WOEFUL BRIDGE AND BREEDON'S EXTRA-MURAL CEMETERY

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ABSTRACT

In 2005 the Melbourne Historical Research Group, of Melbourne, Derbyshire, published the diary of a local Victorian antiquarian, John Joseph Briggs. For the year 1867 this included entries about archaeological finds, in nearby Derbyshire and Leicestershire, made during the construction of the Midland Railway line between Derby and Ashby de la Zouch. In particular, reference was made to a burial ground near Woeful Bridge on the edge of the parish of Breedon on the Hill, Leicestershire. Neither the cemetery nor Woeful Bridge appear in the Historic Environment Record. This article locates both Woeful Bridge, which is still in existence in an overgrown state, and the cemetery. The probable dates of the burials and their context in relation to the Anglo-Saxon minster at Breedon are discussed.

THE DIARY ENTRIES

The basis for this article is text from the published edition of a diary of a local Victorian antiquarian, John Joseph Briggs[1]. Quoting from the entry under the date 26 December 1867:

> 'There has long been a tradition that in the valley on the south-east of Bredon [sic] near a spot now called "Wooffer" bridge a great battle was fought between the Saxons and the Danes - The place is most likely for such a battle and the name of the bridge seems somewhat to confirm the account of tradition - "Wooffer" is merely a corruption of Wulfur, and was spelt in old Saxon Chronicles in a dozen different ways, and is probably derived in some way or another from the name of the great Mercian King of that name. Recent excavations by railway navies [sic, i.e. navvies = navigators] when making a line of railway near the spot have found several skulls (two of which are in my possession) and other remains corroborating to a great extent the story of a great battle having been fought there and I have no doubt whatever that such did take place there between the Danes and Saxons one army occupying the entrenched camp at Bredon [sic] and the other occupying the hill opposite which bears some traces of rude fortification.

> [The following seems to be a new entry, date not given:]

> I went this day to the spot where the skeletons were found. It is on a gentle knowl which runs down to a rivulet which tradition says "ran down with blood" on the day of battle. I disinterred several of the skeletons : some were without skulls : some buried straight some crooked : some with the knees drawn up others on their sides, but one thing was observable in all the skeletons, that whenever the skull was on the skeleton it always lay due north. The skulls were all of persons grown up to manhood. They seemed to me to be remarkably thick, very similar in character being very broad at the back of the head and very narrow over the forehead. The hill seemed full of skeletons, many thousands must be there : indeed some hundreds must already have been carted away with the soil in making the Railway - The hill seemed quite full of animal matter and cut with a spade like butter. Before the surface was disturbed, the grass upon it grew long and rank, three times as high as the surrounding herbage and cattle did not seem to care to graze it. The skeletons were buried about 18 inches beneath the surface. No bones of horses have as yet been found and no implements of warfare or utensils of domestic use.'

Briggs was a substantial landholder and farmer from King's Newton, Melbourne, Derbyshire, and had antiquarian interests. He lived about 2 miles away from the Leicestershire location discussed in the above quotation. A few months earlier he had reported on the cremation cemetery, now believed

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[1] Philip Heath (ed.), *Melbourne 1820 – 1875: A Diary by John Joseph Briggs* (Melbourne, Derbyshire: Melbourne Historical Research Group, 2005), pp. 221-2.

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to date from the sixth century, in Kings Newton, which was also exposed by the railway construction, and shortly afterwards he and others published further information[2].

As is not uncommon with Victorian antiquarians, he came up with some ideas which, in the light of more recent scholarship, might be seen as rather fanciful. However, the above extracts contain some very useful information.

WOEFUL BRIDGE

Briggs suggested that "Wooffer" Bridge, normally written as Woeful Bridge, got its name from a corruption of the name of a Mercian king "Wulfur". Another local writer, F Taylor[3], says that Woeful Bridge was so named because of 'great slaughter which took place'.

Beyond these two suggestions there is a further possibility based on the fact that Woeful Bridge lies at the boundary of several settlements or townships, including that of Wilson, Leicestershire. The earliest forms of the place-name Wilson were Wifelesthorp and subsequently Wiveleston, meaning Wifel's outlying farmstead and Wifel's settlement. A charter[4] (King Edgar, AD 972) says 'wifelesthorpe' in which the Anglo Saxon letter called 'thorn' has here been replaced by 'th'. The final 'e' is the dative form, so the nominative would have been 'wifelesthorp', meaning Wifel's farmstead. Wifel was a not uncommon personal name. Woeful Bridge may therefore just be a corruption of Wifel's bridge.

