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MONASTERY AND VILLAGE AT CRAYKE, NORTH YORKSHIRE

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INTRODUCTION

In 1983, an excavation was conducted at Castle Garth, Crayke, North Yorkshire, in

order to investigate a pre-fourteenth century cemetery first encountered during excavations in 1956. The excavation evidence, together with analysis of fieldwork,

chance finds, maps and historical sources, suggests a settlement sequence running from

the Roman period to the present. Of greatest interest is the evidence relating to the

monastery founded by St. Cuthbert in 685, and what followed it.

LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

The village of Crayke is perched on the edge of the Vale of York, some 19 kilometres

(12 miles) from York itself (Fig. 1). It lies in the middle of its sub-circular parish on an

outlier of the Howardian Hills. While at just over 115 metres above Ordnance Datum

this hill is neither particularly towering nor rugged (Figs. 1 & 2), the subdued relief of

the surrounding countryside means that its summit commands a clear view of the

Hambleton Hills to the north, the Dales to the west, and the Vale of York to the south.

The village is laid out along a roughly T-shaped road system (Figs. 2 & 3). The road

from Oulston curves up the steep north-west slope of the hill; at the summit it changes

course and as Church Hill runs down the gentle south-east slope, a small green to the

east. Halfway down the hill, it meets Brandsby Street, to the east, and West Way, which

leads to the roads to York and Easingwold. The summit of the hill is occupied by Crayke

Castle, St. Cuthbert’ s Church, and a modern covered reservoir.

THE PRE-CONQUEST HISTORICAL SOURCES

Crayke was a peculiar of Durham until the mid-nineteenth century, when it became

part of Yorkshire[[1]](#footnote-1). The connection with the See of St. Cuthbert goes back, however, to

when Crayke was the site of a monastery founded by St. Cuthbert. In keeping with the

sparse documentation of the early medieval period, only a handful of brief references

attest to Crayke’s monastic status. The most important source is the Historia de Sancto

Cuthberto[[2]](#footnote-2), hereafter HSC. This is an account of the patrimony of St. Cuthbert, basically

‘an ancient estate-roll of the monks of St. Cuthbert, rather than a history’[[3]](#footnote-3). It appears

to have been originally compiled in the mid-tenth century, though the text had been

added by the eleventh century[[4]](#footnote-4). Crayke is first encountered in 685 in connection with the synod of Twyford, when in the presence of King Ecgfrith of Northumbria and Archbishop Theodore, Cuthbert was elected Bishop of Lindisfarne[[5]](#footnote-5). ’ HSC reports that along with Carlisle and land in York, they [Ecgfrith and Theodore] gave to him also the villa which was called Crayke, and three miles around that villa, so that he might have a dwelling-place, however

many times he might go to York, or return from there. And there the Holy Cuthbert established a community of monks, and ordained an abbot[[6]](#footnote-6). As to the trustworthiness of this reference, Craster suggests that the monks of St. Cuthbert may have attributed benefactions to Ecgfrith simply from a natural assumption that the king responsible was a living contemporary of the saint[[7]](#footnote-7). As a counter argument, there is the reliability of HSC as a whole: ‘in nearly every case there is confirmatory evidence that the places named ... did have some early connection with the See of Lindisfarne’[[8]](#footnote-8). 8 The main objection to Crayke as an Ecgfrith grant would seem

to be a lack of supporting evidence; given the limited historical sources for the seventh

century, such an objection would seem to be unrealistic[[9]](#footnote-9).

An alternative origin for the monastery has been proffered by Arnold[[10]](#footnote-10), 10 who suggests

that Crayke was the site of the monastic cell in Aethelwulf de Abbatibus[[11]](#footnote-11), the

Northumbrian Latin poem of the first quarter of the ninth century that details the

history and inmates of a monastery founded in the reign of Osred (704/5 to 716). This

monastery existed, and was a cell of the Community of St. Cuthbert[[12]](#footnote-12). The poem

describes the cell as being sited on ‘a small hill with a bending downward path, where the rising sun speeds across the face of Libra the weigher’, with the church at the top of the hill[[13]](#footnote-13). The reference to Libra has been taken to mean that the principal aspect of the hill faced east[[14]](#footnote-14) or a little south of east[[15]](#footnote-15). Crayke is a Community of St. Cuthbert foundation, and is indeed on a hill. However, the vagueness of the poem’s description of the cell, together with the likelihood that our knowledge of Lindisfarne landholdings could be incomplete[[16]](#footnote-16), has allowed other sites to be nominated. Bywell is a recent candidate[[17]](#footnote-17), and it has even been suggested that the cell might have been located in Ireland[[18]](#footnote-18). Campbell simply states that ‘any place near a small hill in the north of England might be the site’[[19]](#footnote-19). All told, one cannot ignore HCS , a reasonably reliable and specific source, in favour of speculation.

