

I was born in the year of our Lord, seven hundred something in the East of England, in a region then known as the Danelaw. My family, like the others in our small settlement, were farmers, growing oats and other grains, and raising chickens and other fowl.

My father was bald-headed, and talked loudly, and my mother was large, and always happy, no matter what happened. one time my sister accidentally burned up a quilt that mother had been sewing for months, and mother just hugged her, and said how glad she was that the saints had liked liked her work enough that they had wanted it for themselves.

The Lords of the land traveled on horseback, and were seen once a month, when they rode in accompanied by a Carter, to take a bag of grain and several chickens. "simple minded thugs" my father proclaimed at the dinner table. "we could do worse". Then he looked at my older sister "mind you stay out of sight when they be about".

After being tried in several capacities, I was found to be useless as a farmer. Any sort of work filled me with boredom, and even if I hadn't been a runt, I would have done it poorly. when I turned ten, my mother again became pregnant, and it was decided that the saints wanted me too, and I was sent to be an altar boy at Huckston, the vicarage which served several nearby towns.

The cart ride and the cut stone buildings were both wonderful, but though I tried to make this new life my own, and began to learn my letters, I was of no more use in church than I had been on the farm. My presence was tolerated until one day, I left a window open, allowing blackbirds to get at the communion wafers. The vicar looked furious as he pantomimed the placing of nonexistent bread on the parishioners tongues that Sunday, and two weeks later, I was loaded onto another cart, this time headed North.

This ride was even better than the first. the cart was driven by two fat friars who ate and told jokes. for three happy days, I jostled in the cart, listening to the monks' stories and eating bread and cheese.

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The sea smelled horrible at first, and I didn't think I would ever get used to it, but I did, and the buildings at the monastery were even better than at the vicarage. On the island, I finally found a place. I was not the first useless boy they had seen, and they had plenty of pointless and unimportant chores to keep us occupied.

Each morning we would assemble to hear from the prior or one of his assistants. These talks were serious in tone, and some of the boys made a sport of getting the others to laugh. I was a common target of these efforts, which were usually led by brother Punsley. a smallish northerner with frizzy hair. I would be given some chore as punishment for the disruption, but it was rarely more tedious than our normal routine.

one day, as I began giggling during a reading from the rule of saint Benedict, the wrinkled prior was struck with an inspiration. after handing me my sentence, he glared at the satisfied faces of my tormentors, and then he grabbed their leader by the hair and said "you too".

I expected to be beaten, but the instigator accepted his punishment as fair play, and we became fast friends as we spent the afternoon carrying stones up from the beach. brother Punsley fearlessly told impious jokes, and he also talked about looking through a gap in the wall to the nun's enclosure. I crossed myself as he said these things, an act which only earned more dismissive irreverence.

Spying on the nuns became brother Punsley's new sport. He and a few others would talk about how many ankles and elbows, and how large a portion of calf they had seen each day. claims, were made regarding knees and shoulders, but this never happened when I was present.

The nun's calves were a great break from the usual monotony, but the biggest change to my life at that time came when brother Punsly chalked an instructional drawing on the floor of the vestry. I was trying to figure out what I was looking at when we heard approaching footsteps. panicked, and with nowhere to run to, I quickly drew legs and a head, turning the mysterious object into a horse.

The result of this affair, aside from some dishwashing, was that I became a colorist for one of the junior scribes. this was the first thing I had ever done well, and though I had been told, and I believed that the feeling was an illusion, for the first time I stood on the rocks above the waves and felt strong.

I was eventually granted my own carrel in the scriptorium, and I loved this little alcove above all other places. My refugium contained a battered bench and a desk, both of dark wood, and up at the ceiling was a small colored glass window. Far from being envious, brother Punsley was proud to be associated with such a rising star... all in spite of the fact that I would not accede to most of his requests for lewd drawings.

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the next year, we were tonsured, and formally joined the monastery. it was about then that Punsley began to talk of clandestine encounters with the nuns. "I know you're crossing yourself under that robe" he chided me. "you should join me, and make it mean something".

