

SAXON PARISHES OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE

by A. Bailey

The first recorded Saxon invasion of Gloucestershire occurred in 577 when the West Saxons by their victory at Dyrham consolidated their westward expansion with the capture of Bath, Cirencester and Gloucester. The northern invasion was probably more insidious, but in 628 the Mercian King Penda defeated Cynegils of Wessex at Cirencester and the county came under Mercian overlordship. The people of the Hwicce who dwelt in Gloucestershire, Worcestershire and the western part of Warwickshire from this time are considered to be of mixed West Saxon and Mercian descent.

By 664 Christianity had become the dominant religion of the country, and the first Mercian bishopric was established at Lichfield in 669. The Bishopric of Worcester was established by 680. The early church in Gloucestershire was influenced both by the Roman tradition of Theodore and also by Celtic Christianity, via the great abbeys of Malmesbury and Glastonbury and the early Mercian bishops. Of the four priests introduced into the diocese by Penda, Penda's Christian son, two were Irish; and three of the early Mercian bishops were of Irish extraction or education. In the year of the foundation of the Worcestershire diocese the earliest Gloucestershire church to be established was founded by Malmesbury Abbey at Tetbury. (1). The early spread of Christianity was from the bishop's familia and this extended to serving the population from monasteries, or minister churches of collegiate canons. Churches serving individual parishes or estates were established later, often starting as chapelries or field stations to the minister churches. Early minister churches were usually wooden and, as at Berkeley, no traces survive today of the original church. The two earliest stone churches of Gloucestershire are the famous minster church at Deerhurst and the church at Somerford Keynes founded by Aldhelm of Malmesbury Abbey. A monastic church was founded at Gloucester in 681 and by 730 there were abbeys at Worcester, Gloucester, Bath, Evesham and Pershore and monastic churches at Withington, Tetbury, Westbury-on-Trym and Yate. Monasteries were often double houses ruled over by an abbess. The ninth century ravages of the Danes lead to a decline in monastic Christianity; in Gloucestershire the area to suffer plundering raids was that surrounding the Severn river. In the quiet uplands around the Coln and Churn valleys there were built at this time several churches in stone; churches such as at Daglingworth, Coln Rogers, Bibury, and Ampney Crucis which shew evidence of their Saxon origins today.

By 850 there is documentary evidence for churches at Tidenham, Twynning, Beckford, Bishops Cleeve, Blockley Cheltenham, Daylesford, Winchcombe, Hawling, Tetbury and Yate; architectural evidence establishes the existence of churches at Somerford Keynes and Deerhurst, and there were monasteries at Gloucester and Tewkesbury and Cirencester. There are later charters relating to Berkeley, Bibury, Sodbury, and these churches were probably also established by this date. There must also have been churches at Lydney and Bourton on the Water where churches have been built on sites known to have Roman origins. Fairford one of the early

villages to suffer Saxon occupation must also have had a church by this period. The minster church at Standish must also have existed by this date and the early Frocester church may have been in existence as a chapel. (2). There is no evidence for an early church at Thornbury but it is the most likely site for an early church in the south. It also seems unlikely that the royal manor of Pucklechurch was without a chapel.

From this period onwards there must have been steady erosion of the large parishes as estate lords established private churches and chapels to the minster churches were established, until by 1000 the parish system as we know it today was well established. In many cases it is impossible to allocate accurate boundaries on existing evidence. It seems unlikely that the Berkeley hundred by 1000 had only one church, or that Withington and Gloucester served such a large area, but I have no documentary evidence to enable me to be more accurate, and in the Cirencester area I cannot establish the parish boundaries accurately.

In the more detailed analysis that follows (Finberg No.) refers to the charter number in H. Finberg, The Early Charters of the West Midlands (1972).

Brightwells Barrow

Bibury church has Saxon architecture and is mentioned in a Charter (Finberg No.87) and had a priest recorded in 1086. Fairford, with its Saxon cemetery, must have had an early church and a priest in 1086. By 1086 churches had been established at Southrop and Quenington.

Crowthorne & Minety

Somerford Keynes has been established as the earliest church of an area which is rich in churches with Saxon architecture. Early minster churches were probably Cirencester (Finberg No.169), and outside the Hundred boundary Malmesbury and Cricklade. By 1000 there were churches at Stratton, Duntisbourne Rouse, Daglingworth, Driffield, South Cerney, the Ampneys and Siddington. Bagendon church is not considered authentic Saxon.

