

the basis of parish churches which began to emerge in the following century.

To return to Freomund, who, if he genuinely existed, was presumably a late Mercian aristocrat who had chosen an ascetic life as a hermit but who became involved in the fight against the pagan Danes. The story relates how, after being decapitated, he miraculously picked up his head, forgave his murderers and then walked to a specifically-named, but as yet unidentified, location between Bishops Itchington and Harbury, where he finally became inanimate. These neighbouring villages are inside modern Warwickshire and some ten miles from Prescott, but it should be understood these legendary events occurred long before the formation of modern counties later in the tenth century. The story continues: how his assassins repent their deed and take his corpse together with his head to Offchurch. Freomund is then buried in a lead coffin within the precincts of a palace there. The story then relates how, many years later, after a vision, three crippled girls find his grave marked by a column of light and, instructed by an angel, seek out and carry the coffin to a place once more specifically-named: a place surrounded by marsh, between the Cherwell and the Bradmere, where those rivers meet. This last place is quite obviously Prescott, which still retains field-name elements that do seem to connect it with both hermits and possibly Freomund himself. The story continues, telling how the girls deposit the coffin by a white carved stone and plant a willow wand as a marker. By the following morning this has grown to be a tree around which grows hay so marvellous it cures sick animals, indicating that the spot is now a holy one. Meanwhile a pilgrim in Jerusalem is told in a vision to seek a place on the Cherwell where five priests live, where also grows a willow tree under which lies a tomb containing Freomund.<sup>16</sup> Curiously the tale includes a miraculous sow with thirteen piglets in association with his tomb. This might hint that Cropredy and Prescott were involved in pig rearing. It is believed that some of the religious foundations around the upper Thames area had extensive pig farms. The miraculous legend of Saint Frideswide of Oxford has connections with pigs and there is an admittedly much later reference to pig farming at Bampton, itself an early religious foundation.

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<sup>16</sup> See Blair, *Anglo Saxon Oxfordshire*, concerning the story of Freomund and associated topics, pp. 74- 76