

SAINT WULFSTAN IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

A. H. J. BAINES

As Bishop of Worcester, Wulfstan kept Old English letters and culture alive for a generation after the Norman Conquest, yet was trusted by the Conqueror. His sanctity, and the attractiveness of his character, are as well attested as those of any of our native saints, and three of the stories about him are connected with Buckinghamshire. Dr Baines here reviews the details and background of the saint's documented visits to High Wycombe and Marlow, and suggests that another of his recorded miracles should also be associated with the Chilterns.

Of the saintly bishops of the later Old English church, the greatest and the most attractive to the modern mind is Wulfstan of Worcester. He cannot be claimed as one of the saints of Buckinghamshire, but two of his miracles occurred at High Wycombe and another significant episode of his life took place at Marlow. All Saints, the mother church of High Wycombe, celebrated in 1987 the novocentenary of its consecration by St Wulfstan, which was the occasion of one of the best authenticated of his works of healing. These events are recorded in the *Vita Wulfstani*,¹ a Latin version by William of Malmesbury of the lost Old English biography by Coleman, Wulfstan's closest collaborator, a work of deep interest, less well known than it deserves to be. It can, however, be supplemented from other sources.

In 991 St Oswald, archbishop of York and bishop of Worcester, granted a hide of land at Itchington, a tithing of Tytherington in Gloucestershire, for three lives to his man Ælfstan.² Wulfstan, son of Ælfstan and Wulfgifu, born about 1008, took one element of his name from each parent, as was quite customary. The combination was probably chosen to name him after Wulfstan, archbishop of York and bishop of Worcester from 1004 to 1023, author of the Homilies and draftsman of Ethelred's laws.

Wulfstan was handsome, cheerful and intelligent, a good runner and all-round athlete. He

was educated at two great Benedictine abbeys, Evesham under Ælfward, a relative of King Canute and later bishop of London, and Peterborough under the holy but unworldly Earnwine,³ calligrapher and artist. Wulfstan entered the household of Brihteah, bishop of Worcester, who ordained him priest at some time before 1042⁴ and offered him a valuable living, but Wulfstan wished to offer God not part of his life, but the whole. He became a monk of the cathedral monastery of Worcester, where he was successively schoolmaster, precentor, sacrist (to give him time for prayer and study) and then provost or prior,⁵ and thus in effect dean and archdeacon.⁶ He distinguished himself by the earnestness and eloquence of his sermons and by baptizing the children of the poor, who could not pay the secular clergy for the sacrament. He was soon credited not only with learning, wisdom and charity but with the gift of prophecy and with powers of healing.

Early in 1061 Ealdred, bishop of Worcester since 1047, was appointed to York and hoped to retain Worcester as well, but Pope Nicholas II refused to follow precedent and would not give him the pallium until he agreed to give up Worcester. The papal legates stayed at Worcester as Prior Wulfstan's guests during Lent 1062 and strongly recommended him to King Edward the Confessor, with the support of Earls Harold and Ælfgar. He was accordingly appointed bishop of Worcester at the Easter

witan, though against his will, and was consecrated by archbishop Ealdred, as Stigand's position as archbishop of Canterbury was uncanonical. Ealdred claimed that the bishop of Worcester was his suffragan, but this was never conceded by Wulfstan. His first act as bishop was to dedicate a church in honour of Bede, whose name stands first in English letters.

On King Edward's death Wulfstan induced the northerners to accept Harold as king, but after the battle of Hastings he submitted to William at Berkhamsted,⁷ and remained faithful to him and to William Rufus, supporting them against repeated baronial revolts.⁸ His community, which he increased from 15 to 50, remained thoroughly English. Elsewhere the Norman Conquest shattered vernacular culture; for over a century English clerics wrote and even thought in Latin, which soon became the language of administration. Wulfstan's *familia* included his brother Ælfstan, who had succeeded him as prior, his chancellor Coleman, his chaplain Fritheric, his stewards Ordric and Alfric, his chamberlains Alric⁹ and Godric, his constable Alstan, his writer Alfære and several members of dispossessed English families whom he accepted for training. An account of his curing a Frenchman suggests that the *familia* did not readily speak French. When Wulfstan gave Lanfranc his profession of canonical obedience¹⁰ in 1070, he used the ancient title 'bishop of the Hwicce', the one Anglo-Saxon tribe whose conversion is not recorded; Bede clearly implies that Christianity had never been extinguished in their territory,¹¹ and their Mercian rulers adopted the faith of their British subjects from the start;¹² they were *Christiani cum suo populo*. This explains why St Augustine met the British bishops at the Hwiccian frontier.

There is no sufficient evidence that Wulfstan's position was ever seriously threatened; the story that his intended deposition was averted by a miracle is not found until a century later, when his growing *cultus* invited legendary accretions, and the tale of the staff which only he could move seems borrowed from the Arthurian legend. In any event the alleged attempt to remove him could not have been

earlier than 1077, since it involved bishop Gundulf of Rochester.¹³ Lanfranc had previously supported Wulfstan and rebutted the long-standing claims upon his see by successive archbishops of York; indeed, he had given Wulfstan temporary charge in 1070-2 of the unsubdued diocese of Chester. It was on this occasion that, according to the account given to Coleman by Walkelin, bishop of Winchester, that 'he departed bearing two bishoprics who had come in peril of losing one'.

