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THE SKULL OF BEDE

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In 1831 Dr James Raine excavated Bede's tomb in Durham Cathedral, revealing a partial skeleton accompanied by a medieval ring. Three casts were made of the skull; the recent re-discovery of one of these casts provokes an examination of the authenticity of the remains and of antiquarian interests in craniology in the mid-nineteenth century.

THE 1831 EXCAVATION

Dr James Raine (1791–1858) excavated St Cuthbert's tomb in Durham Cathedral in 1827.[1] The spectacular discoveries of that controversial investigation no doubt then encouraged him to turn his attention to Bede's tomb in the Galilee chapel. In 1830 workmen dismantled the table tomb down to pavement level and then – with his well-honed sense of dramatic timing – Raine excavated the grave beneath on the anniversary of Bede's death on 27 May 1831. His report was published in 1833 as part of a history of the cathedral building, and this information can be supplemented by a draft of its text, which is contained in Raine's autograph annotations to his earlier book on St Cuthbert.[2]

According to Raine, when he opened Bede's tomb he found human bones that:

> Although by no means furnishing the full complement of those belonging to a perfect skeleton, appeared nevertheless to have been purposely arranged in their respective places, in a coffin of the full size, of which, though in a very decomposed state, there were numerous traces. 1. The *palvarium*, tolerably perfect, consisting of the *os frontis* and the *ossa parietalia*, the former so remarkably flat (still more so than that of Cuthbert above) that a cast was made of the whole bone before its re-internment. 2. The *ossa temporalia* and portions of the bones of the basis of the scull. 3. The lower jaw, apparently that of a man advanced in years, who had lost the greater part of his teeth at an early age. The cavities from which the teeth had fallen had disappeared in the bone, so that a considerable portion of time must have intervened between that period and the death of the individual to whom the jaw had belonged. 4. A portion of the *malar* bones. 5. The heads of both the *humeri*. 6. The *radius* and *ulna* of one fore-arm. 7. The *os humeri* of the other. 8. A portion of the *sternum*. 9. The thigh bones.

1. Raine 1828; Battiscombe 1956; Bailey 1989; McCombe 2014.
2. Raine 1833, 79–82; Raine's draft text is contained in his annotated copy of Raine 1828, which is now Durham, Durham Cathedral Library, Add MS 148, fols 178a–b.

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10. Eight bones of the *tarsi* of the feet. The above bones were found, as we have already stated, stretched along a space of nearly six feet in length, and that the grave had contained no other human remains was proved by very careful excavation.[3]

THE CASTS

This published record refers to Raine's commissioning of a single cast of the *palvarium* (*recte*: the *calvarium*), or the upper part of the skull cavity, including the brow. Other elements of the skull (nos 2–4 in Raine's list) were reinterred with the limb bones (nos 5–10) without a cast or other record being made of them. Derivative accounts, such as those published in 1834 and 1860, also refer to 'a' or 'the' cast, in the singular.[4] But Raine's autograph draft report of the excavations shows that, in fact, three casts of the *calvarium* were subsequently taken from a master mould:

During the time the grave was open I obtained a perfect cast of the Calvarium or front part of the scull which was of the most peculiar formation
For a mould & three casts from St Bede's scull

s	d
0	8 – 4½

G. Robson Plasterer.[5]

Of these three casts, one is readily traceable through part of its subsequent history. The Accessions Register of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle shows that the Revd James Raine presented a cast of the skull to the Society on 7 February 1859.[6] It presumably reached the Antiquaries as a consequence of the death of Dr James Raine the elder in 1858, for the timing of the gift significantly coincides with the month in which his library at Crook Hall was sold.[7] After its donation, however, there is no subsequent trace of the cast's fate; it was certainly not listed among the Society's holdings when they were transferred to the new museum at Newcastle University in 1962.

With the loss of the Newcastle cast, a review of 'Bede's bones' in 2001 concluded that 'there is now no visible trace of Bede's body or his relics'.[8] However, one of the other two casts made for Raine in 1831 has recently emerged from the Duckworth Laboratory collection in the Leverhulme Centre for Human Evolutionary Studies at the University of Cambridge.

The Duckworth cast

The Duckworth cast of Bede's skull survives as part of a collection of crania that was made between 1847 and 1872 by the medical doctor and antiquary, John Thurnam MD, FRCP, FSA (1810–73). Thurnam's collection comprises twenty-five plaster casts and 280 crania obtained from archaeological and ethnographic contexts, and survives largely complete

3. Raine 1833, 80; an identical listing appears in Mackenzie and Ross 1834, II, 384–5.
4. Mackenzie and Ross 1834, II, 385; Longstaffe 1860, 28.
5. Annotations to Durham Cathedral Library, Add MS 148, fol 178.
6. Accession no. 1859.4; see also Longstaffe 1860, 28; *Archaeol Aeliana*, 1869, 2nd ser, **4**, 33.
7. Hardcastle 1859; Longstaffe 1860, 28.
8. Bailey 2001, 181.

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in the Duckworth Laboratory along with two copies of the catalogue made under his direction.[9] The 'reputed *calvarium* of the Venerable Bede' is no. 4 in Thurnam's collection of plaster casts, and his catalogue notes that it had been 'presented by the late Rev. James Raine'.[10] It could have been an early addition to his collection; Thurnam worked in York from 1838 to 1849, before moving south to become medical superintendent of the Wiltshire County Asylum in Devizes, Wilts, which opened in 1851.[11] This complements the recorded excavation dates of the first few items in Thurnam's collection of original crania (nos 1–12), all of which came from sites in northern England that had been opened before 1850; thereafter the majority of skulls and artefacts that he acquired came from excavations in Wessex, closer to his new home in Wiltshire.[12]

Annotations to a bookplate at the front of the primary copy of Thurnam's catalogue show that the 'collection of skulls, chiefly obtained by excavation during 25 years, 1847–72, by or with the aid of John Thurnam', was presented to the University of Cambridge by Sir George M Humphry (1820–96), Professor of Anatomy 1866–83, and then of Surgery. Humphry was a noted collector of specimens for the museum of anatomy and surgical pathology in Cambridge, and it was doubtless through his efforts that Thurnam's collection of skulls was acquired for the university.[13] The catalogue frontispiece notes that: 'A fair copy of this catalogus was made under the direction of Dr Thurnam and sent with the crania', suggesting that Humphry may have acquired the collection shortly before Thurnam's death in September 1873. Below this, the same hand records that 'This [ie the primary copy of the] catalogus was sent by his son Mr F. W. Thurman after Dr Thurman's death in 1873'.

Thurnam's collection of skulls was subsequently incorporated within the collection of 'Crania and Cranial Bones in the [Anatomy] Museum of Cambridge University', where they were catalogued for Alexander MacAlister (1844–1919) who succeeded Humphry as Professor of Anatomy in 1883, and who was also a noted antiquary and FSA. The cast of

9. Thurnam's manuscript catalogue is Original File Reference 017 and the fair copy is Original File Reference 018 in the Duckworth Laboratory archives. The original catalogue often contains much more information about the archaeological context of the specimens than the fair copy, especially for the specimens added later in the list.
10. Cambridge, Duckworth Laboratory, John Thurnam's 'Catalogus Craniorum', Original File Reference 017, p 91, and Original File Reference 018, p 67: 'Plaster Casts, no. 4'.
11. Urquhart 2004.
12. Marsden 1999, 84–94. Cambridge, Duckworth Laboratory, John Thurnam's 'Catalogus Craniorum', Original File Reference 017, pp 1–4, and Original File Reference 018, pp 1–3. Lamel Hill, York (nos 1–5); Danes Dale Barrow, nr Driffield (nos 7–11); Arras, nr Market Weighton (no. 12). Item 6 in Thurnam's collection came from excavations conducted a decade before, in 1838, in the cemetery of the Anglo-Saxon monastery at Hartlepool (Cross Close, when digging the foundations of a house); his notes concerning the woman's skull acquired from there record the presence of 'graves opened in 1838 with head-stones inscribed in part in Runic, in part in Roman characters'. A single inscribed stone, bearing the name *berchtgyd*, was found in these 1838 excavations, adding to those recovered nearby in 1833. The *Gent's Mag* (1838, 2nd edn, **10**, 536) records that this stone was uncovered on 15 Oct, and adds that 'During the previous week the workmen had found several human bones, and under each skull was a flat stone'. The author of that report noted that the cemetery where these stones were found was 'not more than fifteen or twenty yards long, and that the burials had been placed in two rows only, north and south'. The skull that Thurnam acquired was presumably from one of this small group of graves. The 'Berchtgyth' stone is now in Durham Cathedral, Monks Dormitory, no. XXVIII: see Haverfield and Greenwell 1899, 93–4; Cramp 1984, 100, pl 85 (no. 444). The Hartlepool skull is item no. 46 of 50 of Anglo-Saxon skulls measured for (but not illustrated in) Davis and Thurnam 1856–65, I, Table VII, 252–3.
13. Power 2004.

