

# St Mary's, Deerhurst – a retrospective

by Rosemary Cramp, Tim Tatton-Brown, Richard Gem & David Parsons

*This year saw the publication of the long-awaited final report on the 13-year research project at St Mary's Church, Deerhurst (Glos). The work at St Mary's was formative in the development of church archaeology as a sub-discipline and to celebrate the project Rosemary Cramp, Tim Tatton-Brown, Richard Gem and David Parsons reassess the importance of the work at Deerhurst and the resulting book.*

## Preface

### Rosemary Cramp

Members of the Society for Church Archaeology, will hardly need any explanation as to why a long review article by leading exponents of our subject should be devoted to the publication of *St Mary's Church, Deerhurst*. A new book by Philip Rahtz and Lorna Watts is always a noteworthy event, but this is the final report of one of the most high profile research programmes in church archaeology that was conducted in the 1970s to early 80s. The programme of work was supported primarily by the Society of Antiquaries of London and the CBA, with additional input from the British Academy and the Universities of Birmingham and Leeds, and the research proposals were ambitious (Rahtz 1976, 60 & Fig 20). As the authors say in their Preface, the comprehensive research design to elucidate the above- and below-ground history of this standing building sadly proved to be 'beyond the resources currently available for research work in archaeology in this country'. Nevertheless the project is a milestone in the history of church archaeology, and its successes – and failures – deserve the closest analysis.

There was a star-studded cast in this co-operative venture. The research design was a direct result of the work of Harold Taylor whose great series of volumes, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture* (Taylor & Taylor 1965; Taylor 1978), stimulated a whole generation of church archaeologists, and whose publications and indefatigable fieldwork continued to inspire those who knew him into what in anyone else would have been considered old age. It is very sad that he was not able to complete his input into the structural analysis of this building and that much of the work must remain in archive. The authors would be the first to admit that they have not the Taylor expertise in structural criticism, but it is greatly to their credit that they have brought his work, and their own, to this published form.

Lawrence Butler provided the team with the special skills of a medieval historian and his work on the documentary evidence is to be found not only in the short account of the post-Conquest sources in this volume

(p. 183–87), but also in the earlier summary account (Butler *et al* 1975) when the pre-Conquest sources were considered. In addition in this volume Michael Aston contributed a section on field work within the parish.

Philip Rahtz provided the archaeological expertise throughout and brought to the project not only unrivalled field experience, but clear-headed understanding of the limitations of the conclusions which archaeological evidence can provide. His energy and enthusiasm has not only pushed out the frontiers of the subject, but has also, with Lorna Watts' support, brought this particular project to a coherent conclusion and to publication. It is, for this reader at least, unfortunate that the work of the triumvirate should have been published in three places each of which needs to be consulted for the full picture to emerge. The Society of Antiquaries article of 1975 (*ibid*), provides some details not to be found elsewhere, and Rahtz's full report of the excavations around the east end of the church, although corrected in some details in this volume, is still important in itself as a fuller record of the archaeology of that area than is included in the final report.

After the larger format of the earlier publications this neat little hard-bound book, equipped with a massive substructure of comment in the end notes, comes as something of a surprise. The only visual element which links all the Deerhurst publications together is Rahtz's immaculate and distinctive drawings. In these days where many excavation reports are illustrated by drawings which are crude sketches, spattered with computer printed numbers, it is a pleasure to 'read' the informative sections and elevation drawings in this volume.

## Archaeology

### Tim Tatton-Brown

At Easter 1971 Philip Rahtz and a small group of students from Birmingham University went to Deerhurst to excavate the foundation of the ruined eastern apse of the church, and to see if it contained a ring-crypt. This fieldwork followed on from a detailed study of the remaining Anglo-Saxon fabric made a decade earlier by Dr H M Taylor.

Harold Taylor's work on this highly unusual Anglo-Saxon building itself followed many earlier studies going back to the earlier 19th century.

