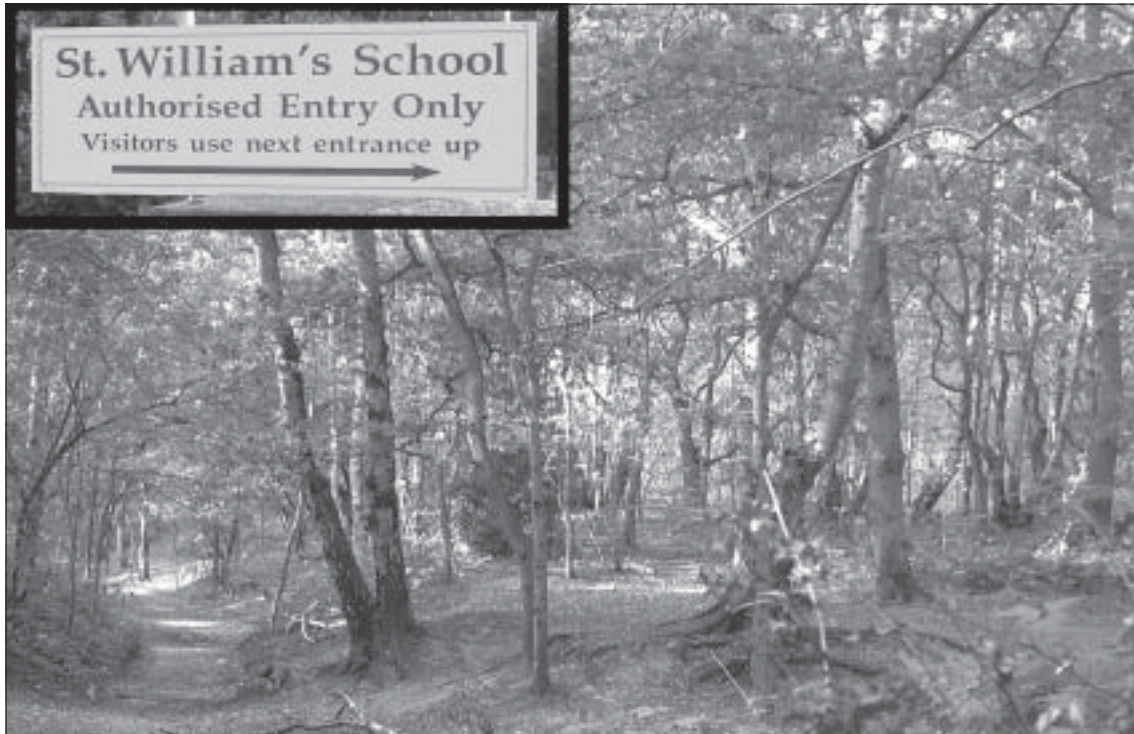


NORWICH SCENES

The story of St William



Moses not only prophesied of the Jews' wanderings (see previous 'Norwich Scene'), he also foretold their persecution: "thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life" (Deut. 28:66). Our picture shows Mousehold Heath, an area of woodland within the boundaries of the modern city. Somewhere in the vicinity are the foundations of a small chapel dedicated to St William, though I have been unable to find it. It marks the spot where, on 24 March 1144, the body of a twelve-year-old boy called William was found. After the discovery the stories began: a group of Jews had been seen in the area carrying a sack; the body showed signs of being crucified; the Jews had used his blood in baking their matzos (the unleavened bread they use at Passover).

There was no evidence for these stories, but those who owed money to the Jews were glad of an excuse to persecute them and escape their debts. Also, Norwich had no native 'saint' to attract pilgrims, and of course their money. A monk claimed to have been told in a dream that William should be revered as martyr and saint. His body was exhumed and the coffin displayed in the cathedral; miracles of healing were said to have occurred, an example of the "lying wonders" which Paul said would characterise the "man of sin" (2 Thess. 2:3,9); and the anniversary of his death became the Feast of St William. Even today his name is commemorated in one of the eleven cathedral altars; in a road, St William's Way; and a school, St William's Primary School (see inset on picture above). As for the monstrous allegation that Jews like to include the blood of a Christian child in making their matzos, which seems to have emerged for the first time in this incident, this has been repeated many times since, and can be found on the websites of Arab extremists even today.—*Tony Benson*