

## HISTORICAL NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

### A NOTE ON THE BREEDON ANGEL

by David Parsons

In her review at the Mercia Conference<sup>1</sup> of the evidence for Breedon-on-the-Hill in the Anglo-Saxon period, Ann Dornier referred to a charter of the late tenth century,<sup>2</sup> which is not often given prominence or even mentioned in discussions of the pre-Conquest material at Breedon. The significance of this charter with its implication of the continued existence or the refoundation of the Breedon monastery seems to have been ignored or tacitly rejected (most recently Miss Dornier regards it as evidence for no more than a parish church on the site),<sup>3</sup> although Sir Frank Stenton's first reference to the charter in 1910 was quite specific:

"In 966 Eadgar granted to Bishop Æthelwold 13 *cassati* at Breedon in Leicestershire, where, it would seem, there existed, or had recently been created, a religious house which was to enjoy the property in the future."<sup>4</sup>

Stenton's better-known pronouncement in *Anglo-Saxon England* was perhaps not entirely unambiguous, but certainly stated that St Æthelwold did *not* found a monastery either at Breedon or on the estate at Barrow-on-Humber, which Stenton apparently regarded as a parallel case:

"He [Æthelwold] acquired the sites of a number of decayed monasteries, established monks on some of them, and gave others as sources of revenue to religious houses where the principles of the revival were in operation. . . . it is significant of his intention that although he did not found monasteries upon them, he also acquired estates at Barrow-on-Humber, where Bishop Cedd had lived in the seventh century, and Breedon in Leicestershire, which had supplied an archbishop to Canterbury in the eighth."<sup>5</sup>

Now Æthelwold's intention in the case of Barrow-on-Humber is quite clear: the very charter quoted by Stenton in his footnote<sup>6</sup> indicates that the property was to be made over to the monastery of Peterborough, an endowment also listed in the foundation charter.<sup>7</sup> Æthelwold's other acquisitions of church property seem to have been similarly treated.<sup>8</sup> The estates of the monastery at Horningsea, after a chequered history in the ninth and tenth centuries,<sup>9</sup> appear to have been in the hands of the Ely monks at Domesday,<sup>10</sup> though there is no specific statement of Æthelwold's having given them the five hides which he had bought from King Edgar. The church of St Mary, Huntingdon, a collegiate minster with two priests at Domesday, but described as *monasteriolum* in the Thorney foundation charter, was similarly given to Thorney Abbey;<sup>11</sup> on this occasion it seems that it passed directly from the donor, King Edgar, to the monastery, though it is difficult to imagine that Æthelwold had no hand in the transaction.<sup>12</sup>

It is apparent, therefore, that the Breedon transaction must be viewed in a different light from those involving the other church lands acquired by Æthelwold. There is no charter evidence that the Breedon property ever passed to one of the major monastic houses, and the Breedon charter itself not only makes no mention of such a transfer (unlike the Barrow charter) but quite specifically states that the property is to be enjoyed in perpetuity by the church at Breedon itself. So Breedon does not fall into that class of monastery which was given to another house, but into Stenton's other category of houses which were refounded or revived. It may be argued that there is no other evidence that the Breedon monastery *was* revived<sup>13</sup> and that the charter refers to nothing more than a church. Against this may be set Æthelwold's interest in the site and the size of the property concerned. Æthelwold is hardly likely to have taken trouble simply to install a parish priest, and if he wished merely to prevent the alienation of church land he could simply have granted it to the mother house at Peterborough. It is unthinkable that he of all people should have wished to establish a collegiate foundation, yet the endowment was sufficient to maintain a fair-sized community. At thirteen hides the property was the largest of those under discussion:

the total of the Horningsea estates was seven hides, and the estate of St Mary's, Huntingdon, dwindled from three to two hides by the Conquest, at which time it could apparently support the two priests. The size of the Barrow estate is unknown. It seems that Stenton's initial reaction to the evidence in 1910 represents the most acceptable interpretation, namely that the monastery at Breedon was refounded by Æthelwold c.967. It follows in any case from the charter that a church of some sort with a reasonable endowment was in being at Breedon in the late tenth century. It thus seems perfectly reasonable to reopen discussion on the possible date of some of the carved stone panels, in particular the angel, for there is an historical context in which work later than the main friezes might have been executed.