Crayke next appears in the Historia Regnum.[[20]](#footnote-20) The entry for the year 767 mentions

briefly that Etha the Anchorite ‘died happily at Crayke’[[21]](#footnote-21). In his York Poem[[22]](#footnote-22) Alcuin devotes six lines to the ascetism, chastity, and powers of prophecy of the hermit Eacha,

‘obviously the same man’[[23]](#footnote-23). Etha can also be equated with Eccha presbiter in the ninth century Lindisfarne portion of the Liber Vitae Ecclesiae Dunelmensis[[24]](#footnote-24) . HSC reports that in 867 Aella and Osberht, contenders for the Northumbrian throne, seized a number of St. Cuthbert’s properties; Aella seized and lived at Crayke[[25]](#footnote-25). The Scandinavians, however, made short shrift of them[[26]](#footnote-26), and Crayke and its monastery were soon back in the hands of the Community of St. Cuthbert. This is evident from the visit of the Community in 882 or 883, recorded in HSC[[27]](#footnote-27) , during their seven years of wandering with their patron’s body[[28]](#footnote-28). They were cared for by Abbot Geve, and after a stay of four months they left for Chester-le-Street, their temporary home before their final move to Durham[[29]](#footnote-29). ‘Geve’ is a woman’s name; it has consequently been suggested Cy o that the Crayke house was a double monastery.[[30]](#footnote-30),

This 882/3 reference is the last mention of the monastery, which presumably was

included in the eclipse of northern English monasticism. The monastery could have

ceased functioning as such immediately after the visit by the Community. The longevity

of other Community foundations suggests, however, that there is no reason to assume an

immediate demise. According to HSC , in 883 the Community’s monastery at Carlisle still had an abbot, “ while in 915 one of the abbots of Norham, Tilred, became a bishop of Chester-le-Street. Add to this the late ninth, early tenth century evidence for an entente cordiale between the Scandinavians and the Church[[31]](#footnote-31), and there is no reason why

the monastery should not have survived to the early tenth century. As to the monastery’s

ultimate fate, it could simply have been abandoned, or could have limped on in a more secular guise[[32]](#footnote-32).

In a later addition to the Liber Vitae[[33]](#footnote-33), Earl Thured is noted as having given the

Community two hides of land at Crayke, as well as land at Smeaton and Sutton[[34]](#footnote-34). This

Qr grant is likely to have been made in the late tenth century[[35]](#footnote-35). Domesday Book reports Crayke as having been held as one manor by Bishop Aldhun (990-1018)[[36]](#footnote-36). It also mentions the presence of a church and priest, and describes the estate as two miles long by two broad, roughly the extent of the present parish. 35.

Secondly, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states that a Thured was appointed joint leader of the English fleet assembled in London in 992. EHD, supra note 20, at 213. Thirdly, immediately following Thured’s grant in the Liber Vitae , there is one in the same style in the name of Earl Northman; on similar external evidence, a late tenth century date for Northman has been suggested. Robertson, supra note 34, at 213. It therefore seems that the three references to Thured are contemporary, and it is reasonable to assume that they refer to the same person. Whitelock suggests that he was Aelflhelm’s predecessor as earl of southern Northumbria, and that the end of his reign can be linked with the abortive operations of the 992 fleet, hence the 990 limit to his presence on Aethelred’s charters. D. Whitelock, ‘The dealings of the kings of England with Northumbria in the tenth and eleventh centuries’, in The Anglo-Saxons (P. Clemoes ed. 1959), 79-80.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The hill at Crayke has been archaeologically investigated twice previously. The first

time was in 1937, when levelling work for a tennis court below Crayke Hall (Fig. 3)

uncovered a number of artefacts of various periods[[37]](#footnote-37). These included Roman pottery

and a medieval kiln[[38]](#footnote-38), but of greater interest are the early medieval finds[[39]](#footnote-39).

