

Saxon sculpture: realising the potential

Jeffrey West

Everson, P & Stocker, D, 1999, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture, Volume V, Lincolnshire*. OUP for the British Academy: Oxford. ISBN 0 19 726188 4. Hb, 510p, 494 black and white plates, 30 figures, 8 tables; £130.00.

Lincolnshire is a large county. The boundaries are ancient and until united in the 11th century the county was administered as three separate 'Parts' of Lindsey in the north and east; Kesteven in the south-west; and Holland in the south-east. The Lincolnshire escarpment runs north-south on the western side of the county and provides an abundance of high quality limestone. While stones of lesser quality for building and carving were quarried in the Lincolnshire Wolds in the north-east of the county, there are no natural stone deposits in the fens skirting the Wash in the south-east.

When the authors of the Lincolnshire volume took up their task, they formed the view that 'the county's early medieval stone sculpture [had] been under-studied and its potential largely unrealised' (p.1). The observation is justified, although through a process of agglomeration in local antiquarian notes and modern records 111 carvings had been identified at 62 locations. In view of the dearth of written records for Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire, stone sculpture and carved stone monuments represented an important body of primary evidence and 'one of the few sources of information of any sort for the period that is available in quantity to sustain analysis' (p. 9). All medieval

church sites in the county were visited, with the result that the corpus of material grew to 371 stones at 160 locations (p. 4), of which 187 monuments at 96 separate locations comprise the main catalogue (p. 27). The increase is significant, and the new corpus is of an importance far beyond its value as a catalogue of artefacts. An indication of its significance and the light that sculpture can throw on broader historical issues is provided by the core chapters introducing the 'Monument Groupings' and setting out the 'Conclusions' drawn from the analysis of a wide range of material and literary evidence. Without stretching the evidence unduly, the authors move confidently from the analysis of the sculpture to the discussion of quarries and production, trade and transport, the function of monuments, the foundation of graveyards and the status of burials, monastic settlement and ecclesiastical provision, church administration, the growth of towns and regional contacts. Many of these topics are explored in Peter Sawyer's long-awaited history of Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire – published a matter of months before the *Corpus* volume appeared in print (Sawyer 1998) – and Ulmschneider's recent article on the late 7th and early 8th centuries (Ulmschneider 2000) – and yet neither of these works invalidate Sir David Wilson's assertion that the volume offers 'new insights into the cultural and political history of Lincolnshire' (Preface). There can be little doubt that the authors have established a datum line from which future studies of Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire will move forward.

The layout of the Lincolnshire volume follows that established for the series. The fact that there are two authors and three further contributors is hardly worthy of remark: the text is coherent, clear and confident in tone. What is noticeable is the apparent wealth of maps and line drawings. In

fact, there are fewer than are in the south-east England volume of the *Corpus*, although being full page, both maps and line drawings stand out and are clear, legible and informative: a helpful adjunct to the text discussion and a real aid to the analysis of distribution, form and detail. This is particularly well demonstrated by the coverage of the mid-Kesteven grave covers, one of the large groups of grave covers which together constitute 104 items of the 187 artefacts in the main catalogue. In addition to three pages of text, all examples are diagrammatically represented on five pages of drawings comprising figure 9, with drawn details comprising figures 11 & 12, a table listing the corpus by county, and a full-page distribution map (fig. 12). Despite the authors' concern that the maps should not be taken as 'exhaustive' (p. 4), they establish the current state of research. What is more, both the quantity and quality of visual material supporting the text is an efficient and effective means of conveying information and, thereby, provides the reader with every opportunity to analyse the group as a whole, as well as place individual objects in their 'artefactual' context. The same approach is taken with the Lindsey covers (pp. 51–57, table 6, figs. 14 & 15), but not the 'Fenland' group and its relatives. Even though drawings of the Lincolnshire examples would have balanced the discussion of the Kesteven and Lindsey covers, 58 of the 64 examples of the Fenland group occur outside Lincolnshire (table 5, fig. 13). While this seems to justify omission, it is evident from the petrology (p.49) that the 'out-county' examples were exported from Lincolnshire and are thus part of the 'Lincolnshire corpus' providing evidence of the regional economy, transport, and trade.

