

## THE CULT OF MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL IN BRITAIN

### *A survey, with some thoughts on the significance of Michael's May feast and angelic roles in healing and baptism*

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Rather than fixing customarily on Michael's hilltops, the results of this survey suggest we pay equal regard to his watery contexts and the religious and historical ramifications they might carry<sup>1</sup>. The report begins with a note about Michael's abiding importance and popularity as reflected in medieval text and image and in post-Reformation attitudes and customs<sup>2</sup>. This leads into a review of his British dedications, the four recorded before 800 and then the general corpus discussed in relation to its geographical distribution and the historical and thematic significance of individual cases<sup>3</sup>. Dedications in

<sup>1</sup> It was a particular honour to be invited to the Bari conference, since the British contributor to the Mont-Saint-Michel millenary conference was Herbert Finberg, Head of the Department of English Local History in the University of Leicester, where the author's doctorate was obtained under the supervision of Finberg's successor-but-one, Charles Phythian-Adams. Gratefully indebted to his teacher's guidance on the handling of dedication evidence, the author also thanks the many others who have helped with information and ideas. Any errors are solely his own.

<sup>2</sup> Summary introductions to Michael and his cult in English include, in chronological order, R. Sinker, *Michael the Archangel*, in W. Smith and S. Cheetham (eds.), *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, London 1908, 2, 1176-81; F. G. Holweck, *Michael the Archangel*, in C. G. Herbermann et al (eds.), *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, X, New York 1911, 275-7; D. Attwater with C. R. John, *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints*, Harmondsworth 1995<sup>3</sup>, 254-5; D. Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, Oxford 2003<sup>3</sup>, 300-1. An essential summary in Italian is in F. Spadafora, *Michele, Arcangelo, I. Nelle Sacre Scritture*, 410-16, and M. G. Mara, *II. Il Culto in Oriente, III. Il Culto in Occidente, IV. Nella Liturgia, and V. Iconografia*, 416-46, in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, IX (13 vols, Roma 1961-70). The Bollandists' documentation is in *Acta Sanctorum*, Sept. VIII, Antwerpen 1762, 4-123. Other texts include, in chronological order, W. Lueken, *Michael: Eine Darstellung und Vergleichung der jüdischen unter der morgenländisch-christlichen Tradition vom Erzengel Michael*, Göttingen 1898; O. Rojdestvensky, *Kult sv. Michaila v latinskom Srednovekovi*, Petrograd 1917, abridged as *Le Culte de Saint Michel et le moyen âge*, Paris 1922; A. M. Renner, *Der Erzengel Michael in der Geistes- und Kunstgeschichte*, Saarbrücken 1927; M. Gasnier, *Saint Michel Archange*, Paris 1944; J. Daniélou, *Les anges et leur mission*, Paris 1952; J. Lemarié, *Textes liturgiques concernant le culte de S. Michel, Sacris Erudiri* 14, 1963, 277-85; M. Baudot, *Origine du culte de Saint Michel and Saint Michel dans la legende médiévale*, in M. Baudot (ed.), *Millénaire monastique du Mont-Saint-Michel. III. Culte de Saint Michel et Pèlerinages au Mont*, Paris 1971, 15-22, 29-34 [5 of 6 vols. in series published in 1967-93]; H. P. R. Finberg, *The archangel Michael in Britain*, in Baudot (ed.), *Millénaire monastique du Mont-Saint-Michel. III. cit.*, 459-69; and R. F. Johnson, *St Michael the Archangel in Medieval English Legend*, Woodbridge 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Any examination of dedication evidence must consider landscape and local history. To keep footnotes to a minimum, the reader is directed in individual cases to the following standard resources: the topographical and thematic volumes of the Victoria History of the Counties of

juxtaposition with those of certain other cults are commented on; also examples of Michael as patron of cemeteries; and his churches' topography. Observation of low-lying sites and watery contexts – contrary to traditional expectations of hilltops – prompts discussion of his associations with baptism and healing. The possibility is raised that ideas about Michael, and his veneration, provided a bridge between the British and English Churches. Finally the review identifies places of Michael's patronage where indications survive of pre-Christian religion and ritual, and explores their resonance for understanding the cult of the archangel in the long view.

### 1. *Michael's abiding importance and popularity*

#### *Medieval ubiquity in art and literature*

Where wall-paintings survive in British churches, Michael's centrality and ubiquity in medieval religious consciousness is plainly evident. Few churches with sufficient space over the chancel arch appear to have failed to include Michael's weighing of souls in portrayals of the Last Judgement. In stone and stained glass, the warlike Michael brandishes his sword over the dragon who symbolizes Satan, particularly over eleventh- and twelfth-century doors of churches dedicated in his honour. Occasionally Michael is shown as both warrior and psychopomp. Religious literature and liturgy reinforced universal descriptions of Michael: John Mirk, the fifteenth-century homilist, reused central themes already reworked by James of Voragine<sup>4</sup>. Apocryphal texts played their part in spreading Michael's popularity, especially dramatic episodes in which, with angelic help, apostles worked wonders among 'monstrous' races<sup>5</sup>.

#### *Post-medieval survival of interest and custom*

Michael's popularity survived the Reformation through the keeping up of

England; J. Murray Mackinlay, *Ancient Church Dedications in Scotland*, 2 vols, Edinburgh 1910-4; the Domesday Survey of 1086 in the edition overseen by J. Morris and published in county volumes as *Domesday Book*, Chichester 1975-86; the one-inch-to-the-mile sheets of the Ordnance Survey; the county volumes of the English Place-Name Society (1925), still in progress; E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, Oxford 1964<sup>4</sup>; A. D. Mills, *A Dictionary of British Place-Names*, Oxford 2003; V. Watts et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, Cambridge 2004; P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters, An Annotated List and Bibliography*, Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks 8, 1968; and the 'Early Charters' series, e.g. H. P. R. Finberg, *Early Charters of the West Midlands*, Leicester 1961.

<sup>4</sup> T. Erbe (ed.), *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies, by Johannes Mirkus (John Mirk). Edited from Bodl. MS. Gough Eccl. Top. 4, with variant readings from other MSS. Part I*, London 1905, 257-60. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*, trans. W. Granger Ryan, Princeton 1993, 2, 201-11.

<sup>5</sup> M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford 1923, reprinted with corrections in 1954, e.g. the *Acts of Andrew and Matthew*, at 457. For Michael as intercessor, see Id., *The Apocryphal New Testament* cit., *The Apocalypse of Paul*, at 547.

parish feasts, and his choice as patron for new churches, or others whose patrons were forgotten or discarded, angels being considered 'safer' than saints. He was a popular choice, for example, in Leicestershire, where Lollardy had been strong and about one church in five changed its dedication. Such changes had their own patterns, so that in the West Midlands Michael often changed places with Mary, while in four East Midlands parishes Michael replaced Helen – who also has associated feasts in May and September<sup>6</sup>.

Well into the nineteenth century, folk prayers and hymns invoking Michael were used in the Western Isles of Scotland to call or bless cattle<sup>7</sup>. The flowers called Michaelmas daisies, or *angelica*, were expected in bloom on September 29, which continued as a quarter-day for settling rents and accounts. Michaelmas fairs continued, sometimes with horse-racing and sometimes, as at Nottingham, where Michaelmas was also mayor-making day, as goose fairs. Dressing stubble-geese as seignorial perquisites to accompany annual rents was among surviving Michaelmas customs, which also included baking oatcakes called St Michael's Bannocks, and in some places the annual procession and replenishment of church floor-coverings called Rushbearing survives, as at Urswick, Lancashire. Urswick also has one of several landmarks linked to Michael, a stone called St Michael's Stirrup.

## 2. Dedications in honour of Michael

### *The four dedications recorded before 800*

An important gauge of the strength of Michael's cult is the number and spread of dedications in his honour, particularly of churches built before 1500. For the earliest periods the information is patchy. Only a modest number of dedications are documented before the year 1000. Britain has no archive comparable with the more than one hundred consecration certificates from the diocese of Urgell in Catalunya<sup>8</sup>. One must rely for the most part on chance remarks in saints' Lives, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and charters granting rights

<sup>6</sup> For dedication evidence in Britain see G. Jones, *Introduction: Diverse expressions, shared meanings: Surveying saints across cultural boundaries and Comparative research rewarded: religious dedications in England, Wales and Catalunya*, in G. Jones (ed.), *Saints of Europe: Studies towards a survey of cults and culture*, Donington 2003, 1-28 and 210-60; *Saints in the Landscape: Heaven and Earth in Season and Locality*, Stroud due 2007; *Church dedications and landed units of lordship and administration in the pre-Reformation diocese of Worcester*, unpublished PhD, University of Leicester 1996; and the inventories available on the websites of the UK Arts and Humanities Data Service, and TASC (the Trans-national Atlas and Database of Saints' Cults) <http://www.le.ac.uk/users/grj1/tasc.htm> accessed September 21, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> A. Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, Edinburgh - London 1928-71, 1, no. 77 etc.

<sup>8</sup> C. Baraut, *Les Actes de Consagracions d'Esglésies de l'Antic Bisbat d'Urgell (Segles IX-XII)*, La Seu d'Urgell, 1986.

and privileges. Among eighty-eight dedications of churches, oratories and altars in England prior to 800 identified by Wilhelm Levison are four churches of Michael<sup>9</sup>. The proportion, about five per cent, is consistent with later data. Around 650 ancient churches are dedicated in his honour in England, about 5.9 per cent of the total, 75 in Wales (5.8), and 18 in Scotland (5.9). A likely indicator of the cult's early popularity in Britain is the acute rarity in all parts of side-chapels, altars and lights (and indeed wells) in Michael's honour, since it appears that the greater the proportion of such 'secondary' dedications in the profile of an individual cult (relative to the total numbers of dedications), the later its popularity or adoption<sup>10</sup>.

### Hexham

The earliest dedication belonged to a cemetery adjoining which a retreat with an oratory was established *circa* 690 by Bishop John of Hexham, known to history as St John of Beverley. His deacon told Bede, himself one of John's pupils, that it was there, 'a mile-and-a-half from his cathedral', on the far side of the river Tyne, that John cured a young boy of his lack of speech<sup>11</sup>. The retreat oratory of Michael at Bobbio, Columbanus' monastery founded in 613, springs to mind<sup>12</sup>.

John's retreat may have been at Warden hillfort on the north bank of the Tyne opposite Hexham. Warden's village church is St Michael's and an early Anglian cross-shaft stands in its yard. The river flows east towards Corbridge, site of a Roman town, while Hadrian's Wall runs in parallel along the crest of high land to the north. Old English *weard dūn* means 'watching hill'. Such places may have been look-out points for sentries, but watching in the religious sense of keeping vigil should also be considered. Bede's precise description of the cemetery as 'a mile-and-a-half from Hexham' favours rather a place called St John Lee (John the Baptist, not of Beverley). This is on low-lying ground near the confluence of the Tyne and one of its tributaries, from the opposite bank of which Warden hillfort looks out from a slightly greater distance.

Whatever the exact location, this was no isolated spot, for Hexham lies centrally within the so-called Regality of Hexhamshire, a large territory supposedly given to the Church by a Queen of Northumbria. Sovereignty independent of the Northumbrian and later the English Crown was vested in the Bishop of Lindisfarne, passing to the palatine Prince-Bishop of Durham and sometimes enjoyed by the Archbishop of York. Its autonomy was finally

<sup>9</sup> W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century: The Ford Lectures Delivered in the University of Oxford in the Hilary Term 1943*, Oxford 1946, 33-36, 259-65.

<sup>10</sup> Jones (ed.), *Saints of Europe: Studies cit.*, 257, *Saints*, Part One, Chapter 3.

<sup>11</sup> Bede, *The Ven., Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (trans. L. Sherley-Price, rev. R. E. Latham, intro. and notes D. H. Farmer), Harmondsworth 1990, ch. V. 2, 267-8.

<sup>12</sup> The Bobbio retreat was noted at the Bari conference by Monica Saracco.

extinguished only in 1830. Hexham, whose name indicates the homestead for a younger son of a king, was the effective successor of Roman Corbridge and the Regality probably formed part of its *territorium*.

### Malmesbury

After his death in 709, Aldhelm, first bishop 'West of Selwood' (precursor of the later bishops of Bath and Wells, Dorchester, and Exeter), was buried in the church of St Michael at Malmesbury, a hilltop town in Wiltshire. Here he had succeeded the town's eponymous Irishman Maildubh as abbot of a monastery renowned for its learning and established within an Iron-Age defended enclosure, looking out over a large *parochia* with which it was endowed by royal gift<sup>13</sup>. Near the foot of the hill (around which flows the Wiltshire Avon) archaeology has revealed at Brokenborough a large mid-Saxon hall, plausibly that of a king. The site of St Michael's is probably represented by St Michael's House between Malmesbury's abbey and market-place.