Firstly, a bronze ring with four inward-projecting lobes was found, the open space

between the lobes in the form of an equal-armed cross with expanded terminals[[40]](#footnote-40). It

would seem to have been a pendant. Hawkes cites similar bronze openwork objects from pagan Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, but suggests that the equal-armed cross points to a date

during the early spread of Christianity from the end of the seventh century onwards. This remains a plausible interpretation.

An ironwork hoard was also recovered. ‘This hoard appears to consist of broken

objects, scrap metal, blanks and perhaps a finished object or two’, and so would seem to have belonged to a metal worker.

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41 It is, therefore, likely that smelting took place on the hill. The presence of a one-sided sword suggests the hoard dates to 900 or earlier.

42 This indicates a monastic context for the hoard. Two fragments of an Anglian stone cross were also found during levelling for the tennis court.

43 Kendrick 44 dates the vine scroll ornament on the cross arm to the first half of the ninth century, a date which still stands. 43 As Anglian sculpture is found predominantly on monastic sites, 46 this fragment was the first piece of evidence that the monastery was sited on the hill.

The next investigation was carried out in 1956 with the aim of uncovering Roman

evidence. 47 To this end three small trenches were dug, two of them just outside the

36.

37.

38.

39.

42. Richard Hall, personal communication. Morris suggests a ninth century date. Morris, supra note 39, at 37. That the hoard includes a T-shaped socketed axe is less helpful for dating, as such axes continued to be used into the Norman period. Consequently, Sheppard’s conclusion that it is ‘typical of the Viking period’ can be discounted. Sheppard, supra note 37, at 280. The horseshoe was not found with the other objects; otherwise, it might suggest a Norman date for the hoard. Id. at 281.

43. Only a cross arm was published in Sheppard, supra note 37, at 278-79. The secon

d and unpublished fragment, part of a central figure of Christ, is on display in the Yorkshire Museum.

44. Id. at 278.

45. Jim Lang, personal communication.

46. R. N. Bailey, Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England (1980), 81. But see I. N. Wood, ‘Anglo-Saxon Otley: an archiepiscopal estate and its crosses in a Northumbrian context’, Northern History 23 (1987), 30 (‘[Djespite the absence of any clear indication that there were non-monastic crosses in pre- Viking Northumbria, it would be rash to conclude that Anglian crosses in the North of England were only to be found within monasteries’.).

47. E. J. W. Hildyard, ‘Romano-British discoveries at Crayke, N. R. Yorks., (ii) the trial excavation’, Y.A.J. 40 (1959), 99.

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Fig. 1. Craykc: location and topography of parish

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Fig. 2. Aerial view of Grayke village looking east.

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CRAYKE: THE VILLAGE

Ridge (and furrow) ★ 1937 finds

SH] Woodland \* Architectural fragment

== 1956 excavations ♦ 17th century sherds

- 1983 excavation

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Fig. 3. Crayke: plan of the village, showing sites of excavations and finds.

1. ‘Crayke’, in The Victoria County History of York North Riding (W. Page ed. 1923)

   [hereafter VCH], 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia I (T. Arnold ed. 1882, Rolls Series 75), 196-214. The HSC references aremirrored in Symeon of Durham’s later Historia Dunelmensis Ecclesiae (Arnold, supra, at 3-135). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Arnold, supra note 2, at XXV. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. E. Craster, ‘The patrimony of St. Cuthbert’, English Historical Review 49 (1954), 177-78. The HSC references are mirrored in Symeon of Durham’s Historia Dunelmensis Ecclesiae, written between 1104 and 1 109. Arnold, supra note 2, at 3-135. This is not surprising, as Symeon freely admits to having made use of HSC. Id. at XIX. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People , iv. 28 (B. Colgrave & R.A.B. Mynors eds. & trans. 1969), 437. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Arnold, supra note 2, at 199 (translation by Edward James). There is a charter that purports to record this grant. W. Farrer, Early Yorkshire Charters II (1915), 256; P. H. Sawyer, Anglo-Saxon Charters (Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks No. 8, 1968), 87, no.66. It is, however, ‘an obvious forgery’, perhaps produced to support Durham’s claim to Carlisle after its annexation by William II in 1092. M. Roper, ‘Wilfrid’s landholdings in Northumbria’, in St. Wilfrid at Hexham (D. P. Kirby ed. 1974), 76 n. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Craster, supra note 4, at 380; see also Cambridge, ‘Why did the Community of St.