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Bede's skull is no. 580 in the MacAlister catalogue, and this number corresponds to that on the blue rectangular tin box in which the cast is still kept, and with a label stuck on the front of the cast itself (figs 1 and 2).[14] A label within the box reads '580. Skull of Venerable Bede. Cast from mould made in 1831 when his tomb in Durham Cathedral was opened'. The MacAlister collection was transferred in 1968 from the Department of Anatomy to the Department of Physical Anthropology, and moved thence to the reference collections of the Duckworth Laboratory that became part of the Leverhulme Centre for Human Evolutionary Studies, established in new premises on Fitzwilliam Street, Cambridge, in 2000.

The Duckworth cast is readily identifiable; the back of the cast is truncated and the letters 'V. Beda' are inscribed on the flat surface (fig 3). It consists of the upper part of the cranium only, comprising all of the *os frontale*, both *ossa parietalia* and the upper parts of the temporal bones at the side of the head, as well as the upper part of the nasal bone. However, the quality of the cast is far below the technical standards required by modern science and, since it is also an incomplete record of the original skull (preserving only the shape of its upper part), areas crucial for osteological evaluation of sex – such as the nuchal crest and mastoid processes – are missing. Skulls often exhibit a mosaic of male and female features and, even when complete, estimates of the sex are considered to be only about 85 per cent reliable.[15] The sloping forehead and rather pronounced temporal lines of this specimen are male features, although it lacks a prominent glabellar region (the area between the eyes and above the nose). Age also has a significant effect on the morphology of the adult human skeleton, including the skull, especially if teeth have been lost, making older male skulls often appear more female than younger male skulls.[16] Raine had noted that the Durham skeleton had lost many teeth in life, and this feature, especially if it had occurred in an older individual, could account for some slightly more ambiguous 'feminine' elements of this cast. However, the Duckworth cast clearly corresponds to Raine's description and shows the anatomical features that he considered unusual and worthy of three-dimensional record. He had described the condition of the original cranium as 'tolerably perfect', and noted that the frontal bone was 'remarkably flat'. The cast shows what Raine meant by this observation: the superciliary arches (brow ridge) of the frontal bone are insignificant viewed in profile and the angle of the forehead is markedly shallow (figs 4 and 5).

It was this feature that had attracted Raine's attention and he invited his readers of the published report to compare the shape of the frontal bone of this skull to the engraving of the skull that he had earlier extracted from the tomb of St Cuthbert (fig 6).[17] Raine's motive was to demonstrate that the human remains that he had uncovered in Cuthbert's tomb were the same as those that had been seen and described by the Durham monks in 1104, and thence to prove the evident folly of their belief that the saint's remains were incorrupt. Raine's engraving of Cuthbert's skull showed how 'the bone of his nose was observed to turn rapidly outwards, and the tip of his chin was furrowed with a line of such depth that a finger might almost be laid in the cavity'. Re-examining Cuthbert's skull in 1899, Selby Plummer concluded that Raine's illustration had exaggerated these features, including 'the slightly

14. Cambridge, Duckworth Laboratory, manuscript catalogue of 'Crania and cranial bones in the Museum of Cambridge University', Vol 1, 1–2678, no. 580: 'Cast of calvaria of Venerable Bede from Durham Cathedral XXIII5'.
15. R Gowland, pers comm (25 Feb 2015); the authors are very grateful to Dr Rebecca Gowland and Dr Anwen Caffell for their expert osteoarchaeological evaluation of the cast, on which these comments are based.
16. Gowland 2007.
17. Raine 1828, 214; reproduced and discussed by Raine 1833, 63.

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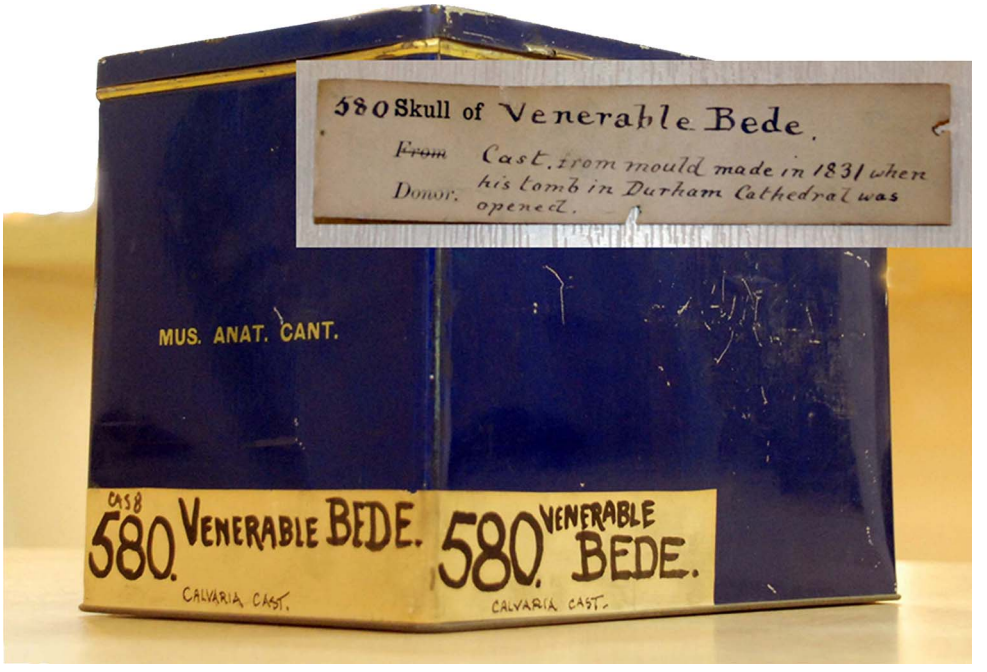


Fig 1. The storage box for the cast of the skull of Bede and its accession label (Cambridge, Duckworth Laboratory, MacAlister catalogue, no. 580). *Photograph*: J Story



Fig 2. Front view of the cast of the skull of Bede, numbered 580. *Photograph*: J Story

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Fig 3. Back view of the cast of the skull of Bede, engraved 'V. Beda'. *Photograph*: J Story



Fig 4. Side view of the cast of the skull of Bede showing the shallow angle of the front of the cranium, about which Raine and Thurnam commented. *Photograph*: J Story

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Fig 5. The top of the cast of the skull. *Photograph*: J Story

low retreating forehead', and that it was little more than 'a caricature of the actual skull' (fig 7).[18] Raine drew no conclusion from his observations of the unusual shape of the foreheads of the skulls excavated from the Durham tombs of Cuthbert and Bede, but evidently thought the feature so extreme in the latter case that a cast should be made for future study and discussion. It was probably in this context that Raine gave a cast of the skull of Bede to Thurnam to augment his growing comparative collection of human crania.

John Thurnam's interest in the shape of skulls arose from his work with inmates of the asylums for which he was medical superintendent, first at the Friends' Retreat in York, then at the Wiltshire County Asylum in Devizes. Thurnam was at the forefront of a move to medicalise the treatment of the 'insane' and, to that end, in 1841 was a founding member of the Medico-Psychological Association, the forerunner of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He developed at this time a professional interest in cranioscopy (the basis of phrenology), which endeavoured to establish brain function through external observation of the surface anatomy of the skull.[19] Through the study of human skulls, Thurnam's interests in humanity past and present came together, and his collection of crania included a few contemporary ethnographic examples as well as archaeological specimens.

