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R. F. R. Gardner.  
Thesis for Master of Arts degree  
1992

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN EARLY BERNICIA: FORERUNNERS AND FOUNDATION.

Abstract of thesis.

A firmly multidisciplinary approach starts from a theological definition of the Church as the Body of Christ, and Christians as empowered by the Holy Spirit, the possibility of miracle, and the reality of warfare with demons are taken seriously, and scholarly belief in them defended. They are made the subject of excursuses. Hagiographic writings are treated with cautious respect.

Bernicia, land and people, and its relationship to its neighbours are considered. In a demographic *excursus* the view that Dark Age life-span was short is rebuffed.

Part two discusses the life and mission of the Church in sub-Roman Britain. In our area evidence for this proves to be largely limited to the shadowy activities of Ninian and Kentigern, therefore further evidence of the status of the British church in the fifth and sixth centuries is sought in Patrick's *Confession* and Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniæ*. A new model for the latter - the sermon of the protomartyr Stephen - is proposed; as is a new exegesis of *D. E. B.* c. 69, which may have implications for our understanding of the persistence of Pelagian beliefs. An *excursus* considers the significance of white stones in association with Christian burial. The origins of the mission of Augustine are considered briefly.

Part three considers the mission of Paulinus in detail, in particular the reasons for its collapse; in contrasting it with the Celtic mission missiological principles are cited. A reappraisal of Paulinus's retreat, more favourable to him than that normally held, is reached by invoking wartime experience.

The discipline of obstetrics is involved to advance the theory that Æthelburh's delivery was premature; also earlier to re-examine the Herbertian account of Kentigern's conception, where the 'something contrary to sound doctrine' is identified, against the hitherto standard view, as the apparent approval, by Servanus, of extramarital coitus.

The final establishment of the Church in Bernicia is seen as occurring principally as the result of Aidan's mission, but with valid contributions from the British and Roman traditions. That Simeon of Durham gave the credit for this foundation to Oswald is found justifiable.

A new genealogical tree of Oswy has been constructed, and maps have been provided.

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THE CHURCH OF CHRIST  
IN EARLY BERNICIA  
FORERUNNERS AND FOUNDATION.

R. F. R. GARDNER

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THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

1992



10 MAR 1993

CONTENTS

Abbreviations	2
Preface	3
<u>PART 1</u>	
1 Introduction	5
2 History, hagiography, and miracle	13
Excursus; Miracle free of propaganda (24-27)	
3 Bernicia: Land and Peoples	28
Excursus; Life expectancy (31-32)	
<u>Part 2 : FORERUNNERS</u>	
4 Introduction	45
5 Sources	47
6 The archaeological evidence	57
7 The Ninianic Mission	63
Excursus; White stones as evidence of Christian burial (79-80)	
8 The evidence of Patrick	83
9 The witness of Gildas	92
10 Sixth-century forerunners	108
Excursus; 'Something contrary to sound doctrine' (128-32)	
Excursus; The account of Kentigern's conception (132-33)	
Excursus; Warfare with demons (134-36)	
11 The Church in Britain at the coming of the Roman mission	137
12 The origins of the Roman Mission	146
<u>Part 3 : FOUNDATION</u>	
Excursus; the date of Paulinus' mission (152-55)	
13 The Northumbrian mission of Paulinus	156
14 The collapse of the mission of Paulinus	170
15 The Celtic mission	176
16 The Church in Bernicia established	201
Bibliography	216
 <u>MAPS:</u>	
Archaeological sites	57 <sup>a</sup>
Whithorn and the evangelization of Scotland	81
Whithorn and the Celtic lands	82
The cult of Ninian and Kentigern	126
Centres associated with Kentigern in Cumbria and Northumbria	127

ABBREVIATIONS EMPLOYED.

- ABEKTB Archaeological background of the emergent kingdoms of the Tweed Basin (Smith)  
 ACDS; Ancient church dedications in Scotland; Non-Scriptural dedications (MacKinlay JM)  
 ASE; Anglo-Saxon England, Annual volumes (Ed, Clemoes P)  
 AVC; Adomnan's Life of Columba  
 SAR; British Archaeological Reports; (B) British, (I) International series  
 BEHC; Bede's Ecclesiastical History - Commentary (Wallace-Hadrill JM)  
 BEHEP; Colgrave's notes in Colgrave and Mynors' edition of HE,  
 BLTW; *Bede; Life, Times and Writings* (Ed, Thompson AH)  
 BVAB; *Bede's History of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*  
 BVC; Bede's (prose) *Life of Cuthbert*  
 CBA; Council for British Archaeology  
 CIB; *Church in Britain AD 300-700* (Barley and Hanson)  
 CIEB *Church in Early Britain* (Williams H)  
 CIRB; *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (Thomas C)  
 CMCS; Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies  
 CPS; *Chronicles of the Picts and Scots* (Ed, Skene W)  
 C&W; Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiquarian and  
     Archaeological Society  
 CS; *Celtic Scotland* (Skene W)  
 DEB; *De excidio Britonnum* (Gildas)  
 D&G; Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Antiquarian and Natural  
     History Society  
 E; Patrick's *Epistle to Coroticus*  
 Ed, Edited by  
 ECANB; *Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain* (Thomas C)  
 EECH; *Early English Church History* (Bright)  
 EHD; *English Historical Documents* vol.1 (Ed, Whitelock D)  
 E&T Edited and translated by  
 EHR; English Historical Review  
 ESSH; *Early sources of Scottish history* (Anderson AO)  
 GNA; *Gildas; new approaches* (Ed, Lapidge M, D Dumville)  
 H; The Herbertian fragment (The anonymous *Life of St Kentigern*)  
 HB; *Historia Britonnum* 'Nennius'  
 HCD; Simeon's *History of the Church of Durham*  
 HE; Bede's *Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum*  
 J; Jocelin's *Life of St Kentigern*  
 LGG; *Life of Gregory the Great by an anonymous monk of Whitby*  
 MNE; *Miracula Nynie Episcopi* (E&T MacQueen W)  
 n. d.; no date  
 PC; Patrick's *Confessions*  
 RBES; *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (Collingwood and Myers)  
 RCAM(S); Royal Commission for Ancient Monuments (Scotland)  
 SCH; *Studies in Church History* Annual volumes - Ecclesiastical History Soc.  
 SEBC; *Studies in the early British Church* (Ed, Chadwick NK)  
 SEHI-E; *Sources for the Early History of Ireland; Ecclesiastical* (Kenney)  
 SIBH; *Studies in early British History* (Ed, Chadwick NK)  
 Tr; Translated by  
 VN; Aelred's *Life of Ninian*  
 VW; Eddius Stephanus's *Life of Wilfrid*  
 WS; Wodrow Society's publications

## PREFACE

The discovery that the medieval parish church of Seefeld in the Tyrol is dedicated to 'St Oswald: King of England' further stimulated a life-long interest in the Dark Age and Anglo-Saxon period. This interest was focussed by the fact that, in a Bernicia believed to have had then only a very small Anglian population, Paulinus spent more than five weeks catechising and baptizing in the River Glen; no-one was able to tell me whom he was baptizing'. On retirement from the practice of Obstetrics and Gynaecology it became possible to devote time to historical study, and I am most grateful to Mr Gerald Bonner for encouraging me to look into the beginnings of the Northumbrian Church. As my supervisor throughout the years of preparation - a labour which he generously continued even after his own retiral - he has been a constant source of stimulus. It is to him that I owe the advice to illustrate topics from my own experience, and in doing so to use the first person.

Alas my schooling, professional, and later linguistic studies have led in such directions that I do not have access to Latin, nor to modern European languages, apart from French. The translations employed are indicated in the bibliography. One of the least satisfactory aspects in the study of early medieval period is the inability of scholars to agree a common spelling of the protagonists' names<sup>2</sup>. Except in quotations, in the present work the name as it appears in Colgrave and Mynors' translation of *HE*<sup>3</sup> will normally be employed, unless an even more common name is firmly established. Otherwise the most widely known name in plain English will be used, even although the purist may object; so 'Ninian' is employed, rather than Ninianus or Nynia.

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 1 Rosemary Cramp was to write that this 'is a question which remains unanswered', 'Northumbria, the archaeological evidence' (Eds) Driscoll ST, MR Niece *Power and Politics in early medieval Britain and Ireland* 1988 Edinburgh pp.69-78

2 Although one appreciates the difficulties, it seems pedantic for a scholar who in 1974 employed for the first Christian king of Northumbria the widely accepted spelling 'Edwin' [Kirby DP *St Wilfrid at Hexham*], in 1991 to employ for the same monarch 'Eadwine' [*The earliest English kings*]. Plummer's index inevitably faithfully copies his Latin text [*Venerabilis Baedae, Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum* 1896 Oxford], the names in which, especially some of the more obscure Saxon ones, bear little resemblance to those used in standard translations of the same work. Inevitably most baffling are the Welsh notables of the Dark Age, there are at least thirteen spellings for the name of Kentigern's mother, of which St Enoch proves the most confusing. In this situation the commonest has been used here.

3 Colgrave B and RAB Mynors *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 1969 Oxford

The question of end-point has presented a problem. The coming of Aidan c. 635 has been argued, by Thomas<sup>1</sup>, as the new beginning; but it would have given us no time to see the baby through its neo-natal period. One of the dates associated with Theodore and the establishment of a recognizable English church would have been tidier, while the Synod of Whitby was an obvious choice. Constraints of length, however, demand that this study stop at the earliest point at which it is clear the church has been permanently established. For this we must allow Oswald some years to establish his authority, under the protection of which the Lindisfarne missionaries could evangelise unhindered: half-a-dozen years is not too long for this.

I have deliberately stopped in the springtime of the Bernician church when there was no doubt as to its catholicity. Bernicia was to escape the fate which in Hugh Williams' view befell the Cambrian church: 'We began with one faith, one Church; we close with one faith but two hostile Churches,..' <sup>2</sup>. Williams was too strong, as will become obvious from evidence to be presented<sup>3</sup>. Bede reports that Aidan commanded respect from the 'Roman' bishops throughout his lifetime [*HE* III:25], so his death (AD 651) commended itself. Nonetheless controversy and doubt must inevitably have arisen when Oswy's bride *Kanfled* arrived, 643 x 645<sup>4</sup> with her Roman chaplain, her different forms of worship, and her different calendar.

The confusion following Oswald's death in 642, illustrated by the succession, must have hampered the Lindisfarne enterprise. Taking all these into consideration I have chosen *circa* AD 640 as endpoint.

I am grateful to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Durham, and to its Department of Theology, for enabling me to pursue this study, and to Dr Sheridan Gilley who oversaw the final submission of this thesis. I am also grateful to Dr Ian Smith for allowing me access to his doctoral thesis *The archaeological background to the Emergent Kingdoms of the Tweed Basin in the Early Historic Period*, otherwise embargoed until 1996.

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 1 Thomas AC 'The evidence from North Britain' *CIB* pp.93-122

2 Williams H *CIEB* p.480

3 Note also the eighteenth-century recusant historian Thomas Innes' words: 'I hope no impartial learned man will seriously call in doubt, that the Episcopacy of the Scots in Ireland and Britain, as well as that of the Britons, was acknowledged in these times by the Apostolical See and by other foreign Churches.' Innes T *The civil and ecclesiastical history of Scotland* unpublished until 1853 Aberdeen p.221

4 Miller M 'The dates of Deira' *ASE* 1979 2 pp.35-61

## INTRODUCTION

Scholarship continues to increase our knowledge of Early Northumbria, largely through the illumination provided by new approaches. In the last couple of decades the meaning of kingship has been investigated, and more recently the manner in which the kingdoms were formed; while the previously despised *Lives* of our English saints have been subject to re-examination<sup>1</sup>. Inter-disciplinary studies are now almost the norm: history, archaeology, linguistic and place-name studies, numismatics, art-history and others being involved. It is the aim of this thesis to continue this trend by the inclusion of theology (and, to a small extent, medicine) among the disciplines employed.

The original title of this study was '*The Church in Bernicia*', however approval was obtained for a change to the present title '*The Church of Christ in Bernicia, forerunners and foundation*' when an initial reading of the standard secondary sources demonstrated that a purely historical approach severely limits an understanding of the subject. In particular a full empathy with its primary sources: Patrick in the fifth century, Gildas in the sixth, and Adomnan and Bede in the late-seventh early-eighth, must benefit from sharing the standpoint from which they wrote of God's dealings and works of power on behalf of the people, and in building up his church. Each constantly quoted Holy Scripture. Moreover a theological study is not limited by those disciplinary constraints which often<sup>2</sup> inhibit the pure historian from adopting such an understanding.

As undertaken in a Department of Theology this study's understanding of the church is in theological terms, as an organism, not an organisation. It is the people of God, the Body of Christ, the dwelling

1 For example, and to quote only books

KINGSHIP Chaney WA: *The cult of kingship in Anglo-Saxon England* 1970 Manchester

Wallace-Hadrill JM *Early Germanic kingship in England and on the Continent* 1971 Oxford

Sawyer PH, IM Wood (Eds) *Early Medieval kingship* 1977 Leeds

KINGDOMS; Bassett S *The origins of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms* 1989 Leicester

Kirby DP *The earliest English Kings* 1991 London

SAINTS; Ridyard SJ *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England* 1988 Cambridge

Rollason D *Saints and relics in Anglo-Saxon England* 1989 Oxford.

2 But not always. It was not a theologian but a professor of modern history who bemoaned the fact that 'even serious students, like our great Cambridge historian, Lord Acton, have been greatly interested in church history while regarding it as a form of politico-ecclesiastical history, and they have tended to overlook that more intimate thing, the inner spiritual life of the Church.' [Butterfield H *Christianity and history* 1950 London p. 131.



place of the Holy Spirit. My original draft dealt separately with the British Church, the Roman Church, the Celtic Church; maturer thought reminded me that, although those are handy labels, there can only be one Church: the Church of Christ. This was the title employed by Florence of Worcester when he recorded: 'AD 635 King Oswald sent to the elders of the Scots, requesting that they would send bishops to him. Bishop Aidan was sent; by whom, and the said most renowned and holy king Oswald, the Church of Christ was first founded and established in the province of Bernicia''. In this study Florence's title is used to emphasise that its subject is the ἐκκλησία of God, in the words of Kittel's *Wörterbuch*: 'consisting of all who belong to him...not just a human society but of all who belong to Christ'<sup>2</sup>.

As the Church's Lord is 'the same yesterday, today and forever' [Heb. 13:8], and as he has promised to be with his Church to the end of the age [Matt. 28:20], it follows that our study is not of an isolated entity which can be separated off for examination, but is of an integral part of the continuum of salvation-history stretching from Pentecost up to today and beyond. This allows us to illustrate the Church in Bernicia by cautious reference to other portions in other lands and other ages. As a Benedictine has put it: 'In point of fact the conditions for Christianization are not totally different in these [today's] missionlands from Europe in the early Middle Ages, for in both instances it is a matter of pagan and often primitive peoples - peoples who were, some of them at least, still barbarian and to whom was being proffered a religion that was completely strange to them'<sup>3</sup>

The rapidly growing academic study of missiology<sup>4</sup> gives support to the examination here of some of the missionary practices of the British, Roman and Celtic evangelists; a subject which will require further research in

1 Florence of Worcester *A history of the kings of England c.1117* (Tr J Stevenson) 1988 Rpt, Lampeter p.17

2 Kittel G, & Friedrich *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (tr, and abridged) GW Bromiley 1985 Exeter Article *Ekklesia* pp.398-99.

3 Leclercq J 'Saint Bede and Christian expansion' *Word and Spirit; a monastic review, No.7 St. Bede; a tribute (735-1985)* Petersham, Mass, pp.3-22

4 Under this title it is not mentioned in the *Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church* [Oxford 1957], nor in *The New International dictionary of the Christian Church* [Grand Rapids 1974]. In Britain academic teachers of missiology are now sufficiently numerous for them to meet in January 1992 (when teaching started in Cambridge, to be followed shortly by Glasgow) to initiate a loose organisation.

depth'. To exemplify: that an historian<sup>2</sup> of the early Anglo-Saxon church considers remarkable the sending back of the gospel to the Saxons on continental Europe, can only be due to a misunderstanding of missionary motivation<sup>3</sup>. Similarly while Adomnan's *Life of Columba* has yielded a vast amount of information<sup>4</sup> about Ireland and Dalriada, its actual topic, its whole *raison d'être* - the display in Columba's life and work of the powerful gifts (charismata) of God - is almost totally neglected, being outside the remit of academic history. An interdisciplinary approach enlightens these matters by permitting illustration from the Pentecostal and neo-pentecostal ('charismatic' and 'third-wave') movements. Within these the much-criticised 'Power evangelism'<sup>5</sup> associated since the mid nineteenthies with the name of John Wimber (named also by Ian Smith in his doctoral thesis *The archaeological background to the emergent kingdoms of the Tweed Basin*<sup>6</sup>) is highly relevant to an understanding of sixth century Iona and its missions. In *Miracles of healing in Anglo-Celtic Northumbria as recorded by the Venerable Bede and his contemporaries: a reappraisal in the light of 20th century experience*<sup>7</sup> I sought to employ insights from this renewal.

1 There are already a number of isolated papers e.g. Millgarth JN 'Modes of evangelization of Western Europe in the seventh century' *Irland und die Christenheit* (Eds) Mí Chatháin P, Richter M 1987 Tübingen pp.311-31; Stancliffe C 'Kings and Conversion; some comparisons between the Roman mission to England and Patrick's to Ireland' *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 1980 14 pp.59-94.

2 Youngs SM 'Pagan into Christian' *The making of England; Anglo-Saxon art and culture AD 600-900* 1991 London pp.15-16.

3 Emboldened by Henry Mayr-Harting's recent example of quoting a modern South Seas anthropological study to illustrate seventh-century Northumbrian conversion [*The coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* 1991, Introd. to 3rd edit.] this question of zeal can be illustrated from the evangelization of Rarotonga (Cook Islands) in 1824. The first potential evangelists, Polynesian converts, barely survived the night and were delighted to escape with their lives back to the vessel next morning. Whereupon 'Papeiha, a young native Christian, volunteered to attempt the evangelization of the island alone. "Let the savages spare me or kill me, I will land among them; Jehovah is my shield, I am in his hands." Leaving all his goods on board, clad in a skirt, and girt with a few yards of calico, and with the portions of the Scripture already rendered into Tahitian tied in a pocket handkerchief, he swam on shore, and landed amidst a crowd of tall armed men...'. [Buzacott A *Mission life in the islands of the Pacific* 1866, 21985 Suva p.31]

4 Reeves W *Life of Saint Columba, founder of Hy. Written by Adomnan* 1874 Edinburgh] has 184 pp of introduction, and a further 139 pp. of notes, Anderson AD, MO Anderson *Adomnan's Life of Columba* [1961 Edinburgh] has 175 pp. of introduction.

5 Wimber J, K Springer *Power evangelism* 1985 London; *idem Power healing*' 1986 London

6 PhD thesis 1990 Durham.

7 British Medical Journal 1983 287 pp.1927-33.

An example will illustrate the benefit of employing such insights from an experience of the Holy Spirit which was the normative life of the Church in the first centuries'. Bede records [HE III:12] of King Oswald 'because of his frequent habit of prayer and thanksgiving, he was always accustomed, wherever he sat, *to place his hands on his knees with the palms turned upwards.*' This posture must have been unusual for it to have been remarked upon at the time, and recorded a century later. It is not included in, or a parallel of, any of the seven attitude of prayer analysed by Dom Louis Gougaud in his *Devotional and Ascetic Practices in the Middle ages*. So W. A. Chaney tells us, who turns to Oswald frequently for support in his own thesis of the continuity of pagan practices into post-conversion English kingship. Chaney writes:

This Northumbrian ruler sheds some interesting light on a god-sprung king of the Conversion period. The *mana*-filled Oswald, *sanctissimus ac victoriosissimus rex*, was much given to blot, for Bede tells us that he often remained in prayer from matins until day... The praying position of sitting with the palms of his hands turned upwards on his knees suggests not the customary Christian posture for prayer but a ritual attitude perhaps used by his pagan predecessors in offering intercessions for the folk, particularly in view of the hand and knee as sacral objects associated with fertility<sup>2</sup>.

From this David Kirby draws the obvious conclusion: 'There was probably much in Oswald that was still very pagan.' citing as evidence this posture<sup>3</sup>. If we had accepted those views, then important implications for our understanding of the Church in Bernicia in the 630s would have resulted. However the advent in the late 1960s of the charismatic renewal, in all Christian denominations, brought a complete change to open prayer - from petition to praise and adoration. Simultaneously, without any instruction or suggestion, many people spontaneously adopted the Oswald posture. More recently in a booklet on meditation Richard Foster wrote: 'The hands outstretched, or *placed on the knees palms up, gently nudges the inner mind into a stance of receptivity*'<sup>4</sup>. In what we had understood to be

1 McDonnell K, 6T Montague *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit; Evidence from the First Eight Centuries* 1991 Collegeville p.83ff.

2 Chaney WA *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England; The transition from paganism to Christianity* 1970 Manchester; UP p.116. (My underlining) The quotation from Gougaud is fn 130 on that page.

3 Kirby DP *St. Wilfrid at Hexham* 1974 Newcastle-on-Tyne p.15 (My underlining)

4 Richard Foster *Meditative Prayer* 1983 London (My italics)

a new urge of the Holy Spirit, Oswald had forestalled us. Manifestly this factor affects not only our assessment of his character, but has profound implications for our understanding of the dynamic of the 'Columban' church<sup>2</sup>.

Viewing the Church as the Body of Christ one need not be surprised to find this relationship constantly manifesting itself in similar ways. The martyrdom of Polycarp<sup>3</sup> is matched in our lifetime by the martyrdoms of Christian Kikuyu. Dragged from his hut and bidden to drink blood as part of the Mau Mau initiation ceremony one replied: "I have drunk the blood of my Lord, shall I drink the blood of demons?"<sup>4</sup>. By the same token, because in 1990 miraculous healings occur<sup>5</sup> we can understand the reactions aroused when similar mighty acts were done by God in the six and seventh centuries, and the powerful influence this has on the community.

-----  
1 The phrase 'Columban church', and similarly 'British', 'Irish', 'Celtic' or 'Roman' is employed only as shorthand, without prejudice to my thesis that there is only one Church.

2 A further example of the value of employing theological insights may be permitted. Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon* [General Ed, Watt DER 1989 Aberdeen] has a hymn said to have been written by St Columba in praise of St Kentigern [3:30]. Its historical value is minimal (this chapter is not even in Bower's known sources: *Fordun, Pluscarden* nor *Extracta*). However, for what it is worth, the editors (John and Winifred MacQueen) make the deduction: 'As it is clearly addressed posthumously to Kentigern in heaven, the author cannot be Columba who died while Kentigern was still alive' [*op.cit.*, p.228]. More importantly it could be argued that it proves Kentigern died before Columba and we would thus lose our only flimsy anchor-date for Kentigern - his death in ? 612. The modern editors' interpretation turns principally on the words: 'Abba alme agie / taen nostre ut ignoscas imploramus scorie' translated as 'Abbot, father, saint / still we implore you to pardon our impurities'. However saints in heaven are not asked for forgiveness, that is God's prerogative. Mrs MacQueen has accepted my suggestion that these lines (and the rest of the poem) should be read as addressed to God (1888) thanking him for Kentigern - who may well have been still alive. The historical importance of this is that the dating of their deaths is therefore unaffected.

3 'For eighty-six years' replied Polycarp, 'I have been [Christ's] servant, and He has never done me wrong; how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?' [Eusebius 15,23] This episode, and the wider subject, is discussed in Bonner 6 'Martyrdom: its place in the Church' *Sobornost* 1983 5:2 pp.6-21

4 I happened to mention this to a friend (Oct. 1990) who replied that her sister, while living in Kenya at that time, had seen her Christian cook dragged out of his hut and hacked to pieces after similar refusal.

5 The most dramatic has been a lady who had been largely confined to a wheel chair for about seven years, and during that period had published a record of her emotional and spiritual healing despite the continuing disability [Larcombe JR *Beyond Healing* 1986 London] In July 1990, following prayer (by a previously unknown young woman who had only been a Christian for a few months) she was suddenly completely healed and that evening was standing on the kitchen table hanging up balloons for a party! Two months later she wrote to me to report having climbed a Scottish mountain, alone. The attempts made in General Synod 1991 to discredit this healing are completely unconvincing to those of us with inside knowledge. (See now Larcombe JR *Unexpected Healing* 1991 London).

The Holy Spirit has always indwelt His church, in the seventh century as in the twentieth, therefore, despite wide differences of ecclesiastical practice, we can cautiously extrapolate from our spiritual experience, our problems being very similar. Reading the early fifth-century works of 'Fastidius', who has been claimed to be a Briton and was certainly of the Pelagian school the writings of which were popular here, we recognise contemporary problems. Despite our caveats we instinctively recognise that here is a member of the family, a member of Christ<sup>2</sup> writing within the body of the Church, discussing with burning zeal matters which, now as then, are of deep concern<sup>3</sup>.

Of course one has to keep firmly in mind the risk of reading Dark Age material through present-day spectacles with resulting distortion. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than during the ecclesiastical struggles of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when protagonists were happy to interpret early mediaeval church practice so as to support their contemporary theological polemics<sup>4</sup>.

---

1 *The works of Fastidius; Britannorum Episcopus* Trans RST Haslehurst 1927 London; Soc. SS Peter & Paul. This, hitherto the only English translation is judged 'inaccurate' by the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* it had *faute de mieux* to be employed. Some recent scholars believe that some of these writings were, in fact, those of Pelagius himself; but the subject is too complex to detain us here. (BR Rees *The letters of Pelagius and his followers* [1991 Woodbridge] appeared too late for quotation here.)

2 Gardner RFR 'Union with Christ' *Reformed Journal* Grand Rapids, 1959 July-Aug, pp 5-6

3 e.g. His concern for those who offer 'easy faith' [IV;VI,1 and IV;IX,1] in the light of our concern for those who offer 'cheap grace'. He is dissatisfied with the way the church has fallen from its first purity; 'At that time men had only recently begun to be Christians, yet they shared one another's houses without distinction; it makes me wretched to think that no-one called anyone else his servant, and' (shadow of late twentieth century Anglican debate) 'there was no invidious differentiation between men and women...' [IV;XII] He struggles with 'The just shall live by his faith' [Hab,2;4; Rom,1;17] just as Luther will a millenium later. We empathise with his cry 'When we would hurt one of our brethren or heap all manner of infamy on his character, we boast that we do so owing to our zeal for righteousness and religion and faith, in order to appear to men to do our unrighteous works in a righteous way and be accounted holy by those who are without, though we are most wicked both in the sight of God and of our own conscience' [IV;VI;1]. It is echoed by our sad contemporary experience of Ulster religious leaders, or the in-fighting between American TV-evangelists. Mention of these last illustrates clearly the continuity in the problems of the church. Later in this study the question of different attitudes to confession and penance will be raised, a question which proves to be of major concern in 1989-92 when some half-dozen high-profile Christian leaders have confessed to immorality, with the ensuing problem of discipline ['penance']. See Wamber J 'Fallen leaders in the Vineyard; how should we treat them?' *Renewal* March 1992 pp.20-23

4 Bishop GF Browne, in 1896, used his series of lectures 'Theodore and Wilfrid' (1897 London) to bolster the Church of England against 'the modern aggression of the Roman schism' In 1924 the Rev. David Davies of Penarth issued a study *The Ancient Celtic Church and the See of Rome* (Cardiff) as a specific anti-Roman Catholic tool in the Welsh ecclesiastical debate of the day. On the other side, a Catholic monk, Dom Columba Edmonds [*The Early Scottish Church, Its Doctrine and Discipline* 1904 Edinburgh p,xiii] produced a work on the Columban Church to resist claims by Presbyterians and Episcopalians.

With this caveat historians have found the experience of distant or later societies to be a useful tool. For example our direct knowledge of Elmet, a brief-lived kingdom overwhelmed by Edwin early in the seventh century, is very slight: a tombstone in North Wales<sup>1</sup>, a phrase in Bede [HE ii:14] and a sentence in the *Historia Brittonum* [p.38]. However, by extrapolation from the fuller records of Gwynedd, a similar state which survived until the thirteenth century, considerable light has been shed on Elmet<sup>2</sup>. It is a pity that such lateral thinking is not more widespread among historians. We shall see that most scholars cast scorn on later accounts of British missionary endeavours in the late sixth century to the Northern Isles and beyond, forgetful of the fact that within a lifetime other Christian missionaries reached as far as Chang'an in central China<sup>3</sup>. In fact they reached the T'ang capital in the same year that Aidan reached the Northumbrian one: AD 635. We can move even further ahead in time, for although not usually explicitly acknowledged, implicit is the light which twentieth century experience casts on early medieval issues. This is exemplified in the report of a conference held to honour Dr H.M. Taylor, where a paper was read recording a present-day pilgrimage by Land-Rover to Lourdes and Compostela. Although ostensibly an essay in ethnoarchaeology<sup>4</sup>, its presentation at a conference devoted to the Anglo-Saxon Church is only justifiable by the illumination which present experience sheds on the church in earlier ages.

There is a further advantage of a multidisciplinary approach. Whereas academic history has little place for personal illustration (although Plummer is an exception<sup>5</sup>), on the contrary the discipline of archaeology is firmly founded on personal experience, and those who fail to record their finds are subject to criticism. Similarly the foundations of my own discipline of medicine were of necessity anecdotal<sup>6</sup>. Certain views which

1 Nash-Williams VE *The early Christian monuments of Wales* 1950 Cardiff p.88 P.IV

2 Jones GRJ 'Early Territorial Organisation in Gwynedd and Elmet' *Northern History* 1975 10 pp.3-27. .

3 Foster J *Beginning from Jerusalem* 1956 London p.49

4 Rahtz P and Lorna Watts 'The archaeologist on the road to Lourdes and Santiago de Compostela' *The Anglo-Saxon Church; Papers on history, architecture and archaeology in honour of Dr H.M. Taylor*, (Eds.) Butler LAS, RK Morris, CBA Research report 60, London 1986

5 Plummer C *Venerabilis Baedae; Historia Ecclesiastica...* 1896; Oxford p.iii.

6 The bible of my specialty, *Munro Kerr's Operative obstetrics* up to its sixth edition [Ed. Moir JC 1956 London] being founded on the experiences of its original author, contained vivid illustrative cases from his own unrivalled experience among the slum dwellers of Glasgow.

are advanced in the present work - notably the question of Paulinus's 'desertion of his post' - depend on my personal experience': whether as serviceman, foreign missionary, ordained minister, or hospital consultant. To have refrained from employing such insights would have been to commit the most heinous sin in scholarship - the suppression of evidence.

Scholarship rightly looks for proofs. To anyone educated in a scientific discipline this is self evident: "Believe nothing unless I prove it" was hammered into our heads in the first pre-clinical term. Unfortunately proof is almost always unobtainable in Dark Age studies, we must work on a basis of probabilities, using such traces and hints as can be found. The sources available to us will be considered in a later chapter.

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1 RG Collingwood would not have agreed [*The idea of History* 1946 Oxford] because the use of testimony cannot be scientific knowledge, and history is a science [p.257]. The flaw in his reasoning is 'Like every science, history is autonomous' [p.256]. 'Science is finding things out' Collingwood maintains [p.9], but that is an inadequate definition, science is the pursuit of truth, and therefore - as repeatedly stressed and illustrated in this Introduction - must be multidisciplinary. Again while methodology is of the very greatest importance and must be followed, it does not always yield the ultimate prize - witness the vital unravelling of the structure of the DNA molecule by Watson and Crick. On the other hand it is to be hoped that Collingwood would have approved the larger methodology of this study which incorporates the use of the historical imagination as he describes it [ibid pp.231-49]. In pursuance of this the vast majority of the sites mentioned in this study have been visited, in an endeavour to get some insight into the Christian mind of our forbears under discussion.

## HISTORY, HAGIOGRAPHY, AND MIRACLE.

Saints' Lives, which provide almost our sole literary resource in this period, were written to edify, not primarily as history. As this is still the case in twentieth century Christian biography<sup>1</sup> can we demand a higher historical standard in earlier centuries? Their aim of edification, however, does not automatically discount their value as history.

Among our earliest records of the kind, outside the New Testament, are the mid-second-century *Martyrdom of Polycarp*<sup>2</sup> and the letter written, a couple of decades later, to their fellow believers in Asia Minor by the Christians in Lyons and Vienne recording their own martyrs<sup>3</sup>. These rank in historical value with any contemporary documents.

Soon, however, we come up against the problem that straight historical records become, with the passage of time, modified and altered out of all recognition. It will be appropriate to exemplify this metamorphosis of history into legend by the case of our Bernician saint King Oswald.

Bede's record shows him as a good Christian warrior king, without, in his lifetime, any question of miracle. Capgrave in his *Nova Legenda Angliae*, adds the story of Oswald's willingness to make himself and his family sacrificial victims to save his people<sup>4</sup>. The first miracles - almost all of healing - occurred after Oswald's death in 642, but in time for Bede to record them less than a century later [*HE* iii:9-12]. Their fame had become sufficiently widespread for Willibrord to take some of his relics on his missionary journeys to Frisia within a short time of Oswald's death [*HE* iii:13]. In England about sixty ancient churches are dedicated to him<sup>5</sup>.

1 This has always been the case with religious biography. Perhaps the most famous missionary biography is the two-volume work on Hudson Taylor the pioneer missionary to inland China [Dr & Mrs Howard Taylor *Hudson Taylor in Early Years* 1911, *Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission* 1918 London], after more than half a century still in print on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite its eleven hundred pages it makes no reference to his affairs of the heart, for although perfectly proper they were considered unsuitable for publication. These had to await a more recent biography which reveals a much more human man, [Pollock JC *Hudson Taylor and Maria* 1962 London; H&S,]. Similarly the cricketer and missionary C.T. Studd (died 1931) had been the subject of much laudatory biography before Eileen Vincent in an equally admiring biography [*C.T. Studd and Pricilla* 1988 London], revealed his drug problem.

2 In *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (E&T Musurillo H) 1972 Oxford, pp.2-21

3 Ibid pp.62-85

4 (Ed.) Horstman C *op.cit.*, 1901 p.263 Not available in English. This passage kindly translated for me by B Smallman.

5 Arnold-Forster F *Studies in Church Dedications* 1899 London II:307-316; III:433.



At Kirkoswald in Cumbria it is remembered that he accompanied Aidan on missionary journeys. In Oswald's chapel in Peterborough cathedral his miraculously undecayed arm was once preserved; the sentry post of its guardian is still to be seen. However the reason for the dedication is now frequently uncertain (Ashbourne in Derbyshire) or merely conjectural in the case of his rarely used church at Widford in the Oxfordshire Windrush valley, and that near the Sussex village of Hooe. At Kirkoswald ("Kirkossal") in Ayrshire attention is now paid only to Robbie Burns and his circle! At Seefeld, in the Tyrol, where the parish church is dedicated to Oswald, although a carving of his death at *Maserfelt* occupies half of the tympanum, the guide book refers solely to the event involving a local count which occupies the other half. Judith, widowed when Earl Tostig was killed in 1066 at Stamford Bridge, took a cask of Oswald's relics with her home to Brabant, and on her second marriage, to Guelf IV of Bavaria, they were deposited at Weingarten in Wurtemberg<sup>1</sup>. In the Venezia region of Italy he was, in the last century, much venerated in time of plague, but Baker recorded in 1949 that his cult had all but disappeared. He was then unable to find the reported figure of Oswald on the ceiling of Treviso church<sup>2</sup>. A freshly-painted very youthful Oswald may be found in Forni di Sopra, while further up a hazardous road in the Carniche Dolomites the statue of a much more mature Oswald stands in his church of Sauris where there continues a cult of "Sant' Oswaldo, nostro protettor". The paintings which Baker reported of Oswald and Aidan distributing food and silver to the poor [HE iii:6] are no longer obvious<sup>3</sup>. In their margins they bear the signatures of sick (some seventeenth century) who recorded their healing after pilgrimage to Oswald's shrine. While healing is in the early tradition, of more interest is Baker's 1947 report and photograph of the procession of his statue being carried round the fields on his saint's-day to encourage the harvest<sup>4</sup>. In a Bavarian Middle High German poem Christ appears as a

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1 His statue was hidden in scaffolding when I visited, but Judith was to be seen painted on the roof of the northern aisle, in its westernmost bay. She had given other notable relics to Weingarten; and statues and a cross to Durham cathedral in earlier days.

2 Baker EP 'The cult of St Oswald in Northern Italy' *Archeologia* 1951 94 pp.167-194. I am happy to record that in 1986 the ceiling had been freshly repainted, and through binoculars Oswald is clearly to be seen in the north-east corner. However of his cult in the church at Tambre no trace could be found, however it was a bottle of St. Oswaldo wine which arrived on our dinner table further up the Piave valley!

3 We eventually found them in a heap of discarded pictures in the organ-loft.

4 Forty years later it was somewhat neglected with only two candle-stumps before it, but April is not harvest-time.

beggar at Oswald's marriage feast and the king bestows kingdom, bride and all on the pauper before Christ reveals his true self'. It is said that in the Tyrol Oswald is remembered as a King of Norway, or a King of Tyrol. Robert Folz tells of: 'la chapelle isolée du Mont Hinger au Nord-est de Merano où on lui demandait, en tant que maître du temps, de préserver les cultures de la foudre et de la grêle'<sup>2</sup>.

In other words, given those later traditions alone, historians would understandably discount Oswald. However, thanks to Bede we have the figure who is central to Bernician history, and whom we have earlier identified as a deeply spiritual Christian.

As hagiography has been so widely misunderstood it is worth quoting recent words of Benedicta Ward:

'To Bede, as to Gregory the Great, saints were proof that the message of salvation actually worked in transforming real human beings into the likeness of Christ...They are saints insofar as they have "put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27)...the central concern of the saint is not to talk about life in Christ but to have it and the work of the hagiographer is to present this Christ-likeness to others who run the same race, as model, as encouragement, and as assurance that they are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses and that with God all things are possible...The question that Bede, like any hagiographer, asked is...whether in this human life and death the marks of the Lord Jesus were visible...Their miracles were not to him *miracula*, wonders, but *signa* signs of a greater reality and truth. Their lives were not interesting, either to Bede or his audience, as a reflection of life in the kingdom of Northumberland but as accounts of how life in that place had been lived orientated towards the kingdom of heaven'<sup>3</sup>.

Hagiography is a genre directed towards edification and spiritual challenge, and therefore the everyday biographical details of the saint are relatively unimportant; moreover it is planned for reading aloud. However too much should not be made of its distinction from biography and history<sup>4</sup>. In particular Bede, for example, did not use a different criterion of truth in his biographies and his history. 'Heaven was the fundamental

1 Clemoes P *The cult of St Oswald on the Continent* 1983 Jarrow Lecture.

2 Folz R 'Saint Oswald Roi de Northumbrie' *Analecta Bollandiana* 1980 98 pp.49-74

3 Ward B *The Venerable Bede* 1990 London pp.88-90.

4 As can be seen from much later development - autobiographies, written under obedience; e.g. *the Life of Saint Teresa* [of Avilla] (Tr. Cohen JM 1957 London), and *Autobiography of a Saint; Thérèse of Lisieux* (Tr. Knox R 1958 London); and the inspirational biographies not only of well known characters such as John Wesley (Wood AS *The Burning Heart* 1967 Exeter) and *The Curé d'Ars* (Monnin A n.d. London), but of the otherwise insignificant and unknown, such as a Cornish tin-miner *The King's Son, or a memoir of Billy Bray* Bourne FW 1896 (33rd ed) London.

dimension of all his writing...' according to Benedicta Ward<sup>1</sup>. And of his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* she has written: 'It is a book full of accounts of saints which are "true histories", combining both the care for facts of the historian with the insight of a theologian'<sup>2</sup>. These surely should still be the twin approaches of those who treat a portion of the same subject.

Employing therefore the second of Bede's insights, the theological, it is important to realise that such holy Christians were not limited to those of whom Bede wrote. As they were holy due to the indwelling Christ, it follows that there is value in studying the lives of others similarly indwelt, whether in sixth-century Ireland and Gaul, or later ages. Two points follow. First: the history of the Israel of God is a history not of an organisation, but of God's people<sup>3</sup>. Our study, therefore, inevitably must major on such individuals as we can identify, however hazily: on Ninian, Patrick, Kentigern, Aidan and Oswald principally. Secondly: The question 'What, minimally, will make a person a "Christian"?' is raised by Robert Markus<sup>4</sup> at the very start of his study *The end of Ancient Christianity*<sup>5</sup>. To this a modern theologian's answer is: the relationships summed up in the two confessions: 'Abba, Father' [Gal. 4:6] and 'Jesus is Kurios, Lord' [I Cor. 12:3], verses which emphasise that it is the Holy Spirit who brings us into these relationships<sup>6</sup>. As that same Holy Spirit empowered not just the Bernician Church but the Church worldwide in every age, we can obtain new insights into our subject. This is invaluable as Ian Wood has made the point that our records are written from the viewpoint of the missionaries, and that we have almost no knowledge of the reactions of the converts<sup>7</sup>. This deficiency can be made good to some extent as we

1 Ward *op.cit.*, p.99

2 *ibid* p.99

3 as is demonstrated by the fact that in the Bible almost every book from Ezra to Jude is named for the man of God who wrote it, or the people of God to whom it was addressed.

4 And by others in every age, Abbé G Michonneau (*Revolution in a city parish* 1949 London p.1) writing of his Parisian parish in 1944 maintains that despite their often having been baptised, even taken their first communion, the mass of his parishioners are 'pagan'. He would restrict the title Christian '(and we are not saying "good Christian") to those who have the Faith, to those to whom Christ is a reality..'

5 Markus RA *op.cit.*, 1990 Cambridge p.6

6 Smail TA *The Giving Gift: the Holy Spirit in Person* 1988 London p.13

7 Wood I 'Pagans and Holy Men 600-800' *Irland und die Christenheit* Eds, Ní Chatháin P, M Richter 1987 Tübingen pp. 347-61

watch the Holy Spirit's activities in somewhat similar circumstances'.

For instance there are enough similarities to allow a useful comparison of seventh century Bernicia with the twentieth century small Central African kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi, effectively first evangelized by English anglican [CMS] missionaries from 1923<sup>2</sup>. We come to understand that Wilfrid's attitude [HE iii:28] need not have been motivated principally by pride<sup>3</sup> having read that the African clergy there insisted on the use of stoles (thus disappointing the missionaries who had never used them) to mark their membership of the worldwide anglican communion<sup>4</sup>. However the main importance of the illustration is to answer Ian Wood's problem, for in Central Africa we find evidence of the zeal of first-generation Christians. Reading of Sam Sindamuka (later to be Archbishop of the province of Burundi, Rwanda and Zaire) walking some 300 miles to a convention<sup>5</sup>, we no longer need to take the travels of Ninian, Kentigern, and the Lindisfarne monks with a pinch of salt. Twenty-five students sent to Uganda for theological training were expelled from college because they refused to abandon their 4 a.m. prayer meetings; perhaps we can better believe the stories of the nocturnal prayers of Cuthbert and Oswald. During the genocidal civil war in Burundi in 1972 the church had many martyrs<sup>6</sup>. In other words here is reality. Here are stories which can be matched in the first generation of missionary work worldwide<sup>7</sup>. The absence of documentation does not entitle us to imagine the Anglo-Saxon and British converts in the Church in Bernicia in the second quarter of the seventh-century to be any less Spirit-filled, or less dedicated. As Hillgarth writes: '...a proportion of [seventh-century] laity were certainly able to respond to the new faith'<sup>8</sup>, even although we cannot accept

1 A prime example was written by Maretu in 1871. Born before the first European reached Rarotonga, himself a cannibal, he became an evangelist. Crocombe MT (Tr & Ed) *Cannibals and Converts; Radical change in the Cook Islands* 1983 (?Suva) Inst. of Pacific studies, University of South Pacific

2 Osborn HH *Fire in the Hills* 1991 Crowborough

3 A few years earlier (in 1964) the same issue arose in Uganda where the first African bishop-designate of Mbale asked the Cathedral Ladies Altar-linen Guild (then chaired by my wife) to provide him with a mitre!

4 Osborne *op.cit.*, p.213

5 *ibid* p.118

6 One is now named in the Chapel of the Twentieth-Century martyrs in St Paul's Cathedral. He was Yona Kanamuzeyi. Church JE *Forgive Them; the story of an African Martyr* 1966; London

7 e.g. Buzzacott A *Mission Life in the Islands of the Pacific* 1866/1985; Suva; Maxwell JL *Half a century of Grace* [Nigeria] 1953 London; Ashe RP *Two Kings of Uganda* 1889 London.

8 Hillgarth JN 'Modes of evangelization of Western Europe in the seventh century' *Irland und die Christenheit* Eds, Ní Chatháin, M Richter 1987 Tübingen pp.311-31

as adequate his definition '...the religion (that is the interpretation of the world and of the place of God and man in it) [which was] available to seventh-century man'. That is too cerebral and too anthropocentric. Drythelm [HE v:12] was not responding to an interpretation, but to an encounter with God. He cannot have been the only layman in Northumbria to have had a life-changing spiritual encounter of one kind or another.

Later in the high Middle Ages the need for suitable inspirational material to be read aloud on the day of one's patron saint, of whom perhaps nothing was known, was met by the churning out of totally fictitious biographies with no historical content whatever. A Bollandist comments: 'You ask for a living portrait, and he (the hagiographer) gives you a programme. What is more, there is very little variety in this programme'<sup>2</sup>. Earlier Delehaye had enunciated as a rule the importance of not confusing the poet with the historian. 'Inspiration apart, hagiographers do just as poets do: they affect complete independence of, sometimes a lofty contempt for, historical facts; for real persons they substitute strongly-marked types; they borrow from anywhere in order to give colour to their narratives and to sustain interest.' In Delehaye's view: 'The work of the hagiographer may be historical, but it is not necessarily so'<sup>3</sup>.

In view of those remarks, the secular historian who has not the Bollandists' religious calling may be forgiven for discarding all hagiographical writing as valueless as history<sup>4</sup>. However in any investigation of Dark Age Northumbria, to do so is to discard almost every source of information. Herein lies our problem.

Bede we have discussed. It seems to me that we are in danger of making the mistake of imagining that Jocelin and Aelred adopted one attitude to truth when writing history, and another when writing hagiography. We will note later Jocelin's high repute as a scholar. Sufficient here to recall that in his *Life of Kentigern*<sup>5</sup> he states that he was unable to report any postmortem miracles - not because he doubted that they occurred, but because

1 *op. cit.*, p. 316 my italics.

2 Delehaye H *The legends of the Saints* (Trans. D Attwater) 1962 London p. 20

3 *ibid* p. 4

4 Recent scholars have shown that it is of considerable value for an understanding of the age in which it was written. See the works of Susan Ridyard and David Rollason discussed later in this chapter.

5 Trans. Bp Forbes *Historians of Scotland* vol. 5

he could find no records. Aelred's view is on record: he considered that the concealment of undoubted miracles of the Lord was a kind of sacrilege'. The theological profundity of his miracle stories in his *Life of Ninian* has been demonstrated by MacQueen<sup>2</sup>.

Attitude to miracle is central in assessing the value of the hagiographical writings on which we so largely depend for an understanding of the coming of the Christian Church to Bernicia. Thomas Mackay writes: 'In the case of Bede, we have an outstanding mind who at all times exercises judgement and restraint, yet admits as valid evidence that which was acceptable in his day and age.' He quotes Wrenn: '(Bede) had not the modern limitation which would preclude him from recording what he had heard without seeking to offer a purely rational explanation'. Further, in Mackay's view: 'we ought not to be so presumptuous as to reject such valuable evidence solely on the basis that our interpretation of history is in conflict with Bede's explanation'<sup>3</sup>.

Crucial to this problem is the attitude of the age in which the observer lived. While Bede's attitude has been much discussed<sup>4</sup>, the constant changes in attitudes to miracle stories from that in the early Christian World<sup>5</sup>, through the Middle Ages<sup>6</sup> to more modern times<sup>7</sup> have also been studied. Modern attitudes have been almost universally negative, although not necessarily because of a purely rationalistic viewpoint. Many orthodox Christian scholars, fully convinced of the occurrence of miracles in the first century Church, stridently deny that they continued after that period, in the belief that they were phenomena (*charismata*) unique to the neonatal period of the Church's life<sup>8</sup>. Where people who hold that view nevertheless find the miraculous occurring, their witness is of particular

1 Quoted from his tract *De Sanctimoniali de Watton* by F.M. Powicke in his introduction to Walter Daniel's *Life of Ailred of Rievaulx* p.lxxix.

2 MacQueen J 'History and miracle stories in the biography of Nynia' *Innes Review* 1963 13 115-129.

3 Mackay TW 'Bede's hagiographical method, His knowledge and use of Paulinus of Nola' *Famulus Christi* Ed. Bonner 6 1976 London pp.76-92 my emphasis.

4 A mere sample includes C. Grant Loomis 'The miracle traditions of the Venerable Bede' *Speculum* 1946 21 404-418; Bertram Colgrave 'Bede's miracle stories' *Bede; His life, times and writings* (Ed. A. Hamilton Thompson) 1935; Oxford pp.201-29; Benedicta Ward 'Miracles and history; a reconsideration of the miracle stories used by Bede' *Famulus Christi* pp.70-76]

5 Kee HC *Miracle in the early Christian World; a study in sociohistorical method* 1983; Yale

6 Ward B *Miracles and the mediaeval mind; theory, record and event, 1000-1215* 1982 London

7 Brown C *Miracles and the Critical Mind* 1984 Exeter

8 Warfield BB *Counterfeit Miracles* 1918 London; Budgen V *The charismatics and the Word of God* 1985 Welwyn

value. Because this was true of the first century of the Scottish reformation I append to this chapter, in an *excursus*, examples from their records. There is an additional value in looking at those cases, for hagiographical writings have very recently been reinvestigated on the theory that cults of saints did not arise spontaneously. Susan Ridyard summarises this view:

'To hagiographers the matter was straightforward, The development of cult was dependent in the first instance upon the expression of divine approbation by the bestowal upon the saint of miraculous powers: popular veneration traditionally followed hard on the heels of miraculous intervention. Historically a saint did not perform miracles unless a substantial body of opinion was predisposed to believe in those miracles. Cults did not simply develop, they were developed. And their development owed less to divine acknowledgement than to successful advertising' <sup>1</sup>.

According to this modern interpretation miracles were reported as part of the orchestration of a cult, so current research is interested in identifying the impresarios<sup>2</sup> and their purposes. Although that work started with cases from the high Middle Ages, its theories have been read back into the seventh century<sup>3</sup>. Were that correct, miracle could be shrugged off as merely part of the essential build up of a cult. My aim is to illustrate that this is often far from being the case, that miracles must be considered in their own right, not discarded as propaganda.

Disbelief in miracle was perhaps understandable until comparatively recently, despite the fact that there are occasional records of miraculous healings scattered throughout history,<sup>4</sup> notably in the nineteenth century in association with the Irvingites and early Pentecostal pioneers, but these were outside the ken of the mainstream churches. However, to hold such views in the last quarter of the twentieth century, is to run counter to current experience widespread in the Church, which it must be unscientific to discount. So far as healing miracles are concerned I have been able to take advantage of my status as a hospital consultant to obtain from medical colleagues the case records, X-ray and pathological reports,

1 Ridyard S *The royal saints of Anglo-Saxon England; a study in West Saxon and East Anglian cults* 1988 Cambridge p.5

2 The word is David Rollason's, *Saints and relics in Anglo-Saxon England* 1989 Oxford p.110

3 *Ibid* p.109

4 Gardner RFR *Healing Miracles; a doctor investigates* 1986 London pp 67-102

of some reputed cases of recent healings. I have published about a score of records of cases in which I am personally satisfied the healing cannot fit into known medical categories, and where prayer for healing has been made. The claims of Lourdes are now paralleled by charismatics: protestants and catholics.

We are now, therefore, faced with the difficulty that we cannot discard hagiographical writing just because it includes miracles, for otherwise we would have to give the lie to modern witnesses. It is not open to us to discard Bede's naming of witnesses to miracles which in earlier days, unaccustomed to reports of contemporary miracles, was rejected as a mere literary device'. We now must realise that explanation to be unrealistic. I have myself named witnesses in this manner, and have had television<sup>2</sup> and newspaper reporters take me at my word and go to the witnesses for confirmation. Bede obviously ran the same risk. In the light of my experience it is clear that when he reports a miracle, and names witnesses still alive, he is fully persuaded that his report can stand up to hostile cross examination.

This is not only a twentieth century problem. Clare Stancliffe in her *St Martin and his hagiographer*, wrote :

That miracles had occurred in the early church in order to bring unbelievers to Christianity was an old, widespread belief, which by the fourth century was usually coupled with the explanation of why such miracles were not still wrought: Christianity having spread throughout the empire, such miracles were no longer needed...For churchmen who belonged to this traditional school of thought, the fourth-century upsurge in the cult of martyrs and its accompanying miracles was perhaps as disturbing as the charismatic movement for many traditionally-minded Christians today'<sup>3</sup>.

However acceptance of the fact that miracles sometimes really occur does not mean that we suspend our critical judgement. The majority of "miraculous" healings reported to me do not stand up to critical examination, proving to be readily explicable in medical terms<sup>4</sup>.

Very suspect in hagiographical writings are the standard miracles of

1 Colgrave B *Two lives of St Cuthbert* 1940 Cambridge pp.12/13

2 One TV crew came from Australia to check up on my accounts, and to interview the patients,.

3 *op.cit.*, 1983 Oxford p 256, Augustine of Hippo similarly had to change his mind and accept miracles as still occurring, as I had discussed *Healing miracles* pp.135-37.

4 Gardner RFR *op.cit.*, pp.23-41.



speedy crops, sand as seed, wolf-in-harness and so on which have no Biblical precedent. Have these, like the verbal copying of attributes from earlier lives, been inserted as poetic pictures of the kind of man, and of his spiritual power?

We must also beware of pre-Christian ideas being imported. Binchy refers to a pre-Christian custom of 'fasting against' someone, for which the Irish term was *troscad*, used to coerce the opponent into agreement. It has a parallel in a Brahmin ritual know as *prāya*. The early Christian Irish had a quite different word for fasting as an ascetic practice - *aíne(e)*. However as time passed this latter word was lost, and *troscad* took over, not only as a word, but as the idea of coercing God to yield what He was apparently unwilling to give. 'The saint's "fast against God" in order to wring various concessions from Him is a well-documented feature of Irish hagiography'.

What criteria should we employ in seeking to weigh up the episodes recorded by the writers? I suggest we ask these questions:

First: What is the scholarly integrity and spiritual stature of the writer, if known?

Secondly: Are there reputable parallels in Christian history and experience? This, of course, depends on one's awareness of the current scene, as many of the events in hagiographic writings are now astonishingly mirrored in late twentieth century church life; even when one allows for much exaggeration and some fraud. This is further exemplified in a story told me recently by a British ex-missionary nurse<sup>2</sup> a close friend of my own sister.

Some twenty years ago she had to walk back to her mission hospital in India, late at night, through a wood renowned as a place of dacoits. She sought the company of a local man going the same way, but, aware of danger, prayed throughout the walk. On arrival at the hospital the man admitted he himself had intended to rob her while passing through the wood, but was deterred by the presence of a tall shining being at her side. He insisted on staying in the hospital overnight so that next day he could learn of this God, so powerful that he would protect his servants in this way.

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1 Binchy DA 'A pre-Christian survival in mediaeval Irish hagiography' *Ireland in early mediaeval Europe* (Ed; Whitelock D, R McKitterick, D Dumville 1982 Cambridgepp.165-178

2 Miss K. Kutler, St John Pauntley, Cotmaton Rd., Sidmouth, Devon.

What credence would be given to that story were it to be found in one of our early mediaeval sources? That story highlights another issue in considering miracle: whom does the incident glorify? Does it glorify God? This point was well made in the first of all classical hagiographies: St Athanasius' *Life of Antony*. Parents of a sick girl sought to bring her to Antony. He told them to go away. "For this good deed is not mine, that she should come to me, a pitiable man; rather, her healing is from the Savior who works his mercy everywhere for those who call on him. So also in this case the Lord has granted her prayer and his benevolence has shown me that he will cure the ailment of the child where she is"<sup>1</sup>. The problem of later hagiographers is that they directed the listener to the saint rather than to the Lord. In doing so they sometimes distorted the picture out of all recognition, as is well illustrated by Binchy:

'St Patrick's two seventh-century biographers often depict him as acting like a vengeful druid, cursing those native kings and nobles who opposed him, by forecasting the impoverishment and eventual extinction of their progeny, and even extending his maledictive activities to inanimate objects like rivers whose fishermen refused to supply him with fish...the effect of these and similar fables is the exact opposite of what the writers intended: far from glorifying Patrick they diminish him, and had his own writings perished, his biographers would have effectively obscured the true greatness of the man, his humility, his fortitude, his courage and his charity. Perhaps too, if the other saints whose *vitae* were composed long after their deaths had left us a contemporary account of themselves, we should find the same vast differences we see between the truly heroic Patrick of the *confessio* and the fictitious hero whose unbroken career of triumphs is chronicled by Muirchú, Tírechán and others<sup>2</sup>.

In my judgment we must accept the challenge and opportunity offered to historical understanding<sup>3</sup> by the belief in the possibility that miracles really occur, even if infrequently<sup>4</sup>.

1 Athanasius *Life of Antony* (Trans. RC Gregg) 1980 London, C,58

2 Binchy *op. cit.*,

3 C.S. Lewis's point is noteworthy: 'the rejection as unhistorical of all passages which narrate miracles is sensible if we start by knowing that the miraculous in general never occurs...this is a purely philosophical question. Scholars, as scholars, speak on it with no more authority than anyone else. The canon "If miraculous, unhistorical" is one they bring to their study of their texts, not one they learned from it, ['Modern theology and Biblical criticism' *Christian Reflections* 1967 London pp.152-66].

4 The problems, for a theological faculty, of the reality of miracle today have been well demonstrated in the largest post-graduate seminary in the United States, when discussion of the *charismata* was accompanied, in the classroom, by their demonstration. Despite the academic problems they would not deny the reality of the miraculous. See the Faculty Report *Ministry and the Miraculous* (Ed. Suedes LB) 1987 Pasadena; Fuller Theological Seminary; also *Signs and Wonders today: the story of Fuller Theological Seminary's remarkable course on spiritual power* (Ed. Wagner CP) Rev.ed. 1987 Altamont Springs

Excursus: miracles free of propaganda.

It can be argued that modern 'miracles' are reported as propaganda for the charismatic movement, and similarly that most cases of 'miracles' throughout history have been performed to impress doubters or enhance prestige and recorded as propaganda. Augustine of Canterbury's cure of the blind man [HE 11:2] can be seen as an act of spiritual one-up-manship to impress the delegates of the British Church; and Adomnán's biography, replete as it is with miracles enhancing the prestige of Columba, as ammunition in the Celtic-Roman controversy. Such accounts are therefore considered suspect and without further ado rejected by scholars as untrustworthy. This is illogical: after all because modern advertisements have blatant motives we do not automatically deny their factual content.

However for the present study it seems useful to cite cases where there is not the slightest hint of any of those motives currently ascribed to miracle stories: no building of any cult, no advancing of any theological argument, not even an emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit; in fact where miracles, smacking as they did of discarded popery, were suspect and even unwelcome. I refer to the first century of the Reformation in Scotland reported by contemporary observers of unimpeachable godliness and probity, many of whom themselves suffered for their faith. The records I shall quote are mostly those republished by the Wodrow Society [WS] in the mid-nineteenth century when post-apostolic miracles were theologically unacceptable.<sup>1</sup>

## RAISING THE DEAD

The memoir of John Knox's son-in-law, John Welch (Welsh) was written in the next generation, probably by James Kirkton, who himself suffered in the covenanting troubles. He records at length an instance of what can only reasonably be thought of as Welsh raising the dead.

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 1 In one WS volume the editor writes 'It has not been deemed necessary to offer any remarks on the claims to prophetic power put forth on this Reformer's [Welsh's] behalf. The Editor, in accordance with the constitution of the Society, reckoned it his province merely to embody the statements of others - not to speculate concerning them.' [(Ed.) Tweedie WK *Select Biographies; Vol. 1* 1845 Edinburgh p.vi].

In another the editor maintained that some of the stories concerning Bruce were so strange and marvellous that a previous writer (Fleming) forbore to publish them, while Wodrow (whom manuscript he was now editing) 'set them down rather for preservation and farther inquiry than for present publication, till they be farther considered'. He approved Fleming's abstinence and Wodrow's caution, [Cunningham W *Sermons of the Rev. Robert Bruce, with Collections for his Life by the Rev. Robert Wodrow* 1843 Edinburgh p.x]

So far as the remarkable prophesies of 'Prophet Peden' are concerned, an admiring biographer wrote 'Clearly, the people, two centuries ago, believed in a supernatural gift of prophecy, and this gift was believed to be possessed by Peden in an extraordinary degree. But the foresight mistakenly supposed to be the prophet's distinction, was, in all probability, the result of his insight.' [Johnston JC *Alexander Peden; the prophet of the Covenant* 1902 (1988 rpt, Kilkeen) p.60].

While of the first story I am about to recount, Young, a nineteenth century biographer of Welsh wrote: 'This episode... By certain parties it has been made a handle for casting reproach on the memory of John Welch, on serious religion, and on the cause of Presbytery.' [quoted by Edmunds V and Scorer G *Some thoughts on Faith healing* 1979; London p.51]

A young nobleman, staying with Welsh during the latter's exile in Paris, fell ill, deteriorated over a long time, and died. He was laid out, but Welsh continued to pray over him to the anger of his friends who demanded burial as it was a hot summer. To placate him, after 48 hours of Welsh's prayers over the body, 'physicians are set to work who pinched him with pinchers in the fleshy parts of his body, and twisted a bow-string about his head with great force, but no sign of life appeared in him, so the physicians pronounce him stark dead, and then there was no more delay to be desired. Yét Mr Welsh begged them once more, that they would but step into the next room for an hour or two, and leave him with the dead youth, and this they granted. Then Mr Welsh fell down on the pallet and cried to the Lord with all his might for the last time, till at length the dead youth opened his eyes, and cried out to Mr Welsh, whom he distinctly knew....' This was not done in a corner, for the man himself, later Lord Castlesteuart, was well known. 1

In view of this<sup>2</sup> we must treat with more respect the records of return from the dead reported by Adomnán [AVC 2:32] and Bede [HE V:12]<sup>3</sup>

#### HEALING MIRACLES.

John Scrimgeour had been chaplain to King James VI during his Scandinavian voyage to bring home the royal bride; thirty years later he was deposed for conscience sake by the same monarch.

All his children, save one, had died and at last he was called 'to see her die.' She had abscesses, one large one in her arm, and presumably septicaemia. 'I went out into the fields and began to expostulat with God in a fitt of great displeasure... At last it was said to me "I have heard thee at this time, but use not such boldness in time coming, for such particulars"; and I came back, the child was sitting up in bed fully healed, taking some meat, and when I looked at her arm it was quite healed'<sup>4</sup>.

#### PROPHECY

This word is here used in the sense of fore-telling the future. This gift, demonstrated so often by Columba [e.g. AVC I:9], was seen in better-documented sixteenth century Scotland. Row wrote:

'for it is ordinar with God to give his servants whom he stirres up and employes in extraordinary employments with extraordinary gifts and endowments, such as the gift of prophecie. Such prophets there were many in Scotland about and shortlie after the tyme of the Reformation, viz. Messrs Wishart, Knox, Welsh, Row, Craig, Davidson, Fergusson, &c. They foir-prophecied many things, whereof some were fulfilled in their owne dayes, and all of them after their death'<sup>5</sup>.

Of Welsh many prophecies are recorded, including the following:

1 The history of Mr James Welsh, In (Ed.) Tweedie WK *Select Biographies; Vol. 1* 1845 Edinburgh pp.35-36

2 These cases have a modern parallel from Thailand which I have reported in *BMJ* 1983 287 1927-33, and from Chile (Gardner RFR *Healing miracles; a doctor investigates* pp.139-40)

3 Bede's cases have been discussed at length by Patrick Sims-Williams in his *Religion and Literature in Western England 600-800* 1990 Cambridge pp.243-72

4 Livingstone J *Wodrow's Select Biographies* I:308

5 Row J *The History of the Kirk of Scotland 1558-1637* 1842 Edinburgh p.462

Lord Ochiltree, having failed to present a petition of Welsh's to King James, claimed that he had done so. Welsh replied: "'Nay My Lord, you should not lie to God and to me, for I know you never delivered it, although I warned you not to undertake it except you would perform it, but because you have dealt so unfaithfully, remember God shall take from you both estate and honours, and give them to your neighbour in your own time." Which accordingly came to pass: for both his estate and honours were in his own time translated unto James Stewart. son to Captain James...' So adds Kirkton'.

In the 'Killing times', two generations later, Peden often prophesied, including the fact that his body would be taken out of the grave and buried elsewhere. In fact soldiers exhumed him and buried him under the gallows tree. It is perhaps interesting in view of the desire among late-antique Christians to be buried near the saints<sup>2</sup>, that the townsfolk of Cumnock 'forsook their old burying ground...brought their dead, and buried them where Peden was buried. Thus the gallows-hill became God's acre, a hill of glory...' <sup>3</sup>

#### WORD OF KNOWLEDGE

Adomnán cites a number of cases of Columba announcing to his monks that something was happening at that moment far off. [e.g. *AVC* I:8] Cuthbert's knowledge of the disaster at Nectansmere is a further example. [*VSCAA* 8] This gift, exemplified in the earliest days of the Church in Peter's knowledge of the clandestine financial plotting of Ananias and Saphira [Acts 5:1-11], is one of the gifts of the Spirit, [I Cor. 12:8 JBP]. It is therefore quite inadequate to characterise it, as Picard does, as 'clairvoyance' <sup>4</sup>.

In a time of plague Welsh, then minister of Ayr, was asked by magistrates whether it was safe to allow into the town packmen who brought a certificate from the last town that they were uninfected. After prayer he told them 'that they would do well to discharge those travellers from their town, affirming with great asservation, the plague was in those packs. So the magistrates commanded them to be gone, and they went to Cumnock, a town some twenty miles distant, and there sold their goods which kindled such an infection in that place that the living were hardly able to bury the dead' <sup>5</sup>.

This cannot be written off as 'playing safe' for, had there been no ill-effects in the next town, his reputation and effectiveness as a minister would have suffered.

