

**A Misplaced Miracle: the origins of St Modwynn of
Burton and St Eadgyth of Polesworth**

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Abstract

The twelfth-century *Life* of St Modwynn of Burton-upon-Trent (Staffordshire) includes an episode in which St Modwynn and St Eadgyth of Polesworth (Warwickshire) resurrect a nun named Osgyth who had drowned in a river. Current scholarly consensus locates the origins of this miracle with the cult of St Osgyth of Aylesbury (Buckinghamshire). This article seeks to restore the earliest written version of the miracle to St Modwynn, and goes on to consider the place of the miracle in the early medieval cults of St Modwynn and St Eadgyth. It is suggested that the miracle was first part of St Eadgyth's cult, and that St Modwynn was intruded at some point in the eleventh century during the early development of the Benedictine monastery at Burton.

Key words

Hagiography, St Modwynn of Burton, St Eadgyth of Polesworth, Anglo-Saxon minsters

Recent scholarship on the local saints of Anglo-Saxon England has demonstrated their importance to the founding and establishment of the minsters that housed them during the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries.¹ Some of these saints are known to have been members of the royal or noble dynasties of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and their cults served to define sacred landscapes, contributing much to the contemporary identities of these kingdoms and often enshrining connections forged between them through dynastic marriage or over-kingship.² Unfortunately, the origins of many others remain mysterious, their cults only coming to light in later sources; such cases indicate an ongoing importance for these cults, both to their communities and within a broader sacred landscape, although to what extent they demonstrate continuity or reinvention is a matter for detailed local study. Indeed, the progress of scholarship on local saints' cults rests on local case studies, each of which can contribute to a broader understanding of their roles in society, both at the times of their establishment and subsequently.

The case study offered here concerns St Modwynn of Burton-upon-Trent (Staffordshire) and St Eadgyth of Polesworth (Warwickshire), who are connected by the following miracle story told by Geoffrey, abbot of Burton (1114–1150), in his *Life and Miracles of St Modwenna*. St Eadgyth sent a nun, Osgyth, from her monastery at Polesworth to take a book to St Modwynn, who was then living in a nearby hermitage. However, on the way the nun fell into a

¹ See for example A. Thacker and R. Sharpe (eds.), *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West* (Oxford, 2002), and in particular the articles by John Blair ('A Saint for Every Minster? Local Cults in Anglo-Saxon England', and 'A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Saints', 455–565), who has done much to take forward the study of Anglo-Saxon local saints.

² A good example in a Northumbrian context is provided by I. Wood, 'Monasteries and the Geography of Power in the Age of Bede', *Northern History*, 45 (2008), 11–25.

river and drowned, but was resurrected three days later by the prayers of St Modwynn and St Eadgyth, who then welcomed the nun on the riverbank when she stepped up out of the water, the book still clutched in her hands.

This paper aims to explore the early hagiography of St Modwynn of Burton and St Eadgyth of Polesworth. In particular, it seeks to restore the resurrection miracle to St Modwynn; since 1970, scholarly consensus has assigned the primary version of this miracle to St Eadburh of Bicester following Denis Bethell's analysis of the hagiography of St Osgyth of Chich (Essex) and Aylesbury (Buckinghamshire).³ In what follows, St Modwynn's claim to the earliest written version of this miracle will be promoted. An analysis of the rest of the evidence for the early cults of St Modwynn and St Eadgyth will then be presented, before a concluding discussion attempts to ascribe a hypothetical earlier version of the tale to St Eadgyth, and elucidates what can be said concerning the origins of both saints, as well as their subsequent reuse.

Geoffrey writes of 'Editha', 'Moduenna' and 'Osid' in his work. In what follows, the Old English forms Eadgyth, Modwynn and Osgyth will be used, except where reference to the forms in the text is explicitly intended. Whilst Eadgyth is the obvious root of 'Editha', and Osgyth of 'Osid', Modwynn, meaning 'heart's delight', is less secure, but has been proposed by Robert Bartlett as a

³ Christopher Hohler proposed that the *Life* of St Osgyth should be understood as a composite of two distinct Osgyths, one at Aylesbury, the other at Chich: C. Hohler, 'St Osyth and Aylesbury', in *Records of Buckinghamshire*, 18 (1966), 61–72; accepting this proposition, Denis Bethell attempted to disentangle the various textual elements of the legends: D. Bethell, 'The Lives of St Osyth of Essex and St Osyth of Aylesbury', in *Analecta Bollandiana*, 88 (1970), 75–127. The jury is still out on whether Osgyth is a divided or conflated saint: see R. P. Hagerty, 'The Buckinghamshire Saints Reconsidered 2: St Osyth and St Edith of Aylesbury', in *Records of Buckinghamshire*, 29 (1987), 125–32; J. Blair, 'A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Saints', in A. Thacker and R. Sharpe, *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West* (Oxford, 2002), 495–565 (at 549).

'perfectly plausible, although not otherwise recorded' Old English root for Geoffrey's 'Modwenna'.⁴

St Modwynn's hagiography

The following paragraphs rehearse the complex relationship of St Modwynn and St Eadgyth to surviving hagiographical works, and include an extended discussion of the river miracle, its appearances and revisions, throughout several different saints' *Lives*. The first *Life* to include both saints explicitly was that written by Geoffrey, although they appear under slightly different names in an earlier work. Beyond the presence of her relics, not much was known of St Modwynn at Burton when Geoffrey arrived there to take up his abbacy in 1114. He therefore undertook a period of research, and eventually came across 'a hidden treasure containing priceless riches', which, because 'the style was displeasing and some parts of the book were, so to speak, a disorderly jumble', he determined to rewrite, adding things 'learned from the trustworthy and reliable report of truthful men, who had knowledge of them from their elders or witnessed them at first hand.'⁵ Geoffrey probably completed St Modwynn's *Life* at some point between 1118 and 1135.⁶ His source, the 'hidden treasure', was the *Life of St Monenna*, abbess of Killevy in Ireland, by Conchubran.⁷

Conchubran cannot be dated with certainty; Mario Esposito made the logical point that he must predate Geoffrey's composition of St Modwynn's *Life*, and

⁴ R. Bartlett (ed.), *Geoffrey of Burton: Life and Miracles of St Modwenna* (Oxford, 2002), xix.

⁵ *Ibid*, 3; the only surviving copy of Conchubran's *Life* is located in a twelfth-century manuscript from Burton, and was probably copied directly from Geoffrey's source.

⁶ *Ibid*, xi n.1.

⁷ BL Cotton Cleopatra A. ii; Bartlett, *Geoffrey of Burton*, xiv.

suggested that he postdates the mid tenth century, because he refers to both Ireland and Scotland as *Scottia*, a usage largely confined to the former before this date.⁸ More recently, Alex Woolf has suggested that references to the land of the Scots in northern Britain may display geographical variation as much as temporal, and that Northumbrian usage of ‘Scotti’ terminology in this way may go back at least to the time of Bede; a date for Conchubran earlier than the mid tenth century cannot therefore be ruled out.⁹ Conchubran synthesized at least three different sources to construct his *Life* of St Monenna; the work is primarily based on an anonymous *Life* of St Moninne (also called Darerca), abbess of Killeevy, but incorporates episodes set in the English midlands and Scotland.¹⁰ The Scottish episode has been plausibly connected with the legendary activities of St Ninian under the hypocoristic form of his name, Moninn.¹¹ The English elements are certainly to be connected with St Modwynn of Burton and St Eadgyth of Polesworth, as the contextual details of the narrative are convincingly place-specific. Geoffrey thus had good reason to recognise St Modwynn in St Monenna, and it will be demonstrated in what follows that Conchubran’s work contains our earliest record of St Modwynn’s hagiography, and in particular the river miracle.

⁸ M. Esposito, ‘Conchubrani Vita S. Monenna’, in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 28 (1910), Section C, 202–251; reprinted in M. Lapidge (ed.), *Irish Books and Learning in Medieval Europe* (Aldershot, 1990), No. XV (at 203). See also M. Esposito, ‘The Sources of Conchubranus’ Life of St Monenna’, in *English Historical Review* 35 (1920), 71–78 (at 71–72).