### South Malling

In 765 King Ealdwulf of the South Saxons granted lands to a collegiate church of St Michael he had previously founded at [South] Malling, outside Lewes, now the county town of East Sussex<sup>14</sup>. The structure of Malling's extensive, later archiepiscopal manor and *parochia* has been compared with Welsh models of great antiquity<sup>15</sup>. Thirteenth-century customary dues included Michaelmas rushes. The South Saxons had had St Wilfrid for their bishop for a period. His biographer told how the archangel appeared to Wilfrid when he fell sick while returning from Rome<sup>16</sup>. Michael told him the Virgin Mary complained that he dedicated churches in honour of the apostle Andrew but not for her. If he relented, Wilfrid would be restored to health and Michael, psychopomp as well as heavenly herald, would come for Wilfrid another day. Malling's church and its curvilinear yard sit within a larger precinct occupying a great curve of the river Ouse – a classic minster site. Here, near the sea, the river breaks through the South Downs, with Malling overlooked from either side by Mount Harry and Cliffe Hill.

### Bishop's Cleeve

In a charter issued between 768 and 779, King Offa of Mercia gave land for

<sup>13</sup> William of Malmesbury, *De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. N. E. S. A. Hamilton, London 1870, 361, in the *vita* of St Aldhelm which occupies Book V, 330-443.

<sup>14</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters. An Annotated List and Bibliography* cit., 50 (MS BL Add. 33182, 8v).

<sup>15</sup> G. R. J. Jones, *Multiple estates and early settlement*, in P. H. Sawyer (ed.), *Medieval Settlement: Continuity and Change*, London 1976, 15-41.

<sup>16</sup> Eddius Stephanus, *Life of St Wilfrid*, ch. 17, in J. F. Webb (ed.), *Lives of the Saints*, Harmondsworth 1965.

the *refoundation* of the church and monastery of St Michael at *Clife*, modern Bishop's Cleeve, near Cheltenham, Gloucestershire<sup>17</sup>. The parish church stands within a semi-curved area at the heart of the village, on the wide plain of the Severn which ends abruptly one mile east with the steep scarp of the Cotswolds, its 'cliff'. By 1086 the monastery's substantial 30-hide estate had passed to the Bishop of Worcester. Possibly its origins lay in the conversion to religious status of what had been a Romano-British villa-estate, for Offa's charter refers to it as the land of a *vicus*. Local names include Wick Hill and Field. Recent scholarship interprets Old English *wîc* as applying *inter alia* to Romano-British rural settlements.

#### *Michael's dedications in general*

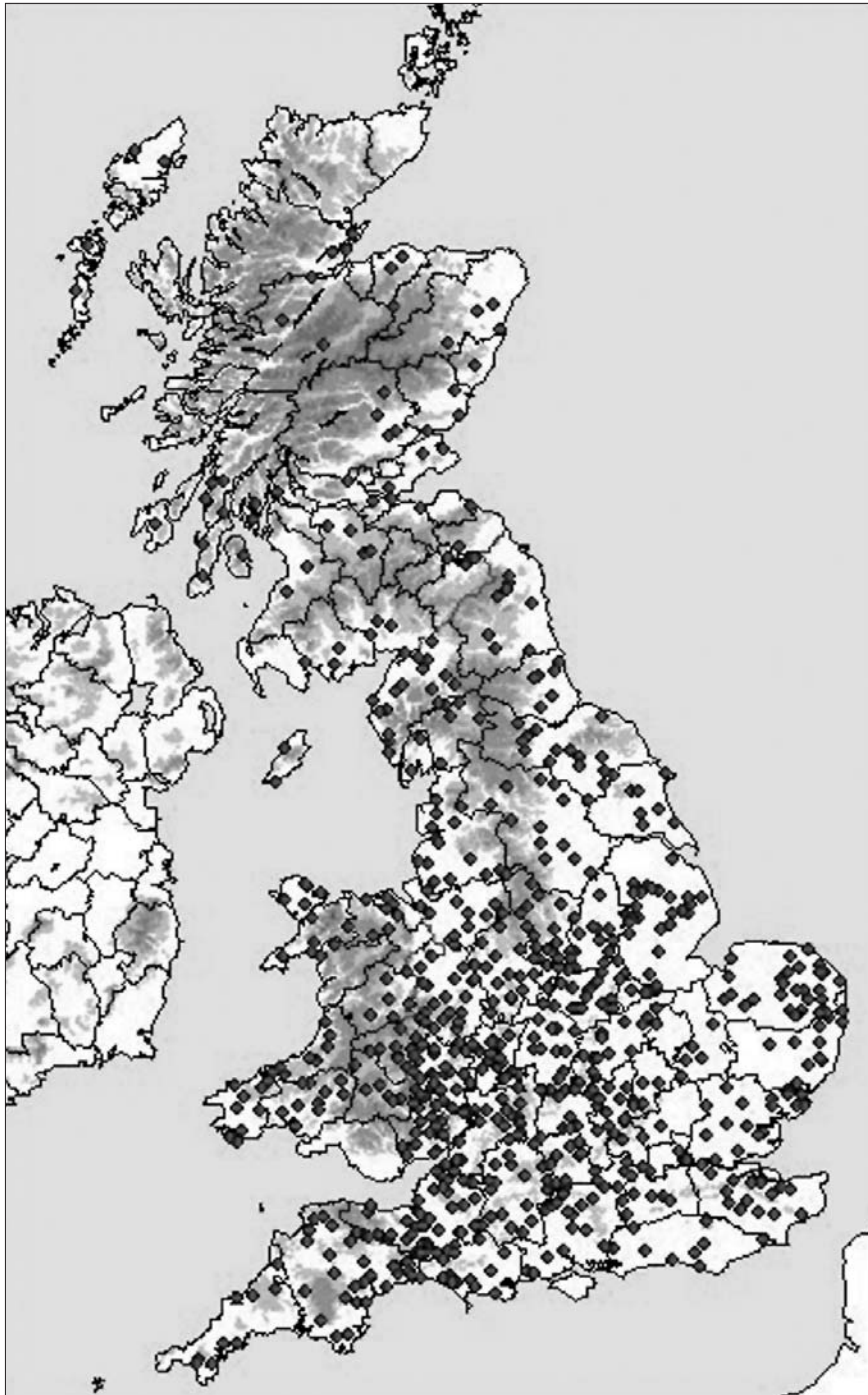
##### The geographical distribution

The number of Michael churches in Britain makes them the largest group after those of Mary, All Saints, and Peter and Paul, but they are not randomly distributed (fig. 1). In Scotland there are concentrations in the eastern lowlands and in the mainland and islands of Argyll in the west. Both were fields of Irish mission, Argyll being part of the Irish kingdom of Dalriada, and the likelihood of Irish influence on Michael's cult is strengthened when the frequency of Michael dedications south of the Border is mapped as a percentage of all dedications in each English county (fig. 2). Around 85 per cent of the archangel's parochial dedications in England and Wales lie west of a line from the Wash to the Isle of Wight.

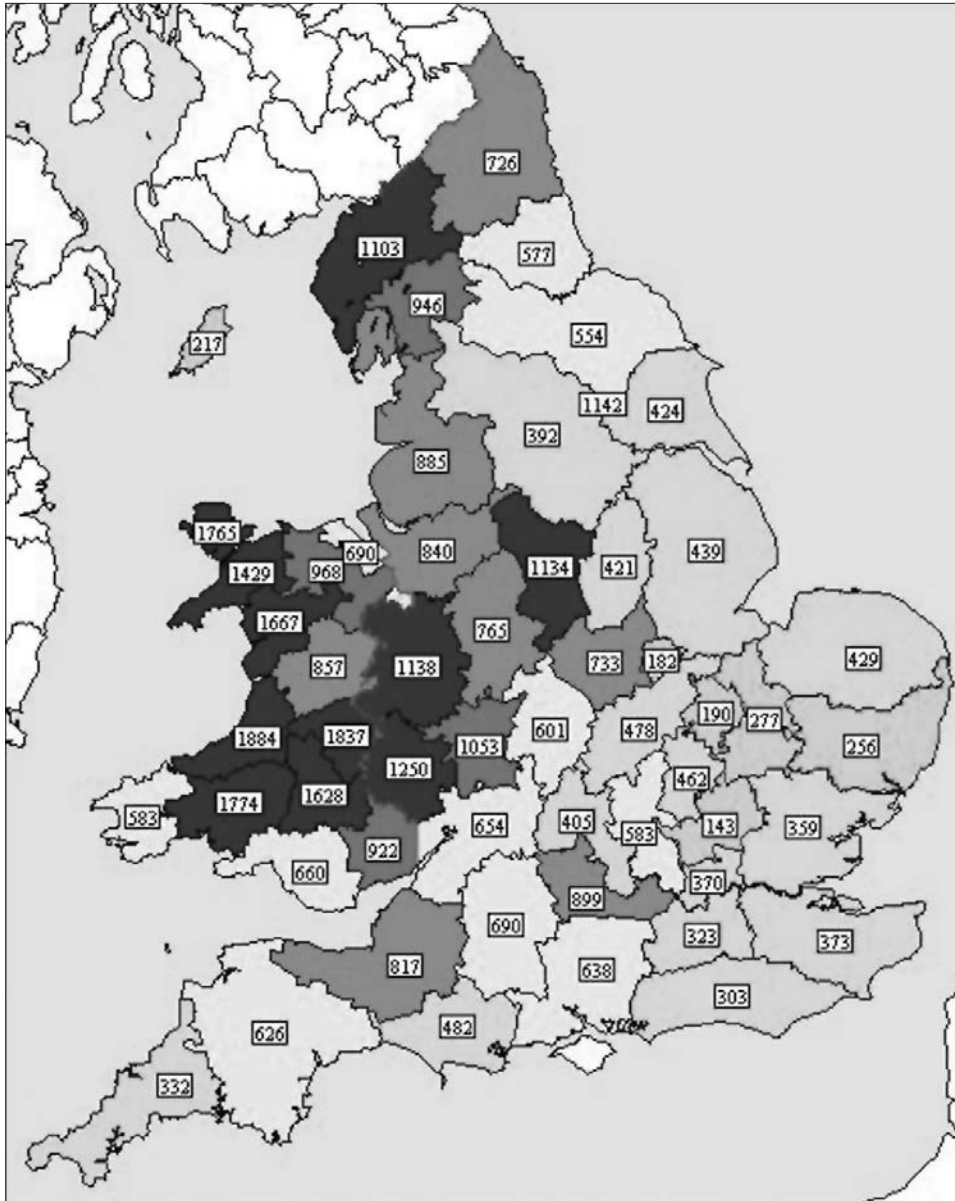
There are very distinct patterns even within this zone. More than one in seven cases lies in five contiguous western shires, those of Gloucester, Monmouth, Hereford, Salop (Shropshire) and Worcester. In western Herefordshire Michael's parishes outnumber Mary's. In Gloucestershire, on the other hand, they are limited to a corridor from the Herefordshire border to the Thames. In Somerset they occur most frequently in a central belt from the mouth of the Parrett in the north and spreading east and west along the county's southern borders. Other concentrations occur in southern Derbyshire and in Lincolnshire, where all but four of the twenty-five churches cluster in tight groupings north and south of Lincoln and in the southern Lindsey wolds.

With a few exceptions, such as St Michael's at Hallaton, Leicestershire, which has marks of a small pre-Conquest minster, the archangel's churches in eastern England and Yorkshire are generally small, looking very much like manorial *eigenkirche* serving places of late nucleation. In the East Midlands almost all are found at minor settlements. Most of Leicestershire's, for example, have yards resembling regular plots in a village plan, often next to a manor house. They are

<sup>17</sup> Finberg, *Early Charters of the West Midlands* cit., 38, no. 30.



1. - Dedications in honour of Michael of churches built before 1600 in mainland Britain.



2. - Density of Michael dedications (Fig. 1) as a proportion in each English and Welsh county of all dedications honouring universal cults: e.g. in Cumberland (top left), '1103' indicates Michael as patron at 11.03 per cent of ancient churches.



symptomatic of new settlements surrounded by open fields, a reorganized landscape still undergoing change within a century of the Norman Conquest.

Across western and northern England, in contrast, many more Michael churches are found at historically significant centres. Their names appear in bold type in the following overview.

