

Oswald was defeated by the pagan King Penda of Mercia around A.D. 642 and sacrificially mutilated to Woden, with his head being later buried initially on Lindisfarne. Quite a few religious centres subsequently claimed his other body-parts as relics. Oswald was not credited with being a cephalophore saint or head carrier, but was remembered as a hero who died a sacrificial death in battle for his Christian faith. He has not been particularly remembered for the cup he gave the Church. Kenelm,⁵ a Mercian prince, may have been murdered but it is more likely he died in battle against the Welsh around A.D. 820. It is not certain if he was decapitated, although one folk tale does relate that he was beheaded in the town of Winchcombe and that his head, after being severed from his body, rolled to the spot which became a holy well. But again, Kenelm is not credited with being a cephalophore saint. In addition the folk tale relates that Kenelm was only seven years old when he was murdered, making the depiction of him as a bearded man unlikely. Both these saints have connections with the old kingdom of Mercia, although indirectly in Oswald's case, as he was a defeated Christian enemy of the then pagan Mercia.

Depictions of saintly kings or princes might be expected to have crowns,⁶ but there is no particular reason to associate either Oswald or Kenelm with a palm frond. Symbols in religious iconography were often used to identify a particular saint to an otherwise illiterate congregation. A sword might accompany depictions of martyrs, especially Saint Paul, whilst a cup might most commonly be associated with John the Evangelist, a chalice with yet other saints, or a cruet with Joseph of Arimathea. John the Baptist, who was beheaded by Herod, is often associated with a lamb and a long wooden cross, or sometimes, rarely, an axe. He was invariably depicted wearing animal skin, symbolizing his time spent in the wilderness. He was particularly revered by the Knights Templar who held land close by at Temple Hardwick. These paintings depict no identifiable emblems other than a bearded severed head, a lidded chalice or ciborium, the coronets and possibly a sword.

⁵ See *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, by D. Farmer, re Oswald, p.379, re Kenelm p.285. However Kenelm's death may be associated with the village of Kenelmstow now known as Romsley near Clent: see *Saints in the Landscape*, by G. Jones, p.120 et ibid.

⁶ See Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, Appendix 2, Principal iconographical emblems of saints.