

TWEED VALLEY SESSION 3 – SAINTS AND SETTLER

Post-Roman Britain

Was the English take-over of Roman Britain carried out by hordes of ferocious Angles, Saxons and Jutes?

Germanic peoples had been involved in British affairs for over 100 years. As the Roman army declined, increasing numbers of German mercenaries were employed, such as the unit known as Notfried's Troop that was based at Housesteads in the late 3rd century.

Britain had suffered attacks by raiders from across the North Sea since the early 4th century.

Around 460AD, Britain was gripped by a terrible famine. There was a renewed threat from the barbarians to the north and, to add to the misery, there was a Saxon revolt in the south.

In desperation, the Britons appealed for help from Aetius, the Roman military commander in Gaul. The so-called "groans of the Britons" fell on deaf ears as Aetius had too many problems of his own to divert an expeditionary force to Britain.

Things were looking pretty grim in Britain at the end of the 5th century.

Was there an Arthur?

The oldest written evidence from the period is the *Annales Cambriae*, compiled in the late 5th or early 6th century, perhaps in an Irish monastery.

For the year 499 or 500, the *Annales Cambriae* records: **"The Battle of Badon, in which Arthur carried the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ for three days and three nights on his shield and the Britons were the victors"**.

The monk Gildas says that Britain enjoyed a time of security between about 500 and 560AD. Perhaps this followed a series of military successes that halted the enemies of the Romanised Britons.

There is a reference to Arthur in another of our main sources of evidence from this period - the *Historia Brittonum*, a collection of documents from various British, Irish, Roman and Saxon sources, gathered in the 8th century by the Welsh monk Nennius.

According to the *Historia*: **"Arthur fought against them in those days, with the kings of the Britons, but he himself was the Dux Bellorum - the "Leader of Battles"**.

Nennius gives a list of Arthur's battles and this, together with other scant pieces of evidence, may support the idea that Arthur may have been a Romano-British Christian war leader, based in what we now call the Borderlands.

According to Nennius, Arthur's first battle took place near the mouth of a river called Glein, or Glen. The strongest contender is the River Glen near Wooler. Throughout history Glendale has been a strategically important route. The flat terrain offers an easy north/south line of march and the fertile farmlands provide good forage for an army on the move.

Glendale is dominated by the rounded hill of Yeavinger Bell. Its summit is crowned by the largest hill-fort in Northumberland, which was an important settlement site in the Bronze Age and early Iron Age. Yeavinger was probably a tribal capital of the Votadini so Glendale would have been an obvious place for a Gododdin war leader to block the northward advance of Anglo-Saxon warbands.

Arthur's next four battles were fought beyond a river called Dubglas in Gaelic the River Forth is "Dubh Glais" - the "Dark River". Control of the area beyond the Firth of Forth was vital for the security of the Gododdin and their Christian allies in Strathclyde, against the threat from the Picts to the north.

Arthur's seventh battle, in the Wood of Celidon, is generally accepted as being located in the remnants of the ancient woods of Caledonia – Perhaps this refers to the Ettrick Forest to the west of Selkirk which was stronghold of the Selgovae, enemies of the Gododdin and perhaps in league with the Picts.

Intriguingly, in the valley of the Yarrow close to Ettrick Forest there is A standing stone in the Yarrow Valley, close by Ettrick Forest, bears an inscription that has been dated to the early 6th century AD, commemorating the deaths of the princes Nudus and Dumnogenus, the sons of Liberalis. The survival of Latinised names over 100 years after official end of Roman occupation suggests the survival of Romanised civilisation in the Borders. The name Dumnogenus is related to the Damnonii of Strathclyde, who were Christian allies of the Gododdin.

Perhaps the sons of Liberalis were casualties from Arthur's army who died in a hard fought battle to stem the tide of Pictish invasion.

The Annales Cambriae, which is the record that dates most closely in time to the exploits of the legendary Arthur, states that Arthur's last battle was fought at Camlann "**in which Arthur and Medraut fell, and there was plague in Britain and Ireland**". The Latinised form of Camlann, Camboglanna is the Roman name for their fort at Castlesteads on Hadrian's Wall.

