

Conference Report

Jane Roberts

CONFERENCE TITLE: GUTHLAC OF CROWLAND: CELEBRATING 1300

DATE AND LOCATION: 10-11 APRIL 2014, INSTITUTE OF ENGLISH STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON, SENATE HOUSE

ORGANIZED BY: JANE ROBERTS (IES/KCL) AND ALAN THACKER (IHR)

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THURSDAY 10 APRIL

After welcoming delegates to the participating institutes of the School of Advanced Study, University of London, Jane Roberts spoke briefly about Saint Guthlac, his legend and Crowland Abbey, touching on the *Historia Croylandensis*, which does for Crowland what Geoffrey of Monmouth did for Arthur, and pointing to the importance of the last of the Harley Roll roundels as evidence for the abbey's medieval estates.

‘GUTHLAC AND HIS LIFE’

CHAIR: RICHARD SHARPE (WADHAM COLLEGE, OXFORD)

ALAN THACKER (IHR): GUTHLAC AND HIS *LIFE*: FELIX SHAPES THE SAINT

ANDY ORCHARD (PEMBROKE COLLEGE, OXFORD): *LEGE FELICITER; SCRIBE FELICIAS: THE ORIGINALITY OF THE VITA S. GUTHLACI*

CATHERINE CLARKE (UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON): ON BEAUTY: WORDS, PLEASURE AND VALUE IN SOME GUTHLAC TEXTS

The opening paper, by **Alan Thacker**, discussed the centrality of the temptation sequence within Felix's *Vita S. Guthlaci*, showing how the text's various elements are built around it and demonstrating Felix's skilful manipulation of hagiographic conventions. Whereas Thacker's analysis centred on the *vita* as an historical document, **Andy Orchard** examined the work's texture, confronting the widely held view that it is deeply derivative, an unhappy alliance of what Plummer once unfairly derided as the 'puerile pomposity' of Aldhelm and the more acceptably limpid language of Bede. Orchard explored the complex and rich Latinity of Felix's *Vita S. Guthlaci*, arguing that Felix's use of forms and formulas more commonly associated with the language of Latin verse not only reveals a confident and innovative stylist keen to make his own mark, but also implies a far more sensitive and sophisticated audience than is sometimes supposed.

For **Catherine Clarke**, Guthlac's virtue is manifested in his beautiful words, both in Felix's *vita* and *Guthlac A*, as he triumphs over his demonic persecutors. In her discussion of performative speech and the appropriation of liturgical formulae in both Latin life and English poem she showed how both authors negotiate an uneasy distinction between the true beauty of heavenly language and the literary trappings of rhetoric and eloquence.

'GUTHLAC AND HIS TIMES'

CHAIR: **JO STORY** (UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER)

MORN CAPPER (UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER): GUTHLAC AND THE BRITONS

TOM LYNCH (ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE): RITUAL IN FELIX'S *LIFE OF GUTHLAC*

SARAH LEESER (KEBLE COLLEGE, OXFORD): THE EARLY CULT OF ST GUTHLAC: DYNASTIC AND TERRITORIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Arguing that the story of Guthlac seems, for the first time in Mercian history, to record a clear political and ideological divide between English and British interests in the midland kingdoms, **Morn Capper** considered the history of Mercian relations with their British neighbours and used a range of evidence to question the changes in attitudes towards the Britons which emerged within Guthlac's lifetime and during the establishment of his cult. **Tom Lynch** focused on episodes in Felix's *Vita S. Guthlaci* concerned with ritual as keys to understanding what kind of a holy man Guthlac was and how the saint related to contemporary religious and political events. For Lynch, the rituals performed in the *vita* reflect the confluence of a powerful hermit, the reforms associated with Theodore of Tarsus and the politics of Mercia, against a backdrop of British unorthodoxy. Rituals involving Guthlac were always successful: the saint overcomes unorthodoxy in ritual contests and

ritually submits to appropriate authority. But, asked **Sarah Leeser**, was Guthlac a Mercian or an East English saint? The ambiguity is the natural result of Guthlac's choice of Crowland, which lay in the marginal and disputed Middle Anglian territory, for his hermitage. Leeser placed Crowland in the context of the high concentration of royal shrines and monasteries already to be found in the south-east Midlands, exploring the long-term effects of territorial competition between successive Mercian, Northumbrian and East Anglian rulers during the seventh century and the upheaval which brought Æthelbald to the Mercian throne in 716.