Wulfstan's position was strengthened by his membership of a distinguished Benedictine confraternity of English abbots, including even the formidable Æthelwig, abbot of Evesham, described as a despoiler of Worcester, who had canvassed for that see in 1061 and who was entrusted by the Conqueror with the government of Mercia.¹⁴ On his death in 1077 Wulfstan in compassion offered special and urgent prayers for the soul of his adversary, but was rewarded only with a severe attack of gout, Æthelwig's sole legacy to him.¹⁵

Wulfstan was deeply concerned to conserve the archives of his see; he repaired decaying records himself, endeavoured to recover those which were missing and commissioned the superior Heming to compile a great cartulary¹⁶ in four books, completed soon after Wulfstan's death. A comparison of variant texts of the bounds of Radenore¹⁷ (identified with Pyrton, Pishill, Stonor and probably Warmscombe) discussed in a previous paper,¹⁸ indicates that the Worcester scriptorium endeavoured, though with variable success, to replace colloquial or dialectal by literary forms, and to restore the inflexions which were rapidly disappearing from the spoken language and from the field notes of contemporary surveyors. The tongue of Alfred and Ælfric had become a language of lore, and Wulfstan himself can hardly have used it in his sermons.

Almost certainly Worcester maintained its own text of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, but it is not certain how far we still have it. Earle thought that the D-text¹⁹ down to its mutilated ending in 1079 originated in Worcester, as did its continuation (at least to 1090) incorporated

in the E-text,²⁰ a Peterborough transcript made in 1122. Plummer at first inclined to this view,²¹ but later regarded as an insuperable objection 'the almost entire absence of any mention of Wulfstan, the great Worcester saint and hero . . . How can we account for the total absence [from D] of the very name of Wulfstan?'²² The answer is that Wulfstan would have prohibited any mention of himself. The account of his repulsion of the Norman and Welsh rebels from Worcester in 1088 was surely inserted or at least expanded after his death, as the words 'þurh þæs biscepes geearnunga' (through the bishop's merits) indicate.

On this view, the chronicler's famous account of King William's character and administration can be attributed to Wulfstan himself. The writer of this obituary knew William and had sojourned in his court; he had a special interest in the building of churches and the fostering of Benedictine communities; he was acquainted with European affairs from Denmark to Spain (Wulfstan's correspondence was still more extensive); he wrote excellent Old English prose and tolerable verse. One cannot think of anyone but St Wulfstan who could write with such authority and balanced judgment, and yet with such charity. It is to this account that we owe some familiar findings: 'He was gentle to the good men who loved God, and stern beyond all measure to those who resisted his will'; 'If he could have had two years more, he would have conquered Ireland by his prudence and without any weapons' (the kings of Ireland were in touch with Wulfstan);²³ 'A man who was of any account could travel over his kingdom without injury with his bosom full of gold; 'He loved the tall deer'²⁴ as though he were their father'.

The Latin chronicle attributed to Florence of Worcester was started at Wulfstan's instance²⁵ and used a Chronicle text which was at least nearly akin to D; it became a main source of William of Malmesbury's works and of the *Historia Regum* attributed to Simeon of Durham. Without Wulfstan's initiatives, our knowledge of his times would have been greatly impoverished. Fortunately his Norman successor, Sampson of Bayeux, who was married,²⁴ only in minor orders and distinguished mainly

for his enormous appetite, did not interfere with the work of the Worcester scriptorium, and even fortuitously stimulated it. Wulfstan had re-established the Benedictine community at Westbury-on-Trym, founded by St Oswald, and by 1093 had rewarded Coleman's many years of friendship and help by making him its prior. Sampson dispersed it at some time after 1096,²⁷ and Coleman returned to Worcester to write Wulfstan's life, following the English custom by which the work of a noteworthy bishop was recorded as soon as possible after his death by someone who had known him well. Soon after Coleman's death in 1113 William of Malmesbury spent some time at Worcester and used Coleman's biography in his *Gesta Pontificum*. Florence, who died in 1118, also had Coleman's text before him. By the 1130s literary Old English, basically West Saxon as standardized in the tenth century, had become intolerably archaic²⁸ and William of Malmesbury was invited to Worcester to translate Wulfstan's life into Latin; it took him six weeks, working day and night. He seems to have followed Coleman's text closely, even when this was not chronological, but he appended some valuable reminiscences of Nicholas, prior from 1113 to 1124, of noble English stock,²⁹ and omitted (a) some fine phrases which Coleman had borrowed from the lives of other saints;³⁰ (b) lengthy accounts of what any bishop must needs do; (c) most regrettably, nearly all the names of witnesses, lest he wound the delicate ears of his readers by their barbarous sound. William dedicated his *Vita Wulfstani* to Warin, prior from 1124 to 1140 or soon after.

Devotion to Wulfstan, always strong, was stimulated by a fire in 1147 when his tomb, and even the cloth covering it, remained unharmed.³¹ By the end of the century his posthumous miracles were numerous enough for Worcester to secure his canonization. The bull proclaiming his sanctity, dated 14 May 1203, cites a 'scripturam quoque autenticam de vita ipsius ante centum annos Anglicana lingua conscriptam'.³² This was undoubtedly Coleman's biography, sent to Rome as primary evidence by Bishop Mauger and the community under their seals, but not returned. If the reference to

100 years is taken literally, it would put the completion of the *Vita* about 1103.