Northumbrian folklore tells us that Arthur lies sleeping beneath Sewingshields Castle, not far from Housesteads, though Borderers claim the Eildon Hills as his last resting place)

2. THE FIRST ANGLO-SAXONS

MAP – ANGLO-SAXON BRITAIN, CIRCA 600AD

By the 6th century AD, the Votadini tribe seems to have become divided into two Celtic British kingdoms. The Gododdin to the north of the Tweed had their seat at Din Eidyn (modern Edinburgh) on the Firth of Forth, while the Brynaich in North Northumberland had their capital at Din Guaroi, modern Bamburgh.

For the year 547AD the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records: **“In this year, Ida assumed the kingdom (of Brynaich), from whom arose the royal race of the Northumbrians.”**

Ida established his hold on Brynaich with perhaps only a few hundred warriors. There is no evidence of a violent takeover. It was more likely a palace coup by a band of Anglian mercenaries supported by a faction within the local elite.

Under Ida, Brynaich became known as Bernicia...

Ida was succeeded by his sons, who soon faced a series of attacks by a league of British kingdoms including the Gododdin, Rheged and Strathclyde.

Led by the heroic Urien of Reghed, the British confederacy forced the Bernician Angles to fall back onto Metcaud – the Brittonic name for the island of Lindisfarne.

The “Triads of the Island of Britain”, a collection of early Welsh texts, stated that Urien was one of the “Three Battle Leaders of the Island of Britain”. Three was a mystical number to the Britons.

Urien was a real John Wayne type character. A Welsh bard recorded:-

“If there’s enemy on the hill = Urien will make him shudder

If there’s an enemy in the hollow – Urien will pierce him through

If there’s an enemy on the mountain – Urien will bruise him

If there’s an enemy on the dyke – Urien will strike him down”

The Britons besieged the Angles on Lindisfarne for three days but, just when it seemed Angles would be driven into the sea, Urien was assassinated by a jealous rival.

Urien’s death temporarily broke the British confederacy.

His murder was listed as one of the “Three Atrocious Assassinations of the Island of Britain”.

Battle of Catraeth

The Gododdin were to make one last attempt to drive the Angles out of Brynnaich, In about 597AD Mynnyddog the Wealthy, King of the Gododdin, hosted a mead-feast in his great hall at Din Eidyn (Edinburgh) where warriors from the Lothians, Strathclyde, Cumbria, North Wales and the Pennines swore loyalty to his cause.

Mynnyddog and his army of the Britons followed the old Roman road of Dere Street southwards to Catraeth (Catterick), where they were met by an Anglian army perhaps five times larger, led by Ida's grandson, Aethelfrid.

The Battle of Catraeth was a disaster for the Britons and the flower of their warrior class was decimated. the northern British kingdoms were fatally weakened AND Bernician control was extended northwards through what we now call Berwickshire and the Lothians.

Aethelfrid

Aethelfrid's first wife was Ebba, or Bebba, of the Bernician royal family, to whom he granted the estate of Din Guaroi. It became known as Bebbanburgh or "Bebba's fortress", which has changed over the years to the modern Bamburgh.

In 603AD, Aethelfrid united his kingdom of Bernicia with the neighbouring kingdom to the south by marrying Acha, daughter of Aelle, King of Deira, which covered much of modern Yorkshire. Aethelfrid then quietly had his father-in-law murdered and drove the rest of the Deiran royal family into exile.

HANDOUT - NORTHUMBRIAN ROYAL FAMILIES

Aelle's son, Edwin spent much of his childhood in North Wales, under the protection of the Celtic Christian king of Gwynedd. His childhood companion was the king's son, Prince Cadwalla.

As a young man, Edwin moved to East Anglia, where he stayed at the court of King Redwald, Bretwalda or Overlord of England.

Meanwhile in 603AD, the same year he united Bernicia with Deira by marrying Acha, Aethelfrid inflicted a heavy defeat over the British kingdom of Dal Riada, at a place called Degstastan, thought to be located in Liddesdale or Lauderdale.

In 616AD, Aethelfrid conducted a successful campaign in North Wales that brought Gwynedd under his control. But on his way back home he was ambushed and killed by an army of East Angles led by King Redwald. The battle took place near the River Idle in Nottinghamshire

Aethelfrid's death was described in the Triads as "One of the three fortunate assassinations of the Islands of Britain".

