Repton, Dorthworthy (Derby), and Wirksworth.

By Thomas L. Tudor.

MANY of the facts in the following article will be already known to readers of local notes and literature. But the theory to which those facts are now applied, and which tends to revitalise old and threadbare statements, is certainly new.

Archæological facts are not at their best until groups of circumstances can be linked together to form some consistent story, and although there is always a temptation to overdo this, yet the intellectual satisfaction of reasoned construction is usually its justification, both to writers and readers. We need these constructive efforts, which, gathering light from the disconnected flashes of the past, endeavour to fill in the dim spaces with some degree of visibility until the picture is sufficiently complete for its purpose—either to satisfy the critic or to provoke further efforts toward the truth.

The figure that shines brightest at the beginning of this subject is that of St. Werburga, one time abbess of Saxon Monasteries in Mercia; abbess of Sheppey; fourth abbess of Ely; princess of Mercia and afterwards the famous saint of Chester. This lady attained an extraordinary reputation for christian sanctity even in her own lifetime, and her fame lingered about the spheres of her earthy labours all through the middle ages with singular vividness. We are helped somewhat, to understand all this by a consideration of the circumstances surrounding her life, although this paper is not intended to be in any sense biographical.

St. Werburga was the daughter of Wulfere, the first king of Mercia to be baptised in his own realm. Her mother, Ermenilda, was a christian lady, daughter of Erconbert, king of Kent and his wife Sexburga—Sexburga's sister was Etheldreda daughter of the king of East Anglia and wife to Egfrid of Northumbria. These ladies were abbesses of Ely in the following order:—Etheldreda, Sexburga, Ermenilda, Werburga. St. Werburga's paternal uncle, Peada was predecessor to Wulfere in the lordship of Mercia, and had been the first of his line to look favourably on the new religion, having been baptised "At the Wall."[1] This was after the stormy life of his father Penda, the last of the Pagans, had ended in battle, *circa* 655. Another of her uncles, Ethelred, a devout christian, succeeded her father Wulfere in the headship of the Mercian realm.

The Venerable Bede tells us that Peada brought four priests from Lindisfarne to preach the gospel in the heart of England "Cedd and Adda and Betti and Diuma."[2] The last named became first bishop of Mercia about 650. He died and was buried among the Middle Angles at a place called Feppinghum (Repton).

It has been assumed by numerous authorities that the name "Feppinghum" is a mis-spelling for Reppingham, and that the latter means Repton. The grounds for this assumption appear to be good. This is the first mention of any locality in Southern Mercia having any possible connection with Repton, and we know from authentic records, that a monastery existed at Repton before the year A.D. 714. An old English poem of the eleventh century tells us that "Guthlac went to a monastery which is called Repton" (Hrypadun), and the Anglo-Saxon chronicle tells us that St. Guthlac died in A.D. 714.

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[1] Bede H.E III. 21.—Montalembert. Monks of the West, III., p. 359, "At the villa near the Roman wall."

[2] HE III., 21, Diuma was first bishop of Mercia.

There is much more to be said about the monastery of Repton, but the subject is an extensive one and must be reserved for a future paper.

After Peada's death his brother Wulfere succeeded to the kingship of Mercia. Under the influence of his wife Ermenilda, and daughter Werburga, he founded monasteries at Hanbury and Trentham, while it seems clear that the monastery at Wedon was founded by St. Werburga herself, a mansion or palace having been given to her for that purpose.[1] Persistent records of various dates tell us that St. Werburga was placed in charge of these three monasteries, but no mention is made of her connection with the monastery of Repton. Yet it is quite incredible that she should not have been associated with the earliest foundation in Mercia, which, in all probability, took its beginnings from the time of the four monks which king Peada brought from Lindisfarne. The strong monastic traditions of this Northern school would almost certainly result in the founding of a religious house and working centre from the first, and seeing that St. Werburga was niece to the king who had first instituted the christian policy of Mercia by bringing these missionaries into his realm, it is probable that St. Werburga, by a kind of natural right, would take charge there as she grew up, especially as it is evident that she was a suitable person for the office.

When we bear in mind all the foregoing circumstances of the earliest christian times, which conjoined to surround the princess Werburga with those first glowing influences of a newly embraced faith, we can perhaps realise how it was that she herself developed a character that was so deeply revered in after days. It is only by looking into many early records and noting this unbroken tradition

[1] Leland. Tome II. "Sup. Werberga. Cum in ipsus Wedunæ Mansione Moraretur Virgo." See also Tanner's Notatia, p. 373.—"St. Werberga, about the year 680, turned the royal palace here into a monastery or nunnery."

that one can fully realise its vitality. St. Werburga died about the year 700.

