THE ANGLO-SAXONS AND VIKINGS

The end of Roman rule in Britain came in the early fifth century, probably around A.D. 410, but for most people life would have changed little, and there is increasing evidence that the many Roman soldiers and their families continued to occupy the forts of Hadrian's Wall, albeit as subsistence farmers rather than professional soldiers. It is known that in 445 A.D., Newcastle upon Tyne was still known by its Roman name of Pons Aelius - the site of a fort adjoining a bridge over the Tyne. Some army leaders may have used their military strength to control the areas surrounding their bases, while other local leaders may also have seized the chance to increase their own importance. The early Anglo-Saxon period was undoubtedly an age of war and turmoil but our knowledge of the period is scanty. It is known that before the Anglo-Saxons arrived, the North East, like the rest of Britain was occupied by the descendants of the Romanised Britons. In the far north, one group of these Celtic people had developed into a tribal kingdom called the Goddodin in the Lothians with their tribal fort and capital located at Din Eidyn (Edinburgh). The Goddodin are thought to have been the descendants of the Votadini, a tribe that inhabited this territory along with north Northumberland in the early days of the Roman invasion. To the north of the wall the British tribes started raiding and fighting deep into modern Tyne and Wear and County Durham, and by the sixth century the Gododdin were recorded as fighting with Anglo-Saxon armies as far south as Catterick in North Yorkshire. These native tribes would have soon shed any Roman influence and spoke a language similar to modern Welsh.

Having beaten off the Pictish menace from the north, the incipient British kingdoms of this period were soon threatened by a new power, the Anglo-Saxons. These Germanic raiders consisted of two main groups, the Angles (or Anglians) from what is now the border of Germany and Denmark (Schleswig Hosltein) and the Saxons from what is now Northern Germany and began to settle in Britain from the mid-fifth century. There is much debate about how many settlers came over to England, and it is likely that only a small number reached the north-east, although their influence upon the indigenous British population was considerable. We know very little of the first several hundred years of the Anglo-Saxon era, primarily because the invaders were an illiterate people. Our earliest records of them are little more than lists of rulers, but we know that they established separate kingdoms, the Saxons settling in the south and west, the Angles in the east and north, and the Jutes on the Isle of Wight and the mainland opposite. They probably thought of themselves as separate peoples, but they shared a common language and similar customs. The new arrivals soon started forming powerful kingdoms, and probably seized an area corresponding to the present Tyne and Wear and north Durham by about 500 A.D.

In 547 A.D. the ancient British coastal stronghold of Din Guyaroi (Bamburgh) on the North East coast was seized by the Angle chief called Ida the Flamebearer, who probably already had a foothold in the Tyne, Wear and Tees region. The name of this emerging kingdom, Bernicia, was probably an adaptation of an existing Celtic name and would come to be synonymous with the North Eastern region in the centuries to come. The rivers Tyne and Wear probably lay at the centre of this kingdom, which included most of present Northumberland and extended southwards to the Humber. Ida had conquered huge areas of land in the North East by 550 and was now undisputedly the most powerful leader in the northern Angle Land (later England). In 593, Aethelfrith, the grandson of Ida the Flamebearer, became the new King of Bernicia in the North-East of England and in 598 Aethelfrith's men heavily defeated the native Britons in a great battle at Catterick. Aethelfrith's then became King of both Deira and Bernicia, uniting all the Angle territory

north of the River Humber into one kingdom called Northumbria. In 615, the Bernician capital Din Guyardi, was renamed Bebbanburgh (later Bamburgh) in honour of Bebba, Aethelfrith's new wife. This was perhaps one of many Celtic place names that were replaced by Anglo-Saxon names in this period and may reflect the gradual replacement of Celtic with Anglo-Saxon speech. On April 11th 627, Edwin, son of Aethelfrith converted to Christianity, undertaking a baptism at York performed by a Roman missionary called Paulinus. Edwin's successor, Oswald continue the reintroduction of Christianity to the North East and employed St Aidan, an Irish monk from the Scottish island of Iona to convert his people. One of the lesser known monastic sites on the Tyne was established at this time at Gateshead, known to the Anglo-Saxons as 'Ad Caprae Caput' ('Goat's Head'), which was under the jurisdiction of an abbot called Uttan in 653.

