

Politics, Power and Piety: The Cult of St Armel in Early Tudor England and Wales

Madeleine Gray

The Tudor dynasty plays such a key part in the construction of the English (and even the British) national identity that it is hard to remember how very tenuous was the claim to the throne of the dynasty's founder Henry VII. His own line, descended from John of Gaunt and his mistress Katherine Swynford, had been legitimated but barred from the succession. He was the half-nephew of the last Lancastrian king Henry VI, but by the king's French mother and a Welsh squire. In the earlier years of his reign he had to confront several serious challenges, from legitimate claimants as well as the two famous pretenders Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck. This vulnerability continued into the reign of his second son, who eventually succeeded him as Henry VIII, and at least partly explains the latter's determination to beget a son and his break with Rome.

For the older Henry, though, it was an entirely conventional piety which underpinned his political strategies. The saints he chose for private veneration and public commemoration resonated with his own life and experiences as well as with the identity of his kingdom, and his own personal devotions could be appropriated by his subjects as tokens of loyalty. The Lady Chapel which he built and endowed in Westminster Abbey appears to reflect the devotional stance of a traditional late medieval ruler but also had a clear political agenda (Tatton-Brown and Mortimer 2003). Henry's original intention was ostensibly to provide a fitting shrine for the remains of his saintly half-uncle Henry VI and a suitable focus for a complex pattern of endowments for his soul and those of his family. Generally regarded as an ineffectual ruler, Henry VI was nevertheless revered as a saint almost from the moment of his death, and his burial place at Chertsey rapidly became a focus for pilgrimage in defiance of prohibitions by the Yorkist monarchs (Webb 2000: 175-79; Knox and Leslie 1923). The whole of Westminster's Lady Chapel was intended as a burial place for the royal 'saint', whose cult was fostered by the Tudors with a blend of political and religious propaganda. Their success is suggested by the fact

that over 200 pilgrim souvenirs featuring Henry VI, in several distinct designs, have now been excavated in London (Denison 1996).

The lavish endowment was in fact a testimony both to Henry VII's deep and highly conventional piety and to his personal and political vulnerability. The repeated emphasis on commemoration of 'our uncle of blissed memorie King Henry the vjth' was designed to blur the very tenuous nature of his own claim to the throne. The new chapel was to be built over the thirteenth-century Lady Chapel which housed the tomb of Henry VII's grandmother Katherine de Valois, daughter of Charles VI of France, widow of Henry V and mother of the saintly Henry VI. By his emphasis on her commemoration, Henry VII linked his own victory at Bosworth with Henry V's victories in France, recalled the English claim to the throne of France and drew attention to his own descent from another royal saint, Louis IX of France (Condon 2003: 63). The link with France had a more immediate resonance. Henry's final push for power in 1485 was made with French support and it was probably the French pikemen with their Swiss training who gave him the victory at Bosworth (Jones 2002: 166-67).

In their studies of the iconography and significance of the chapel, Margaret Condon, Christopher Wilson and Philip Lindley (in Tatton-Brown and Mortimer 2003) suggest that the structure and decoration were virtually complete by the time of the king's death and can therefore be attributed with some confidence to his own wishes. The iconography of the chapel is a remarkable compendium of late medieval devotion which has survived surprisingly undamaged, presumably because of its location at the heart of English (and British) royal power. Unfortunately, we cannot be certain that all the statues of saints are in their original locations, so any conclusions based on their arrangement must be tentative. Nevertheless, they are a carefully-chosen cloud of witnesses. Here are the traditional saints of the international church, evangelists, apostles, virgin martyrs, learned doctors. But here also are the saints of the English tradition: ecclesiastical saints like Thomas of Canterbury, St Cuthbert and St Dunstan, but also royal saints and martyrs like Edmund and Edward (on the cults of the royal saints of England, as well as Tatton-Brown & Mortimer, see Bale 2009; Lindley 2009; and for an alternative explanation of one of the Worcester carvings, Buckley 2006). Charles Phythian-Adams has pointed out that the kings and bishops provide a pretty comprehensive regional coverage of England – a nation-building strategy as well as an assertion of royal power and piety (Lindley 2003: 282).

