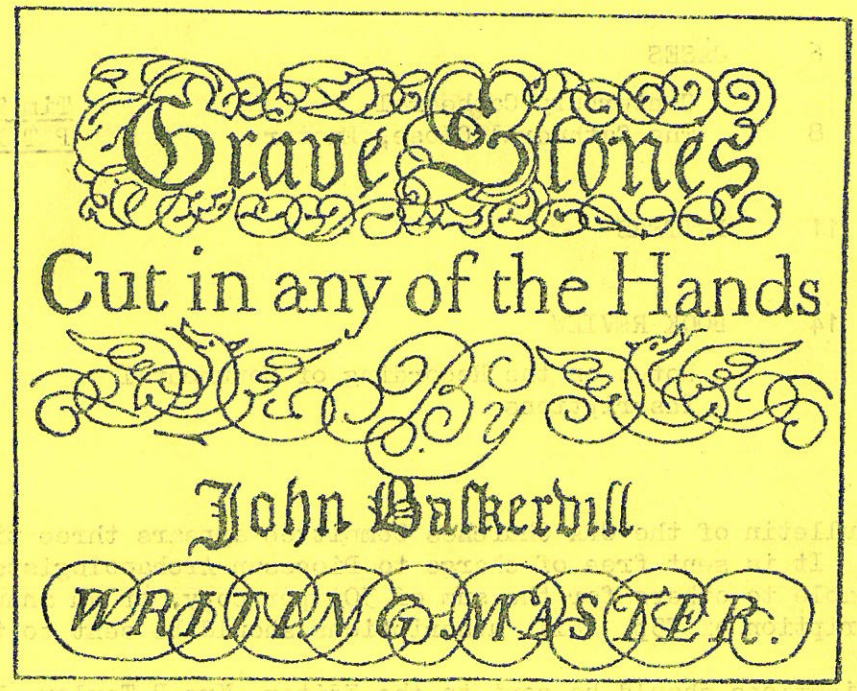
BULLETIN

of the C B A Churches Committee



John Baskerville's slate window advertisement, c 1735

Number 9 August 1978

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The Bulletin of the CBA Churches Committee appears three times a year. It is sent free of charge to Diocesan Archaeologists and is available to others for the sum of 30p per copy, or an annual subscription of 75p. All ubscriptions should be sent to the CBA.

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NOTES

Annual Conference of DAC Members

This year the Annual Conference will be held in Bishop Grosseteste College, Lincoln, from 5-8 September. The occasion is a good opportunity for Consultants to foster an awareness of the problems and potentials of church archaeology. The programme includes lectures by Simon Jervis (V & A Museum) on church woodwork, and Stephen Dykes Bower (Architect Emeritus of Westminster Abbey) on Sir Gilbert Scott, and sessions on aspects of the faculty jurisdiction and the work of the Redundant Churches Fund.

Changes

Professor Rosemary Cramp of Durham University has succeeded Mr Peter Addyman as Chairman of the CBA Churches Committee for the next three years. She has been concerned in many excavations but is principally known for her excavations of the monastic sites of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow. Her main research interests are the sculpture and architecture of the Anglo-Saxon period and she is at present preparing a corpus of this work for publication.

Professor Cramp serves as Consultant Archaeologist to Durham Cathedral and is a member of the Ancient Monuments Board for England, and the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments for Scotland, and a Vice-President of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

Symposium on Monumental Effigies

A two-day symposium is being organized by The Armouries, HM Tower of London, at the Education Centre, HM Tower of London, from 22-23 September 1978. Speakers from home and abroad will give talks on a variety of subjects, including style, colouring, conservation, and costume. There will also be an evening visit to Westminster Abbey.

Excavations 1978

St Peter, Barton-on-Humber : excavation and structural study of the Saxon and medieval church led by Warwick and Kirsty Rodwell and Harold Taylor. The first season will take place from 19 June-29 July.

Raunds, Northants : excavation of a medieval manor/Saxon church and cemetery by A Boddington, 1 April-early July.

St Albans Cathedral Chapter House : excavations on the site of the Norman Chapter House prior to construction of a new Chapter House directed by Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle, 28 May-8 July.

St Oswald's Priory, Gloucester : excavation continues on the early 10th century church directed by Carolyn Heighway, 24 June-end September.

Other excavations include Brixworth, three weeks from 12 June; High Hoyland, S Yorkshire, a redundant church, later this year; and Hexham crypt, June or July.

Excavations in progress or completed include Stainburn; the Cathedral Close at Wells; Warmsworth, a ruined church near Doncaster, (abandoned because of persistent vandalism); and St Paul-in-the-Bail, Lincoln.

Victorian Society Cemetery Survey

The Victorian Society is currently involved in carrying out a survey of 19th century cemeteries in Britain. The questionnaire which has been drawn up requests information on buildings such as chapels and lodges with name of architect/builder where known, landscaper where known, notable tombs and present condition.