The *Vita Wulfstani* was still rather too diffuse for monastic reading, and at some time after 1147 a second edition,³³ slightly abridged but with some new material, was prepared at Worcester, probably by Prior Senatus, who lived until 1207 and saw Wulfstan's sanctity officially acknowledged. Three later abridgements are extant.³⁴ The original text of the *Vita* survived in one manuscript of the late 12th century,³⁵ but it then fell out of sight until Henry Wharton printed rather more than half of it, not including the Buckinghamshire episodes, in 1691.³⁶ His selection was reprinted by Mabillon³⁷ and Migne.³⁸ Meanwhile the *Vita* in Capgrave's *Nova Legenda* had been based on the second edition, together with the *Gesta Pontificum* and Florence (or perhaps Roger of Wendover). The Bollandists in their *Acta Sanctorum* used only these secondary sources; the saints of January had both the benefit and the limitations of early treatment. The full texts of both recensions of the *Vita* were made available by R. R. Darlington in the Camden Series in 1928,³⁹ and the first edition was translated into English at the instance of Sir Ivor Atkins by J. H. F. Peile, archdeacon of Worcester, in 1934, though without annotation.⁴⁰

The First Miracle at Wycombe

King William, whom others greatly feared, did nothing to trouble Wulfstan; indeed he revered, loved and honoured him as his spiritual father and restored to his see a number of estates which had been seized by the Danes or appropriated to the support of the archbishopric of York. Wulfstan was frequently summoned to the King's court⁴¹ at Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide. The decision in 1085 to proceed with the Domesday survey was taken in his diocese. When the crown-wearing was at Westminster, Wulfstan's route would take him through the Chilterns. On one such journey he and his clerks with their baggage-train spent the night at a dilapidated inn at Wycombe.⁴² It may well be that the reference in Domesday Book⁴³ to the meadow provided for the horses of the court refers to a recognised posting-station on the London road, and this may help to explain

why High Wycombe became the urban centre, outgrowing West Wycombe.

Early in the morning, when the company was about to set out, the whole building began to creak and the beams and rafters to sag. Everyone except the bishop, who always rode last,⁴⁴ ran outside in confusion, leaving him alone indoors. When they realised this, they shouted at the top of their voices for him to come out before the building collapsed, but no one was willing to go back at his own peril. At this moment of danger, Wulfstan stood firm and rebuked their clamour with 'O men of little faith! You thought that the fall would crush me!' The remark seems slightly misplaced at this point in the narrative; the revised text omits it, and says that Wulfstan stood motionless, armed with the shield of faith; a headnote takes this to mean that he made the sign of the cross. His serene confidence on this and other occasions may be explained by his having received a revelation that he would die in extreme old age.⁴⁵ He would not leave the building until all the beasts which carried the baggage had been released and moved out. When this order had been obeyed, he walked out of the inn, which was at once violently shaken. With a fearful crash, the walls and roof subsided into a chaotic heap of rubbish. The *Vita* adds the natural reflection that by a wonderful and glorious sign the house delayed its fall while the Saint was within it; Wulfstan is already *sanctus*. When he had come out, it yielded forthwith to its weakness (*continuo debilitati cederet*). There seems no reason to question this account. Wulfstan's concern for the pack-animals anticipates St Francis, whose formative years coincided with the official promotion of the *cultus* of the English saint.

The Consecration of All Saints, and the Second Miracle at Wycombe

It would appear that there was no church at High Wycombe at the time of Wulfstan's deliverance. If there had been, he would have gone there to say Matins before the company set out, as the Marlow story will show. The assessment of the Wycombes at 30 hides is evidenced as early as 767, when King Offa acquired the estate from Abbot Stithberht in exchange for

Harrow,⁴⁶ but the plural form *Wicumun*, indicating the separation of the estates, is not found until c.970.⁴⁷ West Wycombe was assigned 20 of the 30 hides, and the first church was presumably on the hilltop there, 'the properest and most natural place on the earth for a church'.⁴⁸ The growth which was to make High Wycombe the largest town in Buckinghamshire took place after the Norman Conquest, and is first evidenced in the Domesday survey. The manor, though still assessed at 10 hides, was valued at £26 in 1086 compared with £10 when Robert d'Ouilly acquired it and £12 before 1066.⁴⁹ In contrast, the total value of West Wycombe had increased only from £13 to £15 17s.⁵⁰ Except for the reference to *pratun ad equos de curia*, there is no definite indication that the vill of High Wycombe had as yet any non-rural characteristics; no burgesses, market or toll are mentioned, yet there were as many as six mills on the Wye, and the status of the four *buri* is not clear.

The last quarter of the eleventh century was a great age of church-building. 'You might see churches rise in every village . . . each wealthy man counted the day lost in which he had neglected to perform some outstanding benefaction'.⁵¹ High Wycombe had its wealthy benefactor; he was not Norman, but probably Norse.

