



Shaftesbury, Dorset

Σκαρτεβυφ

Abbey Church of St Mary the Virgin and St Edward, K & M

Grid ref ST 86? 22?

Church fabric

Tomb of St Edward, king and martyr

Date

One strip of walling, only.

Notes

The Benedictine Abbey for women was founded by King Alfred the Great, his Church, consecrated in AD 888, being dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Alfred's second daughter, St Ethelgiva [*recte* Æþelgyfa] was a nun here and although delicate became Abbess. The names of 33 Abbesses are recorded.

St Elgiva, Queen of Edmund I was buried here c. 944 or 966. On 18/03/978, when about 17 years of age their grandson, King Edward was murdered at Corfe Castle while visiting his step-mother whose son, Ethelred the Unready (*recte* Æþelræd Unræd) became king in his stead. Edward was buried at Wareham but in February the next year, his body was translated to this Abbey Church with great ceremony and on 20 February placed in a tomb. On 20/06/1001, his remains were moved again, into a shrine here, some bones because of their miraculous properties being sent to other churches. His name was added to the dedication and he was proclaimed a Saint and Martyr. Because of his shrine and royal patronage the

Abbey became so rich and famous that it was said, if the Abbess of Shaston (Shaftesbury) were to wed the Abbot of Glaston (Glastonbury) their heir would own more land than the King. The Abbesses ranked as Barons. Between c. 1080 and 1100 the Saxon church was replaced by a larger Norman one.

King Canute died at Shaftesbury on 12/11/1035. He was buried at Winchester.

There is no record of what became of the Shrine and Relics of St Edward at the Dissolution, but on 22/01/1931, at this spot (marked "X" on plan) a roughly made lead box was unearthed. It was full of ancient bones which proved to be part of the skeleton of a youth. The fractures are consistent with those of a wounded rider having slipped from his horse and been dragged. There is reason to believe that these are the remains of St Edward hidden here for nearly four hundred years.

From the official guide.

The relics of St Edward are now preserved and venerated at St Edward's church, Brookwood, Surrey.

Malcolm Eadmund Dunstall