After expanding into Scotland, Oswald was succeeded by his brother Oswy in Bernicia (the North East region north of the Tees) and by a rival called Oswine in Deira (Yorkshire), thereby weakening the Kingdom and inviting attack from Mercia. The defeat and death of King Penda of Mercia at the Battle of Winwaed in 655 seemed to mark the beginning of a new period of Northumbrian greatness. It was certainly an age of important Christian developments in the region. King Oswy died in 669 and was succeeded by his son Ecgfrith who continued Northumbrian military and political expansion northwards and westwards. The year 674 saw the establishment of the monastery of St Peters, Monkwearmouth, which became one of the most important Roman Christian monasteries in the north. On May 20 685, King Ecgfrith of Northumbria was killed fighting Brude, King of Caledonia, marking an end to the period of Northumbrian expansion. The year in which Aldfrith succeeded as king, saw Benedict Biscop's completion of the monastery of St Paul's at Jarrow, a twin monastery to Monkwearmouth. Among the new students at Jarrow was Bede, a young boy of nine years old, who had been transferred from Wearmouth to the new site.

Settlements and Buildings

The basic building block of early medieval society in the north was the estate, some of which were enormous – it is thought that some of the Northumbrian shires such as Hexhamshire preserve the boundaries of these landholdings. At the centre of each estate was an administrative villa, comprised of a large hall and associated buildings. It is likely, given its strategic importance, that the fort and bridge at Newcastle would have been taken over as a royal estate, and several sites in the city have been suggested as sites of an Anglian settlement. The rulers of the British and early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms do not seem to have had a single capital, but probably used a number of different palace sites. As well as Newcastle, Bamburgh and Yeavering are known to have been important sites in the north – at Yeavering archaeologists have found the remains of a series of great wooden halls, as well as smaller timber buildings. Elsewhere in the north-east there is archaeological evidence for more wooden houses and small, partially sunken structures known as grubenhaüser. Round houses also continued to be used until as late as the seventh century. Some occupation of former Roman sites appears to have continued, as evidenced by brooch finds from Benwell (HER 1497 and 1498) and structural and burial evidence from South Shields (HER 915-6), but this is likely to have been ad hoc squatter occupation rather than any attempt to maintain an urban society, and there is scant evidence for continuity of use into the middle or later Anglo-Saxon period. New towns only began to develop in Britain in the late Anglo-Saxon period, usually based around monastic sites. In Newcastle, an Anglo-Saxon cemetery dating from the beginning of the 8th until the later 12th century has been found, although associated settlement evidence is presently lacking and

artefacts from the period are rare in the city (e.g. HER 1495). Some possible features associated with settlement have also been excavated at Jarrow (HER 1232).

An important clue to the early settlement of Anglo-Saxons is in place names. Most of the place names of our region (and England as a whole) are of Anglo-Saxon origin and often tell us the names and activities of the first Anglo-Saxon settlers. There are many forms of Anglo-Saxon place names, but amongst the most common elements are the endings, 'ton' or 'ham', which are both of Anglo-Saxon origin.

Economy and Agriculture

The end of Roman rule was marked by the abandonment of coinage, as well as most commercially-driven industrial practices. The manufacture of wheel-made pottery, for example, an industry introduced to Britain at the beginning of the Roman period, seems to have been abandoned in the early fifth century, subsequently only regaining a foothold in the north-east after more than half a millennium. With the steep and rapid decline in commerce, the majority of the population in the north-east of England would have subsisted mainly by farming. Crop cultivation was important - cereals being ground for flour in water-mills with horizontal mill wheels - as was animal husbandry for meat and the various by-products, leather, wool and bone. Fish from deep sea sources are also known from archaeological evidence to have been an important source of food.

