

Whithorn – urban monastery or monastic town?

Philip Rahtz

Hill, P, 1997, *Whithorn and St Ninian. The excavation of a monastic town 1984–91*. Sutton Publishing: Stroud. ISBN 0 7509 09129. Hb, 643pp, 479 figures, 10 colour plates; £30 (+ £6 p+p).

‘The word was preached to them [the southern Picts] by Nynia, a most revered bishop and holy man of the nation of Britons, who had been regularly instructed at Rome. [His episcopal see] distinguished by the name and by the Church of St Martin the bishop, where he himself, together with many other saints, rests in the body; [the church] is called in the vernacular At the White House, because he there built a church of stone in a manner to which the Britons were not accustomed.’

These famous words of Bede will be familiar to many readers. Although these events took place two centuries before his own time, some tradition of the White House, *Candida Casa*, had passed down to him. Bede also tells us of the Northumbrian take-over of the see with Pecthelm as the new bishop; a phase which lasted from 731–802.

Many scholars believe that there were attempts to convert the southern Picts in the 5th century and specifically that the see ruled by Nynia or Ninian was ministering to a substantial settlement in the area at that time, if not before (in the late Roman period). It has been generally believed that present-day Whithorn was the scene of at least part of this

early Christian activity. An area of higher ground there is certainly the nucleus of an important monastic/ecclesiastical complex, but the greater part of this has, alas, been mutilated, by both later buildings and earlier excavations, the latter poorly conducted by modern standards and published only in part.

The areas discussed in this book, however, are principally in a lower part of the site, the Glebe Field, which is somewhat peripheral to anything that might be directly associated with Nynia or Ninian. The book is thus akin to Hamlet without the Prince. The cult of St Nynia, however, became of great importance as a pilgrimage and trade centre and gave rise to a very rich material culture which is represented by the impressive structures and finds in the ‘monastic town’ of the sub-title.

A word of warning to start with: no review can hope to do justice to a work of this size and complexity, on a site of such international importance. It needs to be *studied* and one needs a table to do so – it weighs in at 2.2 kg.

Before discussing the wider implications of this book, it will be necessary to sketch its framework in a descriptive way to give the reader some idea of what to expect.

Chapter 1, ‘Background and speculation’ takes us into the documentation (sparse before the 12th century), the history of the bishopric, its cult, and the relevance of sculpture and place-name studies. There is a discussion of the material enshrined in the *Vitae* of Nynia. Certain episodes here, concerning miracles and healing, seem to find echoes in the archaeology.

Whithorn and its area are topographically complex. Being so remote, even from Carlisle, not many have made the journey and for them it will not be easy to appreciate the landscape which Peter Hill discusses. Galloway has sea-borne links, though Whithorn is not itself on the coast. Its harbour is at the Isle of Whithorn,

some 5km distant, where there is a chapel and a ‘hermitage’ cave nearby. Previous excavations in the 1950s show that there is apparently nothing in this area earlier than the 13th century but there was clearly access to the inland complex by way of a small river.

*the most important
book on the post-
Roman archaeology of
the north since
Yeavinger*

Earlier excavations at Whithorn extend back to the last century and were concentrated on the nuclear area of the churches. Raleigh Radford (who died recently at the age of 98) believed that a structure he located, of stone with coarse cream mortar, was the *Candida Casa*, but this is now discounted. Rich graves in the Priory were dug by Ritchie in 1957–67, but not published. A crosier found at this time, suspended over an aerial view, provides one of the most dramatic covers of any archaeological book. Other finds were made too: ‘colleagues who penetrated the screens surrounding the excavation have assimilated their impressions into their own published works.’ Charles Thomas, for instance, recalls a ‘cremation cemetery’ and finds of wheel-thrown pottery in the lowest levels, which suggested to him that there was a Roman settlement here.

Further work was done in rescue conditions in 1972 and 1975 and finally rescue became research (a difference in funding) in the large-scale work of 1984–91 described in this volume, with its 11,212 contexts, and 42,800 finds.

Rather surprisingly, we have next

'speculations', which we might have expected much later in the book, after the evidence. Here, Hill attempts a very wide synthesis of the history and archaeology of the whole of Galloway, from an early monastic community, through the Northumbrian bishopric and the mid 9th-century devastation to the full development of the cathedral and monastic town. This bold account ends with Hill's justification for the concept of urbanism – 'a consistent thread in the book', citing Biddle's urban criteria and finding a number of them at Whithorn – 'a cult centre which generated sufficient activity to drive the economy.' This section is probably intended to widen the reader's horizon to the full implications of what the book is about to exhibit. Of particular interest are Hill's specific links between aspects of the written sources and the excavated evidence. For instance, the healing cult associated with the relics and tomb of Nynia is linked to medicinal herbs identified, to the remains of a herbal compress and a surgeon's knife; the presence of glass drinking vessels may be related to the penances only for *extreme* drunkenness in the *Penitentials*.

Chapter 2, again unconventionally, is a period by period synthesis of the archaeology – 'Whithorn transformed' – with a series of speculative phase plans and attempts to integrate these with historical evidence. This is well set out, but the illustrations are rather difficult. Modern boundaries and buildings (intended to locate the features being discussed) are confusing; the only way to achieve clarity in these plans would have been the use of a pale different colour for the modern background. The 'speculative reconstructions' are disappointing. 'Speculative' they can be, but these are rather crude sketches, such as Hill might have made on the back of an envelope to be developed by an illustrator of the status of Bryant or Dobie.

This takes us through six periods as follows:

- I (*confusingly 1 at the start of chapter 3*) – *the monasterium to c AD 730*
- II *The Northumbrian minster (and its destruction)*
- III *The minster restored*
- IV *Diverse arts – the monastic town*
- V *Priory and town 1250–1600*
- VI *After the Reformation*

These periods are further subdivided into numerous *phases*, also subdivided into *stages*. The reader needs a cool head to follow these through. A valiant attempt to distinguish them (and other major recurring features) by typographical variation is not entirely successful; if one is prepared to mark one's copy, a series of coloured pencils would assist understanding.

