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## **Converting the Peak District? Britons, Angles, and Christians**

The conversion of Mercia came late, and the uplands ... must have been among the last areas to receive Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Texts, Objects and the Imaginary***

#### *Conversion texts – fragmentary, partial and predetermined*

Historical accounts of the early Middle Ages in England continue to be dominated by narratives of Germanic migration, conversion to Christianity, and kingdom building. These narratives remain based on a small number of textual sources which are laconic, fragmentary, partial, and (frequently) not contemporary with what they describe. The textual sources provide us with very uneven coverage of the processes we seek to understand – and that unevenness is a product not only of the vagaries of survival, but also of limited perspective and wilful manipulation and distortion. These deficiencies result in a process of ‘stretching’ what we know (or think we know) to cover/mask what we don’t, and so to a ‘flattening’ of the histories we write.

Unlike history as we know it, Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* had direction and purpose.<sup>2</sup> Its story of the conversion of ‘a Gentile nation located ... at the edge of the known world’ constituted the fulfilment of biblical prophecies that, before the end of the world, God’s Word would reach the Ends of the Earth.<sup>3</sup> Events taking place in Bede’s own day were regarded as prefigured in the Old Testament and as marking the ‘last days’.<sup>4</sup> Bede’s was a history imbued with, and structured by, a sense of ‘English predestination’.<sup>5</sup>

Although the *Historia Ecclesiastica* does convey some sense of the struggle needed to effect even a pre-ordained process, and some setbacks, reversals and ‘pagan reaction’ are recorded,<sup>6</sup> ‘negative examples of this process are not generally preserved –

there was no ideological mileage for a churchman such as Bede in recording kings carefully assessing Christianity and finding it wanting'.<sup>7</sup> Although Bede claimed to write an ecclesiastical history of the *English* people, this Englishness was very 'Northumbrian', excluding (especially) the Mercians who 'are almost never expressly included by name within the *Angli*'.<sup>8</sup> However, it is his enmity towards the 'Britons', rooted in a fear that they were schismatics, which epitomises the partiality of Bede's *Historia*. Such was this antipathy that they, not the 'pagans', were the *Historia Ecclesiastica's* real Other.<sup>9</sup> Alexander Murray goes so far as to argue that the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is imbued with a 'racial animus' which would ensure that, were it written today, it would be banned in schools. The Britons were 'the unchosen race'.<sup>10</sup>

Bede's partiality does more than create gaps in our historical knowledge. It affects our understanding of the historical process. The fact that we still privilege his (very partial) assertion that the British Church played little part in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons contributes to narratives in which the Gregorian/Augustinian mission rolls (seemingly inevitably) across the country from the south and east.<sup>11</sup> This is especially problematic in regions, like the Peak District (Fig. 1), which lay at the interface of influences from *both* the Gregorian/Augustinian mission and that of the Irish/Northumbrians and where, as well as what we would call 'paganism', there might have been significant continuity of British Christianity. This congeries of belief probably more accurately reflects the realities of the age than the flattened, monochrome narratives we have constructed from the written sources.

But Bede's history is socially as well as geographically restricted. All our textual sources emanate from, and talk about, (ecclesiastical) elites. We read elite thoughts and hear about elite actions; the voices of the lower orders are 'invariably silent'.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, we ascribe historical directionality to elites. This leads to what David Petts calls a 'Constantinian model' of conversion, a top-down, follow-my-leader

version of that process which is predicated on the conversion of kings and princes.<sup>13</sup> Our sources also tend to record a transformation from pagan to Christian effected through baptism - as a consequence, they highlight 'the potency of the missionary as a catalyst of change'.<sup>14</sup> In our texts, kings and missionaries make history happen; they are at the heart of the historical process.

Fragmentary, predetermined, and partial – if these texts can speak, how much can we believe what they say?

