

# Jot & Tittle

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A personal selection of  
Salisbury, Wessex,  
British and world, history

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## EDITORIAL

The Historian is the excellent magazine of the Historical Association. Issue 161 majored on *The Silk Roads* with a number of articles on a variety of aspects including the various uses of the term. One aspect is that the impression was conveyed of the start (China) and the end (Europe) completely forgetting the stories of the countries in between and the fact that the flow of goods and ideas was two-way. Right<sup>1</sup>, early medieval costume from the Alans of Moshchevaya Balka in the Caucasus. Another aspect is the story of silk being 'stolen' from the Chinese whereas there is evidence that they willingly parted with their 'secret'. A third point is the influence of (and on) the Vikings who were exploring and trading not only by sea but by river down through Russia to Constantinople. Finally there are the politics: even today, the Chinese are manipulating the story to support their westward 'expansion'. All in all the Silk Road is a much more complex and nuanced story than we supposed.



## ST EDMUNDS CHURCH



They always say that you miss the treasure that is right under your nose. I recently acquired a copy of Margaret King's *The Church and The Chequers* which is printed in a rather homespun way with many typos and a map that is upside down. However, it is full of little gems.

Firstly, what I had always taken to be a tomb to the south of St Edmunds Church (now the Arts Centre), turns out to be a *Dole Stone*. These stones were stone tables or ledges usually located in church porches and more rarely in churchyards. From medieval times until the 16th or 17th centuries they were used for settling contracts and the payment of debts, bequests, tithes and church dues. They were also used to distribute money or bread to the needy of the parish and passing travellers in need of help. Apparently very few dole tables have survived to the present day.

Secondly is the plaque (page 2) that was erected on the west face of the tower after it fell down in 1653 without loss of life. The church originally had a large nave but this was destroyed when the tower fell and never rebuilt. What I had missed was the inscription below the main oval. It reads

- praise hIM o yee ChILDren. Margaret points out that this is a *chronogram* which yields the date if you rearrange the Roman numerals (capital letters).



### MISTER MANUSCRIPT<sup>2</sup>

The manuscript shown (below right) is catalogued in the British Library as *Cotton MS Julius A VI*. Cotton refers to Sir Robert Bruce Cotton MP (1571 - 1631), a bibliophile and antiquarian who realised that Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries would result in the loss of the nation's collection of manuscripts and *incunabula* (printed books up to the year 1500).

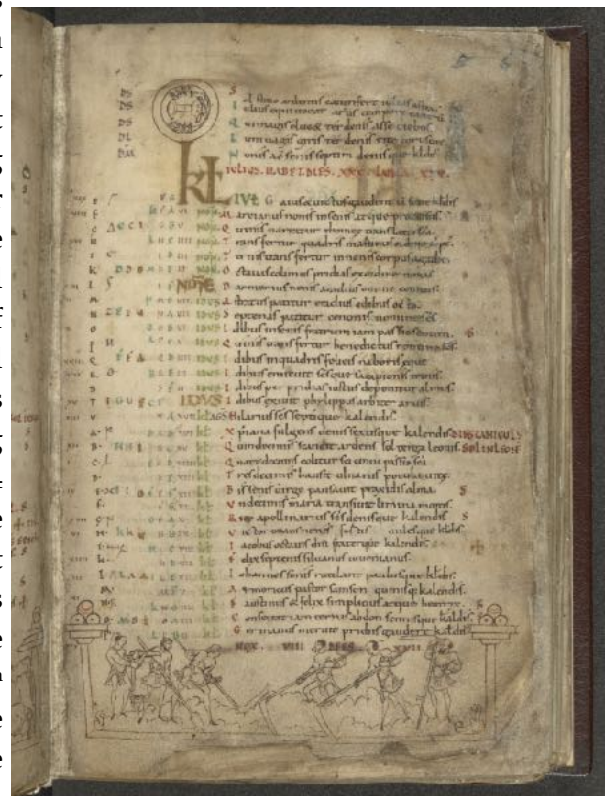


So he assiduously traced these old documents and purchased them for his library (original size just 26' x 6') which was open to the cognoscenti of his day. His bookcases were surmounted by classical Roman busts - in this case we have Julius Caesar. So books in that case were catalogued as *Julius*; A refers to the top shelf and VI to the position on the shelf. His son and grandson added to the collection which was then gifted to the British Museum and it was later transferred to the British Library of which it formed a key part of its foundation. He saved for the nation such gems as *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, the 1215 *Articles of the Barons* and two 1215 exemplifications of *Magna Carta*.