Finds and features earlier than cAD 500 are a few flints, a possible roadway which could lead to an early church, a possible round house and some Roman finds. 'Unfortunately', the latter are principally of early–mid Roman date; the only 4th-century find is a single coin. Seven samian sherds are all Antonine. There is nothing here to support the idea of Roman settlement, or indeed of a 'Ninianic' phase, but we must remember that such may have existed elsewhere at Whithorn or in the area nearby. Hill clearly supports a real beginning nearer to 500, and a *floruit* in the mid 6th century for the area excavated; 'rigorously organised with an inner precinct, with graves and shrines and an outer 'residential' area'. This is period I, in which there is a remarkable range of finds and features, of both insular and imported origins. The whole is seen as a developing cult centre with very wide connections, breaking new ground in Scottish Early Christian archaeology.

The Northumbrian minster of

period II continued as 'a successful 8th-century cult centre, ruled by a bishop, accommodating monks, and surrounded by an enclave of Anglian settlements'. In the inner precinct, a timber church was built in the area of the period I cemetery with a very important stone-based clay-walled burial chapel with coloured window glass.

There was extensive destruction of the site by fire in the mid 9th century. Hill rejects a simple Viking responsibility, preferring to see the devastation as a result of a wider cultural breakdown involving various political affiliations. The destruction was widespread and resulted also in neglect of maintenance of features such as drainage, leading to severe flooding.

In the area excavated there was (period III) restoration, with a new timber church and chapel, later demolished and replaced by dense secular buildings. This is also the time when the 'Whithorn School' of sculpture was flourishing in the mid–late 10th century and also when activities, such as comb-making, indicate to Hill that Whithorn was now a town, with lay patronage.

After c1000, in period IV, there was reclamation and drainage, with new enclosures and a market. While still a cult centre, Whithorn became 'an industrious trading centre with specialist craft quarters, with mixed cultural associations: Hiberno-Norse, Northumbrian and British.'

The cathedral was built in the mid 12th century; its construction probably destroyed all the earlier cult nuclei, including possibly the tomb-shrine of Nynia. The urban attributes expanded, especially in the outer areas.

In the later middle ages, there are further developments, including a very destructive cemetery in periods V–VI and a shift of population to the present burgh; leaving the hill of 'Scotland's oldest town as a green field site'.

Such are the bare bones of the changes in a millennium and half. It is these chapters 1–2 that readers will study most readily; but they are dense and difficult.

In chapters 3–9 it is with some relief, and a certain apprehension, that one embarks on the archaeology proper of the Glebe Field. Here are 224 pages of close detail and many drawings. The evidence here needs to be studied carefully to determine the validity of the summaries given in chapter 2. Chapter 10 deals with the finds; it will be widely used by archaeologists working in Scotland as a reference point for many classes of finds, thankfully here grouped by material, not function. The final chapter, 11, is entitled 'The environmental material' but most of this is on the human remains (by Amanda Cardy), again of fundamental interest to demographic studies. There are also two appendices on the inscriptions of Galloway and their design and patronage, and an extensive bibliography but, sadly, no index.

Such is the structure of the book. I shall now consider the archaeological detail and finds chapters in more details, concentrating on periods I and II, which are unique to Whithorn.



It is in period I that we have a remarkable assemblage of finds, related to features. The imported Mediterranean pottery includes amphorae of several classes, North African red table-ware (ARSW) but not the more easterly Phocian (PRSW). The somewhat later E ware is well represented. But the outstanding material is vessel glass: drinking vessels and bowls, mostly imported from unknown sources, but including one group which may have been made at Whithorn. It is conjectured that the necessary technical skills were brought in by continental craftsmen (as we know

happened in later centuries in the north-east). These and other craft debris 'transform our understanding of technology and trade in western Britain in the early medieval period'. Hill interprets all this as successive cargoes of trade goods or even the result of immigrant missionaries. Ewan Campbell compares Whithorn with other trading sites or *emporium*, notably Samson in Scilly and Dalkey Island near Dublin.

The only other sites with such large amounts of imported finds are those in the south-west and Wales, notably Dinas Powys, Cadbury Congresbury and Tintagel. The latter site indeed has yielded what is still the largest amount of pottery (except E ware); Cadbury Congresbury's total of 333 glass sherds (60 vessels) is outshone by Whithorn's 431 sherds (80 vessels). But these other sites are all apparently secular and it is very long way from the Bristol Channel to Western Scotland. Also odd is the absence of any imported glass or pottery from the earlier excavations on the summit of the hill.

No monastic site of this period (5th – early 8th century) has produced so much imported pottery and glass. This may be countered by pointing out that no other such site has been so extensively excavated except Iona, and here I would emphasise the extraordinary contrast between these two sites; both in western Scotland, both of major importance in the history of early Christianity and broadly contemporary, but a long series of excavations at Iona yielded only one imported sherd (of ARSW) and, indeed, few finds of any kind.

Hundreds of plough-pebbles were found (these are pebbles embedded in the sole-board to protect it and are characterised by distinctive wear facets). They derive from early cultivation (where?) and were found in period I and later levels. They have hitherto been believed to be an invention of much later centuries.

The structures of this period include small sub-rectangular wooden buildings and an enclosed graveyard. The graves show a change from lintel-graves (timber or stone lintels; a new name for long-cist graves) to log-coffins in the later decades. All burials were of adults or juveniles. Little is made of orientation in this cemetery. That of the site as a whole is angled at 45° to the cardinal points, because of the lie of the underlying rock ridges, so that 'site W–E is really NE–SW'. Most of the early graves are more or less on this line, but a few, oddly, are not, including one that is quite reversed. There are associated shrines/oratories in this period, but it is difficult to visualise what they might have looked like. All is interpreted by Hill as centred on a healing cult based on a primary church and founder's tomb on the hill-top.