The distribution maps of the various monument groupings also present topographical and geological information. 'Quarry zones' based on

petrological analysis are marked and can be located relative to sites, local and regional topography, and the coastline. Although this is not a new approach, it is revealing and adds weight to the emphasis placed on sea and river transport as means of distribution. While sea transport is probable in relation to the use, or reuse, of imported millstone grit from Yorkshire (pp. 28, 81), it is the only viable means of transport to account for the distribution of the Fenland covers in east and south-east England (table 5, fig. 13). Distribution on this scale presupposes organised production at the quarry: a factor indicated as much by the pattern of distribution in relation to river systems, as by the consistency of form and detail of the major groups of monument. The deductions made from this single element of the material evidence throws some light on industrial practice and, in the process, also points to the development of a stable society in Lincolnshire during the later 10th and 11th centuries. The evidence for a 'continuing tradition' of Anglo-Saxon sculpture after '1066' presented in chapter ix tells much the same story, and there is no reason to challenge the conclusion that 'the stone industry in Lincolnshire was not greatly affected by the Norman Conquest' (p. 90). It is evident from a reading of the chapter on the 'overlap' and the 'continuing tradition' of stone sculpture after the Conquest, that the authors are fully equipped to discuss Anglo-Saxon and Romanesque sculpture on equal terms. The so-called 'Anglo-Saxon' towers of Lincolnshire, although notable by their absence in the catalogue, are judged to be among the 'earliest manifestations of an expansion of stone quarrying which followed the Conquest' (p. 90), and will be the subject of a separate publication.

On a several counts the Lincolnshire volume of the *Corpus* has exceeded expectations, not least in

realising the potential of an important body of material evidence for the history of the county in the Anglo-Saxon period. It should stimulate further discussion not only of the artefacts, but also of the wider historical issues the authors have sought to elucidate. If there is a difference of view it is about the function and iconography of some notable sculptures, such as the Edenham roundels, the Edenham cross shaft, or the less well known grave covers at Hackthorn and St Mark's, Lincoln. These, however, are minor points of erudition in an important body of work that is a substantial contribution to the history and archaeology of Lincolnshire.

Jeffrey West is the Secretary of the Advisory Board for Redundant Churches.

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The *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture, Volume V, Lincolnshire* is available from all good bookshops.

Churches militant

Peter F Ryder

Brooke, Christopher J, 2000, *Safe sanctuaries. Security and defence in Anglo-Scottish border churches 1290–1690*. John Donald: Edinburgh. ISBN 0 85976 535 0. Hb, 408pp, 174 figures; £25.00.

One of the most interesting things about the medieval parish churches (and chapels) of Britain is their diversity and the manner in which they take on regional characteristics, occasioned by their physical or historical background. One of the most intriguing of these regional groups is the defensible churches of the Borders, buildings in which a troubled political history is reflected structurally and architecturally. It is this relationship between history, geography and architecture that Chris Brooke addresses in his new book, *Safe sanctuaries*. In a region that saw 400 years of strife, following the outbreak of war between England and Scotland late in the 13th century, the rich man might well have his castle or tower (and, in the 17th century, the richer tenant farmers their bastle houses), but the only strong-walled relatively fireproof building to which the majority of villagers could retreat was the church.

This well-researched book is nothing if not thorough. After a useful introduction, Brooke takes us on an antiquarian travelogue through all six Border Marches, starting in the East, Middle and West, English and Scottish in turn. This book is much more than a gazetteer of churches and monastic buildings, it is an enthusiastic survey that alternates descriptions of buildings with stories, quotations and verses from contemporary ballads that underline the often lurid detail of local history. It also touches on the many castles and towers that played a role in these stories. Every ancient church and church site in the region – well over 500 – is assessed and described. The book is profusely illustrated, with a wealth of clear black and white photographs, old prints, maps, plans and drawings.

