

ART. VIII – *Athelwold the Bishop and Walter the Priest: a new source for the early history of Carlisle Priory*

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The origins of Carlisle Priory, and hence of Carlisle cathedral, are so obscure that any addition to the small body of information presently available is something to be warmly welcomed. There survives, both among the muniments of St Edmund Hall, Oxford (at present deposited in the Bodleian Library), and as part of the records of the Dean and Chapter of Carlisle lately placed in the keeping of the Cumbria Record Office in Carlisle, a transcript of a charter of Athelwold, the first bishop, which sheds valuable light on the early fortunes of both the Priory and the see.<sup>1</sup> At Carlisle this document occurs among papers belonging to Dr Hugh Todd, a scholarly canon of Carlisle in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, in a gathering of seven folios whose numbering – 299 to 306 – shows that it once belonged to a larger collection. That collection will doubtless have provided a basis for Todd's *An Historical Description of the Bishoprick of Carlisle, Sacred, Civic and Natural*, now preserved in manuscript in Oxford, in which another copy of Athelwold's charter may be found.<sup>2</sup>

It is most unlikely that Todd had access to an original document, even though some of Carlisle Priory's early charters do appear to have survived into the seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> That he used a copy is strongly suggested by his description of its seal, as 'The Figure of a Bishop in his Pontifical Habit, leaning upon his Right Elbow'. No twelfth-century bishop would have been shown on his seal in such a posture; Athelwold would certainly have been represented standing upright, with his right hand raised in blessing, and it is hard to imagine Todd, who was a learned man, misrepresenting a seal in this way, if he had had it before him. But a drawing of a seal, if presented horizontally (as seals often were by antiquarians), might easily suggest a recumbent figure reminiscent of a sixteenth or seventeenth century tomb effigy, especially if the seal was damaged or the artist unskilful. What Todd saw, it may be suggested, was an earlier transcript of Athelwold's charter, decorated with a picture of the bishop's seal.

Where he came across such a transcript can only be a matter of speculation. It could have been in the archives of the Dean and Chapter, though very little from them survived the civil wars of the mid-seventeenth century – Todd himself recorded sadly that 'The Registries of the Priory of Carlisle, as to all the affairs of the Convent, before its Desolution, 31 H.8 (if ever any such were in being) are entirely lost and gone. . .'.<sup>4</sup> But it is more likely that he found it in the collections of the antiquary John Denton of Cardew (d.1617), which he acknowledged having consulted: Not only did Denton, who was said to have accumulated 'whole loads of old evidences gotten heere and there',<sup>5</sup> have access to early manuscripts belonging to Henry Robinson, bishop of Carlisle from 1598 to 1616 – indeed, he was alleged to have stolen some of them – but in his own *Accompt of the most considerable Estates and Families in the County of Cumberland* he wrote of the early endowment of Carlisle Priory in terms (discussed further below) so similar to those of Athelwold's charter,

as to leave little doubt that he had himself consulted that document. Certainty on this point is not to be had, but it seems reasonable to surmise that Denton possessed a copy of the charter, which Todd later transcribed.

The charter is a typical product of the mid-twelfth century. Athelwold, styling himself by divine grace bishop of Carlisle, informs all the faithful that through his episcopal authority he has confirmed to Prior Walter and the convent of Carlisle all the lands and churches which belonged to Walter the Priest, and which King Henry I gave in alms. The lands consist of Linstock, Rickerby (the first appearance of this place-name), High and Low Crosby, Walby, Brunstock, Carleton and 'the other Carleton' – probably a secondary settlement; the churches are those of St Cuthbert in Carlisle and Stanwix. The bishop confirms to the Priory all the other lands and possessions given to it in charity, and declares it his wish that the canons should hold them peacefully and quietly, in accordance with the charters of Henry I and other benefactors. His own charter is witnessed by Robert the archdeacon, Ughtred de Carlatton, Ralph Engaine and Enoch de Walton, and is authenticated by his seal.

