

UNRESOLVED MYSTERIES OF DERBYSHIRE HISTORY

Presidential Address by Gladwyn Turbutt

Looking back to the days of our earliest ancestors, it is clear that there are many mysteries concerning their ways of life and the artifacts associated with them. From excavations of graves on the limestone plateaus of north-west and north-east Derbyshire, no less than those discovered along the Trent valley, Victorian and later archaeologists have revealed a good deal about the rituals of death and burial of these early peoples, and the emphasis now – with many more tools and techniques at our disposal – is to discover more about the social and economic background of their lives. The Neolithic people who occupied the north-west uplands of Derbyshire from *c.* 3750 BC were the first settled farming communities, and this period ended with the gradual arrival of the vibrant ‘Beaker’ people (so-called from the characteristic pottery ‘beaker’ vessel found in their burial tombs) who were also responsible for developing the later design of henge monuments such as Arbor Low and the stone circle formerly situated at the Bull Ring at Dove Holes, as well as the mysterious ‘cursuses’ visible as crop marks at Aston-on-Trent and Findern. There has been much speculation about the Beaker peoples: in particular, the purpose of their megalithic monuments and their possible use in astronomical observations designed to formulate a primitive calendar, but the problems are too many to consider here and in any event they concern the whole of Britain.

However, there is one indigenous prehistoric mystery which has always puzzled me, and this is the subject of the first of my series of mysteries. The first half of the second millennium BC was a period of warm and dry weather very favourable for the pastoral economy practised by the Beaker settlers. Before long we find a new style of ceramic known as a ‘food-vessel’ being introduced to Derbyshire. The food-vessel was a fusion between Beaker ware and local insular Neolithic ware resulting in a hybrid, flat-based form of vessel with pronounced Beaker decorative features, and it has been found in numerous barrows in the High Peak. Also introduced for the first time were objects of bronze such as daggers, flat axes and awls, and even a few gold and amber personal ornaments which came from further afield. Thus this period came to be known as the ‘Bronze Age’. By about 1500 BC cremation began to be practised as a funeral rite by these Bronze Age people and Stanton Moor became a necropolis for the communities in the surrounding area. There now began to occur a significant population movement of food-vessel users away from the traditional Neolithic occupation areas in the centre of the limestone region (i.e between Taddington and Brassington). They appear to have moved eastwards towards the river Derwent and on to new settlement sites on the upland areas of the Millstone Grit. We may perhaps envisage an expanding population, with resultant pressures on the arable resources of the limestone area as the determining factor for this movement. It is now recognized that, following forest clearance, the fertility of the woodland soils is diminished with exploitation and gradually becomes impoverished, so that ultimately it may support only rough grazing for sheep and

cattle. This indeed was what my relations found when clearing the bush in New Zealand in the 19th century, but they had the advantage of new chemical fertilizers such as superphosphate and the ability to fence and stock the newly-cleared land. At any rate, the population gradually moved over to the gritstone area of East Moor, where there is evidence of considerable forest clearance, and extensive remains of Bronze Age settlement have been found at Swine Sty on Big Moor, north-east of Curbar, on Totley Moor, and elsewhere in this area.

Surprisingly, the latter years of the Bronze Age is a period in Derbyshire prehistory in which archaeological evidence is almost totally lacking, and remains of both artifacts and burials from this date are rare in the former settlement areas of both the limestone and gritstone uplands. This apparent blackout of the archaeological scene is in fact part of a remarkable prehistoric episode which has been observed from *c.* 1400 BC across the whole country. In Derbyshire – to quote the words of Colin Burgess – “all the established pottery types, beakers, food vessels, enlarged food vessels, collared, cordoned, encrusted and biconical urns and pigmy cups, and the whole range of burial and ritual monuments and practices with which they are associated, vanished at this time”. Thus the sequence of Bronze Age ceramic types seems to have come to an abrupt end and burials ceased in former cemetery areas like Stanton Moor. Furthermore, the distribution of finds of Late Bronze Age metalwork (that is, after 1000 BC) confirms the almost complete desertion of the limestone plateau by this period, with the relatively few finds concentrated along the edge of the Hope Valley and to the east of the Derwent. It is as if some cataclysm had stopped Bronze Age man in his tracks. What was the cause of this mysterious disappearance of the evidence of human life?

It has been suggested that the most likely catalyst for such a dramatic change may have been climatic. It is now thought that from about 1300 BC the climate began to deteriorate, with wet and stormy conditions and annual mean temperatures falling to some two degrees lower than those of today. Soil erosion also became a problem (as indicated by the frequent evidence of stone clearance from the land) and bogs began to form. My belief is that it was indeed adverse conditions such as these which drove later Bronze Age communities to seek new farm sites along the woodland edges of the river valleys and to desert the higher ground of the now-impoverished limestone and gritstone regions, which from then on could only be used for rough livestock grazing. Yet so far no new series of settlement sites has come to light which would confirm the movement to lower ground. However, we can readily envisage a scenario in which increasing population, resulting land pressures and economic and social rivalries began to lead to the growth of tribal antagonism; to the definition of tribal lands, and to the beginnings of defended hilltop sites which were to become a characteristic feature of the hill forts of the later Iron Age (and we know of these beginnings from archaeological evidence that there were late Bronze Age hut foundations and burials within the Mam Tor enclosure dating from *c.* 1100 BC). By about 400 BC signs appear of the new Celtic Iron Age peoples slowly coming up the Trent valley and then gradually spreading northwards on to the uplands where their predecessors had farmed before them, but whose demoralized remnants would have been in no condition to impede their advance.