'THE LANDSCAPE OF GUTHLAC'S WORLD'

CHAIR: **RICHARD NORTH** (UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON)

KELLY KILPATRICK (UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM): THE PLACE-NAMES AND LANDSCAPES IN THE *VITA SANCTI GUTHLACI*

BRITTEN BROOKS (LINCOLN COLLEGE, OXFORD): THE LITERAL LANDSCAPE: FELIX'S USE OF AUTHORIZING ALLUSION AND LEXICAL ECHO IN HIS CONSTRUCTION OF THE ENGLISH FENLANDS

The place-names in the *Vita S. Guthlaci* are, **Kelly Kilpatrick** pointed out, for the most part directly associated with Guthlac. That there are so few contributes to the sense of the fenland as 'desert'. Indeed, it is the general absence of names that is of interest when compared with other historical places in the vicinity of Crowland and the background within which Felix, the author, composed the text, a frontier zone between the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Mercia and East Anglia.

Britton Brooks put forward two distinct ways in which Felix deploys source material: as 'authorizing allusions' and as 'lexical echoes'. In his authorizing allusions Felix uses borrowed text from hagiographical sources and Scripture to legitimize Guthlac as a saint of equal standing to the hagiographical heroes recognized by his contemporaries: especially Antony, Martin, Paul, and Cuthbert, his closest antecedent. In contrast, lexical echoes, in particular of Virgil, do not provide a similar sort of intertextual reading, but are instead a relatively mechanical reflex to Felix's education; when confronted with the job of describing the fenland, he simply thought of it in Virgilian descriptive terms that had a linguistic 'fitness' suited the literal scene being presented.

'LITURGY, MUSIC AND THE LATER CULT'

CHAIR: **DAVID TRENDELL** (KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON)

HENRY PARKES (GONVILLE AND CAIUS COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE): TWO MUSICAL PORTRAITS OF ST GUTHLAC

TOM LICENCE (UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA): GUTHLAC AFTER THE NORMAN CONQUEST

Two early medieval Offices survive for the feast day of St Guthlac: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 198, perhaps copied in eleventh-century Worcester; and London, British Library, MS Harley 1117, from eleventh-century Canterbury and a concordant fragment found in a thirteenth-

Networks and Neighbours

century Crowland book, now Dublin, Trinity College MS 370. **Henry Parkes** scrutinized these fragments of musical material, considering the differing uses made of Felix's *vita*, creative interactions with scripture and with existing liturgical formulae, the ways in which the Guthlac's story was crafted both musically and for the purpose of prayer, and the possibility of their having been sung at Crowland Abbey in its early history.

Tom Licence discussed Guthlac's cult at Crowland from c.1066 to about the middle of the twelfth century, arguing this was a period of relative inactivity in the promotion of the saint *vis à vis* what was happening to established cults after the Conquest.

FRIDAY 11 APRIL

'THE MANUSCRIPTS'

CHAIR: **JULIA CRICK** (KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON)

STEWART BROOKES (KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON): CAPRICIOUS CURSIVENESS: THE *VITA S. GUTHLACI* FRAGMENT IN LONDON, BRITISH LIBRARY, MS ROYAL 4 A. XIV

CHRIS VOTH (NEWNHAM COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE): THE TENTH-CENTURY LATIN MANUSCRIPTS OF FELIX'S *LIFE OF ST GUTHLAC*

TIMOTHY BOLTON (CARDIFF UNIVERSITY): GUTHLAC, WALTHEOF, CROWLAND AND DOUAI BIBLIOTHÈQUE MUNICIPALE, MS 852

Five of the thirteen *vita* manuscripts extant were examined in this session: the earliest; three from late in the tenth century; and an early twelfth-century text from Crowland. **Stewart Brookes** looked at the capricious cursiveness of the Royal fragment, acknowledging the appropriateness of Julia Crick's descriptive phrase and showing how the terminology developed in the DigiPal project (www.digipal.eu/) to describe the features of eleventh-century minuscule might be adapted for earlier script forms. **Chris Voth**'s paper focused on the production, reception and audience of three *vita* texts from the tenth century. She dated Corpus Christi College MS 307, the second surviving manuscript, to early in the century and then examined two texts produced in the aftermath of the Benedictine reform: c. 960, Corpus Christi College 389, copied by the St Augustine's scribe responsible also for the Oxford, St John's College, MS 28 copy of Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis*; and, towards the end of the tenth century, Royal 13. A. xv, a small but complex book. **Timothy Bolton** examined Douai 852, an important witness to the hagiography and liturgical practices of Crowland Abbey in the early Middle Ages. The manuscript includes Guthlac materials, a *Life* of St Neot and virtually all known texts relevant to the nascent cult of Waltheof. Explaining how the manuscript is far from a simple witness, Bolton demonstrated how palaeographical and codicological analysis reveals that on several occasions in these centuries the book was significantly altered, with entire sections removed, rearranged and replaced and suggested how these adaptations can reveal changing patterns of worship in Crowland Abbey.

