

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 Dale 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 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 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 It appears to have been originally compiled in the mid-tenth century, though the text had been added by the eleventh century.

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Crayke is first encountered in 685 in connection with the synod of Twyford, when in the presence of King Ecgrith of Northumbria and Archbishop Theodore, Cuthbert was

1. 'Crayke', in *The Victoria County History of York North Riding* (W. Page ed. 1923) [hereafter VCH], 119.
2. *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia I* (T. Arnold ed. 1882, Rolls Series 75), 196-214. The HSC references are mirrored in Symeon of Durham's later *Historia Dunelmensis Ecclesiae* (Arnold, *supra*, at 3-135).
3. Arnold, *supra* note 2, at XXV.
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 1109. Arnold, *supra* note 2, at 3-135. This is not surprising, as Symeon freely admits to having made use of HSC. *Id.* at XIX.