Burial and Religion

It is likely that at the end of the Roman period, many people had converted to Christianity, though many pagan practices probably continued. The earliest Anglo-Saxon settlers were also pagan, but we know little about their religious practices, except what is suggested by the relatively abundant grave goods found in their burials, and by the apparent re-use of prehistoric burial monuments (e.g. HER 437). The conversion of the population of Anglo-Saxon Northumbria began in the early seventh century, though there may also have been some small Christian communities surviving from the Roman period.

By far the most important development in the pre-(Norman)Conquest history of Tyne and Wear is the establishment of early Christian monasteries and other religious sites. Those for which we have material evidence in Tyne and Wear are at Jarrow-Monkwearmouth, Bishopwearmouth and Tynemouth, but there are a number of other sites in the region where early churches are known or suspected to have been located, or which place-name evidence suggests were early settlement sites. One such site is Newcastle, thought of as a possible monastic site on the basis of an early cemetery and the name, Monkchester. The early Northumbrian Church was based on half a dozen great monasteries under a single bishop, and no parish churches. Later, when the Church became better organised, more bishops were appointed, and parish churches began to be established in the 8th century – this provides an alternative explanation for the early cemetery at Newcastle.

On the River Wear, Monkwearmouth monastery (HER 87) was founded by Benedict Biscop in 674 A.D. Documentary sources record a stone church built by Gaulish masons, with windows glazed by glaziers, also from Gaul. It was abandoned after Viking attacks in the mid-9th century, but revived in 1072 by Aldwine, Prior of Winchcombe, who found the buildings in ruins, before it became a cell of Durham in 1083. Excavations in the area have produced a large number of fragments of building stones, architectural

details, church furniture and burial markers (HER 88-99 and 401-417), and south of the church is a Christian cemetery (HER 420). Fewer remains have been recorded from the documented church site at Bishopwearmouth.

On the River Tyne, at Jarrow, a donation of land in 681 A.D. allowed the building of a monastery by monks from Monkwearmouth, to begin in the following year. It was abandoned after the Viking attacks of 874-5, perhaps briefly reoccupied before the Conquest, and revived in 1072 by Aldwin, Prior of Winchcombe, who found the buildings in ruins, before it became a cell of Durham in 1083. As at Monkwearmouth, excavations in the area have produced a large number of 7th and 8th century stone-work fragments (HER 995-1000 and 1201-1226) associated with the monastery and its associated cemetery (HER 1227). Other finds from the excavations of the site of St Paul's monastery, all dating to the late 7th and early 8th century, include large quantities of some of the earliest coloured window-glass from Britain, fine imported pottery, green porphyry and beautiful stone carvings. These illustrate the world in which Bede lived; a monastery equipped with the finest art and craftworks imported from Rome and Gaul, contrasting with the simplicity of the personal possessions of the monks, represented by iron belt buckles and knife blades. Styli from the monastic scriptorium testify to the writing that formed part of the daily work of the monks.

Further down river, at Tynemouth on the north side of the river mouth, a monastery was in place by the later 8th century, since it is mentioned by Bede, and there is some evidence to suggest that it may have been founded as early at the mid-7th century. In 800 it was sacked by the Danes who returned in 875 and completely destroyed it. Very little is known of its history and there are no visible surviving structures, but excavation in 1963 revealed evidence for oblong timber buildings. Various fragments of stone-work have also been recovered from the site (HER 124-9). Up-river at Newcastle, excavated traces of structural remains thought to be those of a church may belong to the Anglian settlement of Monkchester, mentioned in medieval documents. Otherwise, virtually the only evidence for human activity known from the site is the excavated remains of an early medieval cemetery thought to have been established there by the early 8th century. A monastic settlement at Gateshead is also mentioned in early literary sources (see above).