It may be noted that Clapham (whose numbering of the stones is followed here) did not commit himself when he originally published the sculptures to so firm a date for the figural panels as he did for the friezes.<sup>14</sup> The panels with running figures in arches (Nos. 21, 23, 24) are assigned only in the most general terms to the pre-Conquest period;<sup>15</sup> the cowled figure (No. 20) is compared with St Cuthbert's coffin of the late seventh century, but reference is also made in a footnote to the tenth-century Benedictional of St Æthelwold;<sup>16</sup> to the pair of figures (No. 13) are attributed various characteristics of the Winchester school, but a date comparable with that of the friezes is finally accepted because of the similarity of the hollow leaves;<sup>17</sup> the angel (No. 19) is dated to the eighth century on the basis of the Greek blessing.<sup>18</sup> Kendrick accepted all these pieces as early in date, by which he meant the first part of the ninth century,<sup>19</sup> but so far as the angel is concerned his argument is hardly convincing. His introductory words suggest that he was barely convinced himself:

"were it not that we are already prepared for an astonishing variation in the character of the carvings of the ninth century in Mercia, we should be tempted at once to exclude from the series this panel in the interior wall of the tower."<sup>20</sup>

Kendrick felt obliged to discuss these carvings in terms of "three dissimilar styles"; Clapham noted that numbers 13, 19 and 20 were by different hands.<sup>21</sup> Altogether these early discussions of the figural panels do not inspire a great deal of confidence. It should also be noted that when Clapham originally read his paper to the Society of Antiquaries there was criticism of the tacit acceptance of all the pieces as the work of the same period.<sup>22</sup>

In the same paper Clapham also noted that panel number 21 (small running figures under arcades) was "of different type and on different stone from the other carvings".<sup>23</sup> More recently Jope has suggested that all the panels at the east end of the south aisle at Breedon are of Barnack stone, while most of the rest are of Permian calcareous limestone.<sup>24</sup> This is something of an oversimplification, as a recent visit in the company of Dr R. J. King of the University of Leicester Geology Department has shown, although firm identifications must await laboratory examination of samples from each stone. Panels 21, 23, 24 are indeed a coarse shelly oolite of Barnack or Ancaster type, but number 20 (the cowled figure) is a finer and less shelly oolite, dissimilar to the others. The remaining stones, whether panels or friezes, are mixed sandstone and a third type of oolite. The variety of stones used and the range of possible sources, and in particular the mixing of sandstone and oolite in the frieze sequence argue rather for *in situ* carving than for importation from a specific craft centre, in so far as pieces of homogeneous style are concerned. Where the style is less consistent, as in the case of the panels under discussion, it is possible to think of a variety not only of sources but also of dates.

The angel (No. 19), the only panel apart from numbers 21, 23 and 24 to be carved in coarse shelly limestone, seems to warrant treatment as a special case (see Pl. 3). Its scale is quite different from that of all the other stones, and it must surely be part of a larger composition, for example, an Annunciation. The way in which the figure overlaps the frame, the position of the feet with their suggestion of alighting and motion across the panel from left to right, the long fingers, and the swing of the drapery are all characteristics of the Winchester style, which need not be surprising in view of the opinions of Clapham and Kendrick quoted above. The lumpiness of the figure itself need not be an obstacle to a date in the tenth century; lumpy figures occur even in the Benedictional of St Æthelwold, for example St Æthelthryth on fol. 90b.<sup>25</sup> There is still Clapham's objection that English parallels for the Byzantine blessing cannot be found, though in view of the immediate sources of the Winchester style and the frequent occurrence of this form of blessing in Carolingian and later works (some of which Clapham himself mentioned) this is not an insuperable difficulty. To Clapham's important references<sup>26</sup> may be added examples of Carolingian ivory