In 1973 a research project on 'The archaeology of the English church' was launched, sponsored by the Society of Antiquaries of London, and beginning 'with a total examination of St Mary's priory church beside the river Severn near Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire' (Myres 1973). Two years later in the *Antiquaries Journal* (Butler *et al* 1975) an interim statement on the research project outlined even grander aims. 'All aspects of the church' were to be explored, 'above and below ground, both inside and outside, and considering not only its structure and use, but also its relationship to all aspects of the life of the district and community in which it is set'. A quarter of a century later, in its 55th Research Report, the Society has published its final report entitled 'Fieldwork, excavation and structural analysis 1971–84'. Sadly this report shows that few of the original aims of the 'research design' have been fulfilled. Why?

The project, despite its grandiose aims, seems to have been poorly funded and was clearly grinding to a halt after 1976 when the small-scale excavations came to an end. Most of the proposed 'research directions' were never carried out, and those that were (for example, the recording of gravestones in the churchyard) had little bearing on the church itself. In this new volume Mick Aston's first chapter on 'Fieldwork at Deerhurst: a preliminary survey' freely admits that this tells us little about the wider setting of the Anglo-Saxon church. In fairness, it should be added that the fieldwork (carried out in 1970 and 1975–77) did allow all the earthworks of the village and parish to be plotted and some idea of the topography of the later medieval parish to be gained (there is also a brief excursion into the bounds of the late Anglo-Saxon estate). A geological or geomorphological survey of the parish would have enhanced the value of the landscape survey.

The bulk of the report (chapters 2 and 3) is on 'excavation and structural analysis' and 'synthesis and periodization', and it is clear that this is the work of two people: Philip Rahtz and the late Harold Taylor (with Lorna Watts when the report was in preparation). The large amount of material here is expressed in a series of plans and sections, and written descriptions of the small evaluation trenches dug between 1974 and 1976 (the 1971–73 excavations were rapidly published in CBA Research Report 15 (Rahtz 1976)). This is followed by a series of carefully drawn stone-by-stone elevations of some of the Anglo-Saxon walls at the east and west ends of the church. These elevations are supplemented by a written commentary and provisional interpretations are given. However, the structural analysis of these elevations has barely started. This is primarily because geological identification of all the stones and mortar analysis was

*Fig 1 Elevation drawing of the north interior walls of the north a and b porticus (Illustration: P A Rahtz. Reproduced with the kind permission of Boydell Press)*

never carried out leaving only a key which differentiates 'oolite', 'reddish limestone', 'purplish sandstone', etc (Fig 1). The report is complicated by the use of numbers, letters and abstruse terms, particularly in the excavation trench plans and sections, where a 'stratigraphic matrix' is also supplied with hundreds of layers and features (including the 'weathering layer', 'root holes' and 'base of buried soil'). This and much else shows that the wood is being missed for the trees (and there is apparently much more in the unpublished site archive).

Chapter 3 tries to draw some conclusions, but after much discussion only a rough 'summary of stratigraphic and structural sequences' and a 'potential dating table' are given. In the end the reader is left with the feeling that Warwick Rodwell's brilliant two sentence summary (written in 1985 and quoted by Rahtz in his introduction) still applies:

Deerhurst church 'is an undated building of many phases, with a substantially incomplete plan. Fundamentally, we do not know whether to class it as a simple box-like church with a more or less random

collection of appendages, a full-scale basilica from which deletions have been made, or a cruciform building achieved by tortuous conversion' (Rodwell 1985, 238).

The synthesis chapter does contain a series of carefully-drawn plans and reconstructions of the church in each of its main periods (the so-called isometric reconstructions are surely all 'axonometrics') (Fig 2). They are, however, mostly based on tenuous criteria (like 'pre-herringbone'), and the overall synthesis takes us only a little further than Harold Taylor's analysis of the early 1960s.

My other major criticism is that no attempt has been made to analyse the post-Norman Conquest masonry. Only by studying and then eliminating the later medieval features is it possible to go back to the earlier features and untangle the complex structural history of the building. Drawings of the later medieval masonry where it is exposed in the arcades and externally in the clerestory, cloister walk and priory farm would have been helpful in elucidating later alterations. Dr Lawrence Butler's contribution on the 'post-conquest development' is brief, although the highly unusual history of the later medieval patronage of the church must have been a major factor in the survival of the Anglo-Saxon masonry.

Chapter 4 covers a series of 'test holes' and a largely unrelated trench (dug in 1980) outside the churchyard. Some topographic profiles are then generated and a possible *vallum monasterii* suggested. Finally there are brief notes on the few small finds made, on the pottery and animal bones, and more importantly, on the radiocarbon dates. Unfortunately these have little to contribute to our knowledge of the chronology.