The legacy of the four troubled centuries (the 'Three Hundred Years War' between England and Scotland, followed by another 100 years of

reiving and general lawlessness) comes down to us in a variety of ways. The most obvious is in the highly fortified churches such as Newton Arlosh (Cumb) and Ancroft (Nhumbs). Here the west tower is virtually a tower-house in itself, with a vaulted basement, and upper chambers clearly designed for residence (enforced or otherwise) by being provided with such features as fireplaces and garderobes. Burgh by Sands (Cumb) is another obvious case – its ‘severely defensible’ west tower has immensely thick walls and an iron ‘yat’ closes the doorway to the nave. As if this was not enough, there was a second tower, now much altered, attached to the east end of the chancel; parishioners and clergy would have retreated to their respective ends of the building.

These spectacular examples are exceptions to the rule. Often one has to look a little harder for evidence of defensible intent. Those who know the churches well may find scope for friendly debate. One recurring theme is the blocking up of a tower arch, as at Kirkwhelpington, Hartburn and Newbiggin, all in Northumberland and all with complex structural histories. At Kirkwhelpington and Newbiggin the tower arches were blocked when vaulted chambers were inserted in the base of their towers (two, one above the other, at Newbiggin). At Hartburn the barrel-vault seems to go with the 12th-century tower arch and the blocking wall might conceivably be a post-medieval insertion intended to prop up a tower riven by structural cracks. Certainly the mass of rubble masonry constricting the foot of the newel stair, here seen as ‘deliberately blocked in order to form this passage’ also serves the purpose of holding up the badly-cracked treads of the stair. At Kirkwhelpington too the ‘series of remarkably massive buttresses’ gives ‘a strong visual impression of robustness’, but the buttressing is a response to a structure that is perennially threatening collapse.

Another intriguing stair is at Brigham (Cumb), where hands and feet are required to clamber up what is more like a steep and twisting chimney in a cave than a formal piece of architecture. But is this a piece of defensible design or simply a vernacular attempt at fitting something that might functionally approximate to a stair in a restricted space?

Other towers, like Ingram, Edlingham, Eglingham and Stamfordham (Nhumbs) present bleak facades of masonry unbroken by anything but the smallest openings; even the belfries often have nothing but narrow single lights. It is perhaps unfair to include the Saxon towers of Bywell and Ovingham in Tynedale; their fenestration too is sparse, but no more so than contemporary towers further south. They have their own puzzles, such as their mysterious high-level doorways (this reviewer’s favourite interpretation entails a Saxon predilection for hang-gliding backed up by Pope Gregory’s famous ‘non angles sed angeles’ comment).

In a handful of cases a stone vault provides the ultimate fireproof roof to a church. Ladykirk, on the north bank of the Tweed, is a splendid c1500 building with such a vault, and a west tower with three levels of vaulted chambers. This was used in the 18th and 19th centuries as a prison, as was the remarkable tower at Greenlaw where Brooke seems wisely wary when it comes to unravelling medieval and post-medieval phases: ‘no other church in the six Marches has quite the remarkable intricacy of adaptation and usage to which this site has been put’. Further south the steeply-pointed tunnel vaults of nave and transepts make Boltongate ‘one of the architectural sensations of Cumberland’ as Pevsner observed. At Kirknewton (Nhumbs) the tunnel vaults of chancel and south transept, springing almost from ground level, are so far removed from textbook

architecture as to be virtually undateable and at Bellingham a rebuilding came as late as the 17th century, when the 13th-century aisles were replaced by 1.3m thick side walls and remarkable ribbed stone vaults. Clearly even the Union of the Crowns could offer little sense of security in the North Tyne valley.

Another form of less explicit testimony to the troubled centuries is seen in the many churches which have been reduced in size or simply abandoned. This, of course, can simply be the result of other historical factors, but mutilations, contractions and losses occur in such numbers as to suggest that many buildings had suffered violence at some time. Kirkwhelpington managed to lose both aisles and transepts, and Newbiggin its aisles.