"I'd go, but I'm afraid of what I'll have to tell in confession"

"Oh, don't mind that... just mind you go on Wednesday afternoons, when father Shipnard is in the booth. he always gives light penance, and probably can't hear or remember most of what you say"

For months I shyly demurred from joining my Friend in his liaisons, not wanting to jeopardize my newfound status. Eventually, though, his pleas became so impassioned and vivid that I allowed a small break.

"how can you promise there's no risk?"

"Jesus, I've been doing it for over a year, and you're worried about one time?"

"My work is important" I countered.

"look man, we just walk past the sisters on the beach as if by accident... there's nothing to even get caught at!"

"that sounds harmless..." i said noncommittally.

"Good. tomorrow after matins" and he walked away before I could back out.

My mind was in turmoil for that entire evening and the following morning. by the time the bell rang to signal the end of matins, I had resolved to face down my friend, and refuse my promise as one that had been extorted. somehow, though, when his encouraging hand grabbed my arm, I forgot my rehearsed refusal.

we carried periwinkle pails as we walked towards the beach.

"we just walk past them?"

"easy as cake"

"that's all"

"yep"

When we got to the landward beach, we could see two hooded nuns about a hundred yards away. one of them had lifted her robe to wade into the water. I saw a female knee for the first time since leaving home, and I turned in panic.

"no backing out now!" Punsley said, strongly gripping my thin and irresolute wrist."going back will look worse anyway". The landscape spun, but somehow we were moving forward.

"we just walk past" I repeated.
"that's right"

Forty yards now. The sisters now both stood on land with heads bowed over a pail. I began to shake.

"we just..."
"yes, for the last time!"
"alright" I said, staggering "just walk past"
"yep...then I sit beside sister Alyf, and you sit beside sister Marg
"what!!!" I dropped my hand to hide my shaking. it was all a lie. I heard the chattering of teeth, and the clatter of beach pebbles. and I began to swoon.

"good day brother" I heard a young woman's voice. "good day" replied my former friend, gripping my arm for support.

I looked up at the nuns, and the taller of the two said "*that's him?*", not bothering to hide her disappointment. I looked down, and prepared to shuffle away, but my brother held strong.

"damn right that's him!" he said indignantly. "Fifteen years old and apprentice to the head scribe!" I tried to say that I was just a junior colorist, but my mouth wouldn't open.

"this here is a famous artist" my brother continued "what do *you* think *you* are?"

I heard voices conferring, and girls giggling, and then, somehow, I found myself seated beside one, with my friend and his companion about ten feet away. I stared down as the girl's hand drew aside my hood.

"I'm sister Marg" she said, smiling
I sputtered my name.
the rest of the conversation was no better, but I did at last admit to being a lowly colorist.

"That's lovely" said the girl, who had neither believed nor needed the famous artist story, "I like green"

"My frock has green buttons" she said, pulling on her collar. I turned to look, but my mind could not make sense of what it saw. I recall freckles, and a what might have been an elbow, but if there was a green button, it was lost in a confusion of incoherent images.

Just then a bell rang in the nunnery, and I was never so grateful for a bell. But before the girls scurried off, mine put a finger to my chest.

"Ye'll not get off so lightly tomorrow" she grinned. I would have fallen if I had remembered how.

As my brother and I walked back to the abbey, we passed another monk who had obviously been keeping guard. "no periwinkles or gulls eggs today, eh" He winked, gesturing at our empty pails.

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I spent another evening and morning in confusion, though I did manage to collect a pocket of green objects for my new companion.

By the time the afternoon bell rang, I was feeling better. I looked at brother Punsley and said:
"I think I know a little of what it feels like to be a chicken thieving thug" he looked at me for clarification, but there was no opportunity, because the bell just continued to ring.

It was like the frock episode, but on a larger scale. Everything seemed confused, and I heard shouts, some of which could not have issued from the throat of any monk.

"look" said my friend, pointing at the beach, where I saw two large boats from which fur clad men were leaping.

Soon they were everywhere, and there was smoke rising in several places.

"let's run for the South head!" urged my friend "We can wade to land and get away easy".

"What about the manuscripts." I resisted. "And the nuns!"

