BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Eanswythe of Folkestone

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: September 12

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IN BRIEF

Saint Eanswythe of Folkestone

Anglo-Saxon princess of the 7th century, founder of the monastery at Folkestone according to tradition.

Feast day	September 12, August 31
Born	early 7th century, kingdom of Kent
Died	mid 7th century, on an August 31 according to tradition, Folkestone (Kent)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	7th century

In this booklet

Life

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Church of St Mary and St Eanswythe, Folkestone

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Eanswythe of Folkestone

Saint Eanswythe (also spelled Eanswith) was an Anglo-Saxon princess of the first half of the 7th century, a granddaughter of Æthelberht, the first Christian king of Kent. According to tradition, she founded at Folkestone, on the Kent coast, one of the first monasteries for women in England, and died very young. Her feast day is September 12, the day of the translation of her relics, and sometimes August 31.

Who was Saint Eanswythe?

Eanswythe belongs to the first Christian generation of the kingdom of Kent, converted thanks to the mission sent by Pope Saint Gregory the Great and led by Saint Augustine of Canterbury, which arrived in 597. Historical information about her is scarce. A group of early texts, known as the "Mildrith legend", which tells the lives of the saints of the Kentish royal family, says only that she was the daughter of King Eadbald and his second wife, Ymme (or Emma), a Frankish princess, and that she was buried at Folkestone.

A much more detailed Life was written in the 13th century by an anonymous monk of Folkestone. It is known only from a summary, preserved in the collection of saints' lives of John of Tynemouth. This account, full of marvels, cannot be read as a biography in the modern sense. Yet it keeps the memory of a young woman who chose consecrated life and whose cult has come down through the centuries.

Key dates in the life of Eanswythe

- **597**: Saint Augustine's mission arrives in Kent; her grandfather, King Æthelberht, is converted soon after.

- **Early 7th century**: Born, daughter of King Eadbald of Kent and Queen Ymme.
- **First half of the 7th century**: According to tradition, she founds a monastery at Folkestone and withdraws there, with her father's help.
- **Same period**: According to her Life, she refuses to marry a pagan king of Northumbria.
- **Mid 7th century**: Dies at Folkestone, probably before the age of twenty; she is remembered on August 31, the day of her death according to tradition.
- **1137**: After the old monastery has disappeared, the community moves to a new site; Folkestone Priory is founded by William of Avranches.
- **13th century**: A monk of Folkestone writes her Life.
- **1535**: The priory is closed during the dissolution of the monasteries ordered by Henry VIII.
- **1885**: A lead reliquary containing bones is discovered in a wall of the church at Folkestone.
- **2020**: Scientific analysis confirms that they are very probably her remains.

A princess in Christian Kent

Eanswythe was born into a royal family where the Christian faith was very recent. Her grandfather Æthelberht had welcomed Saint Augustine at Canterbury and was baptized. Her father Eadbald, who at first remained pagan, later converted. Her mother, Ymme, came from the kingdom of the Franks, Christian for more than a century. Eanswythe thus grew up where two worlds met: that of the old Germanic gods, still present in people's memories, and that of the Gospel, which was beginning to shape the life of the kingdom.

The foundation of Folkestone

According to the 13th century Life, Eanswythe wished to withdraw from the world to devote herself to God. Her father built for her, at Folkestone, a small oratory and a church dedicated to Saint Peter. There she gathered a community of women. This monastery is considered one of the very first monasteries for women founded in England.

The account tells that a pagan king of Northumbria wanted to marry her, and that she escaped his advances through a miracle. It also reports other wonders that took place while the monastery was being built, and after her death. These episodes, typical of medieval saints' lives, above all express the firmness of her choice: to belong to Christ alone. Tradition holds that she died young, on an August 31, and was buried in her monastery.