### Western England

*Ancient Worcester diocese.* They include, for example, three *Gloucestershire* parishes associated with small family monasteries of the seventh/eighth centuries: **Bishop's Cleeve**, **Bibury**, and **Withington**. The last had Anglo-Saxon bounds Finberg saw as perpetuating a Romano-British estate<sup>18</sup>. Here Michael is recorded only from 1712; Mary was patron in 1287. However, where Mary is described in that period as sole patron of places which had early monasteries, it may reasonably be suspected that double or multiple dedications had been common. Similarly a likely fourth minster, **Blockley**, has Peter and Paul as its patrons but also a rare (and potentially significant north side) Michael chapel and a Michaelmas fair. Also in Gloucestershire, the probable hundredal minster of **Bisley** occupies a large, curvilinear, hilltop yard notable for its seven springs, and **Bulley** whose curvilinear yard is the largest among two thousand surveyed in the Marches and eastern Wales<sup>19</sup>. High on the eastern slope of the Malvern Hills, Michael was joint patron with Mary at **Great Malvern** priory, *Worcestershire*, in which are also found **Elmley Lovatt**, a queen's manor in 1066, **Salwarpe**, named after the river by which the church stands and thus symptomatic of a riverine estate, and **Great Comberton** by the River Avon.

*Hereford diocese.* Because of their number, *Herefordshire's* Michael churches will be examined in detail later. **Ledbury's** pre-Conquest mother church served a Domesday episcopal manor and medieval market-town. A twelfth-century Bishop of Hereford believed it the seat of British predecessors. Peter and Paul were its late medieval patrons but Michael was titular in 1733, raising the possibility that an earlier dedication had been recovered. At the northern end of the diocese lay **Much** (or 'Great') **Wenlock** priory in *Shropshire*, founded in the mid-seventh century by Merewalh, king of the Magonsaetan, for his daughter Milburh. It was a daughter house of Icanho, the famous East Anglian monastery of St Botolph, who had been a chaplain at the great Frankish abbey

<sup>18</sup> H. P. R. Finberg, *Roman and Saxon Withington*, in H. P. R. Finberg (ed.), *Lucerna: Studies of Some Problems in the Early History of England*, Leicester 1964, 21-65.

<sup>19</sup> D. Brook, *Early Christian Archaeology of the Southern Marches of Wales*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Wales, Cardiff 1992, summarized in *The early Christian church east and west of Offa's Dyke*, in N. Edwards and A. Lane (eds.), *The Early Church in Wales and the West, Recent Work in Early Christian Archaeology, History and Place-Names*, Oxford 1992, 77-89.

of Chelles before embarking on his mission in eastern England. The Domesday survey refers to 'the Church of St Milburh', but fourteenth-century seals show the archangel and in 1438 the patronage was shared<sup>20</sup>. The name Wenlock appears to join the Proto-Welsh word for 'white', with Old English *loca* (from Latin *locus*) as applied to a monastic enclosure. Conventional etymology refers to the limestone hills above Wenlock and a British district name *Wim-* or *Winnicas* in the foundation charter. However, where 'white' is encountered in saints' names in Celtic-speaking lands, 'holy' is implied. The extent of Milburh's estate is indicated by the district name, the size of Much Wenlock's ancient parish, and the location of Little Wenlock at some distance on the far, northern bank of the River Severn in a salient cutting into the diocese of Lichfield. Possibly Milburh Christianized an existing ritual site.

*Lichfield diocese.* Elsewhere in northern *Shropshire* two small vills, Lesser Poston and Souldon, in the large northern parish of Wem, were held in 1086 by an unidentified 'Church of St Michael'. The tenant of the former, a single farmstead of about 30 acres, rendered a bundle of box on Palm Sunday. Wem church is unlikely as the landlord: its patrons are Peter and Paul. Possibly **High** or **Child's Ercall** is meant. Six miles apart, they most likely represent separated portions of a large, ancient district along the valley of the river Tern which also includes **Chetwynd**, a Domesday vill of Countess Godiva, and **Lillieshall**, site of Mirk's Augustinian abbey and perhaps a pre-Conquest minster. A church of Michael which in 1086 held land at Manchester in southern *Lancashire*, has been provisionally identified as that of **Ashton-under-Lyne** in the probable British district called *Lime*, 'elm-tree region'.

**Lichfield** itself (in *Staffordshire*) has an important early church of St Michael, as does **Coventry**, *Warwickshire* (for a time the medieval capital of the diocese). More will be said about these. Three significant places in south Staffordshire are **Tettenhall**, **Penkridge**, and **Kings Swinford**. The first two were Domesday vills of the king, served respectively by a royal free chapel and a college of nine clerks. Their large parishes flank that of Brewood, a forest lordship given to the Bishop of Lichfield, and together these appear to represent the whole or part of an ancient territory. Kings Swinford has been St Mary's since at least 1754, but has a Norman tympanum showing Michael. In northern Staffordshire is **Stone**, which has one of the largest parishes in the county and occupies part of a low-lying, semi-curved enclosure less than half a mile from the river Trent. It was the probable mother church of a territory encompassing the Domesday royal estate of Stoke-on-Trent and the Mercian royal vill at Trentham. In east Staffordshire is St Michael's, **Rochester**, a Romano-British

<sup>20</sup> A. Binns, *Dedications of Monastic Houses in England and Wales 1066-1216*, Woodbridge 1989, 115.

settlement and in 1066 a comital vill which fell into royal hands by 1086, while in neighbouring *Derbyshire* is **Melbourne**, *caput* of a Domesday royal soke later given to the Bishops of Carlisle as a staging post on their way to and from the king's court.

### North-west England

*Northern Lancashire.* **St Michael's-on-Wyre** appears to be the most ancient, as well as the most central church of Amounderness, a large district given by King Aethelstan to the Archbishopric of York in 934. The adjacent and similarly extensive parishes of **Kirkham** ('estate pertaining to a church'), with its chapelry of **Grimsargh**, and **Cockerham** seem to have originated as detachments. Dedications in honour of Northumbrian and Mercian saints (Wilfrid, Chad, Oswald) fringe the district's edge. Even St Helen, mother of Constantine and widely popular in northern counties, particularly where she is associated with holy wells, is subordinated as patron of St Michael's-on-Wyre's former chapelry of Garstang. St Michael's stands beside the river Wyre. It never attracted a settlement larger than a small village – a clue that it occupies a site of ancient religious significance.

*Cumbria.* Cumbrian cases include both baronial *capita* in the half of *Westmorland* known as Applebyshire – 'Old' **Appleby** itself and **Brough**, 'the stronghold' – and successors of probable British monasteries at **Lowther** and **Shap**, predating Anglian and Norse settlement of the area, which has a probable royal estate at its core. Also in Applebyshire is **Barton**, a remote, isolated church in a curvilinear yard. It has been argued that Michael was the patron saint of the entire district<sup>21</sup>. Similarly in *Cumberland*, Michael protected **Addingham**, *caput* of Addinghamshire, while the lands of two baronial centres, **Burgh-by-Sands** and **Dalston**, appear to have been formed from a single territory surrounding the ancient Romano-British regional capital of Carlisle. It also includes the **Bowness** peninsula, commanding the Solway Firth<sup>22</sup>. A further cohesive group dominates the southern extension of Cumberland, formerly known as Copeland: **Muncaster** (a Romano-British settlement, as its name implies), **Bootle** (from the Old English word used for a royal hall), and **Irton**. **Arthuret** on the River Liddel was the site of a sixth-century battle and perhaps, therefore, the site of a British royal hall.

### English-Scottish borderlands

Michael dedications cluster in two blocks either side of the Cheviot Hills.

<sup>21</sup> Ch. Phythian-Adams, *The Land of the Cumbrians, A Study in British Provincial Origins, AD 400-1120*, Aldershot 1996, 95-7.

<sup>22</sup> Phythian-Adams, *The Land of the Cumbrians* cit., 139.

That on the Scottish side in the valley of the Tweed includes a county town, **Roxburgh**, the market town of **Kelso**, and **Melrose** – site of the seventh-century monastery of St Cuthbert. On the English side is a series of four *Northumberland* parishes stretching the best part of 20 miles north to south and 15 miles at their greatest width. **Ilderton**, **Ingram**, **Alnham**, and **Alwinton** represent upland, forest lands of early, perhaps pre-Anglian territories whose centres lay further east. The first three form the westernmost block of lands in the probable territory dependent on the royal Bernician centre of Bamburgh on the coast near Holy Island or Lindisfarne, St Cuthbert's eventual base from where he administered his diocese stretching between the North and Irish seas. (Ilderton's northern neighbour, Kirknewton, contains the site of the royal hall at Yeavering, famously the place of Paulinus's preaching to King Edwin and his court).

*County Durham.* The ancient minster church of Sunderland at **Bishopwearmouth** ('South Wearmouth' in 934) stands above the south bank of the Wear near its confluence with the North Sea and opposite Monkwearmouth. The names reflect the extensive transriverine *parochia* thought to represent the royal endowment of 40 hides with which the monastery of Wearmouth was founded (at Monkwearmouth) in 674<sup>23</sup>. This was one of Bede's twin monasteries, the more famous Jarrow lying at Tynemouth not far to the north. At some point royal ownership resumed, for in the same year that Aethelstan gave Amounderness to York he gave 'my beloved vill of South Wearmouth' with its dependencies to the monastery of Chester-le-Street, County Durham, and its shrine of St Cuthbert<sup>24</sup>. Wearmouth's monastic church was dedicated in honour of St Peter. That of Michael, within a partly curvilinear yard next to 'Rector's Park', a large area with probable ancient hunting functions running down to the river, offers itself for interpretation as the successor to a royal chapel. Its site might even deserve consideration as a British precursor to the Wearmouth monastery, whose dedication ties it to the reception of papal relics of Peter and Paul by the Northumbrian court in the mid-seventh century.

### Southern England

Even where Michael churches are rare, they are sometimes to be found at significant places like **Great Tew**, in *Oxfordshire*, centre of a large pre-Conquest estate. *Hertfordshire* has **Bishop's Stortford**, a market town which in 1066

<sup>23</sup> C. Plummer (ed.), *Vita Ceolfridi Anon.*, Ch. 7, 390, in *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, 2 vols., Oxford 1896, *Historia Abbatum autore anonimo* (anon., *Vita Ceolfridi*).

<sup>24</sup> *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, 26, in T. Arnold (ed.), *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, 2 vols., London 1882-5, I, 196-214.

belonged to King Harold's wife, Edith the Fair, and **St Michael's**, one of the suburban parishes of St Albans, established in the tenth century (the others are St Peter's and St Stephen's) within the enceinte of the Romano-British city.

In *Essex* two neighbours arouse interest: **Wickham Bishops**, a manor of the Bishops of London at the confluence of the River Blackwater with its tributary the Brain, named from the market town of **Braintree** about nine miles upstream. Royal land in the eleventh century, Braintree's name hints at assembly at a tree (on the land of one Branca). Old English *wīc-hām* names are now widely taken to indicate places of late surviving Romano-British local administration. Athwart the Blackwater is the parish of Witham, with whose boundaries those of Wickham interdigitate. Witham, a Domesday royal vill and head of a half hundred, was fortified by Edward the Elder of Wessex during his campaigns against the Danelaw *circa* 920. Its church was an Anglo-Saxon minster<sup>25</sup>. Strangely for so significant a place, its dedication, first recorded in 1389, honours Nicholas, whose cult was promoted in England after the translation of his relics to Bari in 1087<sup>26</sup>. No case is known of patronal commemoration at a major English church before that period. With Michael in a neighbouring parish perhaps once united with Witham, did Nicholas supplant the archangel? Both churches are found at the bottom of the hills on which their settlements sit, Witham's only a few hundred yards from the river<sup>27</sup>.

Further associations with ancient royal centres are found west of London. In *Berkshire*, **Bray** is the most important of a trio of cases clustered around Windsor: Domesday royal demesne served by a pre-Conquest minster held in 1086 by a king's clerk and sited close to the River Thames. In *Hampshire* is **Basingstoke**. Like Bedwyn, this Domesday royal vill's antiquity is indicated by its pre-Conquest exemption from tax. In 1086 its minster had recently been given to the church of Mont-Saint-Michel. Does its dedication date from that time, or was it a factor influencing the king's gift of this church rather than another? Its parish was separate from, but appears to have been superior to, that of Old Basing (patron, Mary), the settlement ('of Bassa's people') of which Basingstoke was an off-shoot. Possibly it had been the district's mother church – a district which also included **North Waltham**. The most significant of several *Wiltshire* cases is **Little Bedwyn**, part of a estate paying the ancient render of 'one night's *feorm*' (sustaining the king and his court for one night of their annual perambulations) and which had belonged to King Alfred. It adjoined, and was probably once united with, Ramsbury, see of the Wessex bishops

<sup>25</sup> W. Rodwell, *The Origins and Early Development of Witham, Essex. A Study in Settlement and Fortification, Prehistoric to Mediaeval*, Oxford 1993, 5, 65-73.