3. EXPANSION OF ANGLIAN SETTLEMENT

Dere Street and the Catrail

Aethelfrid's victory over the Dalriadans at Degsastan resulted in the spread of Anglian control beyond Bernicia into what we now call the Scottish Borders. But how far westwards Anglian settlement spread is a matter for debate.

In Roman times, the north-south route of Dere Street separated the Votadini from the neighbouring Selgovae tribe and it seems that it continued to mark a political and cultural boundary for some time after the first Angles settled in our region.

Another physical boundary marker is the Catrail, an enigmatic monument from the post-Roman period. It comprises a 40 mile series of earthwork embankments and ditches running roughly south to north from Peel Fell in the Cheviots across Slitrig, then down the Teviot Water, across the valleys of the Ettrick and the Yarrow, over Minch Moor and across the Tweed, ending at Torwoodlee near Galashiels.

In the past it was also known as the "Pictish Wall", but no-one really knows who built it or what its original purpose was. Perhaps it served at one time as a boundary between the territory of the Britons and the Angles?

Spread of Anglo-Saxon place names

The spread of Anglo-Saxon place names and the survival of Brittonic (or Celtic) ones provides evidence of the speed and extent of progress of Anglo-Saxon settlement in the Tweed Valley area. The Derek Street boundary again illustrates a division of cultural identity that continued well into the Anglo-Saxon period.

MAPS SHOWING PHASES OF PLACE-NAMES

- I. CHESTER names, such as **Darnchester** near Coldstream, indicate the location of an old Roman or native fortified place and date from the earliest period of Anglian settlement in the first half of the 7th century AD.
- II. INGHAM and INGTON place-names also date from this early period. These names denote a settlement associated with a particular person.
- III. Place-names including HAM meaning hamlet, TUN meaning a township or estate, or WORTH meaning an enclosed place, represent another phase of settlement
- IV. Names featuring BOTL meaning a house and WIC meaning a farm or village came a little later
- V. The Final slide shows the survival of Celtic place names, referred to as P-Celtic or Brithonic and the later introduction of Gaelic and Scandinavian place names in the 9th and 10th centuries.

As Anglo-Saxon settlement expanded, many place names that are familiar to us today began to appear.

The original meanings of these place names give a vivid word-picture of the landscape those settlers found and some have left a record of the people who cleared the forests and built the farmsteads that grew into the towns and villages of today.

LIST OF LOCAL PLACE NAMES – TWO SLIDES

END OF PART ONE

4. CHRISTIANITY COMES TO NORTHUMBRIA

REFER TO HANDOUT – RULING DYNASTIES

Edwin, the exiled son of Aelle of Deira was now able to snatch the throne of Northumbria, taking control of a kingdom that stretched from the Humber to the Firth of Forth, and that held sovereignty over vassal British kingdoms from North Wales to Strathclyde.

With Edwin on the throne of a united Northumbria, it was now the turn of Aethelfrid's children to flee to safety.

Aethelfrid's eldest son Eanfrid, child of his marriage to Bebba of Bamburgh, escaped to the land of the Picts, north of the Firth of Forth.

Oswald, Oswy and Ebba, the children of Aethelfrid and Aelle's daughter Acha, found sanctuary among the Irish Christian monks on the Island of Iona, in the Kingdom of Dal Riada on the West coast of Scotland.

Edwin's Kingdom

Edwin soon increased his dominion by taking over the British Kingdom of Elmet, based around Leeds, and the islands of Anglesey and Man that belonged to Gwynedd, which was now ruled by Edwin's childhood playmate Cadwalla.

Edwin's take-over of Anglesey and Man began a feud with Cadwalla that was to last beyond Edwin's own death.

Coming from the royal house of Deira, rather than Bernicia, Edwin's core support was based in the area between the Humber and the Tees. While he was in exile, he had married a Mercian princess, Coenberg, and they had two sons – Osfrid and Eadfrid.

In 625AD, nine years after Edwin came to the throne of Northumbria, Edwin cemented his claim as Bretwalda, or overlord of England, by marrying Aethelberga, daughter of the King of Kent.

