St. Frideswide is the patron saint of Oxford, the town and university. According to her legend, Frideswide dedicated her life to God, serving as an abbess in what is now Oxford and its surrounding area. She is credited with performing many miracles such as eliciting a well for a nunnery and healing a leper. Even after her death, people thanked Frideswide for healing them from injury and affliction. Frideswide lived from 650-727 yet the earliest recording of her story is from the early twelfth-century, nearly 500 years after her death. The legend of St. Frideswide was written many times. The most commonly studied primary sources include three versions written in Latin and two in Middle English, the common language of twelfth-century England. While all of the versions contain some similarities, they were each written at a different time, by different authors, for unique audiences, and served different social and political purposes. None of the versions are a clear and truthful biography of Frideswide. As England underwent a Christian Reformation, Frideswide, her legend, and her relics were lost. Once rediscovered, her legend continued to metamorphosize. While the legend of Frideswide can explain some aspects of her contemporary society and its views of women, the legends shed even more light on the authors’ societies and the changing status of women. These changes to Frideswide’s legend continue today.¹

Keywords
Saint Frideswide; religious stories; legends; retelling; lives of saints

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