If this is indeed the correct answer to the mystery, it demonstrates how early communities could be overwhelmed by the forces of nature, just as – in medieval times – we sometimes find villages becoming deserted for similar reasons. The deserted villages of

Barton Blount, Hungry Bentley and Alkmonon come to mind. The moral is perhaps that we should beware of assuming, for early peoples, an uninterrupted linear advancement in the economic background and quality of their lives. Nature – both then and now (as indeed we know from recent earthquakes and tsunamis) – can be frighteningly ruthless.

Let us now turn the clock forward to the arrival of the Roman army in Britain. From 43 AD the Roman army set about subduing Britannia. The earliest appearance of Roman troops in Derbyshire would have been about twenty years later when a small fort was constructed in the vicinity of Strutt's Park in Derby. However, it was not until the days of Agricola in the early 80s that the construction of garrison forts at strategic points in the upland areas of the county was undertaken. This led to the building of a road network to link these forts to their main base at Little Chester.

The Romans were not slow to survey the natural resources of their newly-conquered territories, and by the turn of the first century pottery kilns had been set up at Little Chester, Holbrook, Hazelwood and elsewhere to serve the needs of their troops in Derbyshire as well as for export. Coal, stone and marble were also exploited to a limited extent. But of much greater importance to Rome was the discovery of lead ore in massive amounts in the Derbyshire uplands. Lead was used throughout the Roman empire for many purposes: for roofs, building work, water pipes, cisterns and baths, for weights, for sealing trade consignments, and much else. Thus the army required continuous supplies for its fort construction programmes, as did civilian authorities for baths and other public buildings. The Romans were also aware that certain lead deposits (though not unfortunately in Derbyshire) were rich in silver and that this could be extracted by means of cupellation and used for the minting of coins and silver ingots. It is not surprising to find that within only six years of the Claudian invasion lead mining was already in full swing in the Mendips.

Derbyshire lead could clearly not be exploited until the Agricolan forts and road network had been completed, perhaps from about the early 80s. The main area of the lead-mining industry extended over much of the upland limestone region of north-west Derbyshire – between Wirksworth in the south and Castleton in the north. As in later days it was divided naturally into two districts: the High Peak field controlled from the military fort at Brough-on-Noe (*Navio*) – where traces of galena have been found, and the Low Peak field centred on *Lutudarum* - the putative overall administrative centre of the Derbyshire industry whose location has yet to be identified. This is my next mystery.

How did the name *Lutudarum* arise? The name appears as *Lutudaron* next to that of *Derbentione* (commonly agreed to be Little Chester, Derby) in a somewhat haphazard list of place-names contained in a seventh-century document known as the *Ravenna Cosmography*. Moreover, it occurs in an abbreviated form on 20 out of the 28 lead ingots (or pigs of lead) which have been identified as coming from the Derbyshire lead mines, and it is therefore assumed to have been the administrative centre of the Derbyshire lead-mining industry, and to have been located within a reasonable distance of *Derbentione*. Only one ingot was found in the High Peak lead field, in the village of Bradwell, but unfortunately the inscription had perished or it might have told us whether lead from that area was also regarded as part of the *Lutudarum* field and similarly stamped to those found in the Matlock, Cromford and Wirksworth areas.

We can only infer from the ingots discovered locally that their relatively denser concentration close to the Low Peak lead field is presumptive evidence for the site of *Lutudarum* being somewhere in this area.

The location of *Lutudarum* has been the subject of much speculation. In the light of excavations near Carsington prior to the construction of the Carsington reservoir, Roger Ling and Terry Courtney made a case for *Lutudarum* being in this area, especially as the buildings excavated were of Roman date and were close to the line of the Roman road between Buxton and Derby known as *The Street* (all now being submerged beneath the reservoir). However, I have my doubts about this.

