“To My Dear “St. Chad”: Anglican Devotion to an Anglo-Saxon Saint in late Edwardian Toronto

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While a comprehensive study of what Nicholas Orme terms *the invention and casting* of church dedications in Canadian Anglicanism remains elusive, by attending to details of the singular life of ecclesiastical layman Edward Marion Chadwick (1840-1921), the circumstances of the limited introduction into the Diocese of Toronto of the cult of St. Chad, bishop of Lichfield, are for the first time revealed in this paper.¹ Presenting archival and monumental evidence, I shall explore the surprising origins and unique representations of an innovative High Church dedication, acutely racialized to suit contemporary prejudice, cast and invented at the height of an era in Toronto characterized by rapid unplanned urbanization, spiking levels of English migration, and opportunistic efforts at church extension.

Quietly transitioning from a form of semi-private, or family, to a public devotion, aspects of a medievalizing cult of St. Chad in late Edwardian Toronto were officially promoted as a means by which to honour the outstanding contribution of one individual to the life of the Diocese. In the same gesture, the patronage of St. Chad was conveniently leveraged to re-enforce prevailing imperialist constructions of Anglo-Saxon Canada and to appeal to the sensibilities of migrant churchmen from England.² This unusual dedication, invented between 1909 and 1912, though never subsequently repeated in the local context, remains important for understanding lay piety and contemporary episcopal attitudes towards the cult of the saints in the period, as well as evidences both the dogged persistence of an Imperial Anglican identity, and an ongoing revival of

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medieval art.

**St. Chad’s Wick**

A pioneering amateur ecclesiologist, genealogist, and heraldist, Edward Marion Chadwick, like so many other Victorian gentlemen of leisure throughout the British Empire, was consumed by the middle-class vogue for antiquarianism. Unusually, however, Chadwick’s methods were always painstaking and he mostly succeeded in his task of documenting the most obscure minutiae of his own family history, as well as those of many others, often accessing scarce primary records on both sides of the Atlantic divide, and laying a foundation for the Loyalist genealogical project in Canada. Little wonder that in the final of the several volumes exclusively treating the history of the Chadwicks of Guelph and Toronto he variously authored, illuminated, limned, and published himself, we find related the following arcane details concerning the origin of the family name,

In East Lancashire, not far from the borders of Yorkshire, is situate the important town of Rochdale. A short distance from Rochdale there was a wick or hamlet anciently called Ceadda’s Wyck or St. Chad’s Wick (Chaddewyck). The parish church of Rochdale . . . bears the name of St. Chad’s. There would seem to have been some close connection between St. Chad’s Church and St. Chad’s Wick . . . St. Chad was a missionary to the Saxons of Mercia, which comprised a large eastern and middle part of England, who became Bishop of York and afterwards of Lichfield . . . Chadwick, originally Chaddewyck, no doubt derived its name from the church, and manifestly the family, anciently DeChaddewyck, in more modern form Chadwick, derived their name from Chaddewyck.3

Thus, Chadwick’s own name presented in itself an opportunity to identify, if not the distant heroic ancestor typically searched for in more desperate episodes of genealogical stretching, then an obvious choice of patron saint for the family.4 His fuzzy mention of “some close connection between St. Chad’s Church and St. Chad’s Wick” could easily serve as an alternative title for this paper, and the prominence of what is referred to informally as “nominative determinism” in Chadwick’s devotional life is striking. As with his leisurely genealogical explorations, onomastic reflection became serious identity work.5
Indeed, as Chadwick claimed, St. Chad had been an important Anglo-Saxon bishop of the seventh century whose controversial episcopal consecration was a kind of shorthand for the struggle for independence of the English church. The central details of his Life are to be found in the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* of Bede who describes St. Chad’s lengthy career, his education at the Celtic monastery at Lindisfarne, his perambulations among the Northumbrians, Irish, and Mercians, his episcopal consecrations, and his foundation of a monastery church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.  

In time, this sanctuary was transformed into the present-day Lichfield Cathedral of the eponymous diocese in the Church of England, to which dedication St. Chad’s name was later added. Of uncertain origin, the so-called *Lichfield, or St. Chad Gospels*, are the greatest treasure owned by the Cathedral Chapter there, and while this precious manuscript cannot easily be associated personally with the one whose name it bears, the *Book of Chad*, as it is also called, figures more prominently in what follows than any specific hagiographical detail taken from the Life of St. Chad.  