Although it does not survive in its original form, there seems to be no reason to doubt the charter's authenticity. Its style is indistinguishable from that of countless others from the middle years of the twelfth century, while its witnesses are entirely consistent with a date of *circa* 1150. Walter is first recorded as prior of Carlisle in about that year,<sup>6</sup> and shortly afterwards addressed an instrument to St Martin's Priory at Richmond in collaboration with the second witness to Athelwold's charter, Robert the archdeacon,<sup>7</sup> here making what is probably his first recorded appearance. Ughtred of Carlatton twice subscribed as a witness to deeds in favour of Wetheral Priory in the 1160s and 1170s.<sup>8</sup> Ralph Engaine, lord of the minor barony of Burghby-Sands in the right of his wife, was an early benefactor of Carlisle Priory, granting the canons Harraby with its mill.<sup>9</sup>

Especially interesting is the presence of Enoch of Walton. One of the abiding puzzles of the early history of the church in Cumbria has been the inquest into the status of Triermain chapel conducted by unnamed elders in the 1230s, recording how Gilemor the son of Gilandrus had constructed and endowed a chapel made of wattle at Triermain, 'lord Edelwan the bishop granting it, Enoc being then parson of Walton'. This was said to have taken place 'a long time before the coming of Sir Hubert de Vaux into Cumberland', that is, before 1158.<sup>10</sup> Who was 'Edelwan the bishop'? Some scholars have argued that he was Aethelwine, bishop of Durham from 1056 to 1071,<sup>11</sup> others that he was Athelwold of Carlisle. The appearance of Enoch of Walton among the witnesses to Athelwold's charter makes it impossible to doubt that the latter was the bishop who consented to the building of the Triermain chapel. The charter thus has the negative value of implicitly diminishing the likelihood that the bishops of Durham were active in Cumbria in the years before the parts south of the Solway were annexed by William Rufus in 1092.

But Enoch's position among the witnesses gives it a positive value also. Triermain, lying north of the Roman Wall, was in the lordship of Gilsland, which until 1158 remained part of the kingdom of the Scots.<sup>12</sup> Yet Athelwold was bishop of Carlisle, and his diocese was largely created, at the behest of Henry I, as a means of stabilising a newly-established border between England and Scotland, and particularly in order to resist the claims of the bishop of Glasgow to exercise

jurisdiction in Cumbria, south of the Solway. One might therefore expect to find that, just as John of Glasgow was to be kept out of English Cumbria, so Athelwold of Carlisle was excluded from Scottish Gilsland. Yet the fact that Athelwold's consent was apparently thought necessary for the building of the Triermain chapel indicates that this English bishop, who owed his promotion at least in part to the fact that he had been Henry I's confessor, was nevertheless able to act in his capacity of diocesan in a lordship owing allegiance to the king of Scots, and that the ecclesiastical border between the two realms may thus have run north of the political one. The parson of Walton, found witnessing Athelwold's charter, may well have been closely associated with the bishop, and perhaps even acted as the latter's agent in Gilsland.

But above all Athelwold's charter has important implications for the very early history of Carlisle Priory, and of its endowment. Several traditions of the foundation of the house survive from the Middle Ages, some of them recorded for the first time only in the sixteenth century. The detail contained in the charter provides a benchmark against which the reliability of some, at least, of these traditions can be checked. What it establishes is, above all, the reliability of the Priory's own tradition that its founder had been Henry I. Barely a decade before its dissolution, the Priory still possessed 'a great horne of venery, havyng certeyn bonds of sylver and gold, and the versus folowyng graven uponne. Henricus primus nuster founder opimus ac dedit in teste carte pro iure foreste'.<sup>13</sup> The involvement of Henry I was, indeed, never disputed, but always associated with him was the much more dimly perceived figure of Walter the Priest, who was sometimes alleged to have been himself the first benefactor of the house. Walter's claim to precedence was most clearly set forth by John Denton, who in his *Accompt* wrote of him that he 'gave to the church of Carliell for ever in pure alms his lands in Lynstock, Richardby, Crosby, Little Crosby, Walby, Brunskewgh, Carleton, Little Carleton and the wood and the churches and rectories of St Cuthbert in Carlisle, and Staynwiggs (which the King had given him) and the same gift was confirmed unto them both by the King and Bishop Athelwald. . .'.<sup>14</sup>