### *Stretching the evidence – the conversion of the Pecsæte?*

The *Pecsæte* (Peak-Dwellers) are one of the peoples listed in the *Tribal Hidage*, a late-seventh/eighth-century 'assessment' of the area then under Mercian domination.<sup>15</sup> They were one of a group of small kingdoms in a buffer-zone between the 'core' kingdoms of Mercia (to the south) and Northumbria (to the north) (Fig. 1),<sup>16</sup> and were incorporated into Mercia by the end of the eighth century, their royal line perhaps replaced by ealdormen at the Mercian court.<sup>17</sup>

Our texts actually tell us *nothing* about the Christianisation of the *Pecsæte* – but we have stretched evidence from elsewhere to fill that gap. Raleigh Radford assumed that the process worked from south to north, from Mercia through to the uplands of the Peak. Audrey Ozanne agreed, and connected some of the evidence from the Peak District barrows to the 'official introduction of Christianity into Mercia in 655'.<sup>18</sup> In this absence, one might *imagine* a process similar to that which, in 653, saw the Middle Angles accept Christianity. Their king, Peada, married Alhflæd, daughter of Oswiu, king of Northumbria. Oswiu gave his permission on condition that Peada and his people 'accepted the Christian faith and baptism', and he sent four priests (Adda, Betti, Cedd, and Diurna) to effect the process.<sup>19</sup> Alternatively, we *might* link conversion

of the *Pecsæte* to the elevation of Chad, a ‘missionary bishop’, to the see of Mercia and Lindsey (with his seat at Lichfield) in 669 (Fig. 1).<sup>20</sup>

It is important to note, however, that Lichfield (and the surrounding area) might already have been a centre of *British* Christianity.<sup>21</sup> Damian Tyler uses placename evidence (especially *eccles*- toponyms) to support his argument for the persistence in the Midlands of a ‘British Church structure’.<sup>22</sup> These have their origins in the British *\*Eclēs*, a loan word from the Latin *ecclesia*, and indicate both ‘places which were recognizable as churches when their English names were formed’ and the persistence of a British ecclesiastical structure.<sup>23</sup>

And this should make us pause for a moment. We have tended to think in terms of simple pagan/Christian oppositions – of the conversion of pagan peoples, via kings and missionaries, to Christian ones. But just because Bede wrote the British and the British church out of history does not mean that they did not exist in history. What do we mean by ‘conversion’ when it takes place in landscapes where there was already a significant Christian presence? This is an important question because, if we choose to look for it, (rather than stretching that from elsewhere) there is evidence in the Peak District, not for a simple ‘conversion’ from pagan to Christian, but for a variety of belief, including some ‘continuity’ from the traditions of (at least) the Romano-British past, the introduction/adoption of a form of ‘Germanic paganism’, as well as (perhaps) two varieties of Christianity.

### *Objects and the imaginary*

Our reliance on the limiting written sources would be understandable if they were all that is available. There is, of course, the material record (objects, monuments, landscapes) from the period – but our narrative histories, unaccountably, tend to

ignore it. This is regrettable on a number of levels, the more so since recent work on the 'agency of objects' has highlighted their role in the historical process. Some 'things' had an intended purpose within a system of signification (see below), but some of efficacy of things derives from their sheer materiality.<sup>24</sup> Durability is a quality which means that, in a process of 'gathering or sedimentation', objects, monuments and landscapes from the past(s) persist into the present to frame human action.<sup>25</sup> As we shall see, the prehistoric landscape was a significant presence in the everyday of the *Pecsæte*, and served as a basis for their interaction with the supernatural.

Fluidity is another important quality of material culture. It is polysemous.<sup>26</sup> The meaning of material culture is not usually fixed or given (it emerges in practice), and even where the object has intentional communicative content the relationship between signified and signifier is not so tightly bound as to rule out other readings. This indeterminacy of objects was acknowledged in the Middle Ages - 'being less controllable than the authorised text, images were deeply divisive; they pretended to be what they were not'.<sup>27</sup> Therein lay some of their potency.

Things, natural and man-made, are key to our interaction with the supernatural – what Maurice Godelier calls the 'imaginary'. The imaginary is a *real* world, but one composed of *mental* realities (*réalités idéelles*). It is the sum of all our beliefs about origins and ancestry, about the 'order or disorder prevailing in the universe or in society', and about 'how people should behave with respect to each other and the world around them'. There is nothing illusory about the imaginary. Materialised in the symbolic, it directly impacts on people's lives.<sup>28</sup> So medieval rogation processions, bearing crosses and ringing bells, ensured that 'the power of the wicked spirits which keep in the air may be laid down, and the air made pure and clean, to the intent the corn may remain unharmed and not infected of the said hurtful spirits'.<sup>29</sup>

Henri Lefebvre asks, rhetorically, '[a]re not the surreal, the extraordinary, the surprising, even the magical, also part of the real? Why wouldn't the concept of everydayness reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary'?<sup>30</sup> In what follows I will show how the marvellous permeated the early medieval Peak District, and how the objects, monuments and landscapes in which it was expressed were themselves integral to the historical processes which transformed their imaginary world.

