Eilmer Encyclopedia Article

Eilmer

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980-after 1066

English monk who attempted to fly off the tower of Malmesbury Abbey with a set of wings attached to his arms and feet. It so happened that the great historian William of Malmesbury witnessed the event as a boy, leaving an account of it in his *Gesta regum anglorum.* Apparently Eilmer panicked after flying some 600 ft (183 m) and suddenly plummeted to earth, breaking both of his legs. In spite of this, he wanted to make a second flight, but the abbot forbade it. According to William, Eilmer also had the distinction of twice seeing the comet known today as Halley's comet. As a nine-year-old boy in 989, Eilmer believed the comet to be a portent of dire happenings, and indeed it was soon followed by a Danish attack in England. The second time Eilmer saw the comet, in 1066, the Normans invaded, bringing an end to the Anglo-Saxon world he had known.