In period II (the Northumbrian minster) the principal church will still have been on the summit, with peripheral guest quarters. The oratories of period I were joined to create a large timber church, still with burial enclosure. The secular timber buildings were now typically Anglo-Saxon with opposed lateral doorways. A burial chapel however, had thick clay walls on a stone base, with coloured glass windows. It had five important burials and was perhaps part of an inner gateway. It may have also had a special function as 'a cool chamber for the temporary repose of the dead'. There was also a graveyard of infants and young children, perhaps of a lay population living outside the consecrated area.

Rosemary Cramp (who has been a major inspiration for the Whithorn project) contributes a authoritative essay on the window glass – the first in Scotland. She comments on the absence of lead comes, the glass being apparently pinned into wooden frames in the clay walls.



Peter Hill has been the guiding spirit to this work – Whithorn has been his life for many years. He directed excavations from 1984–91. The stratigraphic and structural problems were formidable and this book is a record of his skills on site. What is, however, equally remarkable is that he has produced this report in only six years after the conclusion of the work and at such an affordable price.

He has been supported by a small army of helpers and, rather unusually, not only by officers of local government, but by the people of Whithorn, who ‘fed and housed us, shared our triumphs, condemned our extravagances, explored our eccentricities.’

There is no doubt that this is the most important book on the post-Roman archaeology of the north since the legendary *Yeaveering*. Like that great work, it provides a wealth of material and will generate discussion well into the third millennium.

It is not, however, the last word. The book is seen as the ‘culmination of the first phase of the Whithorn Trust’. Further excavations have already been undertaken by the York Archaeological Trust and more research is planned. One step forward was the holding of a research seminar, ‘The Way Forward’, at Edinburgh on February 28 1998. A group of 19 eminent scholars discussed a wide variety of topics related to the site, suggestions were made for future directions of research and the need to publish earlier excavations was highlighted. Did the Ninianic monastery ever exist? If so, where was it, if not at Whithorn? Was the complex wholly monastic, as the 6th-century finds might suggest? Can the ‘urban’ character of the site be maintained? What was the ethnicity of the Galloway and Whithorn’s cultural contacts?

A report on the meeting was compiled by Dr Christopher Lowe, and will, one hopes, be made more widely available.

Philip Rahtz was Professor of Archaeology at the University of York from 1978–86. Since his retirement, he has continued to write excavation reports and to excavate in North Yorkshire, principally at St Gregory’s Minster at Kirkdale.

Whithorn and St Ninian can be obtained from The Whithorn Trust, 45–47 George Street, Whithorn, Newton Stewart, Dumfries & Galloway, DG8 8NS, Tel 01988 500508, email butterworth@whithorn1.freeserve.co.uk.

A new approach?

D F Mackreth

Reilly, L A, 1997, *An architectural history of Peterborough Cathedral*. Clarendon Press: Oxford. ISBN 0 19 817 520 5. Hb, 143pp, 108 plates, 5 figures; £60.00.

Until the appearance of this book the main published account of the monastic church/cathedral at Peterborough and its associated buildings was that by Sir Charles Peers in the *Victoria History of the Counties of England* (1906, 431–56). Issued by a famous press in a noted series, Lisa Reilly’s book deserves more than a cursory review, not least because its basic thesis seeks to rewrite the accepted history of the building.

This thesis, best set out in quotations from the book, is felt necessary because ‘much of Peers’s interpretation of the evidence is problematic, largely due to his overly specific reading of the [...] chronicle by [...] Hugh Candidus’ (p. 2). Lisa

Reilly has ‘a new approach [involving] turning to the building itself as the primary source of information and carefully examining what the fabric reveals about its date, order of construction, and source’ (p. 3). Reilly believes this ‘will establish a relative chronology for the building which will suggest the order of construction. Then, on the basis of stylistic comparison with other buildings, a framework can be established for the absolute chronology of the building [and] the medieval literary sources will be discussed’ (p. 3).

A revision of the history is ‘necessary because examination of the fabric reveals that two basic tenets of the current chronology, i.e. that the building was begun in 1118 and was built essentially from east to west are incorrect’ (p. 3). By implication the English approach to architectural history has failed. With appetites whetted, we turn to the text.

Terminology has to be sorted out first. Reilly’s retrochoir is the new building. This 19th-century term – retrochoir – should not be used as it is behind the presbytery, the term used by Hugh Candidus, which Reilly, in turn, calls the choir. In fact, the choir lies under the crossing and extends into the nave.

The main thesis of the book is developed from p. 50 and opens with the arrival of Ernulf as Abbot of Peterborough in 1107. The interpretation which Reilly seeks to challenge is that the Anglo-Saxon church was still standing on Ernulf’s arrival and that it was the fire in 1116 which prompted its replacement in 1118/19. Hugh Candidus, quoted in the book, tells us that ‘in another year Abbot John himself began a new church and laid the foundations on the eighth day of March in the 1118th year after our Lord was made flesh’ (pp. 51–52), ie 1119 in modern terms. Reilly’s explanation of this apparently unequivocal statement is that since Hugh was ‘writing about

Ernulf's activity with hindsight, he may have been focusing on a current situation in which John de Sais inaugurated the recommencement of construction after the fire as the beginning of a new church in the wish that it be regarded as such' – this despite Hugh's statement that he was an eyewitness. Reilly explains that 'the reasons for not assigning the beginning of church construction to Ernulf have rested *largely* [author's italics] on the fact that the chronicle does not mention it and on the account of a new church having begun under his successor, John de Sais' (p. 52).

