

## History of St Edmund's Day

### The legend of St Edmund, King and Martyr

Edmund was crowned King of the East Angles in about 855AD. Fourteen years later, in 869, according to the Anglo Saxon Chronicle, he attempted to repel a huge invasion by the Danish Vikings who had camped at Thetford. King Edmund's army was comprehensively defeated and the invaders, led by Hinguar and Habba, proceeded to occupy the whole of the North and East of England from Northumbria down.

Edmund was killed – exactly how and when is not known for certain, but the legend that evolved and which was recorded a century later by Abbo of Fleury in his Life of St Edmund, tells of his capture, torture, execution and martyrdom. Edmund, writes Abbot, was taken prisoner, whipped and tied to a tree. When he persistently refused to renounce his faith he was shot with bows and arrows 'until he bristled like a hedgehog'. He was then beheaded and his head was thrown into a bramble patch.

Later his loyal supporters set about looking for the missing head and were alerted to its hiding place by the sound of Edmund's own voice calling: "Over here, over here, over here!" They found the head guarded by a wolf.

The body of the king, reunited with its head, was eventually buried, according to a legend, in a little purpose-built chapel at Bedericsworth (later Bury St Edmunds).

Stories abound of miracles associated with St Edmund, not least the legend that, when his body was exhumed after a fire more than 300 centuries after his death, it was found to be uncorrupted, with all the arrow wounds healed and the head reattached to the body with just a thin red line indicating the site of its severance.

The date of St Edmund's canonization is not known for certain although one account has it that it occurred in the reign of Athelstan between 924 and 939 AD. The shrine at his burial site became a huge draw for pilgrims. Churches dedicated to St Edmund exist throughout England and his feast day, November 20, has been widely celebrated over the intervening centuries.

In Southwold, the practice of celebrating the Saint's day by issuing sticky buns to the town's schoolchildren is an ancient one. Perhaps the bun is meant as a symbolic reminder of the miraculous head! This ancient tradition died out after the Second War but was revived in 1988 and continues to this day.