On the Scottish side of the Border, although there are far fewer ancient churches, Brooke is no less thorough, chronicling barely-discernible sites and fragmentary ruins, and turning to documentary sources to spell out the vicissitudes suffered by the great Border Abbeys (Dryburgh, Jedburgh, Kelso and Melrose) at the hands of English armies. Physical evidence of fortification at monasteries is commoner on the English side of the Border, although surprisingly sparse at some of the houses which suffered worst of all, notably Hexham. In north Northumberland Hulne Friary (Carmelite) has a curtain-cum-precinct wall, gatehouse and a remarkable tower-house that is usefully provided with a ‘1486’ date stone. Lindisfarne Priory is equally well defended; where else is a refectory provided with a barbican? Further south the Premonstratensian Blanchland has some interesting defensive detail in the stair of its tower, oddly sited at the end of the north transept. As if this was not enough, the Prior had his own tower in the west range, with a crenellated gatehouse adjacent. I have seen an unpublished plan showing

foundations (seen in the earlier 20th century) of yet another tower within hand-shaking distance of these, at the west end of the vanished nave.

It is clear that even the seclusion of monastic life could not totally guarantee freedom from violence. Sadly few physical sanctuaries could really prove safe. This is underlined by a photograph of the stonework of the west front of Lanercost Priory (Cumb), pockmarked by musket balls in some otherwise unrecorded encounter. One of the most telling and bizarre images is the last photograph in the book, of an effigy of an unknown abbot of Dundrennan Abbey. He is carved holding his pastoral staff with one hand whilst the other clutches a dagger that penetrates his breast; meanwhile a small figure, spilling intestines from a stomach wound, sprawls at his feet. Does this denote the retribution suffered by his assassin, or is it perhaps a sideways reference to betrayal symbolised by a death like that of Judas (Acts 1.18)? Once again, the story is lost to us.

This is an excellent and readable volume for layman and academic alike. It is concluded by the sort of appendices that can only result from a true labour of love, summarising firstly all the buildings judged defensible, secondly providing a 'dramatis personae' of Border history, thirdly an expansive glossary of English and Scots terminology, and finally 15 pages of bibliography.

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Safe Sanctuaries can be obtained from John Donald Publishers, c/o Burlinn Ltd, 8/5 New Street, Edinburgh, EH8 8BH, Tel 0131 556 6660, Fax 0131 557 6250.

In search of the Golden Minster

Tim Pestell

Heighway, C & Bryant, R, 1999, *The Golden Minster: The Anglo-Saxon minster and later medieval priory of St Oswald at Gloucester*, CBA Research Report 117. CBA: York. ISBN 1 872414 94 X. Pb, 267pp, 202 illustrations and plates; £32.00.

This book is the final report of an important research project concerned with understanding the Anglo-Saxon minster, later the Augustinian priory, of St Oswald's in Gloucester. Work began as a rescue excavation in 1975 when it was proposed to build a block of flats to the south-west of the upstanding remains and, although the threat never materialised, the excavation and accompanying survey of the surviving fabric demonstrated that the priory church contained elements of Anglo-Saxon date. This led to a research excavation carried out between 1976 and 1983, dedicated to understanding the underlying Anglo-Saxon building. As a result, we now have a far clearer picture of a Mercian minster church founded under royal patronage, of some significance at its time of foundation but which, with shifting political fortunes, never attained long-lived importance.

Despite excavations ending some 18 years ago, the project's results have always been easily accessible in some form, thanks to a steady stream of interim reports and spin-off articles. Indeed, the stone-by-stone elevation drawings of the nave north wall seem almost like old friends. The reader should be warned that this particular element has been rephased yet again, but it is slightly disappointing to note that the north side elevation drawing was more accurately scaled for publication in the site's fifth interim

report, published over 20 years ago in the *Antiquaries' Journal* for 1980.

Several other more finished considerations have appeared elsewhere. For instance, many elements of Michael Hare's excellent discussion of the documentary evidence for St Oswald's were published in his 1992 Deerhurst Lecture *The Two Anglo-Saxon Minsters of Gloucester*. Similarly, the reader wanting to discover more about the Anglo-Saxon bell-founding pit in the nave will be disappointed to find only 11 lines in the final report and a reference leading instead to a 1993 article in *Medieval Archaeology*. Fortunately, this report still has much that is new and interesting to offer.