⁹ A. Woolf, ‘Reporting Scotland in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’, in A. Jorgensen (ed.), *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Language, Literature, History* (Turnhout, 2010), 221–239 (at 234).

¹⁰ The early *Life* of St Moninne survives in the fourteenth century Irish *Codex Salmanticensis*, a hagiographical compendium, although the *Life* itself could originate as early as the seventh century; Conchubran’s synthesis has most recently been discussed in Bartlett, *Geoffrey of Burton*, xiv–xix.

¹¹ J. MacQueen, *Ninian and the Picts*, Fifteenth Whithorn Lecture (Whithorn, 2007), 10–11

Robert Bartlett has considered the various differences between the *Lives* written by Geoffrey and Conchubran.¹² Here, a broader consideration of Modwynn's English excursions is provided, enabling a more in-depth discussion of the river miracle. In Conchubran's *Life*, St Monenna's English excursion has its origin in her healing of 'Alfredus', 'son of the king of the English', who had sought her help in Ireland, and who once healed returned to England.¹³ Later, escaping persecution in Ireland, Monenna visited Alfredus' father at his villa called 'Streneshalen', next to the forest called 'Arderne', and in gratitude was given this estate along with the king's sister, at first unnamed, whom he wished Monenna to raise as a nun.¹⁴ 'Arderne' can only refer to the Forest of Arden in northern Warwickshire, on the edge of which St Eadgyth's Polesworth is located. 'Streneshalen' is not a place-name now to be found in the Polesworth region, but is obviously the same place-name as 'Streaneshalh', St Hild's minster at Whitby that features so prominently in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.¹⁵ The place-name appears to have been similarly elusive in Geoffrey's time, and when he reworked Conchubran's tale he replaced 'Streneshalen' with Polesworth ('Polesworda').¹⁶ Geoffrey also located the story in the ninth century by equating Alfred the king's son with 'the son of the noble Æthelwulf, king of the Mercians and West Saxons', that is, Alfred the Great (r. 871–99).¹⁷

¹² Bartlett (ed.), *Geoffrey of Burton*, xx-xxvi

¹³ Esposito, 'Vita S. Monenna', Bk 1, Ch 14: 'filius regis Anglicorum'

¹⁴ *Ibid*, Bk 1, Ch 15

¹⁵ B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), Bk iii, Ch 24 & Bk iv, Ch 23

¹⁶ Bartlett (ed.), *Geoffrey of Burton*, Ch 20

¹⁷ *Ibid*, Ch 18; 'nobilis filius Athulfi regis Merciorum et Westsaxonum'.

Continuing with Conchubran's narrative, Monenna left her companion virgin Athea with the king's sister and returned to Ireland, but on a later visit to Rome she stopped on the way to pick up Athea and 'Ite', evidently the name of the king's sister but only at this stage revealed. On the way back, Monenna stayed with Athea and Ite at 'Streneshalen' for three years, then built a second place (*alium locum*), unnamed, close to the first; she and Athea stayed in the new location, whilst Ite and her *puella*, 'Osid', remained in the first.¹⁸ Here Conchubran narrates the river miracle: Ite sent Osid to take a book to Monenna, but Osid fell into a river swollen by rain lying between the two places where she drowned; three days later she was miraculously resurrected by Monenna's prayers.¹⁹

Osid can reasonably be equated with the Old English name Osgyth, and in Geoffrey's hands Ite became Eadgyth; although less obviously satisfactory, it has been suggested that Conchubran deliberately modified Eadgyth's name to resonate with the seventh-century Irish saint Ita, as part of an attempt, evident throughout the work, to bring St Monenna into contact with as many other saints as possible, and that Geoffrey therefore effectively restored the name that Conchubran had changed (as he did with St Modwynn also).²⁰ Geoffrey also transformed Conchubran's 'second place' into 'Streneshale'; this, together with his alteration of Conchubran's 'Streneshalen' to Polesworth, suggests that he knew St Eadgyth belonged at Polesworth on the edge of Arden, but that he knew nothing of 'Streneshalen', and thus used the name for

¹⁸ Esposito, 'Vita S. Monenna', Bk 2, Ch 8

¹⁹ *Ibid*, Bk 2, Ch 9

²⁰ Bartlett (ed.), *Geoffrey of Burton*, xviii-xix.

a place that remains unnamed in Conchubran's narrative.²¹ Geoffrey also identified the river of the miracle with the Anker ('Anchora'), which runs before Polesworth, and the place where Osgyth fell was apparently known in his day as 'Nunnepol' (which would give a modern 'Nunpool', now unknown).

Later in his narrative Conchubran describes another visit to Britain, during which Monenna formed a company with Athea, 'Ede' (an alternate spelling of Ita perpetuated in this form, or as 'Eda', throughout the remainder of the work), Osid and 'Lazar' (probably to be identified with an unnamed girl whom Monenna had previously raised from the dead).²² The five of them came to the River Trent ('Trente') where it runs before 'Mons Calvus', apparently called 'Calvechif' in English; there they built a church, dedicated to St Andrew, on a small island from thence called 'Andreseie'. In Geoffrey's narrative the English name of 'Mons Calvus' became 'Scaleclif', but here he generally had much less to do. The locations are readily identifiable in the neighbourhood of Burton: Scalpcliff Hill rises on the east side of the Trent, opposite Burton on the western side, and Andresey is the name of an island lying between.

According to Conchubran, Monenna stayed on Andresey with Athea and Lazar for seven years, Ede and Osid having returned to 'Streneshalen'. Subsequently the group again travelled to Rome, but on returning built a second church, located over the water from Andresey at the foot of 'Mons Calvus', dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul. After many miracles had been performed beside the Trent, Monenna decided to return to Ireland, but

²¹ *Ibid*, Ch 20

²² Esposito, 'Vita S. Monenna', Bk 3, Ch 3; for Lazar's resurrection see Bk 2, Ch 13

predicted that her bones would eventually rest on Andresey, where Athea remained; this eventually came to pass. Interestingly, Geoffrey omits any mention of the second church, which is probably to be equated with the church of St Peter at Stapenhill, at the foot of Scalpcliff Hill next to the Trent. He does, however, celebrate St Modwynn's relics, which, he explains, were translated from Andresey into the church of St Mary at the abbey at Burton, after the latter had been founded by Wulfric Spot ('Wlfric Spot') in the late tenth or early eleventh century.²³

This consideration of those parts of Conchubran's *Life of St Monenna* that feature an 'English' saint has emphasised the degree to which it clearly refers to locations around Polesworth and, even more so, Burton, confirming that Conchubran used sources related to St Modwynn and St Eadgyth.

Conchubran's narrative is also the earliest to feature the river miracle, which forms the only real story amongst these episodes, as the rest largely concern the foundation of churches. So why does Denis Bethell believe the miracle to be a transposed version of a story that first applied to the Aylesbury region? In order to resolve this problem, we need to investigate his analysis of the hagiography of St Osgyth of Chich in more detail. Bethell's central assertion, that all existing hagiography of the saint derives from a lost *Life of St Osgyth*, written at the twelfth-century Augustinian priory at Chich, will not be challenged here; instead, it is the place of the river miracle within this thesis that concerns us.²⁴ In what follows, the relevant parts of Bethell's thesis will be rehearsed, and an alternative argument will be made in the case of the river

²³ Bartlett (ed.), *Geoffrey of Burton*, Ch 43

²⁴ Bethell, 'Lives of St Osgyth'.

miracle that promotes the primacy of St Modwynn's hagiography, essentially reversing Bethell's conclusions on the direction of influence between the hagiographies of St Modwynn and St Osgyth.