From the detail he supplies, and still more from the order in which he presents it, it is hard to avoid drawing the conclusion that Denton had access to Athelwold's charter, even though he misrepresented it at a crucial point. For whereas the charter is specific in disposing of 'all the land and churches which were Walter the Priest's and which King Henry gave in alms. . .', Denton was claiming that the gift was Walter's, and that King and Bishop had only confirmed it afterwards. Although it is possible that Denton simply misunderstood the text, it seems more likely that his purpose was to push the foundation of the Priory back in time, by attributing it to a man whom some traditions described as having come to England with William the Conqueror, and as having been associated with Carlisle from the time of its annexation by William Rufus. Since he attributed the beginnings of Anglo-Norman secular rule in Cumbria to William I's reign, he may have felt that consistency required him to do the same for the region's ecclesiastical development.<sup>15</sup>

Be that as it may, Denton was certainly not alone in ascribing a very early date to Walter's career in north-west England. His account has at least some points in common with that given of Walter in another version of the origins of Carlisle Priory, allegedly taken from the now-lost register of Bishop William Strickland

(1400–1419), which is now preserved in the British Library in a collection probably made by one of the scholars associated with William Camden in the years round 1600.<sup>16</sup> Walter, a Norman who had come to England with William I, is here said to have obtained ‘the church of Carlisle and the church of Stanwix, with their chapels and the vills round Carlisle’ at an unspecified date, and, being a very rich man, to have begun to found a most noble church in honour of the Virgin within the walls of Carlisle. However, he died before he could finish this, and William Rufus having also died and been succeeded by Henry I, the latter proceeded to install canons regular in the church which Walter had founded, and to give them Walter’s lands and churches. A similar (though less precise) tradition concerning Walter’s role in the foundation of the Priory was picked up in the reign of Henry VIII by John Leland, who described Walter as a Norman priest whom William Rufus had placed in command of Carlisle, where he began to found a monastery in honour of the Virgin, a project completed by Henry I after Walter’s death.<sup>17</sup> Running parallel to these two accounts, and perhaps giving sustenance to them, was yet another local tradition, that there had been a religious community of sorts at Carlisle before the foundation of the Priory, established in either 1101 or 1102 according to the source used.<sup>18</sup>

Athelwold’s charter gives little support to these traditions. In particular, although it confirms the register’s description of Walter’s estates outside Carlisle, it makes no mention of them as including any property in Carlisle apart from St Cuthbert’s church. It is indeed striking that his estates should have consisted entirely of lands round, but not in, the future city. But this is hardly matter for surprise, since Carlisle was royal demesne. Its *raison d’être* from the time of its annexation by Rufus was the maintenance of a newly-created border between the English and Scottish realms, and the English king’s principal concern, in the years immediately after 1092, would surely have been to maintain a firm hold on Carlisle as a strategically vital position. The foundation of the Priory, as of the see of Carlisle in 1133, was in large measure intended to help Henry I to keep control of Cumberland, and for it a portion of royal demesne was then given up – in the late thirteenth century it was formally declared that the Priory had been ‘ancient royal demesne in the time of old king Henry’.<sup>19</sup> Until then, the king’s policy would most probably have been to remain in command of the whole site. Walter may thus be regarded as unlikely to have built, or begun to build, a church in Carlisle for the same reason that his estates which later came into the possession of the Priory included no lands in the city – he owned nothing there to build upon. This does not exclude the possibility that there was a community founded on the king’s demesne, but as it was not the beneficiary of any recorded royal grant, its existence must be entirely hypothetical, and should probably be regarded as unlikely.

It is impossible to say when Walter came to Cumberland. The *Book of Fees*, in an entry dating from John’s reign, records that Henry I gave Linstock and Carleton to Walter his chaplain.<sup>20</sup> The date is unspecified; it must have been before Henry I’s charter of the 1120s, perhaps 1125, in which he gave to Carlisle Priory ‘all the land which belonged to Walter the priest’,<sup>21</sup> but need not have been very long before. The *Book of Fees* goes on to tell how Walter had become a canon in the Priory, and had given his lands to it, with the consent of the king, but this is contradicted both by the royal charter and by Athelwold’s. Indeed, one of the most important features

of the latter document is the information it provides about the Priory's early landed endowment. Within Linstock and Carleton, it is clear, were comprehended a number of lesser properties, both along the north bank of the Eden and south of Carlisle. Most of them lie within the two parishes whose churches were also given to the Priory – Brunstock, Linstock and Rickerby in the parish of Stanwix, Carleton in that of St Cuthbert's (Walby and High and Low Crosby are in the parish of Crosby-on-Eden). This early record of St Cuthbert's church makes it all the more likely that it antedated the arrival of the Normans, and served whoever occupied the site of Carlisle before 1092.<sup>22</sup>