### THE JULIUS WORK CALENDAR

The Cotton manuscript illustrated right is the *Julius Work Calendar*. This is the earliest surviving calendar in England and was written on parchment in Canterbury Cathedral around 1020 AD.

Lacey and Danziger<sup>3</sup> tell us that the Anglo-Saxons were a strong and healthy race, largely living in a green, quiet and unpolluted countryside. They lived on a wholesome diet and were able to support a population of a million souls - gives us something to aim for! Bede refers to the confusion over Easter which even resulted in it being kept twice in one year. King Oswy of Northumberland who followed the calendar of the Irish-influenced monks of Lindisfarne, while his wife, Eanfled of Kent used the Roman calculation. So whilst the king was celebrating Easter his wife was fasting and keeping Palm Sunday. Eventually, the *Synod of Whitby* (664 AD) came down on the side of Canterbury. Bede popularised the *Anno Domini* system of dating but as the zero had not yet reached England, Christ's birth was still a year out. Bede assumed that the year should begin with Christ's birth on the 25<sup>th</sup> December, but working back nine months, the Church had arrived at the Feast of the



Annunciation or Lady Day, 25<sup>th</sup> March, so for centuries this was the true beginning of the year.

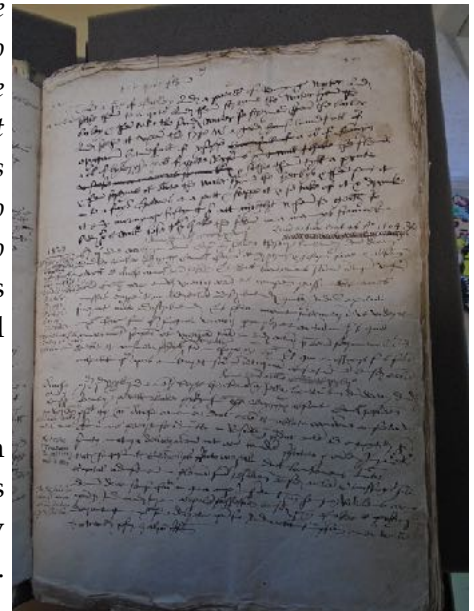
In the manuscript you will see the column of dates on the left which were based on the peculiar Roman system of *Kalends, Nones and Ides*. To the right are the saints and religious festivals to be observed. Incidentally, when the Anglo-Saxons took over *Engla-lond*, they referred to the dispossessed Britons as *wealisc*, meaning foreign - from which we get the word *Welsh*. In turn, the Celts referred to the Germanic invaders as *Saxons* from where the Scots get their word *Sassenach*.

The other great Anglo-Saxon manuscript is King Alfred's *Saxon Chronicle*. One incident recorded in the year 987AD is where a royal council, sitting in Calne, Wiltshire, fell through the floor of a newly constructed royal manor house; the only one left standing was archbishop Dunstan. This at least shows that they had started to build two-storey houses.

### THE MESS OF POTTAGE

**J**une, my highly qualified colleague working in the Salisbury Cathedral Archives, can cope with Latin which is quite beyond me. Not only that but she also has to battle terrible handwriting (Chapter Act book, right); things rather went to pot during Cromwell's time. Below is what she found recently.

*'Take a quart of barley and a botell of running water and sokelset them to a quarter then strayne the water from the barley and then take the same water so strayed from the barley and set it upon the fyre with a good handfull of oregano handfull of hyssopp an ounce of ?remyng and an ounce of liquorice an ounce of grete?raisins (some instructions crossed out) and set them untill a pynke and then strayne off the water from the herbys and then putt it into a saus crokker or a pott and stoppe it and so take of it and drynke it any mornynge fastyng or at nyght then so forth to.. so it will lose ye or breke the fever in a ...?'* She was unable to decipher the rest. June wonders if it is a medicinal recipe to alleviate a fever.



So, any ideas please let us know? Oregano is a Mediterranean herb that was brought over by the Romans and as well as its culinary use it has antibacterial properties. Maybe they brought hyssop too for its antiseptic and expectorant qualities. Biblical Hyssop though was probably Syrian Oregano.