The Society is concerned about the condition of these cemeteries, many of whichwere laid out by some of the best planners and designers and are now threatened with official or unofficial vandalism. A national association of organizations anxious to save individual cemeteries is to be set up with the cooperation of the Victorian Society and a one-day conference is planned to enable enthusiasts to get together to discuss the best way of saving these important examples of Victorian townscape. The Society has started to assess the problem by means of the questionnaire. Further information is available from Hugh Meller, The Victorian Society, 1 Priory Gardens, Bedford Park, London W4 1TT.

A SURVEY OF BIRMINGHAM GRAVEYARDS

Jane Sage and
Ruth Taylor

Introduction

During autumn 1977 a survey was carried out on those graveyards in the Birmingham diocese which lie within the boundary of the West Midlands Metropolitan District of Birmingham. This survey was considered necessary because of the number of faculty applications coming to the DAC for levelling and re-ordering churchyards owing to vandalism, over-crowding, stone-deterioration, and general problems of maintenance. There have been six faculties granted within the last two years with at least one more expected in 1978.

This area was selected partly because of the high proportion of churches (over 64% of the diocese's Anglican churches are in Birmingham) and partly because of the large number of burials, particularly in the inner city churchyards, with, for example, over 10,000 burials in St Saviour, Saltley.

It was hoped that an assessment of the condition of each churchyard would reveal those lilely to be the subject of a faculty application within the next few years so that a phased programme of recording in advance of clearance could be initiated. It was also decided to include the graveyards of the other denominations within the same area.

Background

Only 41 burial grounds remain in Birmingham but once there were 71. Of these 36 were Anglican, 11 Roman Catholic, 16 Nonconformist, 3 Jewish, 2 plague pits, and burials within the grounds of Winson Green Prison, Erdington Orphanage, and the medieval Priory of St Thomas. Some of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches also had catacombs or crypts. The survey was based on a card-index drawn up in the 1940s and added to since by the Birmingham genealogist, Dr R J Hetherington. It is not intended to discuss here in detail the information contained in Dr Hetherington's index as the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry is preparing it for publication.

Results

Fieldwork concentrated on four main points - the total number of stones surviving, the number of stones for each decade with the date of the earliest and the latest, the names of the stone-masons and the condition of the graveyard.

Anglican 13 parish churches of medieval foundation survive; one chapel - St John Baptist Deritend - was demolished in 1947. All have churchyards except for St Edburgha Yardley which was completely cleared in 1959. St Martin-in-the-Bull Ring's churchyard was closed in 1861 but its extension at Park Street, opened in 1807, still survives with 37 stones. 15 churches with churchyards were established after 1831, 2 of which have been demolished and their churchyards removed - St Thomas Birmingham and All Saints Birmingham - and a further 2 demolished but with their churchyards still in existence - St George Birmingham and St James the Less Ashted.

Roman Catholic The earliest known churchyard belonged to St Peter Broad Street, opened in 1786 and later replaced by a school playground. However, there is some evidence for an unlocated burial ground in Erdington for Catholics before 1688. Most of the churchyards are private. Only college servants, staff and students are buried at St Mary's College New Oscott and only Fathers, including Cardinal Newman, are buried at St Philip Neri's oratory churchyard at Rednal. Two of the 3 public churchyards remain.

Nonconformist Only 4 chapelyards remain of the 16 which once existed in Birmingham. The earliest to be established were the Friends at Monmouth Street in 1682 and the Presbyterians in Old Meeting House Street in 1689. Most were established in the 18th century and the majority were closed in 1873 by Order in Council. The bodies were removed to the public cemetery at Witton and the land used mainly for road-widening schemes. The Union Row Congregationalist, however, was sold with its chapelyard to an Indian sect c. 1971; 12 stones survive.

Jewish The Froggery, possibly opened as early as 1730, was removed in 1846 for the building of New Street Station. The bodies were taken to Chequers Walk and removed again when that burial-ground closed c. 1873 to Witton cemetery where the Jewish community had a separate area. The only extant ground is Betholom Row, 1823-1873, where c. 16 stones survive.

Recording policy

Three factors influenced the formation of our recording policy. To a genealogist the dates 1813 and 1851 are of particular importance: the former marks the introduction of standard burial forms with age at death and residence and the latter the census returns which give family relationships. Dr H L White has drawn attention to the need to concentrate on recording these earlier inscriptions which are of greater historical interest.[1] Within Birmingham district there are 509 stones pre-1813 and 1411 pre-1851 out of an approximate total of 16,482.

The second factor is the interest of local historians in the Birmingham monumental stone industry, which meant that we concentrated on signed stones. The third factor is the establishment of the city's public cemeteries at Key Hill in 1835 and Warstone Lane in 1848. These cemeteries are not at present threatened so that it is possible to study the work of the Victorian stone-masons here rather than in the churchyards.