None of the existing hagiography of St Osgyth represents a direct copy of the lost archetype of the *Life* of St Osgyth, which will hereafter be referred to as X₁; instead, we have a series of six surviving witnesses that abbreviated, rewrote, cut and embellished it, dating from the late twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. Arguments concerning their relationship must therefore be built on contradictions between them and the ordering of story elements rather than a fine-grained textual critique. On this basis, Bethell divides the six witnesses into two groups of three, distinguished by an episode in which two bishops either refused or consented to veil Osgyth as a nun. The first group, in which the bishops consented, comprises a short *Life* in a late twelfth-century manuscript, probably from Ramsey Abbey (hereafter 'Ramsey *Life*'); a series of lections forming a narrative *Life* contained in a fourteenth-century compilation of saints' *Lives* made at Bury St Edmunds (hereafter 'Bury *Life*'); and the fourteenth-century *Life* of St Osgyth by John of Tynemouth (hereafter 'Tynemouth's *Life*').²⁵ The second group, in which the bishops refused to veil Osgyth, comprises an Anglo-Norman French verse *Life*, dated philologically to the late twelfth century (hereafter 'Anglo-Norman *Life*'); an abbreviation of six Hereford lections forming a narrative *Life*, contained within the thirteenth-century *Hereford Breviary* (hereafter 'Hereford *Life*'); and notes made by John

²⁵ Ramsey *Life*: Oxford MS Bodley 285, fos. 121-122v; Bury *Life*: Oxford MS Bodley 240, fos. 588-9; see Bethell, 'Lives of St Osgyth', 77-78; Tynemouth's *Life*: C. Horstmann, *Nova Legenda Anglie* (Oxford, 1901), Vol. I, 232-7.

Leland from a now-lost *Life* written by William de Vere, a twelfth-century canon of St Osgyth's Priory at Chich (hereafter 'Leland's Notes').²⁶

William de Vere went on to become bishop of Hereford 1186 to 1198, rendering it likely that he was the source of Hereford's interest in St Osgyth of Chich, and so suggesting a likely connection between the Hereford *Life* and de Vere's *Life*. Bethell therefore suggests that the texts in the second group derived from William de Vere's lost *Life*, and furthermore proposes that de Vere's canon law-minded attitude to the veiling of Osgyth without the consent of her husband, King Sigehere of the East Saxons (c.664–c.690), might have prompted him to alter the episode so that the bishops refused Osgyth's request. The texts in the two groups therefore derive independently from the earlier archetype, X₁, in which the bishops consented to Osgyth's request.²⁷ These proposals are accepted in what follows.

The river miracle is not confined to one of the two groups; instead, it appears in the Bury and Tynemouth's *Lives* from the first group and the Anglo-Norman *Life* and Leland's Notes from the second. In all of these it is placed early in the *Life*, following an introductory genealogical dossier (in which Osgyth's descent is traced to her grandfather King Penda of the Mercians) and, in the Bury and Anglo-Norman *Lives*, a section concerning Osgyth's holy childhood and virginal vow, and is itself followed by the story of Osgyth's unwanted marriage

²⁶ Anglo-Norman *Life*: BL Add.70513; Hereford *Life*: W. H. Frere and L. E. G. Brown, *The Hereford Breviary; Edited from the Rouen edition of 1505, with collation of manuscripts; Vol. II: Sanctorale* (1911), Henry Bradshaw Society 40, 361-4; Leland's Notes: L. Toulmin Smith, *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535-1543* (London, 1906-10), Vol. 5, 167-72; see Bethell, 'Lives of St Osgyth', 75-77

²⁷ Bethell, 'Lives of St Osgyth', 99-100.

to King Sigehere of the East Saxons. Three of these witnesses identify the miracle with St Modwynn and St Eadgyth, but Leland's Notes assert that Osgyth was taught by her aunts, Eadburh ('Edburga') of Adderbury ('Edburbiry') and Eadgyth ('Editha') of Aylesbury ('Ailesbiry'), and that these two monasteries were separated by a river, 'frequently swollen by surging rain and pounding storm, and difficult to cross'.²⁸ This is as far as the notes go, and it is only with knowledge of the other *Lives* that we can recognise here a stage set for the drowning and resurrection of Osgyth. Leland abbreviated the *Life* as he saw fit, and, generally, 'was not interested in the miraculous, but he took note of what seemed to him of genealogical or topographical interest'.²⁹ Nevertheless, enough remains to make it clear that the *Life* Leland had before him located the river episode between Adderbury and Aylesbury, and it is this version of the story that Bethell assumed to be original, with the St Modwynn version replacing it at some point in the ancestry of the other three texts.³⁰

However, the *Life* epitomised in Leland's Notes was derived from de Vere's lost *Life*, and it is possible to demonstrate that this did not contain the river miracle. The Anglo-Norman *Life* also derives from de Vere's *Life*, and A. T. Baker reasons philologically that a large block of 199 lines, including the entire river miracle and introductory comments about Osgyth's birth at Quarrendon, was an interpolation of the second half of the thirteenth century into a late

²⁸ 'qui saepe turgidus inundatione pluviarum et ventorum inpulsione itinerantibus molestum facit transitum', as printed in Bethell, 'Lives of St Osgyth', 119.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 75-76.

³⁰ In part, Bethell's assumption was informed by his belief that Eadgyth of Polesworth had been a tenth-century West Saxon princess; Bethell, 'Lives of St Osgyth', 106 n.1. On this confusion, see further below.

twelfth-century poem.³¹ Without this block of text the poem proceeds from Osgyth's childhood vow to remain a virgin straight to her parents' arrangement of her marriage. The interpolated text even ends with the same idea, that Osgyth would live and die a virgin, as the original text immediately preceding it, presumably in order to smooth the join back to the narrative sense of the original text at this point; this also indicates that the interpolation did not replace an alternative episode original to the twelfth-century poem. The Anglo-Norman *Life* is full of embellishment on many details of Osgyth's life, and is probably, according to Bethell, 'now the best witness' to de Vere's *Life*.³² It seems inconceivable that the poet would have left out a large miracle story such as the river episode. It is far more likely that de Vere's *Life*, and so its exemplar X₁, began with the genealogical section together with a brief description of the holiness of Osgyth's childhood character and her decision to remain a virgin, and immediately continued with the story of her abortive marriage to King Sigehere.³³

³¹ ll. 183-382; A. T. Baker, 'An Anglo-French Life of St Osith', in *Modern Languages Review* 6 (1911), 476-502, and 7 (1912), 74-93 and 167-192 (at Vol. 6, 483). J. D. Zatta ('The *Vie Seinte Osith*: Hagiography and Politics in Anglo-Norman England', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 41 (2005), 306-338) makes the valid point (at 316-317) that Baker's linguistic analysis is now dated and requires revision. However, her own assertion that the poem is a single-phase composition does not take into account its relation to the complete set of St Osgyth's hagiography, relying only on a comparison with the Ramsey *Life*; for example, if both the Anglo-Norman *Life* and de Vere's *Life* included the river episode *ab initio*, why does it not appear in the Hereford *Life*, which is otherwise closely related to these two *Lives*? Baker's conclusion (at least regarding the river episode) is accepted here, with the caveat that at least some of his linguistic argument may require updating.

³² Bethell, 'Lives of St Osgyth', 102; A. T. Baker's assertion ('Anglo-French Life', 479) that the Anglo-Norman *Life* derived its interpolation from Conchubran was based on his understanding that Geoffrey of Burton does not mention Osgyth accompanying Modwenna to Rome, but this is erroneous: the equivalent passage is in c. 34 of Geoffrey's work; Baker's other objection, concerning an apparent translation from the Latin 'pontem, erat enim unum lignum' used by Conchubran to describe the bridge, as opposed to Geoffrey's 'pontem ligneum', is too singular and trivial a match, and ignores more prevalent matches between the Anglo-Norman *Life* and Geoffrey's work, such as the presence of both Streneshale and Polesworth in both, as opposed to only Streneshalen in Conchubran, and likewise the etymological explanation of Nunpool.