With a commodity as heavy as lead, to be transported over a long distance, the Romans would have opted, if at all possible, for water-borne conveyance rather than transport by road. The river Derwent – assuming it were then navigable by shallow-draught barges (frequently used by the Romans for river transportation) – offers the obvious method of transportation. Lead from the High Peak field could be taken by road along the Old Portway to the river Wye at Ashford (a road which, near Great Hucklow, had been widened to 20 feet and showed signs of being reconstructed at least three times) and thence down the Derwent, while lead from the Low Peak could be taken to the river Derwent at Cromford. The barges or rafts would be sent downstream to Little Chester, and then on to the Trent, and from there to *Petuaria* (Brough-on-Humber) where a number of Derbyshire stamped ingots have been found, suggesting that it was an entrepôt where lead was either sent on by road to York, or transhipped into ocean-going vessels. From here during the second century large quantities of lead would have been shipped to the Roman port on the Tyne at South Shields for use on the Roman Wall installations. Moreover, we know that at *Petuaria* were stationed the *Numerus barcariorum Tigrisiensium*, or ‘Tigris barge-men’, who would have been ideally suited to bringing lead down the river Derwent from the Derbyshire lead-fields. It is worth noting that in the twelfth century William de Ferrers granted Darley Abbey a licence to transport wood from Duffield Frith by water – demonstrating that there must have been sufficient depth in the river Derwent at that period for rafts loaded with wood to be used as a means of transportation.

From the Low Peak field we may envisage that lead would have been taken downhill to Cromford in wagons, which would then have been hauled uphill empty. Cromford would be ideally situated as a collecting centre for lead, since roads would have led downhill to it from both Middleton and Bonsall Moors. A possible reason for the early disappearance of the Roman road between Brassington and Derby is that commercial freight all used the steep hill down to the wharf at Cromford, while road traffic used the route through Wirksworth to the Derwent at Makeney or Duffield (and thence either across to the Rykniel Street or south through Little Eaton to Derby). It is clear that by the late seventeenth century when John Ogilby embarked on his great road map of the country, the southern section of *The Street* had gone out of use as a thoroughfare and he depicted a new road from Derby to Brassington via Kedleston and Hognaston, thereafter following the northern course of *The Street* to Buxton, much as today.

However, it is an open question whether a collecting centre and wharf need have been coincident with the administrative centre for the lead-field, assuming such were situated near Carsington. And we must also pose the question whether the final moulding into stamped ingots might not have been a secondary operation – with crude,

unstamped ingots produced in bole-hearths from both the High and Low Peak lead-fields (such as the two ingots found at Carsington in 1983) being collected for re-moulding, stamping and weighing at, say, Cromford, before being despatched by river and road to different parts of the country (those going by road accounting for the ingots found near Cromford, Matlock and Tansley).

Another appropriate site for *Lutudarum* would be in the neighbourhood of Middleton Cross. This would be close to the main Roman road coming up through Wirksworth from the Derwent crossing at Makeney or Duffield and proceeding north via the Chariot Way to Ashford and the High Peak lead-field, with a branch road leading off to join the Derby-Buxton road near Minninglow. It is perhaps significant that tradition asserts that enslaved Roman convicts of the Emperor Hadrian who worked in the mines were housed at Middleton. In this connection a most unusual three-acre T-shaped enclosure (containing 'possible rectangular huts or divisions') surrounded by lead-mining spoil heaps has been identified by Harry Lane on the north side of Middleton Moor, and excavation might reveal whether it was a lead workers' barracks or indeed some official building connected with the industry.

In view of the lack of firm evidence – and particularly the absence of stamped ingots from the High Peak area – all that can be proffered at present is a bland statement that *Lutudarum* is likely to have been located somewhere in the region of Wirksworth. And we must hope that, before long, someone discovers the remains of a barge laden with lead ingots in the river silt of the rivers Derwent or Trent on its way to Brough-on-Humber, or that excavations on Middleton Moor or in the vicinity of Middleton Cross may bring us closer to discovering the mystery of the whereabouts of *Lutudarum*.

The next unresolved mystery is one which offers no tangible clues whatsoever and to me is perhaps the most fascinating of all those which I am laying before you. The first appearance of Christianity in Derbyshire is a subject of considerable interest about which there can be little more than speculation. Christianity had reached Britain by the second century AD, and St Alban – a Roman citizen and reputedly the first British Christian martyr – is supposed to have died about the year 208. By 312 Christian bishoprics had been established at York, London and possibly Lincoln, and these sent representatives to the Council of Arles in 314. Thanks to Constantine I's prohibition of sacrifices, the worship of household gods and the closure of pagan temples (391–392), the new religion was helped forward in its early years and enabled to meet the intense competition from other cults (such as Mithraism and Sol Invictus). Very few buildings with clearly identifiable Christian associations have been found in Britain which date from the Romano-British period, and only a few articles bearing the Chi-Rho monogram (deriving from the Greek *chi* (X) and *rho* (P) signifying the beginning of the word *Christos* or 'the Anointed One'), of which the Water Newton hoard of church plate is perhaps the best known. From this period Derbyshire can claim the rare silver tray, known as the 'Risley Park lanx', which was originally found in 1729 in Risley Park.

