

**EXCAVATIONS AT CARLISLE CATHEDRAL
IN 1988:
ROMAN, MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL
DATA**

by

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INTRODUCTION *by* MIKE MCCARTHY

Between March and September 1988 archaeological excavations took place on behalf of the Dean and Chapter immediately west of the west wall of the nave at Carlisle Cathedral. A report on this work focusing on the early medieval period is published in *The Archaeological Journal* (McCarthy forthcoming 2014). The present digital report contains details of Roman, medieval and post-medieval findings which lie beyond the scope of that paper and is intended to alert researchers to the scope and nature of the Roman, medieval and post-medieval material recovered during the excavations in 1988.

The basis of the print report and the present text is the site archive which (in 2013) is lodged with the Dean and Chapter, Carlisle Cathedral where it can be accessed by application to the Canon Warden.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Circumstances of the excavation

From about 1986 the Dean and Chapter considered various means of displaying a range of church treasures, some belonging to the cathedral itself, and some to parishes in the diocese, in secure conditions at the Cathedral. Treasures included church plate such as chalices and patens, vestments and archaeological discoveries. The solution adopted comprised an underground Treasury accessed only from within the Cathedral itself.

At the time protection for underground remains beyond the Archaeological Areas and Monuments Act (1979) was much more limited than is the case today. Buildings such as the Cathedral and the Fraternity were listed, the precinct itself was unscheduled and there was little or no guidance available from English Heritage or church authorities with regard to developers, local planning authorities and others, for the protection of archaeological remains. Similarly, there were no protocols for the management of archaeological projects. The Treasury proposals also antedated the Pastoral Measure (1990) which placed responsibility for the fabric and works in cathedral precincts with the Cathedrals Fabric Commission who appointed Fabric Committees for each institution. A further complication at Carlisle was the lack of a full-time Bursar and Chapter Clerk so that the administration of

major works, such as the construction of the Treasury and the maintenance of financial control, was undertaken by a local firm of solicitors.

In the 1980s, where proposals affecting great churches were mooted, archaeologists made individual representations to planning authorities and potential developers when they became aware of threats to the archaeological resource. The present writer heard of the proposal for a Treasury at Carlisle Cathedral during 1986 and initiated discussions focusing on the archaeological importance of the site with the then Dean. Subsequently, he was invited to sit in on Chapter meetings when the matter was discussed along with the then Architect and Surveyor to the Fabric, Mr Ray R. Nichol. It was largely through that mechanism that the Dean and Chapter became aware of, and readily accepted, their duty of care to the archaeology.

Carlisle Archaeological Unit had previously excavated six small trenches in 1985 at the behest of the then Architect and Surveyor, the late Norman Phillips. English Heritage were consulted about this but provided no funding. In 1987, whilst the plans for the Treasury were actively being drawn up, English Heritage scheduled the Cathedral precinct (SMR No. 546). An application for Scheduled Monument Consent was made and approved. English Heritage provided no funding for the project and had no further involvement.

The excavations commenced in March 1988 on a footprint determined by the architect and structural engineer. From the outset it was decided to limit the depth of the excavation solely to that required for the construction work. As the depth was set at slightly more than 3 m, it was clear that a substantial part of the archaeology, including early waterlogged levels the presence of which was hinted at as a result of works undertaken in 1953 (Simpson 1988) and elsewhere in Carlisle, would be left undisturbed.



Illus. 1. Shoring being inserted.



Illus. 2. Shoring *in situ* showing cramped working conditions

The excavation team and the employer

The excavation team comprised a site director, Graham Keevill (GK), and a number of excavators recruited for the project. GK was employed by the Dean and Chapter, Carlisle Cathedral. Funding was provided by the Dean and Chapter as part of the larger scheme which entailed the construction of an underground Treasury, the brainchild of the then Dean, the late Very Reverend Jack Churchill. Other personnel working on the archaeological project were mostly supported by the Manpower Services Commission.

THE ARCHIVE

Site codes

Whilst the project was undertaken entirely by the Dean and Chapter, the site recording system and the site codes were those in use by Carlisle Archaeological Unit (CAU) at the time of excavation. All CAU codes comprised a three letter abbreviation of the unit name and the year of excavation. Thus CAR 88 means Carlisle 1988. Subsequent letters in site codes refer to the site name and trench. Thus CAT G means Cathedral trench G, codes CAT A-F having been allocated in 1985.