Despite the extensive and important work which has already taken place, the way is still open for a properly-funded research project on all the above- and below-ground archaeology at Deerhurst church. In the present climate, where this sort of research is not 'politically correct', such a project seems unlikely and Deerhurst remains an enigmatic challenge for a new generation of church archaeologists in the 21st century.

### *Historical and art-historical contexts* *Richard Gem*

Deerhurst is one of the most important surviving buildings for the study of the architecture of the Anglo-Saxon church. Not only does it retain an impressive amount of pre-Conquest fabric, including a range of sculptural decoration; but it also has a documented history which shows its status and connections at certain periods. Only a handful of Anglo-Saxon churches can be studied from these two perspectives, and to them has now been added a third, through the detailed archaeological analysis of the building and its associated contexts published here. Much new light has been thrown on our understanding of the building, for which we must be extremely grateful; but other issues will remain the subject of discussion.

Deerhurst at an early date appears to have been the focus of a territory spanning the river Severn between Gloucester and Tewkesbury and lying in the sub-kingdom of the Hwicce. We do not know when the minster was founded and endowed with part at least of the land of this territory, but in 804 the thegn Aethelric, son of Aethelmund, bequeathed to Deerhurst four outlying estates for the souls of his father and himself on condition that he should be buried there: his bequests had come into effect by 823. Deerhurst seems thus to have been a wealthy minster of the mid Anglo-Saxon period. A community was still in existence there in the third quarter of the 10th century, and was perhaps influenced by the monastic reform movement. However, it was soon to be eclipsed by the other great late Anglo-Saxon monasteries in the region, such as Pershore (Worcs), Evesham (Worcs) and Gloucester (Glos). The endowments of Deerhurst towards the middle of the 11th century passed under the control of the family of Earl Odda, and then were divided by Edward the Confessor between Westminster Abbey and his physician

Fig 2 Period II elevations and reconstruction (Illustration: P A Rabtz. Reproduced with the kind permission of Boydell Press)

Baldwin, a monk of St-Denis near Paris – of which Deerhurst became an alien cell following the Conquest. This historical framework provides a model against which the surviving fabric may be viewed, but it cannot be assumed that there is a neat correlation between the two. Rather it raises a series of questions: how early is the first phase of the building? were there any significant developments relating to the 9th-century increase in endowments? was there a continuous development into the 10th century? how early did the decline start which had become so marked by the middle of the 11th century? was there any renewed interest through the St-Denis connection?

Rahtz and Watts quite rightly do not regard such questions as a starting point for their archaeological analysis. Archaeology has its own discipline and methods to set the agenda, and it is only when these have offered their proper results that one can attempt to correlate them to the historical context. Yet this procedure is far from being as straightforward as it may sound. The authors and their collaborators have conducted a meticulous study which has produced a series of detailed observations on different parts of the fabric but, as they observe, the co-ordination of these observations through the church as a whole becomes to a greater or lesser extent subjective (p. 150). It involves a number of assumptions which may not be true in particular cases or overall. What they hope to have established, nonetheless, is some idea of the basic sequence of events in the development of the fabric, even if on the basis of this sequence the reader may postulate different groupings of events from the authors (p. 189).

The overall scheme proposed in the book involves six main periods in the pre-Conquest development of the fabric:

*Period I – archaeological features before the construction of the first stone church*

*Period II – the building of the first church with a rectangular nave of which the walls survive to a height of 2.5m. Above this they may have been of timber. Attached may have been a west porch and, at the east end, a timber apse with flanking porticus*

*Period III – the apse was constructed with a semicircular stone foundation. Tripartite porticus were built on the north and south sides flanking the east end of the nave and apse and at the west end the porch was further developed as a two-storeyed structure*

*Period IV – the nave was rebuilt in stone above the lower 2.5m up to something like the present height of the building. The apse was rebuilt as a polygonal structure, the north and south main porticus rebuilt with two storeys and an eastern annexe, and the west*

*porch was probably further developed as a two-storeyed structure*

*Period V – the west porch was now increased to four storeys and various alterations were perhaps made to the doorways here and elsewhere in the church*

*Period VI – at different times, the west porch was further increased in height into a tower, the porticus were extended along the sides of the nave, and other alterations were made to the fabric.*

It is clear from this that the overall development of the building was extremely complex, with only two fixed horizons; the first being the construction of the first stone building; the second being its substantial rebuilding from a height of 2.5m upwards. Even this, however, indicates that the building cannot be regarded as a type-monument for any one period, since the ground plan belongs to the first horizon and its subsequent development, while the superstructure largely follows the second horizon. But how are we to get any chronological fix on this?