Comparative craniology was prominent in Thurnam's earliest archaeological investigations. The first five skulls in his collection came from his excavation in 1849 of an 'Anglo-Saxon'

18. Plummer 1899, esp pl 1; reprinted in Fowler 1900, 19–24.
19. Urquhart 2004.

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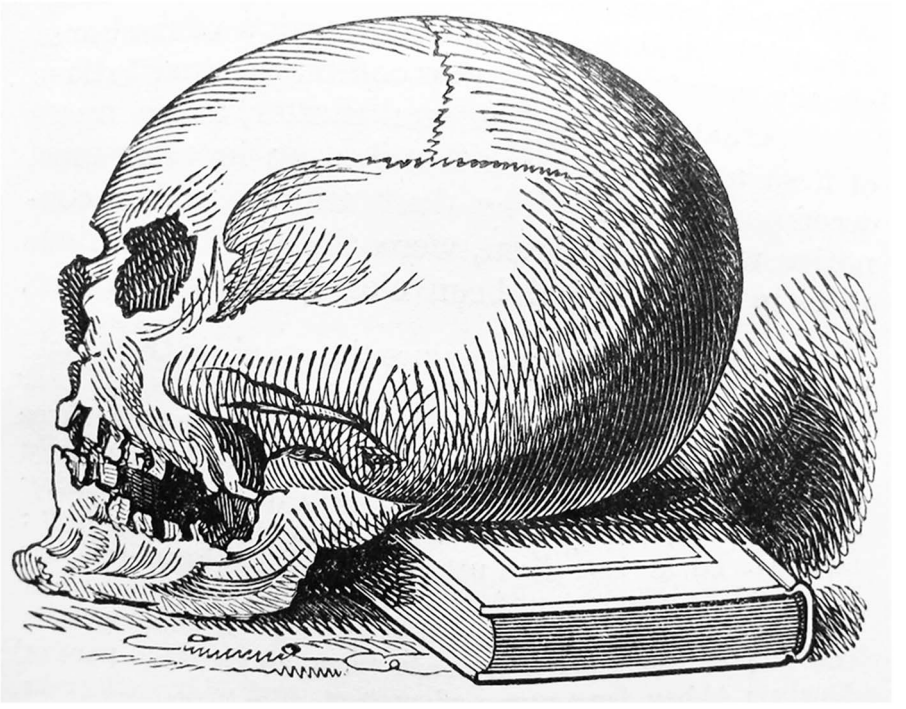


Fig 6. Raine's engraving of the skull of St Cuthbert. *Source*: Raine 1828, 214; Raine 1833, 63

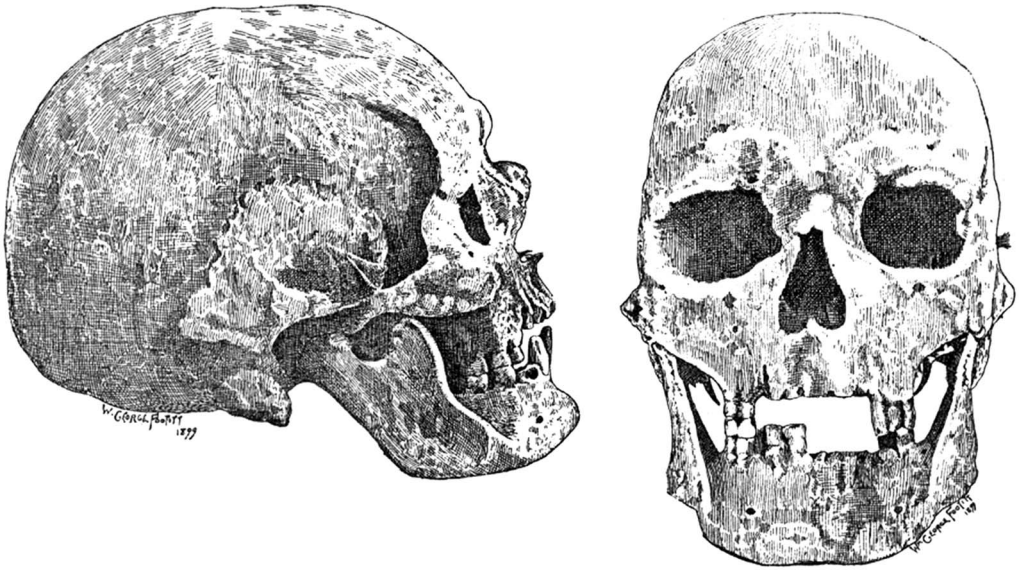


Fig 7. Engraving of the skull of St Cuthbert made at the 1899 exhumation. *Source*: Plummer 1899, pl 1; reprinted in Fowler 1900, 19–24

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cemetery at Lamel Hill in York, which lay within the grounds of the Friends' Retreat. His account of that excavation includes a description and drawings of the shape and condition of the skulls recovered. He noted variations between those that were 'generally small … the frontal region being decidedly narrow and low' and those that 'approximate more closely to the modern European standard, and are better proportioned and tolerably ample in the frontal region'.[20] The desire to recover further skeletal material drove his subsequent investigations of prehistoric barrows in Wessex and his reports to learned societies about the variations that he perceived in skull morphology were based on data carefully recorded from hundreds of examples. Thurnam understood that their interpretation depended on diagnostic artefacts and on the archaeological context of the burials that he was investigating, and he kept careful records of both.[21] The conclusions that he drew from his osteological and archaeological research argued that observed and measurable variations in skulls were a result of biological difference and admixtures of distinct populations in the distant past.[22] As such, his science was very much in tune with that of the leading thinkers of the day, developing alongside the research of such antiquaries as James Cowles Prichard, William Wilde, Daniel Wilson, Thomas Bateman and John Lubbock, who wove the new Scandinavian theory of the 'three ages of man' into British antiquarian scholarship.[23]

Thurnam's reflections on the 'historical ethnology' of prehistoric Britain are best represented by his contributions to *Crania Britannica*, published in six fascicules between 1856 and 1865.[24] His discussion of the recovery of bones and artefacts, and the conclusions that he draws from his observations of both, are much more prosaic than those of his co-author, Joseph Barnard Davis, whose poetic glosses on the probable character traits of the people whose skulls he was examining undermine his data collection and efforts at scientific objectivity.[25] Both men were primarily interested in the peoples that they regarded as the 'aboriginals' of the British Isles, and most of the book is devoted to analysis of 'ancient Britons', rather than to 'invading' Romans, Anglo-Saxons or Scandinavians.[26]

20. Cambridge, Duckworth Laboratory, John Thurnam's 'Catalogus Craniorum', Original File Reference 017, pp 1–2, and Original File Reference 018, pp 1–2; Thurnam 1855, esp 101–2 and pl 3; Davis and Thurnam 1856–65, I, Table VII, 252–3 (nos XXVI–XXVIII and LXIX–L). Modern scholarship is less certain than Thurnam that these remains were of Anglo-Saxon date: Meaney 1964, 293; Geake 1997, 190.
21. British Museum, Register of Antiquities, British and Medieval. February 1873 to December 1878: '12–19 (items 1–323), purchased from Mrs Frances Elizabeth Thurnam, widow of John Thurnam MD FSA. £100.00', including 'no. 223 boss of an Anglo-Saxon shield, found with skull no. 232'. See also Marsden 1999, 85–6.
22. Manias 2012, 919–21, stressing the importance of the role of deep time admixture in Thurnam's theories of the development of race.
23. For an account of the adoption of the 'three age system' by craniologists in England (including Thurnam) in the 1840s and 1850s, see Morse 1999, esp 9–11; see also Giles 2006.
24. Davis and Thurnam 1856–65, I, esp 44–155.
25. See, for example, his comments on a woman's skull from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Long Wittenham, Berks: 'The well proportioned ovoid skull is such as could hardly be distinguished from the bony casket for protecting the tender central mass of the nervous system of an English-woman of the present day … She was interred in the full costume of a matron with her keys attached to her side, as usually worn, and testify to the tender respect in which she was held, most likely by a husband deploring her early fate': Davis and Thurnam 1856–65, II, pl 47 (p 2).
26. As such, it fits into a broader mid-19th-century debate about the peopling of Britain, and the extent of 'Germanic' influence on its population both before and after the Roman invasion. See, for example, Thomas Wright (1852), who argued strongly that Saxon migrations to Britain had evolved from earlier tribal movements of the Belgae, whom he considered to have been more Germanic than Celtic. Our thanks to R Sweet for this reference.