Longtree

The earliest church was Tetta's minster (Finberg No.2), founded in 681. Minchinhampton had a priest in 1086, and it is suggested that this church with a sister church at Avening belonged to Beotric. Woodchester is known to have had a priest by 896, and by 1000 churches were established at Rodmarton and Lasborough.

Bisley

Bisley is recorded as having two priests in 1086, the parish included the present day Chalford, Stroud, Thrupp, Edgeworth. Winstone and Miserden are considered to be Saxon churches. Winstone was originally a chapelry of Miserden. Painswick was a separate parish by 1086.

Rapsgate

Brimpsfield is one of two churches in the hundred to have a priest mentioned in 1086, the other is Side. U. Daubney says that Cobberley had a Saxon cross (3), it may have been a field station or have had a chapel by 1000. The original minster church must have been Withington.

Bradley

Contains the important minster at Withington (Finberg No.5), established by 700. Shipton Oliffe, the sheep farm to the minster had a church and priest by 1086, and churches had been established at Salperton, Hazelton and Hampnett. There are no records of early churches at Northleach and Eastington. Verey suggests that the church at Notgrove is built on a Saxon foundation. Coln Rogers is a Saxon church.

Lower Slaughter

V.C.H. Gloucestershire Vol.VI should be consulted. There were prehistoric and Roman settlements at Slaughter and there was probably an early church. A Domesday priest is recorded for Little Barrington, and Little Rissington may have been a chapelry by 1000.

Upper Slaughter

The minster church was at Daylesford (Finberg No.13) c.727. By 1086 there were also churches at Swell and Broadwell. At Lower Swell there is a sacred spring and there was probably an early chapel.

Upper Kiftsgate

Bleckley minster was established by 855 (Finberg No.76). Clifford Chambers and Mickleton on the White Way to the ford at Stratford were early parishes. Mickleton is mentioned in a late charter of 1005 (Finberg No.148). Willersley, Weston Sub Edge and Weston on Avon had priests in 1086. Lasborough had an ancient chapel dedicated to St. Edmund, and Ebrington has a dedication to St. Eadburg which may denote early churches.

Lower Kiftsgate

The most important church was the Abbey church at Winchcombe founded in 811 (Finberg No.56). The parish of Hawling originally included the present parishes of Roel and Sudeley (Finberg No.189). The neighbouring parishes of Guiting Power and Temple Guiting had priests at Domesday and were probably chapels to Hawling.

Tibblestone

The minster church of the hundred was at Beckford (Finberg No.52), by 1086 there was a church at Ashton Underhill, this was a chapel to Beckford.

Upper Tewkesbury

Ecclesiastically Great Washbourn was attached to Beckford, and Alderton to Winchcombe.

Lower Tewkesbury

Includes the minster church at Twyning (Finberg No.22) and the Abbey at Tewkesbury. The history is fully documented in Vol.VIII of the V.C.H.

Deerhurst

Is also discussed in Vol.VIII of V.C.H. It contains the famous Saxon church and chapel at Deerhurst. The hundred of Westminster was also in the Deerhurst parish.

Cleeve

Has the minster church of Bishops Cleeve (Finberg No.30).

Cheltenham

The minster of the hundred was at Cheltenham (Finberg No.52). Charlton Kings was a chapelry to Cheltenham, probably established by 1000 and Prestbury with Sevenhampton attached had a church by 1086 (Finberg No.88).

Upper Dudstone & Kings Barton

By the year 1000 there were three churches in Gloucester, and the town had become a Saxon garrison town. Brockworth had a priest mentioned in Domesday book. There is no documentary evidence of these churches, but there must have been peripheral field chapels by 1000.

Middle Dudstone & Kings Barton

Is again centred on Gloucester. The church at Harescombe has Saxon remains and probably extended its parish bounds into Brookthorpe and Whaddon. Brookthorpe undoubtedly had a church by 1000 (V.C.H. Vol.II).

Upper Whitstone

Standish was a minster church (V.C.H. Vol.X) and much more of the hundred was under this church. Arlingham was in Berkeley Hernesse and although Fretherne was a thirteenth century chapel it was probably originally independent. (V.C.H. Vol.X).