The archaeological project fortunately has provided a number of radiocarbon dates from excavated material and scaffold poles built into the structure (but readers should note the errors in Table XV when compared with the text). These appear to relate as follows (the dates are cited first as correct to one sigma variation, then in brackets to two sigma):

<i>Period II?</i>	<i>Excavated charcoal</i>	<i>AD 667–871</i>	<i>(642–948)</i>
<i>Period IV</i>	<i>Scaffold pole</i>	<i>AD 891–1012</i>	<i>(811–1030)</i>
<i>Period IV</i>	<i>Scaffold pole</i>	<i>AD 888–1007</i>	<i>(789–1027)</i>
<i>Period V</i>	<i>Scaffold pole</i>	<i>AD 968–1034</i>	<i>(886–1165)</i>
<i>Period V</i>	<i>Scaffold pole</i>	<i>AD 724–960</i>	<i>(666–1011)</i>

The authors do not consider that taken together the dates from periods IV and V are significantly different statistically (p. 116). But what do the radiocarbon dates tell us? In their summary of the chronology (Table IX, p. 190) the authors do not seem to attach any determining significance to them.

If, then, a balanced view of the dating of the Deerhurst chronology must take into account a range of factors, detailed consideration should be given to all relevant evidence, including the art-historical (which the authors recognise as significant but do not discuss in detail). One of the most characteristic features of Deerhurst is the assemblage of animal-head sculptures used to ornament the springings and the crown of arches. Animal heads terminating arches (rather than merely standing near their

springing) start to appear in Anglo-Saxon manuscript illumination and metalwork from the 9th century but, as David Wilson has pointed out, the specific style of the Deerhurst heads relates to a body of metalwork of the 8th and 9th centuries, with none later than 900 (cit Taylor 1978, 1057). The angel sculpture on the apse at Deerhurst has been dated to the late 9th and 10th centuries (Kendrick 1938, 217; Cramp 1975, 193), but María Muñoz de Miguel has also made a good comparison with the early 9th-century evangelist portraits in the Book of Cerne. The Virgin and Child sculpture over the inner west doorway is not closely dateable, but is linked to the animal sculptures by its technique, which involves the use of paint to complete the details of the sculptured design. The font does not form part of the building but, against its array of earlier motifs, Jeffrey West has pointed to a similarity between its floral scrolls and Carolingian ivories and manuscripts of the mid 9th century (J West pers comm) (Fig 3). Whereas the animal head sculptures may seem likely to belong fairly closely together, there is no stylistic reason to suppose that the other sculptures necessarily do. One is therefore looking at a date range centering on the 9th century, but extended into the early 10th at one terminus, and perhaps back into the late 8th at the other.

Whether the sculptures help to date the building



Fig 4 Period IV elevations and reconstruction (Illustration: P A Rahtz. Reproduced with the kind permission of Boydell Press)



Fig 3 The Deerhurst font (Photo: Dr Jeffrey West)

depends crucially upon whether they are *in situ*, and here the Rahtz and Watts project may be expected to help. The Angel sculpture they consider to be integral with the period IV masonry of the polygonal apse; and the Virgin and Child to be integral with the period IV or V masonry of the ground floor of the west porch (Fig 4). For the animal heads they suggest that they all belong together in one period, but the evidence is not clear as to how precisely they relate to the fabric. Although the chancel arch is in a period IV wall and leads into the period IV apse, they suggest that it may be an insertion of period V because it is in a slightly different plane from the wall: but how compelling is this? The external doorway to the main south porticus they suggest is an insertion into possibly period III walling; again this seems to me far from certain. In the west porch the second-floor west doorway is apparently *in situ* in period V masonry. In conclusion, I do not think it can be demonstrated on this basis that the animal head sculptures are a feature only of period V and not also of IV.

