

= Biddenden Maids =

Mary and Eliza Chulkhurst ( or Chalkhurst ) , commonly known as the Biddenden Maids , were a pair of conjoined twins supposedly born in Biddenden , Kent , England , in the year 1100 . They are said to have been joined at both the shoulder and the hip , and to have lived for 34 years . It is claimed that on their death they bequeathed five plots of land to the village , known as the Bread and Cheese Lands . The income from these lands was used to pay for an annual dole of food and drink to the poor every Easter . Since at least 1775 , the dole has included Biddenden cakes , hard biscuits imprinted with an image of two conjoined women .

Although the annual distribution of food and drink is known to have taken place since at least 1605 , no records exist of the story of the sisters prior to 1770 . Records of that time say that the names of the sisters were not known , and early drawings of Biddenden cakes do not give names for the sisters ; it is not until the early 19th century that the names " Mary and Eliza Chulkhurst " were first used .

Edward Hasted , the local historian of Kent , has dismissed the story of the Biddenden Maids as a folk myth , claiming that the image on the cake had originally represented two poor women and that the story of the conjoined twins was " a vulgar tradition " invented to account for it , while influential historian Robert Chambers accepted that the legend could be true but believed it unlikely . Throughout most of the 19th century little research was carried out into the origins of the legend . Despite the doubts among historians , in the 19th century the legend became increasingly popular and the village of Biddenden was thronged with rowdy visitors every Easter . In the late 19th century historians investigated the origins of the legend . It was suggested that the twins had genuinely existed but had been joined at the hip only rather than at both the hip and shoulder , and that they had lived in the 16th rather than the 12th century .

In 1907 , the Bread and Cheese Lands were sold for housing , and the resulting income allowed the annual dole to expand considerably , providing the widows and pensioners of Biddenden with cheese , bread and tea at Easter and with cash payments at Christmas . Biddenden cakes continue to be given to the poor of Biddenden each Easter , and are sold as souvenirs to visitors .

= = Legend = =

According to tradition Mary and Eliza Chulkhurst , or Chalkhurst , were born to relatively wealthy parents in Biddenden , Kent , in the year 1100 . The pair were said to be conjoined at both the shoulder and the hip . They grew up conjoined , and are said to have " had frequent quarrels , which sometimes terminated in blows " . At the age of 34 , Mary Chulkhurst died suddenly . Doctors proposed to separate the still @-@ living Eliza from her sister 's body but she refused , saying " as we came together we will also go together " , and died six hours afterwards . In their wills , the sisters left five pieces of land in the Biddenden area comprising around 20 acres ( 8 ha ) in total to the local church , with the income from these lands ( claimed to have been 6 guineas per annum at the time of their death ) to provide an annual dole of bread , cheese and beer to the poor every Easter . Henceforward , the lands were to be known as the Bread and Cheese Lands .

= = History = =

The churchwardens of Biddenden continued to maintain the annual dole from the Bread and Cheese Lands . It is recorded that in 1605 , the custom that " on that day [ Easter ] our parson giveth unto the parishoners bread , cheese , cakes and divers barrels of beer , brought in there and drawn " was suspended on account of a visit from Charles Fotherby , the Archdeacon of Canterbury , owing to previous ceremonies having caused " much disorder by reason of some unruly ones , which at such time we cannot restrain with any ease " . In 1645 , rector William Horner claimed that the Bread and Cheese Lands were glebe ( land intended for the use of the parish priest ) , and attempted to take control of the lands . The case of the Bread and Cheese Lands was brought before the Committee for Plundered Ministers , who eventually found in favour of the charity in 1649

. Horner brought the case before the Court of the Exchequer in 1656 but again without success , and the charity continued to own the lands and to operate the annual Easter dole . Witness statements from these cases mention that the lands had been given by two women " who grew together in their bodies " , but do not give any name for the women .

In 1681 the " disorder and indecency " of the annual dole led to the threat of intervention by the Archbishop of Canterbury . The distribution of the dole ceased to be conducted inside the church ; it was moved to the church porch .