It is in this light that we should view the two representations of one of the most obscure saints in this holy assembly. At the east end of the north aisle and in the third bay of the south triforium there are statues of a bearded man wearing armour

under a chasuble, with a small dragon bound in his stole. This is St Armel, a saint for whom Henry had a particular devotion. St Armel or Armagill was a sixth-century Welsh saint, said to have been the cousin of Sts Samson and Cadfan. He left Wales for Brittany, possibly as a result of the Yellow Plague of the mid-sixth century. According to the Breton accounts of his life (the earliest of which is in the twelfth-century Rennes Breviary), he settled first at Plouarzel. Here, according to one legend, he became involved in political struggles connected with Iudhael, heir to the kingdom of Cornwall. With the help of King Childebert, he founded monasteries at St Armel-des-Boscheaux and at Ploërmel, where his relics were venerated. The most famous story in his *vita*, and the one depicted in most visual representations of the saint, is said to have taken place at St Armel-des-Boscheaux. The district was being ravaged by a dragon. Armel defeated the dragon, tied it up with his stole and led it to the top of a hill called Mount St Armel, whence he commanded it to throw itself into the river Sèche (Baring-Gould and Fisher 1907-13: i, 170-73; Bond and Camm 1909). The church at Ploërmel has a series of sixteenth-century windows depicting episodes in Armel's life.

From this nucleus Armel's cult spread to Normandy, Anjou and Touraine. He was one of the most popular local saints in Brittany but became virtually unknown in his native land, until his cult was rescued in the late fifteenth century by Henry Tudor. A rubric next to the painting of Armel in a prayer roll belonging to the young Prince Henry (later Henry VIII) explained that the 'life and legende' of the saint 'was brought out of Britayne at the ynstans off the kyngwe owre sovereyn lord Harry the seventh' (Charlton 1858. The roll was until recently in the library of Ushaw College, Durham, MS 291; it is now British Library Additional MS 88929).

It seems unlikely that Armel's presence at Westminster can be explained simply by reference to Henry's Welsh origins. Only one other saint in the king's chapel clearly comes from the Celtic tradition: St Winefride, who is depicted with pen and book in the north bay of the triforium. (It is of course possible that one of the unidentified bishops is David.) Armel's life to some extent echoed Henry's own: born in Wales, leaving his native land for Brittany, involved in political conflict, interceding for a wronged prince. Henry credited Armel with rescuing him from a shipwreck: according to one version of the tradition, it was during his previous bid for the throne, in November 1483, when his fleet was caught in a storm on its way from Brittany to England.

There is nothing in surviving versions of the saint's life to indicate why he was an appropriate saint to ask for help against shipwreck. However, the more detailed depictions of the saint in the Plas-y-Pentre and Stonyhurst alabaster panels discussed below show the saint praying or making offerings before a crucifix with

a ship in the background. This may illustrate an episode in the saint's life which is missing from the surviving written versions – possibly an episode in which he too was threatened with shipwreck but was saved by an apparition of the crucified Christ. Henry seems also to have attributed some of his success at the battle of Bosworth to the saint's intercession (Jones 2002: 181-83).

The double depiction of Armel was part of a compendium of essentially political saints. The Royal Commission description of the tomb suggests that the royal martyr Kenelm was also depicted twice, between St Cuthbert and St Nicholas in the south triforium of the nave and between St Armel and St Lawrence at the east end of the north aisle (Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) 1924: 65 and caption to plate 211). Both figures are however of adult kings, and according to tradition Kenelm was martyred while still a child. The figure next to Armel in the north aisle is a king with a sorrowful face and downturned mouth carrying a sceptre and an open book. Lethaby suggested that this might be a second statue of Henry VI.

Like the royal saints and martyrs, Armel was a particularly appropriate saint for a royal memorial. He is normally depicted as being at once a monk (or even a bishop) and a soldier. Henry was presumably aware that the king's consecration ceremony, from Edgar's, was based on the consecration of a bishop. He could therefore have felt that this was another similarity between himself and Armel: that he had an almost sacramental role in using his fighting abilities to bring 'evil' under control, in the form of Revelation's much-represented equation of the dragon with the devil. The liturgies which Henry specified for services in his chantry were carefully chosen. The psalms and responses recalled his coronation, the tribulations of his life and reign and his desire for the peace and prosperity of his realm (Condon 2003: 85). In the light of this, Armel's presence in the chapel can be read as a reminder of the king's survival and eventual victory at Bosworth and the divine protection which made that possible.

Armel was depicted in numerous late medieval contexts: in alabaster carvings, on rood screens and even on jewellery. A chapel dedicated to him outside the west gate of Westminster Abbey was a popular local pilgrimage destination and several badges depicting Armel and presumably bought at or near the chapel have been found in and near London (Spencer 1998: 187-88, though this misidentifies the saint as St George; van Asperen 2005; Gray 2007: 20-26). In a more elite context, the young Henry VIII's prayer roll had a miniature of St Armel holding a dragon by his stole and kneeling before a crucifix. The accompanying text promised that 'all that prayeth hartily to God and to Seint Armyl shalbe delyverd fro all these sekenes underwriten. That is to sey of all gowtis, aches, agwis [...] fevers and pockes, and

mony other infirmytes' (British Library Additional MS 88929; Charlton 1858; Skemer 2006: 264-67; Starkey 2008: 205).

