

ART. IX.—*Ninekirks, Brougham*. By the Rev. C. M. L. BOUCH, M.A.

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IT is not intended to repeat in the present article the information already set forth in earlier volumes of *Transactions*,¹ to which reference may be made for many interesting points, but rather to deal with some points which have hitherto been neglected. It may be premised that the best modern description of the church is to be found in the Royal Commission's volume of 1936.²

No instance of a medieval use of the name Ninekirks has so far been found. Its first known occurrence is in an entry in the episcopal register of 1583, noting the appointment of an incumbent to "the rectory of Brougham alias Ninekyrkes".³ The first known attempt to explain the name is found in Thomas Machell's manuscripts, volume i, 442: "The parish church . . . called Nine Church concerning which name there are several conjectures—see my note d, Westmorland in general to Oglesby's queries. But the most probable is from Ninianus to which saint there are several churches dedicated in Scotland." Unfortunately, the note under reference has not yet been found (all who have had the joy and the exasperation of toiling through the six wonderful — but ill-arranged and usually almost, and sometimes wholly, illegible volumes, will sympathize), but its substance seems to be given in the following entry in the Hill MSS. (v 3), which must suffice for the time being: "Machell when speaking of Ninechurch says it

¹ CW1 iv 420-424; CW2 iii 353-365, cf. xxiv 375 and xlvii 243.

² *RCHM Westmorland* 54-56 and pl. 10.

³ N & B i 392.

had that name from St Ninian, a Scotch Saint, according to tradition or from that church being eight times demolished and rebuilt the ninth time." With reference to the latter derivation, it is interesting to find in a book published in 1859⁴ a note that "the youngsters said it was called Ninekirks because evil spirits pulled it down nine times of nights when it was a-building." But probably most people today would consider the derivation from the name of the saint to be the more probable. Ninian was a Roman Briton and a Christian, who was brought up somewhere on the shores of the Solway at the end of the fourth century. From there he journeyed to Rome, where he was educated and in due course ordained; on his way home he made the acquaintance of St. Martin of Tours, who has been regarded as the father of Western monachism, and under his inspiration founded a monastery at Whithorn on his return to Britain.⁵

It is at least suggestive that there are two sites in our area, both close to the main Roman road from the south into Scotland, with church dedications to connect them with these two saints. One of these is Brampton, where the church dedicated to St. Martin stands within the area of an early Roman fort;⁶ the other is Ninekirks. A tradition connecting Ninian with the evangelization of our district is preserved in the words of the twelfth-century rhyming chronicler, Geoffrey Gaimar;⁷ and it is known that there were Christians among the inhabitants of Roman Brougham, the fort of *Brocauum*.⁸

⁴ W. White, "Northumberland and the Border", 20-21.

⁵ Cf. W. Douglas Simpson, "St. Ninian and Christian origins in Scotland", 1940; idem, "New light on St. Ninian", AA4 xxiii 78-95; *D. & G. Trans.* 3rd ser. xxvii (1950) 9-53 ("St. Ninian: a preliminary study of sources", by Mrs N. K. Chadwick) and 155-162 ("The Ninianic controversy", by W. Douglas Simpson). The *floruit* of Ninian is still a matter of controversy, but a date *circa* A.D. 400 is on balance easiest to accept.

⁶ Cf. CW2 xxxvi 172-182.

⁷ Cf. AA4 xxiii 92, where Dr. Douglas Simpson cites the passage, and gives a translation; the whole article is of great interest.

⁸ CW2 xxii 140-142.

Why did Ninian place his church so far away from the site of the Roman fort and town? Dr Douglas Simpson, in a letter to the writer, suggests that this was "an early monastic or anchoritic foundation in which the caves of Isis Parlis will have played their part; indeed there is a remarkable resemblance between the Brougham complex—Broccavum the Roman settlement, plus Ninekirks the preaching station, plus Isis Parlis the retreat—and St. Martin's arrangements at Tours."⁹ The point is one to which we shall have to return presently; meanwhile, I take this opportunity of acknowledging Dr Douglas Simpson's kind help in the study of the problem.

Despite the alleged connection of St. Ninian with the site of the church, there is ample evidence to show that its medieval dedication was to St. Wilfrid. A. J. Heelis, then rector of Brougham, speaking on the church in 1902, left the matter open;¹⁰ but there is really no doubt, witness the following references:—

(a) When Bricius de Penrith granted lands in this vicinity to the abbey of Holm Cultram, *circa* 1255, he set out the bounds; and the lands named include St. Wilfriholm (*The Register of Holm Cultram* = C. & W. Record Series vol. vii, 17, 85 and 127).