‘THE VERNACULAR LITERATURE: *GUTHLAC A*’

CHAIR: JENNIFER NEVILLE (ROYAL HOLLOWAY COLLEGE, LONDON)

RICHARD HAWTREE (UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK): SWALLOWING AN ENGLISH SAINT ‘FOR OUR TIMES’: WISDOM, *GUTHLAC A*, AND THE MEDITATIVE IMPULSE IN THE EXETER BOOK**STEFANY WRAGG** (ST CROSS COLLEGE, OXFORD): A SAINT FOR ALL SEASONS? THE CULT OF GUTHLAC AND *GUTHLAC A*

Pointing out how at the close of *Guthlac A* the poet advises that ‘*we wisdom a / snyttrum swelgen*’ (ll. 763b-4a) [‘that we should always swallow wisdom skilfully’], **Richard Hawtree** argued that this ability is one of Guthlac’s special gifts and that it is partly wisdom (see, for example, his *snyttrucraeft* at l. 184) which makes him a ‘*bysen on Brytene*’ at l. 175 [‘a (good) example in Britain’]. Hawtree made clear the striking tension throughout the poem between the spiritual understanding that Guthlac is making available for us (as audience) to swallow and the flames that, through the agency of his demonic adversaries, continually threaten to swallow him. The well-spring of Guthlac’s wisdom is his ‘obedient intellect’, the ‘*hyrsumne hige*’ of l. 368a, Guthlac meditates deeply before engaging in his numerous verbal battles, and it is this concerted meditation that marks him out as one of God’s *husulweras* (l.796b), men of the eucharistic wafer, which must itself be swallowed at Communion. This notion of ruminative swallowing led naturally to ideas of monastic *meditatio* and textual assimilation, as the paper explored the implications of Guthlac’s meditative impulse for reading the Exeter Book.

Also sifting the image of Guthlac as a ‘*bysen on Brytene*’, **Stefany Wragg** explored the tensions between the geographic limitations of the cult and the way in which the *Guthlac A* poet presents the saint as a universal model. Arguing that the cult nevertheless remained mostly confined to Mercia, Wragg suggested that the limitations of Guthlac’s appeal stem from the origins of his cult, inseparable from attempts to legitimize the accession of Æthelbald to the Mercian throne in 716. In the *vita*, she suggested, the royal and specifically Mercian origins of the saint had to be stressed as authorizing his saintly endorsement of an exiled noble from a junior branch of the royal dynasty, whereas the *Guthlac A* poem extrapolates from this limited appeal to present Guthlac as a universal model of sanctity in England, in the thematic treatment of landscape and the vision of a Coldingham-like monastery – the latter giving a timeless message of Christian hope and forgiveness. For Wragg, the poet of *Guthlac A* transforms a fundamentally Mercian saint into an English saint whose appeal reaches far beyond his homeland.

‘CROWLAND, HEREFORD AND THE CULT’

CHAIR: GIOVANNI IAMARTINO (UNIVERSITY OF MILAN)

MEREDITH BACOLA (UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA): *VACUAS IN AURAS RECESSIT?* RECONSIDERING THE SOCIAL RELEVANCE OF EMBEDDED HEROIC MATERIAL IN THE GUTHLAC NARRATIVE

MICHAEL CHISHOLM (ST CATHARINE'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE): CROYLAND ABBEY, A TENTH-CENTURY FOUNDATION

JULIA BARROW (LEEDS UNIVERSITY): ST GUTHLAC'S MINSTER IN HEREFORD: DOMESDAY AND BEYOND

At the outset of her paper **Meredith Bacola** pointed out that amongst the surviving Anglo-Saxon hagiographical texts Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* is unique in two respects: it cannot be attributed to the community guarding the saint's bones; and it is the only *vita* dedicated to a king. She highlighted the presence in the *vita* of many unconventional aspects that must have served some purpose in the early days of the cult, most notably the great deal of embedded secularized heroic material. Arguing that Felix composed his *vita* for a wide audience that included the courts of East Anglia and even Mercia, she identified both the social relevance of the heroic material in early times and its later eclipse in Crowland. In Bacola's reading of the *vita*, some of the numerous phrases from and allusions to Virgil's *Aeneid* assume an intertextual resonance.

Michael Chisholm contextualized Crowland, showing how the three roads that converge on Trinity Bridge were once waterways. Although there is some archaeological occupation evidence for the seventh to ninth centuries at Anchor Church Field, this is consistent only with a shrine, not a monastery, and the first medieval archaeological evidence on the monastic site is tenth century. Felix's account is therefore confirmed in recording that the Guthlac hermitage was not directly on the bank of a main river (the Welland) – the excavation of South Street provided a two-mile waterway to a branch of the Nene and thence to the entirety of the Fens south of The Wash. In such a context, Guthlac's Crowland was much more accessible, by two significant rivers, than Felix would have us believe.