Woeful Bridge is spelt as Woefull Bridge on the 1758 pre-enclosure map for the Lordship of Tongue[5]. The bridge itself is not named on the map but is indicated by a heavier line where the road, marked as 'Moor Lane' and 'Road to Breedon', crosses the watercourse. It lies within a small area marked 'Common', but there is an adjacent 'Woefull Bridge Close' of just over an acre.

This small close is unnamed on the 1761 map of the Lordship of Tongue[6]. Instead a 'Woefull Bridge Close' of nearly 8 acres is to be found on the 1761 map of the Lordship of Breedon[7]. On the associated 1758 map[8] this was a part of Breedon's 'Nether Field' and was labelled 'Demesne Lands'. This re-location of 'Woefull Bridge Close' looks like an error on behalf of the 1761 mapmaker (and there are several discrepancies between 1758 and 1761 maps in the area of these settlement boundaries) particularly because the nearest point of this field is 160m uphill from the bridge.

The bridge carried the road passing through Breedon and Isley Walton over the large brook, or small river, formed from the confluence of two brooks – those from Tonge and Breedon respectively – continuing as Wilson Brook, and Ramsley Brook further downstream, before passing through Kings Newton to the River Trent.

In 1760 Woeful Bridge became the terminus of a section of turnpike (other terminus Hinckley) and occurs by name in the associated Act of Parliament. Comparison of two maps already mentioned (Tonge 1758 & Tonge 1761), dating from either side of the creation of the turnpike, shows some road widening, realignment, etc. Woeful Bridge featured, again in relation to the turnpike, in a further Act of 1774.

The records of Leicestershire County Quarter Sessions then show that a contract for repair / building work on Woeful Bridge was placed for the turnpike in 1812[9].

In 1867 work on the Derby to Ashby branch of the Midland Railway reached the area of Woeful Bridge. Part of the work required a new bridge, just a few yards away to the south, to carry the turnpike over the new line of railway as well as the brook. On completion of the railway construction

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[2]   J J Briggs, W Massey, & L Jewitt, 'Notice of a discovery of ancient remains at King's Newton, Derbyshire', *The Reliquary* 9 (1868-9), pp.1-8 + 3 Plates.

[3]   F Taylor, *History of Breedon-on-the-Hill: Church & Village* (1906), p. 7, hereafter Taylor 'Breedon History 1906'.

[4]   Sawyer no. S 749

[5]   The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland, Ref. DG20/Ma/46/2, hereafter 'Tonge 1758'.

[6]   The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland, Ref. DG20/Ma/46/6, hereafter 'Tonge 1761'.

[7]   The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland, Ref. DG20/Ma/46/4 , hereafter 'Breedon 1761'.

[8]   The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland, Ref. DG20/Ma/46/1, hereafter 'Breedon 1758'.

[9]   The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland, Ref. QS30/2/8

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works, the old Woeful Bridge was no longer used for the turnpike road but was nevertheless not demolished. The turnpike continued as such for several more years until 1878.