The provenance of Henry's prayer roll is uncertain: it has Catherine of Aragon's badge of a sheaf of arrows at its head and could originally have been made as a gift for her or (more likely) for Prince Arthur. Armel also appears (sometimes with similarly formulaic prayers for protection from illness) in illuminated books of hours, including one ornately-illuminated example clearly commissioned by a wealthy English owner (it also includes full-page depictions of St Ninian and 'St' Henry VI with the owner of the manuscript kneeling before him) and now in the Berger Collection of the Denver Art Museum and known as the 'Bute Hours' after its twentieth-century owner. Another example appears in a book of hours, apparently made in France but for an English patron in 1532 and including a miniature of St Armel, offered for sale by Christie's in 2006. Its present whereabouts are unknown.¹

The conscious revival of the cult of St Armel had a clear political charge. Many of these depictions – like the stained glass at Merevale Abbey and the statue on Cardinal Morton's tomb in Canterbury Cathedral – occur in contexts which demonstrate a link between devotion to St Armel and conspicuous loyalty to the Tudor dynasty. This devotion could be expressed in the most opulent terms. An inventory of the jewels owned by the second wife of Mathew Cradoc of Swansea (Glam.) includes, as well as gold chains and rosaries, gold crosses set with diamonds and pearls, jewelled hearts and a brooch depicting the Virgin Mary, 'a ruby and a nocte of gold with Armgill and a saffur a garnet and iij perlis hanging by hym' (TNA PROB 11/24/69; Riden 1985: 4-6).

This is particularly intriguing because Cradock's second wife was Lady Katherine Gordon, 'the White Rose of Scotland', cousin of the king of Scotland and widow of the pretender Perkin Warbeck (Moorhen 2002). After Warbeck's defeat, Katherine was captured in Cornwall and taken to the king's camp in Exeter. The historian Polydore Vergil describes Henry as being impressed by her beauty (Hay 1950: 109). More to the point, perhaps, was her rank: she was a cousin of the king of Scotland, and Henry needed Scotland's neutrality while he dealt with rebellion at home. Katherine was thus treated with honour and sent to London, where she became part of Elizabeth of York's household and retinue.

We can only speculate how and why Katherine came into possession of her elaborate Armel brooch. It may have been a gift from the king, part of the munificence appropriate from a king to one of the senior ladies attendant at his court, though the meticulous care with which Henry's wardrobe accounts were

¹ <http://www.artfact.com/auction-lot/book-of-hours,-use-of-sarum,-in-latin-and-english,-1-c-z5ffe6pesw> (last accessed 13.07.2015).

kept makes it unlikely that such a gift should have gone unrecorded. It is perhaps more likely that Katherine herself commissioned it to display, subtly but clearly, her public loyalty to the Tudor dynasty.

We have no idea what Katherine Gordon's Armel brooch looked like, apart from the fact that it was richly jewelled and had a portrait of the saint. The other known Welsh depiction of St Armel is better documented, though its provenance is still uncertain: and the depiction itself survives, although out of its Welsh context (Edwards 1992). In the parish church of St Mary's, Brookfield, North London, is an alabaster panel about 45 cm high with an elaborate carving of the saint. He is shown robed and tonsured as a priest but with armour under his chasuble; he wears gauntlets on his hands and his feet are encased in broad-toed sabatons with clearly-visible spurs. With his right hand he holds a maniple or stole with which he is leading a small dragon. The saint is kneeling before a large carving of the crucified Christ. In his left hand is a bag, with which he appears to be making an offering to the crucifix. However, in a discussion of the very similar tablet now in Stonyhurst College, Arthur Green describes this as a forel or book-bag (Green 1933). This would certainly be in keeping with other depictions of the saint, in which he is carrying a book.

In the background, behind the crucifix, is a small, stubby ship. The Plas-y-Pentre and Stonyhurst plaques are very similar in overall layout and iconography but there are differences in detail and craftsmanship. In particular, while the ship on the Plas-y-Pentre panel has the high, squared forecastle and aftcastle typical of the mid thirteenth century, the ship on the Stonyhurst panel has a lighter forecastle with a more rounded curve down to the deck and the sails and rigging are more clearly visible (for comparisons see McGrail 1987: 238, 256-57). These differences are doubtless fascinating to the maritime historian but scarcely noticeable to anyone else. What they do suggest, though, is that the two plaques were made from the same cartoon (or possibly from a familiar woodcut) but by different craftsmen, and that the individual craftsmen had some freedom in the presentation of details. This in turn suggests that the design was fairly popular and that the two surviving plaques represent a much larger corpus.