Turning to the other architectural stylistic features of the building, the chancel arch may claim particular attention because of the treatment of the jambs which are built up with a series of three-quarter columns against the flat reveal of the rubble walling. The treatment is significantly

different from a Romanesque arrangement in which a part column is constructed in ashlar masonry coursed with a rectangular jamb. It seems to me much more similar to, for example, the arrangement of the arches into the side porticus at Repton (Derbys), which have columns built in drums standing *en délit* against the jambs: the date of Repton is perhaps shortly before 873. Repton is also notable for the decoration of the rectangular chancel with pilaster strips, although the closest parallel to the period IV polygonal apse and pilasters of Deerhurst is at Wing (Bucks), which unfortunately is undated. Pilaster strips and projecting animal-head sculptures are again a feature of the west tower of Barnack, which appears to be dated by other sculptures adorning its top stage to around 920. Moving forward, the archway on the east side of the main south porticus is thought by Rahtz and Watts to be inserted into the surrounding walling and to be itself of two different periods as between the jambs and the arch: however, both jambs and arch show decidedly Romanesque characteristics, the former having a part-column formed integrally with a dossier, the arch having a bold roll-moulding which continues the language of the jamb.

These stylistic comparisons perhaps continue the story told by the radiocarbon determinations. That is, they point to a general cultural context which extends from the 9th century into the 10th. The stylistically dateable features, however, cannot be assigned to a single period on the archaeological evidence, and it remains best to suppose that the fabric continued to develop through this period. What is perhaps significant, though, is that the animal-head sculptures, if one accepts the dating indicated by their metalwork parallels, ought to indicate that these period IV and V developments begin before 900 rather than after – Rahtz and Watts seem to suggest a beginning of Period IV in the late 8th or early 9th century, apparently on the basis of the earlier termini of the two radiocarbon dates.

The conclusion that one must draw is that it is not yet possible to correlate the fabric of Deerhurst to its documentary history except in a most general way. It is likely that the building was already in existence before Aethelric's benefactions at the beginning of the 9th century, but we cannot say which period of its development it had reached, nor whether it was these benefactions which facilitated subsequent 9th-century changes. It is likely, however, that the period IV and V developments of the fabric were begun, if perhaps not completed, before the time when Aelfheah was at Deerhurst around the 960s (if he was). By the middle of the 11th century the period IV additions had perhaps been completed, but the Romanesque arch in the south porticus may point to the St-Denis phase before or after the Conquest.

There may be an overall lesson to draw from this uncertainty. That is, that in the case of such complex, multi-period buildings as Deerhurst, it may require much

more total archaeological programmes, with correspondingly sized budgets, to produce conclusive results. In the meantime, the careful research of Rahtz, Watts and colleagues, and the equally thoughtful presentation of it (not claiming for the results more than is justified) has made an invaluable contribution to the understanding of this sphinx-like building.

### *The art of the possible* *David Parsons*

The Deerhurst project was begun at a formative period in British archaeology. It was the era of the 'New Archaeology', which emerged in the late 1960s and 70s, and of which Philip Rahtz was an advocate. One of the features of the new archaeology movement was a very proper concern with objectivity, and it became customary, not to say fashionable, to separate description from discussion, with the laudable intention of making clear to the reader what was 'fact', and what was subjective interpretation. As a result we have had a quarter-century of archaeological reportage written in pseudo-objective 'archaeo-speak', liberally infected by the politically correct lingo of local government, which hosted many of the active professional units for much of that period. The Deerhurst report is mercifully free of the latter, but adheres to the format advocated by the pioneers: objective description first, interpretative discussion after. As the authors themselves know, this formula is difficult to adhere to, and the dividing line between one and the other is impossible to define; wherever the line is drawn it is artificial. The very act of description, of drawing a plan or section in an excavation trench, or of making a stone-by-stone representation of a standing building, is already subjective and interpretative. Now that we have learned the lesson of the fallibility of the human eye and the camera lens, perhaps the time has come to reintegrate 'objective' description and interpretation, if only to improve the readability of our text and ensure the acceptance of its message. *St Mary's Church, Deerhurst* goes a long way towards acknowledging that the problem exists: the two major chapters are devoted to 'excavation and structural analysis' and to 'synthesis and periodization', effectively description and interpretation. Yet the authors have perceived the need to give at least preliminary discussion to the data as they are presented; each section of description in the first of those chapters is followed by a commentary based on one or more of the elevation drawings of the standing fabric.