Her cult and the rediscovered relics

The first monastery at Folkestone disappeared, destroyed by the Vikings or carried away by coastal erosion. In 1137, the community moved to a new site: Folkestone Priory, founded by the baron William of Avranches. Eanswythe's relics were transferred there, and the anniversary of this translation, September 12, became her main feast. The priory was closed in 1535, at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries. Its church became the parish church of Folkestone, dedicated to Saint Mary and Saint Eanswythe.

In 1885, during building work, a lead reliquary containing part of a human skeleton was discovered in a wall of the church. It had probably been hidden at the time of the Reformation, to escape destruction. In 2020, analysis showed that the bones belonged to a single person, very probably a young woman of about seventeen to twenty, and radiocarbon dating places them around the middle of the 7th century. Everything fits: these are very likely the remains of Saint Eanswythe, which makes them some of the rare Anglo-Saxon relics preserved in England.

What can we learn from Saint Eanswythe?

Saint Eanswythe lived only a short time, but her life was given entirely. As a princess, she could have sought a royal marriage; she preferred to found a house of prayer by the sea. She shows that holiness does not depend on the number of one's years. The rediscovery of her relics, after centuries of oblivion, also reminds us that what is given to God is never lost. We can pray to her for young people seeking their vocation, for nuns, and for the Church in England.

Where to pray to Saint Eanswythe

- **Folkestone** (Kent, England): the church of St Mary and St Eanswythe, now an Anglican church, where her relics are kept.
- In any church, on September 12, entrusting young people and vocations to God.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Eanswythe for Young People and Vocations

Saint Eanswythe, a princess of Kent and granddaughter of the first Christian king in England, chose to consecrate herself to God and, according to tradition, founded a monastery at Folkestone in the 7th century. She died very young. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to her young people, vocations and all who must make a decisive choice.

Prayer to Saint Eanswythe

Saint Eanswythe,
daughter of kings,
you preferred to the throne and the alliances of the world
a small house of prayer by the sea.
Teach me to seek first the Kingdom of God.

You who knew how to say no
to what would have drawn you away from Christ,
give young people the inner freedom
to choose what is good and to follow their vocation.
Support nuns and those who hesitate to answer the call.

Your life was short, but given entirely.
Help me not to put off until tomorrow
what God asks of me today.
Watch over the Church in England and over the unity of Christians.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Eanswythe

- On her feast day, September 12, or on August 31.
- For a young person seeking their vocation or facing a life choice.
- For nuns and contemplative communities.
- For families who pass on the faith to their children.
- For Christian unity, especially in England.

A prayer for young people

> *Lord, you who call each one by name,*
> *give young people a free and generous heart.*
> *Saint Eanswythe, pray for them. Amen.*

To prepare for her feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Eanswythe from September 4 to 12, and read the life of Saint Eanswythe.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Eanswythe of Folkestone

This novena is an original composition inspired by the life of Saint Eanswythe, a princess of Kent and, according to tradition, the founder of the monastery at Folkestone in the 7th century. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on her feast day, September 12, begin on September 4. You can also pray it at any other time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and entrust your intention to God. Read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with: "Saint Eanswythe, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recounted come from a Life written in the 13th century, which mixes history and legend.

Day 1: A brand new faith

Eanswythe was born shortly after the conversion of Kent, into a family that still remembered the old gods. She received a very young faith, which she would make grow.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who proclaimed the Gospel to me. Keep my faith alive and new.

Act of the day: Pray for those who are discovering the faith, catechumens and the newly baptized.

Day 2: The legacy of grandparents

Her grandfather Æthelberht was the first Christian king in England. Faith is often handed on through the elders of a family.

Prayer: Lord, bless grandparents who pass on the faith to their grandchildren.

Act of the day: Call or visit a grandparent, or pray for your ancestors.

Day 3: Choosing God

As a princess, Eanswythe could have aimed for a royal marriage. Instead she longed to withdraw and pray. Choosing God gives everything else its true measure.

Prayer: Lord, help me to give you first place in my choices.