The graveyards were divided into two categories for recording - Category I where threats were known or envisaged and Category II for unthreatened graveyards which would be useful for research by local hist rians. Within Category I, three groups were identified: those with stones mainly pre-1851 (4); those with stones 1813-1851 (5); and those post 1851 (2). Within Category II, two groups were identified: those with stones pre-1851 and identified masons (11); and those 1813-1851 (7). Most of the recording will consist of a full transcription and photograph of each stone, particularly in Category II. Plans will only be made for those churchyards where the stones are in their original positions.[2]

Stone Masons

The most valuable part of the survey has been the identification of over 117 masons from their signatures on the stones. The early Birmingham street directories made no distinction between monumental mason, stone and marble mason and sculptor so that it was not possible to list those who worked as monumental masons. Of the 117 noted, the majority worked in central Birmingham but others worked in Cheltenham, Kidderminster, Lichfield, Manchester, Peterborough, Walsall, and West Bromwich. Mr F Burgess lists only one Birmingham mason, William Carrington, who worked in sandstone and slate[3], but he could also have mentioned John Baskerville, who is the earliest known mason. The evidence suggesting that the Birmingham printer is the earliest mason is his slate window advertisement, date c. 1735, and two gravestones, now lost, but recorded by Charles Pye.[4]

Other sources of evidence for the monumental stone industry are rare. There is an early 19th century trade card for John Nutt and advertisements for James Bennett and Son (1835-1950). Attempts to contact present firms of monumental stone-masons who are known to have worked earlier in the century for information on their history and records were mainly unsuccessful. Dallows Monumental, for example, only retain their records for ten years.

Further research on the organization of the industry may elucidate some of the following problems: the identification of differing classes of masons such as village craftsmen, family contractor, firms and partnerships; the importance of the Midland canals in importing different stone such as slate from the Mancetter/Nuneaton area and red granite, used by James Bennett, whose address was Worcester Wharf at the Birmingham end of the Worcester-Birmingham canal; and the influence of London masons and pattern-books.

(Note: Two appendixes, one listing the graveyards in Categories I and II and the other their condition and number of stones, are not included here. They are available from the City Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham.)

Footnotes

1) H Leslie White, 1977 Monuments and their Inscriptions - a practical guide, 38

2) In accordance with the methods described in Jeremy Jones, 1976 How to record graveyards

3) Frederick Burgess, 1963 English Churchyard Memorials

4) Charles Pye, 1819 A description of modern Birmingham; (with) observations during an excursion round the town in 1818

PROGRESS UNDER THE PASTORAL MEASURE

Leslie White

In Bulletin No 2, Dr H Leslie White, a member of the Society of Genealogists and the CBA Churches Committee, reported on the General Synod's debate on the Report of the Working Party on the Pastoral Measure 1968. Here Dr White gives an account of progress so far.

In 1968 a partnership was set up under the Pastoral Measure between Church and State for the "preservation in the interests of the nation and the Church of England" of Anglican churches supernumerary to pastoral requirements but estimated to be of historical or architectural importance to the national heritage.

The total cost of the Measure over the first quinquennium (1969-74) has been £500,000, contributed in the proportions 3/5 : 2/5 by Church and State. This rose to £1,750,000 for the second quinquennium (1974-79) split in the same proportions. The estimated figure proposed for the third quinquennium (1979-84) has been £2,900,000, nearly six times that of the first quinquennium. Meanwhile, the Church of England Pastoral Measure Revision Committee has reported firmly that the Church has found itself with the major responsibility in an area "where, as we see it, its role should be secondary to that of the State". The Church then attempted to obtain a transposition of relative financial responsibility but has had to accept for the third quinquennium a compromise split of 50:50.

The result of the project so far has been that 118 churches have been preserved up to 30 November 1977 by being transferred into the care and custody of the Redundant Churches Fund. These comprised 46 in the first quinquennium and 72 in the expired part of the second, with a further 28 estimated for the unexpired part to make a total of 100 for the second quinquennium. The proposed funds are estimated to be able to preserve 90 in the third quinquennium, corresponding with a supposed reduction in incidence of redundancy. No convincing explanation has been forthcoming for this estimated fall in redundancy. Unless there should be a permanent reversal of the trend of falling congregations, it would seem more likely to turn out to be due to an over-optimistic projection of a temporary deviation in a long-term curve. So far the number of churches preserved by the RCF works out at 22% of those declared redundant.

The case for the Synod voting the necessary funds was supported by pamphlets, posters and an exhibition of photographs and diagrams at Church House during the period of the Synod meeting. It was presented with considerable ability by the Third Estates Commissioner who obtained an overwhelming vote. A major point was that Ministers had so far refused to raise the State's contribution to more than 50% but, since the State was going in for substantial grant-aid to 'living' churches, the Church could not have it both ways.

The Bishop of Wakefield, Chairman of the Pastoral Measure Revision Committee, made two interesting suggestions for the future: that the General Synod adopt a 'ceiling' for future expenditure on redundant churches, with 0.40% proposed as against a present level of 0.36%; and that the split contribution between Church and State should be on a sliding scale so that the expenditure on each individual church taken into the Fund would after ten years be transferred to the State.