<sup>26</sup> J. Cooper, *Church Dedications in Colchester Archdeaconry*, *Essex Archaeology and History* 31, 2000, 167.

<sup>27</sup> My thanks to Janet Cooper for the description of St Michael's, Wickham Bishops.

before they moved to Salisbury. Immediately north of Ramsbury is the Domesday royal vill of **Aldbourn**. The central settlement of this complex, Great Bedwyn, had Mary as its patron but also a Michaelmas fair. Its large parish adjoined that of **Lambourn** in *Berkshire* – again a royal estate belonging to Alfred<sup>28</sup>.

One of the most famous and ancient rural fairs of pre-industrial Britain was held until recent times from October 10 to 16 (Michaelmas 'Old Style' after the reform of the calendar) next to St Michael's church on the hilltop at **Weyhill** near Andover in *Hampshire*. The place's name indicates the presence of a pre-Christian temple, sited at the crossing place of long-distance routeways.

Four of the five cases in north *Wiltshire* are on what were church estates in 1066. They include **Highworth** and **Lyneham** on their respective hill-spurs. Further south are **Melksham**, serving a Domesday estate of 84 hides, one of which was allocated to the maintenance of the minster and its named priest, and **Urchfont**, a major estate of St Mary's, Winchester, its name incorporating *funta*, an Old English loan from Latin, perhaps via British.

#### South-West England

*Devon*. The south coast church of **East Teignmouth** was mentioned in 1044 and a Michaelmas fair was held there by 1253<sup>29</sup>. The Domesday royal estate centre was at **Kingsteignton**, with Mary as patron in 1742 but its parish feast, recorded the previous year, was at Michaelmas. Michael became patron in 1754. In north Devon, **Great Torrington** was a major holding of Beorhtric, a mid-eleventh-century magnate who may have been an official of the queen's household. This market town's church, Michael's since at least 1342, lies close to the River Torridge. Similarly the parish church of **Bampton**, an untaxed estate of Edward the Confessor on the border with Somerset, lies close to a tributary of the Exe. Michael has been its dedicatee since at least 1448, though Mary was mentioned *circa* 1200. Perhaps the two were earlier joint patrons as at **Awliscombe**. Like Basingstoke, **Ottertton** in south Devon, previously a major holding of Gytha, wife of Earl Godwin of Wessex, had in 1086 recently been given to Mont-Saint-Michel. **Stokenham** in the same area was served by a pre-Conquest minster whose dedication may have been shared with an Anglo-Saxon St Hunbeorht. The market town of **Honiton**, a Domesday dependency of royal Axminster, has had Michael as patron since at least 1406.

*Cornwall*. Edward the Confessor's gift of **St Michael's Mount** priory to the Benedictines of Mont-Saint-Michel is a key point in the history of Michael's cult

<sup>28</sup> For the relationship between Bedwyn and Lambourn see J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, Oxford 2005, 301.

<sup>29</sup> D. Hooke, *Pre-Conquest Charter Bounds of Devon and Cornwall*, Woodbridge 1994, 204; Trimmer-Crump (eds.), *Calendar of Charter Rolls*, vol. I, 1226-57, London 1903, 248.

in the British Isles. Mirk's *Michaelmas* homily speaks of an apparition of Michael to 'another bishop at a place that is now called Michael's Mount in Cornwall', mentioned also in the *Miracula in Monte S. Michaeli in Cornubia*, though in fact he copies James of Voragine's account of the apparition at Monte Tumba<sup>30</sup>. Michael's regional primacy was demonstrated when in 1050 Edward merged the bishoprics of Cornwall and Devon. The seal of the new archdeaconry of Cornwall showed Michael standing on, and transfixing the dragon, or raising his sword in triumph.

Michael's popularity across the bay at **Helston** (he appears on the town's fourteenth-century seal, for example) also helps explain his popularity in Cornwall generally. The borough at Helston, whose associations with Michael will be revisited, was promoted by the Earls of Cornwall, whose predecessor Robert, Count of Mortain and half-brother of the Conqueror, fought under the banner of Michael at the Battle of Hastings and confirmed the Confessor's gift.

One expression of Michael's relationship with Cornwall is his patronage of three of the component parishes of the great episcopal manor of **Lawhitton** on the Devon border: Lawhitton itself, Lezant and Trewen. The manor derives its name from that of a founder Gwithian, a supposed disciple of St Samson. Similarly South Petherwyn, where the manor-house stood, preserves the name of [St] Padern Gwyn, Paternus the 'White' or 'Holy', who remains its patron. Trewen appears to combine *tref* ('farmstead') and Gwyn. Helston was a chapelry within the much bigger parish of **Wendron**, under Michael's patronage but named after its eponymous saint, perhaps properly Gwenfron/Findbron, 'White Breast' and to be identified with the Irish St Bronfinn, sister of St Ibar, whose disciple Etain is patron of neighbouring Stithians. Bronfinn was also supposed to be the mother of Lithgean, suggested original of the eponymous patron saint of Ludgvan, a parish overlooking St Michael's Mount (actually the name may mean 'place of ashes')<sup>31</sup>. Michael in Cornwall arguably represents a stratum of universal dedications earlier than the names whose incorporation of a word for enclosure, Cornish *Lann*, Welsh *Llan*, produced hundreds of 'Celtic saints' about whom next to nothing is known.

*Somerset and Dorset.* **Lyme**, Dorset, is first recorded in 774; the dedication of **Lyme Regis** in 1405. One hide at Lyme (whose name implies a district named from the river Lim) was held by the Bishops of Sherborne (later of Salisbury) whose estates also included **Halstock**, 'the holy place'<sup>32</sup>. In 841 Halstock was

<sup>30</sup> Erbe (ed.), *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies* cit.; MS BHL 5955b.

<sup>31</sup> J. Fisher and S. Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the British Saints*, 4 vols, London 1907-13, 4, 350-1; 3, 196, 362-4.

<sup>32</sup> K. Barker, *The Sherborne estate at Lyme*, in K. Barker, D. A. Hinton and A. Hunt, *St. Wulfsige and Sherborne: Essays to Celebrate the Millennium of the Benedictine Abbey, 998-1998*, Oxford 2005, 199-204.

granted by King Aethelwulf of Wessex to a deacon 'for the love of St Michael... whose church is in the same little monastery'<sup>33</sup>. In 844 Aethelwulf granted a reduction of taxation through his kingdom to which the Church responded with prayers for the intercession of Michael, Mary, Peter, and All Saints in that order<sup>34</sup>. By the eleventh century Halstock, a village in a well-watered district, was known for its local British saint, Juthwara (Aed-wyry, 'Zealous Virgin'), whose legend linked her with dairying. After the translation of Juthwara's relics to Sherborne, Mary assumed the patronage. Michael was forgotten. His churches in Dorset generally serve relatively insignificant places. Much the same can be said of *Somerset*, but with important exceptions like **Milverton**, a market town and the head of a hundred. In the king's hands in 1086, its large manor had previously been a possession of the Bishops of Wells – most likely by royal gift, perhaps after the conquest by Wessex of Somerset west of the River Parrett in 682.

Also in western Somerset is **Minehead**, overlooking the Bristol Channel. The possibility that St Michael's presence might predate the defeat of the British in 682 or relate to British survival is raised by Minehead's name, perhaps combining Old English *hçafod*, 'projecting hill-spur', with Celtic *\*mönith*, 'mountain'. Other hilltop Michael churches in Somerset include those of **Dundry**, a beacon point on the Mendips south of Bristol. The archangel also has churches at **Somerton**, the King's chief Domesday manor of Somerset, which gave its name to the county; **Penselwood**, widely but not universally taken to be the site of the battle at *Peonna* in 658, when the British were pushed back to the Parrett; **Stoke St Michael**, a dependency of Doultling (where Bishop Aldhelm died in the early eighth century at one of his monasteries); and **Brent Knoll**, discussed later.

The tiny Somerset parish and Domesday manor of **Michaelchurch**, half a hide of land (about 60 acres), lay wholly surrounded by the large royal manor of North Petherton, itself almost entirely marsh and pasture alongside the River Parrett from which it is named. In 1086 Michaelchurch was one of several manors tenanted by Ansgar the king's hearth-keeper. His duties required cooperation with the King's Forester for the county, whose office long went together with the keepership of Petherton Park. Michaelchurch is reminiscent of those Domesday manors attached to pre-Conquest churches which were given to King's Clerks. North Petherton's river-plus-*tûn* name probably indicates a render-collection point organized following the conquest by Wessex of Somerset west of the Parrett, serving a royal hall and probable hunting lodge on the Isle of Athelney – Alfred's refuge during his warfare with the Danes.

<sup>33</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters, An Annotated List and Bibliography* cit., 290. H. P. R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of Wessex*, Leicester 1964, No. 567, 160.

<sup>34</sup> Finberg, *The Early Charters of Wessex* cit., 160-4.



Conceivably, Michaelchurch predates North Petherton with its church of St Mary, and St Michael's represents a survival from the British Church. Like **Michaelstow**, Cornwall, first recorded in 1282, St Michael's-on-Wyre, and Michaelstow, Herefordshire, its name indicates a religious site distinct from agrarian settlement.

Herefordshire. Returning full-circle to the region centred on the lower reaches of the Severn and its tributary the Wye, Michael's pre-eminence – even ahead of Mary – in western and southern *Herefordshire* offers itself for detailed examination. His churches are divided evenly between that part of the county east of the Wye dominated by Anglian Mercia by the mid-seventh century and, on the opposite bank, those parts still under Welsh law at the end of the eleventh. With the exception of **Ledbury**, already mentioned, none serves a major settlement. Even so, there are some marks of significance.

**Sutton St Michael** is one of the smallest parishes in Herefordshire, smaller than neighbouring Sutton St Nicholas. Nevertheless its boundaries encompass Sutton Walls, an important Iron Age hill-fort commanding the lower valley of the River Lugg and the scene of an infamous political murder – the beheading in 794 of King Aethelbeorht of East Anglia by King Offa of Mercia, whose daughter he was visiting with a view to marriage<sup>35</sup>. Aethelbeorht was buried by the Lugg, one mile away at Marden, to be taken later to Hereford Cathedral where he was acclaimed a saint. Marden was still in 1086 a major royal estate – burgesses of Hereford owed services in its fields. Its name means 'enclosure in the district called Maund', from British *Magnis* (probably 'The Rocks' the name also of Hereford's Romano-British predecessor town at Kenchester). This was therefore the *caput* of the Kingdom of the Magonsaetan. However, Offa's royal hall was at Sutton, Marden's 'south *tûn*' and almost entirely surrounded by Marden's parish. St Michael's, nearer to the hill-fort than St Nicholas' and between it and the river, may be the successor of the royal chapel. In 1086 both Suttons and Maund itself were possessions of Kings' Clerks and previously of St Guthlac's, a pre-Conquest collegiate church at Hereford of probable royal foundation, and Leoflaed – perhaps a nun. About three miles north of Marden is another church beside the Lugg – that of **Bodenham**. Michael is patron there and also at **Felton**. Both are contiguous with Marden and are likely to have been constituent vills of Maund. **Felton**, like part of Sutton, was given to St Guthlac's and some of its land in 1086 was free of tax, a mark of royal in-land. Marden's church is under the joint patronage of Aethelbeorht and Mary. While Michael's presence at Sutton may solely reflect the elevation on which the hill-fort stands, riverside Marden is an obvious place where the royal household could have received baptism. Given Michael's presence elsewhere within the

<sup>35</sup> D. Whitelock (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. A Revised Translation*, London 1961, 36.

'multiple estate', it is conceivable that Michael was joint patron there with Mary but gave way to Aethelbeorht after his acclamation as a saint.

**Kenchester's** church is St Michael's, as also neighbouring **Mansell Lacy**. Kenchester retained something of its former significance: land here was among the estates with which the Welsh king Maredudd was rewarded for aiding the palatine Earl William of Hereford. **Breinton** outside Hereford included the city's 'Barton', or grain-store. It was cathedral land. Its church stands by the Wye, but so do many others on this stretch of the river – **Winforton's**, for example. Winforton's parish boundary with Whitney, 'the white (holy?) island' (patrons Peter and Paul), passes Stowe, 'a place of assembly (usually religious)'.