Turning to the second main revision in the history of the building, Reilly states that 'there is nothing about the fabric of the building which demands a post-1116 date for the start of construction or an east to west building pattern' (p. 53). The test of this thesis is in the nave. For it to be valid, the south tower of the twin-towered front, in bay 9 of the nave, has to be earlier than the work to the east and be contemporary with the earliest part of the eastern limb. The basis for the theory appears to rest on analysis of the ornament rather than the structure although it is noted that 'this evidence is difficult to interpret [. . .] and the proposed scenario is not wholly satisfactory. Stylistic comparisons between [the work in] the south gallery of bay 9 suggests that this work in the nave may have been going on at the same time as the choir [presbytery] and transept aisles were being constructed, although this is a somewhat problematic conclusion as some details of the nave elevation in bay 9 do not match the choir [presbytery]' (p. 34). No other evidence is produced and the rest of the book assumes that the thesis has been adequately demonstrated.

This reviewer has for some time been recording the masons' marks at Peterborough Cathedral, beginning at the east, and has now completed the

survey up to the western transepts. The forms of the mouldings, bases and capitals have also been analysed and the evidence used to establish discrete stages of construction: the uniform style of the Romanesque masonry renders normal mismatches in coursing useless for interpretation of the construction history. Applying this work to the nave, numbering the 10 bays and piers from the crossing of the nave, piers 8 and 9 are clearly associated with the unfinished twin-towered west front. Although this front is dated to before 1114 by Reilly, the historical sources suggest that it was later than 1140 and had been abandoned by 1193. The writer's research allows four stages of construction to be suggested for the nave:

Phase 1

South side, the outer aisle wall in bays 1–7 and the layout of the main arcade up to and including the east part of pier 9. In the tribune the same parts of piers 8 & 9 belong to this phase as do bays 1–5 in the outer wall of the north side and piers 1–3 of the arcade.

Phase 2

South side, tribune bays 1 and 2, and clerestory bay 1 (without the wall ribs for the high vault) are of this Phase. The outer aisle wall in bays 8 & 9, and tribune bay 9 with the upper half of pier 8 are also part of this phase. At this stage, the west wall on the south side was built up to the clerestory along with the south-west tower at tribune level. On the north side, tribune bays 1 and 2 and clerestory bay 1 were constructed to support the central tower. Piers 4 and 5 and the bay 3 arch were finished in the main arcade and bases for pier 8 and the eastern half of pier 9 placed.

Phase 3

In this phase the south side of the tribune was completed up to pier 9 and clerestory bays 2–8 were constructed. The wall ribs, tas de charges and supporting corbels for the high vault were provided and the ribs inserted in bay 1 on each side. On the north side, bays 6–10 were finished at arcade level, the tribune completed through to pier 9 and all of the clerestory to a point in pier 8 constructed. This phase included, at the very beginning, a small group of floriated capitals and a few bell capitals (Mackreth 1994, figs 1–6).

Phase 4

This phase saw the extension of the nave to the west and the layout of the western transepts. Bay 10 of the clerestory may have been completed: this bay was later partly dismantled.

There is no evidence that any part of the nave is earlier than the presbytery. In addition, it can be assumed with some confidence that the floriated capitals of the third stage were carved under Abbot Benedict (1177–1193) as they are closely related to the capitals in the choir at Canterbury Cathedral which was being built under Benedict's general supervision when he left for Peterborough.

Returning to Reilly's thesis, she draws on evidence of the traces of fire to support her interpretation that the design of the new church must predate the fire of 1116 (pp. 54–55). However, reddened stones occur only in courses 10–12 and 14 of the shaft in south pier 9 for the diagonal vaulting rib in south bay 9. These are obviously reused and were burnt before being placed. They would have been hidden under the whitewash. A fire of the intensity described by Hugh would not have respected the

edges of individual stones. This, coupled with the clearly tertiary sections of the blind-arcading and style of the capitals in the aisle outer wall contradicts Reilly's interpretation.

To return to the absence of any reference to activity in the church by Ernulf in Hugh Candidus, who was an eyewitness to his activities, this can only really mean that there was nothing to report. Hugh Candidus and his successors tell us that John de Sais started the new church on 8 March 1118/9; Martin de Bec introduced the monks into the new presbytery in 1140; William de Waterville completed the transepts, the three stories of the tower and laid out the choir; Benedict finished the nave in wood and stone up to the front, built the *pulpitum* and began the magnificent work next to the brewhouse. Phase 2 relates to propping the central tower and is de Waterville's, Phase 3 is the main part of Benedict's work, with Phase 4 relating to the western transepts. There are no convincing alternatives.

disappointing and expensive

Any discussion of the nave must include consideration of the evidence for the high vault. Reilly concludes that 'the question remains as to whether the [. . .] clerestory was built in conjunction with the vaulting campaign and the ceiling after the vault was abandoned' (p. 38). She also states that 'the intention of the pointed wall ribs as part of the overall vaulting scheme was undoubtedly to give a unified and updated aspect to the heavy Norman nave in keeping with the lighter and more modern west end'. Actually, there is very good evidence that the high vault was well in hand by 1193 and the *Lives of the Abbots* points to the whole nave and

western transepts having been vaulted by 1214, contrary to Reilly's theory. All the stonework facing into the nave above the clerestory string-course, except that enclosed by the wall ribs, is 13th-century.

The book also contains many inaccuracies. For instance, the ceiling over the apse was *not* destroyed by Cromwell's troops (pp. 23–24); the cathedral is *not* built on fenland or marshy ground (p. 24); the tracery shown on plate 33 would only be early 16th-century if it were in France, in England it is early to mid 14th-century (p.25); the blind arcading shown in plate 37 is not 12th-century work, it is 19th-century plaster with a textured finish applied to the blocked lower part of the 14th-century windows (p.26); the 'extensive' painted decoration is confined to a dismantled room and there is no evidence for liturgical use (p. 26); the chevron voussoirs in the east face of an arch in the tribune level of the south transept could not possibly have been carved *in situ* (p. 27); and so on. Other omissions raise concern at the level of detailed observation which informs the work. For example, a piece of massive string course in Winchester style lies in the south presbytery tribune and can be easily inspected while the Winchester-style impost is published (Backhouse *et al* 1984, 130–31, No 137) (p. 11); the two arches leading into the Lady Chapel from the north transept are still there and remains of the chapel between the presbytery aisle and the Lady Chapel are visible on the outside of the aisle (p. 114).