   Cuthbert settle at Chester-le-Street?’, in St. Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to AD 1200 (G. Bonner, D. Rollason & C. Stancliffe eds. 1989), 380 (‘The personal association of Cuthbert with this grant may be a later construct, which casts some doubt on its purported date ....’). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Craster, supra note 4, at 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. A. Thacker, ‘Lindisfarne and the origins of the cult of St. Cuthbert’, in St. Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to AD 1200, supra note 7, at 115-16. (‘Though doubt has been cast on them, there seems no good reason to dismiss the grants which the Historia de Sancto Cuthberto records that King Ecgfrith made to Cuthbert’.). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Arnold, supra note 2, at XXXIII. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Aethelwulf de Abbatibus (A. Campbell ed. & trans. 1967). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Id. at XXVI, XXIX-XXX. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Id. at 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Id. at XXV. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Arnold, supra note 2, at XXXV n. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Craster, supra note 4, at 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. D. R. Howlett, ‘The provenance, date and structure of De Abbatibus’, Archaeologia Aeliana 5th Ser. 3 (1975),122-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. J. F. Kenney, The Sources for the Early History of Ireland (1929), 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Campbell, supra note 11, at XVI. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia II (T. Arnold ed. 1885, Rolls Series 75), 3-283. T

    he Historia Regnum is a collection of materials that goes under the name of Symeon of Durham. English Historical Documents I: c.500-1041 (D. Whitelock ed. 1955, 1st ed.) [hereafter EHD], 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Arnold, supra note 20, at 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Alcuin, The Bishops, Kings and Saints of York (P. Godman ed. & trans. 1982), 108-09. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. D. A. Bullough, ‘Hagiography as patriotism: Alcuin’s York Poem and the early No

    rthumbrian vitae sanctorum ’, in Hagiographie, Cultures et Societes IV-XIF Siecles (Centres de Recherches sur 1’Antiquite Tardive et le Haut Moyen Age ed. 1981), 349. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Liber Vitae Dunelmensis Ecclesiae (Stevenson ed. 1841). The Liber Vitae is a list of names classified according to their bearers’ rank in the world and the Church. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Arnold, supra note 2, at 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. F. M. Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England (1971, 3d ed.), 247-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See generally D. W. Rollason, ‘The wanderings of St. Cuthbert’, in Cuthbert: Saint and Patron (D. W.Rollason ed. 1987), 45-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. EHD, supra note 20, at 93 n. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Arnold, supra note 2, at 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. P. H. Sawyer, Kings and Vikings (1982), 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Suggested by, for example, the Christian elements in the early tenth century York coinage, and the baptism of Guthfrith by Abbot Eadred, as reported by HSC. A. P. Smyth, Scandinavian York and Dublin I (1979), 52-55; Arnold, supra note 2, at 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Sawyer, supra note 30, at 96-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See supra note 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Stevenson, supra note24, at 56; for a translation, see A. J. Robertson, Anglo-Saxon Charters (1939), 125; Sawyer, supra note 6, at 454, no. 1660. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The only dating for this grant is provided by the possible occurrence of Thured

    in other contexts. A Thured signed Aethelred’s charters between 979 and 989-90. Robertson, supra note 34, at 368. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Domesday Book 30: Yorkshire Pt. 1 (M. L. Faull & M. Stinson eds. 1986), 304d. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. T. Sheppard, ‘Viking and other relics at Crayke, Yorkshire’, Yorkshire Archaeological Journal 34 (1939), 273-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Id. at 277-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Id. at 279-81. The hoard consists of ‘two swords, one of which was broken, two figure-of-eight horse-bit links and ring, a fragment of a (?) horse bit, two more rings, a broken T-shaped axe, a hook or fastener, a socketed gouge, nine chisel blanks, a chisel, a fragment of another sword, four (?) knives, a wall hook, parts of iron hoops, six bars, a horseshoe fragment and three fragments of indefinite shape’. C. A. Morris, ‘A late Saxon hoard of iron and copper-alloy artefacts from Nazeing, Essex’, Medieval Archaeology 27 (1983), 37.

    40. Id. 41. J. A. Smyth, ‘Metal objects made by the Vikings’, Hull Museum Publications 212

    (1941), 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. This is confirmed by the fact that one of the bars is a piece of bloomery iron. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)