



Kirkdale, Yorkshire, North riding

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Church of St. Gregory

Grid ref SE 677 857

Church fabric

Sundial

Grave slabs

Sculpture

Location

E off A170 just over ½mile E of Nawton, turn down minor road signposted 'St Gregory's Minster'. ¾m along road, turn N along another minor road. The church is to NE in c. 100 yds

Date

Nave – period C3

Taylor

Within the walls of the Saxon church are remains of grave slabs and crosses of a yet earlier period. Two of these slabs were removed from the W wall early in this century and placed inside the church. They are Saxon work of great beauty and it is good that they are no longer subjected to the ravages of the weather. One of these, upon which is a fine

cross, was said, a century ago, to bear the inscription in runic characters, 'Cyning Æpilwald', but no writing is now decipherable.

Saxon Sundial

This is to be seen over the S door and under cover of the porch. It is due to the protection of a coat of plaster until discovered in 1771 and since then of this porch that it has been preserved so remarkably. There are other Saxon sundials in the district, at GREAT EDSTONE and OLD BYLAND, but the inscriptions are not so clear or of anything like such interest. The dial seems to be in its original position, and consists of a stone slab, seven feet long, divided into three portions. The centre one is the dial, while the outer ones contain an inscription recording the rebuilding of the church,



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and giving a fairly exact date. The dial itself is divided into eight, which accords with the octaval system of time division.

The inscription in modern language reads:-

'Orm Gamal's son bought S. Gregory's Minster when it was all broken down and fallen and he let it be made anew from the ground to Christ and to S. Gregory in the days of Edward the King and Tosti the Earl. And Haward me wrought and Brand Priests

'This is the day's sun-marker at every time.'

General

The runic inscription to King Æpilwold was one of the foundations of the theory that Kirkdale was the true site of the monastery founded by St. Cedd in C7. Since very early times Kirkdale church has been known as St. Gregory's Minster, which implies the existence of a religious house. St. Cedd, an Angle of Northumbria, was one of a family of missionary priests, of whom the most famous was Chad, first Bishop of Lichfield. They were all educated at Lindisfame under St. Aidan, and Cedd preached first to the Middle Angles and then to the East Saxons. About 654 he became their Bishop. The Venerable Bede writes of him:

"The same man of God, whilst he was Bishop among the East Saxons, was also wont several times to visit his own country, Northumberland, to make exhortations. Ethelwald, the son of King Oswald, who reigned among the Deiri, finding him a holy, wise and good man, desired him to accept some land to build a monastery, to which the king himself might frequently resort, to offer his prayers and hear the word, and be buried in it when he died; for he believed that he should receive benefit by the prayers of those who were to serve God in that place ...

That prelate, therefore, complying with the king's desires, chose himself a place to build a monastery among craggy and distant mountains, which looked more like lurking places for robbers and retreats for wild beasts, than habitations for men."

Bede goes on to say that to cleanse the place from former crimes, St. Cedd planned to spend all Lent there in prayer, but being called away on the king's affairs, his place was taken by his brother Cynebil, who:-

"readily complied, and when the time of fasting and prayer was over, he there built a monastery, which is now called Lastingau, and established



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therein the religious customs of Lindisfarne, where they had been educated."

Bede also tells us that St Cedd was visiting this monastery when he died of a pestilence.

