

Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers & Local History Study Group NEWSLETTER No. 6: March 2021



Edmund of East Anglia – King and Patron

The story of Edmund, a little known early East Anglian king, who became patron saint of Medieval England is told in a recent book by **Francis Young, entitled 'Edmund In Search of England's Lost King'**. He lived at a time when the separate kingdoms which made up England **were**[1] being severely threatened by Danish invasions; Alfred the Great was his contemporary. As some of Edmund's coins survive, we know that he became king of East Anglia (Norfolk, Suffolk and part of Cambridgeshire) around 855 and, according to the **Anglo - Saxon Chronicle** met his death at Viking hands in 869: *'Here the raiding - army rode across Mercia into East Anglia, and took winter quarters at Thetford; and that winter King Edmund fought against them, and the Danish took the victory, and killed the king and conquered all the land'*.

These are the bald facts; everything else was recorded later, and clothed in legend and saintly mystery. However, it is known that within 20 years of his death, Edmund was being venerated as a saint; it would appear that he became a symbol of unity in the struggle against the Danes, and for the unity of England. His body was moved to a shrine at Beodricesworth (to become **St Edmondsbury or Bury St Edmunds**). The Danish Christianised settlers also valued him, perhaps as a means of identifying with their new land; many memorial coins dedicated to him were minted in the Danelaw.



St.Edmund by Elizabeth Frink

In 985 **'The Passion of St Edmund'** compiled by Abbo of Fleury and commissioned by Ramsey Abbey, told a story of his death which, much repeated and embellished, became the traditional version. Abbo said that his information had come from an interview with the aged Archbishop Dunstan, who remembered hearing an account of Edmund's death from 'a decrepit old man' who had witnessed Edmund's death. A very gruesome martyrdom is described: Edmund, proclaiming his devotion to Christ, was tied to a tree and used as target practice by the Danish archers so that his body bristled with arrow spikes *'like a prickly hedgehog or a thistle fretted with spines'* and finally beheaded, the severed head being thrown into brambles.

In a later search, the head was discovered, guarded and embraced by a wolf. The recovered head was miraculously rejoined to the body and the whole corpse declared 'incorruptible', a real proof of sanctity! He had become **'Edmund the Martyr'**.

As a home-grown warrior king who bravely resisted foes and a Christian martyr, Edmund had great appeal to kings of England and their subjects as a powerful and influential patron. Some of his many miracles show a protective, even aggressive, side to the saint; he wreaked vengeance on enemies who lacked sufficient respect for those under his patronage. King Sweyn had threatened Bury, and his sudden death was attributed to **the miraculous intervention of Edmund**. Despite or perhaps because of this, Sweyn's son, Cnut, realising Edmund's significance, encouraged his veneration and built him a new shrine!

The Norman conquerors, originally Vikings themselves, were also keen to promote his cult to add to the legitimacy of their takeover. In the winter of 1096/7 a French abbot who was saved from a watery death in the channel through prayers to Edmund, recognised him as **'patron of all England'**. This is what he had become. Numerous accounts and pictorial illustrations of his life were produced, citing details for which there was no historical evidence whatsoever but which added to his renown and status. **A huge new Romanesque abbey** was constructed to house a magnificent shrine, which became a great centre of pilgrimage. The abbey controlled a large part of Suffolk, the Liberty of St Edmund; its great abbots were wealthy powers in the land who, for centuries, zealously promoted and guarded the national prestige of their saint.



The ruins of the Abbey - plus tennis courts/grave of St Edmund?

There were other important English saints but it was **a foreigner, St George**, whose growing popularity, patronage of Edward 11's prestigious Order of the Garter, and finally official adoption as England's patron saint which removed Edmund from his pedestal. Although he continued to have a supporting role in the later Middle Ages, the Reformation put an end to the Abbey, his shrine and his veneration. Edmund's remains may still lie close to the abbey ruins, under tennis courts which were built over the monks' cemetery, where it is possible that they were secretly buried at the time of the

Dissolution. It could become a case of **the body under the tennis courts rather than under the car park!**

You can see a Virtual Reality tour of the abbey as it was originally here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHHiD1ODTbM>

Study Group ZOOMS!

