

# THE MIRACLE OF SAINT FREOMUND: A Ninth Century Political Murder

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*The author is extremely grateful to Deborah Hayter for her encouragement and advice in the production of these notes, now published in the hopes that all who read them will endeavour to visit the church of All Saints at Burton Dassett, one of Warwickshire's most beautiful and unaltered churches and, perhaps after pausing to wonder at its enigmatic wall paintings, will then be moved to make as generous contribution as possible to its fabric fund. In early 2008 a large portion of the roof lead was stolen from this increasingly fragile thirteenth century church.*

Cradled in the Burton Dassett hills lies the ancient church of All Saints, close by a holy well.<sup>1</sup> Today, apart from the noise of the nearby M40 motorway, it is otherwise a most peaceful place, with only three or four houses and rooks cawing from the trees. Long ago, and long before county boundaries had existed, this little hamlet had been a settlement in the Anglian kingdom of Mercia<sup>2</sup> and very close to the boundary with yet another contemporary kingdom, that of the Hwicce. By much later in the thirteenth century it had become a thriving market town creating enough wealth to support a spacious church with extensive wall paintings.

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<sup>1</sup> Burton Dassett Church, one of South Warwickshire's finest, situated at Ordnance Survey ref 398514.

<sup>2</sup> Mercia became Christian in AD654 and later St Chad established his See at Lichfield on being made a bishop in AD699. The kingdom of the Hwicce was absorbed into Mercia and was given its own bishop who established his See at Worcester, the ancient diocesan boundary corresponding to that of the two kingdoms. This boundary divided the area of modern Warwickshire unequally, running from Tamworth-in-Arden through Warwick, Kineton and Tysoe. *The Place-Names of Warwickshire*, published by the English Place Names Society, vol xiii, identifies a field name in the parish of Radway, known as Martinmow, as very likely being the *Merclumere* or the boundary of the Mercians and the Hwicce. For further reading see *A History of Warwickshire*, by T. Slater, p.31; *In Search of the Dark Ages*, by M. Ward, p.83.

Also see *Victoria County History* for Warwickshire concerning the growth and prosperity of Burton Dassett.