

From the days of early Christianity in England up to the Reformation, devotion to a particular chosen saint was often a marker of local culture.⁷ Dedications to saints were not made randomly but for a specific reason appropriate to the location, although dedications could change if powerful new landlords, with their particular favourite saint, so decided. It was believed that intercession in Heaven could be obtained through the saints by prayer and the more miraculous the saint the more powerful their intercession. Prayer at a shrine possessing a relic of the saint, and especially one associated with some miraculous event, amplified this accessibility. A relic could take many forms: for instance a splinter of bone or finger nail, or even a drop of blood. The possession of any relic enhanced the importance of a church and consequently its ability to attract both pilgrims and wealthy sponsors. Chadshunt church,⁸ not too far distant from Burton Dassett, possessed a painted image of Saint Chad which generated a great deal of revenue for the church until the Reformation, when it was reported "*the said Picture and Ymage of Chadde [was] broken downe and burnte*". The wall paintings at Burton Dassett were simply covered over at the Reformation, but up until then an image such as a wall painting would nonetheless be an acceptable second best for people to pray to and make offerings to the benefit of the church.

The popularity of different saints rose and fell over centuries, though local saints' cults might retain popularity in their locality for longer and continue to be regarded as powerful protectors on earth. The stories of many early saints lives were only finally written down by the eleventh century because the Normans, contemptuous of Anglo-Saxon culture, were demanding documentary evidence concerning these early saints.⁹ Perhaps local desire to snub later Norman overlords would fuel the cult of a local saint and keep memories alive for centuries after, long enough for wall paintings to be created. It could be suggested the wall paintings in Burton Dassett church might have been made by an itinerant artist

⁷ See *Saints in the Landscape*, by G. Jones, pp. 1-21, concerning evidence for the tracking of patron saints.

⁸ Chadshunt Church. See *Warwickshire History; the Journal of the Warwickshire Local History Soc.* Vol xiii, No.6, p.221, 'The lost parish church of All Saints, Bishops Itchington', by P. Upton, concerning the image of Chad.

⁹ See Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, Introduction, p.xv, concerning requirements for documentary evidence of sainthood.