Most obviously, the structural development of the Anglo-Saxon minster is discussed in some detail. This is also the part which will be most familiar to readers through the site interim reports. Considerable revisions to the dating and phasing of the building have been made in the meantime, and the life of the Anglo-Saxon church is now much extended and refined. Some difficulties remain and one senses that this has as much to do with the circumstances of the excavation as with the intricacies of stratigraphy. For instance, Building 'A', a sunken structure immediately to the east of the main Anglo-Saxon church, was only partially excavated in an area no larger than 5m by 5m because it lay in the back garden of an adjacent property. Less than a quarter of this building, as reconstructed, was excavated and the suggested plan is also tentative. Thus, a tiny platform of mortared rubble 560mm square is interpreted as the foundation for a pier base. A further three pier bases are then reconstructed to give a subterranean vaulted chamber with upper floor. The overall size of the crypt is proposed from the subsidence cracks in two adjacent modern houses; the third house along, without such settlement, is presumed to lie outside the crypt area. Upon

this limited evidence Repton is cited as a possible parallel, although it seems that the form of Repton has influenced the initial pier foundation interpretation. Given the importance of crypts for housing relics and of St Oswald's relics to this particular foundation, Building 'A' may well have been one of the more significant elements to the St Oswald's minster complex. It is therefore frustrating that we still do not know even where the entrance was, or how it related to the main church to the west.

Perhaps more eye-catching are subsidiary details of the church's internal layout. Features such as paving, steps and screens were always ephemeral, but as presented here they demonstrate the fluidity of arrangements (and thus decoration) consequent upon, and possibly structuring, liturgical requirements. In particular, they emphasise the ways in which the church's internal spaces, already small through the use of porticus with small entrances, were visually broken up still further.

There are many other sections of interest, not least the discussion of the several burials and coffins of late Anglo-Saxon date. These form an important addition to our knowledge of such burials, supplementing the information from other sites such as York Minster and Winchester Old Minster. Some may question the way burials across the site have been allocated to particular 'burial generations', 'a generation being the period of time taken to fill the space available before burying over it again' (p. 195). As an interpretive tool this presents some danger in that certain areas may well have been more popular and favoured for reburial ahead of others. Nevertheless, certain structural developments meant that a number of graves are dateable to the 10th and 11th centuries, within which several traits were identified, notably the use of charcoal layers on which to lay the body or coffin. The apparent Anglo-Saxon nature of this

tradition seems reflected in its rapid curtailment at Gloucester around the late 11th century. Also of interest, and described in passing, was the boar's tusk found at the right shoulder of an Anglo-Saxon female adult (coffined charcoal burial B383). Although not mentioned, this finds a ready parallel in the two pig tusks seen at the left elbow of burial HB56, to the east of the apse at Deerhurst (Rahtz 1976, 37). There they were only tentatively identified as 'possibly some form of amulet'; the St Oswald's discovery may strengthen such an identification and suggests that more examples may await recognition.

Finally, the discussion of the coffin burials is useful. As the preamble makes clear, their reconstruction was far from easy as the ironwork was mostly in poor condition. The result is the discovery that about 30% of the Anglo-Saxon burials excavated had coffins of some sort, and of these, 12 were elaborate constructions with right-angled fixing brackets spaced along the upper and lower edges. In one case (burial 241), the brackets included two decorative bifurcated terminals bent back into a loop while other coffins had only a few angle brackets and no nails, indicating pegged or jointed woodwork. More generally, nail heads had been plated with a non-ferrous metal, probably some form of tinning, and therefore much of the ironwork must have been decorative rather than purely functional. Together, these show a sophistication in grave furniture and a concern with burial ritual in a Christian context which we are only beginning to appreciate.

There are many other aspects of this report which will reward the reader. For instance, the extensive catalogue and illustrations of the sculptural and architectural stonework will form a valuable resource for specialists. Similarly, the documentary background is a model of handling sparse Anglo-Saxon primary material judiciously and meshing it well with