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Although acknowledging Weber's 1830 thesis that a greater diversity of cranial types existed within a population than between populations, the authors of *Crania Britannica* argued nevertheless that a preponderance of characteristics could be attributed to, and be used to identify, individuals belonging to a particular cultural group, whose members were linked by shared biology or 'race'. Davis argued that 'individual skulls may occur in these races which deviate from the rule in some particulars; rarely do they deviate in such an association of peculiarities as to carry them over strictly into the form of a different race'.[27] To this end, Davis and Thurnam published illustrated accounts of selected skulls from known archaeological sites, with the measurement data of each one, alongside an account of the artefacts and context of each burial and an exquisite lithograph engraving of each specimen.[28] They drew conclusions about the chronological, biological and cultural origin of each example, and commented on the extent of agreement with or deviation from the skull type that they considered typical of that 'race', based on measurements of many more examples. Davis argued that the skulls of women tended not to exhibit the hereditary features that were considered peculiar to a particular population, so their published analysis was restricted primarily to the skulls of men, fifty-four of the fifty-seven examples having been taken from skeletons assumed to have been male.[29] Their analyses also made inferences about the physical and intellectual capacity of the individuals whose skulls lay before the reader, although Thurnam's comments in this regard were considerably more restrained and far less inclined to the poetic fancies of 'JBD'.

Thurnam contributed descriptions and analysis of three of the eleven Anglo-Saxon skulls presented in *Crania Britannica*, deriving from cemeteries in West Harnham, Wilts, Brighthampton, Oxon, and Fairford, Glos.[30] These are important for understanding Thurnam's comments on the cast of the skull from Bede's tomb. In all three cases, he considered that the frontal region was 'somewhat narrow'. Of the skull from West Harnham (fig 8), which he considered to have been that of a male of about twenty-five years of age, he said that 'the forehead is poorly developed, being narrow and but moderately elevated'. Comparing it with others from the site, he concluded that:

> On the whole, the examination of the skulls from the Harnham cemetery warrants only the conclusion of a somewhat low grade of intellectual endowment and mental cultivation; and would lead us to assign these graves to the lower rather than the upper ranks of West Saxon settlers, the, perhaps degenerate, successors of the conquerors of this district.[31]

Of the skull from Fairford, which he considered had belonged to a pagan Mercian, he observed that 'the frontal region, somewhat narrow, rises with a uniform though receding

27. Weber 1830; Davis and Thurnam 1856–65, I, 3–4.
28. The lithographs were produced by G H Ford, who later supplied illustrations for Darwin's *Descent of Man*; see Prodger 2009, 44.
29. Davis and Thurnam 1856–65, I, 5: 'The female skull, except in races equally distinguished by forms strikingly impressed, does not exhibit the gentilitial characters eminently'. Measurements of women's skulls were included in Table II ('Ancient Britons': 81 men, 30 women), Table III ('Aboriginal people of Sweden and Denmark': 33 men, 13 women), Table V ('Ancient Romans and Romano-Britons': 31 men, 12 women) and Table VII ('Anglo-Saxons': 30 men, 20 women).
30. Ibid, I, Table VI, nos III–IV and X. These are listed as nos 20, 87 and 15 respectively in Thurnam's catalogue.
31. Ibid, II, 'Anglo-Saxon skull from cemetery at West Harnham, South Wilts', 4 (and I, Table VI, pl III.9).

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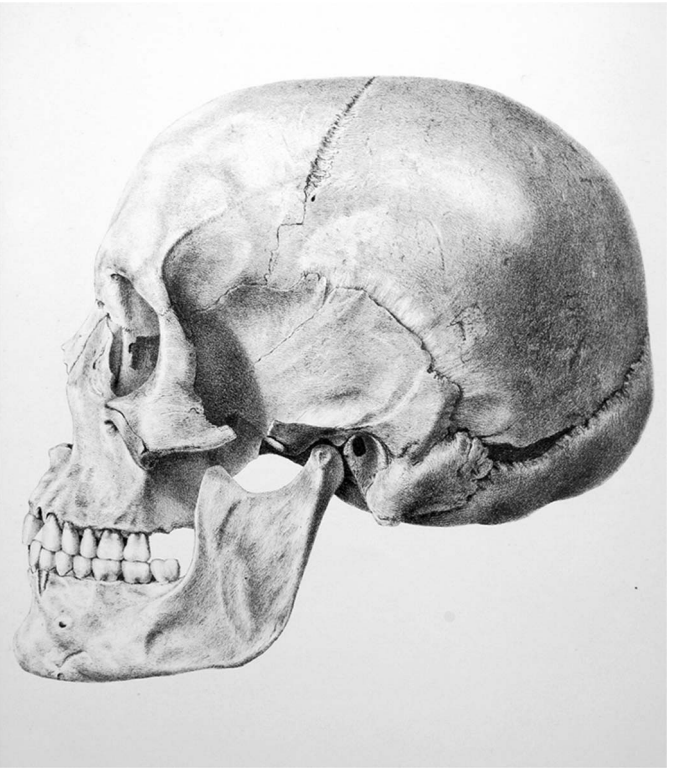


Fig 8. *Crania Britannica*, the skull of an Anglo-Saxon man from West Harnham, Wilts. *Source*: Davis and Thurnam 1856–65

sweep and moderate elevation to the coronal suture'. He argued here that 'the general form of this skull is such as pertains rather to the Anglo-Saxon than the ancient British type'. But he thought that the characteristics of the face – the brows, jaws and teeth – that is, 'the parts which constitute the general physiognomy, are such as belong to the aboriginal Celtic population'. He concluded that the skull must have been 'the cranium of a Mercian of mixed blood; on the paternal side of Angle, and on the maternal of British descent'. Here, Thurnam concurred with contemporary theory that, in cases of intermarriage between 'races', the mother provided the characteristics of the face and 'nutritive organs' and the father the structure of the head and the locomotive powers (that is, 'brain, nerves, organs of sense, and skin and likewise the bones and muscles more particularly of the limbs').[32] To Thurnam, therefore, observed variations from the norm reflected gender and social hierarchy as much as 'race'.[33]

Thurnam's observations on the shape of the frontal regions of these three specimens, and their contribution to his conclusions about the cranial capacity of the 'Anglo-Saxon

32. Ibid, II, 6 (note) and 'Fairford', pl 20 (p 8), quoting Walker 1851, 150 and 202.
33. This distinction is often overlooked by modern scholarship, which tends to focus on the racial aspects of later 19th-century antiquarianism: Williams 2008, 70–3.

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race' as a whole, were prefigured by Davis's more overt racial stereotyping, where the shape of the frontal region was especially important. Davis had argued that:

> The lowest races have undersized and ill-developed brains, narrow and low anterior lobes, manifested in crania of small capacity, of little elevation, contracted and recedent in their frontal region, with generally a large amount of osseous matter in their composition, deposited in comparatively irregular nodular masses so as to occasion heaviness and thickness and rudeness. In this category may be placed the skulls of Australians, almost universally. At the other end of the scale is situated a large fully expanded cranium. Well-developed in every part, lofty and graceful in its vault – wide, capacious, elevated in the frontal region – with all its outlines gently moulded and curved so as to produce the impression of beauty. This is the picture of the skull of a man of European race, usually that of an enlarged capacity.[34]

Of the Anglo-Saxon skulls presented in *Crania Britannica*, Davis concluded that:

> the pleasing oval, rather dolichocephalic, form may best be deserving the epithet 'typical' among them. The eye at once perceives that it is the conformation so generally repeated in modern English skulls. Its permanence, as a characteristic of race, is at once unquestionable and impressive.[35]

Thurnam's thoughts about the Anglo-Saxon skulls in his collection (contextualised by Davis's sweeping generalisations) go some way to explaining the doubts that he had about the identity of the skull that Raine had recovered from Bede's tomb in Durham. Thurnam's catalogue records the following entry:

> *Plaster Casts*
> 4. Anglo-Saxon? Male aet c. 60. Reputed Calvarium of the Venerable Bede from his tomb in Durham Cathedral, opened in 1831. See 'Rev. J. Raine's Brief account of Durham Cathedral' 1833 p 78, 'Giles' Bede and Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' Preface XXII. Much doubt exists as to this very poorly developed calvarium being that of the celebrated man. The story is that the bones of Bede were stolen by Elfred the Sacrist & brought by him from Jarrow to Durham, but though believed to be such, did he succeed in obtaining the actual remains?
>
> Presented by the late Rev. James Raine

Where Raine had observed a 'remarkably flat' *calvarium* 'of the most peculiar formation', Thurnam saw one that he considered 'very poorly developed'. Elsewhere, Thurnam had interpreted this kind of physical feature as profoundly negative, and a sign of low status and meagre intellectual capacity – the antithesis of the reputation of the Venerable Bede. What is more, the skull clearly did not conform to his expectation of a 'typical' cranium of a male of the Anglo-Saxon race, less still the 'pleasing oval' that Davis considered a permanent legacy of Anglo-Saxon breeding to modern Englishmen.