The subsequent history of the lanx is both curious and mysterious. When discovered the lanx was broken into several pieces. These were re-assembled, and were examined by the antiquary William Stukeley who published an article on it in 1736 with an engraving by G. van der Gucht. The Risley lanx, a rectangular silver tray of similar size and shape (15 × 20 ins) to one discovered in 1735 at Corbridge, Northumberland, and decorated with pastoral and hunting scenes, was correctly identified by Stukeley as

being of the late Roman period. Of great significance was the fact that beneath the tray was an inscription which we now know to be: 'EXUPERIUS EPISCOPUS BOGIENSI DEDIT (Chi-Rho)', the Christogram emphasizing its Christian context and signifying that the tray was a gift by a Bishop Exuperius to the Bogiensian church. Stukeley was much exercised in attempting to identify both the donor and the church, and finally concluded that the bishop was Exuperius, the fourth-century bishop of Toulouse, and the church that of Baugé, the site of a battle between the English and French in 1421, from which church he supposed the tray had been looted and carried back to England, being eventually presented to Dale Abbey (three miles from Risley) whose monks buried it for safety at the time of the Dissolution. Contemporary scholars disagreed, and the consensus of view was that the church should be identified with that of Bayeux whose first bishop was named Exuperius.

Between 1736 and *c.* 1920 the lanx disappeared. In 1991 it re-appeared in a London gallery, but with a difference: the tray was not precisely identical to that engraved in 1736. After extensive tests it was found that the composition of the metal was indeed consistent with that of late Roman silver, but that the tray had not been buried in the ground and that its casting structure was puzzling. In short, it appeared that – at some date after 1736 – casts had been made of the original fragments of the lanx which had then been soldered together. Therefore, what we see today is a precise and unique copy of the original lanx dug up in 1729. British Museum scholars Catherine Johns and Kenneth Painter have suggested that, on technical grounds, the original lanx may have been cast by a craftsman accustomed to working in pewter and probably located in Britain. If that is so, then we need to seek an English bishop and church, and they postulate an Exuperius bishop of a cathedral located on an estate belonging to land-owner named Bogius. The whereabouts of such an estate and bishopric is at present unknown.

Such is the story, and, as you will appreciate, it raises many questions. The least of which is who was responsible for re-casting (between 1736 and 1991) the fragments of the original lanx to produce the attractive piece of reconstituted Roman silver which we see today in the British Museum? Secondly, was Stukeley correct in supposing that the lanx had been given to Dale Abbey whose monks buried it for safety at the Dissolution? If the monks had indeed buried it for safety, then surely other items of church plate would have been buried with it. None were apparently found. It is more likely, in my view, that it was stolen from the abbey and dumped by a fugitive from justice and never recovered. If the lanx had been given to Dale Abbey – a plausible suggestion in view of where it was found – who might the donor have been and how did he or she acquire it? Stukeley suggested that the lanx had been looted by English soldiers from the church of Baugé in 1421, but other scholars have held that the lanx originally belonged to Bayeux whose first bishop was named Exuperius.

To take the Baugé suggestion first. After Henry V's successful Normandy campaign of 1415 had culminated in the battle of Agincourt on 25th October that year, English troops remained in France under the command of the Duke of Clarence to confront the Dauphinist army which had recently been reinforced by the arrival of a contingent from Scotland. On 22nd March 1421, Clarence rashly attacked the enemy near Baugé with only part of his army and pursued them into the town where some of the Scots shut themselves up in the parish church where they were besieged by the English

troops. However, the French managed to regroup and attacked Clarence's small force, and Clarence and several of his companions were killed. It would therefore have been possible for the English soldiers to have gained possession of the church at Baugé in the initial stages of the skirmish (though whether this happened is unknown), to have looted the lanx from the church and then made their escape before being cut down by the French. But the circumstances of such a theft seem to me improbable. On the other hand, there would have been ample opportunity while the English forces were campaigning in Normandy during the Hundred Years War for the lanx to have been stolen from Bayeux, but the chance of our discovering when and by whom must be minimal. Both bishop and Bogius are surely beyond our reach. So there we must leave this mystery, and I am extremely doubtful whether – short of the miraculous appearance of some historical evidence – it will ever be resolved.

The church of St Mary at Wirksworth, a former minster church built on a large and ancient royal estate, was originally the mother church of much of the surrounding countryside. It was possibly the only Derbyshire settlement site at which Christian worship had been maintained from Romano-British times, its circular churchyard being an indication of a very early foundation. There is no suggestion in the predominantly 13th century architecture of the church, with its crossing tower and spire and transepts, of its very early origins, although there are a number of fragments of Norman stonework which suggest an impressive predecessor. Nor is there any surviving sculptured high cross within its precincts. But the chief glory of the church lies in an exceptionally interesting Anglo-Saxon grave or shrine cover discovered in 1820 two feet below the surface of the pavement in front of the high altar covering – upside down – a stone-built vault which contained a large and perfect human skeleton. It had apparently been re-used as a convenient cover for this grave, which, because of its position, must have been that of an important person. It seems highly unlikely that the inverted grave cover could have had any connection with the tomb over which it had been placed; it is more probable that the remains of the pre-Norman church were used indiscriminately as building material in the erection of its successor, and that the grave cover – being of a convenient length – was reused to cover the new vault of some distinguished individual closely associated with the Norman rebuilding.