But there are other grounds for maintaining the importance of Repton and its claim to having once been the centre of Mercia. Under date 755 the Saxon Chronicle says " And the same year Ethelbald king of the Mercians was slain at Seckington, and his body lies at Repton." Another indication that Repton was intimately associated with the central power of this period is gathered from the same source—" A. 874. This year the army went from Linsey to Repton and there took up their winter quarters and drove King Burhed over sea, etc." Earlier chronicles enumerate kings and royal persons buried at Repton. Tanner's *Notitia* gives :—Merewald, Marewala, Kynechard, brother of the king of Wessex, also Ethelbald. Florence of Worcester names Wiglaf, and also Wystan a murdered prince to whose memory the church of Repton is dedicated. The same author uses that oft quoted expression " mausoleum " with reference to the burial-place of St. Wystan. There is indeed no other locality in the old Mercian kingdom which can lay claim to records of such antiquity touching its rank as a religious centre of importance, and as an honoured place of refuge in the stormy days of early England.

The Saxon chancel of Repton church must surely be a remnant of the seventh century monastery.[1] We do not propose to argue this matter fully but the following text seems to the point—concerning the burial of St. Wystan : Flor. Wig., vol. I., p. 266—" Hujus corpus ad Hreopedun monasterium tunc temporis famosum delatum, in mausoleo avi sui regis Wiglaf est tumulatum." That the lower portion of the chancel, now called the crypt, was a place of burial in its earliest period, admits of no doubt.

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[1] *Vide* Vols. v. and VIII. of this *Journal*.

Vague and incomplete as the earliest records of Repton are, the persistent tradition of ancient fame shines like a halo around its past, especially when we bear in mind the probability that for every event recorded, a hundred others are forever lost in oblivion. Even that cautious and learned searcher into obscure origins, the author of "The Arts in Early England" falls for a moment under the spell of these age-long traditions, and says, speaking of the Danish ravages—"Repton with its glorious memories of Early Mercian Christianity, was ruined in 874." [1]

Having briefly reviewed the conditions prevailing at Repton contemporary with, or closely following upon, the time of the princess Werburga, it is natural that we should seek some explanation of the origin of the church in Derby (many times rebuilt) which has been dedicated to her memory since Saxon times.

Prior to the coming of the Danes, *circa* 874, Derby did not exist. The Saxon town in this locality was known as "Northworthy." Why the North worth? Obviously because of its situation as being a few miles north of Repton, the leading place in these parts in pre-Danish times.[2]

The traditions and recorded facts of Repton carry us inevitably to the conclusion that it was due to these associations that a church bearing a dedication to St. Werburga was founded in Northworthy in pre-Danish times.

The little company of priests which came to Repton from Lindisfarne had been trained in Irish traditions. Lindisfarne was an offshoot from Iona, and Iona was the child of Clonard where the sainted Columba laboured, more than thirty years before the Roman mission arrived in Kent. Celtic christianity possessed those romantic and engaging qualities which, far too often, have had to

[1] G. Baldwin Brown, M.A.

[2] See "Derby, its rise and progress," by A. W. Davison, p. 4.

yield before the hard facts of practical organisation. The system of Rome entirely superseded it, but the old realms of Mercia and Northumbria are rich in its spiritualised radience. The Count de Montalembert pays a noble tribute—

"A characteristic still more distinctive of the Irish Monks, as of all their nation, was the imperious necessity of spreading themselves without, of seeking or carrying knowledge and faith afar, and of penetrating into the most distant regions to watch or combat paganism. This monastic nation therefore became the missionary nation par excellence."[1]

The Lindisfarne priests had no sooner settled down at Repton than they looked abroad for fields of labour; discovered the remnants of an old industrial population round about Wirksworth where a new Saxon settlement had already arisen, and there preached the gospel. Were there any special circumstances which would attract their attention to this religion? We think so. In the ancient records of Ely cathedral we read:—

"Aedberga in Rependuna Abbatissa famulo Dei Guthlaco Sarcofagum plumbeum lintheumque transmissit." (Aedburga Abbess of Repton sent a coffin of lead and linen to Guthlac, servant of God).[2]

We have seen that St. Guthlac died in 714, according to the Saxon Chronicle, although from Leland we may infer a slightly later date. But the point is immaterial.