We have had three well attended 'virtual' sessions, with hardly any technical issues! It was good to 'see' each other again and indulge in some on line chat. Regular Zoom sessions will now take place on the third Monday of the month at 10.30am. As we appreciate that Zoom is not accessible or suitable for all our members, we will continue with the Newsletter and usually a brief report of each meeting will be included in it – as follow:.

Monday January 18th.

Puzzles & Quizzes in Christmas Newsletter

Heather 'went over' the answers to these.

Church Quiz - This was the main item and consisted of 20 questions on Norwich Churches, including some with picture clues. It was a lighthearted way to revise our local knowledge; we did not disclose our scores!

Other Business

The group was told about two interesting contacts we have had; the first was brought up in the King St. area in the 1950s, and has promised a copy of his memoirs, and the second could lead to a visit to the Medieval undercroft in Three Tuns Yard.

Monday February 15th.

There were three items on the programme:-

'Snippets from the EDP Local Recall Research Service'

Susan told us how valuable this subscription service had been in researching her family history. The content of the newspaper for the past 150 years is now available on line and had shed some light on her family, who lived in 121 King St (part of Dragon Hall). Particularly interesting was the report on an alleged street assault involving Susan's formidable grandmother, Gertrude Perfect; it was remarkable how much detail was provided for a case which was dismissed.

'A Polish Literary Ancestor - Stanislaw Kozmian'

Elizabeth shared some of her research into her Polish, landowning gentry, family. One of her ancestors, Stanislaw Kozmian, an eminent literary figure left Poland after the uprising of 1831 and, in exile, became a great champion of Polish culture. He spent a lot of time in England and was the first to translate Shakespeare and the works of other English poets into Polish.

'Bromholm and the Paston Funeral'

Richard gave us an account of John Paston's funeral in 1466. John died in London and his body was brought with great ceremony, via Norwich, to the family burial place,

Bromholm Priory. It was a very expensive, ostentatious affair, as no one believed in 'simple' funerals! We also saw images of how the now ruined Priory, once a great medieval centre of pilgrimage, might have looked at the time. Thank you to our three contributors for an excellent session

Our last meeting was on Monday, March 15th. Participants will have received Mary's report of it recently. **The next two meetings are on April 19th and May 17th at 10.30. Please note that the May meeting is on the 17th not the 7th.**

If you haven't previously participated or received an invitation but would like to join these meetings please contact Richard: richardmatthew24@gmail.com

News about Mother Julian and the Julian Centre

Felicity Maton from the Julian Centre writes:

'During the pandemic when allowed, St. Julian's Church has been open daily for private prayer and copies of 'St. Julian's Church Norwich' by Upjohn/Groves are for sale from the bookstall for £7.50. Although the Julian Centre is closed at present for renovations it is hoped to reopen later in the year, welcoming visitors. It's now part of the Julian Campus together with St. Julian's and All Hallows House. This is an interesting development for the Cultural Quarter, especially as the Lady Julian's words from the fourteenth century are touching people worldwide today in another era of 'plague'. '

EDP Nov 26th 2020:

Former Wensum Lodge wardens celebrate 65th wedding anniversary

Wensum Lodge remembered – and the beginnings of 'Dragon Hall'

This headline from the EDP about Ken and Brenda Davis caught my eye and reminded me of another aspect of the rich history of King St, i.e. Wensum Lodge in its heyday.

The following extract from an interview c.2010 for **King St. Community Voices** with Jenny Downing – a long time resident of King St - shows how Wensum Lodge developed, the huge contribution made by Ken and Brenda, and how a remarkable degree of self – help was involved:

“Ken and Brenda Davies, who were the wardens at Wensum Lodge, moved in just about the same time as we did. It was **originally lodgings for young people** from the county who were at City College and needed somewhere to stay in the city during the week. That was why Ken and Brenda were called wardens. Then Southwell Lodge was built beside City College so the students moved there. Ken started one or two classes. I think someone like the WI or Townswomen's Guild asked for some classes and like Topsy, it just grew and grew. There used to be a sports hall too. In its heyday it was geared very much to older people, because it was the only Adult Education Centre functioning in the daytime, and older people didn't want to

go out at night to classes held in schools. Ken and Brenda retired about fifteen years ago and the place has changed totally.