He just pointed back to the beach, where some of the nuns had already been collected, and stood huddling next to a heap of assorted treasures. There was no rational hope of fighting back, but still it was oddly galling to see them show so little resistance or even distress at their captivity.

An older monk, who might have been father Tortoise appeared on the beach, and angrily confronted one of the invaders, who felled him to the ground as casually as if he were popping the float bladder on a piece of kelp.

"come on!" urged Punsley, motioning towards escape
"the books!" I said, and I broke for the scriptorium before his hand could stay me.
"god damn" said my friend as he followed. Once inside, we barred the door, and I began gathering manuscripts while my brother watched at the window.

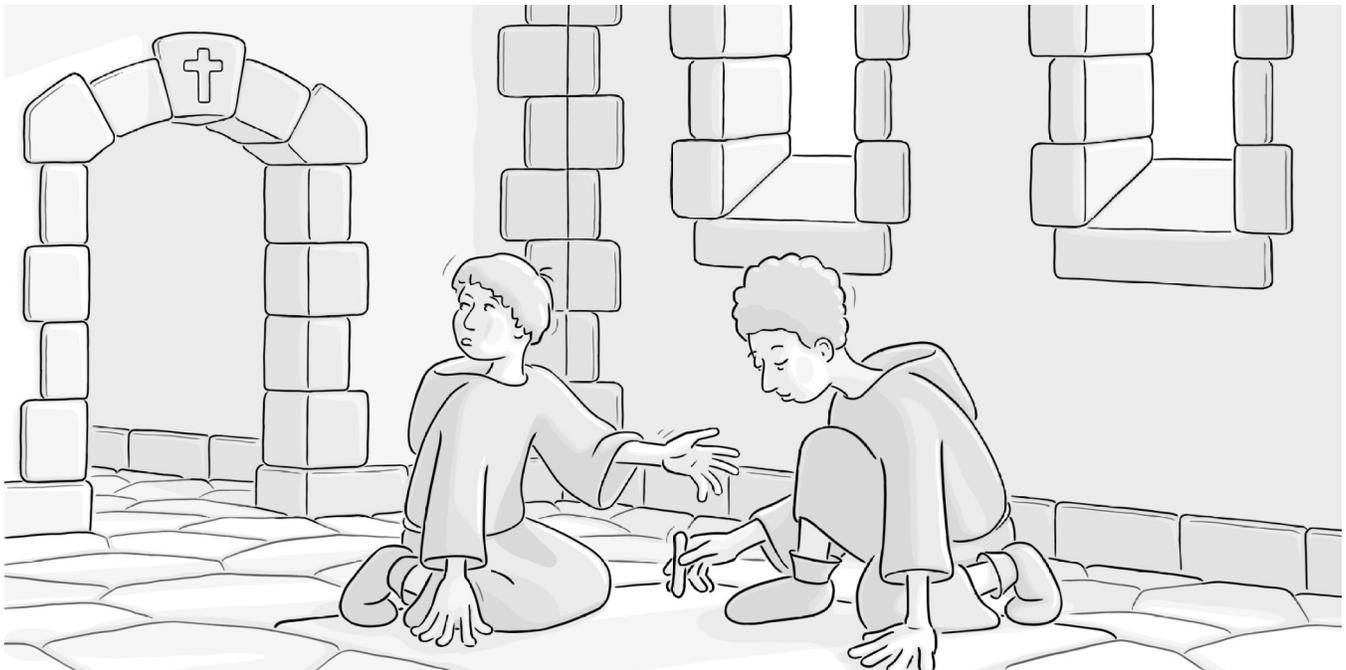
"Hurry! We can still make it!"

"Manuscripts!" I pleaded.

He angrily grabbed a random parchment.

"Whatever it will take to get you out of here"

Then the door flew inward in splinters. and two of the invaders were inside with us. Both had wild beards, and heavy, hairy forearms. I could understand some of their speech, which was similar to that of the rider-lords of my youth. Both men seemed perfectly at ease. Almost jovial.



I cowered against a wall, but brother Punsley was made differently, and he began throwing things, and shouting insults in his native dialect. The warrior calmly batted aside the incoming missiles, laughing, and even setting his sword on a table.