(b) In two medieval wills, of 1367 and 1382, there are references to the church of St. Wilfrid of Brougham; in that of 1382, a rector desires to be buried within the church (*Testamenta Karleolensia* = C. & W. Extra Series vol. ix, 87 and 148); it is known from a document of 1393 that burials were not allowed in Brougham chapel (N & B i 391), so that this record must apply to the parish church.

We have to jump to 1686 before we get any more light. A letter of that year in the Machell MSS. (i 522) refers to the parish of St. Wilfrid of Brougham. A little

⁹ Cf. *St. Ninian and Christian origins in Scotland* 53.

¹⁰ CW2 iii 354.

later, January 1701/2, the Brougham parish register contains the entry of a burial in the church of this name; and this cannot refer to the chapel, because Bishop Nicolson states in his *Survey* of 1703 (C. & W. Extra Series vol. i, 67) that "none are bury'd here". Lastly comes the most conclusive evidence of all: the inscription on the Bird chalice, given *circa* 1713, includes the words "ecclesia Sancti Wilfridi vulgariter appellata Ninekirkes". Here is absolute proof that the church referred to above as that of St. Wilfrid of Brougham is the same as that also referred to above as Ninekirkes. It is worth noting that this is the only ancient dedication to St. Wilfrid in the diocese of Carlisle; it would be inappropriate to insert a detailed account here, but it may be recalled that he was born in 634, died in 709, was bishop successively of York, Selsey and Hexham, and was buried at Ripon: he was thus one of the most noteworthy Northumbrian saints.

We must now go into the question of the siting of the church, an important matter overlooked by earlier writers. The theory that St. Ninian may have founded a monastery in the vicinity does not explain why the parish church and village were placed here. The charter of Gilbert de Brougham to Robert de Veteripont, *circa* 1230, shows that there was then a town of Brougham, and a study of the place-names in the charter suggests that the "town" was probably near the site of the present church. Now it is noteworthy that in the boulder of the barony, dated 1284, the "town" or village is not mentioned, but only "the walled church of Brougham"; and the wording of the document suggests that these lands were now within the forest of Whinfell (Appleby castle records, MSS. at Tullie House, Carlisle). Thus it seems clear that there was a village of Brougham, in the vicinity of the parish church, and that some time in the middle of the thirteenth century the village was destroyed and its land included within the forest.

That brings us to the really important point: why was the village ever on this site? The obvious place for it was where the Roman fort and the medieval castle stand, beside the bridge by which the Roman road crossed the Eamont; and that is plainly what Mr Birley had in mind when he wrote: "If there is any site in our district where Romano-British survival may be postulated it is here—away from English and from Norse alike—and the name suggests a survival of Roman *Brocavum* long into the post-Roman period."¹¹ But the curious fact is that, though the name survived, the population moved over a mile away, to a spot now known by a double name in which the Roman Ninian and the Northumbrian kirk are joined together; and the church which stands there has a double dedication, to the Roman Briton Ninian and to the Northumbrian Wilfrid.

There seems no doubt that the primary dedication was to the former. There are many parallel cases in Scotland, in all of which it is the primary dedication which persists in the memory and affections of the country folk: hence the title of the church, St. Wilfrid *commonly called* Ninekirks. The reverse process is unthinkable: we cannot imagine that a dedication to a great and powerful northern churchman like Wilfrid could ever have given place to one to the much less celebrated Ninian.

Taking all these facts together, what sequence of events do they suggest? First, surely, that in the survival of the Roman place-name *Brocavum* in the modern name of Brougham, and of the Romano-British personal name of Ninianus, in the form of Ninekirks, as the primary dedication of its church, we have evidence of folk memory, and therefore of continuous habitation, from Roman times until today. It is submitted that, while the existence of one of these forms might be attributed to chance (cf. CW2 xxxii 138), to assert that

¹¹ "Materials for the history of Roman Brougham", CW2 xxxii 124 f.

both together can be so attributed is to extend the arm of coincidence beyond the range of probability.

Assuming, therefore, the continuity of habitation as proven, an explanation must be sought for the fact that medieval records show the centre of that habitation to be, not by the Roman settlement (as we should have expected), but tucked away in a bend of the river, over a mile away. That Ninian or his disciples may have had a monastery there is not in itself sufficient reason for the medieval village being placed there. It must be emphasized that no theory of the histories of the sites occupied by the fort and castle and by the church respectively can be satisfactory unless it explains why the former was deserted in favour of the latter—and this fact has been overlooked in the past.