³³ An objection to this might be raised by the presence in the Hereford *Life* of a passage explaining that when Osgyth 'came to adulthood, being fully taught by holy virgins, her father

If the archetypal *Life* of St Osgyth did not contain the river miracle, how might it have found its way into four of the witnesses? Bethell has demonstrated that the episode in Tynemouth's *Life* 'is taken by abbreviation, close paraphrase, and direct quotation from Geoffrey of Burton's *Life* of Modwenna',³⁴ likewise, the similarities between the miracle in the Anglo-Norman *Life* and Geoffrey's narrative suggest the latter as the source text in this case also.³⁵ Furthermore, there are two points of similarity between the Anglo-Norman and Tynemouth's *Lives*: both include the statement that Osgyth fell into the river because of a gust of wind, and both explain that Osgyth returned to her parents on Modwynn's death. Neither of these points is included in Geoffrey's *Life* or the Bury *Life*, both of which explain that Osgyth took fright and fell. It thus seems likely that Tynemouth's *Life* and the Anglo-Norman *Life* share a source as regards the river miracle, and as this source included Osgyth's return to her parents, it must have been another lost *Life* of Osgyth (hereafter *X*₃) into which the river episode had already been interpolated, slightly rewritten but largely verbatim, from Geoffrey's *Life* of St Modwynn.

In contrast, Bethell tentatively suggested that, due to small differences found in the Bury *Life*'s narration of the river episode, in particular the use of an

decided to give her in marriage.' ('Cum igitur ad annos puberes deuenisset, beatarum virginum ad plenum edocta, decreuit eam nuptiis dare pater eius'; W. H. Frere & L.E.G. Brown (eds.). 1911. *The Hereford Breviary*, p 362). The Hereford *Life* omits the river story, and most probably derives directly from William de Vere's *Life*. Nevertheless, the reference to Osgyth's teaching by holy virgins could be understood to refer to her childhood spent away from home, and thus to her adventure with St Modwynn narrated in the other *Lives*; however, this phrase need imply nothing more than a general reference to Osgyth's education as a child.

³⁴ Bethell, 'Lives of St Osgyth', 100; see also his Appendix V, where he highlights the phrases in Tynemouth directly copied from Geoffrey.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 104.

uninflected 'Modwen' and provision of an additional legend about Nunpool, the compiler of the Bury *Life* had access to a version of the miracle antedating that in Geoffrey's *Life*, and inserted it on his or her own initiative.³⁶ This interpretation cannot be ruled out, but the differences are minor enough, and the fact of the Bury *Life*'s abbreviation significant enough, that it is just as likely to have been derived and slightly reworked from Geoffrey's *Life*. Nevertheless, the compiler of the Bury *Life* did not rely on the source X_3 posited above for the Tynemouth and Anglo-Norman Lives, but instead either interpolated the river episode directly whilst copying an exemplar that lacked it, or used another lost *Life* that already contained the episode. Crucially, the Bury, Anglo-Norman and Tynemouth's *Lives* all refer to Eadgyth as sister to Alfred, and not to his father as does Geoffrey, who followed Conchubran's description of Ite. This strongly suggests that they all relied on the same misrepresentation of Geoffrey's work, most likely located within a lost *Life* of St Osgyth, and here denoted X_2 . Thus three of the witnesses can be traced to a single exemplar, in which the river miracle was no doubt included due to its author's awareness of Geoffrey's work, and his or her equation of Geoffrey's *Osid* with St Osgyth.

Only the river miracle implied (but not explicitly narrated) in the version of de Vere's *Life* epitomised in Leland's Notes remains to be explained. Here, it is useful to focus on the source's positioning of the river between Adderbury and

³⁶ *Ibid*, 104-106; his seventh point, that the resurrection took place on the fourth day in Geoffrey's text as opposed to the third in the Bury *Life*, is overly pedantic, as both texts agree that Osgyth lay dead beneath the water for three days, and that Modwynn went to the river after three days; it is only Geoffrey's expansion of Osgyth's sub-aqua sojourn to three days *and nights* that means Modwenna must in fact have arrived on the fourth day. This is not explicit, and probably not intended, the symbolism of the number three being paramount.

Aylesbury and the association of St Eadgyth with the latter. Leland states that 'Osgyth was devoted to the teaching of Eadgyth and Eadburh, whose niece she was', and also, that Eadburh was 'Eadgyth's sister', implying that Eadgyth, like Eadburh, was a daughter of King Penda.³⁷ St Eadgyth of Aylesbury is known only from Leland's Notes and is otherwise totally without textual testament;³⁸ crucially, she is not mentioned in the genealogical section of Osgyth's *Life*, which includes her parents King Frithewald and Wilburh, daughter of Penda, and, at its fullest extent, Penda's other saintly descendents: Peada, his son;³⁹ Eadburh and Cyneburh, his daughters;⁴⁰ Mildthryth his granddaughter (*neptis*);⁴¹ and Waerburh, Ælfthryth ('Elfreda'/'Elstreda') and Ealdgyth ('Elgida'), supposedly his great-granddaughters (*proneptes*).⁴² The absence of St Eadgyth from this genealogy restates the case for the secondary interpolation of the river episode, and also hints that no such daughter of Penda was known outside the source of Leland's Notes.

There is therefore no reason to understand St Eadgyth of Aylesbury as anything other than a relocation of St Eadgyth of Polesworth, transposed via the importation of the river miracle, suitably relocated to the Aylesbury region, into a version of de Vere's *Life* of St Osgyth; this should be added to other points of local lore in Leland's Notes concerning Osgyth's birthplace at

³⁷ 'Ositha adhaesit doctrinae Edithae et Edburgae, quarum neptis erat' (Bethell, 'Lives of St Osgyth', 118); 'Edburga soror Edithae' (*Ibid*, 119).

³⁸ *Ibid*, 83 n. 1; Bethell's faith in Editha's foundation of Aylesbury on the basis of Leland's Notes alone seems premature.

³⁹ In the Bury and Ramsey *Lives*.

⁴⁰ In the Bury, Ramsey and Anglo-Norman *Lives*.

⁴¹ In the Bury and Ramsey *Lives*.

⁴² In the Bury and Ramsey *Lives*.

Quarrendon, Eadgyth's foundation of the monastery at Aylesbury, and Eadburh's monastery at Adderbury, all of which was apparently added to de Vere's *Life* after its initial composition. Osgyth's birthplace at Quarrendon was also mentioned in the interpolated text in the Anglo-Norman *Life*, which (unlike the rest of the Anglo-Norman *Life*) did not derive from de Vere's original *Life*; This detail does not appear to have been part of X₃, the source of the interpolation in the Anglo-Norman *Life*, and so must have enjoyed some separate vector of transmission, perhaps in the context of the cult of St Osgyth at Aylesbury, in or before the second half of the thirteenth century. The same applies to the other details in Leland's Notes, which all have a direct relation to the re-imagining of the river miracle in the Aylesbury region, and might even date as late as the early sixteenth-century elevation of the supposed remains of St Osgyth at Aylesbury, during which festivities the saint's *Life* and the promotion of local connections would no doubt have loomed large.⁴³ Given the paucity of detail in Leland's Notes, it is not possible to discern the particular source of the river miracle that was reworked in the revised version of de Vere's *Life*, but it was doubtless either a version of Geoffrey's *Life* or a version of the *Life* of St Osgyth into which the miracle had already been imported, possibly even one of the versions discussed above.

⁴³ It is at least certain that these details predate Leland: he states that the two monasteries are separated by a distance of ten *stadia*, but appears to have believed *Edburbiry* to have been Ellesborough in the Chilterns; this is approximately ten miles distant, but if *stadia* means league, then Adderbury, etymologically correct and surely the intended location, is also the correct distance away; Bethell, 'Lives of St Osgyth', 119 nn. 2 and 3.