Whence came the lead? From Wirksworth as the chronicles of Canterbury show.

"Anno D DCCCXXXV Cinewarra[3] Abbatissa dedit Humberto duci terram juris sui nomine Wircesmuth, ea conditione, ut omni anno det ecclesie Christi in Deroberaia pro gablo, plumbum tercentorum solidorum ad opus ejusdem ecclesie archiepiscopo Ceolnotho et successoribus sius in perpetuum."[4]

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[1] Monks of the West, vol. II., p. 248–9.

[2] Liber Elian. c. VII., p. 25.

[3] Ingulf and other authorities spell this name with k.

[4] Dugdale Monasticon. New edition, 1846. Canterbury.

If then in 835 an abbess gave her lands called Wirksworth to a leader (or alderman) on condition of an annual grant of lead to Canterbury Cathedral we are practically certain that these were the lead workings known to Repton in A.D.714. It is evident moreover, that before the event of that year there must have been some preparatory intercourse—we may in fact, put down the beginnings of this intercourse to any date within the period 650-714. Now it is not likely that the early Saxons in the unsettled conditions of the seventh century, would have been able to discover and re-open the old lead workings. But there may very well have been the remnant of a native population living about the neighbourhood, which still retained some touch with the local industry and may have done so in more or less degree since Roman times.

The so-called Picts and Scots probably did not scour the country so clean of its earlier peoples as former historians have made out. The "extermination" theories once so readily allowed, have not held their own very thoroughly under more recent criticism. There are places in England where the Romanised Britons maintained a continuous occupation all through the interregnum from the departure of the Romans to the coming of the English, and an inland spot like Wirksworth, far from the coasts and the borders, surrounded with waste and moor and forest, may very well have held on to some sort of continuous life, however rude and precarious.[1]

Let us now see if we have any concrete evidence of early christian influence at Wirksworth. Built into the north wall of the nave of the church there is a very remarkable piece of primitive sculpture, a photograph of

[1] The Roman civil population did not all leave the country with the army (see *Social England*, vol. 1). H. D. Traill, Ed.

The Saxon Stone.
WIRKSWORTH CHURCH.

which is given with this article. It is a sepulchral stone slightly coped in the traditional manner, but without the hipped-off ends often found in later Saxon stones of this kind. This stone measures about five feet by three. It may once have been a little larger as the edges are obviously fractured in places. It was found about 1820, buried, and lying on its face in front of the altar of the church, and covered a stone chamber containing an interment. No record appears to have been kept of this interment or of anything that may have accompanied it, save that the skeleton was large and perfect. The fact that the Normans were apt to destroy anything of Saxon work may have led to this stone, a remnant of the old Saxon church, being buried, and thus saved from destruction. The *Gentleman's Magazine* of that date has an account of the "find" and a suggested interpretation of the sculpture which, however, is doubtful in several respects. The full quotation is given in Dr. Cox's *Churches of Derbyshire* under "Wirksworth." Wesuggest the following explanation which differs from this in several respects—on the top side of the sculpture there appears to be—I. Christ washing the feet of His disciples. II. The "Agnus Dei" on a Greek cross with symbols of the four Evangelists: the Lion (St. Mark),[1] the Winged Man (St. Matthew), the Ox and the Eagle (St. Luke and St. John). This would seem to indicate the crucifixion. III. Conveying of the body to burial with allegorical figure of Death vanquished below the bier.[2] IV. Figure with palm, also adult figure with child[3] (doubtful). V. On the lower side of the stone is a scene which is doubtful—possibly the Resurrection. Note a

[1] The priority of St. Mark belongs to the Primitive Church. Here again we have trace of the Irish influence.

[2] Or it might be the body laid in the tomb.—Editor.

[3] Might possibly be the triumph of Christianity or the entry into Jerusalem. —Editor.

small swathed figure, apparently ascending.[1] Below are two heads looking over a curious shaped grill. Is this meant for the tomb and the Roman guard?[2] VI. The Ascension.[3] The figure of Christ holds a Sceptre and is surrounded by the vesicle, or a cloud. Angels carry the vesicle upwards, while figures look up from below. VII. Figure holding a crown (?). Figure sitting. VIII. Procession, viz., the Witnesses of the Ascension returning to Jerusalem.

