

## SHORTER CONTRIBUTIONS

### A NEW SITE FOR THE MARTYRDOM OF ST EDMUND?

*By S. E. West, M.A., Ph.D., F.S.A.*

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year 869 records that 'In this year the host [the Danish Army] rode across Mercia into East Anglia, and took winter quarters in Thetford; the same year King Edmund fought against them and the Danes won the victory, and they slew the king and overran the entire kingdom. . . .'

The next account, by Abbo of Fleury between 985 and 987, although written some 116 years after the event, was based upon his hearing the story from Archbishop Dunstan who had it from Edmund's armour-bearer. It is from this source that the bald statement of the Chronicle is filled out: Edmund was killed in November 869. After being tortured with arrows the Danes cut off his head and hid it in Haegelisdun wood, where it was later found by the English, with the aid of a miraculous wolf, and reunited with the body. The King was buried nearby and a primitive, wooden chapel erected over the grave. Eventually the Saint was translated to Bedericesworth (Bury St Edmunds) in the early 10th century.

Later still, Hermann of Bury, writing *c.* 1095, locates the first burial of St Edmund at a place called Sutton, close to the site of the Martyrdom.

Hoxne is not mentioned in connection with St Edmund until Bishop Herbert of Norwich refers to the martyrdom in a charter of 1101. Hoxne had been the seat of the Bishop in the 10th century and there was before 1101 a Chapel of St Edmund there. About the same time as the charter the dedication of the church was changed from St Ethelbert to St Edmund. Eventually, *c.* 1226, a small priory in St Edmund's honour was established next to the chapel, about a mile from the Bishop's palace. There are no earlier links with St Edmund and the place-name Hoxne cannot be derived from Haegelisdun.

In recent years Haegelisdun has been taken to be Hellesdon on the outskirts of Norwich, simply on the evidence of the one name.

In 1978 while discussing archaeological field work with Miss Baker of Bradfield St Clare, I noticed that a field just south of Pitcher's Green in that parish was called Hellesden on the 1840 Tithe Map. Although much removed in time from St Edmund, no reason could be found for this unusual name and excitement grew when two further names were noticed. About two miles to the north, in Rougham parish, are Kingshall Farm, Street and Green (Kingshae, Kingshal, in The Kalendar of Abbot Sampson, 1200 - 11, meaning perhaps the King's water meadow, or corner of land), and a mile to the south, on the parish boundary between Bradfield Combust and Cockfield, is Sutton Hall (FIG. 47). Thus, a mere five miles from the great Abbey there are three elements of the story: Hellesden, which could be derived from Haegelisdun, Sutton and Kingshall; two place names and an implication from Abbo of a royal residence near the scene.

Bradfield St Clare, not far from the winter headquarters of the Danish Army at Thetford and, presumably, their line of communications down the Gipping valley to the sea, and so close to the final resting place of the Saint, must be a strong contender for the site of the martyrdom and subsequent events.

