

## St. Fremund

Fremund, reputedly the son of King Offa, renounced position and money to follow Jesus, becoming a hermit on the island of Lundy. While there his cousin, King Edmund, was killed by the Danes when they invaded West Mercia in 870. As Offa was now dead, the people asked Fremund to come to their aid. Fremund agreed and won a great victory at Radford Semele, near present day Leamington Spa.

His friend, Duke Oswi, angered when Fremund decided to return to Lundy instead of becoming king drew his sword and decapitated Fremund. Oswi instantly repented. Fremund's corpse picked up the head and walked some distance. When it struck the ground with its sword a spring arose and Fremund washed his head and wounds before finally expiring. Oswi buried Fremund's body at nearby Offchurch.

Sixty-three years after this burial three virgins, one deaf, one dumb and one crippled, walked through Offchurch when they were struck by lightning. They saw an angel who told them to dig up the body and move it to a spot three miles from Banbury, the present site of Prescote manor. When they have done this, they are all healed.

Years later, Edelbert, a pilgrim in Jerusalem, had a vision of an angel telling him to go to a chapel near Prescote, which had five priests, where he will find the body of Fremund. He was not willing to do this and wrestled with the angel in his dream. On waking he discovered that his shoulder has been dislocated. This persuaded him to carry out the mission. After much travelling he found the grave, moved the remains a short distance and built a shrine. Local people found that their sick animals could be cured by eating the nearby grass. Many pilgrims came for a cure and it was decided to move Fremund to the nearest monastery, at Dorchester on the Thames. Bishop Birinus came to Prescote and loaded the remains onto an ox cart. The cortege did not go far. When it got to Cropredy, the ox refused to move any further, so the local people built a chapel in the village, on that spot.

In 1050 the first church was built to house the bones and many miracles are recorded. About 150 years later, Cropredy church was in need of repair and the villagers could not afford it. Richard de Morins, Prior of Dunstable arrived and made them an 'Offa' they cannot refuse. He promised all the money they needed in exchange for the bones, which King John had said could be transferred to Dunstable. The villagers accepted reluctantly, but they managed to retain a few bones and miracles continued to happen in Cropredy.

The bones of St. Fremund, or at least most of them, were translated to Dunstable in 1205, where an altar was dedicated to him in 1207. This did wonders for the commercial life of Dunstable. In 1213 his bones were moved to the high altar and re-dedicated by Bishop Hugh II. The pilgrims, who previously passed through on their way to or from the shrine of St Alban, stopped in Dunstable for a while and prayed for a miracle there as well. The bones of St Fremund remained in Dunstable until the Reformation and miracles were reported throughout this time. At that point, the altar and the bones it contained was destroyed.

In 1962 the east wall of the Priory church was re-ordered and two windows were installed to celebrate the saints to whom altars were dedicated in the pre-Reformation priory. St Fremund is one of these – along with St. John the Baptist, St. Peter, St Martin, St James and St. Nicholas. In the mid 1960s a new church was built on Dunstable's Beecroft estate. It was dedicated to St. Fremund the Martyr in May 1968 by the Bishop of St Albans.