The disused Woeful Bridge still exists in an overgrown state, next to the current highway bridge over the railway and brook. Grid reference SK 41773 23946; see Figure 1.
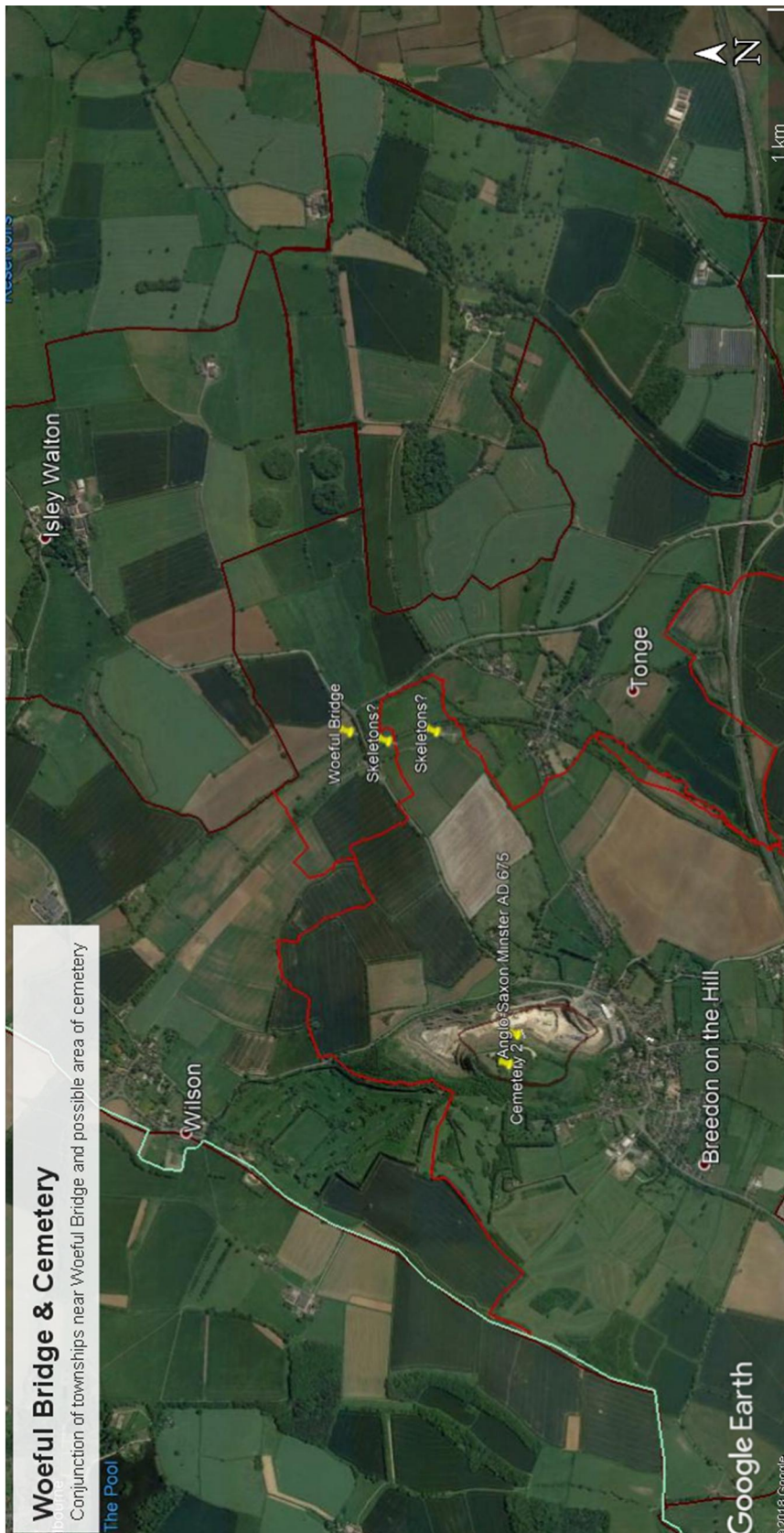

FIGURE 1 - WOEFUL BRIDGE AND CEMETERY

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WAS THERE A 'GREAT BATTLE'?

Returning to Briggs' diary, the suggestion that 'a great battle was fought between the Saxons and the Danes' near Woeful Bridge is not supported in the historical record nor by any archaeological evidence, although the suggestion of a battle was repeated by Taylor, 'Breedon History 1906', p. 7:

> 'It is most probable that a battle was fought near where Tonge and Breedon Station now stands, and a small hill there has always borne the name of "Woeful Bridge Hill" because of the great slaughter which took place. The word bridge refers to a bridge which probably crossed the small stream which flows at the foot of the hill'.

Taylor didn't mention that 'there had long been a tradition that', only that 'it is most probable that' a battle took place, and if there had been such a tradition it doesn't seem to have survived to the present day other than in Briggs' diary. However, although there is no written record of a specific event, it is generally assumed that the famous minster probably founded in about AD 675 at Breedon[10]:-

- like many others, was plundered by the Danish 'army', or
- foreseeing this possibility, was abandoned by the inhabitants who took at least part of their movable treasures and archive collections with them.

There is no historic record of such events at Breedon but, if either of these happened, the most likely dates would have been

- about AD 868 when a Danish presence was established at Nottingham (roughly 24km from Breedon Hill as the crow flies), or maybe more likely
- about AD 873/4 when a Danish force overwintered at Repton (roughly 11km away)[11].

With respect to this latter event, if the Danes travelled to Repton from the east via the River Trent they would have passed within 4km of Breedon Hill and if they travelled by roads / tracks which existed at that time they could have passed within 3km, with the Hill very prominently visible. When the Danes left Repton in the spring, part of that force moved on to Cambridge by an unstated route but which could perhaps have passed within about 3km of the minster.