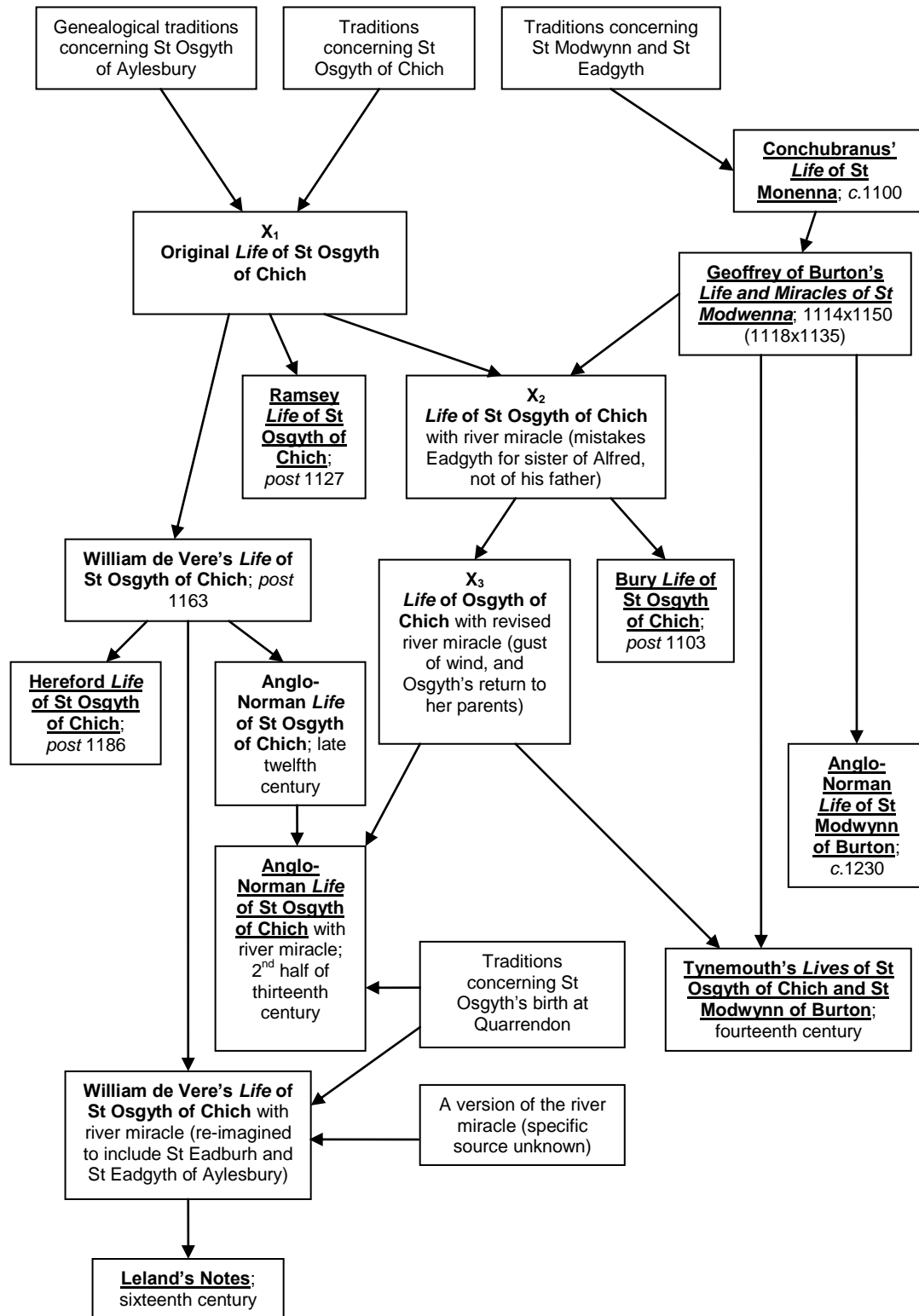


Figure 1: A stemma of different versions of the *Lives* of St Modwynn of Burton and St Osgyth of Chich; existing works are underlined, all others are hypothetical

In summary, the river miracle appears originally to have belonged to St Modwynn and St Eadgyth at Polesworth, as narrated by Conchubran, before being slightly re-worked in Geoffrey's *Life* of St Modwynn, and from there transplanted into a version of the early twelfth-century *Life* of St Osgyth by the second half of the thirteenth century and, transposed to the Aylesbury region, a version of William de Vere's *Life* of St Osgyth by the mid-sixteenth century. The stemma in Figure 1 illustrates these developments. The implication of these conclusions is that Conchubran's *Life* of St Monenna contains the earliest extant version of the river miracle, a fact of some importance regarding the cults of both St Modwynn and St Eadgyth.

Other early evidence for the cults of St Modwynn and St Eadgyth

Other than her appearance in the work of Conchubran and Geoffrey, St Modwynn is not readily apparent in the historical record before the twelfth century. Indeed, it is quite possible that Geoffrey's *Life* invigorated her fame, as she appears in resting-place lists from the twelfth century onwards, beginning with Hugh Candidus' list: *in Birtuna sancta Moduenna*.⁴⁴ St Eadgyth, on the other hand, appears rather earlier in the documentary record in her own right.

St Eadgyth's cult is attested in the *Secgan be þam Godes sanctum þe on Engla lande ærost reston* ('Tale of God's saints who earliest rested in England'; hereafter *Secgan*), witnessed by two eleventh-century documents.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ W. T. Mellows, *The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus, a monk of Peterborough* (London, 1949), 62; see also Blair, 'Handlist', 546.

⁴⁵ D. W. Rollason, 'Lists of saints' resting-places in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Anglo-Saxon England*, 11 (1978), 61-93, this reference 61-68.

The first part of this document contains the names only of saints who, where known, lived during the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries, the latest probably being St Edmund, king and martyr in East Anglia (d. 869);⁴⁶ the associated resting places generally attest to the locations at which saints could be found before the many translations of the tenth century, and again Edmund's location at Bury, to which he was translated in the early-tenth century, represents the latest dateable event.⁴⁷ Thus the first part of the *Secgan*, in whatever form it appeared to the compilers of the complete eleventh-century list (or its exemplar), probably represents a compilation of the earlier tenth century. St Eadgyth appears as 'Eadgyð' at 'Polleswyrð' on the river 'Oncer'.

In the late eleventh century Goscelin of St Bertin made reference to a St Eadgyth of Tamworth in the earliest version of his *Life of St Eadgyth of Wilton*.⁴⁸ Likewise, in Hugh Candidus' twelfth-century resting-place list an 'Edgitha' appears at Tamworth ('Tamuurthe'), and the resting-place list in the fourteenth-century Book of Hyde also gives Tamworth, although this later reference may be derivative of the earlier.⁴⁹ John of Tynemouth, mentioned earlier, abbreviated the earlier version of Goscelin's *Life* in his fourteenth-

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 63, suggests that St Eadgyth of Polesworth was a tenth-century saint, but this is disputed here.

⁴⁷ Rollason suggests that the notice of St Cuthberht at Durham and St Oswald's head with St Cuthberht and his body at Gloucester are later interpolations made to the original tenth-century compilation (see Rollason, 'Lists of saints' resting-places', 63-64, 68 and 81). Rollason's dating of St Eadburh's enshrinement at Southwell to the late-tenth century is based on a charter testifying to the gift of the place to the archbishop of York in 956, when he apparently established a collegiate church (Rollason, 'Lists of saints' resting-places', 63 n. 12); however, this takes no account of the possibility that the archbishop simply refounded an older minster already possessing the saint's relics, which, judging by the floruit of all the other saints in the first part of the *Secgan*, seems very likely.

⁴⁸ A. Wilmart, 'La Légende de Ste. Edith en prose et vers per le moine Goscelin', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 56 (1938), 53-54.

⁴⁹ Mellows, *Chronicle of Hugh Candidus*, 62.

century *Sanctilogium Angliae*, but altered Tamworth to Polesworth.⁵⁰ Indeed, Geoffrey's *Life of St Modwynn* situated Eadgyth solely at Polesworth, and two early thirteenth-century chroniclers at St Albans, Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris, also associated Eadgyth with Polesworth.⁵¹ Whilst St Eadgyth's presence at Polesworth is therefore attested from the early tenth century through to the fourteenth, there is a notable minority of references to her presence at Tamworth during the same period, particularly by writers working in the late eleventh or earlier twelfth centuries.

