

HALTON IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

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The eleventh-century sources for the history of Halton are examined to show how Christ Church, Canterbury, eventually secured possession. The use of declarations in gospel books as documents of title is briefly reviewed.

Halton, *æt Healtune* in the Old English sources,¹ *Halton* in Domesday Book,² is the village in the corner or recess; *h(e)alh* glosses *angulus*³ and *healhiht* is *angulosus*.⁴ It was a 5-hide unit, with 2½ hides in demesne, in the north-east corner of the great estate of Wendover, from which it appears at some time to have been separated. It was a manor of Christ Church, the cathedral monastery of Canterbury, in reversion from an uncertain date before the Norman Conquest, in possession from soon after the Conquest until the Dissolution. King Henry VIII granted it to the newly formed Chapter of Canterbury in 1541,⁵ but in 1545 he compelled the Dean and Chapter to exchange Halton for other lands so that he could sell the manor to Henry Bradshawe of Wendover,⁶ then solicitor-general,⁷ since when it has been in lay hands.

The suggestion that Halton was given to Canterbury in the tenth century at the same time as Monks Risborough⁸ seems to be unsupported. So is the belief that 'Queen Edith or Edeva', presumably Eadgifu, widow of King Edward the Elder, gave it to Christ Church in 959.⁹ In that year King Edward restored to her the estates that King Edwy had seized, and she gave some of these to Canterbury,¹⁰ but Halton is not mentioned among them. Indeed there is a record dated to 1020-38¹¹ which does not support either of these traditions or conjectures. It takes the form of a declaration entered in the Gospels of MacDurnan,¹² a MS which had belonged to Maelbright MacDurnan, abbot of Armagh and Raphoe (d. 927); it was given by King Athelstan to Christ Church,

and is still in the library of Lambeth Palace. The text is as follows:

+ Her swuteliad on disse Cristes bec Æpelnodes arceb forword & Tokiges embe þ land æt Healtune. þ was þ Tokig com to Hrisbeorgan to ðam arceb syþþan Aedelflæd his wif fordfaren was. & cydde him Wulfnodes cwyde þ he þ land becweden hæfde into Xps cyrcean æfter his dæge & his wifes. & bæd þone arceb þ he þ land habban moste his dæg. & æfter his dæge þ hit lage into Xps cyrcean mid eallum þingum þ he þæron getilian mihte unbesacen. & cwæð þ he wolde þam h þances kepan & his mannum. & se arceb him þæs tidude. & sæde þ he riht wið hine gedon hæfde þ he sylf him for ðam cwyde secgean wolde. þeh he hit ær ful georne wiste. & ðises was to gewitnyse Æpelstan æt Bleddehlæwe. & Leofwine his sunu. & Leofric æt Eaningadene. & feala oðra godra cnihta. þeh we hi ealle ne nemnon. & call ðæs arcebiscopes hired. ge gehadude ge læwede.

This memorandum was transcribed by the eighteenth-century Welsh antiquary Lewis Morris and was printed from his transcript¹³ by Kemble¹⁴ and Thorpe.¹⁵ Dr Robertson's text¹⁶ was collated with the original. The following translation is offered:

+ Here is declared in this Christ's book the agreement of Archbishop Æthelnoth and Toki about the land at Halton. This was that Toki came to (Monks) Risborough to the Archbishop after Æthelflæd his wife was

dead, and told him of Wulfnoth's testament, that he had bequeathed that land to Christ Church after his and his wife's lives, and he (Toki) asked the Archbishop that he might have the land for his life, and after his life it should come to Christ Church uncontested, with everything that he could produce thereon; and he said that he would be grateful to the (arch)bishop and his men (the community at Christ Church), and the Archbishop granted him this, and said that he had acted rightly towards him in mentioning the testament himself, though he (Æthelnoth) was already fully aware of it. And the witnesses of this were Æthelstan of Bledlow and Leofwine his son and Leofric of *Eaningadene* and many other good *cnihtas*, although we do not name them all, and all the Archbishop's household, both clerics and laymen.

The natural interpretation of Wulfnoth's will is that he had left Halton to Canterbury subject to the life interests of Toki, probably his son-in-law, and Æthelflæd, Toki's wife. If so, Toki was not asking for a concession, but simply requesting recognition of his continuing life tenure. Æthelnoth accepted this as a matter of courtesy, and said that he did not need to be informed of the terms of the will. It was of course in the interests of the Archbishop and the community to have this recognition that Toki claimed no more than a life interest, and that on his death Canterbury would take the estate with everything in it.