### ***The Barrow and the Cross***

#### *Threads of continuity*

It is clear that topography was a significant element in the identity of the *Pecsæte* – they were named for the dominant topographical feature in their landscape (the Peaks).<sup>31</sup> The limestone plateau of the White Peak lies at the heart of the region, and is surrounded by the gritstone Dark Peak, and by the Trent Valley to the south (Fig. 2).<sup>32</sup> Fernand Braudel suggested that such defined, regional landscapes (*pays*) engender 'a type of inhabitant and a way of life', and it is likely that the *Pecsæte* owed something of their identity (and character?) to the distinctive, 'self-contained' nature of their region.<sup>33</sup> The landscape (too) was an agent in the historical process.

Chris Loveluck has argued that the late Roman Peak District (from the late third/fourth century) was characterised by a distinctive inhumation rite (east-west aligned, in/under barrows, in rock-cut graves, and accompanied by red deer antler tines and quartz pebbles). The use of antler tines and quartz pebbles harks back to regional Bronze Age and Iron Age funerary traditions.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, prehistoric barrows became platforms for ritual acts, including the deposition of coins, sherds of pottery, and animal parts, and some may have served as minor shrines in what Ronald Hutton regards as a 'sacralisation of the landscape'.<sup>35</sup>

Elements of this burial tradition (the significance of antler tines and quartz pebbles, as well as the use of earthen barrows) provide important threads linking the late Roman world with that of the mid-seventh century, when we see the flowering of the barrow burials for which the *Pecsæte* are now best known (Fig. 3).<sup>36</sup> The tendency to see barrow burial as a pagan, intrusive, *Germanic* tradition,<sup>37</sup> however, speaks of discontinuity, and has coloured our understanding of the *Pecsæte* (see below). It is important, therefore, to highlight the fact that the reuse of barrows, and barrow burial, was also a feature of ‘western’, *British* traditions.<sup>38</sup>

#### *Placenames, hanging bowls and the British church* (Fig. 2)

As we saw earlier, *eccles* placenames have been taken as an indicator of the existence of a British church/population. There is a significant grouping of these in the Peak itself and around Sheffield. Nick Higham argues that this indicates an area of ‘cultural conservatism ... where Brittonic survived as a spoken language into the eighth century’. Around Sheffield these names survive alongside some containing British elements, and others ‘indicative of Welsh speakers at a comparatively late date’. Might we begin to speak of ‘the *British* inhabitants of the Peak District’, and of an established Christian presence?<sup>39</sup> There is some material evidence to support the suggestion.

Recent studies suggest that, from the mid-sixth century through the first quarter of the seventh, enamelled hanging bowls were made in ‘some of the most prosperous centres of British Britain’, and were originally produced ‘for use in the rituals of the British church’.<sup>40</sup> There is a small cluster of such bowls and/or escutcheons from the Peak District – at Over Haddon, Middleton Moor, Roystone Grange and Benty Grange (Figs 2 and 4).<sup>41</sup> The fragments from Middleton Moor were accompanied by a piece of red and yellow enamelled metalwork identified as ‘the

hinge of a house-shaped shrine'. The yellow enamel suggests direct influence 'from the Celtic principalities bordering the Irish Sea', while a sixth-century bronze penannular brooch from Pikehall is a 'post-Roman native type' of 'Celtic' manufacture, and a seventh-century silver penannular from Wigber Low is 'British or Welsh in origin'.<sup>42</sup>

The material culture and placename evidence, taken together, allow us to propose some continuity of British tradition, including religious, among the *Pecsæte* (can we call them than yet?). It is probably premature to import John Blair's picture of a sixth- to eighth-century west Britain containing 'large numbers of small monastic or clerical settlements whose rulers and patrons tended to be venerated in them as saints',<sup>43</sup> but the important point is that by the mid-seventh century (at around the same time as, to the south, Chad was installed as bishop) this was, if not a Christian landscape, then a landscape with Christians.

### *Pagans*

A small number of place-names hint that these Christians shared the landscape with people whose imaginary was 'Germanic'. *Wensley* and *Friden* are related to Woden and Frig respectively, and *Thirst House Cave* in Deepdale preserves a connection between *þyrs* (OE for a giant or demon) and an opening into the underworld (Fig. 2).<sup>44</sup> The material evidence is more vocal.