#### MIRACULOUS LIGHT

Welsh is recorded as being surrounded by a 'strange' 'extraordinary' light when he was at prayer, in the dark, in the manse garden, <sup>6</sup> which

1 *Wodrow's Select Biographies*; I p.30, See also pp.4,24-29 for further examples.

2 Brown P *The Cult of Saints* 1981 London ch.1

3 Johnstone JC *Alexander Peden* p.179.

4 Picard J-M, 'The marvellous in Irish and continental saints' *Lives of the Merovingian period' Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism* (ed. Clarke H.B. and Brennan M.) 1981 *BAR-I* 113 pp.91-104

5 *op. cit* p.12

6 *op. cit*, p.12

immediately reminds us of, and reassures us as to, Sulpicius Severus' account of St Martin'.

#### INCORRUPT BODY

Robert Bruce, one of the first generation of the reformers, died in 1636. When his 'grave was opened, to lay in his grandchild, his body was almost fresh and uncorrupted, to the great wonder of many; and if I right remember the grave was again filled up, and another made. The fresh body had no noisome smell. It was nearly eighty years after he was buried. My informer was minister of Larbert when it happened'<sup>2</sup>.

Apart from those seven lines of print there is no reference to this discovery in the volume, nor in any other history of the period available to me, although Robert Bruce, who was so outstanding as to have been chosen to crown James VI's Queen, is frequently mentioned. It is doubtful whether the reformers, or their presbyterian successors, were aware of incorruption as a sign in earlier days of holiness. It is even more doubtful if they would have given any weight to this<sup>3</sup>. It is precisely for this reason that this account is of such importance in my present argument. In his discussion of *Saints and relics in Anglo-Saxon England* David Rollason has suggested that bodies were found incorrupt because they were expected to be so, steps having been taken to preserve them<sup>4</sup>, citing evidence for the contemporary knowledge of embalming techniques<sup>5</sup>. The case of Robert Bruce finally rules out any such trickery as an adequate explanation in all cases.

Similar parallels to the miracles found in Bernician church sources can be culled from other periods in church history<sup>6</sup> however for this excursus I have concentrated on the single century to 1688, because at that time miracles were dispensationally suspect, unexpected, and recorded without any of the hidden motives assumed by many modern scholars to invalidate such accounts. In the light of this evidence, historical records can no longer be discounted on the grounds that they accept the miraculous.

1 Sulpicius Severus; *Dialogues*; 2:11 trans. FH Hoare *The Western Fathers* 1980 London p 103

2 Wodrow J, *Collections for the Life of Mr Robert Bruce, Minister at Edinburgh*, p.150 Prefaced to *Sermons of the Rev Robert Bruce*, 1617; London, Edited by Cunningham W, 1842 Edinburgh

3 As can be seen by the remarks of his Presbyterian biographer of a later age, commenting on this story; 'Surely they are sorely lacking in insight who fail to interpret stories like these. What are they but the shadows cast by this towering figure upon the page of history?...Not the body but the spirit and the influence of Robert Bruce are undecayed to the present hour, both in Larbert and throughout the Church,' MacNicol DC *Robert Bruce* 1907, Reprint 1961, Edinburgh p.186

4 While this may be relevant in some later cases when incorruption was taken as a major evidence for sainthood, there is no reason for it in the early days of the Anglo-Saxon church.

5 Rollason D *op.cit.*, 1989 Oxford pp.39-41

6 as I have done elsewhere, Gardner RFR *Healing miracles; a doctor investigates* 1986 London Ch.4

## BERNICIA AND ITS PEOPLES

According to Ptolemy's map<sup>1</sup> the north of what we now know as England was occupied by the Brigantes, while the south of what was to become Scotland was occupied by the Novantae, the Selgovae, and the Votadini, with the Damnonii across the waist of the country. Although at the zenith of their power the Romans had exercised control, not just south of the line of Antonine's Wall, but over the whole lowland zone south east of the Highland Line<sup>2</sup>, the degree of their influence in southern Scotland after 367 is in doubt.

A number of scholars believe that after Roman direct rule was withdrawn from the Antonine wall to the Hadrianic, suzerain power continued to be maintained through indirect rule exercised by client rulers<sup>3</sup> drawn from the philo-Roman tribes. The use of the epithet *pes-rut* 'scarlet cloak' for Paterus (grandfather of Cunedda) has been taken, on the grounds of parallels in the east of the Empire, to be emblematic of some such Roman investiture<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand J.C. Mann has maintained that the total absence of late fourth-century pottery types of east Yorkshire manufacture north of Hadrian's Wall, which are everywhere and plentifully found south of it, argues for a total and complete withdrawal of Roman involvement to that line after it was re-established by Theodosius in 368<sup>5</sup>. However, that the Roman influence continued after 368 seems to fit the facts better especially if one accepts Hope-Taylor's interpretation of his building E at *Ad Geferin* as an echo of a Roman theatre<sup>6</sup>.

Although the collapse of Roman power from the mid fourth-century may have been gradual, the main difference being that the pay packets for the watchers on the Wall no longer arrived<sup>7</sup>, there must inevitably have arisen centres of local power. Of the very sparse information available about the fifth century the most important item is the reported migration of Cunedda and his brothers from *Manau . . . Guotodin* to North Wales where they expelled

1 Reproduced by Ian Richmond in *Roman and Native in North Britain* 1958 Edinburgh p.134

2 Mann JC 'The Northern Frontier after A.D. 369' *Glasgow Archaeol. J.* 1974 3 pp.34-42

3 That it is an eminently successful technique was demonstrated by Lord Lugard in Northern Nigeria in 1900, [Margery Perham *Lugard; a maker of modern Africa* 1956 London *passim*].

4 Richmond *op.cit* p.124. Many scholars now reject this idea.

5 Mann *op.cit*.

6 Hope-Taylor *Yeavinger; An Anglo-British centre of early Northumbria* 1977 London pp.241-244

7 Breeze DJ, B Dobson *Hadrian's Wall* 1978 Harmondsworth p.231

the Irish invaders, and themselves founded dynasties'. Sir Ifor Williams describes Cunedda as marching south to Wales leading troops armed and trained to fight in the Roman manner, and has pointed out that such a migration would require a central authority<sup>2</sup>. If this had been arranged by the Roman power in the late fourth century it would fit in with the '146 years before Maelgwn's reign' quoted in the record [HB 62], for in the *Annales Cambriae* his death is recorded in 547, which places Cunedda's expedition before 401. However from other pedigrees<sup>3</sup> it appears that Maelgwyn was the great-grandson of Cunedda, and to allow for that date each generation must be overstretched. Hence it is usually assumed that the migration cannot have taken place until well into the fifth century<sup>4</sup>. If this is so then we may have a hint that Roman type organisation was maintained well after their authority was withdrawn<sup>5</sup>.

A considerable degree of continuity between Roman and post-Roman life is now widely accepted, being illustrated by the writings of H.P.R. Finsberg<sup>6</sup> and others. Moreover experience confirms some continuity always occurs<sup>7</sup>. Although there is often a marked fall in the standard of living,

1 Although the written source for this migration [HB,62] dates from the ninth century, the primitive spelling Cunedag argues for an appreciably earlier written source - possibly an Easter Table going back at least to the seventh century, Alcock L *Arthur's Britain* 1971 London pp.38,125

2 Williams I 'Wales and the North' *C&W* 1952 51 pp.73-88. Similar contemporary organised migrations are known from the continent.

3 Miller M 'Date-Guessing and Pedigrees' *Stud,Celtica* 1976 10/11 pp.96-109 where she repeatedly quotes Cunedda's migration ('from Manaw of Gododdin' p.109) without the expected proviso.

4 Chadwick HM *Early Scotland; the Picts, the Scots & the Welsh of Southern Scotland* 1949 Cambridge p.4fn

5 David Dumville calls all this; 'an incredible modern construct [which] must be firmly rejected,' [Sub-Roman Britain; history and legend' *History* 1977 62 pp.173-192]. Unfortunately many modern writers, including Salway [*Roman Britain* 1981 Oxford p.404] and Nick Higham [*The Northern Counties to AD 1000* 1986 London p 242] have followed him. Dumville's argument is poor. He stated 'Mrs Nora Chadwick, however, was able effectively in 1958 to dispose of this story, though her words have hardly been heeded by many later writers. He quotes for this her article 'Early culture and learning in North Wales' [*SEBC* pp.32-34] However in fact she goes on; 'In the same way the date c.450 favoured by the most recent scholars for the invasion of Cunedag and his sons into Wales receives confirmation from the genealogies of the founders of those Welsh kingdoms claiming descent from his eponymous sons, all of which fork at a date somewhere in the fifth century.' [*op.cit.* p.34-5]. Moreover the year before Dumville's paper appeared, Mrs Chadwick in her *British Heroic Age* [1976 Cardiff], returned to the story, and wrote 'There is nothing inherently improbable in it' [p.87] going on to discuss Cunedda as she does other 'men of the north'. It is noteworthy that in 1987 Frere continued to include the story, and in a couple of footnotes rebuffs Dumville's arguments. [*Britannia* 1987 3rd ed, London p.350 fn39; p.377 fn 34].

6 Finsberg HPR *Lucerna* 1964 London

7 The India I revisited, forty years after my wartime service, is very changed; the Raj has gone, the princely states have disappeared, the tiny European enclaves have been absorbed; however the atmosphere of Goa remains strongly Portuguese, while the army Officers' Mess in Bangalore is pristine.



the tenacity of cultures and life styles even where change has not been due to gradual decolonization but to sudden brutal conquest, was well demonstrated in twentieth century Europe.

Probably few of the officials in later Roman Britain were natives of Italy, and (after AD 212) all free-born Britons were Roman citizens. They did not disappear overnight, and must inevitably have been the backbone and power in the emergent kingdoms. Although this would possibly be less marked in southern Scotland, its possible 'protectorate' relationship with Rome implies a considerable body of educated and able men; too much, however, must not be made of this in view of the absence of Roman artifacts already noted. So far as the area round Hadrian's Wall is concerned, some workers have suggested that the population suddenly dropped; the implication being that the people disappeared. Experience shows that, short of a cataclysmic natural calamity such as Ethiopian famine or Bangladeshi flood, this does not happen. In eastern England are many evidences of wartime airfields, which memory populates with hundreds of airmen, NAAFI girls, and other civilians. Now all that is left is a decaying control tower, or a small monument to the men from that station who died in missions over Germany. The former population has merely scattered. Just so Julian Bennett has argued convincingly that after withdrawal of the Roman power, the population moved elsewhere, the land round the Wall being agriculturally poor, and the economic incentive of the garrison gone'. This is much the most reasonable explanation.

Although the percentage of people in the Dark Ages who reached old age would be less than in the twentieth century, there is abundant evidence that a certain number survived into their eighties. By the same token at the time of the publication in 731<sup>2</sup> of *H. E.* Bede, or at least some of his friends, should have been able to record their own grandfather's memories going back to the siege, by Urien and his allies, of Lindisfarne, and to the *Gododdin* sortie to Catreth<sup>3</sup>. This of course turns on the question of life-span in the Dark Ages. This we must now consider.

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 1 Bennet J 'The end of Roman settlement in Northern England' *Settlement in North Britain: Papers presented to George Jobey* (Ed, Chapman JC, HC Mytum) 1983 BAR(B) 118 pp.205-232

2 Just to parallel the dates, in 2031 when our oldest son attains the age of 75, he should be able to report stories which his grandmother told him of her childhood in the 1890s.

3 I am arguing only for memory of *major* events.

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 EXCURSUS ON LIFE EXPECTANCY

Dark-age *Life expectancy* was short, just as current Indian expectation of life is short. However, this statistic based on averages is largely meaningless, as can readily be demonstrated. In Northern Nigeria, from figures obtained in our ante-natal clinics we showed that of every thousand live-born children 495 died within the first four years of life<sup>1</sup>. Only eleven years later Lang, in the same journal, showed that in the same Northern Nigerian community the rate had fallen to 225 per thousand<sup>2</sup>. Statistically this shows that life-expectancy had doubled, yet obviously it made no difference to the *lifespan* of any member of the adult community. Life expectancy, in summary is irrelevant to life span, which seems to have been unaltered at around seventy years throughout recorded history.

Calvin Wells has admitted that 'few problems are more slippery to solve than the estimation of a people's longevity'<sup>3</sup>, however, from a study of skeletons in Anglo-Saxon graves he deduced that almost everyone was dead before the age of 40<sup>4</sup>. Helen Cayton presents a dissenting note, based, in part, on her doctoral thesis<sup>5</sup>. She calculated from the recorded ages for 200 people in the Anglo-Saxon age that the average age at death was 57.7 years, with ecclesiastics living to an average of 64.6 years. In the North Elmham excavation report she argued, against her co-author Calvin Wells, that the commonly accepted estimation of *average age at death* for Anglo-Saxons was too low. The explanation of the discrepancy must lie in the paleopathological criteria on which these estimations are based<sup>6</sup>. Cayton quotes Hungarian research workers who when they applied those same criteria to skeletons of known age, found that they yielded a death-age about ten years too early<sup>7</sup>. As the documented age of many Anglo-Saxon kings, warriors, and clerics amply disproves the widespread assumption that almost everyone was dead before the age of 40: 'The evidence indicates that the life expectancy for the Anglo-Saxons must now be raised..an acceptable range might be between forty five and fifty years'<sup>8</sup>. This, be it noted, is for *life expectancy* which is an average.

There is no reason to think that similar figures should not have applied also to Britons. That the figures quoted above are Anglo-Saxon rather than British need not disturb us. Faustus of Riez, a 5th century Briton, is reckoned by some scholars to have lived from 408 to 495.

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1 Gardner RFR, ES Gardner 'Infant Mortality in Northern Nigeria' *J. Obst, Gynaec, Brit, Emp* 1959 **65** pp.749-758

2 Lang JR 'A further study of fetal loss and child mortality in the north of Nigeria' *J. Obst, Gynaec, Brit, Comw*, 1970 **77** p.427

3 Wells C *Bones Bodies and Diseases; evidence of disease and abnormality in early man* 1964 London p.176

4 Wells C, H Cayton 'The Human Bones' *Excavations in North Elmham Park 1967-1972* (Ed, P Wade-Martin) East Anglian Archeological Report no.9 Norwich 1980. For the excavations at North Elmham Park he claims that of those who had already reached the age of eighteen the mean age for male deaths was 38.2, and for women 35.8, combined 37.0. And he considers this high, the other centres he had excavated giving figures combined for the adults of both sexes of 33.9 at Red Castle; 34.1 at a late Saxon site at St. Catherine Thorpe; and 34.7 at Caister-on-Sea.

5 Cayton HM *Anglo-Saxon medicine within its social context* Ph.D thesis, Durham, 1977 Ch.8

6 Cayton 'Some Contributions from the Written Sources' in Wells and Cayton *op.cit.*, pp.303-314

7 Acsádi Gy, and J Nemeskéri *History of Human Life Span and Mortality* 1970 Budapest

8 Cayton *op.cit.*, ref.5 *supra*; p.314

A number of scholars, working from lapidary inscriptions, have produced life-tables for various populations in the Roman Empire. For instance in Tripolitania, Byzacena and Proconsularia (general population, non-Christian): of males 56.9% were alive at the age of 42, the curve dropping smoothly to 22.8% at 72. There was a sharp drop to 9.5% at 82, but 1.7% of males were centenarians. The figures for women were only marginally worse. Among the Christian population the figures were almost parallel for men to 92, although none claimed to reach 100<sup>1</sup>.

It will be noted that these figures are for Roman or Romanised burials. Such folk would have lived in the best circumstances, but it does not follow that their life-expectancy was better than that of the British in their more primitive villages. Burn has shown that in the mid-nineteenth century the life expectancy of Scottish islanders, living in poor circumstances, was better than that of their contemporaries living in cities, or even in the most favourable farm lands on the mainland. He deduced that this was because the islanders' isolation protected them from the spread of infection<sup>2</sup>. We do not need to assume, therefore, that the Britons in their homesteads necessarily died younger than the Romans in their cities.

The importance of statistics is demonstrated by the fact that Molly Miller, having validly defended their use, then adopts the assumptions: '(1) that no life is longer than 55 years; (2) that all children are born to parents aged 21-38...'<sup>3</sup>. These assumptions one must reject. Longevity has been discussed. As late classical, and medieval authorities are agreed on 12-14 as the age of menarche<sup>4</sup>, it is incredible (at least to an obstetrician) that first childbirth never occurred until 9-7 years later.

The fact that historians use for calculating purposes an average reproduction period of 27 years<sup>5</sup> should not blind us to the possible length of memory between grandparent and grandchild<sup>6</sup>. In a community it only requires one or two folk of over 70 in each generation (and with Cayton's figures<sup>7</sup> there were many) to ensure that the *major* events are recollected for at least one hundred and twenty years.

1 Burn R 'Hic Breve Vivitur' *Past and Present* 1953 2 pp.2-31.

2 Burn *op.cit.*, p.17 Similarly my teachers reported that in their pre-war experience an operation in the patient's home on her kitchen table was often safer than one in hospital.

3 Miller M 'Date-Guessing and pedigrees' *Stud. Celtica* 1976 11/12 pp.96-109

4 Post P 'Ages at menarche and menopause; some mediaeval authorities' *Population Studies* 1971 25 pp.83-87

5 Miller [*op.cit.*] shows this can vary by several years

6 This can readily be proved from modern experience. It so happened that I noted in a single day, October 7th 1988, BBC Radio 4 'Desert Island Discs' featured a 99-year old ex-actress Athene Seyler whose memory of her childhood was sharp, and by coincidence BBC TV Omnibus programme that same evening had an interview with another actress, 97-year-old Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies. Both recited from memory pieces they had declaimed in their youth. Alert children who listened to these broadcasts should be able to recall them after 2060; an effective 160-year span. An even more extreme example was told me by a friend (a retired ambassador) who visiting his old Cambridge college - Trinity - in 1990 spoke to a centenarian fellow. The latter (1) recollected standing on the steps of Trinity in 1911 talking to an aged fellow (2) who recollected standing on those steps in the 1870s, talking to an aged fellow (3) who had been standing on those steps when the news arrived of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. In other words those three generations covered 188 years.

7 Cayton HM 'Anglo-Saxon Medicine within its social context' Unpublished Ph.D thesis, Durham 1977

Because, in our age, there is the ready availability of written records, such memories are not highly prized. In an age when oral memory was the prime source of record it can be accepted that such oral traditions would be detailed and highly esteemed. However for the present argument this is maintained only for such major events as invasions, defeats and victories - even although genealogies appear to have been preserved over much longer periods. It must also be remembered that in societies where artificial lighting is unavailable and pastimes are few, conversation occupies many hours of the evening'. Much of such conversation must inevitably be reminiscence. It follows that Dumville's comment: 'The argument that Bede lived much nearer to the fifth and sixth centuries than we do should not be allowed to cut any ice'<sup>2</sup> must be firmly rejected, at least as regards the later sixth century.

Life in Dark Age and early Anglo-Saxon society is often portrayed as of very poor quality, brief, uncomfortable and 'brutish'. Although not explicit there is left the sense of a population intellectually almost subnormal. Hunter Blair devoted his *World of Bede* to recording the amazing change from an illiterate population to the intellectual world of Bede and Theodore, to folk some of whom spoke Latin and Greek, in a period of under 150 years<sup>2</sup>. While this is true of the wide scene, we are surely safe, at individual level, in seeing this change in terms of less than two decades. Given the opportunity this is surely always the case. I recall, at University College Hospital, Ibadan, being shown by one of our students a family photograph: while his parents were each dressed only in a single bunch of leaves, he wore a western suit as befitted a medical student about to appear for unmodified London University MB BS finals! In seventh century Northumbria Wilfrid was born about nine years after Paulinus first arrived, by the time he was 25 years old he was in Rome, drinking in its culture.

In other words human intelligence in primitive societies is, and in dark ages was, on a par with our own, it was only in education and technology that they were deficient.

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 1 In the 1950s my patients in Northern Nigeria reported that, after returning from the farm, they normally partook of a meal and then went to sleep. After a few hours they awoke, stirred the fire into flame, and sat around to talk for several hours before going to sleep again.

2 Dumville *op.cit.*

2 Blair PH *op.cit.* 1970 London p.vii

## 'BERNICIA'

The origin of the name Bernicia has been studied in detail by Kenneth Jackson<sup>1</sup>. While it had been generally regarded as derived from \**brigant-* as in the Brigantes tribe of Yorkshire, he showed that this is philologically unlikely. Moreover later he drew attention to 'the striking fact that the land of the Brigantes ends precisely where that of the Bernicians begins, that there is no overlap at all, and that the old identification is therefore still more severely weakened'<sup>2</sup>. Against this is the view of Ian Smith that the Brigantes extended up into north Northumberland, and it was this portion of that people, cut off from the rest of the tribe by the Wall, who became the nucleus of the Bernicians<sup>3</sup>. Jackson tentatively suggested that the Old Irish *bern*, meaning "a gap, a mountain pass", may have come from a Celtic stem which, if it existed in British, could yield \**bernaco-* or \**birnaco-* "full of gaps", and thus possibly \**Bernaccia* or *Birnaccia* "the land of the mountain passes" which he considered a very good description of the Pennines<sup>4</sup>. While Brian Hope-Taylor accepts this as a possible derivation<sup>5</sup> he points out that the passes implied are as likely to be those of the southern uplands.

Its people were the more-or-less uniform Cymric-speaking British who, as Sir Ifor Williams has shown<sup>6</sup>, occupied the vast majority of our island south of the Clyde-Forth line. As Nora Chadwick put it: 'A traveller could have set off from Edinburgh, and walked through Cumberland, and along the Welsh Border to Land's End, and he would have had no difficulty in making himself understood all the way. He would have felt at home everywhere'<sup>7</sup>.

The Bernician rulers, at least from 547, were Germanic. The British word for these was *Saeson*: 'Saxon'; but so they called all the Germanic peoples<sup>8</sup>. Some writers have suggested that they may have been Frisian<sup>9</sup>.

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1 Jackson KH *Language and History in Early Britain* 1953 Edinburgh pp.701-705

2 Jackson KH *The Gododdin; the oldest Scottish poem* 1969 Edinburgh p.81

3 Smith I *ABEKT B*

4 Jackson *Language and literature* p.705

5 Hope Taylor *Yeaving; An Anglo-British centre of early Northumbria* 1977 London p.291

6 Williams I 'Wales and the North' *C&W* 1952 51 pp.73-88

7 Chadwick NK *The British Heroic Age; The Welsh and the men of the North* 1976 Cardiff p.64

8 Jackson *The Gododdin* p.8

9 Simpson JY *On the Cat Stane, Edinburghshire* 1862 Edinburgh p.28

Skene derived the name Dumfries from that root<sup>1</sup>, but Watson refuted this<sup>2</sup>. The Frisian sea referred to by Jocelin [*Life of Kentigern* (ch.8)] is generally accepted to be the Firth of Forth<sup>3</sup>. That, despite Bede's silence on the fact, Frisians were among the Teutonic invaders of Britain, is probable, and the sixth-century Byzantine historian Procopius has been quoted<sup>4</sup> as writing that in his day the population of Britain, apart from the native Britons, was divided between Angles and Frisians. Despite this it is generally assumed that the Bernician aristocracy were Angles.

Our understanding of the relationship between native Briton and incoming Angle has undergone a complete *volte-face* in this century. In 1913 an historian of the Scottish Church wrote: 'Both [Deira and Bernicia] were thoroughly Teutonized. About this part of Britain at least we may accept the statement which Freeman applies more widely, that "at the end of the sixth century the Celtic inhabitants has been as nearly extirpated as a nation can be"<sup>5</sup>. However by 1977 Hope-Taylor's thesis was that Bernicia was overwhelmingly a Celtic land whose Germanic rulers had been accepted, and perhaps even welcomed. As evidenced by the lack of defences in the royal residence at Yeavinger, the races lived in harmony. The numerical insignificance of the Angles he highlights in a memorable sentence: 'One *au-pair* girl could, after all, have made and broken in a week all the "Anglo-Saxon" pottery that is in evidence in Bernicia before and during the time of Edwin'<sup>6</sup>. By blood-group studies on the present twentieth century population, Potts has claimed that 'in north Northumberland, the nuclear region of Bernicia, the proportion of Anglo-Saxon ancestors must have been [only] around one-tenth.' Employing different criteria, Potts still maintains that 40% of the present population of Northumberland is of Romano-British descent<sup>7</sup>; however his methodology was criticised by a co-author<sup>8</sup>.

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1 CS III:25.

2 Watson WJ *The Celtic place-names of Scotland* 1926 Edinburgh p.422

3 Blair H 'The origins of Northumbria' *Archeologia Aeliana* 425 1947 pp.1-51

4 among others by JNL Myers *The English Settlements* 1986 edition Oxford p.47

5 Macewen AR *A history of the Church in Scotland* 1913 London; p.17

6 Hope-Taylor B *Yeavinger* p.309

7 Potts WTW 'History and blood-groups in the British Isles' *Mediaeval settlement* (Ed. P.H. Sawyer) 1976 London pp.236-253

8 Sunderland E 'Comment on W.T.W. Pott's paper' *op.cit.* pp 254-261

Be that as it may, it is now generally accepted that the population of Bernicia remained very largely British during the period of our study.

This, of course, raises the question of the beginnings of Bernicia's Germanic aristocracy. It is known that in Roman days there were Germanic auxiliaries (*foederati*) among the troops on the wall, many of whom must have settled in the area. Hope-Taylor believes that as well as ground troops there were naval auxiliaries employed to guard the coasts and forewarn of Pictish seaborne attacks. The Saxons were, after all, notable sailors; perhaps 'the Saxon Shore' was so named after its defenders rather than its attacker. On his theory it was the officers of such Roman-employed coastal vessels, based on Tynemouth and Bamborough, who were accepted by the British as their rulers. Hence Bede's surprisingly placid phrase that 'in 547 Ida began to reign, from whom the Northumbrian royal family trace their origin' [*HE* V:24].

The older view was that the Angles arrived as invaders or freebooters and fought their way ashore. Whether they came leap-frogging from Deira or not, Myers remains convinced that 'the beginnings of Bernicia as well as of Deira, Lindsey and Mercia must be sought, in greater or less degree, among the Humbrenses of the Humber basin.' He cites tell-tale place-names 'such as that of Bede's monastery *In Gyrvum* (now Jarrow), derived from the *Gyrwe* of the northern Fenland, or Lindisfarne...which clearly comes from the Lindiswaras, the people of Lindsey'.

Among the previously disregarded statements of early writers, one of many which is now being taken seriously is the account [*HB* cc 29,30] of Octha and Ebissa, son and nephew of Hengest, who were sent to fight against the Scots, and rewarded with lands near the wall called *Guaul*. They took possession of very many districts beyond the *mare Frenessicum* presumably to be interpreted as the Frisian Sea<sup>2</sup>. Hope-Taylor suggests that the dating may be wrong, and that this report could be a garbled reference to the Roman-commissioned naval forces he has postulated<sup>3</sup>.

1 Myers JNL *op. cit.*, p. 175

2 Blair H 'The origins of Northumbria' *op. cit.*

3 Hope-Taylor B *op. cit.*, pp. 202-03

## THE BORDERS OF BERNICIA

The nucleus of the Anglian settlement has been thought to be around the mouth of the Tyne', and sparse evidence in the shape of Anglo-Saxon metalwork has been found along the course of that river. However on the evidence of place-names (ending in -ingham or -ing)<sup>2</sup>, it lay between the Rivers Coquet and Tweed, with the early centre at Bamburgh. Both may be true. Most scholars believe this to have been the territory of the *Votadini*, whose territory stretched down the coastal strip from Forth to Tyne, but did not extend inland to the hill areas of the Tweed basin.

As the name Bernicia is British we must assume that it was taken over from a pre-existing British state, manifestly arising on the break-up of the Roman hegemony. Charles Thomas has suggested that the lost native state of *Bernaccia* may have been in 'Greater Tweed-dale'<sup>3</sup>. This would fit in with Ian Smith's interpretation of that area in Roman times and immediately thereafter. He draws attention to the *loca* recognised by Roman law as tribal meeting place for markets or fairs and supervised by military personnel. He considers *Locus Segloes* to have been such for the *Selgovae*. He makes the valid point that

To maintain the native state would make sense in terms of frontier policy. There is, after all, little point in destroying the fabric of native society and its economic framework, and then expecting that same society to fulfil, effectively, the role of a buffer zone. ....In contrast to many parts of Romanised Britain, where sub-Roman society reverted to a socio-economic model based upon that of the late pre-Roman Iron Age, it is conceivable that, in what became the Borders region, there was no need for such a reversion. Instead there persisted a society which had evolved and profited through its ability to maintain long-distance trade and access to the Roman north, a society with its roots in a well developed landscape and capable of withstanding the extremes of the late fourth century<sup>4</sup>.

Smith has studied the Anglian spread into this area. While it is true that aerial photographs of crop markings at Sprouston on the Tweed demonstrate significant discontinuity in boundaries and field-pattern consistent with

1 Higham N *The northern counties to AD 1000* 1986 London p.259

2 Hope-Taylor B *op.cit.* Map. Some of the problems of using such names for dating have been discussed by JNL Myres *The English Settlements* 1986 Oxford p.37ff

3 Thomas C *The early Christian Archaeology of North Britain* 1971 Oxford p.17

4 Smith I 'Brito-Roman and Anglo-Saxon: the unification of the Border' *The Borders* (Eds) Clack P and J Ivy 1983 Durham: CBA 6p.3 pp.9-48



Anglian settlement, in marginal lands as exemplified by the Manor valley south of Peebles, he is able to demonstrate the Welsh pattern of upland *maenor* with its thirteen townships continuing almost unchanged to this day<sup>1</sup>.

On the other hand Hope-Taylor does not have much time for a Selgovian state. He sees the whole Forth-Tyne area as Gododdin, but split Janus-like into a semi-literate, Christian, northwards-looking half; and a barbarian pagan half looking south; with the Tweed as dividing line. He claims that all the Christian memorial stones (except Chesterholm) are within the northern half, and none in the south. He takes the Tweed as a real barrier<sup>2</sup>. This is in complete contrast to Thomas's view of Tweeddale as an entity. The modern visitor to Tweeddale will probably consider the latter as the more likely.

We may, then, envisage Bernicia as bounded by Tyne and Tweed, and largely coastal, spreading up the Tweed to take over the Selgovian state. The site of the battle of *Degsastan* has been much debated<sup>3</sup>, but Smith has recently convincingly located it as being on the obvious route from Edinburgh to Northumbria at the modern junction of the two shortest routes: the A.68 and A.697 at Addinston (*Ad Aednes stan*). Against most authorities he is prepared to take Fordun's account of the campaign seriously, and therefore finds that the latter's account of the Dalriadan armies laying waste the countryside prior to the battle implies that the land was already in hostile, i.e. Anglian, hands by 603<sup>4</sup>. Bernician northward advance must have been slow, for Edinburgh was not taken until 638, presumably by Oswald<sup>5</sup>. Abercorn, on the Forth itself at the obvious jumping-off point for Fife was founded as a Bernician bishopric shortly before the fatal outcome of Ecgrifith's expedition north of the Tay not only put a stop to Bernician expansion, but marked that time from which 'the hopes and strength of the English kingdom began to ebb and fall away' [*HE* iv. 26].

1 Smith I *op.cit.* p.31. In *ABEKTB* he now thinks the Tweed valley emergent kingdoms comprised *Goddeu* (Tweeddale), *Calchvynd* (Kelso), and *Bernaccia* (the Merse - which he sees as an extension of the Northumbrian plain); and that Anglian settlement initially extended no further west than Dere Street.

2 Hope-Taylor B *op.cit.* p.289.

3 Blair PH 'The Bernicians and their northern frontier' *SIBH* pp.137-142

4 Smith 'Brito-Roman and Anglo-Saxon; the unification of the Border' *The Borders* (Eds) Clack P and J Ivy 1983 Durham; CBA 6p.3 pp.9-48. And at length in *ABEKTB*

5 Jackson KH 'Edinburgh and the Anglian occupation of Lothian' *The Anglo-Saxons* Ed. Cleaves P 1959 London pp.35-42. Unaccountably, Kenneth Jackson credits 'Oswy'. *The Gododdin* p.10

To the south Bernicia eventually marched with Deira, probably on the Tees', although most of County Durham appears to have been sparsely inhabited. The changing relationship of Bernicia and Deira to each other, the possibility that there was a temporary take-over of the latter by the Bernicians in the sixth century, as was to occur in the seventh by Aethelfrith, and again Oswald, and yet again by Oswy, does not affect our study. Similarly the contemporary British state of Elmet is not directly relevant, although its continued existence until the middle of Edwin's reign, despite Anglian settlement in the plain of York for several generations, is significant as an example of co-existence.

The principal area of interest, and of uncertainty, is Bernicia's western neighbour, usually thought of as Rheged. In the west, if we are to believe Jocelin, Kentigern on his recall by King Rydderich around 570 or 580, worked in his Strathclyde kingdom which extended at least as far north as Glasgow, and southwards at least to the river Derwent in Cumbria, but apparently did not include Galloway. Quite possibly these borders were drawn by Jocelin to fit into the ecclesiastical issues of the eleventh century following on the reforms of Prince (later King) David, for it is difficult to fit such a southern extent for Strathclyde in with the kingdom of Rheged. However the constantly changing maps of Central Europe in our own century are evidence that even had there been in the Dark Ages fixed frontiers - which was certainly not the case - these would never be static.

Rheged was presumably at its greatest extent during the reign of its most notable ruler Urien, assassinated at the peak of his power during the siege of Lindisfarne c. 580. The suggestion that the Wigtownshire name Dunragit includes an element of the name Rheged, while doubted by some recent authors<sup>2</sup>, was considered 'beyond doubt' by Watson<sup>3</sup>, certain by Kirby<sup>4</sup>, and is accepted by Jackson<sup>5</sup>. We know that, on the east, Urien was 'ruler of Catraeth': which is now accepted by scholars as being Catterick in North Yorkshire. A generation later it was to be one of Edwin's royal

1 Blair PH 'The boundary between Bernicia and Deira' *Archologia Aeliana* 1949 '27 pp.46-59

2 e.g. MacQueen J *St. Nynia; a study based on literary and linguistic evidence* 1961 Edinburgh pp.55ff

3 Watson WJ *The history of the Celtic place-names of Scotland* 1926 Edinburgh p.156

4 Kirby DP 'Strathclyde and Cumbria; a summary of historical development to 1092' *C&W* 1962 62 pp.77-94

5 Jackson KH 'The Britons in Southern Scotland' *Antiquity* 1955 pp.77-88

palaces. In fact Nick Higham<sup>1</sup> sees *Catraeth* as itself one of the states arising on the collapse of the Roman power, and the original site of Urien's power; a view which has not commanded the support of the majority of scholars. On the contrary, in the view of Sir Ifor Williams<sup>2</sup> and others, the Welsh couplets

Lord of Heaven and earth, Lord of a man of Gwynedd!  
 How far from Kerry is Carlisle  
 I mounted my bay from Meillenydd  
 To the land of Rheged (riding) by night and day<sup>3</sup>

imply that Carlisle was situated in Rheged, despite opinions<sup>4</sup> to the contrary. *Merin Rheged* found in the *Book of Taliesen* was understood by Sir Ifor Williams as the Solway Firth, and Nora Chadwick accepted this identification. She too considers Carlisle as Rheged's main centre<sup>5</sup>.

Catterick and Dunragit may seem very insignificant places on which to hang the eastern and western ends of an unusually large kingdom. To one who has served, in wartime, in the immediate vicinity of each of them, their strategic importance is obvious. Dunragit strategically commands the routes from Northern Ireland both northwards up the coast via Ayr, and eastwards to England via Dumfries.<sup>6</sup> In Loch Ryan nearby is a safe harbour for shipping which could control the northern end of 'the Celtic Mediterranean'. In more desperate need thirteen centuries after Rheged's heyday, the seaplanes covering the Western Approaches were based at Wig Bay within a dozen miles of Dunragit, while presumably it is still at windy Dunragit station that airmen detrain for the still operational RAF station at West Freugh.

Catterick is of great significance commanding as it does the gap between Pennines and Cleveland hills through which, even today, all north-south traffic passes. Its neighbour Richmond blocks one of the few trans-Pennine routes, and it is close to there that the main northern army base, named Catterick, is situated.

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1 Higham N *The northern counties to AD 1000* 1986 London; Longmans, Map p.254,

2 Williams I *op.cit.*,

3 Quoted by MacQueen J *St Nynia* 1961 Edinburgh p.56

4 *ibid.*,

5 Chadwick NK *The British Heroic Age* 1976 Cardiff UP

6 See map p.21

As most of the successor states had their centres on citadel rocks: Strathclyde at *Alcluith* (Dumbarton Rock), Gododdin at *Din Eidyn* (Edinburgh), and Bernicia at *Din Guayroi* (Bamburgh), Catterick seems an odd choice. However if we accept Catterick as including Richmond, as in Sir Ifor Williams' translation of *Catraeth* as Catterick/Richmond<sup>1</sup>, and as it does in the modern army headquarters, the difficulty disappears. If this be true, then when the *Gododdin* force swept round and down Swaledale on *Catraeth* it was not to a mere 'hinge between Deira and Bernicia', as is commonly suggested, but to a great fortress of Rheged. Presumably this had earlier been captured by the Angles: for were the British task-force coming to relieve a place under attack, their twelve-month preliminary feast would hardly have made tactical sense.

In addition to the eastern and western places discussed, extension of Rheged northwards into Ayrshire and southwards to Lancashire has also been postulated. As Rheged has importance for our current study, it deserves a little further thought. Kirby<sup>2</sup> considers that it probably disintegrated under the onslaughts of Aethelfrith, whose victory at Degastan gave him a free hand to exercise the ruthlessness reported by Bede: [*HE* 1.34] However this ending of Rheged seems to me unlikely, principally in view of the diplomatic implications of Oswy's marriage to Rieinmelt, granddaughter of Urien, and presumably princess of Rheged [*HB* 57].

Despite Bede's silence about this marriage, later history makes such a marriage inevitable. Oswy was about thirty [*HE* iii.14] when he ascended the throne on the death of Oswald in 642. He had a son Alchfrith whose legitimacy, unlike that of his half-brother Aldfrith, has never been questioned, and who shared Oswy's rule with the title of King [*HE* iii.28] Alchfrith was old enough to fight alongside his father against Penda in 655 [*HE* iii.24], and therefore can hardly have been the son of Eanflæd, whom Oswy married only in 643. It seems to have escaped notice that Alchfrith had fought against his father in an earlier attack by Penda [*HE* iii.14]. That such a treason was forgiven and did not stand in the way of his advancement surely implies that at the time he had been an unwitting tool

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<sup>1</sup> Williams I *op.cit.*

<sup>2</sup> Kirby O *op.cit.*

a mere boy. Surely chronology demands this<sup>1</sup>.

It is inconceivable that Rheged would give one of its princesses in marriage to the youngest son of a group of fugitives, however royal, whose chance of regaining power from Edwin must have seemed remote. The idea would not have had any advantage for the rulers in Rheged, it would have been, in any case, impracticable. Edwin was all powerful, his writ ran from sea to sea<sup>2</sup> while Edwin and the British Church in Rheged had spiritual connections as we shall see. We may therefore rule out any chance of a princess of Rheged marrying Oswy during the latter's exile. That episode closed, however, the dynastic advantages of a marriage to the brother of all-powerful Oswald were obvious. Therefore we can presume it took place not earlier than 634, with the birth of Alchfrith not before 635. He would therefore have been no older than seven when his father ascended the throne. The other side of the coin, of course, is that for the Bernician royal house, once re-established on the throne following the victory at Heavenfield, there would have been no benefit in an alliance with Rheged were it no longer an important state. Jackson, referring to the name *Rægnmæld*, which occurs in the Durham *Liber Vitæ* among the 'names of the Queens and abbesses' of Northumbria states: 'there can scarcely be any doubt that in *Rægnmæld* we have an attempt to spell the name *Rieinmelt*'<sup>3</sup>.

While some authorities have considered Alchfled, who was later to marry Pœada of Mercia, to be, along with Aldfrith, illegitimate, surely her name makes it much more likely that she was a sib of Alchfrith and thus also a child of *Rieinmelt*? Of their mother there is no further word, but manifestly Oswy was free to marry Eanflæd in 643, and we hear nothing of the furore with Rheged which would inevitably have occurred had their princess been discarded for a more important marriage. We may assume she had died, for at this period life expectancy was less for women than men<sup>4</sup>.

1 I am here in disagreement with Bertram Colgrave's view [footnote on p.279 of his translation of *HE*]. He maintains there that after 664 [Alchfrith] is heard of no more, *either as the result of his rebellion against his father (iii,14) or because of his death.* (My italics.) That rebellion had occurred early in Oswy's reign, long before *Winwæd* where Alchfrith fought victoriously alongside his father. After having done that, earlier sins surely could not have merited his liquidation.

2 His expedition to the Isle of Man (*HE*ii,5) implies access to the Irish Sea, probably through Rheged.

3 Jackson KH 'On the Northern British section in Nennius' *Celt and Saxon* (Ed) Chadwick NK 1963 Cambridge pp.20-62

4 Although as an obstetrician I do not accept the argument that this was chiefly associated with childbirth.

The siting of the Bewcastle cross has seemed surprising to most scholars. I have wondered if its significance is in these relationships. It is generally agreed, by those who claim to have been able to read the runes, that the names of Alchfrith (probably) and more certainly of Cyniburg his queen, appear on it'. Alchfrith, on my reasoning, was the son of a princess of Rheged. It might, therefore, have seemed appropriate, even politic, to place his memorial in that part of Northumbria which had been the nearest part of Rheged in its independent days; an independence which may have come peacefully to an end as a result of this marriage. W.G. Collingwood believed the Bewcastle cross to date from the end of the eighth century. He suggested that it might have been erected by King Ethelred of Northumbria, who on Michaelmas Day 792, married a daughter of King Offa of Mercia, the second Mercian bride of a Northumbrian king; in memory of the earlier Mercian bride Cyniburg and of her husband Alchfrid<sup>2</sup>. In the Count de Montalembert's phrase : 'Alchfrid.. had married the king of Mercia's daughter, in whom he found not only a Christian, but a saint<sup>3</sup>.' Although W.G. Collingwood's view runs counter to modern scholarship's date for the Bewcastle cross of around 750, or even the last quarter of the seventh century<sup>4</sup>, that does not affect my suggestion as to reason for its locality<sup>5</sup>.

1 Hodgkin RH *History of the Anglo-Saxons* 1952<sup>o</sup> Oxford I:363; these readings have been debunked by JK Hewison *The Romance of Bewcastle Cross: the mystery of Alchfrith and the myth of Maughan* 1923 Glasgow. Smith's monograph is devoted to uncovering the rivalries of local antiquarians.

2 Collingwood WG *Northumbrian crosses of the pre-Norman age* 1927 London p.114ff

3 Montalembert *Monks of the West* Edinburgh 1867 4:113

4 Rosemary Cramp writes; 'Certainly the monument can reasonably be assigned to a period after the importation of stone carvers to Monkwearmouth in 674 and the construction of stone churches in east Northumberland in the period c.670-5, indeed one might feel that the nearer the production of the monument to that time, the better the context for such humane and classical figures.' *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*, Bailey RN, R Cramp *Cumberland Westmoreland and Lancashire north of the sands* 1988 Oxford p 20

5 It would be a mistake to assume that such crosses were merely memorials, they had much more important functions as preaching sites and teaching aids. Moreover the great interest they hold for art historians e.g. RT Farrell 'Reflections on the Iconography of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses' [*Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture* (Ed, Szarmach PE) 1986 Kalamazoo pp.357-376] must not close our eyes to the fact they were in some way instruments of divine power. This was surprisingly demonstrated in the early nineteenth century. Duncan MacDougall was then working in the kelping industry near the fine carved cross on the island of Oronsay. 'When passing the cross one day he remarked to his companion, looking at the figure carved on it, which represented the Crucifixion; "I suppose that will be Donald Balloch", meaning thereby a man of ill-repute in local tradition. His conscience at once rebuked him, as he knew quite well who was represented in the carving, and repenting of his past life he became a changed man and was baptized into the Church' (He went on to be one of the most notable ministers in the Inner Hebrides), Meek DE *Island Harvest; a history of the Tiree Baptist Church 1838-1988* 1988 Tiree p.5

Be that as it may, we appear to be safe to assume that Rheged was incorporated into Bernicia, probably by Oswy, thus providing the corridor to Galloway and the eventual establishment of an Anglian bishopric at Whithorn. By the end of the seventh century at the latest, Galloway too was Bernician; while by mid-seventh century at the latest the Cunningham district of Ayrshire was also Bernician [*HE* v. 12] but whether acquired as being part of Rheged, or by arms from Strathclyde, is not known. We do know that it became part of Strathclyde later, possibly as part of that throwing off of Northumbrian rule which followed on Egfrith's defeat and death at Nectansmere. However with these later extensions we are not concerned.

For our present purposes Greater Bernicia will be considered as extending over twentieth-century Durham, Northumberland, northern Cumberland, Westmoreland and the modern Borders Region of Scotland, Dumfries and Galloway, and spilling into Lothian. However, to quote Julian Bennett, 'like any writer concerned with the nebulous subject of post-Roman, pre-Medieval Britain, I shall cheat where necessary and go outside the parameters I have just defined'.

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1 Bennett J 'The end of Roman settlement in Northern England' *BAR(B)* 118 1983 pp. 205-231

## THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN BERNICIA: FORERUNNERS AND FOUNDATION

## PART TWO

## THE FORERUNNERS

## INTRODUCTION

In his study of the poem *The Gododdin* Kenneth Jackson wrote: 'It is noted that the English army at Catterick is contemptuously spoken of as "heathen". Whether simply as an aspect of the general Romanisation which affected them in their situation on the very borders of the Empire, or whether more specifically as the result of the activities of St Ninian of Whithorn in the early part of the fifth century, there is evidence that the Britons of southern Scotland were Christians by the sixth century'. Similarly on very different grounds Alfred Smyth claimed: 'the archaeological evidence, however scrappy, points to a relatively unified Christian culture among the northern Britons going back to the sixth century in the north-east on the Forth, and to the fifth century in Galloway'<sup>2</sup>.

During the seventh century Bernician power was, for a time, paramount throughout southern Scotland. The actual nature of this power, and whether this reached its peak during the reign of Oswald or of Oswy, is not important for the present study; suffice it that the northern expansion from *Degsastan* onwards was into territory already Christian. What evidence is there of the origins of the Church there? In seeking answers the archaeological evidence will first be reviewed. The search for historical evidence yields about a dozen names of Christians on tombstones - unidimensional in that they are purely names. Of St Servanus and St Monenna, of the father and grandfather of Patrick, and of a few kings of Strathclyde we know, or can deduce, very little more than their names: they

1 Jackson KH *The Gododdin; Scotland's oldest poem* 1969 Edinburgh p.37

2 Smyth A *Warlords and Holy Men* 1984 Edinburgh p.34



are merely shadows. Our search is therefore inescapably shut in to the two Christian missionaries: Ninian and Kentigern who (with Kentigern's mother Thaney) are the only three-dimensional people, very shadowy it is true, who appear in the records; records which are far from satisfactory. Of some much later documents David Dumville wrote: 'they fail the historian's first basic test. They are non-contemporary sources whose information has no identified pedigree(s). *As such they are not available for use by students [of ninth-century Northumbria]*'. If we were to accept Dumville's words which I have italicised, then we must draw a curtain firmly down on all Northumbrian history prior to the reign of Æthelfrith, in fact prior to AD 603 [HE 1:34]. Fortunately historians are not so bound, otherwise, for example, African history and that of all pre-literate societies prior to their contact with record-keeping civilizations, would be impossible. That said, we have to pick our way among the routine legends with which twelfth-century hagiographers embellished their accounts, heartened in our task as the evidence reveals that they include material written at least four centuries earlier.

Of supreme value, whether or not Patrick is believed to come from our area, is his *Confession* in which we have first-hand evidence of the reality of the Christian faith in the life of a whole-hearted believer during the fifth century. By noting its close resemblance to that in every century we find warrant to extrapolate from later and current experience. Turning from the inner life of the Christian to the life of the British Church we find, in Gildas, a less attractive state of affairs which unhappily we recognise only too well, as it likewise has been mirrored in later centuries.

This part will conclude with an overview of the Church in Britain at the coming of the Roman mission of Augustine to Kent.

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1 Dumville D 'Textual archaeology and Northumbrian history subsequent to Bede' *Coinage in Ninth-Century Northumbria*, *BAR(B)* 180 1987 pp.43-55.

## SOURCES

This chapter looks at the sources available for our study, in general terms. Although examples will be given here, the detailed discussion of material will be postponed until the relevant chapters.

The importance of involving every possible source is apparent when one realises that the first clear *written* mention [HE II:14] of the Church (and then unorganised) in the Bernician heartland refers to an event (the baptisms at Yeavinger) occurring a mere dozen or so years prior to the conclusion of this study. On the other hand we shall note that archaeology gives us evidence of Christian burial, only a few miles away at Coldstream, perhaps three centuries earlier.

ARCHAEOLOGY provides information of crucial importance, anchoring the church to the landscape, drawing one back repeatedly to sites from Kirkmadrine to Jarrow, and hopefully providing firm evidence. However, the problematic value of its evidence is demonstrated by Charles Thomas. He wrote: 'I stress that it would now be possible to build, slowly, a reliable framework for the Christian events of those [fifth to eighth] centuries, using no more than archaeological, artistic, and architectural data'. Yet he later wrote of setting his archaeological students an essay in which they were imagine themselves visitors from the planet Sirius, examining intact but uninhabited places of worship in Birmingham or York. '"Ascertain from the visual and architectural clues alone, the nature of the dominant religion"...the correct answer is: Sun worship'<sup>2</sup>.

This highlights that the problem is of interpretation. The huddle of children's skeletons at one side of the current (July 1991) stage of the Whithorn dig is interpreted by some of the archaeologists working there as displaying a special care for children, and by others as their having been pushed into a corner<sup>3</sup>. Similarly Hope-Taylor's interpretation of some of the structures he identified at excavation at Yeavinger<sup>4</sup> are called in question by Alcock<sup>5</sup>. In both these cases, as in many others which could be

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1 ECANB p.1

2 CIRB p.17

3 A noteworthy example is Tintagel. The excavator, having earlier published this as the ruins of a monastery, later rescinded this identification.

4 Hope-Taylor B *Yeavinger: an Anglo-British centre of early Northumbria*

5 Alcock L *Bede, Eddius, and the forts of the North Britons* 1988 Jarrow lecture.

cited, there is no argument as to the actual archaeological findings.

With each of our sources its value is immeasurably increased when used along with other disciplines. The obvious example is archaeology and documentary sources, however here it is worth demonstrating its use to validate poorly-supported tradition. In the absence of proof some iconoclasts are swift to sweep away tradition. Archaeological discoveries may cause us to have second thoughts. The then Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford illustrated this from abundant studies of private houses handed over for churches: 'Trier furnishes two examples. First St Martin's: Sulpicius Severus describes the conversion of a *proconsularis* Tetradius by Martin at Trier in 385. Later on, we hear that Tetradius founded a church. Later on, I say: to tell the truth the earliest extant source for this dates from 1514. Later still, in a book citing some vague annals, we hear that this church was constructed *ex consulari domo*, a very fishy story, understandably swept aside by the confident scientific criticism of the nineteenth century. But in 1943 the site of St Martin's was bombed; it has been excavated, and behold, evidence of a large Roman dwelling-house converted into a church (the excavators say late fourth century) with sarcophagi placed there from about 400. St Martin's was not the cathedral.... Then we have another romance harshly treated by near-modern scholarship. Helen - and who more likely to engender romances about churches? - gave her palace as a site for a cathedral. What is the earliest evidence? A ninth-century *Vita Helenæ* commissioned by Hincmar of Rheims. Away with it! Yet excavation has now uncovered a magnificent palace under the cathedral in which Dr Kempf unhesitatingly sees substantial verification of the mediaeval story'<sup>1</sup>.

In Northumbria the technique of dowsing in church archaeology has provided, in numerous cases, confirmation that the older churches recorded by tradition, in fact underlay later buildings<sup>2</sup>.

It is usually forgotten, however, that in Christian history, anywhere, archaeology only comes in at the third phase, its earliest findings

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<sup>1</sup> Greenslade 6S 'Reflections on Early Christian Topography' *SCH* 1966 3 pp.1-22 [quoting Kempf TK 'Die altchristliche Bischofssadt Trier' in *Rheinischer Verein für Denkmalpflege* 1952 pp.47-64 (to which I do not have linguistic access)].

<sup>2</sup> RN Bailey, E Cambridge, HD Briggs *Dowsing and Church Archaeology* 1988; Wimborne

normally being Christian burials. This requires that already non-Christians have been converted, and then a community of believers established. The first two phases in a Christian community involve meeting in the open air (except where evangelism is solely on a one-to-one basis), and then gatherings of converts in unmodified private dwellings. These leave no specific trace to be found by future excavators. This can be readily demonstrated by two examples in Dumfriesshire.

At Canonbie, following the 1853 disruption, the new Free Kirk congregation was refused ground to erect a church building. Even a tent was barred as that would involve digging a post-hole. The congregation therefore worshipped on the grass verge of a road, summer and winter, in the open air. Their minister died as a result of exposure. This notable proof of dedication is well recorded<sup>1</sup>, local tradition points to the spot, however no archaeological proof can ever be forthcoming. Some fourteen miles west lies Hoddam<sup>2</sup> where, according to Jocelin, Kentigern on his return from exile in Wales met King Rydderich [J.32], and addressed a multitude of people from a hill that arose to provide a pulpit. At NY 168733 there is a natural auditorium marked out on the south by a bend of the River Annan, and a raised bank on the east. Towards the SE end there is a small hillock, perhaps six feet above the otherwise large flat field. Tradition marks this as the place, and the hillock itself is crowned with the ruins of 'St Kentigern's chapel' and a small graveyard. Archaeology can confirm details of these later edifices, it can never confirm the preaching. But Kentigern, and any peripatic preacher at the pioneering stage of a missionary enterprise, must have preached somewhere. That is the initial phase, unavoidable, but beyond the reach of archaeology.

These limitations have been stressed because the valid statement 'there is no archaeological proof' is too frequently read as a point against tradition, whereas where archaeological proof is by definition impossible, its absence does not tilt the balance of probability one way or the other. At Burnsall, Upper Warfedale, the church of St Wilfrid claims to have been founded by him before 700, while tradition names a scar<sup>3</sup> across

1 Brown T *Annals of the Disruption* Edinburgh 1893 pp.431-36, 447

2 Radford CAR 'Hoddam' *D&G* 1954 31 pp 174ff

3 SE 032618 'Wilfrid Scar' so named on OS 1:25000 map

the river as that on which Wilfrid preached. The absence of any stonework (other than the font) in the church earlier than twelfth century can have no bearing on this tradition; which is, of course, unproven.

EPIGRAPHY, which can also be thought of as a written record, is of prime importance, provided agreement can be reached as to the inscription, which is often much weathered: a problem exemplified by the Bewcastle Cross, which we shall note is further complicated by antiquarian vandalism. Although in our region there are copious examples, most of these refer to non-Christian Roman monuments. The few Christian ones, principally in the Whithorn area, will be discussed in due course.

PLACE-NAME studies prove valuable. There are specific ones linked with the name of the church: e.g. Kirkoswald (Cumbria, and Ayrshire), considered under 'Church dedications' below. The large group implying an early settlement by saints, in Kil- or Cill- e.g. Kilmarnock (Ayr), are almost all in the Celtic west outside our area, as are those Cambrian ones in Llan-'. The much rarer names implying the site of a hermit's 'desert': e.g. Dysart (Fife) do not appear to be recorded in Greater Bernicia.

There are, however, two geographically widespread forms which have church connections.

*ECCLES*<sup>2</sup> is taken to imply that the incomers noted the place to have a British church, although whether that is to be taken in its basic meaning of a congregation, or its subsidiary meaning of an edifice set aside for worship, is uncertain. Barrow<sup>3</sup> has emphasised the great value in Scotland of this 'small but widely distributed class of Christian place-names associated with the regions of P-Celtic Brittonic speech and of Pictish speech.' He considers that such names must have become embedded in place-name vocabulary only *after* conversion to Christianity but *before* P-Celtic or Brittonic usages had given way to those of Q-Celtic and Germanic speakers in the west and south-east respectively - which in the area of our interest he limits to c. 400 through to c. 650<sup>4</sup>. In Greater Bernicia

1 Wendy Davies notes that some of these latter may refer to a secular settlement, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* 1982; Leicester p. 145

2 Cameron K 'Eccles in English Place-Names' *CIB* pp. 87-92,

3 Barrow GWS 'The childhood of Scottish Christianity: a note on some place-name evidence' *Scot. studies* 21 1983 pp. 1-15

4 *op. cit.*, Barrow's italics

Barrow notes that it occurs on the Northumbrian border (Eccles Cairn), the town of Eccles (Berwickshire), in Dumfriesshire as Eccles (Penpont parish) and Ecclefechan (Hoddon parish), in Kirkcudbright (Terregles), and in East Lothian as Eaglescairnie.

ANNAT, with the connotation of 'old church', 'the original foundation', in Macdonald's view implied a church of any kind which was abandoned and subsequently replaced on another site'. He considers it to be a ninth- to tenth-century term. He has not found it in south-east Scotland, but he adds a site in Dumfriesshire to Watson's listed two in Kirkcudbrightshire and one in Wigtownshire. These are not germane to our current interest.

#### CHURCH DEDICATIONS.

Originally there was only one church in a community, the Christians gathering round to listen to the reading of scripture, of letters of encouragement or news. There would be instruction, corporate and open prayer, the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in prophecy and exhortation, and often a celebration of the eucharist. Thus it was in the first century; a gathering of the believers all of whom were 'called to be saints' [Rom. 1:7, 1 Cor. 1:2], and who were addressed as such [Eph. 1:2]. It didn't need a name<sup>2</sup>. As more than one such group developed in a town they would be identified by the name of the members in whose house they met; later, as specific buildings were erected, by the name of the person who made this possible<sup>3</sup>. These have been called '*Proprietary Dedications*'<sup>4</sup>. In the words of Robert Markus: 'But it was the community that was holy, not the church that housed it. The building had a sacredness only derivatively...For centuries the church building received no consecration other than by use...True worship had no relation to any particular place.'

1 Macdonald A 'Annat' in Scotland; a provisional review' *Scot. studies* 1973 17 pp.135-46, Watson WJ *The history of the Celtic place-names in Scotland* 1926 Edinburgh pp.170, 250-51, Thomas *ECANB* pp.89,137,224.

2 This is the normal pattern in any small Christian community in its earliest stages. In the 1940s I attended several such in West China, Burma, and Himalayan hill-stations. In Britain in the late-twentieth century they have recurred in house-churches and some house-groups which are usually identified only by a geographical name, or by that of the houseowners.

3 Owen Chadwick ('The evidence of dedications in the early history of the Welsh Church' *SEBH* pp.173-8) instances Carthage where in the early fifth century three churches were thus identified as 'the church of Fustus', 'the church of Florentius', 'the church of Leonitus'.

4 For these italicised names I follow Francis Bond *Dedications of English Churches; ecclesiastical symbolism, saints and emblems* 1914 Oxford p.9, although Stubbs is said to have used some of them earlier.

Until the fourth century Christians inhabited a spatial universe spiritually largely undifferentiated'<sup>1</sup>

However where a church met at the site of the martyrdom of one of its members it would be known by the saint's name (a *Memorial church*); but Augustine denounced the notion that the church called after the martyr 'belongs' to the martyr. A church was blessed by the presence of the relics, but it was still the church of God<sup>2</sup>.

It was the upsurge of the cult of relics<sup>3</sup> in the fourth century which introduced the concept of the relics of a saint as linking that church with the saint in heaven, who acted as its patron, and took a specific interest in, and care for, its needs. Such dedications, which have been categorised as *Intercessory Dedications*, formed the normal pattern in pre-reformation England, and scholars have come to accept it as normative. However, if we follow Hillgarth, the attraction of saints resulted from the catholic overreaction to Arianism, which resulted in the person of Christ being presented as so exalted, so distant, so mighty and wrathful against sin, as to be unapproachable. Believers resorted to saints as intermediaries to intercede on their behalf<sup>4</sup>, having been robbed by this aberrant Christology of the true closeness and accessibility of Christ.

The British and Irish churches never had to fight Arianism to any extent<sup>5</sup>, never required heavenly intermediaries<sup>6</sup>, and therefore never got deviated into relics<sup>7</sup> and intercessory dedications<sup>8</sup> until the Roman victory

1 Markus R *The end of Ancient Christianity* 1990 Cambridge pp.140-41

2 Chadwick O 'The evidence of dedications in the early history of the Welsh Church' *SEBH* pp.173-8

3 Brown *The cult of saints* 1981 London *passim*

4 Summarised from Hillgarth JN *Christianity and Paganism; 350-750, The conversion of Western Europe* 1986 Philadelphia p.86

5 Although Gildas does mention it [*DEB* 12:31]

6 Wendy Davies (*Wales in the Early Middle Ages* 1982 Leicester) wrote 'Although it is rare that the role of the saint as mediator is explicitly noted in early Welsh material, the poet of *Armes Prydein* is very clear about it' [p.173] - however her own date for that document is c.930 [p.211] Her later examples; 'The intercession of David would lead the Welsh and their allies to victory over the invading Saxon; that of Padarn might lead people to heaven' [p.184] appear to be from late eleventh- and early twelfth-century hagiographies [p.208].

7 Except briefly at the end of the fourth century with the visit of Bishop Victricius of Rouen (who carried relics on his person), and in the early fifth century during the visits of Germanus of Auxerre, who sought relics of St Alban.

8 Owen Chadwick 'The evidence of dedications in the early history of the Welsh Church' *SEBH* pp.173-8 wrote; 'There are a few signs that the cult of relics may have made slow progress among the Celts; and if this is true, it would have retarded the development of dedications.

at Whitby. It was not an issue in our period. Significantly, although in 667 Pope Vitalian sent King Oswy a gift of relics [HE iii:29], four decades earlier, at the establishment of the Church in Northumbria, Pope Boniface's gifts sent with his letters to King Edwin and Queen Æthelburh [HE ii.10.11], did not include relics. In the period and area of this study, therefore, with the exception of the churches founded by Paulinus, churches can be classified as 'proprietary.'

They were not dedicated. Anderson was perhaps too dogmatic when he wrote: 'It was the peculiarity of the Celtic system, that the saints whose memory was held in veneration were in every instance the planters of the churches in which they were commemorated, or the founders of the monasteries from which the planters of these churches proceeded. Hence these early dedications are altogether different in their character from the later ones that superseded them. They have a historical as well as a religious significance, and on this account they fall within the province of the archæologist and the historian'<sup>1</sup> Despite Owen Chadwick's views<sup>2</sup> Bowen's viewpoint is more satisfactory when he claimed to be 'not concerned with the fact that a particular dedication to St. David, or any other Celtic Saint, was established by a visit of the Saint in question (or one of his immediate followers) to the site that now bears his name, but with the fact that the distribution of dedications to a particular Saint marks his or her "patria", a specific territory in which a revival of the Saint's cult might have taken place many times and over many centuries'<sup>3</sup>. This is frequently misunderstood as merely echoing Anderson's view cited above. There is a further point which appears to have missed comment. While some dedications to well-known saints may be ascribed to empire-building on part of the monastic family which they founded, the many solitary dedications of otherwise unknown or insignificant saints<sup>4</sup> cannot be so easily explained away. In this area where certainty is impossible, the likelihood must be that such names mark churches raised up by the witness of that Christian -

1 Quoted by MJ Murray *Ancient Church Dedications in Scotland; non-scriptural dedications* 1914 Edinburgh

2 Chadwick O *op.cit.* is of limited value. It draws largely on continental practice, although granting that it is doubtful whether the Welsh followed European practice. It is frequently cited as though it covers all Celtic dedications.

3 Bowen EG *Saints, seaways and settlements in the Celtic lands* 1969 Cardiff

4 Watson WJ *The Celtic place-names of Scotland* indexes around 350 saints' names, while Murray *op.cit.* devoted 200 pages to his account of Irish and Pictish saints commemorated in church dedications.



be (s)he hermit or evangelist<sup>1</sup>.

If we accept that, there is some interesting information to be garnered very relevant to some Anglian saints normally thought of as youths trained by Aidan after his arrival in Bernicia: the brothers Cedd and Chad. In Breadalbane Saint Cedd and St Chad are remembered, with the implication that they too were among the exiles in Scotland, and that while Oswald was fighting in Ireland they commenced their missionary enterprises in Perthshire (possibly already in association with St Aidan? He also has dedications in that area), years before the founding of Lindisfarne and their later work in East Anglia, Mercia, and Lastingham<sup>2</sup>.

Dedications to St Oswald will be considered in detail elsewhere. Here they are noted as illustrating widely different origins. The dedications around the Severn and in Cheshire can reasonably be considered as a spread from his abbey at Gloucester and his church at Chester founded by the Lady of the Mercians; those in Lincolnshire (and probably Nottinghamshire - many of which have been later rededicated to other saints) as a spread from Bardney where his niece deposited many of his bones. However, the majority of his north country dedications can most reasonably be explained as marking the sites of some of the many church which Bede tells us were founded in his reign by Aidan. Kings travelled constantly, and many of Aidan's journeys must have been in the royal entourage. A number of these dedications are strung along the few trans-Pennine routes, at the few fertile areas which have always attracted settlements. If churches were established these are among the places which inescapably would have been chosen. In the absence of any Iona tradition of dedicating churches to saints, the likelihood is that such congregations would be known by the name of their founder. Nearer than that historical certainty will not allow us to go.

1 Wendy Davies [*Wales in the Early Middle Ages* 1982 Leicester p.176] makes the same point: 'Where we find the church or community of St N, at a very early date, with no evidence of the recognition of that saint at any other place or in any other context, then the implication is that St N was the founder; hence St Buddwalan at Ballingham c.620, St Cynwal at Rhosili c.650,....'

2 *ACDS* pp.259-61 St Cedd had a field *Dal-no-cheode*, a monumental stone *Leac-no-cheode*, and a fair *Faill-no-cheode* in Fortingall, St Chad had a church-place *Laggan-math-Chaid* at Logierait, with a well *Fuarán-Chad* behind; and his place of residence and glebe *Croit-Chad* at Grantully. (At first sight the presence of Cuthbert dedications in the area appears to suggest all were dedicated, under Northumbrian influence, later. However Cuthbert dedications are so widespread in Scotland [*ACDS* pp.243-58] that their presence here is not of significance to the argument.)