No mention was made of a matter of great importance to archaeology, viz, the inclusion of ruined churches in the Pastoral Measure. There is no doubt this was never originally intended but loose wording has enabled parishes and dioceses to include them and thereby ensure a very minor saving in third party insurance. The result is disastrous, for sites are usually unsuitable for alternative use and demolition becomes the only option. At present the matter is not going to be put right by the Church saying the DoE should take over ruins as ancient monuments and the DoE saying there are too many of them and they do not want them. The only upshot of this situation will be the loss of valuable archaeological sites on an appreciable scale.

The Canterbury churchman, who on a previous occasion (Bulletin No 2, p 3) had been somewhat vociferous, had secured even more scope this time by getting three amendments onto the Agenda. His remarks about inflation and clergy's stipends, how the fabric of churches ought to be dealt with on a 'make do and mend' basis and especially his view that 'the Church's living agents should come a long way before disused buildings' attracted loud applause. But his proposal that the Church's financial contribution to conservation should be transferred to the local 'quotas', with its implication that falling congregations leading to redundancy would be bubbling over with enthusiasm for the Redundant Churches Fund, was met with a corresponding lack of enthusiasm for his vote.

An amendment concerning the cost of church building repairs enabled the Bishop of London to explain that the Church had met with no success in their attempts to persuade the Government to adopt a more reasonable policy. By the time the amount of Aid to repairs of living churches, through grants by one Government Department, had reached £2 million (possibly in the year after next), the amount of VAT levied on church building repairs by another Government Department, would also be likely to have reached £2 million, leaving the Church exactly where it was before! If only Gilbert and Sullivan had been able to express their opinions. One feels they would have regretted missing such a magnificent example of their craft by living a century too soon.

C A S E S

Canterbury Cathedral

Tim Tatton-Brown

Many of the greatest cathedrals in England have never been studied in detail from an above ground 'archaeological' point of view. Consequently, when standard 'text-books' are written, they go back to the 19th century studies of Willis[1] et al, assuming that nothing new needs to be added. This is perhaps partly because, for their time, these mid 19th century studies of Willis' were brilliant pieces of work and far better than most late 19th century work. It is however odd that few of the 20th century architectural historians, with their far greater knowledge of medieval architecture, have bothered to look in detail at the 'archaeological' fabric of most of our great cathedrals, particularly above ground.

If we look, for example, at Canterbury Cathedral, one of the greatest buildings in north-west Europe, we find that virtually no work has been done on studying the fabric of the building since Willis' time, 1845.

Many articles have been published but most of these either attempt reconstructions of the Anglo-Saxon cathedral or speculate on the form of Lanfranc's building. Two very recent articles on the latter have virtually ignored the details that actually still exist of Lanfranc's building in the upper parts of the cathedral.

During the last year or so the present writer and his colleague, Hendrick Strik, have been exploring and recording many details in the cathedral which are virtually unknown. For example, the upper part of the south side of the chapel of St Blaise in Lanfranc's cathedral, east of Martyrdom, and the first portion of the apse are still in situ above the 15th vaulting of the "Dean's" Chapel. The filled-in spiral stair of Lanfranc's "Angel Steeple" is another "new" discovery. This staircase was in the upper part of the north-east tower pier, starting in the triforium and having another entrance from the clere-storey of the choir. It was clearly filled in in the later 15th centrry when the present "Bell Harry" tower was built. The staircase for the latter was in the south-west corner and only starts above the roof vaults. Exploration of "Bell Harry" tower itself shows that this magnificent late 15th century tower has a far more complicated building history than had previously been realized. The tower was originally designed as a simple lantern tower, but in about 1493 the builder, Cardinal Morton, with John Wastell as his architect, obviously changed his mind and decided to double the height of the tower, probably to celebrate his at last acquiring a cardinal's cap from the Pope. Dr Urry, the then cathedral archivist, suggested 13 years ago[2] that the extant building documents suggested a more complicated history but it is only very recently that we have found positive evidence for this by actually examining the details of the brickwork inside and finding a "buried" roof half-way up.

Another recent "discovery" is that the spire on the tower, west of the south-east transept, is in fact almost certainly of a late 12th century date, probably a replacement put on soon after the fire of 1174. The carpentry of the spire is a superb example of late Romanesque work with 'secret' notched-lap joints. It is probably the earliest "timber-frame" still surviving above ground in Kent and one of only two medieval roofs to survive in Canterbury Cathedral[3] The other, the magnificent 1470s roof of the north-west transept, is much better known, particularly since the recent publication of a fine drawing of it by Cecil Hewett.[4]

It is particularly important, now that so much of the fabric of our cathedrals is being renewed - on a larger scale than ever in many cathedrals - that a detailed programme of recording work and study should take place as soon as possible or it will be too late. For example, almost all of the bays of the cloister at Canterbury Cathedral have been totally rebuilt since the last World War without detailed measured drawings being made first, and very recently the whole of the Caen stone gable to the south-west transept was demolished and rebuilt in Lepine stone. The gable of the south-east transept was completely rebuilt in the 1930s with a most unsuitable Jurassic limestone. Of course this rebuilding work and renewal of the stone must take place, but please let it be preceded by detailed recording work or else many unique details within the building which have survived to 1978 will disappear for ever without record to the detriment of all future architectural historians.