It is clear that the grave cover was designed for a tomb which was to be placed against a wall, probably on a low plinth, so that spectators could look down on it. This is evident from the design of the sculptured stone itself. In form, it comprises a slightly coped coffin lid, divided lengthwise into two compartments by a rib, each compartment being filled with a series of biblical scenes. Its structure and design is very similar to early Christian sarcophagi of Italy and Gaul. But the scenes of each sub-compartment are carved so as to be viewed from one side of the tomb only – rather than being carved back-to-back as would be the case if spectators had been free to circumambulate the tomb. We may reasonably assume therefore that this was the cover of the tomb or shrine of an important ecclesiastic of the Anglo-Saxon church at Wirksworth, and which would have been placed against one of the walls of the chancel in the original Anglo-Saxon church. The records are however strangely silent on this point, and no local missionary priest or saint is traditionally associated with Wirksworth. The mystery therefore is: whose tomb was it?

With regard to the tomb itself, we first notice that the left-hand edge of the stone has been broken off, so that the original sculpture would have contained five scenes along each face of the coped stone illustrating important biblical events or feasts of the then current liturgical calendar, and with the Symbolic Crucifixion and Ascension scenes in the central position. There has been much discussion as to the interpretation of the various scenes depicted and the question of what scenes were illustrated on the left-hand section of the grave cover now broken off. There is general agreement on the central panels representing the Ascension and Symbolic Crucifixion. The latter depicts the Lamb of God in the centre of a Greek Cross between symbols of the four Evangelists, which Jane Hawkes believes is not in fact an *Agnus Dei*, the sacrificial lamb and symbol of Christ's Passion, which was used in art specifically from the ninth century onwards, but rather an *Agnus Victor*, the Lamb of the Apocalypse illustrating Christ 'the eternal victor and universal sovereign', which was based on models in the West between the sixth and eighth centuries AD. There is agreement, too, on the panels representing the *Pedilavum* (or Christ washing the Disciples' Feet), the Annunciation, and the Burial of the Virgin.

As to the date of the work, both the figural style and the iconography of the carvings provide important clues. Most scenes are based on Eastern Christian art forms of the sixth century. Jane Hawkes, in a scholarly study published in 1995, suggests that 'most of the scenes could have been reproduced in Mercia at any time after the sixth century' while noting the 'absence of any sign of the iconographic developments associated with Carolingian art of the late eighth and ninth centuries'. This narrows the production date to between 600 and 800 AD, and most scholars seem generally of the view that the grave cover cannot be later than 800 AD.

We may note the importance throughout the work of the place of the Blessed Virgin, whose cult had reached England from Rome at an early date. The feast of the Dormition (15 August) was introduced into the Roman church at the end of the seventh century, while in the Gallic church a feast commemorating the Virgin's death was celebrated in January from as early as the sixth century. There was however at that period a theological debate concerning the corporeal assumption of the Virgin, but the legend of her death and funeral procession – as depicted on the grave cover – was well known and uncontroversial. Undoubtedly the Marian cult played an important part in the Anglo-Saxon church, and during the course of the eighth century liturgical celebrations of the Purification, Annunciation, Assumption and Nativity became established. If, on figural and iconographical grounds the Wirksworth grave cover may be dated to the eighth century AD, whom did it commemorate?

It will be recalled that the earliest Derbyshire ecclesiastics were the four missionary priests sent by St Finan of Lindisfarne in 653. Of these Diuma, an Irishman, was consecrated bishop of the Middle Angles and the Mercians in 656 with his *cathedra* at Repton, where he died shortly afterwards. Of the other three, Cedda became bishop of the East Saxons and died of the plague at Lastingham Abbey in 663, being later canonized like his brother Chad. Adda became abbot of Gateshead where he is presumed to be buried. Of the subsequent career of the fourth, Betti, we know nothing. If Betti had lived to old age one would have expected him to die about the year 700. And if it were then decided to construct a shrine in his honour this might well not have been accomplished for a further decade, and its artistic style would therefore match the

period of the sculptures on the grave cover. Thus a prime candidate for commemoration by such an elaborate tomb is the missionary priest Betti (as maintained by the late Dr Charles Cox). Yet we have to admit the total lack of any positive evidence connecting Betti with any particular minster church in the county (although Professor Cameron has noted that the name 'Back Bridge' in Ashbourne was formerly known as *Bettebrugge* which could be translated as 'Betta's Bridge').

We *could* speculate that Betti was the only one of the original four missionaries who devoted a long and arduous life to the evangelisation of Derbyshire (Diuma, the diocesan, having died relatively young); that he and his acolytes founded – or possibly re-founded – the minster church at Wirksworth which he dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary; that he also founded the nearby minster church at Ashbourne and dedicated it to the popular Northumbrian saint Oswald (a close relative of the Northumbrian king under whose patronage his mission had originally been dispatched); and that he finally retired to Wirksworth where he died, and where a shrine was subsequently erected in his memory in the chancel of his new church.