William of Malmesbury mentions that he will follow Coleman in recounting a miracle which took place at Wycombe some years after the bishop's deliverance (Parker says 'six years later' but does not cite his authority⁵²); as it was still more worthy of veneration, he held it permissible to weave together in the fellowship of a single page matters which were separated in time but which corresponded in excellence.⁵³

There was in High Wycombe a man nicknamed Swertling, 'little dark man', though it would appear from other sources discussed below that his name was really Swerting. He was disposed (by the first miracle?) to revere the Saint, and when he had built a church at his own expense he did not wish anyone else to consecrate it; he would not reckon it properly dedicated unless Wulfstan agreed to act. The bishop was normally swift in deciding, but he could not comply without the consent of the

bishop of Lincoln, whose diocese included Buckinghamshire. Remigius, almoner of Fécamp, had brought a ship and 20 knights to the Conqueror's expedition, and had been rewarded with the see of Dorchester-on-Thames; he had removed his *cathedra* to Lincoln in 1072. He was a Domesday commissioner for the west midland circuit, which included Worcester,⁵⁴ and instead of regarding the request as insulting to himself, he ended Wulfstan's worries by courteously giving him permission to proceed. The revised text slurs over Swerting's insistence and Wulfstan's hesitation.

On the appointed day Wulfstan came and set the new building apart for the service of God in honour of all His Saints. Probably he called to mind the chapel of All Saints in his cathedral where as a novice he had often shut the door and called on Christ.⁵⁵ He took great pains with his sermon to the people of Wycombe. Crowds always flocked to hear Wulfstan when he came to dedicate a church, seeking his blessing and remission of penances. His favourite theme on these occasions was that it was Christ's will that Christians, the people of God, should live together in peace, 'for mortal men can hear of nothing sweeter, seek nothing more to be desired, find nothing more precious. Peace, which is the beginning and the end of man's salvation, the final purpose of God's commandments. The angel choir chanted it at the Incarnation, the Lord gave it to the disciples before the Crucifixion, and at the Resurrection brought it back to them as a trophy of victory'.⁵⁶

After confirming a number of children, a joyful task which he never neglected, he went to Swerting's house to break his fast. Swerting's wife felt inhibited from conversing with the bishop because of her reverence for him and the modesty of her sex, but she told Coleman of her trouble. Her waiting-woman was wasting away through an unheard-of disease; her tongue was monstrously swollen, like that of an ox. The tumour denied her all solid food, since she could not masticate it; she could only drink from a *coclea*, apparently a spoon rather than a drinking-tube. Coleman gave her the water which the bishop had blessed that day for the

consecration of the church, and then commended her case to him. Wulfstan had one of the gold coins called bezants, from Byzantium, the old name of Constantinople; it had been struck with the point of the Holy Lance, the weapon with which the Roman soldier had pierced the Saviour's side after His death. Wulfstan dipped the bezant in the holy water and himself gave that to the girl. This procedure had been found beneficial in many cases, and it proved efficacious. Some days later Swerting's wife informed Coleman that her handmaid had been restored to full health, and Coleman saw to it that the miracle was validated by her oath and by the testimony of others. The revised text omits the point that the use of the bezant had previously been effective, and attributes the cure to the Saint's virtues, which he himself would certainly have disclaimed. 'Praise God, not Wulfstan.'

We need not speculate whether the healing had any instrumental cause beyond the faith of all those concerned, but one difficulty can be removed. One recalls from Gibbon⁵⁷ that the Holy Lance was discovered at Antioch during the First Crusade, and therefore after Wulfstan's death. At first this shook the present writer's confidence in the whole story, but Sir Steven Runciman was good enough to point out that there was a lance with a far better pedigree in the Imperial collection at Constantinople.⁵⁸ Apart from this reference in the *Vita Wulfstani*, there seems to be no mention of it in any Western source before the list compiled by the Scandinavian Nicholas Thynrenensis in 1157. William of Tyre says that it was shown by the Emperor Manuel to King Amalric of Jerusalem when he visited Constantinople in 1171. In the years before Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Seljukian Turks in 1076, numerous pilgrims to the Holy Land had travelled by way of Constantinople, where they could see the relics traditionally found at Jerusalem by St Helena. Probably one such pilgrim had acquired a bezant with a hole in it which was said to have been made by the Holy Lance, and presented it to his bishop on his return.

The Founder of All Saints Church

The name of the founder of the parish church of

High Wycombe has been corrupted in all texts of the *Vita Wulfstani*. The Cottonian Claudius manuscript reads 'Spert linsur nomine'. The form of the first *r* indicates that in the exemplar the name was written in Old English characters which the scribe tried to imitate, but he mistook the Old English *w* for *p*. However, an emendation to 'Swert linsur' is not enough. Those abridgements which include the chapter have 'vir quidam Sperdingus (*or* Sperdignus) nomine', and it is therefore suggested that William of Malmesbury wrote 'vir Swertlin(g) surnomine', 'a man by-named Swertling'. It is a little too early to give 'surname' its modern sense. Swertling (better, Swertling) would be a Saxon diminutive of Old Norse Svartr; the form would be jocular, his proper name being Swerting. One recalls Sverting, the son of the Icelandic chieftain Runolf Ulfsson whose prosecution of Hjalti Skeggjason for blasphemy against the pagan gods precipitated the acceptance of Christianity by the Althing in 1001.⁵⁹ Sverting was trading with Norway, but King Olaf Tryggvason called him 'the idolater's son', had his ship unloaded and kept him hostage for two years until Iceland was converted.⁶⁰ It does not appear that he returned to Iceland. Two of the twelve lawmen of Lincoln in 1086 were called Suartin (Suartine, Suardine); both were of Norse descent, and one had held the same office in King Edward's time.⁶¹