34. Davis and Thurnam 1856–65, I, 235.
35. Ibid, II, 'Litlington', pl 49/50 (p 3).

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THE IDENTITY OF THE BONES

The discovery of the Duckworth cast revives a long-standing dispute: did Raine excavate genuine parts of Bede's skeleton? Raine himself claimed 'no inclination to enquire', noting that 'Bede's bones … were widely dispersed – much, we dare say to the profit of the man who is reported to have stolen them from their first resting-place at Jarrow'.[36] Thurnam, as we have seen, was far more sceptical. The answer is best considered in four stages of reverse chronology.[37]

From 1832 to the Reformation destruction of Bede's shrine

There seems no reason to question the fact that Raine excavated a coffined burial that had lain undisturbed since the destruction of Bede's shrine in November 1542 – an act for which the relevant payments survive in the cathedral's accounts:

> Post Festum Divi Michaelis die S. Andreae. Solut' Johanni Symson pro ablacione Tumbae S. Cuthberti & Tumbae S Bedae pro quattuor diebus ijs per me Robertum Dalton …
>
> Payd to Rayffe Skelis and iij fellows for taking away Sanct Beds Tummbe 15^{d}.[38]

According to the late sixteenth-century *Rites of Durham* the saint's remains were buried where the shrine had once stood, and the description in *Rites* of the position of the pre-Reformation shrine on the south side of the Galilee chapel certainly equates with the site of the tomb as it was depicted in eighteenth-century illustrations.[39] In that position the modest tomb had remained an object of post-Reformation pilgrimage and of occasional offerings.[40] There were, however, claims recorded by the poet Robert Southey in 1826 that the zealous Protestant William Whittingham had removed the skeleton during his stormy tenure as Dean (1563–79), so that the tomb might no longer 'be visited by Papists'.[41] It is true that Whittingham (and his wife), in the words of *Rites*, 'could not abyde anye auncyent monuments, nor nothing that appteyned to any godlie Religiousnes or monasticall liffe'.[42] But the author of *Rites* was ever anxious to chronicle the extent of Whittingham's destructive activities and it is therefore significant that he makes no mention of any interference with Bede's tomb. Moreover Raine's discovery, after Southey's publication, of a *partial* skeleton in the grave, is difficult to explain if Whittingham had indeed emptied the burial. The evidence thus points to Raine's skeletal remains being those that were removed from the shrine in the Galilee chapel at the time of the Reformation.

From the Reformation destruction to the 1104 translation of St Cuthbert's shrine

The bones that were re-buried in November 1542 can reasonably be identified with those described by Symeon of Durham in his *Libellus de Exordio* as having been found, quite

36. Raine 1833, 80.
37. Bailey 2001; Bailey and Cambridge forthcoming.
38. Raine 1828, 178; see also Fowler 1903, 103.
39. Smith 1722, pl facing p 805; Carter 1801, 7, 13, pl II; Fowler 1903, 103; Greenwell 1905, pl IV.
40. Bailey 2001, 179.
41. Southey 1826, 91.
42. Fowler 1903, 60.

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separate from other relics, in a small linen bag (*in lineo saccello*) in the coffin of St Cuthbert when the island saint was translated into the new Norman cathedral in 1104.[43] Symeon was writing in 1115 at the latest, and more probably between 1104 and 1107. He had been present at the translation and there can therefore be no question that he had seen a bag of bones that he believed to be the remains of Bede.[44] What is more, the audience for his *Libellus* included a large number of his community who had witnessed Cuthbert's coffin being opened; their presence argues against any suspicion that Symeon has invented a discovery narrative. The same information, though in a more ambiguous form, is repeated in a second Durham text, *De Miraculis et Translationibus Sancti Cuthberti* (the '*Anonymous Account*') whose relevant section was composed around 1124.[45]

Symeon repeated the claim to Durham's possession in a letter to Dean Hugh of York in 1130–2 while, slightly later, the 1143/52 Durham relic list acknowledges the presence of *corpus venerabilis Bede presbiteri et doctoris* among Durham's treasures.[46] Acceptance of Symeon's assertion – though far from universal and not always wholehearted – had reached as far as Malmesbury, Winchester and Exeter in the first half of the twelfth century.[47]

The *Anonymous Account* records that the relics found in Cuthbert's coffin in 1104 were subsequently – with the exception of Oswald's head, which was replaced alongside Cuthbert – preserved honourably in the church (*celebriter reservantur reliquiae*); Reginald of Durham, writing *c* 1167, described them as being placed in specially prepared wooden receptacles (*vasculis ligneis*).[48] Soon after, according to Geoffrey, writing from the Durham cell of Coldingham in *c* 1214, Bishop Hugh of le Puiset (1154–95) removed the Bedan bones into an elaborate shrine of gold and silver – a gift commemorated by a verse inscription preserved in the post-Reformation *Rites of Durham*.[49] The same enshrinement is recorded in a continuation of Symeon's *Libellus* found now in Cambridge, University Library,[50] written in the last quarter of the twelfth century. Significantly, for present purposes, this text adds the further information that the Bedan bones were placed in the shrine 'together with the relics of many other saints' (*cum multorum aliorum sanctorum reliquiis*).[51] If true, this might seem to raise the possibility that his remains could have been fused, or confused, with other relics at this point. Given, however, that it was Bede's bones that formed the primary element of the shrine's contents and that the Reformation workmen had no problem in assembling a partial skeleton, it is probable that the other *reliquiis* were non-corporeal or, even if they were not, that Bede's remains continued to be kept distinct from those associated with *aliorum sanctorum.* Indeed it is worth noting that their identity was probably aided by some form of *authenticum* or written identification. Such labelling was an essential part of veneration;[52] early medieval continental examples survive in some numbers at Chelles and Sens and the practice is attested in Anglo-Saxon England from

43. Rollason 2000, 166; see also 56–8, 68.
44. Ibid, xlii, xliv, 53, 167; Raine 1835, 84.
45. Arnold 1882–5, I, 252–3; for the date, see Rollason 2000, lxxv–lxxvi.
46. Arnold 1882–5, I, 228; Battiscombe 1956, 113; Rollason 1998, 26.
47. Edwards 1866, 279; Hamilton 1870, 275; Doble 1940, 13; for other 12th-century views, see Bailey 2001, 174.
48. Arnold 1882–5, I, 255; Raine 1835, 85.
49. Raine 1839, 11; Fowler 1903, 45.
50. Shelf mark: Ff i.27.
51. Rollason 2000, xxvii, 322.
52. McCormick 2001, 283–4.

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St Wilfrid in the seventh century to Exeter in the tenth.[53] It is perhaps particularly relevant here to recognise that the lack of such labelling (*sine billis*) in post-Norman Durham was sufficiently exceptional as to merit noting in the 1383 relic list.[54]

Until 1370 le Puiset's shrine was set in the feretory of the cathedral but it was then moved to the Galilee chapel, according to another verse inscription recorded in *The Rites of Durham*, at the instigation of Richard of Barnard Castle, Archdeacon of Northumberland; the relocation may well, as Halsey has argued, have been designed to ease crowd pressure in the sanctuary.[55] Here the relics remained, apart from occasional processional excursions, until the Reformation destruction.[56]

It follows from all this that the skeletal remains excavated by Raine, with some reservations stemming from the information provided by the *Libellus* continuator, can be plausibly traced back to those found at the 1104 translation of St Cuthbert and subsequently deposited in le Puiset's shrine; their fragmentary nature indeed chimes well with the fact that they could be contained in a small linen bag.

A larger problem remains, however: was Symeon justified in claiming that the bagged bones he had seen were those of Bede? The answer to that question depends on three interrelated issues: the credibility of Symeon's account of how the Bedan bones reached Durham; the date of the late Old English poem *De Situ Dunelmi*; and the plausibility of alternative modern narratives.