### A PEEK THROUGH THE WINDOW - NO. 49

**Mike Deeming writes:**

**I**n April, I extolled the virtues of the glorious windows in one of Wiltshire's great churches, St Mary and St Nicholas Church in Wilton. Not surprisingly I have since been encouraged by requests for a comparable recommendation in the Dorset half of the diocese. I have to say, it's not so easy here.

Over the past few years I have regularly mentioned Dorset churches, usually with reference to windows of particular artists –

Douglas Strachan in Stinsford (Jot&Tittle 74)

Christopher Whall (Arts and Crafts champion) in Iwerne Minster (J&T 87)

Harry Clarke and Mary Lowndes in Sturminster Newton (J&T 100)

Thomas Denny in several churches (J&T 140).

Other churches I could have mentioned for specific windows include Cattistock (William Morris angels resembling those in the Cathedral), Trent (for C16/17 Germanic glass), Melbury Bubb (for some charming C15 glass) and, of course, Sherborne Abbey.

But my personal favourite is linked to glass in the Cathedral. If you look carefully at the engraved glass tablets on the back of the organ in the north quire aisle, the memorials to the Booker sisters, you can see that Laurence Whistler has engraved an image of St Nicholas Church, Durweston, Blandford Forum (J&T 58).

That leads us naturally to St Nicholas Church in Moreton, near Dorchester. The church was bombed in 1940, damaging the building and destroying all the windows. After the church was rebuilt, twelve clear glass engraved windows were created by Laurence Whistler between 1955 and 1985, described by Pevsner 'as a stroke of genius'.

The church sits in a meadow, so the views from the windows are of fields and trees (above 4). The windows all have beautifully engraved commemorative pictures or pictures based on biblical texts. A final controversial Whistler window, depicting the death of Judas, was added in 2014, but is only visible from outside the church.

I can't recommend it highly enough. And if interested, you can visit the grave (right) of T E Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) in the nearby cemetery.



## AND AND AND.....

The symbol that seems to cause a lot of confusion is the jolly old Ampersand so beloved of typeface designers. Reference is often made to its starting life as part of Cicero's amanuensis Tiro's system of shorthand which was developed by the monks for condensing the Latin writing on expensive parchment. However, my experience has been that his symbol was a 7, often with a crossbar, and this is still sometimes used in Ireland. In Latin *and* is *et*.



The symbols above<sup>5</sup> show the development of the ampersand. It is actually what printers call a ligature of *and per se*. Letters that were also words such as A and I, when spelt aloud, were followed by *per se* (by itself). *And per se* was gradually slurred into ampersand and was in common usage by 1837.



## LOST SKILLS<sup>6</sup>

The Book of Durrow is an illuminated velum manuscript dated to c. 700 (over a century older than the Book of Kells) that consists of text from the four gospel books, written in an Irish adaption of Vulgate Latin, and illustrated in the Insular script style. This medieval style of writing originated in Ireland and spread to England and Europe with Irish monks. It influenced modern Gaelic writing and typefaces.

The book was created in or near Durrow, County Offaly, on a site founded by Colum Cille (aka Saint Columba) (c. 521-97), rather than the sometimes proposed origin of Northumbria, a region that had close political and artistic ties with Ireland, and like Scotland, also venerated Colum Cille.

Historical records indicate that the book was probably at Durrow Abbey by 916, making it one of the earliest extant Insular manuscripts. It is badly damaged, and has been repaired and rebound many times over the centuries. Today it is in the Library of Trinity College Dublin.

## EX LIBRIS - The Road

Written by Christopher Hadley and published by William Collins in 2023. *A whelm* was a wooden drainpipe, a hollowed-out tree trunk, "whelmed down" or turned with the concavity downwards to form an arched watercourse. It is why we are underwhelmed and overwhelmed.

1. Courtesy of Silk for Nomads - [caravan@kazarbazar.com](mailto:caravan@kazarbazar.com)  
2. Sir Robert Bruce Cotton, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet Connington, circa 1629, courtesy of Trinity College, Cambridge. In the Public Domain.  
3. The Year 1000, Robert Lacey and Danny Danziger, Little, Brown & Company 1999.  
4. Courtesy of the St Nicholas Center.  
5. From Typography 01 <https://ku-viscom.com/type1/TheAmpersand.html>.  
6. Courtesy of Wikipedia.