

= Mellitus =

Mellitus ( died 24 April 624 ) was the first Bishop of London in the Saxon period , the third Archbishop of Canterbury , and a member of the Gregorian mission sent to England to convert the Anglo @-@ Saxons from their native paganism to Christianity . He arrived in 601 AD with a group of clergy sent to augment the mission , and was consecrated as Bishop of London in 604 . Mellitus was the recipient of a famous letter from Pope Gregory I known as the *Epistola ad Mellitum* , preserved in a later work by the medieval chronicler Bede , which suggested the conversion of the Anglo @-@ Saxons be undertaken gradually , integrating pagan rituals and customs . In 610 , Mellitus returned to Italy to attend a council of bishops , and returned to England bearing papal letters to some of the missionaries .

Mellitus was exiled from London by the pagan successors to his patron , King Sæberht of Essex , following the latter 's death around 616 . King Æthelberht of Kent , Mellitus ' other patron , died at about the same time , forcing him to take refuge in Gaul . Mellitus returned to England the following year , after Æthelberht 's successor had been converted to Christianity , but he was unable to return to London , whose inhabitants remained pagan . Mellitus was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 619 . During his tenure , he was alleged to have miraculously saved the cathedral , and much of the town of Canterbury , from a fire . After his death in 624 , Mellitus was revered as a saint .

= = Early life = =

The medieval chronicler Bede described Mellitus as being of noble birth . In letters , Pope Gregory I called him an abbot , but it is unclear whether Mellitus had previously been abbot of a Roman monastery , or this was a rank bestowed on him to ease his journey to England by making him the leader of the expedition . The papal register , a listing of letters sent out by the popes , describes him as an " abbot in Frankia " in its description of the correspondence , but the letter itself only says " abbot " . The first time Mellitus is mentioned in history is in the letters of Gregory , and nothing else of his background is known . It appears likely that he was a native of Italy , along with all the other bishops consecrated by Augustine .

= = Journey to England = =

Pope Gregory I sent Mellitus to England in June 601 , in response to an appeal from Augustine , the first Archbishop of Canterbury . Augustine needed more clergy to join the Gregorian mission that was converting the kingdom of Kent , then ruled by Æthelberht , from paganism to Christianity . The new missionaries brought with them a gift of books and " all things which were needed for worship and the ministry of the Church . " Thomas of Elmham , a 15th @-@ century Canterbury chronicler , claimed that in his day there were a number of the books brought to England by Mellitus still at Canterbury . Examination of the remaining manuscripts has determined that one possible survivor of Mellitus ' books is the St. Augustine Gospels , now in Cambridge , as Corpus Christi College , MS ( manuscript ) 286 . Along with the letter to Augustine , the missionaries brought a letter for Æthelberht , urging the King to act like the Roman Emperor Constantine I and force the conversion of his followers to Christianity . The king was also encouraged to destroy all pagan shrines .

The historian Ian Wood has suggested that Mellitus ' journey through Gaul probably took in the bishoprics of Vienne , Arles , Lyons , Toulon , Marseilles , Metz , Paris , and Rouen , as evidenced by the letters that Gregory addressed to those bishops soliciting their support for Mellitus ' party . Gregory also wrote to the Frankish kings Chlothar II , Theuderic II , Theudebert II , along with Brunhilda of Austrasia , who was Theudebert and Theuderic 's grandmother and regent . Wood feels that this wide appeal to the Frankish episcopate and royalty was an effort to secure more support for the Gregorian mission . While on his journey to England , Mellitus received a letter from Gregory allowing Augustine to convert pagan temples to Christian churches , and to convert pagan animal sacrifices into Christian feasts , to ease the transition to Christianity . Gregory 's letter marked a sea change in the missionary strategy , and was later included in Bede 's *Ecclesiastical History of the*

English People . Usually known as the *Epistola ad Mellitum* , it conflicts with the letter sent to Æthelberht , which the historian R. A. Markus sees as a turning point in missionary history , when forcible conversion gave way to persuasion . This traditional view , that the *Epistola* represents a contradiction of the letter to Æthelberht , has been challenged by the historian and theologian George Demacopoulos , who argues that the letter to Æthelberht was mainly meant to encourage the King in spiritual matters , while the *Epistola* was sent to deal with purely practical matters , and thus the two do not contradict each other .

