

SAXON ABBOTS OF DOVER AND RECULVER.

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It happens that no Saxon abbot of Dover is mentioned, as such, in any document of the Saxon age or in any writing of post-conquest date. It has usually been assumed that their names are beyond recovery. It is thus with some diffidence that this essay sets out to identify seven abbots of Dover and, incidentally, certain abbots of Reculver not hitherto known to have been attached to that monastery. The clue to their detection is simple enough and occurred to the writer when he was trying to explain the curious fact that so important a man as Abbot Feologeld, later Archbishop, should always sign last of the abbots attesting any particular charter. The clue, indeed, resides in the fact that Kentish abbots witnessed Kentish charters in the order of the foundation dates of their monasteries (and this may of course be true of other counties also) and not, as might perhaps have been expected, in the order of their personal seniority in the rank of abbot. It is the writer's object to prove the validity of this clue, and to demonstrate the results of its application, but these things cannot be done without first dealing with certain preliminary matters. We must be sure that we are dealing with Kentish abbots and not with those of other kingdoms, and that we can discover the foundation dates of the three Kentish abbeys concerned. The abbeys served by women do not come into the discussion, since their abbesses very rarely attested charters. It is sometimes suggested that there were double abbeys at both Minster in Thanet and Lyminge, from which abbots might have appeared amongst the witnesses to charters. In the writer's view the evidence for such double abbeys in Kent is quite unreliable, and the present investigation has disclosed no reason for considering the existence of any but the three abbeys of Saint Augustine, Reculver and Dover.

THE FOUNDATION DATES.

The available information is not as precise as one would wish, as might well be expected, for all these abbeys have long since vanished and it is not surprising that their title deeds have often perished with them, while their history has been copied and re-copied so many times that manifold errors may well have crept in. Nevertheless, the records that remain are sufficient for our purposes.

1. Saint Augustine's, alias SS. Peter and Paul, of Canterbury

The site for this abbey, and the Barton lands for its endowment, were both given in the year 605 (BCS 4,5). Bede states that it was consecrated by Archbishop Lawrence (A.D. 604-619) and that Peter (who, according to Thorne, was drowned in 607) was the first abbot. All these records are of good repute and we may therefore put the date of consecration about the year 606.

2. Reculver, S. Mary. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that in the year 669 King Egbeorht gave land at Reculver to a mass-priest named Basse that he might thereon build a monastery. He apparently proceeded at once with the building, but did not survive many years, for in 674, only five years later, we meet with the name of an Abbot Beorhtweald (BCS 73) who must certainly have been abbot of Reculver, for there existed no other house to which he might have belonged. We meet with him again in 679 (BCS 45) and he is then described as abbot of Reculver. The monastery was therefore built between 669 and 674 and we may accept 670 as the probable date of consecration.
3. Dover, S. Martin. This was certainly in existence before the Bapchild Council of which the date was, I think, between 702 and 707 (BCS 91-95) although it is only fair to admit that others hold other views. King Wihtraed presided at this Council, which sent instructions to various Kentish monasteries, including Dover. This evidence accords with the story in the *Liber Vitae* of Hyde Monastery from which we learn of King Wihtraed that "he built that minster at Dover and consecrated it in honour of Saint Martin, and Saint Martin himself had erstwhile pointed out that place, that he would have his minster there. And he then so did and then established God's servants there, and there they yet live to this day." (The best edition of this story is that of Liebermann, entitled *Die Heiligen Englands*, and published at Hanover in 1889. I have a copy of this but cannot sufficiently understand the commentary and, in particular, the date which he would assign to it. My own opinion, for what it is worth, is that the records of King Wihtraed were probably in writing as early as 800.) In any case the two convergent lines of evidence suggest that we may safely put the year 700 as the approximate date of the founding of Dover Abbey.

The dates of foundation of the three abbeys may therefore be taken as follows: St. Augustine's in 606, Reculver in 670 and Dover in 700, and the order of seniority is as shown.

THE IDENTIFICATION OF KENTISH ABBOTS.