By 1770 , it is recorded that the annual dole took place immediately after the afternoon Easter service . The annual income from the Bread and Cheese Lands had risen to 20 guineas ( about £ 2 @, @ 600 in 2016 ) , and a huge quantity of food was distributed each year . By this time as well as the dole of bread , cheese and beer , hard bread rolls known as " Biddenden cakes " , moulded into an image of the sisters , were thrown to crowds from the church roof . The Biddenden cakes were flat , hard and made of flour and water , and were described as " not by any means tempting " ; one writer in 1860 described one as " a biscuit plaque " .

= = = Origins of the Biddenden Maids legend = = =

Although it is known that the charity had been in operation as early as 1656 , an anonymous article in The Gentleman 's Magazine in August 1770 is the earliest recorded account of the legend of the Biddenden Maids . This account states that the twins were joined at the hip only , rather than at both the hip and the shoulder , and that they lived to a relatively old age . The article explicitly states that their names were not recorded , and that they were known only as the " Maids of Biddenden " . The anonymous author recounts the story of their bequest of the lands to the parish to support the annual dole , and goes on to say that despite the antiquity of the events described , he has no doubt as to their authenticity . As with all accounts of the tradition prior to 1790 the author does not mention their alleged birth in 1100 , or the name of Chulkhurst ; these details first appeared in a broadside published in 1790 . The Antiquarian Repertory of 1775 says that the sisters had lived " as tradition says , two hundred and fifty years ago " . Drawings of Biddenden cakes from this period show that they featured an image of two women , possibly conjoined , but no names , dates or ages .

Historian Edward Hasted , in the third volume of The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent published in 1798 , dismissed the legend of the Biddenden Maids . He claimed that the Bread and Cheese Lands were the gift of two women named Preston ( although he elsewhere described the lands as having been " given by persons unknown " ) . Hasted stated that the Biddenden cakes had only begun to be moulded with the imprint of two women in the last 50 years ( i.e. since 1748 ) and that the figures were intended to represent " two poor widows , as the general objects of a charitable benefaction " . While he mentioned a legend that the figures represent two conjoined twins who died in their 20s and bequeathed the Bread and Cheese Lands to the parish , he dismissed it as " a vulgar tradition " .

Hasted 's arguments were largely accepted by influential historian Robert Chambers , and the story was generally treated as a folk myth . A letter to the British Medical Journal in 1869 pointed out that surnames were not in use in Kent in the 12th century , and that in older styles of English handwriting the 1 and 5 characters could easily be confused , and suggested a correct birthdate of 1500 . The Biddenden Maids were occasionally mentioned in pieces on conjoined twins , particularly after Chang and Eng Bunker proved that conjoined twins could live to an advanced age and lead relatively normal lives . Notes and Queries magazine called in 1866 for a close examination of Biddenden documents , the editors describing Hasted 's conclusions as " very obscure and unsatisfactory " and questioning why the names " Eliza and Mary Chulkhurst " should have been added to the design of cakes granted by a family named Preston , but no significant research into the tradition was carried out .

= = = Growth of the charity = = =

As the annual dole grew larger the Easter distribution became increasingly popular . In 1808 a broadside featuring a woodcut of the twins and a brief history of their alleged story was sold outside the church at Easter , the first recorded mention of the names " Eliza and Mary Chulkhurst " , and clay replicas of Biddenden cakes were sold as souvenirs .

In the 1820s , a new account of the Biddenden Maids was published , which claimed that a gravestone marked with a diagonal line near the rector 's pew in Biddenden church was the sisters ' burial place . In 1830 it was noted that Biddenden was becoming thronged by visitors every Easter , " attracted from the adjacent towns and villages by the usage , and the wonderful account of its origin , and the day is spent in rude festivity " . The large crowds were increasingly disorderly , and churchwardens on occasion had to use their staffs to hold back the mob . As a result , the distribution of the dole was moved from the church to the workhouse , but the crowds continued to cause problems . In 1882 Biddenden 's rector applied for authority to abandon the ceremony ; the Archbishop of Canterbury permitted the distribution of bread , cheese and Biddenden cakes to continue , but abolished the free beer in an effort to combat the problem of unruly crowds .