The other, related, development of the early 1970s was the emergence of church archaeology as a separate sub-discipline with its own philosophy. The CBA set up its Churches Committee in 1972 and sponsored the first public conference on the subject in the following year, with

another in 1975. The resulting publication, *The archaeological study of churches* (Addyman & Morris 1976) set out the church archaeologists' stall. The essential creed, expressed by Peter Addyman in his foreword, was that 'church archaeology must subsume a variety of allied disciplines which have often tended to flourish in isolation'. The essentials were mapped out by the late Harold Taylor, and set in their wider context by Martin Biddle. Church archaeology was to be all-embracing: excavation, the study of the stratigraphy of standing fabric, architectural typology and history, and the analysis and application of documentary sources would all contribute on an equal footing to the study of any individual church. One example of a project in progress was St Mary's, Deerhurst: the stone-by-stone east elevation was used as the front cover illustration. Philip Rahtz gave an early insight into the project leaders' proposed research directions, together with a flow-chart, which was perplexing as it was explanatory. If nothing else, this diagram highlighted the complexity of a truly inter-disciplinary project such as Deerhurst was intended to be. (In the present report one notes with some relief, incidentally, that the authors were forced to abandon their attempt to apply the Harris-style matrix to the analysis of the standing fabric: diagrams of this sort often increase rather than reduce the complexity of the data.) Tim Tatton-Brown in his contribution to this review has referred to two of the stumbling blocks in the way of church archaeologists and of the Deerhurst team in particular: lack of finance at a level appropriate to such a complex project, and the current attitude to research archaeology which has grown up over the period of archaeological activity at St Mary's. There is a third: the difficulty both at a practical and at an inter-personal level of investigating a church which remains in ecclesiastical use. We were warned of these problems by the Rodwells in the CBA volume (*ibid* 45–54). Despite the high ideals, it has proved possible only to achieve partial success at a variety of Anglo-Saxon churches in use, for example at Jarrow (Durham) or Brixworth (Northants). Deerhurst is not alone. In practice the archaeology of the whole church is possible only where it is redundant, like Barton-upon-Humber (Lincs) or – in a different context – Wharram Percy (Yorks), or out of use for other reasons for a sufficient period to mount a meaningful archaeological campaign, eg Hadstock (Essex). Archaeology, like politics, is an exercise in the art of the possible, and the reader perceives the frustration and disappointment of the authors of St Mary's Church, Deerhurst that more was not possible in this particular case.

Nevertheless, Richard Gem has pointed out areas in which more could have been achieved non-destructively without inconvenience to the work and worship of the parish. The application of the techniques of architectural history to the standing structure may seem a little old-

fashioned to hard-nosed 'dirt' archaeologists, despite the *rapprochement* of the last 25 years. However, architectural and art historians deal in typological sequences, much as the archaeologist does, and more of the building is available for study by this method than is implied in this report. In fairness to the authors, however, one must agree that a thorough-going investigation of the stone sculptures is probably premature in view of the impending review of the area for the appropriate volume of the British Academy Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture. What is disappointing is that we still do not know whether the carved stones at Deerhurst are *in situ* or not, in spite of the analysis of many of the building's elevations.

If the holistic approach has not proved possible, what *has* been achieved? The major plus point of the work at Deerhurst and of the present report is the integration of the standing fabric analysis and excavation. Both have proved to be partial exercises, but where they could be applied together, notably around the north-east corner of the church and at the west end, knowledge has been considerably advanced; knowledge, that is, not only of the history of St Mary's church, but of sequences of construction and of the application of different building materials, which will be relevant to the understanding of other churches under investigation. In particular, the identification of timber phases at Deerhurst, to which both fabric analysis and excavation have contributed, has opened our eyes to interpretative possibilities at other sites. As a result of the Deerhurst study, continental examples of masonry churches with timber superstructures no longer seem so outlandish and irrelevant to the study of ecclesiastical buildings in this country.