Our Swerting can probably be identified with a moneyer of Wallingford: he could well have accompanied Wigod of Wallingford, who made his peace with the Conqueror and is said to have moved to Wycombe.⁶² Wigod's daughter Maud married Robert d'Ouilly, who held High Wycombe in 1086 in right of his wife, so that it became part of the honour of Wallingford.⁶³ Swerting would have prospered as Wycombe developed, becoming *opibus ex facili confluentibus fortunatus*,⁶⁴ so that he could build All Saints. His holdings in 1086 are listed in the table overleaf.⁶⁵

All these holdings were acquired after the Conquest. Miles Crispin married Robert d'Ouilly's daughter, and Swerting seems to have made good use of his connection with Wigod and Robert. At Cheddington, which

<i>Holder</i>	<i>Lord</i>	<i>Vill</i>	<i>Hidage</i>	<i>Value 1066</i>	<i>Value 1086</i>
Suerting	King	Caldecote	2½	20s	20s
Stuerting	King	Cheddington	2¼	20s	20s
Stuarting and Herding	King	Bradenham	2	20s	20s
Suerting	Miles Crispin	Pitstone	2	20s	10s
Stuerting	Miles Crispin	Horton	1	13s 4d	13s 4d
Suarting	Gilbert of Ghent	Horton	¾	6s 8d	6s 8d
Suerting	Geoffrey De Mandeville	Waldrige	½	15s	10s
Suertin	William fitz Ansculf	Cheddington	½	10s	5s

Swerting shared with Robert, his antecessor was Fin the Dane, who retained some of his lands for a time after the Conquest. It would thus appear that Swerting was among the surviving king's thegns who actively participated in the land market arising from the upheaval of the Conquest. His acquisitions were somewhat run down; there were only 7¾ plough-teams on his 11½ hides, and their annual value was only £5 5s compared with £6 5s in 1066. Clearly he still belonged to the moneyed rather than the landed interest. Herding or Harding, who held Horsenden from the King, was perhaps Swerting's brother.

The church which Wulfstan consecrated was probably of flint with some stone, consisting of chancel, nave, central tower and north and south transepts, which were incorporated in the aisles when these were added c.1275; at the same time the nave and probably also the chancel were lengthened. The tower was demolished in 1510, having been replaced by a west tower in ashlar, and the chancel was again lengthened. During the restoration of 1889 two stones, still on view, were taken from the wall of the north aisle, having been twice re-used; one came from a cushion capital, the other has chevron ornament; both features were just coming in towards the end of the eleventh century. These appear to be the only identifiable remains of Swerting's church, but its fine proportions have governed all the rebuildings,⁶⁶ just as his choice of site has provided High Wycombe with a focal point, a public building around which the borough was soon to grow. Such a building, the only large covered space within the town, could be used

for purposes of the most varied kind, until the Lateran Council in 1215 prohibited the use of churches as warehouses or the like, except for urgent reasons such as fire or warfare.⁶⁷

The construction of a church, as of a bridge or other public work, was held to be of spiritual value, provided that it was not undertaken for private gain; but ownership of the church when built was at best neutral, and could be a source of temptation. Its transfer to spiritual hands, and thus to a body with perpetual succession, was therefore meritorious. By the middle of the twelfth century, if not before, the abuses of misappropriated endowments and trafficking in livings were making it intolerable for laymen to retain churches as mere property.⁶⁸ As early as 1054, Brihtmær, the earliest named alderman ('senator') of the city of London, had given his house and his church of All Hallows to Christ Church, Canterbury, subject to the life interests of his wife and his two sons, for the redemption of their souls and to ensure that the service belonging to the church should not cease or fall off. Christ Church was still waiting for the reversion in 1100, when it had acquired 7½ other City churches.⁶⁹ In the city of Lincoln there were several churches owned by citizens until the king called upon them to answer for their advowsons, and subsequent proceedings brought them into the hands of the Crown, which then bestowed them on the bishop.⁷⁰ What happened there illustrates the king's policy, but is not necessarily what happened elsewhere in the diocese; the king was lord of the burgesses and therefore of their churches, but at Wycombe the borough was from the start under the overlordship of the honour of

Wallingford. However, Wycombe came into the hands of Henry II even before his accession, when Robert's daughter Maud and her second husband Brian fitz Count embraced the religious life. At Henry's coronation the title of Brian's nephew Wigan of Wallingford was recognized, but on his death in 1156 the whole honour came into Henry's hands, so that he was able to grant All Saints to the abbess and nuns of Godstow.⁷¹ The missing link is that there is no record of how Swerting's interest in the church had been secured by the manor, so that Henry could dispose of both. The anarchy of Stephen's reign makes such an unrecorded event likely enough; the damage done *apud Wycumbam in obsidione* can hardly have been confined to the mills and workshops.⁷²

Although Swerting could build his church without anyone's licence or permission, he could not endow it with tithes except those on his own land. When Maud inherited the manor, her first husband Miles Crispin showed the new church no great good will; he granted the tithes of the demesne to the Abbey of Bec,⁷³ except the tithes of the thirtieth acre which went to the church of Wycombe. This arrangement was confirmed after a suit in 1234, which decided that Godstow, as holding the church, should have two-thirds of the tithes on the manorial assarts and of all other tithes.⁷⁴ Godstow leased the Bec tithes in 1254 and redeemed the rent-charge in 1357.⁷⁵