In the middle of the seventh century a community chose to bury their dead in the Bronze Age mounds on the ridge at Wigber Low, near Bradbourne (Fig. 3). In doing so they acted within a funerary tradition reaching back into the fifth century.<sup>45</sup> Burial 4 contained the bodies of a man and a woman. The man was buried with a small knife and a sword, the woman with a knife and spear, a purse, and a buckle (probably

from the belt on which the purse was suspended) - a side of beef had been placed over her left leg (Fig. 5).<sup>46</sup>

It was once thought that such 'weapons-burials' were markers of the (immigrant) warriors through whom the Anglo-Saxon conquest of England was effected, but Heinrich Härke has demonstrated that they were the 'ritual expression of an ethnically, socially and perhaps ideologically based "warrior status"'.<sup>47</sup> Although by the seventh century some of those buried with weapons may have been Britons who had come to believe they were migrants (there was more than one conversion in the Peak District!), it remained a (largely) *Germanic* rite (see below). As such it articulated beliefs about ancestry and origins, about a myth of migration, and about an imaginary world in which connections with the Homeland across the North Sea were central.<sup>48</sup>

Just to the south, in another prehistoric mound, the body of a young woman was interred.<sup>49</sup> She had been buried with an ornate wooden box, an iron knife, a crystal ball, 'a pendant made from a beaver's incisor, enclosed in a gold tube and suspended on gold hook', a spear, a drinking vessel, a food offering (beef), and part of a 'ring-bead or pendant in amethyst glass'. The rest of this bead, along with another beaver-tooth pendant, a (broken) gold bracteate, a silver ring-brooch, and two silver wire 'knot-rings' were found in nineteenth-century excavations (Figs 6 and 7).<sup>50</sup> This intriguing assemblage provides important insights into the imaginary world of the *Pecsæte*.

Crystal balls are rare; this is the only one from the region (Fig. 7.i). They tend to be found (as here) in female graves. The hole drilled in its surface suggests that it was attached to an item of clothing or a belt.<sup>51</sup> It was clearly a valuable object but its value might have derived as much from its connections with the imaginary as from its rarity. Rock-crystal was among the category of objects which contained 'natural magic' (a power *inherent* in some things).<sup>52</sup> In the Middle Ages this quality of rock-crystal was deployed to cure sick humans and animals, to protect from the Evil Eye, and to light

(especially sacrificial) fires.<sup>53</sup> Valerie Flint traces the capacity of crystal balls to conjure up images back into Antiquity, and links it with necromancy.<sup>54</sup> Seen in this context, the crystal ball at Wigber might have been used in *both* 'natural' and 'supernatural' magical practices.

Early medieval beaver-tooth pendants are perhaps even rarer - there is only one other example in England with gold-fittings (Fig. 7.ii). Meaney suggests that the 'strong' incisors of a beaver, imbued with natural magic, were worn 'in the hope of warding off pain and dental decay'.<sup>55</sup> Alternatively, their power might derive from the place of animals in the imaginary world of the *Pecsæte*. Marilyn Dunn links the early medieval idea of 'a totemic guardian animal' with shamanism and the belief that the soul could leave the body, 'usually taking on the form of an animal'.<sup>56</sup>

The deep purple glass bead was clearly intended to be seen as amethyst, which also had special, natural, powers. It protected against drunkenness and ill-health, improved memory and provided safeguard against 'poison and wild beasts and in battle'.<sup>57</sup>

This assemblage, with its rare items and precious materials, might be taken simply to indicate that this young woman was of high status.<sup>58</sup> Recently, however, scholars have begun to rethink the bases of the power of women in early medieval society, and connections have been made between the 'performance of a practical magic and divination known [in later Scandinavian literature] as *seiðr*' and the 'little bags or boxes of Anglo-Saxon and Germanic curative equipment' found in some female graves. These might include 'animals' teeth ... and such possible instruments of witchcraft as rings ... and pierced coins ... [as well as] amethyst and crystal beads.<sup>59</sup> Audrey Meaney has suggested that women buried with these kinds of objects were 'the cunning-women of the tribe'.<sup>60</sup> If the Wigber young lady were such a figure, her

capacity to harness the forces of both *natural* and *supernatural* magic would have made her a very powerful, mystical, force among the *Pecsæte*.