It is not to be supposed that every abbot who signs a Kentish charter is therefore an abbot of a Kentish monastery. Kent was often under Mercian or Wessex influence, very strong influence, and its charters could only pass at the royal councils of these greater kingdoms, councils at which many abbots were present and at which Kentish abbots would have been of no great account. We have therefore to establish some criteria as to whom are to be accepted as true Kentish abbots. The following would seem to qualify :

- (a) All abbots who witness the charters of Kent while it was a completely independent kingdom..
- (b) All those known from other sources to be abbots of Kentish monasteries.
- (c) All those who appear in support of the Archbishop of Canterbury in charters of purely Kentish and domestic concern, e.g. the witnessing of a will or a grant by the archbishop to his monks.
- (d) Those who appear as supporting the archbishop, and as associated with the Canterbury contingent, when witnesses from Canterbury are set out separately from others, as is sometimes the case in charters of Mercian kings.

Only such abbots as pass one of the above tests have been accepted in the investigations which follow.

A TEST INVESTIGATION.

It will not be possible to discuss every charter in which any abbot is named, for this would consume more space than the editor would be likely to allow, but—having now cleared the ground somewhat—we can take a test case. This case is naturally that of abbot Feologeld, from which this investigation started. Here are the charter records with the abbot witnesses in the order of occurrence of their names :

Anno 803	BCS 312	—————	Aethelheah	Feologeld
805	319	—————	Cudaman	Feologeld
805	322	Wernoth	Duda . . .	Feologeld
805/24	318	—————	—————	Feologeld
806	445	Wernoth	—————	Feologeld
811	332	Wernoth	Beornwine	Feologeld
826	851/	Wernoth	Beornwine	Feologeld
	1337			

In the first column is Wernoth, a known abbot of Saint Augustine's and three blanks. It is reasonably certain that Wernoth, had he chosen

or been invited to be present, would have filled these spaces. There is some uncertainty as to his period of office but there is no doubt that none of the names in the second column are those of abbots of St. Augustine, so that we can now suppose the whole of the first column accounted for by representatives from St. Augustine's. The last column contains only the name of Feologeld. It is evident that he is senior in office to Cudaman (alias Duda . . .) and Beornwine but his attestation nevertheless follows theirs. His prestige (for he became archbishop) was certainly greater than theirs, his personal seniority as an abbot was also greater, and it can only have been his connection with the junior abbey which obliged him to take always the last place. The junior abbey was that of Dover. Feologeld was therefore abbot of Dover.

It equally follows that those in the second column, not being abbots of Saint Augustine's or of Dover, must have been attached to the only remaining abbey, that of Reculver.

It is unfortunate that the argument cannot be further supported from charter evidence. We do not know from any other source the name of any abbot of Reculver during Feologeld's lifetime and, where we know of an abbot of this house, we do not find his name upon charters which are of any use to us in the present enquiry. It is true that the deductions we are enabled to make do not conflict with any other evidence, and this in itself is not without significance, but it is only natural that one should hanker after water-tight evidence, even for the events of over one thousand years ago.

ABBOT BEORNHEAH.

Having once identified an abbot it is sometimes possible to find more about him in the charters. Here are five entries relating to Beornheah :

Anno 843/59. BCS 405. Beornheah appears fifth in a list of deacons witnessing a bequest to Christchurch. He is clearly a member of the Christchurch familia.

Anno 863/67. BCS 406. Beornheah appears fourth in a list of arch-deacons, after others named Oswulf and Sigefreth. He witnesses a grant by the archbishop to his monks.

Anno 863. BCS 507. Beornheah has accelerated promotion. He is now first amongst the arch-deacons, before Oswulf and Sigefreth.

Anno 867. BCS 516. Beornheah is now a priest, although only eleventh on the list of the familia. This is a Wessex charter with a list of Canterbury witnesses.

Anno 890 or about then. BCS 539. Archbishop Plegmund confirms a charter granted in 875 (BCS 539) and Abbots Beornhelm and Beornheah sign after him in this order.

It is thus clear that Beornheah was trained as a member of the familia at Canterbury, to which he belonged for some 45 years at least before he became Abbot of Dover. We have no later record of him or, in fact, of any abbot of Dover. It is not unlikely that the abbey was destroyed by the Danes in Beornheah's time. These invaders were at Appledore and Milton in 893 and Kent was very much at their mercy.

THE ABBOTS OF DOVER.