the more plentiful post-Conquest sources. There are, however, other more frustrating aspects. Poor design layout means that figure 5.14, a plan showing the location of charcoal burials, appears between a description and numbering of the various skeleton burial positions and the tables listing these skeletal arrangements. Similarly, figure 2.57, reconstructing the 18th-century topography of the priory area, insists on showing burials coded by sex with symbols actually described in a figure three chapters further on; a key to accompany this plan would surely have been more simple and logical. Perhaps the greatest cause for concern from such an important research excavation is the pitiful resolution at which most sections have been reproduced. The graphic images throughout are smart and the reconstruction drawings of the church in chapter one positively snazzy. But to have important sections through the church reproduced at (for instance) 1:60 is simply too small and indistinct to be of any real use. Figures 2.59 and 2.60 in particular are poor and do little to illuminate certain points in the text, for instance the discussion of a possible wooden step within the church in Period IVb (p. 69). There are other occasional confusions. Figure 2.63 shows, apparently, north wall W74 of Building 'A' on section 121, but the diagram locating this section (Fig 2.4) suggests instead that this must have been Building 'A's west wall, as it lay immediately to the east of the east porticus.

These are, of course, only niggles. This report represents an important and welcome contribution to our understanding of a Mercian church, and to wider debates in understanding Anglo-Saxon architecture and ecclesiastical archaeology. Equally valuable, although excavation was at times limited in extent, the complete digging and recording of features has

resulted in a publication of greater detail than any contemporary rescue excavation could hope to achieve. The outcome is a publication which can act as a model for the investigation of other similar sites. The challenge will now be for a new generation of targeted research projects to build upon works such as this.

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The Golden Minster can be obtained from the Council for British Archaeology, Bowes Morrell House, 111 Walmgate, York, YO1 9WA, Tel 01904 671417, Fax 01904 671384, Email archaeology@compuserve.com.

NEW BOOKS

Anglo-Saxon Christianity: exploring the earliest roots of Christian spirituality in England

1999, Paul Cavill. Fount: London. ISBN 0 00 628112 5. Pb, xii + 211pp; £7.99.

Anglo-Saxon Christianity is intended to provide a history of early Christianity in England, mainly through the literary and textual evidence, with about a quarter of the book devoted to a selection of various texts. The book is aimed at readers with little or no knowledge of the subject and is somewhat simplistic in its approach and language, with very short sections in each chapter and terminology such as 'a big book at Exeter' to describe the Exeter Book. The chronological history of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England, and the sequence in which events occurred, may be difficult to follow for those without some background in the period.

After four general chapters on the conversion, on why Christianity as presented by the missionaries appealed to the Anglo-Saxons, and on Christian life in Anglo-Saxon England, there are two chapters on the Celtic background, including an examination of Cædmon's hymn, which is judged to be a genuine work. The book concludes with two

chapters on the fusion of pagan and Christian ideas as seen in *Beowulf*, an ostensibly pagan work but viewed as an examination of the question of the good heathen, and the *Dream of the Rood*, an overtly Christian poem which uses traditional Anglo-Saxon warrior images. The book would have profited from an index and some illustrations, for example of the Ruthwell Cross. Despite its shortcomings it does manage to convey something of the depths of emotion to be found in Anglo-Saxon Christian literature.

Margaret L Faull

Available from all good bookshops.

St Augustine and the conversion of England

1999, Richard Gameson (ed). Sutton Publishing: Stroud. ISBN 0 7509 2087 4. xii + 436pp, 8 colour plates, 25 plans and maps, 79 black and white prints; £30.00.

In 1997 there were extensive celebrations of the 1400th anniversary of the arrival of St Augustine in Canterbury to convert the English to Christianity. Dr Richard Gameson has now edited the collected papers from a conference held in Canterbury to mark the occasion. Sixteen

chapters by experts in their fields examine the historical, documentary, textual, architectural and archaeological evidence from the period, not just in England but also extending to relations with the Continent and, of course, with the native British Christians.

There is much here to interest readers of *Church Archaeology*, perhaps the most relevant being the chapter by Eric Cambridge on the architecture of the Augustinian mission. This examines the nature of early churches in south-eastern England, such as St Pancras, and SS Peter & Paul at Canterbury, and those at Rochester and Reculver, as well as their dedications. It is suggested that there may have been an initial adoption of Gallic forms, related to Merovingian patronage, but that these forms were then rejected in favour of Italian ones, perhaps as a deliberate cultural statement.