To sum up: like the Stonyhurst panel, the Plas-y-Pentre carving obviously belongs to a traditional pattern for the representation of St Armel. This suggests that it depicts aspects of the life or cult of the saint which are not reflected in the surviving written sources – possibly a vision of the crucified Christ and a shipwreck or other seafaring episode which would have made Armel a suitable saint to intercede against shipwreck.

The panel was brought to St Mary's Brookfield by a Victorian incumbent. It came from his family home in Oswestry, on the Welsh border. The panel had been found with a carving of the Bound Christ under the floorboards of Plas y Pentre, a mainly seventeenth-century house near Chirk. The panels were traditionally believed to have come from the nearby Cistercian abbey of Valle Crucis: the Edwards family of Plas y Pentre leased much of the land of Valle Crucis after the Dissolution. It is necessary to exercise caution with these traditions where there is no substantiating evidence. Not all the fine carving in medieval Wales came from religious houses. Small panels like the Plas y Pentre alabasters were produced in large numbers by the Derbyshire workshops and used as a focus for private devotions in the homes of the moderately wealthy. The later medieval period saw developments in lay spirituality which led many people to acquire devotional books, paintings and carvings for personal use. The Plas y Pentre alabasters may have formed part of a small altar table in a private chapel, possibly at the Edwards family's earlier home at Plas Newydd, also near Chirk. In his poem praising the house and its hospitality, the fifteenth-century poet Lewys Môn described it as:

Neuadd braf newydd ei brig [...]

Bwrdd a chapel, lle melys,

A pharod lle, ffeiriad llys.

(A fine hall, newly roofed [...] Table and chapel, a sweet place, A place ready for the mansion's priest; Roberts 1986: 14)

The *bwrdd* or table mentioned with the chapel was probably a small altar, though it could also be a reference to the hospitality of the house.

The Edwards family of Plas Newydd could well have felt a need to display their loyalty to Henry VII. The family was descended from Iorwerth ab Ieuan ab Adda, brother of Ieuan Fychan of Pengwern (Edwards 1992: 63-64; Kennedy 1992; Smith 1987). Iorwerth's son John Edwards (the first of the family to exchange his Welsh patronymic for an English-style surname) was one of the leading tenants of Sir William Stanley, the lord of Chirk. By 1498 he was chief forester and receiver of the lordship. There is no direct evidence linking him with the service of Sir William Stanley. However, Llinos Beverley Smith (1987: 178) suggests that his allegiance is reflected in the lines from Guto'r Glyn's poem to John: 'Syr Wiliam sy reolwyr,/ Siôn gyda'r Goron a'r gŵr' [Sir William is the leader,/ Siôn sides with the Crown and the man].²

² Lines 47-48, quoted from <http://www.gutorglyn.net/gutorglyn/poem/?poem-selection=107&first-line=118> (last accessed 13.07.2015).

What we do know is that Edwards accompanied his lord to Bosworth, where they eventually fought for Henry. It may have been after this that Edwards was appointed Receiver of Chirk, possibly in reward for his services. In 1493, however, Sir William Stanley became one of Perkin Warbeck's supporters: he was executed for treason in 1495. There is no evidence to link John Edwards with the Warbeck conspiracy, and he died peacefully at home in 1498. However, the suspicion of involvement with his lord may provide a context for his commissioning an alabaster of Henry's patron saint and installing it in a prominent position in his chapel. Like Katherine Gordon's jewelled brooch, the alabaster panel may have been part of a conscious display of loyalty at a period of increasingly dangerous political tension.

There is of course no suspicion of such uncertainty behind the depiction of St Armel on Cardinal Archbishop Morton's cenotaph in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral. John Morton was one of Henry Tudor's earliest supporters. He was imprisoned by Richard III but escaped and fled to Brittany to join Henry Tudor. He returned to England with him and served as his Lord Chancellor for thirteen years until his death in 1500. His own wish seems to have been for a simple memorial, 'nothing more than a marble stone' according to his obituary; he was actually buried with a typical late medieval brass memorial (Collinson, Ramsay and Sparks 1995: quotation on 485, discussion of the tomb on 485-86). His obituary described his burial place as 'a secluded spot below ground known as the crypt': it was in fact the chapel of Our Lady Undercroft, one of the cathedral's most prestigious and politically-significant burial places. As well as the burial place of the Black Prince, it held the original tomb of St Thomas of Canterbury, and the relics of an earlier archbishop, Æthelred, were under the altar in the chapel. After a lifetime of royal service, was Morton pointing out that he, too had higher loyalties?