Significantly, both High Church devotion to St. Chad, and antiquarian fascination with the *Lichfield Gospels*, provided recourse in late Victorian Toronto to a heavenly guardian, and to one of the greatest works of manuscript culture, the shared Anglo-Saxon identity of which fitted seamlessly with the useable history of a Gothicized medieval past so popular in the period. Embodying in political terms what contemporary historian James Anthony Froude (1818-1894) described as “Oceana,” a utopian, globe spanning “transcolonial polity of Anglo-Saxon communities” emerged as an Imperial fantasy. This racialized imagined community was “anchored in ideas of British or Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism,” that involved the “reorganization of bodies and spaces” based on “relations with local political specificities, places, and peoples.”  

In other words, St. Chad was a growing concern. As Frances Arnold-Forster (1857-1921), the foundational writer on English church dedications, opined of the saintly bishop of Lichfield in 1899, “St. Chad is one of those saints upon whom the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century are entirely agreed and we have eight modern churches dedicated to him.” Nor was devotion to his cult by any means an isolated episode of pious Victorian medieval revival. As Joanna Parker and others have deftly shown, cultic mania for King Alfred, the Black Prince, even Britannia,
alongside SS Alban, Chad, Cuthbert, George, and Hilda, and an expanding host of Anglo-Saxon and other characters, “was central to the nineteenth-century formation of a British national identity rooted in English history.” Chronologically, though, official recognition of a medievalizing cult of St. Chad was a relatively late and unfashionable arrival in Toronto, and this poor timing, in conjunction with burgeoning Canadian nationalism, sometimes expressed in terms of anti-English rhetoric, as well as St. Chad’s own relative obscurity, does much to explain its limited appeal.

**Family Devotion to St. Chad**

While Chadwick was strangely successful in his promotion of the cult of St. Chad, first as a family devotion, and later as a public commemoration, dabbling in the cult of the saints remained a risky business in sectarian Toronto from the advent of the Metropolitan Ritualist controversies. One contemporary writer prefaced his fashionable study of St. Chad with the admission,

> Should the critic ever vouchsafe to notice so small a work, the propriety of a presbyter of the Anglican Communion writing the Life of a Canonized Saint, may, perhaps, be called in question . . . while I have endeavoured to do justice to the character of this ancient bishop of our Church, I have only made use of the title of ‘Saint,’ given to him by the Bishop of Rome, as a historical designation, which it would have been inconvenient, if not impossible, to suppress.

It was not until after the death of his father that Chadwick elected first to invoke St. Chad openly as family patron. He had already obtained the grant of a striking armorial achievement to associate with his father’s name from Ulster King of Arms in 1873, and the idea of devotion to a canonized saint, in addition to flashy heraldic display, would likely have offended the sensibilities of the older generation of a family of landed Anglo-Irish Recorde evangelicals. But the gap was permanent and the ecclesiological sensibilities of the son had heightened considerably.

In April 1890, local and national newspapers reported the details of the placing of a memorial stained glass window and brass within St. George’s Church, Guelph to the memory of John Craven Chadwick (1811-1889), Chadwick’s father. The first account, printed in *The Canadian*
Churchman, emphasized the Life of the subject of the design of the window, the authenticity of the depiction of an obviously racialized figure of St. Chad, and its quality:

The window is in three lights, of which the centre one contains a figure representing the famous Saxon missionary and Bishop Ceadda, or St. Chad, with accessories referring to what is known of his ministry, and also emblematic of Lichfield, of which diocese Chad was first Bishop . . . the window is by N.T. Lyon, of Toronto, whose well established reputation it fully maintains both in design and workmanship.

The account reported in The Guelph Herald, the local newspaper of which Chadwick’s elder brother was long the proprietor, contained more detailed information on the origin of the design, likely supplied by the designer himself: “This figure and the details of dress, etc., are designed from a study of figures in illuminated Saxon MSS. of about the seventh century. The cross is taken from the MS. still extant, known as ‘St. Chad’s Gospel,’ and which is believed to be Bishop Chad’s property.”

Several members of the family had contributed substantially to the building of St. George’s in 1872, including Chadwick, who also furnished the original designs for the interior decoration of the church. The memorial window to his father was both a continuation of and a reflection upon that legacy. An accomplished amateur, in private Chadwick was keen to claim credit for the design of his father’s memorial. Indeed, so pleased was he with his own work at Guelph that in designing a memorial window for himself at St. Alban’s Cathedral in Toronto several decades later, Chadwick repeated the subject.

Recording in his diary the details of Christmas dinner 1918, he listed each of the assembled loved ones, “And the two family saints, Chad and Margaret of Scotland, hung up on the wall in the form of cartoons for a family window which we are going to have in the Cathedral.” While St. Margaret of Scotland was yet another fashionable Anglo-Saxon revival invoked on behalf of the Scottish relations of Chadwick’s wife, Maria Martha “Mattie” Fisher (1849-1933), cadets of Clan Ross, in the Toronto design, the figure of St. Chad has been vastly refined, and together the two figures share space in one of the finest windows created in the annals of Canadian stained glass.
In April 1919, Chadwick recorded that, “A window of armorial ornamentation with figures of St. Chad and St. Margaret of Scotland was put up in St. Alban’s Cathedral at Mattie’s expense. I spent the most of this day watching the work of taking out the old windows and putting in the new one. It is quite a success, being very beautiful. I of course made the drawings . . .” And a little more than a week later, “The Bishop accepted and dedicated the window above mentioned.”