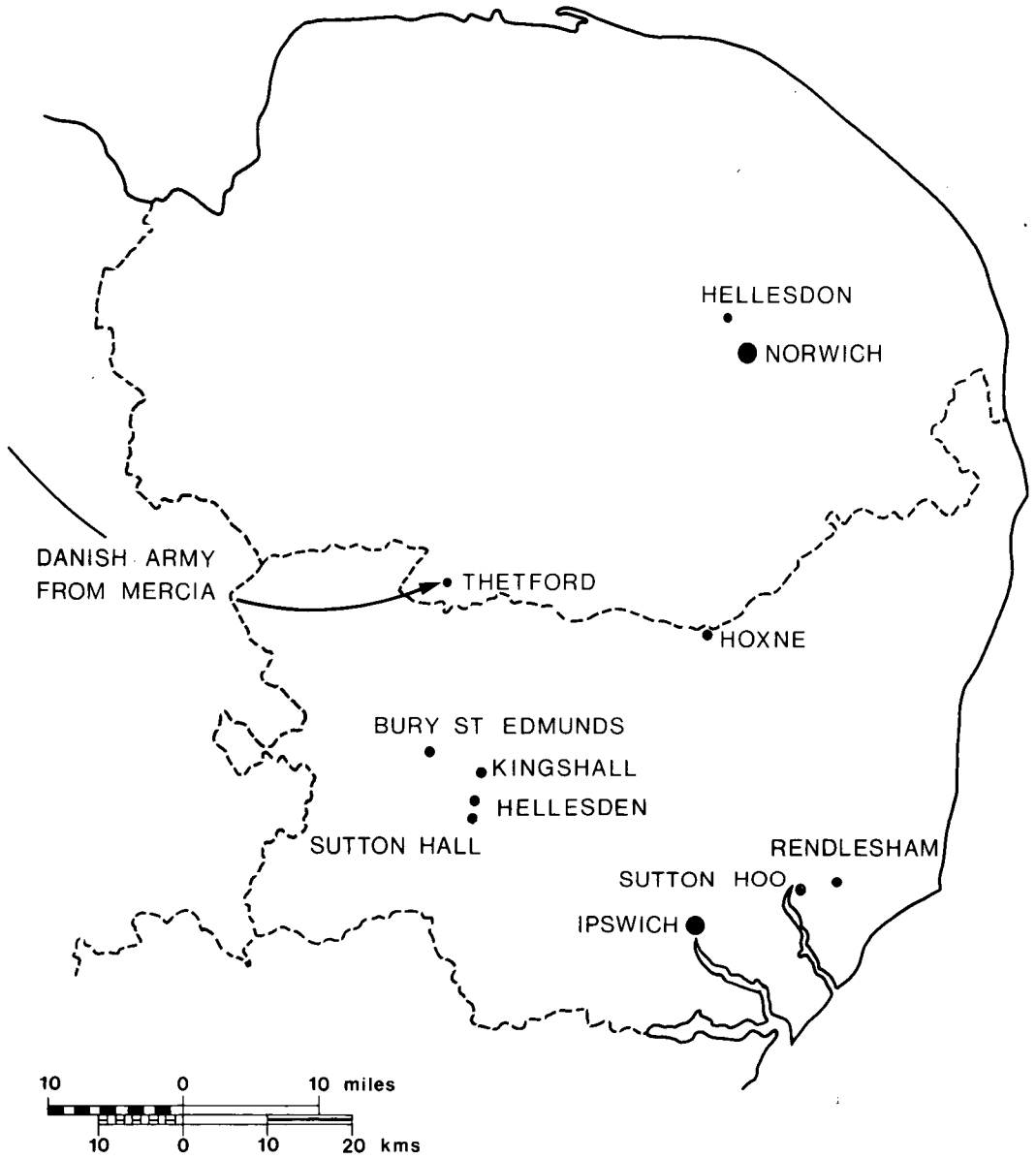


FIG. 47 — King Edmund A.D. 869.

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*Coincidence or Corroboration?*

A note from D. P. Dymond

The hypothesis that St Edmund was martyred at Bradfield St Clare may find support in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, a survey of ecclesiastical income which was commissioned by Henry VIII in 1535. This records that the Cellarer of Bury Abbey had a large annual income of £903 12s. 2d. Out of this he was obliged to make various payments, mostly of a charitable and personal kind. However, he also paid a series of relatively small rents for pieces of land. Two of the latter entries are eye-catching:

Aule de Saint Clarisbradfeld	vj <sup>s</sup>	viiij <sup>d</sup>
Suttonhal	iiij <sup>s</sup>	ij <sup>d1</sup>

These two manors or 'halls' are, of course, close geographically but their striking juxtaposition in the list of rents may have another significance. It could mean that the abbey traditionally rented, through a major officer, two small pieces of land which were connected with St Edmund: one at Bradfield St Clare being the place of his martyrdom, and the other at Sutton Hall being the earliest resting-place of his revered body.

*Note*

<sup>1</sup> Record Commissioners, *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, III (1817), 461.