**Lyonshall** means 'border-land of Lene', the district which also gave its name to the minster-town of Leominster. Lyonshall's church stands next to its castle, overlooking the valley of the river Arrow and its crossing at Kington. **Kingsland** is one of three parishes comprising probable 'in-land' of Leominster: the others are Eardisland ('Earl's Land') and Monkland. Kingsland itself lies on a long spit of gravel between the Lugg and the Pinsley Brook. It was a major royal manor in the mid-eleventh century. There was a castle here and St Michael's stood outside the bailey. A similar pairing occurs at **Croft**, a probable outlier north of Kingsland, and also at **Lingen**, a parish on a headwater of the Lugg.

**Castle Frome** is one of a group of places whose names derive from the river Frome and therefore point to an ancient riverine territory. Before 1066 they belonged either, as at Castle Frome, to the future King Harold in his office as Earl of Hereford, or to his sister Edith, wife of King Edward. Kingstone Bridge between Castle and Bishop's Frome (dedication, Mary) indicates earlier royal possession, so St Michael's, Castle Frome, set high above the river, may well occupy the site of a pre-Conquest royal chapel, St Mary's being the mother church of the district (it belonged to Hereford cathedral and may have been collegiate: in 1086 a hide of land was sub-tenanted by the Bishop's Chaplain while a further virgate was held by 'a priest of the vill').

**Brampton Abbots** was a constituent vill within a pre-Conquest 'multiple estate' that looks very much like the surviving *territorium* of *Ariconium*, the Romano-British town which gave its name to the British kingdom of Eryng. In 1086 the lordship of Brampton Abbots, on the east bank of the Wye, was divided between Gloucester Abbey and St Guthlac's, Hereford. Part of the abbey lands was free of tax – a hint that the 'broom *tūn*' had been royal in-land. **Sollers Hope** is a minor parish; its church is in a valley close to its stream. Turning to the Michael churches in the late-surviving 'British' areas of Herefordshire, west and south of the Wye, that of **Moccas** stands close to the river at Moccas Court, not next to the castle on the hill – Moccas means 'swine moor'. In 1066 it belonged to St Guthlac's, perhaps as a former prebend, for

part had been given to a King's Clerk, Nigel, William's physician. The status may echo its association with a famous sixth-century British bishop, St Dubricius, grandson of a king of Ergyng, who founded a monastery here on family land. The saint's legend claimed he was born nearby at Madley in or beside the Wye – most probably a play on his name, meaning 'of the water' – but capable of interpretation as an allusion to baptism. Between Madley and the bridge at Hereford are found **Kingstone** ('the king's *tûn*'), an important royal manor which supplied the king's table when he was Hereford, and two small places in the royal Westwood, **Callow**, and **Dewsall**. The latter means '[St] David's Spring'), and attached to the place sometime after 1086, when it was called Westwood. The parish is largely surrounded by that of Much Dewchurch ('David's church'), not mentioned in Domesday. David's cult was imported relatively late into this far corner of the Welsh-speaking lands. Though the well is known from *circa* 1150, its ascription may easily postdate that of Westwood's church to Michael. Perhaps this had been Michael's Well. **Michaelchurch** near Ross-on-Wye is a tiny hamlet at the head of a small stream over the hill from another of Dubricius's monasteries, Hentland ('the old *llan*, or [church] enclosure'). This, too, might qualify as a spring-site. A similar interpretation suggests itself at **Garway**.

**Ewyas Harold** was the *caput* of a Welsh territory called Ewyas and the site of an important Marches castle. However, its church was in the village on the opposite side of 'the black brook', the Dulas, whose name attached to another settlement only a mile upstream, known also as **St Michael in Ewyas**, and arguably an older site. Also in this district, also on a stream, is **Michaelchurch Escley**.

### Wales

The Herefordshire evidence seems to present Michael as patron of churches associated with royal power – whether major centres, places with putative royal chapels, or small manors. Watery contexts are more frequent than elevated sites, including those at castle gates, particularly in the surviving British areas. These might be expected to have characteristics in common with Michael churches in Wales. Is this the case?

Few Welsh churches of Michael serve seminal places. Their parishes generally comprise upland farms and hamlets. Nevertheless, the distribution is notably concentrated in a wide arc across the centre of the country and down into the south-west peninsula. Very few occur in *Glamorgan*, a part of south Wales heavily under Norman influence and colonization. In terms of location, lower-lying sites (valleys and riversides) in this arc outnumber those on hillsides and the exceedingly rare hilltops (two at the most?) by more than two to one. The settlements served in anglicized *Pembrokeshire* stand out as including four coastal towns (to which one should add **Kidwelly** in

*Carmarthenshire*), some fortified, and defensive sites such as **Castlemartin**, **Castlebythe** and **Egremont**. Most Welsh cases involve places called **Llanfihangel**, 'the [church] enclosure of Michael archangel'. Signs of antiquity can be glimpsed in the names and/or sites of **Trefeglwys**, *Montgomeryshire* ('the farmstead of the church'), **Myddfai**, *Carmarthenshire* ('[the place of] the medics'), **Talley**, with its abbey, next to lakes on a plateau in Carmarthenshire, and **Whitechurch**, *Pembrokeshire*.

(ii) Juxtaposition with other saints

The number of cases is notable where Michael was joint patron with Mary, or where one took the place of the other at the Reformation. Did the earliest cases involve Mary's installation alongside the already present Michael after the arrival from Rome of her new, Eastern-inspired festivals? Did later impulses include their twin roles at the Last Judgement as represented in chancel-arch images of the Weighing of Souls?

Adjacent parishes of Andrew also invoke earlier periods: dedications in the missionary apostle's honour encouraged by Gregory the Great and later Wilfrid, and the popularity reflected by the Old English poem *Andreas*. Mission precedes Baptism and Judgement. Rome might well meet the British Church in cases like Bulley, Gloucestershire, noted earlier for its large curvilinear cemetery. Its parish is almost surrounded by that of Churcham (St Andrew's), itself perhaps a minster – six priests were murdered here *circa* 1040<sup>36</sup>.

Continental evidence that Michael supplanted Mercury and was venerated by herders – in Apulia chapels of Michael stand every 30 kilometers or so on transhumance routes – has provoked suggestions that some of his British dedications relate to pastoralism<sup>37</sup>. Dairy products, butter and cheese tithes, were certainly laid at the foot of Michael's patronal statue in the church of Lawhitton, Cornwall. It is also remarkable that in Wales Michael parishes border half the twenty-two parishes where Brigid is patron. Typically her parishes have extensive water-meadows, while Michael's include large areas of upland grazing. Medieval iconography often shows Brigid with a calf, and legend said her cows gave copious milk. Michael's associations were with horses, and cattle pastured on summer uplands, returning to the folds after Michaelmas. (Beguildy in Radnorshire means 'the shepherd's hut'). Pairings occur too in Somerset, Devon, and Derbyshire. On alluvial flats in northern

<sup>36</sup> Finberg, *Early Charters of the West Midlands*, 68, no. 156.

<sup>37</sup> R. Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*, London 1989, 51ff. On Michael as supposed successor of Mercury, Wotan, and a Gaulish divinity, see Rojdestvensky, *Le Culte de Saint Michel et le moyen âge*, Paris 1922, x-xii, 1-8. Italian and Iberian transhumance data was given to the Bari conference respectively by Mario Sensi and Francesco Nasuti.

Somerset which look across to Wales is Chelvey with its church of Brigid. Its name means 'calf's *eg* (dry place in river meadows)'. Here the nearest Michael churches serve Mendip hill-parishes overlooking the meadows.

(iii) Patronage of cemeteries

Michael, psychopomp and weigher of souls, is dedicatee of several medieval cemetery chapels. Besides that at Hexham, one stood eastwards of Worcester cathedral, another at Pershore Abbey, Worcestershire, and a third at Abergele in Gwynedd. At Chichester, Sussex, in 1227 the king granted to the bishop his garden outside the walls 'with the chapel built therein and the [charnel] place where the bodies of the dead were buried'. Large churchyards include Bulley and Bisley (Gloucestershire), already mentioned, and St Michael's, Lichfield (Staffordshire).

(iv) Topography: 'High' and 'low'

The persistent expectation that Michael churches inhabit hilltops is both supported by, and derived from, his most famous places: St Michael's Mount, Cornwall, echoing Mont-Saint-Michel ('Monte Tumba') on the opposite coast of Normandy; Skellig Michael (actually from Gaelic meaning 'big Skellig') off the coast of Ireland; St Michael's Chapel on Glastonbury Tor (with its Michaelmas fair); and Mount Gargano overlooking Apulia's shore. Castel Sant'Angelo at Rome and the St Michael's tower at the west end of St Gall monastery in Switzerland, according to its famous ninth-century architectural plan, echo the association with high places. Less well-known are the highest places of worship in Devon and Cornwall, chapels at Brent Tor and Roughtor respectively, and a chapel on the summit of Skirrid Fawr near Abergavenny, Monmouthshire, an area noted for persistence of Roman Catholicism. In 1676 its pilgrims received a papal indulgence. In 1690 an informant told investigators he had witnessed in his time 'hundreds' of people 'kneeling' towards the archangel. Rural hilltop churches include Edlesborough, Buckinghamshire, rising above the Plain of Aylesbury under the Chiltern Hills. Highworth's church, crowning the spur from which the Wiltshire village looks out across the Thames valley, was known specifically in 1405 as St Michael-in-Monte-Tumba<sup>38</sup>. Urban cases of 'St Michael's-on-the-Mount' occur at Lincoln, and at Bristol on the steep hill leading north from the medieval town and port.

Notwithstanding this range of evidence, the review identified many locations which confound the expectation of hilltops, and some have had churches from very early times. In many cases the churches serve places overlooked by hills, for example at Little Bedwyn and other places beneath the scarp of the Wiltshire, Hampshire and Berkshire Downs – including Inkpen and

<sup>38</sup> My thanks to Jennifer Aconley for recording this.

Tidcombe, overlooked respectively by Inkpen Beacon and Haydown Hill, two of the highest points in southern England. Shalbourne, another in this series (and like Tidcombe part of the 'Bedwyn' group of ancient royal estates referred to earlier), lies on the stream from which it takes its name. At such low-lying sites water, not air, often seems the critical element. Water is essential to healing, and in Christianity to baptism also.

### 3. *Michael's association with baptism and healing*

The number of such low-lying sites raises the possibility that Michael's widespread and early popularity – and perhaps also the 'western' distribution of his churches – may be better explained by reference to his relationship to baptism and healing rather than his care for dead souls and the casting-down of Lucifer as Captain of the Heavenly Host – important though these factors remained<sup>39</sup>.

#### *Baptism*

An intriguing group of cases is associated with water, including those beside or particularly close to rivers. St Michael's-on-Wyre, Stone (Staffordshire), Bampton (Cumberland), Bishopwearmouth, Basingstoke, South Malling, East Teignmouth and Great Torrington were probably district mother churches. Rural chapels, unlike minsters, are largely ignored by British scholars. Jeanette James' Devonshire study has identified two Michael chapels with adjacent holy wells – a rare conjunction in England but found in Wales and 'Welsh' Herefordshire. A spring is suggested by the siting of the Shropshire church of **Stowe** ('place of assembly'), downstream from Knighton on the Teme but away from the river, enclosed in a combe below Stow Hill. Devon furnishes Michael's chapel on **Burgh Island** off its southernmost shoreline – while Cornwall's St Michael's Mount overlooks Penzance Bay, the westernmost haven on the Channel coast.

Between a fifth and a quarter of all medieval Michael churches in Scotland stand beside rivers or at their mouths. They include **Crossmichael** (Kirkcudbrightshire) on the Dee with a Michaelmas fair as well his eponymous cross, and **Balnacross** on the river's west bank; **Cambusmichael** ('bed of St Michael') (Perthshire) on low ground beside the Tay; **Kilmichael Inverlussay** in North Knapdale parish (Argyll mainland) about 300 yards from where Knapdale

<sup>39</sup> For representations of Michael as healer in literature from the second century BCE to the sixth CE, see J. P. Rohland, *Der Erzengel Michael. Arzt und Feldherr. Zwei Aspekte des vor- und frühbyzantinischen Michaelskultes*, Leiden 1977. Besides Gargano, there were healing waters of Michael in Italy at the sanctuaries of Bacinella, Sant'Angelo di Prefoglio and Sant'Angelo di Monte Pennino (noted at the Bari conference by Mario Sensi).