At this period the *cnihtas* who acted as witnesses would be senior servants or responsible agents.¹⁷ The term *cniht* has successively denoted boy, youth, attendant, retainer, warrior and knight. Toki, whose name is Norse though his wife was English, may have had stewards at Bledlow and *Eaningadene*, an unknown valley of the Eaningas. In compound place-names *-inga-* is the genitive plural of *-ingas*, denoting a group or association of people. In the settlement period the association would be personal, the dependents or followers of an individual leader; in the late Old English period the association is more likely to be geographical, the inhabitants of a particular

locality, or perhaps a group coming together for their common economic advantage. **Ean* 'a lamb' is not on record in Old English, but is sufficiently evidenced by derivatives and as a place-name element. One would like *ëaningas* to mean 'people who rear lambs' in the Chiltern valley concerned, but there is no known parallel, and in our present state of knowledge *-ingas* will hardly bear this sense. One suspects that *-ingas* names could be formed from appellatives, not necessarily topographical, but there is no independent evidence of this.

Archbishop Æthelnoth died in 1038 and was succeeded by Eadsige, a monk who had been Cnut's priest.¹⁸ Toki asked the new Archbishop to confirm his life tenancy of Halton, and a further agreement to this effect was entered on the preceding page of the same gospel book.¹⁹ The text is as follows:

+Eadsige arceþ cyþ on þisse Cristes bec þ Tokig sende to me to Hrisbeorgan his twegen cnihtas oðor hatte Sexa oðor Leofwine. & bæd me þ þa forword moston standan þe Æthelnoð arceþ & he geworht hæfdon ymbe þ land at Healtune þ he his bruce his daeg. & eode æfter his dæge into Xþs cyricean & ic him dæs tidude on manegra godra manna gewitnyse & ealles mines hiredes ge gehadudra ge læwedra.

Transcription²⁰ and publication²¹ are as for the previous declaration, and the translation is as follows:

+ Archbishop Eadsige states in this Christ's book that "Toki sent to me at (Monks) Risborough his two *cnihtas*, one called Sexa, the other Leofwine, and asked me that the agreement should stand which Archbishop Æthelnoth and he had made about the land at Halton, that he should enjoy it for his life, and after his life it should come to Christ Church, and I granted him this with the witness of many good men, and of all my household, both clerics and laymen".

On this occasion Toki did not come to Monks Risborough in person; perhaps he was

too old or infirm. Of the two *cnihtas* who represented him, Leofwine was presumably the son of Æthelstan of Bledlow.

Eadsige was incapacitated by illness from 1044 to 1048, and died in 1050. If Ekwall²² was right in dating this declaration to c. 1050, Toki would have been seeking reassurance before the Archbishop died, but he seems more likely to have made this approach in or soon after 1038.

When Toki died, Christ Church should have taken peaceable possession of Halton with its crops and stock, but this did not happen. It appears from Domesday Book that in Archbishop Stigand's time Halton was in the possession of Earl Leofwine, probably wrongfully.²³ After the Conquest King William restored it gratuitously to Archbishop Lanfranc,²⁴ and did not transfer it with Leofwine's other estates to the Bishop of Bayeux.²⁵ If Wulfnoth and/or Toki were Earl Leofwine's men, and if Leofwine's earldom included Buckinghamshire,²⁶ Leofwine may have felt able to deny the validity of the testament, especially if it had not been reported to the shiremote. In a well-reported case in Herefordshire,²⁷ during Cnut's reign, an oral will was declared before witnesses and authenticated by the shire meeting, which then had it noted in a gospel book (*let settan in ane Cristes boc*) which survives at Hereford

Cathedral.²⁸

Declarations (*swutelunga*) were less formal than solemn charters and less authoritative than royal writs, but they would last as long as the holy books themselves, and could be further hallowed by the declarant's placing his hand on the book and placing the book on the altar.²⁹ Inventories of church property and treasures were sometimes recorded in this way; surviving examples include the York Gospels in the Dean and Chapter's Library at York, with a list of church goods at Sherburn in Elmet,³⁰ and the record of Bishop Leofric's gifts to Exeter in 1069–72,³¹ entered in a Latin gospel book³² and in the Exeter Book itself,³³ that invaluable anthology of Old English poetry.

Until Lanfranc's time the interests of the Archbishop and his monastic community had hardly been distinguished, but now the advowson of Halton was assigned to the former, the manor to the latter, the prior holding the lordship.³⁴ With Monks Risborough, Halton formed a separate deanery in the exempt jurisdiction of the Archbishop until that was abolished in 1841,³⁵ but the advowson of Halton was surrendered by Archbishop Cranmer to King Henry VIII,³⁶ who granted it in 1545 to Sir Edward and Alice North.³⁷ King Edward VI compensated the Archbishop for the loss of the patronage,³⁸ which later descended with the manor.