carving, such as the book covers of the Dagulf Psalter or the Codex Aureus.<sup>27</sup> The later manuscripts quoted by Clapham include the Gero Codex, which with such books as the Codex Wittekindeus is clear evidence for the close copying of Carolingian models in the second half of the tenth century.<sup>28</sup> The appearance of the Greek blessing in this and in early eleventh-century Regensburg manuscripts (also mentioned by Clapham) makes it clear that the feature, archaic though it may have been, was still in use or was revived around the date now suggested for the Breedon angel. It is, incidentally, not entirely true, as Clapham claimed in the footnote under discussion, that no French examples are found after the ninth century. A St-Bertin manuscript of c.1000 contains a closely comparable blessing.<sup>29</sup> There is, therefore, no difficulty in accepting that there may have been contemporary as well as earlier models available towards the end of the tenth century from which the angel's blessing may have been copied. Apart from this, there are in any case enough features in the carving characteristic of the Winchester style to support a late tenth-century attribution. The principle of dating by the latest feature surely makes such a dating unavoidable, however archaic one may think the blessing.

In an unpublished note written in 1963 and submitted to the then City of Leicester Museums and Art Gallery, Mr (now Professor) D. M. Wilson came to the conclusion that certain of the sculptural fragments might belong to the tenth century.<sup>30</sup> He noted that

“one fragment of an inhabited vine-scroll . . . has a particularly fine parallel in Anglo-Saxon ivory carving,<sup>31</sup> while the developed pelta motif<sup>32</sup> is a popular feature of Rhenish manuscripts of the late tenth century. The remarkable full-length figure of a man with hand raised in blessing is distinctly tenth century in style and is closely related to the style of the Winchester school of manuscript illumination. A number of other stones are also decorated in the same style, but are rather worn and weathered and cannot with absolute certainty be assigned to the tenth century.”

If one admits the possibility that some of the Breedon pieces may belong to the tenth century, and thus probably to the period of monastic revival, then a brief look at the cowled figure (No. 20) may be justified. The feature which strikes a discordant note in an eighth/ninth-century context is the form of the capitals supporting the arch. These seem to be close to fully developed cube capitals, which in architectural terms do not become common on the continent until c.1000. If a date as late as that is admissible, it is perhaps not fanciful to see the figure as a monk, in which case the panel might have been a piece of reform-period propaganda of some sort.

However compelling the evidence, it is of course impossible to prove a case such as this, and I am well aware that Professor Cramp and Miss Wheeler, who both discuss the Breedon material in their respective chapters in *Mercian Studies*,<sup>33</sup> do not accept my conclusion about the angel. It is my view, however, that there is at least something to be discussed. In the context of a revived monastery at Breedon in the tenth century it is reasonable to think of further stone carving being done, and one or two of the panels which seem not altogether happy in the eighth/ninth-century period could find a more comfortable niche in the late tenth.

#### NOTES

1. Held at the University of Leicester in December 1975; see *Mercian Studies*, edited by Ann Dornier (Leicester University Press, forthcoming)
2. P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an annotated list and bibliography* (1968), No. 749; W. de G. Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum* (1885-99), No. 1283
3. There is, for example, no reference to it even in D. Knowles and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales* (1971)
4. F. M. Stenton, “Types of manorial structure in the Northern Danelaw”, *Oxford Studies in Social and Legal History*, edited by P. Vinogradoff, II (1910), 3-96 (p.78)
5. F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1943), 446
6. Sawyer, *op. cit.*, No. 782; Birch, *op. cit.*, No. 1270
7. Sawyer, *op. cit.*, No. 787; Birch, *op. cit.*, No. 1280
8. Amidst the multifarious property transactions of Æthelwold for the endowment of his refounded houses (which can be followed as far as the Danelaw monasteries are concerned through the index entries of C. Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England* (Leicester, 1966), *s.v.* Ely Abbey, Peterborough Abbey, Thorney Abbey, and more generally through the index to Sawyer, *s.v.* Æthelwold) there are, to