Although the smallest of the seven English kingdoms, and the only one settled by Jutes rather than Angles or Saxons, Kent was the first kingdom to be converted to Christianity, by St Augustine's mission from Rome in 597AD

Edwin promised Aethelberga's father, Aethelbeht that he would convert to Christianity and Aethelberga brought her chaplain, Paulinus with her to Northumbria

Despite his promise to Aethelbeht, Edwin initially held fast to his pagan religion until a series of events prompted his conversion to Christianity.

A year after the marriage, the King of the West Saxons sent an assassin to the Northumbrian king's court. Edwin was wounded, but survived the attack.

The same night, the queen bore the king a daughter, who was named Eanfled.

Bishop Paulinus assured the king that these two fortunate events were the results of his prayers to God and Edwin renounced his pagan idols and was baptised by Paulinus at York at Easter 627AD. .

Later that year, Edwin spent a month with his court at his palace of Ad Gefrin, at Yeavinger near Kirknewton, where Paulinus is said to have baptised thousands of Northumbrians in the waters of the River Glen.

Archaeological evidence suggests that Yeavinger had been a site of religious significance since prehistoric times, as well as a tribal centre of the Votadini south of the Tweed, which is perhaps one of the reasons why the early Anglian kings of Bernicia and Northumbria established the site as a place for ceremonial gatherings. Significantly they retained the old Celtic name, Ad Gefrin, meaning "At the place of the hill of the goats", perhaps as a mark of respect for local customs during this period of integration of the Anglian warrior class with the native Brynaich people.

Edwin's sovereignty stretched far beyond Northumbria itself and, as Bretwalda, he held nominal over-lordship over all the English kingdoms.

The monk historian Bede called the 17 years of Edwin's reign as King of Northumbria and Bretwalda of England, a "golden age", but he still had enemies.

Edwin's childhood friend Cadwalla was now King of Gwynedd in North Wales. He nursed a grudge against Edwin because of his taking of Anglesey and Man from Gwynedd early in his reign. Although Cadwalla was a Christian, he had made an alliance with Edwin's arch-rival, King Penda of Mercia, a ferocious defender of the old pagan religion.

The end came in 633AD when Edwin faced a united force of Mercians and Welsh warriors under Penda and Cadwalla, at a place called Haethfeld. Edwin was killed and his army slain or scattered. His sons, Osfrith and Eadfrith died soon afterwards and the Kingdom of Northumbria split into its two constituent parts.

REFER TO HANDOUT – RULING DYNASTIES (OSFRID AND EADFRID)

After Edwin

Edwin's cousin Osric took the crown of Deira. He attempted to besiege Cadwalla at a town, which was probably York, but Cadwalla broke out, surprising and destroying Osric and his army.

Aethelfrid's eldest son, Eanfrith, born of his marriage to Bebba of Bamburgh, returned from exile in Pictland to claim the throne of Bernicia. He decided to sue for peace from Penda. However, when he arrived at Penda's court with a bodyguard of only twelve thanes, he was swiftly put to the sword.

Penda and Cadwalla wrought devastation throughout Northumbria and excavations carried out at Yeavinger in the 1950s revealed a layer of destruction by fire, and evidence of the violent and deliberate demolition of the buildings on the site.

Queen Aethelberga and Bishop Paulinus fled back to Kent.

Edwin's decision to adopt Christianity had been more to do with a political alliance with Kent than a matter of religious conviction. When the rulers changed through the fortunes of war, so did the religion of the kingdom and those skin-deep Northumbrian converts were quick to change back to their former beliefs.

Oswald and Celtic Christianity

REFER TO HANDOUT - RULING DYNASTIES

A new Christian elite was being formed in Dal Riada, the kingdom north of Strathclyde where Aethelfrid's sons, Oswald and Oswy had found sanctuary among the Irish monks in the monastery founded by St. Columba on Iona. The two Northumbrian princes were probably baptised by their protectors and brought up as Christians.

In 634, after seventeen years in exile, Oswald and Oswy returned to Bernicia and confronted Cadwalla's army near the ruins of Hadrian's Wall.