There are, of course, instances where one method of investigation on its own can supply information not forthcoming from the other. Most striking here is the excavation towards the east end of the north aisle, which revealed the former existence of a small porticus in the angle between the clumsily named 'North a Porticus' and the nave (basic rectangle). Since the east-west walls of the larger and smaller porticus abutted the basic rectangle, neither is represented in the north elevation of the nave north wall. The smaller porticus, whose north wall was not found, was apparently too small to be embedded in the present north aisle wall. There is, therefore, no available elevation from which the existence of this porticus could be read. Its original function is puzzling. The authors refer to it as a *porticus ingressus*, though this term is normally applied to porches leading from the exterior to the interior of the church. This small chamber could only have led from the body of the church into the 'North a Porticus', and at first sight seems to be without purpose, unless there was no access between the 'North a Porticus' and the central space (east compartment of the 'basic rectangle') in the position of the later doorway with a gable head

(OP20). Much depends on the interpretation of the ground floor room of the 'North a Porticus'. If this were a vestry/sacristy, then the small porticus adjacent to it might have served as a preparation room for the elements of the Sacrament, such as is shown on the parchment plan at St Gallen dated to c830. On the other hand, because of the multi-storey elevation of the 'North a Porticus' other explanations are possible.

Dr Warwick Rodwell, whose suggestions for alternative interpretations are frequently referred to in the text, put forward the idea of a turret with staircase access to upper parts of the 'North a Porticus', and drew attention to the frequent occurrence of such turrets 'in the armpit' between transeptal elements and the main body of the church. This is a very tempting reconstruction to propose, especially if one assumes a mirror image of these structures on the south side of the church (a rash assumption, perhaps, in view of the evidence for the asymmetrical layout of the church at several stages of its development). This interpretation is rejected by the authors, but on grounds of general probability. The real problem with it, however, is that many of the comparanda are of late pre-Romanesque or proto-Romanesque date (not counting the problematic Saint-Riquier drawing, since doubt has been cast on the date of the elements of the building depicted). In this country one might refer to the supposed Anglo-Saxon 'cathedral' at North Elmham (Norfolk), now thought to be of post-Conquest date. This would hardly fit with what appears to be known about the chronology of St Mary's, especially taking into account the subsequent development by serial addition of further porticus. This is the morphological stage represented by Reculver II (Kent) (admittedly not securely dated), whereas excavations at Brixworth in the early 1980s showed that the plan with full series of porticus integrated with the nave had been achieved by c800. Whatever is the correct interpretation of this fascinating discovery, it is disappointing not to find in the present report this kind of comparative discussion, which would have emphasised the significance of the achievements of the Deerhurst team, not only for St Mary's itself, but in relation to Anglo-Saxon church studies and church archaeology in general.

### Endnote

#### Rosemary Cramp

Revisiting the report of Deerhurst 1971–74 in the *Antiquaries Journal* (Butler *et al* 1975), I was struck by the heroic age in early medieval archaeology in which this project was engendered. In that same volume was 'The excavations at Winchester, 1971, The tenth and final interim report', with the plans of the evolution of the churches of St Mary Tanner Street and St Pancras; reports of the exciting transitions between the Roman and

medieval periods not only in Winchester but in Lincoln and Gloucester, with hints at an understanding of how the rural hinterlands of Roman towns were developed by the Anglo-Saxon kings. This was also the period when churches within their context were being studied at Brixworth, Jarrow, Rivenhall (Essex) and Wharram, and where Martin Biddle's concluding section in *The archaeological study of churches* (Addyman & Morris, 1976), 'A widening horizon' seemed a very appropriate subtitle to summarize what we all felt about church archaeology. Twenty years later several of these projects, my own included, are still struggling towards their final large-scale publications, and some like Brixworth, which were truly co-operative projects, are still bedeviled by lack of even limited research assistance to bring the individual sections together.

