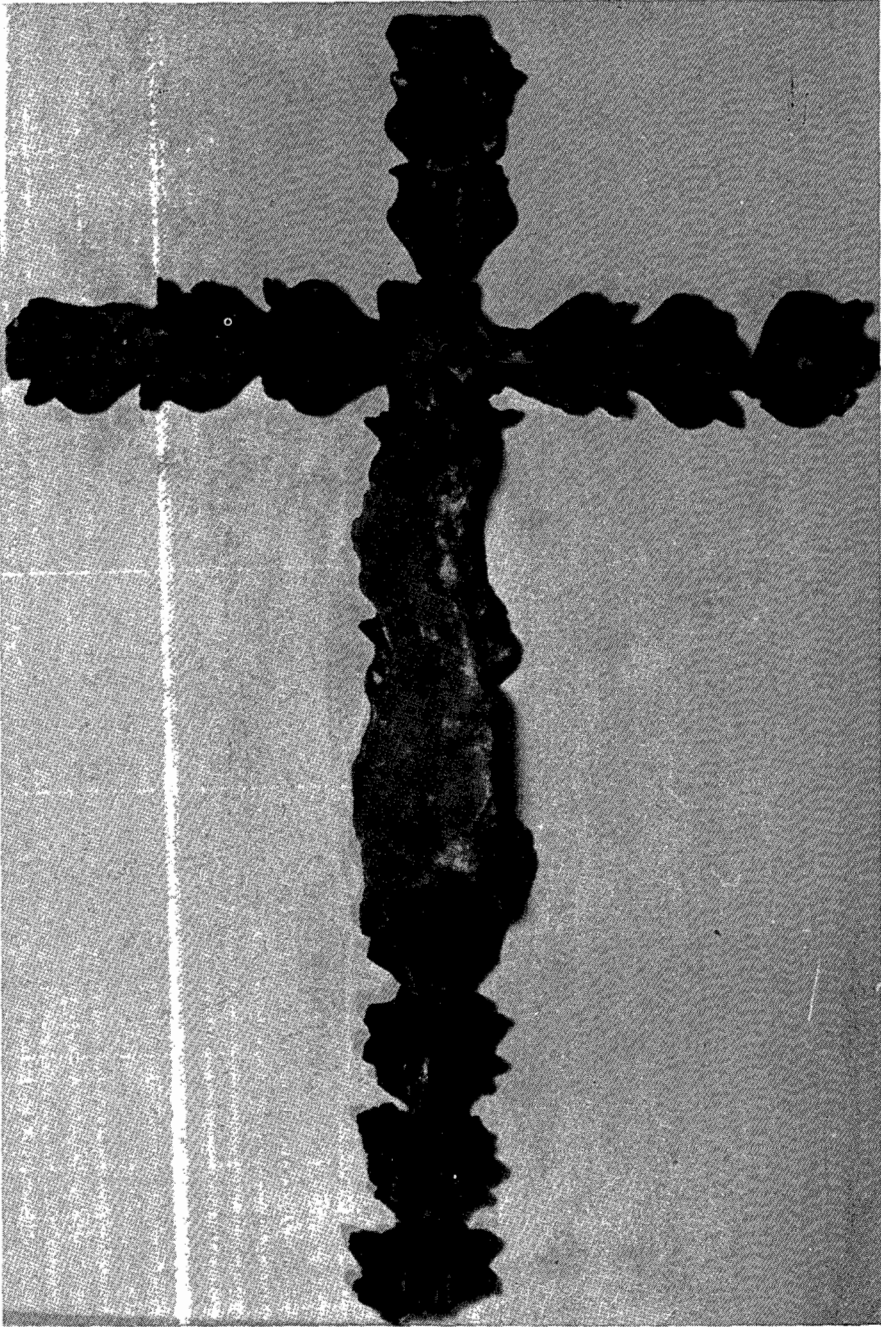


FIG. 1 Mutilated crucifix, 2ft × 3ft, discovered at St Mary-le-Port, Bristol, in 1875, and probably representing St Wilgefort. Photograph by Gordon R. Wood.