Bede and the Golden Age

Amongst the religious houses in Northumbria described above, none was more influential than the joint monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow. On January 12, 690 Benedict Biscop, the founder of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow monasteries died of palsy. He was succeeded by Ceolfrith who became abbot of both monasteries. Two years later in 692 Bede, a scholar at Jarrow monastery was ordained as a deacon at the age of nineteen. By 703 Bede progressed to the rank of priest. An excellent pupil, he was fortunate enough to be growing up in one of the most influential and learned monasteries in Europe. This was an era of great art and literature, which saw the publication of an illuminated bible called the Codex Amiatinus at Jarrow and the completion of the beautiful Lindisfarne Gospels at Lindisfarne in 721. At Jarrow, Bede was writing the Life of St Cuthbert, a work specially written for the monks of Lindisfarne, but there were other works for which he would achieve greater fame. A chronolgical work published by Bede in 725 introduced dating from Christ's birth - Anno Domini and this was eventually adopted by the entire Christian world. But Bede's greatest work was undoubtedly his History of the English Church and People completed in the year 731 at Jarrow, which traced the thread of Christianity from Roman times through to the arrival of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes and the development and eventual conversion of the early Anglo-Saxon

kingdoms. He dedicated this work to King Ceolwulf of Northumbria. It was to become one of the most important sources of information about the history of the Anglo-Saxon period and was undoubtedly the first written history of England. Bede was one of the most respected figures of his day and such was his influence that his presence in Northumbria helped to persuade the pope to upgrade the Bishopric of York to the status of an Archbishopric in 734. The first Archbishop to be independent of Canterbury, Egbert, was a former pupil of Bede, who died at Jarrow on May 25th, 735. The work of Bede and others at Wearmouth-Jarrow was highly significant in introducing to Northumbria stylistic and intellectual elements used to great effect in the Lindisfarne Gospels.

The Vikings

The Vikings, from Scandinavia, first arrived in the north-east in the late 8th century. At first they raided important sites along the coast, particularly monasteries, such as Lindisfarne, Monkwearmouth and Jarrow (attacked 794 A.D.) and Tynemouth (800 A.D.). However, after this initial stage of attacks and raids, the Viking began to settle permanently from about 866 A.D., when they took over York. However, they showed less interest in the Northumbrian province of Bernicia, north of the Tees until 875 when, under the leadership of Halfdene, they entered the Tyne and destroyed Tynemouth priory before wintering at the mouth of the River Team near Gateshead. Once the winter was over the Danes began their battle campaign in Bernicia and Scotland and the monastery town of Hexham was ransacked. Despite this campaign, Bernicia north of the Tees (Northumberland and Durham) seems to have largely escaped Danish settlement. One of the few major Danish strongholds established at this time was at Tynemouth, where the naturally defended promontory strategically located at the entrance to the Tyne helped the Danes control access to the Tyne. Interestingly, an unusually high number of Scandinavian personal names were still common in Tynemouth at the time of the Norman conquest, and dialect experts as late as the nineteenth century remarked that Tynemouth had a non-Angle dialect, quite distinct from the rest of Tyneside and Northumberland. Danish and Norse, or ‘Viking’ settlement elsewhere in the north-east region seems to have been concentrated in the area south of Durham. While a number of possible artefacts from the period have been discovered in Tyne and Wear (HER 923), the several reports of ‘Viking’ boats made in the 19th century are almost certainly based on mid-identifications.

The invasions of the 9th and 10th centuries shattered the cultural unity of Northumbria and extinguished its monarchy. The year 882 saw the creation by Guthred, the Dane, of a new region in southern Bernicia where the Christian heritage of Northumbria was actively preserved. This new region would serve as a buffer zone between the surviving Anglian culture of northern Northumbria and the emerging Danish culture of southern Northumbria. Centred around the old Anglo-Saxon minster church of Chester-le-Street (then known as Conecaster) this territory was the beginning of what would eventually develop into the Bishopric and later the County of Durham. Eardwulf, previously the Bishop of Lindisfarne became the first Bishop of Conecaster (Chester-le-Street). This meant that the ancient see of Lindisfarne had been transferred to what would become the County of Durham. By the eve of the Norman conquest, the territory on the south side of the Tyne belonging to the estates of the Durham Bishipric was bordered on the north side of the river by lands forming part of the estates of the Earls of Northumberland, a noble clan based at Bamburgh.