

## The vampires of Drakelow, c. 1090

*This text comes from an account of the life and miracles of Saint Modwenna, a mysterious saint whose bones were kept at Burton Abbey (founded in 1008). The account was written by the monastery's abbot, Geoffrey, probably between 1118 and 1135, and certainly before 1150 when Abbot Geoffrey died. For Saint Modwenna's life, Geoffrey relied on an earlier written text, but for her miracles at Burton he depended mostly on stories passed on orally. This particular episode probably took place during the abbatiage of Geoffrey Malaterra, 1085-94.*

*Text adapted by Charles West from Geoffrey of Burton, Life and Miracles of St Modwenna, ed. and tr. R. Bartlett (Oxford, 2002), pp. 192-8.*

There were two villagers (*villani*) living in Stapenhill under the jurisdiction of the abbot of Burton who ran away to the neighbouring village called Drakelow [in Derbyshire], wrongfully leaving their lords the monks, and wishing to live under the authority of count Roger called 'the Poitevin'. The father of the monastery ordered that their crops, which had not yet been taken out of the barns, should be seized and taken to his own barns, hoping in this way to bring them back, and to recall them to their own dwellings. But these men went off and lied deceitfully, and brought a troublesome charge before Count Roger, stirring him up and speaking wickedly so that the count's deep anger was aroused against the abbot, so much that he threatened to kill him wherever he might find him.

Eventually, violently angry, the count gathered a great troop of knights and peasants with weapons and carts and sent them in a great company to the monks' barn at Stapenhill and had them seize by force all the crops stored there, those belonging to the abbey (*dominicas*) on which the monks depend, as well as those of the wicked fugitives we mentioned.

*[Count Roger also sends a group to knights to fight the monastery's ten knights, who however with the help the monks' prayers defeat their more numerous opponents].*

The very next day, at the third hour, the two runaway peasants (*rustici*) through whom and because of whom this evil had arisen were sitting down to eat, when they were both suddenly struck down dead. Next morning they were placed in wooden coffins and buried in the churchyard (*atrium*) at Stapenhill, the village from where they had fled. What followed was amazing and truly remarkable. That very same day on which they were interred they appeared at evening, while the sun was still up, at Drakelow, carrying on their shoulders the wooden coffins in which they had been buried. The whole following night they walked through the paths and fields of the village, now in the shape of men carrying wooden coffins on their shoulders, now in the likeness of bears or dogs or other animals. They spoke to the other peasants, banging on the walls of their houses and shouting to those listening inside "Move, quickly move! Get going! Come!" When these astonishing events had taken place every evening and every night for some time, such a disease (*mortalitas*) afflicted the village that all the peasants from it fell into desperate straits and within a few days all except three (whom we shall discuss later) perished by sudden death in a remarkable way.

The count, seeing these remarkable occurrences, was stunned and absolutely terrified. He immediately repented and came with his knights to the monastery, where he begged humble pardon, made a firm concord with the abbot and monks, and entreated them with prayers that they should placate God and the virgin [Modwenna] whom he had offended. Before them all,

with faithful devotion, he gave a command to Drogo the reeve (*prepositus*) of the village that there should be double restitution for all the damages he had inflicted, and so, in peace of mind, he left the monastery and hastened without delay to his other lands. Drogo then quickly returned and restored double to the abbey as he had been ordered and, after seeking pardon yet again, he too left for other parts with all haste, desiring to escape that lethal scourge.

The two peasants who still remained in the village (Drogo was the third) fell sick and languished for a long time. But some people, greatly afraid of the already-mentioned dead men who fantastically (*phantastice*) carried their wooden coffins on their shoulders every evening and at night as has been described, received permission from the bishop to go to their graves and dig them up. They found them still intact, but the linen cloths over their faces were very stained with blood. They cut off the men's heads and placed them in the graves between their legs, tore out the fleshly hearts from their corpses, and covered the bodies with earth again. They brought the fleshly hearts to the place called *Dodecrossefora* and there burned them from morning until evening. When as if greatly compelled they had at last been burned up, they cracked with a great sound and everyone there visibly saw an evil spirit in the form of a crow fly from the flames. Soon after this was done, both the disease (*mortalitas*) and the haunting (*phantasia*) ceased. The two peasants sick in their beds recovered their health as soon as they saw the smoke rising from the fire where the hearts were burned. They got up, gathered together their children and wives and all their possessions, and, giving thanks to God and to the holy virgin [Modwenna] that they had escaped, they departed very hastily to the next village, which was called Gresley, and settled there. Drakelow was thus abandoned (*vastata*) and for long thereafter no one dared to live there, fearing the vengeance of the Lord that had struck there and wondering at the prodigies that God omnipotent had worked through the holy virgin.