The reader is entitled to ask what happened to the 'new approach [involving] turning to the building itself as it is the primary source of information' (p. 3). The building itself does not appear to have been closely studied yet there is plenty of information to show the stages of construction precisely.

As for the promised discussion of the medieval sources (p. 3), all we are

really given is 'Although this reconstruction of the building history relies a good deal on hypothesizing without extensive archaeological evidence [author's italics] it does seem the best way to make sense of the extant evidence. The information contained in the chronicle is, as usual, very general and provides little to suggest a firm chronology for any part of the building' (p. 84). Then follows a brief mention of what William de Waterville and Benedict could have done, and that is all.

This disappointing and expensive book has a text of doubtful value married, however, to the best published collection of photographs of the building. It demonstrates that the old-fashioned English archaeological method need fear nothing from Reilly's 'new approach'. The publisher might at least have checked that the photograph on the dust wrapper (of Peterborough cathedral's most famous feature – the west front) was printed the right way round. It is a warning of what to expect inside. Peers' account of the cathedral, cited at the beginning of this review, remains the best in print.

Donald Mackreth is archaeological consultant to the Dean & Chapter of Peterborough Cathedral.

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An architectural history of Peterborough Cathedral is available from all good bookshops.

Archaeology at the Omphalos of Christendom

Tim Tatton-Brown

Biddle, M, 1999, *The Tomb of Christ*. Sutton Publishing: Stroud. ISBN 0 7509 1926 4. Hb, 172pp, 103 illustrations, many in colour; £25.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem is one of the most extraordinary building complexes in Christendom. It is also one of the most bitterly disputed of sites, because it claims to be the site of both the death and burial of Jesus Christ. As a result of this, the building has never been studied in the detail it deserves and, remarkably, one of the best plans of the whole complex was made by A W Clapham during the British Mandate immediately after the fall of Jerusalem at the end of the first World War. (It is a splendid coloured plan, published at the very beginning of the first ever volume of the *Antiquaries Journal* in January 1921.) Even more remarkable was the work of Professor Robert Willis who, in 1849, published the first architectural study of the building without ever having been to Jerusalem!

At the very centre of the rotunda of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is a miniature building, known as the Edicule, which was constructed, in its present form, in 1809–10. It was very badly shaken in an earthquake in 1927 and probably the only thing which stops it falling apart is a 'temporary' timber and steel external

'cage' built by the British in 1947. It is this building which is the subject of Martin Biddle's splendid new book.

Whenever I have been to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, it has been impossible to spend much time in the Edicule itself because of the huge numbers of pilgrims who come here. Martin Biddle's negotiating skills with all the different church authorities (Greek Orthodox, Coptic and Latin, in particular) allowed him and his team unique access, often at night, to study and record the structure photographically and photogrammetrically in 1989, 1990 and 1992. This book could be described as a large 'interim' report which, as usual for Martin Biddle, has an exceptionally detailed and well-researched section on the historical background. It is also illustrated with many very fine coloured photographs, a large number by John Crook, who must rank as one of the best photographers 'in the business'.

an excellent and most readable book

The first main section of the book is on the 'visual sources for the study of the Edicule' and surveys the large number of surviving models, larger scale copies, drawings, engravings and paintings of the Edicule. This chapter is greatly enhanced by its many high-quality illustrations. Martin Biddle then proceeds with a series of four chapters covering the history of the Edicule, from its very tentative beginnings (as a rock-cut tomb), to its rediscovery in AD 325–26, its destruction by the Caliph al-Hakim in 1009 and its various rebuildings culminating in the present structure of 1809–10 (rebuilt following a fire in 1808). These chapters are full of fascinating detail (as expected, the whole book is a very good read) and

the long and complicated story is carefully put together. After the wanton destruction in 1009, a new Edicule was built which perhaps still survives, in part at least, behind the 1809–10 facades. Biddle suggests that the structure was rebuilt in the early 11th century, embellished by the crusaders and later stripped and left to decay, with only minimal repair, until its rebuilding 'from the first foundations' by Boniface of Ragusa in 1555. From my study of the visual sources, I would suggest a different scenario, namely that the Edicule, which is seen in almost all the visual sources up to the fire of 1808, is a total rebuilding of the Crusader period (ie mid 12th-century). Thus it is contemporary with the complete rebuilding of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as a church and convent of Augustinian Canons. The fluted columns, crocketed capitals and pointed arches of the blind arcading around the polygonal west end of the Edicule all suggest a date in the third quarter of the 12th century, not long before the City of Jerusalem surrendered to Saladin on 2nd October 1187. I see little visual evidence for the rebuilding of the Edicule 'from the first foundations' in 1555. The cladding of the east end, as shown in engravings of 1681 and 1729, may well be of this date, as is possibly the inner facing of the tomb chamber and the Tomb of Christ itself. It is also worth noting that the actual tomb is said in the 12th and 13th century to have had three large roundels or 'port-holes' in one side while, in 1345, an English traveller tells us that the tomb was 'decorated with a porphyry slab, that had lips on the sides, and in the middle of the slab there was cut a streak.' The present tomb has no visible port-holes and is certainly not made of porphyry, though it does have a groove cut across its middle – the streak? Is it possible that the earlier tomb is hidden behind a 1555 marble facing within the present tomb

chamber?

As an aside, it is worth mentioning that Thomas Becket's first tomb-shrine of before 1220, in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral, had port-holes in its sides (as shown in contemporary stained glass), as did the still surviving tomb-shrine of the 'Blessed' Osmund (not yet canonized) in Salisbury Cathedral. I believe that the latter was made for Old Sarum Cathedral in the late 12th century. Was Hubert Walter, Bishop of Salisbury (1189–93), Archbishop of Canterbury (1193–1205) and a key figure in the Third Crusade, a link here? In 1192, after the truce between Richard 'Coeur-de-Lion' and Saladin had been concluded, Hubert Walter led a group up to Jerusalem, and then requested Saladin:

That at the tomb of the Lord, which he had visited and where the divine rites were only occasionally celebrated in the barbarous manner of the Syrians, the sacred liturgy be permitted to be celebrated somewhat more becomingly by two Latin priests and the same number of deacons, together with the Syrians, and that they be supported by the offerings of pilgrims' (quoted in Biddle, p. 99).