Another interesting speculation has been made by Jane Hawkes who has suggested that in view of the emphasis on Marian scenes on the grave cover 'the iconography of the slab suggests that those worshipping at the shrine included in their number a significant female presence. It implies in fact that the sarcophagus was originally set up, either within a female monastery, or more likely, within a double monastery'. Bearing in mind the fact that Repton, with its close links to Wirksworth, was a double monastery ruled *c.* 700 AD by Abbess Aelfthryth – and continuing to be ruled by abbesses for at least the following century – it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that a similar monastic community had been established by the early missionaries at Wirksworth (dedicated, appropriately, to the Blessed Virgin Mary) and that this shrine commemorated the first patroness or abbess of this house. We should remember that, in this same generation, no fewer than six abbesses of religious houses (including St Werburgh) were female members of the Mercian royal house, and that it may have been another of these aristocratic ladies – hitherto anonymous – who was in fact the person in whose memory this elaborately carved shrine was made. Jane Hawkes also suggests that one of the two diminutive figures beneath the mandorla surrounding Christ in the Ascension scene – although it has to be said that the gender of this figure is not altogether clear – may in fact be that of the patroness.

It is nevertheless truly amazing that this outstanding piece of sculpture was discovered quite by chance after languishing below ground for more than seven centuries. It is indeed a remarkable story, yet the person it commemorates remains an unresolved mystery.

My next mystery concerns Chesterfield and the Norman Conquest. The minster churches of Derbyshire were built on the largest pre-Conquest royal estates which after the Norman Conquest are listed as royal manors to which were attached a number of outlying berewicks or areas of sokeland. They were given endowments by the Mercian kings and sympathetic noblemen. Although the Domesday Survey is well known for its haphazard listing of churches, most of the Derbyshire minsters may be recognized as churches of superior status by the fact that they have one or more priests and endowments of at least one carucate. However, there is no mention in the Survey of any church or priest at Chesterfield, which features merely as one of several berewicks of

the royal manor of Newbold (1½ miles to the north-west). Indeed, there is even doubt as to whether the berewick termed Chesterfield was not in fact a place-name for sokeland in Wingerworth! Yet within seven years of Domesday, in 1093, we find King William II giving the church of St Mary and All Saints (described as being situated in the 'manor of Chesterfield'), along with its dependent chapelries of Brampton and Wingerworth, to the bishop and cathedral church of Lincoln. The mystery is therefore threefold: how can we reconcile the relationship between Newbold and Chesterfield at Domesday? Was the Domesday scribe correct in making no mention of a church or priest at either place? What was the history and condition of the church which William II gave to Lincoln in 1093?

Turning to the first of these problems, it is now generally accepted that Newbold (OE for 'new building') was the newly-built manor house representing the *caput* of this large and important manor. To the Domesday scribe Newbold would simply have been the 'capital mansion' of the royal manor he wished to describe, and as such the administrative centre and venue for the manor court. Why, then, did he not mention the presence on the royal manor of a church or priest? The simplest answer may turn out to be the correct one: that in 1085–6 there was neither church nor priest at Newbold or Chesterfield. This does not discount the possibility of their having been an earlier Anglo-Saxon church, but it may have been destroyed and was still lying in ruins. We should therefore consider the likelihood of the church having existed as a pre-Conquest minster.

The strongest argument in favour of this is that Newbold was the principal vill and centre of the only large royal manor within the wapentake of Scarsdale. Its structure of six berewicks and seven areas of sokeland is comparable with other typical pre-Conquest royal manors (e.g. Ashbourne, Wirksworth and Bakewell) all of which possessed minster churches. The position of the church immediately on top of a former Roman fort in Chesterfield is historically significant (cf York Minster). Moreover, in the early medieval period Chesterfield was a 'hundredal manor', i.e. a manor associated with the lordship of a hundred or wapentake. This type of manor was usually based on ancient pre-Conquest royal estates which were recorded as ancient demesne in the Domesday Survey, and manor and hundred were often known by the same name. So it is not surprising to find that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there are references in documents to the 'wapentake of Chesterfield'. Similarly Wirksworth was a hundredal manor (whose name became synonymous with that of the hundred from 1180 onwards), and it is well known that this had been a royal estate and the seat of a minster church several centuries prior to the Conquest. Other pointers to its former status have been noted, such as the employment of two portionary vicars in the late twelfth century and we also learn from a clerical subsidy list of 1533 that the church then had a staff of no less than 13 (including a vicar, curate, gild priests and cantarists). From another angle the present church of St Mary's and All Saints possessed attributes of a minster church by virtue of its association with four early medieval trade gilds in the town, and their gild priests had a tradition as late as the sixteenth century of sharing in parochial work. Archaeologically and historically, however, there is no evidence for its early existence. All that survives within the church from the early period is the Norman font and some Norman stonework built into the present fabric. There are no traces of Anglo-Saxon building work or of any pre-Conquest sculptured crosses.