Within a few years of his death, however, an elaborate cenotaph was constructed as near as possible to his grave. The dating of the cenotaph rests on its architectural borrowings from Henry VII's chapel at Westminster:

the tracery 'panelling' masking the underside and jambs of the twelfth-century enclosing arch, and the badge-encrusted moulding set at the inner edge of the niches - are unmistakably quotations from the Lady Chapel of Westminster Abbey, which Henry VII rebuilt from 1503. Half of the badges are Tudor roses and Beaufort portcullises such as are liberally sprinkled over the surfaces of the Westminster chapel and other buildings of Henry VII's, but here, by virtue of their alternation with Morton's rebus and cardinal's hat, they become a memorial to a political association which had begun in 1483, when Morton, then bishop of Ely, assumed the rôle of mastermind behind the plots to put Henry VII on the throne. (Collinson, Ramsay and Sparks 1995: 486)

The other memorial to this long political association is to be found among the figures of saints which decorate the tomb. All have been savagely mutilated, but some can be identified as saints named in the Cardinal's will (Woodruff 1914: 85-93). Here, for example, are the Virgin Mary, patron of the chapel of Our Lady Undercroft (recognisable only by the lily pot in the Annunciation group); Sts Catherine, Mary Magdalene and Dunstan (patrons of altars elsewhere in the crypt); and St Christopher. The lowest figure on the east side wears armour under a chasuble. In its right hand it holds a dragon tethered by a stole. Here again we have a clear depiction of Henry VII's chosen saint (Green 1933: 311, 312).

An alabaster panel of St Armel which is remarkably similar in its iconography to the one from Plas-y-pentre survives at Stonyhurst College, between Clitheroe and Blackburn (Lancs). Unlike the Plas-y-pentre panel, the Stonyhurst panel has been painted. The provenance of the Stonyhurst panel is uncertain. It may have been the property of the Shirburn family, whose family estate was centred around Stonyhurst. However, much of the material in the Stonyhurst collection came from the English College in Rome, which had collected materials from a number of English and Welsh sources in the aftermath of the Reformation (Tristan Gray Hulse, personal communication).

It is difficult to establish a political context for the commissioning and installation of this panel. There is little or nothing to connect the Shirburns with any of the key events of Henry VII's reign: no suspicion of treason, no need for gestures of conspicuous loyalty. They really did lead lives of blameless obscurity – at least, as far as the official record is concerned. Their only tenuous connection with the seats of power is that they held their principal manor of Aughton from Sir Edward Stanley, fifth son of Thomas Stanley, Earl of Derby (and hence Margaret Beaufort's stepson: but also hence the nephew of the traitor Sir William Stanley). But Sir Edward was as conspicuously loyal to Henry VII as most of the rest of his family. Was the Stonyhurst alabaster installed out of simple loyalism, then – or did the family have another, completely unknown reason for commissioning it? Or was it from another source altogether?

Other depictions of St Armel are less detailed, possibly because they present him in the company of other saints. In the former Benedictine abbey church of Romsey (Hants), he appears on a painted wooden reredos now placed in the north transept of the church (Green 1933). The complete reredos depicted Christ in Majesty with angels, saints and, in the lowest register, the Resurrection. Now only the lower two tiers survive. Armel appears towards the south of the upper surviving tier, in company with St Jerome, St Francis of Assisi, St Sebastian, St Benedict, St Roche, a Benedictine abbess (possibly the first abbess, St Ethelflaeda, or her successor

St Merwenna or Modwenna, though Green suggests that she is most likely St Scholastica, founder of the Benedictine order for women) and two unidentified bishops. It is difficult to identify a coherent theme for this very eclectic assembly. It includes an early Christian martyr, a learned doctor of the church, saints from the Benedictine tradition but also from other religious traditions, and two saints with very recent cults, Roche and Armel.

In the Romsey reredos, Armel is depicted with long hair and a beard: there is no apparent tonsure. He wears a chasuble over his armour and a diminutive dragon tethered by a stole sits at his feet. Like most of the saints in the reredos, he is shown carrying a book. Jerome displays his open book to the viewer: he is a teacher. Benedict holds a small open book, and the two bishops both hold large service books, open: they are performing the liturgy. St Francis, the abbess and St Armel hold their books closed, suggesting private devotion or learning. The painting on the Romsey reredos has been dated stylistically to the late 1520s: far too late for a specific reference to Henry VII, though it could still be a gesture of commemoration.