1. BRUN. He witnesses three charters in company with Archbishop Bregowin (BCS 189, 190, 194) in the time of the Mercian viceroys in Kent. He was abbot in 761 and 762 but we know no more of him.
2. EALDBEORHT. He attests in 765 (BCS 196) for one of Offa's viceroys on a purely Kentish matter and his name appears again in 774 (BCS 213-214), but there are then two of the name and nothing to show that either of them is abbot of a Kentish monastery. This latter date cannot therefore be accepted with any confidence.
3. FEOLGELD. We know nothing of him before he appears as abbot of Dover. The name occurs in no other charter and it is rather unlikely that he was of Kentish origin. In 803 (BCS 312) he appears at a great Council at Clovesho in the entourage of the Mercian archbishop Aethelheard. Two years later (BCS 322) he attends another Council at Acleah. We have a second charter which passed at this Council (BCS 321). It is a muddled copy but must be mentioned because it goes so far as to put the name of Feologeld first of the abbots, instead of last as in all other charters. In the year of the Acleah Council Archbishop Aethelheard died and was succeeded by Wulfred who was possibly a Kentish man, and certainly no friend to Mercians. Feologeld remained at Dover but in 811 attests a charter by which Wulfred conveys certain lands to his monks. All three Kentish abbots were present. In 823 (BCS 375) and 825 (BCS 384) Feologeld is again present at Councils, but there is nothing to show whether he feels himself attached to the Mercian or the Kentish part. The latter was a particularly contentious Council at Clovesho. In 826 Feologeld attests a bargain between Christchurch and S. Austins but we have no other records in the long period between 803 and 832, i.e. nine appearances as a witness in nearly 30 years. There were many other Kentish charters which he might have witnessed in this time. It is a possible inference that he was a Mercian and rather more attached to Mercian sentiments than to the claims

of Archbishop Wulfred. However that may have been, he was elected Archbishop on 26 May 832, on the death of Wulfred. He was consecrated on 9 June 832 but died soon after, on 29 September 832 (these dates are taken from MS. "F" of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle). Since he had already been thirty years an abbot he was presumably a very old man, and nothing is known of any acts of his short tenure of the archbishopric.

4. **WERHEARD.** In 824 he attests as a deacon for his relative Archbishop Wulfred (BCS 381) and in the following year he attends a Council at Clovesho, witnessing as a priest (BCS 384, 385). In 832 (BCS 402) he made what is often described as "Werheard's Will" but this is not really a testament in the ordinary sense. It recites that Archbishop Wulfred granted very many church lands to Werheard, with the consent of his familia, and that these lands lay at Harrow, Otford, Graveney, Bishopsbourne, Westwell, Barham, Cliffe and in Romney Marsh, etc. All these Werheard returns and adds lands of his own right at Hayes, Twickenham, etc. Werheard gives no reason for his action except that Archbishop Wulfred had desired it. Since the Archbishop had died quite recently, that may well have been one of Werheard's reasons but it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that his promotion to be abbot of Dover had something to do with it. Christchurch would not willingly see its estates in the possession of the head of another house, which might in consequence lay claim to them. Werheard was a powerful and influential man before he gave back the lands to Christchurch and became abbot. He continued to be a person of importance and also a landowner (BCS 448). He attended Councils in Kent (BCS 380, 412, 419, 420, 426, 442) and on at least one occasion was present at a royal council in Surrey (BCS 421), a very unusual distinction for a Kentish abbot. Our last record of him shows him present at a Council in London in the year 845 (BCS 448), where he is more than a witness, for the Council ratified his exchange of lands in Middlesex, on Sunday, 8 November, in the presence of nine bishops. He was assuredly a much richer and more important abbot than Dover had ever known before.
5. **BEORNWULF.** We have only one record of this abbot, in the year 863 (BCS 507), when he attests as a member of the familia of Christchurch.
6. **EARDWULF.** In 867 (BCS 516) he is sixth on a list of priests of Christchurch and about 870 (BCS 529, 530, 538) he also witnesses charters, as a member of the Christchurch community. In 871 (BCS 529, 530, 558) he is present when Duke Alfred's

affairs are settled "with all the brotherhood". He then attests as abbot and after that we hear no more of him.

7. **BEORNHEAH.** His record has already been discussed and it may well be that he was the last abbot of the first Saxon monastery at Dover, although the house was refounded before the Conquest, but for canons and not monks.

HISTORY OF THE MONASTERY AT DOVER.