The Bedan identity of Symeon's bagged bones

Symeon explained the presence of Bede's bones in the Cuthbert coffin as the work of Elfred, son of Westou (*fl c* 1020– *c* 1060):

> Every year on the anniversary of the death of Bede the teacher, Elfred was accustomed to visit Jarrow, where he knew Bede to have lived, died and been buried, and there he would stay saying prayers and keeping vigil. On one occasion when he had gone there according to his custom, and had passed several days alone in the church engaged in praying and keeping vigil, he left at the crack of dawn without his companions knowing (which he had never been accustomed to do before) and returned to Durham, clearly not wishing to have any witness to his secret. For, although he afterwards lived for many years, he never again visited the aforesaid monastery, as if he had gained possession of what he desired. So that when he was asked by those close to him, as he very often was, where the bones of the venerable Bede rested, he was accustomed to reply as though he were quite sure of the answer: 'No one knows this more certainly than I. O beloved friends! You may regard it as firm and certain and beyond any doubt, that the same coffin which contains the most sacred body of father Cuthbert also contains the bones of the venerable doctor and monk Bede. No one should look for any portion of his relics outside the shelter of this coffin'. Having said this he instructed those close to him to keep silent about it, lest the outsiders who were at that time living in the

53. Colgrave 1927, 66; Bruckner and Marichal 1985, 84–108; Bruckner and Marichal 1987, 40–59; Connor 1993, 172; McCormick 2001, 286–318.
54. Fowler 1899, 427, 430, 431, 433.
55. Fowler 1903, 45; Halsey 1980, 61.
56. Fowler 1903, 44–5, 96, 103–4, 105.

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> church, should contrive some mischief, for their chief aim was to carry off relics of the saints, and above all those of Bede, if they could. For this reason when he enshrined the bones of the saints with the body of St Cuthbert (as was described above), he took care to do this very secretly. His account of Bede agrees also with that poem in the English language which, when it speaks of the condition of this church and the relics of saints which are contained in it, mentions the relics of Bede there with those of other saints. It is known for certain that it was his bones which were found many years later enshrined with the incorrupt body of the father Cuthbert, where they had been kept separate from the other relics by being contained in a linen bag.[57]

Elfred was sacristan and custodian of the Cuthbert shrine and therefore had access to the reliquary; a late twelfth-century source indeed describes him as clipping the saint's nails and beard.[58] He was also assiduous in collecting together in Durham the relics of early Northumbrian saints as part of an apparent policy by the secular canons of the *Congregatio Sancti Cuthberti* to assert their role as the spiritual and land-holding inheritor, and relic repository, of the golden age of Northumbrian monasticism associated with Cuthbert and Bede – a policy continued by their Benedictine and Norman successors.[59]

It must be admitted that the story, as narrated by Symeon, is a strange one. It is not surprising therefore that a series of distinguished documentary and literary historians have rejected the Elfred narrative.[60] But there are strong arguments in its favour which are set out below.

Firstly, that Bede's relics were believed to be present in Durham before Symeon's record is seemingly supported by their listing in the Old English poem *De Situ Dunelmi*; its composition date is uncertain but it certainly pre-dates Symeon's text since, as seen above, he alludes to it. The standard edition of the poem, however, assigns it to a period after 1104, and influential arguments, notably by Kendall, have convinced many writers that its text reflects information which could only have been available *after* the 1104 translation of Cuthbert's remains into the new Norman cathedral.[61] In their view, therefore, the poem does not provide independent evidence for knowledge of the presence of Bede's relics in Durham *before* that translation. Against this near-total critical consensus, however, two recent papers have set out a detailed rejection of the 'post-1104' thesis, arguing *inter alia* that the poem's riddling allusions fail to carry the chronological significance assigned to them by Kendall.[62] More importantly, these two papers stress the significance of the context in which Symeon refers to the poem. Writing probably between 1104 and 1107 – and certainly before 1115 – he is using it as evidence to support his story about Elfred's removal of Bede's bones from Jarrow. It is difficult to see why he should refer to that poem to strengthen his case *if* it were such a recent composition – and, moreover, a work that must have emerged

57. Rollason 2000, 165–7.
58. Raine 1835, 57–8.
59. Arnold 1882–5, II, 33; Rollason 1989, 212; Bailey 2001, 173. On medieval relic theft, see Geary 1978.
60. For example, Kendall 1984 and 1988; Ward 1998; Higham 2006, 29; Blurton 2008; Grossi 2012.
61. For this edition, see Dobbie 1942, 27. Post-1104 arguments depend heavily on Kendall 1984 and 1988 together with Evan 2013. Widespread acceptance of this dating can be exemplified by Greenfield and Calder 1986, 249; Bragg 1991, 65; Fulk and Cain 2003, 187–8; Blurton 2008; Magennis 2011, 29; Grossi 2012.
62. O'Donnell 2014; Bailey and Cambridge forthcoming.

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from the same small local literate community to which Symeon himself belonged. In our view, these arguments, combined with the lack of explicit reference in the poem to the discoveries made in 1104, imply knowledge of claims to Bede's Durham presence before the great translation ceremony.[63]

The fact that Symeon was drawing upon a traditional view that Bede's relics were present in Durham does not, of course, offer full endorsement of the truth of the Elfred narrative. The bones, if present, could have arrived at another date. Among these possibilities, the most fully argued is a proposal by Kendall and Ward.[64] They suggest that, if the bones ever were actually translated from Jarrow, then they arrived in the period *c* 1083 when the Benedictine monks of Jarrow were brought to Durham to replace the expelled *Congregatio* clerks. This scenario is, however, actually less plausible than Symeon's narrative. Symeon had entered the Benedictine community in *c* 1089/91, at which stage at least four of the monks who had been transferred from Jarrow were still alive; falsifying the date and circumstances of a recent acquisition would consequently have been somewhat difficult.[65] There are two further arguments against a 1083 transfer. Firstly, unless we view the *Anonymous Account*'s description of the monks' ignorance as to the internal arrangements of the Cuthbert coffin in 1104 as a literary device, then it is highly unlikely that there could have been any intrusion as late as the 1080s, given the extent of contact between the Benedictine monks and their *Congregatio* predecessors.[66] Secondly, delivery of Bede's remains to Durham by the transferred Jarrow monks would actually have better fitted with Symeon's main agenda of reinforcing the Benedictine priory's claims to be the proper *monastic* custodians of Northumbria's saintly relics; that he did not make this claim is thus doubly significant.

Granted, on the evidence of the Old English poem, that knowledge of the claimed presence of Bedan relics in Durham pre-dates Symeon and the 1104 opening of Cuthbert's coffin – and recognising the weakness of the case for a transfer *c* 1083 – we are thrown back on Symeon's story of Elfred. This, however, as we have noted, has not found widespread acceptance among historians, despite the fact that Symeon's information came from Elfred's contemporaries, notably a monk called Gamel.[67] But many of the claimed peculiarities in Symeon's account are now more readily explicable than once they seemed. Thus Kendall objected to the clandestine nature of Elfred's theft on the grounds that the monastic house at Jarrow had collapsed in the later ninth century, and that there would therefore be no local opposition to the open removal of relics.[68] Yet this ignored the fact that there is sculptural evidence for continuity of Christian activity on the site, a continuity which has been more recently confirmed by archaeological discoveries.[69] Moreover, Elfred and his companions (*sociis*) were described by Symeon as being regular worshippers at Jarrow on Bede's anniversary (*anniuersaria dormitionis*), a phrase that implies the existence of some form of local liturgical celebration. Against this background, illicit removal under cover of darkness would have been essential.

63. As argued by Offler 1962 and accepted by Rollason 2000, 167.
64. Kendall 1984, 18; Ward 1998, 142.
65. Piper 1986, 37; Piper 1989, 437; Piper 2007, III, 134.
66. Arnold 1882–5, I, 248; Cambridge 2015.
67. Rollason 2000, 162–3; Aird 1998, 120–2; for the importance of Symeon's links with the pre-1083 community at Durham, see also Rollason 2000, lxxxi–lxxxiii, 21, 105, 147, 151, 160, 163, 174, 188; Meehan 1975, 57–8.
68. Kendall 1984, 16.
69. Cramp 1984, 107, 109; Cramp 2005, 115–17, 229–30, 237–41, 242–5; Cramp 2006, 200, 203, 272.