Wulfstan at Marlow

On his frequent and rapid journeys ('he seemed rather to fly than to travel') it was Wulfstan's practice to sing Matins in a church, even if this was at a distance from his lodging. Thither he went, through rain or snow; he would not be deterred by darkness, foul weather or deep mud. He would overcome such difficulties in order to come to church in time, so that he could truthfully say 'Lord, I have loved the honour of Thy house'. Further, he would approach a church only on foot, and he attempted with little success to persuade others not to ride into the churchyard. Once before Christmas he was travelling to the king's court and secured lodgings near Marlow.⁷⁶ His destination could hardly have been Westminster or

Winchester; it may be significant that he witnessed a royal charter at Dover in January 1091.⁷⁷ As was his custom, he told his companions early in the morning that he was going to church. It was a long way, and unfit for a traveller on foot even in daylight; moreover, there was a raging storm of sleet.⁷⁸ Wulfstan's clerks pleaded with him unsuccessfully; he was determined to reach the church with one companion or even by himself if someone would tell him the way, so that he should not wander on to a cross-path. In view of his persistence, the clerks ceased to argue and concealed their annoyance. The Durham and Harleian texts say that, still in ill-humour, they chose one of their number to guide him: Frewin, a deacon, later a monk, who sometimes acted as his messenger, described elsewhere as an honest and cheerful fellow, though he hardly proved so on this occasion. The older Cottonian text does not say that the other clerks chose Frewin, but only that he was more rash and hasty (*mente preruptior*) than the rest. He took Wulfstan's hand and doubled his fault by leading him through the marsh by a most unsafe way. The bishop was soon knee-deep in mud and lost one of his shoes; he knew that the clerks intended that he should have to abandon his undertaking, but gave no indication of this. The oldest text does not expressly say that Wulfstan reached Marlow church; the abridgements assert that he did so, already stiff with cold. It was quite light when he rejoined his companions at their lodging (*diversorium*), his limbs half dead. Then at length he mentioned their fault and asked them to look for the shoe, but instead of chiding Frewin he dismissed his offence with a cheerful smile (*atrocitatem facti vultus hilaritate attenuans*: a literal translation would be too strong).

Wulfstan was a very tolerant Lord Bishop; his self-control was such that he appeared unmoved by mockery or by injury in word or deed. Quite often some of his *familia* criticised him openly or made jokes about him behind his back, but neither this nor any outward misfortune could lead him into sin. His biographer concludes 'I will not attribute to him that praise which I cannot affirm, that there was no anger in his heart; for I say that no religion could or can destroy the emotions. It may repress them for a

time, but it cannot remove them for ever.' The later texts omit this reflection, but no one knew Wulfstan's kind heart better than Coleman. Elsewhere he mentions one occasion when the bishop could not conceal his anger, when his chamberlain struck an innocent child who had been serving Wulfstan at Mass.

Wulfstan's usual robust health began to fail about 1090, and his legs were first affected; one fears that the misadventure at Marlow did them no good. In 1092 he told his synod that his life was drawing to its close,⁷⁹ and he was too unwell to attend St Anselm's consecration as archbishop in December 1093. The following year he adjusted a difference between Anselm and the bishop of London on the basis of Old English custom, and he died on 19 January 1095.

The form *Merlaue* in the *Vita* is to be read *Merlave*. The Durham text has the better form *Merlafe*, 'the lave (leaving) of the mere'. The only pre-Conquest form is *Merelafan* in the atheling Athelstan's will of 1015,⁸⁰ a dative plural, perhaps referring to Great and Little Marlow, or perhaps because *lāf* in place-names was regarded as a plural 'leavings', as in German names in *leben*. Marlow clearly grew up as the mere shrank,⁸¹ and Wulfstan's experience implies that there were alternative paths round or through the retreating marsh, of which his guide chose the more founderous.

Another Chiltern Miracle?

The posthumous healings attributed to the intercession of St Wulfstan and listed in the additions to the *Vita*⁸² include the immediate cure of a man from Radenore who had been deaf for twelve years ('homo quidem de Radenore qui annis duodecim surdus fuerat; eadem die curatus est'). His home has naturally been located at New Radnor in Powys; the continuator may not have heard of the Chiltern Radenore, mentioned above as an ancient Worcester estate, (*æt*) *Readanoran* in 774 and 887, the 'red slope' perhaps referring to the woods on the Chiltern escarpment.⁸³ The axis of Radenore, including Knightsbridge Lane (*cnihtra brygc* in the charter bounds) and Assenden (*assundene*), is part of the route from Worcester to Henley along which Wulfstan

would have travelled on his journey to Marlow.

