

Folkestone, Kent

Folcanctan

Church of St Mary and St Eanswythe

Relics of St Eanswyð

Grid ref ..... TR 229 358

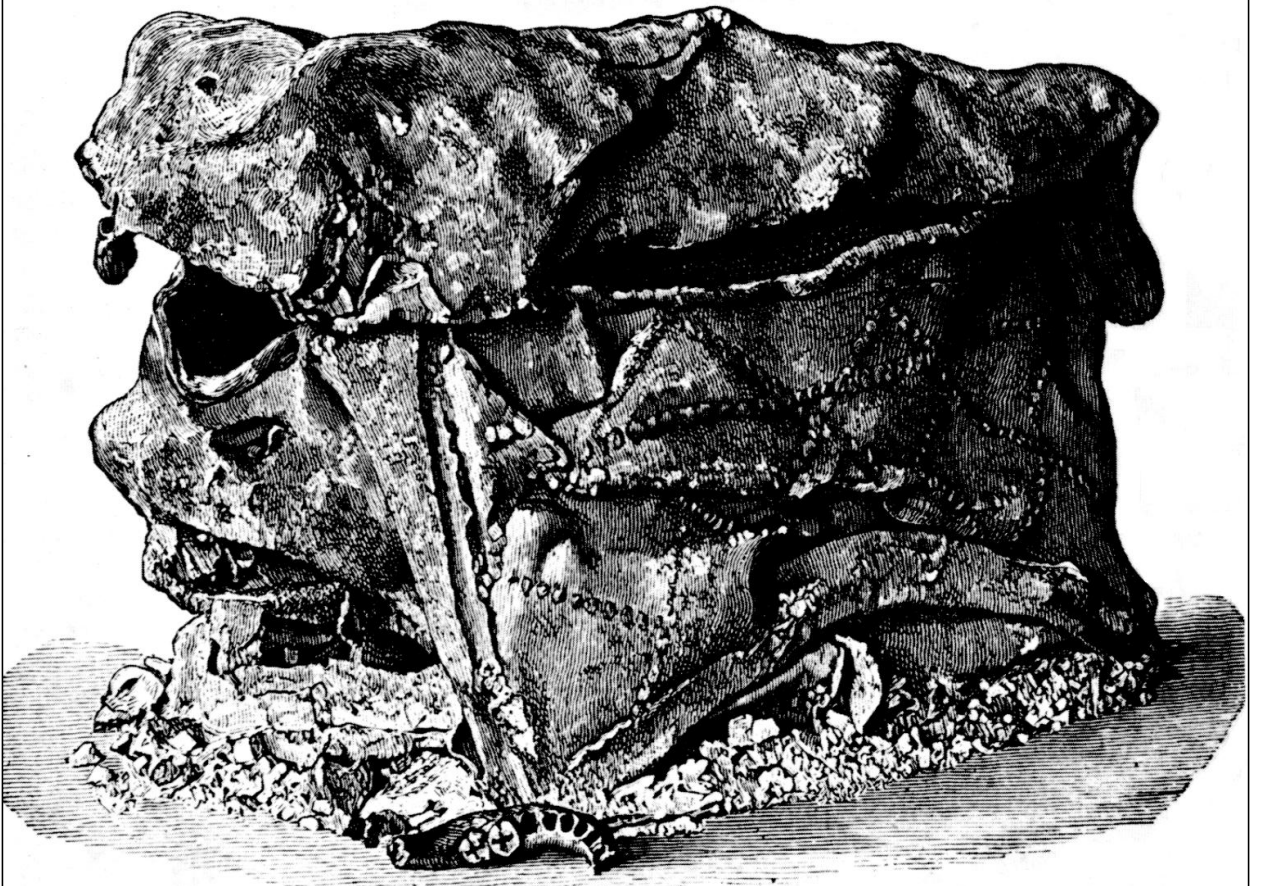
There has been a Christian community in Folkestone since AD630. At that time Eadbald, son of Ethelbert who was converted by St Augustine at Canterbury in 598, ruled the Saxon Kingdom of Kent. Eadbald built a convent and church for his daughter Eanswythe, which he dedicated in honour of the apostles Peter and Paul.