It is possible that the selection of saints for the rood screen reflected either local devotion or the specific hagiography of Romsey's calendar. At least one of the other saints on the rood screen had a separate cult in the parish church. The will of Stephen Hayes of Romsey, dated 7 July 1537, included a bequest of one pound of wax for St Roche's light (Liveing 1912: 185). Unfortunately, we do not have a calendar of saints commemorated in the late medieval church at Romsey. It may be that Armel was added to the calendar in the late fifteenth century, either because of the local influence of the king's mother (whose parents were buried at nearby Wimborne Minster) or in deference to the wishes of Henry's early supporter Richard Fox, bishop of Winchester from 1501 to his death in 1528. Fox had been in Henry's service in France and was present at the battle of Bosworth. He became the king's secretary in 1485 and was promoted to the keepership of the Privy Seal in 1487. In spite of heavy duties as a government advisor and diplomat he was actively involved in the spiritual affairs of his diocese and was a diligent visitor of the women's houses in his charge. It is even possible that the decoration of the reredos was done under his guidance and connected with Henry VIII's planned visit to the abbey in 1526: a visit which, in the event, he never made because of an outbreak of plague in the town. Instead, the king stayed with Fox in Winchester – where, according to FitzWilliam, he 'had great cheer' (Liveing 1912: 244-45).

The rood screen at Torbryan is earlier – some say as early as 1470-80. Here Armel was depicted on the southernmost panel, as one of an unusually wide range of saints. The screen was recently damaged by the theft of some of the panels, but it included Victor of Marseilles, Laurence, Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena,

Dorothy, Vincent, Helena, Sitha, Alexis, Apollonia and Ursula, as well as a full complement of apostles, evangelists and the Coronation of the Virgin Mary. As usual, Armel is wearing a chasuble over his armour. He is bearded and tonsured, and has an open book in his left hand. His dragon is small and tethered by a chain rather than a stole.

It is difficult to supply a political context for the depiction of Armel at Torbryan. The parish must have had some Yorkist connections: the stained glass in the windows includes depictions of the Yorkist emblem of the Sun in Splendour. It is also worth noting that Henry's ally Richard Fox was bishop of Exeter from 1487 to 1492 and responsible for nominating at least one of the parish priests at Torbryan. However, we should not assume that every surviving depiction of Armel has a story of political controversy behind it. The king's devotion to the saint brought him back into the list of suitable saints for commemoration: that is all.

There is almost certainly a political context, though, for the depiction of Armel in the stained glass at Merevale Abbey in Warwickshire. Henry probably stayed at or near Merevale on the night before Bosworth: he subsequently paid compensation to the abbey for damage caused to the fabric by his men who were lodged there and for damage to crops caused by his army as it marched across the abbey's fields to battle (Jones 2002: 149-53). The Crowland chronicle actually describes the crucial battle as the battle of Merevale. Henry returned to the abbey in 1503, and this provides the most likely context for the installation there of an elaborate stained glass window commemorating the battle. In the upper tracery of the window, Armel is depicted mitred and in full armour under a chasuble. In his right hand he holds a book closed by a clasp and a long stole. The dragon peeps out from the folds of the stole.

Other depictions of St Armel are less easy to identify or known only from documentary references. He appears on the rood screen at Litcham (Norfolk) and there was a guild dedicated to him at Stratton (Cornwall) (Orme 2000: 66). He was one of a lengthy list of saints whose images are known to have been in the parish church of Luton (Beds.), mainly from bequests for lights (Marks 2004: 159; Cirket 1957: 43). There is no obvious Tudor connection here, though Margaret Beaufort's protégé Reginald Bray had local influence. The locally-powerful Rotherham family included Edward IV's Lord Chancellor and Archbishop of York, Thomas Rotherham, and might have been behind the installation of the statue as a declaration of loyalty, but this must remain purely speculation (Christine Buckley, personal communication). The stained glass at Fotheringhay church (Northants) once included a mitred abbot with armour under his tunic who has been tentatively identified as Armel, possibly by analogy with the Merevale glass where he is also

depicted with a mitre. Richard Marks suggests that the Fotheringhay glass was probably completed by 1475, possibly under the influence of Edward IV, who had his father and brother reburied at Fotheringhay in 1476 (Marks 1978; Marks 1998: 72-5). This of course predates Henry Tudor's return to power. It is possible that the figure has been mis-identified, and as the glass no longer survives it is impossible to be certain. Alternatively, the glass may be a little later in date: Edward IV's mother Cecily Neville spent most of her widowhood at Fotheringhay and was buried there in 1495. We could then speculate that this depiction of the saint was also geared to demonstrating association with the Tudor dynasty: but in the absence of conclusive evidence of dating this must remain unproven.