The churches at both Tamworth and Polesworth are today dedicated to 'St Editha', and it is generally averred that these are the same saint.⁵² It has been suggested by both D. A. Johnson and Jim Gould that a possible post-Conquest translation from Polesworth to Tamworth would explain the difference in recorded resting places, and could be associated with the Marmion family, who held Tamworth and surrounding lands, including Polesworth, by the early twelfth century; the Marmion *caput* was probably at Tamworth castle, and they may at some point have decided to move St Eadgyth's relics there.⁵³ However, the dominant tradition of Eadgyth's relics being at Polesworth, when coupled with the fact that Robert Marmion and his wife Millicent also founded and patronised a nunnery within the defunct

⁵⁰ 'Inter multa autem sanctorum exempla que libris legebat, interque presentia sanctum et maxime propinquorum religiosorum lumina, vicinius accendebatur virginali palma sanctissime amite sue Edithe, Edgari regis patris sui germane, que in monasterio Pollesworth, prouincie Warwici, meritorum signis, sicut et ipsa Wiltonie, refulsit': Horstmann, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, Vol. I, 311.

⁵¹ H. R. Luard (ed.), *Matthæi Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani, Chronica Majora*, Rolls Series Vol. 57.1 (London, 1872); H. R. Luard (ed.), *Flores Historiarum*, Rolls Series Vol. 95.1 (London, 1890).

⁵² Blair, 'Handlist', 527-528.

⁵³ *Victoria County History of Staffordshire* III (1970), 310, esp. n. 6; J. Gould, 'Saint Edith of Polesworth and Tamworth', in *South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society Transactions* XVII (1987), 35-38, this reference 37-38.

minster at Polesworth in 1135x1144, suggest that Polesworth remained the seat of the saint's cult. Nevertheless, as Sarah Foot has noted, it is not unreasonable that the community at Tamworth might have gained a relic of St Eadgyth at some point.⁵⁴ Alternatively (or additionally), references to Tamworth in the late eleventh and earlier twelfth centuries might be due to the town's position as *caput* of the honor in which Polesworth was then situated.

St Eadgyth's identity also witnessed some confusion during this period. Goscelin suggested that St Eadgyth of Tamworth was St Eadgyth of Wilton's aunt, and sister of the West Saxon king Edgar (r. 959–75), and he was the first of several writers to suggest that she was a West Saxon princess. As mentioned earlier, Geoffrey of Burton suggested that she was the sister of King Æthelwulf of Wessex (r. 839–58), and later chronicles that made use of Geoffrey's work, such as Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon*, repeated this assertion.⁵⁵ Another alternative identification was offered by the chroniclers Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris, of whom the latter probably derived his information from the former: both included St Eadgyth of Polesworth in a discussion of Edward the Elder's children. They explained that Eadgyth ('Eadgytha'/'Edgitha') was a daughter of Edward and his second wife Ælflæd;⁵⁶ later, after Edward's death, his son King Athelstan offered Eadgyth to Sihtric, king of Northumbria, at a meeting at Tamworth, on the understanding that he would be baptised a Christian, but shortly afterwards Sihtric repudiated his new wife, apostatised and then died. Eadgyth, having

⁵⁴ S. Foot, *Veiled Women; Female Religious Communities in England, 871-1066* (Aldershot, 2000), Vol. 2, 194

⁵⁵ Bartlett (ed.), *Geoffrey of Burton*, Ch 18; J. R. Lumby, *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis* (London, 1876), Vol. 6, 318-321.

⁵⁶ Luard (ed.), *Chronica Majora*, Vol. I, 436; Luard, *Flores Historiarum*, Vol. I, 479.

retained her virginity, spent the rest of her life at Polesworth ('Pollesberia') in prayer and almsgiving.⁵⁷

The diversity of identities on offer diminishes confidence in any of them. Geoffrey's identification probably derived from his own speculation on Conchubran's Alfred, 'son of the king of the English', whilst Goscelin's speculation is less easily explained. The passage on Edward the Elder's children presented by Roger, and following him Matthew, was ultimately taken from William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*. However, William explicitly stated that he did not have a written source for the name of Sihtric's wife, and he also suggested that she was a daughter of Edward's first wife Ecgwynn, and thus a full sister to Aethelstan.⁵⁸ William does write of an 'Edgitha', daughter of Edward and Alflæd, as one of two daughters married to foreign princes, one to Otto, son of Henry, 'emperor of the Germans', the other to 'a certain duke near the Alps.' Thus William's Eadgyth cannot have been married to Sihtric, although his confusion over both the name of the second princess (variously 'Elfgiva' and 'Aldgitha') and which of the two was married to which foreign potentate, might have opened the door to further confusion.⁵⁹ This may have been compounded by the location of notices concerning the marriages of Otto and Sihtric in successive entries in the

⁵⁷ Luard (ed.), *Chronica Majora*, Vol. I, 446; Luard, *Flores Historiarum*, Vol. I, 490.

⁵⁸ R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (eds.), *William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum Anglorum* (Oxford, 1998), ii.126: 'Primogenitum Ethelstanum habuit ex Egwinna illustri fœmina, et filiam cuius nomen scriptum non in promptu habeo; hanc ipse frater Sihtricio Northanimbrorum regi nuptum dedit...'

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 170-171 & 198-201; in the first passage the sisters are *Aldgitha* and *Edgitha*, of which Otto is (correctly) said to have married the second, whilst in the second passage the sisters are *Edgitha* and *Elfgiva*, of which Otto is (incorrectly) said to have married the second.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.⁶⁰ It is perhaps possible that Edward had a second daughter Eadgyth by Ælflæd, but if so there is no explicit textual evidence for her before Roger's thirteenth-century work. In conclusion, all these identifications were probably the product of speculation, more or less informed, on the origins of a saint whose origins were by then obscure.⁶¹

In any case, St Eadgyth's presence in the first part of the Secgan almost certainly places her in a seventh-, eighth- or ninth-century context, as has recently been noted by both Sarah Foot and Barbara Yorke.⁶² Of the chroniclers' identifications, only Geoffrey's sits within this period, and Jim Gould supported it on this basis, pointing to closer relations between Mercia and Wessex during the mid-ninth century as a context.⁶³ However, Geoffrey's claim is clearly based on speculation on Conchubran's text, and it must be accepted that any evaluation of candidates for St Eadgyth by reference to the historical context in which she might have lived involves circular reasoning, as there is always some way of fitting her in, as the activities of our various chroniclers and hagiographers have shown. Only Conchubran's work offers

⁶⁰ s.a. 924 and 925 (*recte* 926) in the Worcester Chronicle (ASC(D)); D. Whitelock, *English Historical Documents. Volume I. c. 500-1042* (London, 1955), 199: 'Athelstan was chosen by the Mercians as king, and consecrated at Kingston, and he gave his sister in marriage over the sea to the son of the king of the Old Saxons'; 'King Athelstan and Sihtric, king of the Northumbrians, met together at Tamworth on 30 January and Athelstan gave him his sister in marriage'.

⁶¹ Alan Thacker was recently inclined to back an identity with Athelstan's full sister, and included Eadgyth in a group of West Saxon scions who were culted during or after Athelstan's reign, expressing a more enthusiastic attitude to the cult of royal saints on behalf of this royal family, which Athelstan had perhaps acquired during his upbringing at the Mercian court: A. Thacker, 'Dynastic Monasteries and Family Cults; Edward the Elder's sainted kindred', in N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill (eds.), *Edward the Elder 899-924* (London, 2001), 248-263. Barbara Yorke offered opposition to this identification for some of the reasons discussed above (B. Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses* (London, 2003), 77-8.

⁶² Foot, *Veiled Women*, Vol. II, p 140-1; Yorke, *Nunneries*, 20, 78 and 39 n. 58.

⁶³ Gould, 'Saint Edith'.

the possibility of identifying Eadgyth, as it is the earliest reference to her in more than name (albeit here as Ite/Ede/Eda) and place; all else is derivative.