Owing to the rudeness of the work many points are uncertain. As already stated the stone is evidently broken, and we look in vain for the Nativity, for notwithstanding the assent which Dr. Cox gives to the explanation in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the lower left-hand details do not conform to this reading. The sequence would be wrong, and we know very well that our forefathers, in whatever else they were deficient, knew how to tell and how to appreciate a story.

The six heads in an oval, above the bier, seem intended for angels looking down. They do not suggest a Roman guard over the body. The figures at the end of the upper line do not suggest the presentation in the temple. Here, again, the sequence would be wrong. Concerning the two figures in the lower line, which follow the ascension, we suggest that they represent the crowning of Christ as the King of Heaven after His Ascension. One lifts an object to the head of the other. The sitting figure is draped in a robe of many folds. The last figure of the lower half carries a scroll. Is this the written testimony—the Scriptures? We notice that the two

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[1] In Mediaeval Art the soul is usually represented by a small ascending figure.

[2] Or it might mean Christ preaching to the Spirits in Hell.—Editor.

[3] May not this represent the angels rolling the stone away from the tomb while Christ appears as leaving it with the Sceptre, signifying his triumph over death, the figures being those of the Roman Guard [Editor].

end figures seem to be standing in the prow of a boat. Does this represent the bringing of the Gospel to the shores of Britain?[1]

There are several grounds upon which we may assume a very early date for this work.[2] In the first place, the cross is the Greek form and not the Latin. The equal armed cross is essentially a form favoured by the pre-papal churches of Asia Minor, where Greek influence predominated. We meet with it in the earliest Byzantine work, in the Chi-Rho monogram, in the decorative symbolism of vestments of the eastern church, and in the derivative Byzantine Mosaics of Ravenna. The Byzantine influence was against realism and the symbolical form of the equal-armed cross expressed the truth with a restraint that is lacking in the scaffold form of the cross which the Latin church seemed to prefer. When the Crucifix was adopted this western realism reached its climax.

Now we have said above that the Irish Church bore many indications of a pre-Latin christianity. This may have come through Gaul, and have been the direct or indirect result of the travels of St. Paul. In any case there are distinct Byzantine influences in the early Irish sculpture and manuscripts, while the difference between the Irish and Roman missions as to the true date of Easter, which came to an end by the suppression of the Irish method in 664, again points to a non-Latin influence in Ireland in the seventh and earlier centuries. The Greek cross then, on the Wirksworth sarcophagus, emphasises its early date and points to a period during the first influence of the Irish mission. The "Agnus

[1] With respect to the last figures a careful study of the actual stone would suggest that the figure seated represents Christ sitting on the Judgment Seat, while the figures on the left are the lost going to hell, the carving below the feet of the two last being the jaw of a fish, the ancient symbol of Hell.—Editor.

[2] Not later it is said than 940 A.D.—Editor.

Dei" again leads to the same conclusion. It began to be used as a symbol of the Redeemer in the fourth century and ceased to be so used during the seventh. If in so remote a place as mid-England its use lingered on somewhat later, this could not be for long. and the symbol practically limits the downward date of the sculpture to that epoch. Another feature that suggests the Byzantine influence is the stiff, severe, treatment of angel wings and drapery, and especially the swathed tightness of the latter. This however, may be due to the rudeness of the art. The drilled eyes of the figures suggest an archaic realism, while the scheme of the composition, undivided by the arcading which occurs in later Saxon sculpture, again throws us back into the earliest period of Christian art in these islands.

There is still another consideration which justifies the above conclusion. The very unadorned simplicity of the gospel story suggests that the work was done under the first impulses of the new faith, which we know, was often seized upon by these early people with a burning enthusiasm by reason of the very interest of the christian story, and the appeal it made to their delight in tale-telling and the recital of deeds of wonder. No tradition of a saint's life, nor any local colouring whatever is given to the simple presentation of what must have seemed to the men of those times, an entirely new and unheard-of story of wonder. The work seems like a fervid tribute to the memory of some missionary, some christian adventurer who penetrated to Wirksworth and first told the news of the gospel to isolated and half-forgotten people of this region. Even if the Saxon "Wyrcsworth" had already been established, the proposition is not materially affected. We conclude by pointing out that the situation in which the stone was found proves that the altar of Wirksworth church was placed over, or close by, the grave of this early pioneer. When this

sepulchral stone was displaced and buried it is impossible to say.