The foundation of the monastery has already been described, as it is set forth in what the writer considers the best authority. This is not the only authority to which writers have appealed, and the different authorities do not agree. The V.C.H. states that King Eadbeald (616-640) ordained 22 secular canons to serve God in the church of St. Mary in the Castle, while Wihtraed in 696 removed them into the town. V.C.H. quotes in support two MSS. in the British Museum. The MSS. are apparently of post-conquest date. Statham (*History, etc., of Dover*, p. 173) accepts this view, but on page 31 he seems to approve an even earlier foundation. Florence of Worcester, however, supports the view taken in the *Liber de Hyda* (Ch. Hist. edn. of Flo. Worcest., p. 393).

Our list of abbots is therefore not without importance. There is a reasonably complete sequence of abbots from 761 to about 890. There can therefore have been no secular canons during that period and it is also to be noted that the admonitions of Wihtraed, drawn up at the Council of Bapchild, were certainly not framed for the guidance of canons. In fact, the monastery was assuredly not founded for canons and we can accept the evidence of Bapchild and of the abbot-lists that Dover was an abbey of monks from its foundation at least until 890. The charters help us to some further information. In 1045 (Ord. Facs. iii, 43) Archbishop Eadsige gave certain lands to St. Augustine's on the condition that they should pray for him. The witnesses include

Godric the Dean
and all the brotherhood of Christchurch
Leofwine the priest
and all the brotherhood at Dover

The priest Leofwine appears by name in other charters, but it is difficult to date them. The earliest is about 1017/20 (K.732) in which "Leofwine the priest of Dover" is one of the sureties of a marriage settlement. In 1038/50 he is concerned in a dispute with St. Augustine's about some lands which had formerly belonged to the nunnery of Saint Mildred in Thanet (K.790). Earl Godwin is the arbitrator and he allows Leofwine a life interest in the land, with reversion to St. Augustine's. In about

1047/48 (K.789) "Leofwine the priest" witnesses a land conveyance in which the chief men of Kent are concerned as parties or witnesses.

Thus we know a fair amount about the position of this Leofwine. We know that he spoke for the community at Dover and we know from other sources (K.769) that there was a land-owning community there during his lifetime. Although Leofwine is a priest, he is never given the title of Abbot or even Dean, but we need not doubt that he presided over the canons of St. Martin. He himself may have held a prebend (i.e. the land allotted to a particular canon for his support) at Charlton by Dover for D.B. tells us that "Leuvin" held a prebend there, while the D.B. of St. Augustine's spells his name "Lifuin"—these forms being about as near to the Saxon Leofwine as Norman clerks could be expected to get. Several other canons are mentioned in D.B.

This institution of canons must have been set up between the time of the last known abbot in 890 and the earliest date for Leofwine the priest in 1017/20. It is more than likely that in that interval of time there were many years in which the abbey of Dover had ceased to exist owing to the Danish troubles.

THE ABBOTS OF REOULVER.

Some of these are known from charters addressed to them, or from other records, namely, Abbots Beorhtweald, Deneheah, Heahbeorht, and Hwitraed. These have been included in the following list, together with a few comments :

1. BASSE. A grant of land was made to a priest of this name by King Ecgbeorht in order that he might found a monastery, of which he was presumably the first abbot. This could hardly be anything but a very small establishment which may have centred about the small church whose foundations still exist within the walls of the Roman fort (ASC).
2. BEORHTWEALD. In 674 he is mentioned by name as possessing land near Lyminge (BCS 73) and is described as the "venerable presbyter abbot". Reculver is not mentioned but there existed no other abbey of which he might have been head except Saint Augustine's, where Abbot Adrian bore rule. In 679 he had a grant of "Westan ae" in the Isle of Thanet (part of St. Nicholas-at-Wade) from King Hlothair (BCS 45). The charter was granted "in civitate Racuulf". In 692 Beorhtweald witnessed a charter (BCS 89) of King Wihtraed, but the dating is uncertain and the charter of poor repute. It should perhaps be noted that Searle in his *Onomasticon* says that Beorhtweald was formerly Abbot of Glastonbury, which cannot have been the case. In 694 Beorhtweald became Archbishop (Bede v, 8) and is described as having been abbot of "the

monastery which is next to the north mouth of the river Genlada called Raculfe.”