In 1900 , antiquarian George Clinch investigated the Biddenden Maids in detail . Examining the costumes of the figures on the Biddenden cake moulds , he concluded that the style of dress depicted dated from the reign of Mary I ( 1553 ? 1558 ) , a date roughly consistent with the " two hundred and fifty years ago " reported in 1775 , and concluded that the tradition had originated in the 16th century . He suggested that the " 1100 " date on Biddenden cakes had originally read " 1500 " , and explained the absence of names on prints of 18th century Biddenden cakes as an engraving error . It is likely that the cake moulds examined by Clinch were not the original moulds , as the designs Clinch examined are strikingly different to the earliest surviving drawings of Biddenden cakes , published in 1775 . Writing in the early 1930s , William Coles Finch explains the confusion over the dates , saying " the old @-@ fashioned numeral five is so frequently taken as a one " . He lamented the quality of the Biddenden cake then being produced , compared to that of former years . Coles Finch stated that the villagers considered the then @-@ current cake to be unleavened bread .

= = Belief and scepticism = =

In almost all drawings and Biddenden cake designs , the twins are shown as conjoined at both the hip and the shoulder . Although such a fusion is theoretically possible , in that twins fused at one point may form a secondary fusion elsewhere , no case of a viable double fusion has ever been documented .

Although Clinch believed that the evidence pointed to the twins having genuinely existed but that they had lived in the 16th century , rather than the early 12th century as generally claimed , they are not mentioned in any journals or books from the period . This points against their having lived in the 16th century ; the case of Lazarus and Joannes Baptista Colloredo ( 1617 ? after 1646 ) had prompted great interest in conjoined twins , and conjoined sisters surviving to adulthood in south east England would have been widely noted .

In 1895 , surgeon J. W. Ballantyne considered the case of the Biddenden Maids from a teratological perspective . He suggested that they had in fact been pygopagus ( twins joined at the pelvis ) . Pygopagus twins are known to put their arms around each other 's shoulders when walking , and Ballantyne suggested that this accounted for their apparently being joined at the shoulders in drawings . The pygopagus Millie and Christine McCoy had lived in Britain for a short time before going on to a successful singing career in the United States , and it was known from their case that such twins were capable of surviving to adulthood .

Jan Bondeson ( 1992 and 2006 ) proposed that , while the names " Eliza and Mary Chulkhurst " are not recorded in any early documents and are likely to have been a later addition , the existence of the twins and the claimed 1100 year of birth cannot be dismissed . Although mediaeval chronicles are unreliable , he noted multiple reports in the *Chronicon Scotorum* , the *Annals of the Four Masters* and the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* of a pair of conjoined sisters born in or around 1100 , although all three are records of Irish history and none mention Kent as the location . He concluded

that the case of Christine McCoy , who survived for eight hours following the death of her polypagus twin Millie , shows that the claimed six hours between the deaths of the Biddenden Maids is plausible , and agreed with Ballantyne 's proposal that the idea that the twins were joined at the shoulder is a later misinterpretation of the figures on the Biddenden cake . He also pointed out that although there is no recorded version of the legend prior to 1770 , there would have been no possible motive for the villagers of the 18th century to fabricate the story .

= = Today = =

In 1907 , the Chulkhurst Charity was amalgamated with other local charities with similar purposes , to form the Biddenden Consolidated Charity , still functioning as a registered charity . The Bread and Cheese Lands were sold for housing , expanding the charity significantly to provide Biddenden pensioners and widows with bread , cheese , and tea at Easter , a cash payment at Christmas , and distribute Biddenden cakes . ( During the food rationing of the 1940s and early 1950s , the cheese was replaced by cocoa . Distribution of cheese resumed in 1951 . ) A wrought iron village sign showing the Biddenden Maids was erected on Biddenden village green in the 1920s .

The tradition of the dole continues to the present , and every Easter Monday tea , cheese and bread are given to local widows and pensioners through the windows of Biddenden 's former workhouse . All those eligible for the annual dole are given a Biddenden cake , and they are sold as souvenirs to visitors . The cakes are baked so hard as to be inedible , to allow better preservation as souvenirs ; they are baked in large batches every few years and kept until the stock runs out . Historically , the loaves used were of the archaic quartern loaf size , but this particular part of the tradition ended when Biddenden 's last bakery closed in the 1990s .