A Roman road passed near Repton and ran to the old station of Derventio or Little Chester on the Derwent. Now, although the Saxon people never cared to live upon these great roads and usually made their "tuns" and "worths" some distance away, there is no reason to doubt that they made use of these routes whenever they found them in tolerable condition. Where the Romans had bridged the streams, bridges may have remained, more or less safe, and the chances are that the so-called Rycknield, Street, running from Letocetum to Derventio was the most obvious way northward in the early days of the Repton settlement. So we may imagine the Repton men taking to this road on their outward journeys. If Derventio was at that time a place worth their efforts, they would be able to make straight for it by keeping to the Roman street, and would cross the valley of the Markeaton Brook along the line which is now that of the Old Uttoxeter Road, Nun Street, and Kedleston Street, after which the alignment is lost in later developments. If again these travellers had no knowledge of Derventio and merely travelled north in a spirit of adventure and discovery, it is scarcely to be imagined that they would miss this region in any journeys northward. By taking the Trent ford at Twyford (if then known) they would merely arrive at the junction of the Markeaton Brook with the great stream at a slightly different point. From Derventio or its neighbourhood, a choice of ways, British and Roman lay before them, towards Wirksworth.

At what particular point of time between the middle and the end of the seventh century the leader "Wyrc" founded his "worth" at the head of the Ecclesbourne valley we cannot say, but the event, as we have seen, ultimately resulted in the establishment of systematic

communications with Repton and the dowering of the monastery with rights in the lead mines. It is scarcely to be doubted that the settlement of Northworthy sprang into being as the consequence of these communications, and even as a direct offshoot of Repton, hence its old name, which orients it with that centre. The early prospectors were on the look out for good arable land, fertile meadows, running water of manageable dimensions, and a certain degree of retirement and security away from the great roads of Rome and the high exposed trackways of the Britons. They found just such a spot down by the shores of the Markeaton Brook in a lesser valley, and sufficiently removed from the Rycknield Street to satisfy their temperament. Other indications that the locality round about St. Werburgh's church is really the old town of Northworthy, are to be found in the name of the principal street, " the Wardwick " closely allied to the name of the town, for " Ward " correlates the idea of guard or protection and is akin to " Worth," while " wick " is pure Saxon for dwelling-place or abode. Let it be noticed also that we have, in this locality, the ancient " cheaping " or bargaining place still evident in the name " Cheapside."

We observe, moreover, that no one leading person made Northworthy, unless it was the king himself. Great numbers of early settlements have taken their names from the principal landowner, this fact being the key to the majority of Old English place-names. " Northworthy," however, is an impersonal name arising probably from the operation of some royal influence in connection with its foundation as an offshoot from the capital town. The dedication of its church to the first woman saint of this realm, who was also a princess of the reigning line, argues forcibly in the same direction, while we know from many sources that Derby was a royal " burgh " from unknown antiquity. It may very well

have begun its career as such, from these days of its earliest uprising under the old name.

That St. Werburgh's church was founded as the immediate result of those communications between Repton and Wirksworth of which we have spoken, hardly admits of doubt. At all events, having in view all the circumstances which have passed under consideration in this paper, we venture to believe that its beginnings go back to the seventh century, and that for nearly two hundred years, until the arrival of the Danes in 874-5, Northworthy, a small settlement of perhaps a few score houses gathered round its church, filled the intervening period between the decay of the Roman Derventio and the new settlement, in due time to be called Derby.

It has often been said that the Danes changed the name of the town. We do not think this expresses the truth. At all events they did not change the name so much as they caused it to change. The statement is based upon a careless reading of Ethelwerd's Chronicle (end of eleventh century), in which it is recorded: "In locum qui Northworthige nuncupatur juxta autem Danaam Linguam Deorby." From this we infer the simple truth that the Danes called their settlement on the higher ground overlooking the Derwent—"Deorby" from the name of the local leader. Afterwards Deorby, for reasons arising out of its subsequent prosperity, completely overshadowed the older town in the valley whose name gradually fell into disuse as the newer settlement expanded and increased in prestige.

Thus Derby, as we know it to-day, has made three successive beginnings, viz.:—Roman, Derventio; Anglo-Saxon, Northworthy; Danish, Derby. The first seems to have been abortive after the fourth century, and it is interesting to be able to associate the real fruitful beginning of our town with so picturesque a group of circumstances, political, religious and industrial, as that reviewed in the foregoing argument.