Now the chief difference between the two sites is in their accessibility. The fort and castle stand beside a road which from Roman times onward has been open to wayfarers — some friendly, some hostile to those who dwelt there. It requires little imagination to realise that at times (for instance, in the days of the Anglian invasions or of the passage of the men of Halfdene the Dane) that accessibility must have been a cause of fear and terror to the inhabitants. The exact opposite is true of the church site. From the main road it is even today completely hidden; in early medieval times, when trees large and small abounded, it would be even more so. In fact, at no period in its history can the large meadow in which the church stands have been visible to any traveller from that side until he reached the bank which immediately borders it; and on its other sides the meadow is almost as well hidden from prying eyes.

Let us picture then this small community of Roman Britons living, after the "departure of the legions", in the village beside the fort, on the main road from Carlisle to Stainmore and the south. Some, at least, of them are Christians (CW2 xxii 142), with memories of Ninian and

of the monastery which he had founded not far away. But life is becoming more and more uneasy, as the Anglian invaders pour along the road, until at last the villagers reach the stage of despair; and then someone has an inspiration—to seek refuge on Ninian's holy ground, where there is water, and good pasture, and protection from prying eyes and, in emergencies, the caves on the other side of the river for them to hide in. So off they go. Then, at some time, the Anglians find them. What happened to the sub-Roman villagers we do not know, but some of them must have survived, to preserve the memory of Ninian and the name of Brocavum. The Anglians were either Christians already, with a veneration for the great Northumbrian Wilfrid, or they were soon converted by missionaries with such a veneration; they were men who had little use for the saints of the conquered, but the conquered had long memories and did not forget their Ninian. And so today the saint of the vanquished, as well as the saint of the vanquisher, is commemorated in the twofold title of the church of St. Wilfrid of Brougham commonly called Ninekirks.

It is perhaps because the writer, as rector of Brougham, has had much time to ponder, as he has toiled along that path from the main road to the church, on why on earth anyone ever built a parish church in such a remote, though most beautiful place, that he has come to the theory here presented. If anyone else can produce a better one, let him produce it. But let it be noted once again that any theory, if it is to cover the facts, must explain not only why the church was placed on that site, but also why the village was placed there, instead of remaining where the fort had stood and where, in due course, the castle came to be built.

We now come to the later history of the church, but here there is not much to add to the account given by Mr Heelis.¹² A fragment of a twelfth-century moulded

¹² CW2 iii 353-365.

stone, now in the east wall of the chancel, gives an approximate date for the Norman church. There are also thirteenth-century coffin-lids — which have been appropriated by the Brougham family. To make it more realistic, they have added a skull to the collection, claiming it to be that of Odard de Burgham (who flourished *circa* 1175), and showing at the Hall “his good sword’s rust”, his spear, spurs and the like—but it all seems to savour more of Wardour Street than of fact. The present rector of the parish recently discovered, near the porch, the medieval altar stone, with three of its crosses clearly marked; this has now been moved inside the church and placed under the altar table.

Some account must now be given of Brougham chapel. In my “Prelates and People” (1948) p. 162 I somewhat incautiously accepted J. F. Curwen’s date of *circa* 1200 for its foundation,¹³ but on further reflection I cannot see that there is any real evidence for this statement, which is based on one by Nicolson and Burn (i 390) that “the chapel seems to have been erected” when the site of the ancient village was incorporated into Whinfell forest—that is to say, *circa* 1230. If we accept the view that references in ancient documents to St. Wilfrid’s apply to the parish church, and not to the chapel, then the earliest mention of the latter is in the agreement of 1393.¹⁴ This does not mean that the chapel may not have been erected earlier, but merely that there is no evidence for an earlier foundation; nor is there any evidence of its titular saint.

Unfortunately, the whereabouts of the document of 1393 is unknown, and we have to rely on Nicolson and Burn’s account of it; from that, it seems probable that at that time Ninekirks was only used for parish services on the greater festivals, all other services, except burials, being held in the chapel. Bishop Nicolson, in his

¹³ *The later records of North Westmorland* = C. & W. Record Series vol. viii, 284.

¹⁴ N & B i 390-391.