= Ælfric of Abingdon =

Ælfric of Abingdon ( Old English : Ælfr?c ; died 16 November 1005 ) , also known as Ælfric of Wessex , was a late 10th @-@ century Archbishop of Canterbury . He previously held the offices of abbot of St Albans Abbey and Bishop of Ramsbury , as well as likely being the abbot of Abingdon Abbey . After his election to Canterbury , he continued to hold the bishopric of Ramsbury along with the archbishopric of Canterbury until his death in 1005 . Ælfric may have altered the composition of Canterbury 's cathedral chapter by changing the clergy serving in the cathedral from secular clergy to monks . In his will he left a ship to King Æthelred II of England as well as more ships to other legatees .

= = Early life = =

Ælfric was the son of an earl of Kent and became a monk of Abingdon Abbey in Berkshire ( now Oxfordshire ) . He was very likely Abbot of Abingdon before becoming Abbot of St Albans Abbey around 975 , although some historians do not believe that he held the office of Abbot at Abingdon . Although the *Historia Ecclesie Abendonensis* , or *History of the Church of Abingdon* , names Ælfric as abbot , the abbatial lists do not record him as such . Indirect corroboration of his being abbot at Abingdon is a grant of land to Ælfric personally ( instead of to the office he held ) while he was archbishop that had previously been unjustly taken from Abingdon . This land was to revert to Abingdon after Ælfric 's death .

= = Bishop and archbishop = =

Ælfric 's brother , Leofric , succeeded him as Abbot of St Albans when he became bishop . Between 991 and 993 , Ælfric rose to the Bishopric of Ramsbury , and possibly continued to hold office of abbot of St Albans while bishop . In 995 he was elevated to the see of Canterbury . He was translated , or moved with appropriate ecclesiastical ceremony , to Canterbury on 21 April 995 at a

witenagemot held at Amesbury . Here he received the permission of " King Æthelred and all the witan " to be elevated to Canterbury . Ælfric continued to hold Ramsbury along with Canterbury until his death . The story that his brother was chosen first for Canterbury but refused , stems from confusion on the part of Matthew of Paris and historians generally hold the entire episode to be untrue .

Ælfric 's appointment to Canterbury caused consternation with the clergy of the cathedral chapter . In reaction , the chapter sent two members to Rome ahead of Ælfric and tried to secure the archbishopric for either of the monks . Pope Gregory V , however , would not appoint a candidate without royal permission , which neither of the monks had . Instead , when Ælfric arrived in Rome in 997 , he was appointed and received the pallium , a symbol of an archbishop 's authority . He also witnessed some miracles at the gravesite of Edward the Martyr at Shaftesbury Abbey , helping to lead to Edward 's sainthood .

A story was told that Ælfric introduced monks into the cathedral church of Christ Church , Canterbury , replacing the secular clerks that had taken over the foundation during the ninth century . Ælfric is said to have done this on the command of the pope . This story originally dates to soon after the Norman Conquest and originated with the monastic historians of Canterbury , and its veracity is unclear . He likely performed the marriage ceremony of King Æthelred the Unready and Emma of Normandy in 1002 . A later tradition held that he consecrated a Bishop of Llandaff and two Bishops of St. David 's in Wales , which , if true , would have meant extending Canterbury 's jurisdiction into new territory .

Either Ælfric or his predecessor Sigeric wrote a letter to Wulfsgie , Bishop of Sherborne about the duties of bishops to make sure that the laity did not despoil churches . The letter also urged Wulfsgie to exhort the laity to strive for justice in their dealings with others , help widows and orphans , not fight , as well as other moral precepts . Ælfric also ordered the composition of the first Life of Dunstan , a hagiography , or saint 's life , of Dunstan , a predecessor as Archbishop of Canterbury . He also acted as a royal judge , once being ordered by King Æthelred to adjudicate a case between thegns , or local noblemen .

= = Death and legacy = =

Ælfric died on 16 November 1005 and was buried in Abingdon Abbey , later being translated to Canterbury Cathedral . His will survives and in it he left ships to the people of Wiltshire and Kent , with his best one , equipped for sixty men , going to King Æthelred . The hagiography of Dunstan was dedicated to Ælfric at the end of the 10th century . After his death , he was considered a saint with a feast day of 16 November .