= = Bishop of London = =

Exactly when Mellitus and his party arrived in England is unknown , but he was certainly in the country by 604 , when Augustine consecrated him as bishop in the province of the East Saxons , making Mellitus the first Bishop of London after the Roman departure ( London was the East Saxons ' capital ) . The city was a logical choice for a new bishopric , as it was a hub for the southern road network . It was also a former Roman town ; many of the Gregorian mission 's efforts were centred in such locations . Before his consecration , Mellitus baptised Sæberht , Æthelberht 's nephew , who then allowed the bishopric to be established . The episcopal church built in London was probably founded by Æthelberht , rather than Sæberht . Although Bede records that Æthelberht gave lands to support the new episcopate , a charter that claims to be a grant of lands from Æthelberht to Mellitus is a later forgery .

Although Gregory had intended London to be the southern archbishopric for the island , Augustine never moved his episcopal see to London , and instead consecrated Mellitus as a plain bishop there . After Augustine 's death in 604 , Canterbury continued to be the site of the southern archbishopric , and London remained a bishopric . It may have been that the Kentish king did not wish greater episcopal authority to be exercised outside his own kingdom .

Mellitus attended a council of bishops held in Italy in February 610 , convened by Pope Boniface IV . The historian N. J. Higham speculates that one reason for his attendance may have been to assert the English Church 's independence from the Frankish Church . Boniface had Mellitus take two papal letters back to England , one to Æthelbert and his people , and another to Laurence , the Archbishop of Canterbury . He also brought back the synod 's decrees to England . No authentic letters or documents from this synod remain , although some were forged in the 1060s and 1070s at Canterbury . During his time as a bishop , Mellitus joined with Justus , the Bishop of Rochester , in signing a letter that Laurence wrote to the Celtic bishops urging the Celtic Church to adopt the Roman method of calculating the date of Easter . This letter also mentioned the fact that Irish missionary bishops , such as Dagan , refused to eat with the Roman missionaries .

Both Æthelberht and Sæberht died around 616 or 618 , causing a crisis for the mission . Sæberht 's three sons had not converted to Christianity , and drove Mellitus from London . Bede says that Mellitus was exiled because he refused the brothers ' request for a taste of the sacramental bread . Whether this occurred immediately after Sæberht 's death or later is impossible to determine from Bede 's chronology , which has both events in the same chapter but gives neither an exact time frame nor the elapsed time between the two events . The historian N. J. Higham connects the timing of this episode with a change in the " overlordship " from the Christian Kentish Æthelberht to the pagan East Anglian Raedwald , which Higham feels happened after Æthelberht 's death . In Higham 's view , Sæberht 's sons drove Mellitus from London because they had passed from Kentish overlordship to East Anglian , and thus no longer needed to keep Mellitus , who was connected with the Kentish kingdom , in office .

Mellitus fled first to Canterbury , but Æthelberht 's successor Eadbald was also a pagan , so Mellitus , accompanied by Justus , took refuge in Gaul . Mellitus was recalled to Britain by Laurence , the second Archbishop of Canterbury , after his conversion of Eadbald . How long Mellitus ' exile lasted is unclear . Bede claims it was a year , but it may have been longer . However , Mellitus did not return to London , because the East Saxons remained pagan . Although Mellitus fled , there does not seem to have been any serious persecution of Christians in the East Saxon kingdom . The East Saxon see was not occupied again until Cedd was consecrated as bishop in about 654 .

= = Archbishop and death = =

Mellitus succeeded Laurence as the third Archbishop of Canterbury after the latter 's death in 619 . During his tenure as archbishop , Mellitus supposedly performed a miracle in 623 by diverting a fire that had started in Canterbury and threatened the church . He was carried into the flames , upon which the wind changed direction , thus saving the building . Bede praised Mellitus ' sane mind , but other than the miracle , little happened during his time as archbishop . Bede also mentioned that Mellitus suffered from gout . Boniface wrote to Mellitus encouraging him in the mission , perhaps prompted by the marriage of Æthelburh of Kent to King Edwin of Northumbria . Whether Mellitus received a pallium , the symbol of an archbishop 's authority , from the pope is unknown .

Mellitus died on 24 April 624 , and was buried at St Augustine 's Abbey in Canterbury that same day . He became revered as a saint after his death , and was allotted the feast day of 24 April . In the ninth century , Mellitus ' feast day was mentioned in the Stowe Missal , along with Laurence and Justus . He was still venerated at St Augustine 's in 1120 , along with a number of other local saints . There was also a shrine to him at Old St Paul 's Cathedral in London . Shortly after the Norman Conquest , Goscelin wrote a life of Mellitus , the first of several to appear around that time , but none contain any information not included in Bede 's earlier works . These later medieval lives do , however , reveal that during Goscelin 's lifetime persons suffering from gout were urged to pray at Mellitus ' tomb . Goscelin records that Mellitus ' shrine flanked that of Augustine , along with Laurence , in the eastern central chapel of the presbytery .