Rather than a battle, which implies a resisting force, inhabitants of the minster may have fled or may even have been killed. It certainly appears to have been the case that minsters and churches were a target for such raids, as suggested for instance in King Alfred's preface[12], dating from the 890s, to his translation of the 6th century Pope Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis* where he talked of how:

> '… I saw, before it had all been ravaged and burnt, how the churches throughout all England stood filled with treasures and books, and there were also a great many of God's servants.'

While this background suggests that there might have been violent events at Breedon during the Danish Viking period, there appears to be no evidence of a 'battle'. Nor does Briggs' own description of the burials near Woeful Bridge suggest that they resulted from such.

BREEDON AND ITS CEMETERIES

Before delving further into Briggs' diary extract, it is worth considering how the history of Breedon on the Hill (which incidentally, in translation from earlier languages, is a doubly tautological placename meaning 'hill hill on the hill'!) would have influenced burial practices and the locations of those burials.

Breedon is not a typical parish. Firstly there was a Late Iron Age hillfort enclosing about 9ha (22 acres) of the hill at Breedon, the boundary earthworks of which are known locally as The Bulwarks. Secondly there was an early Christian minster at Breedon, probably from about AD 675 as referenced above on page 4. If the background to this dating is correct, the land grants were under King Æthelred

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[10] See for instance: *Charters of Peterborough Abbey*, ed. S E Kelly, Anglo-Saxon Charters 14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2009), pp 178–185.

[11] Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. There are nine different medieval manuscript versions of this. In these versions the Nottingham dates vary between 868 and 869 while the Repton dates vary between 873/4 and 875/6.

[12] <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/english/courses/engl440/pastoral/ translation.shtml> accessed 30 November 2018.

of Mercia, brother of Wulfhere his predecessor as king who is said to have been the first to have converted to Christianity. The minster would appear to have been centred on the former hillfort. The inner bank of The Bulwarks is shown as a brown line enclosing a roughly oval shape on Figure 1. Within this is a yellow pushpin representing the minster, which has been positioned at the present-day church, and another marking the nearest point to the church of a group of graves excavated in 1946.

The minster as a whole, was no small affair, probably originally having control of 66 hides of land[13]. This number, based on three transactions of 20 hides at Bredun, 31 at Hrepingas, and 15 at Cedenan Ac, arises from a composite document preserved amongst the charters of Peterborough Abbey and which undoubtedly "depends on seventh century records"[14].

It consisted of 3 multiple estates probably making up a single block of land equating to nearly 60 square miles of South Derbyshire and North West Leicestershire (assuming Hrepingas, S1805, to have been a multiple estate including Repton, and Cedenan Ac, S1804, to have been a multiple estate bounding that of Breedon and based on Cademan, rather than the unlikely Cadney in north Lincolnshire). Note, though, that apart from Breedon these locations are a matter of ongoing debate.

Generally minsters had walls or other barriers, sometimes only symbolic, separating the religious activities and inhabitants from the secular world. In the case of Breedon this precinct may have been provided by the 9ha (22 acres) within the Iron Age hillfort boundary, since this was a typical minster size[15]. There are also other instances of hillforts being adopted for use by minsters. Within the precinct boundaries there would have been a church, or in many cases more than one church, which in the early days of the minster might typically have been constructed in timber. There would also, of course, have been domestic buildings and guest accommodation.

From its early beginnings, the minster at Breedon quickly became important. For instance, four saints said by Hugh Candidus, in the early twelfth century, to have been buried at Breedon – Saints Ærdulf (to whom, in the form St Hardulph, the current church is dedicated jointly with St Mary), Cotta, Benna and Fretheric[16] – are likely to have been early in date. Furthermore, in AD 731 Tatwine (later St Tatwine), a former member of Breedon's *familia*, became Archbishop of Canterbury. Tatwine may well have composed his set of *Enigmata* while still at Breedon[17] where there is good reason to believe there was a 'decent working library'[18].

Bearing this early success in mind it is likely that a church, churches, or other buildings, built in stone, were in use by some point in the eighth century. Certainly the famous stone sculptures now built in to the present-day parish church, which constitute by far the largest collection of Mercian sculpture still in existence, date from either side of AD 800 according to Dr Bergius[19].

Two charters of the mid-ninth century[20] indicate that the minster was still then maintaining 'scribal and educational standards' (see Snook 'Aldhelm', p. 131). They also, however, provide some evidence of the pressure being placed on religious establishments under King Berhtwulf in a period of decline of Mercian power.

As already mentioned in the previous Section, the life of the minster as a powerful working entity may have come to an end at the time of the Danish predations of the late ninth century, although there are other potential reasons for its decline. The presence of certain charters relating to Breedon

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[13] See Sawyer nos. S1803, S1804 and S1805.