Saladin agreed to this and ever since no one Christian sect has been allowed to dominate the Holy Sepulchre.

The final, and relatively brief, sections of the book cover 'new interpretations of the form and survival of the rock-cut tomb' and 'new discoveries: the structure of the present Edicule'. These are the most disappointing chapters. The first covers more up-to-date speculation on the form of the original tomb, while the latter deals with the recent recording work. No proper drawings are produced, only a series of 'in progress' photogrammetric wire-frame 3D computer graphics model print-

outs. There are also some 'partly surfaced' (to use the computer jargon again) isometric print-outs in hideous false colours – the main Edicule structure is shown in a sort of plastic gold. I am surprised that these wire-frame graphics have not, after seven years, been utilized to produce a set of plans, sections and elevations, with the different building materials marked. John Crook's excellent colour photographs seem to indicate that the marbles and other materials of the floor and wall surfaces inside the tomb chamber are different from those used in the 1809–10 refacing, but has a geologist yet identified the materials and their sources? A comparison of the new wire-frame plan of the Edicule (p. 124) with Bernadino Amico's plan (p. 45), which was drawn in 1593–97, suggests to me that the tomb chamber and its polygonal outer wall face may indeed lie buried behind the 1809–10 cladding. The eastern part of the Edicule (the 'chapel of the angel') seems, however, to have been demolished to floor level in 1809 and given new outer walls and internal staircases. All this is, however, still speculation and we must now await the careful dismantling and rebuilding of the Edicule, which is promised for the near future and is most urgently needed if the Edicule is not to collapse. Martin Biddle ends his preface to this excellent and most readable book with the words:

'In due course the decisions will be taken which lead to the restoration of the Edicule. This extensive and successful programme (of restoration in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre), now well on its way to completion, is not a catalogue of dissent and delay, but a record of agreement and achievement.'

Let us hope that he is right.

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The Tomb of Christ can be obtained from Sutton Publishing Ltd, Phoenix Mill, Thrupp, Stroud, Gloucestershire, GL5 2BU, Tel 01453 731114, Fax 01453 731117.

Anglo-Saxon church and medieval abbey at Chichester: a long-awaited report

Kevin Blockley

Wilkinson, D & McWhirr, A, 1998 *Cirencester Anglo-Saxon church and medieval abbey*, Cirencester Excavations IV. Cotswold Archaeological Trust Ltd: Cirencester. ISBN 0 9523196 2 4. Pb, xii + 180pp, 116 illustrations (figures and plates); £18.00 (+ £3.40 p+p).

Extensive excavations were undertaken by the Cirencester Excavation Committee between 1964 and 1966 in Abbey Grounds, Cirencester (Glos) after plans for a 16.4 ha development of the area had been put forward. A significant sequence of stratigraphy was revealed comprising two Roman structures, a substantial Anglo-Saxon church and a

large area of the medieval abbey. Interim reports were published in the 1960s and 70s, but we have had to wait for this publication for a fuller picture.

The report has clearly seen several authors over many years (each accredited at the head of their section) and it is pleasing to see that the volume has been well edited. McWhirr's introduction sets the background to the excavations, the subsequent post-excavation and editorial programme, and the excavation strategy. Figure 4 is particularly helpful in showing the location of all the trenches.

A chapter on the historical and topographical background leads us gently into the broader phasing. Bryant and Heighway describe briefly the topographical development of the site and provide us with a concise picture of the ten main phases, with general plans to illustrate the development from the Roman period to 1966. The historical evidence summarised by Evans contains valuable information, particularly for the medieval and later phases of the site.

The report on the stratigraphic sequence covers only 51 of the 180 pages in the volume, and with 57 figures in this section the written details are perhaps a little brief. The Roman buildings have been published prior to this report (McWhirr 1986). The Anglo-Saxon church is a significant addition to our knowledge of church architecture and one of the most interesting sections of the book. Brown presents the details of the Anglo-Saxon church, the plan of which is partly conjectural because areas of the building had been destroyed by later building phases or were unavailable to the excavators. Only foundations or robber trenches were found and the excavators have done a good job in reconstructing the possible ground plan. The church, as reconstructed, measures 54.6m long by 15.8m wide (externally) and as

such is one of the largest Anglo-Saxon churches excavated, on a par with Canterbury Cathedral's early 9th-century phase (Blockley *et al* 1997). My only quibble with the suggested ground plan of the Anglo-Saxon church (fig 15) is that an extra room is shown at the eastern end of the south aisle. This does not conform to the detailed stone-by-stone plans (figs 12 & 14) which show no return west of the north-east wall (W103). The dating of the Anglo-Saxon church is so sparse as to cover the entire span of the Anglo-Saxon period, although it is well argued that the church probably dates to the early 9th century.

Gem's discussion of a reconstruction and evaluation of the Anglo-Saxon church is welcome and presents a better understanding of the possible layout of the church and its crypt. His suggested date of the early to mid 9th century is further strengthened by the postscript that includes his research on Carolingian architecture (Gem 1993) and my report on Canterbury Cathedral (Blockley *et al* 1997): the former noting the abbey church of Werden an der Ruhr (c840–875); the latter the second phase cathedral possibly attributed to Archbishop Wulfric (805–832).

In the late 11th or early 12th century the Anglo-Saxon church appears to have been shortened with the demolition of the western end and addition of graves to the west and east.