I maintain that the dedications to St Kentigern (or St Mungo) in northern England are even more suggestive of dedications evidencing their founder's activities', although this view counters the popular view that that these Cumbrian churches have been dedicated only in the twelfth century to the patron saint of the revived diocese of Glasgow<sup>2</sup>. A visit to these churches leads to two unexpected observations:

1 The churches are not scattered haphazard among the churches of Cumbria, but are about a dozen miles apart, and on a route which can be fitted in to Jocelin's report of Kentigern evangelising<sup>3</sup>, before setting sail for Wales.

2 Almost all have a well (usually known by the name of the saint) in their immediate vicinity<sup>4</sup>, the constant tradition being that Kentigern baptized there<sup>5</sup>. This does not appear to be true of other dedications to a similar extent<sup>6</sup>. Wells often had pagan ritual uses, but living water is a potent Christian symbol; its use by the evangelist in the rite of admission to the Church, would ensure its being renamed. However there is an implication here that has been missed. In the life of an established church (community of believers) baptism - like the eucharist - is a regular rite and does not need particular mention. But in pioneer evangelism among a pagan peoples baptism is the central rite not only of initiation but a witness

1 This was the view advanced by Edmund Venables 'The dedications of the parochial churches and chapels of the modern diocese of Carlisle' *C&W* 1884 [ pp.118-49, THB Graham and WG Collingwood are a bit more cautious 'Patron saints of the diocese of Carlisle' *C&W* 1925 27<sup>th</sup> pp.1-27, but take the evidence as suggesting 'that there was a real tradition in the tenth century of the mission of St. Kentigern in the sixth... Then in the twelfth century this tradition was re-found or revived.' They add ' It seems reasonable to suggest that the name of the founding missionary would become attached to each place'

2 Typical is the comment; 'But the dedications may tell us more about the efforts of the bishops of Glasgow to claim northern Cumbria as part of their diocese than about the saint's movements,' Burgess J *et al.*, *Christians in Cumbria* 1982 Carlisle Diocese p.3

3 This argument I deploy in detail in 'St Thaney's conception of Kentigern; a gynaecological view' *forthcoming*

4 Major H *Memorials of Copgrove* 1922 Oxford p.81 says seven out of nine have them, I have been unable to visit Grinsdale, and did not see the well at Crosthwaite, but the others I have personally confirmed, Major, however, omitted Dearhan and Kircambreck from his list; each of which has a riven running below the church, which would have been eminently suitable for baptisms.

5 Major (*op.cit.* pp.73-82) quotes *the Times* report (10.12.17) of a baptism in Brighton '...The water for the baptism was taken from St Mungo's Holy Well at Calder, from the family seat in Mid-Lothian.' He envisaged not only 'the first-fruits of Christ in our parish, possibly as far back as the seventh century, coming to St Mungo's well for Christian baptism' but that it was probably the ancient practice that water for baptisms at Copgrove Church was always drawn from St Mungo's well; as still the practice at Caldbeck.

6 It is not true of the forty or so Oswald churches I have visited which have yielded only two wells.

to their still-pagan neighbours that this person has become a Christian. It has a high profile. It is, moreover, the beginning of the church - which starts with converts, not with a building. A site with a baptismal well suggests, therefore, an initial church-plant. Where a string of them are associated with the name of the same pioneer evangelist the likelihood that it was he who first preached the gospel and made converts must be very strong.

It is in any case clear that on many of these sites there were churches before the twelfth century. Simonburn has hogbacks, Aspatria and Bromfield have tenth century monuments, and may even then have already been dedicated, as it is known that tenth-century Christian Norse dedicated their churches<sup>2</sup>.

Butler has discussed the many complex practices associated with church dedications which still require work<sup>3</sup>. For our present task I assume that Celtic Christians did not dedicate churches to saints, but that a church was known by the name of the evangelist who first founded it<sup>4</sup>, or the hermit who first found there his *desert*<sup>5</sup>.

#### LITERARY SOURCES.

*Annals*: widely accepted as arising from entries made in the ecclesiastical calendars necessary for the observation of the Church's year - 'Easter annals', and King Lists will give us some information. The 'tracts for the Times' by Salvian and Gildas (whose *De Excidio Britanniae* will be reexamined and a new theory as to its plan propounded) supply information, with Patrick's *Confessio* proving of the utmost importance. Other contemporary literature will be referred to. However the prime importance of the seventh century historians and biographers; and the twelfth century hagiographers is so great that it requires separate consideration.

1 This argument would not apply were these regular 'holy wells' resorted to for cures - as was Copgrove in Yorkshire; but none of those Cumbrian ones listed appear to have that reputation.

2 Lawrence Butler suggests that we eliminate from the lists of ancient churches only those 'which historical sources indicate as obviously post-conquest. It is possible to regard the remaining 8000 or more surviving churches as being of Anglo-Saxon foundation and dedication until the contrary be proved.' ('Church dedications and the cults of saints' *The Anglo-Saxon Church* Eds Butler LAS and RK Morris 1986 pp 44-50)

3 Butler *l. op. cit.*, p 2.

4 We have records from the earliest days of the Church of the bonds of affection between Paul as founding missionary and his churches [Acts 20; 17-38], and the tendency (which he castigates) of the converts to associate themselves with one or other of the apostles [1 Cor. 1; 12-13]

5 A similar approach is used by DDC Pochin Mould in her *Scotland of the Saints* 1952 London

## THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

That the Church was present in the Bernician heartland from early Roman times has been demonstrated by Rosemary Cramp's discovery, during her excavations at Coldstream. In an area on the south of the church where fragments of Samian pottery were also found<sup>1</sup>, there were skeletons associated with white quartz pebbles<sup>2</sup>. These are a widely recognised token of Christian burial, their meaning is discussed in an *excursus* below.

Evidence for the continuation of the church in the Bernician heartland after the Roman withdrawal is tenuous: a silver (? christening) spoon has been found in Sunderland<sup>3</sup>, and it has been wondered if the destruction of the Mithraeum at Carrawburgh was the work of Christians<sup>4</sup>. There is at Chesterholm, however, a tombstone of which Eric Birley wrote: 'The inscription is very late, and Christian (to judge by the formula), and it therefore provides some indication of occupation of the site in the period immediately following the severance of Britain from Rome'<sup>5</sup>. Otherwise, almost nothing<sup>6</sup>.

The paucity of evidence encourages us to look at Greater Bernicia which is much more plentifully supplied with evidence. A series of inscribed stones have been found in Wigtownshire<sup>7</sup>. On epigraphic evidence, and in particular on the form of the Chi-rho (the first two letters of the name of Christ, written in the Greek form ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ), the series 'ranges from 5th to the 7th century. The oldest is the first stone at Whithorn, which would date about 450; the two memorials from Kirkmadrine would follow in the course of the 6th century, with the third stone from that site belonging to the period about 600'<sup>8</sup>. Two of the Kirkmadrine stones allude to

1 Cramp R *Excavations at the Hirsell, Coldstream, Borders* Fifth season, 1984, 1985 Durham

2 *ibid*, Fourth season, 1982, 1983 Durham.

3 Wall J 'Christian evidences in the Roman period; the Northern Counties' Part II, *Archeologia Aelina* 1966 44 pp, 149-64

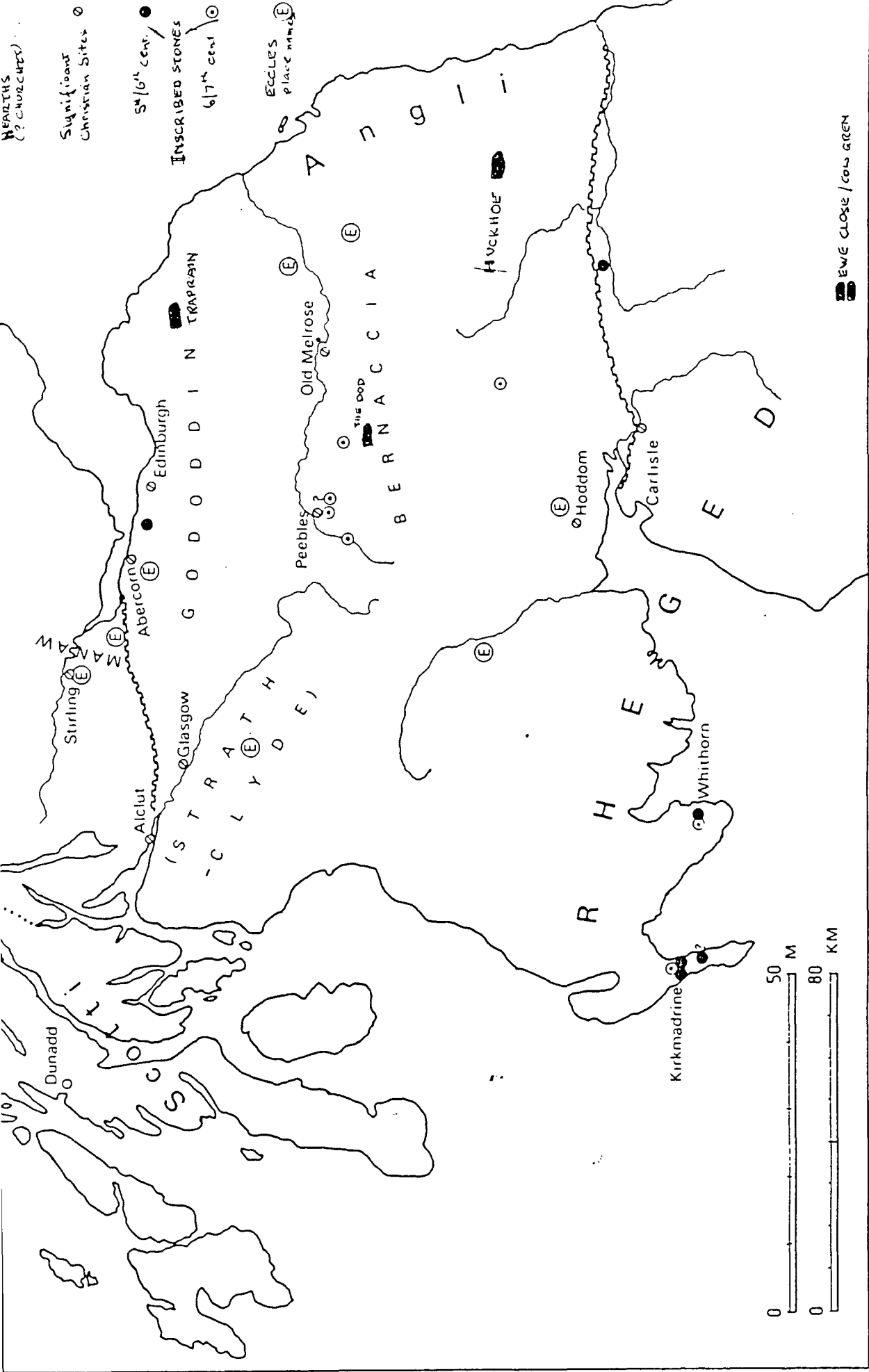
4 Breeze DJ, B Dobson *Hadrian's Wall* 1978<sup>2</sup> Harmondsworth p.270

5 Quoted by Wall, *op.cit*, Part I AA 43 pp.201-25.

6 See map, based on fig.56 in *CIRB*, The sole other inscribed stone (type 3) Thomas marks is presumably the fish ('Pictish') stone near Galashiels, now believed to be a comparatively recent artefact.

7 Collingwood WG *Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman age* 1927 London p.2; *idem* *The early crosses of Galloway* 1925 Reprinted 1988 Whithorn.

8 Radford CAR and G Donaldson *Whithorn and Kirkmadrine* 1953 Edinburgh p.7 The most recent edition, revised by I Fisher and CJ Tabraham, 1989 Edinburgh, agrees with the span of dates, but is less detailed (p.25).



Map.

CHRISTIANITY IN SUB-ROMAN SOUTHERN SCOTLAND [After Charles Thomas *CIRB*]  
 Round-ended buildings without hearths, possibly churches, added from Ian Smith *ABEKTB*.

another title of Christ, taken from Rev. 21:6, one by the Greek symbols A and Q, another by the Latin *initium et finis*. The first of these two pillar stones, dated from the fifth century, is of particular interest for our study. Its inscription reads:

HIC IACENT/S(an)C(T)I ET PRAE/CIPUI SACER/DOTES IDES/VIVENTIUS/ET/MAVORIUS

"Here lie the holy and chief priests, Ides, Viventius and Mavorius." The term chief priests should probably be interpreted as Bishops, implying that Kirkmadrine was one of the principal evangelistic centres in this part of Scotland<sup>1</sup>. As Kirkmadrine is in one of the most inaccessible corners of Scotland, and even there is now off the beaten track up a mud track off a C road, that word 'centre' is difficult; it will be explored below.

At Whithorn is another pillar stone, 'the earliest Christian memorial in Scotland, with the inscription:

TE DOMINU(M)/LAUDAMUS/LATINUS/ANNORU(M)/XXV ET/FILIA SUA/ANN(ORUM) IV/(H)IC SI(G)NUM/FECERUT/NEPUS/BARROVA/DI. "We praise the Lord, Latinus aged thirty-five and his daughter, age four. The grandson Barrovadus set up the monument here." The letters, although some are carelessly formed, are all Roman capitals.' It is dated from the middle of the fifth century<sup>2</sup>.

A further pillar-stone, which used to stand by the road south of Whithorn, with a later type of Chi-Ro and lettering of a type associated with Merovingian Gaul, reads:

(L)OCI/PETRI/APU/STOLI. "The place of Peter the apostle." It is dated from the seventh century. There are also at Whithorn, in 'St Ninian's cave' at Glasserton, and elsewhere e.g. Kirkinner and Wigtown, other crosses currently thought to have been produced in the next three centuries<sup>3</sup>.

A stone, believed to be perhaps similar to the Petrine marker-stone from Whithorn just described, was discovered in Peebles in 1261 according to Fordun, who gave the reading LOCUS SANCTI NICOLAI EPISCOPI "The place of Saint Nicholas the Bishop". It has long since disappeared<sup>4</sup>. A number of

1 Radford CAR, 6 Donaldson *Whithorn and Kirkaadrine* 1953 (1980)Edinburgh p.43

2 *ibid* pp.35-36.

3 *ibid* pp.36

4 *Peeblesshire; an inventory of the ancient monuments* 1967 Edinburgh, item 377

authorities' believe this to be a misreading of NINIAUI or NINIA. In the vicinity of Peebles (where the unattractive apparently unshaped slab of whinstone is now locked in its museum) in the Manor Water valley was found a stone with a cross, the name CONINIE on the first line, and the letters -RTIRIE below. Despite the earlier denial of this possibility by Kenneth Jackson<sup>2</sup>, in the RCAMScot report, Ian Smith (an archaeologist with that department) believes the missing letters to be MA = MARTIRIE. He notes that the local church is dedicated to St Gordian, a fourth-century martyr whose only dedication this is in the United Kingdom; and suspects this may have arisen as a misunderstanding for the local martyr commemorated by this stone, possibly killed in that struggle between Christian and pagan factions which culminated in the battle of Arthuret<sup>3</sup>.

At the very northermost limits of Greater Bernicia, in Midlothian, is the Cat Stone<sup>4</sup> associated with long-cist burials. These predate the initiation of burial in churchyards; they are reminiscent of the Celtic Iron Age burials, but orientated now in a Christian fashion. They extend along both sides of the Forth (and northwards into Fife and Angus). This is among the evidence for Alfred Smyth's claim, already noted, that 'the archaeological evidence, however scrappy, points to a relatively unified Christian culture among the northern Britons going back to the sixth century in the north-east on the Forth, and to the fifth century in Galloway' <sup>5</sup>.

Similarly the stones to the Christian princes at Yarrow, on a moor known as Annan Street, probably evidence survival into the Early Historic Period of the pagan custom of roadside burial, a custom not displaced until late in the sixth century by the Christian practice of churchyard burial. The inscription is very difficult to decipher, but Raleigh Radford offers as his preferred translation "Thus (is) the everlasting memorial. In (this)

1 Including Duncan AM 'Bede, Iona and the Picts' *The writing of history in the Middle Ages; Essays presented to RV Southern* (Ed, Davies RHC, JM Wallace-Hadrill) 1981 Oxford pp.1-42

2 *Peeblesshire; an inventory of the ancient monuments* 1967 Edinburgh, item 376

3 Smith *EKTB*

4 This is the only monument listed here which I have not visited, it being now inaccessible due to the runways of Edinburgh airport. It was described and illustrated by Simpson JY *On the Cat Stone, Edinburghshire, Is it not the tombstone of the grandfather of Hengist and Horsa?* 1862 Edinburgh.

5 Smyth *A Warlords and Holy Men* 1984 London p.34

place (lie) the most famous princes Nudus and Dumnogenus. In this tomb lie the two sons of Liberalis." Radford dates it early in the sixth century<sup>1</sup>.

The absence of any Christian monument east of Dere Street (which he has taken as the limit of Anglo-Saxon penetration) prior to Heavenfield confirms to Smith's mind that this was a religious and cultural boundary. To the west was a British population by the late fifth century at least nominally Christian, and to an extent literate, as demonstrated by the number and distribution on Christian memorial stones. The *Eccles* place-name on this line he sees as significant. Was it the presence of Angles in sixth-century Bernicia which caused the native population to give way to the practices of their overlords, and thus remain relatively backward, illiterate, and pagan?<sup>2</sup>

Half-a-dozen round-ended buildings, without hearths, have been excavated in our area, the most recent on the Dod Burn, Borders Region, by Smith who suggests that these may have filled the role of Late Roman churches, the absence of hearths ruling them out as dwellings. 'It is possible that our failure to recognize early church buildings in the North may owe more to the emphasis placed on the attributive elements of burials, gravemarkers, and the presence of a burial enclosure. Absence of evidence thus need not necessarily be evidence of absence... The context of the round-ended buildings from North Britain, if churches at all, lies not with the urban or estate churches of the sub-Roman diocese, but with those of the Celtic west, and ultimately with those of Anglian Bernicia, which, in common with secular buildings may be judged to reflect an underlying degree of British influence. Most of them are small (at the Dod 10 x 6 m) suggesting *parochiae* built and maintained by the effort of their own congregation. They are in a true sense vernacular buildings constructed by local people, using local materials, in fulfilment of a local idiom. Hence Bede drew attention to buildings which he considered unusual in a British milieu: *Candida Casa* built of stone 'a method unusual among the Britons' [HE iii:4] and noted Finan's church at Lindisfarne was built 'after the Irish method, not of stone but of hewn oak' [HE iii:25]<sup>3</sup>.

1 *County of Selkirk; an inventory of the ancient monuments* 1957 Edinburgh, item 174

2 Smith *ABEKT8*

3 *ibid.*



Traprain Law<sup>1</sup>, originally a hillfort of the Votadini, was excavated by Curle<sup>2</sup> sixty years ago, and is especially noteworthy for the hoard of silver which has been variously interpreted<sup>3</sup>. It has been thought that the Votadini abandoned it to move to the vicinity of Edinburgh in the mid fifth, or the seventh, century<sup>4</sup>. The most recent excavator, Ian Smith, however suggests the Votadini abandoned it c.AD 141, and that afterwards it was reoccupied by the Picts from the mid third century to the fifth. Of particular interest is his identification in phase 2 of the Pictish buildings of a large (96<sup>2</sup>m) round-ended building (building IV) without a hearth (hearths being plentiful in the neighbouring buildings). This he identifies as a church. Although the site appears to have been abandoned by the Picts in the fifth century there was some continuing activity until the eighth<sup>5</sup>. He suggests it may have been (re)dedicated for use by St Monenna in the sixth century<sup>6</sup>.

Evidence germane to our subject has accrued in the 1980s through the technique, new to archaeology, of dowsing. Being non-destructive this allows us, for the first time, to investigate structures buried beneath existing buildings. Confirmation of the existence of buildings of an early date has, in several cases, upheld tradition against the views of some recent scholars who have based their opinions on the late date of the existing edifice<sup>7</sup>.

In Galloway, at Ardwall Island, Charles Thomas has uncovered a chapel and graveyard used over a long period<sup>8</sup>. However the major interest centres on Whithorn where excavations continue, having currently reached the level of the Northumbrian church. There are preliminary reports in *Whithorn 3* and *The Whithorn Excavations: 1990 supplement*<sup>9</sup>, as ideas are constantly updated and altered. When, in July 1991, I asked the excavator - Peter Hill -

1 Baldwin JR *Exploring Scotland's Heritage: Lothian and the Borders* 1985 Edinburgh, Item 83

2 Curle AO *The Treasures of Traprain* 1923 Glasgow

3 Smyth A *Warlords and Holy Men* 1984 London p.15

4 Breeze DJ, B Dobson [*Hadrian's Wall* 1978<sup>2</sup> Harmondsworth] give both dates pp.238, 138

5 Smith I *ABEKT8*

6 In this Smith follows Skene W *CS* 37

7 Briggs HD, E Cambridge, RN Bailey 'A new approach to church archaeology: dowsing, excavation and documentary work at Woodhorn, Ponteland and the pre-Norman cathedral at Durham' *Arch, Aeliana* 611 pp.79-100; Bailey RN, E Cambridge, HD Briggs *Dowsing and church archaeology* 1988 Wimborne.

8 Thomas *CECANB - passim*

9 *op.cit.*, 1991 Whithorn

whether for St Ninian he favoured MacQueen's fifth century date, or Macquarrie's sixth century one, he opted for David Dumville's approach of complete ignorance, and was even prepared to accept that Ninian might be a fictitious character invented in the period of the Northumbrian bishopric.

To Hill, as an archaeologist, the history was of very secondary importance. For our study this is unhelpful. We must therefore turn to written sources, fully realising that they fall far short of the standards historians desire.

#### ADDENDUM:

As this thesis was about to be submitted it was reported<sup>1</sup> that archaeologists excavating at Hoddam 'have found what may be one of Scotland's earliest churches...[They] have revealed a sunken stone building linked by a subterranean passage to a tiny underground chamber... The building, 15ft long and 9ft wide, and east-west aligned, is believed to date from the fifth or sixth century AD - and may have been built as a chapel or baptistry by one of Scotland's earliest bishops - St Mungo'. No further details have appeared in print at present writing, but the excavator, Dr Christopher Lowe, tells me that initial carbon-dating yields a sixth-century date. If confirmed this provides the first firm support for the activities of Kentigern which are considered below.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Independent* Jan,6 1992 Report by David Keys, its Archaeological Correspondent, I am grateful to Gerald Bonner for drawing my attention to this newspaper report.

## THE NINIANIC MISSION.

It was noted earlier that, although our twentieth-century minds would be more comfortable with a study of organizations, the Body of Christ is not wholly like that'. We must turn to Ninian who, Nora Chadwick wrote, is, in his setting, 'the most important link which we possess between the Roman and the medieval period, the Ancient World, and the Dark Ages'<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, even if Margaret Deansley's 'Nynia was a cleric from Bernicia'<sup>3</sup> is premature, his activities involved what was later Bernician territory.

For this task there are three main literary sources available to us.

(1) BEDE. The prime source is Bede [*H. E.* III: 4], who wrote:

In the year of our Lord 565...there came from Ireland to Britain a priest and abbot named Columba, a true monk in life no less than habit; he came to Britain to preach the word of God to the kingdoms of the northern Picts which are separated from the southern part of their land by steep and rugged mountains. The southern Picts who live<sup>4</sup> on this side of the mountains had, so it is said<sup>5</sup>, long ago given up the errors of idolatry and received the true faith through the preaching of the Word by that reverend and holy man Bishop Ninian, a Briton who had received orthodox instruction at Rome in the faith and the mysteries of the truth. His episcopal see is celebrated for its church, dedicated<sup>6</sup> to St. Martin, where his body rests, together with those of many other saints. The see is now under English rule. This place which is in the kingdom of Bernicia is commonly called Whithorn, the White House, because Ninian built a church of stone there, using a method unusual among the Britons. Columba came to Britain...'

It has been suggested that this notice of Ninian sits awkwardly in Bede's work as if added later. It has also been noted to be unusual in not being really germane to Bede's main task of recounting the birth and growth of the Church among the English, for nowhere else does he detail the activities of the British Church before the coming of his own people<sup>7</sup>. However, if we

1 Bishop Lightfoot develops this [*The Christian Ministry' Dissertations on the Apostolic Age* 1892 London pp.135-246] starting with the ideal 'a holy season extending the whole year round - a temple confined only by the limits of the habitable world - a priesthood coextensive with the human race'.

2 Chadwick NK 'St Ninian, A preliminary study of sources' *D&P* 1948-49 27 pp.9-53, while in 1967 Charles Thomas wrote 'the present trend of thought on North British Christianity...revolves around the earliest and best-known Christian figure in the region, the person popularly known called 'Ninian. 'The evidence from North Britain' *CIB* pp.83-122

3 Deansley M *Sidelights on the Anglo-Saxon Church* 1962 London p.28

4 John MacQueen *St Nynia* 1961' Edinburgh translated this 'dwell', but in his second edition (1990) amended to '...Picts, who have their sees within (i.e. to the south of) the same mountains' p.1

5 MacQueen is now clear that Bede's 'up perhibent' refers to uncertainty as to the actual date (hence his vague phrase 'long ago', but not to the account itself, *op.cit.* 1990 pp.12-21.

6 Leo Sherley-Price's translation 'named after St Martin' is safer.

7 In fact this section was omitted in the Anglo-Saxon translation of *H. E.* .

examine the placing of this section, its probable purpose becomes clear. Inevitably, in recording the history of the Church in Northumbria, Bede has to tell of the arrival in northern Britain of the Celtic mission in the person of Columba. Our discussion of that mission will be undertaken later; for the moment we will note Bede's report that Columba came to convert Picts. The northern Picts that is, whose king Brude in Inverness permits the foundation at Iona, and who is the overlord of all its hinterland to the east. However Bede's life was lived against the memory of the Celtic/Roman struggle in Northumbria a couple of generations before his own time, and its much more recent continuation in Pictland. King Nechtan IV had written to Bede's own monastery for advice on the matters in dispute between these parties, [HE V:21] and it is possible that Bede himself may have been involved in drafting the reply 'which ultimately resulted in the last Celtic missionaries being driven out of Pictland'. It could be, therefore, that in his history this section on Ninian is introduced, not for its own sake, but as a counter-weight to Columba's success with Picts. In effect he may be saying: 'Agreed Columba evangelised the northern Picts, but don't forget that an earlier missionary, Ninian, trained in the most orthodox Roman way, converted the southern Picts, establishing a centre the very name (St Martin) of which linked it with the mainstream church, and whose place of worship was none of your wooden Celtic buildings, but of stone, just like our modern buildings here at Jarrow, Monkwearmouth, Hexham and Ripon.'

On the other hand Bede the historian may have found this a convenient place to add an item of information about the activities of the early church in Britain, before there was any divergence of practice.

A number of scholars<sup>2</sup> note that Bede's sources were Pictish, and the account may come from there. On the other hand it may be that his information came from his friend Pecthelm, now bishop of Whithorn. John MacQueen now believes that Bede employed the same source as the next two documents<sup>3</sup>

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1 Colgrave B *BEHEP* p. xxxiv

2 Duncan AM 'Bede, Iona and the Picts' *The writing of history in the Middle Ages* (Ed. Davies RHC, JM Wallace-Hadrill) 1981 Oxford pp. 1-42, Hughes K *Early Christianity in Pictland* 1970 Jarrow lecture, Squire A

3 MacQueen J *St Nynia* 1990<sup>2</sup> p. 6

(2)MIRACULA. The second source is referred to in a letter from Alcuin, written between 782 and 804 to the monks at Candida Casa, as 'Poems, written in quantitative verse, which were sent to me by my faithful pupils, the scholars of York'. Long lost (Charles Plummer admitted that they did not exist to his knowledge),<sup>1</sup> they have recently been located in a *florilegium* collected by Alcuin himself, and consist of a brief *Hymn* and the much more important *Miracula Nynie Episcopi*. [MNE].<sup>2</sup>

(3)VITA. The third source is a *Life of Ninianus*: [VN] written by Aelred. Although he lived in the post-conquest *milieu*<sup>3</sup> I like to think of Aelred as the last of our Northumbrian Anglo-Saxon saints. Powicke has remarked that 'this strict Cistercian came of a long line of married priests, learned, respected, conscientious.'<sup>4</sup> Raine noted that Aelred's father and grandfather, both named Eilaf, had been priests of Hexham, so it is not unlikely that one of his ancestors may have been that Eilaf who helped to carry Cuthbert's bier during its wanderings.<sup>5</sup> In Aelred's youth Northumbria alternated between being Scots and English<sup>6</sup> and he was brought up at the court of King David before yielding to the call of the cloister and entering the Cistercian monastery at Rievaulx. Rising to be its abbot, he had the duty of periodically visiting its daughter monastery in Galloway at Dundrennan, during one of which we glimpse him taking time off to celebrate the Feast of St Cuthbert in a little Kirkudbright church.<sup>7</sup> He was well placed therefore to glean information on the history of the Church in Galloway. With the interest and pride which he took in northern saints, as evidenced by his work, *Lives of the Saints of Hexham*<sup>8</sup>, we can be sure that he missed no opportunity of obtaining information. His *Life of Ninian*,<sup>9</sup> like the almost contemporary improved *Life of Kentigern* by Jocelin, was part of the renewal of the Church in Scotland under the influence of King David. Aelred tells us that it was written because an earlier *Life* was obscured by barbarous language.

1 Charles Plummer *VBOH* 2:129

2 (E&T) MacQueen W in *D&P* 37 1961 pp.21-57, Rpt in John MacQueen *St Nynia* 21990 pp.102-24

3 *Aelred of Rievaulx* 1969 London; p.13-14 ← Squire A.

4 Powicke FM Intro, to *Walter Daniel's Life of Ailred of Rievaulx* Edinburgh; p.xxxi

5 Raine J *The Priory of Hexham* 1864 Surtees Soc, I:lii.

6 *Chronicle of Melrose* for AD 1136ff trans. J. Stephenson, *Church Historians of England* IV:1 pp 124

7 Reginald of Durham, quoted by Squire *op. cit* p.65. It was 20th March 1164/5

8 in Raine *op. cit.*

9 in *Historians of Scotland* vol.5 (E&T Forbes AP) 1874 Edinburgh

A comparison of Aelred's *Life* and the *Miracula* makes clear that they are both dependant on the same source.<sup>1</sup> This source is generally assumed to be that earlier *Life* in a barbarous language which Aelred had set out to replace. In view of the date of Alcuin's letter, this earlier source cannot have been written later than third quarter of the eighth century, and may well be earlier. From the fact that the *VN* ends with a series of miracles involving folk whose Anglian names are given, it has been deduced that it was written after the establishment of a Bernician diocese at Whithorn, assumed to start with the consecration of Pecthelm, probably in the first decade of the eighth century. However, it has been pointed out by John MacQueen that these illustrative cases are not necessarily an integral part of the work but an appendix to the actual *Life* of Ninian, which may therefore long antedate it, and may indeed come from pre-Anglian centuries.<sup>2</sup> This argument is strengthened by the fact that the miracles with which the *MNE* ends are not identical, and include no Anglo-Saxon names.

DATE. The initial and vital question is that of Ninian's dates. Bede merely provides 'long before' (Columba's mission: which we know started in 563). More usefully both *Vita* and *Miracula* tell that Ninian, soon after he founded his church, was initially driven out by King Tuduael [*MNE*. 5] or Tuduvallus [*VN*. 4]. There are two possible candidates for this king:

Adamnan<sup>3</sup> [*AVC* 1:15] mentions a *Tóthal* father of Rhydderech, the friend of Columba. Alan Macquarrie<sup>4</sup> accepts that identification, thus placing Ninian in the mid sixth century, and so explaining how the cemetery he had dedicated was still unused when Kentigern came to it around that time.<sup>5</sup> However Nora Chadwick<sup>6</sup>, and almost all authorities, consider he is far too late to be the king for whom we are looking.

In the Harleian genealogies there is a *Tutagual* who was grandson of Maxen Guletic, and who is reckoned to have lived about 400. This fits

1 Levison W 'An Eight-century poem on St. Ninian' *Antiquity* 1A pp. 280-291.

2 MacQueen J *St. Nynia: a study based on literary and linguistic evidence* 1961 Edinburgh Oliver & Boyd p. 3

3 (Ed. Anderson AO and MO *Adomnan's Life of Columba* 1961 Edinburgh

4 Macquarrie A 'The career of Saint Kentigern of Glasgow: *Vitae, Lectiones* and glimpses of fact' *Innes Review* 1986 37 pp. 3-24

5 Jocelin's *Life of Kentigern* ch. IX

6 Chadwick NK 'St Ninian: A preliminary study of sources' *D&P* 27 pp. 9-53.

better with another piece of evidence, provided only by the *VN*. Whereas both *VN.2* and *MNE.2* tell of Ninian going to Rome where he was consecrated bishop by an unnamed pope, it is Aelred alone who states:

'There flourished at this time the most blessed Martin, bishop of the city of Tours, whose life, rendered glorious by miracles, already described by the most learned and holy Sulpicius, had enlightened the whole world. Therefore the man of God, returning from the City, full of the Spirit of God, and touched with the desire of seeing him, turned aside to the city of Tours. With what joy, devotion, and affection he was received by him, who shall easily tell?' [*VN.2*]

This implies that Sulpicius Severus' volume was already written, but Martin still alive, and gives a date of 395-405. Before accepting this two questions arise.

Can we accept the story of Ninian's journey to Rome? And that of his detour to Tours? Travel from Britain to Rome was obviously frequent in imperial days, at least by officials and soldiers. It was taken for granted that British bishops would attend continental synods. The same is true in the seventh and eighth centuries when considerable numbers of named Christians from these islands visited Rome'. Although during the barbarian conquest of Gaul travel must have been very difficult, there is little evidence of it becoming absolutely impossible, as evidenced by the visits to Britain of St Germanus; however in the late fourth century such a visit was eminently possible. No one has expressed surprise that Pelagius travelled from Britain<sup>2</sup> at that time to take up a career in Rome.

The later mediaeval motives implied for Ninian's journey are anachronistic; nevertheless in the late fourth century many Britons were travelling to the Continent, not only in the train of Maximus. Simpson emphasises the encouragement given to higher education at Rome in the last decades of the fourth century.<sup>3</sup> The most recent scholarly comment, that of Wallace-Hadrill, supports the account: 'Nynia was "Roman" to Bede, though whether he actually visited Rome is questioned (I think unnecessarily)'<sup>4</sup>.

1 Moore WJ *The Saxon Pilgrims at Rome, and the Schola Saxonum* 1937 Fribourge.

2 Rees BR *Pelagius; a reluctant heretic* 1988 Woodbridge p.xiii

3 Simpson WD *St Ninian and the origins of the Christian Church in Scotland* 1940 Edinburgh pp.38, 45-6

4 Wallace-Hadrill *BEHEP-HC* 1988 p.92

Ninian's visit to Tours is disbelieved by almost every modern writer<sup>1</sup>, on grounds which appear to me to be questionable<sup>2</sup>. However, apart from its value in giving him a firm date, it would only be of real importance if we were to accept the view that Ninian was an exponent of the monastic movement which originated in the lands of the eastern Mediterranean<sup>3</sup>. More generally accepted<sup>4</sup> is the alternative view that Ninian was a member

1 It was accepted by CAR Radford 'Excavations at Whithorn 1949' *DAG* 1950 27<sup>3</sup> pp.85-126

2 John MacQueen's words are typical; 'Recent studies have indicated, conclusively, I would say, that Ailred's story of Nynia's visit to Martin is a late fabrication' [*St. Nynia* p.86.] Yet when one seeks for the grounds of this statement the source is an article by Levison where he states; 'It is unthinkable that the poet would omit a personal link with the celebrated bishop of Tours, if he had found it in his source' [Levison W 'An eighthcentury poem on St Ninian' *Antiquity*, 1940 14 pp.280-291]. That single sentence is the sole ground, known to me, on which all scholars discard Ninian's visit to Tours. That is unless one gives weight to Nora Chadwick's view; 'Aelred knew that the 'Life' [of Martin by Sulpicius Severus] was published shortly before the death of Martin and suggested Ninian had an opportunity of reading it or hearing of its contents in Rome. He may therefore have derived the idea of the building of stone churches as an element in the cult of St Martin from the 'Life', and the statement by Bede that Ninian was trained in Rome may have suggested the visit on the homeward journey through Gaul, and the borrowing of the stone masons from Tours.' [*op.cit.*] In my judgement Levison's argument from silence does not carry conviction. The insecurity of such a foundation may be demonstrated by looking at the almost exactly contemporary *Versus de Patribus, Regibus et Sanctis Eboricensis Ecclesiae* of Alcuin himself. Although a Romanist, Alcuin never mentions the first Roman missionary to England; Augustine. His editor comments that it; 'is noteworthy for what it omits. The third member of Bede's trio of royal virtue, Oswine, king of Deira... is never referred to.' [Alcuin *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York* [E&T] Godman P 1982 Oxford p.1]. It is also noteworthy that the synoptic gospels omit the raising of Lazarus, and John omits the birth narratives of Jesus. We should also notice Winifred MacQueen's comment, in discussing this *Miracula*, that the poet's style is impressionistic. He is not so much concerned with photographic details as with a symbolic truth. Physical facts are not his concern, but rather the glorification of God and St.Nynia by means of poetry. *For example there is nowhere any physical or personal description of detail given of the saint... Whithorn is never directly named or its topography hinted at* [*op.cit.* p.22 my emphasis.]

3 If, on arrival in north Britain Ninian started some kind of monastic community, where did his idea of a monastery come from? Almost all workers accept that he commenced his work around 400. Although before that date Martin, inspired by tales from the Egyptian desert, had established his cells at Marmoutier, and as a result some of his wealthy admirers were beginning to live communal lives on their estates. Where else apart from Tours was Ninian's model? The two other notable early monastic centres were founded too late to have influenced him; Lérins in 410 and Cassian's monastery at Marseille in 415. Support for this view has also been found [Knight F *Archaeological light on the early Christianizing of Scotland* 1:120] in the similarity of names; *Locotegiacum* Martin's first community, six miles from Poitiers, said to come from *louc* and *tigh* 'white hut' and Ninian's *Candida Casa*; while Ninian's community *Magnum Monasterium* in Latin, but *Mor-Muinntir* in Celtic was identical with Martin's establishment by the Loire *Marmoutier* from *mor* and *muinntir* 'the big household'. Simpson accepts these [*op.cit.*] but comments that Grosjean considers the etymology inadmissible. Also against this we may note that Ptolemy's map marks a *Leucopibia* near *Iena aestuarium* which Sir Ian Richmond [*Roman and Native in North Britain* 1958 Edinburgh p.135] considered to be Wigton Bay. Although Richmond makes no comment, both Plummer [*VBOH* 2:130] and Watson [*CPNS* p.34] think this may be connected with *Candida Casa*. At Whithorn, in 1990, the view is gaining ground that *Candida Casa* is a translation of *Leucopibia*, the latter being *λοικε* Greek for 'Shining trading-post'. If they are correct this would invalidate Bede's attribution, and any necessary connection of the name with the work of Ninian or Martin.

4 Hill P *Whithorn* 3 1990 Whithorn p.4



of the church of late Roman Britain. Although Macquarrie has pressed for a sixth-century date<sup>1</sup> John MacQueen does not find his arguments convincing<sup>2</sup> There is no obvious reason for rejecting the traditional, if poorly supported, date of 442 for his death<sup>3</sup>.

BACKGROUND. Of this we are told almost nothing except that Ninian was the son of a king. This has so routinely been pooh-poohed as a fictitious norm of hagiographical writing that it is worth examination. Accepting the argument that 'king' translates 'chieftain'<sup>4</sup>, such chieftainly parentage is likely to be true, not only for Ninian but for others, for two reasons: First: understandable nepotism. Having worked in an area inhabited by many small tribes (the area of a dozen tribes could be seen from the hill behind our hospital in the Plateau province of Northern Nigeria) makes one aware that the chief's son is always in the first group to receive any education or other advantage. Secondly: status. The gospel will be listened to more readily if it is preached by folk who are respected in their community<sup>5</sup>.

As these are surely universal attitudes it should rather be a source of surprise to us if the leaders of the Church in essentially tribal societies did not normally spring from the ruling families.

If his father was a Christian, this would imply that Ninian was brought up in an area where the church was already established. The obvious place has been thought to be Carlisle<sup>6</sup>. Gregory the Great's

1 Macquarrie J 'The date of Saint Ninian's mission; a reappraisal' *Rec, Scot, hist*, 1987 23 pp.1-25

2 MacQueen J *Walter Bower's Scotichronicon* 1989 Aberdeen p.200 where he comments that an association with Martin's name is found in all forms of Ninian's legend.

3 The rather suspect sources include Fordun and the Magdeburg Centuriators, See Forbes AP 'Introduction' *Life of S. Ninian* 1874 Edinburgh pp.xii-xiii.

4 e.g. Chadwick NK *op.cit*, p.21 Similarly Kathleen Hughes writes of 'petty kings' in Ireland *Early Christian Ireland; Introduction to the sources* p.53. In early Anglo-Saxon England the term *Rex* was given to the ruler of so small an area as the Isle of Wight, and Edwin killed five *reges* in Wessex, (J. Campbell *Bede's REGES and PRINCIPES* 1979 Jarrow Lecture.

5 We get an insight into the importance of status from a very different culture, the China of the 1930s. Missionaries from the west had been in the habit of promoting to the pastorate men who had started life as their house-servants, not realising that these did not inspire esteem among the educated Chinese. The independent Chinese churches, however, chose as their pastors men from cultured and intellectual circles whose appeal - and therefore evangelistic usefulness - was much greater. [AI Kinnear *Against the tide; the story of Watchman Nee* 1973 Eastbourne p.108]

6 The neglected monograph by R Cunliffe Shaw, *Post Roman Carlisle and the kingdoms of the North-West* 1964<sup>2</sup> Preston; Guardian Press pp.3-23, is germane to this discussion.

commission to Augustine to consecrate twelve bishops under himself as Archbishop of London, with another archbishop at York having similarly twelve bishops under his jurisdiction [HE 1:29] is surely based on records of the church in Britain in imperial days. In any such list Carlisle, as almost certainly one of the five provincial capitals after 369<sup>1</sup>, must have been the strongest competitor in the north-west<sup>2</sup>.

However against this argument is the fact that Ninian's father was a petty king, and one would not expect such in an organised Roman province. That is unless we accept McCarthy's recent suggestion that the land of the *Carvetii* (approximately modern Cumberland) became, in the last decades of the fourth century, a buffer zone, a client kingdom to defend the western end of the wall, and thus reduce demands on the depleted Roman army<sup>3</sup>. Which brings us to the crucial question: was there already a Christian Church in lowland Scotland prior to the mission of Ninian?

#### NINIAN'S MISSION

Around AD 200 Tertullian had written of 'places of the British not approached by the Romans...made subject to Christ'<sup>4</sup>. Whether or not Tertullian's words applied to this area, in the two centuries since he wrote there had certainly been Roman influence between the walls. This allows for the probability of Christian communities in southern Scotland by the time, around 400, which we have accepted for Ninian. Some of these Christians would no doubt be expatriate (in the trading centres even if the forward military forts had by then been abandoned) and some native. No doubt they were very thin upon the ground as there is no evidence of any centre of population of any size. Strong support for the existence of such communities is advanced by Ian Smith, whose work at Traprain, cited earlier, has unearthed places of worship, one a large congregational building, with dates going back to perhaps the fourth century<sup>5</sup>. Ninian's consecration would be a most useful further piece of evidence for such a community in

1 McCarthy MR 'Thomas, Chadwick, and post-Roman Carlisle' *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland* (Ed. Susan M Pearce) 1982 Oxford; BAR(B) 102 pp.241-256

2 Thomas C *The early Christian archeology of north Britain* 1971 Oxford p.13

3 McCarthy *op.cit.* p.25. WD Simpson had held rather similar views *Saint Ninian and the origins of the Christian Church in Scotland* 1940 Edinburgh p.55

4 Quoted by Thomas *CRB* p.43 from Tertullian [*adv. Ind.* 7]

5 *ABEKT8*

southern Scotland at this date<sup>1</sup> if, as has been maintained, bishops were consecrated only to serve already existing Christian communities. However such is not necessarily the case, as seen in the life of Birinus, the apostle of Wessex<sup>2</sup>. William Bright's comment is: 'Birinus was thus made a 'regional' or missionary bishop, and left free to choose his own centre of operations - as had been Ninian's case, and as was the case with Swidbert, Boniface (at first), Amandus, &c.'<sup>3</sup>

A stronger argument, however, for the presence of the Church in Scotland is the fact that Ninian's mission was to the Picts. Had the Britons in southern Scotland been pagan it is inconceivable that they would not have been a prior target for missionary enterprise. Where would he start? Bede implies, and the *Miracula* states, that Ninian's initial task was the evangelisation of the Picts. On the other hand Aelred places the foundation of his church at *Witerna* first. Unless Ninian brought with him, ready-made, a band of co-workers, then Aelred's order of priorities is the more likely. The establishment of a group of assistants, with whom to share the work and for mutual encouragement and prayer, is essential in evangelism. Kentigern, Columba, Aidan each has such a band. So surely Ninian first settled somewhere and trained his team. Similarly it has been questioned whether 'St Ninian's cave' was used by him. Repeatedly we read of quiet places of retreat: Martin, John of Beverley, Chad, Cuthbert. For Ninian, therefore, surely somewhere; why not the cave remembered?

A few workers discount the Whithorn area as the initial site. Ian Smith favours Peebles<sup>4</sup>. Nora Chadwick wrote: 'It is natural to identify the site with Candida Casa in Galloway, but from the fact that Candida Casa was known as the *Magnum Monasterium* in Irish sources it is tempting to ask whether it is not a secondary foundation, and if there were not originally a smaller monastic foundation elsewhere - perhaps nearer the centre of Ninian's missionary activities among the southern Picts?<sup>5</sup>'. However, granted her facts, the geography of the Machars peninsula does not require

1 Charles Thomas advances evidence that this was true of the Whithorn area *CRB* p.283

2 Birinus went to Pope Honorius and solemnly promised before him that 'he would scatter the seeds of the holy faith in those furthest inland areas of England, which no teacher as yet had visited, for which purpose he was consecrated bishop by the pope's command by the bishop of Genoa' [*HE* III:7]

3 Bright *W EECP* p.168 fn.9

4 *ABEKT8*

5 Chadwick *NK op.cit.* at p.14

her conclusion'. The apparent contradiction between Aelred's clear geographical description (which did not fit in with the site of the Priory in his day) and the modern excavations on the sites, can in my view best be solved by postulating an initial settlement on the Isle, probably with wooden buildings, followed by the building, later, of the stone *Magnum Monasterium* at Whithorn itself when a monastic set-up was established. This may still have been within the lifetime of Ninian, in which case there is no need to find the absence of any recorded translation of the body as a stumbling block, as does Bishop Forbes who, however, in a lengthy note, also quotes writers who accept the Isle as the original spot<sup>2</sup>.

On the other hand it may be that the *Miracula* is correct and that Ninian conducted his great missionary enterprise first, as perhaps supported by the stone long ago found at Peebles a stone allegedly reading *Locus Sancti Nicolae Episcopi* discussed above. The number of early

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 1 Aelred wrote of Ninian's place 'situated on the shore of the ocean, and extending far into the sea on the east, west and south sides, is closed in by the sea itself, while only on the north is a way open to those who would enter,' [VN, 3] Anyone who is familiar with the area will recognise this description as fitting the Isle of Whithorn far better than Whithorn town, some two miles distant from the nearest seashore. In fact the Isle's northern isthmus is so narrow that, given the right conditions, the sea sweeps over and it becomes an island; in 1990 we were told this had happened as recently as 'about three years ago.' This identification is usually discounted on the grounds that an archeological dig has failed to find trace of very early buildings here. However those excavations were confined to the site of the mediaeval 'St Ninian's chapel', the surrounding area not being dug. So when we read the excavator's comments 'we are left with the possibility; all traces have probably gone for ever' [Radford CAR *op. cit.* at pp. 122-23] we have to add the proviso that they may lie under the undisturbed area immediately to the north of the chapel, where the possible line of a compound enclosure has been already pegged out by Peter Hill, archeologist of the Whithorn Trust.

2 The Isle of Whithorn as the original site of Ninian's work has the support of tradition and earlier scholars [Sir Herbert Maxwell as quoted by Frank Knight *Archeological light on the early Christianizing of Scotland* 1933 London I:121]. It is powerfully and convincingly argued by Simpson [*op. cit.* p. 71ff], however his further arguments that the Isle remained the main centre, with Whithorn town, Kirkmadrine etc. being mere outposts, are unconvincing. It is hardly necessary to argue the case for inland Whithorn itself soon becoming the main centre but perhaps worth noting that in *MNE*:4 the description, sent to Alcuin, is of the shrine from which the poet is writing, and which was dedicated by Ninian himself. A better proof is found in the story of the schoolboy (he cannot have been older, if he ran away from a caning) who fled, and jumped into a coracle, which was blown by an east wind to Scotland. Bishop Forbes and his correspondent Skene, [Forbes AP *The Historians of Scotland* vol. 5 1874 Edinburgh Note Y] make very heavy weather of the geography. To anyone who knows the area it is clear that the boy raced over to the coast probably south of the present Port William, launched an unattended coracle and landed on the opposite side of Luce Bay. In other words he effectively retraced St Medan's voyage [Kalendars of the Scottish Saints, p 396], between her two chapels, but in the opposite direction. Forbes makes the point [*op. cit.* p 285] that in the Aberdeen Breviary Ninian's name is associated with St Medan(a) and her chapel in its cave on the east side of the Mull of Galloway. It has deteriorated a good deal since he described it, and by 1968 the approach was hazardous. If the monastic school had been at the Isle, and the lad borrowed a coracle from the harbour there, the presence of Burrow Head jutting out to the S.W would have made his journey impossible with an east wind blowing.

Christian stones found in <sup>the</sup> vicinity point to some kind of a centre, whether primary or secondary it is impossible to say. The lost Peebles stone could equally well bear the name of one of those whom Ninian consecrated as bishop. In Rome - assuming that he went there - if no earlier, Ninian could have become aware of how far his fellow-Christians at home had drifted from the purity of the faith. (VM:2) It can reasonably be assumed that one aim of his work was bring these British Christians to the true orthodox faith and practice. But the other great aim was to evangelise the Picts. Where did these Picts live?

Much ink has been spilt on the Picts of Galloway but belief in such has now been abandoned. It is true that the names of two out of the first three bishops in the revived Anglian bishopric of Whithorn in the early eighth century were Pictish; however it is less likely that they were locals than that their origins' were in that Anglian Pictish mission based at Abercorn, which had to be abandoned after the Bernician defeat at Nechtansmere in 685. There has been general acceptance of Wainwright's view: 'Historical evidence is explicit that the southern boundary of the Pictish kingdom was the Forth-Clyde line'<sup>2</sup>, Bede [HE IV:26] being clear: 'Abercorn, which was in English territory but close to the firth which divides the lands of the English from that of the Picts...'. Recent work on the siting of Abercorn as a base for the Bernician Christian outreach to the Picts raises the question as to whether there were Picts south of the Forth<sup>3</sup>, and we have noted Ian Smith's work at Traprain demonstrating their presence there; nevertheless the consensus view is that the 'Southern Picts', whom Bede records Ninian as evangelising, were located north of the Forth and south of the Grampians.

On the other hand many modern scholars<sup>4</sup> disbelieve the account of

1 The fact that one of them - Pethelm - had been a deacon and a monk under Aldhelm at Sherbourne in Dorset [HE v:18] does not necessarily invalidate this argument.

2 Wainwright F (Ed) *The problem of the Picts* 1955 Edinburgh, repub, 1980 Perth p.37

3 Thomas *CIRB* pp.288-90.

4 For example Nick Highom states unequivocally: 'The British Church was ... not geared to missionary activity [*The northern counties to AD 1000* 1986 London p.276] Earlier Thomas had written: 'I see no evidence that he founded any monastery... that he had any direct connection with St. Martin of Tours, or that he engaged in personal missionary adventures in his native Cumbria, still less among the Picts in the east and north-east of Scotland,' [ECANB p.14]

Ninian's mission. This is surprising for two reasons:

First, it is generally accepted that the only firm data on Ninian which we possess is Bede's aside in *HE* iii:4. As suggested above, a likely reason for Bede's mention is to provide, by an account of Ninian's successful evangelisation of the southern Picts, a counterweight to Columba's similar but later mission north of the Mounth. If Ninian himself, with his conveniently attested Roman training, did not in fact conduct such a mission, the whole *raison d'être* of Bede's notice is gone. This does not imply that Ninian personally went to every site associated with his name; but he must have been the leader of the mission.

Secondly St Patrick, in his letter to Coroticus<sup>1</sup>, king of Strathclyde<sup>2</sup>, complaining of British raiders attacking Christians in Ireland, claimed that they had had associated with them 'apostate Picts'. In other words, possibly a generation after Ninian's mission<sup>3</sup> there were among the Picts lapsed Christians. which requires an earlier mission to them. Ninian fits the time, his labours among them are recorded, even if our extant records ~~be three~~ centuries later. Moreover, as Isabel Henderson has expressed it, 'it is highly unlikely that the Northumbrians would have gone to the trouble to invent a claim concerning a mission to the Picts'<sup>4</sup>.

Ninian was not a peripatetic Celtic missionary, but was a bishop in the church of the Roman Empire, in the Gaulish mode. Charles Thomas was therefore apparently logical in boldly sweeping away any Cumbrian work by Ninian, despite the dedications there to Ninian and Martin, on the grounds that the bishop of a relatively unimportant see, such as was Whithorn, could not possibly trespass by working in an older urban diocese such as Carlisle. But the times did not conform to the regular pattern. In the debacle of 367 many churches must have been destroyed, their congregations scattered, and their pastors dead or fled. Normality was never fully re-established. The archeological evidence reveals only clumsy physical

1 (Ed.) Hood *ABE St Patrick* 1980 Chichester

2 Although EA Thompson 'St Patrick and Coroticus' *J. Theol. Stud.* 1980 31 pp 12-27 believes Coroticus was a chieftain in Ireland, this view does not appear to have found acceptance, other than by Michael Richter *Medieval Ireland; the enduring tradition* 1988 London p.44.

3 This of course begs the question of St Patrick's dates, discussed in the next chapter.

4 Henderson I *The Picts* 1967 London p.70

repairs'. In view of this it would be bold to claim that the church organisation was fully repaired and staffed. Our knowledge of the reconstruction of Roman society on the Hadrianic frontier is insufficient for any certainties.

J. N. L. Myres wrote: 'In Gaul the new notion of a bishop's duty popularized in the circle of S. Martin included the deliberate evangelization of rural folk, and men imbued with these notions, such as Victricius, Bishop of Rouen, who is known to have visited Britain in the 390s, are not likely to have neglected this aspect of his teaching'<sup>2</sup>. Ninian may well have returned to Britain to find that home-base decayed. As a Briton he would almost certainly feel it right to 'begin at Jerusalem' [Lk. 24:47] which for him might well be Cumbria<sup>3</sup> or southern Scotland, before going on to 'Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth' [Acts 1:8].

Having revived his home base, having trained his team of fellow-workers, Ninian would set about the work of evangelism. From the later scanty records we can prize some information of his methods and results. Our belief that he would have a team is confirmed by the phrase: 'surrounded by the society of his holy brethren as a heavenly host, he invaded...' Miracles followed, presbyters were ordained and bishops consecrated. The whole land was divided into 'parishes' which is acceptable when understood as dioceses<sup>4</sup>. Nick Higham suggests that, because of dependence on royal patronage each fifth-century kingdom constituted a

1 Richmond IA *Roman and Native in North Britain* 1958 Edinburgh p.123

2 Myres JNL Introduction to *CIB* p.5

3 There is a dedication to St Martin in the centre of the site of the Roman fort at Old Braampton, with a Ninewell on its boundary. At Brougham, a couple of miles east of Penrith, there is St Ninian's church similarly well protected in a curve of the River Eamont, and even today difficult to find (NY 559299). On the south-east shore of Ullswater, at the end of the road, is Martindale; its present evocative 'old' church is seventeenth century but on an ancient site. John and Winifred MacQueen note that 'An association with Martin's name is found in all forms of Ninian's legend', noting how it occurs even in Patrician matter, [*Bower's Scotichronicon* (Ed Watt DER) 1989 Aberdeen 2: 200], R.G. Collingwood's comment on the Ninianic church is worth quoting: His work was not confined to Galloway; St Ninian's Well at Braampton in Cumberland, and St Martin's Church within the wall of the Roman fort there,... show that he evangelised the Irthing valley, once sacred to Cocidius, it may have been Ninian who destroyed the local cults in the Wall region; he certainly blazed the trail along which, in the seventh century, Irish missionaries travelled from Iona to the Tyne and Yorkshire. A tombstone, perhaps of the late fifth century, to a Christian called Brigomaglos (the name is given with its Celtic termination) found at Chesterholm close to Hadrian's Wall, shows how this evangelisation of the Border country made its mark in the village that still existed on the sites of Roman forts [Collingwood R6, JNL Myres *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* Oxford p.310]

4 Innes T *Civil and ecclesiastical history of Scotland* c.1740, 1853 Aberdeen; Spalding Club p.43

single ecclesiastical see, as did many of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms a little later<sup>1</sup>. However, in the fifth century church most bishops had pastoral (rather than monarchical) charges, in Gaul and Italy usually confined to a single city or even a large estate<sup>2</sup>. The geography of the southern uplands would demand a number of such bishops. The recorded ordinations and consecrations are therefore logical, for evangelism which does not leave an organised church leaves no permanent result. The Peebles stone already noted confirms the presence of a bishop there, while three others are commemorated in the pillar noted at Kirkmadrine.

Kirkmadrine, as earlier hinted, poses a problem. Were they predecessors of Ninian, or colleagues, or successors? Now the Rhinns of Galloway would not require three bishops. As it is improbable that they succeeded each other in rapid sequence, it is likely that there was some training centre there, such as those which figure so largely in Ireland. A route from Whithorn to Chapel-Finian<sup>3</sup>, across Luce Bay by boat, and then crossing the Rhinns for Portpatrick and Ireland, would pass Kirkmadrine. Ninian is commemorated in Ireland, in one account it was there he ended his days and was buried<sup>4</sup>. While discounting the latter there is no need to discount his contemporary influence. Kirkmadrine is a highly improbable site for the centre of any kind of Church activity for Scotland. But it would be a very useful centre for such an activity involving Ireland, if we think, not in terms of Scotland, but of the Irish-Sea Province<sup>5</sup>. There is however, a problem due to the pillar stones: while the shape of the Chi-Rho suggest Irish-Sea Province influence, their early date is confirmed by the latinity and the script. Whatever the explanation, which must require more work, it is clear that there was a strong and continuing Ireland-Whithorn connection<sup>6</sup>.

For the mission to the southern Picts 'who still worshipped deaf and dumb idols' we have only the evidence of Bede<sup>7</sup>.

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1 Higham N *op. cit.* p. 275

2 Jones AHM 'The Western Church in the fifth and sixth centuries' *CIB* pp. 9-18 at p. 9

3 Stell G *Exploring Scotland's heritage; Dumfries and Galloway* Edinburgh 1986 Item 74

4 *SEHI-E* p. 160 fn. 1

5 Patrick is probably seen best in the generation after Ninian; whether he hailed from Dumbarton or Carlisle his route to-and-fro Ireland would sensibly be through the port named for him 'Portpatrick', a few miles only from Kirkmadrine.

6 MacQueen J *St Nynia* 1990<sup>2</sup> pp. 41-42 and pp. 84-85

7 Bede's record implies that this mission extended throughout their territory; however our present task does not require us to enter into the debate as to the evidences for its extent.



So far as Ninian's labours are concerned, the records are deplorably scanty. The *Miracula* gives us no worthwhile information (M.3), while Aelred gives us one brief chapter (VM.VI), which consists largely of a series of vague statements which could be (and doubtless was) applied to any missionary work. There is Patrick's *Letter to Coroticus*, already discussed, plus a number of place-names and church dedications<sup>1</sup>.

As for Bernicia proper, Charles Thomas's argument against a Ninianic mission in Cumbria has already been rejected, leaving us free to accept the findings in Cumberland. From Brampton the natural progression is through the Pennine gap into Tynedale. In Northumbria the famous Ladywell at Holystone, west of Rothbury (now incorrectly associated with the name of Paulinus, whose statue broods over it), was earlier known as Ninian's well. Here we are in the heart of what is to become Bernicia, but it was very peripheral to the main thrust of the Ninian mission. However, the *Eccles* names reassure us that the Christian church was not completely absent.

A Jewish scholar has said that if Moses is not a historic figure, then there must have been an unknown person, having the same name, who did the same things at the same time. Without being quite so dogmatic about Ninian, it is clear from Bede's account of the conversion of the southern Picts, that there was evangelism, while the reference to 'apostate Picts' in Patrick's letter to Coroticus implies that it had been successful if only temporarily, and not later than the fifth century.

The only named candidate for this activity is Ninian. The details of Ninian's life which we have discussed are, from the standpoint of the origin of the Christian faith in Bernicia, relatively unimportant. The archeological evidence, scanty as it is, is compatible with the story told in the *vitae* which originate no later than the third quarter of the eighth century. From it we may deduce that the gospel of Christ (and there is no suggestion that it was in any way different from that believed elsewhere in the Roman world), was proclaimed in some parts of what was to become Bernicia. Further the evidence suggests it was believed, that churches were established, and in that hope the faithful died.

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<sup>1</sup> Knight F *Early Christianizing of Scotland* 1933 London; 1;124-6 goes to excess.

Archaeology can uncover Christian graves, but the faithful did not just die. The early fifth century is among the darkest days through which the Church in our land has had to live; there was, in truth, a shaking of the foundations. Not only had the Roman authority gone from Britain, but the whole imperium was collapsing. In such circumstances any hint of evangelistic outreach, whether it is found in hagiographical writings or in the spread of dedications, is evidence of spiritual zeal. We have to rely on such data to form an opinion as to the reality of the spiritual quality of Ninian and his colleagues, for the records in the *MNE* and *VN* are so full of later hagiographic jargon as to be useless for that particular purpose. However fortunately there is excellent evidence from a near contemporary<sup>1</sup> as we turn to Patrick.

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<sup>1</sup> His dates will be discussed below.

Excursus: White Stones as evidence of Christian burial.

In her excavations in 1982 at the Hirsell, Coldstream, Rosemary Cramp found that some of the earliest graves contained quartz stones.<sup>1</sup> Although white stones in association with skeletons have been recognised as indicative of Christian burial<sup>2</sup>, the theological implications seemed to me not to have been fully explored. I suggested to her that the origin might lie in the Revelation to St John where the Risen Christ promises to the believers in Pergamum: 'To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone...' (2:17). This passage has been much discussed by biblical commentators, at least seven different explanations having been identified by Leon Morris<sup>3</sup>. On the analogy of the *tesserae* used as admission 'tickets' for Roman spectacles, Michael Wilcox, in his commentary on this passages, suggests that this white stone might be the admission ticket to the heavenly banquet<sup>4</sup> [Rev. 19:9]. Another compatible possibility is that it identified the person as justified or acquitted<sup>5</sup> - the opposite of 'black balled.' Just as on the eve of the exodus, each Jewish family had to paint blood on the door lintel as identification for the angel of death who would otherwise bring doom (Ex. 12:13), so it seems to me these stones might be placed with the Christian dead (perhaps in their hand<sup>6</sup>) to identify them to the archangel at the last trump (I. Thess. 4:16), and to ensure their resurrection.

Professor Cramp kindly had one of her students prepare a dissertation on these stones<sup>7</sup>. More than seventy years earlier they had been the subject of a paper whose writer, although living in Corbridge-on-Tyne<sup>8</sup>, found none of her examples in the Bernician heartland, but rather in Galloway and farther north. Examples in the Isle of Man, and Ireland, have been reported<sup>9</sup>. Quartz stones have been widely associated with magic<sup>10</sup>. Fiona Baker's review of the literature implies that quartz stones, associated with a single skeleton, occur only in Christian graves. She also reported the tradition that, as recently as the late nineteenth century, white stones were being placed on graves - without doubt Christian - in Inveraray. In her personal participation in the continuing excavations of

1 Cramp R 'Excavations at the Hirsell, Coldstream, Borders' *Archeology Reports for 1982-1983* Durham

2 Crowe CJ 'Cartmel, the earliest Christian community' *C&W* 1984 **84** pp.61-66.

3 Morris L *Revelation; An introduction and commentary* 1969 London

4 Wilcock M *I saw Heaven opened; the message of Revelation* 1975 London

5 Fleure HJ *A natural history of man in Britain* 1951 London p.45

6 Labour (see 8) quotes a Mr Bateman as reporting: 'Sometimes the pebble was actually placed in the hand of the deceased as at Alsopp.'

7 Baker F *The occurrence of white quartz in ritual context in Scotland* B.A. dissertation, Durham, 1988

8 Labour N 'White quartz pebbles and their archeological significance' *D&G* 1914 **II** pp.121-134.

Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society, List of Members, *D&G* 1914 **II** p.266

9 Crowe CJ 'A note on white quartz pebbles found in Early Christian contexts on the Isle of Man' *Isle of Man Nat. Hist. & Antiq. Soc. Proc.* 1982 **VIII** pp 413-415.

10 Labour reported that some fisherman carry one in their boat for luck, others consider that to do so is unlucky, while in New South Wales they were employed in manhood initiation ceremonies (Baker *op.cit.*). However they have chiefly been associated with burials back to New Grange and beyond, perhaps because they glowed in the dark. It seems, however, that they were placed in a position of prominence in a burial chamber containing several skeletons, or scattered on the ground outside, or in a circle around burial urns, but were not normally associated with any one of the skeletons.

early Christian graves at Whithorn, quartz material was abundant'. In the current opinion of the archaeologist in charge of the Whithorn excavation, these white stones appear to have been spread over the grave, their present chaotic arrangement being due to these coverings being disturbed by later burials on top<sup>2</sup>. One wonders whether the spiritual significance of placing a single white stone with the body of a Christian became forgotten with the passage of centuries, quartz becoming associated with the Christian dead as mere tradition? Hence the carpeting of graves with quartz, the more the better! After all such has happened with many a Christian ritual.