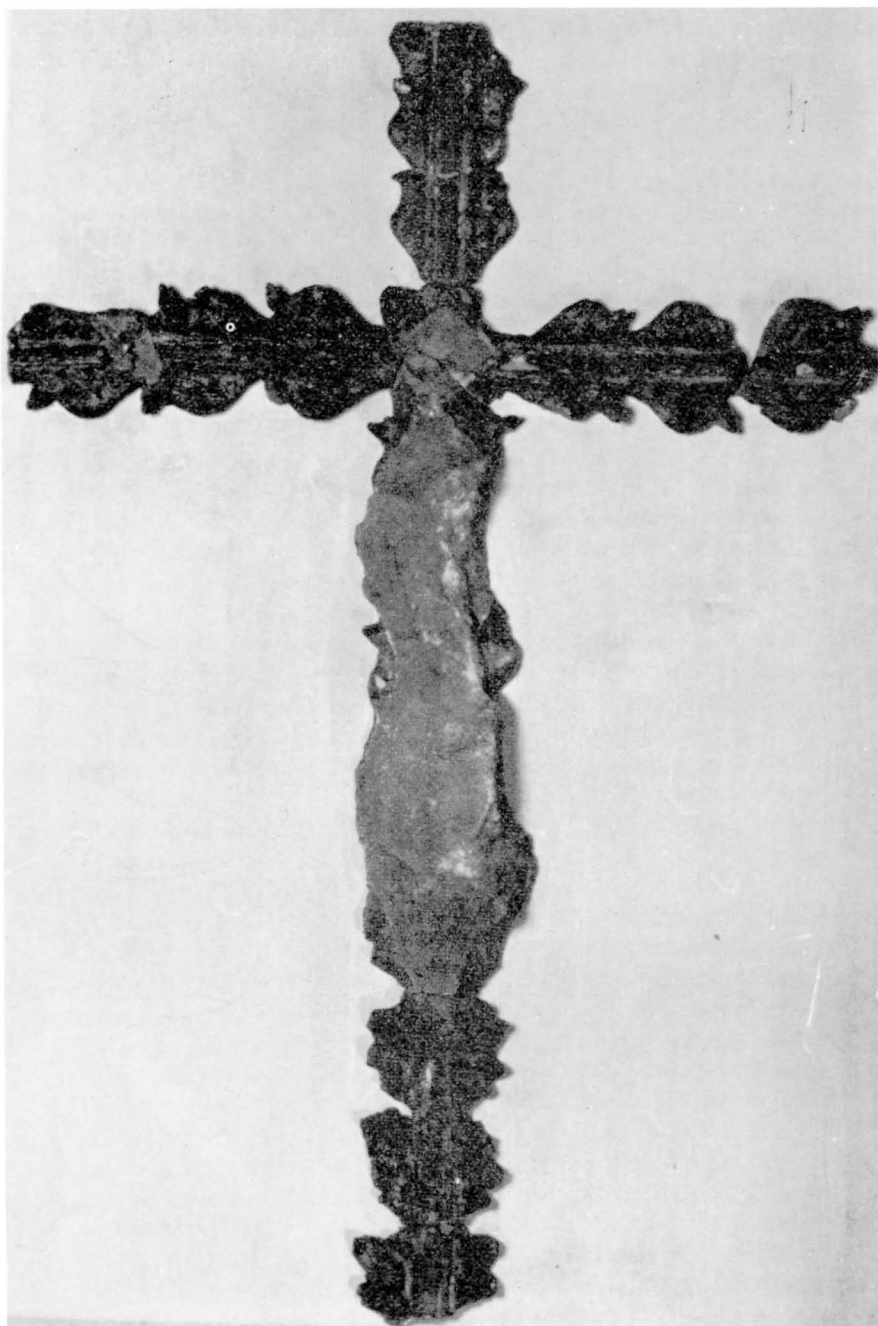


FIG. 1 Mutilated crucifix, 2ft  $\times$  3ft, discovered at St Mary-le-Port, Bristol, in 1875, and probably representing St Wilgefort. Photograph by Gordon R. Wood.