Footnotes

1) R Willis, Architectural History of some English Cathedrals 1845, re-published 1972.

(cont'd)

2) W Urry, "Cardinal Morton and the Angel Steeple", 38th Annual Report, Friends of Canterbury Cathedral, 1965.

3) Cecil Hewett and Tim Tatton-Brown, "New Structural Evidence regarding Bell Harry Tower and the South-East spire at Canterbury", Arch Cant 92 (1976), 129-136

4) C A Hewett, English Cathedral Carpentry, London, 1974, fig 30, p 42.

The Cathedral Close, Exeter

P T Bidwell

Excavations in advance of landscaping and associated works in the Cathedral Close at Exeter from 1971-1977 have investigated four successive cemeteries, the Anglo-Saxon minster (which later served as a cathedral), the parish church of St Mary Major and part of a medieval charnel-chapel. There were four main periods of activity subsequent to the Roman period:

1) Fifth to seventh centuries

Following the demolition of the basilica and forum, which had been remodelled c. AD 350 and remained in use until the late 4th or early 5th century, a series of pits was dug on the site. One, which was over 3m in diameter, contained much debris from metal-working. This casual occupation presumably ceased when the western part of the site was brought into use as a cemetery. Only six burials survived disturbance caused by later grave-digging. They shared the same alignment (north-west to south-east) as the Roman buildings which had previously occupied the site, and their orientation was presumably distated by some surviving element of the Roman town-plan. The burials, representing four men and one woman (only one edge of the sixth grave survived), had been made in shallow graves without coffins or grave-goods. Two were submitted for radiocarbon dating and produced results of AD 420 ± 70 and AD 490 ± 80. Despite its early date and situation at the heart of a former Roman town the cemetery could well have been Christian, and may have remained in use until the 7th century.

2) Seventh to twelfth centuries

The surviving 5th century burials were sealed beneath a later cemetery which once again was confined to the western side of the site. The fifty-nine surviving burials shared an exactly east-west alignment and thus could be readily distinguished from the earlier burials. The cemetery included fifteen charcoal-burials. One grave contained a gold ring of Merovingian workmanship which has been dated to the 8th century. There was no further dating evidence and the results of radiocarbon tests are not yet available. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to associate this second cemetery with the foundation of the Anglo-Saxon monastery at which, as his Life tells us, St Boniface was educated at a date which must lie near AD 680. Excavation failed to reveal any trace of structures associated with this cemetery.

3) Tenth to early twelfth centuries

The second cemetery was succeeded by a third with a slightly different alignment, which was still confined to the western side of the site. Fifty-three burials could be shown to belong to this cemetery; of these forty-one were charcoal-burials. They were contemporary with the minster and a few of the later burials included sherds of 11th or early 12th century date.