The nature and condition of the archive in 2013

During and after the conclusion of the excavation in 1988 all the data was transferred to Shaddon Mill, Carlisle, the premises occupied by Carlisle Archaeological Unit until 2001. The paper archive was stored in dark conditions whilst finds were on open shelves. The atmospheric conditions were dry, and whilst there was no monitoring of relative humidity, it is believed that they were relatively stable in the archive store.

Following the Unit's move into voluntary administration in 2001, the archive was handed over to the care of the Dean and Chapter at the Cathedral where it remains. The paper archive and some finds are stored in dry conditions in the Muniment Room of the Fraternity, and where the relative humidity values are probably fairly stable, although not monitored. There is little natural light. Bulk material including the human remains is curated by Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery in its stores.

Much of the text-based data exists in the form of a partial draft report prepared by the excavator and surviving as a print-out. Some sections of text are very faint and difficult to read, but other parts are clear. During the initial post-excavation process some of the data was entered on to 5.25" floppy disks and HD 1.44 mb 3.5" floppy disks, but the former cannot now be accessed. Some of the 3.5" disks can be read, if with difficulty, and have been used in the preparation of both the print and digital reports. There is little sign of deterioration in the paper and photographic archive. A more detailed assessment of the archive was prepared prior to the preparation of the reports for publication (McCarthy 2009).

Context sheets

All stratigraphic data was recorded on hand-written context sheets in conformity with standard practice at the time of the excavation. They are all present and in good order but some recording boxes were unfilled causing occasional difficulties in interpretation.

Photographic

Colour and B&W photography proceeded in tandem during the excavation. The B&W negatives appear to be in good condition, and they are indexed. There are few contact prints, however. The 35 mm slides are in good condition.

Plans and sections

The drawings are all on permatrace and generally in good condition. However, the drawings are of very varied sizes. This is because several drawings appear to have been placed on the same sheet, but subsequently cut up so that there are now many small drawings. A great many, perhaps all, drawings are incomplete.

Day books

It was standard practice throughout the history of Carlisle Archaeological Unit/Carlisle Archaeology to maintain 'day books', registers of objects as they arrived into the office from the field. Objects were listed, allocated numbers according to the material out of which they were made (Ae, Pb etc) and given preliminary descriptions prior to conservation and despatch to specialists. They formed the primary artefactual record. The 'day books' have been lost.

Illustrations of artefacts

Original scale drawings of artefacts, many inked in, are mounted on card with the context numbers, scales, draughtsperson's initials and the date of drawing. Not all objects had been drawn by the time the Unit folded but all are in good condition (McCarthy 2009).

The ceramics

A report on the Roman and medieval ceramics was initially produced by Catherine Underwood, a member of the excavation team. Between 1994 and 1996 Catherine Brooks and Louise Hird, both from Carlisle Archaeological Unit, revisited the pottery, updated the identifications and recorded their findings on handwritten sheets and context x context pro-formas using classifications developed for Carlisle. Two files on Roman and medieval material prepared by Hird and Brooks respectively survive and are in good condition. There are no pottery drawings.

The animal bones

Up to 10 boxes of animal bones was collected and delivered to a specialist, but no report was produced. Enquiries failed to elicit a response. The whereabouts of the material is unknown.

HISTORY OF THE HUMAN REMAINS

It was evident during the 1988 excavations that the skeletal remains constituted a major resource with the potential to shed new light on the cathedral and its site.

The human remains comprised complete and partial skeletons and disarticulated bones. The bones were washed, labelled, boxed and indexed before being despatched by the excavator to a specialist at the University of Birmingham Medical School for osteological reporting. A report was produced, but notes in the archive show that it was regarded as of poor quality, incomplete in many respects and unacceptable for publication purposes.

In 1990, by which time the excavator had moved on, the Dean and Chapter expressed concern that the human remains excavated in 1985 and in 1988 should be re-interred. A slim file of correspondence dealing with aspects of this exists and is in the archive. On 24 May 1990 a trench was excavated (CAT J) by workmen and “3 plastic bags and 1 metal bucket full of bones” was placed in the trench. The notes state that the purpose of the trench was to receive “disarticulated human remains”. A letter dated 6 June 1990 notes that 45 bags of disarticulated human bones had been dumped in a trench adjacent to Paternoster Row. These must have originated from the work undertaken in 1985 (CAT A-F) because the 1988 assemblages had not been returned to Carlisle from Birmingham at that stage.