Burn empties into the sea; **Tarvet** (Fife) on rising ground near the Eden; **Dallas** (Elginshire) near the Lossie; **Glenbervie** (Kinkardineshire) on the north bank of the Bervie; **Maxwell** (Roxburghshire) at the confluence of Tweed and Teviot; **Teampull Mhichael** on the south-east estuary of North Uist; **Kirvig** at the head of Loch Carolway (Lewis mainland); **Dalgarnock** (Dumfriesshire) on the plain on the east side of the Nith; and **Kinkell** (Aberdeenshire) beside the Don.

Riparian (and coastal?) churches, particularly those associated with royal or aristocratic estate centres, constitute plausible places of mass baptism, a critical strategy in the conversion of the English. Kings were baptized 'with all their people', presumably at riverside locations within an easy reach of a royal hall. Bede recorded how Paulinus baptized in the Glen when visiting the king's court at Yeavering, Northumberland, and in the Swale, in modern-day north Yorkshire, when staying at the king's hall at Catterick: «for during the infancy of the church in those parts it was not yet possible to build oratories or baptisteries»<sup>40</sup>. Springs, too, were natural baptismal places, especially if already held to be holy.

Michaelmas, September 29, marks the anniversary of the dedication of a church of the archangel on the Via Salaria outside Rome, probably in the sixth century. Arguably a more ancient feast is that on May 8, celebrating the second of two visions of Michael at the grotto on Mount Gargano celebrated for its healing waters, perhaps *circa* 495. This feast comes one potentially symbolic week before the earliest date for Whit Sunday, the feast of Pentecost, which in Biblical tradition marks the descent of the Holy Spirit, and three days after the earliest date for Ascension Day. These 'earliest' dates are reckoned from March 27, the first possible date for Easter in the table of moveable feasts based on the first full moon of the spring equinox ('the Pascal moon'). However, they are also the dates ascribed to these events in the earlier, fixed Christian calendar. In this the day of Christ's Passion was computed as March 25 by reconciling the Jewish lunar calendar date of the Passover in the accepted year of his death to the corresponding date in the solar Julian calendar. Between the second and fourth centuries, Whit Sunday and Easter were the only permitted times for ceremonial baptism. Epiphany was added in the fourth century, and in the fifth century, not long before the Gargano vision, Pope Leo protested against the addition in Spain and Gaul of Christmas and certain other feasts<sup>41</sup>. Whitsun eve was not only the candidates' day of preparation, but also the traditional time for blessing the font (a custom which long survived). Around the turn of

<sup>40</sup> Bede, *The Ven., Ecclesiastical History* cit., 2.14 (132).

<sup>41</sup> F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, London 1974<sup>2</sup>, 126-7.

the second century, the theologian Tertullian wrote in his treatise on baptism that an angel was present at the font and prepared its waters. Under this angel's auspices candidates were prepared, by the cleansing of the font, for the reception of the Holy Spirit<sup>42</sup>. Tertullian's identification of this angel with the one who moved the healing waters of the Pool of Bethesda was replicated in baptism liturgy in the West into the mid-eighth century: *qui Bethesdas aquas angelo medicante procuras* in the words of the Gotho-Gallican missal<sup>43</sup>.

Baptism, in which the Christian 'dies unto sin' and acquires the promise of Resurrection through immersion and/or anointing with water and chrism, requires vows of struggle and the rejection, Michael-like, of the Devil<sup>44</sup>. The blessing of the font, involving the dipping into its water of the paschal candle, symbolizes the crucified Christ's descent into, and his harrowing of, hell, preparatory to his resurrection. The Easter Vigil liturgy underlines the victory: 'This is the night in which Christ harrowed hell,' and earlier, 'This is the night in which Moses parted the Red Sea and led the Children of Israel to liberty'. An angel is said to have parted the sea. In Rome May 8 was the eve of *Lemuria* (May 9, 11, 13), ritual offerings to the unburied<sup>45</sup>. In some Mediterranean landscapes the tomb is represented by a grotto like the one at Monte Sant' Angelo on Gargano. Britain has very few such caves – but a great many springs, traditionally an interface with the underworld. It was not until the ninth centuries that baptisteries began to be introduced routinely into the church building<sup>46</sup>. In British churches the font is normally situated at the west, a location linked to dedications honouring John the Baptist, but the location of baptisteries varies in the earliest Continental churches and in some British cases, too<sup>47</sup>. In St Gall monastery in Switzerland the font stood towards the west end, near the archangel's tower. In France are found medieval fonts on which is inscribed the name of Michael, clearly linking him with baptism<sup>48</sup>.

It must be conceded that Michael's chief feast in the East was November 8, and that no evidence for a May 8 celebration appears to predate the Gargano

<sup>42</sup> Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, in CChL, i, Turnhout 1954, 281-282.

<sup>43</sup> W. B. Marriott, *Baptism, Angel of*, in Smith and Cheetham (eds.), *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, London 1908, I, 172, citing the *Collectio* of the Gotho-Gallican Missal, and the *Liber Sacramentorum*, the so-called Gelasian Sacramentary (Martène, *De Ant. Eccl. Rit.*, 1, 66).

<sup>44</sup> I am grateful to colleagues at the Bari conference for this observation.

<sup>45</sup> I am grateful to the colleagues at Bari who pointed this out to me.

<sup>46</sup> A. Nesbitt, *Baptistery*, in Smith and Cheetham (eds.), *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, London 1908, I, 173-8.

<sup>47</sup> Statistically positive data collected by Tom Macluskey of West Virginia University links John the Baptist churches with westward orientation at the time of John's Midsummer Nativity feast (research seminar, Centre for English Local History, Leicester University 2002).

<sup>48</sup> I am grateful to Professor André Vauchez for pointing this out to me.



tradition. However, things may not be so clear cut. The precise six-month interval is suspicious. Similar cases include, most obviously, the nativities of Christ and John the Baptist at the solstices, and the interval between the equinoctial festivals of the Annunciation by Gabriel (coinciding with the March 25 date for the Passion), and that of Michaelmas. The latter, like May 8, celebrates, on the face of it, the dedication of a place of devotion. The November feast itself needs explanation. In the first place, it is shared with Gabriel and All Angels, but the attendant angels are absent in the corresponding feast of the Armenian Church, whose unity with Constantinople ceased after the Council of Chalcedon. Furthermore, it, too, appears to be linked to the date of the consecration of a Michael church. In the Coptic Church, Michael alone is venerated on November 8 and historically the feast went on for another two days. The *Annals* of Said-ibn-Batrik or Eutychius ('Said'), Patriarch of Alexandria (†940), reported that at the accession of Patriarch Alexander (†326) a large temple in the city, built by Cleopatra in honour of Saturn, contained a brass statue named 'Michael' to which offerings were made and a great annual festival observed. Alexander kept the offerings and festival, having melted down the statue into a cross, and the temple became the Church of St Michael, with the feast and sacrifices still kept in Eutychius' day<sup>49</sup>. However, this November feast is only part of a larger pattern, for the Copts also keep a three-day feast of Angels beginning with Michael on June 6 and Gabriel following on June 7. It appears likely that June 8 was the date of the consecration of the Sosthenion<sup>50</sup>. On September 6 (or occasionally September 7), the Greek Church celebrated Michael's miracle at Chonae. Finally, November 9 was a feast of Seraphim and Cherubim in the church of Ethiopia, which together with the Copts kept also a feast of 'Mounted Cherubims' (*equites cherubini*) on November 4. These prompt comparison with the 1,000 cherubim who in Islamic tradition assist Michael in his role as controller of the forces of nature. All these dates, it will be noticed, fall between the 4th and 9th days of our calendar months. In a similar way, most of the Western feasts of the Apostles and other chief characters of the Biblical drama fall around the 25th days of our months. Here, moreover, is a crucial link with the veneration of Michael, for the Copts and Ethiopians commemorate him not only in November but in every month on the 12th day, which varies from the 5th to the 9th day of the month in the Greek and Latin calendar<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> Eutychius (Said-ibn-Batrik), *Annales*, ed. E. Pocock, Oxford 1658, 1, 435. See also Selden, 202.

<sup>50</sup> Smith and Cheetham (eds.), *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, London 1908, 2, 1179-80, linking the *Menology* of Cardinal Sirletus (Petrus Canisius, *Thesaurus*, 3, i, 438) with a manuscript *Synaxarion*.

<sup>51</sup> E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church: A translation of the Ethiopic Synaxarium. made from the manuscripts Oriental 660 and 661 in the British Museum*, 4 vols., Cambridge 1928.

One could speculate at length on what this calendrical pattern implies. Monthly commemorations are also observed in the Ethiopian church in honour of Mary, Michael's fellow archangels, and several others<sup>52</sup>. It may be significant, however, that Michael's ancestry leads back to the Babylonian or Egyptian sky-spirits known as Dekans, paralleled in ancient Persian mythology by the seven spirits of the planets, the Amshaspans. All were precursors of Michael and his fellow Jewish archangels, for not only the first parts of their names are Chaldean, but in the Jewish Kabbala each archangel rules a world: Raphael the Sun, Gabriel the Moon, and Michael Mercury<sup>53</sup>. These ideas lived on into the Christian era. Michael, given a lion's head or that of a dog, was represented among the second- or third-century Gnostic Archons – animal-headed astral gods who ruled the solar year and whose forms were assumed by the souls of the righteous<sup>54</sup>.

Suffice it to say here that the earliest Michael churches in Britain existed long before May 8 fell out of favour as a date of the archangel's celebration. Both May 8 and September 29 appear in the ninth-century *Old English Martyrology*; both were in the calendar fixed by Gregory VIII in 1187. Indeed, some stray threads of evidence support the likelihood that the May festival long influenced Insular ideas about the archangel and his commemoration. **Wembworthy**, Devon, celebrated its parish feast at Whitsun in the first half of the eighteenth century and subsequently on Whit Monday. Michael has been Wembworthy's patron since at least 1493. Similarly **Cheriton Bishop**, St Michael's since at least 1445, celebrated variously on Whit Sunday and Whit Tuesday. **Chagford** in Devon had parish feasts at Michaelmas and Whitsun. The parish feast of **Marwood** in Devon (St Michael's since 1476 and a Michaelmas fair instituted in 1293) was in 1740 on the Monday following Trinity Sunday. In the same district, **Horwood's** feast was on May 1, while in south Devon **Honiton's** feast was at Michaelmas in the mid-eighteenth century, but the parishioners also observed Ascension Day with a procession. Ascension Day was also the feast at **Colaton Raleigh**. The name **Troose-Mehall** or 'St Michael's Foot', attached to a place at Brea near Redruth in Cornwall in a document of 1698, possibly refers to the hill of Carn Brea, under which it lies and which had a chapel on its summit whose dedication is lost. However, echoes of Michael's footprint on Gargano should not be dismissed here or in the case of the stone on Birkrigg Common near Urswick, in Furness,

<sup>52</sup> M. Kropp, *Ethiopian Orthodox Church*, in K. Parry et al. (eds.), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity*, Oxford 1999, reprinted 2002, 184-90, at 189.

<sup>53</sup> F. Gregorovius, trans. A. Arthus, *The Archangel on Mount Garganus*, in *Wanderjahre in Italien* ('Travelling Years in Italy'), Leipzig 1874.

<sup>54</sup> Z. Ameisenowa, *Animal-headed gods, evangelists, saints and righteous men*, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 12, 1949, 21-45, cites Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 6.

Lancashire, known as St Michael's Stirrup, apparently the remains of a prehistoric burial monument.

While it would be foolish to link all Whitsun activities with memories of Michael's summer feast, it is worth noting, because of their early dedication evidence, annual civic ceremony and merry-making at Greenhill Bower on St Michael's Hill, **Lichfield**, since at least the fifteenth century, and the country's largest one-day fair held at Stagshaw by Hadrian's Wall in the parish of St John Lee, **Hexham**. Nevertheless, the best-known survival of Insular celebrations on May 8 is Cornish, the Furry or 'Fair' Day (Cornish *fer*, 'feria, fair') with its famous Floral Dance at **Helston**, discussed earlier. Local lore explains the day as celebrating a battle in the sky between Michael and the Devil. The Devil's stone, intended to hurt the town – an intentional antithesis of Michael's stone at Gargano? – is shown in the courtyard of the Angel Inn. The widespread dedications in Cornwall and Wales in honour of obscure saints with 'white' in their names, mentioned earlier, suggests an association of ideas which links perfection and insight with baptism under angelic agency. It might well have been attractive to societies in western Britain undergoing the process of Christian conversion, often under the oversight of Irish missionaries.