The fight took place by the Rowley Burn, near Chollerford.

On the eve of the battle Oswald had a vision in which St Columba came to him and told him he would gain a great victory over his enemies. Although heavily outnumbered, Oswald's small force took their enemies by surprise. After a fierce fight the Britons broke and ran and Cadwalla was killed.

With Northumbria under Oswald's control, he set about restoring order in his kingdom.

The palace of Ad Gefrin was rebuilt and, unlike Edwin, Oswald will have spent much of his time here and at Bamburgh, as he was descended from the Bernician line of Ida, not from the Deiran Royal House as Edwin had been.

Oswald's reign re-established Northumbria as the greatest military and political power of all the English kingdoms,

Aidan and Lindisfarne

Oswald had sworn he would convert his people back to Christianity and he sought help from Iona. The first missionary they sent, an Irish monk named Cormac, was not up to the job and he soon went back to Iona complaining that the Northumbrians were "an intractable people of stubborn and uncivilised character".

His replacement, Aidan, was more successful. Far from being a simple monk, he had already been bishop of two other island monastic sees in Ireland and Western Scotland, before he came to Northumbria.

Oswald granted him the island of Lindisfarne as the place for the first monastery in Northumbria, together with rich estates to support it.

Successive Northumbrian kings added to the Lindisfarne estates, which later became known as St Cuthbert's Lands, the foundation of the wealth of the medieval prince bishops of Durham.

Other monasteries were established on the Lindisfarne estates including Coldingham, founded on the Berwickshire coast by Oswald's sister Ebba, and Old Mailros, situated in a horseshoe bend of the River Tweed, about 3 miles east of the present town of Melrose.

The Anglo-Saxon administrative area was called a shire.

Shires were often superimposed on existing Celtic maenors, each of which comprised 7 townships or "vills" in lowland areas or 13 in the uplands. The purpose of the maenor was to provide food and services to the lord, or "maer". Maer is a Scottish surname to this day. An example of survival the ancient Celtic maenor system into recent times was the Manor Valley itself, where 13 discrete farm holdings continued into the 19th century.

The shire was managed by the shire-reeve (or sheriff), who was responsible for organising the payment in goods and services to the local lord, or "thegn".

The estates gifted to Lindisfarne were formed into shires.

MAP - THE LINDISFARNE ESTATES

(Ignore the shaded area, which refers to another course)

I	COLDINGHAMSHIRE	c 635AD
II	NORHAMSHIRE AND ISLANDSHIRE	c 635AD
III	YETHOLMSHIRE	c 655AD
IV	CARHAM	c 674AD
V	JEDWARD AND TEVIOTDALE	c 830-845AD

After Oswald

In 642AD, Oswald met his death at the hands of his old enemy Penda of Mercia, at the battle of Maserfield. The exact location of Maserfield is uncertain, but it may have been at Oswestry - "Oswald's Tree", or possibly Makerfield in Lancashire.

Penda had Oswald's body cut to pieces, though most of the parts were later rescued by his brother, Oswy, and taken back to Northumbria as relics of the martyred king. In later centuries, wherever Oswald's relics were to be found, there were stories of miracles of healing and fertility, and the cult of St. Oswald spread throughout Christian England.

Penda ravaged Northumbria relentlessly over the next few years. In 650AD, Bamburgh was besieged, and was saved only by a miraculous intervention called upon by St. Aidan, who was watching the pagans' mischief from his retreat on the Farne Islands.

A couple of years later, however, the Mercians returned and finished the job. The church at Bamburgh was destroyed, but the monastery on Lindisfarne seems to have survived.

Excavations at the site of Ad Gefrin revealed evidence of the wholesale destruction of the site. Gefrin rose again briefly, but on a much reduced scale, before it was finally abandoned in favour of a new palace built at Maelmin, modern Milfield.

Following Oswald's death, Northumbria once again disintegrated temporarily into its constituent kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira.

Oswy succeeded to the throne of Bernicia, while the crown of Deira was taken up by Oswin, of the line of Yffi.

REFER TO HANDOUT - RULING DYNASTIES

Oswy

Oswy's first task was to re-unite Deira with Bernicia. First of all, he married Eanfled, the daughter of Edwin who had fled to Kent as a child with her mother Aethelberg and Paulinus after her father's death.