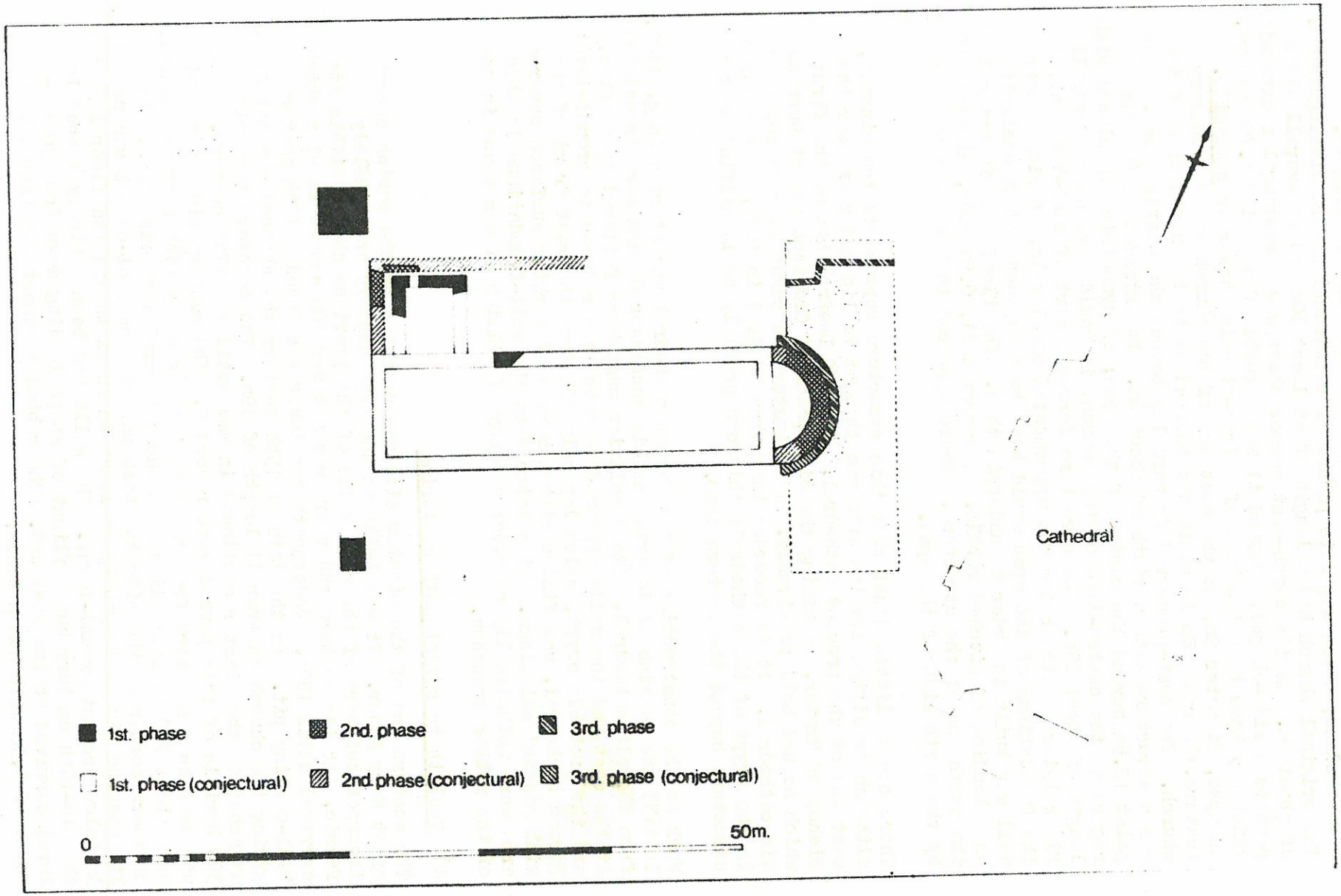

Fig. 1: Exeter, the Cathedral Close, plan of excavations 1971-1977

The remains of the minster were extremely fragmentary (Fig 1). Nevertheless, three separate phases of construction were distinguished. The original church had a length of at least 30m and on overall width of about 9m. At its north-west corner there was a rectangular extension, perhaps a side-chapel. Beyond it was a rubble foundation 3.75m square, which may have been the base of a free-standing tower or campanile. An apse, diameter 9m, at the east end of the church was a secondary feature. A range 8m in width had been added to the north side of the church. The best-preserved feature lay beyond the eastern apse. This was a structure with a width of about 8m. It extended northwards to a point 12.5m beyond the centre of the apse; if symmetrically placed with regard to the centre-line of the church, it would have had an overall length of about 25m. The structure formed a sort of semi-basement, its floor lying a metre below the uppermost Roman levels. During construction the foundations of the apse would have been exposed and an encircling wall was built in order to underpin them. The floor was of mortar laid on a bedding of pitched rubble. A narrow wall, 0.5m wide, divided off the north end of the structure. There appeared to have been an entrance by the north side of the apse.

There can be little doubt that this structure represents the minster, although traditionally its site was thought to lie under or near the east end of the present Cathedral. In 1050 Leofric became the first Bishop of Exeter, combining the Bishoprics of Crediton and St Germans which he had held previously. The minster was taken over to serve as his cathedral. It is recorded that when he died in 1072, he was buried in the crypt of the cathedral; this can probably be identified as the structure beyond the eastern apse.

Work on the construction of the Norman cathedral was started in c. 1100. In 1133 the remains of Leofric and his successor Osburn were translated from the old cathedral. Its demolition must have followed soon after. At the east end the walls appeared to have been reduced to ground-level and the probable crypt, which lay only 10m from the west front of the Norman cathedral, was filled with a series of working surfaces covered with masons' chippings. At a later date the wall-foundations in this area were methodically removed; a penny of William II was found in one of the robber trenches.

4) Twelfth to seventeenth centuries

The western end of the minster site was occupied by the parish church of St Mary Major. It was built in the 12th century and possibly incorporated part of the nave walls of the previous church within its fabric. At its western end there was a tower 10m square in plan which survived until 1864. Underneath the tower was found a 12th century bell-casting pit. In the 14th or 15th century the chancel was extended, giving the church an overall length of 39m. The cemetery formerly attached to the minster continued in use until the 17th century. Some 300 burials of this period were recorded. The eastern side of the site was used as a cemetery from the late 12th or early 13th century onwards. Here about 200 burials aligned on the cathedral were excavated. In the northern corner of the site the basement of a charnel-chapel was revealed. It measured 11m in length by at least 4m in width and its floor lay about 3m below present ground-level. The walls had been entirely robbed in the mid-16th century but a flight of steps leading down from ground-level survived at its west end. The robbed basement was filled to a depth of 1.5m with human bones.

Post-medieval

The parish church of St Mary Major survived until 1864 when it was entirely rebuilt in the Early English style. The Victorian church was demolished in 1971.

(Publication : monograph in the Exeter Archaeological Reports series, to be published by the University of Exeter).

LETTERS

Dear Madam

NORTON PRIORY - BURIALS

It is frequently assumed that absence of nails from a burial implies that the body was placed in a shroud and not a wooden coffin. Mr R D Andrews' interesting summary of the excavation of St Patrick's chapel at Heysham, Lancashire, (CBA Churches Bulletin 8, February 1978, 2) makes this assumption; and he may well be right. However, results of Runcorn Development Corporation's excavation at Norton Priory have demonstrated another possibility where there are no nails in a grave.