### *Healing*

Bede's informant about Bishop John's oratory and cemetery near Hexham told him that a physician was also on hand, providing remedies to villagers at John's prescription. Emphasis on Bede's description of the oratory as 'remote' has prompted some scholars to conclude that its dedication had to do with wilderness and Michael's battle with primeval forces. However, Bede also wrote that the place was only a mile and a half from Hexham. Its remoteness was relative. A speech and language clinician describes Bede's account of John's loosening of a mute's tongue as a highly circumstantial account of therapy for an evident form of dyspraxia<sup>55</sup>. Michael may have been patron of the cemetery, but the retreat was also a place of healing. Myddfai, 'the place of physicians' in Carmarthenshire, comes to mind.

As late as 1714 coins known as Angels from their portrayal of Michael and the Dragon were used in a ritual known as 'Touching', in which the monarch laid their hands on a number of victims of scrofula, known popularly as 'The King's Evil'. The coins were given to the 'patients' to be pierced and worn round their necks. Among the last to be 'touched' before George I discontinued the

<sup>55</sup> Primrose Jones, pers. comm.

ritual was Samuel Johnson, compiler of the famous *Dictionary*. Amulets and prayers for Michael's healing are an abiding feature of 'popular' religious practice, evident today on various web-sites.

An important medieval source of healing remedies was water, often chemically rich, from holy wells. Church councils periodically pronounced against worship at wells, but found it easier to incorporate wells, sometimes literally, into its structures and ritual<sup>56</sup>. Next to the church of **Scalford** (St Egelwin, formerly St Martin) in Leicestershire, a spring gushed downhill with such force and volume that it was remarked on by the eighteenth-century county historian John Nichols. Scalford's annual wake was at Michaelmas and Michael was patron at neighbouring **Eastwell**, close to a Roman settlement. No wells were more remarkable, perhaps, than those issuing from hilltops. At the site of Romano-British *Vernemeton*, 'The Great Shrine', on the Fosse Way near the Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire border, a Christian chapel was established by the ninth or tenth century at a hilltop spot called The Wells, surviving till the end of the Middle Ages. Over the county border in Rutland, a spring rose some yards west of the hilltop church of **Whitwell** and flowed under the church itself, before emerging a good way down in the village, as it still does. At the chancel entrance two floor-drains predate the twelfth-century column built partly above them. When the water in the spring was at its fullest, probably in May, it bubbled up into the church, which appears deliberately built over its channel. The spring is very likely the eponymous Whit, White, or Holy Well, named in the eleventh century. Michael's patronage is first recorded not long after. He is patron also of the similarly named **Whitwell** in Lancashire, and also at **Ledbury** in Herefordshire, a large and important mother church already mentioned, where a stream, issuing from a pool just to the east, ran alongside, or perhaps at one time within, the church itself.

Pools are also associated with two important hilltop churches of Michael. At the foot of the hill on which stands St Michael's at **Lichfield** in Staffordshire, and close to St Chad's cathedral, is a pool treated as holy and named after the bishop. At the far end of the pool is a small church of St Chad, once on an islet called Stowe and adjacent to two holy wells, one chalybeate. It has been argued that St Michael's predates the cathedral and was the seat of a British bishop. It retained much of its huge *parochia* throughout the Middle Ages<sup>57</sup>. Similarly, at

<sup>56</sup> J. Rattue, *The Living Stream: Holy Wells in Historical Context*, Woodbridge 1995, 78-79.

<sup>57</sup> S. Bassett, *Church and diocese in the West Midlands: the transition from British to Anglo-Saxon control*, in J. Blair and R. Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, Leicester 1992, 13-40, esp. 29-35.

**Coventry**, Warwickshire, St Michael's is on the hilltop and below it is St Osburh's Pool, close to the pre-Conquest religious house where Osburh was abbess<sup>58</sup>. St Michael's (the seat of the Bishops of Lichfield for a time) shared a graveyard with Holy Trinity and has been thought to originated as a castle chapel, but a considered history of Coventry's complex ecclesiastical landscape is still awaited. A third potential case is **Lincoln**, whose early development has recently been linked to ritual activity in the area of Wigford or Broadford Pool where the river Witham breaks through Lincoln Edge, with its ancient ridgeway<sup>59</sup>. However, the origins of St Michael's on the Mount, outside the south gate of the hilltop Roman and medieval walls, are unclear, while St Michael's at Wigford was only one of several small medieval churches<sup>60</sup>.

At **Melbourne**, Derbyshire, the ancient royal hundredal minster stands below the hill almost on the edge of a pool several hundred metres across, two miles from the river Trent on its wide flood-plain. Just outside the town but in Stanton-by-Bridge' parish, also St Michael's, is St Brides, a farmhouse converted from the church of a small community of canons. Its tympanum, showing Brigid with her calf, survives. St Michael's outside **St Albans**, Hertfordshire, stands within the walls of Roman *Verulamium* below the hill associated with Alban's martyrdom, where his cathedral stands. Two pools here are called the Fish Pools but may be natural in origin.

All these cases illustrate the critical association of Michael with healing waters made in the anonymous Old English 'Blickling' Homily 16 for Michaelmas, dated 971 but perhaps composed in the previous century<sup>61</sup>. It speaks of the healing capabilities of 'a very pleasant and clear stream'<sup>62</sup> which cures 'many men with fever-sickness and various other infirmities'<sup>63</sup>. It is worth remembering that swimming in the Tiber was judging to be purifying<sup>64</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> J. C. Lancaster, *Coventry*, in M. D. Lobel (ed.), *The Atlas of Historic Towns* 2, London 1975, esp. Map 2.

<sup>59</sup> M. J. Jones, D. Stocker, and A. Vince, *The City by the Pool. Assessing the Archaeology of the City of Lincoln*, Oxford 2003.

<sup>60</sup> At Bath St Michael's stood outside the Roman north gate. Michael's Italian gate churches were noted at the Bari conference by Monica Saracco.

<sup>61</sup> *To Sanctae Michaelis mæssan*. This should be compared with Aelfric's homily for September 29 (*Dedicationis Ecclesie Sancti Michaelis Archangeli*).

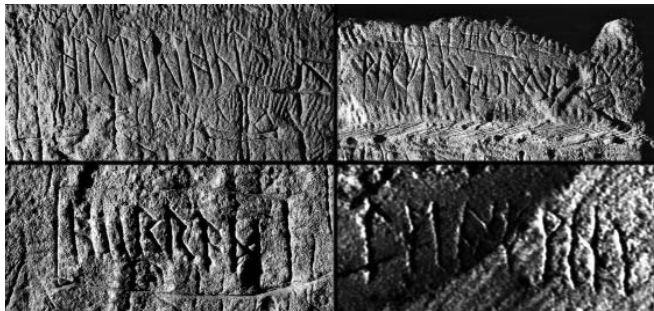
<sup>62</sup> *Swiðe wynsum and hluttur wæta*.

<sup>63</sup> *manige men of feforadle and on misclicum oðrum untrumnessum*.

<sup>64</sup> As pointed out by colleagues at the Bari conference.

#### 4. Was Michael an important bridge between the British and English churches?

The route of Michael's arrival in Britain is problematical, given his popularity both in Gaul and Ireland<sup>65</sup>. In Normandy Michael is patron of mariners in his famous sanctuary at Mont-Saint-Michel in the diocese of Avranches. He is said to have appeared there in 708 to St Aubert, Bishop of Avranches, a previous visitor to Gargano. In Normandy his feast, *S. Michaelis in periculo maris* (for those 'in peril on the sea') or *in Monte Tumba* (the mount itself) was universally celebrated on October 16, the anniversary of the dedication of the first church in 710, though now confined to the diocese.



3. - Monte Sant'Angelo, runic inscriptions: Hereberecht, Wigfuss, Herraed, Leofwini.

A possible factor in Michael's insular popularity is the devotion of the English to their apostle Gregory the Great, recipient of a vision of Michael at Rome in 590. Certainly interest was evident by *circa* 690, date of the Hexham dedication recorded by Bede (who also testified to the devotion to Gregory). *Circa* 700 a pilgrim called Leofwin became one of five English visitors to scratch their names in runes into the rock at Gargano (fig. 3)<sup>66</sup>. The Welsh, too, were interested. An entry in the *Annales Cambriae* under the year 718 records the dedication of a church of St Michael, perhaps that at Mont-Saint-Michel. Gregory and Aubert's visions notwithstanding, the westward concentration of Michael's British dedications favours Irish influence, and the Irish may have obtained their understandings of Michael directly from Gargano rather than via Rome<sup>67</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> M. Baudot, *Origine du culte de St Michel and Diffusion et évolution du culte de St Michel en France*, in Baudot (ed.), *Millénaire monastique du Mont-Saint-Michel*. III. cit., 15-27, 109-12; H. M. Roe, *Ireland and the Archangel Michael*, in Baudot (ed.), *Millénaire monastique du Mont-Saint-Michel*. III. cit., 481-7.

<sup>66</sup> C. Carletti, *Iscrizioni murali*, in C. Carletti and G. Otranto (eds.), *Il Santuario di S. Michele sul Gargano dal VI al IX secolo. Contributo alla storia della Langobardia meridionale*, Atti del convegno tenuto a Monte Sant'Angelo il 9-10 dicembre 1978, Bari 1980, 7-180.

<sup>67</sup> V. Ortenburg, *The English Church and the Continent in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Cultural, Spiritual, and Artistic Exchanges*, Oxford 1992, 108-9. The cult's development in Ireland from *circa* 730 was described to the Bari conference by Jean-Michel Picard.

Apocryphal texts mentioning Michael were compiled in Gaul in the late sixth century, but the underlying texts from the East, some in Syriac, may have been available to Irish scholars. It would be surprising if they were not known to churchmen of other backgrounds like Oftfor, bishop of Worcester in the second half of the seventh century, who had trained at Edessa, in modern Syria<sup>68</sup>. With the exception of Pembrokeshire, the proportion of Michael dedications among all those of universal, regional, and unrecorded cults (a means of measuring popularity which excludes the ubiquitous but problematic dedications in honour of obscure 'Celtic' saints) is greatest in the counties which border the Irish Sea (peaking in *Cardiganshire*) and reaches into central Wales and England most noticeably via the shires of *Brecon* and *Radnor*, bordering on the English counties of Hereford and Shropshire. At face value this suggests, as in Scotland, some influence from Ireland. Indeed, *Cardigan* is a county which frequently honours saints with explicit or likely Irish origins or aspects, while tradition makes the eponymous founder of *Breconshire* a member of a ruling Irish kin group, the *Demetae*, established on Wales' south-west peninsula. *Helston's* commemoration of the *Gargano* feast day, and other indications that May 8 was remembered in south-west England, also suggests that Michael's veneration in *Cornwall* came originally from Ireland rather than *Mont-Saint-Michel* with its October feast. Indeed it is possible that the Irish monks who founded *Mont-Saint-Michel* arrived there via *Cornwall*.

Many churches of Michael in *Leicestershire* and elsewhere in the East Midlands share a striking characteristic: they lie along Roman roads. Two are even named from such roads or 'streets': *Little Stretton* and *Stretton en le Field*. Roman origins for these churches are unlikely. Rather we must be looking at a period when the legacy of Rome was still visible in the landscape. So we notice also three places called 'stone *tûn*': *Stony Stanton*, *Stanton-by-Bridge*, and *Stonton Wyville*. At a time when middle Saxon estates were being organized, such places still had vestiges of abandoned Roman buildings, sometimes villas but perhaps also local worship centres. These were ready sources of building materials. Place-name evidence points to survival of British speech in this region into the seventh century, at least. Dedications in honour of *St Guthlac* († *circa* 720) cluster prominently in north *Leicestershire*, perhaps his patrimony. The saint, we are told, knew the British language and his father's name was *Penwall*, 'Chief Welshman'<sup>69</sup>. His hero, the apostle *Bartholomew*, is characterized in persistent legend for appropriating other people's places of worship. *Guthlac's* career coincided with an early advance of Michael's cult on the Continent, led by Irish and English missionaries: *Thiérache* abbey founded

<sup>68</sup> See Footnote 5.

<sup>69</sup> *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, trs B. Colgrave, Cambridge 1956.