The next phase, the 12th-century Augustinian abbey of St Mary, is described by Wilkinson who proposes a two-phase construction, the first of which saw the early church remaining standing whilst the eastern end of the abbey was built. This phasing shows well in figure 33 as a break on the north wall of the church (W321). Subsequent alterations to the church and claustral buildings are discussed, as is the destruction of the abbey from 1541 and the post-dissolution features. Sadly, no general discussion

of the 12th-century abbey complex was included to put the remains into a local or national context.

I would have liked to have seen an additional figure at the start of the stratigraphic section showing a block plan of all major features of all phases on one plan to a scale of 1:250 (or larger). This would have enabled a better understanding of the development and how individual elements of the churches related to one another (for example how grave H118 related to the underlying church). This was not possible with the figures provided. The main phase plans were not easy to use because the hatching was too similar for the two phases being denoted (for example in figs 33 & 57). The section drawings were clear but lacked a key so that it was impossible, without finding individual layers in the text, to determine what layers were comprised of.

The finds reports were comprehensive and well presented, although the 43 pages given over to the pottery was perhaps excessive when compared with only 51 pages for the stratigraphy. The pottery is said to have been mainly residual and of little use for dating the various phases. The justification for presenting such a lengthy report was that this was Cirencester's first published medieval pottery fabric series.

The finds section includes a useful report on the medieval tiles by Vince, and a selection of the architectural stonework by Wilkinson. The latter incorporated a study of only 10% of the total. It should be seen as vital that the remaining stonework is fully recorded and published as soon as possible, rather than forgotten. Given that only foundations survived for the abbey church, detailed study of the sculptural and architectural stonework could have been used, in conjunction with a discussion of the excavated remains, to gain a better understanding of the abbey church

than that presented here.

The few criticisms above should not detract from the immense scholarly value of the publication, which at only £18.00 (plus p+p), is good value for money and should soon be on many archaeologists' / architectural historians' bookshelves or Christmas list.

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archaeological projects throughout Britain and has recently undertaken work at St George's Chapel, Windsor and Lambeth Palace. He is also the archaeological consultant to Brecon Cathedral and currently in the final year of a PhD on the Anglo-Saxon churches of Canterbury.

Cirencester: Anglo-Saxon church and medieval abbey can be obtained from Cotswold Archaeological Trust, Headquarters Building, Unit 9,

Kemble Business Park, Cirencester, GL7 6BQ, Tel 01285 771022, Fax 01285 771033, email cots.arch@virgin.net.

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NEW BOOKS

Compiled by Charlotte Foster

900 years of Cistercian monasticism

The last 18 months have seen the publication of several works aimed at marking the 900th anniversary of the foundation of the *Novum Monasterii* at Citeaux in 1098 which led to the creation of the Cistercian order. Three of the works reviewed below compliment each other so well that one might almost believe their production had been coordinated. Any student of the Cistercians need only select these three works in order to cover the majority of current themes, whilst undergraduates and amateur researchers will find abundant material for the basis of almost any essay or project.

Cistercians in the Middle Ages

1998, David Williams. Gracewing: Leominster. ISBN 0 85244 350 1. Hb, 480pp, with maps and photos; £60.00.

Perhaps the most heavyweight of these books, both literally and academically, is David Williams' *Cistercians in the Middle Ages*. Although the price may limit sales to libraries and society collections, this substantial publication, which reflects a lifetime's work by the author, will be welcomed by those who are familiar with Williams' work on the Cistercians in Wales.

This volume concentrates on the first 250 years of Cistercian history, the period often seen as the 'golden age' of the order. The emphasis is upon the economic history of the order with eight chapters considering the economic activities of the monks. There are also chapters on the abbey sites and monastic buildings, as well as the administrative organization of

the order, its cultural activity and Cistercian nunneries.

The approach is strictly traditional and, whilst recent academic controversy or discussions are acknowledged, the author rarely chooses to enter the debates. In the epilogue the later years of the order are discussed and Williams acknowledges that it had undergone substantial change by the mid 14th century. He avoids discussing whether these changes constituted decay or whether successful adaptation to changing circumstances might be considered a sign of vitality. This lack of discussion is perhaps the most disappointing element, but it is more than compensated for by the wealth of subjects covered and the variety of original detail provided on topics as wide ranging as monastic medicine, liturgy, decoration, serfs, and ships and harbours. Illustrated in black and white with extensive endnotes, references and a full bibliography, few recent works demonstrate such a depth of knowledge of the order and provide such a comprehensive range of examples.

Available from Gracewing, 2 Southern Avenue, Leominster, HR6 0QF Tel 01568 616835, Fax 01568 613289.

The White Monks: the Cistercians in Britain 1128-1540

1998, Glyn Coppack. Tempus: Stroud. ISBN (0)7524 1413 5. Hb, 159pp, with figures and photos; £18.99

Another well-known authority on the Cistercian order in the British Isles, Coppack provides here an archaeological and architectural slant which pulls the focus closer to home, concentrating on British examples within the European context, again with heavy emphasis on the 'golden age' of the order.

Well produced in a sensible format with copious illustrations and an adequate bibliography, the lack of references may limit this book's academic usefulness. It is perhaps the most accessible recent discussion of the development of Cistercian architecture in Britain, with an emphasis on both plans and elevations. There is a disappointing lack of discussion of less tangible elements such as the use of decoration, interior arrangements and furnishings and consideration of the motivation behind the physical changes, or of the effect of the built environment upon the behaviour of its inhabitants and vice versa. Coppack's chapter on the earliest buildings is, however, one of the most comprehensive summaries of the scarce evidence for the first phases of Cistercian architecture, particularly the timber buildings.

Available from Oxbow Books, Park End Place, Oxford, OX1 1HN, Tel 01865 241249, Fax 01865 794449, e-mail oxbow@oxbowbooks.com.

The Cistercian abbeys of Britain: far from the concourse of men

1998, David Robinson (ed). Batsford: London. ISBN 07134 8392 X. Hb, 224pp, with figures; £25.00.

