

# Reviews

*Edited by Jackie Hall and David Baker*

*Intersections: the Archaeology and History of Christianity in England, 400 – 1200. Papers in Honour of Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye Biddle*

Henig, M and Ramsey, N (eds), 2010  
British Archaeological Reports, British Series, 505  
ISBN 978-1-4073-0540-0  
Pb, 266pp, b&w figs, £49

*Richard Gem*

This volume was fittingly planned as a tribute to the exceptional academic achievements of Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye Biddle over a forty-year period together: tragically, however, it has also turned out to be a memorial to Birthe following her untimely death. In this double capacity, the array of authors and standard of their papers in this volume are a worthy acknowledgement of Martin's and Birthe's contribution to scholarship and to the range of subjects with which they have fruitfully engaged. The papers cover topics including the transition from Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England, the topography of historic towns, the

archaeology of burials and cemeteries, documentary sources and history, artefactual evidence, buildings archaeology, and much more. If, therefore, some of the papers have to be singled out in this review, it is because they will be of particular interest to readers of *Church Archaeology*.

In relation to the Roman and Anglo-Saxon transition, papers on the churches in three urban centres provide significant insights. In London Alison Telfer presents a summary of recent archaeological work at St Martin's in the Fields: there a group of early 5th-century burials was discovered, and nearby a grave with a late-5th-century pot, while the cemetery soil also contained pottery continuing into the late 5th century; a brick and tile kiln was in use in the second half of the 5th century and could suggest the construction of a substantial associated building. Anglo-Saxon occupation of the site commenced no later than the 6th century, while 7th-century burials suggested perpetuation of the earlier use of the site. At Gloucester Carolyn Heighway re-evaluates the evidence for Christian origins. By the late 5th century there was a general

dereliction of the urban fabric, but continued occupation in some areas. At the dock-side site of the later church of St Mary de Lode, a ruined public building was demolished and on its site a timber building was erected containing three burials of perhaps 5th-century date. Then in the late 7th century the Anglo-Saxon minster of St Peter was founded further to the east (either within or without the city wall). Meanwhile on the site of the former fort at Kingsholm, a short distance to the north, a cemetery was in use through the 4th and 5th centuries; much later this area saw the establishment of an Anglo-Saxon royal residence. At St Albans, Rosalind Niblett reviews briefly the evidence for the possible continuation of the city into the sub-Roman period, but she focuses mainly on a re-assessment of the topography of the town in the time of Offa, suggesting that the royal residence was centred on the remains of the forum and basilica complex, possibly including also the Roman south gate. The cult centre of St Alban and the new abbey founded by Offa thus stood apart on the hill above the royal centre. Only at a much later date,

in the 10th or 11th century, was the forum-basilica finally demolished and the church of St Michael constructed on part of the site.

A topic that has caused animated discussion at recent Society conferences is the date at which fixed fonts became a standard fixture in churches. It is particularly welcome, therefore, to have here John Blair's insightful analysis of the prehistory of English fonts. He sees the provision of monumental stone fonts as being in general typical of the period from the late 11th century onwards, while prior to this period various options were available. A number of significant considerations are adduced, including: that baptismal equipment might need to be portable; that containers and vessels used for baptismal water might not differ substantially from those used for secular purposes; that by the late Anglo-Saxon period infant baptism would have been the norm. Thus, while stave-built wooden tubs might be suitable for the baptism of adults (by immersion plus affusion); shallower vessels, such as wooden or metal troughs, bowls and basins, set on a stand, were more suitable for infants. In looking for evidence to support this, he points to skeuomorphs of such forms in later stone fonts, as well as to surviving Scandinavian examples. This analysis does not exclude the existence of a small number of Anglo-Saxon stone fonts, of which he acknowledges six examples as recognisably surviving. The earliest of these is at Deerhurst, where he suggests the form of the font may

reflect the sort of stone well-head to be seen in Italy. The 9th or 10th-century font at Potterne is open-bottomed and was perhaps originally an actual well-head; but its baptismal function is clearly indicated by its inscription. For the 9th-century fragments at Godalming he offers a new interpretation as a stand to support a bowl in another medium; and he interprets similarly the early-11th-century piece at Melbury Bubb (now inverted). Worth reading alongside Blair's paper is that by Anthea Harris and Martin Henig on hand-washing and foot-washing in late antiquity and the early middle ages, which draws attention to another, sometimes ritual, function involving water; here again the types of vessel used might be portable or, as in later medieval religious establishments might take monumental form.

Reference to the Deerhurst font points to another paper, by Michael Hare, who discusses a stone fragment found some miles away at Elmstone Hardwicke, bearing comparable sculpture to the font. This, he argues convincingly, is part of a stone erected in commemoration of Æthelmund (Elmstone = Æthelmund's stone), the father of Æthelric the patron of Deerhurst. Thus the material manifestation of a minster extended out from its centre into its surrounding territory.

