

= Berhtwald =

Berhtwald (also Brihtwald , Beorhtweald , Bertwald , Berhtwald , Beorhtwald , or Beretuald ; died 731) was the ninth Archbishop of Canterbury in England . Documentary evidence names Berhtwald as abbot at Reculver before his election as archbishop . Berhtwald begins the first continuous series of native @-@ born Archbishops of Canterbury , although there had been previous Anglo @-@ Saxon archbishops , they had not succeeded each other until Berhtwald 's reign .

Berhtwald 's period as archbishop coincided with the end of Wilfrid 's long struggle to regain the Bishopric of York , and the two @-@ year delay between Theodore 's death and Berhtwald 's election may have been due to efforts to select Wilfrid for Canterbury . After his election , Berhtwald went to Gaul for consecration and then presided over two councils that attempted to settle the Wilfrid issue , finally succeeding at the second council in 705 . Berhtwald also was the recipient of the first surviving letter close in Western Europe .

= = Early life = =

Little is known of Berhtwald 's ancestry or his early life , but he was born around the middle of the seventh century . By 679 , he was made abbot of the monastery at Reculver in Kent , and a charter dated May 679 names Berhtwald as abbot . This charter , from Hlothere , King of Kent , is the earliest surviving original Anglo @-@ Saxon charter .

= = Election as archbishop = =

The see of Canterbury was vacant for two years after the death of Theodore before Berhtwald was elected to the office on 1 July 692 . The long vacancy resulted from the disturbed conditions in the kingdom of Kent at the time , as various kings fought for control . The succession to the kingdom was disputed between rival claimants Oswine and Wihtred , and various outside kings , including Caedwalla and Swaefheard raided and plundered Kent . Eventually , Wihtred secured the throne , around 691 or early 692 , as Bede names Wihtred as King of Kent , along with Swaefheard , at the time of Berhtwald 's election . Swaefheard , however , is not named as king of Kent after this date .

The vacancy may also have occurred because Wilfrid , who was at that point having problems in Northumbria , desired to become Archbishop of Canterbury . A contemporary biographer of Wilfrid , Stephen of Ripon , says that Theodore had wished for Wilfrid to succeed Theodore at Canterbury . Æthelred of Mercia may have supported Wilfrid 's translation to Canterbury also , but despite these desires , the translation did not happen . Berhtwald was consecrated on 29 June 693 , having travelled to France for his consecration as archbishop of Canterbury by Godwin , Archbishop of Lyon . Berhtwald went to the continent for consecration probably because he feared that his election was not supported by all of the kings and bishops . After his consecration , Berhtwald travelled to Rome to obtain the support of Pope Sergius I , who wrote to a number of Anglo @-@ Saxon kings and bishops in support of the archbishop . Two of these letters survive , and their authenticity has been doubted , mainly because they are only preserved as part of the post @-@ Norman Conquest Canterbury @-@ York dispute . Historians have since come to regard the two letters as genuine . Sergius also gave Berhtwald a pallium , the symbol of an archbishop 's authority .

= = Archbishop = =

Berhtwald appears to have been involved in the governance of the church , establishing the bishopric of Sherborne in Wessex and it was during his tenure that Sussex , the last pagan kingdom in England , was converted to Christianity . He also consecrated the first Bishop of Selsey . During his time in office , King Wihtred of Kent in the Law of Wihtred exempted the church from taxation . Berhtwald was a proponent of his predecessor 's view of the archbishops of Canterbury as primates of the entire island of Britain . Berhtwald co @-@ operated closely with Wihtred in the kingdom , and secured the exemption of the church from taxation under Wihtred 's laws issued in 695 . The law

code also dealt with other ecclesiastical matters , including marriage , Sunday observance , and pagan worship . This law code resulted from a royal council that was held at Bearsted . Further privileges for the church were issued in 699 , and may have been composed by Berhtwald before being promulgated . Another privilege , usually referred to as the " Privilege of Wihtrred " , is claimed to be a grant from Wihtrred to the monasteries of Kent of exemption from non @-@ clerical control . However , this is actually a ninth @-@ century forgery .

Much of Berhtwald 's time in office coincided with the efforts of Wilfrid to regain the see of York , and to reverse the division of York into smaller dioceses . Berhtwald was opposed to Wilfrid 's desire to restore some separated bishoprics to the bishopric of York as well as regaining his old see . Wilfrid 's problems had begun during the archbishopric of Berhtwald 's predecessor , Theodore of Tarsus , when Wilfrid had quarreled with the King of Northumbria , Ecgfrith , and was expelled from the north . Theodore had taken the opportunity to divide the large see of York into a number of smaller dioceses , and Wilfrid had appealed to the papacy in Rome . Berhtwald inherited the dispute and presided at the Council of Austerfield in 702 , at which Wilfrid 's biographer relates the story that King Aldfrith of Northumbria , Berhtwald , and the other enemies of Wilfrid conspired to deprive Wilfrid of all his offices and possessions . A more likely story is that Berhtwald managed to secure concessions from the Northumbrians , and tried to broker a compromise . The offer in the end was that Wilfrid would retire to Ripon and cease acting as a bishop . Wilfrid rejected this compromise and once more appealed to the pope . Three years later , at a further Council , it was arranged that Wilfrid should receive the Bishopric of Hexham in place of that of York . This was the Council of Nidd , usually dated to 706 , and it was held in Northumbria . Bede also mentions that Berhtwald consecrated a number of bishops , including Tobias as Bishop of Rochester .

One of Berhtwald 's letters has been preserved , sent to Forthhere , Bishop of Sherborne , and asking Forthhere to intercede with Beorwold , the Abbot of Glastonbury , to ransom a slave . Another letter , this one addressed to Berhtwald , from Waldhere , Bishop of London , also survives . The main interest in the second letter is that it is the oldest surviving letter close surviving in Western Europe . This second letter also relates that Waldhere and Berhtwald had attended a synod which can be dated to sometime between 703 and 705 , where the kingdom of Wessex was threatened with excommunication . A charter witnessed by Berhtwald which mentions a supposed 706 council , numbered 54 by Sawyer , is now known to be a fake , although the witness list may be based on a legitimate 8th century charter that no longer survives . Likewise , a charter with Berhtwald as a witness and relating to the 716 Council of Clofesho is also known to be a 9th @-@ century forgery , although again it may have been based on actual documents from the council .

= = Death and legacy = =

Berhtwald died on 13 January 731 . An epitaph to him in verse survives , and may have been placed over his tomb , which was at Canterbury . Subsequently he was canonised with a feast day of 9 January . Little evidence of extensive cult activity exists , however , and the main evidence for his sainthood is a late medieval entry in a St Augustine 's calendar . Berhtwald is the first of the continuous series of native @-@ born archbishops in England , although there had been two previous Anglo @-@ Saxon archbishops at Canterbury ? Deusdedit and Wighard .