[14] *Charters of Peterborough Abbey*, ed. S E Kelly, Anglo-Saxon Charters 14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2009), p 180.

[15] See, for instance: Foot, Sarah, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England c. 600-900* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 98-117.

[16] W. T. Mellows (ed.), *The Peterborough Chronicle of Hugh Candidus* (Peterborough Museum Society, 1980), p. 32.

[17] Ben Snook, 'When Aldhelm met the Vikings: Advanced Latinity in Ninth-Century Mercian Charters', *Mediaevistik* 26 (2013), pp. 111-148, hereafter Snook 'Aldhelm'.

[18] Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, OUP, 2006), p. 44.

[19] Gwendoline C. C. Bergius, 'The Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture of Mercia as Evidence for Continental Influence and Cultural Exchange', Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Archaeology, Durham University, 2012. Accessed at <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/6116716.pdf>.

[20] Sawyer nos. S193 (AD 841) and S197 (AD 848).

in the archives of other institutions such as Worcester and Peterborough may be an indication that the incumbents removed themselves to safer locations and that the minster was abandoned.

Various tenth and early eleventh century charters, dealing with particular estates which would probably have previously been part of the 66 hides of minster land, provide some confirmation of this significant change[21]. Some of these suggest unsuccessful attempts to revive Breedon's earlier religious importance during the period often called the Benedictine revolution.

It is not known what became of the Breedon church(es) that existed in the period during which the minster was probably active – seventh century through to the late ninth century – nor where it (or they) were positioned.

The tenth and eleventh centuries were a period in which, Christianity having established its dominance, parish churches developed. That is to say, in earlier times religious communities were based on minsters which served large geographical areas. The later development saw the expansion of parish churches under diocesan control. These were served by priests providing burial, amongst other Christian rites, to those within a much closer proximity.

Cemetery 3

The earliest parts of the current church of St Mary and St Hardulph on the hill at Breedon, other than the sculptures previously mentioned, are said to be Norman. Common practice from those times through the medieval period was for burials to take place within an enclosed cemetery or churchyard often on the south side of a church. This was the case at Breedon[22] until comparatively recent times when the, still active, cemetery had to expand round to the north of the church.

Breedon hill had become the home of a cell of Augustinian canons, under Nostell Priory, Yorkshire, from 1122 until the Dissolution. Compared with the Anglo-Saxon minster, however, this was a small affair with never more than 5 canons, governed from Nostell, and endowment of perhaps 60ha (5 virgates, maybe 150 acres) of land. It is known that Breedon church, or other attached stone construction, extended to the west of the current structures[23]. The date of the now demolished extended church structure is not known nor its connection or otherwise with the Augustinian canons or the earlier minster. However, suffice to say that the cemetery south, and now north, of the current church remains in use and would therefore appear to be the most recent in any sequence of burial grounds associated with Breedon. The date of the earliest burials within this cemetery is not known.

Cemetery 2

Two-thirds of the land enclosed by the Iron Age 'hillfort' on Breedon Hill, which possibly became the main precinct of the Anglo-Saxon minster, has now been quarried away. However, archaeological excavations carried out from 1946, when only 30% had been removed, through to the 1970s located seemingly Christian burials within the hillfort, all of which were 50m or more outside and to the east of the present churchyard and 70m or more from the east end of the church[24]. This near point is shown on Figure 1 with a yellow pushpin labelled as Cemetery 2. The 1946 excavations had targeted the Iron Age hillfort seemingly in the limited knowledge of historical evidence of the Anglo-Saxon minster. They were however aware of the existence of the Mercian sculptures incorporated into the church. The excavation uncovered 23 graves ahead of quarrying. The area of detailed excavation extended about 15m north to south but it was found that the cemetery seemed to have also extended at least 45m to the south of the excavated area. No detail was given of the east to west spread.

The skeletons have never been firmly dated but Kathleen Kenyon, later Dame Kathleen, said of the graves:

> '… they are certainly pre-medieval, for there is a considerable amount of medieval pottery in the upper levels, which would have been introduced into the graves if they had been dug subsequently.'

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[21] For example, Sawyer nos. S224, S768, S749, S906, S1536.

[22] See, for instance the pre-enclosure map, Breedon 1758.

[23] See, for instance, Nichols Vol.3, Pl.92, p. 688.

[24] Kathleen M Kenyon, M.A., F.S.A., 'Excavations at Breedon-on-the-Hill, 1946', *TLAS* 26, Plate 1 & pp.17-82.