Wulfstan's Fetch

There are several references to Wulfstan's fetch,⁸⁴ *doppelgänger* or supernatural facsimile. One of these led to a remarkable achievement, the suppression of the slave trade between Bristol and Ireland, against which neither the love of God nor the fear of King William had prevailed. Pregnant girls were in particular demand in Ireland, and the merchants themselves increased the supply. Wulfstan spent much time in Bristol preaching against their damnable sin, but what finally moved them was a miracle in the Irish Sea. A ship from Bristol had drifted for three days in a storm. When sailors from Wulfstan's diocese sought his intercession, his image or semblance appeared and took charge, ordering the crew to hoist the yards and belay the halyards and sheets. They reached harbour safely and recounted their deliverance. At Worcester the news was not believed, and Coleman was accused of lying for the greater glory of Wulfstan, until he produced trustworthy witnesses. The *Vita* recalls other appearances of holy men succouring those at a distance, sometimes knowing what they did, sometimes not knowing. At Bristol the miracle had such power that the merchants obeyed Wulfstan's injunctions: they even went beyond them by blinding one of their number who persisted in the evil trade.⁸⁵ That penalty often replaced capital punishment, which the Conqueror had abolished.

At the hour of Wulfstan's death he appeared to his friend Robert, bishop of Hereford, asking him to commit his body to the earth and his soul to God. William Rufus (who also had a fetch) gave Robert leave, and he reached Worcester in time for the burial. Many posthumous appearances of Wulfstan are recorded, some in dreams, some in open visions by day, but these do not have the same character as those during his lifetime. To see one's own wraith in the morning is said to ensure a happy longevity; in the evening it betokens imminent death.⁸⁶ One wonders whether the former was the source of Wulfstan's imperturbability when in danger at Wycombe and elsewhere.

St Wulfstan's self-effacing modesty may have hindered full recognition of his historical importance. It was no small blessing to the conquered English to have among them a bishop who was honoured throughout the Christian world, from Jerusalem to Edinburgh.

He was right to recognise that a strong monarchy was necessary if England was not to sink into feudal anarchy, and his influence was often effective in maintaining much that was good in Old English laws, institutions, culture and religion.

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1. R. R. Darlington (ed.), *The Vita Wulfstani of William of Malmesbury, to which are added the extant arrangements of this work and the Miracles and Translation of St Wulfstan* (R. Hist. Soc., 1928).
2. P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* (1968) no. 1364 (cited as S1364).
3. 'Vir mirae sanctitatis et simplicitatis', Hugh Candidus iii. 41. For Wulfstan's own distinctive handwriting, see facsimile in *Palaeographical Society* iii (1873-83) pl. 170; J. C. Holt (ed.), *Domesday Studies* (1987) 89.
4. In that year Worcester cathedral was much damaged when the city rose against King Hardicanute: *V. C. H. Worcs* (1906) ii. 96-7. Eventually Wulfstan rebuilt it, not without tears at having to replace the work of St Oswald, whose shrine he enlarged. 'We pile up stones and neglect souls.'
5. Not later than 1057, since Godiva and Lcofric, who died in that year, restored Blackwell to Worcester while Wulfstan was prior: T. Hearne (ed.), *Hemingi Charularium ecclesiae Wigorniensis* (Oxford, 1723) 413 (cited as Heming, 413).
6. When St Oswald made Wynsius first prior of Worcester, with the consent of King Edgar, he granted to him and all his successors that they should act as supreme dean of the bishop and archdeacon of the cathedral's own churches: H. Wharton, *Anglia Sacra* (1691) i. 542-2; D. C. Douglas, *Engl. Hist. Docs* ii (1953) no. 85, an official declaration by Wulfstan of the findings of his synod in 1092.
7. Florence of Worcester (i. 228) adds Wulfstan to the list of those who submitted at Berkhamsted.
8. Florence of Worcester, ii. 11, 24-6; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum* (Rolls Ser.) 285; *V. C. H. Worcs* ii. 9.
9. Presumably the Ailric of *Vita Wulfstani* iii c. 15.
10. *Vita*, Appendix p. 190; trans. in *Engl. Hist. Docs* ii no. 88, at p. 635.
11. Bede, *Hist. Eccl.* iv c. 13.
12. See H. P. R. Finberg, *Lucerna* (1961) 5. The evidence for the survival of Romano-British elements in the organisation of the diocese of Worcester is reviewed by C. J. Bond in J. Blair (ed.), *Ministers and Parish Churches* (Oxford Univ. C'tee for Archeology 1988) 130-3 and refs. in Notes 42, 44. Cf. D. Whitehead, *The Book of Worcester* (Chesham, 1976) 17-18.
13. Ailred of Rievaulx, ed. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* cxcv, cols. 779-81. Cf. Roger of Wendover, ii. 52-5.
14. *Chronicon Abbatiae de Evesham*, ed. W. D. Macray (Rolls Ser., 1863) 89.
15. Heming, 270-2 ('de conflictu Wulstani episcopi et Agelwii abbatis'); *V. C. H. Worcs* (1901) i. 252-3.
16. See n. 5.
17. Heming, 71-2, 444.
18. A. H. J. Baines, 'Turville, Radenore and the Chiltern feld', *Recs. Bucks* xxiii (1981) 4-22.
19. BL MS Cott. Tiberius B. iv.
20. MS Bodl. Laud 636.
21. C. Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel* i (1892) xi.
22. Plummer ii (1899) liv, lxxvi. Sir Ivor Atkins argued for a Worcester origin of D in *Engl. Hist. Rev.* (1940) iv. 8-26.
23. *Vita* iii c. 20.
24. If *deōr* has its older meaning 'wild animal', 'þa heā deōr' would mean 'deer, great game'. If however *deōr* means 'deer', the compound expression can be taken as 'stags'.
25. Ordericus Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica* (ed. A. le Prévost) ii. 159.
26. Wulfstan had decided not to ordain to the priesthood anyone who was not sworn to celibacy: *Vita* iii c. 12.
27. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum*, 290.
28. The language of the last continuator of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 1132-55, can be regarded as early Middle English. The Oxford Dictionary takes 1150 as its horizon.
29. *Vita* iii cc. 9-17.
30. One echo from the Latin life of St Gregory the Great survived in i c. 5.
31. *Vita* iii c. 10 denies that Wulfstan foretold the burning of his new cathedral. This was presumably interpolated after the fire.
32. Transcript in BL Royal 4, C ii fo. 146b.
33. MS B. iv. 39b in the Library of the Dean and Chapter of Durham.
34. MSS Harl. 322, Lansd. 436, BL Cott. Vespasian E. 9.
35. BL Cott. Claudius A, v fo. 135 (but cf. n. 31).
36. H. Wharton, *Anglia Sacra* (1691) ii. 231.
37. Mabillon, *Acta Ord. Bened.*, li. 836.
38. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* clxxix, col. 1734.
39. See n. 1.
40. J. H. F. Peile, *William of Malmesbury's Life of St Wulstan, Bishop of Worcester* (Basil Blackwell, 1934). Meanwhile the *Vita* had been used by J. W. Lamb in *St Wulstan, Prelate and Patriot* (1933).
41. His attendance is first evidenced at the *curia regis* of Whitsun 1068, as 'Wulfsige episcopus' must be a scribal error for Wulfstan: J. Earle, *Land Charters and other*