One of the more puzzling aspects of the early Tudor cult of St Armel is that he was a Cambro-Breton saint, venerated by a king who was keen to emphasize his Welsh ancestry, but he was best known for subduing and eventually killing Wales's national emblem, the dragon. In Henry's Westminster Abbey Lady Chapel his statues are in close proximity to the red dragon of Cadwaladr, the emblem which Henry carried into battle at Bosworth and on to London. There are however intriguing differences in the representation of Armel's dragon. In both medieval and more recent depictions of the saint in Brittany (the stained glass at St Sauveur in Dinan, for example), the dragon is large, fierce and aggressive. In a book of hours of the use of Rennes, Armel is depicted treading on the dragon, which he has tied up with his stole, and exorcising it with an aspergillum (Paris, Bibl. Mazarine: MS 0506). A corbel in the parish church of Harlington (Beds) is sometimes identified as St Armel taming the dragon, though there are in fact two very threatening dragons on the corbel, or possibly an amphisbaena. The dragon in Henry VIII's prayer roll is also both large and fierce.

Most of the English and Welsh depictions of the saint, though, show the dragon as small and submissive. In one of the Westminster statues, Armel has his foot on the dragon. Unlike the D'Espinay miniature, though, there is no evidence of a struggle: the saint rests his foot on the dragon as one might on a dog. The dragons in the Merevale stained glass, the Torbryan rood screen and the Romsey reredos are similarly tamed and almost like pet dogs, the emblems of fidelity. This is not exclusive to Anglo-Welsh depictions of the saint. In a book of hours belonging to Isabel Stuart but clearly of French production, the saint is depicted with a very engaging little dragon (technically a wyvern) on a short string (Bibliothèque Nationale de France: MS Latin 1369, p. 314). However, the preponderant impression is that, in France, Armel's dragon is depicted as large and threatening, while in England and Wales it is the reverse. This may have been an attempt to negotiate the rather difficult situation in which Henry found himself as a monarch whose emblem was the

dragon ruling over a country whose patron saint was the dragon-slaying St George. On the one hand the saint mutates from being a dragon-slayer to a dragon-friend. On the other hand, the small, tamed dragons of Merevale, Torbryan and Romsey are a reassurance to the English that Henry has the Welsh under control, while they also reassure the Welsh that he regards them as his loyal allies.

Useful though iconography is in the study of otherwise sparsely documented saints' cults, it is not the only source available. In his study of the cult of St Sidwell at Morebath, Eamon Duffy remarked on the gradual increase in popularity of the Christian name Sidwell after the vicar introduced her cult there, paying for a statue of her and installing it on the high altar (Duffy 2001: 76, 171). Parish registers for Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire indicate the popularity of Armel as a baptismal name from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. The name also crops up in London and in a scatter of parishes in the south of England, but the main concentrations are all in the border counties. In Hereford itself and in Kingsland (Herefs) Armilla appears as a popular name for women (data from the International Genealogical Index of the Church of Latter-day Saints).

The most significant cluster is in the registers of Upton Snodsbury church, not far from Worcester and dedicated to Kenelm. The earliest Armel recorded here was an Armel Green in 1542, and the last was baptized in 1833. There was a wide variety of surnames, though the name seems to have been particularly popular with the locally powerful Green and King families. It is likely that the later popularity of the name was connected with the influence of this family, who would have provided prestigious and desirable godparents. However, the name must have come from somewhere.

The Upton Snodsbury cluster of Armel baptismal names is so marked, and so specific to the parish, as to suggest a localized cult of the saint. There is no record of an altar to St Armel in the church, nor any reference to a chantry or image of the saint there. There is however a Henry VII connection, albeit a tenuous one.

The history of the manor is complex (for a summary see VCH Worcs iv: 209). In the fifteenth century it passed through the hands of the Butler, Stafford and Lovell families. Richard III's close supporter Francis, Lord Lovel ('Lovel the Dog' in Collingbourne's satirical rhyme) forfeited the estate in 1485 and Henry VII granted Upton Snodsbury and some of his other lands to Sir John Mortimer. This John was born in about 1450, son of Sir Hugh Mortimer of Mortimer Hall, Hants (Wedgwood 1936: 613-14). His mother was Eleanor Cornwall, daughter of Sir John Cornwall, baron of Burford. John was still a child when his father died in about 1455 and became a royal ward. Eleanor went on to marry Sir Richard Croft of Croft Castle as her second husband. Ostensibly supporters of the house of York,

it was they who cared for Edward IV's two sons at Ludlow when the future 'Princes in the Tower' were sent to the Welsh border to learn the art of kingship by practising on the Marches of Wales. Possibly as a result of this connection with the princes' sister Elizabeth of York, they later had charge of her son, Prince Arthur, when he too was sent to Ludlow to learn how to rule a kingdom. The iconography of Sir Richard's tomb displays another saint who could have signalled his new loyalty to the Tudors. As well as Sts Sitha and Margaret and the newly-fashionably plague saint Roche, it includes a carving of St Anthony the Hermit. Henry VII's mother Margaret Beaufort was deeply devoted to both St Roche and St Anthony. She fasted regularly on the latter saint's day and had several statues of him in her chapel (Jones and Underwood 1992: 144).