Viking Age burials recently discovered on the site of the cathedral show that there was also a church there before 1092, perhaps already dedicated to the Virgin and serving a parish of St Mary's.<sup>23</sup> That church must have formed part of Henry I's grant to Carlisle Priory, and inevitably Athelwold's charter says nothing about it, recording only how the Priory canons came to be patrons of Carlisle's second parish church. The charter is also of the greatest value not only for the light it sheds on the Priory's early endowment, but because it records the beginning of that endowment, or *mensa*, as an independent estate, separate from the endowment of the bishopric. It was believed at Carlisle that Athelwold, who had been prior of Carlisle before he became bishop, had continued to hold both offices for a number of years after 1133, only resigning as prior in about 1150, when Walter began to be recorded as holding that office.<sup>24</sup> This charter, in which the bishop confirmed estates to the prior and canons, suggests that the tradition was well founded, and that Athelwold, as he approached the end of his career, was providing for the future of the Priory by making over to it properties which he had once controlled himself in his capacity as prior, and had continued to control after he became bishop. As a further consideration, Carlisle in the early 1150s was ruled by the King of Scots, and there was a distinct possibility that Athelwold's successor would be appointed by that monarch, and might even be himself a Scot. It may also be, therefore, that the canons, anxious to secure themselves in their possessions before they came under the control of a diocesan who might have little regard for their rights, had asked their bishop, and former prior, for that confirmation which the charter records.

After Athelwold's death in 1156 the see of Carlisle remained vacant for nearly fifty years, while the Priory flourished and added greatly to its estates. When a continuous sequence of bishops began in 1204, their poverty was such that they had to be endowed out of the possessions of the canons. The negotiations required to bring this about were long drawn out and often interrupted, and the process was concluded only in 1249.<sup>25</sup> It has been argued recently that the first attempts at a division, made in 1217, constitute 'the earliest direct evidence of a division of the *mensa* at Carlisle'.<sup>26</sup> Athelwold's charter shows that that was not so, and that the canons had come to hold their own properties, separated from those of the bishop, at a considerably earlier date. The principle being once established that the canons had a *mensa* of their own, they could, and did, add to their endowment – indeed, if the charter's reference to other properties having been granted to them besides those which were formerly Walter the Priest's is not pure rhetoric, they had begun to do so before Athelwold's death. The fact that this was the case no doubt helps to explain the reluctance of the canons to accept the loss of estates granted to them, and to them alone, during the vacancy of the bishopric. Athelwold's charter is thus an

important document. There are some issues it cannot elucidate. But it still helps to date the chapel at Triermain, undermines the case made for an earlier religious foundation at Carlisle, gives a clearer definition to the earliest possessions of Carlisle Priory after its foundation, shows how the canons of that Priory first became the masters of their own estates, and, above all, confirms Henry I in his place as the founder of their house.

Athelwoldus Divina Gratia Episcopus Karliolensis Omnibus Fidelibus Salutem. Charitatu Vestrae notum facimus Nos Autoritate Confirmasse Episcopali Gualtero Priori et Conventui Ecclesiae Karlioli et Eorum Successoribus totam Terram et Ecclesias quae fuerunt Walteri Presbyteri et quae Henricus Rex dedit in Eleemosynam, videlicet Linstock, Richardby, Crosby et aliam Crosby, Waldby et Brunskewgh, Carleton et alterum Carleton cum Bosco, Ecclesiam Sancti Cuthberti in Carlilo, et Ecclesiam de Stainwiggas, cum pertinentiis suis, Et omnes alias Terras et Possessiones eis in Diocesi nostra Charitative collatas. Quare Volumus quod predicti Canonici habeant et possideant in perpetuum predictas Terras et Ecclesias pacifice et quiete sicut Charta Henrici Regis et Chartae Aliorum eis testantur. Testibus Roberto Archidiacono, Ughtereddo de Carlatton, Radulfo Engaine, Enoch de Walton.