### *A Christian among the Ancestors*

The nineteenth-century excavations at Wigber also recovered two mid-seventh-century silver pins with cruciform heads, and the bracteate carried a cruciform design (Fig. 8).<sup>61</sup> These crosses are part of a mid- to late-seventh-century trend, at both the national and local levels, for women (especially) to be buried with grave goods which explicitly symbolise a Christian imaginary.<sup>62</sup> Elsewhere in the Peak District, a mid- to late-seventh century gold cruciform pendant and a mid-seventh century filigree and garnet disc with a cruciform central roundel were found at White Low, near Winstler (Fig. 9), while from Benty Grange we have the famous helmet adorned with both a boar and a silver cross, as well as a leather cup bearing two silver crosses (Fig. 10).<sup>63</sup>

Traditionally these objects (especially the co-presence of the boar and cross) have been taken as evidence for the kind of syncretism thought characteristic of the early stages of conversion.<sup>64</sup> This would have involved the deployment of the power of the cross within traditional cosmologies, and/or the acceptance of Christ within the 'pantheon' of gods and spirits.<sup>65</sup> John Blair, however, argues that it is not always necessary to invoke syncretism – 'the cross was a new and specific symbol of Christianity [and] the boar-crest [was] a traditional symbol of warrior prowess ... contemporary laity, and probably most ecclesiastics, are likely to have thought of them as entirely compatible' (but see below).<sup>66</sup>

Once we accept that there was nothing un-Christian about burial in a barrow and/or with grave-goods, it becomes possible to think that, in the Peak District barrows, we are, in fact, 'studying the remains of a Christian population'.<sup>67</sup> Early

medieval ecclesiastical centres might have had more than one associated burial place, and those who *chose* elaborate burial in barrows might have done so ‘because they did not have strong family ties to any particular “minster”’.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, John Blair points out that the females buried in these rich graves belonged to ‘precisely the same age and class as the first generations of noble abbesses’, and suggests that they had ‘followed careers ... in the world rather than in the Church’.<sup>69</sup> Christian burial in a barrow was a *choice* made in particular circumstances.

In this scenario the presence of the cross in the grave was a product of neither fashion nor chance. It was a statement of belief, and a weapon to ward off demons. This power was spelt out on the walls of a ninth-century tomb at the monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno, Italy – CRVX CHRISTI CONFVSIO DIABOLI (the Cross of Christ the Confusion of the Devil) (Fig. 11).<sup>70</sup> But to be effective this object did not actually need the reinforcement of text, and those buried at Benty Grange, White Low, and Wigber Low would have benefitted from its protection as their souls (vulnerable in their liminal state) awaited Judgement.<sup>71</sup>

Intriguingly, Christians *could* have seen some of the other objects buried with the young woman at Wigber as a materialisation of *their* imaginary. In medieval Christianity, crystal was linked with the Virgin Mary and with chastity.<sup>72</sup> The beaver too was associated with chastity (perhaps because of the similarity between the Latin word for chastity (*castitas*) and the word for beaver (*castor*)),<sup>73</sup> and Bede believed that amethyst had the power of continually recalling the heavenly kingdom to the mind of the humble.<sup>74</sup> Such readings of the objects would allow us to place a Christian, instead of a cunning-woman, in the barrows at Wigber.

The association of crosses with females suggests that women played a ‘dynamic role’ in conversion. John Blair argues that

in a world where seers and magicians were often female, there could have been some continuity in perceptions of women as religious specialists: if sixth-century 'wise-women' worked magic with their bags of trinkets, did a similar aura linger around late seventh-century Christian women who wore crosses, cross-marked pouches, and metal canisters?<sup>75</sup>

Although Blair tells us that there is no need to think of syncretism, in the fluid world of the mid-seventh century, in which both peoples and beliefs were in a process of becoming, it is possible that the lady at Wigber was both wise-woman *and* pious Christian, and that the polysemy of objects facilitated a process of accommodation. But then the question arises, what kind of Christian was she? As I noted above, this was a region located at the intersection of a range of influences, but with significant continuity from the past – and it might be possible to situate some of the Wigber material within that, *British*, context.