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The puzzle of Elfred's insistence on secrecy about the presence of Bedan relics in the Cuthbert reliquary coffin is also readily explained. Symeon refers to Elfred's justification as lying in response to threats posed by 'outsiders' (*extranei*) in Durham who might be tempted to remove relics. It is not difficult to identify these outsiders, for Symeon supplies a full account of the depredations of the successive eleventh-century bishops, Æthelric and Æthelwine, who occupied the see between 1041 and 1071 and who both had strong links to Peterborough.[70] The *Congregatio* had good reason to suppress news of its acquisition.

Awkward as some aspects of the story of Elfred may now appear, it can probably be accepted as true. The removal of Bede's bones from Jarrow would also explain, as Cramp has emphasised, why Symeon notes that it was a Jarrow *porticus* and not his *tomb* that 'provides the faithful with a memorial to his [Bede's] name which they should revere' (*uenerandam fidelibus nominis eius ibidem prestat memoriam*).[71]

Exactly how Symeon and his colleagues were able to identify the bagged bones discovered in 1104 as the Bedan relics purloined by Elfred might seem an unanswerable question. But, as noted above, they could have carried some form of *authenticum*. There is, however, another reason that could have contributed to his certainty. If we examine the mid-twelfth-century Durham relic list, it includes a number of items that came from Cuthbert's coffin, including bones of Balthere and Billfrith, Æbbe and Æthelgitha, which Symeon listed as being among Elfred's acquisitions.[72] But these relics, like almost all of the other corporeal remains in the twelfth-century record, are listed as 'bones' (*ossa*). The term *corpus* (body) is only applied to the relics of Cuthbert, Boisil and Bede and thus implies the survival of significantly large remains. Since we know that Boisil's bones, after their removal from Melrose by Elfred, were separately enshrined in Durham's Anglo-Saxon cathedral, the only contents of the reliquary coffin that would merit the description of *corpus* were the relics of Cuthbert and Bede.[73] If we place this information alongside Elfred's claim that no portion of Bede's relics remained outside the Cuthbert reliquary coffin – and thus, by implication, that he had removed all the bones that were available at Jarrow – then it follows that Bede's relics must have formed a substantial contribution to the coffin's contents, recognisably distinct from the other smaller corporeal fragments that had accumulated over the centuries alongside Cuthbert.

On balance, therefore, the elusive evidence points to the authenticity of the Durham tradition of Elfred's theft and the Jarrow derivation of the bones found *in lineo saccello*.

From Elfred to Bede's death

The final part of the history takes us back to Bede's death on Ascension Eve, AD 735, and his assumed burial at Jarrow. As has been discussed elsewhere, it is clear that Cuthbert, Bede's own pupil and abbot of Wearmouth–Jarrow in the second half of the eighth century, was actively engaged in promoting Bede's cult. His description of his master's death and the promise of a fuller *Vita* would have provided crucial components of that cult.[74] And that it

70. Rollason 2000, 170, 192–4; Meehan 1975. For a recent succinct summary, see Woodman 2012, 310–16.
71. Rollason 2000, 68; Cramp 2005, 34.
72. Battiscombe 1956, 113–14; Rollason 2000, 162–4.
73. For Boisil see Rollason 2000, 164.
74. Colgrave and Mynors 1969, 580–7; McCready 1995, 77–9; Bailey 2001, 165–7; Rollason 2010, 196.

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had some limited success is indicated by a letter of 764 from Cuthbert to Lul, Archbishop of Mainz, thanking him for his gift of pure silk for the relics of Bede.[75] Whether this silk was to wrap corporeal or other relics, or, indeed, to cover Bede's tomb, the gift does indicate that a cult was developing at Jarrow in the later eighth century and (whether translated from his burial place or not) his bodily remains must have been central to that devotion; their location cannot have been in doubt. It has been suggested that the cult seems to have faltered after Abbot Cuthbert's death, though in the late eighth century Alcuin did record an unlocated miracle achieved by his relics and some form of Bedan relic had reached Fulda by 819.[76] But Bede's name is noticeably absent from eighth- and ninth-century English or English-derived calendars and from several of the pre-Conquest lists of saints' resting places;[77] and his cause cannot have been helped by the collapse of the monastery at Jarrow in the course of the later ninth century, which is suggested by its estates being granted to other landlords even though, as we have seen, some excavated structures and finds, together with stone sculpture, show that an active Christian church continued at the site into the tenth and eleventh centuries.[78]

Though the cult may have temporarily failed to gain widespread acceptance – 'temporarily' because it was to be revived in the tenth and eleventh centuries in southern England – belief in its continued existence at Jarrow is recorded in one list of saints' resting places preserved by the twelfth-century chronicler Hugh Candidus of Peterborough.[79] Writing in, or soon after, 1155, he cites the resting place of *sanctus Beda presbyter* under *Girum* (Jarrow). His lists seem to have been compiled in the late eleventh century and partly derive, in a complex manner, from pre-Conquest material. Whatever the date at which *Girum* entered the train of transmission that resulted in its appearance in Hugh's text, it is valuable additional evidence for awareness of a Bedan cult centre at Anglo-Saxon Jarrow to be set alongside Elfred's recognition of Bede's anniversary.

In summary, despite the general lack of ninth- and tenth-century documentation, which is common to all Northumbria, there is no real reason to doubt that the location of Bede's bones, whether translated or not, was known in Jarrow from the date of his death through to the period of Elfred's appearance and theft. What is also clear from the evidence we have reviewed is that the cast made by Raine was taken from a skull that, from at least the early twelfth century, was regarded as that of Bede. Acceptance of the main lines of Elfred's narrative would allow us to take that identification back to his eighth-century burial. On balance we regard the line of evidence as plausible; the Duckworth cast could indeed have been taken from the skull of the Venerable Bede.

APPENDIX

The ring from Bede's tomb

James Raine's account of his 1831 excavation of Bede's tomb describes the discovery of a 'massy ring of iron, plated with a thick coat of gold, and containing upon a boss the device of

75. Tangl 1916, 250 (letter no. 116).
76. Godman 1982, 102–4; Dümmler 1964, 208.
77. Bailey 2001, 167–8; Pfaff 1993.
78. Cambridge 1984, 73; Rollason 2000, 125 n 80; South 2002, 89, 109–10.
79. Mellows 1949, 64; Rollason 1978, 70–2; Butler 1987, 94–9.

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a cinquefoil, a common ornament at the time of the dissolution'.[80] No illustration of this ring was published by Raine, nor has it been figured in any subsequent publication – though it was listed as among the Cathedral Library's holdings in a 1925 catalogue and a 1978 exhibition guide.[81] A pen-and-ink drawing of the ring does, however, appear as a paste-in to the Newcastle City Library's copy of Mackenzie and Ross's 1834 description of the County Palatine of Durham.[82] This drawing of the ring is accompanied by a pen-and-ink sketch of the seated figure of Bede, based on a woodblock image originally published in 1493 in the *Nuremberg Chronicle*.[83] The sketch of Bede is dated 1832 and thus pre-dates Raine's published account (fig 9). The artist initialled his work in the lower corner of the page as 'M T'. We are grateful to Dr Ian Doyle for his identification of the initials as those of Matthew Thompson, a Durham artist who had been employed by Raine in his publication of the excavation of the tomb of St Cuthbert. His record provides useful confirmation of the Bedan identification of the ring now surviving in the cathedral collection as 'Ring no. 3(28) – 2' (fig 10).

The ring is made of some form of alloy and is heavily gilded, but with the original base metal showing through where worn. It has an internal diameter of *c* 230mm. The shank carries diagonal mouldings at the back, decoration that changes to two parallel mouldings marked by raised small pellets running up towards the shoulders. The round bezel is surrounded by two frames, the internal one decorated with pellets. The central cast motif, flanked by four arrow-like foliate forms, consists of a five-leaved flower or cinquefoil, the leaf forms being heart-shaped with a central vein. The intaglio cutting of the decoration shows that it was originally designed as a signet ring for sealing letters or instructions.