As both Treasurer of the Cathedral Chapter and designer, a unique mixture of roles in the annals of ecclesiastical patronage in Canada, Chadwick obsessed over the details of the memorial window, once again executed by the masterful firm owned and operated by N.T. Lyon (1843-1919). In a lengthy letter to the proprietor, with whom he collaborated in the creation of many more windows, Chadwick described each feature of the figure of St. Chad to be rendered scrupulously by Lyon. Every attribute, item of pontifical insignia, and heraldic detail was to be, not just correct, but authentic to the Anglo-Saxon past, so far as could be ascertained from influential sources such as James Robinson Planché’s History of British Costume (1834), or, alternatively, imagined – “Hair grey, Eyes blue. Face rather ruddy, as he spent most of his life out of doors.” Most significantly, the cruciform staff taken from the Lichfield Gospels featured more prominently and in finer detail in the Toronto window. “The peculiar ornament in the head of the pastoral staff is taken from a figure in St. Chad’s gospels,” Chadwick insisted.

The precise significance of the floriated staves grasped by the figure of St. Luke the Evangelist, like many things about the Lichfield Gospels, including its provenance, remains mysterious. In Chadwick’s vivid imagination, informed by a contemporary blossoming of politically charged constructions of Anglo-Saxon identity in Canada, the floral ornament hinted at Celtic origins that lay, it was alleged, in Coptic peregrinations into Ireland in the murkiest depths of history. The rosette, that Chadwick named St. Chad’s cross and blazoned as “an octofoil forming a red cross and gold saltire,” represented for a sizeable minority the hope for the imminent fulfilment of a messianic prophecy that linked the ascendance of what John Darwin termed “A Third British Empire” to the useable histories of the Anglo-Saxons and Celts and their purported origins in Biblical narratives of the glory of pharaonic Egypt, and still more fanciful antediluvian climes.

Never visiting Lichfield, it seems Chadwick only ever had access in
his lifetime to a black and white reproduction of the original figure of St. Luke from the *Lichfield Gospels*, probably included in the *Facsimiles of Manuscripts and Inscriptions* (1873-1878) edited by E. A Bond and E. M. Thompson for the Palæographical Society, or else that published by English antiquarian and non-juring bishop George Hickes within the pages of his monumental *Linguarum Vett. Septentrionalium Thesaurus Grammatico-Criticus et Archaeologicus* (1705). In consequence of this limitation, he invented a color scheme for use in his repeated borrowings of the rosette that he also described as “a figure of eight leaves, ruby with gold edges, and a black ground of which very little appears.” In the original manuscript, however, the rosette is of a solid colouring throughout its eight-pointed geometry.

Inevitably, for all his careful planning, Chadwick was forced to record in his copious notes on the window project that “It has been asserted by a member of the Cathedral that St. Chad was a Romish priest. He was not. He was an Anglo-Saxon . . . !”

**Public Devotion to St. Chad**

Sometime after 1909, Anglican devotion to St. Chad in Toronto was elevated officially from a private to a public cult. In that year, a haphazard new mission station was authorized, situated in the midst of the teeming, unplanned, west end suburb of Toronto called Earls court, an urban periphery derided locally as being part of a “shacktown fringe.” The vast majority of the working-class English immigrant “shackers” in the area were Methodists whose spiritual needs were already being met by the exertions of clergy belonging to that denomination. Indeed, the largest Sunday school class in Canada was organized at Earls court Methodist Church about the same time, but a smaller group of Anglicans began meeting for divine worship under a tent with the approval of fourth diocesan bishop James Fielding Sweeny (1857-1940).