Reformers in the 16th century. The only crucified St Wilgefort that I have seen is the late medieval wooden figure at S-Étienne, Beauvais: fully clothed in a long gown, and with a princess's coronet on. Is it possible that what the savage puritan Rector saw in 1875 seemed to him immediately a bearded Christ, robed and crowned and reigning from the Tree?

Notes

1. Frances Arnold-Foster, *Studies in Church Dedications* (1899).
2. Francis Bond, *Dedications and Patron Saints of English Churches* (1914).
3. A.H. Smith, *The Place-Names of Gloucestershire 1-4* (1964-65; hereafter *PNGI*).
4. Mary Miller, *The Saints of Gwynedd* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1979), 24, 29, 32, 35, 63, 94.
5. *TBGAS* 58 (1936), 212.
6. *PNOron* 1 (1953), 42-43.
7. *TBGAS* 67 (1948) 23; *Glos N & Q* 3 (1887), 404-405.
8. *Glos N & Q* 2 (1884), 495n; *TBGAS* 5 (1880-1881), 325.
9. *TBGAS* 8 (1883-1884), 145-152, in an article important but perhaps utterly wrong.
10. *VCH Glos* 10 (1972), 59, 76.
11. *TBGAS* 15 (1890-1891), 120ff.
12. *TBGAS* 87 (1968), 71ff. and 91 (1972), 129ff.
13. *TBGAS* 79 (1960), 201.
14. *VCH Glos* 7 (1981), 191, quoting Dugdale and Reg. Giffard 406.
15. 'Names of Springs and Wells in Somerset', *Nomina* 10 (1986), 79-91.
16. A.H. Smith, *PNGI* 3, 67.
17. T. Kerslake, 'Vestiges of the Supremacy of Mercia in the South of England, during the Eighth Century', *TBGAS* 3 (1878-1879), 106ff.
18. *PNGI* 1, 190.
19. *PNGI* 1, 29-30.
20. *TBGAS* 13 (1888-1889), 40.
21. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names*, 3rd edn (1977), 4.
22. Quoted in *TBGAS* 37 (1914), 120.
23. *TBGAS* 27 (1904), 206-207.
24. The definitive article on this unique reredos is by R.H.D. Short, 'Graffiti on the Reredos of the Lady Chapel of Gloucester Cathedral', *TBGAS* 67 (1946-1948), 21ff.
25. *PNGI* 2, 212.
26. See note 17.
27. See *VCH Glos* 6 (1965), 159.
28. *TBGAS* 20 (1895-1897), 323.
29. *TBGAS* 73 (1954), 155.
30. *PNGI* 1, 63.
31. *PNGI* 3, 61.
32. *PNGI* 3, 73, 178, 223.
33. *PNGI* 3, 180.
34. *PNGI* 3, 19.
35. *PNGI* 2, 44.
36. *PNGI* 1, 52; 2, 176-77, 186.
37. *PNGI* 3, 18.
38. *PNGI* 3, 64.
39. *TBGAS* 87 (1968), 73.
40. *PNGI* 3, 34.
41. *PNGI* 1, 223.
42. *PNGI* 3, 66.
43. *PNGI* 2, 72, 112.
44. *PNGI* 3, 61.
45. *VCH Glos* 2 (1907), 59.
46. *PNGI* 2, 59, 62, 69.

47. Most fully edited by J.A.W. Bennett and G.V. Smithers, *Early Middle English Verse and Prose* (Oxford U.P., 1966), 96–107, 312–316.
48. *TBGAS* 39 (1916), 13–65.
49. S.R. Bassett, 'A probable Mercian Royal Mausoleum at Winchcombe, Gloucestershire', *Antiq J* 65 (1985) Part I, 81–100.
50. *VCH Glos* 10 (1972), 123, 136.
51. Lorna Watts, P. Rahtz, *et al.*, *Mary-le-Port, Bristol: Excavations 1962/3* (City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, 1985), 33 and 111.