Postscript

An entry in a fragmentary gospel book which belonged to Christ Church, Canterbury³⁹ is the source of the description "Risborough by Chiltern eaves" (Innan Buccingaham scire, be Cilternes efese,⁴⁰ Hrysebyrgan). This occurs in a list which was appended after the Conquest⁴¹ to a genuine declaration by Edward the Con-

fessor granting Chartham to Christ Church, in order to ensure that all the estates listed were protected by St Edward's anathema as guardian and upholder⁴² of the monastery. This anathema appears ancient; it occurs again in a writ⁴³ attributed, perhaps rightly, to the Confessor.

REFERENCES

1. P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* (R. Hist. Soc., 1968), nos. 1464, 1466 (cited as S1464, S1466).
2. Domesday Book i, fo. 143b; *Victoria County Hist., Bucks* (1905) i, 233b.
3. Citations include the prose *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. P. Genser (Heidelberg, 1909) 163, and the *Vision of Leofric Earl of Mercia*, ed. A. S. Napier (Philological Soc. Trans., 1908) 37.
4. *Anecdota Oxoniensia: O. E. Glosses*, ed. A. S. Napier, 121.
5. Pat. R. 33 Hen. VIII, pt. 9, m. 20.

6. Pat. R. 37 Hen. VIII, pt. 6, m. 41; Pat. R. 36 Hen. VIII, pt. 9, m. 63.
7. Pat. R. 32 Hen. VIII, pt. 5, m. 55; appointed attorney-general, Pat. R. 37 Hen. VIII, pt. 13, m. 21; died 1553.
8. *VCH Bucks* (1908) ii, 339.
9. G. Lipscomb, *Hist. Bucks* (1847) ii, 219.
10. S1211 (probably original); S1212, with confirmation by King Ethelred.
11. S1464; E. Ekwall, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Place-names* (4th edn., 1960) 213, dates this c. 1033.
12. London, Lambeth Palace 1370, fo. 115.
13. British Library, Add. MS 14907 fos. 18v–19.
14. J. M. Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici* (1839–48) no. 1321.
15. B. Thorpe, *Diplomatarium Anglicum Aevi Saxonici* (1865) 331.
16. A. J. Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* (2nd edn., 1956) no. lxxx, p. 154.
17. F. M. Stenton, *The First Century of English Feudalism* (Oxford, 1932) 132 ff.; D. Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge, 1930) 235 s.v. *cnih*t.
18. S981 (untrustworthy in its present form, but good evidence on this point). S 1642 makes Eadsige a bishop by 1035.
19. S1466; Lambeth Palace 1370, fo. 114.
20. BL, Add. MS 14907, fos. 21v–22.
21. Kemble, no. 1336; Robertson, no. xc, p. 174.
22. Ekwall, *op. cit.*, 213.
23. D, B, i, fo. 143b.
24. Dugdale, *Monast. Anglie*, i, 97.
25. *VCH Bucks*, i, 210.
26. As argued by Freeman, *Norman Conquest* (1870) ii, 560, 567.
27. S1462.
28. Hereford Cathedral, MS P1.2 fo. 134.
29. S1047.
30. W. de G. Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, no. 1324; Robertson, App. II, no. 2, p. 249.
31. Kemble, no. 940; Robertson, App. I, no. 1, pp. 226–230.
32. Bodleian Library, MS Auct. D.2. 16, fo. 1.
33. *The Exeter Book Facsimile*, ed. M. Förster (1933) 18–30.
34. *Texta de Nevill* (Rec. Comm.) 245b.
35. *VCH Bucks* i, 344–5.
36. Pat. R. 37 Hen. VIII, pt. 14.
37. *VCH Bucks* ii, 341 (1565–6 is a misprint for 1545–6).
38. Pat. R. 1 Edw. VI, pt. 2, m. 26.
39. BL, Cotton Claudius Aiii, fo. 5b(6v); S 1047.
40. The word is singular, but the plural form *eovesen* occurs in Layamon. Wycliffe uses *evese* for the brow of a hill. The lonely sparrow on the housetop in Psalm 102.7 (101.8 in the Vulgate) *passer solitarius in tecto*, is “sparwe anhoga odde anwuniende on efese odde on þecene” (dwelling alone, either on the eaves or on the roof).
41. Robertson, *op. cit.*, 429; F. E. Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs* (2nd edn., 1989) 175 n.5.
42. “þæs mynstres mund & upheald”; cf. Danish *uphold* (support).
43. S1089; Harmer, *op. cit.*, no 34.