As we have seen, the inclusion of quartz pebbles in graves is part of a 'native' Peak District tradition which shows 'continuity' (or revival) from prehistory, through the late Roman period, and into the (Anglian) early Middle Ages.<sup>76</sup> But it is also part of a broader, northern British, tradition of placing quartz or other white stones on or in graves.<sup>77</sup> Rock-crystal is a form of quartz – and so the crystal ball at Wigber might have been part of that same tradition. In 1954 Margaret Fowler suggested that the early medieval occupants of the Peak District barrows were *both* British and Christian.<sup>78</sup> At beginning of the 1960's Audrey Ozanne brusquely dismissed the 'idea that the use of barrows in the Peak has to do with the survival of British elements in the Anglian population'.<sup>79</sup> In the light of the evidence for the deep-history of this tradition, for the importance of barrows as long-term repositories of memory and belief, and taking into account our earlier arguments for the continuity of a British population and a British

church, might it not be time to return to Fowler's early insight? If so, to what extent can we continue to speak of 'conversion'; what need do we have of Chad 'the missionary bishop', or of counterparts to Adda, Betti, Cedd, and Diuma?

By the end of the seventh century, it is unlikely that all the inhabitants of the Peak District regarded themselves as British or 'belonged' to a British church. As the weapons-burials at Wigber Low attest, at least some of the elite believed themselves to be of Germanic descent, with ancestral connections across the North Sea. It is also likely, given the oscillating great-power influence on the region, that the varieties of Christianity associated with the Irish/Northumbrians and with the Gregorian/Augustinian mission had some impact (stylistically, the crosses in the barrow at White Low have Kentish connections [Fig. 9]).<sup>80</sup> If others within the English church thought like Bede about the British they might have considered that 'conversion' of the Peak District was still necessary. But the reality was that there was a pre-existing tradition which made this landscape already Christian. And this particular Christian landscape was made not (or not just) by missionaries and kings – but also by women, and through the objects and places which materialised a Christian imaginary in the Peak District reality. It was 'the work of texts, objects and the social practices of everyday life'.<sup>81</sup>

### *The Cross*

The boar and the cross may have co-existed down the ages on the helmet entombed in the barrow at Benty Grange, but the triumph of the latter seems to be encapsulated in the monumental stone cross raised at Bradbourne (1.4km north-east of Wigber) at the beginning of the ninth century (Fig. 12i). This, with similar crosses at Eyam, Bakewell, and Sheffield (Fig. 3), seems to take us into a landscape now structured around the

church.<sup>82</sup> Bradbourne lay at the heart of an usually large parish, and the presence of sculpted stone monuments suggest that it was an early medieval minster.<sup>83</sup>

The iconography of the Bradbourne cross tells us much about the concerns of the ‘theologically sophisticated’ community which commissioned it and engaged with it as part their liturgical cycle.<sup>84</sup> The (present)<sup>85</sup> east and west faces are covered with plant scrolls (inhabited by humans and animals) signifying the True Vine, and intended to call to mind ‘the blood of Christ, shed for the redemption of mankind’, the Eucharist, and ‘the Christian community, receiving spiritual sustenance from its teaching and sacraments’ (Fig. 12ii).<sup>86</sup> The plant scrolls also signify the Tree of Life, and therefore Paradise.<sup>87</sup> It was through Christ and His sacraments, through the Church, that eternal life was to be gained.

The archers at the base of the plant scrolls are one of the most distinctive features of the Peak District crosses (Fig. 12iii).<sup>88</sup> Barbara Raw argues that the archer symbolises the preacher, whose ‘arrow is the Gospel, the Word of God, which is aimed to strike, illuminate and convert the hearer’ (but see below).<sup>89</sup> The archers brought to mind the *pastoral* duties of the clergy, their role in guiding people to salvation through the Church and her sacraments.

The lower panel on the (present) north face depicts a ‘clerical figure holding before him a book on a T-shaped stand. Perched on his right shoulder is a bird ... [B]elow, he is flanked by two diminutive profile figures facing each other, both apparently with books before them’ (Fig. 13i).<sup>90</sup> This panel has, in the past, been interpreted as depicting ‘one of the Evangelists receiving Divine inspiration’, or as ‘the man to whom the cross was put up’.<sup>91</sup> More recently, however, Jane Hawkes has identified it as a depiction of ‘Gregory the Great in his role as Scribe’. The ‘bird’, of course, is a dove and symbolises the Holy Spirit, and in the *Vita Sancti Gregorii* written at Whitby c.713 it is suggested that Gregory benefitted from its divine inspiration while

writing his homilies on Ezekiel, the eighth of which was concerned with ‘angelic nature, with the fellowship of angels and humanity, with the nature of contemplation and its function in the Christian life’.<sup>92</sup>