This joint publication from English Heritage, Cadw and Historic Scotland completes the trilogy by providing a comprehensive, updated gazetteer of Cistercian houses, allowing the student to select sites for visits and comparative study. It is the most visually attractive of the recent publications, with numerous illustrations. The first 65 pages include two introductory chapters by Janet Burton and Nicola Coldstream. Burton provides a clear and concise narration of the origins and organisation of the order according to recent scholarship, with an introduction covering topics as wide ranging as Cistercian women, Cistercians and trade, sites and depopulation, granges, and royal abbeys. Coldstream contributes a welcome reappraisal of attitudes towards Cistercian architecture and the Cistercians as builders.

The gazetteer is comprehensively illustrated in colour with maps and plans arranged in an easily accessible format and it includes a wide selection of photographs. There is an extensive bibliography, notes and an index. Each entry varies in length between half a page and four pages of text, and provides a useful summary of current and antiquarian sources, concentrating largely upon the buildings but also including a brief history of the foundation, development, patronage and suppression of each house. There are descriptions of the known phases of building, extant remains and any archaeological investigations. Once again the emphasis is on the period up to the 14th century, with the later history of each house at best confined

to a short paragraph and the details of dissolution.

Available from English Heritage Postal Sales, PO Box 229, Northampton, NN6 9RY, Tel 01604 78163.



The major gap left by these three works is the history of the order from the mid 14th century until the Reformation. This shortfall may represent a lack of sources and excavated evidence for the later years, although it is also a reflection of a previous conviction among scholars that the Cistercian order went into both an ideological and economic decline from the mid 14th century. The lack of sources for the earliest phases of the monasteries has, in the past, hampered discussion of the developments of the order in Britain. As the chapter in Coppack's book demonstrates, this is now being remedied. Perhaps it is also time that the later years were given closer consideration.

Studies in Cistercian art and architecture vol 5

1998. Meredith Parsons Lillich (ed), Cistercian Studies Series No 167. Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo. ISBN 87907 776 X. Pb, 299pp, with figures and photos; \$23.99.

Another welcome addition to this eclectic series, volume 5 concentrates upon the 'monks abode', with contributions considering the cellarers' domain in Denmark, infirmaries in England and Wales, bastides in France, Cistercian dormitories and individual examples of the abbot's residence, the chapter house, the refectory wing, an eastern range and a water mill at various Cistercian houses throughout Europe.

The preface includes a call for a re-examination of the monastic plan. There is no bibliography but each contribution has extensive endnotes with references. This book provides a useful discussion of a wider range of sites than is often seen and gives a truly European context.

Available from Oxbow Books' Park End Place, Oxford, OX1 1HN, Tel 01865 241249, Fax 01865 794449, e-mail oxbow@oxbowbooks.com.

Stones laid before the Lord, architecture and monastic life

(1964) 1999. Anselme Dimier, Cistercian Studies Series No 152. Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo. ISBN 87907 652 6. Pb, 306pp, with figures and photos; £5.99.

This is a revision in English of Dimier's original French work which was largely responsible for a revival of interest in monastic architecture. There are chapters on the buildings of several forms of monasticism: Benedictine, eremitical, Cistercian and mendicant. It includes a consideration of architecture as a reflection of the life of the monks, the buildings of the monastery, ascetic reaction and the later developments of the 17th and 18th century in Europe. Illustrated in black and white, it lacks a bibliography and references. The text provides, however, a useful starting point for those new to monastic architecture whilst also acting as a reminder of many basic concepts and the origins of the academic genre for old hands who may not have had the opportunity to read the text in its original publication. A return to such seminal texts can often provide inspiration for new avenues of enquiry or a revision of accepted

themes.

Available from Cistercian Publications Inc, 1201 Oliver Street, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-3850, USA.

Other titles

Sanctity and scandal: the medieval religious houses of Nottinghamshire

1998, D Marcombe and J Hamilton (eds). Nottingham University Press: Nottingham. ISBN 1 85041 088 7. Pb, 109pp, with figures and photos; £8.95 (+ £1.50 p+p)

This volume is the work of the Archdeaconry Research Unit, a group of volunteer researchers based at the University of Nottingham's Local History School, and represents the culmination of their third major project. It is an excellent example which other research groups, amateur or professional, would do well to emulate.

The work is essentially a gazetteer of monastic sites in the county, prefaced by 10 pages of general scene setting and economic background. Each site is presented with discussion of its architectural and economic history, monastic life and the dissolution, illustrated with photographs, line drawings, plans and historic depictions. The simple format, open style and helpful glossary make the book an accessible text for amateurs, whilst the comprehensive coverage and full bibliography provide a useful introductory source for academics. Useful either as a travelling guide book to take into the field or as a starting point for any desk-based

research project, a similar work is required for every county in Britain.

Available from Continuing Education Press, Education Building, University Park, Nottingham, NG7 2RD.

The medieval parish churches of York: the pictorial evidence

1998. Barbara Wilson & Frances Mee, The Archaeology of York Supplementary Series. York Archaeological Trust: York. ISBN 1 874454 19 1. Pb, 168pp, 118 figures, 9 colour plates; £12.95.

A general introduction discussing the medieval churches of York and the nature of the available evidence is followed by what is essentially another gazetteer, albeit an alternative one which concentrates on presenting the sites through their appearance in paintings and drawings. Fifty churches are covered, presented in alphabetical order by dedication, each item varying from a few hundred words to several thousand, with between one and a dozen illustrations. Residents of the town will find the book accessible enough to provide a few afternoons' entertainment visiting some of the sites and comparing the illustrations with surviving structures. The extensive referencing will prove an invaluable time-saver for anyone with a particular interest in an individual church, whilst those with an interest in the history of art may find the variety and style of images of a single building of interest in itself. This is an impressive source book and a useful initial port of call for any researcher.

Available from C Kyriacou, York Archaeological Trust, Cromwell House, 13 Ogleforth, York, YO1 7FG, Tel 01904 663000, Fax 01904 640029.