The actual origins of the church of St Guthlac's in Hereford remain unclear, but, as **Julia Barrow** pointed out, it was a thriving royal minster in 1066 and probably as late as 1086, although in the early twelfth century it came to be regarded as a personal perquisite by successive sheriffs of Herefordshire. Her paper told how eventually the church became part of the endowment of a dependent priory of Gloucester abbey.

'MEDIEVAL CROWLAND'

CHAIR: **BARBARA YORKE** (UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER)

AVRIL LUMLEY PRIOR (INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR): PEGELAND REVISITED: GUTHLAC AND PEGA ON CROYLAND'S SACRED ISLE

CRISTIAN ISPIR (KING'S COLLEGE LONDON): HISTORY WRITING IN THE CLOISTER: *THE CROWLAND CHRONICLE*

ELIZABETH DANBURY (IES/UCL): RICHARD II AND GUTHLAC

Just where was *Pegelandæ cœnobium*? **Avril Lumley Prior** pointed out that the phrase first occurs in Orderic Vitalis's account of Crowland's history, composed early in the twelfth century and to be found in his *Ecclesiastical History*, and that from William Stukeley (1687–1765) to Marjorie Chibnall (1915–2012) antiquaries and historians have wrongly identified it with Peakirk, four miles southwest of Crowland, near the present Peakirk Hermitage (reputedly the site of a cell in which Pega once lived). Making use of aerial photographs and of archaeological, cartographical, documentary, etymological and topographical evidence, she argued that *Pegelandæ cœnobium* lay not in Peakirk, but 500 metres to the north-east of Crowland Abbey, well within the monastic precincts.

Cristian Ispir brought to the conference's attention a chronicle written at Crowland Abbey in the early thirteenth century: London, College of Arms, MS Arundel 10. The chronicle, closely related to five other manuscripts, is not to be confused with the fifteenth-century *Historia Croylandensis*. Later portions of this chronicle tradition have long been known to historians under the name of the 'Barnwell Annals'. Ispir identified in Arundel 10 a universal chronicle from the Incarnation to 1225 as a complex historiographical project that originated at Crowland Abbey in the first quarter of the thirteenth century and suggested that at this time Crowland Abbey was a centre of learning and historiographical reflection.

In letters patent granted to Croyland Abbey on 7 July 1393 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1831) Richard II confirmed charters purportedly granted to the abbey by two Anglo-Saxon rulers; Æthelbald, king of Mercia and Eadred, king of England. **Elizabeth Danbury** addressed two different aspects of the document; first, the issue of the likely forgery of the Anglo-Saxon documents together with the possible dates of forgery; and second, the artistic and historical contexts of the illumination of the initial letter 'R' of the Richard II letters patent, which shows Richard II enthroned, with St Guthlac himself and with King Æthelbald, presenting a sealed royal charter to the abbot and six monks of Croyland.

'GUTHLAC'S ENDURING APPEAL'

CHAIR: **DAVID PELTERET** (FORMERLY UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO)

GRAHAM JONES (ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD): GUTHLAC AND BARTHOLOMEW: THE CHOICE OF A SAINTLY PATRON

KENT PETTIT (SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY): *GUTHLAC A* – A GOTHIC POEM?

JOSEPH GROSSI (UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA): LITERATURE AND REGIONAL IDENTITY IN ANGLO-SAXON EAST ANGLIA

The concluding session cast its net widely, functioning also to lead into Round Table discussion. For **Graham Jones**, the apostle Bartholomew appears so often in the *Vita S. Guthlaci* that it is difficult to dismiss as a posthumous confection. He pointed to aspects of the Bartholomew legend that would have chimed with the conditions in which Guthlac found himself and his aspirations as hermit, exorcist, and counsellor and reflected on wider issues of apostolic cult and hagiography as well as the social and political backdrop to Guthlac's career. **Kent Pettit** indicated how in *Guthlac A*, even

though the poem dates some 800 years before the rise of the Gothic, Guthlac's experiences in the liminal space of Crowland, filled with frightening spirits and paranormal encounters, have Gothic elements. Finally, **Joseph Grossi**, in a paper that deftly took account of others given at the conference, put forward the proposition that the *Vita sancti Guthlaci* may have been written to curb the East Anglian King Ælfwald's wish to lay claim to Guthlac as an East Anglian saint, and instead to persuade Aelfwald that he should resign himself – in a spirit of hermit-like humility – to *subregulus* status under Æthelbald of Mercia.