If we allow the equation of Conchubran's 'Osíd' with St Osgyth, said in her *Life* to be a granddaughter of Penda, this would date St Eadgyth to the later seventh century. However, there may well have been more than one holy woman named Osgyth in Anglo-Saxon England. It is therefore worth noting that an Eadgyth appears very close to an Osgyth in the Durham *Liber Vitae*, a book of those to be prayed for at a Northumbrian minster, most probably the Community of St Cuthbert, dating to the mid ninth century but containing names going back to the seventh century.⁶⁴ The following sequence of names occurs towards the beginning of the list of 'queens and abbesses':

Eadgyð

Cyniburg

Osgyth

Tatsuið

Uerburg

Osburg⁶⁵

'Cyniburg' is the name born by Penda's daughter Cyneburh, who became the abbess of Castor (Northamptonshire); 'Uerburg' is Wærburh, a name borne by a daughter of King Wulfhere who held several Mercian minsters including Hanbury (Staffordshire) and Threekingham (Lincolnshire); 'Osburg' is Osburh, borne by the saint of Coventry cathedral, about whom nothing is known but who again fits plausibly within the stable of Mercian saints of the seventh,

⁶⁴ D. and L. Rollason (eds.), *The Durham Liber Vitae*, (3 vols., British Library, 2007)

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, vol. I, 93; 'Eadgyð' is the twenty-sixth name in the list.

eighth and ninth centuries; 'Tatsuið' is otherwise unknown. Whilst all these names (other than 'Tatsuið') appear again elsewhere in the list, it is their propinquity in an early part of the list that excites comment.⁶⁶ Is it too fanciful to see here Eadgyth and Osgyth included among a delegation of Mercian abbesses of the late-seventh century? There is perhaps enough circumstantial evidence here to suggest tentatively that St Eadgyth belongs somewhere amongst the Mercian princesses of the mid to late seventh century.

The river miracle and the early cults of St Modwynn and St Eadgyth

The foregoing discussion makes clear that Conchubran's relation of Modwynn's activities, and of the river miracle she performed with St Eadgyth, sits amongst the earliest evidence for the cults of both saints, even if his work be dated no earlier than the eleventh century. It is therefore important to attempt to understand why St Modwynn's earliest recorded exploit should have occurred whilst she was accompanied by St Eadgyth at the minster later exclusively associated with the latter saint. Indeed, Eadgyth essentially shadows Modwynn throughout the episode, and it must be wondered whether Modwynn herself was added to a story that once featured only Osgyth and Eadgyth. Alternatively, was a story originally starring only St Modwynn and Osgyth, and perhaps set at Burton, moved to St Eadgyth's Polesworth for some reason? Conclusions regarding the origins of the river miracle must remain speculative, but consideration of its geographical location offers some possibilities.

⁶⁶ This grouping is not noted in the most recent commentary on this section of the *Liber Vitae* (*ibid*, vol. III, 82–84)

If Conchubran's reference to 'Streneshalen' be understood as an interpolation of Hild's famous Northumbrian foundation, intended to add lustre to the narrative, then we are left only with his rather general location of the miracle on the edge of the forest of Arden; nevertheless, this tallies with Polesworth as the later epicentre of St Eadgyth's cult, and Geoffrey also deduced as much. Geoffrey added 'Nunpool' to the geography of the miracle, apparently the name by which the local inhabitants (*incolae*) called the place of Osgyth's resurrection. It is not clear whether Geoffrey himself made an etymological connection between a pre-existing place-name and the events of the story, or whether the inhabitants themselves attached the story (or something like it) to the place. The first possibility is perhaps more likely, as aside from the place-names 'Polesworth' and 'Nunpool' and the river-name 'Anker', Geoffrey made no further substantive additions to the story, and all three can best be understood as conjectures based upon his own knowledge of local topography. If, however, 'Nunpool' was simply a place-name like any other to the local inhabitants, it is nevertheless an interesting one, as it refers to a nun or nuns at a time most likely before the Marmions' foundation of the nunnery at Polesworth (1135x1144; Geoffrey could have written his *Life* at any time between 1114-50, but probably between 1118 and 1135). If so, it might simply have referred to nuns at the earlier minster at Polesworth, but a reference to the river miracle cannot be entirely ruled out.

Of more certain significance is a pool in the course of the River Anker immediately south of Polesworth abbey, still partly identifiable on the 1st

edition Ordnance Survey map, and surely a convincing candidate for 'Nunpool'. Indeed, given its position at the heart of the settlement, it is tempting to suggest that the place-name Polesworth, usually interpreted with reference to a personal name as 'Poll's enclosure', should actually be understood to mean 'enclosure at the pool', or rather, to account for the genitival 'es', 'enclosure at the estate called Pool'.⁶⁷ Whatever the place-name's etymology, the place itself offered a dramatic setting for a story of drowning and resurrection, lending some circumstantial weight to the suggestion that the story is more likely to have been generated at Polesworth, than to have been transferred there from Burton.

The later ecclesiastical geography of the area also resonates with the admittedly sparse description found in Conchubran's narrative. An earlier minster on the site of the later abbey at Polesworth provides the initial foundation described in the tale (Conchubran's 'Streneshalen'), whilst about a mile westwards across the river there is a place now called the Hermitage on the southern side of the road to Tamworth; this marks the site of 'the chapel built above St Eadgyth's Spring in the wood of Pooley', mentioned in a grant of c.1250 and described by Dugdale in the seventeenth century as a stone-built hermitage with a spring emerging from a rock at one end.⁶⁸ There is no evidence that the site had any pre-Conquest existence, but as a place of solitary contemplation close to a larger ecclesiastical centre it resembles the

⁶⁷ J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-names of Warwickshire* (Cambridge, 1936), 21; For the place-name element pōl, meaning 'pool in the course of a stream', see M. Gelling and A. Cole, *The Landscape of Place-names* (Stamford, 2000), 28-29.

⁶⁸ W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, revised edition by J. Caley, H. Ellis and B. Bandinel (1846), II, 366-67; J. Harte, *English Holy Wells: a sourcebook* (Avebury, 2008), Vol. 2, 334.

second foundation of Conchubran's story, and bears comparison with Stowe at nearby Lichfield, the site of St Chad's private oratory set at a distance from his cathedral, also marked by a spring during the later medieval period. Again, this is circumstantial, but suggestive: the tale told by Conchubran could conceivably have been informed by distinctive elements in the geography, both natural and ecclesiastical, of Polesworth.

It is therefore easier to believe that the story developed initially at Polesworth, perhaps as part of the early hagiography of St Eadgyth, the local saint, than that a similar story about St Modwynn of Burton was relocated there. It follows that St Eadgyth was once the protagonist who resurrected Osgyth, and later remained as a spare part in Conchubran's Modwynn-focused version of the story; perhaps St Eadgyth's supporters at Polesworth were too vocal for her to be ostracised completely. The origins of the tale are beyond recovery, and the potential date range for its generation is wide, stretching from the seventh century to the eleventh. Nevertheless, if the river miracle was originally St Eadgyth's, we can still ask when and why St Modwynn found her way into it. At the latest, Conchubran himself might have made the insertion, having perhaps drawn a blank at the epicentre of Modwynn's cult at Burton and come across Eadgyth's cult nearby. However, there is evidence that Modwynn's connection with the river miracle extended further than the confines of Conchubran's text and its readership, raising the possibility that he was not the first to make it.

Of the miracles that Geoffrey added to his version of Conchubran's text, presumably learned via the 'reliable report of truthful men, who had knowledge of them from their elders or witnessed them at first hand', only one features Modwynn as a living person; the rest concern her relics. Geoffrey explains that, whilst living in her hermitage on Andresey, Modwynn often enjoyed the visits of a hermit from Breedon-on-the-Hill ('Bredunia'), particularly because he brought with him a book containing the *Lives* of the Saints.⁶⁹ Once, when he had forgotten to bring the book, Modwynn sent two virgins off in a boat to get it, but the boat overturned and sank in the river at a place called 'Lega' (this place has not been identified), and the girls were only saved when Modwynn's prayers parted the waters of the river above them. This miracle is very similar to Osgyth's resurrection from the river near 'Streneshalen'; in particular, both involve an errand for a book, and it seems quite likely that one story is a transplanted version of the other, with Modwynn as the common denominator.