John Mortimer was one of Edward IV's 'henxmen' by June 1468 (Wedgwood 1936: 614). He held numerous Crown offices including sheriff of Herefordshire (1477-8 and 1481-2) and was Edward IV's constable, steward and receiver in the duchy of Lancaster lordship of Monmouth. He lost these offices, though, in 1483, when Richard III gave them to the duke of Buckingham as part of his elevation of Buckingham to viceregal status in the Welsh march (Horrox 1989: 107-08). Mortimer went on to serve Richard as an esquire of the body but never regained his Monmouth offices, though he was given positions elsewhere. Horrox suggests this may explain his failure to support Buckingham in the latter's rebellion later in 1483 (Horrox 1989: 164). He had probably moved towards overt opposition to Richard by February 1485, when John Huddleston replaced him as steward of the Duchy of Lancaster lands in Gloucestershire.

John was married to Margaret Neville, daughter of John Neville, Marquis Montagu. John Neville was the brother of Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, 'the Kingmaker'. John Neville was conspicuously Yorkist: his eldest son George was at one time betrothed to Elizabeth of York (Cokayne, *Complete Peerage* ix: 93). In 1471, though, John followed his brother in turning against Edward and was killed at the battle of Barnet. Margaret's marriage to John Mortimer must post-date this event but from his age it seems likely that they were married by the 1480s.

John Mortimer was knighted and made a knight of the body in 1485. His offices were confirmed and added to, and he received Upton Snodsbury and its associated manors in 1486. He served as sheriff of Worcestershire (1485-86) and Herefordshire (1493-94 and 1501-02) and represented Worcestershire in the parliament of 1495. John's sister Elizabeth Mortimer's husband Thomas West was made a Knight Bachelor in 1489 on the creation of Arthur as Prince of Wales. For all that, his background of service was uncertain and his wife's family loyalties even more so. It may be that, like John Edwards and Katherine Gordon, he felt it necessary to make

a public profession of loyalty to the Tudor dynasty by demonstrating his devotion to one of Henry Tudor's favourite saints and importing the cult of St Armel into his domains.

While we have no documentary evidence for a shrine or altar to St Armel in the church at Upton Snodsbury, there is some tentative evidence to suggest that one may have existed. The south aisle of the church was built during the earlier part of the sixteenth century, presumably during John Mortimer's period of influence and possibly at his expense. The capitals of the pillars of the arcade dividing nave from aisle are decorated with shields, roses, Tau crosses and other devices drawn from the Instruments of the Passion. The traditional story of St Armel, as depicted in detail on the Plas y Pentre and Stoneyhurst College alabasters, seems to have included an episode involving a vision (or possibly a carving) of the crucified Christ: and the Plas y Pentre alabaster was associated with a carving of the Bound Christ, which may have been a single image or may have formed part (as in the Llandeilo Talybont wall paintings) of a Crucifixion sequence. It is possible (though no more) that the south aisle of Upton Snodsbury was built to house a statue of Armel and decorated to reflect this focus on the Crucifixion: or of course that, having been built, it then provided a suitable home for an image or altar of the saint. This would certainly explain the popularity of Armel as a baptismal name in this particular parish.

It is impossible to suggest origins for the Armel clusters in towns like Cheltenham and Hereford. Urban populations in the early Tudor period were mobile, urban patterns of landholding and influence fragmented. The rural clusters at Boddington and Kingsland offer a little more potential. The principal landowners in Boddington at the end of the fifteenth century were Westminster Abbey and the Beauchamp family, lords of Elmley Castle (Worcs) (VCH Gloucs viii: 190). The family had broadly Yorkist sympathies – but the same could have been said for virtually any landowning family by 1480. Richard Beauchamp married in 1447. His wife was a Stafford, the daughter of Sir Humphrey Stafford of Grafton (Worcs). Apart from a brief period in 1483, the Stafford family had pronounced Lancastrian leanings: Henry VII's mother's second husband was a Stafford. Richard Beauchamp's heirs in 1503 were his two grandsons, both still children, and his daughter Anne, who had married a Richard Lygon.

It is possible that the Beauchamps imported the cult of St Armel into their estates, but their connection with Boddington was not close and there may have been another explanation. Most of the leading families of the period had connections with both sides in the Wars of the Roses; most had periods of uncertain political allegiance and loyalties which were ultimately open to question. It is in precisely

these circumstances that the cult of an obscure saint like St Armel can acquire a powerfully political charge.³

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