[Printed from CRO DX 1329/16, muniments of the Dean and Chapter of Carlisle deposited in the Cumbria Record Office. Abbreviations have been extended and punctuation supplied]

Athelwold by divine grace bishop of Carlisle to all the faithful greeting. We make known to your charity that by episcopal authority we have confirmed to Walter the prior and to the convent of the church of Carlisle, and to their successors, all the land and churches which were Walter the Priest's, and which King Henry gave in alms, namely Linstock, Rickerby, High Crosby and Low Crosby, Walby and Brunstock, Carleton and the other Carleton with the wood, the church of St Cuthbert in Carlisle and the church of Stanwix, with their appurtenances, and all the other lands and possessions in charity conferred upon them in our diocese. Wherefore we wish that the canons may have and possess the aforesaid lands and churches for ever, peacefully and quietly, as King Henry's charter, and the charters of others, testify. Witnesses Robert the Archdeacon, Ughtred of Carlatton, Ralph Engaine, Enoch of Walton.

## Notes and References

- <sup>1</sup> Most recently discussed in H. Summerson, *Medieval Carlisle: the city and the borders from the late eleventh to the mid-sixteenth century* (CWAAS Extra Series Vol. 25, 1993), 30–33.
- <sup>2</sup> Bodleian Library, Oxford, St Edmund Hall MS 7/2, 148.
- <sup>3</sup> See C.R. Davey, 'Medieval Grants to the Priory of Carlisle', in *CW2*, lxxi, 284–286.
- <sup>4</sup> St Edmund Hall MS 7/2, xvi.
- <sup>5</sup> J. Wilson, 'The First Historian of Cumberland', in *Scottish Historical Review* Vol. 8 (1911), 12.
- <sup>6</sup> A.C. Lawrie, *Early Scottish Charters prior to A.D. 1153* (Glasgow, 1905) no. 244 probably records his first appearance; see also J. Wilson, 'Constitutional Growth of Carlisle Cathedral', in *Scottish Historical Review* Vol. 17 (1920), 205 and n.3.
- <sup>7</sup> C.T. Clay (ed.), *Early Yorkshire Charters* Vol. V (Yorkshire Record Society, Extra Series Vol. II, 1936), 72–73.
- <sup>8</sup> J.E. Prescott (ed.), *The Register of the Priory of Wetherhal* (London and Kendal, 1897), 81, 110.

- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 186–188, 387; Sir William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum* Vol. VI (London, 1830), 144.
- <sup>10</sup> J.M. Todd (ed.), *The Lanercost Cartulary* (unpublished Lancaster University Ph.D. thesis, 1991) Vol. II no. 346, 453–455; for commentary and dating see Vol. I, 170–171 n.33.
- <sup>11</sup> Among them Summerson, *op. cit.*, 50 n.44.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.
- <sup>13</sup> British Library Harl. MS 1499 f.49v.
- <sup>14</sup> John Denton, *An Account of the most considerable Estates and Families in the County of Cumberland* (ed. R.S. Ferguson, CWAAS Tract Series no. 2, 1887), 96–97.
- <sup>15</sup> Wilson art. as at note 6 above, 15–16.
- <sup>16</sup> British Library, Lansd. MS 721 ff.54–54v; see also J.C. Dickinson, ‘Walter the Priest and St Mary’s Carlisle’, in *CW2*, lxix, 112–113.
- <sup>17</sup> John Leland, *Collectanea* (2nd Edn., London, 1770) Vol. I, 120–121.
- <sup>18</sup> D. Nicholl, *Thurstan Archbishop of York (1114–1140)* (York, 1964), 147–148; H.S. Offler, ‘A note on the early history of the Priory of Carlisle’, in *CW2*, lxxv, 176–181.
- <sup>19</sup> Public Record Office, London, JUST/1/137 m8.
- <sup>20</sup> *Book of Fees* Vol. I, 199.
- <sup>21</sup> C. Johnson and H.A. Cronne (eds.), *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum II: Regesta Henrici Primi* (Oxford, 1956), no. 1491.
- <sup>22</sup> See Summerson, *op. cit.*, 31.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.
- <sup>24</sup> See Wilson art. as at note 6 above 202–203.
- <sup>25</sup> H. Summerson, ‘The King’s *Clericus*: the life and career of Silvester de Everdon, bishop of Carlisle 1247–1254’, in *Northern History* Vol. 28 (1992), 78–81; *id.*, *Medieval Carlisle* 156–157.
- <sup>26</sup> E.U. Crosby, *Bishop and Chapter in Twelfth-Century England: A Study of the ‘Mensa Episcopalis’* (Cambridge, 1994), 111.