Nevertheless, we know that Christianity had spread north from Repton by the eighth century through Wirksworth and Bakewell and then to the Peak District, as is shown by the evidence of sculptured stone crosses and grave covers, and there is no *prima-facie* reason why it should not also have penetrated into north-east Derbyshire. But it seems that the Danish occupation from the latter years of the ninth century resulted in the destruction of all manifestations of earlier Christian worship in the wapentake of Scarsdale, an area heavily populated by the Danish ‘army’. It would not have been until the second half of the tenth century, after the re-conquest of the Danelaw and by which date the Danes had mostly become Christian, that Christianity would have been able to reassert itself in this part of Derbyshire. It may be significant that the sculptured stone cross preserved at the church of St Werburgh, Blackwell, only nine miles south of Chesterfield, is of this period, and is therefore perhaps an indication of the later reemergence of Christian communities in north-east Derbyshire. As a consequence, churches had been built or rebuilt by the time of the Domesday Survey at Staveley, Barlborough and Elmton. But the fact that at Domesday a priest, but no church, is recorded under Eckington, Newton (i.e Blackwell, known to be a pre-Domesday foundation), Stainsby (i.e Ault Hucknall) and South Wingfield suggests that these churches – like the church at Chesterfield – had disappeared by 1086. Why was this? Perhaps the clue may be found in the Domesday values of some of the manors: Eckington had declined from £7 in the time of King Edward to 60s., and its soke in Beighton was declared to be waste; Newton (i.e Blackwell) had declined from £4 to 30s; Stainsby (i.e Ault Hucknall) from 40s. to 30s.. These sharp reductions in value are uncomfortably reminiscent of King William’s devastation of the north in 1069–1070 when the counties of York, Derby, Chester and Shropshire all suffered severely.

This ‘destruction theory’ seems the most plausible. It would allow for Chesterfield’s earlier history as a minster church and explain its absence from the Domesday Survey. The Domesday silence would conceal the destruction of the church as King William’s troops moved northwards along the Rykneld street in 1069–1070 destroying also the churches of South Wingfield, Blackwell and Ault Hucknall on their way, along (no doubt) with the dwelling houses of the inhabitants of these villages. Was it then an act of contrition on the part of his son William Rufus to rebuild the church at Chesterfield after his father’s death and to present it, in 1093, to the bishop and cathedral church of St Mary, Lincoln, ‘for the good of the souls of my father and mother and for myself.’ At the time of his donation of the church Rufus also gave a landed endowment, and from 1093 the Chesterfield ‘rectory manor’ which was soon to become a personal estate of the Dean of Lincoln, became separate from the principal manor of Chesterfield which remained in Crown hands until 1204.

The church’s double dedication could have arisen if the first minster church had been dedicated to St Mary, and after its putative rebuilding on the same site by William II it was then re-dedicated to All Saints. Moreover, if the Anglo-Saxon minster (dedicated to St Mary) had been virtually destroyed, it would probably have been rebuilt from scratch, and this would account for the lack of any visible pre-Norman building work within its fabric. This however can only be speculation. On the other hand it is possible that the gild of the Blessed Mary, which was founded in 1219, gradually attained a status of such importance in the affairs of the church that the name of the Blessed Virgin began to be coupled with that of All Saints. It would be reassuring – and not

altogether surprising (on the analogy of St Alkmund's, Derby) – if fragments of early Christian sculptured stone crosses and gravestones were to be discovered in any future excavations within the precincts of the church: they would provide tangible evidence of a hitherto elusive but undeniable antiquity of the church of St Mary and All Saints and thereby help to resolve this puzzling mystery.

For the last my mysteries let us turn to Derby. One of the best-known streets in central Derby is St Mary's Gate, but the church from which it takes its name has received little attention since its demolition probably in the sixteenth century. It was long assumed that St Mary's was one of the four pre-Conquest churches in the borough of Derby listed in Domesday. These were typical foundations of the late Anglo-Saxon period, being privately-owned churches founded by laymen on their own estates. It has now been established that these four churches belonged in 1066 to Toki, Leofric, Brown and Coln, respectively. In addition to these, there were of course also listed in Domesday the two minster churches of St Alkmund and All Saints. What, then, is the history of the church of St Mary – the last of my mysteries?