The skeletons were extended and aligned at about 70° from north, i.e. not exactly west – east (90°). Skulls, as might be expected, were at the westernmost end of the graves. Note that many more skeletons were collected ahead of quarrying in subsequent years, resulting in analysis of the ages at death of 156 skulls[25]. Of these, 46 were of various ages up to the age of 20 for which gender could not be determined. The remaining 110 adults consisted of 43 females and 52 males, with 15 undeterminable. At the 1962 date of Professor Miles' paper the undated skulls and other skeletal remains were in the custody of the Odontological Museum.

Since the burials all had a Christian orientation, and were said to be pre-medieval, remote from and not exactly aligned with the current medieval church and churchyard, they must have pre-dated the latter. The likelihood is that this was an Anglo-Saxon cemetery, of the post-conversion period, seemingly located within the overall site of the early minster at Breedon. O'Brien[26] compiled a database of the known Iron Age, Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in Great Britain. She suggested at page 189 that the type of burial dates this Breedon cemetery as 'either late-Roman or post-seventh century'. She, however, was not aware of the cemetery described by Briggs which is only 1100m away.

An interesting possibility is suggested by the coincidence of the alignment of the skeletons with that of the northern boundary of the Marketstead shown on the Breedon 1758 map. It may be that an earlier church or churches, and possibly other related structures and boundaries, had this alignment, which differs from the alignment of the present day church, and the churchyard burials, by about 8°. It may be that the present church was built over an earlier church but we may also speculate as to whether there was an Anglo-Saxon church immediately to the north of this earlier area of cemetery, Cemetery 2. There is a hint that some other buildings might have been further north of this, in the enclosure that came to be called Lamb Croft. That is to say, aerial photographs[27] taken in 1946 show possible rectilinear parch marks with the same orientation as the Anglo-Saxon skeletons.

While it is fairly certain that a minster of the size and importance of Breedon would have had a fairly extensive range of buildings the details and locations of these structures, or some of them, are unfortunately likely to remain a matter of speculation, the land involved having now disappeared to quarrying.

Cemetery 1 –Briggs' Cemetery

Returning to John Joseph Briggs' diary it seems that there might be reason to doubt the orientations that he mentioned – perhaps he visited the location on a cloudy day without a compass. Doubt may exist because Woeful Bridge is in a 62° direction from Breedon Church – much closer to north-east than the south-east that he suggested. If he got this compass bearing wrong, the skull / skeleton directions would then have been roughly west to east, rather than north to south as he suggested. Without re-excavation this alignment cannot be checked.

Briggs could, however, have got his bearings right, as north-south burial alignment was also common in some periods. For instance, O'Brien, p.13, found that

'The almost equal proportions of those using N-S and S-N burial is a factor which should be borne in mind when examining possible Romano-British burials in early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. East-west burial is a minority rite in all cemeteries in the sample. It would appear, therefore, that the generally received wisdom that west-east burial had become the statistical norm in Roman Britain by the late fourth century needs to be reassessed.'

The presence of consistently aligned, articulated, and extended skeletons will often imply Christian burial with roughly west to east direction. However, north-south (or south-north) was the favoured

[25] A Miles, 'Assessment of the Ages of a Population of Anglo-Saxons from Their Dentitions', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 55, pp. 881-886.

[26] Elizabeth O'Brien, 'Post-Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England: the burial evidence reviewed', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1996, hereafter 'O'Brien'. Accessed at https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:e415687f-4964-4225-8bc3-23e4ab8e5e78/download_file?safe_filename=602363777.pdf&file_format=application%2Fpdf&type_of_work=Thesis.

[27] <https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/en/image/EAW000937> zoomable high resolution image accessed 11 December 2018; also <https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/en/image/EAW001668>

alignment throughout the Iron Age but generally in crouched burials. Extended inhumations, which might have had N-S or W-E orientation, developed in the later Romano-British period[28].

Amongst the skeletons that Briggs described he also came across 'some buried straight some crooked : some with the knees drawn up others on their sides'. The contemporaneity of crouched and extended north-south inhumations is known to have occurred elsewhere in the late Iron Age, but continued up to the late fourth century (or later in small numbers) in rural locations away from Roman centres[29]. By this date the burials were normally unfurnished, as here.

Headless inhumations were amongst those described by Briggs – 'some were without skulls' – and occurred in the later Romano-British[30] and Early Anglo-Saxon (fifth to eighth century) periods, sometimes also Middle Anglo-Saxon (600 or 650 – c.850). Briggs says that, when the skull was in place, the orientation was fixed (he said N-S but also possibly roughly W-E). This implies that at least some of those without the skull in place were not so orientated.