A second reburial of human remains took place on 15 January 1991 at the insistence of the Dean and Chapter, despite protestations that the examination was incomplete. Material from the 1988 excavation, which had then been returned from Birmingham, was removed from Shaddon Mill and placed in a hastily dug trench with no archaeological supervision. Alarmed at this, the present writer arranged for some material to be stored elsewhere temporarily, and so managed to retain some for future analysis. This residue was retained in storage at Shaddon Mill until 2002.

The unhappy post-excavation history of the human remains, combined with the medieval and later grave-digging activity, throws into question the integrity of the remains. Careful examination suggests that the site archive contains a faithful record of what was found and the excavator's attribution of phases to the burials was broadly accurate. However, it is clear that there was some mixing up of remains in the ground as can be seen where skeletons are clustered together or where one burial truncates another. The difficulty in recognizing grave-cuts during excavation further exacerbated the problem of distinguishing *in situ* skeletal material from bones disturbed from elsewhere.

It is thought most unlikely that any of the skeletal material originates from outside the cathedral precinct. Although skeletal material has been mixed up, there is no reason to doubt that the radiocarbon dates do indeed reflect burial at the dates quoted by Batt in the print report. Indeed, the dating attributed to the metalwork and other items in the artefactual assemblages is largely supportive.

THE LAYOUT OF THE REPORT

The report on the excavations at Carlisle Cathedral in 1988 is laid out in two parts. First, the article in *The Archaeological Journal* (McCarthy forthcoming 2014) focuses on the circumstances of the excavation, the stratigraphy, metal and other finds attributed to the post-Roman/pre-Norman centuries, radiocarbon dates and summaries of the osteological and isotopic data. Included in this is a summary of programmes of geophysical survey undertaken more recently and relevant to the principal findings.

Second, the present digital report includes catalogues of much of the remaining artefactual data, and sets out the human remains and isotopic data in more detail. The material reported is Roman, medieval or post-medieval in date. For ease of use, each file within the digital report has its own bibliography.

METHODOLOGY

The text describing the structural sequence in both the *Archaeological Journal* and the present digital report are edited versions of the excavator's original draft report. The rest of the excavator's draft report, however, has been entirely reconstructed because the original texts, written over two decades earlier, were not only incomplete but required updating.

Where possible, specialists involved in the original reporting were contacted. Some readily agreed to update their entries whilst others consented to different scholars being invited to update texts. Two contributors did not reply. Where reports were absent, as with textile impressions, human remains, radiocarbon dates and the more recently developed discipline involving isotopic analysis, new specialists were invited to contribute.

At an early stage in the preparation of the article in the *Archaeological Journal*, the decision was made to devote less attention to the Roman and medieval and later elements in the sequence, and instead to focus on the period from the late Roman period to the twelfth century. As this may be regarded by some as controversial, the reasoning is outlined below.

The Roman data is dealt with summarily in the *Archaeological Journal* because the size of the excavation precluded any clear overview of the Roman remains. However, an examination of the data also showed that, with the exception of an altar already published (Hassall and Tomlin 1989), it was felt that little in the Roman finds assemblages would significantly add to our understanding of the Roman buildings in phase 1 or Roman Carlisle in general. Further, a sizable proportion of the Roman assemblage was found in post-Roman and medieval contexts and so lacked stratigraphic value. Finally, there have been a number of recent excavations in the Roman town, some of which have been extensively published providing larger and more comprehensive views on the artefactual assemblages, especially for the Roman period (McCarthy 1990, 1991, 2000; Zant 2009; Howard-Davis 2009).

Two categories of Roman material have not been revisited in the digital report. The Roman pottery was re-examined in 1994-5 by Hird, and a catalogue produced but not written up. A summary of Hird's data is included in the present report, but there is potential here for further research as Swan's allusions to African forms reminds us (Swan et al. 2009). Secondly, a catalogue of glass (mostly Roman) was also produced by a member of the excavation team but without specialist input. As it stands it lacks academic credibility but the material may also repay examination in the future.

The medieval and later material has been dealt with summarily because the deposits were particularly heavily disturbed by the activities of grave diggers, as well as by construction workers in the seventeenth and possibly nineteenth centuries. Where artefacts of interest have been identified, they are included in the present report. Almost all the medieval pottery sherds lack any stratigraphic value, and an examination of these by Brooks show that they are almost all of types already well-known in Carlisle (Brooks 1992; Brooks 2000; Hird and Brooks 2010; McCarthy and Brooks 1992).

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