However, there was still the problem of Oswin "a man of great piety and devotion, who ruled his kingdom for seven years, and was loved by everyone". So Oswy had Oswin assassinated. It was said that St. Aidan was so hurt by this murderous act against a fellow Christian king that he died a few days later. Oswy endowed a monastery at Gilling as penance for his terrible sin.

On the night that St Aidan died, the 31st August 651AD, a shepherd boy called Cuthbert was looking after his flock in the hills overlooking the River Tweed near the monastery of Old Mairos. He had a vision of Aidan's soul being carried to Heaven by angels and took this as a call to the service of God.

He went to the nearby monastery and the prior, Bolsil, recognised Cuthbert as a truly holy man and admitted him as a novice monk. In due course, Cuthbert rose to be prior of Mailros and later Prior then Bishop of Lindisfarne.

In 655AD, Oswy finally defeated and killed Penda of Mercia at the Battle of Winwaed, near modern Leeds. This re-established Northumbria as the Anglo-Saxon super-power and Oswy as the seventh Bretwalda, or overlord of England.

The Synod of Whitby

During Oswy's long reign the conflict between the traditions of the Celtic and the Roman Church were finally resolved, at the famous Synod of Whitby in 664AD.

The Roman clergy looked on their Celtic brethren as little better than heathens. Bishop Paulinus had persecuted the Celtic Christian priests in the British territories conquered during Edwin's time.

The two branches of Christianity differed over various matters such as the calculation of the date of Easter and how the priests should cut their hair.

There were also fundamental differences in the way the monks and priests of the two traditions lived and worked.

The Roman Church was run on bureaucratic lines with a clearly defined hierarchy, from the Pope in Rome down to the local parish priests. Roman-style churches were built in stone, with beautiful decoration and the priests and monks lived apart from the common folk, who provided them with tithes for their upkeep.

Priests and monks of the Celtic tradition worked in the community and laboured in fields and gardens to produce much of their own food. Their monasteries were largely self-running houses, ruled by their own abbot or prior, and the buildings were made of wood and turf or thatch, in the Irish style, rather than stone...

The grand confrontation between the two branches of Christianity took place in 664AD at the Abbey of Whitby, under the chairmanship of King Oswy, who personally followed the Celtic tradition...

At the Synod, Colman, the Bishop of Lindisfarne, spoke for the Celtic tradition. The senior Roman churchman present was Agilbert, the Bishop of Wessex, but he was a native of Gaul with a poor command of English, so he left most of the talking to an enthusiastic young cleric named Wilfrid, a son of a wealthy Northumbrian nobleman who was a sort of Peter Mandelson spin-doctor type and enthused with all things Roman.

After much discussion, Wilfrid's superior presentational skills won the day. However, Oswy's final decision in favour of the Roman Church was probably more a matter of good politics rather than theological revelation. As a reward, Wilfrid was rapidly elevated to become Bishop of York.

Bishop Colman left Lindisfarne with many of the monks who refused to accept the Roman way, and they set up two new monasteries in Ireland - one for the Irish monks, the other for the English ones!

It was left to the new prior from Melrose, Cuthbert, to restore morale among the remaining monks on Lindisfarne. Although he was a believer in the Celtic tradition himself, Cuthbert accepted the changes and worked to secure future of the monastery and Cuthbert later rose to become Bishop of Lindisfarne.

The Decline of Northumbria

King Oswy passed away in AD 670, at the age of 58.

He was succeeded by his son Ecgfrith, whose death in 685AD, in battle against the Picts in North East Scotland brought an end to Northumbrian expansion and no future King of Northumbria would be acknowledged as Bretwalda of all England.

However, the next hundred years saw the flowering of Northumbria's Golden Age of art and literature, such as the magnificent Lindisfarne Gospels, completed in about AD 700 and dedicated to King Aldfrid, a philosopher ruler such as Plato would have fully approved of. He was also one of the few fortunate kings of Northumbria who managed to die peacefully in their beds. From that time onwards, the kings of Northumbria were as much under threat from plots within their kingdom as from invasion by external enemies.