St Augustine and the conversion of England is a substantial work of solid scholarship which makes a major contribution to the field. It is unfortunate that there is no list of illustrations and that the colour plates are not numbered, although referred to by Roman numerals in the text; also the index is very much one of people and places and a comprehensive subject index would have been helpful. But these are minor quibbles and Dr Gameson is to

be congratulated on bringing this work to print in such an otherwise well-edited and attractive format so quickly after the conference.

Margaret L Faulk

Available from all good bookshops.

Medieval decorative metalwork in England

1999, Jane Geddes. Society of Antiquaries of London: London. ISBN 0 85431 273 0. Hb, 411pp, 6 maps/584 plates and figures; £75.00.

This is a major national corpus on a neglected area of church decoration. There are brief introductory sections on medieval ironworking and carpentry, which Geddes is well equipped to write. These are followed by a short but informative discussion of the symbolism of church doors.

The main body of the book discusses the development of decorative church metalwork – door hinges, handles and knockers, chest fittings and grilles – from the Romanesque period to the late Middle Ages (Parts 4 to 6). The development of various elements is considered in detail and illustrated from surviving examples. Where appropriate, the iconography of decorative elements, for example Romanesque picture doors (pp 67–74), is also discussed. Major stylistic innovations marked the 13th century and led to examples of doors covered with iron scrollwork. This period also saw the introduction of stamped work using dies to produce more regular and delicate decoration on the terminals and surfaces of the ironwork. In the later Middle Ages decorative iron worked cold with chisels and files was increasingly used. The flowing ironwork of earlier periods produced by hot working was replaced by chisel-cut tracery and relief work. Distinctive products of this period were elaborate lock and

knocker plates with fine tracery or relief decoration. These sections are well illustrated with a large number of clear photographs.

The book is completed by a gazetteer which aims to include ‘all the decorative ironwork used for doors, chests and grilles made in England between c1050 and 1350 that are known to the author’. One suspects that little has escaped her attention. The gazetteer is usefully ordered alphabetically by parish. The entries locate and briefly describe the surviving decorative metalwork and provide bibliographic references; most of the metalwork described is also illustrated by at least one plate or drawing. The book is quite expensive, but it is an essential reference work for those studying medieval church decoration and furnishing, and is a valuable addition to the literature. The work is more than a gazetteer, for it also throws light on an area of medieval metalworking and craftsmanship.

Ian Scott

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

The Irish Round Tower

1999, Brian Lalor. Collins Press: Cork. ISBN 1 898256 64 0. Hb, 247pp, with figures and photos; £20.00.

This book is both timely and welcome. Brian Lalor brings to the work an interesting and varied range of experience: he is an architect and travel writer and worked on several major international archaeological projects. George Petrie’s early work on round towers, published in 1845, was so influential that there was no serious study of the whole body of towers until George Lennox Barrow’s

The Round Towers of Ireland in 1979. This was welcomed for its detailed inventory, but also justly criticised for its cavalier use of written sources and unsubstantiated claims of very early dates. Twenty years later, Lalor has used Barrow’s factual material, checked when possible, and provided his own introduction and inventory. The first six chapters cover many topics including the prehistoric background in Ireland, the historical context to the 13th century, possible models abroad, the functions of towers, and the information from written sources. The discussion of structural features in chapters 4 and 5 is particularly useful, but there are reservations over the historical introduction. The emphasis on a monastic church, for example, the use of the word ‘oratory’ for early stone churches, and the claimed ‘urban’ nature of the great churches, have been questioned recently. The core of the book is the inventory (pp. 100–235), covering 73 towers of which some trace survives; the missing towers are listed. Examples are described alphabetically by county and illustrated with good black and white photos. The entries are clear and perceptive, and the suggested dates are well argued, based on features like doors and windows and the nature and treatment of the stonework. Perhaps the claimed tower at Dungiven (Derry/Londonderry) should be removed from the list – it was definitely the stair tower of a late medieval tower-house. There is also doubt over the inclusion of Tamblaght in the same county. This book is, nevertheless, very useful, both as a reference work, and for anyone searching for these remarkable buildings in the Irish countryside.

Ann Hamlin

Available from all good bookshops.