My friend then charged at the warrior, with a furious shout, as I sank to the floor amid green scraps and baubles.

Brother Punsley was an embodiment of pure rage, however as soon as he came within reach, a huge arm shot out, lifting him into the air by his hood. "This one is brave!" bellowed the warrior, proffering my flailing friend towards his companion. "He will make a good serving boy for my sister."

"Aye, she'll soon tame him" said the second, who was now standing over me. "this one is a coward", He then declared, looking down at me with disdain. "useless!" He lowered his great wooden shield.

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My next recollection is of waking up in the nunnery, which was the only building that had not lost its roof. The few remaining nuns had fled to the mainland, and were not to return. These, and other things, I learned in the days I lay waiting for my ribs to knit, and my bruises to subside. Of Punsley, there was no sign.

When, at last, I was deemed well enough to stand, I donned my habit for the first time in a week, knotting it loosely over my chest bindings. I walked down to the seaward rocks, where I drew out one last scrap of green printed parchment that I had found in my pocket, and dropped it into the waves.

"Punsley", I said, smiling and ignoring the cold wind. "I do not know if you were taken to be the plaything of a red haired giantess, but I hope so, because I know you would acquit yourself admirably in that role."



Annual Excavations at Borglund Island yield a wealth of discoveries, and provide new insights on Viking-Age Settlement Patterns

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Recent excavations on Borglund Island, Denmark have turned up many finds, that enhance our understanding of late-medieval settlement patterns and cultural practices, and some that challenge long-held assumptions. "Aarbel", a site known to have been inhabited since at least the seventh century, is mentioned in court annals and other documents from the Carolingian age and later.

The dig at Aarbel, administered jointly by The U. of Glasgow, and the U. of Malmo, has been underway for nine seasons (beginning 1988). The site, covering more than 100 hectares, is known to have been a fishing and agricultural settlement, as well as an important trading hub¹.

Aarbel is mentioned in several contemporary archives on mainland Europe, including the "Annales Regium"² of...

...when groundwater mitigation measures became necessary¹⁴.

One of the more intriguing discoveries of the season came in Early August, when a grave-site (Fig. 10) was unearthed in one of the new quadrants on the Northeast (fig 1). The occupant, who has been

dubbed "Anferny"¹⁵, was determined to be about sixty years of age, and was interred with several artifacts of interest.

"Anferny" is interesting both for the eclectic collection of artifacts with which he was found¹⁶ and for the unusual manner of his interment. The grave goods (Fig. 11) include several pieces which must have been valuable, and perhaps most notably, a small wooden cross¹⁷. Both stratigraphy and radiocarbon analysis date Anferny to the ninth or tenth century, placing him well into the pre-Christian era...

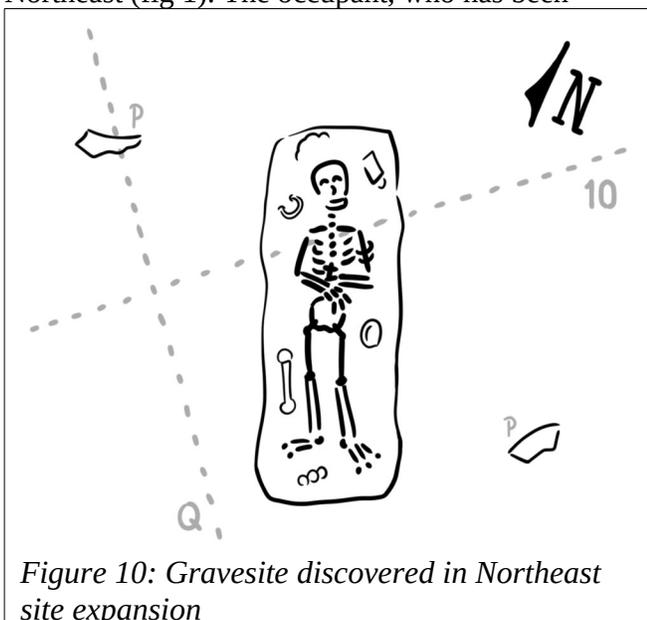


Figure 10: Gravesite discovered in Northeast site expansion