When a small investigation of the area north of the monastic church (presumably the lay people's cemetery) was carried out in 1975 several wooden coffins were found. Their method of construction did not involve the use of nails at all. They consisted of oak planks, bound together with wands of hazel. Incidentally, there was no trace of a skeleton, not even teeth or nails, in the wooden coffins. The low pH of the soil, which had contributed towards the preservation of the timber, had the opposite effect on the bones. In contrast, skeletons found in the church were in a good state of preservation, due presumably to the neutralising effect of lime mortar in walls and floors, but no traces of wooden coffins were found.

I too had tended to think that graves within the church lacking nails were shroud burials until the discovery of the wooden coffins re-opened the question.

Yours sincerely
J Patrick Greene

Archaeology and Museum Officer
Runcorn Development Corporation
Chapel Street
Runcorn WA7 5AR

Dear Madam

It is reassuring to find that the Bulletin of the CBA Churches Committee has remained constant to its tradition of editorial impartiality. When it was launched in 1975 I expressed the hope that it would 'facilitate the exchange of ideas, provide an opportunity for criticism' and 'play a part in the formulation and promotion of a policy for archaeological action in churches.' (No 1). After Dr H Leslie White's combative

remarks on How to record graveyards (No 5) and Mr Martin Carver's searching review of Historic churches: a wasting asset (No 8) on-one could dismiss the Bulletin as a mere instrument of CBA propaganda, although to some it might seem to be fairly useful as an instrument for the delivery of self-inflicted wounds.

However, Dr White offered his criticisms from the standpoint of one who has had extensive experience of recording churchyard monuments. Moreover, he is convinced that such recording is valuable in terms of the information it recovers. His comments on the Jones booklet may be read in the light of his own publication, in which his opinions on practical methods of retrieving evidence from churchyards are set out,

Carver's credentials are not so obvious, since many of his key observations about Research Report 19 and church archaeology in general revolve around the proposition that there is precious little evidence to retrieve. To use his own words, he regards churches as being 'particularly unedifying' as archaeological sites. It would thus appear that Carver sees churches as falling into a special category, distinguished by what might be called their negative potential, in much the same way as others (eg the Rodwells) have gone to the opposite extreme by claiming that churches, in some circumstances, may have more to offer than many other types of site. Special cases demand special pleading, and while Carver may have a point in his view that Research Report 19 does not explain 'why historic churches are an asset at all', it would take a rather more substantial analysis of the available evidence than Carver has given us to make a plausible case for any contrary view. Perhaps Carver has this material up his sleeve already. If so, one would like to know what it is.

Meanwhile, two or three points in Carver's review seem to call for further discussion. Carver states that 'the structural sequence' of a church 'is difficult to read and usually impossible to date.' This is interesting, because if an archaeologist is unable to work out the relative chronology of a building which survives with its roof on, what hope can he have of extracting sense from the site of a building which has been flattened? As for dating, it is perfectly true that church sites often present problems in their pre-Conquest phases. I think the same could be said of a number of other types of site. Archaeology would not have progressed very far if all sites which presented difficulties had been avoided. Archaeology, at least as I understand it, encompasses more than dated foundation inscriptions, potters' stamps and legible coins, even if they are amplified by what Carver refers to as 'a documentary aside'. The lengths to which we are prepared to go in order to solve difficulties of dating, or for that matter any other technical problem, are normally determined by the yield of information which is expected at the end of the exercise.

This, of course, is precisely Carver's point. He goes out of his way to suggest that the yield is pitifully small: 'Artifacts are rare, and the only biological deposits susceptible to analysis are generally those of human bone, normally so numerous that their incidence can be disentangled from each other, and from structures, only with elaborate and often unrewarding efforts.' (This view may be unduly pessimistic. Bones are very useful sources of demographic data. They are particularly useful if they are stratified in relation to structures, or each other, or both). Carver calls attention to the limits of what archaeology 'is intended or empowered to achieve' and challenges the

Rodwells' belief that archaeology can shed light upon the history of the Church as an institution in any given area. Thus 'Archaeology does not dig up hymns; it digs up nails, buttons, stones and mud, from which extrapolation to abstract concepts is notoriously difficult.' There are at least three fallacies here. First, there is the contention that archaeology only has to do with disjecta membra, discarded, discovered and presumably considered in isolation. Carver ignores context, circumstances, the cultural entity, and the relevance of information acquired from other sources (which is strange, because he claims that these are extensive). Secondly, Carver assumes that because extrapolation from physical evidence to some concepts is difficult, that therefore extrapolation to all concepts is difficult. Thirdly, Carver gives no indication that he sees church archaeology as anything other than a process of digging things up.

If we consider the last two points, it could be said that the archaeologist would have a hard time of it trying to demonstrate the history of parson's freehold on the basis of archaeological deposits, whereas physical deposits might well inform about the status of a church at different stages in its history. Churches have almost always been organised into hierarchies of one kind or another; some of the hierarchical factors can be made to respond to archaeological investigation. The word 'investigation' is chosen with care. It is revealing that Carver thinks only of excavation in his review, thereby excluding from consideration a major portion of the total body of evidence and misrepresenting a cardinal statement in the opening of the Rodwells' book.