Two pieces of the cross head have survived. One, found in 2002, shows only part of a head and some moulding, but the other bears images of ‘angels with staffs and trumpets’ (Fig. 13ii). The Bradbourne cross, like those at Eyam and Bakewell, was crowned with angels.<sup>93</sup> In the early Middle Ages there was intense interest in angels, not least by Gregory the Great whose ‘angelology was heavily promoted by Bede’. Imitation of the angels, through which eternal life would be assured, required *combining contemplation with action*, and was ‘a critical element in the pastoral life of the priesthood’.<sup>94</sup> As with the archers, the message here relates to the pastoral mission of the Church, and the centrality of the clergy in delivering the Christian message of Salvation through the sacraments – especially the Eucharist.

The Crucifixion, with Longinus piercing Christ’s side, is depicted on the (present) south side of the cross-shaft (Fig. 13iii).<sup>95</sup> The blood flowing from His side was another symbol of the Eucharist - ninth-century theologians ‘argued that the bread and wine offered in the mass became the same human body that was sacrificed and buried’. And just as angels had witnessed (and shuddered at) the Crucifixion, so they were present in the church during the celebration of the mass.<sup>96</sup>

The Bradbourne cross, therefore, materialises Christian belief about the Church as the community of the faithful, about the path to salvation through the Crucifixion and the sacraments, and (especially) about the pastoral duties of the clergy. The obvious question then is to whom were these messages directed? The monumental scale of such crosses, combined with the belief that the images they bore served as ‘prompts’ for preaching, has supported assumptions that they were ‘public’

monuments. There are reasons to doubt that this was their intended context. A medieval image was not, in our sense,

a picture of something, but rather *the means for memorialising and recollecting* the same matter or story that written letters also record. ... Both textual activities, picturing and reading, have as their goal not simply the learning of a story, but learning it to familiarise and domesticate it, in that fully internalised, even physiological way that medieval reading required.<sup>97</sup>

Further, Éamonn Ó Carragáin has argued that the idea of the ‘preaching cross’ may be a product of the Reformation’s emphasis on (hearing) the Word of God – ‘the eighth century ... is likely to have been much more “sacramental” in its priorities’. He also suggests that the ‘unique programme’ of these crosses would have ‘cramped a preacher’s style by over-determining his themes. What was he to do most Sundays and feast days, when no panel on the cross reflected the gospel read that day?’<sup>98</sup> The narrative cycles which one would expect to support preaching are, in addition, rare. In most cases, as at Bradbourne, ‘the surviving figural images are ... iconic portraits ... of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the apostles or saints, and angels’.<sup>99</sup> The task of the viewer was to draw out the themes that bound the images together – and it is likely that only the clergy would have possessed the knowledge and understanding to do so.<sup>100</sup>

The Bradbourne cross, therefore, had its (intended) rationale within the liturgy and contemplative life of the community that created it. It reminded them of their pastoral duties, of their responsibility to bring the people of the region into the body of the Church and (therefore) to salvation. They were to be archers spreading the word of God, bringing the people to feed off the sacraments. They were to imitate the angels. We might, in addition, argue that the action demanded of them included *on-going* conversion – not just to Christianity, but to orthodoxy. And in this context the archers might be read as standing for the ‘enemies by whom the Roman Church ... was

surrounded, *pagans and heretics* alike<sup>101</sup> – a further stimulus to turn contemplation into action in a landscape with a deep *British*, Christian tradition.

The ‘inherent’ polysemy of material culture meant, however, that still further readings of these images were possible – readings which may have subverted their intended purpose.

### *The Cross as Tree*

The cross on which Christ was crucified was ‘of course’ a tree.<sup>102</sup> The most famous Anglo-Saxon representations of the ‘cross as tree’ are to be found in *The Dream of the Rood* and on the Ruthwell cross (Dumfries and Galloway).<sup>103</sup> Richard North has suggested that the description of the cross in *The Dream of the Rood* is ‘partly based on an image of the Anglian “world tree”, analogous to the role of Yggdrasil in the Old Norse-Icelandic cosmos’.<sup>104</sup> This ‘correspondence’ between cross and tree, it has been argued, helped to facilitate conversion – ‘the vine-scroll carved crosses of Anglo-Saxon England helped to mediate the transition from the veneration of sacred trees to the Cross of Christ’.<sup>105</sup> However, it is also possible that some would have been able to read the ‘vegetal’ crosses as a materialisation of their own, old ways. In 1885 Bishop George Forrest Browne proposed that *Ratatoskr* (the squirrel-messenger who ran up and down the trunk of Yggdrasil) was depicted in the vine-scroll at Bakewell – and so made a connection between the Peak District crosses and the Germanic World Tree. In these crosses, he argued, we find ‘a combination of the Christian and the Teutonic religious beliefs’.<sup>106</sup> The fact that a prominent clergyman could read the monument in this way reinforces the possibility that some contemporaries might have taken it as a materialisation of elements of their non-Christian imaginary world.