Miscellany Accounts,¹⁵ makes this interesting statement: "all the north side" of the chapel "is taken up with seats for the noble family at ye castle; the eldest wherof, as appears by the carving, were made in 1556". Taking these two records in conjunction, it seems probable that in the later Middle Ages Ninekirks was allowed to fall into decay—the chapel largely taking its place, except for burials; and that explains the state in which Lady Anne Clifford found it: "It would in all likelihood have fallen down it was so ruinous", she writes. Her great restoration of both church and chapel was fully described by Mr Heelis, and need not be recapitulated here. But it must be observed how tragic it is that we no longer have the interior of the chapel as she left it. Instead, it is a museum piece, crammed with magnificent fittings bought on the Continent by Lord Brougham. How much more interesting it would be to have the Clifford woodwork of 1556, with Lady Anne's additions! The difference between the furniture of the church and that of the chapel is just this: a rich man, even today, could create a Brougham chapel, but no wealth in the world could re-create the rude and rustic simplicity of a Westmorland church interior of the seventeenth century, such as Lady Anne has left us at Ninekirks.

It is rather strange, but despite the Laudian injunctions, Lady Anne's work at Ninekirks did not include altar rails. We know this from a presentment of 1685¹⁶:—

"We have all things in good order in and about our church except our altar which wants Rayling and that wee intend to get done quickly."

It is clear that at first the screen, between the nave and the chancel, ran across the church, with a door in the centre of it; today the door has been cut away, all but

¹⁵ C. & W. Extra Series vol. i, 67.

¹⁶ *The Registers of the parish of Brougham*, C. & W. Parish Register Series vol. xxxi, 72.

the top part of it. This screen was perhaps regarded by Lady Anne as equivalent to communion rails, and its partial removal may be connected with the provision of the new communion rails which seemed to make it superfluous.

When the writer became rector of Brougham, he found in the rectory an old table which seems to have been regarded as a rectorial heirloom, passing on from one incumbent to another. He also found in the church, not a seventeenth-century altar table, but a Victorian one. Now the table in the rectory was of a size that fitted nothing except an altar; the carvings on the legs were very similar to those on the Ninekirks furniture. As there seemed little doubt that this was the original altar table of Lady Anne's restoration, leave was obtained to replace it in the church. Nothing has been found to throw any light on the questions when and why it was ever transferred thence to the rectory.

A horrid fate often befalls all those who invent, or have invented for them, fictitious ancestors: sooner or later they are sure to be found out. There are some elaborate memorial slabs on the floor of the sanctuary at Ninekirks, obviously nineteenth-century work, but in imitation of older ones. One of them commemorates the marriage of Katherine Neville and Henry Brougham, ob. 1570. Now the Nevilles were, of course, earls of Westmorland and their pedigree has been very fully worked out — and no such marriage occurs in it. Katherine, daughter and heiress of Ralph Neville of Thornton Bridge, did marry Henry, second son of Edward, Lord Burgh, ob. 1529. What the Broughams have done is calmly to annex this match, turning Henry Burgh into Henry Brougham. Another of these slabs shows the claim of the Brougham family to be heirs to a Vaux barony: but not only was there in fact no such barony, but the Broughams were not even the heirs of the branch of the Vaux family from which they claimed

to base their rights (cf. CW2 xlvii 229). As far as the Burgh-Brougham blunder is concerned, it is possible that Lord Brougham was misled by a pedigree-monger; but it is difficult to believe that a man who rose to be Lord Chancellor did not know the truth about his claim to the Vaux title.

Within the last few months another famous Brougham monument—the Countess' Pillar—has been repaired, and its heraldry and inscription repainted. This has given rise to the interesting discovery that the pillar has two different dates inscribed on it. On the front, in high relief, is 1654; on the back, 1656. The most probable reason is that the pillar was erected in the earlier year, and the inscription added two years later. It is obvious that the plate which carries the inscription has been made to an inexact measurement—indeed, there is hardly room for the last line of the text. Strange though it may seem, not one of the printed copies of the text is correct; even Dr Williamson, in his great life of the Lady Anne, has erred. Below is given what it is hoped is a true copy:—

This Pillar was erected anno 1656
 by y^e r^t hono^{ble} Anne Countess dowager of
 Pembrook ec. daughter & sole heire of y^e r^t
 hono^{ble} George Earl of Cumberland ec. for a
 memorial of her last parting in this place
 with her good and pious mother y^e r^t hono^{ble}
 Margaret Countess dowager of Cumberland
 y^e 2^d of April 1616 in memory whereof
 she also left an annuity of four pounds
 to be distributed to y^e poor within this
 parish of Brougham euery 2^d day of April
 for euer upon y^e stone table here hard by
 Laus Deo