3. **AETHILMER** who attest in 699 (BCS 99), before Dover was founded, succeeded Beorhtweald.
4. **DENEHEAH**. There is a long gap after Aethilmer. We know that the admonitions of Bapchild were addressed to Raculf about 702/7 (BCS 91) but no abbot is named. In 760 Eadbeorht king of Kent gave to Deneheah, abbot of Raculfe the dues on a ship at Fordwich, i.e. freedom from the port dues which would otherwise have been levied (BCS 173). He is probably the same person as Abbot Daene who attests a grant of King Eadbeorht in 761 (BCS 189).
5. **BAERE**. An abbot of this name attests after another named Hereberht in the year 762 (BCS 194). “Hereberht” is certainly an error, either for Abbot Iaenbeorht of St. Augustine’s or, possibly, for sub-king Heahbeorht who was one of Offa’s viceroys about this time. Baere must then be abbot of Reculver, for he is followed by Brun, who must have been abbot of Dover. It is just possible, since the copying of this charter is far from satisfactory, that “Baere” may be a mis-reading of “Daene” but it is impossible to arrive at any certainty on the meagre evidence available.
6. **HEAHBEORHT**. This seems to be the correct formal rendering of a name which is spelt “Heaberht” and “Eadberte” in the two records which remain to us (BCS 176, 199). He was an abbot of Reculver, named as such, to whom, in both records, King Eardulf of Kent granted land at Palmstead in High Hardres. Although they refer to the same transaction Birch dates the two charters as “About A.D. 747” and “About A.D. 765”. I think the earlier date is unlikely but must admit that the existence of so many abbots of Reculver about 760-765 is exceedingly confusing, even when we remember that Offa was very active in Kent about this time and that there were consequently “Plurimae ac diversae inquietudines apud nos” —many and diverse disturbances amongst us (Haddon and Stubbs, Concilia. iii, 398). I do not attempt to solve the dating problems which arise.
7. **HWITRAED**. In 784 King Eadmund of Kent granted to Abbot Hwitred and his familia at “Raculfeestre” certain land at Scilduic (BCS 243). It is likely that folk etymology got hold of this place name, pronouncing it successively Schildwic, Schildwicford and Shelvingford, which place is in Hoath, a well-known possession of Reculver. This abbot also attests in a charter of uncertain date (BCS 194—confirmation).

8. **ÆTHELHEAH.** About the year 800 King Cenulf of Mercia seized the estates of Reculver into his own hands or, at least, their revenues. The story is to be found in BCS 384. In spite of this the monks remained in occupation, for in 803 an Abbot Aethelheah supports the Canterbury contingent at a Clovesho Council and is evidently, from his position, abbot of Reculver (BCS 312).
9. **DUDEMAN.** In the year 805 we have three records of an abbot of Reculver whose name appears as Duda . . ., Dudemon and Cudaman. Dudeman is the correct form (BCS 322, 323, 321, 319, 320).
10. **BEORNWINE.** This abbot attests in 811 (BCS 332) and again in 826 (BCS 851, 1337).
11. **BAEGMUND** attests in 832 (BCS 390), 833 (BCS 412), 838 (BCS 419, 420, 421) and 839 (BCS 417, 426). He is not the same person as the next.
12. **DAEGMUND** has his name spelt in many ways which are not worth recording. He appears as a deacon at Clovesho in 825 (BCS 384) and as a priest in 833 (BCS 405) and 834 (BCS 380). In 859 (BCS 497) and 863 (BCS 507) an Abbot of Reculver of this name appears, and is probably the same person. In 883 an abbot of Saint Augustine bears this name and may have been promoted from Reculver (Tho. Elm. p. 17), for great age was no bar to high ecclesiastical office.
13. **BEORNHELM** attests in 867 as also in 870/889 (BCS 529, 530, 538), about 871 (BCS 301), 871 (BCS 558) and at an uncertain date possibly as late as 905 (BCS 572, 638) and not before 890. He is the last abbot of whom we have any record. In 949 (880/1) all the lands of Reculver were given to Christchurch. It is true that in 1030 there was a Dean Guichard "of the church of S. Mary of the monastery of Reculver" and there is evidence in this that some sort of community lived there, but not a community of monks. It may be that Reculver was used as an annexe to Christchurch for such special purposes as may have been convenient.

In closing this short list of its abbots it seems fitting to record that Reculver did provide at least one saint. His name was Ymar or Himar, and he probably gave name to Margate where he was buried. He was a monk of Reculver (Tho. Elm., p. 223).