Act of the day: Begin the day with a few minutes of prayer before anything else.

Day 4: A father who supports

According to her Life, her father built an oratory and a church for her. He helped his daughter follow her call.

Prayer: Lord, bless parents who support their children's vocation without stifling it.

Act of the day: Pray for a young person who must make a life choice.

Day 5: Saying no

Tradition tells that a pagan king wanted to marry her and that she refused. Knowing how to say no to what turns us away from Christ is a form of freedom.

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to refuse what draws me away from you.

Act of the day: Give up a habit that distracts you from what matters most.

Day 6: A house of prayer by the sea

At Folkestone, Eanswythe gathered a community of women. Facing the sea, they prayed for the kingdom and for the young Church.

Prayer: Lord, bless the communities of nuns who pray for the world.

Act of the day: Pray for a religious community, or write them a note of support.

Day 7: A short and full life

Eanswythe died very young, probably before the age of twenty. Her life was brief, but nothing in it was wasted.

Prayer: Lord, comfort families who have lost a child or a young person. Welcome them into your peace.

Act of the day: Pray for a young person who has died and for their family.

Day 8: Hidden relics

At the time of the Reformation, believers hid her relics in a wall to save them. They were only found again in 1885.

Prayer: Lord, keep your Church in times of trial, and help us to guard faithfully what you entrust to us.

Act of the day: Pray for Christians who are persecuted today.

Day 9: Nothing is lost

After centuries, science confirmed what tradition had preserved: Eanswythe still rests at Folkestone. What is given to God endures.

Prayer: Lord, make hope grow in me. Through the intercession of Saint Eanswythe, grant me the grace I ask of you in this novena, if it be your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass if you can, and pray for Christian unity.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Eanswythe,*
> *princess of Kent and bride of Christ,*
> *you who gave everything in so short a life,*
> *present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Keep young people in the freedom of the children of God*
> *and gather Christians in unity.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Eanswythe at any time, and read the life of Saint Eanswythe.

PILGRIMAGE

Church of St Mary and St Eanswythe, Folkestone

The church of St Mary and St Eanswythe stands in the old town of Folkestone, a port on the Kent coast of England. It is the heir of the Benedictine priory that succeeded the monastery founded, according to tradition, by Saint Eanswythe in the 7th century. Today it is a parish church of the Church of England, and it keeps the saint's relics, rediscovered in 1885.

From Eanswythe's monastery to the priory

According to her Life, the princess Eanswythe, daughter of King Eadbald of Kent, founded a monastery for women at Folkestone, where she lived and was buried. This first monastery disappeared, destroyed by the Vikings or by coastal erosion. In 1137, the community settled on a new site: a priory founded by the baron William of Avranches. The saint's relics were transferred there, and the anniversary of this translation, September 12, became her main feast.

The priory was closed in 1535, during the dissolution of the monasteries. Its church became the town's parish church, dedicated to the Virgin Mary and Saint Eanswythe. In all likelihood, it was at this time that believers hid the relics in a wall to protect them.

The rediscovered relics

In 1885, during renovation work, a lead reliquary containing part of a human skeleton was found in a wall of the church. In 2020, scientific analysis established that the bones belonged to a single person, a young woman of about seventeen to twenty, who died around the middle of the 7th century

according to radiocarbon dating. These results agree with what is known of Eanswythe: they are very probably her remains, which makes this one of the few places in England to keep the relics of an Anglo-Saxon saint.

Praying there

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Eanswythe. Near her relics, entrust to her young people seeking their vocation, nuns and the unity of Christians, then say the prayer to Saint Eanswythe. Since the church is now Anglican, a pilgrimage here also becomes a prayer for unity among Christians. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

Folkestone is in Kent, not far from Dover and the entrance to the Channel Tunnel; the town can be reached by train from London. The church is a place of worship: modest dress and silence are requested during services. Opening hours and service times may vary: check with the parish or the tourist office before your visit.

Credits and sources

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