One further aspect is perhaps worth mentioning. In his life of Columba Adomnan (*AVC* II:3) mentions that the saint took a white stone from the River Ness remarking: 'Mark this white stone. Through it the Lord will work many cures of the sick among this heathen people.' It is just possible that in their employment in burial ritual there is an echo from the end of the *Revelation of St John* (22:2) where we are reminded that the healing of the nations occurs in heaven. There too the dead will be wholly healed. Be that as it may, although white stones have been associated with death before the Christian era, they have been employed in the British Isles in a way sufficiently distinctive for archaeologists to use their presence as indication of Christian burial<sup>3</sup>.

In her 1982 dig at the Hirsell Rosemary Cramp had found these quartz pebbles in 'some of the earliest graves to the south of the church'. In 1984<sup>4</sup> she reported: 'Fragments of Samian pottery were found in an early grave to the south of the church, ... These, together with some fragments of coarse wares and the glass bangle discovered in 1980, testify to settlement within the area in the early Roman period.'

As Professor Cramp found the white stones in the earliest graves on the site the implication is that in Roman times there was a community of Christians only about seven miles from the later Bernician centre of Yeavering.

The further implication that that community had already access to *the Revelation of St John* has been suggested to me by Gerald Bonner<sup>5</sup>.

Perhaps the most outstanding difference between Christian and non-Christian is in attitude towards death. This is most clearly spelled out by Paul in his memorable passage which culminates: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. For where now, O death, is your power to hurt us? Where now, O grave, is the victory you hoped to win?... All thanks to God, then, who gives us the victory over these things through our Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>6</sup> Here, in the Bernician heartland of lower Tweeddale is evidence suggestive of a people with an expectation of that resurrection.

1 Baker *op. cit.*

2 Peter Hill (Excavation Director) Personal communication, November 1988.

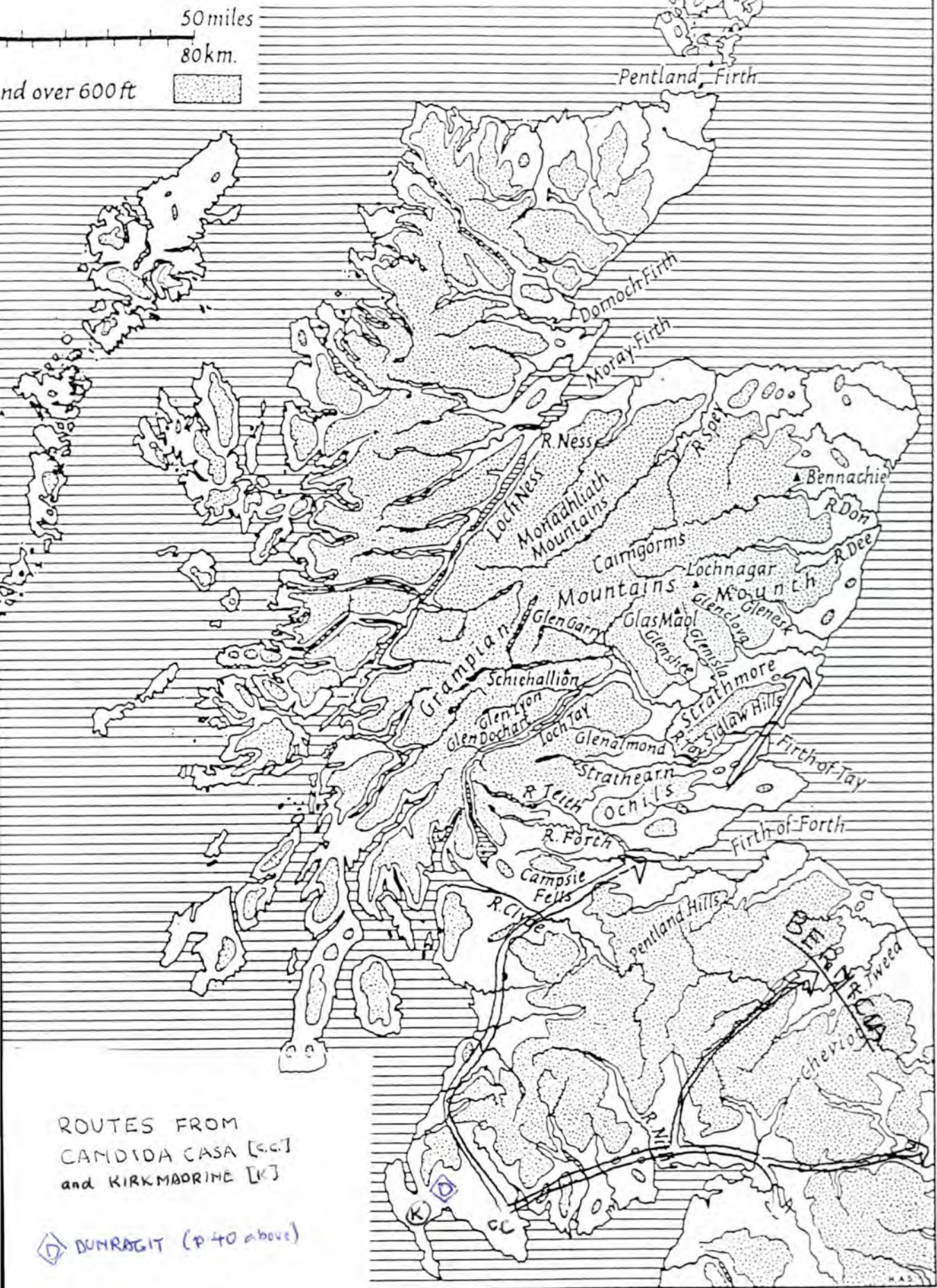
3 A few writers, such as Lebour *op. cit.* quote Rev. 2;17 but none appear to have explored the implications.

4 Cramp R 'Excavations at the Hirsell, Coldstream, Borders Region' *Archaeological Reports for 1982* Durham Univ, 1983 pp 57-60 *Ibid* (1984) 1985.

5 He had discussed the Apocalypse as one of the earliest of Bede's commentaries on Holy Scripture in a Jarrow lecture, [Bonner G *St Bede in the tradition of western Apocalyptic commentary* Jarrow Lecture for 1966].

6 Paul *I, Cor, 15: 54-55* [JB Phillip's translation *Letters to Young Churches* 1947 London]

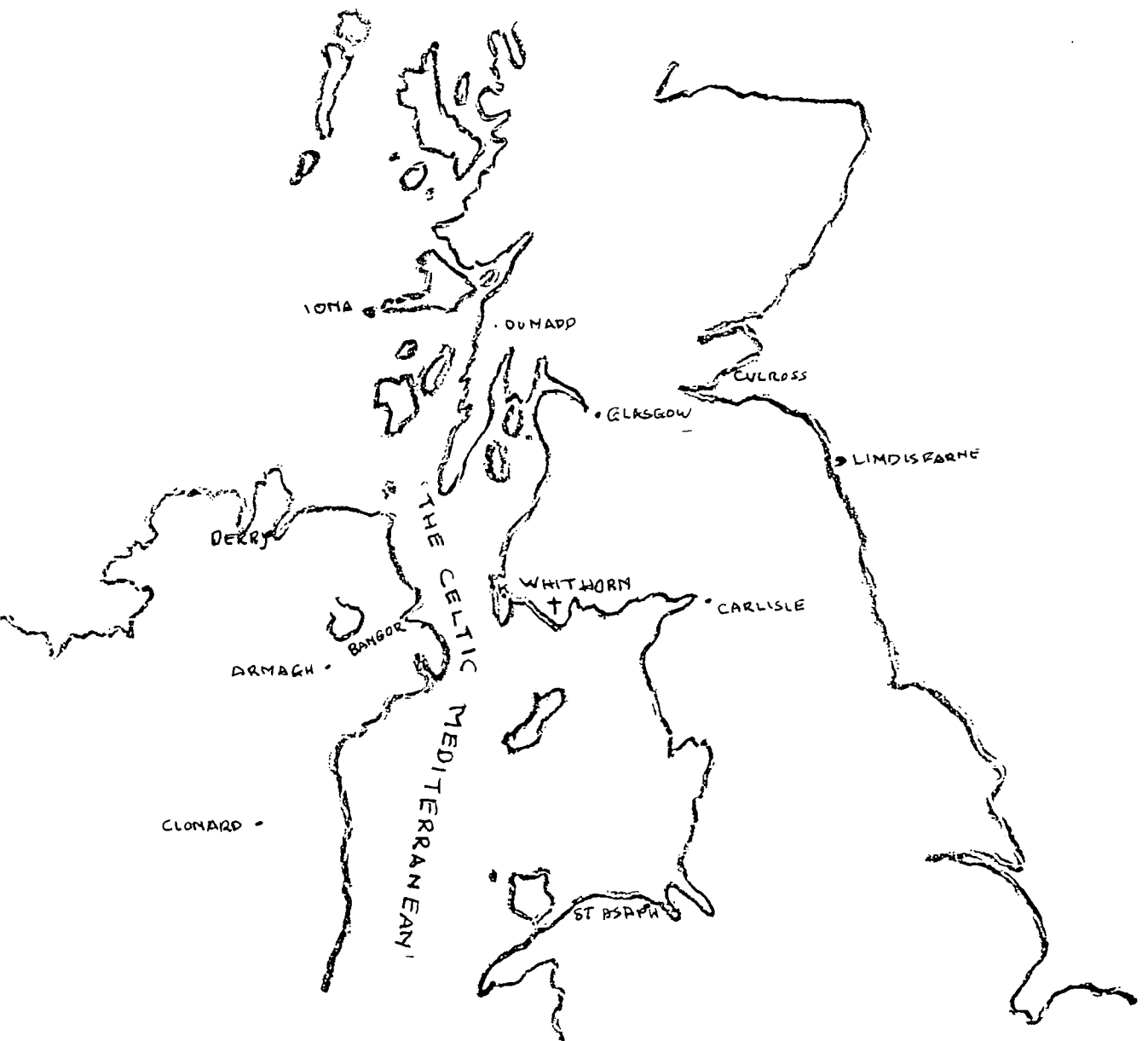
50 miles  
80 km.  
and over 600 ft



ROUTES FROM  
CANDIDA CASA [C.C.]  
and KIRKMABRINE [K]

◇ DUNRAGIT (p 40 above)

WHITHORN: An awkward 'centre' for the evangelization of Scotland



To demonstrate the strategic position of Whithorn and Kirkmadrine (K) in the Celtic lands, and at the shortest crossing point between Britain and Ireland.

The ecclesiastical centres marked were not all active simultaneously

## THE EVIDENCE OF PATRICK

If Ninian has some claims to be considered as the first three-dimensional figure in British Church history, Patrick has better claims as the first person whom we can know and understand; more importantly, the depth of whose spirituality can be directly assessed from his own writings. His direct relevance to our present study is the currently widely accepted view that his home was in Greater Bernicia, near Birdoswald on Hadrian's Wall. This is based on a re-examination of the name of his home *vicus bannavem taburniae* which can be read as *vicus banna venta burniae/berniae* containing the same element \*berna already noted in the name Bernicia<sup>1</sup>. We are therefore thinking of church life based on the Carlisle area. However, whether this localization be correct or not, the light which Patrick casts on spirituality in the fifth-century British church is vital to our study.

If we exclude maverick views<sup>2</sup>, it is accepted that Patrick lived and laboured in the fifth century. Richard Hanson<sup>3</sup> listed three different chronologies for Patrick's Irish mission which have been pressed: those of Esposito (AD 395-430), of Bury and his followers (AD 432-461), and of Carney (AD 457-493). Of the most recent writers Hanson himself, and probably Thompson, favoured the second, and Thomas the third of these alternatives. So far as our proto-Bernician interests are concerned this matter of dates is not important. That is unless the view is accepted that Patrick's behaviour, at a fairly late stage in his Irish work, was the subject of a meeting of a church synod. Were that so, the late dating would imply that such church organization persisted well into the second-half of the fifth century; however my understanding of Patrick's story does not require such a scenario. As it seems most improbable that, were Patrick writing to Coroticus in the last third of the century, he would write of 'fellow citizens of the holy Romans' [E.2] as he did, the second option - the mid fifth century - appears the most probable.

1 Thomas C *CIRB* pp.310-14. This identification is not accepted by EA Thompson [*Who was St Patrick?* 1983 Woodbridge] who is agnostic on the issue. The claims of Kilpatrick on the Clyde [JR Ardill, see fn.2], as well as those of *Bannaventa* near Daventry - a most unlikely spot on tactical grounds; of Ravenglas (by Grosjean), of South Wales, and of the West Country have all been canvassed.

2 JR Ardill, a Church of Ireland Dean, pressed for a mid-second century date [*St. Patrick; where was he born?* 1934 Dublin].

3 Hanson RPC *St. Patrick, a British Missionary Bishop* Inaugural lecture at University of Nottingham 1965

R. P. C Hanson's assessment of Patrick is so important that it requires quotation at some length:

(Patrick) makes himself transparent to us to a very unusual extent...He sees himself as a fisher of men...This (his expectation of the end of the world) is part of his incentive and dynamic...Another interesting feature of Patrick's doctrine is its scriptural quality.....The most prominent doctrines in Patrick's writing are a conviction of God's goodness, love, care and providence towards those who know Him and seek Him, and a boundless gratitude for this goodness...Patrick has one or two moving and effective references to the Atonement....We may, indeed, say that Patrick has a truly evangelical understanding of the Christian faith...''

Of course Hanson goes on to emphasise that just as 'Patrick was no Roman Catholic bishop, controlled by the Curia, solemnly issuing Lenten pastorals full of correct doctrine for the edification of his flock', so he 'was not a Protestant evangelist preaching justification by faith and believers' baptism in defiant independence of the papacy'. And this is a valid point. It would be ridiculous to see him in present-day guise proclaiming our *shibboleths* with some twentieth-century pronunciation. That said however, in almost every line of the *Confession* I can hear echoes of writings and conversations with evangelists, missionaries, yes and martyrs, of my own acquaintance. With the exception of his one clause about 'monks and holy virgins' [PC. 41; E. 12] a match for every part of his *Confession* can be found in recent missionary literature<sup>2</sup>. Even the giving of gifts to the king before commencing evangelism, has sometimes been found necessary, as a century ago in Buganda<sup>3</sup>.

Hanson finds remarkable the fact that, of all the books in the Bible, 'this unlearned bishop' most often quotes from Paul's Epistle to the Romans. This says more about Patrick's grasp of the central issues of the issues of the gospel than anything else could do<sup>4</sup>. The eschatological

1 Hanson RPC *St Patrick; his origins and career* 1968 Oxford pp. 200-03

2 And even there there was a time, in the late 1930s, when a group of us wondered whether our Christian commitment could be best served by avoiding matrimony. There are those who have accepted celibacy as a practical requirement of missionary service in hard lands in the twentieth century. See Mildred Cable and Francesca French's biographies of two missionaries to Chinese Central Asia *George Hunter; apostle of Turkestan* [1948 London p. 51]; and of Percy Mather *The making of a pioneer* [n.d. London p. 38].

3 Ashe RP *Two Kings of Uganda* 1890 (2nd ed.) London, p. 62

4 This statement cannot be defended here, suffice to note the explosive effect for the Christian faith in continental Europe, between the world wars, of Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* 1933 Oxford UP



passages quoted by Patrick are those which have impelled many a twentieth-century student to the mission-field'. His dreams, and visions, and foreknowledge can be matched<sup>2</sup>. The whole *Confession* fits the genre of *Circulars to Prayer Partners* which all of us on the mission field have had to pen. Being confidential they could - and did - include details of difficult relationships with colleagues, financial hassles, problems about converts, and all the other things with which Patrick deals. Read, then, with these eyes we must see what light Patrick's own writings shed on the British church.

There was a tradition of Christian ministry. We note two previous generations of clergy in his family, stretching back, in all probability, well into the fourth century. Two counter arguments must be considered:

First, following a suggestion of Bury<sup>3</sup> it is customary to imply that, in the case of his father Calpornius, if not of his grandfather, the taking of deacon's orders was merely a technique of tax-evasion. This may have been so in many cases, but we do not read a hint of criticism in Patrick, no note of regret at a spiritually-barren upbringing. After all, because in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many unspiritual young men accepted anglican livings in the family gift, it would be ridiculous to suppose that there were then no clergymen with a divine calling nor of spiritual stature. So it must have been in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Secondly: Commenting on Patrick's words [C.1] that he and his fellow-captives had by their disregard of their priests merited their captivity, Bieler wrote: 'It is unlikely, however, that indifference to the demands of a Christian life would have been so rampant among the young had their elders raised serious objections'<sup>4</sup>. Similarly Thompson wrote: 'In Patrick's household the householder and his son set them an example of a non-Christian life'<sup>5</sup>. Not necessarily so! We cannot use this to imply a spiritually sterile homelife. The majority of my intimate friends busy in God's service are broken-hearted over at least one child who is rebelling

1 As Missionary Secretary on the national Executive Committee of the Inter-varsity Fellowship in 1949 the records of several hundred potential missionary candidates were in my keeping.

2 See discussion below of *charismata* in Columba's life.

3 Bury JB *Life of St Patrick* 1905 London pp 17-20

4 Bieler L 'St Patrick and the British Church' *CIB* pp 123-131

5 Thompson EA *op. cit* p.3

against God. One hears scores of testimonies which have started "I was brought up in a godly home, but it was not until I was aged so-and-so that I came to know God for myself..." Quite possibly Patrick's experience.

In that home there was access to learning. Perhaps Latin was spoken there', for he envies the others (by implication his childhood friends) who have been able to continue their studies<sup>2</sup> (obviously in Latin) having never changed their language from infancy. However the suggestion made that he might have had only a few words of British, is surely improbable. Whatever his language at home, no one brought up in childhood in close contact with people of another language, even domestic servants, can fail to be fluent in it: born in Kenya my first language was Kikuyu.

In the six years of his captivity in Ireland Patrick presumably had no contact with the organised Church; less possibly this may also have been true of his years in Gaul. It follows that certainly for six years, perhaps in all for as many as nine years, he was without the ministrations of the church. Yet there is proof that in these years Patrick's spiritual life was strong, and no doubt maturing as God answered his constant prayers [PC 16].

He had such close communion with God as to be aware of specific guidance. Thompson disbelieves most of Patrick's escape story: 'How he decided in which direction to run, we do not know. He says simply that God "kept directing my journey towards good", which means in effect, I suppose, that good luck and good judgement led him to an appropriate harbour in the end'<sup>4</sup>. Such a supposition completely fails to understand the degree of specific guidance which God sometimes gives to those who listen, and which is well demonstrated by Patrick going out on a limb to promise to his fellow-travellers, in their starvation, that 'this day' the Lord would

1 Clare Stancliffe, in her review article of Thompson's *Who was St Patrick?* in *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 1987 pp.125-32, disagrees.

2 Hanson RPC [*The life and writings of the historical St Patrick* 1983 New York p.21] considers Patrick is particularly regretting missing the *rhetor* stage of his education.

3 That his escape was to Gaul seems most likely, especially in view of the implied contrast [PC,233]; 'And again a few years later I was in Britain,' Christine Mohrmann is quoted (both by RPC Hanson *St Patrick; his origins and career* and by EA Thompson *op.cit*) as demonstrating from her study of Patrick's Latin, that it has affinity with the spoken vulgar Latin of central Gaul. She also shows, however, that it shows no sign at all of the sort of Latin which was spoken in Gallic or Continental monasteries generally. (Hanson *op.cit*, p.128)

4 Thompson *op.cit*, p.21

provide food [PC.19]. That degree of faith comes from a close walk with God, and demonstrates clearly that the years without church attendance had not been spiritually barren<sup>1</sup>. When Thompson goes on to state categorically that the journey through the desert could not have happened, it was a 'cover up, a fiction'<sup>2</sup>, we must assume that he had forgotten Patrick [PC.7] having quoted: 'You shall destroy those who speak a lie' [Ps. 5:7].

Patrick's call is too similar to Paul's Macedonian one to be discounted, and in view of the dangers and disadvantages which obedience would entail too uncomfortable to have been invented. Of this Clare Stancliffe notes:

'The initiative appears to have come from Patrick himself, not from the Pope, nor Ireland, nor even the British church... Strenuous efforts were made to dissuade the would-be evangelist, and it was only after a battle of wills that he was allowed to go. Thus, although Patrick appears to have received financial assistance from the British church, he was in no sense its official missionary. In his own writings the emphasis lies on his personal conviction that God had called him, Patrick, to spread the Gospel amongst the Irish'<sup>3</sup>.

Patrick had that determination to obey the will of God, which counterbalanced the pleas of parents and the logic of circumstances.

If we knew how he was trained, ordained, consecrated, and supported, we would know a great deal about the British church. Alas, we know none of these things. Patrick confesses that he and his fellow prisoners deserved their fate because they had not obeyed their *sacerdos* [PC.1]. Hanson is quite firm: 'Patrick, following contemporary usage, always means 'bishop' by *sacerdos*'<sup>4</sup>, and he criticises Newport White for 'making the mistake of thinking that *sacerdos*' means priest'. Thompson accepts this, but points out that the implication is that the raiders carried off prisoners from a number of different bishoprics<sup>5</sup>.

1 One cannot say 'without church support' for can it be doubted that his name, and those of his fellow captives, would be on the daily prayer-list of the Christians in Carlisle? Certainly in our home, in Carlisle, in the late 1920s, at family prayers Christians captive in China were regularly named.

2 Thompson *op. cit.*, p.33.

3 Stancliffe C 'Kings and Conversion; some comparisons between the Roman mission to England and Patrick's to Ireland' *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 14 1980 pp.59-94

4 Hanson *St Patrick; his origin and career* p.33fn.

5 Thompson *op. cit.*, p.4. Patrick, however, is not necessarily claiming that all his fellow-captives were carried off in a single raid. In fact it is difficult to envisage a single raid, employing the kind of boats then available to the Irish, which could carry off 'so many thousands'. Even today, the logistics would be formidable.

However, Hood translates *sacerdos* as 'priest'. If, at the time of Patrick setting out on his mission and thereafter, there had been a normal diocesan set-up at Carlisle, it seems likely that there would have been - especially in the matters when he was subject to criticism - some reference in his writings to the bishop. But, in fact, all we get is Patrick's reference to elders, *seniores*, to whom he was beholden, perhaps responsible. W.H.C. Frend translates this 'lay elders'<sup>2</sup>. In considering who these *seniores* might be we have a series of options, each casting a different light on the situation in the fifth century British church.

1 The first, favoured by Grosjean<sup>3</sup>, is that they were Patrick's superiors in the monastery from which he came: which he believes to have been in Gaul - he favours Auxerre. But Patrick's poor command of Latin makes this improbable. That leaves the view that Patrick belonged to a British monastery. The evidence for monasteries in Britain at this date is uncertain, but granted they had just been founded, what evidence is there to suggest Patrick was a monk? The matter has been discussed at length by Hanson, who favours the idea. He quotes *PC.27* as possibly referring to a sexual sin, because Patrick had not reached the stage when he could take a vow of celibacy! He suggests the words in *PC.30* translated (by Hood) as 'not to hinder me from setting out on the journey' as possibly meaning 'not hindering my resolve to live as a monk'. In *PC.44* he reads as referring to monastic life Patrick's longings for 'the purity of true religion' and 'the perfect life' from which his temptations keep him<sup>4</sup>. But surely Patrick's is the problem with which Paul struggles in Romans 7, while the passages Hanson quotes from Patrick's writings are those of any zealous Christian who, with Paul, cries; 'Not that I have already obtained all this this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me' [Phil. 3:12-13]. It is worth heeding Christine Mohrmann's belief that 'there is not a single indication or clue in [Patrick's] language that he personally had anything to do with monasticism'<sup>5</sup>.

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1 Hood *op.cit.*

2 Frend WHC *The rise of Christianity* 1984 London p,792

3 Grosjean quoted by Hanson *op.cit.*, p,14

4 Hanson *St Patrick: his origins and career* p,141ff

5 quoted by Hanson *op.cit.*, p, 141.

2 The second possibility which must be considered is that a collapse of the regular diocesan organisation had left the church with what has always been its basic structure, from the Upper Room onwards': that group of spiritually mature men, earning their living in the secular world, responsible for the life of the local body. Paul wrote about them to Timothy [I Tim. 3] and to Titus [Tit. 1:5-9] using a title variously translated Elder, Bishop, or Overseer. In any local church, bereft for whatever cause of clergy, such men inevitably carry on. This is a possibility which cannot be discounted. If it were to be true then the church in North Britain was at this time in a more disorganised state than we have hitherto considered. However this seems unlikely in view of the warm welcome home which Patrick received from his family, presumably including his clerical father, and also in view of the absence of any hint of such a major catastrophe in his writings.

3 A modern reader might think in terms of a mission-board separate (as in Anglicanism) from the church organization. There may be some merit in thinking of the *seniores* as a group of senior friends whose advice Patrick sought, who undertook his continuing financial support, and who therefore felt some responsibility for the way he carried out the mission in which they had encouraged him, for there have, after all, been many such support groups in the later history of Christian missions. But this explanation is probably anachronistic.

4. The apparently obvious idea that Patrick is writing of his ecclesiastical superiors<sup>2</sup> presents difficulties, for this would imply an episcopal synod. Given the distance between 'cities' in northern Britain, is this probable? However it cannot be discounted, for surely the Christian communities would not have totally abandoned all trace of their earlier relationships. Some contact would have been maintained, even if tenuous.

There is much talk about Patrick and his Irish 'see', (as about Ninian and his). Are we not reading into frontier missionary situations unwarranted geographical and organizational complexities? Patrick felt called to evangelise the Irish, not principally to set up an ecclesiastical

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1 Broadbent EH *The Pilgrim Church; being some account of the continuance through succeeding centuries of Churches practising the principles taught and exemplified in the New Testament* 1931 London

2 CIRB p. 337

administration, of which there is not a word in his writings. In any pioneer work the missionary travels round with a group of helpers, spreading the gospel. Only later as heathen are 'reborn in God' (to use Patrick's words [PC.3]), can groups of believers be gathered together. Then someone must be provided to teach and shepherd them: 'clergy should everywhere be ordained for them' [PC.3], these usually coming from the ablest of the converts. To make this possible, Patrick had to be able to ordain them; therefore he had to be consecrated as a bishop, presumably back home in Britain. It may have been necessary to send send him to York for this purpose, but obviously the recommendation of his *seniores* would have been crucial. We do not need to read anything organizationally more complex into it than that. In a recent seminal article Sharpe has written:

'Concerning the first introduction of christianity and its subsequent expansion, one may well question whether the Irish church has at any stage the appearance of being organized, after the manner that Gregory suggested Augustine should work towards and Theodore tried to achieve in England, or whether it was not rather the result of disorganized growth. For two centuries the advance of christianity was probably rather slow - it is only from the seventh century that it shows any really noticeable effect in society; an organized mission might be expected to progress more rapidly. Throughout, however, there is no evidence pointing to a clearly defined hierarchical structure, no evidence for a canonically recognized metropolitan authority; in short, no sign that the growth of the church or its organization was the subject of any form of control'.

It is worth noting that only once [c.48] does Patrick refer to the Church. The phrase is significant. He does not talk about 'my church', or 'the church I have been able to build up' or even such a neutral phrase as 'the church here'. What he in fact writes is 'God knows I have cheated none of them, nor would I think of it, for God and His church's sake.' Paul's farewell discourse to the Ephesian eldership [Acts 20:16-38] is obviously in Patrick's mind here, and more than once in penning his *Confession*.

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 1 Sharpe R 'Some problems concerning the organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland' *Peritia* 1984 2 pp.230-70. No doubt the following parallel is far from exact, but when an isolated expatriate community of Scots (largely in the tin-mining industry) in Nigeria requested the ministrations of the church; especially communion and baptism, the General Assembly of my church instructed presbytery in Glasgow to ordain me to the Christian ministry to provide for those needs - without requiring me to fit into the normal church polity of kirk session and presbytery; an unusual provision for an unusual situation. That something like this happened in Patrick's case is pure speculation; but in view of the paucity of the information Patrick gives us, we have little but speculation to fall back on,

Hanson summarised: 'We can learn from St Patrick a number of things about the early British Church: it included monks and nuns, people in minor orders, widows and *continentes* [C.41,42,49; L.12]); it practised episcopal confirmation by chrismation [C.38,51; L.2,3]; it held synods [C.32], it permitted married clergy; it used colloquial Latin and probably used a Gallican type of Bible-text; it inflicted penance on its members and employed excommunication [L.7]; its faithful gave gifts to the clergy by placing them on the altar [C.49]; it identified Christians with Romans [L.14], and it sent missions to the Irish, and perhaps to the Picts. [L.2, 15]''.

Even more important for a study of the Church of Christ, the value of Patrick's life, as demonstrated by his writings, lies in its demonstration of spiritual vitality in the fifth century church. In a doctoral study Harry Boer (himself a missionary theologian) shows the prime importance of the Holy Spirit in missionary enterprise: 'It is *at Pentecost* that the witness of the Church began, and it is *in the power of the Pentecostal Spirit* that this witness continues to be carried forward'<sup>2</sup>. The missionary activity of Patrick in Ireland, along with the evidences of the *charismata* in his life amply demonstrate the activity of the Holy Spirit in the fifth-century Church. Although this autobiographical record is unique among the material available for our present study, we are no more justified in imagining that Patrick's experience of God was unique, than we would be in considering Paul's spiritual intimacy with the Lord to have been unique. The similarity of Patrick's experience to that of the revived Church in every age will only seem uncanny or irrelevant to those who forget that the Christian is indwelt by the Lord who is the same yesterday, today and forever [Heb.13:8]; and that the Holy Spirit's gifts manifested at Pentecost [Acts 2], are for all generations of the ongoing Church: in the Dark Ages as in the first and the twentieth centuries.

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1 Hanson RPC *St Patrick, a British Missionary Bishop* p.20

2 Boer HR *Pentecost and Missions* 1961 London p.110 Boer's italics.

## THE WITNESS OF GILDAS

The main, some would say the sole, source available to us for information of the British Church after the fall of Roman power is the *De Excidio Britanniae* of Gildas', who was to be described by Bede as the Britons' 'own historian' [HE I:28] and by Wulfstan as 'a prophet of the people in the time of the Britons'<sup>2</sup>. As its value for our purpose must largely depend on its status this must be first examined.

THE UNITY OF *DE EXCIDIO*

After an introductory chapter the work naturally falls into an historical section [2-26] and an hortatory section [27-110]: although some have sub-divided it further. A number of scholars have held that these two parts were written by different authors at widely different dates. Others, such as Margaret Deansley<sup>3</sup>, while not committing themselves, have been inclined to such a view point. No modern scholar, however, appears now to support it. As far back as 1941 Stevens claimed: 'There can be no serious doubt that the *De Excidio* is a single whole'<sup>4</sup>. This argument is strengthened by the fact that the linguistic style and vocabulary are unchanged throughout the work. Kerlouégan after a detailed study of its Latin reached the following conclusion:

Il n'existe aucune différence notable entre la partie attribuée par certains à l'école d'Aldhelm - c'est-à-dire l'*Historia* - et le reste. La syntaxe est en gros la même et les mêmes types de phrase, les mêmes figures se retrouvent dans les deux parties, avec des proportions variables que la différence des genres pourrait expliquer.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Unless otherwise stated the references are to *Gildas; the Ruin of Britain* E&T Winterbottom M 1978 Chichester, who refers to it as *De Excidio Britonum*, while RW Hanning [*The vision of history in Early Britain* 1966 New York p.45] claims that Gildas 'or his readers' called it *De excidio et conquesto Britanniae*.

2 Quoted from his *Anglo-Saxon Homilies* by Hugh Williams *CIEB* p.65

3 Deansley M *Sidelights on the Anglo-Saxon Church* London 1962, p.36 fn.1

4 Stevens CE '*Gildas Sapiens*' *English Historical Review* 1941, 56 p.353.

5 Kerlouégan F '*Le Latin du De Excidio Britanniae de Gildas*' *CIB* p.173.



THE DATE OF *DE EXCIDIO*

1. That it was written while Roman days were still a live memory is indicated by the fact that Gildas addresses his readers as *cives* [20:31].
2. There is no hint of papal authority. When Gildas writes of successors to Peter [66:2] he is writing of bishops, not of a pope<sup>1</sup>. As O'Sullivan has put it 'There would be little reason on the basis of *D.E.* to deduce that the city of Rome had any special prominence as a Christian religious centre'<sup>2</sup>.
3. There is no hint of schism, as was to result from the calamitous meeting of Augustine and the British bishops at the end of the 6th century.
4. There is no hint of the Easter controversy which troubled the church in Britain from the second quarter of the 7th century, and about which Columbanus wrote in his first epistle, usually dated at 600<sup>3</sup>.

It is tempting to try to pin-point the date from the fact that when Gildas sits down with his Old Testament in front of him to cull suitable condemnatory passages in his diatribe to rebuke kings and prelates he quotes from the Vulgate translation of scripture, (e.g. Isaiah) but when he throws in a text from memory he uses an earlier version. To take one example when Gildas quotes Is. 57:21 [in 40] he writes "As there is no joy for the wicked says the Lord" (Winterbottom's trans.), whereas the Vulgate reads "For the rebellious, says the Lord, there is no peace"<sup>4</sup> It has been suggested that this is because he was backward-looking, 'a man of the old school'<sup>5</sup>. This argument is invalidated by personal experience in that, when quoting from memory, I always use the Authorised Version of Scripture - the Bible of my youth - even although for the past forty years I have daily employed one or other of the newer versions.

By the use of modern parallel-version Bibles the present-day preacher aims to achieve appropriate emphases, but Gildas' finely

1 Williams H *Gildas* 1898-1901 London; Cymmrodorion Record Series 3; I & II p.152

2 O'Sullivan TD *The 'De Excidio' of Gildas; its authenticity and date* 1978 Brill p.26

3 Walker GSM (Ed.) *Sancti Columbani Opera* 1957 Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies p.xxxvi

4 I quote the Vulgate as translated in Mgr Ronald Knox's version of the Bible 1947 London

5 Williams's *Gildas* - *op.cit.* p.9.

nuanced quotations, in the absence of such aids are the proof of a painstaking preacher with a thorough knowledge of, and memory for, various translations of scripture'. We have got to allow time for Gildas to soak in the earlier versions of scripture, and yet acquire a copy of the Vulgate<sup>2</sup> prior to writing this work.

6. It is evident that the kings addressed by Gildas were still alive when he wrote. One of these was Maelgwyn whose death is recorded in the *Annales Cambriae* for 547: 'The great death [i.e. plague] in which Maegwyn king of Gwynedd died. Thus they say: "The long sleep of Maelgwyn in the Court of Rhos." Then was the yellow plague'<sup>3</sup>. Although the dates in the *Annales Cambriae* are notoriously corrupt, we know from elsewhere of 'The plague of Justinian' in Constantinople in 542, thence spreading westwards. McCarthy believes that Maelgwyn's death fits in with this pandemic of bubonic plague followed by epidemic relapsing-fever which is still popularly known as 'yellow plague' in Ireland<sup>4</sup>. We can therefore accept this date, and therefore be confident that *De Excidio* was written prior to that year.

The commonly received date of around 540-550 for the writing of *De Excidio* will serve us well enough, as our present purpose is to

1 This matter of the different version identifiable in Gildas has been discussed by Williams, who does not seem, however, to have picked up some of the subtlety of Gildas' choices. Gildas normally quotes I Samuel in the Vulgate, however he switches versions as most appropriate to his readership. This is well seen in his use of I Sam, 2:30; which in the Vulgate reads: 'Honour is for those that honour me, for those that make light of me, only contempt'. However in writing to tyrants Gildas employs a different version: 'I will honour those who honour me, and those who spurn me shall be without glory.' [62:81; glory being greatly desired and prized among kings. On the other hand glory being an unacceptable ambition for clergy, when Gildas is addressing them [76:3] he quotes the same text from yet another version in which the danger with which God threatens them is not a lack of glory, nor even contempt, but nothingness: 'I will honour those that honour me, and those who count me as naught shall be reduced to naught.'

2 Unfortunately the date that the Vulgate version became available in Britain cannot be deduced with any accuracy. Moreover the hope that this approach might help us with dating is destroyed by the fact that Columbanus, writing so long afterwards that he is able to quote Gildas' late writings as authoritative, himself employs a variety of Bible versions. Walker [op.cit, p.220] tabulates these showing that of the 321 scriptural verses quoted by Columbanus, only 115 were from the Vulgate. The spread is very even for while Columbanus quotes verses from 30 Biblical books in the Vulgate, from 27 of these he also quotes in other versions.

3 *Nennius: British History and Welsh Annals* E&T Morris J 1980 Chichester

4 McCarthy WP 'Identification of some pestilences mentioned in the Irish annals' *Irish Historical Studies* 1949 pp.169-88

consider the light it casts on the British Church in the sixth century. For this, closer dating of the document is unnecessary<sup>1</sup>.

#### GILDAS' STATURE

Michael Lapidge argued that 'the evidence of Gildas' Latin, in particular the correctness of his grammar, and the accuracy of his knowledge of the Latin lexicon, in combination with his ready familiarity with Vergil and Latin poetic diction, places him firmly in the context of Late Latin authors of the 5th and early 6th centuries, and suggests that, like them, Gildas may have received his education in a traditional Roman school at the hands of a *grammaticus*'<sup>2</sup>. Lapidge went on to show, from a study of the structure of *De Excidio*, its concept, style and the use of the specialised terminology of the Roman court, that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Gildas had undergone training at the hands of a *rhetor* in preparation for a career in the law-courts. As rhetorical training had the strictly practical aim of supplying administrators and advocates for Roman government, the state-supported schools had closed: the last detectable date in Gaul being 474. However private education by an ever-diminishing number of *rhetors* continued in Gaul into the early 6th century. 'Gildas must have received his training from a private *rhetor*. That he was willing and able to do so must imply that a career in secular administration was a feasible undertaking. In short that there was some facsimile of Roman government still operating during his youth'<sup>3</sup>.

In view of this we can disregard the picture of Gildas as a bumbling early mediaeval writer, which is impression left by Dumville in his pursuit of 'the continued rejection of apparent knowledge'<sup>4</sup>. He refers to the 'potential fluidity of Gildas' mental chronology'<sup>5</sup> and comments:

1 The matter of date could be settled were we sure that Gildas' Latin (26:1) really means that he was born in the year of the Siege of Mt Badon, and that these two events had occurred 44 years prior to his writing; that is provided we knew the date of that momentous victory! O'Sullivan largely basing his view on his laborious attempt to date the five rulers Gildas addresses (28-64), favours a date around 515-520 (*op.cit.*, p 89ff), but he has few present supporters

2 Lapidge M 'Gildas' Education and the Latin Culture of Sub-Roman Britain' *Gildas: New Approaches* (Eds, Lapidge & Dumville), [Hereafter *GNA*] 1984 Woodbridge pp.27-50.

3 *ibid*

4 Dumville D 'General Editor's preface' in *GNA* p.xiii.

5 *idem* 'The Chronology of *De Excidio* Bk.1' *GNA* p.61

'It is of course possible that Gildas knew no temporal era, that he lived in a chronological fog'. In 1930 Myres, commenting on Gildas' [26:1] remark on the extra month, had written: 'This is just the sort of irrelevant piece of information which a man of Gildas' mentality might have thought worth giving'<sup>2</sup>. It is evidence of the current reappraisal of Gildas' intellectual stature that in his 1986 revision Myres omits those words<sup>3</sup>.

#### GILDAS' MOTIVE.

As Gildas [2-26] is the only near-contemporary source for British history in this darkest age, those chapters have almost monopolised scholarly study. It means, also, that such study has been largely the province of historians. Despite the frequent passing acknowledgments that Gildas' function was hortatory, that he was a prophet rather than an historian (as by Sutherland<sup>4</sup>), modern scholars have failed to stand back and look at the work as a whole. Lapidge and Dumville wrote: 'Scholars' principal difficulty in understanding Gildas has always been ignorance of his context. This is true of chronology, geography, politics, social structure, education, language, *and the whole thought-world he inhabited*'<sup>5</sup>.

In that last sentence the italics are mine, for the situation is unnecessary in at least one respect. There is a large segment of the twentieth-century Christian Church which accepts Gildas' theological premises on divine concern in the affairs of men, and God's disciplining of the sinful to bring them back to His paths. To cite merely one example, it was as the storm-clouds of the Biafran war gathered over Nigeria in 1966 that the Nigerian Provost of Lagos Cathedral preached a series of sermons on social righteousness. He talked of gross social inequalities, of hatred of enemies of one's tribe, of political corruption and rigged elections, of all the things that blew up his country while he was still preaching. And he did this in the context of

1 *ibid* p. 52

2 Collingwood RG and Myres JNL *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* Oxford (2nd; 1937) p. 461 fn. 2

3 Myres JNL *The English Settlements* Oxford 1986 p. 223 fn. 2.

4 Sutherland AC 'The imagery of Gildas' *De Excidio Britanniae*, 'GNA' pp 157-168.

5 Lapidge M and D Dumville 'Editors' Preface' *GNA* p. x

'interviews' with Old Testament prophets'. To such Gildas' approach is not strange. Gildas is a prophet, 'a revivalist'<sup>2</sup> Myres wrote: 'In considering the last days there is a special reason for thinking that it might be profitable to bridge the gap between history and theology, or rather to seek the aid of both to discover what happened, and why it happened in that way'<sup>3</sup>. I propose to attempt to look at *De Excidio* from the homiletical view-point.

Various influences are manifest in Gildas' writing - the work of Orosius, of Rufinus's translation of *Eusebius*, even of Vergil's *Aeneid* - have been identified<sup>4</sup>. However to anyone trained in homiletics one model for Gildas must surely be obvious: Stephen's speech recorded in *The Acts of the Apostles* 7:2-56. Even had Gildas not quoted this biblical incident, which he does [1:11 and again in 73:3], his obvious thorough acquaintance with scripture ensures that he must have been very familiar with the passage. My thesis is that it was Gildas' template, and as such has implications for our understanding of Gildas which are worth considering, especially as the matter seems to have escaped notice<sup>5</sup>.

Stephen takes 49 verses to rehearse Old Testament history. Quite obviously his audience, the Sanhedrin, knew this history at least as well as he did; it can therefore have been repeated only for a specific purpose. Stephen recounts their history solely to highlight Israel's repeated rejection of God and of the deliverers He had sent them. Then (v.51) he suddenly and dramatically turns on his audience: 'You stiffnecked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears, you are just like your fathers, you always resist the Holy Spirit!...' The similarity of Gildas 27, and 66:1 is startling. It is further worth noting:

1) that the history as Stephen told it was highly selective, their last thousand years are not touched on at all, except in that he takes one verse from Amos and retrospectively applies it to an incident in the Exodus wanderings. Similarly, as Bede noted, he conflated O.T. incidents [Acts 7.16] concentrating 'less on the arrangements of the historical details than on the point with which he was concerned'<sup>6</sup>.

2) that the history was their own. Stephen did not weaken his case by condemning other nations, as had been the burden of previous prophets. (eg Amos 1:3-2:3).

1 Segun FO *Cry Justice* 1966 Ibadan

2 Williams H *Gildas - op. cit.*, p.vii

3 Myres JNL 'Pelagius and the end of Roman Britain' *J. Rom. Studies* 1960, p.21)

4 Winterbottom M *Gildas* 1978 Chichester p.7

5 Gildas' approach reminds Winterbottom of a 'forensic speech,' 'The preface of Gildas' *De excidio*' *Trans. Hon. soc. Cymrodorion*, 1974-5 pp 277-287

6 Bede *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (tr. Martin LT) 1989 Kalamazoo p.71-72

3) that, although highly selective, the history Stephen chose to record was accurate: anything else would have destroyed his case.

4) that it, together with the bitter condemnation, was said by Stephen to their face, not sent from a safe distance. This was in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, e.g. Elijah [1 Kgs 18:18], Micaiah [1 Kings 22 8-28], Amos [Amos 7:10-17].

5) that the history was merely to set the scene for his denunciations'.

What evidence is there that Gildas used this as a model? We know that he considered the British to be a latter-day Israel [26:1] who were being led astray by their leaders. The British Israel had two sets of rulers<sup>2</sup> thus requiring two shafts. First the secular power: 'Britain has kings, but they are tyrants; she has judges, but they are wicked' [27] and then the spiritual authorities: 'Britain has priests, but they are fools; very many ministers, but they are shameless; clerics, but they are treacherous grabbers...' [66:1]

Like Stephen, Gildas provides a review of their history to give cogency to the attacks he is to launch. We cannot accept the view: 'Gildas does not explain why he proposes (to give details of the history of Britain before his denunciations) nor what its relevance would be to his denunciations. *In fact it has no relevance*, for there is no reference in the denunciations back to the history'<sup>3</sup>. O'Sullivan was nearer the mark when he wrote: 'The *De Excidio* is not in intent a work of history even by 6th century standards. It is a work of edification whose author is concerned to describe the past and present of Britain only enough to move his readers to repentance'<sup>4</sup>.

Stephen had painted a picture of sinful Israel rebuffing God's advances, and rejecting his leaders [Acts 7:9,25,35,39], as a result of which God turned away from them [vv.42-43]. Now Gildas paints a picture of the island of Britain, idyllic in nature [3] spoiled by being inhabited by ungratefully rebellious stiff-necked haughty people,

1 We note that Gildas' predecessor Salvian wrote 'I might mention countless further examples [from Scripture], but I am afraid that in my efforts to give adequate proof I may seem to have composed a whole history.' *De Gubernatione Dei* I:9. Translated by Eva M Sanford as *On the government of God* 1930 New York

2 In contrast to Stephen who had only the Jewish authorities to deal with, so one shaft sufficed.

3 Stevens CE 'Gildas Sapiens' *E.H.R.* 1941 56 p.354 (my italics)

4 O'Sullivan *op.cit* p.180

unwarlike, untrustworthy [5:2], inefficient and cowardly in war and faithless in peace [6:2]. Even their acceptance of the gospel was without enthusiasm [9:1] and they were open to every heresy, having no firm grip on the truth [12:3] Their fecklessness he demonstrates by recounting that they were not even capable of building an efficient wall for their own protection, using only turf [15:3], having to leave the building of a stone one [18:2] to the Romans under whose wings they huddled like frightened chicks [17:1], From 5 to 20:2 Gildas piles his picture of a congenitally [12:3 & 13] weak-kneed vascillating people. Then in 20:3 the wind changes. 'Their enemies had been plundering their land for many years; now for the first time they inflicted a massacre on *them*, trusting not in man but God.'

Just as in the life of Israel in the period of the Judges, so in Britain; their liberation from attack not being matched by spiritual zeal, God had to purify them by further trials [22:1] - so here Gildas brings in the coming of the Saxons. I suspect he refers to three keels [23:3] to make the standard homiletical point that sin usually starts in a small way, a tiny yielding to evil, as when the disobedience of a single soldier (Achan) during the conquest of Jericho resulted in defeat for Israel's arms in the next battle [Jos.7] - an incident Gildas recalls in his own preface [1:4]. More recently God had provided the British with two miracles [26:2] but they are still sinners. Gildas (like Paul before him: Rom. 1:18) sees himself as a debtor [1:16] with a responsibility to speak out. With that sudden burst of accusation which, as we have noted, is so reminiscent of Stephen's own, he turns to his real task, in chapters which even such an appreciative student of Gildas as Stevens categorizes as 'the almost unreadable later chapters'.

#### IMPLICATIONS OF THIS MODEL FOR AN UNDERSTANDING OF GILDAS' HISTORY

In my view Gildas was not primarily interested in recording history, therefore those who complain about his inadequacy<sup>2</sup> have misunderstood his purpose. He needed history only as example. Nevertheless such history as he did record must have been acceptable as accurate to his

1 Stevens CE *op.cit.* p.353.

2 Miller M 'Starting to write history: Gildas, Bede and 'Nennius'' *Welsh Historical Review* 1977 & pp.456-65.

readers. As Myres has noted: 'It would have been fatal to his argument to describe in terms a situation which his readers knew to have been quite different'<sup>1</sup>. How much could they be expected to know? First, it is evident that some of them were educated and well-read. The technical terminology for weights and measures which Gildas employs in his *Penitentiary*<sup>2</sup>, 'a Roman half-pint of milk' would, as Lapidge has pointed out have had no meaning for an audience which did not clearly understand the amount specified, that is for them Latin must still have been a living language<sup>3</sup>. While that argument may not be valid - the name of the measure does not require knowledge of its origin - the fact remains that Gildas quotes scripture without insulting his readers by spelling out the names of those Biblical characters to whom he refers. This is true even in fairly obscure passages: he likens himself to 'the intelligent ass', assuming they will recognise the story of Balaam.

The implications of Lapidge's deductions for the study of sub-Roman Britain are enormous. For the moment our interest lies in the continuity of formal education which must include at least some sense of history. Although Gildas has to complain that written records were sadly missing in Britain [4:1], we cannot omit consideration of oral history. While the limitations of this are well recognised<sup>4</sup>, it remains true that in many areas where writing is a recent acquisition. our knowledge of history depends on this source. We must assume that this was a useful, and unavoidable, source of information. How far back does tradition stretch with any degree of reliability? I have argued earlier that its general outline must be reasonably accurate for the previous 150 years - in Gildas' case to the very end of Roman rule. Of an evening in the dark-age halls of Gwynedd and its sister states, as in those so well described in *Beowulf*, there was much time to talk and exchange reminiscences; what else did one do while quaffing mead? It is ingenuous to deny that the conversation must repeatedly have run along the lines "Were you in the fight at Badon?... Now my dad fought alongside Ambrosius..." It must have gone like that, with an enlarged corpus of

1 Myres JNL *The English Settlements* Oxford 1986 p.14

2 'The preface of Gildas on Penance' In Winterbottom *op. cit* p.84, para.1

3 Lapidge M 'Gildas' education and the Latin culture of sub-Roman Britain' *GNA* pp. 25-50

4 Finnegan, R 'A Note on Oral tradition and Historical Evidence' *History and Theory* 1970 9 pp 195-201



memory as each new traveller was questioned. Scholarship is sterile if it denies the fact. It should be recognised that such stories, even if exaggerated, must ring true. At our continuing RAF-in-China reunions the other veterans' memories of 1942 and 1943 must, and do, mesh in with mine.

#### GILDAS' GEOGRAPHICAL HORIZON

However, bearing in mind his homiletical purpose we can go further and say that the history Gildas records has got to be that relevant to the kings he is addressing. The whole point is lost if he is writing about the regional affairs of some other part of Britain. As we have seen Gildas started by describing our island, and then went on to deplore the character of its inhabitants, their inability to help themselves, and their need of aid from outside: aid superficially represented by Rome, but really needed from God. The idea then that Gildas' principal (almost sole) historical interest is in some corner of Britain is ruled out by his homiletic purpose. Neil Wright makes this point (in discussing 22:1): 'Since in C.26 Gildas terms *Britannia* "the latter-day Israel" God's family is here most likely to include all the inhabitants of Britain, and the fear engendered by the rumour is not therefore to be restricted to the north alone. Gildas' view of British history is of one *Britannia: Britannia - insula*'.

Sims-Williams writes: 'Many modern scholars regarding Gildas as a fearful rather than as a fearless prophet have supposed that he wrote at a safe distance from those kings, and kept a discrete silence about the ones near at hand. This is a novel way of localising prophets, but I

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 | Wright N 'Gildas' Prose Style and its origins' *GNA* pp 107-128. We must therefore discard views such as those of Molly Miller ['Bede's use of Gildas' *EHR* 1975 90 pp 241-61] that Gildas' interest is localised, first to the north, then to the south, or those of E.A. Thompson's ['Gildas and the History of Britain' *Britannia* 1979 10 p.219] that Gildas' interest is confined to the very north of Roman Britain (up to the wall). 'If his words have any meaning whatever *regio* here (19) means the part of Britain about which he has been speaking hitherto, that is the north. To think otherwise would not only be wrong, but wrong-headed'. When Thompson went on: 'Kent, the south-east generally, East Anglia are regions of which Gildas appears to know nothing. He is never able to speak of post-Roman Britain as a whole. The vast area of the midlands, the south-east and the south is to him unknown land', Thompson is thinking of an early-medieval ignoramus, not of the trained late-Latin scholar who corresponded with overseas scholars.



doubt if it is justified'<sup>1</sup>. He was perhaps thinking of Thompson, who maintained: 'The five kings who Gildas names ruled in the south-west and the west of Britain, so we may be sure that Gildas was not living in that area... (for) it is not easy to believe that the murderous bullies whom he describes would have tolerated his forthright criticisms if they could have laid hands on him'<sup>2</sup>. Biblical and church history completely negate this argument. Earlier attention has been drawn to Amos, Amaziah and Elijah who bearded the wrong-doing monarchs. So it has continued. We think of John Knox preaching before Mary, or in the next reign Andrew Melville, plucking the king's sleeve, and cutting him down to size: "There are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland. There is King James the head of this commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus the King of the church, whose subject King James the Sixth-is, and of whose kingdom not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member"<sup>3</sup>. I recall meeting Archbishop Lwum, who later tackled General Amin to his face and so earned a martyr's crown. Prophets don't skulk at a safe distance. Morris is surely closer to the truth in asserting that it was in South Wales that Gildas 'clearly wrote'<sup>4</sup>.

#### GILDAS' THEME:

It is remarkable that there is, in the hortatory chapters of *De Excidio*, no hint of the need of evangelism. It is assumed that the readers - even the wicked tyrants - are Christian. The theme is a challenge to sinners - rulers and clerics - to repent, to churchmen to live up to their ordination. [106-7]

Nowhere is this theme better illustrated than in 69. Gildas lists a series of Old Testament heroes, and the inclusion in it of the obscure Jephthah signalled that he is quoting from Hebrews 11<sup>5</sup>.

1 Sims-Williams P 'Gildas and the Anglo-Saxons' *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 1983 6 p.3

2 Thompson EA 'Gildas and the History of Britain' *Britannia* 10 p.219

3 quoted in McCrie T *The Life of Andrew Melville* 1856 Edinburgh p.181

4 Morris J 'Historical introduction' to Winterbottom's *Gildas*; *op.cit.* pp 1-4

5 Hugh Williams (*Gildas* p.174) noted with a cursory comment; 'C.69, His O.T. sources have a partial resemblance, in point of order though not of fact, to the list in the Epistle to the Hebrews XI,' Winterbottom 'Index of Scriptural Quotations' (*op.cit.* p.158) did not pick it up, but rather for each name gave merely the Old Testament passage.

A comparison of this chapter of Gildas with Heb. 11 yields some provocative ideas. First the similarities are much closer than Williams had realised. Gildas goes through the Hebrews list name by name, with trivial exceptions occasioned by the fact that he is here criticising the clergy<sup>1</sup>:

No doubt because female roles were inappropriate to clergy, Gildas omits the women (or their representatives) in the list: Sarah; Moses' parents (it is only his mother who figures in the Genesis story); and Barak (who was merely tool of Prophetess Deborah). By the same token for the incident of the crossing of Jordan he names Joshua rather than Rahab. Similarly as inappropriate in this denunciation of the clergy, he omits David, a king.

On the other hand, as particularly appropriate to the priesthood he inserts Melchizedek (who earlier in Hebrews had earned a whole chapter: 7), and where the writer to the Hebrews concludes 'and the prophets' Gildas spells them out - Elijah: 71:3, Elisha: 72:2 Isaiah: 72:3 Jeremiah: 72:4 . He also inserts Phineas, the sole name on to which hatred of sexual impurity can be imputed<sup>2</sup>.

The outstanding impression left by this comparison is that while the Hebrews 11 passage is devoted to a practical study of faith - a word which occurs 25 times in the chapter - Gildas uses that word only once [70:3]. Is it too much to claim that he is deliberately saying: 'Don't be deluded into thinking that faith is all that matters - I'll take its *locus classicus* in the New Testament and prove that in those characters there were undergirding works'? This section could be taken as a commentary on the Epistle of James c. 2 in which the lives of Abraham and Rahab are reviewed: 'But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?' [2.20].

In view of the Pelagian controversy which a century earlier had wracked the church this surely cannot be unintentional; a view strengthened by the observation that Gildas' silence about that episode is

1 I am unable to explain Gildas' omission of Isaac.

2 Homosexuality was one of Maelgwyn's sins (cf J & W MacQueen's notes (pp 222-23) in their edition of Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon* in which they also mention the problem in clergy (citing Jocelin's *Life of Kentigern* 28)), Gildas tackles it at the very start of his *Preface on Penance* (Winterbottom's *Gildas* p. 84)

more remarkable than has usually been noted. For even although historians can find no record of Arianism affecting our islands, Gildas refers to 'the Arian treason' affecting Britain 'a country that always longed to hear some novelty - and never took firm hold of anything' [12:3]. Surely if our modern understanding of the situation is correct, then the most telling illustration of British waywardness which Gildas could have employed, the climax of his argument, should have been: 'And, worse, our island produced the heretic Pelagius and even nurtured the heresy when other parts of the world had condemned it. And when the Church in Gaul sent messengers to root it out, our reformation was so half-hearted that we soon backslid, and they had to send yet again.' That would have clinched his whole argument. But not a word does he utter. Moreover he quotes a Pelagian text [38:2] as written by 'one of us'. Hugh Williams has shown that: 'we can conclude that Gildas was conversant with the writings of Jerome, and in particular with such as treat of the doctrine of Pelagius'<sup>2</sup>.

Most scholars, taking Constantius [VGA 27] at his face value, have assumed that Pelagianism disappeared from Britain around the middle of the fifth century so completely that Gildas' silence on the issue was due to his never having heard of it. However, the question of residual Pelagianism in sixth-century Britain has been the subject of some recent speculation. Rees questions why it should be unthinkable that Pelagianism, having infiltrated into south-west Wales in the fifth century, should exert a continuing influence in popular religious thought until the sixth<sup>3</sup>. Markus makes the point that at the beginning of the fifth century Britain would not have accepted the full-blown Augustinian theology (only then being worked out), and at most would have been pre-Augustinian. By the same token (as the debate had not been settled) might it not have been rather pre-Pelagian? Might the missions of St Germanus be thought of as instigated by a small group of pro-Augustinian zealots? As he points out, this suggestion would solve many

1 'Gildas seems to have known the Pelagian *De Virginitate*, whose author he probably regarded as a Briton, although he may well have been mistaken,' Wood I 'The end of Roman Britain; Continental evidence and parallels' *GNA* pp. 1-25

2 Williams *Gildas* fn. to his translation of 4:3

3 Rees BR *Pelagius; a reluctant heretic* 1988; Woodbridge p. 116

of the problems associated with Germanus's missions to Britain. It would also account for the continued circulation of Pelagian literature in the following years'. In a nut-shell, the evidence of c.69 may point to Gildas holding some semi-Pelagian view as being orthodox, with 'faith-only' as a new-fangled heresy to be resisted, in this instance by a more profound exegesis of scripture.

Markus's suggestion would also explain the attitude I detect in Gildas, in his complete silence on evangelism<sup>2</sup>. We must conclude that Gildas did not consider Pelagian views to be heretical, but rather had some sympathy for them. The argument that this proves he was out of touch with the wider church cannot be sustained as, were that the case, Gildas' prestige - as shown by Columbanus' references<sup>3</sup>, and his *Lives*<sup>4</sup> - would never have been established in that wider church. Rees, in his study of Pelagius, draws a parallel with the Church of Scotland in 1831 depriving Macleod\* Campbell of his ministerial status on a charge of heresy, because of his work *The nature of the Atonement*, a work now recognised as a classical exposition of orthodox doctrine<sup>5</sup>. By the same token we must assume that Gildas, now that the furore had died down, felt free to incorporate what was of value in Pelagian thinking into his own theological position. It seems highly probable that, in Britain at

1 Markus RA 'Pelagianism: Britain and the Continent' *J.Eccles.Hist.* 1986 37 191-204

2 Stripped of its finer points on the damnation of unbaptised babies, and of the harsher aspects of predestination, the essence of Augustinian teaching, as of the New Testament, is God's grace, not only forgiving the past, but empowering the present. This is 'gospel indeed'. Nothing less could explain the spread of the Christian faith at a time when it carried no social advantages. By contrast, at the end of day, full-blown Pelagian practice is a Christianity largely of 'works'. Granted forgiveness of the past at baptism, granted God's very watered-down grace to guide, it is in essence a challenge to struggle through will-power. This is not 'good-news' which impells simple believers with evangelistic zeal. This was not news to 'turn the world upside down'. Was residual Pelagianism a factor in that British failure to evangelise the Anglo-Saxons, of which Bede's complaints will be discussed below?

3 Columbanus; letter I:6 *Sancti Columbani Opera* (Ed. and trans.) Walker GSM 1957: Dublin p.8

4 *Vita Gildae; Auctore Monacho Ruiensi* Trans. Williams H as *The Life of Gildas* by the Monk of Ruys [*Gildas; op.cit* pp.324-389], and *Vita Gildae; Auctore Caradoco Lancarbanensi* Trans. Williams H as *The Life of Gildas* by Caradoc of Llangarfan. [*op.cit.* pp.394-413].

5 Rees BR *Pelagius; a reluctant heretic* 1988; Woodbridge p.23 (For McLeod Campbell's rehabilitation see Tuttle GM *So rich a soil; John McLeod\* Campbell on Christian atonement* 1986 Edinburgh). Unhappily Rees was too optimistic in implying that these views are now totally accepted, as demonstrated in Murray HM *Martyn Lloyd Jones; The fight of faith 1939-1981* 1990 Edinburgh pp. 225-248

\* Macleod, McLeod, MacLeod; each variant will be found in the naming of this minister.

any rate, the issues were not then seen in the clear-cut terms we use with hind-sight.

In Gaul, a century before Gildas, in the catastrophic decades following the collapse of Roman power, Salvian had written *De Gubernatione Dei*, a work which Gildas may well have known<sup>1</sup> in which it was maintained that the present troubles of the Church were not evidences of God's abandonment, but rather of his judgment<sup>2</sup>. Gildas, writing in a deceptively peaceful lull in British affairs, likewise saw God's hand in their recent history. He saw the British as God's 'latter-day Israel' [26], but ridden with sin. That his call was to holiness<sup>3</sup>, and that there were brethren of a like mind [1:16] demonstrates that, sinful as much of it was, there was yet a spiritual nucleus in the Church in Britain which was deeply concerned for its spiritual weakness, due to the sin of those who should have been its leaders.

There has been much debate about the evidence for monasticism in *De excidio britanniae*, and the later *Lives* of Gildas set him firmly in such a situation. All that is very shadowy. However it is widely accepted that it is this Gildas from whom advice on monastic problems was sought by 'Vinnian' of Ireland<sup>4</sup>; and the same who, as we have noted, was quoted by Columbanus as an authority<sup>5</sup>. In Sharpe's words: 'The writer of the *De Excidio* and the counsellor of 'Vinnian' appears as the leading reformer of the sixth-century Church in these islands, whose writing shamed or inspired the British Church to strive for something higher - and so gave it new vitality - and who in later life remained its guiding light'<sup>6</sup>.

The development of monasteries everywhere in Wales, and the blossoming of the age of the Welsh saints - with blessing not only in Wales, but in Cornwall and Brittany - are widely held to result, in part

1 'a work which may well have influenced the shape of *De Excidio*' Winterbottom M 'The preface of Gildas' *De Excidio* Trans, Hon, soc, Cymmrodorion 1974-5, pp 277-287

2 Salvian 'On the government of God' (Ed, and trans,) Sanford EM 1930 New York; Columbia UP

3 Hanning RW *The vision of history in Early Britain: from Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* 1966 New York; Columbia UP, pp 44-62 Hanning gives a detailed comparison of Salvian and Gildas.

4 Dumville DN 'Gildas and Vinniau' *GNA* pp 207-214

5 Gildas was one of the sources used by the Irish compilers of *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* widely used throughout Europe from the eighth century, *SEHI* p 249.

6 Sharpe R 'Gildas as a Father of the Church' *GNA* pp 193-205

at least, from the courage, and faithful proclamation of the truth, of Gildas and his companions. They are a classical example of the 'godly remnant' through whom God has, time and again, revived his Church. As we now turn to look at the records of the next evangelist of Bernicia - Kentigern - the tradition will be noted that he stayed in Wales for some years; a tradition which, it will be argued, should not be discarded too readily. On the tenuous dating for Kentigern's life, such a visit will probably have occurred within two or three decades of the circulation of *D.E.B.*, and therefore in the springtime of the resulting revival of spirituality and the blossoming of monasteries. If this be so, then the Church in Bernicia and its neighbours must count Gildas as among its benefactors.

## FORERUNNERS: SIXTH CENTURY

*The Annales Cambriae*<sup>1</sup> s. a. 612/613 note: 'The death of Conthigirnus'<sup>2</sup>. This, taken to refer to St Kentigern, has been thought to be sum-total of our historic knowledge of our only sixth-century forerunner. Were this so Kentigern (or 'St Mungo') would be a unidimensional figure, but in fact we may be able to dig a great deal more information from the hagiographies produced for twelfth-century bishops of Glasgow: the anonymous *Life* produced for Bishop Herbert, of which only fragments remain [hereafter H]; and that written for Bishop Jocelin by his namesake [J].

Had these hagiographies been written out of pious imaginations<sup>3</sup>, rather than assembled, a much smoother and trouble-free result would have been obtained: but been useless. However the fact that the twelfth-century writers were working with much earlier written sources becomes obvious:

- 1 No author would willingly tie himself into tortuous reasoning, as H does in his account of Kentigern's conception. A suggested gynaecological explanation is the subject of an *excursus*.
- 2 No bishop would sanction for public reading sexual details of that incident, if it could be avoided.
- 3 Much of that record is only explicable as directed to preserving good relations with Rheged, a kingdom which, having disappeared in the early seventh century, would have been of no interest in the twelfth.
- 4 The fact that Kentigern was consecrated by a single bishop would make his status suspect in twelfth-century eyes. It would therefore never have been invented, even to provide antiquarian flavour.
- 5 By the same token his practice of baptising at Epiphany was unwelcome; it had been condemned in AD 517. It cannot be a gratuitous invention.

Other similar evidences of early written sources will be deduced below. Some of this material goes back to the seventh century, according to

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1 Although compiled late-eighth century the entries for this period closely follow earlier Irish annals, Hughes K 'The Welsh Latin chronicles; *Annales Cambriae* and related texts' (1973) reprinted in her *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages* 1980 Woodbridge pp.67-85

2 *ESSH* p.126

3 As in *The life of Servanus* [*Lives of the Scottish Saints* (Tr, Metcalfe WM) 1895, 1990 Lampeter pp.29-41]. He was possibly contemporary with Kentigern, It is a work of pious fiction, Even its apparent sole value in linking his name with Fife probably merely explains its commissioning.



