



This story explains why, in the gatehouse at St Benet's, on either side of the main entrance there are ancient carvings of what is thought to be a man with a large spear and a dragon.

This version comes from a collection of local history documents compiled by William Henry Cooke, a resident of nearby Stalham. He handed them to Russell Colman, a member of the mustard manufacturing family, in 1911. The papers now rest with the Norfolk Record Office and we are grateful to them for allowing their reproduction here.

The Legend of the Seal , as retold by William Henry Cooke.

Many years ago, in the reign of King Henry 1 there was a young monk of the Abbey named Edwin who wanted to follow his own will with an easy conscience.

The Godly discipline of the Abbey was irksome to him. Many were the chastisements which his unsatisfactory conduct brought down upon him. He had to carry the lantern of penance. He was whipped and sentenced to punishments without end. He was repeatedly sent to prison but all in vain. He remained unhumbled and knew no sense of shame.

It was during one of these imprisonments that a pious brother monk, having obtained permission from the Abbot, visited him to try to move him to a better state of mind. He might as well have tried to move a rock. To all his warnings, entreaties, arguments and expostulations he received only one answer: his own will and pleasure were the only laws the monk would obey.

The good brother in despair turned to leave him, but first put into his hand a small relic. It was a single hair of St Benedict, and bade him ever to keep it on his person in remembrance of a friend. This touched the right chord. Edwin preserved, for a friend's sake, that which he otherwise would have thrown away as worthless.

It was well he did so, not that he seemed the better for it, but rather waxed worse and worse. Till one day he took the last fatal steps and ran away from the convent to which his vows bound him. Far he wandered, following the proud instincts of his carnal will, neither pleasing God nor regarding man.

It so happened that as he journeyed on, footsore and weary, a gallant knight mounted on a noble steed overtook him.

"Weary monk, whither goest thou?", said an insinuating voice.

"I go no whither", replied Edwin.



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"Then follow me", said the stranger. "I have need of an esquire and thou, by thy manly looks and well-built frame, art made for better service than the life of a nomad. Thou shalt have thy fill of pleasure and a share in many a noble enterprise and plentiful wage. Lo – here is thy first coin."

Edwin gazed on the heavy purse which the strange knight held towards him.

"I will serve thee", said Edwin, taking the purse. As he did so for the first time he beheld the countenance of the stranger. It was that of a hideous dragon!

Edwin dropped the purse and cried out in terror.

"Ha! It is too late", said the fiend triumphantly. "Thou hast taken the coin. Thou hast promised to serve me. Thou shalt follow thy will, for thy will is my will."

He then seized the monk with an irresistible grasp. At that instant, a sword thrust and pierced the dragon from whose armour there flowed a shower of sparks and fire. With a howl of rage the fiend vanished.

Swooning with fear, Edwin could just distinguish in front of him a bright figure in a close vest and gown. A lofty cap was seen issuing out of a coronet, in his right hand was a great broad sword.

Then he heard a sweet voice saying, "Those that bear about with them a remembrance of me, I remember, but thou must return and do the will of God lest worse befall thee".

It was St Benedict and the relic given to him by a pious brother had saved him. So Edwin returned to the Abbey and became obedient to his vows.

After reading this legend there can be no doubt but that the carvings on the west front of the gateway refer to this miraculous deliverance.



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