Owing to the small numbers of Earls court Anglicans, it was several years before Chadwick recalled in his diary paying the first of several visits, “to St. Chad’s Church in the afternoon: found it a rather smart looking little Mission Church, mostly very new and unfinished but pretty well arranged and appointed.” This entry, written in March 1912, is the earliest identifiable mention of the mission’s dedication to St. Chad, Diocesan records, as well as successive editions of *The Toronto City
Spiking English migration in the period was met with ambivalence, even hostility, on the part of Torontonians, a symptom of economic resentment. The sheer number of these arrivals, however, forced a belated pastoral response. The eventual dedication of the Earls Court mission to St. Chad was a unique instance on the local sacred namescape, never subsequently repeated, and the public promulgation of the cult of an otherwise obscure medieval Anglo-Saxon bishop. This gesture of social denotation was part of a late Edwardian rhetorical strategy to subsume an undesirable English identity in that of exceptionalism, of patriotic Imperial Britishness, then shared enthusiastically by a wider Canadian public. The construct of a Greater Britain included both the real and imagined heritage of the Anglo-Saxon church, and the dedication was also calculated to appeal nostalgically to the cultural memory of the newly arrived Earls Court Anglicans, “for [mutatis mutandis] it has always been the wisdom of the English and American Churches to encourage the national rites, customs, and traditions of other national Catholic churches . . . The names therefore of a few of the most popular saints of France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Italy, and other countries, are supplied for the dedications of churches with congregations of foreign-born persons.” Thus, the “Anglo-British identity that migrants laid claim to (or were assigned by imperially oriented observers),” figures like the Anglican bishop of Toronto, derived its spatial dimension from the dedication to St. Chad.

An admittedly thin and incomplete case for the novel dedication of the newly established Earlscourt parish being a personal tribute to Chadwick by his bishop is rendered more plausible in light of a Christmas card given him by Sweeny in 1909. The inclusion, tipped into the pertinent volume of his diary, and written only months after the founding of the suburban mission, is addressed, “To my dear ‘St. Chad.’” On the reverse of the note, Chadwick wrote that “the within is the nickname the Bishop has given me, our family are often, in Toronto, called ‘The Chads.’” Just weeks before his death in December 1921, Chadwick recorded briefly the last occasion on which he ventured out of doors: “Went to the laying of the cornerstone of an extension of St. Chad’s Church, Earls Court.”
Conclusion

While never repeated in the Diocese, the medievalizing dedication to St. Chad, “a mixture of ancient truth with modern inventions, guesses, and errors,” outlived both the man to whom it likely alluded, and his friend, the bishop, with whom he shared the joke. Happily, like the survival of the two stained glass windows, St. Chad’s emerged from the Anglo-Saxon twilight as a lively community of faith, not immune from the controversies and the decline of the present generation, but one that currently boasts an Ahadi Ministry, a Swahili-language Fresh Expression of church appealing to Canadian Anglicans of East African heritage.

Thankfully, not every church dedication owes itself to the same overwrought personal and ideological commitments as those at play in the case of St. Chad’s, described in what precedes. Still, without more thorough examination, many comparably picturesque dedications continue to languish in obscurity, their meanings lost, or even forgotten. It is hoped that some of the colourful history of this dedication may spark greater curiosity in a promising, if neglected, field of study.

Endnotes

1. For the Victorian (re-) invention and casting of medieval church dedications, see Nicholas Orme, English Church Dedications with a Survey of Cornwall and Devon (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), xi, 58.

2. The dedications of churches built within ethnic settlements in Canada have historically invoked saints associated with the ethnicity of the particular community, for which see Cecilia Morgan, Commemorating Canada: History, Heritage, and Memory, 1850s-1990s (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 66.


7. No complete facsimile edition of the *Lichfield Gospels* exists, though a digital manuscript is available for online consultation at https://lichfield.ou.edu


13. For the situation of the memorial within the church, as well as the contemporary prevalence of ‘the Imperial idea’ in the parish, see Peter B. Moore, ed., *A History of St. George’s, Guelph, Ontario, 1832-1982* (Guelph: The Anniversary Committee, St George’s Church, 1982), 46, 51, 152-3.

14. Clippings from *The Canadian Churchman* and *The Guelph Herald* are included in entries for April 1890 within the relevant volume of the diaries of Edward Marion Chadwick, Trinity College Archives, Edward Marion


17. For St. Margaret’s Victorian revival, see Catherine Keene, Saint Margaret, Queen of the Scots: A Life in Perspective (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 134. For the reputation of the window, see Bruce Patterson, Heraldry in the Church of St. Alban the Martyr in Church of St. Alban the Martyr, Toronto: Windows, Plaques, Arms and Memorials, A Transcription (Toronto: Ontario Genealogical Society, 1998), 23.

18. Diary of EMC, entries for Friday, 11 April and Saturday, 19 April 1919.

19. Cartoons, draft correspondence with Lyon, notes, and other draft materials form part of the Edward A. Chadwick fons, private collection, Toronto.


22. For the development and identity of the Earlscourt neighbourhood, see Richard Harris, Unplanned Suburbs: Toronto’s American Tragedy, 1900 to 1950 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

23. Diary of EMC, entry for Sunday, 3 March 1912.


27. Chilton, Travelling Colonist, 186.

28. Diary of EMC, entries for December 1909 and Saturday, 3 September 1921.