It is small wonder, considering the time which has elapsed for many of the long term excavations of the 1970s and 80s to reach their final publication, that funding authorities clamped down on long term research digs and have insisted on time consuming assessments at every stage of the progress towards a limited intervention. In today's context, at its best such discipline produces swift and immaculate results, as in the recent publication by Canterbury Cathedral, *Canterbury Cathedral nave* (Blockley *et al* 1997). When one considers the fundamental nature of the discoveries made in the earlier excavations cited above, and the considerable influence which their interim reports have had on succeeding research, one wonders if some of the more limited, and expensive, interventions of today will ever contribute the same benefit. Rahtz's 1971–73 excavations at the east end of Deerhurst, published in 1976, cost according to his estimate £300. This excavation successfully disproved the architectural historians' supposition that there could have been a ring crypt at the east end, whilst proposing a sequence of two apses, as well as a plethora of possible plans for the nave and side adjuncts, and initiating discussion of the possible timber phases of the church.

Perhaps that publication led us to hope too much for the results of later work, which, as Tim Tatton-Brown observed, lost some impetus after 1976. It is also true, as the reviewers above state, that only the full excavation of church interiors such as Warwick Rodwell's excavation of Barton-upon-Humber yield satisfying results, in which evidence from the excavated and above-ground structures can in some measure complement or support each other.

The excavated evidence of a full plan and the traces of interior fittings in buried churches have provided illuminating examples of period achievements for example in the excavations of stone churches at Winchester Cathedral (Hants) or St Oswald's, Gloucester, at one end of the spectrum, and the remarkable series of timber and half-timber churches at Whithorn (Galloway) (Hill 1997) at the other. Nevertheless it is easier to provide a convincing



narrative sequence from the plan of buried foundations than when the standing structure also survives and the baffling complexity of the building's history is apparent. The evidence that Deerhurst provides into the development and use of upper floor space is uniquely important and this exposition also provides a starting point for further research.

It is a compliment to this project that so much was expected of the publication. The reviewers above found what is common archaeological practice in presenting evidence irritating, confusing, and lacking in clear-cut conclusions. It is true that archaeological reports are usually not couched in elegant, or even plain, unvarnished prose and the very act of trying to provide an objective overview can result in an unselective common emphasis on trivial and crucially significant facts. David Parsons is quite correct in saying that 'objective description' totally devoid of any element of interpretation is a difficult formula to adhere to and not necessarily desirable. The reader needs to be able to distinguish clearly in the text between record and interpretation, but also deserves to see the building set within a non-anachronistic cultural context.

Every generation enthusiastically embraces improved techniques for solving the abiding problems of establishing chronology and hierarchy in buildings, but as we learn more the difficulties of reaching firm conclusions only increase. A fashionable preoccupation of today is to consider the sources of stone for different phases of building in much more detail than was done 20 years ago and this has provided important insights into the phases of building of particular monuments and their relationships to surviving Roman structures as demonstrated in the essays in *Stone: quarrying and building in England AD 43–1525* (Parsons 1990). We are faced nevertheless with the loss of an unknown quantity of evidence for early quarries whether primary or from secondary robbing of earlier (usually Roman) buildings, which may well distort the picture.

As for mortar studies, all of us who have tried know that in the primary gathering of samples it is extremely difficult, save when walling is actually being dismembered, to extract the original core uncontaminated by later grouting, and that, having recovered one's samples, they may be characterised, but until a reliable series of radiocarbon dates for mortars has been achieved from the many projects which have gone down this route, mortar samples cannot provide absolute dates.

As for the relationship of the sculpture to the structure at Deerhurst, this is certainly crucial, and early drawings and photographs of the building before restoration are of great importance. The dating of sculpture is however an imprecise art, and attempts to link motifs and styles with well-dated manuscripts or metalwork depend upon the assumption (not universally accepted) that the appearance

of similar motifs in different media are contemporaneous. The sculpture is more likely to be dated by the context than vice versa, as has been illuminatingly demonstrated in the discoveries from St Oswald's, Gloucester, where some well-stratified sculptures can be linked with a range of other grave monuments discovered in south-west England, but some of the architectural sculpture so far stands alone. At Deerhurst the font, and the panels have no close parallels, although the label stops can be compared with terminals in metalwork, as Richard Gem noted, and also with a piece, which could be later, from Gloucester.

Rahtz and Watts have very clearly laid down the parameters of their enquiry, and it is to be hoped that some of the lines of research which they have indicated may be followed up in the future. One might have wished for a wider discussion of the evidence, but the Deerhurst project has advanced the subject of church archaeology and has also demonstrated how hard a co-operative multi-disciplinary study can be.

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