However, Carver caters for all this by telling us that he is not convinced 'that either the past or our knowledge of it has any intrinsic merit . . . .' Carver's doubts certainly touch a raw nerve in current archaeology. We are not all convinced - are we? - or, at least, most of us are operating without a raison d'être which would either be intelligible or convincing to the British population as a whole. Whether it was up to the Rodwells to produce one is a different question.

Finally, Carver recognises that churches are not isolated features, of interest in themselves alone. He points out that churches are a function of the communities which built and used them. But he does not go out of his way to enlarge upon the importance of churches in relation to settlement. Instead he prefers to concentrate upon minimizing the interest and intelligibility of their below-ground deposits. In my view churches, churchyards, and the cemeteries which sometimes preceded them, are fundamental to the elucidation of settlement history in Britain. The full impact of their relevance will become apparent when enough investigations have taken place to enable discussion to proceed in a chronological framework provided by the dates of the foundation and stages of development of the churches concerned. This framework can only be established through archaeological investigation.

Carver will probably accuse me of uttering 'rousing words'. I agree that generalizations, both mine and his, are no substitute for data. This is why the Churches Committee is preparing a tract which deals with the academic issues which he raises, and one or two other matters which he does not. Whether this will turn out to be an acceptable substitute for 'the great unwritten chapter' of Research Report 19 remains to be seen. But it must be said that the compilation of the text is not so easy as might be expected against the background of Carver's announcement that 'We know what everything in a church was for, and what happened there on every day of the liturgical year; and this information has its own clear sources, which are rarely archaeological.'

Yours sincerely
Richard Morris

BOOK REVIEW

J L Rayment, Notes on the Recording of Monumental Inscriptions
30 x 21 cm, 18pp, 4 figs, 4 appendices, 1977. Price 20p.
Obtainable from J L Rayment, 57 Coopers Hill, Ongar, Essex.

J L Rayment, whose recommendations on behalf of the Federation of Local History Societies were incorporated in H L White's booklet Monuments and their Inscriptions : A Practical Guide (reviewed in Bulletin No 6), has now compiled his own notes on the recording of monumental inscriptions. In his Foreword, he states that they are not intended to 'replace any previous work on the subject; indeed they are intended to be complementary'. Most of the booklet is concerned therefore with the usual subjects of organization in the field, photography, basic recording, the scale plan and safety and insurance, but one section, The Broad Plan, (pp 4-6) deserves special mention. The importance of a planned programme of recording churchyard inscriptions is referred to briefly in White's booklet (p 44). Rayment, however, stresses the vital need not only to keep informed of clearance schemes, but also to check existing records of inscriptions (and he includes as Appendix 3 the form supplied by the Federation of Family History Societies) and to carry out surveys of existing burial-grounds of all denominations with a view to preparing a list of priorities for recording before a clearance scheme is initiated or further deterioration in the condition of the stones occurs.

RT

CBA publications on the archaeology of churches

Research Report 13 — The Archaeological Study of Churches
edited by Peter Addyman and Richard Morris
Published : 1976 Price : £4.50 post free

Research Report 15 — Excavations at St Mary's Church, Deerhurst, 1971-73 by Philip Rahtz
Published : 1976 Price : £4.00 post free

Research Report 19 — Historic Churches - a wasting asset
by Warwick Rodwell with Kirsty Rodwell
Published : 1977 Price : £5.00 post free

How to record graveyards by Jeremy Jones
Published : 1976 Price : £0.75 post free

(A grave recording form designed by the author and approved by the CBA Churches Committee, is also available, price £2.00 per hundred plus postage.)

Churches and Archaeology - Archaeological work in and around Anglican churches in use
by Richard Morris
Published : 1978, by the Church Information Office
Price : £0.75 post free

Available on application (cash with order please) from the CBA, 112 Kennington Road, London SE11 6RE.

CBC publications on the archaeology of Smyrna

Research Report 17 The Archaeological Study of Smyrna
edited by Tobie Meyers and Deborah Norris
Published : 1979 Price : £4.50 post free

Research Report 15 Excavations at St Irene's Church, Deerhurst, 1971-73 by Philip Rahtz
Published : 1976 Price : £4.00 post free

Research Report 13 Hellenic Quarries - a working manual
by Vernice Jo Swell with Kirsty Mitwell
Published : 1977 Price : £5.00 post free

How a Record is Created by Jeremy Jones
Published : 1975 Price : £0.75 post free

(A guide recommended by Form 1 signed by the author and approved by the CBC Chronicles Committee, is also available, price £2.75 per hundred plus postage.)

Churches and Local Life - Archaeological work in and around Hellenic churches in use by National Trust.
Published : 1978, by the Church Information Office
Price : £0.75 post free

Available on application (stop with order please) from the CBC, 112 Kennington Road, London SE11 6RE.