

## **OXTED: ALL SAINTS CHURCH: ST HEDWIG WINDOW**

This window, in the Lady Chapel, was the gift of a parishioner, Miss Hedwig Eden<sup>1</sup>, and this explains the rather unusual subject. It was created in 1923<sup>2</sup>.

### **St Hedwig of Silesia (about 1174-1243)**

Hedwig (Jadwiga in Polish)<sup>3</sup> was born at Andechs, Germany, one of the eight children of Berthold IV, Count of Dießen-Andechs and Duke of Istria. At the age of 12 she was married to Henry, the future Duke of Silesia<sup>4</sup>. They had seven children: following the birth of the seventh the couple took a mutual vow of chastity, living apart thereafter, but Hedwig continued to be a great help to her husband. They founded several religious houses, including the Cistercian nunnery at Trzebnica (near Wrocław), at which Hedwig spent much of her time. By 1232 Henry was High Duke of all Poland: he died in 1238, and Hedwig then took up permanent residence at the Trzebnica nunnery, wearing the Cistercian habit and adopting the monastic lifestyle. She spent her time in prayer, and in caring for the sick and supporting the poor.

Hedwig died at Trzebnica in 1243 and was buried in the nunnery church. During her lifetime she had been renowned for her piety and gentleness, and many miracles were reported after her death: she was canonized by Pope Clement IV in 1267. Her feast day is 16th October<sup>5</sup>, and she is the patron saint of Silesia.

### **The Window**

Hedwig is depicted in her Cistercian habit, walking barefoot, deep in thought, along a path of stones and brambles. Apparently she walked like this everywhere, even in winter, ignoring the damage to her feet, and when given a pair of shoes to alleviate her suffering she simply carried them – you can see them in her right hand. The book which she is carrying in her left hand bears on its cover the Latin word BREVIARIUM. This is a Breviary, the book containing the prayers, hymns, psalms and readings forming the Divine Office, which would have been recited or sung at fixed times every day in the nunnery. Also in her left hand she is carrying a rather smart handbag. This would be an incongruous accessory for a nun, who would have renounced all personal possessions, but not for Hedwig, for she never became a nun. Nuns had to take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and Hedwig wanted to retain control over her wealth so that she could use it for charitable purposes. Perhaps the handbag contains money for distribution to the poor.

Behind Hedwig is an agricultural scene: trees in the background, labourers, an ox being led and wheatsheaves. The artist has included these details because Hedwig

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<sup>1</sup> *Surrey Mirror* 8<sup>th</sup> July 1927.

<sup>2</sup> *Sevenoaks Chronicle & Kentish Advertiser* and *Kent & Sussex Courier* both 20<sup>th</sup> July 1923.

<sup>3</sup> Not to be confused with St Hedwig/Jadwiga Queen of Poland (about 1373-1399) who was canonized in 1997.

<sup>4</sup> A historic region now mostly in SW Poland, its capital Wrocław.

<sup>5</sup> It was 17<sup>th</sup> October until 1929.

invited German settlers into Silesia to found settlements, clear forested areas and cultivate them. Above this scene, to the left, are the arms of Poland: a white crowned eagle with a golden beak and talons on a red background. To the right are the rooftops of Trzebnica, with the nunnery church in the centre as it might have appeared in the 11<sup>th</sup> century in its original Romanesque style. At the bottom of the window is the earthly crown which Hedwig has discarded – she was the wife of the ruler of Poland – and above her head is the crown which she will receive in heaven.

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