

Reflection Wednesday 4th Week Easter St Erkenwald and Mellitus 2024

Saint Erconwald (-693) [or Erkenwald] was born at “Stallyngeton in Lindsey” in the early 7th century. His father Anna or Offa, king of East Anglia, was a pagan. Erconwald was converted to Christianity at an early age by St Mellitus, a companion of Augustine and 1st Bishop of London. He then converted his younger sister Ethelburga and baptised her, much to the fury of their father. Ethelburga eventually fled with one servant to escape a forced marriage with a pagan.

In 666 Erconwald founded the monastery of Chertsey on a Thames island during the reign of King Egbert of Kent. It was richly endowed, by Frithwald, viceroy of Surrey, under Wulfhere King of Mercia. The Viceroy put himself and his son under obedience to Erconwald in return for prayers. A further charter of Frithwald and Erconwald increased the Monastery lands with the “*Limites Terrarum*” that included Chertsey, Thorpe, Egham and adjacent parishes.

Shortly after Erconwald founded a convent at Barking intended as a refuge for his sister Ethelburga.

Erconwald remained Abbot of Chertsey until 675 when he was consecrated 3rd Bishop of London by St Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury. St Erconwald was apparently the 1st resident bishop and probably began building St Paul’s Cathedral.

Erconwald became noted for miracles and for evangelization. He instructed St Neot, of Crowland Abbey, and the two Kings of Essex, Sebba and Sigheir.

Thus, Erconwald is associated with the Kings of East Anglia, Mercia, Essex, Wessex and Kent, all having interests centring on Chertsey.

Towards the end of his life Erconwald was confined to a wheelchair. It is written that on one occasion a raging river parted to allow the Saint to cross in his chair; on another one wheel fell off but the chair miraculously stayed upright. After his death many miracles of healing were worked by the same wheelchair.

Erconwald died in 693 and was buried in a common earthen grave where he remained until 1087 when a fire destroyed the cathedral and everything in it except the coffin containing his remains. These were then translated to a shrine behind the high altar, where they remained until the Great Fire of 1666. Despite the depredations of the Reformation. He was venerated throughout the Middle Ages.