- the best of my knowledge, no sites other than the four discussed here where the documents state or imply the existence or former existence of a monastery or church
9. See Hart, *op. cit.*, Nos. 238-46, 261 (pp. 222-3, 225); *Liber Eliensis*, edited by E. O. Blake, Camden Third Series XCII (1962), 420-21
  10. *Liber Eliensis*, 421
  11. C. Hart, "The church of St Mary of Huntingdon", *Proc. Cambridge Antiq. Soc.*, LIX (1966), 105-111; Sawyer, *op. cit.*, No. 792; Birch, *op. cit.*, No. 1297
  12. According to Hart, n. 11 above, p. 105, the endowment was made "at the request of" Æthelwold
  13. The foundation of an Augustinian cell there in the twelfth century may, however, be regarded as suggesting that there was something there to revive
  14. A. W. Clapham, "The carved stones at Breedon on the Hill, Leicestershire, and their position in the history of English art", *Archæologia*, LXXVII (1927), 219-40
  15. *Ibid.*, 235
  16. *Ibid.*
  17. *Ibid.*, 233
  18. *Ibid.*, 233-4
  19. T. D. Kendrick, *Anglo-Saxon Art to A.D. 900* (1938), 174-6
  20. *Ibid.*, 175-6
  21. Clapham, *op. cit.*, 223
  22. *Ibid.*, 239-40
  23. *Ibid.*, 223
  24. E. M. Jope, "The Saxon building stone industry in southern and midland England", *Medieval Archaeol.*, VIII (1964), 91-118, esp. 100, 108
  25. F. Wormald, *The Benedictional of St Ethelwold* (1959), 27, Pl. 6
  26. Clapham, *op. cit.*, 234 n. 4
  27. J. Hubert, J. Porcher and W. F. Volbach, *L'Empire Carolingien* (Paris, 1968), Pls. 208, 210 and the notes on p. 354. (This book has been republished in English by Thames and Hudson with the title *Carolingian Art* (1970).)
  28. L. Grodecki *et al.*, *Le Siècle de l'An Mil* (Paris, 1973), 98 and Pl. 88; this and another Reichenau manuscript, the Petershausen Sacramentary (*ibid.*, Pl. 112) also use the pelta decoration referred to below by Professor Wilson as comparable with Breedon stone No. 3
  29. The Odbert Psalter, fol. 124<sup>v</sup>; see Grodecki *et al.*, *op. cit.*, Pl. 191
  30. Professor Wilson has since mentioned his views briefly in print: *Anglo-Saxon Ornamental Metalwork, 700-1100, in the British Museum* (1964), 46-7, where he mentions the Breedon sculptures in connection with metalwork decorated in the Winchester style, in particular the bronze censer-covers, and suggests a tenth- to eleventh-century date
  31. Compare frieze No. 12 (Clapham, *op. cit.*, Pl. 31, fig. 3) with the lid of the pectoral cross of c. 1100 in the Victoria and Albert Museum (No. A6-1966), see J. Beckwith, *Ivory Carvings in Early Medieval England* (1972), No. 45, p. 128 and Pl. 100
  32. Frieze No. 3 (Clapham, *op. cit.*, Pl. 31, fig. 4); see n. 28 above
  33. Forthcoming, see n. 1 above

THE HASTILY DRAWN UP WILL OF WILLIAM CATESBY, ESQUIRE,  
25 AUGUST 1485

by Daniel Williams

William Catesby, Esquire of the King's Body, has the unique though unenviable distinction of having been publicly beheaded for high treason in the town of Leicester. This singular execution took place on the 25 August 1485, three days after his capture on Bosworth Field by the victorious forces of Henry Tudor.<sup>1</sup> In his final hours Catesby, a friendless and deserted victim of the vicissitudes of fifteenth-century politics, drew up his last will and testament. The only person to stand by him was his "dere and Welbelovid wiff" Margaret who alone was willing to act as her husband's executor.<sup>2</sup> Catesby's fall was a dramatic vindication of the maxim "put not your trust in princes" for the chief cause of his summary execution was having served his Plantagenet master too well. The continuator of the *Croyland Chronicle*, who may have known Catesby personally, makes this observation succinctly:

"There was also taken prisoner William Catesby who occupied a distinguished