Eanswythe had decided at an early age to take the veil and enter the Religious Life. The young princess was joined by a group of similarly pious women, and their foundation, where they kept a

form of the Benedictine Rule, was the first convent for women in England.

A few years later St Mildred founded a similar establishment at Minster in Thanet and yet another convent came into being at Lyminge where St Etheberga, Eanswythe's aunt, settled in AD633. These early nunneries heralded the spreading of the Christian Faith throughout England and reflected the first dawns of what came to be called the Age of Faith.

*The 'ancient lead casket' as it appeared in June 1885. It would appear to be made of lead or pewter with a punched, repoussé design of dots in a diagonal, grid pattern, with a single horizontal line about 3" from the top. Its design suggests a date nearer to the Reformation. What may have happened is that the relics were removed from the original, Saxon reliquary, put into a contemporary box, and hastily immured before the arrival of Henry VIII's commissioners, the original reliquary being filled with animal remains. This theory, if applied generally, would partly account for the large number of 'spurious' relics that appear in the records. Malcolm Eadmund Dunstall*



## Folkestone, Kent

Eanswythe lived a life of great holiness and many miracles were later attributed to her. She died while still young about the year 640, by tradition on 31 August, and was buried in the church her father had built for her. In the South Chapel is an oil painting by a past organist, A. Oake, showing St. Eanswythe giving alms to the poor and lame at the door of the new Convent

### Later Churches

This first church and its adjacent convent were later destroyed by the inroads of the sea into the cliff on which they stood. A new church was built and the Saints relics re-interred within, but this building was also destroyed, this time by the Danes, who raided and pillaged the SE of England throughout the C8 and C9.

In 927 Athelstan built a new church at Folkestone, granting it a charter and dedicating it to the Blessed Virgin Mary. This church lasted until 1052, when Earl Godwin plundered Folkestone in revenge for having been outlawed by King Edward the Confessor. It must have remained in ruins until well after the Norman Conquest, for it was not until 1095 that the Norman Baron Nigel de Muneville built a new church and priory, this time for Benedictine Monks of the Abbey of Louley in Normandy, to which community he gave it as a daughter house.

### Beginnings of the Present Church

A little over forty years later the monks became alarmed at the insecurity of the cliff on which the buildings stood and petitioned the then Lord of the Manor, William d'Averanches, to remove them to

a safer site. And so in 1138 the present church was founded and dedicated in honour of St. Mary and St. Eanswythe. To this new building the relics of Folkestone's Patron Saint were translated on 12 September, which date it still observed as St. Eanswythe's Day.

### St Eanswythe's Relics

During the installation of Hem's elaborate sanctuary arcading of Derbyshire alabaster in June 1885, with the Apostle mosaics designed by Capello, the workmen came across a small cavity in the N wall containing an ancient lead casket. Upon its removal and examination it was found to contain the remains of a young woman who had died in the C7. From the place of burial near the High Altar, the position of greatest honour and distinction in the church, it was concluded that here were the long lost relics of St. Eanswythe which tradition asserted had been hidden somewhere in or near the Parish Church at the time of the Reformation.

The remains were reverently interred in the place where they had been rediscovered, still in the age-old Saxon coffer, and enclosed behind an elaborate brass grill and engraved door. There they remain to this day, bestowing a rare distinction upon our church which is one of the very few places remaining in this country which has the bones of its patron saint buried within its walls.

*Anthony Reader-Moore:  
from St Mary and St Eanswythe, Folkestone:  
pub Photo Precision Ltd., St. Ives, Huntingdon,  
May 1973.*



*Above:  
The door of the shrine in the  
north wall of the sanctuary*

*Left:  
Oil painting by A Oake,  
showing St Eanswyð giving  
alms to the poor*