

PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL

THE CEILING AND ARCHAEOLOGY

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The ceiling is principally noted for the painting on it. The only recorded interventions on the ceiling itself are those carried out about 40 years before 1789 and in the 1830s when the Nave roof was replaced. Some cosmetic work took place in the 1880s when the Central Tower was rebuilt, but this only really affected the ceiling in Bay 1 of the Nave.

The general principles governing the recording of the painted face of the ceiling have been agreed. There is in being a set of base drawings showing all boards. The base record will be at 1:20, with details picked out at 1:10 and larger if need be. There should be provision for layering of records so that, where necessary, both the latest painted scheme can be seen, then traces of earlier ones, as well as a record of all holes, nails or otherwise, as well as surface relief. The object here is to have to hand a set of records which can be analysed so that series of acts can be arranged in proper order. This sequence is not only important for the ceiling itself, but also for the boards which used to cover the ashlar pieces of the original common rafter roof, and the boards which seal in the W end of the ceiling above the W arch.

Who is to do what has yet to be agreed, but it would appear sensible that, attached to the people who would actually work on the painted surface would be at least one person who would be responsible for making sure that the recording of features under the top surface was carried out. While it might require a specialist in painting to record earlier layers of colour or line, it would be advisable for there to be someone who would be responsible for recording holes and relief work. Whoever deals with the painted surface should also have it in his or her brief to record all graffiti. Indeed, a separate register should be maintained of such items, along with their precise character and location. Ostensibly, written graffiti are likely to be later than the C17, but, being informal, are likely to be better in providing dating for interventions than surviving records, at least those which have been looked at so far.

Moving on from the painted surface, there are the boards themselves. These will be subjected to a dendrochronological programme. The aim of this is to establish the likely date of the boarded ceiling itself. Bearing in mind the particular layout of the boards demonstrates that the design of the painted ceiling required the boards to be laid out in that particular pattern, this should provide the best independent dating for the painting itself. However, now it is known that some of the boards introduced in the 1830s were themselves from a context using painted boards, and that the designs bear some relationship with the boards over the erstwhile ashlar pieces, it would seem sensible to include examples of both in the same programme.

The ceiling naturally commands most attention, but it is, after all, in practical terms only the under surface of a kind of membrane sealing that. What needs to be taken into full consideration is the context of the provision of this membrane. This means that what is left of the medieval common rafter roof will need to be recorded in greater detail than has been possible from the central catwalk running through the roof space. As work progresses across the upper surface of the boarding, so should the detailed recording of the lowest elements of the earliest roof structure.

In terms of who is to do what, this may best be carried out by whoever does the recording of holes and relief-work: the paint is only on the under surface of the wood, the board itself has two main faces and a section. Therefore such records as are made of the under surface would have also to include at the very least comment about the top surface. At the least, nail holes could then be related to what ever it may have been in the roof space the nail points penetrated, whether it is there now or has been removed. By extension, there would have to be a record of what the back of the vertical boarding along the Nave shows.

Last, and not least, while there may not be a general agreement about the dating of the remains of the stone vaulting in the Nave, the examination of its traces and of the walling above the wall ribs for the vaulting needs to be carried out. The objective is to establish just how much was constructed. Examination of the Clerestory on each side from end to end is advisable: it is known that there are the holes for a major staging across the Nave from E to W suitable for putting up the vaulting, for removing it, putting the ceiling in place and applying paint to that.