*circa* 700, Saint-Mihiel in Verdun diocese supposedly in 709, Saint-Michel-in-Honau on an island in the Rhine, 720-22, and Boniface's churches on the basalt rock of Amoeneburg, 722, and at Ohrdurf. Michael churches were appearing, in northern Francia too<sup>70</sup>. This was still a time of Christianization and Conversion in England, too. Important missionary churches were being built in Midland England, including Breedon, Brixworth, and Peterborough.

A similar retreat to John's at Hexham, a *mansio*, was established by St Chad at Lichfield, away from his cathedral which he set up in 669, but again at no great distance. This best describes the site of St Michael's. It seems likely there had been a church at Lichfield before the cathedral, staffed by British clergy, for an early medieval Welsh poem describes a raid, probably for cattle tribute, in which many monks died. Again, the best candidate is St Michael's in its curvilinear, hilltop yard of eight acres – one of the largest in Britain. Across the Trent from Stone, also in Staffordshire, is Walton, 'the *tûn* of the Welsh-speakers'. Churches with large, ancient *parochiae*, or serving royal estate centres, or at places with strong Romano-British antecedents, may well bear witness to some importance which Michael's veneration may have had in cementing elements of the British church into the structures of its English-speaking successor. For example, insofar that baptism carries the metaphor of death (to sin – as prerequisite to life) and that May 8 in Rome ushered in the Lemurial rites for the unburied dead, it may be significant that many Anglo-Saxon minsters, like many collegiate ('class') churches of the British in Wales, served kin-groups and their territories.

### 5. *Places with indications of pre-Christian religion and ritual*

Occasionally Michael dedications associated with cemeteries carry suggestions of pre-Christian activity. St Michael's at Bishop's Cleeve stands in a curvilinear ditched enclosure of a sort typical at pre-Conquest minsters, whose western perimeter is marked by Romano-British and Iron Age burials. Hints of a ritual landscape are found in the list of boundary marks attached to the charter by which Offa's estate was given to the church. They include 'Hengest's [i.e. Stallion's] head' and a place still today called Spelhonger, Old English *spel* indicating speech in formal assemblies<sup>71</sup>. Animal heads on poles appear to have marked places of social and religious ritual in early Anglo-Saxon England. A pre-Christian community with Germanic cultural customs is indeed evidenced by a cemetery of persons with Anglo-Saxon dress and grave-goods

<sup>70</sup> Reviewed at the Bari conference by Catherine Vincent and Vincent Juhel.

<sup>71</sup> The charter calls it *Swel hongre*, so association with the river Swell needs first to be discounted.



about half a mile west of the church. Also in Gloucestershire is St Michael's, Guiting Power, mother church of a royal estate named after the Guiting stream which flows close by. Just east of the church is the site of a small apsidal chapel and a few yards north the excavated outlines of a large Bronze Age curvilinear enclosure. Stone (Staffordshire) means '[at the] stone or stones', perhaps a place of pre-Christian ritual. It had relics of two supposed martyr-princes. The name of Crich in the neighbouring Derbyshire Peak District is from British 'mound or hill', and that of its dependency Shukerstone means 'the (ritual?) stone haunted by an evil spirit'.

All such Michael dedications found at sites with demonstrable pre-Christian associations require investigation. We may treat sceptically the claim that in Germany many mountains were sacred to Wotan, and that Michael replaced him, leading to the numerous mountain chapels called Michelsburg. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, the etymology of the hilltop Michaelmas fair site at Weyhill, Hampshire, on the junction of long-distance routes, including that linking London and Exeter via Stonehenge, is from Old English *wçoh*, 'roadside shrine'. Another ancient trading route, linking the Welsh borderlands and the English Channel, passes close to Uley hillfort in Gloucestershire. Here was a temple in honour of Mercury<sup>72</sup>. His images show him with wings, though on his helmet, not his shoulders, and holding not a weapon of war but a herald's wand, the *caduceus*. Heavenly herald is one of Michael's roles, too. A major problem in attempting to link Michael with Mercury, as some propose, is that the distributions of Michael dedications and find-spots of artefacts associated with Mercury do not match. However, this may say as much about the geographies of archaeology and of landscapes with archaeological potential as it does about the cult of Mercury. More needs to be known about the absorption of Roman cults into the Celtic divine pantheon. Lead curse tablets found at Uley show that Mercury was occasionally confused with Mars, who is sometimes portrayed spearing a dragon, though from horseback, like George. These two iconographic traditions come together in representations of Michael. Possibly this was a healing temple. A proliferation of bones suggests animal sacrifice, conceivably the offerings of pastoral farmers – Mercury being a protector of flocks. The temple was demolished and replaced by a series of structures from the fifth to seventh centuries, which are interpreted as Christian churches. Fragments from the cult statue of Mercury were built into the wall of the final church, but not its head, which was carefully deposited outside the church yet alongside the south-east

<sup>72</sup> A. Woodward and P. Leach, *The Uley Shrines: Excavation of a Ritual Complex on West Hill, Uley, Gloucestershire, 1977-9*, London 1993, esp. ch. 4, *The latest Roman and post-Roman shrines*, 63-79; ch. 6, M. Henig, *Votive objects: images and inscriptions*, 88-112; and ch. 7, *Votive objects: the inscribed lead tablets*, 113-30.

wall. (Gregory's instructions on the treatment of pre-Christian cult sites were being prefigured in a deliberate and sophisticated fashion). Alongside successive churches was built a baptistery: a place of conversion and the power of redemptive waters.

Lead curse tablets came to light at Leicester in 2006 near a substantial third-century building respected by medieval graves associated with an adjacent church of St Michael. Could this be another case of adaptive devotion? Elsewhere in Leicestershire, St Michael's at Hallaton, mentioned earlier as rare in its region in being a pre-Conquest minster, lies in a hollow next to a stream and close to what was known in the Middle Ages as '*stôw well*', 'the assembly spring'. By the seventeenth century this was 'St Morrell's well', most likely named after Maurilius, a disciple of Martin of Tours and like him portrayed in hagiography as a shrine destroyer. Morrell's feast day precedes by a week that of Michael on September 29. Pilgrims visited a miraculous image of Morrell, probably in the hilltop chapel at which an Easter Monday ritual survives involving football and a scramble for hare pie paid for from an ancient church endowment. Recently several thousand gold and silver 'Celtic' coins, the greatest number yet discovered in Britain, was found within a short distance of the chapel, ritually deposited at a hilltop temple in use from around 50 BCE and where also a votive Bronze Age rapier was found.

The evidence in this review points to an awareness of Michael as a healing as well as baptismal figure, associated with water as well as with hilltops and with ritual locations of pre-Christian origin. Pilgrims to **Gargano** doubtless took back accounts of healings, and may have encountered stories of the peninsula's pre-Christian temples, respectively dedicated to the soothsayer Calchas and to Podaleirius, one of the sons of Aesculapius the healer<sup>73</sup>. Both offered healing by incubation, a possible use of *porticus* (cell-like lateral spaces) in Anglo-Saxon minsters. Monks and clergy promoting Michael's cult would know also of his pilgrimage places in Asia Minor and Thrace<sup>74</sup>, often associated with healing waters as at **Chairotopa** near Colossae (attributed to a healing miracle by the apostles John and Luke)<sup>75</sup>; **Chonae**, modern Khonas, outside

<sup>73</sup> R. Johnson, *The genesis and migration of the Archangel's cult*, In Progress, Harper College Department of English Newsletter 1/1, at [http://www.harpercollege.edu/libarts/eng/dept/inprogress/ip\\_v1\\_johnson.html](http://www.harpercollege.edu/libarts/eng/dept/inprogress/ip_v1_johnson.html), accessed October 28, 2005.

<sup>74</sup> V. Saxer, *Jalons pour servir à l'histoire du culte de l'archange Saint Michel en Orient jusqu'à l'iconoclasme*, in I. Vazquez Janeiro (ed.), *Noscere Sancta: Miscellanea in memoria di Agostino Amore, I Storia della Chiesa, Archeologia, Arte*, Roma 1985, 357-426.

<sup>75</sup> Johnson, *The genesis and migration of the Archangel's cult cit.*, and *St Michael the Archangel cit.*, 32-3; Holweck, *Michael the Archangel*, in Ch. G. Herbermann *et al* (eds.), *The Catholic Encyclopaedia cit.*, 276.

Colossae itself<sup>76</sup>, whose Christians were warned against angel-worship by St Paul and by the Council of Laodicea<sup>77</sup>; **Germia** in Galatia, with its Myriangeli baths visited by Justinian<sup>78</sup>; **Pythia** in Bithynia, whose name commemorates worship of the Python's killer, Apollo<sup>79</sup>; **Anaplous** on the Bosphorus, the Sosthenion associated with Jason's Argonauts and a healer god, perhaps Telesphorus, helper of Aesculapius, which Constantine Christianized and Basil II extended<sup>80</sup>; **Hestiae** likewise on the European shore<sup>81</sup>; and **Constantinople**, at the site of the thermal baths of Arcadius<sup>82</sup>. They may also have been aware of Michael's identification as the angel who moved the waters in the healing Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem<sup>83</sup>. Excavations have revealed that before or after the time of Christ's life, the Pool, which was excavated *circa* 200 BCE to provide water for the Temple, became a shrine dedicated to Aesculapius. The traditions attached to these places could well have been known to John at Hexham, for example, for his master had been Theodore of Tarsus, educated at Edessa. Those with access to large libraries, like John's own pupil Bede, could read the so-called *Mysteries of St John the Apostle and Virgin* and other texts containing homilies which specifically associate Michael and water, including the story preserved in the Jewish apocryphal *Book of Enoch* that at the time of Noah's Flood God appointed Michael 'lord of the waters'.

This survey has highlighted the veneration of Michael at a notable number of 'central' places within ancient administrative districts, and their frequent location in conjunction with water (putative baptismal places) – sometimes additionally close to, or in, high places. Few dedications can be proved earlier than 1300. Nevertheless, the observation prompts a systematic search for cases in which Michael is associated not simply with hilltops, a Western counterpart of Elijah, but with wider, perhaps pre-Christian sacred landscapes of healing and devotion incorporating also springs, pools or rivers. A possible example involves Brent Knoll, a prominent hill rising steeply from the coastal marshes of

<sup>76</sup> On the Chairotopa and Chonae miracles see G. Peers, *Holy Man, Suppliant, and Donor: On representations of the miracle of Archangel Michael at Chonae*, *Medieval Studies* 59, 1997, 173-82.

<sup>77</sup> St Paul, Col 2:18; Council of Laodicea, Canon 35.

<sup>78</sup> C. Mango, *The Pilgrimage Centre of St. Michael at Germia*, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 36, 1986, 117-32.

<sup>79</sup> Poetic inscription of Paulus Silentarius (*fl.* sixth century CE). See also G. F. Hill, *Apollo and Michael: Some analogies*, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 36, 1916, 155-7.

<sup>80</sup> G. Peers, *The Sosthenion near Constantinople: John Malalas and ancient art*, *Byzantion. Revue internationale des études byzantines* 68, 1998, 110-20; C. Mango, *St Michael and Attis*, *Δέλτιον Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Ἑταιρείας* 12, 1984, 57ff; Holweck, *Michael the Archangel*, in Ch. G. Herbermann *et al* (eds.), *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* cit., 276.

<sup>81</sup> Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* II, iii.

<sup>82</sup> Holweck, *Michael the Archangel*, in Ch. G. Herbermann *et al* (eds.), *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* cit., 276.

<sup>83</sup> Io 5:2.

Somerset. On the summit of its equally prominent companion hill, Brean Down, which juts out into the Severn estuary, is the site of a Romano-British temple. Michael is patron at Brent Knoll, while Brean's is St Brigid, sharing the first element of her Celtic name, 'exalted', with that of the place. In Worcestershire, landless tenants of Pershore Abbey were buried in the yard of St Peter's, Little Comberton, a church with eleventh-century fabric which stands on a low mound beside a pool. Romano-British pottery has been found in the yard, which local tradition believes represents the site of a 'Roman temple', within easy reach of the Romano-British settlement at Wick (*vicus?*). There is reason to suspect that the dedication was changed to Peter, the patron of its later medieval owners, Westminster Abbey, from Michael, patron of Great Comberton, close by on the bank of the Warwickshire Avon. The Combertons (*tûn* of Cumbra, 'Welsh-speaker') lie under Bredon Hill ('exalted', again) with its hilltop chapel and well of St Catherine. Close investigation of such places may well reveal 'little sanctuaries of Michael' analogous with those of Asia Minor, Greece and Italy, where the archangel was venerated not only as the expeller of Satan but also as mover of healing waters and blesser of the waters of baptism – places with a ritual history often predating Christianity.