This is in fact a singularly interesting question, since the history of St Mary's church is something of an enigma. We know that it was given by William I to Burton Abbey in or before 1085 as part of an estate which included the manor and church of Mickleover (together with its dependencies and chapelries), property in Derby such as *Copecastel* mill and Sheriff's mill, various tenements and 12 acres of meadow in the Wardwick. The fact that Domesday Book shows no churches listed as belonging to Burton in 1086 need not invalidate the reality or date of William's gift, since the Domesday record of churches is notoriously incomplete. A Burton cartulary of c. 1100 records the fact that the abbey held a church in Derby of which Godric was the priest, which presumably was St Mary's, while Godric also appears as a tenant holding two bovates of land on the abbey's Mickleover estate. In 1114 another cartulary records that the abbey held a church in Derby – again, presumably St Mary's – which was held by Godric the priest, and that Godric held four bovates of land, together with the church and its tithes in Mickleover, and that another priest by the name of Swein was also a Mickleover tenant. It is a reasonable inference, therefore, that between c. 1100 and 1114 the church of St Mary and its dependent chapelries, with all their tithes, was held by Godric assisted by Swein, who represented the nucleus of what might be termed the St Mary's team ministry.

Now shortly after 1253 Thomas of Muskham in his Chronicle of Dale Abbey refers to the church of St Mary as having had in the previous century – and I quote in English – 'a large parish and the church of Mickleover and its chapelries was subject to it'. This categorical assertion that St Mary's was the mother church of Mickleover, and that it had a *magnam parochiam*, is of a significance which has hitherto been overlooked. Since Mickleover in the time of Edward 'The Confessor' was a large royal manor with dependent berewicks and sokeland, as well as property in Derby, its mother church must have been built on royal demesne and must also have had a status equal to the minster churches of St Alkmund and All Saints which themselves were built on royal demesne and were the nuclei of former royal estates.

What, then, was its early history and its relationship to the other two minster churches? On this we can only speculate. Let us first look at dates. For the building of St Alkmund's Dr Radford suggested 'a date in the eighth or even at the end of the

seventh, would be appropriate and would accord with the importance of the church in the ninth century'. St Alkmund (it will be recalled) was killed *c.* 800. During excavation it was found that the building was extensively damaged – probably by the Danes about the time they sacked Repton in 873–4, and it was then largely rebuilt. My contention is that St Mary's, another minster church built on royal demesne and within a short distance from St Alkmund's, was also badly damaged at the same time. But with the increasing reputation of St Alkmund's as a place of pilgrimage for Northumbrians, and in consequence its stronger financial position, the church of St Mary probably languished. Less than a century later, when King Edmund was contemplating a new ecclesiastical foundation in Derby about the year 940, he might have decided – rather than rebuilding and augmenting the resources of the existing church of St Mary – to build a new minster church, dedicated to All Saints, on a fresh site and to found a new college of secular priests (which, as we know, later became known as The College). The Domesday record shows that the 'new' minster was more generously endowed both in property and personnel than the old minster of St Alkmund. And, as we have noted earlier, there is no mention in Domesday of a church that can be identified as St Mary's.

In a papal bull of 1185 St Mary's is cited as one of King Willam's donations to Burton Abbey, but after that it disappears from the records. Furthermore, it does not feature again in the inventories of Burton property. What happened to it? Was it perhaps handed over by Burton Abbey to the new minster of All Saints? It may be significant that in 1252 the Dean of Lincoln acting as 'Dean of the Free Chapel of All Saints at Derby' decided to unite the older collegiate church of St Alkmund with that of All Saints, by whose clergy it was thereafter served. Its endowments were also amalgamated with those of All Saints. After this reorganization it is possible that Burton Abbey – which is known to have been in a parlous financial position in the early thirteenth century – saw the chance of having its church of St Mary taken into the new pastoral system for central Derby and offered the church of St Mary together with a small endowment to All Saints to bring this about. The fact that rents in the Wardwick originally forming part of William's grant of St Mary's to Burton Abbey appears at the dissolution of the College of All Saints in 1548–9 as part of the college property, and also that the site of St Mary's and its cemetery appear to have been absorbed into the parish of All Saints, suggests that this is what may have happened. But although stripped of its original minster status the church of St Mary continued to exist, and we may note that in the will of one Richard Robinson, dated 1518, he made a bequest of a veil to adorn the image of the Virgin Mary 'standing in the chapel in sent Mary gate'. When the College of All Saints was dissolved and its assets appropriated by the Crown in 1548 no funds remained for pastoral provision at any of the minster churches. This however was partially rectified in 1554 when Queen Mary granted the corporation of Derby sufficient property to found a perpetual vicarage at St Alkmund's and two perpetual vicars at All Saints. By that date St Mary's had almost certainly become redundant and would have been demolished.

In 1925 stone foundations and two skeletons were found at a building site on the north side of St Mary's Gate close to its junction with Queen Street. Without doubt these must have been the remains of St Mary's church and its churchyard. It is doubtful whether there will be any other opportunity to engage in trial excavations in this area

in the foreseeable future. But there could well be documentary evidence awaiting discovery which might throw further light on the intriguing mystery of St Mary's Church.

I have tried to present you with a selection of unresolved mysteries from Prehistoric, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Derbyshire history. There are of course countless others. But at least the ones I have chosen illustrate the diversity of the history of the county and will I hope stimulate further research, or even excavation, in an attempt to find convincing – rather than speculative – solutions.