### *Gregory and the Pecsæte*

We are told that Augustine's mission to England was inspired by the future pope Gregory's encounter with the 'fair-skinned, light-haired' Anglian boys in Rome.<sup>107</sup> We have already seen how Bede's narrative was framed by the eschatological significance of this mission, and scholars have argued that Gregory's conception of a single church for a single people (a product of his assumption that *all* the inhabitants of England were *Angli*) was critical in the construction of the English from the numerous Anglo-Saxon peoples.<sup>108</sup> Gregory became known as the 'apostle of the English', at first (and in the end) more revered in England than in Rome. His cult was disseminated nationwide by Archbishop Theodore (668-90), first at the major churches in Kent and Northumbria, and 'then fostered in a second phase at ecclesiastical centres throughout England'.<sup>109</sup> Theodore's promotion of the cult of Gregory was not at all disinterested – 'by 679 [he] had adopted the style "archbishop of Britain", exercising authority over both English provinces [Canterbury and York]. The fact that Gregory provided the English church ... with an apostolic patron not localised upon Canterbury would ... have rendered his cult especially attractive to Theodore'.<sup>110</sup> The cult reached its apogee in the eighth century, and in 747 the council of *Clofeshoh* stipulated that his feast should be kept throughout the country.

One wonders if Bradbourne was one of the minsters through which the dissemination of the cult of Gregory was effected, his representation on the cross carrying that tradition into the ninth century, and beyond? In contemplating Gregory's image on a monument crowned with angels, the community there were reminded to imitate the angels, and also of the importance of the pivotal encounter with the Anglian boys in Rome for the Gregorian mission to the English.<sup>111</sup> Such reminders might have resonated more forcefully in a landscape where conversion was an on-going process, and where the Christian tradition was (or recently had been) at odds

with Gregory's vision of 'a single "ecclesia" for a single "gens Anglorum"'.<sup>112</sup>

### *Landscapes of change*

In the pre-modern worlds in which they were viewed as other than commodified landscapes were 'doubly-faced', comprising the domain of everyday existence conducted in cosmologically-ordered space. These phenomenal and the mythical landscapes did not just co-exist for, as Ton Derks argues, 'cosmological conceptions and ordinary life were constituted in each other'.<sup>113</sup> Given the centrality of the 'imaginary' to beliefs about origins and ancestry (above), we should not doubt the place of landscapes (as things), or of the human action within them, in the construction (or transformation) of identities.<sup>114</sup>

The durability and fluidity of things, monuments and landscapes meant not only that they persisted, but also that they were both the bearers of memory and meaning from the past and were open to alternative readings. The prehistoric barrows at Wigger Low may have been 'reactivated' in the context of mid-seventh century 'paganism', but there was nothing intrinsically pagan (or 'German') about them. Their use for the burial of the powerful Christian dead may have been an important factor in the acceptance of Christianity in the region.

The construction of the church and cross at Bradbourne provided new cosmological anchors around which the landscape was re-imagined and re-articulated, and the routines of prayer and work restructured<sup>115</sup> – but in a world where the conversion of the *Pecsæte* was neither complete or guaranteed, the barrows at Wigger persisted as vehicles for local memory, belief and identity. Similarly, although we do not yet know whether (as was the case elsewhere<sup>116</sup>) the minster and cross at Bradbourne were constructed on a place already sacred in the traditions of the

*Pecsæte*, it is certainly possible that those among them who were not yet aware of the coming triumph of Christianity might have found some comfort in their focus on, and depiction of, the World Tree. The persistence, and malleability, of things in the landscape undermines the categorical shifts (from pagan to Christian, from barrow to cross – effected through ‘great men’) in terms of which we have tended to view the Christianisation of early medieval England.

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