

BURY ST EDMUNDS

Magna Carta 800



The importance of St Edmund and the Abbey.

Bury St Edmunds was a good place for the barons to meet in 1214 as St Edmund and the Abbey provided a special location that was largely beyond the reach of King John.

The crown had granted special privileges to the Abbey called the Liberty of St Edmund. This large area is the size of modern West Suffolk and was run as a separate legal entity from the rest of the county.

Edmund

Edmund, king of the East Angles, met his death at the hands of Viking invaders in 869, probably on 20 November, which has been celebrated as his feast day since soon after his death. It was said that Edmund was bound to a tree, scourged and shot at with arrows and that afterwards he was decapitated and his head was thrown among some bushes. Within a few years, Edmund had come to be regarded as a saint, and, especially in those parts of eastern England controlled by the Danes.



The Liberty of St Edmund

The Shrine

Soon St Edmund's body was brought from its first burial place to Bedericesworth, as Bury St Edmunds was then known. Priests who went out into the surrounding country, preaching and administering the sacraments, cared for his shrine. After suffering further troubles from Viking invaders, in 1020 Canute, king of Denmark as well as England, established a Benedictine monastery at Bedericesworth.



Shrine in place from Magdalen Hall Museum

Canute also commissioned a church which was consecrated in 1032. After this date, the town which was growing up around the walls of the abbey came to be known by names of which St Edmund formed an element - Bury St Edmunds, St Edmund Stow, or simply St Edmunds, cover from his attack of dysentery.

The Abbey

The abbey of St Edmund grew in importance. It had an extensive library, and there was a scriptorium which produced lavishly illuminated manuscripts. The town grew too, it was planned on continental lines with a grid arrangement of streets, and Abbot Baldwin encouraged settlement here. One of Baldwin's successors, Anselm, 1121-1148, enlarged the plans for the abbey church.



The Abbey painted by Hardy in 1873

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