The river miracle had therefore moved since Conchubran wrote, from Polesworth, where it arguably originated, to 'Lega', at least according to the knowledge of Geoffrey's informants, who were presumably associated with, perhaps part of, the monastic community at Burton. If the Modwynn-centred version of the tale had remained within the community's memory at Burton since (at least) Conchubran's time, it is plausible that this community was also responsible for inserting Modwynn into the Eadgyth-centred Polesworth-based story in the first place. The circumstances of this insertion are a matter of

⁶⁹ Bartlett (ed.), *Geoffrey of Burton*, Ch 35

conjecture, as is the timing of it, but it is conceivable that the monastery at Burton laid claim to the minster at Polesworth at some point, perhaps when the latter was at a low ebb; Modwynn's miracle would serve to bolster such a claim. Such a context may lie behind the story's move to 'Lega': the Domesday Book of 1086 records a manor at Leigh held by Burton abbey, but this lay on the River Blythe north-west of Burton, and can in no way be understood to lie between the monastery and Breedon.⁷⁰ Likewise, the story in Conchubran's text concerning Modwynn's connection with the church at Stapenhill (St Peter's under Scalpcliff) might be understood as a bolster to Burton's claim to this estate, although surviving evidence only dates this claim as far back as the reign of Edward the Confessor, when the king gave the monastery an estate there.⁷¹ Whatever the precise circumstances, it is at least possible to understand the emphases of the narrative given to Conchubran as elements of particular concern to the monastery at Burton at the time he was writing, whether connected to claims on estates, or simply as part of an attempt to provide origins for the local social and ecclesiastical geography.⁷²

Much of the discussion above is speculative and deals with circumstantial evidence. There is nevertheless enough to support a tentative hypothesis. By the late tenth or early eleventh century, when Wulfric Spot founded his Benedictine monastery at Burton next to the old minster on Andresey, none of the local inhabitants appear to have known anything about St Modwynn, whose relics lay in St Andrew's church there. Wulfric bequeathed a great

⁷⁰ J. Morris (ed.), *Domesday Book; Volume 24: Staffordshire* (Chichester, 1976), 4,7.

⁷¹ P. Morgan (ed.), *Domesday Book; Volume 27: Derbyshire* (Chichester, 1976), 3,5 and 14,2; P. H. Sawyer, *Charters of Burton Abbey*. Anglo-Saxon Charters, Vol. II (Oxford, 1979), xlvi

⁷² See J. Blair, 'A Saint for Every Minster?' 484-5, for discussion of the connection between saints' Lives and claims to territory.

amount of land to the new community, including an estate at Tamworth, which lay nearby to (and might even have been associated with) the old minster at Polesworth.⁷³ Enough of a community remained at Polesworth to maintain the story of Eadgyth's resurrection of Osgyth in the pool there, and at some point the newly powerful community at Burton found reason to insert their own St Modwynn into the story. Thus, when Conchubran enquired of the community at Burton about St Modwynn, quite plausibly at some point during the eleventh century, they were able to tell him this tale, and to describe St Modwynn's apparent foundations in the vicinity of Burton, which essentially comprised the pre-existing ecclesiastical geography of the area: the church of St Andrew on Andresey, an island in the Trent, and the church of St Peter under Scalpcliff Hill on the east bank of the river. Conchubran probably wrote before St Modwynn's relics were translated into the new abbey church of St Mary on the west bank (an event that Geoffrey describes), as he only mentions Modwynn's burial on Andresey, and presumably intended that his readers be able to find her shrine if they so desired.⁷⁴

The re-location of the river miracle to 'Lega' indicates that the tale thereafter remained malleable, perhaps unrestricted by textual expression at Burton, but also that the community there remained active in supporting Modwynn's cult up to Geoffrey's time and beyond. In contrast, there is no evidence that the community at Polesworth survived into the twelfth century, when the minster was re-founded as a Benedictine nunnery by Robert Marmion and his wife; by

⁷³ Sawyer (ed.), *Charters of Burton Abbey* (Oxford, 1979), 54-55.

⁷⁴ Bartlett (ed.), *Geoffrey of Burton*, Ch 43; Conchubran does not mention the new monastery at Burton, but perhaps considered such recent events irrelevant to his tale of the more distant past.

this time (1135x1144) all memory of Eadgyth and Osgyth appears to have been forgotten, save only St Eadgyth's name and her relics in the church there.⁷⁵ A legend printed by Dugdale claims that one Robert Marmion, having received estates from William I, ejected the occupants of a nunnery at Polesworth along with their abbess 'Oseyth', who accordingly took her community to live at their cell at Oldbury; a year later, Robert had a vision of St Eadgyth, who upbraided him for his action, persuading him to re-establish the community at Polesworth.⁷⁶ A series of charters confirms that a nunnery existed at Oldbury by the earlier twelfth century, and that the Marmion family moved the inmates into the old minster at Polesworth. However, the legend itself, with its vague grasp of chronology, cannot stand as evidence for a community of nuns at Polesworth before the twelfth century, and may well have been invented later to construct a spurious continuity between old and new institutions at Polesworth.⁷⁷ The name of the abbess is intriguing in light of the river miracle, but may well have been invented with knowledge of the miracle to hand; the name of the prioress recorded in the charters was 'Osanna'.⁷⁸

Taking a broader view, there is enough circumstantial evidence to confidently place Polesworth and Andresey amongst the Mercian minsters of the seventh, eighth or ninth centuries. Indeed, the possibility that the earlier dedication of the church of St Peter at Stapenhill included St Paul may indicate an early

⁷⁵ Dugdale, *Monasticon*, II, 366-368.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, II, 365-366; the legend was contained in a seventeenth-century manuscript in the possession of the Ferrers family of Tamworth castle.

⁷⁷ Foot, *Veiled Women*, 139-142; the evidence of the place-name 'Nunpool' is too tenuous to provide authority to a conjectured earlier nunnery.

⁷⁸ Dugdale, *Monasticon*, II, 366-368

minster there too, as such paired dedications were popular for these institutions;⁷⁹ the church on Andresey might then represent an early ascetic retreat, at a short distance from the main minster, paralleling that at Stowe in Lichfield and the one at Pooley suggested above for Polesworth. Both Pooley/Polesworth and Andresey/Stapenhill were located in a wider sacred landscape around the Rivers Trent and Tame in the heartland of the Mercian kingdom, which also contained the cathedral at Lichfield and the minsters at Hanbury, Repton and Breedon-on-the-Hill.

Of the minsters' saints, St Eadgyth can arguably be positioned amongst the Mercian saints of the later seventh century, although her identity otherwise remains obscure. St Modwynn is less easy to place, and it has been argued here that she was inserted into a tenth- or eleventh-century legend concerning St Eadgyth by a community that otherwise knew next to nothing about her; nevertheless, her name is rare, particularly in the element 'Mod', although, according to the 'Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England' database, she shares this element with up to nineteen different men named Æthelmod in the corpus of Anglo-Saxon charters, some of whom have Mercian connections in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries.⁸⁰ At any rate, there is no basis for considering her to be of Irish origin; this connection was almost certainly invented by Conchubran as part of his quest for St Monenna. Ultimately, whilst their origins will remain obscure, St Modwynn at Andresey and St Eadgyth at Polesworth should certainly be included amongst the pre-tenth

⁷⁹ J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), 200-201

⁸⁰ http://www.pase.ac.uk/pdb?dosp=VIEW_RECORDS&st=PERSON_NAME&value=2783&level=1&lbl=%C3%86thelmod. Furthermore, according to PASE, a man named Modulf witnessed a West Saxon charter in a spurious charter of the ninth or tenth century (S 287); and people named Modgifu, Moding, Modwin and Modwine appear in Domesday Book.

century corpus of Mercian saints and their minsters, whilst the hagiography that they inspired, from at least the tenth or eleventh century, provides an intriguing lesson in the malleability of miracle tales and, at the same time, the important connection between holiness and place.

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