MacQueen, in his contribution to the debate on the *Lives*'. The complex relationship of these *Lives*, to the simplification of which I make a new suggestion, is important to our view of the records, but peripheral to the story of the Bernician Church. It has been postponed to an *excursus*.

It is clear, therefore, that the twelfth-century hagiographers had before them a nucleus of what I have elsewhere<sup>2</sup> called unmalleable facts. That they included them gives us valuable information. That they were prepared to use such unwelcome material encourages a respect for their integrity - without, of course, blinding us to the padding with standard hagiographical *topoi*.

In the absence of other sources for the sixth-century church in our area, and having established that there is useful information to glean, it is to Kentigern we must turn. He was born<sup>3</sup> in what was to become, around the time of his death, Bernician territory. There too he spent eight years of his ministry - at *Lothwerverd*, which is Loquhariot, fifteen miles from his birthplace, and less than a mile from Borthwick church [NT 369597], which is dedicated to him. Jocelin records that it was the site of one of two miraculous crosses erected by Kentigern. Kenneth Jackson says: 'The wonder-working cross of the saint there in the eleventh or twelfth century, the dedication at least as old as the early fourteenth, and the well there in the sixteenth, show that this place had special associations with

1 MacQueen J 'Yvain, Ewen, and Owein ap Urien' *D&G* 1956 33<sup>3</sup> pp.107-31

2 Gardner RFR 'Thaney's conception of St Kentigern; a gynaecological view' *forthcoming*

3 The age of 185 years is credited to him. It is tempting to wonder if this figure was conjured up in order to upstage St. Monenna who lived 'nine score years'. In one form of her legend this Irish saint founded seven churches in Alba, including one on Dunspeider in which she established nuns [Skene *CS* I:37]. Already noted is Smith's suggestion that there may be a foundation for this in the rededicated church at Traprain Law [AB78]. It was hereabouts that Kentigern was conceived, Skene suggested that Kentigern's mother was one of the nuns there [*op.cit.*]. While the date of his birth is completely unknown we can work back from that of his death in the early years of the seventh century. It is possible that we can date this exactly, for it is known to be on January 13th; entered as his feast day in several of the calendars. (Unaccountably Bishop Forbes, who published a number of these calendars [Calendars of the Scottish saints; Edinburgh 1872], in his biographical note of Kentigern in that same volume records it as November 13th, both on p.362 and p.372.) Assumed to have been a Sunday, January 13th fell on a Sunday in 603 and 614. In the *Annales Cambriae* Kentigern is recorded as dying in 612 but its entries have been shown to be one or two years too early in the case both of Columba's arrival in Argyll (562 for 563) and his death (595 for 597). Allowing for this slippage 614 would be appropriate. On the other hand there is support for 603 in the first lection of the *Office of St Baldred* in the Aberdeen Breviary [Tr. Stevenson J 1874 Edinburgh] where we read that Kentigern died in 503, which looks very like a scribal error for 603. Jocelin tells us that Kentigern died in the same year as King Rydderech, but as we do not know the date of this king's death, despite John Bannerman's discussion [*Studies in the history of Dalriada* 1974; Edinburgh, p.88], this proves insufficient to settle the question.

St. Kentigern. It is possible of course that these go right back to his own time, before the Anglian conquest, and that though Lothian became part of the bishopric of Lindisfarne in the seventh century, such Brittonic population as survived kept his memory alive there<sup>1</sup>.

The connection of Kentigern with later Bernician territory is also supported by the dedication to St Mungo of Simonburn church in the North Tyne valley<sup>2</sup>. While it is possible that the Mungo dedication there may be part of the wave of interest evidenced by his *Lives*, and associated with the re-establishment of the diocese of Glasgow, and the rebuilding there of his cathedral<sup>3</sup>, this is not necessarily so. Although the present building at Simonburn is thirteenth century, at a time when the living was in the gift of the kings of Scotland (Master Abel, rector of Simonburn in 1243, was a canon of St Mungo's cathedral in Glasgow), there are a number of carved stones (three of which Rosemary Cramp dates to the early part of the eighth century)<sup>4</sup>, while the foundations of an earlier church below the nave have been outlined by dowsing<sup>5</sup>. Local tradition, which holds that Kentigern came eastwards from Cumbria on an evangelizing mission, points also to a St Mungo's well, much deeper in Northumberland<sup>6</sup>. It is still to be seen on the west side of Holystone village [NT955026], more famous for St Ninian's or Lady well.

Whatever his age, we are probably safe in placing the final stretch of Kentigern's ministry in Strathclyde in the thirty years after the battle of Arthuret in 573, with the victory of his patron Rydderech and the consequent re-establishment of Christianity in that kingdom<sup>7</sup>.

1 Jackson K 'The sources for the life of St. Kentigern' *SEBC* p.337

2 This dedication appears to have been overlooked in recent literature, not marked on Bowen's maps of the Cult of Kentigern [*Saints, seaways and settlements in the Celtic lands* 1969 Cardiff p.84, 87] nor was it noted by Bishop Forbes in his exhaustive list of dedications to our saint [*Historians of Scotland* vol.5 *Lives of St. Kentigern*, 1874 Edinburgh pp. lxxxiii-lxxxv]. However it is listed, without comment, by Frank Knight [*Archeological light on the early Christianizing of Scotland* 1933 London 1:326]

3 Radford CAR, ELG Stones 'The remains of the cathedral of Bishop Jocelin at Glasgow (c.1197)' *Antiquaries J.* 1964 44 pp.220-32

4 Cramp R *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture: County Durham and Northumberland* 1984 Oxford pp.223-24

5 Bailey RM, E Cambridge, HD Briggs *Dowsing and Church Archaeology* 1988 Wimborne pp.127, 167.

6 Ward David CD *The great parish of Simonburn* 1972: Newcastle pp. 8-9. The Holystone section of *The County History of Northumberland* [vol. XV 1940 Newcastle] however, states this well may have become known by Mungo's name only since the popularity of the Rob Roy legend, but I find no support for this in Sir Walter Scott's *Rob Roy*.

7 The historicity of this battle is discussed by Molly Miller 'The commanders at Arthuret' *C&W* 1975 75 pp.96-118

Stevenson's edition of the Aberdeen offices of Kentigern, Thaney, and Baldred, was originally published privately for his friends with a long appendix much of which is written in a light-hearted vein - as exemplified by his rollicking *Ballad of St. Thenew*, and by his tongue-in-the-cheek very lengthy and erudite discussion of the Round Table legends, with the implications that Thaney's mother was sister or half-sister, or even aunt of Arthur! This attitude is as good as admitted by Stevenson himself, in whose view a discussion of the various sources for Kentigern's life was valueless: 'Hence what at first sight seemed to be three distinct sources of Jocelin's *Vita* shrink into one source only; and that - the vulgar faith and floating marvels of a singularly credulous time'. Happily modern scholars take the accounts more seriously.

Agreed is the presence of authentic early Cymric material in the Herbertian and Aberdeen material; noticable for example in the name of Kentigern's mother and of her lover. As indicated, in the first excursus below, there is evidence in the Herbertian *Life* of an early source which the writer had before him. There are, moreover, other philological evidences of early material which prevent us from discarding the Lives as being totally worthless hagiography invented six centuries after the imagined events<sup>2</sup>.

The events surrounding Kentigern's death serve as strong evidence of the historical substrate which must lie beneath later elaborations and that 'seasoning with Roman salt' which Jocelin proudly claims. According to Jocelin's story [J. 42, 43] Kentigern, on the octave of the Epiphany, when it had been his annual custom to conduct baptisms, gave a dying exhortation to his disciples from his stone bed telling them of his approaching death.

1 Stevenson *op. cit.*, p. 45

2 The Gaelic material presumed by the 'little volume in the Scottic style' mentioned by Jocelin as one of his sources, is assumed by Jackson [*op. cit.*, p. 276] to date probably from the Gaelicising of Strathclyde when it was absorbed into the orbit of Gaelic Scotland in the early eleventh century. However Macquarrie [*op. cit.*, p. 11] has suggested that one item could be as early as 642. This is the episode in J. 9 where Kentigern comes to the hermit Fergus, who dies in his presence and whom Kentigern buries in a previously unused cemetery consecrated by St. Ninian, at Cathures. Despite Jocelin giving this as another (otherwise unrecorded) name for Glasgow, most scholars consider it to refer to the Stirling/Falkirk area which is known to be associated with Ninian. The story abounds in Gaelic names, and there is evidence of Dalriadan penetration there which, however, ceased when they were driven out after defeat in 642. Macquarrie believes that this story may well refer to a Gaelic hermit who lived there during this period of Gaelic power, and if so it probably originated prior to 642. The story does not seek to link Kentigern with any other important figure, and therefore was not inserted for any propaganda motive.

He instructed them to prepare a warm bath, on stepping into which he would die. In response to their fervent requests, passed on by him to heaven, it was granted that such of his followers who managed to step into the water while it was still warm would die with him and thus form an entourage for his entry to glory.

David McRoberts in reconstructing this story reveals the ancient material lying behind it. As Kentigern's established feast day was Jan. 13th, Jocelin was tied to the Octave of the Epiphany as the day of his death. He would never have invented Epiphany as a date for baptisms, for although once popular in western Europe, this custom had died out centuries before, having being condemned by the Council of Gerona as early as 517. He must therefore have been using a written source for this episode itself so early that it contained no criticism of the practice. Jocelin misread as 'bed' the word in his source which should have been 'chair'. McRoberts interprets the recorded speech [J. 42] as Kentigern's address to catechumens delivered from his stone episcopal chair, then his collapse on Epiphany Sunday while standing in the baptismal water which had been warmed for his benefit in view of his great age, followed by his death a week later<sup>2</sup>. In recording earlier baptisms by Kentigern Jocelin had written [J. 19] of folk who 'like thirsty harts ran to the living fountain of baptism with burning desire' (quoting Ps. 42). No doubt a similar phrase occurred in the original account here and was taken literally by Jocelin as an act - in Monsignor McRobert's felicitious phrase - of ecclesiastical suttee.

If we tentatively accept James MacQueen's view that the earliest Life was probably written in 600-650, it would date from the lifetime of some of Kentigern's contemporaries. While other scholars reject so early a date it is clear that there is early material of Strathclyde provenance. Additionally it is agreed that some geographical details come from a source in Lothian. With this encouragement to treat the records of St Kentigern with a respect which has not usually be given them, what information can we sift which might cast light on to the Christian faith in the areas abutting on Bernicia?

1 Presumably Jocelin had not seen the Frith stool in Hexham Abbey, nor the similar stone seat in Beverley Minister.

2 McRoberts D 'The death of St. Kentigern of Glasgow' *Innes Review* 1973 24 43-50 fn.10

In fact the story starts at Thaney's father's palace in Lothian in what is to become Bernician territory: Traprain Law alone fits the picture'. It has sufficiently precipitous edges to supply the execution-site recorded in J.3 and H.4. In H.7 we read of the death of Thenew's father being marked by 'a great royal stone...which remaineth to this day at a distance of about a mile to the south of Mount Dumpelder.' The ordnance survey records a monolith as Lot's Pillar 1 km south of Traprain Law [NT 578741].

To turn to THANNEY: 'But when into the land of that region the sound of the announcement of the Christian faith went forth, and the words of the saintly preachers advanced into those northern regions from which all evil used to proceed, she heard with her ears; straightway her heart was hot within her...' [J.1] Jocelin calls her father 'most pagan'; moved to rage 'because of the name of Christ...' [J.1] While the Herbertian writer refers to him as 'half pagan', he also records that his swineherd was 'secretly a Christian.' [H.1] This suggests contemporary pioneer missionary preaching with its normal responses: the convert opening up her heart eagerly to the gospel, and the simultaneous inevitable stirring up of much stronger opposition than occurs where Christianity is already established<sup>2</sup>. Such a pattern is seen repeatedly in Paul's missionary journeys as well as in recent experience. This picture of initial evangelism is supported by the fact that Thaney is not sufficiently instructed to realise the impossibility of her dream of becoming a second Mary, and by the fact that, despite the absence of any of the usual reasons for postponing baptism, she is as yet unbaptised. It suggests, therefore, that in the early sixth century there was missionary activity pushing into Lothian.

ST SERVANUS. Across the Forth, in Pictish territory, we meet St Servanus and an established monastery with clerics and boys being trained

1 Described in Baldwin JR *Exploring Scotland's Heritage; Lothian and Borders* 1985 Edinburgh pp 138-9. It is known to have been a British fort although scholars continue to argue about the dates at which it was occupied. The latest reappraisal is in *ABTB*.

2 Although these are routine hagiographical *topoi* their content should not be too readily discarded. An early-twentieth century missionary to South India; Amy Carmichael [Houghton F *Amy Carmichael of Dohnavur* 1953 London] tells of a young girl who, after a single-afternoon's contact with missionaries in which she learned that there was a God who loved her ('no time to tell her much of the Lord Jesus Christ') refused to rub Siva's ashes on herself. She was beaten repeatedly, yet hung on to her minuscule knowledge of, and trust in, God for many years without further instruction. [Carmichael A *Mimosa* 1935<sup>6</sup> London].

for the Divine service [J.4, H.8]. Of St Servanus we know almost nothing'. However J. had a Gaelic source (doubtless behind his 'little volume written in the Scotie dialect', which was presumably in barbarous Latin, as he was able to read it) from which he took Servanus' exclamation: 'Wherefore in the language of his country he exclaimed "Mochöhe, Mochöhe" which in Latin means "Care mi, Care mi."' [J.4] This probably would also have yielded him the description of the coracle: 'built after the fashion of the Scotti' [J.3]. However he also used a Cymric source for this passage: 'Wherefore (Servanus) was accustomed to call him in the language of his country "Munghu", which in Latin means "Karissimus Amicus"'. Presumably Jocelin did not notice that he was giving 'as the language of the country' first Gaelic and then Welsh. No one in the twelfth century would invent the latter fact, so it must be accepted as copied from an early source, which we would be wise not to discard off-hand. The swineherd, secretly Christian, had been instructed by Servanus [H.1]. While William Stevenson shows that the ruins of St Kentigern's church at Culros are of a building almost certainly erected after 1491<sup>2</sup>, I have argued earlier that this proves nothing as to the original foundation. The universal tradition linking both the name of Servanus, and Kentigern's childhood, with the north shores of the firth of Forth cannot be easily dismissed. It seems likely therefore that such an established Fife centre was the source of the missionary enterprise into Lothian, and the fact of such enterprise reflects an active spiritual life. Spiritually moribund churches have no missionary programme. It tends to confirm spiritual fruit remaining from St Ninian's mission to the southern Picts probably about a century earlier.

THE EPISODE OF FERGUS: Jocelin's ignorance of the geography of the Upper Forth is manifest in his description of Kentigern's flight from Servanus; he misunderstands the names of tides as the names of rivers. However he does tell us that Kentigern reached Fergus the same day [J.9] as he left Servanus, which strongly supports the episode as being in the Stirling/Falkirk area, for Glasgow would have been too far. Fergus dies

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1 Such dates as we have cast a considerable doubt on this episode. It is quite possible that two saints have been confused in the records, [Forbes AP *Kalendars of Scottish saints* 1872 Edinburgh p.449]. He is also discussed by Alexander Boyle ['St Servanus and the as tradition of the Life of St Kentigern' *Innes Review* 1970 31 pp.37-45].

2 Stevenson *op.cit.* p.65.

next day and is buried in a cemetery consecrated long before by St Ninian. Such a visit by St Ninian is very likely as his journey to Fife would go that way' and is further support for Ninian's earlier mission to the Picts.

ELECTION AS BISHOP OF STRATHCLYDE. Even stronger proof of earlier missionary enterprise (for which Ninian must be the obvious candidate) is found in the account of Kentigern's election to the bishopric at Glasgow: 'Therefore by divine prompting, the king and clergy of the Cambrian region, with other Christians, albeit they were few in number, came together, and after taking into consideration what was to be done to restore the good estate of the Church, which was well-nigh destroyed, they with one account approached St. Kentigern...' [J. 11] It is a picture of a degenerate church which fits in perfectly with Patrick's anger at the un-Christian behaviour of Coroticus<sup>2</sup>, an earlier king of Strathclyde, and a so called Christian. It looks as though things had not improved in the intervening hundred years or so. We have evidence of the survival of a remnant of practising Christians in a previously evangelised but now largely apostate Strathclyde,

CONSECRATION AS BISHOP. Kentigern is consecrated by only one bishop, as then was the custom 'among the Britons and Scots' [J. 11], and the bishop has to be sent for from Ireland. However Jocelin reports that Kentigern was elected by, among others, the clergy. Unless we are to postulate that clergy were elected and appointed by local groups of believers, which seems most improbable in that age, they must have travelled to Ireland<sup>3</sup> or Wales for ordination, which presumably only followed on training there also. However we read [J. 11] 'Many (in Strathclyde) in name only Christians, were plunged in the slough of vice of all sorts; the greatest part of them had been taught by the ministry of men who were unskilled and ignorant of the word of God.' There are a number of possibilities. One is that among the men who travelled abroad for ordination some were unworthy<sup>4</sup>. Or it may be

1 Macquarrie's view that this story is of early date has been discussed above.

2 Epistle to Coroticus *Patrick* Chichester; Phillimore

3 There has always been constant coming and going between Ulster and Scotland [*The Irish-Sea Province in archaeology and history* Ed. Moore D 1970 Cardiff *passim*]. Individual houses in Scotland can be seen from the other side on a clear day. Many unknown Christians must have crossed. Brignat was sent to Britain 'to receive the rites of the monastic life in the monastery of Whithern'. St Monnena/Modwena is reported to have built churches in Scotland, *Kalendars* pp. 405/6.

4 Obtaining ordination perhaps for money, a custom which we know existed among Britons because it was harshly criticised by Gildas in the previous century [DEB]

that the number of clergy was so few that much pastoral care had to be exercised (often inadequately) by assistants similar to the evangelists and colporteurs everywhere employed in missionary situations of a later age. The alternative: that the cooperative Irish bishop was in the habit of making regular visits to ordain clergy for Strathclyde, seems most unlikely as that would have involved him in some pastoral responsibility (which on the evidence was not being exercised), or at least required his approval before Kentigern was elected.

The implications are that there was no bishop nearer than Ireland: neither at Whithorn nor Carlisle; that the church had struggled on without them, as we will see it doing under James the Deacon; and that there was sufficient dedication for some men to travel afar for training and ordination; but that much of the pastoral care was inadequate.

HIS MINISTRY Much of the account given of Kentigern's spiritual life is not germane to our purpose, and the routine stuff of hagiography. However, while we recognise in the phrase 'he betook himself to his accustomed weapons of prayer', an echo of Sulpicius Severus<sup>1</sup>, this is not necessarily to disbelieve the record of Kentigern's practice, but merely to note a borrowing of the vocabulary in which to express it. The claim that he began to divide parishes [J.19] is surely an anachronism. On the other hand his baptising, training clergy, and building churches were inevitable in any pastoral care. The account of Kentigern travelling on foot rather than horseback [J.19] is almost certainly true, for there is in it an inescapable criticism of later bishops - doubtless including those who commissioned these works<sup>2</sup>.

Following plots against his life in Strathclyde Kentigern left the area, but did not abandon his evangelistic activities<sup>3</sup> remaining for some

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<sup>1</sup> Sulpicius Severus *Life of Martin* c.16

<sup>2</sup> The fact that these traditions were admitted to parallel those of Cuthbert [H, Introd.] makes one wary; however walking provided ideal opportunities for evangelism; Bede wrote of Aidan: 'He used to travel everywhere, in town and country, not on horseback but on foot, in order that, as he walked along, whenever he saw people whether rich or poor, he might at once approach them and, if they were unbelievers, invite them to accept the mystery of the faith; or, if they were believers, that he might strengthen them in their faith...' [HE iii;5]

<sup>3</sup> It would have been remarkable had he done otherwise for this has been standard practice of missionaries forced to move on; from Paul [Acts 13:51-14:21] to missionaries ejected from China by Mao's victory in 1950, Kentigern's contemporary Columbanus, and Wilfrid in the next century did the same.



time in Cumberland [J.23] which brought him into nearer contact with the future Bernicia. Jocelin records that Kentigern converted to the Christian religion many from a stange belief, and others who were erroneous in the faith. The latter could refer to Pelagianism which has been said to be strongest in the north and west of Britain'. Be that as it may, there were manifestly Christians of a sort in 'Cumberland'. Positive evidence of Kentigern's activities there has already been provided in the discussion of churches dedicated to him in the area north of the River Derwent [Map p.127]. These support Jocelin's account, based as we have seen on early material. The Tyne Gap, and of the Stanegate, provided easy access to the east, and an extension of his missionary endeavours in that direction has been postulated on the evidence of the Simonburn dedication, and the Holystone well. A further outreach by Kentigern into Tynedale and the Bernician heartland in the mid-fifth century is therefore likely.

While accepting Kentigern's activities in Cumbria, Jackson<sup>2</sup> rejects as bogus the account of a further journey to Wales [J.23-25], with the foundation there of a monastery at St Asaph's<sup>3</sup>. There are other authorities, however, who believe the story<sup>4</sup>. The episode has been discussed at length by Simpson<sup>5</sup>, who accepts it. In fact no-one has satisfactorily answered Jackson's own question: 'Why the monks of St. Asaph should wish to take the credit from their patron Asaph and give it to Kentigern, if that is what happened, remains a mystery'<sup>6</sup>. Why indeed, unless founded<sup>7</sup> on fact?.

1 David Wright suggested Carlisle as a possible birthplaces for Pelagius, [unpublished paper read Oct.91; Newcastle on Tyne]. All this, of course, must be pure conjecture.

2 Jackson K *op. cit.*, p.341

3 Jackson K *op. cit.*, p.315 and fn<sup>3</sup>) citing as evidence the late Norman-Latin forms of the Brittonic names 'the whole thing smelling of the twelfth century.' He was followed by Molly Miller who believed the establishment of the cult of Kentigern in Llanelwy to date only from the ninth century, and therefore by a knock-on process considers its corroborative story (contained in a 1265 'forgery' - printed by Forbes *op. cit.*, pp lxxix-lxxxii but unhappily not translated) to be 'certainly fictitious' ['Historicity and the pedigrees of the Northcountrymen *Bull. Bd. of Celtic Studies* 1975 26 pp.169-74]; and Macquarrie: 'a Welsh exile for Kentigern is inherently unlikely' ['The career of St Kentigern' *Innes Review* 1986<sup>3</sup> pp.3-24].

4 Sir Ifor Williams wrote that 'Kentigern, .. our *Cyndeyrn*, certainly travelled south and founded a monastery on the bank of the R. Elwy' ['Wales and the North' *C&W* 51 1951 p.87]. Similarly Kathleen Hughes displays no doubts when referring to 'St. Kentigern of Glasgow and Llanelwy' ['The A-text of *Annales Cambriae*' *Celtic Britain in the early Middle Ages* 1980 Woodbridge pp.86-100].

5 WD Simpson [*The Historical St. Columba* <sup>3</sup>1963 Edinburgh p.103] refers to Jackson's article as 'a brilliant but brittle and disintegrative study'.

6 Jackson *op. cit.*, pp.317-18

7 Many of the details are clearly hagiographic embellishment, with the Roman trips being anachronistic.

While that episode is not directly relevant to our Northumbrian interest, it has implications for the credibility of the Life we are considering, and is a reminder of the contacts between Wales and its northern fellow-countrymen. In a recent study Simon Evans writes: 'As a general statement we can say that up to the beginning of the seventh century (and indeed later) there must have been a close link between Wales, especially North Wales, and the "North", by which is meant parts of northern England and southern Scotland. The inhabitants of both these areas probably felt themselves as peoples of one land; they were *Cymry* (*#Combrogī*), an appellation first used perhaps towards the end of the sixth century, when the progress of the Anglo-Saxons was threatening to divide their country in two. The sense of kinship between North Wales kingdoms and the 'men of the North' may well have persisted after the political link had been destroyed.' Evans notes that, at the end of the sixth century, a poet at the court of Powys could travel to a court on the edge of the Pennines and then on to Rheged<sup>1</sup>.

KENTIGERN'S STAY AT HODDOM. On being recalled to Strathclyde by King Rydderich after the latter's victory at Arthuret, Kentigern is recorded by Jocelin [J.33] as staying at 'Holdelm' [in Dumfriesshire] for some years. There are a number of problems about this episode. Constantine<sup>2</sup>, born to Rydderech's queen, is not recorded in the genealogies; however the queen's name Languoreth is Cymric. Macquarrie considers 'this episode to show signs of coming from a Bretonnic source with some factual information...the most reliable and historical parts could well go back to the late seventh or early eighth century'<sup>3</sup>. Another problem is that Kentigern's sermon [J.32] to the crowd that gathered on his arrival refers to 'Woden', Jocelin adding 'whom they, and especially the Angles, believed to be the chief deity.' This is almost certainly an anachronism, as Anglian penetration so far west at this time is unlikely, or at most was minimal. Jackson makes the useful suggestion that the writer wanted to record Kentigern as converting the people from the worship of Celtic pagan gods, but as he did not know of the names of any, substituted that of Woden<sup>4</sup>. There is, however, nothing

1 Evans DS 'Introductory Essay' *GM Doble Lives of the Welsh Saints* 1971 Cardiff p.34

2 The possible confusion between several Constantines, including this, is discussed in *ESSC* pp. 91,92.

3 Macquarrie *op.cit.* p.16.

4 Jackson *op.cit.* p.321

intrinsically anachronistic in Jocelin's record of Kentigern's prayer;

When he had finished he arose and, in the Name of the Holy Trinity, blessed the assembled multitude. Then, *as if fortifying the bystanders with the sign of the holy cross*, he spake as follows; "I command that all those who envy the salvation of men, and oppose the Word of God, in the power of the same, depart instantly from hence, and oppose no obstacle to them who shall believe." Whereupon, with exceeding speed, an immense multitude of phantoms, horrible in stature and appearance, coming out of that crowd, fled away in the sight of all, and a great terror fell on those who beheld them. [J.32]

As was demonstrated in the early 1970s by a disastrous death during an attempted exorcism in the north of England, demonic warfare is no trivial enterprise. The words italicised in that passage have a modern sound which suggest a contemporary record, and indicates the quality of Kentigern's spirituality. Other types of miracle, such as those linked with Kentigern's evangelism, have been discussed in an earlier *excursus*. This is an opportune moment to look at demonic warfare as reported not only in Kentigern's life, but in that of other Christians of that age, notably Germanus<sup>1</sup>, Columba<sup>2</sup> and Guthlac<sup>3</sup>. Such reports have been almost universally discarded out of hand by historians. In an *excursus* I show that, in view of current evidence, this attitude to the demonic is no longer acceptable, even although the concept may be philosophically or academically unwelcome. Hillgarth, in a study of *Christianity and paganism: 350-750. The conversion of Western Europe* has written: 'To understand the mentality of these centuries, one might consider equatorial Africa today. Christ's power over demons, over *visible* appearances of evil, especially in the form of demon possession, is perfectly intelligible, believable, and is of the utmost importance to modern African converts to Christianity'<sup>4</sup>.

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1 Constantius of Lyons *Life of St Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre* Tr. Hoare FH *The Western Fathers* 1954, 1980 London; especially ch.13

2 *AVC* 3:8

3 *Felix's Life of Guthlac* pp.29-36, and Bertram Colgrave's notes pp.184-87

4 Hillgarth JN *op.cit.*, 1986 Philadelphia p.12

## KENTIGERN'S MINISTRY IN STRATHCLYDE.

In view of Kentigern's earlier mission in Cumberland, his stay in Dumfriesshire is logical, being an ideal centre for anyone having to exercise pastoral oversight of churches between the Cumbrian Derwent and the Clyde estuary. Glasgow, while convenient for the royal residence at Dumbarton, is very badly placed for the oversight of Strathclyde, necessitating long journeys south in answer to every call of duty. However when Kentigern became old and unable to travel much himself, it became sensible for him to be based near the administrative centre of the country, and he moved to Glasgow [J.33], appointing disciples to make journeys on his behalf [J.34]. For the present, however, the implication of his Hoddam base is that Kentigern gave priority to his pastoral duties throughout his area. From Hoddam it is possible [Paul provides the precedent: Acts 15:36] that he would have made further travels in the 570s and 580s along the Stanegate into Bernicia to increase and build up the Church there.

It is from the time when he had later settled in Glasgow that the meeting of Kentigern and Columba is reported [J.39-40]. Scholars make much of Adomnan's silence on the subject, but the argument from silence proves invalid in this case<sup>1</sup>. On the contrary the argument from pastoral and missionary experience makes such a meeting very probable indeed. Kentigern and Columba were the only men with oversight for the church in northern Britain. Their fields of missionary evangelism and church founding were contiguous, so matters of church membership and discipline needed to be ironed out. However, we surely make a mistake if we think of this being the meeting of two competing and mutually suspicious Christian agencies<sup>2</sup>. They were members of the one Christian Church into the leadership of which Kentigern had been consecrated by an Irish bishop. But it would not be only administrative problems they would wish to discuss. They would want to pray and talk together about the work of their Lord, to encourage one other in

1 Adomnan's main purpose was to record the miracles of Columba, not his travels. We would indeed be hard pressed from the material he provides to map out Columba's journeyings, or build up a neat record of his life and work. As Adomnan himself wrote in his preface 'We have thought that the reader should be warned of this also, that for the sake of brevity, we have left out many things concerning this man of blessed memory, even things that were worthy of remembrance, AVC p 179

2 as WD Stimpson does, e.g. in his *The origins of Christianity in Aberdeenshire* [1925 Aberdeen]. He misunderstands, as curse, Columba's prophecy (of St Donnan's martyrdom) and considers this 'strikingly reveals the true relations between the Pictish church and the rival Scotian church of Iona' [p.26 fn,2] yet William Reeves' *Adomnan* [p.293-94], which he cites, nowhere supports this view.

the faith. Although 'to fellowship' is current transatlantic jargon, the experience has been greatly prized throughout the history of the Church'.

Jocelin [J. 39] writes of Columba's desire

'to visit him, to behold him, to come into his close intimacy and to consult the sanctuary of his holy breast regarding the things which lay near his own heart....But how great was the sweetness of Divine contemplation within these holy hearts is not for me to say, nor is it given to me, or to such as I am, to reveal the manna which is hidden, and, as I think, entirely unknown save unto them that taste it.'

This is not mere hagiography but the experience of the godly of every age.

Adomnan tells us [AVC I: 15] that King Roderic who reigned in the rock of Cloth (i. e. Kentigern's patron Rydderic) was a friend of Columba's and had sought his prophetic word. There must surely be every likelihood that the king would have said to his own bishop: "You two must meet".

Additional to all this we have the statement by Jocelin that Kentigern and Columba during this visit exchanged pastoral staffs, and that Columba's was preserved at Ripon<sup>2</sup>. There is the additional witness of Fordun, writing two and a half centuries later: 'And now the cambo (or crook) which the blessed Kentigern had received from the blessed Columba, inclosed in gold mountings and studded round with a variety of pearls, is still preserved with great reverence in the church of St. Wilfrid of Ripon.' In quoting this William Stevenson adds: 'But for the gold and the pearls we might have suspected that the author of the *Scotichronicon* merely echoes the monk of Furness'<sup>3</sup>.

Joseph Anderson<sup>4</sup> described the *Quiग्रich* or Crozier of St Fillan. This consisted of an outer case of silver gilt ornamented with silver wire, apparently of fourteenth-century workmanship, which, when opened, proved to

1 As exemplified in the visit of Acca and Wilfrid to Willibrord in Frisia [HE iii: 13]

2 Jackson [*op. cit.*, p. 327] considers this story to have entered the Kentigern legend from an English source. He bolsters his argument by the fact that the see of Glasgow was in the eleventh century subject to York. But in that case if, as Jackson maintains, the whole story was an invention, why would it be included in a Glasgow document produced at a time Glasgow was seeking independence from York? Macquarrie [*op. cit.*, p. 16] also, considers that we should regard this episode as unhistorical; but believes the story to be a concoction from a period when Strathclyde was being drawn increasingly into a Gaelic cultural sphere.

3 Stevenson *op. cit.*, p. 92

4 Anderson *J. Scotland in Early Christian Times* 1881 Edinburgh pp. 216-51.

contain within it the actual crook which appears to be much older. Anderson traced the well-documented history of this crozier over many centuries, in particular the rights which its possession gave to its guardian. It was not a mere symbol of office, but to some extent an actual conveyance of office. If we accept this then it seems we may have hitherto missed the point of the account of Columba and Kentigern exchanging staffs. They were not giving each other a memento of their meeting, but were conveying authority in each others spheres. Nothing could better symbolise the unity of faith and purpose of the Celtic and British 'churches'. Even if this is Jocelin's fabrication it demonstrates that in the twelfth century it was believed that in the sixth century the Celtic and British churches accepted each other's ministries. However in support of the truth of the story there is a cluster of facts which appears to have escaped previous notice:

1 Walter Bower wrote, c.AD 1440: '[Oswald] venerated his protector St Columba with the greatest devotion and notably built various churches and oratories in his kingdom, namely in Lindisfarne. Topcliffe-on-Swale and other places'<sup>1</sup>. That church at Topcliffe [SE399761] is one of only four ancient churches in England certainly dedicated to our Columba<sup>2</sup>; of the many churches which Bede tells us were established by Oswald and Aidan, why this one to Columba? Because Ripon is next door?

2 Five miles south of Ripon is St Mungo's well at Copgrove where the church [SE346633] Major believes may have been originally dedicated to Mungo<sup>3</sup>.

3 The third point is Ripon itself<sup>4</sup> (now revealed by Ian Wood as 'an outlier of Columbanan monasticism'<sup>5</sup>, and therefore surely with Celtic connections) in which we are told Mungo deposited Columba's crozier.

While, to copy Ian Wood's description of his own argument just quoted: 'this hypothetical chain of events is extremely tenuous'<sup>6</sup>, it adds some weight to an acceptance of the tradition of a meeting between Kentigern and Columba, with the deposition of Columba's crook at Ripon.

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1 *Scotichronicon* [III:42] Ed. Watt DER, [Vol.2 E&T John and Winifred MacQueen] 1989 Aberdeen, p.121. They were unable to trace Bower's source for this statement about Topcliffe-on-Swale, p.242.

2 Dedication mentioned in 1303, i.e. before Bower wrote. [leaflet *History of Topcliffe Church* n.d.]

3 Major H *Memorials of Copgrove* 1922 Oxford p.81

4 Ripon must believe the tradition, for its modern reredos carries a statue of Columba.

5 Wood IN 'Ripon, Francia and the Franks Casket in the Early Middle Ages' *Northern Hist.* 1990 26 pp.1-19

6 *idem*

Some modern scholars, seem to assume that a fog-bank covered Britain in the later-fifth and sixth century', and that journeys of any distance did not occur. Yet scholarship happily accepts that Benedict Biscop and Wilfrid commuted to and from Gaul and Rome a century later; and, more to the point, that Kentigern's younger contemporary Columbanus travelled widely in what is now France, Switzerland and Italy. No surprise is expressed that Welsh warriors were part of the *Gododdin* expedition. Their presence there as kin is assumed, their trip to the hosting taken as granted, but the reverse journey by Kentigern a few decades earlier has to be explained away as a later invention for ecclesiastico-political reasons. Kentigern and his followers and the Welsh to whom they were reported to have gone, were of common stock, perhaps even kin<sup>2</sup>.

The reference to his disciples is made by Jocelin in connection with a new missionary outreach northwards and overseas. There are dedications to Kentigern up the east coast to the Aberdeen area and beyond. Although one at least may be traced to Bishop Elphinstone in the late 15th century 'who, remembering his previous residence in Glasgow, selected St. Mungo as one of the titulars of his new seat of learning'<sup>3</sup>, and many may be twelfth century<sup>4</sup> it would be facile to date all these dedications as late. Of value is Simpson's note: '...these two Welsh brother saints, Nidan and Finan, who laboured together under Kentigern in Mar, have also churches side by side in far-away Anglesey (Llanfinan and Llannidan)<sup>5</sup>.

1 e.g. EA Thompson ['Gildas and the history of Britain' *Britannia* 10 1979 pp.203-261]; '...Kent, south England generally, East Anglia, regions of which he [Gildas] appears to know nothing whatever...The vast area of the Midlands...is to him unknown land'.

2 William Stevenson, although unsympathetic to the historical accuracy of the Kentigern records, nevertheless noted some curious relationships; 'We have a twofold line of connection between the Britons of Strathclyde and their kindred tribes in the south; and in this complex relation moreover, St Mungo is doubly involved, Melangell, a sister of Roderic, the princely friend and protector of Kentigern - or, as Jocelin would have it, the pious regent under the royal saint - was herself a saint, and the foundress of a church in Wales; and her kinsman, Dingad, also called a saint by the Welsh, had for his wife Tonwy or Trefrian, a daughter of Loth of Lothian, the sister therefore of St Thenew and the aunt of Kentigern. [*Aberdeen Breviary* p.92].

3 *ACDS* p.187

4 Jackson [*op.cit.*]; 'One may guess that the Kentigern dedications in the north are due to the twelfth-century revival of his cult already mentioned, dating perhaps from the period when David I, formerly Earl of Cumbria, became king of all Scotland and introduced many southern influences in the north,' [p.322] He appeals for support to William Watson whose rejection of the tradition, however, is by no means so robust. [*The Celtic placenames of Scotland* p.324]

5 Simpson WD *The origins of Christianity in Aberdeenshire* 1925 Aberdeen p.25

Jocelin states that they went 'towards' the Orkneys, Norway and Iceland. Obviously we have no proof that Kentigern's followers reached these distant destinations, and it would be foolish and unnecessary to maintain that they did. Nevertheless, before we accept Jackson's: 'The missionaries to Scandinavian lands are a bogus and preposterous piece of fancy'<sup>1</sup>, it is perhaps worth pausing for a moment<sup>2</sup>.

The flat assumption that such missionary enterprise did not occur need not be accepted without question. Jocelin describes Kentigern's stimulus as being due to: 'his spirit, always panting for the salvation of the many, never rested...' [J.34] This, again, rings true, recalling Paul's cry "necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel!" [1.Cor.9:16] and demonstrated in the constant motivation of Christian missions based, in part, on the dominical command which closes Matthew's gospel: 'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations' [28:19]. Already noted is the fact that, within a generation of Kentigern, Christians fired with the same zeal reached Central China with the gospel.

The assumption against missionary stimulus is also contradicted by a passage in H.E. [ii.2] to which insufficient attention has been paid. Bede, recording the massacre of hundreds of British monks by Æthelfrith at the battle of Chester, sees it as a fulfilment of Augustine's warning to the

1 Jackson *op.cit.* p.322. Macquarrie also feels that this aspect of the story cannot be accepted adding as explanation (not as opinion) that these overseas enterprises were: 'an attempt to improve upon the missionary work of Ninian and Columba' [*op.cit.* p. 15].

2 There is the curious record in the *Landnámabók* [ESSH p.340; and Forbes *Historians of Scotland* - 5 p.366] that the Norwegian settlers in Iceland found there were already Celtic Christians there. Knight draws attention to the fact they were called 'Papa' (and he cites the word used in many placenames in Iceland, and Orkney and Shetland) "Papa" was the 'Father', whom, as Joceline states [J.34] Kentigern placed over the monasteries which he founded. The point of interest is that the word would have been unpronounceable by the Gaels of the Columban Church, who in its place, with their antipathy for the letter 'p', substituted the Eastern word 'Ab' to describe the head of their monasteries, 'Papa', therefore, wherever it is found, indicates that it was a spot Christianized by the P-using Pictish churchmen, sent forth either by Ninian or by Kentigern.' [*Archaeological light on the early Christianizing of Scotland* 1:334] Even although one would substitute 'British' for 'Pictish' in that last sentence the linguistic argument would at first sight appear to hold. Although the Papay, Papel, Papa names were Old Norse, not directly P-celtic, it seems highly likely that the Norse borrowed the word which the Christian monks had used to describe themselves. The fact that there is a five-century gap is of little importance, for it seems unlikely that North Atlantic transport improved markedly in that period. However, against that argument is Glyn Jones' note that these Islandic Celtic 'solitaries had no wish to proselytize' [*History of the Vikings* 1973 Oxford p.275]; and the urge to self-exile as a form of martyrdom in the search for holiness [Stancliffe C 'Red, white and blue martyrdom' *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe; studies in memory of Kathleen Hughes* (Eds Whitelock D, R McKitterick, D Dumville) 1982 Cambridge pp.21-46] is peculiarly Irish.



British bishops that 'if they would not preach the way of life to the English nation, they would one day suffer the vengeance of death at their hands.' This passage only makes sense if missionary enterprise was then seen to be mandatory, even to those who had inflicted much bloodshed and disruption. It was clearly reckoned to be such an inescapable obligation that divine retribution would inevitably fall on those who failed to carry out God's commands. Bede felt so strongly about this, and that the command had been operative in the earliest years of the seventh century, that he returned [HE V. 22] to castigate the Britons 'who would not proclaim to the English the knowledge of the Christian faith which they had.'

Haddan and Stubbs wrote: 'It is remarkable that while Scots (Irish) were the missionaries *par excellence* of nearly all Europe north of the Alps, and in particular of all Saxon England north of the Thames, not one Cumbrian, Welsh, or Cornish missionary to any non-Celtic nation is mentioned anywhere'. Quoting that, the 'name of Nynias as a notable exception' was added by Plummer<sup>2</sup>. If we exclude, as improbable, the Scandinavian world, it must be admitted that the missionary enterprise of Kentigern and his followers appears to have been to Britons and Picts. However this was dictated by geography - the areas at hand to be reached were Pictland, Cumberland and Bernicia - there is no evidence of lack of evangelistic zeal on the part of these sixth-century Christians.

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1 Haddan AW and W Stubbs *Councils and ecclesiastical documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland* 1-p. 154 fn. \* They modify this somewhat; 'except in the suspicious substitution of Rhun the son of Urien for Paulinus in the conversion of Edwin of Northumbria (*Nennius*).'

2 Plummer C *VB* 2:76

DEDICATIONS TO ST KENTIGERN

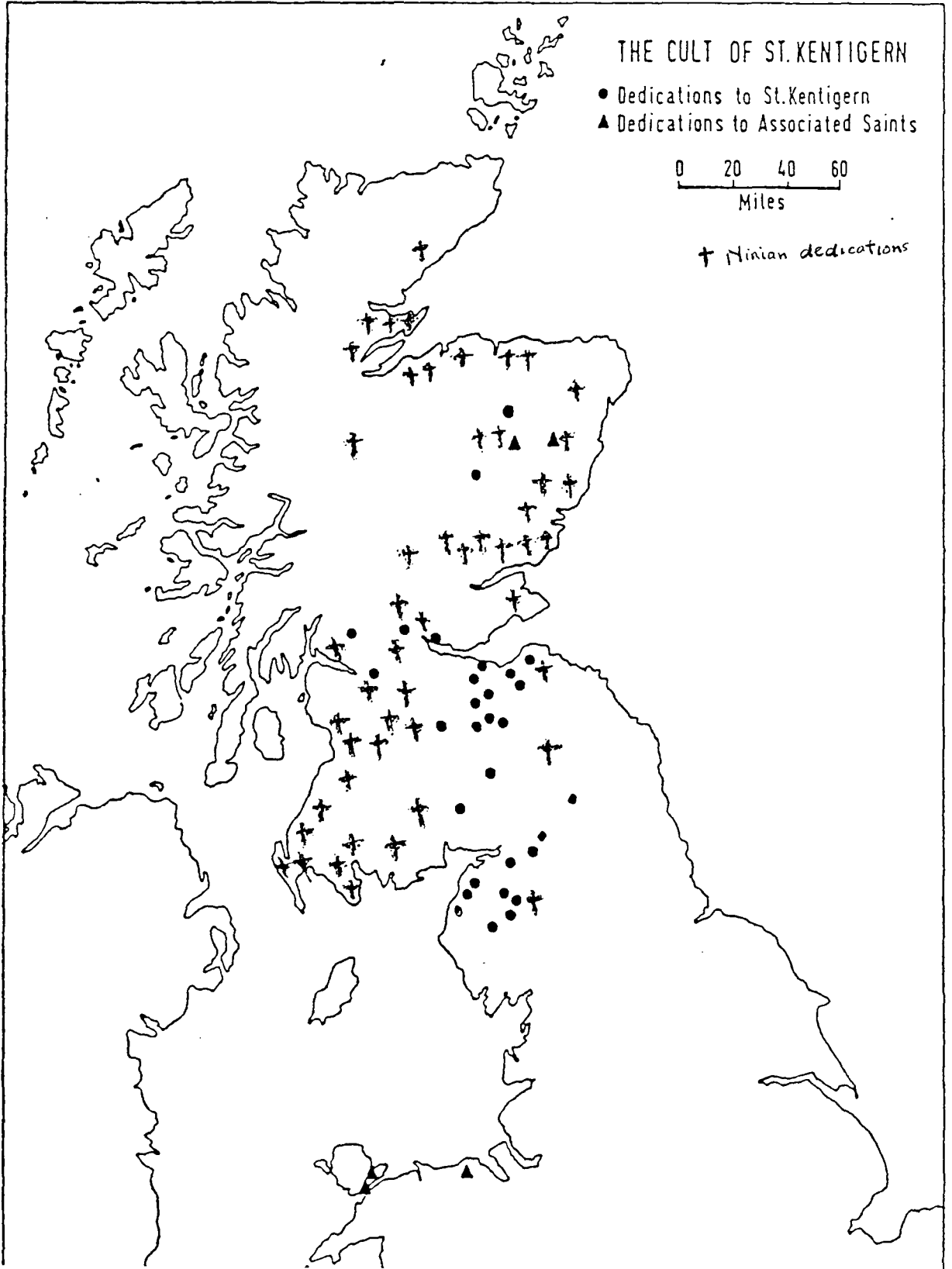
[modified from EG Bowen *Seaways and settlements in the Celtic Lands*]

to which have been added [marked with a cross]

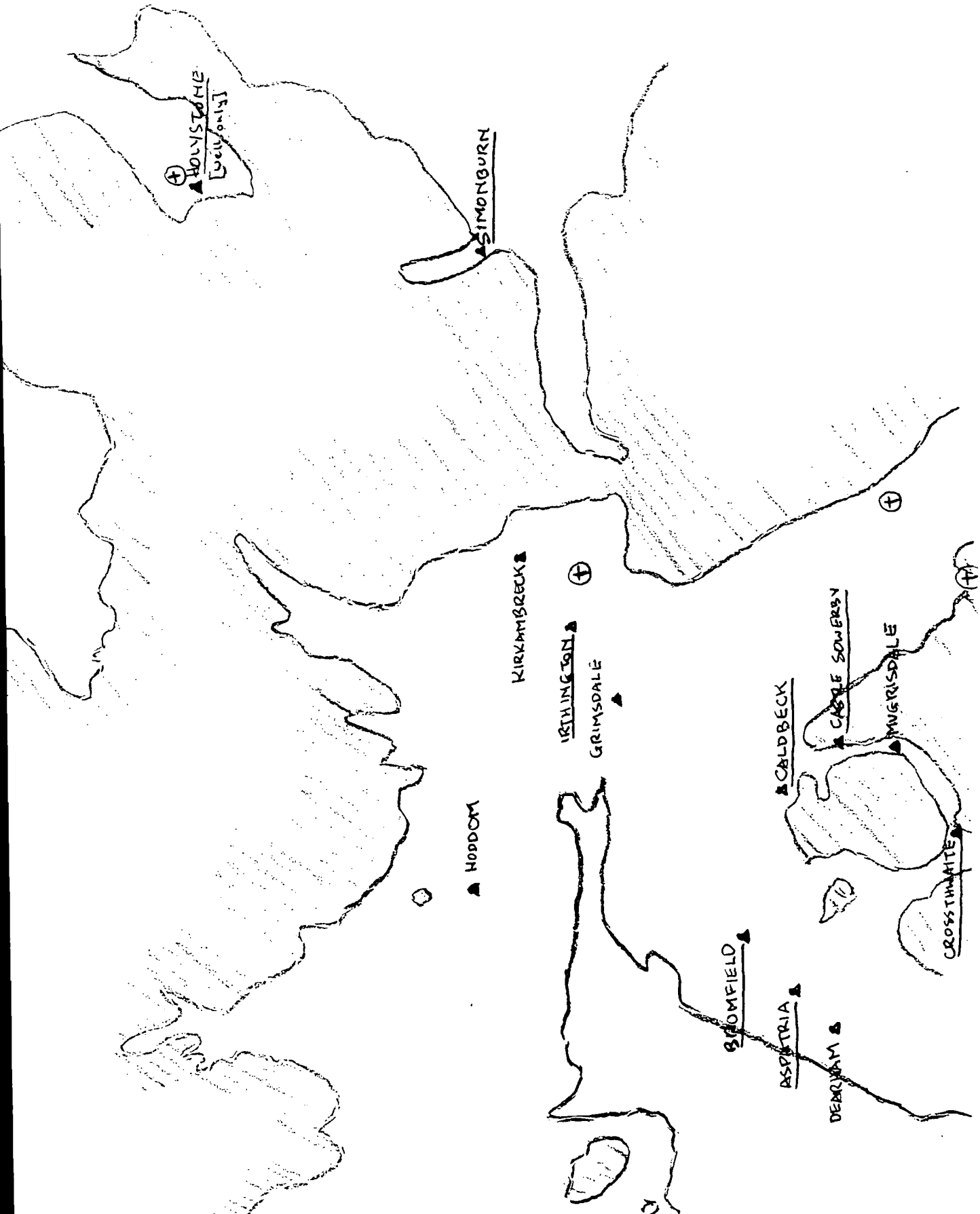
DEDICATIONS TO NINIAN

[modified from F Knight *Archaeological light on the early Christianizing of Scotland*]

There is very little of the intermingling of these dedications which would have been expected had they been the result of later medieval revivals. Especially note worthy is the absence in Glasgow's traditional sphere of influence of dedications to its patron,



The relationship of Kentigern dedications in Cumbria and Northumbria.  
Underlining indicates baptismal site associated with his name.  
[Crosses mark Ninian sites] 1000' contours.



Excursus: THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE LIVES OF ST KENTIGERN IN THE LIGHT OF A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF JOCELIN'S: 'SOMETHING CONTRARY TO SOUND DOCTRINE...'

Firm facts have to be won with difficulty out of what Nora Chadwick called 'a whole cycle of saga literature', which we must categorise as largely twelfth century pious fiction of scant historical value.

1 The major record is the *Vita Kentigerni, autore Jocelino monacho Furnesensi*<sup>2</sup>, written at the request of Jocelin (bishop of Glasgow from 1175 to 1199) by his namesake a monk of Furness Abbey, and therefore presumably before the writer moved to Ireland in 1185. It must be realised that, in part at any rate, this Life was produced as ammunition in the struggle to establish the independence of the See of Glasgow from the dominance of York, by providing it with a worthy tradition.

Kentigern is made to build on the earlier work of St Ninian, is said to have been reared by St Serf, visits St David in Wales, and is visited by St Columba. Inevitably he is made to visit Rome, and not once but seven times. Much of this is probably mere pious fiction to set him in relationship as equal to the acknowledged saints of his age. However just as our knowledge of forged charters does not mean that genuine charters were never granted, so we must guard against the trap into which some Dark Age scholars appear to fall, of thinking that because in an early document we can identify a possible motive for a statement, then it follows that that statement was mere propaganda with no foundation in history.

2 Also extant are the first chapters of a Life composed for Herbert, an earlier bishop of Glasgow (1147-64)<sup>3</sup>. This remnant cannot have been the whole work, for so far as Kentigern is concerned it records only his first day of life, and is effectively a record of his mother's tribulations. There is a reference [H.3] to material 'written in the following pages' but which does not appear in the work we have. John of Fordun in the fourteenth century quoted a passage from a *Historia Beati Kentigerni* which in fact we find in the Herbertian fragment<sup>4</sup>. However, Fordun also quotes a further passage not elsewhere preserved: 'Contemporarily with St Columba flourished the most blessed Kentigern, Bishop of Glasgow, of marvellous sanctity, and a worker of many miracles. His venerable bones rest there entombed, made famous by many miracles to God's praise. His bishopric's further boundary towards the south was at that time, as it ought to be now, the royal cross below Stanemor. One of his principal disciples was St Convallus, famous for miracles and virtues, whose bones therefore rest buried at Inchinnan, near Glasgow'<sup>5</sup>. On the strength of this Macquarrie believes that the remainder of the Herbertian Life was preserved in Aberdeen and was available to John of Fordun who was chaplain in the cathedral there<sup>6</sup>.

1 Chadwick NK *Celtic Britain* 1963 London pp.113-14.

2 Edited and translated by Bp. AD Forbes in *The Historians of Scotland* vol.5 1874 Edinburgh pp.29-119. The chapters from this will be prefixed with the letter J.

3 also Ed. & Tr. by Forbes [*op. cit.*] pp.121-33. The chapters from this will be prefixed with the letter H.

4 The couple of sentences in H.1: 'This Servanus, ... to those whom he could not himself reach'.

5 Fordun *Chronica Gentis Scotorum* III;29 *ESSH* pp.139-40. Recently Winifred and John MacQueen claim to have identified a further fragment, '*Vita Merlini Silvestris*' in *Scottish Studies* 1989 29 pp.77-93.

6 Macquarrie A 'The career of St Kentigern of Glasgow; *Vitae, lectiones* and glimpses of fact' *Innes Review* 1986 37, pp.3-24

3 The sixteenth century Breviary of Aberdeen contains an office of Kentigern in which the verse canticles appear to follow Jocelin, but the *lectiones* arise from a different, and probably<sup>1</sup> earlier, source allied to the Herbertian *Life*<sup>2</sup> The Aberdeen Breviary also contains similar offices for his mother: St Thenew; for his successor in Wales: St. Asaph; and also for Kentigern's alleged suffragan: St Baldred.

4 The Arbuthnott Missal includes a Sacramental Commemoration of St Kentigern, to be used at Mass on his feast day in churches outside his own diocese<sup>3</sup>.

5 In addition an otherwise unknown story of Kentigern is found in Capgrave's *Life of St. Kentigern* which is included in his *Nova Legenda Anglie*. However as this otherwise consists merely of extracts from Jocelin's work it has been suggested that this story too originally found its home in the latter, but was lost in copying<sup>4</sup>.

The relationship of these documents to each other was explored, almost simultaneously, in the early 1870s by William Stevenson<sup>5</sup> and by Bishop Forbes<sup>6</sup>, and again simultaneously in the late 1950s in great detail by Kenneth Jackson<sup>7</sup> and by John MacQueen<sup>8</sup>, with somewhat contradictory results. These in turn have been the source of further debate<sup>9</sup>. Recently Alan MacQuarrie has worked over the whole ground again<sup>10</sup>. The major debate is as to the relationship of Jocelin's *Life* and the Herbertian fragment.

Jocelin [J. Prol.] states that his book was intended to replace that currently in use in Glasgow which was uncouth, ill-composed, and at its very commencement 'contained something contrary to sound doctrine and to the belief of the Church'. The obvious candidate for this volume must be the Herbertian *Life* issued some thirty to forty years previously. This was the view of Jackson<sup>11</sup> who, like every writer without exception, maintains that the heretical issue referred to was that of Kentigern's conception, as there was a popular legend that he had been born of a virgin.

Jocelin makes the best he can of the story of Kentigern's conception, stating clearly that his mother (not named at this stage in the account) conceived as the result of 'the embrace of a man'. However he attempts to support her claim of ignorance of the event and of the man concerned by citing conceptions resulting from the sleight of hand of soothsayers, or

1 Stevenson W *The legends and commemorative celebrations of St. Kentigern, his friends and disciples* Translated from the Aberdeen Breviary and the Arbuthnott Missal 1874 Edinburgh pp.1-9

2 They closely resemble those in a thirteenth century *Edinburgh breviary* printed in Forbes [op.cit. pp xciv-c], but not translated

3 Stevenson op.cit. pp.11-14.

4 Jackson KH 'The sources for the Life of St Kentigern' *SEBC* pp.273-358

5 Stevenson op.cit. pp.41-45.

6 Forbes op.cit. pp.lxiii-lxvi

7 Jackson op.cit.

8 'A lost Glasgow life of Saint Thaney (Saint Enoch)' *Innes Review* 1955 6 pp.125-30. Also 'Yvain, Ewen, and Owein ap Urien' *D&G* 1956 33 pp.107-131

9 Jackson op.cit. pp.343-350; MacQueen 'A reply to Professor Jackson' *D&G* 1959 36 175-183]

10 'The career of St. Kentigern of Glasgow *Vitae, Lectiones* and glimpses of fact' *Innes Review* 1986 37 3-24

11 Jackson op.cit. p.275

potions of oblivion'.

The 'Herbertian' hagiographer admits in his introduction that his writing is uncouth, thus making it a candidate for the work criticised by Jocelin. But does his work in fact support the tradition of virgin birth as is generally assumed by scholars?<sup>2</sup> The very opposite proves to be the case. It admits Thaney's longing to emulate the Virgin Mary and have a virginal conception, but then names the suitor approved by her father (Ewen, Son of King Ulien<sup>3</sup>) and describes how by a stratagem he was able to surprise her and make sexual advances. However the document nowhere hints that the child was not his, and in fact clearly calls St Kentigern his son. [H. 3] Admittedly the hagiographer has got into deep water in attempting gynaecological explanations which one would have thought were rather unseemly for public reading and well worth replacing. However there can be no suspicion that he has supported the popular idea that Kentigern had in fact resulted from a virginal conception. This story did not, therefore, merit replacement on those grounds.

A further argument advanced against the Herbertian fragment being the discarded book is the fact that it contains much specific detail of names and places, none of which Jocelin picks up. He does not even at that stage name Kentigern's mother. Later he records it as Taneu, implying that it was given her by St Servanus after her child's birth. It could be argued that he is trying to distance his work from its unsatisfactory predecessor, but it is argued that the absence in his work of much useful and uncontroversial details available from it is surely inexplicable if he was revising the Herbertian fragment.

As the arguments against the discredited book being the Herbertian Fragment seem so strong, it has been suggested that Jocelin's criticisms must have been directed another book in use in Glasgow. Such was MacQueen's view<sup>4</sup>. It is supported by Macquarrie<sup>5</sup>, even although he acknowledges the difficulty (advanced by Jackson<sup>6</sup> in rebuffing MacQueen) of believing that the Herbertian life had been superseded by a second unacceptable Life, this in turn to be superseded by a third (Jocelin's), all in the course of a few

1 J.Y. Simpson, the obstetrician who first introduced anaesthesia, appears to support the latter view when quoting this story in his 'History of Anaesthetics in Midwifery' *The works of Sir James Young Simpson* 1871; vol. 11 pp. 10-11. Simpson was simultaneously Professor of Antiquities to the Royal Scottish Academy and Professor of Midwifery in the University of Edinburgh. William Stevenson, who had earlier occupied the Chair of Divinity and Ecclesiastical History in the same university, wrote a *Legend of St. Thenew* as a ballad in which his colleague's interest was repaid:

Not a moment too soon had Thenew reached the strand  
For already her critical hour was at hand;  
And her case, in that hour, seemed extremely forlorn, -  
Pharach's Midwives all dead, Dr Simpson unborn, - ...

[Aberdeen Breviary *op. cit.*, pp. 54-61 at p. 60]

2 see eg Boyle A 'St Servanus and the ss tradition of the Life of St Kentigern' *Innes Review* 1970 31 pp. 37-45

3 Now generally agreed to refer to Urien of Rheged, although older antiquarians offered other suggestions,

4 MacQueen 'Yvain etc.', *op. cit.*, at p. 114

5 Macquarrie *op. cit.*, at p. 4,

6 Jackson *op. cit.*, p. 343

decades. It must be admitted that this does seem very far-fetched, and not compatible with Jocelin's description of his sources. It also demands that the Herbertian life had been totally lost; otherwise Jocelin would have used some of its factual information. So the arguments against this view also are strong.

In a nutshell the problem is that Jocelin's work was commissioned to replace an earlier official life which was uncouth, and contained at its beginnings something contrary to sound doctrine. It has been assumed without question that the latter was support for the popular idea of Kentigern's birth of a virgin. The Herbertian fragment, as an earlier Life which admits to being uncouth, is the obvious candidate, but this leaves unexplained why Jocelin did not at least quarry from it useful and uncontroversial data.

Having found the standard arguments unsatisfactory can we find any alternative which presents fewer disadvantages? It appears to me that there is such an explanation which is worthy of consideration. It turns on the interpretation of Jocelin's criticism of the 'book which thy church useth: because, as seemeth to most men, it is stained throughout by an uncultivated diction, discoloured and obscured by an inelegant style; and what beyond all these things any wise man would still more abhor, **in the very commencement of the narrative something contrary to sound doctrine and to the Catholic faith very evidently appeareth.**' Although all scholars appear to have considered this to refer to the question of virginal conception, I believe that they have been misled, for as we have seen, none of the documents gives such an idea a moment's support. On the other hand, what indeed shocks and dismays this Christian reader occurs in the words which the Herbertian writer puts in the mouth of Servanus:

*I think, in the opinion of all the faithful, men should be exhorted not to presume to think that the conception of this blessed child hath contracted the taint of fornication. For it seemeth to me that the meeting of his father and mother excels in sanctity lawful marriage: seeing that it was the intention of the father to allure the mind of the virgin towards marriage with himself, while the devotion of the mother prompted her by preserving her virginity to avoid the society of men. From the agreement of both there proceedeth, in the case of others, an espousal, in their meeting lawful love abounded, and the virgin devotion was not destroyed...'*

This is not merely teaching that the end justifies the means, for there is no suggestion that Ewen aimed at a pregnancy. In effect, the document becomes the charter for every lad to have his way with the girl of his choice, especially if she pleads unwilling. This is indeed 'contrary to sound doctrine' and must surely have scandalised the hearers when it was read aloud in church.

It is significant that the Herbertian fragment stops short, not at the actual birth of Kentigern as is usually stated, but exactly at the end of this dangerous speech of Servanus. We must also note that it is a fragment which has become separated from the remainder of the work, for whose existence we have seen evidence in John of Fordun. It is at least possible that that separation was not accidental - that Bishop Jocelin removed the offending early folios from the Cathedral book written for Bishop Herbert and put them on one side, whence chance has preserved them for us as the

Herbertian fragment. On this hypothesis he then sent for a suitable scholar - his namesake and fellow Cistercian from Furness<sup>1</sup>. The bishop handed him the remainder of the book to use with any other material he could find, to be the foundation for a new and more worthy volume. This suggestion that Jocelin got down to his writing at once, and therefore had been brought from Furness specifically for this task, is perhaps supported by his ignorance of local Glaswegian geography. Otherwise while he might be excused for getting mixed up about the Forth, his thinking that the Molendiar burn, which in Glasgow ran more or less at his feet, was a place (Mellingdenor: J.21) is inexplicable. An earlier copy of the whole work found its way to Aberdeen. This hypothesis yields a simpler explanation for the various problems outlined above than do others. It also does away with the necessity to postulate an intermediate life.

Excursus: THE HERBERTIAN AUTHOR'S ACCOUNT OF KENTIGERN'S CONCEPTION AS INDICATIVE OF POSSIBLE SEVENTH CENTURY MATERIAL IN HIS SOURCES

A long and tedious account of Thaney's seduction occupies almost two chapters [H 2,3] of the fragment. For most people it cannot be pleasant reading, and presumably for that reason has been neglected by scholars<sup>2</sup>. This neglect may account for the commonly held, but incorrect, belief that it supports the idea of virginal conception. As an obstetrician and gynaecologist, I have found it of considerable interest.

Why did the author get involved in this morass at all? I suggest this was initially for two reasons. He was anxious to make it abundantly clear that Ewen fathered Kentigern; that there was no miraculous conception. Yet he was aware of the tradition of a virginal conception, which can only have arisen because of Thaney's denials of sexual intercourse, even after her pregnancy became obvious. He believed he could only reconcile these facts by physiological explanations, as he understood them.

As to the human fathering. Of this our author will leave no doubt at all, later on writing: 'Of this action therefore he [Ewen] took no account, until it was recalled to his memory a long time afterwards by S. Kentigern, his son...' But the Herbertian author finds it necessary to go into details. Ewen's aim was to get Thaney sexually aroused: "If perchance I could touch the knot of the virginity of this girl, perhaps after that she would consent to me." Presumably he had no detailed knowledge of pudendal anatomy, for 'virginity' implies the [intact] hymen, but 'knot' surely implies the clitoris, stimulus of which would be likely to achieve his

1 That Jocelin of Furness was a conscientious scholar is evidenced in the prologue of this work by his apology: 'I have nowhere been able to find the description of the translation of this saint, nor the miracles performed after his death, which, however, were not noted, perhaps because they escaped the memory of those who were present, or were multiplied beyond enumeration, and which thus have been omitted, that the mass of facts collected might not engender fatigue in feeble readers.' This belies the normal modern picture of hagiographers as mere blatant and unscrupulous copiers. The high standard of his work, exemplified especially by his life of Waldef, has been noted by George McFadden ('The *Life of Waldef* and its author, Jocelin of Furness' *Innes Review* 1953 6 pp. 5-13. He wrote Lives of St. Patrick, Waldef, and St. Helen, probably all after his Life of St. Kentigern and in that order.

2 To my knowledge no one has discussed this event in detail (if we except the historical novelist Kathleen Herbert *Bride of the Spear* 1988 London - who has an explanation very different from mine).



hoped-for ends'. He manifestly achieved his initial aim for he was able to form an opinion (that she was a concubine) which depended on sight and touch. Ewen 'impregnated her': that point has been made crystal clear.

Despite believing her sexually experienced, and therefore knowledgeable, Ewen maintained: "I have not known thee as a man is used to know a virgin." Thaney remained 'wretched and sorrowful, in doubt whether she was defiled or not.' In my obstetrical practice there have been a number of patients who have conceived following deposition of semen at the vulva during sexual caresses stopping short of vaginal penetration. They are bewildered and angry: "Honest, I didn't let him inside me." In some cases I have believed them, as the hymenal ring remained intact. Is this what our author is attempting to describe: a case of pregnancy following what is called, in current jargon, 'heavy petting'? Thaney's repeated assertions to her women folk that she had not had intercourse were therefore justified, and gave rise to the tales of virginal conception. That our author believed these facts to be true explains, as nothing else does, his insertion of what must have been an unpleasant and unwelcome passage in his work. Other explanations raise greater difficulties.