The cathedral's label dates the object to the sixteenth century and we are grateful to John Cherry, FSA, for his view that the object can be assigned to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries. It therefore has no early medieval association with Bede or his relics; as a non-episcopal cleric Bede would not, in any case, have worn a ring. Consequently it must have been placed in the grave during the re-burial after the 1542 destruction of the shrine recorded in the Durham accounts.[84] Whether it had been found among recent shrine offerings during the 1542 works, or was newly introduced as a final tribute, remains an insoluble problem.[85] However, when set alongside the respectful manner in which the fragmentary skeletal remains had been laid out full length in anatomical order within the coffin, the ring's presence does point to a continued veneration of the Jarrow scholar even at the moment of his shrine's destruction.

Raine's account suggests that the ring had been placed in the position where it would have been if the hand had been raised in blessing; given the seeming absence of any finger bones this appears an unlikely interpretation. He also records that the ring was 'lined internally with one or two folds of thick woollen cloth, as if to fit it to its situation'.[86] It is far

80. Raine 1833, 80.
81. Hughes 1925, 89; Brown 1978, 30.
82. Mackenzie and Ross 1834, II, facing p 385.
83. For the image of Bede in the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, fol 158, see the digital facsimile at <http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/PR-INC-00000-A-00007-00002-00888/362> (accessed 2 June 2015).
84. See Bailey 2001, 178–9.
85. A local parallel for later deposition of a ring in a shrine is provided by the 13th-century ring that Nicholas Harpsfield claimed to have been found in St Cuthbert's coffin in 1537: Tonnochy 1956. Offerings of rings are a well-known feature of medieval shrines: see Nilson 1998, 109.
86. Raine 1833, 80.

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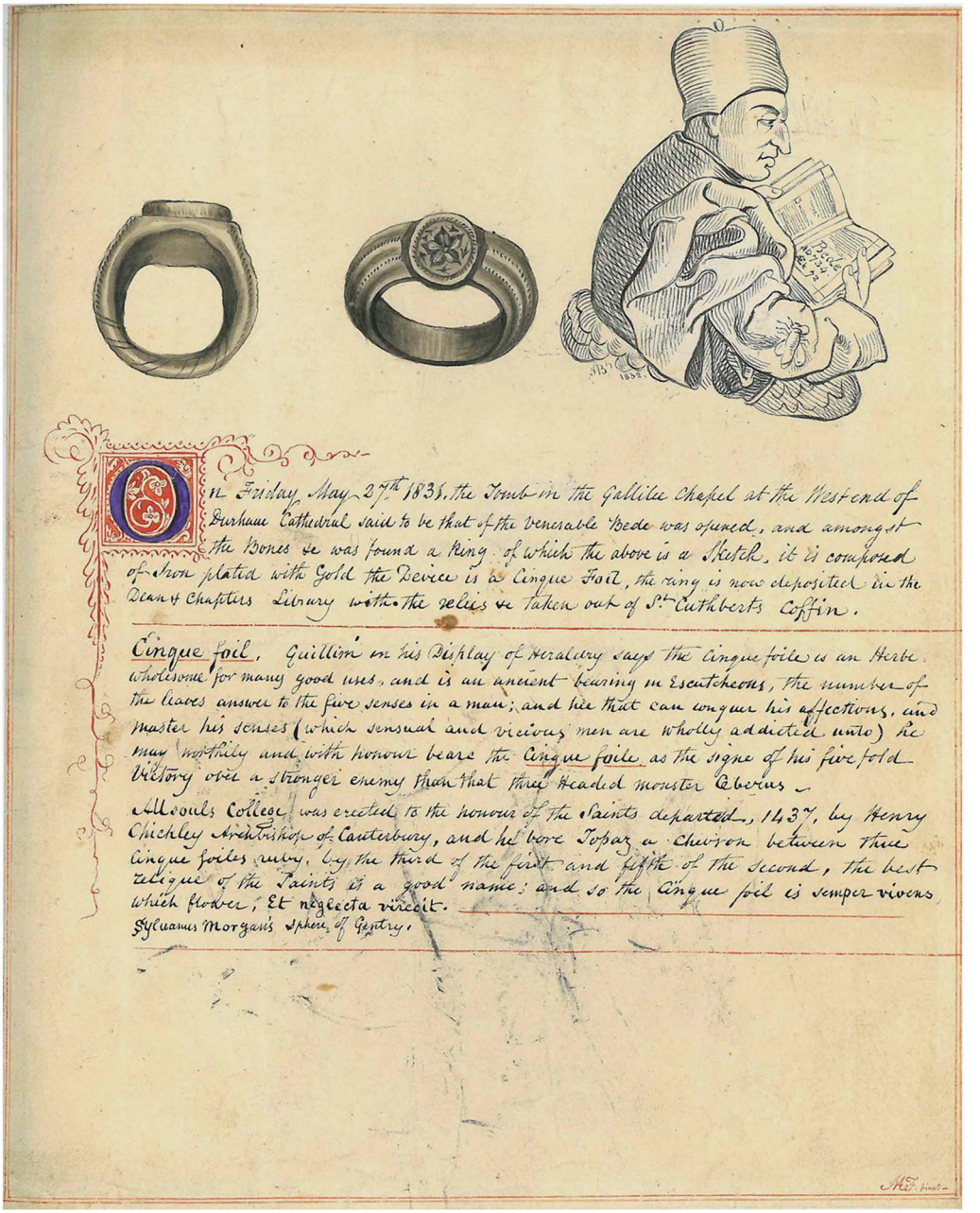


Fig 9. Manuscript addition to Newcastle City Library's copy of Mackenzie and Ross 1834. *Photograph*: courtesy of Newcastle City Library

from clear what he meant by the latter phrase unless he believed that the ring had been placed on a now-lost finger which was much thinner than the internal dimensions of the ring and thus would have been worn over a glove, of which the woollen cloth may have been the fragmentary survival. But the cloth might equally have been a fragment of

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Fig 10. The ring found in Bede's tomb. *Photograph*: courtesy of the Chapter of Durham Cathedral

textile associated with either the saint or the shrine – possibly even a piece *de tunica Sci Bede* that figures in the Durham relic inventory in an early fourteenth-century York Minster manuscript and in Richard de Segruk's list of 1383.[87]

In the absence of an inscription or highly distinctive armorial on the ring, its original ownership cannot now be ascertained, and the online catalogue of the magnificent seal collection in Durham Cathedral provides no exact parallel for this combination of cinquefoil and arrow-like leaves;[88] neither do any of the numerous publications by C H Blair of regional seals and armorials.[89] In the Durham collection there are, however, two round signets with cinquefoils, without accompanying inscription – nos 623 and 1,241, dated respectively to 1457 and 1538 – and in the same archive there are other seals using the motif, though these latter are accompanied by inscriptions and non-foliate decoration as well as being often of larger or non-circular form (nos 946, 1,152, 1,654, 1,677, 1,731, 1,796, 1,821, 2,322, 2,507–2,511, 2,600, 2,647, 2,939 and 2,984). This list includes a cluster associated with the local Umfraville family for whom the motif, with its distinctive heart-shaped leaves, is a persistent armorial device.[90]

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87. York, York Minster Chapter Library, XVI. I. 12, printed in Raine 1839, cccxxix; for Richard de Segruk's list, see Fowler 1899, 429.
88. Durham University Library, Archives and Special Collections, Medieval Seals in the Durham Cathedral Muniments; reference code: GB-0033-DCD.
89. Blair 1910; 1923; 1924; 1927; 1942; 1944; 1945; 1949.
90. Blair 1910, 132, 157 and pl IV facing p 132; Blair 1945, 72.

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RÉSUMÉ

En 1831, le chanoine James Raine fit ouvrir le tombeau de Bede, dans la cathédrale de Durham, et mit au jour un squelette incomplet, accompagné d'un anneau médiéval. Il fit réaliser trois moulages du crâne; la redécouverte récente d'un de ces moulages conduit à examiner l'authenticité des vestiges et l'intérêt porté à la craniologie par les archéologues au milieu du XIXe.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

1831 ließ der Chorherr James Raine die Grabstätte des Beda Venerabilis in der Kathedrale von Durham öffnen, in der ein teilweises Skelett und ein mittelalterlicher Ring gefunden wurden. Einer der vom Schädel angefertigten drei Abgüsse wurde jüngst wieder aufgefunden und er diente dazu, die Authentizität der Überreste und auch das antiquarische Interesse an der Kraniologie in der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts zu prüfen.

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