**Becoming a Saint in Ely: a speculative life** *by Pamela Job*

The wind off the fens finds the marrow of my bones.

I watch the sun break through to manufacture light

And, in this, her place, I think of Aethelthryth, her dessication,

whose bones failed to find flesh to hold them.

She fled here – far from warring men blinding this same sun

with metalled shields – in the midst of the riddle

Of an age when minds were filled with eels, when demons

in their saints’ disguise infested people’s dreams.

For her, the idea alone of God put flesh on faith at last.

Offered fine linen, she declined. She rationed hot baths.

But surely she would have wanted to get under the skin

of a day such as this, her eyelids closing on blue

on her way to bliss. Perhaps her strong belief turned each chill breeze

into the scant caress she scorned from men.

Always fasting to purge evil thoughts, did she think she was

withstanding well the state of weightlessness?

Her possible pleasures – we know she had no appetite for husbands,

for, *someone who is tied up cannot run,*

but she devoured books. Words, hand-wrought, freed her mind

to roam, a *highly ingenious bee in the flowering fields of scripture,*

so she was well equipped to recognise her soul when it skipped

towards her singing, *O I will leape up into God…*

Aethelthryth falls back into the shadows cast on a wall, as I retreat

to wrap my hands around the answered prayer of hot coffee.

*Saint Aethelthryth, (636-679)*

*Words in italics: Evagrios of Pontus, (345-399); Aldhelm of Malmesbury, (639-709); treatise ‘On Virginity’; Edith Sitwell, ‘Still Falls the Rain’*