Lower Whitstone

Includes the Saxon chapel of Leonard Stanley and a minster church sited on the present Frocester/Coaley parish boundary (4). Nympsfield was also attached, as was Eastington.

Although there was probably a Saxon settlement at Frampton on Severn Domesday book only records a priest at Whitminster at Domesday.

Upper Berkeley

No trace remains of Berkeley minster (Finberg No.83), and it has been suggested that it was the only early church, however pre-conquest sculpture at Beverstone and remains of a cross from Wotton under Edge suggest that peripheral field chapels had been established.

Lower Thornbury

I have found no documentary evidence of a church at Thornbury, however, the dedication to St. Arilda and the fact that a market had been established by 1086, suggests that there must have been an early church here.

Rockhampton has a dedication to St. Oswald, and Oldbury on Severn to St. Arilda and there were probably chapels here by 1100.

Upper Grumbald's Ash

There was an early church at Yate (Finberg No.37). Hawkesbury had a college in 680 and by 984 a Benedictine monastery had been established there.

Great Badminton had a Domesday priest and it has been suggested that there was a nunnery at Boxwell and Lighterton destroyed by the Danes (Rudder P.305).

Lower Grumbald's Ash

There was a private church at Sodbury and the dedication of Little Sodbury is St. Adeline, and it is suggested that Old Sodbury is a Saxon site. Evidence for the existence of a church is provided in Finberg No.25, mentioning that Earbald held Sodbury with a reversion to the church at Worcester when the holder was not in priestly orders.

Tormarton had a priest in the Domesday survey.

Upper Thornbury

Is represented by the parish of Marshfield, a priest is mentioned in the Domesday survey.

Pucklechurch

Pucklechurch was a Saxon royal residence (Finberg No.96), and probably had a church. Rudder mentions that it had three churches, one dedicated to St. Cuthbert, so this may have been the early church. All the other parishes in the hundred were in the manor of Pucklechurch.

Upper Langley & Swinehead

Bitton has a church with Saxon architecture and a priest was mentioned in the Domesday survey. Oldland, Hanham Abbots and Kingswood were probably attached. Cold Ashton went with Doynton and should be included in the Pucklechurch manor.

Barton Regis

Includes Bristol, to which Mangotsfield should be attached. Clifton was in the manor of Westbury.

Lower Berkeley

Filton and Almondsbury probably owed allegiance to the monastery at Westbury.

Lower Langley & Swinehead

Alveston and Olveston had Domesday priests, as did Littleton on Severn.

Henbury

The earliest church of the region must have been at Westbury on Trym, but a 1093 charter mentions a church at Henbury as well.

By 1086 Stoke Gifford had a priest.

Westminster & Berkeley Detached

Corse, Hasfield and Tirley belonged to the manor at Deerhurst. Ashleworth was an ecclesiastical manor, with, I suspect, a chapel by 1000.

Lower Dudstone & King's Barton

There is a Romano-British figure in the churchyard at Churcham, and Highnam was included with Churcham and probably Bulley.

By 1100 there was a church at Hartpury (Finberg No.27). The present church contains herringbone masonry. Originally the parishes were probably served from St. Peter's at Gloucester.

Highleadon and Rudford have early Norman churches.

Botloe

Before 1060 there was a church at Newent, a chapel at Taynton and Pauntley (V.C.H. Vol.II p.105). Dymock has records of a priest in 1086, Redmarley D'Abitot and Staunton were associated with the Worcestershire minster at Longdon.

Duchy of Lancaster

Tibberton church which has herringbone masonry is rejected by Taylor. The parish had a right of common in Huntley and the Forest and I think there was an early church at Tibberton. Bulley was a chapelry to Churcham.

Westbury

The original minster was at Westbury. Newnham and Little Dean became chapels to Westbury (Rudder p.402). Newnham has a dedication to St. Ethelbert.

St. Briavels

Includes the Forest of Dean. By 1100 there was a church at Ruardean a chapelry to the minster at Ross.

Staunton is an Anglo-Saxon settlement and the church contains herringbone masonry.

St. Briavels and Hewelsfield were originally chapels to Lydney (Rudder p.530); they both have Norman churches. St. Briavel is a Celtic Saint.

Bledisloe

By 1086 there was a church at Awre in addition to the church at Lydney.

Westbury Detached

Contains the well known minster of Tidenham (Finberg No.7).

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