Briggs suggests that 'some hundreds' of skeletons were carted away in making the railway, but that 'many thousands must be there'. Leaving aside the possibility of some exaggeration of numbers, we see that he had reason to believe that the railway only destroyed part of the cemetery. One presumes that there remain archaeological possibilities, especially bearing in mind that bone preservation seems to have been good. This may mean that the soil is alkaline, as might be anticipated since Breedon hill has long been quarried as a source of limestone.

Despite many skeletons having been carted away and his own digging of 'several of the skeletons' (which presumably were close to but beyond the railway's earthworks), he says that 'no implements of warfare or utensils of domestic use' were found. He made no mention of jewellery or costume items. This apparent lack of grave goods suggests that it would be classed as a completely unfurnished cemetery[31]. Most Iron Age burials lacked grave goods. In rural areas this practice may have continued through into the Anglo-Saxon period but unfurnished cemeteries were again 'found in large numbers during the second half of the 7th century'.

It is worth noting that, until at least a century after the minster was probably founded (and possibly longer), with the possible exception of a few special cases such as the saints, burials might not have taken place on the hill.[32]

Professor Foot says:

'The transition in England from the use of pagan burial grounds, lying predominantly on the boundaries of territories and settlements, to burial within Christian graveyards, attached to minster churches, depended on a number of local factors and no single pattern can be postulated for the entire country.[142] There was no single model to which all churches conformed; patterns of burial in the countryside would have differed from those of urban settlements, particularly before the early ninth century, while the Roman prohibition on intra-mural burial was still respected.[143]'

Her footnotes here were:

'[142] Richard Morris has shown how further understanding of this question is dependent on more intensive archaeological fieldwork: *The Church in British Archaeology* (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1983), pp. 49-62. For a more recent analysis of burial on boundaries see Andrew Reynolds, 'Burials, boundaries and charters in Anglo-Saxon England: a reassessment', in Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds (eds.), *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales* (London: Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2002), pp. 171-94.'

and

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[28] O'Brien, p. 3.

[29] O'Brien, pp. 9-11, 50.

[30] O'Brien, pp 3

[31] Geake, Helen, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England c. 600 - c. 850 A.D.* (D Phil Thesis, University of York, Department of Archaeology, 1995), v.1, p. 283.

[32] Foot, Sarah, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England c. 600-900* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.312.

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'[143] I discussed this issue in detail in my thesis: *Anglo-Saxon minsters AD 597-ca 900: the religious life in England before the Benedictine reform* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1990), pp. 275-8. It was the eighth-century archbishop of Canterbury, Cuthbert, who was credited with moving the burial-place for the archbishops inside the walls of the city, at much the same time as the ban on intra-mural burial was lifted in Rome.'

Note that archbishop Cuthbert, referred to in Professor Foot's footnote number 143, was in post from about 740 to late 760. He was next but one (6 years) after the death of Archbishop Tatwine (formerly of Breedon). It seems possible therefore that none of the Anglo-Saxon burials from Cemetery 2 within the Iron Age "Bulwarks" on Breedon Hill, from an area now lost to the quarry, dated from before the late eighth century. They are most likely to have been from the period known as Late Anglo-Saxon (beginning c. 850) or later, although they could have been as early as the foundation of the minster. Unfortunately, so far as I am aware, no work has been done on dating any of the recovered skeletons although radio-carbon dating has become available since they were excavated.

A further possibility might be considered – that the precinct that contained the religious functions of the minster was confined to the western sectors of the former hillfort, consisting of about 2½ha (6½ acres) including the present church. This cemetery location might then have been seen as suitably extra-mural to allow general burials to have taken place prior to the ninth century.

As the minster was probably founded in about AD 675, minster-period Christian burials could, in the light of current knowledge, have been in an older cemetery outside the minster precinct and possibly at a boundary between territories or settlements. It is also known that, for this early period, such Christian burials could co-exist in the same burial ground with pagan burials.

It is therefore greatly significant that Woeful Bridge lies at the territorial boundary of Breedon, Tonge, Wilson, Isley Walton and Langley. The boundaries of the first 3 of these have been taken from the 1758 Enclosure maps; the other 2 are taken from the civil parish boundaries shown on the 1882 Ordnance Survey map. In Figure 1 the darker red lines are parish boundaries and the brighter red lines are township boundaries. The light blue line towards the left of the Figure is the county boundary (Leicestershire / Derbyshire).

