



Orm of Kirkbymoorside

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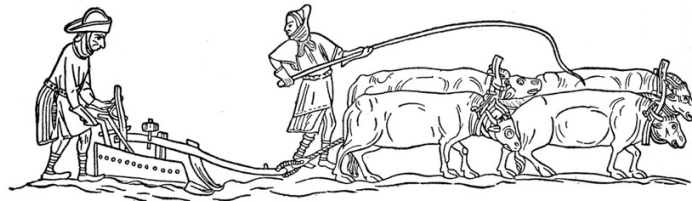
Orm has a special place in the heritage of Kirkdale and Kirkbymoorside as he is the earliest individual who we can link to the area by name. This is because he is listed in Domesday Book, and because he rebuilt St. Gregory's Minster, Kirkdale.

Domesday Book records the detailed survey of English landholding conducted on the orders of William the Conqueror in 1086: one of its main purposes was to allow taxes to be collected efficiently. The entry for Kirkbymoorside tells us that Orm was the Lord of the Manor and that he held five carucates of land. The inscription translates as:

"In CHIRCHEBI (KIRKBY) Orm has 5 carucates of land taxable"

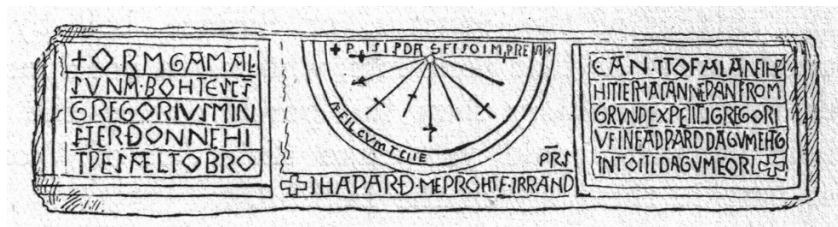
In CHIRCHEBI. h̄b Orm. v. car⁴ træ ad gl̄d.

A carucate was a medieval unit of land that could be cultivated by a team of eight oxen during a year; the name derives from the *carruca*, a heavy plough introduced to England following the Viking invasions of the 9th century.



In modern terms, a carucate is roughly 120 acres (50 hectares), which means that Orm owned about 600 acres around Kirkbymoorside – a substantial estate in medieval times. In addition, Domesday Book records that he owned other large holdings, including 8 carucates at Hovingham.

Orm is also known because his name appears on the Anglo Saxon sundial above the door of St. Gregory's Minster.



The inscription reads:

"Orm the son of Gamal acquired St. Gregory's church when it was completely ruined and collapsed and he caused it to be built anew from the ground to Christ and to St. Gregory in the days of King Edward and in the days of Earl Tostig"

Orm and Gamal are Scandinavian names, so it is likely they were descended from Viking settlers. They may have been from a family of aristocratic warriors called 'housecarls' who helped King Canute

conquer England in 1016 and were rewarded with English landed estates. The Earl Tostig referred to was Earl of Northumbria from 1055 to 1065 and the brother of Harold Godwinson, who led the English forces against William of Normandy in 1066: knowing these dates means we can date the church's reconstruction to that 10-year period. Tostig murdered Orm's father in 1065 and was himself killed at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066 fighting his brother, after which Harold and his army had to hurry to the south coast to fight the Norman invaders less than three weeks later – the forced march was a factor in William's victory at the Battle of Hastings.

Before the Norman Conquest Orm was an influential person in Northumbria (in other words the land to the north of the Humber), and had married into the leading aristocratic family of the region. His wife Aethelthryth was the daughter of Ealdred, Earl of Northumbria between 1025 and 1038, and his brother-in-law Siward became the Earl from 1041 to 1055.

Many centuries later, Orm's reconstruction of St Gregory's was commemorated by the poet, art critic and philosopher Herbert Read (1893-1968), who loved Kirkdale and is buried in the graveyard at St. Gregory's. His poem 'Kirkdale' reads:

*I, Orm the son of Gamal,
Found these fractured stones
Starting out of the fragrant thicket.
The river bed was dry.
The rooftrees naked and bleached,
Nettles in the nave and aisleways
On the altar an owl's cast
And a feather from a wild dove's wing.
There was peace in the valley:
Far into the eastern sea
The foe had gone, leaving death and ruin
And a longing for a priest's solace.
Fast the feather lay
Like a sulky jewel in my head
Till I knew it had fallen in a holy place
Therefore I raised these grey stones up again.*

Nothing is known about Orm after the Norman Conquest, except that the time of the Domesday Survey all his lands were held by tenants of Norman origin (although he remained the owner). He was evidently not involved in uprisings against King William, as his holdings were not affected by the 'harrying of the north' when William laid waste large areas between the Humber and the Tees. Ring-leaders of the rebellions had their lands devastated; for instance the holdings of a man named Morcar, at Pickering, reduced in value from £88 in 1066 to just over £1 in 1086.

By 1076 the Earl of Northumbria was a Norman, as were many other landowners and higher-ranking people. Yet an Anglo Saxon culture continued to thrive in parallel, as evidenced by the retention by Orm of large tracts of land towards the end of that turbulent half-century.

Steve Peet edits the Kirkbymoorside History Group's e-newsletter, which appears three times a year. To receive copies, please contact Steve on smpeet@outlook.com.

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