

## 13th-Century Marginal Entries Relating to Colchester in Trinity College, Cambridge, MS. 0.7.41

by DAVID STEPHENSON

Trinity College MS. 0.7.41 consists of copies of two works ascribed to Marianus Scotus (*ob. c.* 1082), namely the *compotus*, made up of a Kalender, Easter tables and tables of movable feasts, and a tract, *De concordia Evangelistarum*. We are here concerned only with the *compotus*. The text is in an 11th-century hand, and was copied, on internal evidence, in 1086. In the margins next to the Easter tables there are rudimentary chronicle entries in a 13th-century hand. Some of these relate to events of national importance, such as the succession of kings, but many refer particularly to Colchester: it is clear that the entries were made in St. John's Abbey in that town. The references which concern Colchester are set out below; in each case they have been assigned a date calculated from their position in the margin of the Easter tables.<sup>1</sup>

- 1096 *Ceptum opus Colec'.*
- 1115 *Dedicatio.*
- 1120 *Ob. Eudo.*
- 1121 *Ob. Roahis(a).*
- 1132 *Ecclesia nostra incensa.*
- 1155 *Eccl(esia) de Snapis funda(ta).*
- 1177 *Dedicata ecclesia sancti Botulfi.*

These entries take on considerable significance when they are compared with other chronicle material relating to St. John's, notably the central sections (1095-c. 1160) of the so-called *Annates Colecestrenses* compiled in the early 14th century, and the history of the foundation of St. John's in Bodleian MS. Gough Essex 1,<sup>2</sup> a 16th-century copy, probably of a late 14th-century original. The present writer has analysed elsewhere the relationship between these texts,<sup>3</sup> which can be briefly expressed as follows: the central sections of the *Annates Colecestrenses* and the account in the Gough manuscript are derived partly from the grossly untrustworthy description of the early history of St. John's in B.L. Cotton MS. Nero D. VIII, and partly from a lost set of *annates* drawn up in St. John's in the 12th century. Material from the *annates* seems to be reliable, and it is thus of some importance that the marginal entries in the *compotus* seem to reflect only the lost *annates*, being unaffected by the material which found its way into the Nero text.<sup>4</sup>

If we examine each entry in turn, the extent of their contribution to our grasp of architectural and other developments in 12th-century Colchester will become clear.

(a) 1096: *Ceptum opus Colec'*. This agrees with the *Annates Colecestrenses* and with Gough, both of which have 1095 as the year in which the ground for the Abbey was measured out, 1096 as the year in which building began. The generally accepted dates, derived from Nero, have been 1096 and 1097 respectively.

(b) 1115: *Dedicatio*. This supports the date given in Gough. Nero is hopelessly vague on the date of the Abbey's dedication.

(c) and (d) 1120: *Ob. Eudo*.

1121: *Ob. Roahisa*.

The dates of the deaths of Eudo, founder of St. John's, and his wife, are common to all of the texts.

(e) 1132: *Ecclesia nostra incensa*. This is a most interesting entry. *The Annates Colecestrenses* and Gough have references to a fire in 1133 which destroyed the Abbey and a large part of the town, and caused

the Abbey workshops to be moved from the north to the south side of the church. Nero has no reference to a fire, and attributes the removal from north to south of the Abbey workshops, and dormitories, to the desire of the first Abbot, Hugh, in about 1104, to move them away from the noise of the town. The entry in the *compotus* confirms Gough and *Annates Colecestrenses*, whilst its insertion at a point corresponding to 1132, a year earlier than the date given in those texts, may simply be the result of an error by the annotator in working out the place in the Easter tables of an *anno domini* entry in the lost *annates*. The difference between the *compotus* date and those given by Gough and *Annates Colecestrenses* does at least make it clear that the *compotus* is not the text from which the other two are derived: all three are copied from a fourth text.

(f) 1155: *Ecclesia de Snapis Fundata*. This corresponds to an entry in *Annates Colecestrenses*. 11 is beyond the scope of the Gough text. Snape was a cell of St. John's.

(g) 1177: *Dedicata ecclesia sancti Botulfi*. No entry to this effect is found in *Annates Colecestrenses* or in Gough, probably because it was not relevant to the purpose of these texts. Nevertheless, this is a most interesting piece of information. It has been argued on architectural grounds that the priory church of St. Botolph was not completed until the 12th century was far advanced; in the absence of 'a date of consecration, marking the completion of the church', it has been tentatively suggested that building was finished in 1160-70.<sup>7</sup> The entry in the *compotus* supplies a precise date which accords well with the architectural evidence.

It is noteworthy that there are some strong phraseological similarities between the *compotus* entries and the *Annates Colecestrenses*, which suggest that we are here close to the wording of the lost *annates*. There is one further element of interest in the *compotus*, however, apart from the significance of its marginal entries. The *compotus* was copied a decade before building began at St. John's, and was thus probably written outside Colchester. But by the 13th century, at the latest, it had been brought to the Abbey, where the marginal annotations were made. Now, *Annates Colecestrenses*, in their description of the arrival from York of the thirteen monks sent to establish a monastic community in St. John's,<sup>8</sup> note that they came *cum nonnullis codicibus aliisque divino cultui necessariis*, amongst which would assuredly have been texts of the sort contained in the *compotus*. It seems not at all unlikely that Trinity College MS. 0.7.41 was one of those codices brought from York to Colchester at the end of the 11th century.

## NOTES

1. All of these entries are to be found on ff. 9v-11v.
2. For *Annates Colecestrenses* see F. Liebermann, *Ungedruckte Anglo-Normannische Geschichtsquellen*, Strasbourg, 1879, pp. 158-65. The account of the foundation of St. John's in the Gough manuscript has been printed in translation by George Rickword, 'The Obits of the Abbots of Colchester', *Trans. Essex Archaeol. Soc.*, **xvi** (1923), pp. 122-6.
3. See David Stephenson, 'An analysis of the chronicle accounts of the foundation and early history of St. John's Abbey', in Philip Crummy, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Colchester* (forthcoming).
4. The Nero manuscript is best consulted in the transcription of H. J. Duckinfield Astley, 'Medieval Colchester—Town, Castle and Abbey—from MSS. in the British Museum', *Trans. Essex Archaeol. Soc.*, **viii** (1903), 117-37, esp. 122-8. Duckinfield's translation, *ibid.*, 129-35, contains some notable inaccuracies and is to be treated with caution.
5. Sir Charles Peers, *St. Botolph's Priory*, H.M.S.O., 2nd ed., 1964, pp. 12, 17.
6. See the long entry, covering several years, in *Annates Colecestrenses* sub anno 1095.