However the account is not finished yet. We read:

'the tokens of her sex were then beginning to appear in her as in every woman at the conception of a child, so that she did not discern the certain sign of corruption, although she had suffered from pain in the flesh. For at such times the membranous structures are naturally relaxed, as well in virgins as those bearing children, and thus the means of defilement always lie more nearly within reach. And because this was unknown to the young man, he went away deceived...'

This may refer to the pudendal engorgement and softening accompanying sexual arousal, but more likely to that copious discharge of clear cervical mucus associated with ovulation (which infertile women are told to watch for as an aid to timing successful intercourse); probably both.

Why did our author find it necessary to include this lengthy account of female sexual physiology? The answer must lie in the words 'He [Ewen] went away deceived'. There are two important reasons for his making this point. The first is to vindicate Thaney's virtue: to make the point that Ewen's belief that Thaney had previously lost her virginity was wrong, being based on his ignorance of physiology. But there is a second and equally important reason. In all this fragment our author bends over backwards to draw a picture of Ewen as an honourable man, even at the cost of the speech he puts into Servanus' mouth with its reprehensible morality. Surely were he inventing a work of twelfth century imaginative hagiography this would be a pointless exercise. I suggest this may be evidence that the Herbertian writer was using a document prepared at a time when it was politically expedient to keep on the right side of Rhaged; in other words early seventh century at the latest. This takes us back close to the time of Kentigern himself; thus greatly enhancing its historical value.

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 1 Knot; 'a hard lump in an animal body; a swelling or protuberance, (Middle English)' [*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*]. It has been suggested to me that 'knot' ('nodus virginitatis') was used of the hymen. Anatomically this presents difficulties; the hymen itself has no nerve supply mediating sexual arousal, while if used figuratively the implication is no easier, for tearing of the hymen against her will would be unlikely to make Thaney kindly disposed towards a suitor.

Excursus: WARFARE WITH DEMONS

Battling with demons was of course commonplace in the ministry of Our Lord. James Dunn comments:

Jesus believed that he cast out demons by the power of God. Here coming to clear expression is *Jesus' consciousness of spiritual power, the visible evidence of God flowing through him to overcome other superhuman power, evil power, to restore and make whole*. We should not attempt to discount this sense of divine power, to 'demythologize' it, as though we now in the twentieth century are somehow in a better position to determine the facts'<sup>1</sup>.

The apostle Paul is quite clear. 'Our fight is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers, against the authorities and potentates of this dark world, against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens.' [Eph. 6:12 NEB] These fundamental concepts cannot be discarded without destroying the whole New Testament picture. To quote another modern theologian:

If any subject is taught with clarity and persistence throughout the Bible and supremely in the New Testament it is the existence of the personalised source of evil, Satan or the devil...I cannot see how anybody who regards the Scriptures as at all normative for belief or behaviour can possibly avoid the conclusion that this is the firm and unwavering teaching of the Bible...The kenotic theory if applied to Jesus' understanding of Satan, proves too much if it proves anything at all. It will not do simply to take those areas of the teaching of Jesus which we like and regard them as coming from God, while rejecting those areas of his acknowledged teaching which do not appeal to us. Such eclecticism is academically indefensible...'<sup>2</sup>

The present Archbishop of Canterbury (George Carey), recalling his ministry in modern Bernicia as a vicar in Durham (1975-82) writes:

I am not the kind of person to go looking for demons under beds, neither do I believe that everything has to have a spiritual or demonic origin. It could well be a coincidence, but we had to entertain the possibility that, if God was attempting to build his kingdom among us, someone deeply involved in the eternal struggle between good and evil did not like what was going on'<sup>3</sup>.

Dr Scott Peck, an American psychiatrist who has been involved in the rehabilitation of Viet-Nam veterans, recalls that 'In common with 99 percent of psychiatrists and the majority of clergy, I did not think the devil existed.' He goes on to describe two cases of Satanic possession. 'I now know Satan is real. I have met it'<sup>4</sup>.

In the Wartburg Castle at Eisenach is preserved the room in which Martin Luther threw an inkwell at the Devil. In early nineteenth century France the village priest at Ars (now 'patron-saint' of parish priests) underwent notable and prolonged physical attacks from devils<sup>5</sup>.

1 Dunn JDC *Jesus and the Spirit* London; 1975 p.47 author's italics

2 Green M *I believe in Satan's downfall* 1981 London p.26, p.29

3 Carey G *The Church in the market-place* 1984 Eastbourne p.109

4 Peck MS *People of the Lie* 1988 London pp.182ff

5 Monnin A *The Curé d'Ars* n.d. London (Abbé Monnin had been assistant to the Curé in his last days).

However it was principally in the third world that post-reformation Christians identified contact with demonic forces. John Nevius, an American presbyterian, started forty years missionary service in China in 1854:

'I brought with me to China a strong conviction that a belief in demons, and communication with spiritual beings, belongs exclusively to a barbarous and superstitious age, and at present can consist only with mental weakness and want of culture'. (After recounting case histories which caused him to change his mind, and discussing the philosophical and theological issues, Nevius states): 'Many cases of "demon-possession" have been cured by prayer to Christ, or in his name, some very readily, some with difficulty. So far as we have been able to discover this method of cure has not failed in any case, however stubborn and long continued, in which it has been tried. And in no instance, so far as appears, has the malady returned, if the subject has become a Christian, and continued to lead a Christian life''

In the last couple of decades it has become a problem in the 'civilised' west also. Of course medicine now recognises many cases earlier diagnosed as demon-possessed, as being sufferers from schizophrenia or the manic phase of manic/depressive disease, but psychiatry cannot explain away all such cases. In 1972 the Bishop of Exeter found it expedient to appoint a Commission on Exorcism, commenting:

'In western countries today, the widespread apostasy from the Christian faith, accompanied by an increasing recourse to black magic and occult practices, is revealing the presence and power of evil forces...'<sup>2</sup>,

while the initial essay states 'One cannot get away from the fact that the New Testament is teaching a personal origin for evil; it simply will not do to dismiss this language as metaphor'<sup>3</sup>. The report concluded with the recommendation that every diocesan bishop should appoint a priest as 'diocesan exorcist....' This has, unfortunately, been found necessary, and my immediate next-door neighbour, Canon G Gibson, who is one such, can (with difficulty, for he is loath to talk of the matter) be persuaded to tell of some frightening cases; while incidents from the congregation of which I am a member have been published<sup>4</sup>. There are, after all, believed to be at least three Satanic 'places of worship' here in Sunderland.

The Exeter Report itself starts with the definition 'Christian exorcism is the binding of evil powers by the triumph of Christ Jesus through the application of the power demonstrated by that triumph, in and by his Church'. That is what Kentigern was doing at Hoddom. In particular the phrase Jocelin uses 'as if fortifying the bystanders' is not necessarily an example of routine florid hagiographic writing, for it describes the essential protection against demonic backlash found necessary in late twentieth century ministry in many orthodox churches. Columba appears to have omitted this essential step when repulsing the demons from Iona, and the folk on Tiree suffered as a result. [AVC 3: 8].

1 Nevius JL *Demon Possession* 1894, 1969<sup>3</sup> Grand Rapids p.9, p.145

2 Petitpierre R *Exorcism: the findings of a commission convened by the Bp of Exeter* 1972 London p.103

3 Crehan JH 'Exorcism in the New Testament' in Exeter Report *vide supra*

4 Bridge D and D Phyper *More than tongue can tell* 1982 London *passim*

It is, of course, necessary to take into account the thought-world of whatever age<sup>1</sup> is being considered. Today third-world first-generation<sup>2</sup> churches have no doubts of on the reality of the demonic. This appears also to have been true of the early Church

Martin of Tours fought against demons<sup>3</sup>; and also used the Sign of the Cross as a weapon of power<sup>4</sup>. Clare Stancliffe has noted: 'Martin's miraculous activities arise either through his solicitude for the people he comes across...or else through his warfare against evil in the forms of error, paganism, and demons. Such stories are too close to the genuine concerns of a fourth-century bishop to make it likely that they have been borrowed from the pool of popular Gallic folk-stories'<sup>5</sup>. Columba fought the same battles and used the same weapon<sup>6</sup>. Cuthbert engaged in similar struggles<sup>7</sup>. As those records are reported by contemporary, or near contemporary authors, there is no necessity to disbelieve that Kentigern and other forerunners of the Bernician Church were engaged in the same warfare, or used the same powerful sign<sup>8</sup>.

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 1 And of particular groups within it. For our own day the view of many orthodox informed Christians has already been described, there are others - and the great majority of the unchurched - who have no belief in unseen powers. Yet other Christians have an exaggerated and unhealthy belief, seeing demons everywhere, and the explanation of every difficulty.

2 Not only first-generation. During the course of the celebrations of the centenary of the Anglican church in Tanganyika, on Feb. 20 1974, a group of named Tanzanian Christians spending a night of prayer in Bagamoyo church were physically attacked by visible 'strange unknown creatures' [Namata JA *Edmund John, man of God; a healing ministry* (Tr) M Stanway 1986 Canberra p.76]. In 1990 an English missionary nurse, on furlough from Taiwan, mentioned to friends of mine, who are her prayer-partners, that on two occasions she had actually *seen* demons. In reply to my queries, she stated that she feels it unwise to put details in writing. This is relevant here because of the report that Kentigern *saw* demons at Hoddom.

3 Sulpicius Severus *Life of St. Martin* e.g. c.17

4 *ibid*, c.13

5 Stancliffe C *St. Martin and his Hagiographer; History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus* 1983 Oxford p.162 (emphasis added).

6 *AVC* e.g. II:16; II:27.

7 *BVC* e.g. 15, 22.

8 NH Baynes wrote of the Byzantine world; 'And part of man's daily, hourly fear is the demon world which besets him on every side,...the Hellenistic world is a demonic hunting-ground - and they are even more terrifying than the bacilli of our modern world, for they are inspired by a maleficent will and that will is directed against man...And it is to this demon-haunted world that Christianity came as a great liberation...The atmosphere of the Hellenistic Age will continue to be the atmosphere of the Byzantine world, but that world has added to the Hellenistic pharmacopoeia the most powerful wonder-working chara - the Sign of the Cross. Armed with this the East Roman can venture to face those principalities and powers, those cosmic rulers of this dark world with whom the Christian's wrestling-bout is waged (Ephesians vi,12)'. ['The Hellenistic Civilization and East Rome' *Byzantine Studies and other essays* 1955 London; Rpt. 1974 Westport, Connecticut, pp.1-23.

## THE CHURCH IN BRITAIN AT THE COMING OF THE ROMAN MISSION.

The period of this study is referred to as 'the Dark Ages', as 'Late Antiquity', as 'Post-Roman', and most often as 'Early Medieval', usually without allowance for their differing nuances, often unsuspected'. This last label, however accurate from a later stand-point, sends the wrong signals for any understanding of the 'late-sixth, early-seventh centuries<sup>2</sup>. We must not copy Bede's mistake of seeing the Church of that time through the lens of the Synod of Whitby and its associated results; still less of that of the High Middle Ages. Our discussion is of the universal catholic church in its life in Britain continuing after the departure of the eagles.

In a notable peroration Professor Toynbee said:

'Britain received her Christianity, in the first instance, during the first or second century, ultimately, if not proximately, from Rome, by then established as the focal point of Christendom; and from Rome the faith returned again, with Pope Gregory's envoy, St Augustine, to those parts of the islands in which it had been submerged, although not, it would seem, completely wiped out from sight and memory. The so-called Celtic Church, surviving continuously in the west and north, was thoroughly Roman in creed and origin; Roman too, initially, in its organization and practice. From Rome the British clergy had received the afterwards outmoded style of tonsure and date of celebrating Easter, to which they clung so obstinately. It was not their fault if they had lost touch with the centre of Catholic unity amid the storms and upheavels of two-and-a-half centuries. When, at the Synod of Whitby, the great majority of that clergy accepted contemporary Roman

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1 To cite one example of nuance: in writing of the three British bishops who attended the council at Arles in 314, Jocelyn Toynbee discusses which of them was 'primate of Roman Britain' [Toynbee JMC 'Christianity in Roman Britain' *J. Brit. Archeol. Assoc.* 1953, 16 1-24]. She considered these to come from London, York and Colchester (amending *colonia Londinensium* to *Camulodunum* (Colchester) which, Thomas says, is 'not entirely a supportable reading' [CIRB p.197], Whilst WHC Frend ['The Christianization of Roman Britain' *CIB* pp.37-49] agrees with her, most workers, including Bright [CEECH p.9], and Williams [CIEB p.78] read *Lindensium* (Lincoln). As Colchester was the *colonia par excellence*, and as its bishop - unlike his fellows - was attended by a priest and deacon, Toynbee thought he was most likely to be primate. It is true that in the Church of the Empire there were senior bishops who were responsible for calling local councils in their area, (and in Gerald Bonner's view in North Africa at this time the Bishop of Carthage could fairly be termed 'primate') for Britain at any rate the word 'primate' carries overtones from the medieval church which were surely inappropriate. Toynbee went on the comment: 'Nothing is known of the cathedrals of the[se] three', although she thought they were probably multi-cellular house-churches. Again the use of 'cathedral' is unfortunately nuanced, even although technically correct in the sense of containing the bishop's chair. On the continent large buildings, for which our word 'cathedral' would be appropriate, have been excavated at Aquileia and Trier [Radford CAR 'The archeological background on the Continent' *CIB* pp.19-36]. In Roman Britain, however, of the few 'purpose-built' churches so far found, the largest - that at Silchester - is very modest.

2 Future generations will doubtless see the 1990s as curtain-raisers for third millenium issues. Although correct in that view, they would be mistaken in imagining such issues as in any way affecting life in this decade, which is inevitably completely ignorant of them.

discipline, they brought themselves up to date in minor matters. They did not change their doctrine or ultimate allegiance'.

Some caution is necessary. Rome was not the ultimate source of Christianity, whose birth-place is in the Levant. Not only was it propagated in the legionary garrison towns and the very camps themselves<sup>2</sup>, but it was, perhaps even earlier, gossiped in Britain by Mediterranean traders<sup>3</sup>. Again, what did Jocelyn Toynbee mean by 'they did not change their...ultimate allegiance'? Was it to Rome, or to Christ?

With those slight caveats, Toynbee's description is accurate, despite the attempts to prove otherwise, of partisans in inter-denominational warfare<sup>4</sup>. The British church was in no sense a proto-protestant church<sup>5</sup>. Orthodoxy was measured by adherence to the decisions of the Councils of the Church, not in terms of relationship to the Bishop of Rome. However, in Britain as elsewhere in the west, Rome was seen as the centre and its bishop, being successor to the apostles Peter and Paul, as guarantor of truth, whose opinion was sought<sup>6</sup>. While all this was true during Imperial days, the links inevitably weakened as communications became more difficult. Rome was distant, (an Irish deputation which went to seek its ruling 'returned in the third year'<sup>7</sup>); so there was no question of supervision over the Church in Britain, which we will find assumed no duty to obey.

1 Toynbee JMC *op. cit.*

2 'Castra ipsa' filled by Christians', wrote Tertullian, Quoted by Hugh Williams [*CIEB*] p. 271

3 The position of the 'altar enclosure' at Silchester resembled the eastern more than the western arrangement, and that of the possible offertory table the fourth- or fifth-century Syrian practice, while a probable rectangular piscina in an open forecourt is not paralleled in Gaul, but in a church in Carthage, [Frend WHC 'Ecclesia Britannica; Prelude or Dead End?' *J. Eccles. Hist.* 1979 30 pp. 129-144]

4 The heat generated may be illustrated from David Davies's *The Ancient Celtic Church and the See of Rome* [1924 Cardiff pp. 180-81] written to encourage a rapprochement of 'the Church of England (and especially the Church of Wales)' with the Nonconformist Churches; 'To talk about the Celtic Church being "from the earliest days in communion with the See of Rome", in the light of these indisputable facts, is mere balderdash, without a shred of evidence to make it tolerable. One would, indeed, have been inclined to ignore such sheer twaddle...'

5 except that, like the whole church of which it was a part, it was then free of the late medieval accretions of popular religion - e.g. saint-worship, indulgences - against which reformers protested.

6 JC MacNaught, a Church of Scotland minister, set out to investigate the view, which he was strongly biased to accept, that 'the ancient Celtic Church was independent of Rome, not merely that it was to a great extent left to manage its own affairs in its own way, but that it rejected the claims of the Bishop of Rome to be under Christ the Chief Pastor of the whole flock of Christ on earth, the visible head of the visible Church.' However, at the end of his study he accepted 'that the ancient Celtic Church... was simply a part of the Catholic Church and with the whole church acknowledged the Pope as its visible head.' [*The Celtic Church and the See of Rome* 1927 Oxford pp. xiii, 106]

7 Letter of Cumian to Segene, abbot of Iona *SEHI-E* pp. 220-21

The early churches, as founded by St Paul in his missionary journeys, and we may take Ephesus as an example, had 'elders' (πρεσβύτεροι) (Acts 20:17) in the plural. It seems likely that by the time John wrote to them from Patmos, perhaps forty years later, each church had an ἄγγελος (Rev. 2:1), (even if we interpret this as 'bishop' - and a celestial interpretation is favoured by some - we must guard against later monarchical nuances) but there is no hint in the letters to the seven churches of primacy among them [Rev 1-3]. As nothing could be in greater contrast to the splendour of episcopal status exemplified by Wilfrid, we must ask when did the change occur?

In the period here being considered there is no evidence of such primacy in the British Church. The sixth-century British clergy were castigated on many counts by Gildas, but of issues of insubordination, and hierarchy, there is no trace. By the turn of that century their negotiations with Augustine make the situation clear [HE ii:2]. There was no primate, the 'final appeal and final judgement which was found acceptable to them [the British representatives] are not those of their own seven bishops and all their most learned men, but of a recluse, a hermit'<sup>2</sup>. There was no sense of obedience owed to the pope. On this, which could have been the trump card, Bede's silence is deafening. When we come, in the next chapter, to discuss the issues under discussion, we will not find Papal supremacy<sup>3</sup> mentioned. The British delegation returned to the negotiating table prepared to consider Augustine's proposals. His reasonable sticking points were matters of church order, their final criterion was his godliness<sup>4</sup>. While no doubt the problem was, in part, due to the difference between national characteristics, the incidence does throw light on the priorities of the British Church around AD 600.

1 For discussion of this word see Alford H *The Greek Testament* vol. IV 1859, 1958 Rpt Chicago p.560; and Lightfoot JB *Dissertations on the Apostolic Age* 1892 London pp.158-60.

2 Chadwick NK *Introduct. to Studies in the early British Church* 1958 Cambridge p.13

3 Just after the legions left Britain Pope Zosimus (417-18) had to abandon 'overt empire building'. [Jones AHM 'The Western Church in the fifth and sixth centuries' *CIB* pp. 9-18], while a local Church, that of North Africa, was able to force the papacy to change its stance (on Pelagianism), [Markus RA 'The legacy of Pelagianism; orthodoxy, heresy and conciliation' *The Making of Orthodoxy* Ed. Williams R 1989 Cambridge p.214-34] The later process of aggrandizement, primarily in Gaul, occupying the fifth century, is recorded by Scott Holmes [*The origin and development of the Christian Church in Gaul* London 1911, pp.339-78]

4 His posture was presumably intended by him to demonstrate the superior status of his office, and therefore their inferior one; the different signals it sent to them are discussed below.

The Church in Britain, then, would have been similar to that elsewhere in the world. Deliberately stripped of vocabulary which, while often technically accurate, carries anachronistic nuances, we may summarise

1. There would be a local church in most, if not all, of the 28 cities' of Britain; and in some other places. On the normal pattern of Gaul and North Africa there would be a pastor (bishop) in each city, probably elected by the congregation, and consecrated by neighbouring bishops.
2. Each church would be a company of believers meeting, probably weekly, to receive instruction from the bishop's sermon, and to celebrate together the Lord's Supper.
3. The church spread at such notable speed that Gildas assumes the whole British population to be Christian, without what Baker calls the 'enforced or syncophantic general acceptance of Christianity'<sup>2</sup>. Therefore it follows that the church members themselves spread the gospel. This implies that it was to them a *gospel=good news*<sup>3</sup>; not as in Pelagianism a challenge to greater efforts of will, but rather an offer of divine grace.
4. The local church made its mark in the community, to such an extent that even the Anglo-Saxon 'incomers' took note. This is implicit in Kenneth Jackson's view of place-names, already discussed, that the name Eccles implies the existence of some sort of British population-centre with organised Christian worship'<sup>4</sup>. Kenneth Cameron has noted that, as yet, no British church-site has been identified on the ground, at any of the places whose names contain \*eglēs<sup>5</sup>. In other words it was the presence of a Christian community, not necessarily their place of worship, which was so obvious to the pagan Teutons that the place was named in their own tongue accordingly. Bernician examples (and Barrow's comment that for the area of our interest these names became embedded in the language between c. 400 and c. 650) were discussed earlier.

1 Gildas *DEB* 3:2. They are listed in *Historia Brittonum* 66a

2 Baker LGD 'The shadow of the Christian symbol' *SCH* 6 pp. 17-28

3 Augustine of Hippo had already written: '[God] promised to men the divine nature; to mortals, immortality; to sinners, justification; to castaways, a state of glory,' [*Discourses on the Psalms*; Ps. 109:1-3] as trans. in (RC) *Divine Office* 1974 Advent Week 2, Wednesday]

4 Jackson K *Language and History in Early Britain* Edinburgh 1953 p. 227

5 Cameron K, 'Eccles in English Place-Names' *CIB* pp 87-92



Of great importance for the unrecorded birth of the faith among the Anglo-Saxons, is an observation by Patrick Sims-Williams: 'The most attractive possibility is that the Hwicce and Magonsætán were converted in an unobtrusive and ultimately unmemorable way by the Britons among them'. That cannot have been true only of the West Midlands, for the motivating Holy Spirit is not geographically limited. In other words, just as Britons spread the gospel among their own people, so they 'gossiped the gospel' also to the Anglo-Saxon incomers. Whereas it would be possible to think of Christianity as a socially acceptable veneer among the Britons, merely as such it would have no appeal to the Anglo-Saxons who show every sign of being the ruling class. To them it must have been accepted for its own value.

5. New believers would go through a probationary period of training, before being admitted to the fellowship by baptism, which might be in a portable lead-tank<sup>2</sup>, but in most cases would be in a nearby recognised pool, or at a well<sup>3</sup>. It was, therefore, probably by affusion<sup>4</sup>.

6. The place of worship would often be a private house, or even the open-air, or a Christian cemetery. Later there were purpose-built buildings, which in Britain were not elaborate. Frend is obviously surprised, and shocked, that when the Silchester community did not survive the end of their town 'the site of their church retained no special sanctity to be remembered by later generations'<sup>5</sup>. But why should it?<sup>6</sup> Here again is the danger of stepping forwards into the medieval shadow.

7. The Church was not cut off from its family. Referring to the split-up of the empire, R. G. Collingwood wrote: 'The temporal isolation of Britain by no means implied a spiritual isolation'<sup>7</sup>. The Church in Gaul supplied advisors to help with British problems: Victricius of Rouen in 394-5, Germanus of Auxerre in 429 and probably again in 437<sup>8</sup>. While such contacts

1 Sims-Williams P *Religion and literature in Western England 600-800* 1990 Cambridge pp.78-79

2 Thomas C *CIRB* p.220

3 Noted earlier is the fact that almost every site associated with Kentigern in Cumbria and Northumberland has a baptismal site associated with his name, in stream or at well.

4 Thomas C *CIRB* p.212

5 Frend WHC 'Ecclesia Britannica: Prelude or dead end?' *J. Eccles. Hist.* 1979 30 129-144.

6 The point is well made in Sunderland where the building previously having the sign 'Enon Baptist Church' later carried one 'Enon Baptist Church worships here on Sundays at...'

7 Collingwood RG *RBES* p.311

8 Thompson EA *Saint Germanus of Auxerre and the end of Roman Britain* 1984 Woodbridge p.57

are not recorded in the later fifth, or in the sixth century, it is ridiculous to consider that Britain was cut off from the rest of the world. The Irish sea has been called 'The Celtic Mediterranean' and was doubtless always busy with vessels, while contacts between western Britain and Armorica are evidenced by the recorded constant crossings of the Channel by Welsh saints at this time, discussed in detail by Bowen<sup>1</sup>.

8 The church was intellectually and theologically alert. This was demonstrated first by the fact that a theologian of the stature of Pelagius<sup>2</sup>, who for many years was an admired and orthodox teacher and exegete in Rome had, being a Briton, almost certainly been reared in it. Secondly by the fact that when his teachings came in for condemnation British Christians apparently took an active and vociferous interest in the niceties of the ensuing debate on 'grace' and 'free-will'<sup>3</sup>.

9 There was awareness of the importance of organized evangelism, as manifested by the extensive missions - both of which involved Bernicia - engaged in by Ninian and Kentigern.

10. Some of that missionary enterprise was among ill-instructed or heretical Christians. As the days of Roman education became more distant, and the monastic schools were not yet founded, the supply of pastors equipped to understand and teach from the Latin scriptures must have diminished. This is likely to have been so especially in the less populous areas, including Bernicia. It is not to be wondered at that mistaken views readily became accepted.

11. However, above all there is clear witness in all the extant writings - Patrick's letter to Coroticus, his Confession, and Gildas' diatribe - of spiritual zeal. Of a willingness to speak out in God's name, even although to do so was unpopular and risky; and to leave home against all advice in

1 Bowen EG *Saints, settlements, and seaways in the Celtic lands* Cardiff 1969

2 Rees BR *Pelagius. A reluctant heretic* 1988 Woodbridge pp.xi,3.

3 despite the contrary report of Constantius in his *Life of St Germanus of Auxerre* [Translated in *The Western Fathers* Ed, Hoare FH London 1980 pp.294-320, C.27] The whole question of the persistence of Pelagian and semi-Pelagian views and their relationship to the new orthodoxy [Markus RA 'The legacy of Pelagius; orthodoxy, heresy and conciliation' *The Making of Orthodoxy; Essays in honour of Henry Chadwick* (Ed, Williams R) 1999 Cambridge pp.214-234] is too complex to warrant discussion here.

response to the inner compulsion of the Holy Spirit. Of course as in all churches in the absence of persecution there would be a number, perhaps even a majority, of members whose living faith in God would be minimal, or even merely nominal. There would be others who had fallen away, such as King Maelgwyn'. However it would be foolish to imagine that it was only those whose names we know and whose contemporary writings survive, who were spiritually alive. Apart from his youthful upbringing, Patrick in the long years of captivity had, to all appearances, nothing going for him, yet his spiritual growth is outstanding, and a reminder that the Holy Spirit was active, not only in the Church, but in the individual Christian, then as now.

12. The issue of monasticism has not been considered. There is no agreement on the date of its introduction. The whole atmosphere and audience of Gildas (which we have accepted as having been written around AD 540) is of a church organised as described above. In the later *Lives* of Ninian and Kentigern we find references to monks<sup>2</sup>, however although it is argued above that evangelistic enterprise implies a company of dedicated assistants it is unlikely that these resembled the later medieval communities with their Rules, canonical Hours, etc. It is probable that, in Bernicia at any rate, there was no monastic life in the days of the British Church.

At the beginning of the seventh century, then, we may see the Bernician population as consisting (apart from a relatively small Anglo-Saxon aristocracy) of Britons, most of whom would probably think of themselves as Christian. Kentigern's personal evangelistic mission was perhaps fading from their memories, but his assistants had possibly visited more recently; if so a number of the Bernician Britons would have been baptised during one of these safaris.

If we accept Bede's statement that before the battle of Heavenfield (AD 633/634) there were ('as far as we know') no churches in Bernicia (*HE* iii:21)<sup>3</sup>, it may be inferred that there was probably no resident priest. The

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1 Gildas *DEB* C.34

2 The first contemporary reference to monastic life at Whithorn is in the *Miracula Nynia Episcopi* written in the third quarter of the eighth century.

3 Unlikely as it seems from Bede's pen, his comment must primarily be a judgement on what we would now refer to as 'the follow-up' of Paulinus' mission to Yeavering in AD 627.

depth, therefore, of the Christians' religious knowledge and the reality of the spiritual commitment of most of them would probably be slight. However, it is universally accepted that Bede, although drawn to the Celtic missionaries, was antagonistic to the British Church, so we should not accept his statement without careful consideration. For one thing the *eccles* names make it surely probable that the Church was in evidence among the British population of Bernicia and of Deira. For another it is clear that Bede is writing of bricks and mortar ('no symbol of the Christian faith, no church, and no altar...') Has there been a confusion between absence of church buildings and of congregations?

Unless the whole story of Kentigern is discarded as myth, (and it has been argued above that the evidence is against such a course) we have to take note of his mother Thanew. The whole birth narrative depends on the fact that she was a girl of marriagable age, presumably therefore in her teens, who although unbaptized as yet and poorly instructed in the Christian faith exhibits some knowledge of the Bible story, and spiritual yearnings. It should warn us against the assumption that there was no spiritual life present. Kentigern, apostle of Southern Scotland, was later born to her after her seduction, reputedly by Owein, son of Urien king of Rheged. Although Kentigern's dates make this paternity impossible, there is a hint here of a Lothian-Rheged-Strathclyde relationship which is not intrinsically unlikely. We shall see that at least two of Urien's grandsons were cultured men, one or both in holy orders. Rhun, who will figure largely in this generation, was probably the author of *The book of St. Germanus*'.

There was thus, encompassing Bernicia on north and west, a Christian presence. Firm archaeological support for this statement has been cited. It is difficult to imagine Bernicia, with its overwhelmingly British population, being left without spiritual oversight. Had it not been for a sentence in Stephanus' *Life of Bishop Wilfrid* reporting that at the dedication of Ripon cathedral Wilfrid read out: 'a list of the consecrated places in various parts which the British clergy had deserted when fleeing

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! Jackson K 'On the Northern British Section in Nennius' *Celt and Saxon* 1963 Cambridge pp.20-62 at p.49, also Chadwick NK 'Early Culture and Learning in North Wales' *SEBC* pp.29-120 at p.112

from the hostile sword wielded by the warriors of our own nation' [VW 17], we would never have known that such places of worship existed. In Bertram Colgrave's opinion those particular sites were probably in Elmet'. As Edwin took Elmet around fifty years before Wilfrid's dedication of Ripon this seems unlikely, it being more probable that the reference is to an area more recently overrun by Oswy's forces, perhaps in the Pennines. Be that as it may, there is no reason to suppose that similar 'consecrated places' of the same church did not exist further north in Bernicia. And indeed confirmation of this has been noted. If we accept Hope-Taylor's views on population balance and the relationship of Briton and Anglo-Saxon in Bernicia<sup>2</sup>, there is no need to envisage, in Bernicia, such a destruction as Wilfrid described.

Into this situation comes the Roman mission; for which I argue in an excursus that we can accept Bede's date of 625. An important fact, to which I have not seen reference, is that the results of this mission must be seen as two-pronged: towards the conversion of the pagan Angles, but also towards the assimilation of the British Christians. Although the mission majored on Deira, for Edwin was Deiran and we can imagine that the swing of fortunes had left Bernicia as underdog, it was to have considerable implications for the northern neighbour. The origins of this mission must now be considered.

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 1 Colgrave B *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus* 1927 Cambridge p.164

2 Hope-Taylor B *Yeavinger* 1977 London *passim*

## THE ORIGINS OF THE ROMAN MISSION

The Anglo-Saxon church saw Gregory as its founder - and said so fulsomely'. The English author of the earliest Life of Gregory wrote of him that: 'through the Spirit of God and with the incomparable discernment of his inward eye, he foresaw and made provision for our conversion to God'<sup>2</sup>. Similarly Bede wrote: 'If he is not an apostle to others, yet at least he is to us, for we are the seal of his apostleship in the Lord [H.E. ii. 11]<sup>3</sup>, applying to Gregory Paul's words to the Corinthians [I. Cor. 9:21].

Despite its rather romantic and improbable nature, many scholars accept as having some foundation the story, puns and all, of Gregory's meeting with the Deiran slaves in the Roman market [LGG 9]. Bishop Browne suggested that Gregory's interest antedated this<sup>4</sup>, and in effect ascribes the seminal influence to the eastern patriarch Eulogius<sup>5</sup> to whom Gregory was to send news of the initial success of Augustine's Kentish mission<sup>6</sup>.

Gregory himself is said to have wished to go to England with the gospel, but had been prevented [LGG 10]. When opportunity arose he initiated the mission. What were his motives?

1. That Gregory was anxious to spread the faith is obvious from the initiatives he took to encourage, one might almost say brow-beat, dilatory bishops to evangelism, and Christian laymen in authority to feel a responsibility for the religious welfare of their slaves. These efforts are well seen in Sardinia<sup>7</sup>. However these efforts were within the bounds of the

1 Meyvaert P *Bede and Gregory the Great* 1964 Jarrow Lecture pp. 1, 2

2 Colgrave B *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby* 1968 Lawrence, (Ch. 9)

3 It is, therefore, rather surprising that there are so few early churches dedicated to Gregory, although noteworthy that one of the few is the church at Kirknewton [NT 914303] near to Yeavering and to the site of Paulinus's baptisms. No scholar seems to have taken up the suggestion of P. Anderson Graham *Highways and Byways in Northumbria* (London: 1920 p. 93) that Edwin and Æthelburh were married in that church!

4 Browne GF *Augustine and his companions* 1897; London pp. 14-17

5 The argument makes a number of assumptions. The first is that Eulogius, who is known to have been head of the monastery of Deipara at Antioch up to his becoming Patriarch of Alexandria in 579, was in Byzantium during the visit there of the embassy of the King of the Franks, and the second that while there he spoke to the Anglian member(s) of that embassy. Browne's further assumption that while Gregory was ambassador at Byzantium he and Eulogius met and talked about the possibility of evangelising this distant people appears to be on firmer ground, for there is a letter extant (which Browne quotes *op. cit.*, p. 14) in which Gregory says, more than once, that the prayers of Eulogius had moved him to attempt the conversion of the English.

6 (E&T Whitelock D) *English Historical Documents* vol. 1, Item 163 London: 1955

7 Sullivan RE *The Papacy and missionary activity in the Early Middle Ages*, *Mediaeval Studies* 1955 17 pp. 46-106

Roman hegemony. As Sullivan goes on to discuss, apart from the episode in AD 431 when Pope Celestinus sent Palladius to Ireland, there was no precedent for the papacy initiating mission in lands beyond. And in fact Palladius was sent to minister to believers in Christ, not to evangelise pagans.

2 However, severely practical considerations will obviously have also been involved in the decision to send a Roman mission to the lost province. Crawford is clear that in Gregory's mind there was no distinction between spreading the gospel and spreading the orthodox catholic faith. The victory of that faith over Arianism, and the supremacy of the Roman see over other catholic but largely independent 'national' churches, were by no means foregone conclusions in the late sixth century<sup>1</sup>.

3 The influence of Celtic missionaries, notably that of Columbanus, was beginning to be felt on the Continent. While it was disruptive as evidenced by its practice on the date of Easter, the correspondence of Columbanus with the Pope demonstrates that there was no animosity: no sense of belonging to a different Church<sup>2</sup>. Gregory may possibly have felt that it would be wise to make contact with the Irish roots of this enterprise, and to incorporate the evangelistic zeal and spiritual strengths of the Celtic Christians into the work he sought to do<sup>3</sup>. Whether in fact he considered this factor is by no means certain, however it is my thesis that, by a century later, this is what was achieved.

4. Gregory implies that he was responding to a desire on the part of the English to receive the gospel. As Joan Nicholson writes: '(I)t is hard to believe that happy accident brought the Roman mission to the one place in England where they were not going to get the sort of reception Wilfrid got from the South Saxons some seventy years later'<sup>4</sup>. Queen Bertha must have played a part, but the most likely source of this is a message from Bishop Liudhard. The latter has had a rather bad press; however his influence must have been sufficiently attractive to warrant sending signals to Gregory.

1 Crawford SJ *Anglo-Saxon influence on Western Christendom 600-800* 1966 Cambridge p.19

2 Although Crawford has written: 'The truth is that for a time at least the mission of St Columbanus in Gaul was a church within a church, *op.cit.*, p.14

3 Randers-Pehrson JD *Barbarians and Romans* 1983 London p.312

4 Nicholson J 'Feminae gloriosae; women in the age of Bede' (Ed. Baker D) *Medieval Women* 1978 Oxford; pp.15-30

Gregory's strategic aim was the conversion of the English. His tactics are evidenced by the tool he chose. Instead of sending a group of evangelists who would have scattered everywhere preaching the Word, his must have centred on providing a Christian focus, for he sent a group of monks, in other words men whose life-work had been the offering of praise and worship to God in a community<sup>1</sup>. His aim was to convert the king. That achieved, the royal influence<sup>2</sup> should smooth the path for the gospel, through all the kingdoms which acknowledged Æthelberht as *bretwalda*.

In a seminal study of the strategy of missions McGavran maintains that the main missionary thrust should be towards bringing *peoples* to the faith, then within that community individuals will make their personal allegiance. Claiming that *Christendom arose out of People movements*, he states:

'it may be said that, as a rule, the people of northern Europe came to the Christian faith in group movements, or in socio-religious movements, or in politico-religious movements... We can regret the dark Ages which prevented the Christian churches from achieving greater perfection. But the choice was never between tribal conversions considered as a fourth-rate method of discipling and individual conversions considered as a first-rate one. It was tribal conversion or nothing<sup>3</sup>.

There are, of course, disadvantages. Baker's comment is unfortunately accurate: 'Convert the prince, and an *enforced or sycophantic* general acceptance of Christianity resulted'<sup>4</sup>, and it is true that Gregory, in his letter to Æthelberht, wrote: 'strengthen the morals of your subjects by outstanding purity of life, by exhorting them, *terrifying*, enticing, and correcting them...' [HE i: 32]. However against the idea that this recommends coercion Sherley-Price's translation of *terrendo* by 'warning'<sup>5</sup> makes better homiletical sense - 'make them terrified of divine (not regal) wrath.' Despite this it is clear, from the backslidings after Æthelberht's death, that some of his men had accepted Christian practice 'out of fear of the king or to win his favour.' [HE ii: 5]<sup>6</sup>

1 They were not Benedictine, as usually assumed, Deansley M *Augustine of Canterbury* 1964; London, Ch. 1

2 The sacral aspects of kingship, with his people following the king's religion, may be a fact here, It has been discussed by Clare Stancliffe ['Kings and conversion; some comparisons between the Roman mission to England and Patrick's to Ireland' *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 1980 1A pp. 59-94].

3 McGavran DA *The Bridges of God; a study in the strategy of missions* 1955 London pp. 39-39 his italics

4 Baker LGD 'The shadow of the Christian symbol' *SOH* 2, 1970, My italics.

5 Sherley-Price L *Bede; A history of the English Church and People* 1955; Harmondsworth, loc. cit

6 This missionary approach has been discussed by Clare Stancliffe [op. cit.].



Presumably it was foreseeing the need for native clergy, that Gregory planned to obtain and train English boys. In September 595 he wrote to Candidus, who was about to set out for Gaul to take responsibility for the papal patrimony, instructing him to purchase English pagan slaves aged seventeen or eighteen 'that they may be given to God and trained in the monasteries'. While Margaret Deansley thought this was acted upon immediately, and after a very brief training these lads accompanied Augustine a few months later<sup>2</sup>, Bishop Browne has pointed out that there was no time for the plan to succeed or to fail<sup>3</sup>, while Lingard was of the opinion that Candidus only went to Gaul in company with Augustine<sup>4</sup>.

While the arrival in Kent, and the work there of Augustine and his colleagues cannot be discussed here, his meeting with the British bishops is relevant to the Northumbrian situation two decades later, and demands attention.

This meeting, by the accidents of the development of scholarship, is considered as an incident in the province of academic history; which of course it is. However it can equally properly be considered in the new discipline of missiology<sup>5</sup>. Seen from this angle the impasse at Augustine's Oak is recognizable as one in a series of similar negotiations between churches of different traditions. Of course every case is different but there are illuminating parallels<sup>6</sup>, especially when the negotiations occur in a missionary situation. This was the situation as recorded by Bede [HE ii:4]. Augustine urged that they 'undertake the joint labour of evangelizing the heathen for the Lord's sake'. Such an agreement involves a recognition that both preach the same gospel, it involves the necessity of accepting each other's converts as being members of the Church, which also

1 EHD n, 161

2 Deansley M *op.cit.*, p.24

3 Browne *op.cit.*, p.22

4 Lingard J *The history and antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 1845 London, Vol.1 p.21fn.

5 The Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 (initiated by JR Mott *The evangelization of the world in this generation* [1902 London]) set missions in the forefront of the Churches' agenda, but it was the later work of Roland Allen (*Missionary Principles* [London 1913]), and of Donald McGavran (*op.cit.*) which initiated its modern systematic study. The academically respectable Fuller Theological Seminary, in Pasadena, has a Faculty of Missions.

6 (Using the word 'parallel' loosely). Notably Kikuyu [Oliver R *The Missionary factor in East Africa* London 1965 pp.222-29] which failed; and those in South India [Newbigin L *The reunion of the Church; a defence of the South India Scheme* 1948 London *passim*] which succeeded.

involves accepting the validity of each other's baptisms. Different traditions are always stumbling blocks: here at the end of the day they boiled down to three: the keeping of Easter, which much earlier had almost wrecked the unity of the Church [Eusebius *The History of the Church* V:24]; a common baptismal rite to be employed<sup>1</sup>; and common evangelism. The British contingent - who must have been clear on Augustine's position and the papal origin of his mission from his prolonged 'prayers, exhortations and rebukes' at the first session - did not return to the second conference predetermined on rejection. Their final decision would not depend on papal plans nor on entrenched positions, but would await evidence of Augustine's godliness. No doubt their test was unfair, but in many of these cases the personalities of the negotiators is possibly of almost as much importance as the theological issues.

The British churchmen had been prepared to change their practices, modify their sacrament, but the autocratic stance of Augustine must have underlined 'their apprehension of giving to themselves a severe and imperious master'<sup>2</sup>. Bede's account of the incident confirms our understanding that the British Church had no primate. Future relationships were not as frosty as Bede paints, as we may note by the co-operation of British bishops in the consecration of Chad [HE iii:28], and the probable assistance of British priests in later evangelism<sup>3</sup>.

It must not be forgotten that, as well as the motives already discussed, the underlying motives of Gregory were spiritual: three, known to be relevant in the Early Church, were surely involved:

1 Obedience to the dominical command: 'The Great Commission' - to 'go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...' [Matt.28:19]

2 The impulse of the Holy Spirit as a result of Pentecost which, as Harry Boer's doctoral thesis<sup>4</sup> shows, far outweighed the first in the

1 Still a stumbling block (It arose in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1991), although the current issue is the problem some evangelicals have in recognizing the validity of paedobaptism; and how this affects their entering into agreement with other bodies. [Oliver R *op.cit.*, p.228 fn,2]. At Augustine's Ash the issue may have related to confirmation, *CIEB* p.190

2 This phrase, surprisingly, is that of Lingard (*vide infra*)p.381

3 Brooks N 'Historical introduction' *The making of England; Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture AD 600-900* (Ed. Webster L and J Backhouse) 1991 London pp.9-14.

4 Boer HR published as *Pentecost and Missions* London 1961 p.15

experience of the Early Church.

3 What Stanley Heavenor has called *The eschatological imperative in the missionary enterprise of the Early Church*<sup>1</sup>. That is the sense of the imminent return of Christ to earth, and the resulting stimulus to fulfil His work while there is time 'Work while it is yet day for the night cometh when no man can work' [Jn 9:47]<sup>2</sup>. We know from his letter to King Æthelberht [HE 1:32] that Gregory expected the Second Advent in the near future, this may well, therefore, have been a strong motive.

A century and a half ago a distinguished<sup>3</sup> Roman Catholic historian, John Lingard summed up the mission:

'Thus in the space of about eighty years was successfully completed the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons; an enterprise which originated in the charity of Gregory the Great, and was unremittingly continued by the industry of his disciples, with the assistance of co-operators from Gaul, Italy, and Scottish missionaries from the isle of Iona'<sup>4</sup>.

Today there would be few who would accept that as an adequate summary of events, for although the mission can be seen to be the foundation on which the English church was eventually built, the initial superstructure proved inadequate. In the case of Bernicia, it was soon in ruins. Even in the south it was largely a failure. Bishop Browne commented:

The Christian labours of Augustine and his companions had to shew as their actual geographical results the little kingdom of Kent alone... The fact that Honorius made no arrangement for the appointment of a successor, and the fact of an interregnum for a year and a half, combine... in shewing that the original Canterbury mission had practically come to an end, and Theodore's was a new mission'<sup>5</sup>.

Consideration of the causes of such disappointing results will be postponed until the work of Paulinus in Northumbria has been discussed, as some of them were germane to his work also.

1 Heavenor ESP *op.cit.*, Ph.D thesis, Edinburgh, 1963

2 The other side of the doctrine; Jesus' words 'This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come' [Matt.24:14] has also been used as a missionary stimulus, as in the 1934 student watchword 'Evangelise to a finish to bring back the King' [Johnson D *Contending for the Faith* 1979 London p.193] but there is no evidence this aspect was considered here, when the Lord's return was looked forward to with terror, not with hope.

3 There is some evidence that Leo XII created him Cardinal *in petto* in 1826, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*

4 Lingard J *The history and antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church, containing an account of its origin, government, doctrines, worship, revenues and clerical and monastic institutions* 1845 London 1.39

5 Browne *op.cit.*, pp.189,190.

## PART THREE: FOUNDATION

## Excursus: DATE OF PAULINUS' MISSION

The received view, based on Bede [*HE* ii:9], has been that Paulinus was consecrated in 625 and then accompanied Edwin's young bride to Northumbria. The birth, next year, of a daughter was the entryport through which Christianity became acceptable to the king. But, as Wallace-Hadrill has pointed out, Bede's account bristles with chronological problems<sup>1</sup>. However help is obtained from a gestational hint, obvious to an obstetrician, which appears to have escaped previous detailed notice<sup>2</sup>.

Bede tells us that Paulinus was consecrated bishop on July 21 625 to accompany Æthelburh to Northumberland [*HE* ii:9]. The birth of Eanflæd on Easter Day<sup>3</sup> April 20<sup>4</sup> 626, if at full-term, implies a conception date around July 27 625. This is very tight timing indeed, if allowance has to be made, between Paulinus' consecration and the wedding, for the journey from Kent to Deira. Even with a ship waiting in the Medway, favourable winds to the Humber, and horses ready for the last stage, six days for all this seems optimistic. A land journey by the bride with her entourage on horseback would, as we shall see, be no more speedy. This timing also requires that Æthelburh's hormonal cycle produced an ovum on the wedding day plus/minus one. Two solutions present themselves.

Edwin may have gone to Kent for the marriage, in which case the dates would fit in well with a 'honeymoon conception'. However with its implication of being a suppliant, it seems improbable behaviour for a *Bretwalda*, and in any case the account is clear that they went to Edwin.

A more attractive solution, and the one which I favour, is suggested by Edwin's rejoicing at Æthelburh's satisfactory delivery and Paulinus' claim that it was due to his prayers<sup>5</sup>. This seems a bit overdone for a normal birth, and to me implies that there had been an unusual degree of concern. Was this due to labour being premature, perhaps induced by the shock of that day's assassination attempt on her husband? This would allow us to assume a gestational period shortened (but in the absence of neonatal facilities probably by not more than five weeks at the most), enough to allow us to accept all the stated dates, as no other scenario does.

1 *EHC* p.65

2 It was mentioned in passing by Hunter Blair who miscalculated the crucial date of Easter in 626. Writing of Pope Boniface's letter (*vide infra*) Blair commented: 'we must admit that time seems short - a remark which may also apply to the birth of Eanflæd on 31 March (*sic*) if Æthelberg did not set out from Kent on her first visit to Edwin until after 21 July 625.' 'The letters of Pope Boniface V and the mission of Paulinus to Northumbria' *England before the Conquest* (Ed. Clemoes P and K Hughes) 1971 Cambridge pp.5-15) On the dates he gives it would have been nigh impossible, for if the birth was at term as it would involve conception thirteen days prior to Paulinus' consecration!

3 or Easter Eve, April 19, according to Bright (*EECH* p.129)

4 Kirby DP Bede and Northumbrian Chronology, *EHR* 1963 78 514-527, argues that there is a dislocation in Bede's calculations and that Paulinus was in fact consecrated July 20 626, with Eanflæd's birth in 627, As Easter Day in 627 was eight days earlier (April 12) his suggested alteration merely compounds the problem.

5 Although every safe delivery is a cause for rejoicing ('Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his goodness to give you safe deliverance, and hath preserved you in the great danger of Child-birth...') [*The Churching of Women Common Prayer* 1662]), Edwin had already some children, including a male heir, and one would have thought that his escape from assassination would have been a greater cause for thanksgiving

An issue relevant to the date of the wedding, to which attention has been repeatedly drawn from the time of Bright<sup>1</sup>, is Pope Boniface's letter to Queen Æthelburh in which he expressed grief that her husband had 'hesitated to hear and obey the words of the preachers' [HE ii:11]. Most workers read this as an implied criticism of her wifely duties to evangelise her husband. If so, this seems impatient, as we are required to believe that there could have been time for the delay to be noted, report of it communicated to Rome, and a reply sent from the Pope before his death in October 625 - only three months after the marriage!

To get round this problem<sup>2</sup> many scholars suggest the wedding had, in fact, occurred a number of years earlier. The importance of this for our study is that it would bring Paulinus' mission to Northumbria forwards, and makes its duration perhaps twice or three times as long as Bede's firm dates state. On this view it was only some years after his arrival in the bride's entourage that Paulinus returned, in 625, to Kent for episcopal consecration - just as Bede reports [HE i:27] Augustine having returned to Gaul for his consecration<sup>3</sup>. If we were to accept this hypothesis we could then imagine that Æthelburh had had a number of unsuccessful pregnancies, thus explaining the relief and delight at the safe arrival of Eanflæd. However although this view has commended itself to many scholars, I believe it to have a flaw which makes it untenable. It requires Edwin's initial acceptance of a mere priest as his bride's chaplain, whereas her mother had been accompanied by a bishop on her bridal<sup>4</sup>. It is not the kind of gratuitous insult with which one would plan to initiate an evangelistic mission, least of all one aimed primarily at Edwin himself. Further, if the hope and expectation was that churches would be established it builds in a major problem. Either priests would have to be sent to Kent for ordination, or a Kentish bishop sent north for this purpose: in either case the subordination of Northumbria to Kent would be emphasised. Surely even missionaries from Rome would see that, in the prevailing relationships of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, this would not be a very intelligent ploy.

However going along with that suggestion we have to consider when such a wedding would originally have taken place? There are several possible scenarios.

Hunter Blair<sup>5</sup>, who favoured this view, suggested that Edwin spent part of his exile in Kent, where he married Æthelburh. I find this unconvincing. While we have hints of part of his exile having been spent in Gwynedd<sup>6</sup>, and part in Mercia (where he married Cwenburh and had sons) [HE ii:14], there is no record of Kent providing yet another refuge, for it is clear that Edwin's final refuge was at King Rædwald's court where he surely stayed

1 *EECH* p.130fn

2 Sir Henry Howarth solved it simply, by suggesting the letter is spurious. *St Augustine* 1913 London p.lxxi. Others have suggested the letter from Rome came from a later pope.

3 Meyvaert convincingly destroys this unnecessary journey in his 1954 Jarrow Lecture *Bede and Gregory the Great*

4 Wallace-Hadrill believes the pope employed Bertha as an instrument of his policy in extending catholic influence. *The Barbarian West* 1965 ed Oxford p.53

5 Blair H 'The letters of Pope Boniface V...' *op.cit.*

6 Lloyd Sir JE *History of Wales* 1911, 1989rpt, Carmarthen I:183

until his exile was terminated by the victory on the River Idle in 616. Would King Æthelberht have given his daughter to a roving refugee? And if he already had a wife in Kent, why did he leave her at home and flee on to East Anglia? There is no suggestion that he was *persona non grata* at Canterbury.

Another possibility is that, after he came to his throne, Edwin had married Æthelburh during a visit to Kent, then left her there to follow after. This would only make sense if she were too young to cohabit. For this, and the whole discussion of the date of Æthelburh's marriage, we need to know her age. This proves to be an intractable problem.

In addressing it almost the only firm date we have is the death in 589 of her grandmother Queen Ingoberg, then in her seventieth year, for which we have the first-hand witness of Gregory of Tours [HF ix.26]. Assuming a woman's possible child-bearing years normally to lie between 15 and 45<sup>1</sup> Ingoberg's children must have been born between 535 and 565. Her husband, King Charibert came to the throne in 561 [HF iv:22] and Gregory appears to imply it was after this that he dismissed Ingoberg in favour of Merofled, also had a mistress Theudechild, and eventually married Marcovefa, all before dying in 567 [HF iv:26]. Bearing in mind Ingoberg's age and their marital breakdown it seems unwise to assume that Bertha (or her sister Berthefled) was born much after 560.

The date of Bertha's marriage to Æthelberht is unknown, and a wide variety of dates have been canvassed. If we are to take at its exact face value Bede's plural: 'He [Æthelberht] had received her from her parents on condition..' [HE i:25], then the arrangements, at least, were made before her father's death in 567, and we can understand Wallace-Hadrill's guess that the wedding took place 'perhaps in the 560s'<sup>2</sup>. However Æthelberht himself was not born until 552 [ASC-F]. It is not clear what benefit this match to a bridegroom still a minor would offer to the Merovingians at a time when Kent was weak. Wilhelm Levison discussing this marriage wrote: 'The Merovingian kingdom was the greatest power in the West in the sixth century; the marriage of a daughter of its royal house to an English king meant his admission to some equality with the foremost Teutonic rulers'<sup>3</sup>. This implies a much later date for the marriage, after Æthelberht had established his power. John Richard Green, who believed Bertha to have been born after her father came to the throne - he does not mention that her mother was then in her forties - considered that her wedding would take place when she was about twenty: 'about 583 or a little later.'<sup>4</sup>

Irrespective of when that marriage took place, Bertha could hardly have been less than forty in 600. If Æthelburh was a bride of twenty in 625 then her mother had delivered in her forties at the very limit of her childbearing years. One can understand her nickname: Tata - 'Darling'. These dates finally dispose of any idea that she might have been kept in Kent as too young to cohabit with Edwin: fourteen or fifteen would then have been considered a suitable age.

1 See discussion by JB Post 'Ages at menarche and menopause; some mediaeval authorities' *Population Studies* 1971 25 pp.83-88.

2 Wallace-Hadrill JM *Early Germanic kingship in England and on the Continent* 1971 Oxford p.24

3 Levison W *England and the Continent in the eighth century* 1943 Oxford p.5.

4 Green JR *The making of England* 1891; London p.211fn. He has Æthelburh the daughter, rather than the sister, of King Eadbald! (p.258).

All this lengthy debate has been necessitated by the criticism of Edwin's continued paganism expressed in the Papal letter addressed to Æthelburh and written by October 625, read as a criticism of her inadequate wifely Christian witness. But is this a correct understanding of what Boniface wrote? Surely it is rather a comment on her husband's failure to respond to Christian teaching. Bede tells us that the first embassy to King Eadbald seeking his sister's hand brought back a conditional answer, which necessitated a second Northumbrian mission with acceptance not only of the condition that the bride would be allowed freedom of Christian worship, but the further promise that the king would give careful thought to conversion. As Paulinus' mission was very much directed at the conversion of Northumbria we would expect him to have been provided with assistants. Augustine had come over with a team of forty, later reinforced by Paulinus and other colleagues, we would not expect the great outreach to Northumbria to be left to a single worker. In fact there is confirmation of at least one of these in Bede's record: '(Paulinus) had also a deacon named James associated with him in the ministry, a man of zeal and great reputation with both Christ and the church..' [HE ii:16]. The simplest solution to these problems is to suppose that when one or other of the Northumbrian embassages returned northwards it brought with it one or more members of the mission, ostensibly to explain the religious freedoms required by the bride, but also to begin sowing the seed. In essence, then, Pope Boniface is recording his disappointment that Edwin has not responded to the preaching - then, and earlier at Rendlesham - but making the point that now he has a Christian wife she is in duty bound to work on her bridegroom for his salvation.

I see no difficulty, therefore, in accepting Bede's dates for Paulinus' consecration, an immediate journey north of the bridal party, (for which we must allow at least a fortnight<sup>1</sup>) followed by marriage after getting over the journey, say a week later. These are absolute minimum times, and I would have thought unlikely to be met. But accepting them, if conception occurred at the midpoint in the bride's next ovulatory cycle, appropriate to that the expected date of delivery would be a specific date between May 4th and June 1st. Labour on 19/20th April must therefore have been premature by, at the very least, somewhere between two and six weeks, causing great concern. Its successful conclusion, in response - Paulinus claimed - to prayer, was an important factor in opening the door to the gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> It is probable that the party came by land, for in describing her flight south Bede goes out of his way to say she travelled by boat [HE ii:20], not surprisingly in view of the hostile victorious army marching north from Hatfield Chase. The distance from Canterbury to Doncaster is 239 miles by modern routes; she may have travelled further into Yorkshire. Frank Stenton [*The road system of mediaeval England' Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England* pp.234-252] states: 'a long series of medieval accounts would probably give the impression that under ordinary conditions the normal daily ride, even of a man employed on the king's business, approximated much more closely to 20 than to 30 miles.' A royal princess may be expected to have travelled in some style, and therefore less speedily. It is true that her daughter came to her wedding by sea, but the dangers encountered on that journey [HE iii:15] demonstrate it to be a surprising choice. However even if she did come by sea there would be no means of judging how long it would take. In these circumstances - whether or not we assume a ceremony in keeping with Edwin's status was to take place - ample lee-way for contrary winds would require a late date planned for the wedding, for neither would want a sea-sick bride.

## THE NORTHUMBRIAN MISSION OF PAULINUS.

Unlike the mission of Augustine, aimed at the conversion of the English, its Northumbrian offshoot had, ostensibly, the much more modest aim of providing spiritual support to a Christian princess on her marriage to a pagan king. It might, therefore, be thought of as a parallel to that of Bishop Liudhard when he accompanied her mother Bertha to Kent, however the mission of Paulinus had important differences.

Firstly King Edwin, in agreeing to the marriage condition that Æthelburh should be free to continue in her Christian faith, added that that he did not deny the possibility that he might accept the same religion himself if, on examination, it was judged by his wise men to be a holier worship and more worthy of God [*HE* ii:9]. Secondly Paulinus had come to England as a missionary, and for many years had worked as part of the missionary team specifically aiming at the conversion of the English, even although mostly in the shadow of the palace. The potentialities of Edwin's response would therefore appeal to him.

We must also recall the strange episode c.AD 616, during a perilous moment in Edwin's exile at King Rædwald's court when an 'unexpected stranger' appeared to Edwin with words of encouragement, and extracted Edwin's promise that he would follow the teaching of that one who could rescue him from so many troubles and raise him to the throne, and who would then identify and remind him by repeating the sign of a hand on Edwin's head [*HE* ii:12]. Bede implies that this was a spiritual apparition, an angel, and that these facts were not revealed to Paulinus until a crucial moment in Northumbria. Such a divine 'word of knowledge' [I Cor. 12:8 cf. Acts 5:1-11] would have been a great encouragement to Paulinus. However the monk of Whitby [*LG* 16] in recounting this story, ends: 'It is said to have been Bishop Paulinus who first appeared to him in this form', although he is cautious to disclaim even second-hand information. If indeed it was Paulinus, then here was the long hoped for opportunity of building on this promise, which he could only have made at Rendlesham as a result of a 'gift of prophecy' [I Cor. 12:10]. Either way Paulinus must have been encouraged by such specific evidence of the Holy Spirit's working.



## EDWIN'S CHRISTIAN BACKGROUND.

'Edwin, son of Aelle, reigned 17 years., He occupied Elmet and expelled Ceretic, king of that country. His daughter, Eanfled, received baptism on the twelfth day after Whitsun, and all his people, men and women, with her. Edwin was baptised at the Easter following, and twelve thousand men were baptised with him. If anyone wants to know who baptised them [and this is what bishop Renchidus and Elvodug, the holiest of bishops, told me], Rhun son of Urien, [that is Paulinus, archbishop of York] baptised them, and for forty days on end he went on baptising the whole nation of the Thugs', and through his teaching many of them believed in Christ.'

So we read in the *Historia Brittonum* c.63, the bracketed words being added in the later, Nennian, recension. The *Annales Cambriae* independently<sup>2</sup> support this, recording: s.a.626: 'Edwin is baptized, and Rhun son of Urien baptized him.'

It is important to consider the weight of this Welsh record<sup>3</sup>, for Bede says nothing of Rhun. Most historians have avoided the subject, while Colgrave passes it off with a footnote<sup>4</sup>. For the present study the relevant portions of *HB* are c.57, 61-65, which Jackson<sup>5</sup> has shown must contain much material of British origin. It is postulated that 'Nennius' incorporated a *Northern History*, which in its final form may not have been put together until late in the eighth century. However this is believed to have been based on a *Northern Chronicle* compiled perhaps around AD 750 at Whithorn, as Nora Chadwick suggests<sup>6</sup> or at Glasgow<sup>7</sup>, while behind this is believed to lie a *seventh-century written record*, prepared by a British cleric. The favoured author is Rhun himself. Jackson summarises: [The Northern Compiler's] very late date would not detract in any way from the value to us of his work as a historian, if... he was using a 'Northern Chronicle' which was more or less contemporary for most of the events of the seventh

1 'Thug' carries unfortunate overtones, *ambro* having rather the meaning 'spendthrift' or 'glutton'.

2 Kathleen Hughes has shown that this is not a case of the *Annales Cambriae* copying *HB* or *vice versa*. 'The A-text of *Annales Cambriae*', *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages* 1980, Woodbridge; Boydell pp.86-100

3 David Dumville is dismissive of their authority, in an unimpressive paper 'Sub-Roman Britain; history and legend' *History* 1977 62 173-192.

4 'In one group of manuscripts of the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae* it is related that Edwin was baptized by Rhun, son of Urien. Both these sources, however, are later and less authoritative than Bede. The Whitby *Life of Gregory*, which has much information about Edwin, also knows nothing of this story.' *SEHEP* p.186

5 Jackson K 'On the Northern British Section in Nennius' *Celt and Saxon* (Ed) Chadwick NK 1963; Cambridge pp.20-63, esp. p.45.

6 Chadwick NK 'Early culture and learning in North Wales' in *SEBC* pp.29-121 at p.62

7 Jackson *op.cit* p.53

century which he recorded and perhaps drew for the sixth and early part of the seventh century on notes left by Rhun son of Urien'.

Nora Chadwick states: 'It is clear that two or perhaps three sons of Urien were important in the ecclesiastical traditions of the British Church in the early seventh century, that at least one, perhaps two, were educated men in Holy Orders'<sup>2</sup>. Although it is obvious that our traditions of Edwin's baptism are, without exception, strongly coloured by the controversy between the Celtic and Roman churches<sup>3</sup> it is worth recalling that the later ('Nennian') recension of *HB* adds the author's source of information. Kirby has noted that, while nothing is known of Renchidus, Eldobus (styled archbishop of Gwynedd in the Welsh annals), can have had no interest 'in spreading a worthless legend; he it is who brought over the Church in North Wales to the Roman Easter in 768. He himself belonged to a Welsh Romanizing party'<sup>4</sup>.

This inconvenient British record has been treated in several ways, none of them convincing:

1. Rhun as another name for Paulinus. This is the thrust of the addition in the 'Nennian' recension of *HB* already quoted. Bishop Browne supports this idea, advancing the ingenious theory that Paulinus was, originally, 'of a British family, of the Royal race of Rheged, son of Urien, who may have fled to Rome'<sup>5</sup>.

2. The record as a bit of crude British propaganda: an early example of the technique of disinformation. Bright, having been blunt: 'This is plainly a Welsh fiction', then tries to explain the confusion by which it came about.<sup>6</sup> Even less plausible is a ploy quoted by Sir Henry Howorth: 'It is not difficult to convert Paulinus into Paul i hen, and thus make a

1 *op. cit.* pp. 61-62.

2 Chadwick NK 'The Conversion of Northumbria: a comparison of sources' *Celt and Saxon* pp. 138-166

3 Chadwick *op. cit.* p. 165.

4 Kirby CP Bede's native sources for the *Historia Ecclesiastica* *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 1960 42 pp. 341-371.

5 Browne GF *Augustine and his companions* <sup>2</sup>1897 London p. 173. Later he develops the suggestion 'Paulinus may have been one of captives carried off to Rome and trained in Christianity, and that to him British Gaelic was a native and Anglo-Saxon an early acquired language.' [*The Venerable Bede; his life and writings* 1930 London p. 41]

6 *EECH* p. 135fn

Welshman of him, as was in fact done'. Despite referring to Jackson's work Bertram Colgrave, in his notes on *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, remained unrepentant: 'The story may well have been invented after the time of our author and Bede. No British tradition was likely to admit that Paulinus was responsible for the conversion of Northumbria. The peculiar way the story is told ("If anyone wants to know who baptised them, it was Rum map Urbgen who baptised them") seems to imply that the writer is trying to make a point rather than tell sober history'<sup>2</sup>.

Bede's complete silence on the subject would fit in with his animus against the British church. If we are to take seriously the record that, in fact, Edwin was baptised by a British bishop, as surely we must, the question arises as to when this might have taken place.

That Edwin had had considerable contact with the British church is certain. Welsh tradition has him in exile in Gwynedd, and one of the triads lists him as taking part with their warriors<sup>3</sup>, Geoffrey of Monmouth even romanced that he was brought up with Cadwallon<sup>4</sup>. Such a place of refuge was not unusual in that age. Hereric, Hilda's father, took refuge in the British kingdom of Elmet [*HE* iv:23], and it has been shown by many scholars, notably by Finberg<sup>5</sup> that the popular picture of constant warfare between Angle and Briton is false. In Gwynedd Edwin would have been in a Christian society. It is inevitable that he was challenged to yield his allegiance to Christ. A number of workers<sup>6</sup> suggest that Edwin was baptised by a British bishop at that time, with Paulinus later giving conditional baptism. However the Welsh record is clear about dates: 626 they say. Although this differs from Bede's figure by a few months that is of little importance, for HB and HE dates are rarely exactly congruous. It does, however, place the baptism firmly after Eanflæd's birth.

In Gwynedd, Edwin, challenged by the Christian faith, probably did not

1 Howorth Sir H *Augustine the missionary* 1913 London p.263

2 *op. cit* p. 148 n.58.