- Saxonic Documents* (1888) 431; *Engl. Hist. Docs* ii no. 77.
42. *Vita* ii c. 8.
 43. D.B. i fo. 149b.
 44. *Vita* ii c. 10.
 45. *Vita* iii c. 21. Wulfstan several times foretold this.
 46. S106; *Engl. Hist. Docs* i no. 73. The privilege obtained by Pilheard in 801, endorsed on the original charter, that the estate should provide only 5 men for military service, presumably relates to Harrow rather than Wycombe.
 47. S1485 (ealdorman Ælfheah's will).
 48. H. J. Massingham, *Chiltern Country* (1940) 74.
 49. See n. 43.
 50. D.B. i fos. 143d, 144c, 146a.
 51. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, s. 245. The rise of a locally-based parochial system is connected with the fragmentation of multiple estates into local lordships and the increasing nucleation and coherence of village communities with regular field systems. See J. Blair, *Minsters & Parish Churches*, A7.
 52. J. Parker, *Early Hist. and Antiq. of Wycombe* (1878) 7.
 53. *Vita* ii c. 9.
 54. Heming, 288; Holt, *Domesday Studies*, 46.
 55. *Vita* i c. 12.
 56. *Vita* ii c. 15, a sermon at the dedication of a church in Gloucester.
 57. E. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, c. 58 (Chandos Classics edn. iv. 221). Parker, p. 8, cites Gibbon without noticing the anachronism.
 58. Private communication, 20 March 1987.
 59. Njal's Saga, cc. 100–5.
 60. Laxdaela Saga, cc. 41, 43.
 61. D.B. i fo. 336.
 62. Parker cites Camden, i. 327; see L. J. Ashford, *Hist. of the Borough of High Wycombe* i (1960) 4 and *V.C.H. Bucks* iii. 113.
 63. *Testa de Nevill* (Rec. Com.) 115; discussed by J. H. Round, *V.C.H. Bucks* i. 214. To the same effect, BL Cott. Vitellius E. xv fo. 22.
 64. *Vita* ii c. 9.
 65. Possibly also Southcote, where Suetinus (Sweeting, or a bad form for Swerting?) held a quarter of a hide and six acres, valued at 6s.
 66. R.C.H.M., *Inventory of Historical Monuments in Bucks* i (1912) 194–7.
 67. Lateran IV, constitution 19.
 68. C. Platt, *The English Mediaeval Town* (1979) 184.
 69. B. W. Kissan, 'An early list of London properties', *Trans. London & Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.*, n.s. viii (1938) 57–69.
 70. J. W. F. Hill, *Mediaeval Lincoln* (1948) 144–5; Platt, 186–7.
 71. *Testa de Nevill*, 115; cf. *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii. 72.
 72. Refs. in *V.C.H. Bucks* iii. 113, 123.
 73. Exch. K.R. Misc. Books xx, fol. 154; *V.C.H. Bucks* iii. 133 n. 62.
 74. Hist. MSS Com., Rep. ix, App. i, 356b.
 75. *English Reg. of Godstow Nunnery* (E.E.T.S.) 91–2.
 76. *Vita* iii c. 4.
 77. H. W. C. Davis, *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum* (1913) no. 315.
 78. Coleman probably wrote *slēt*, for which his translator found no Latin word and had to say *ninguidus ymber vel nix pluvialis* 'snowy rain and/or rainy snow'. He could have found *nix concreta pruina* in Lucretius.
 79. See n. 6.
 80. S1503.
 81. A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Buckinghamshire* (1925) 186–7.
 82. *Vita*, p. 137.
 83. See n. 18.
 84. A. S. *fæcce*, not in the Anglo-Saxon dictionaries but on record in the 8th-century Corpus glossary.
 85. *Vita* ii c. 19.
 86. References in *Oxf. Engl. Dict.* (1933) F 174.