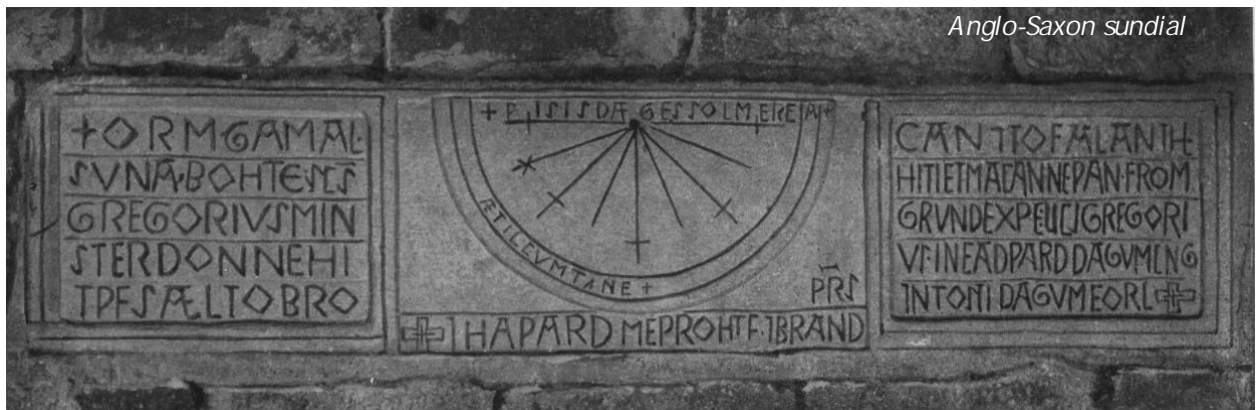
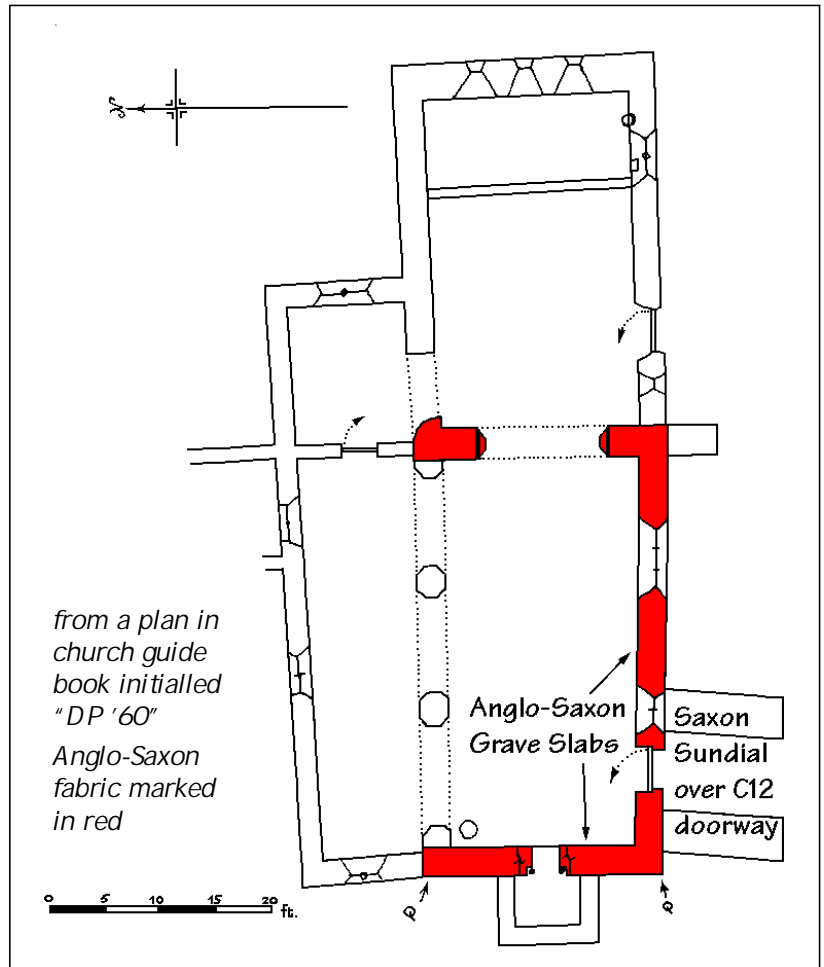
"He was first buried in the open air, but in the process of time a church was built of stone in the monastery, in honour of the Mother of God, and his body interred in the same on the right hand of the altar. The bishop left the monastery to be governed after him by his brother Chad."

It has generally been held that the monastery referred to was Lastingham, where the church is dedicated to St Mary, but in 1846 D. H. Haigh claimed that it was Kirkdale. He identified the coffin lid with the cross as that of King Ethelwald of Deira, on the strength of the runic inscription. The other coffin lid with an interlace design, and the tassels of a pall on the edges, was said to be that of St Chad. This theory has had few supporters.

The dedication is interesting as St Gregory was the Pope who sent Augustine's mission in 597. There was for a time a certain amount of disagreement between the Roman and Lindisfarne missions, which was resolved at the Synod of Whitby

in 664. St. Cedd was at Whitby and agreed to the adoption of Roman customs. It may well be that the dedication of a foundation, established by a Lindisfarne missionary, to St Gregory, was a deliberate attempt to foster unity.

If the theory suggested above is true the (original) church was first built in 654. In any case it must have been built fairly soon after that date, for it was destroyed during Danish raids and lay a ruin until a few years before the Norman Conquest



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The inscription tells us that there was a church previous to the restoration by Orm and that it was a Minster. Presumably this church was destroyed by the Danes and lay a ruin until Orm decided to refound it as a parish church. Domesday book records that 'Chirchebi' (Kirkby Moorside) had two churches, one of which was in the manor of Orm, a great local landowner. Kirkdale is clearly the church referred to, and the other church is in the manner of Torbrand, is Kirkby Moorside Parish Church. The inscription also tells us that the work was carried out in the days of King Edward (the Confessor) and of Earl Tosti. Tosti or Tostig, who became Earl of Northumberland in 1055, was banished for a variety of crimes, including the murder of Orm's father, Gamal, in 1065, but returned with Harold Hardrada, King of Norway, in the following year. The sundial thus dates the building between 1055 and 1065.

Bibliography

- J. C. Brooke: 'Saxon inscription on the church of Kirkdale in Ryedale': *Arch.* 5 (1779) pp118-205.
- C. L. R. Tudor: *A Brief Description of Kirkdale Church*: London 1876, with plans elevations and sections

F. W. Powell: *A Short account of St Gregory's Minster, Kirkdale: Leeds 1909*, with details of the restoration.

J. and H. M. Taylor: *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*: Cambridge 1965 pp357 ff.

From the Church Guide Book: publisher and author lost

Cross Shafts

- 1) N aisle opposite S doorway on stone bench – easternmost carving is probably C10 wheel-head cross.
- 2) Nave S wall 2' up – probably C10 cross-shaft, 5' long.
- 3) 1' further E – probably C10 cross-shaft 4' long.
- 4) Near W wall in tower N wall 9' up, probably C10 cross-shaft.

Guy Points

Sculpture

- 1) The wooden altar has a central roundel carved from wood from the Viking excavations in York.
- 2) In the centre of the E wall 6' up is a stone with interlace ornament, 6' x 18'.
- 3) Next to S end of previous stone is a stone of a quarter its size, possible Anglo-Saxon.

Guy Points

Top:

The Cedd stone

Bottom:

The Epelwald stone

Photos by R H Hayes