3 Lloyd Sir JE *History of Wales* 1911, 1988 rpt, Carmarthen I:183

4 Thorpe L. (Trans) Geoffrey of Monmouth *History of the Kings of Britain* xii:1, The story is also reported in *The Life of St Oswald* printed (in part) in Symeon of Durham *Historia Dunelmensis Ecclesiae* I, in the Rolls Series.

5 Finberg HPR 'Continuity or cataclysm?' *Lucerna* 1964 London pp.1-20

6 Including Nora Chadwick *op. cit.* p.155

commit himself. It may well be that the destruction of the large priestly body at the Battle of Chester, by Æthelfrith, made him doubt the power of the Christian God. In pagan Mercia, to which he next seems to have gone, for there he married Cwenburh (their grandchild Yffi was to be baptised in Northumbria by Paulinus [HE ii:14]) there would have been little further stimulus to Christian commitment.

In East Anglia he was guest of Rædwald who 'had been initiated into the mysteries of the Christian faith in Kent' but had backslid<sup>d</sup>en to the extent of having in the same temple one altar for the Christian sacrifice and another small altar on which to offer victims to devils [HE ii:15]. It is probable that there was at Rædwald's court a Christian priest, possibly Paulinus. There, in the person of the *bretwalda*, Edwin had an example of sitting on the fence.

We must therefore see Edwin has having been, from his youth, in touch with the Christian church, for most of the time British, but latterly Roman. His eyes were always on the hope of a return to the throne of Deira, which having been settled by Angles earlier and more largely than was Bernicia, had a higher proportion of Angles to Britons. As he would therefore be envisaging returning to a country where his powerbase would be pagan, overt declaration of Christianity might well appear a disadvantage. Support for this is found in Bede's record of Edwin's insistence on carrying his council' with him when the moment of decision finally came [HE ii:9; ii:13]. It seems probable that Edwin in his heart was already leaning towards becoming a Christian, for there are a couple of subtle pointers to the fact that Edwin's decision was not between paganism and the Christian faith, but between its British and Roman practice. First: in replying to King Eadbald's condition re Æthelburh's Christian freedom, Edwin promised that 'he would put no obstacle of any kind *in the way of the Christian worship which the maiden practised* [HE ii:9]. Second: While we know, from the presence in council of the pagan priest Coifi [HE ii:13] that Deira was still pagan, Edwin's further promise that he might accept his bride's same religion 'if it was judged by his wise men to be a *holier*

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 † some writers refer to this as a witenagemot, and the O.E. translation uses the word 'wytum' (II:X:ii:13) but as H. Munro Chadwick showed [*Studies in Anglo-Saxon institutions* 1905; Cambridge p.333] it was probably a council of the chief men who formed Edwin's court.

*worship and more worthy of God* does not sound like a comparison between the Christian faith and that of the teutonic pantheon. It suggests that the Christianity of their British population was also under consideration.

#### EDWIN'S CONVERSION

I have argued that Edwin had for many years been dithering about becoming a Christian. That the trappings of Rome obviously appealed to him is demonstrated by his *tufa* [HE ii:16] and by the unusual shape of the auditorium at Yeavinging<sup>1</sup>. The example of the Kentish royal house to which he was now linked by marriage, the witness of his bride, the preaching of Paulinus, were all pushing him towards a decision. There cannot be the slightest doubt that Æthelburh, encouraged no doubt by Paulinus, had been pressurising him to agree to the baptism of the babe she was expecting. If it were boy, and therefore a possible heir, this would be a momentous step. A decision could not be put off for ever.

In this connection the importance of the assassination attempt, at this juncture, does not appear to have been fully appreciated. It is one thing to risk death in battle: but then with adrenalin pouring out, it is always the other person who is going to be killed, never me, or not this time. But Edwin was not physiologically or psychologically prepared when Eomer lunged with his poisoned dagger [HE ii:9] In fact for some hours Edwin, wounded in the attempt, had had to wonder whether the poison would do its deadly work in him. He had had to face death, unprepared to meet his Maker. Paulinus would be too wise to use the weapon of that fear, but majored on rejoicing at the safe delivery of the queen, and the arrival of Eanflæd, which I have earlier argued was also a matter of grave concern and doubt during those tense hours. It was that Easter evening, probably, that Edwin made his decision. His delay in going forwards for baptism was largely to enable him to bring his elders with him. However his agreement to the baptism of Eanflæd seals the decision. One cannot totally accept the worldly view of Joan Nicholson: 'Edwin was delighted when Eanfled was born and, not yet converted to Christianity but about to fight a battle, offered

<sup>1</sup> Hope-Taylor *op. cit.*, 'Building E sets upon (this site) the stamp of Rome; blurred and deformed, perhaps, but unmistakable,' p.241

her for baptism with much the same sort of hopes as Oswy donating Elfled'.

In the intervening months, with Eanflæd and the household already baptised, the religious climate of Northumbria inevitably changed dramatically. It is impossible to believe that the British church, the church of the majority of the population, did not take full advantage of the new situation. One must concur with William Skene's forgotten comment: 'Although the Northumbrians were converted in the reign of Edwin by Paulinus in 625, according to the narrative of Bede, there is reason to conclude that the Church of Kentigern had a large share in their conversion'<sup>2</sup>.

This northern source of Christian input is more likely than any from further south. It was only a decade since Æthelfrith had 'ravaged the Britons more extensively than any other English ruler' [HE 1:34] slaughtering their unarmed priests. Although he had been killed by Edwin (with the mighty assistance of Rædwald), Northumbria must have continued to be feared by the British of Lancashire and North Wales. And with good cause, for Edwin also pressed them hard, even conquering the Isle of Man and Anglesey [HE 11:5]. Bede implies this was before his conversion: 'the king's earthly power had increased as an augury that he was to become a believer' [HE 11:9]. This timing is probably accurate, for the West Saxon assassination attempt can best be seen as a pre-emptive strike against their foreseen attacker. The idea that Oswald was behind this plot need not be taken seriously<sup>3</sup>. Even although there was enmity between North Wales and Northumbria it was not essentially a racial hatred, for Gwynedd was prepared to make Mercia its ally. Again there is no hint that the enmity was essentially religious despite the slaughter by Æthelfrid of the 'prayer-warriors'<sup>4</sup> at the battle of Chester. The title given him by the Welsh 'Ædlfred Flesaur' is translated by John Morris as 'Aethelferth the Artful'<sup>5</sup> or 'Aethelfrid Twister' by Sir John Lloyd, which suggest there may

1 Nicholson J '*Feminae gloriosae*, women in the age of Bede' (ed.) Baker D *Medieval women* 1978 Oxford pp.15-30

2 Skene W *Chronicles of the Picts and Scots* 1867, Edinburgh p.clv.

3 A suggestion advanced by, among others, Pamela Lavery in *Oswald, Saint of Kings* [1980; Bognor Regis p.74], a work which, understandably in view of a number of bizarre theories, has not attracted scholarly notice.

4 Æthelfrith was quite justified, for prayer as warfare is well recognised today.

5 In his translation of *HB* c.57. To Plummer the meaning of this epithet was unknown [VB II:64]

even have been a grudging acknowledgment by the British of his tactics on that occasion.

That Deira had a reasonable relationship with Rheged, however, is suggested by the marriage, within a decade of Edwin's baptism, between Rhun's grand-daughter Rienmelt and Oswy<sup>1</sup> a prince of Northumbria; and although of the Bernician family, one of Edwin's relations<sup>2</sup>. In Wallace-Hadrill's view: 'One may accept the presence of Rhun at Edwin's court, since it sorts well enough with the king's relations with the British. There may have been preparatory British efforts at conversion there; but in the end one must accept Bede's account of Paulinus' mission'<sup>3</sup>. It is with the completeness of Bede's account that one must take issue. A sharp division between the Roman and the British manifestations of the Church, the idea of which is diligently fostered by Bede, is denied by his own record of the episcopal ordination of Chad jointly by one 'Roman' and two 'British' bishops [HE iii:28]. There is no reason, therefore, to deny joint activity in Edwin's baptism. It would be difficult to imagine Paulinus, at last given a free hand to preach, rejecting any help in evangelizing the vast territory now open to the Faith.

Proof of the British and Northumbrian Anglo-Saxon clergy having worked side by side is found in a comment of Haddan and Stubbs: 'Several rites peculiar at first to the early Anglo-Saxon Church, and apparently to the Northumbrian branch of it, were subsequently (for a time) borrowed thence by the Churches of northern France; of which one certainly, viz. the anointing of the hands at ordination (Gildas...[c.106]) and therefore possibly the others, were borrowed from the British Church'<sup>4</sup>

1 This is discussed by Kenneth Jackson 'On the Northern British Section in Nennius' *op.cit.* pp 41-42

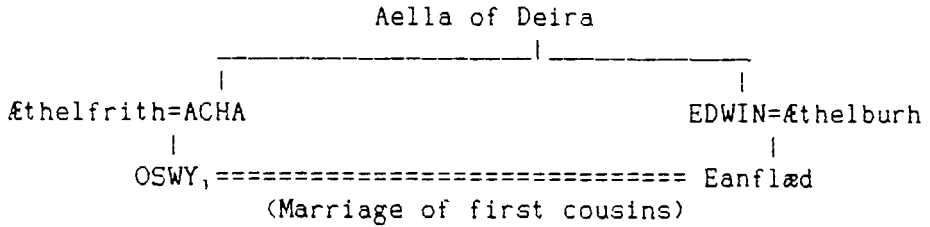
2 He is usually considered to be a nephew, being son to Æthelfrid and Edwin's sister Acca [William of Malmesbury's *Chronicle of the English Kings* p.44 in Giles' edition]. However if this were the case he would be first-cousin to Eanflæd, whom he married later [Molly Miller, The dates of Deira ASE 8 pp 39-61]. In view of the discussions between Augustine and Pope Gregory on forbidden relationships in marriage [HE I:27] there is slight possibility that this marriage would have been permitted. It is here that Geoffrey of Monmouth comes to our aid with his passing comment that Æthelfrith took a second wife or concubine. Charles Plummer quotes the *Vit. Oswaldi* to the same effect [VB II:161]. If Oswy was born to her then he had no blood relationship to Eanflæd, and there was no canonical bar to the marriage. As none of the genealogical tables known to me demonstrate Oswy's relationships as I understand them, I have constructed a revised one.

3 BEHEP p.65

4 Haddan AW and W Stubbs *Councils and ecclesiastical documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland* 1869 Oxford I: 140, [I have supplied the Gildas reference] The other rites, also, refer to ordination practices [*op.cit.* p.141]

OSWY'S RELATIONSHIPS.

I: The 'classical' understanding:



II: More probable relationships: Table A

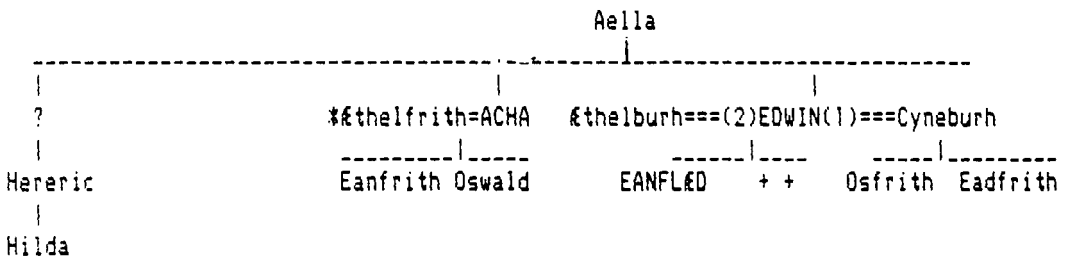


Table B

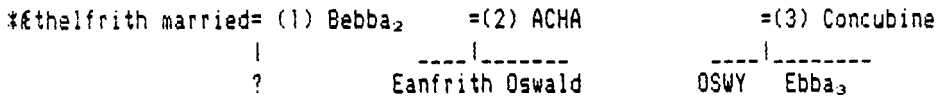
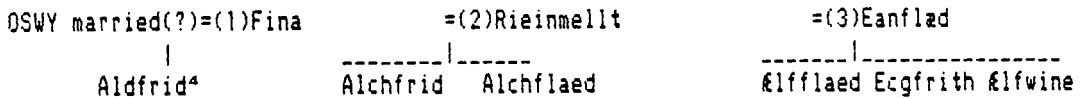


Table C



- Notes: 1. William of Malmesbury states Acha was mother of Oswald and Oswy, (p.44).  
 2. Bebba was Æthelfrith's first wife according to *HB* c.63  
 3. Ebba 'intrauterine sister of Oswy' Bede *VC* c.10, Plummer understands this differently (II:236)  
 4. The Anglo-Saxon historians, to a man, considered Aldfrid illegitimate.



## PAULINUS' S LABOURS

Details of Paulinus' work during the next half-dozen years are scanty. His unrecorded labours must have covered a wide area, extending even west of the Pennines as the survival at Whalley<sup>1</sup> of a carved<sup>2</sup> preaching-cross suggests. From contemporary record [HE ii: 14, 16] we know:

1. That he built churches: in the capital of Deira: York; and at *Campodonum*, which was possibly a royal palace; also in the capital of the sub-kingdom of Lindsey: Lincoln.
2. That he evangelized, at least in Lindsey, and the name of one of his converts: *Blacca*.
3. That he baptized: in the Swale, and in the Glen, and also in the Trent.
4. That he consecrated Honorius as Archbishop of Canterbury. This he must have performed as Archbishop of York, in the terms of Gregory's original plan [HE i: 29] although his *pallium* had not yet arrived.
5. He was involved in the marriage ceremony between Æthelburh to Edwin. Wallace-Hadrill<sup>3</sup> understood Bede to mean that Paulinus accompanied her as a Christian witness to her secular marriage; however I would have thought she would have insisted on some Christian ceremony.

Of the activities just listed only one<sup>4</sup> was in Bernicia.

So great is said to have been the fervour of the Northumbrians and their longing for the washing of salvation, that once when Paulinus came to the king and queen in their royal palace at Yeavering, he spent thirty-six days there occupied in the task of catechizing and baptizing. During these days, from morning till evening, he did nothing else but instruct the crowds who flocked to him from every village and district in the teaching of Christ. When they had received instruction he washed them in the waters of regeneration in the river Glen, which was close at hand. [HE ii: 14]

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1 Whalley, although trans-Pennine, was then part of Northumbria *ASC-E 798*.

2 Collingwood W6 perceptively remarked: 'a missionary would not wait, even had he the means, for such a work before delivering his message. He would set up his walking-stick with its crossed head, or cut a sapling and make a staff-rod in ten minutes. *Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman age* 1927 London p.5

3 *BEHEP* p.67

4 The local tradition that he also baptised in Lady Well, at Holystone west of Rothbury, commemorated now-a-days by a statue of Paulinus beside the pool, has been shown by Hunter Blair to be unfounded, being based on a 'canting translation of a false reading from Bede.' *The Bernicians and their northern frontier*, *SJBH* pp 137-172, p.159 fn.7.

The question we have to address, and in fact the question which stimulated this entire thesis, is - who were being baptised? In 1988 Rosemary Cramp listed it among the questions which remain unanswered<sup>1</sup>.

So far as the initial baptisms of the Northumbrian mission are concerned, we have already noted [*Historia Brittonum* 63] 'Rhun son of Urien (that is Paulinus, archbishop of York) baptised them, and for forty days on end he went on baptising the whole nation of the Thugs<sup>2</sup>, and through his teaching many of them believed in Christ.' To the British 'the Thugs' must mean the Anglo-Saxons. But the implication is that this took place at the same time as Edwin's baptism, and presumably refers principally to Deira, where there is believed to have been a numerous Anglian population.

This, however, is not appropriate to Bernicia, whose Anglian population we have assumed to be small. We cannot believe that Anglian numbers would justify five weeks' continuous catechising [*HE* ii:2] We can therefore only assume that the majority of those coming forwards, no doubt encouraged, if not 'rounded-up', by Edwin, were British. The difficulty is that we have already postulated that they were, at least nominally, already Christian.

The first possibility is that Paulinus was conditionally rebaptising those already baptised by British priests. This is a question we have postponed considering, but which was relevant also to Edwin himself, and to Deiran Britons. Fortunately the papal policy was made clear by Gregory the Great who explained to the bishops of Italy that the children of Lombards who have been baptised in the Arian heresy may be reconciled with the Church because baptism in the name of the Trinity is valid even if administered by heretics. Its force comes from God in whose name it was administered, not from the fallible human being who carried out the baptism<sup>3</sup>. There is therefore no likelihood, and certainly no suggestion, that British baptism was considered invalid at that date. In the second debate with the British representatives [*HE* ii:2] it has not usually been noted that Augustine's second demand was: 'that you complete the office of

1 Cramp R 'Northumbria: the archaeological evidence' (Eds) Driscoll ST and MR Neike *Power and Politics in Early Medieval Britain and Ireland* 1988, Edinburgh pp.69-78

2 Or it may be translated 'the whole greedy/worthless race'.

3 Quoted by Gillian Evans from Gregory's letter I, 17 *CCSL* 99, 16-17, Jan, 591 in *The Thought of Gregory the Great* 1986 Cambridge p.134

baptism, by which we are born again to God, after the manner of the holy Roman and Apostolic Church'. One suggestion is that the 'completion' consisted in going on at once to confirmation <sup>2</sup>.

Having ruled out rebaptism, it follows that these British had never been baptised. Why not?

At one time, in early history of the Church, baptism was postponed to the last possible moment<sup>3</sup>. On this view sins committed prior to baptism were, by that sacrament, forgiven; however sins committed after baptism required penitential duties which were often lengthy and severe. Those who held this view postponed baptism until there seemed immediate danger - such as battle<sup>4</sup>. It is improbable that postponement of baptism on these grounds was enough of a relevant issue to explain the situation in Bernicia in the third decade of the seventh century. On the other hand the reprehensible view that babies, if unbaptised, were damned, led to the emphasis on the importance of neonatal baptism. With the trenchant advocacy of Augustine of Hippo this view had largely triumphed a couple of centuries prior to the period now under discussion. A much more cogent argument is that, in view of the extreme rarity of the opportunity for baptism arising, which we are next to consider, it would be folly indeed to miss the chance.

It may, of course, be that they were not Christians at all, even in name. It is more likely that they considered themselves Christians, but had had no visit from Christian clergy, possibly in living memory. As we have seen, the obvious and nearest Christian centre was Rheged. However, as there had been enmity between Bernicia and Rheged (instanced by the British attack to the very gates of the Anglian base of Lindisfarne, an attack led by Urien of Rheged [HB 63]), it is hard to imagine that emissaries from Rheged - even if ostensibly on a religious visit - would have been welcomed with open arms. Probably baptism had been unavailable.

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1 Bishop Browne's translation *op.cit.*, p.106 Both Colgrave and Sherley-Price fail to bring out this nuance in their translations

2 This suggestion of Margaret Pepperdene's is discussed by Jane Stevenson in the preface to her edition of FE Warren's *Liturgy and ritual of the Celtic Church* 1987 Woodbridge p.liii

3 On a misunderstanding of God's forgiveness, See Macintosh HR *The Christian experience of Forgiveness* 1927 Edinburgh,

4 As exemplified in the mass baptism of British soldiers just prior to the 'Hallelujah Victory' [Constantius *Life of Germanus* c.17].

Under the new circumstances that obtained following AD 626/7, these barriers were gone. Baptism was now available and would be encouraged, and offered by both British and Roman clergy. It may be assumed that a considerable proportion of the population came forward for baptism, especially on occasions such as the visit of Paulinus.

Was all this just a Christian veneer which peeled off with the defeat and death of the king? In quick succession two kings, Osric (baptised by Paulinus) and Eanfrith (baptised in Pictavia) apostasised [*HE* iii:1]. Quite obviously those who had merely jumped on the Christian bandwagon jumped off again when it appeared that the Christian God did not guarantee victory, or when the irksome restrictions of Christian *mores* were no longer obligatory. Was this, in essence, true of everyone? I think not, and the evidence is found in that phrase in *Nennius* already discussed. Whereas Bede, unjustifiably as we have just noted, appropriated the experience of the apostles at the dawn of the Church, and wrote: 'As many as were foreordained to eternal life believed and were baptized' [*HE* ii:14 quoting Acts 14:48] *Nennius* recorded: '..went on baptising the whole nation of the Thugs, and through his teaching many of them believed in Christ.' In mass baptism there is always a differentiation between the crowds who throng for the ceremony, and the individuals who become new men and women in Christ. But to deny that there were such is to deny the work of God as experienced throughout the world and throughout the centuries.

Hope-Taylor has interpreted building D2 at Yeavinger as a heathen temple, not destroyed but made over for Christian use by Paulinus'. Whether this be so or no<sup>2</sup> Paulinus must have had some place to celebrate the mysteries during his sojourn at Yeavinger. He and his royal hosts must have expected this to be the first among many visits to the royal villa there, and therefore have made some provision for worship<sup>3</sup> so we must treat with some caution Bede's denial of any pre-Heavenfield church in Bernicia.

1 Hope-Taylor *op.cit.*, p.278

2 His interpretations have been challenged, most recently by Leslie Alcock in his 1988 Jarrow lecture *Bede, Eddius, and the forts of the North Britons*.

3 The building at Yeavinger identified as a Christian Church belongs, in Hope-Taylor's view, to Oswald's time, *op.cit.*, p.278.

Those among the crowds baptised in the river Glen who 'believed in Christ' did not have continuing regular sacraments or ministry of the Church, but they did have the indwelling Holy Spirit. Whether it was their gathering together that was the source of the *eccles* place name astride the border in that locality, or whether that came from some earlier Christian body we do not know. The number of believers cannot have been large, or that first unsuccessful missionary', who arrived from Iona six or seven years later, would not have been so discouraged. Many or few, here at any rate must have been the Church in Bernicia.

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 1 Colgrave quotes Hector Boethius (or Boece), writing in the sixteenth century, as supplying the name of this first unsuccessful missionary - Corman, *BEHEP* p.229fn

## THE COLLAPSE OF THE MISSION OF PAULINUS.

The missionaries sent by Gregory were not naturally brave. This is shown first by their wavering at an early stage in their journey to Britain:

'In obedience to the pope's commands, they undertook this task and had already gone a little way on their journey when they were paralysed with terror. They began to contemplate returning home rather than going to a barbarous, fierce, and unbelieving nation whose language they did not even understand. They all agreed that this was the safer course...' [HE i:23].

They were, of course, right that to return would be safer. They were balancing human orders against physical risks and difficulties. And without doubt at a human level their unanimous ('all') decision was wise. This incident clearly demonstrates the difference between a missionary enterprise embarked on in response to ecclesiastical obedience, and one entered into as a result of a personal 'divine call'. Their heart was not in it. An ageing single woman missionary, who for many years had been the only European in a city of fifty thousand Chinese, once told me: 'I couldn't bear to live here for a day, were I the wife of a business man, but to live here as a messenger of the Lord is my greatest joy.' Augustine and his companions do not appear to have had adequate personal spiritual motivation for this task.

Again, after Mellitus had been driven out of London after the death of King Sæberht:

'He went to Kent to consult with his fellow bishops Laurence and Justus as to what ought to be done in these circumstances. It was decided by common consent that they should all return to their own country and serve God with a free conscience, rather than remain fruitlessly among these barbarians who had rebelled against the faith' [HE ii:5].

However we must not be too hard on them. They had good authority for such a move. Our Lord had instructed his disciples to shake the dust off their sandals and leave a village which would not accept their preaching [Lk. 9:5]. And had not their own commands come from the Gregory who had supported the decision of Benedict to leave the monastery where the monks would not accept his rule?'. It could be argued that God turned this

1 *Dialogues* ii:3 in Jones C.W., *Mediaeval Literature in translation*.

proposed retreat into good, for it was the stripes inflicted on Laurence [HE ii:6] by St Peter which jolted King Eadbald into repentance and conversion.

Scholars generally take Paulinus' flight from Northumbria [HE ii:20] as a similar example, picturing him anxiously considering those same historical precedents as he long pondered the right options and discussed them with James the Deacon<sup>1</sup>. I am convinced this is totally to misunderstand realities. John Morris contrasts the views of historians in stable Victorian England with 'the modern veteran of two world wars [who] has less authority to condemn past follies, but is better equipped to understand them'<sup>2</sup>. As one such, my recollections from 1942 are of being awakened early one night, in Lashio, with the news that the Japanese armour were just down the road, and that our convoy was leaving up the Burma Road at once. One recalls vividly the surge of adrenalin, the shouting, the pounding of feet, the revving of engines, the grabbing of a few precious items. It must have been just like that immediately after the exhausted messenger staggered into the royal villa to tell the queen that her husband was dead. The victorious enemy, 'who spared neither women nor innocent children' eager for pillage, cannot have been far behind. There was the same smell of fear. The one senior and familiar figure, into whose care she had been given by Eadbald, was Paulinus. Who else was there who could take care of her?<sup>3</sup> Apart from Bass, the thegns who would willingly have died in her defence were already dead on Hatfield Chase. There was in fact therefore no lengthy pondering but a scooping up of family, and they were off on swift horses within the hour. Someone was detailed to rescue the church treasures [HE ii:20] and rendezvous with them on the way. The road south was blocked, so they raced for the coast towards a ship and away from the thrust of the enemy advance.

It is unfortunate that the above sits ill in a work of scholarship, but that this is how such occasions go I, unlike most other scholars, know from more than one personal experience in war. It puts the action and character of Paulinus in a new and more favourable light.

1 e.g. *BEHEP* p. 153 fn. 2

2 Morris JR 'The literary evidence' *CIB* pp. 55-74

3 Mayr-Harting HMRE 'Paulinus of York' *SCH* 1967 4 15-21.

That James the Deacon stayed faithfully at his post remains to his great credit'. But there is a point here that seems to have escaped comment, and which supports the view of Paulinus' headlong retreat just proposed: James was left behind still a deacon. Bright has emphasised the calibre of Paulinus as missionary<sup>2</sup>. As such he must have been concerned for the welfare of the converts after his departure. By advancing James, already a deacon of some years' standing, to the priesthood Paulinus would have been able to ensure that the sacraments were available to the faithful. In an emergency no conscientious bishop would allow any apparent unsuitability of the sole candidate to deprive his people of sacraments<sup>3</sup>. It seems clear, therefore, that if Paulinus had been able to lay his hands, quite literally, on James, prior to his precipitate departure, he would have been priested, willy-nilly. That he was not, argues for an unpremeditated headlong departure<sup>4</sup>.

In my judgement the retreat of Paulinus was justified<sup>5</sup>, and unavoidable<sup>6</sup>.

The cardinal issue in such situations is the arrangement made for the

1 I discuss this in fuller detail in my final chapter.

2 *EECH* p.138ff.

3 The clearest example of this is the ordination of two women to the anglican priesthood, by the Bishop of Hong Kong in the desperate circumstances of 1942.

4 This argument, of course, depends on our interpreting 'deacon' in the normal sense, Bishop's deacons, approximately of the status of present-day Anglican archdeacons but often not in priest's orders and having largely to do with the temporalities of the see, appear on the scene [Deansley M 'Archeacons and Deans' *Sidelights on the Anglo-Saxon Church* 1962 London 145-170] but probably not yet in a pioneering missionary situation such as Northumbria.) On the other hand, a couple of decades later, on the death of Felix of Dunwich, his 'deacon' Thomas (an 'Anglo-Saxon'), was consecrated to succeed him.

5 Gerald Bonner, in a personal communication, refers to a tradition, to which Augustine of Hippo bears witness in a letter, that a bishop must stay in his see as long as there are any of the faithful needing his ministry. Bonner comments that it would surely have been possible for Paulinus to have put Æthelburh on the ship, and to have remained himself at his post. However, in view of the dangers of a voyage, from pirates as well as storms, I doubt if either Paulinus or the queen would have felt he had fulfilled his responsibility until she was safely on land in her brother's kingdom. Why did Paulinus not return to his see after Oswald's victory? Even discounting Bede's story that the king was so suspect in Æthelburh's eyes that she sent her children for safety to Gaul, (*HE* ii:20) Paulinus could not be sure of what welcome would await him were he to return to Northumbria, for Aidan was obviously the *de facto* bishop of Oswald's kingdom. Moreover assuming he had been thirty when he left Rome he would now be 65, and ready for a quiet life. One cannot blame him for remaining in Kent.

6 Such has been the necessary experience of a number of missionaries, both in the 1950s due to compulsory evacuation from China after the triumph of communism under Mao Tse Tung, and from India in the 1980s following the withdrawal of their residential visas under resurgent Hinduism.



survival of the Church. Has it been made indigenous and equipped to survive under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, without foreign oversight?'

The work of the Roman missionaries was hamstrung by their failure to build up local churches. To achieve this two things are necessary:

First: nurture for young Christians. In our own day it has been interesting to note the maturing of the methods of Dr Billy Graham<sup>2</sup> whose evangelistic experience and results world-wide are unequalled. Whereas initially it was a question of large-scale evangelism, almost in isolation with minimal follow-up, in recent years he has demanded the most careful preparation, many months before his arrival, of follow-up teams for the short-term, and nurture-groups for the long-term support of converts. These changes in method have been born out of the fruit of experience, noting the falling-away of converts left without continuing fellowship, encouragement, or membership of a worshipping body. By contrast Paulinus catechized, he baptised, and he went away, leaving the converts bereft of support. That there were real converts among the crowds baptised we have already seen confirmation from the *Historia Brittonum*. The Holy Spirit had brought men and women to new birth, but how often could Paulinus get back to Yeavinger to build up these converts? The task was impossible without local help.

Second: the provision of leadership equipped to carry on the local church in the absence of close oversight by their founding missionary. In Paul's journeys he appointed elders in every place, to nurture the church [Acts 14:23] and he gave detailed instructions to Timothy [I Tim. 3:1-13] and to Titus [Tit. 1:5-9] in the choice of suitable men so that the local church, self-administering and self-propagating, would go on without constant outside supervision. While it is true these had the benefit of a common language - Greek, and the resources of converted Jews, this has also been the method of successful missionary evangelism ever since. There is no evidence in Northumbria that anything of the sort was attempted. There was no mature local spiritual family, and no spiritual leadership. What North Africa had, and Northumbria needed, was a bishop in every township. Gregory

1 This is no academic question but in the forefront of missionary strategy in the late twentieth century, when foreign missionaries, seen as tools of cultural imperialism, are prone to be sent packing.

2 While I have used Graham as an example of the futility of practising spiritual obstetrics without nurture for the babes in Christ, this has been realised in every evangelistic enterprise, notably in pioneering situations, as was Paulinus' problem.

had suggested twelve bishops in the archdiocese of York. No doubt Paulinus hoped that this would eventuate, but, although he had the authority, he failed to consecrate a single one for the northern province.

The problem lay in the ecclesiastical set-up. Presumably in Canterbury monks were being trained, but we hear nothing of their missionary journeys. Clergy to serve local churches were what was needed. We do not know who ministered in those churches in Northumbria, the records name only James - and he a deacon. In a later chapter I will argue, on grounds of his age, that James was probably an Angle. Is it possible that here we have the explanation of his still being a deacon? The original party, led by Augustine, was large, and we are surely safe to assume that most of these would be young; reinforcements, including Paulinus, had arrived half-a-dozen years later. There was therefore a big pool of men from Rome to supply the need for ministry. Obviously Gregory's plan meant that local boys would be being brought along with a view to eventually joining them. Was willingness to trust local men with spiritual responsibilities for a community upsetting to the orderly developed Roman episcopal organisation? If so it would not be the last such occasion' Deacon yes; priest, well - someday.

Racism as such cannot have been a conscious factor, among men from such a cosmopolitan centre as Rome, but inevitably one factor inhibiting the establishment of a corps of local clergy will have been the cultural barrier between highly educated sophisticated cultured men such as Paulinus and these barbaric uncouth illiterate Anglo-Saxons, or the oppressed British. The boys, the select few, brought into the monastery for training were, one must presume, being turned into Romans. With the laity outside, even although some were literate, there was probably too little contact to be meaningful; for the missionaries, heirs to centuries of Roman imperium, uncomfortable outside the Roman pale, had nothing in common with these uncivilized people. They inhabited different intellectual worlds, and points of contact would be few. As we have seen this was probably the first missionary outreach outside the bounds of the empire and among a people to whom Latin was completely strange. Could the missionaries from Rome make

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1 Unfortunately missionary experience worldwide shows a tardiness to advance 'natives' to positions of authority. In a chapter entitled 'The Church in Leading Strings' John Taylor cites a leading missionary in Uganda remarking 'they are "still mere children"' [*The Growth of the Church in Buganda* 1958 London p. 61]

the mental leap and envisage Anglo-Saxon churches so soon?

Another problem, to which I shall return, is the question of the ability to communicate. Inevitably at first interpreters, some from Gaul, were employed [HE i:25]. Fluency with the local language, however, did not rank high among current priorities, for it appears that their mentor Gregory, although for many years stationed at Byzantium, never learned Greek. King Cenwealh of Wessex eventually got rid of Bishop Agilbert [HE iii:7] because he could not understand him, and as late as 664 interpreters were required at the Synod of Whitby. This is hopeless for meaningful missionary endeavour. Deprived, as an urgently needed doctor, of time for language study, I found that even although able, laboriously, to prepare and read a sermon in Hausa, an inability to chat in it, to think it in, effectively prevented adequate personal contact. Such contact the early missionaries of Rome probably never achieved, hence the inability to trust and develop local leadership. Hence also the inability to sit down and have fellowship together with British Christians which would have destroyed barriers.

To sum up, the causes of the failure of the first generation of Roman missionaries, many of them exemplified in Northumbria, form a cascade, each leading to the next:

a lack of sense of spiritual call to this particular place

cultural barriers

the lack of fluency in English and British

the failure to train men for some kind of local ministry.

the failure to build up local churches to nurture converts

On their withdrawal, therefore, the work collapsed.

That collapse, however was not total. The failure was not complete. Converts were made who did not relapse in the coming times of trouble. While it is possible to consider Paulinus as the last, and by no means the least, of the forerunners of the Church in Bernicia, it is more just to rank him, and his deacon James, as among those who laid its permanent foundation.

## THE CELTIC MISSION

At the death of Edwin, those Angles who had been baptised had all come into the Church in the last six years, many, one may suppose, for motives which were not essentially spiritual. Edwin, whose power had extended so widely during his earlier reign, had been defeated after becoming a Christian. so to many of his people it must have seemed that things had manifestly got worse, now that the old Gods had been abandoned. The scanty spiritual nurture which Paulinus had been able to provide could not have amounted to much, except no doubt to those in the royal household. The rulers cannot have been the only Angles to apostasise. However we do not need to accept the blanket statement: 'the converts, deprived of instruction, relapsed into their former idolatry'. Some will have become new men and women in Christ and will have remained faithful.

Whether or not the British bishop Rhun joined with Paulinus in Edwin's baptism, as argued above, it is surely inevitable that during the Christian years British missionaries must have been active in Northumbria. Groups of Christians must have been established, and we may presume continued. We have no evidence as to the relationship of ordinary Britons and Angles at this time<sup>2</sup>, although it seems obvious that before long they must have melded into a common stock, for we never again hear of them as separate. Although we can understand Bede's condemnation of the reality of Cadwallon's Christianity [HE ii.20]<sup>3</sup>. he and his forces were surely no different from typical British Dark Age warriors such as are described in the *Gododdin*<sup>4</sup>. under whose attack Northumbrians, Christian as well as pagan, will have suffered earlier.

1 Lingard J *History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church* 1845 London I:31, Surely Frances Arnold-Forster [*Studies in Church Dedications* 1899 London II:30] however was correct; 'it is too much the habit to speak as though the work of the Roman missionaries had left no impression on the land than if it had never been, Undoubtedly much of their work had to be done again; but surely it is not just to speak as though the very foundations had to be laid anew.'

2 In AD 633/634 was there a coming together of Christians? They had, after all, stood together at Pallinsburn awaiting their turn for baptism, and listened together to Paulinus' teaching. Did Britons shelter and have fellowship with their Anglian fellow-members of the Body of Christ? We do not know, but all evidence in Church history suggests that this must have happened to some degree. This runs counter to Henry of Huntingdon's view [III: AD 633] who at this point reminded his readers; 'Nor is it the custom of the British to communicate with the English any more than with pagans, paying no respect to their profession of Christianity,' *The Chronicles of Henry of Huntingdon* Trans. Forester T 1853 London p.95

3 Colgrave (BEHEP p.203) refers to him as 'quasi-heathen'. I discuss Cadwallon further in the next chapter.

4 Jackson KH *The Gododdin* 1969 Edinburgh pp.37,28-31.

After the defeat of the Bernician-dominated Northumbrian forces at the battle of the River Idle, Æthelfrith's children had fled northwards before the advancing victorious Edwin. Throughout his reign they remained in exile among the Picts and Scots. These peoples, like their southern neighbours in Strathclyde, although often at enmity, were nominally Christian<sup>1</sup>.

We can assume that the eldest brother, Eanfrith, stayed among the Picts, for he married a Pictish princess, and (under the rules of matrilinear succession<sup>2</sup>) sired a future Pictish king<sup>3</sup>. Since there is an almost total lack of evidence (apart from king-lists and Class 1 carved stones) for Pictish Christianity at this period, Kathleen Hughes' view that it did not yet exercise a major influence on society seems valid<sup>4</sup>. Understandably then Eanfrith, despite his baptism in Pictland, may have been poorly grounded in the faith<sup>5</sup>. In any event after returning to Northumbria he apostasised and was soon killed by Cadwallon [HE. iii. 1].

Of the other brothers Oswald and Oswy seem to have gone to the kingdom of Dál Riata, then partly in Ireland and partly in Scotland. The scanty information from Bede has been fleshed out by a study of Irish texts<sup>6</sup>, now thought to be based on a chronicle kept in Iona<sup>7</sup> which had strong Northumbrian interests in our period. From them we learn of an Anglo-Saxon *æpeling* who stayed in Dál Riata during Edwin's reign, and who died fighting on the Dál Riatan side in an Irish battle around AD 628. Moisl considers him probably to be an earlier refugee from Bernicia; therefore the

1 Henderson I *The Picts* 1967 London p.51

2 Bannerman J *Studies in the history of Dalriada* 1974 Edinburgh p.93. Alfred Smyth's attempts to cast doubt on this tradition [*Warlords and Holy Men* 1984; London *passim*] have not commended themselves to many scholars.

3 It was Skene [*Chronicles of the Picts and Scots* 1867 Edinburgh p.cii] who made the identification. Molly Miller wrote: 'Eanfrith's marriage to a woman of the blood royal was undoubtedly, from the Pictish view point, highly prestigious and must be taken, ... as an indication of unfriendliness to Edwin, whose *thuff* was the first threatening Roman standard to be seen for over two centuries.' [Eanfrith's Pictish Son *Northern History* 1976 14 pp.47-66].

4 Hughes K *Early Christianity in Pictland* 1970 Jarrow Lecture.

5 Molly Miller's suggestion that: 'Eanfrith's apostasy was, in its foreign relations aspect, a declaration of independence,' (*op. cit.*) is otherwise inexplicable.

6 Bannerman J *Studies in the history of Dalriada* p.10

7 AMM Duncan believes these to have reached Bede via a Pictish source, with the Anglo-Saxon Egbert having been the intermediary, ['Bede, Iona and the Picts' *The writing of history in the Middle Ages* Ed. Davis RHC and JM Wallace-Hadrill 1981 Oxford pp.1-42]

tradition of such refuge was not new'. In fact two Anglo-Saxons are recorded in Iona back in the time of Columba [AVC 3.10; 3.22]<sup>2</sup>. Another Irish account names Ósalt (Oswald) as fighting in Ireland at that time<sup>3</sup>, while it was in Ireland that Oswy contracted his first marriage<sup>4</sup>. It is clear, therefore, that the Bernician refugees took an active part in their host community, on both sides of the Irish sea.

Close ties existed between the Dál Riata royal powers and the religious community of Columba who, with his successor abbots, were members of the same branch of the Uí Néill family<sup>5</sup>. As the distance between Dunadd and Iona is not great, it is idle to discuss whether the refugees lived in one or the other centre, for there must have been constant coming and going. Although Columba had been dead for almost twenty years when the refugees arrived, his presence must have been powerfully felt. As at the end of the seventh century a later abbot, Adomnán, in his *Life of Columba*, demonstrated the wealth of stories still current, surely sixty years earlier a sense of Columba's continuing presence must have been all-pervasive. In conversation, in sermon, in ceilidh, stories of God's power working through Columba must have cropped up daily; as well in the annual recital of these deeds on the anniversary of his death<sup>6</sup>.

As an impressionable youth Oswald must have listened agog to old salts telling of Columba's God-given powers over the elements, to old monks gleefully swapping tales of the discomforture of Broichan and Brude [AVC 2:34,35]. It is little wonder that he was impressed, convinced, converted to the Christian faith, and baptised. Statistical study of present-day British converts show that the majority become Christians in their teens. It is probable therefore that this was true of Oswald, especially if he were able to take advantage of monastic schooling, as was the case of

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1 Annals of Tigernach ca. 630 *ESSH* pp. 152-3, and discussion by Moisl H 'The Bernician royal dynasty and the Irish,' *Peritia* 1983 2 103-26.

2 Anderson AO and MO *Adomnan's Life of Columba* 1962 Edinburgh

3 Moisl *op.cit.*

4 Reeves W *Adannan's Life of Saint Columba* 1874 Edinburgh p.284 English authorities discount this marriage, holding Aldfrith to be illegitimate. [cf Wm of Malmesbury (I;3) p.53; Plummer II;175]

5 For the alliance between the Dál Riata house and the Uí Néill, sealed at the Druim Cet, and of Columba's part in it, see Bannerman [*op.cit.*, pp.157-170], A large genealogical tree of the early abbots is provided by Reeves [*op.cit.*, p.clxxxv]

6 'Old Irish Life of Columba' Skene *CS* II;473/4

chieftain's sons in contemporary Ireland'. If so, baptized probably around 617-622 and thus several years before Edwin, Oswald must rank as the first Christian in the Northumbrian royal families, 'A rose out of thorns.' It is Oswald's 'most fervent faith' which will be reckoned, five hundred years later<sup>2</sup>, as the foundation of the Church of Durham. It was Oswald's invitation to Celtic missionaries to Northumbria which led to the evangelization of most of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. His conversion therefore was momentous for Bernicia, and for the wider Church throughout almost all of England. And this we owe to Columba, through whose successors he came to Christ.

This surely explains why, in the moment crucial not only for Oswald but for the future of our island<sup>3</sup>, as with his small company<sup>4</sup> he waits the decisive encounter with the much greater force of Cadwallon, the figure who appears to him is Columba [AVC 1:1], tales of whose contemporary victories, vouched for by eye-witnesses, had captivated him<sup>5</sup>. As Columba's mother, before his birth, saw a great mantle spreading over the earth to presage what great deeds would be done through her son<sup>6</sup>, so in this vision Oswald seeing Columba's mantle spread over his army<sup>7</sup>, must have taken courage for the future. We may surely accept Walter Bower's words<sup>8</sup>: '[Oswald] venerated his protector St Columba with the greatest devotion and notably built various churches and oratories in his kingdom, namely in Lindisfarne, Topcliffe-on-Swale, and other places'. Inevitably he would have a great affection and gratitude for Iona, demonstrated by the fact, to be discussed later, that he returned there some time after his victory. Iona was the place of Oswald's spiritual birth and maturing. It is there, and in the *Life of Columba*, that we must seek a key to his character.

1 Hughes K 'Irish monks and learning,' Reprint XII in *Church and Society in Ireland*, 1987 London

2 Symeon of Durham *History of the Church of Durham* c.1 Trans. Stevenson p.626

3 Alcock L *Arthur's Britain; history and archeology* 1971, London pp.140-41.

4 If one paces out the ground between the line of the wall and steep hillside at Heavenfield (NY 937695) it becomes apparent that there was only room for a small company, as Raine also noted [*The Priory of Hexham* 1864 Surtees Soc. I; App.ii fn].

5 The idea of the 'Holy Man' in Late Antique Byzantine Christianity (Brown P. *Society and the Holy* 1982 London p.143) as intermediary between man and God, implies an inflexible Christ quite untrue to the mainstream faith of the Celtic mission.

6 Hennessey WW (ed) 'The Old Irish Life of St Columba' in *CS II*;476.

7 The little unexpected, unexplained, and 'unnecessary' detail that Columba's mantle failed to cover a small corner of Oswald's army, argues strongly for the genuineness of the story.

8 This despite the fact they were written eight centuries later, [*Scotichronicon* III;42, In DER Watt's edition (E&T) J & W MacQueen, 1989 Aberdeen 2;121]. As noted already, Topcliffe church is 'St Columba's'.

The idea that there was a separate 'Celtic Church' is contrary to the understanding basic to this study - that there is only one church: the Body of Christ'. As we have seen, any study of the Church in Bernicia must take cognisance of the fact that there was a nucleus arising from Roman-British days, from the activities of Ninian, Kentigern, Paulinus, Rhun and doubtless from many unremembered believers, both clerical and lay. Nevertheless on these foundations the building of our church is owed to Christians of the Irish tradition.

The Celtic missionary life might be simple but it was not easy. Whilst the Roman missionaries suffered no martyrdoms, St Donnan and fifty-three monks were martyred on Eigg within months of Oswald and his brothers taking refuge in Dál Riada<sup>2</sup>. Bede himself, staunch supporter of the Roman Church though he was, reveals the appeal exerted by the winsomeness of the Celtic missionaries' faith [HE iii:17]. The strictness of their life surprisingly does not appear to have been a barrier in their evangelism<sup>3</sup>. With echoes of Paul's 'this one thing I do forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward to those things that lie ahead, I press on...' [Phil. 3:13-14] and: 'I beat my body, lest I should be a castaway' [I. Cor. 9:27]<sup>4</sup> one gets the sense that their discipline was primarily evidence of the wholeheartedness of their devotion, not a technique of acquiring merit.

To Oswald and his companions the peculiarities of the Irish church organisation would be unnoticed<sup>5</sup>. What enhanced the appeal of the gospel message was the character of the monks. Contemporary records, so Kathleen Hughes maintains:

'show us a church circa 600 remarkable for its austerity, its vitality and its happiness. Constant journeys and displacements, mean dwellings, common food, the discipline of study and prayer left the leaders not saddened but content, and commended them to the peoples' veneration. The motive force for their activities was the love of God, followed with a rare degree of perfection; and, as the sources constantly say or imply, such love is no trouble. *Vive in Christo ut*

1 Kathleen Hughes agrees, ['The Celtic Church: is it a valid concept?' *CNCS* 1981 | 1-20].

2 The date was April 16 617 *Annals of Tighernac CPAS* p.69, and *CS* ii, 152. St Donnan's labours are discussed by DDC Pochin Mould *Scotland and the Saints* 1952 London p.142ff

3 For the failed mission of Aidan's predecessor see below.

4 And, perhaps, of the Egyptian desert hermits.

5 It probably would have appeared of trivial importance. Although Columbanus [Epistle 1] was already embroiled with his ecclesiastical neighbours on the question of the dating of Easter, this explosive issue would not noticeably trouble our island during Oswald's *imperium*.



*Christus in te urges* Columbanus, and Bede in his sober summing-up of the Irish mission to Northumbria, while he disclaims any intimate knowledge of Columcille, testifies "we know for certain that he left successors distinguished for their purity of life, their love of God, and their loyalty to the monastic rule"<sup>1</sup>.

Evidence is found in the well-recorded simultaneous Irish missionary enterprise on the continent. It has been said that 'the shock produced by Columbanus and his followers was so violent, these men "drunk with God as with wine" left so great an impresssion on the conscience of the West, that their message was unforgettable.' and 'their monastery [was presented] as a place that was peculiarly privileged, as an anticipation of paradise regained'<sup>2</sup>.

Oswald saw the life these folk lived, he listened to their message. That he embraced their Lord and that he had a deep experience of the Holy Spirit, is, I have argued earlier in this study, evidenced by his prayer posture [*HE* iii:12]. Wallace-Hadrill has recently pointed out that Bede's language in *HE* implies that before the battle Oswald did not tell his soldiers that 'we are fighting a just cause for the *preservation of our whole race*' but rather, 'we fight a just war for the *salvation of our people*.'<sup>3</sup>

Victorious at Heavenfield, with Cadwallon killed at the ford at Steele<sup>4</sup>, Oswald's early concern was the spread of his faith. He had twelve followers who had been with him in Dál Riada, and had there been baptised [*AVC* 1:1], but presumably the remainder of his small force were Anglo-Saxon Bernicians he had persuaded to join him prior to the battle. They had clearly been cautious about accepting the faith, and had awaited victory before agreeing to baptism [*AVC*. I:1]. Who baptised them? The implication is that this was done soon, long before any Irish bishop, summoned from Iona, could arrive. It is possible Oswald had an Irish priest with him, but if not we have little option but to believe it was a Rhegedian

1 Hughes K *The Church and the world in early Christian Ireland Church and Society in Ireland*, 1987 London, VIII.

2 Riché P 'Columbanus, his followers and the Merovingian Church' *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism* Eds. Clarke H.B. and Brennan M, 1981 *BAR(I)* 113 59-72

3 *BEH-HC* p.89, rejecting Colgrave's translation [*BEHEP* iii:2] (My italics)

4 The footnote of Raine [*op.cit.* Appendix p.ii], plus an intimate acquaintance with Hexhamshire, convinces me that this spot on the Rowleywater (NY938586) was the site of Cadwallon's death at *Denisesburn*.

British priest. Such being available, why trouble Iona for missionaries? Oswald, however, wanted his country evangelized<sup>1</sup> by people with the personal faith and zeal he had so much admired on Iona, and with whom he had close connections. We know that Oswald repeated his vision to Abbot Segene<sup>2</sup> (AVC1:1) whose travels to Northumbria are not on record, so it is highly likely that Oswald went back to Iona, but surely later,<sup>3</sup> for at this stage his victory obviously had to be consolidated. He sent a messenger requesting a missionary bishop [HE iii:3].

The first missionary sent found the task too difficult [HE iii:5]<sup>4</sup>. We note he was preaching to the English, whose memories of the disasters which had followed on Edwin's conversion were no doubt fresh. Discouraged, he returned to Iona to report the Angles as pig-headed, and uncivilised: by which latter he presumably principally meant illiterate. If an Irishman thought that, one can well imagine the kind of complaint which the Roman missionaries must have made in their personal letters home! Aidan, having showed his graciousness, not least in the way he was careful to spare his predecessor's feelings, was sent as his replacement.

Historians do not commonly talk of Columba's 'see', so the concept of Aidan establishing at Lindisfarne a 'see' in Roman terms surely triggers anachronistic nuances. It was his spiritual base, a place to return and recharge his spiritual batteries, not his own spiritual kingdom<sup>5</sup>. His first responsibility was to Oswald's kingdom, but his gospel would be

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1 Skene wrote of 'those primitive Celtic monasteries in which alone it was at the time possible to lead the Christian life,' *op.cit.*, p.86. Obviously Oswald did not share Skene's mistaken belief!

2 In the presence of the future Abbot Failbe, possibly Segene's assistant, for we find Adomnan citing the same two simultaneous witnesses in the affair of Ernene, son of Crasen [AVC I:3].

3 Evidence for his expeditions to Scotland is found in the Ayrshire volume of the eighteenth-century (first) *Statistical Account of Scotland* (pp.384-85) where Matthew Biggar, minister of Kirkoswald recorded the tradition of Oswald, while in exile, leading the Scottish forces against those of Strathclyde, and prior to the battle vowing to build a church if he won the victory. Tradition thus accounts for the dedication of the parish church. If true it would give evidence that Oswald's church-founding activities preceded his return to Northumbria. While the story sounds like a distorted echo of Heavenfield, we still have to account for the Ayrshire Kirkoswald dedication.

4 Bede is too gracious to tell us his name. Was this man too theological, or too ascetic? That the people's response continued mixed is discussed by Rosalind Hill ['Bede and the Boors' *Fanulus Christi* (Ed. Bonner 6) pp. 93-105].

5 And, of course, to report progress to, and have fellowship with, Oswald. No doubt he continued to consider himself as owing allegiance to the abbot of Iona who had appointed him. Thompson thought otherwise: 'The position of Aidan was definitely that of a diocesan bishop, the source of jurisdiction as well as of order, and in this respect the custom of the Scots was abandoned' ['Northumbrian monasticism' *BLTW* pp.60-110], however his arguments are not convincing.

spread to all who would hear. At the time of his death 'he had no possessions of his own except the church and a small piece of land around it' [HE iii:17].

From his centre at Lindisfarne Aidan went out, humbly walking, evangelising and catechising. Because of the lie of the Northumbrian land<sup>1</sup> he would follow the routes earlier trodden by Ninian and Kentigern or their followers, and as he did so the message would not seem foreign. 'To Bede, the Northumbrians were an English people, but it seems certain that many<sup>2</sup> of them had British ancestry, at least on the distaff side. To the crofting population of the hills, St Aidan must have appeared less as an innovator than as a remembrancer'<sup>3</sup>.

There was a constant coming of reinforcements from Iona [HE iii.3] and, as they were trained, a constant departure of evangelists in all directions on their evangelistic treks<sup>4</sup>. As we know that Paulinus was at Yeavinger in the company of King Edwin and his queen, it seems probable that many of his journeys were in the royal company. This, surely, will have been the pattern with Oswald and Aidan, at least in the early years after Heavenfield. Such an arrangement would give the missionary sufficient standing in the eyes of the populace for his message to be given a hearing. For the Anglian part of the population at any rate, it would be important, for their estimation of this new faith must have fallen to a low ebb with the defeat of Edwin. The aspect of Aidan as 'remembrancer' of their own faith would also have the benefit of making Oswald more acceptable in British eyes. There is no certain evidence of their travels together, but church dedications to Oswald are suggestive. The Midland and South of England dedications to Oswald appear to be secondary. The Lincolnshire dedications (and possibly also the Nottinghamshire, once more numerous<sup>5</sup>

1 Hill R 'Christianity and geography in Early Northumbria' *SCH* 1966 3 126-139

2 In view of the demographic statistics noted earlier, it would probably be safe to amend this to 'to great majority'.

3 Hill RMT 'The Northumbrian Church' *The Church Quarterly Review* 1963 164 pp 160-172

4 These have always been a main occupation of pioneer missionaries, as my parents' African diaries show. Even in England, from the 1920s one recalls the annual visits of a team of 'trekkers' from the Missionary Training Colony touring the northern counties, pulling a hand-cart of literature, kit, and tents, ready to preach wherever a welcome in hall or open-air, offered.

5 Bulcote (now Holy Trinity) and Burton-Joyce (now St Helen's) for instance. See Francis Arnold-Foster [*Studies in Church Dedications* 1899 London vol.III] where on p:433 she lists Oswald dedications. Unfortunately there she does not give location, which has to be deduced from her appendix II 'Index of parishes, ...' pp.26-320, which includes county, diocese, and whether Ancient or XIX [century].

than they are now) were probably an outwards spread from Bardney, where most of Oswald's skeleton was buried by his niece, Osthryth [HE iii:11]. The Welsh Marcher dedications probably follow directly from Æthelflæd's translation<sup>2</sup> of his relics to Gloucester, while Widford in Oxfordshire may date from the same time as possibly their resting place during that journey. The further activities of Lady of the Mercians in Chester appear to be the basis of the cluster of Oswald dedications around there. That the proximity of Paddlesworth, in Kent, to Æthelburh's nunnery at Lyminge, and that of Hooe, in Sussex, to Wilfrid's monastery at Selsey [HE iv:13,14] would appear to explain those dedications is considered below. All these will be the subject of more detailed discussion elsewhere.

However, it is not unreasonable to see the Oswald dedications in Greater Yorkshire and in Cumbria as being primary mission sites which were named, in the Celtic manner, for their founders. The recent work of Denis Briggs, using dowsing<sup>3</sup>, is disabusing minds of the need to automatically discredit early traditions. The surprising local claim for East Hauxwell near Catterick raises issues requiring consideration in the next chapter. In Wallace-Hadrill's view the stories of Oswald's victory at Heavenfield [HE iii:2] must have been directly obtained by Bede from the monks of Hexham. 'What this means is that in the Hexham tradition Bernician Christianity begins with Oswald's cross'<sup>4</sup>. So far as the organised church, continuing to our own day is concerned, we must concur with their view. With some slight exaggeration, pardonable on the occasion of the dedication of a new church to St Aidan, Bishop Lightfoot claimed: 'Not Augustine, but Aidan, is the true apostle of England'<sup>5</sup>. Lightfoot's was a smaller error<sup>6</sup> than the opposite view so widely taught by historians.

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1 This may have been a more remarkable achievement than is usually recognised, Bardney was in enemy (Danish) hands at the time, and the translation may have been in the nature of a 'cutting out' raid; which implies the relics were considered of great importance, which must mean they were seen as having intrinsic potency. This is relevant to the present study as showing something of the traditions about Oswald which remained three centuries after his death. As Æthelred, the ruler of Mercia, was a sick man, it appears that the land was being effectively ruled by his wife Æthelflæd [Wainwright FT 'Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians' *Scandinavian England: the collected papers of FT Wainwright* (Ed) HPR Finberg 1975 Chichester pp.305-24].

2 Thacker AT 'Chester and Gloucester: early ecclesiastical organization in two Mercian Burhs', *Northern History* 1982 18 199-211)

3 Bailey RN, Cambridge E, Briggs HD *Dowsing and Church Archaeology* 1988 Wimborne

4 Wallace-Hadrill JM *BE-HC* pp.88-89

5 Lightfoot JB *Leaders in the Northern Church* 1891 London p.9

6 Bright *CEECH* 1897 p.160 denies this.

Why did the Celtic<sup>1</sup> mission succeed when British and Roman evangelists had left so little trace? Our consideration resolves into a comparison of their approaches<sup>2</sup>, although not forgetting that the Irish work was, in part, a boomerang effect from its origins in the British Church<sup>3</sup>.

Even allowing that their purposes were not identical, one cannot avoid being impressed by their differences as we read our foundational documents: Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and Eddius Stephanus' *Life of Wilfrid* on the one hand; Adomnan's *Life of Columba*, with Columbanus's *Letters and sermons*<sup>4</sup> and his *Life* by Jonas<sup>5</sup> on the other. It would no doubt be an oversimplification to characterise them by the words Law and Grace, none the less the discussions and issues recorded of the Roman mission are largely of regulation<sup>6</sup>. Although chiefly demonstrated in the *Libellus Responsum* [HE 1:27], there is in them a frequent harking on grants of land, on the status of clergy in society (in the grave as in life [HE ii:3,5]), seniority, authority, uniformity.

In the character of Wilfrid<sup>7</sup> we see all this in full flower, so that

1 In this discussion the term 'Celtic' is used to refer to the missionaries of Irish background.

2 A comparison highlighted by Patrick Wormald 'the so-called "Celtic Church" did far more for the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons and others than the so-called "Roman Church" (and was, besides, so much nicer)...' Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship; some further thoughts, *Sources of Anglo-Saxon culture* Ed. Szarmach PE 1986 Kalabazoo pp.151-183

3 JF Kenney; 'they too were the heirs of the British Church' [SEHI-E pp.172, 239

4 *Sancti Columbani Opera* Ed. Walker GSM 1957 Dublin

5 Jonas *Life of Columbanus* in *Monks Bishops and Pagans; Christian Culture in Gaul and Italy 500-700* Tr. Peters E 1949 Philadelphia pp.75-114

6 Of course, in Anglo-Saxon society clergy had to have their *vergild* Laws of Ethelbert EHD p.357

7 Eddius Stephanus *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid* (E&T) Colgrave B 1927 Cambridge, [VW hereafter]

Placed in a pagan situation, such as Friesland [VW c.26] Wilfrid worked (in passing) as an exemplary evangelist, although when given the aid of some royal coercion, as in Sussex, he was not averse to its use, [VW 4]. However once his battles to 'root out the poisonous weeds planted by the Scots' [VW 47] were won he spent another forty years fighting for possessions and prestige; 'temporal glories' are the words of Queen Iurminburg which Stephen quotes without demur [VW c.24]. Such battles inevitably spring from and result in a warping of the spirit; St Paul tearfully condemning those whose 'minds are set on earthly things,' [Phil. 3:17] For the dishonesty of Stephen [for a recent reassessment of this writer, making him less blameworthy, see DP Kirby 'Bede, Eddius Stephanus and the 'Life of Wilfrid' EHR 92 1983 pp.101-14], in his use of the epithet *Quartodecimans* [VW 14,15], Wilfrid cannot altogether escape blame; Stephen must have got his standards from his master. As I discuss below Wilfrid's certification in 680 of the orthodoxy of the whole Church, of northern Britain and Ireland, differed widely from his true view, I do not think Wilfrid can escape censure despite recent warnings by DH Farmer of 'the danger of facile and oversimplified contrasts between "worldly" Wilfrid and "unworldly" Aidan, ['St Wilfrid' *St Wilfrid at Hexham* (ed. Kirby DP) 1974 Newcastle pp 35-60], Patrick Wormald's opinion that Wilfrid 'was the greatest, all things considered, of the early Anglo-Saxon saints,' [Bede, Beowulf and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy, 1978 BAR-B 46 pp.32-95] is inappropriate if any New Testament definition of 'saint' be intended, Wilfrid's effect on the church is discussed in the next chapter.

after the transformation of his views and episcopal life-style resulting from his time in Gaul<sup>1</sup> and his dazzling experiences in Rome (the city both background and foundation of Augustine and Paulinus) eventually his biographer will boast of the extent of Wilfrid's 'ecclesiastical kingdom.' [VW 21] A kingdom which, at its height, rivalled in extent and wealth that of his monarch Ecgfrith.

Whereas in these documents the authority of the Roman church is the emphasis on the one hand; the character of the Celtic missionaries and the power of God are the emphases on the other<sup>2</sup>. The latter had, of course, inestimable advantages. On their part the Romans were cultured, civilized men tempted to see themselves as living among rude illiterate barbarians (whose tongue they did not speak), and on whom it was difficult not to look down; a position paralleled by that of so many of the nineteenth century western missionaries 'working among the benighted heathen in darkest Africa.' In contrast the Irish encountered none of these social barriers among their fellow-Celts in Scotland or England. In Skene's view it was by demonstrating the quality of their life among the pagans, that the Irish missionaries got a hearing for their message, and won converts to Christ<sup>3</sup>. That, however, is not the complete story, for the thrust of Adomnan's account is that Columba's life was a demonstration of the power of God. In our day, since the mid-1980s, the place of 'signs and wonders' in evangelism ('Power Evangelism'<sup>4</sup>) has reappeared on the Church's agenda. This in the sixth century was Columba's experience.

The identification of the evangel, the core of the Christian message, is never easy. Any missionary from a 'higher civilisation' is burdened by a pile of cultural baggage, which he often fails to distinguish from the gospel. It has been so with western missions in the third world - the western cultural attitudes to nakedness, polygamy, alcohol, etc have become confused with offer of new life in Christ. In practice it was not always easy to distinguish between what we preached because it is gospel, and what because it is civilised practice: the rejection of 'bride-price'

1 That Annemundus, archbishop of Lyons, was able to promise Wilfrid (then aged barely twenty) the governorship of part of Gaul, must have powerfully influenced Wilfrid's ideas of episcopal power!

2 Celtic bishops would use their authority, as Cedd did with King Sigebert [HE iii:2]), but it was authority *qua* bishop, not because stemming from a distant metropolitan centre.

3 CS II, *passim*

4 Wimber J *Power Evangelism* 1984 London

transactions for example'. So it must have been for the Roman missionaries. If difficult for the preacher it must be even more difficult for the listener to distinguish between the different aspects of his message. That they did grasp the essential truths is demonstrated by Edwin's thegn and his sparrow simile [HE ii:13]. For the Celtic missionaries, however, whose social background, unlike that of the Romans, was close to that of North Britain, these problems did not arise. They had the further advantage of the familiarity of their message against hazy memories of British Christianity.

The social milieu of converts is of central importance<sup>2</sup>. The colleagues of Augustine inevitably brought with them, as part of their church practice and organisation, the whole world of *romanitas*. In Rosalind Hill's view, to a Roman missionary, city life was essentially the proper and reasonable mode of existence; civilized life was life of the *civitas* in which the population lived, going outside to their farms but returning at night. Gregory, in his letter quoted by Bede [HE i:29], indicated quite clearly that he assumed that bishops would normally live in cities and control their people from a civic centre. We can still note, in the small dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester, traces of the Gregorian plan to make the bishopric correspond to the classical idea of a territory which would find its social, as well as its religious, activities bound up with civil life<sup>3</sup>. The Roman ecclesiastical arrangements closely followed the administrative arrangements of the old empire, with its (secular) dioceses, each administered from a principal city by a hierarchy of officials, with an ever more powerful central bureaucracy. These power structures, their relationships inevitably governed by statute, necessarily loomed large in the thinking of Roman missionaries.

These problems did not bedevil the Celtic missionaries who had the

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1 Harries L 'Christian marriage in African society' *Survey of African Marriage and Family Life* (ED. Phillips A) 1953; International African Institute, Oxford pp. 360-70.

2 The continuing relevance of this problem has been highlighted in 1990 by the BBC2 TV series *The Missionaries*, notably in the programme on Papua-New Guinea, with the contrast between the Capuchin Fathers, who now encourage continuation of tribal customs, and the Seventh Day Adventists who replace by western physical exercises the indigenous dancing which they doubtless see as demonic in influence. Some Papuans who were interviewed had confused the offer of the gospel with the coming of 'cargo' and the replacement of their previous garb by shorts and T-shirts. Pettifer J *The Missionaries* 1990 London

3 Rosalind Hill developed these ideas in a number of papers, noted below, but especially in *The workers in the field* 1977 Jarrow Lecture.

benefit of preaching an uncluttered gospel. Although they knew Latin (and enjoyed exercising their expertise in verse composition), their native language and their culture was similar to that of their audience. Rosalind Hill further wrote<sup>1</sup>: 'Neither the Germanic nor the Celtic peoples had shown any marked taste for living in cities before the period of the conversion. [T]he centre of Celtic Christian life was not the city but the monastery, which was often found in a remote place such as Iona or Bangor-ys-coed.' A habit, she noted, taken over by the Northumbrian converts, as demonstrated by Cedd's foundations in inhospitable places such as Bradwell-on-Sea and Lastingham.