Since there are two main differences between the 1758 and 1761 maps, it seems fair to say that the Breedon / Wilson / Tonge township boundaries are unreliable in fine detail near Woeful Bridge. This having been said there are hints at the most likely earlier boundaries.

- Firstly, there is a long hedge on the 1758 map[33] of Wilson which extends continuously for over 1350m from not far out of the north-western side of Wilson's settlement core all the way to the main road at Woeful Bridge, despite the final 380m being shown as part of Tonge on the Tonge 1758 map. This hedge divided the meadow from the ploughland. It seems likely, then, that Wilson township extended all the way to the road. (The 1761 map, in any case, shows this boundary located about 75m beyond that shown on the 1758 map).
- Secondly, the Breedon 1758 map shows 'Moor' and 'Moor Meadow' in Breedon. These are parts of the 'tongue' of land between the watercourses from which Tonge is thought to have got its name! On the Tonge 1761 map this area is shown as, and numbered as, part of Tonge. However, on the assembled 1761 map of Breedon, Tonge and Wilson, the township boundary is shown where it was on the 1758 maps despite the field numbering showing it in Tonge! Place-naming and practical geography imply that this area lay within Tonge's boundaries.

While the detail of any of these boundaries may well have been a little different 1000 years earlier, it remains clear that the area around Woeful Bridge in which the cemetery was located was remote from the settlement centres and in the area of the conjunction of these 5 townships.

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[33] The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland, Ref. DG20/Ma/46/3, hereafter 'Wilson 1758'.

To conclude this Section, the burial practices described by Briggs suggest that the cemetery was probably Romano-British in origins but may have continued in use into the Early Anglo-Saxon (fifth to eighth century) period. It is further possible that it didn't go totally out of use until the mid-ninth century.

CEMETERY LOCATION

The extra-mural cemetery was near "Wooffer" or Woeful Bridge according to Briggs, but whereabouts? He mentions that it was 'on a gentle knowl which runs down to a rivulet'. To identify the rivulet it is important to be aware that some alteration of watercourses seems to have occurred before or at the time of the construction of the railway. That is to say that there is a difference in this respect between the Tonge 1758 pre-enclosure map and the Ordnance Survey maps of 1882 and later. On the earlier map, before the railway, two such watercourses joined near Woeful Bridge. The larger of the two was capable of providing power for the Tonge and Worthington watermills, the upstream locations of both of these being known. The smaller watercourse flows from Breedon. In 1758 this seems to have followed, for about 300m, a course which lies just a few metres to the east of the line that became the railway. It can still be seen on the ground as a ditch which sometimes lies partially wet in the winter. The two watercourses then became one, about 50m upstream of Woeful Bridge. This would have been a typical place for an old route to be bridged over a river – further to the east and two fords or bridges would have been necessary.

Nowadays the brook from Breedon joins the larger watercourse at a point which is about 250m further upstream than the earlier confluence.

It seems possible, then, that the 'rivulet' that Briggs mentioned was the watercourse from Breedon, which is now the visible remnants of a ditch which lies dry in the summer and partially wet in the winter. If this is the case, the skeletons were probably encountered in some part of the land lying between the main Breedon to Isley Walton road and the sewage works at Tonge. These locations are shown on Figure 1 by yellow pushpins labelled "Skeletons?". The 'gentle knowl' of Briggs' diary, if this is the correct location, is certainly gentle and is centred at about mid-way between these.

CONCLUSIONS

A bridge called Woefull Bridge must have been in existence prior to the earliest (1758) map of Tonge. The bridge as it existed in the turnpike era, known as Woeful Bridge, went out of use after a new bridge for the Midland Railway was built in the late 1860s. The disused Woeful Bridge still exists in an overgrown state, next to the current highway bridge over the railway and brook.

John Joseph Briggs' 1867 description of a burial ground near Woeful Bridge might be consistent with its earliest use being in the pre-Christian Anglian, or even Romano-British and Iron Age, periods. The mixed (including pagan and possibly Christian) burial types that he described imply that its use may have extended into the conversion period (perhaps AD 650 onwards). With the knowledge that there was a cemetery of, pre-medieval, Anglo-Saxon date (Cemetery 2) inside Breedon minster's probable precinct boundary, but close to a church or churches, the latest use of the Woeful Bridge cemetery may have been around AD 800 – 850, or even AD 675. Bearing in mind Briggs' burial descriptions, it is also possible that it went out of use at an early or pre-Anglo-Saxon date.

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