I was Chairman of **the Friends of Wensum Lodge** for sixteen years. Our role was to improve the facilities for students. Ken Davies realised that the demand for things at Wensum Lodge was growing, he was surrounded by a lot of semi-derelict buildings [the old Crown Brewery buildings] and he heard about a Friends organisation down at Morley College in London, so a group of us went down to talk to them and came back and formed the Friends here. We raised money to convert the buildings and everything that was the stable block and so on is now part of Wensum Lodge. The students were very enthusiastic. We used to have **a massive Christmas Fair every year** to raise money and we applied to local charities. Ken approached City College Building Department and their students came and did work at Wensum Lodge, rather than building walls at college and knocking them down again. We didn't touch the historic fabric on the outside. The County built the sports hall and the Friends took out a £60,000 loan with the council to build the squash courts.

I think **Jurnet's Bar** was Ken Davies's bright idea - possibly when some of the youngsters living there wanted a party, somebody saw the potential down there, and later Ken thought it would be a good facility for Wensum Lodge and I was roped in as Chairman of the club for a long time. Again, we had to persuade the County Council to let us have a licensed premises and it has to be a members club and the Friends have to be involved”.

From Wensum Lodge to Dragon Hall

One of the Adult Education classes at Wensum Lodge was the King Street Research Group tutored by Chris Barringer and it seems that when the trading hall was re-discovered in 'The Old Barge Building' (aka Dragon Hall) many of Chris's students – some of them very learned – who formed the core group of volunteers and enthusiasts who did so much to research, fund-raise and restore Dragon Hall.

Richard Matthew

A view from Dragon Hall's new neighbour

This photo from Facebook is probably the first 'aerial shot' of the rear of Dragon Hall, taken from one of the new apartments in St Anne's Quarter.



The View from Abroad - from our Welsh Correspondent :

When I was in Norwich and at Dragon Hall I would often say proudly: 'Welcome to the only trading hall built by one person...' or something to that effect. Now I am in Wales and looking for the equivalent here I realize its significance. Most merchants traded from their houses and we know that Mr Toppes did not live at his trading hall.

Unlike England medieval merchants' houses are rare in Wales. This is possibly because a middle class was slow to establish itself here. Or they were warriors, scholars and poets with no interest in commerce?! I have located three and they are interesting to compare to Dragon Hall even though these were dwellings as well as spaces for storage and selling.



This (left) is a **late C15th Tudor merchant's house built of stone in Tenby** a busy commercial port at the time. It sits high up on a cliff above the harbour. There are three storeys, the lower being the shop. The living quarters were on the first floor with the upper floor for sleeping. The first floor was accessed by an external staircase and the toilet was in a tower alongside. Inside the ceilings are of oak beams. The goods stored and sold here were: wool, sea coal, vinegar, pots and spices. Nothing is known of the merchant. Research is ongoing.

This (right) is from **Haverfordwest** on the river Cleddau. It has a vaulted undercroft for storing rope, salted fish, cheese, and casks of wine. The family lived upstairs in a single room with open fireplace. Next to it is a garderobe toilet. This is now in a museum, St. Fagans in Cardiff. The museum has rescued many at risk buildings. They then took them apart and rebuilt them here so there is a village of buildings from all periods.



And this (left) is **Aberconwy House**, an early 14thC, building, with the upper storey added in the C15th. The lower floors are of stone. The curved wooden timbers support the jetty for the upper storey. Note the corbels supporting the beams. This was built by English merchants in order to trade with the Welsh who were not allowed within the town walls! The lower floor was the cellar.

There is much more to find out but at the moment we are cabined, cribbed and confined.

Barbara Roberts

RM/HP/MB