As well as the content of the gospel, and the converts' social milieu, a third and principal factor was the spiritual experience of the missionary himself. This has always been so. It can most conveniently be demonstrated by John Wesley. Earnest, devout, single-minded<sup>2</sup> he laboured as a missionary in Georgia, but, as he was later to record in his journal<sup>3</sup>: 'All the time I was in Savannah I was thus beating the air<sup>4</sup>. [Then, back in London] came the night when 'about a quarter before nine... I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation...'<sup>5</sup>. A new man, he went out to set the world on fire. One must postulate for Aidan and his colleagues some such personal relationship to the same Christ in order to explain the zeal and the grace which fired them, as it had Columba, and a host of believers in every generation back to Saul of Tarsus. As evidence for such a personal commitment to Jesus Christ we can note the twelfth of the so-called 'sermons' of Columbanus<sup>6</sup>. Their title *instructiones* is better, they read like a series of seminars given during a short conference. For his first eleven talks Columbanus has been using 'you', or 'we' of the life of monks. Suddenly he is overcome by his subject, and his own longings for holiness burst out:

1 Hill RMT, 'The Northumbrian Church' *The Church Quarterly Review* 1963 164 pp.160-172

2 'I determined through His grace... to be all-devoted to God, to give Him all my soul, my body, and my substance'. Quoted in Skevington Wood's doctoral study *The Burning Heart, John Wesley; Evangelist* 1967 Exeter p.47.

3 Apr. 24 1738, *Everyman Edition*; London I;99

4 It is true that there is an imposing statue to him in Savannah, but I saw with surprise that it was erected not by descendants of the Anglicans among whom he worked, but by Methodists; i.e. with hindsight.

5 Journal, *op.cit.*, p.102

6 *Sancti Columbani Opera*, Ed. GSM Walker 1957 Dublin pp. 111-115.



'How blessed, how happy are those servants, whom the Lord when he comes shall find watching! Blessed watch in which they watch for God the Creator of the universe, Who fills all things and surpasses all! *Would that me also, wretched though I be, yet His poor servant, He might deign so to arouse from the sleep of idleness, so to kindle with that fire of divine love, that the flame of His love, the longing of His so great charity, would mount above the stars, and the divine fire would ever burn within me!*...

Lord, grant me...that love that knows no fall, so that my lamp may feel the kindling touch and know no quenching may burn for me and for others may give light...Thus do Thou enrich my lantern with Thy light, I pray Thee, *Jesus mine...* that constantly I may see, observe, desire Thee only., and *loving Thee only may behold*, and before Thee my lamp may ever shine and burn...''.

This is the authentic cry of the totally committed Christian in every generation, including our own.

It is significant that the stimulus for Columbanus the teacher to abandon himself to his divine Lover was his eschatological reference. Jesus commanded his disciples to watch for his return [Matt. 24:42ff], an event reiterated on Ascension Day [Acts 1:11], and dozens more times in the New Testament; a command repeated by Paul [1 Thess. 4:4], Peter [2 Pet. 3:11], and John [I Jn. 3:2]. Columbanus specifically warned Pope Boniface IV: 'Do not despise a foreigner's word of counsel...The world is already in its latter days; the chief of shepherds hastens; beware lest He finds you heedless and striking your fellow servants with the blows of a bad example...'². Already noted was Gregory the Great's expectation of the end of the world, at any time, in his letter to King Æthelberht writing: 'Besides, we would wish your Majesty to know that the end of the world is at hand...' [HE 1:32]; he used this to challenge the king to good works. Whether or not the king took any notice of the argument we do not know, but it is quite clear from Gregory's correspondence his own life was lived in that expectation³. In the Columban mission this awareness is evident in Adomnan's account of Columba's birth with its quotation of Maucte's prophecy: 'In the last days of the world a son will be born, whose name Columba will become famous through all the provinces of the islands of the Ocean, and will brightly illumine the latest years of the earth...' [AVC:

1 *op. cit.*, pp 113, 115. My emphases

2 *op. cit.*, letter 5; 4 p. 41

3 Evans GR *The thought of Gregory the Great* 1986 Cambridge p. 43.

second preface] Such a hope is a potent stimulus to holiness of life, its mention is an evidence of spiritual vitality.

The gospel must always be founded on the forgiveness of sins. St Ambrose, in the fourth century, declaimed: 'I have nothing whereof I may glory in my works; I will therefore glory in Christ. I will not glory because I am righteous, but because I am redeemed; not because I am clear of sin, but because my sins are forgiven'<sup>1</sup>. At a later date St Bernard admonished the hearer: 'See that thou believe this also, that it is through Himself thy sins are pardoned: this is the witness of the Holy Spirit speaking in thy heart, Thy sins are forgiven thee'<sup>2</sup>.

What evidence do we have on this central doctrine as it may have been proclaimed in seventh century Bernicia? It is usually dealt with in the literature of our period under 'penance'. There is a group of concepts here: repentance, compunction of heart, confession, restitution of works, but the most serious matter of all is forgiveness of sins<sup>3</sup>. It is this that men and women seek. One major difference in the teaching of the two missions was the question of penance. That arising in Ireland and Wales during their period of separation from the continent proved so much more satisfactory that it was taken over by the Roman authorities 'and according to the *Penitential* of Theodore, constituted the only form of ecclesiastical penance used by the English in the late seventh century'<sup>4</sup>. It spread from the mission of Columbanus throughout Europe, and became the basis of modern private penance.

In Rome, at its most severe, penance could be undertaken once only, and afterwards the penitent was 'forced to live, to all intents and purposes, a monastic life in the world'<sup>5</sup>. The penance was public, in sackcloth and ashes, with the performance of public acts of satisfaction. It involved partial or complete exclusion from church services and enrolment in an order of penitents. After completion of the penance solemn reconciliation by the laying on of episcopal hands, with restoration to

1 Quoted by HR Macintosh *The Christian experience of forgiveness* 1927/1961 London; Fontana p.14

2 *ibid*

3 Calvin J *Institutes of the Christian Religion* III, iv, 2 1559, 1960; (Ed.) McNeill JT London

4 Carroll MTA *The Venerable Bede; his spiritual teachings* 1946 Washington DC p.160

5 *ibid* p.159

communion, was achieved. Grave disabilities often remained lifelong, the penitent not being allowed afterwards to marry or, if already married, to resume intercourse. Holy Orders, the life of a soldier, and certain professions were for ever closed to him. Because of the ineligibility for further penance the necessity to avoid any grievous sin became a most grave necessity. Such was the situation in the third and fourth centuries, but it is not clear how often, and for how long, such severe penances continued to be exacted<sup>1</sup>. It is not surprising therefore that from the fifth to the seventh centuries there was a widespread neglect of all but deathbed penance<sup>2</sup>. It surely follows that the Christian, pending his death-bed penance, lived in constant fear that death might overtake him without this being possible, and moreover had to live with the constant nag of an unforgiven conscience.

In contrast the Celtic teaching, certainly that of Aidan and his co-workers, was that confession should be made privately<sup>3</sup> to a priest who ordered appropriate works of penance. It could be repeated as often as felt necessary, even daily. This fulfils the modern devotional advice: "Keep short accounts with God", and allows for life with a cleansed conscience. Its great appeal is evidenced by the fact it everywhere replaced the Roman teaching. It must have done so in Bernicia.

In Bede's record of the Roman mission the part played by two royal ladies, Æthelburh in Northumbria and her mother in Canterbury, was that of enabler: the one who obtained entry for the missionary as part of her entourage. It was a vital part, as was their personal witness to their husbands, but not an integral part of the mission. We find, however, that in Aidan's mission women play an important part in church leadership.

The earliest Irish church records are contained in the accepted

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1 Duchesne *Christian worship; its origin and evolution* <sup>1931</sup> London pp.435-55. John McNeill [*Medieval Handbooks of Penance* 1938 New York pp.3-22] has discussed the problems of knowing how much all this was actually practised, and when and where. It is not known how much of this discipline Augustine brought with him, or put into practice in Kent.

2 Carroll *op.cit.* pp.159-60.

3 FE Warren [*The liturgy and ritual of the Celtic Church* 1881 2nd ed. Ed. J Stevenson 1987 Woodbridge: p.148] stated that confession in the Celtic Church was public rather than private, but John Duke specifically refutes this [*The Columban Church*, 1932, 1957 rpt. Edinburgh p.129 fn.6]. It is questionable whether the severe penances enumerated by Ludwig Bieler [*The Irish Penitentials* 1975 Dublin] were exacted in practice. In fact, in practice confession and penance probably at all times deviated from the legal situations outlined above.

writings of Patrick already discussed. Although there is no agreement on its status<sup>1</sup>, the *Catalogus Sanctorum Hiberniae* sheds useful light. Its categorization and dates are obviously artificially rigid, nevertheless there is a ring of truth about it, not least in the fact that the majority of practices highlighted in the first 'ordo' of saints: *sanctissimus, must have been disapproved of at the time of writing: 'celtic' tonsure, celebration of Easter, company of women. That all the saints in this 'ordo' were bishops is evidence of the early pattern of the church, with a bishop in charge of each congregation. Of particular interest is the phrase which Nora Chadwick translates<sup>2</sup>: 'They' did not reject the fellowship and ministrations of women'. On this phrase Grosjean wrote:*

'On en a beaucoup discuté, et nous n'entrerons pas dans cette voie: il suffit de rappeler que les écrits mêmes de S. Patrice, par exemple, n'évoquent nullement cette fuite devant la femme, fût-elle consacrée à Dieu, qui caractérise certains récits hagiographiques d'âge plus récent'<sup>3</sup>.

'Il y eut peut-être, cependant, survivance, sous quelque forme, de l'institution des diaconesses que S. Patrice et ses collègues dans l'épiscopat avaient connue en Gaule à la veille de sa disparition'<sup>4</sup>.

Kenney believed this was a reference to 'spiritual marriage'<sup>5</sup>. However O'Donoghue writes: We know that in the early Church men and women worked closely together (this is clear from...I Corinthians) and Patrick's account of his mission seems a kind of continuation or return to this; indeed every upsurge of Christian consciousness seems to produce a re-enactment of this first innocence of holy living...'<sup>6</sup>

The New Testament Church, at its very inception, included women in the company [Acts 1:14, 2:1]. The first converts in Europe were women [Acts 16:13-15], women were among the first recorded martyrs in Europe<sup>7</sup>. It was in the second half of the sixth century that Columbanus in his youth

1 Discussed by Kathleen Hughes *The Church in early Irish society* 1966 London p.69ff. Until recently this document was accepted by most authorities as early or mid-eighth century (e.g. Kenney *SEHI-E* p.478). Now, however, Père Grosjean's opinion that it is ninth- or tenth-century [*Analecta Bollandiana* 1955 73 197-213, 289-322] has been generally accepted; although his arguments seem unconvincing.

2 Chadwick NK *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church* 1961 Oxford p71

3 Grosjean *op. cit.* p.299

4 Grosjean *op. cit.* Notes additionnelles p.322

5 *SEHI-E* p.479 fn.

6 O'Donoghue ND *Aristocracy of soul; Patrick of Ireland* 1987 London p.72

7 As reported by the Christians in Vienne and Lyons in their letter to 'Our brothers in Asia and Phrygia' [Eusebius 5:1]

was warned of the wiles of Eve and of the danger of considering that he could associate with the female sex without sin [Jns.8]; this was well into the time of the second 'ordo' of Irish saints who 'refused the ministration of women'. Born around 522, Columba of Iona was a generation older. His *Life* reveals none of this gynaephobia and shows no evidence of introducing it in his *paruchia*. We find, then, in Celtic Christianity, women playing an important part, and associating with men in the work of the Church. Double-monasteries<sup>2</sup> were not initiated by the mission of Aidan, being known in Spain and Gaul, but uniquely in England they were, without exception, ruled by women; albeit royal women. It was Aidan who called back Hilda to Northumbria as she was on her way to enter a nunnery in Gaul. Of her we read: 'Bishop Aidan and other devout men who knew her visited her frequently, instructed her assiduously, and loved her heartily for her innate wisdom and her devotion to God' [HE iv:23]. She hosted the Whitby synod, and shows no sign of having been cowed<sup>3</sup> by the success there of the opposing side. Hilda's successor Ælfflæd was a friend of Cuthbert<sup>4</sup>, he travelled to Coquet island to discuss with her affairs of state [BVC:25].

It is surely highly significant that although Hilda<sup>5</sup>, an impressionable girl of thirteen or fourteen, was baptised along with her kinsman King Edwin<sup>6</sup> on Easter Day 627 by the Roman missionary Paulinus, and although she must have had her spiritual foundation under his care, she yet sided with the Celtic rather than the Roman side at the synod. Having

1 The commencing date for this 'ordo' is the year 544, but as we have noted this is artificial, Columbanus was probably born c.560 according to McDermott WC [*Monks, Bishops and Pagans* 1949 Philadelphia p.75], or in 543 according to the calculations of Walker GSM [*Sancti Columbani Opera* 1957 Dublin p.xi] The *Catalogue* lists Columba in the second 'ordo'.

2 Blair PH *The world of Bede* 1970 London pp.135-147

3 It must, of course, be noted that almost all these outstanding women were of royal blood. The Count de Montalembert devoted Book XV of his *Monks of the West* [1867 Edinburgh V:213ff] to a study of the Anglo-Saxon nuns, and lists more than two dozen women of the royal houses of Kent, Mercia, and East Anglia who took the veil, many becoming abbesses and many becoming entitled 'Saint'.

4 The calumny of St Cuthbert's misogyny was not foisted on the public until the eleventh century [Tudor V 'The misogyny of Saint Cuthbert' *Archeologia Aeliana* 1984 12 157-68], Hunter Blair noted 'Cuthbert visited at least two other abbesses [in addition to Ebbel] and we find that the contemporary sources, in contrast with the inventions of the Norman age, consistently show him as enjoying the friendliest of relations with women.' [The *World of Bede* 1970 London p.143]

5 For Hild's life see Hunter Blair 'Whitby as a centre of learning in the seventh century' *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: studies presented to Peter Clemoes* 1985 Cambridge pp.3-32.

6 The translation of his relics to Whitby, with the initiation of a cult, did not occur until after her death [Colgrave B in *The earliest Life of Gregory the Great* 1968 Lawrence pp.45-50].

contrasted the two forms of the faith in her own experience what must have made her prefer the Celtic? Of course personal friendships, especially memories of Aidan, and perhaps loyalty to him, will have been a major factor, but there must have many other factors she would inevitably take into account. Some of these have already been discussed, a further one is education, one of the keys to the success of the Celtic mission. Irish society esteemed learning highly. Even in its pagan days systematic intellectual training was provided for special classes of learned men, the most highly skilled *brehon* having an honour-price equal to that of a petty king. There were also literary schools so that a king could have his *filid*<sup>1</sup> to entertain his household during feasting, and inspire them before battle<sup>2</sup>. 'Nothing similar to the organised secular learning and literature of Ireland existed elsewhere in contemporary western Europe'<sup>3</sup>. After the coming of Christianity the zeal for theological learning sent Irish students to Ninian's foundation at Whithorn<sup>4</sup>. Soon its own monastic schools became numerous, large, and famous, attracting in their turn scholars from Britain [HE iii:271]<sup>5</sup> This training was not confined solely to monks, the sons of chiefs and of monastic layworkers also being educated.

Aidan carried on this emphasis; 'all who accompanied him, whether tonsured or laymen, had to engage in some form of study, that is to say, to occupy themselves either with reading the scriptures or learning the psalms' [HE iii:51]<sup>6</sup>. Hilda was no less diligent in training those in her care, she 'made both Hartlepool and later Whitby into places of serious Christian education. "She compelled those under her direction to devote time to the study of the holy scriptures" to such good effect that five men from her monastery subsequently became bishops'<sup>7</sup>. As Bede has told us in

1 Kenney defines the *filid* as 'the official savants and *littérateurs* of Ireland to whom was entrusted the care of the national traditions, literature and scholarship.' [SEHI-E p.21.]

2 Hughes K. *The Church in early Irish society* 1966 London p.6. Confirmation of this Celtic tradition is found in *The Times* report [24, i, 92] that a professional opera soprano has been commissioned to lead the singing of *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* (Land of my fathers) at the next Rugby international at Cardiff Arms Park, where 'a stadium in good voice can be worth at least four points'!

3 Kenney *op. cit.*, p.47

4 Including Énda of Aran, Finnian of Moville, Tighernach of Clones, Eoghan of Ardstraw. [SEHI-E p.172 fn.]

5 As late as the time of Theodore's own school at Canterbury Aldhelm complained of English resorting to Ireland in 'streams and flotillas.' [BEHEP p.334 fn.] King Oswald's nephew, Aldfrith, later to rule in Northumbria, was a notable scholar in Ireland, some of whose Irish verses are extant.

6 A study of the scriptures would be foundational in any monastic training, but the fact that Bede goes out of his way to state this here, suggests that Aidan's emphasis on its centrality was noteworthy.

7 Fell C *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* 1984 London p.109

the passages just quoted, the emphasis in this training was on the Holy Scriptures. It is this that 'makes us wise unto salvation', and is a daily challenge to holy living [Ps. 119].

Ireland had never been a part of the Roman world, and therefore Latin was not the normal speech of the educated classes. For the Irish a knowledge of Latin was necessary to read the Bible and the Fathers, or for the rare contact with non-Celtic speaking foreigners. Apart from that it was of no value in everyday life. It cannot have been the language of Ireland's fledgling congregations. Palladius was sent to 'the Irish believing in Christ' [HE 1:13], i.e. to an unpastored Irish Christian community. It is a profound error to think of first-generation Christians anywhere in terms principally of organization. They are folk who, conscious of salvation by Christ, have come to new life in Him, and finding themselves brothers and sisters of their fellow believers meet together in each others houses. Someone with the skill reads a portion of the Bible to them, and they mull it over together, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. So it must have been before dawn in the first century when the slaves gathered to hear Paul's letter to them read aloud, so it must have been in Ireland, so it was in our barrackroom on a Bengal airfield. Jane Stevenson in summarising developments in the western church in the fourth to sixth centuries writes

'The very existence of a group [monks] within the christian community, which focussed its entire existence on the praise of God, unencumbered by the ties of family-life, administration, and the cares of the world, was bound to have an effect. The eventual result of the influence of monasticism was twofold, although both aspects are due to their status as specialists. Cathedral office was assimilated to the form of monastic office, which gradually supplanted it completely in the Western Church, *and the laity were gradually squeezed out of involvement in the service, becoming spectators rather than active participants*'<sup>1</sup>.

But that was not true of the Church in Ireland in its isolation<sup>2</sup>. The Irish church was tribal, and these were small intimate tribes, what has been

1 Stevenson J Introduction to her edition of FE Warren's *The liturgy and ritual of the Celtic Church* 1987 Woodbridge pp,xxi-xxii (my italics), The concept of laity and clergy is foreign to the N.T. Church, therefore originally all Christians were an integral part of the worshipping community.

2 'during those one hundred and fifty years of obscurity when the Church in Ireland developed its ecclesiastical system, its closest and almost its only foreign relations were with the Christian Britons, both those who maintained their principalities along the eastern border of the Irish sea and ....in Brittany. Beyond these Celtic buffer states lay a wall of more or less antipathetic Teutonic kingdoms, pagan or semi-Christian in religion, Kenney JF *SEHI-E* p.171

called a 'balkanised society'. Although the monks had their liturgy they were obviously closely involved in society. Their faith was a faith of everyday life; their language, certainly at this early stage, must have been that of everyday conversation.

Aidan's preaching was in the vernacular as, of course, evangelistic preaching has always to be, even although his message initially had to be translated from Irish to Anglian for the ealdormen and thegns [HE iii:3]. Bede continues 'churches were built in various places and people flocked with joy to hear the Word.' The gospel seed which fell on good ground would not be forgotten. With all the honeymoon joy of new converts knowing themselves redeemed, children of their Heavenly Father, they must have met together and "fellowshipped" in their native tongue<sup>2</sup>. Because it is only the monastic community which has left records for scholars to read, it is all too easy for us to fall into the mistake of equating the life of the people of God who are his Church solely with that of the monasteries which contained only a small percentage of the redeemed community.

In Ireland it was Irish that was in constant use in the church, especially for devotional, expository, and interpretative writings, and for hymns<sup>3</sup>. The fact that in Northumbria, even a century after the time of Aidan, Bede uses his final breaths to complete the translation of a gospel into English<sup>4</sup>, demonstrates how far Latin was from being universal in the life of the Christian community. Back in the 630s Latin cannot have occupied that normative status<sup>5</sup> it must have done in the Roman mission. A church which lives its spiritual life employing the language of everyday is a church of the people, an integral part of their life<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand

1 Stevenson *op.cit.*, p.xii

2 It is a mistake to think of this purely in liturgical terms, Believers (as in Old Testament times [Mal. 3:16]) chat together about the Lord and pray together. That private books of devotion existed at least by the eighth century is evidenced by *The Book of Cerne*, and other documents [Kenney JF *SEHI-E* pp.718-22].

3 Kenney *op.cit.*, p.1 and p.254

4 Cuthbert; *Epistola de obitu Bedae BEHEP* p.585

5 While of course it would be taught in the monastic schools where 'English children, as well as their elders, were instructed by Irish teachers in advanced studies and in the observance of the discipline of a rule' [HE iii:3]

6 Bede records King Cenwealh of the West Saxons, who spoke only Saxon, as losing patience with Bishop Agibert, from Gaul, because of 'his barbarous speech' [HE iii:7] As late as 667, more than seventy years after Augustine's arrival, Wigard was sent to Rome for consecration as archbishop of Canterbury so that they 'would hear the teachings and mysteries of their faith' not through an interpreter but in their own native tongue.' [BVAb c.3]



one which uses a foreign language distances religion from everyday life'.

Aidan and his followers, who received reinforcements 'every day' (HE iii:31), may have initially required translation in evangelizing the Angles, but some of these had themselves been exiles in Dalriada, and knew the Irish and their life-style as not much different from their own. A like care that the message be understood must have mandated the use of British for much of the evangelism and encouragement of the majority of the population with their Christian tradition, even if tenuous<sup>2</sup>. Presumably British priests cooperated; evidence of their good relationship has been hinted at in the reported earlier meeting of Columba and Kentigern<sup>3</sup>. They had none of the disadvantages of superiority of race, culture, language and class which bedevilled the Roman workers. There can have been no hint that the missionaries' language was the appropriate one for true worship. The winsomness of Aidan shines through Bede's pages, in a way which is absent from his account of Augustine and his successors.

Although anachronistic we can perhaps sense the tensions between 'native' and 'Roman' practice in the episode from *Bede's Life of Cuthbert* [BUC X] where *a vulgaris turba* watching some monks drift out to sea said 'Let no man pray for them, and may God have no mercy on them, for they have robbed men of their old ways of worship and how the new worship is to be conducted nobody knows.' James Campbell comments: 'But was this *turba* one of imperfectly converted pagans? Is it not more likely that they were Christians objecting to change...in their worship...'<sup>4</sup>?

1 This has sometimes been deliberate; Pope Gregory VII to the Bohemian Prince Wratisslaus refusing his request for worship in Slavonic; '...it still pleases Almighty God to direct his worship to be conducted in hidden language, that not everyone, especially the simple, might understand it.' [Quoted by A Bost *History of the Moravians* Eng. trans, 1862 London p.3] Contrast the change, in our own day, by the Roman Catholic Church, [See Hans Küng *The Council and reunion* 1961 (Trans, Hastings C) London p.153ff]. If I rather labour this point of language it is because of experience in Nigeria where, due to the pressure of medical work, and the number of tribes served by the hospital, we worked in Hausa which was spoken, and then only as a second language, by only some of the men but few of our women patients; to our evangelistic loss. The martyr John Williams, pioneer missionary in the Pacific, wrote; 'I think it a circumstance of very rare occurrence, that a religious impression is produced upon the minds of a people, except by addressing them in their mother tongue.' Quoted by A Buzacott *Mission life in the islands of the Pacific* <sup>2</sup>1985 Suva p.68

2 Speaking of Paulinus' mission, only eight years earlier, Hunter Blair wrote 'Pagan Bernicia lay on the edge of a Christian hinterland stretching across the British kingdoms to the Scottish and Irish churches. At the time when Paulinus was preaching at Old Yeavering it seems very likely that there would be Christian communities living in the valley of the Tweed and its tributaries,' *op.cit.* p.94

3 For the overlap of Anglian and British languages see Kenneth Jackson 'The British language during the period of English settlements,' *SEBH* especially p.66

4 Campbell J 'Observations on the conversion of England' *Ampleforth Journal* 1973 78 pp.12-26.

The obvious point has been made by James Dunn, as a theologian, that even in the first century there were different manifestations of the Christian faith which could not 'as a clearly defined entity, be easily extracted from its historic context, like a nut from its shell'<sup>1</sup>. The Roman and Celtic manifestations of the Church are surely to be seen, therefore, as valid examples in the worlds in which they lived, of that diversity without which 'Christian unity will be (heretically) narrow, squeezing out that which is also the life of the Spirit, and what also expresses the grace of God in Christ'<sup>2</sup>. Could they work together in the one body?

It is important to realise that each example of diversity is appropriate to its own age. The temptation to make seventh-century Christians into twentieth-century ones of our favourite shade must be resisted<sup>3</sup>, they were people of their own age. We may allow that Wilfrid, in his dying disposal of his property setting aside a quarter of it to be used to purchase the good offices of kings and bishops [VW. 63], perhaps saw himself in Germanic terms as the lord, the giver of gifts (rings) to his followers, and these to be used not as bribery, but part of the normal relationship of teutonic society. This granted, it does not mean that we must accord each Christian equal spiritual status, for this depends on his or her personal continuing commitment. It is unescapably clear that in this Wilfrid's thought-patterns were still secular<sup>4</sup> when compared with those of Aidan, whose royal guests are treated as any other, royal gifts given away [HE iii: 14].

If we accept the validity of diversity it may seem an error to prefer one manifestation of the faith to another, as I have done in (along with most modern scholars) preferring the Celtic. After all spiritual maturity, a 'showing forth of the loveliness of Christ'<sup>5</sup>, is not tied to any form, being shown in Romanist Bede, and apparently lacking in 'Corman' of Iona<sup>6</sup>.

1 Dunn J06 *Unity and diversity in the New Testament: an inquiry into the character of earliest Christianity* 2nd ed, 1990 London p.4

2 *ibid* p. xix.

3 A temptation to which Sister MTA Carroll unfortunately yielded in her *The Venerable Bede: his spiritual teachings* [1946 Washington *passim*], where she turns Bede into a pre-Council<sup>as</sup> Roman Catholic.

4 The kindest light on Wilfrid is shed by ~~W~~Wright-Harting in *The coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* 1972 London e.g. pp. 157

5 So was Samuel Rutherford described in 1650, [Quoted from Wodrow by Alexander Whyte *Thirteen Appreciations* 1913 Edinburgh p. 120].

6 The name, reported centuries later, is employed to avoid an ugly periphrasis, and to lend him substance.

Nevertheless there is an important factor to be considered - which form of the church is most conducive to spiritual life? For if, as Dunn argues, canonical scripture is the judge of tradition', then we have clear guidance on the life of holiness; a reckoning of ourselves dead unto the law [Rom. 7] (such laws as 'taste not, handle not...' [Col. 2:21]) but alive in the liberty with which Christ makes us free [Gal. 5:11], lives energised by the Holy Spirit. Brendan Bradshaw writes:

'the antithesis between the institutional mentality of Latin orthodoxy and the inspirational outlook of the Celtic Church finds no better expression than the contrast between the monastic movements which each generated... [Bedel] pinpoints a central feature of Irish monastic culture which was to prove a source of scandal to Latin authors over some four centuries. This was the *consuetudo peregrinandi*, the inveterate propensity of the Celtic monks for wandering... One [must] stress the inspirational character of the ideal, that unsolicitous self-abandonment in the quest for God was of its essence. [Bradshaw concludes his point by drawing attention to] 'a revealing throwaway comment by St Columbanus... "amor non tenet ordinem"' [love does not keep an order]<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the discipline of Irish monasteries there was always the freedom to follow the Spirit's leading into the 'desert'. This explains and completely justifies Cuthbert's otherwise inexcusable abandonment - ill though he was - of his episcopal duties for his hut on Inner Farne.

This openness to change, to following the leading of the Spirit, we have in our day seen resulting in the liberation of congregations and individuals throughout the church in the new gale of the Holy Spirit blowing since the mid 1960s. It is because of this that the records of the Celtic mission ring true. In Bradshaw's words: 'Irish heterodoxy lay in the realm of praxis, not doctrine. Specifically it concerned the practice of Christian holiness. And it is here that the transcendental element in Early Irish spirituality manifests itself'<sup>3</sup>.

Where the preachers were occupied with unworthy motives: wealth, or prestige, where their language or customs were incomprehensible, they were stumbling blocks. Where they were personally godly, approachable, and took

1 'Unless the NT functions in a critical role within tradition but also over against the rest of tradition it has ceased to be canonical!' Dunn's emphasis [op. cit p. xxxii].

2 Bradshaw B 'The wild and woolly west; Early Irish Christianity and Latin orthodoxy' *SCH* 25 pp.1-23.

3 *ibid*

trouble to make their teaching simple, then they attracted people to Christ. Given all the circumstances, the contrast between the Lindisfarne community and the Roman missionaries must have been considerable. It is not altogether surprising that Hilda's vote was for Celtic Christianity<sup>1</sup>.

Having noted all these differences it must be emphasised that these are of peripheral matters. Both Roman and Celt believed the same faith, worshipped the same God, and proclaimed the same Saviour. The work of Paulinus and James had not be done in vain.

Hamilton Thompson notes that, in the records, the building of churches was given priority over the establishing of monasteries<sup>2</sup>. Here then, in these churches, pastored by Aidan's colleagues and disciples, we see the foundations of those to which we belong today.

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 1 Liturgical conservatism objects to any change in church worship, as is everywhere evident in our own days, but frequently on nostalgic rather than spiritual grounds. Her spiritual dynamism suggests that Hilda's preference for the Celtic order cannot be satisfactorily explained purely as nostalgia for the forms she had become accustomed to in her twenties.

2 Thompson H 'Northumbrian Monasticism' in *BL7W* pp.60-102

## THE CHURCH IN BERNICIA ESTABLISHED

One of Bede's principal aims in writing his *Ecclesiastical history of the English people* was to establish the credentials of the Northumbrian church as an orthodox part of the Roman communion, argues Peppardine. She sees him emphasising every possible fact legitimatising it in the mainstream of western Christendom'. Bede therefore blows up the Synod of Whitby, which in truth was such a local matter that the Anglo-Saxon translator of his work omits the chapter, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicler found it unworthy of mention. Bede's special interest in computistical matters was such that he made of the Easter controversy a much larger thing than it warranted<sup>2</sup>. The upshot of this is that the *HE* has left us with an unbalanced picture of Bernician Church life in the latter half of the seventh century. In Bullough's view: 'The present day historian has to try to get behind the partly conscious, partly unconscious early falsifications... by "Romanist" interpreters from Bede... to Alcuin'<sup>3</sup>. Thanks to these the commonly received picture is that in 664 the small Celtic church was invaded, routed, or ground down by the all-powerful Roman Church from the south. The fallacy of this view has been pointed out by Hunter Blair: 'There was no English church in the years about 664'<sup>4</sup>.

What was the nature of the Christian church which was established by the Lindisfarne missionaries? As there is little information, we can gain some insight from the fact that missionaries normally use as template the church practices in which they were themselves brought up, modified - if they are wise - by the circumstances in which they are working.

Bede was himself far too godly a man to decry the spirituality of the Celtic missionaries. Charles-Edwards believes that when Bede, in contrast

1 Peppardine MV; 'Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*; a new perspective' *Celtica* 1958 4 253-262.

2 Plummer wrote; 'we cannot help feeling that the question occupies a place in Bede's mind out of all proportion to its real importance, *VBH*.xl

3 Bullough DA 'The mission to the English and Picts and their heritage (to c.800)' *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter* Tübingen pp.80-98

4 Blair continued; 'We may think that Christianity had become strongly rooted among the English of Northumbria and East Anglia, and doubtless also in Kent, although the sees of Canterbury and Rochester were vacant. Elsewhere Sussex and the Isle of Wight were still unvisited by missionaries, Essex was lapsing into paganism. If we may judge from the density of place-names with heathen connotations, much of the land where now lie the counties of Surrey, Middlesex and Hertfordshire were still deeply pagan. And further inland we have no grounds for suspecting anything more than the slightest inroads upon the paganism of Wessex and the Midlands... *The world of Bede* 1970 London p.118

to the British Church, talks of 'far more worthy heralds of the truth' [HE 1.22], he meant not only the missionaries sent by Gregory the Great but also the Irish'. For the godliness of the latter we have Bede's own testimony to Aidan. First it is will prove useful to consider their roots in Iona as found in the testimony of Adomnan to Columba.

We may accept Picard's view that Adomnan wrote his *Life of Columba* as a counterbalance, at a time when Roman churchmen would be increasingly likely to denigrate him and, by implication, his followers who had founded the Northumbrian Church<sup>2</sup>, following Wilfrid's weazel comment "that Columba of yours - yes, and ours too, *if he belonged to Christ* - ... [HE iii:25 ]. However it would be unwise to write *AVC* off as a propaganda exercise. Picard maintains: 'although (Adomnán) does not claim like Bede to be a *uerax historicus* [HE 3:17] there is little doubt that Adomnán wanted to put himself forward: as such'<sup>3</sup>. It is worth examining this testimony to Columba for light on his spiritual stature.

Adomnan does not deluge us with a mere catalogue of Columba's spiritual virtues. He makes it abundantly clear that the incidents he records are not due to virtues of Columba's character, but are God's gifts. [AVC I:3,37, II:12] He is very aware of the gifts of the Spirit, enumerated by Paul [I Cor. 12-14], and takes care to tease them out as they are demonstrated in Columba's life [AVC II:19,21]. He sought an explanation of how these gifts work [AVC I:43]<sup>4</sup>, and then to demonstrate them as illustrated in the life of Columba. As we find parallels in today's church to such manifestations of the Holy Spirit: miracles of healing, raising the dead, words of knowledge, prophecy, turning water into wine, successful encounters with demonic forces<sup>5</sup> we can use the words of Adomnan:

1 Charles-Edwards T; 'Bede, the Irish and the Britons' *Celtica* 1983 15 pp.42-52

2 Picard J-M; 'The purpose of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*' *Peritia* 1982 1 pp.160-77, J Marsden [*The illustrated Columcille* 1991 London] believes that *AVC* was directed to Northumbria.

3 Picard J-M; 'Bede, Adomnán, and the writing of history' *Peritia* 1984 3 pp.50-70.

4 In the passage cited Lugbe asked Columba "Tell me...how they are made known to you". It rings true, for I recall asking exactly that question of a colleague who has the gift of interpretation of tongues, [I Cor. 12,30] It is all very reminiscent of the literature which accompanied a fresh outpouring of these gifts in the 1960s and since, E.g, Bittlinger A *Gifts and Graces* English trans, 1967 London; Ranagan K and O *Catholic Pentecostals* 1969 Paramus NJ.

5 Gardner RFR *Miracles of Healing; a doctor investigates* 1986 London *passim*. The only type not quoted there is the turning of water into wine. This was, in fact, reported in the 1960s from Sumatra, but I did not have sufficient confidence in the reporter to include it in my study.

'the credibility of miracles of this kind, that happened in past times and that we have not seen, is confirmed for us beyond doubt by those of the present day that we ourselves have observed.' [AVC 2:45] We can identify the community at Iona as one where the Holy Spirit was active. We have Adomnan's witness that it was so in Columba's life; we may fairly assume that this was true throughout the community, even if without such spectacular displays of the miraculous. Iona was a spiritual powerhouse.

St Paul enumerated not only the gifts of the Spirit, but the fruit of the Spirit [Gal. 5:22]. Aidan, certainly, is recorded by Bede as displaying this fruit in abundance [HE iii: 5,1]. It was monks of this spiritual calibre who established our church in Bernicia<sup>1</sup>. There was no sudden change of their rule after Whitby, for rules were not yet uniform<sup>2</sup>. There was no change in their communion with God. We can see exemplified in Cuthbert the life of the Bernician monk grounded in the particular Celtic nuances, continuing<sup>3</sup>. It was such men who evangelised, not only in Bernicia, but in Deira, in Mercia, and 'to the uttermost parts' [Acts 1:8] of East Anglia and Wessex. It was they who laid the firm foundation on which the English Church has been built. To have built physical church buildings too, as they did [HE iii:3], would have been pointless if they had not also established congregations of believers - laymen and laywomen. It is clear from the record that Aidan's followers were not all monks, so there were clergy available to pastor these congregations as they were established.

We should not forget James the Deacon, probably aged twenty-nine<sup>4</sup> when

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1 Lightfoot JB *Leaders in the Northern Church* 1902 London cc 1-5,

2 More than a decade later when Benedict Biscop, Northumbrian born and bred, returned to Wearmouth from Lérins, albeit via Rome and Canterbury, the rule he established at St Peter's was a personal distillation of that of seventeen monasteries, [VAB,11] The Lindisfarne monks arranged their own rule, [VCA 3:1], which, even so, was not adopted without resistance, [BVC 16]

3 Bertram Colgrave; 'He lived and died after the manner of the typical Irish monk,' [*Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert* 1940 Cambridge p.3

4 As to his age, as in all Dark Age studies in the absence of hard facts we must make deductions, Paulinus would not have come, as bishop, without a deacon, the obvious candidate for this role was James, Therefore in 625 he was at least twenty, (although Bede was ordained deacon at the age of 19 [HE v:24] that was below the canonical age) giving the latest possible birth date of 605. When Edwin marched to suppress the rebellion of Penda in 633 James was still deacon, therefore he is very unlikely to have quite reached the age of 30, so his earliest birthdate as 603. We are in the unusual situation of being fairly confident, therefore, that he was born around 604. Margaret Deansley [*Sidelights on the Anglo-Saxon Church* 1962 London cc.8-9.] tells of bishop's deacons who, largely because of their function as notaries, continued in that status to an advanced age, but this appears to be a later development.

left behind when Paulinus and his charges fled to Kent in 633. At that age' he would have had no difficulty making his way back to Kent; the journey would have been merely an interesting challenge<sup>2</sup>. That he stayed in Northumbria reveals a determination to carry on the task they had had in hand. Whether Roman or, as I consider likely Anglo-Saxon - a member of the race Cadwallon saw himself as born to exterminate<sup>3</sup>, - he had been associated with King Edwin's entourage. To stay put in one place, perhaps Catterick, would have been foolhardy to say the least. Probably James will have spent the 'hateful year' [HE iii:1] visiting the groups of Christians to encourage them in their faith. With what hope he must have greeted the appearance of Christian rulers in Deira and Bernicia, and how bitterly those hopes must have been shattered by their apostasy and death<sup>4</sup>. After these false dawns of the past year the triumph of a real Christian king in Northumbria, and the arrival of a dedicated band of missionaries, must have seemed like a dream beyond hope. It is important to recall that there was no other potential source of hope: Kent was far off, and the days when its king was Bretwalda long past; the East Anglian power had waned, and although its new king Sigeberht was a committed Christian [HE ii:15], he had his kingdom to convert, and between them lay the invincible pagan king Penda. Cadwallon's example<sup>5</sup> held out no hope from British Christian kings.

James's joy at the coming of Oswald and the Irish was untarnished, for as we may assume him as having come from Kent with Paulinus, he was not personally involved in the Deiran/Bernician struggle, Wilfrid was still *in utero* and the problems dividing Iona and Canterbury as yet unthought of.

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1 Bertram Colgrave sees James quite differently [BEHEP p.207fn] stating that 'James came over with Paulinus', presumably he means from Rome in 601. However Colgrave gives no authority for this statement, nor is James named as among that party [HE i:291]

2 In my own twenties, in Upper Burma, when we were officially warned to expect the order to make our own way back to India, I found the prospect rather exhilarating.

3 'Cadwallon,...as he used himself to say "born for the extermination of the Angles."' [William of Malmesbury *Chronicle of the Kings of England* Trans. JA Giles, 1847 London p.46]

4 Bede's equivocal response to them is discussed by JE Cross 'The ethic of war in Old English' *England before the Conquest; studies in Primary Sources presented to Dorothy Whitelock* 1971 Cambridge pp.269-282.

5 Cadwallon is denigrated by John Godfrey [*The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* 1962 Cambridge p.97] as 'The Welshman (who) in his little hour of triumph was pitiless to the Englishman,' but surely more justly lauded by Sir John Lloyd [*History of Wales* 1989 ed. Carmarthen 1:182] 'Cadwallon holds a place in the forefront of those who have earned the grateful remembrance of the Welsh race...every bold defender of the freedom of Wales was hailed as a new Cadwallon', DP Kirby's view is equally positive in 'The Kingdom of Northumbria and the destruction of the Votadini' *Trans. East Lothian Antiq. and Field Nat. Soc.* 1974 14 pp. 1-13.



The spiritual calibre of Aidan is further confirmed by the fact that 'Rome acknowledges him as a canonical bishop'<sup>1</sup>. For James, 'the one heroic figure of the Roman mission'<sup>2</sup>, here are fellow-labourers in the spiritual harvest-field [Jn. 4:35ff]. After months of danger and hiding and loneliness, here at last is fellowship and partnership. Agreed he will find minor differences in practice and calendar, but after the death of hope these will seem trivial. A score of years later, at Whitby, he will inevitably stand on the side of Rome, but there are no grounds for imagining that during the intervening decades he held himself aloof. He too will have grieved at the death of Oswald, whose reign in retrospect must have seemed halcyon<sup>3</sup> during the renewed dangers of Penda's onslaughts.

After his victory at Heavenfield Oswald's primary tasks must have been to secure his position in the kingdom, and to build up a force strong enough to push outwards its boundaries. The core of that force and of his kingdom will have been his group of young men eager for fame and the rewards that it will bring, a group enlarged by each victory. Already noted is the tradition at Kirkoswald in Ayrshire that he won a battle there, and now is surely a more likely time for that (and also for the incorporation of Cunningham into his realm) than the later date associated with the establishment of the Bernician See of Whithorn. Edinburgh was captured<sup>4</sup>. That he won Lindsey is clear from the residual grudge held by the monks at Bardney [HE iii:11]. There is rumour of other wars<sup>5</sup>. These normal activities of a seventh-century king were his, and it would therefore be a mistake to see him as neglecting them for religious duties, or seeking to abandon them for a life in the cloister, as many later Anglo-Saxon kings were to do<sup>6</sup>.

J. R. R. Tolkien has maintained<sup>7</sup> that '*Beowulf* is, of course, an historic document of the first order for the study of the mood and thought of the period and one perhaps too little used for the purpose by professed

1 *EECH* p. 159

2 Stenton FM *Anglo-Saxon England* 21947 Oxford p. 116

3 I discuss suggestive hints that this was so below.

4 Jackson KH 'Edinburgh and the Anglian occupation of Lothian' *The Anglo-Saxons* Ed. P. Clunies 1959 London; pp. 35-42

5 'A gathering of the Saxons against Oswald' *Ann. Tiger*, ca. 637

6 Stancliffe C 'Kings who opted out,' *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* Ed. P. Wormald 1983 Oxford pp. 154-176

7 Tolkien JRR 'Beowulf; the monsters and the critics' *Proc. Brit. Acad.* 1936 22 pp245-296

historians'. Later an historian, Patrick Wormald, suggested that *Beowulf* gives a picture of the values and traditions of its audience, probably in seventh- or eight-century England'. Tolkien quoted Ker's view that in Scandinavian mythologies the Northern Gods 'are on the right side, though it is not the side that wins.... The gods, who are defeated, think that defeat no refutation.' In their warfare men are their chosen allies, able when heroic to share in this 'absolute resistance, perfect because without hope'<sup>1</sup>.

It is a commonplace to draw the parallel between Hrothgar's hall and the scene in Edwin's great hall depicted by his thane in that crucial discussion on their acceptance of the Christian faith. [HE 11:13] The similarity is confirmed by the great hall at Yeavering<sup>2</sup>. However it is easy to forget that at Bamborough Oswald too would not have had so much a 'court' but a hall and companions not very different from Heorot. Oswald himself and the Christian Bernicians who had been with him in exile, were all 'first generation' believers. There must have been many among his thanes who were still pagan. For all of them their background must have been this of heroic defeat, their only ultimate hope of a degree of immortality in scaldic song. That was no ignoble hope, for in the absence of all we think of as 'the media' the evenings were perforce occupied with the recital of stories and histories. The deeds of the brave would be often recalled, and their names long remembered, as the survival to this day of *The battle of Maldon*<sup>4</sup> demonstrates.

Tolkien makes one of his critical points by imagining that *Beowulf's* poet might have chosen as his theme the life and death of St Oswald. telling 'first of Hevenfield, when Oswald as a young prince against all hope won a great victory with a remnant of brave men; and then have passed at once to the lamentable defeat of Oswestry, which seemed to destroy the hope of Christian Northumbria...' <sup>5</sup>. One could add that the gathering of the enemies after the hero's death, foreseen in *Beowulf* was actualised here.

1 Wormald P 'Bede, Beowulf, and the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy' *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England* (ed, RT Farrell) 1978 BAR(B) 46 pp, 32-95

2 Tolkien *op, cit*,

3 Bertram Colgrave's footnote *BEHEP* pp, 182-3

4 Admittedly much later, but in the heroic vein of earlier centuries, As R Haer's *A choice of Anglo-Saxon verse* [1970 London pp, 48-69] proves.

5 Tolkien *op, cit*,

Tolkien's 'seemed', which I have emphasised, leads us to the core of the gospel as it must have been proclaimed to Oswald's thegns and ealdormen: a gospel of hope and of ultimate victory. This, in perhaps more exaggerated form, can be seen in the Gosforth cross, carved several centuries later during the conversion of the Norse in Cumbria<sup>1</sup>. On three sides the carvings are pagan<sup>2</sup>, the fourth starts with a carving depicting Ragnarock - the day of doom - but underneath this is depicted the Crucifixion. The Christian gospel, through the self-sacrifice of the young God, promises victory and immortality. It is worth recalling that Oswald ensured that his followers and companions heard Aidan preach. Their king's translation into the Anglian tongue will not have been merely a making of the message intelligible, but will have been itself a commendation of the gospel, for no one doubted Oswald's kingliness.

Oswald brought the Christian messenger into his hall [*HE* iii:6], and gave him opportunity to present the gospel to his band. However the normal topics of conversation and song there must have been in traditional heroic terms. A different environment was therefore required for the building up of a task-force of evangelists. It was also essential to provide a milieu for the boys who were going to be the Christian leaders of the next generation. Therefore Aidan built monasteries primarily as a place of training. This would include education, for the Christian must be literate if he is to be strengthened by the Word and equipped to proclaim it. The training would have had to include Latin, to give access to the world of books, but this cannot have been mandatory<sup>3</sup>, for a century later we find Bede not only referring to clergy who required Anglo-Saxon translations [*BEpE*: 5] but devoting his energies to providing for their need. The monasteries were also essential as places to which Christians could retreat for a while to renew their spiritual strength; only later as a place of permanent retreat from the world. In the words of the recusant historian Thomas Innes, writing of Columba (but also instancing Ninian, Patrick, Augustine and Boniface): 'The intention of all these holy men in

1 Best illustrated in WG Collingwood *Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman age* p.156, but best explained by Richard Bailey *Viking Age Sculpture* 1980 London pp.128-29.

2 The Franks casket, also, well exemplifies mixture of pagan, Christian (and classical) motifs. Kendrick TD *Anglo-Saxon Art to AD 900* 1938 London pp.122-25

3 Was there a difference between an élite, monastically-trained clergy (potentially bishops) and parochial clergy whose instructions would probably have been less academic?

these pious institutions was not only to have a place of retirement amidst their labours, but chiefly to be a nursery of young labourers to carry on the work of the Gospel, and to be a bulwark of Christianity...''

In other words the monasteries provided an alternative and attractive focus for the community, as in Ireland. It would be wrong to suppose that the national traditions were destroyed, for as in the chief's halls so in the monasteries the harp was passed round of an evening [HE iv:24]. *Beowulf* clearly reads as the work of a Christian<sup>2</sup>, while Alcuin felt impelled to ask Bishop Hygebald of Lindisfarne 'What has Ingeld to do with Christ?'... 'A question which allows us to recognize the popularity of heroic legend in a Northumbrian monastery'<sup>3</sup>. Adomnan tells of an occasion when Columba's brothers asked: 'When the poet Cronan was leaving us, why did you not according to the custom ask for a song of his own composition, sung to a tune?' [AVC I:42] The clear implication is that that was his custom, for Columba's explanation was that it was the imminent death of the poet which made this inappropriate. In other words the singing of songs (not just psalms) was acceptable to Celtic monks. It is surely significant that it was by a gift of the Holy Spirit that Caedmon's contribution to the diffusion of the Biblical story was made in the tradition of the bard in a king's hall. Although there was no uniform pattern<sup>4</sup>, in some double monasteries women sat with the men, just as women were present in Germanic halls<sup>5</sup>. As at Whitby they benefitted by education, and some became notable scholars<sup>6</sup>. It is too readily forgotten that the Anglo-Saxons were pre-literate. This, then, was the first generation to whom literature became important. Laws and deeds would require a nucleus of scholars, but the availability of the Word of God made the appeal of education much wider.

The record shows that reading the Scriptures, memorizing the psalter, prayer, evangelistic journeys, and church planting were major aspects of

1 Innes T *The civil and ecclesiastical history of Scotland* written c.1730, 1853 Aberdeen p.153

2 Significantly it is JRR Tolkien [*The Lord of the Rings* 1952 London] who has reminded us in this generation that saga, without any overt Christian content, can be profoundly inspiring.

3 Wood IN 'Ripon, Francia and the Franks casket in the early Middle Ages' *Northern History* 26 1990 pp.1-18

4 Lapidge M 'Introduction' to his trans. *De Virginitate, Aldhelm's Prose Works* 1979 Ipswich pp.51-5

5 Surely implicit in Bede's description of Coldingham [HE iv:25] '(nuns) make friends with strange men.'

6 'Nicholson J ' *Feminae gloriosae, women in the age of Bede* *Mediaeval Women* Ed. D Baker 1978 Oxford: pp.15-30.

the Church's life. Just as the *Pax Romana* enabled the spread of the early church, and Victoria's empire facilitated the world-wide spread of the gospel in the nineteenth century, so the Church of Bernicia was the centre and task-force by which, as Oswald's *imperium* extended throughout the island, so the Church of Christ was spread.

As earlier suggested, James must have looked upon these years of Oswald's reign as halcyon ones. Both men were probably the same age, they were both fired with the desire to spread the gospel, it is highly likely that there was built up a warm bond of Christian love and fellowship between them. We have a hint that this was so: the church of St Oswald, East Hauxwell, stands half a dozen miles west of Catterick. Local tradition links it with James the Deacon, and claims the cross in the churchyard to be his monument. The cross itself is probably from the Danish period, but the tradition is not unreasonable as is borne out by the inscription. Although this is no longer readable, accurate details have fortunately been preserved from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Bishop GF Browne, having described and illustrated the shaft of the cross, gives convincing reasons for identifying as the village described by Bede [HE ii:20], 'near Catterick where (James) used to dwell', a spot [SE 188906], a mile and a half from Hauxwell, the site of a 'lost village' now represented by a farmhouse called Akebar'. In the church entrance porch is a framed note, presumably torn from a book<sup>2</sup>, which reads: 'This church is said to have been founded by James the Deacon, around 650 AD and to have been dedicated by him to Oswald, king of Deira (634AD) who was slain by Penda, king of Mercia, at the battle of Maserfield (642 AD) and subsequently canonised. James the Deacon died in 690 AD at the age of 30 years, and the Saxon cross in the churchyard is reported to have been erected in his memory.' This is merely tradition, but we have seen, in the *excursus* on Church Dedications, that it is not always safe to discard tradition out of hand. Tradition or no, it hints at a more likely relationship between James and his new brothers-in-Christ than that normally assumed.

1 Browne GF *The Conversion of the Heptarchy* 1896 London pp 214-19. In the late 1970s CE Wrangham read a scholarly paper reaching the same conclusions. His widow has favoured me with a carbon copy, but has no note of its publication.

2 The vicar tells me that no parishoner can recall a time when it did not hang there; but neither he nor the patron of the living can identify its origin.

Of Oswald's death Bright wrote: 'We can imagine how the tidings [of the tragedy of Maserfield] would be received in Kent; how Paulinus, safe in Rochester, and Ethelburga in her minster at Lyminge, would think of Hatfield, and pray for the soul of another Edwin..' He footnoted: 'It is interesting to observe that the little church of Paddlesworth, occupying the highest ground in Kent...was of old a dependency of Lyminge, and is dedicated to St. Oswald'<sup>1</sup>. I suggest that the unexpected dedication of this elusive church at Paddlesworth, linked with the name of St Ethelburga, foundress and first abbess of the neighbouring nunnery of Lyminge<sup>2</sup>, is good evidence for the esteem in which his work for the Lord was held<sup>3</sup>. If we assume that Æthelburh was a Christian in more than name (and the fact that Edwin accepted her faith suggests that this was the case), then she must have grieved for the collapse of the church in Northumbria after her husband's death, and she must have rejoiced at the renewal of the faith there. As she outlived Oswald it is at least possible (and no equally likely suggestions for this surprising dedication have been offered) that it was Æthelburh who dedicated Paddlesworth to the one who had carried on the work which she, by taking Paulinus to Northumbria, had initiated.

This adds weight to the view that the Church of Christ in England, despite minor differences, saw itself as one. The idea which has so dominated received views that they were rivals mutually at war with one another is a misunderstanding<sup>4</sup>. This is true even when we come to the troubles of which Bede makes so much.

What we find is Wilfrid, a member of that portion of the universal church which sojourned in Bernicia, going with an older companion - Benedict Biscop - as the first Northumbrians in two centuries to visit Rome, other than in chains<sup>5</sup>. Dazzled by the wealth, the prestige, the

1 *EECH* p. 179

2 Davis AW and MJ Cross *A brief history of the church of St Oswald Paddlesworth, Kent* 1975

3 We must read between the lines of Bede's comment: 'Æthelburh, fearing Kings Eadbald and Oswald, afterwards sent [Edwin's son Usctrea, and grandson Yffil to Gaul to be brought up by King Dagobert, who was her friend,' [*HE* ii:20] Why should she she fear Oswald? The usual answer 'dynastic rivalry' seems inadequate; Bernicians had not been involved in the death of Edwin, kingship was not yet firmly hereditary, and her son Usctrea cannot have been more than five, and no menace to Oswald. But if she feared her brother Eadbald (and Bede tells us she did) it would be hardly politic to say so to his face, much better conjure up the excuse of a distant Oswald.

4 As, in Europe, Columbanus saw himself as part of the same church as the pope.

5 Fletcher E *Benedict Biscop* 1981 Jarrow Lecture

glory of the church there, (and, if to a lesser extent, of the Church in Gaul)' he contrasted it to the wooden church, the deliberate poverty, the utter provincialism of Lindisfarne. But he cannot have contrasted them as two separate church denominations in our present-day thinking. Of course he knew of other so-called Christians - Arians for example - but they were heretics, not part of the Church. Even if with some mental reservations, Wilfrid proclaimed<sup>2</sup> to the 679/80 Council in Rome that the Church in the *whole northern part of Britain and Ireland, together with the islands inhabited by the English and British races, as well as the Irish and the Picts*' was orthodox [HE v:19], and this before Iona changed its practice.

Wilfrid cannot have come home with the intention of evicting and replacing his home church. What possible company of people could have replaced it? Surely with all the impatience of a young man of twenty-four<sup>3</sup> his aim must have been to persuade and cajole his fellow Bernician Christians to reform their ways and come into the mainstream. Although he went about it in a tactless way, as when the monks of the Celtic rite, including Cuthbert, were driven out of Ripon, he was aiming at reformation<sup>4</sup>. As the church in Kent followed the Roman pattern, why should not that in Bernicia do likewise?

The first 'reformed' company of monks who took over Ripon [VW:8] must have been Northumbrian Celtic monks who 'had seen the light' and reformed their practice, probably under the influence of the fiery Ronan, a southern Irish monk of 'catholic' persuasion [HE iii:25]; for there is no suggestion that they were incomers<sup>5</sup>. Wilfrid could also, no doubt, count on the support of Queen Eanflaed with her Kentish upbringing, and notably on that of Alchfrith, under-King of Deira<sup>6</sup>, who seems to have been under

1 Ian Wood believes that Wilfrid's stay in Francia was even more important than his visit to Rome ['Ripon, Francia, and the Franks casket' *Northern History* 26 1990 pp.1-19]

2 As one of the 'witnesses, to give evidence as to what the faith of their churches actually was,' Plummer *VBH* II:325

3 on his return to Northumbria, if Bertram Colgrave is correct in dating his return to Northumbria as 658, [*Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*; 1927 Cambridge p.15], He must have been born in 634 [VW:13 telling us that he was elected bishop when thirty years of age.]

4 Ian Wood argues that Wilfrid's monasteries at Ripon and Hexham can be seen as outliers of Columbanian monasticism. [*op.cit.*]

5 Hamilton Thompson has discussed their future in 'Northumbrian Monasticism' in *BLTW* pp. 60-101

6 Florence of Worcester, under 664.

'catholic' influence, perhaps from his step-mother and Romanus her chaplain [HE iii:26], prior to Wilfrid's return [HE v:19]. But on whom else? For the Whitby meeting Wilfrid and Alchfrith had to import outside witnesses to support their case, for, apart from Benedict Biscop [VW 3], no other Northumbrian had seen this blazing vision. At first the decision at Whitby meant minor reformation of the dating of Easter, as to tonsure, and a few other ecclesiastical matters too trivial for our sources to spell out.

The results for Wilfrid we cannot follow in this study<sup>1</sup>, but for the daily life of the church change must have been insignificant. Little, however, as these things seem to matter, they were of sufficient importance to some<sup>2</sup> of the faithful - English as well as Celtic - that regretfully and tearfully they left their life-work and set off for a place where they could continue to practise the faith as before. It was to happen time and again in our history<sup>3</sup>. For those who remained there can have been, apart from the monk's haircut, little obvious difference.

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1 A secondary result was the setting up at York of a new bishopric, and the appointment of Wilfrid to the see. He took off for Gaul to be consecrated in the most proper manner, and there was so seduced by 'the lust of the eyes and the pride of life' [1 Jn 2:16] that he dallied for eighteen months. Eric John [The social and political problems of the Early English Church *Agric. Hist. Rev.* 1970 *18 Supp.*; *Land Church and People*, pp 39-63] who suspects the truthfulness of both Bede and Eddius, but favours the latter, has a different explanation. He favours the theory that Alchfrith's disappearance from history after Whitby may have been due to his rebellion against Oswy, and that therefore Wilfrid stayed away because the political climate at home had become unfavourable. I would have thought the 664 plague would be a more likely alternative explanation. Oswy, a life-long friend of Iona from his boyhood days there, must have grieved at being the cause of the departure northwards of some of his trusted friends. He cannot have been best pleased at the absence of this cocky upstart Wilfrid, and with understandable asperity nominated a Celtic bishop to York. The years of frustration, triumph, ejection, journeyings which engulfed Wilfrid, the recurring contrast between his triumphs in Rome and his rejections in Northumbria, embittered Wilfrid, who had not the spiritual calibre of Chad. As we have seen earlier, this rubbed off on his companions until one of them, Eddius Stephanus, a man from Kent [HE iv:21, hurls epithets at the Celtic community [VW, 5, 47]. I have earlier criticised him for accusing them of being 'quartodecimans' when he must have known this was untrue. Benedicta Ward [*The Venerable Bede* London: 1990] has now said: 'By the eighth century the term 'quartodecimans' had no real meaning and was used simply to suggest error...' [p.29]. If this be so when Stephen was writing, then my earlier comments must be considered somewhat too harsh.

2 Bede is obviously unclear what proportion were affected, cf HE iii:26 'those who' and iv:4 'all'.

3 Not only in the great upheavals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but in the monastic reformations of the tenth and eleventh centuries; at the time of the restoration of Charles II; most notably and repeatedly in presbyterian Scotland, principally in the Disruption of 1843 when 481 ministers left church building, stipend, and manse, and walked out without any visible support or home, for the sake of conscience [see Brown T *Annals of the Disruption* 1893 ed, Edinburgh pp.797-812]. Current proposals for financial aid to any Anglican clergy who may resign over women's ordination, highlight the problem.



Meisner wrote: 'It has never been suggested that the acceptance of the Roman Easter and tonsure in Ireland, and at Iona, meant that the Celtic Church in those places abandoned all its customs and came into line with the Roman communion. Why should it then be thought that the acceptance of Easter and the tonsure in England would have a different effect?''.

It is not until the coming of Theodore that we have any organization of the Church in England as a whole. Change is gradual. Contacts between Ireland and England continue with scholars travelling in both directions. There is a gradual merging of traditions. The debt to Iona is not forgotten, as William Watson demonstrated in a notable passage:

In 685 the Northumbrian power was broken by the Picts at the battle of Nectansmere and King Egfrith was slain. His body, according to William of Malmesbury, was buried in Iona where Adamnan was then abbot. If this is true, as there is no reason to doubt, it is a very remarkable testimony to the veneration in which the mother of Northumbrian Christianity was held, the Synod of Whitby notwithstanding'<sup>2</sup>.

The reign of Aldfrith, who had spent much of his life in Ireland, brings in a golden age of art,<sup>3</sup> and ensures that the Irish elements in Northumbria are not forgotten. The Church of Christ in Bernicia, after the external onslaughts of Cadwallon and of Penda and the internal stresses from Wilfrid, is firmly established, and will not be totally submerged under the later onslaughts of Viking or Norman.

It remains true, however, that no decade in its history was of greater significance than that initiated by the battle of Heavenfield, and no person has made a greater contribution than its victor. When Simeon sat down to write his *Treatise concerning the Origin and Progress of this Church of Durham* it was right that his first sentence should read: 'This holy church derives its original, both as regards its possessions and its religion, from the most fervent faith of Oswald, that most illustrious king of the Northumbrians, and a most precious martyr'<sup>4</sup>.

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1 Meisner JLG *The Celtic Church in England after the Synod of Whitby* 1929 London pp.9-10

2 Watson WJ *The Celtic place-names of Scotland* 1926 Edinburgh p 160.

3 Neuman de Vegvar CL *The Northumbrian Renaissance; a study in the transmission of style* 1987 Selinsgrove p.258 and *passim*

4 Simeon of Durham *History of the Church of Durham*, Ed, J Stevenson 1855 London p.626

One may cavil at that statement on theological grounds: the origin of the Church more accurately being dated from the Day of Pentecost, or even better from before Creation in the eternal purposes of God. Or on historic grounds one can point - as I have done in this study - to precursors through James the Deacon, and Paulinus back to the vision of Gregory the Great. Much earlier there was the British Church, and it is noteworthy that within twenty miles of Oswald's capital at Bamburgh we still find the flourishing small Berwickshire town of *Eccles*, while even nearer is the site, at the Hirsell, where Rosemay Cramp excavated Christian graves, the earliest of which she believes to be Romano-British. All that granted, it remains true that the organised church, in continuity back from today, reaches to Oswald. Prior to that there were Christians in isolated groups, and at his coming they must have been despairing.

There is another point to note. So far as I am aware no historian, mediaeval or modern, has suggested that the Church of Strathclyde was founded by King Riderch, the Church of Dalriada by King Conall, or that of Kent by King Æthelberht, helpful to the spread of gospel as these monarchs were. The same is true of the other insular kingdoms. In each case the foundation is ascribed to the work of the missionary: Kentigern, Columba, Augustine, or whoever. Of course in Northumbria Aidan and his colleagues were in the forefront, were the main agents of this work; however in ascribing the foundation of our church to Oswald, honour is being given to a layman, and one who remained such. It is uniquely spelled out for us, therefore, that the foundation of the Church in Bernicia was the work of men of God, not solely that of a band of Irish monks'. This is worth recalling as, too often, historians have thought of 'the church' purely in terms of the clerical establishment. Then, and now, it consists of the

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1 In fact, as Sarah Foot has recently shown, in that age distinctions were blurred. Responsibility for the cure of souls was shared by monastery as well as cathedral (and 'the Latin term *monasterium* and its Old English equivalent *mynster*, therefore convey nothing about the nature, status, or regularity of observance of the establishments they describe'). It 'encompassed all communal religious institutions from the wealthiest of royal double houses to the meanest of priests' cells.' 'The obligation of preaching (Bede) laid not only on those in priestly orders but on all the faithful' ['Parochial Ministry in Early Anglo-Saxon England; the role of monastic communities' *SCH* 26 1989 pp.43-54]. She goes on to quote Bede; 'As pastors are understood not only bishops, priest and deacons but also the rulers of monasteries, also all the faithful who take charge of even small households should rightly be called pastor.' [ *Homelia* i:7]

whole people of God, men and women, clerical and lay, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

An outstanding contribution to this subject of spirituality has not previously been quoted, as its particular subject - Cuthbert - flourished after the close of the period of this study. However Cuthbert is the ideal example of the fusion of the strands that together formed the Church of Bernicia: probably of the Anglian nobility, a monk of the Celtic rite who eventually became a bishop in the Roman obedience. At the interdisciplinatory conference held, in July 1987, to commemorate the 1300th anniversary of Cuthbert's death, Benedicta Ward discussed Cuthbert's spirituality, defining: 'By "spirituality" I mean what Cuthbert himself thought and said and did and prayed in the light of the Gospel of Christ' Of his nearly contemporary biographers she said:

They also were neither fools nor liars but men of excellent intelligence and literary competence, one of them the first in the great tradition of English historians. The question these men asked about Cuthbert may not be ours, but it is a valid one; they were not interested in his noble connections, his love of gold, beer, or small animals, not even in whether he was clever, brave, or great; they only wanted to know how this frail human being had put on the Lord Jesus through life and death....[O]n Farne, the writers do not give a picture of a busy bishop longing to get away from it all to a lovely island with nature and scenery; they bring the reader into the presence of a man crucified with Christ, alone and keeping silence as he accepts death'<sup>2</sup>

There is no suggestion that Cuthbert was unique in his own generation, or of a different spiritual calibre to his forbears whom we have been considering in this study.

It will be fitting to conclude this study of the Church of Christ in Early Bernicia by applying to its forerunners and founders: Ninian and Patrick and Gildas and Kentigern and Paulinus and James and Oswald and Aidan and a multitude of unnamed other Christians, words which Benedicta Ward said of the accounts of Cuthbert. They 'are not only a window onto the dead past; they are a stream of living water where he who is alive in Christ shows the race that is set before those who come after'<sup>3</sup>.

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1 Ward B 'The Spirituality of St Cuthbert' *St Cuthbert, his cult and his community to AD 1200* (Eds) Bonner G, O Rollason, C Stancliffe, 1989 Woodbridge pp.65-76.

2 *ibid*

3 *ibid*

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