Finally note may be taken of John Crook's analysis of the west front of the Romanesque cathedral of Winchester. He offers conclusive evidence that there was never a single west tower, but that the nave continued through uninterrupted to

the west facade, possible with a gallery in the terminal bay. The two west bays of this nave were separated on either side by solid walls from flanking structures projecting beyond the line of the aisles: structures he interprets as twin west towers. The evidence for these towers is traceable up to clearstory level, but does not survive higher. The comparanda for the west end are not discussed in detail: but it may be observed that the proposed flanking towers would have been extraordinarily oblong in plan, and it may be wondered how much higher they would have continued on this plan (were they perhaps more like the arrangement at Lincoln?).

The absence of specific reference here to other contributions in the volume should not be taken as any reflection of their value: all the papers are excellent and the whole is worth reading from cover to cover. The volume is also well produced and well illustrated and, all in all, it can be thoroughly recommended.

*Richard Gem was formerly Secretary of the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England and is President of the SCA. He has researched widely in architectural history from late antiquity to the Romanesque and is currently writing a book on St Peter's in Rome, as well as papers on Anglo-Saxon topics*

*Mortuary Practices and Social Identities in the Middle Ages*

Duncan Sayer and Howard Williams (eds), 2009

University of Exeter Press, Exeter  
ISBN 978 0 859898 31 7  
Hb 320pp, figs, £60

*Helen Geake*

This book is a collection of 13 essays in honour of Heinrich Härke on his retirement from the University of Reading, and edited by two of his former PhD students, Duncan Sayer and Howard Williams. But unlike a normal Festschrift, it focuses tightly on a single aspect of Härke's multi-faceted research, namely what we can learn about social identity from the archaeological evidence of burials. Because of the quality of the essays, the volume should become a well-thumbed presence on the bookshelves of the more affluent (it costs £60).

There is a good mix of contributors, from recent PhDs to eminent professors, and (appropriately for Härke) from Germany, Denmark and Britain; most papers are very well written and clearly argued. The book concentrates on the pre- or para-Christian European world, but several papers are so fascinating (such as Susanne Hakenbeck's tracing of 'Hunnish' modified skulls across Europe, or Catherine Hills's review of early-medieval DNA studies) that they will appeal to the general reader as much as to the specialist.

The paper by Howard Williams on using images to help us imagine past events will

also be of interest to anyone who commissions or produces guidebooks or display boards – as well as those of us who just look at them. Using the example of early Anglo-Saxon graves and funerals, he argues that they are not just passive interpretations of existing knowledge, but actually skew the way that we think about what's been reconstructed, so that future research is affected by them too.

The outstanding paper in the volume is Grenville Astill's paper on Anglo-Saxon burial practices after c.700 AD. It is full of new and stimulating thoughts, arguing that mortuary practices are not just to do with ideas and beliefs about death and the individual, but are also inextricably linked to the practical ways in which people live. Of course rituals and beliefs cannot stand outside everyday life (as Robert Chapman argues in his Marx-inspired paper), but often we act as if they do. This is a particular risk in the post-Conversion period, where the ostensible similarity of belief then and now makes it difficult to separate our own assumptions and motivations from those operating in the past.

Astill's clear and convincing explanation of how agricultural techniques and settlement form may have affected late Anglo-Saxon mortuary practice is refreshing, and his line of reasoning also clarifies some long-standing problems concerning the start of churchyard burial. Why do churchyards take so long to really get going, bearing in mind the early date at which some people are buried around churches? Why are there so many single burials or

small groups of eighth- and ninth-century date scattered through settlements? Astill links the location of these burials, among fields and in ditched boundaries, to hypotheses about the antiquity of Anglo-Saxon field systems and their symbolic importance to people of the time, and points out that churches were a subsequent innovation in most communities. The gradual marriage of cemetery and church may also help with the knotty problem of why the earliest archaeological evidence on many church sites is not a building, but burials. Although one of Astill's examples has now been re-dated to the post-Conquest period (Wallis and Anderson 2009) this in no way affects his conclusions.

Readers of *Church Archaeology* will probably also find Roberta Gilchrist's paper thought-provoking. It looks at post-Conquest priests' burials, identifiable from the routine inclusion of funerary chalices and patens, and looks at how the medieval world came to terms with a priestly as well as a secular elite; the one celibate and peaceful, the other virile and violent.

There are other papers with a more oblique relationship to church archaeology, but where fruitful connections can be made. Elite burials of the pre- and para-Christian era are generally marked across Europe by rich grave-goods and, often, above-ground structures such as barrows and stone enclosures or settings. Stefan Burmeister and Karen Høilund Nielsen's papers look at these, and are a very helpful summary (for the tragically monoglot English) of German elite burial in the Roman

period, and Danish cremation burial in the sixth and seventh centuries, respectively. They help to emphasise that the analogies between earlier monumental burial investments and later investment in churches and elaborate Christian grave structures are conspicuous, if not necessarily straightforward. Rich burials, like churches, give an opportunity to commemorate the dead and at the same time to show off one's wealth and taste to the living. Church building and decoration is arguably more effective than demonstrative burial; churches have proved to be a remarkably permanent advertisement of the power and status of their builders and benefactors.

The editors and publisher should be congratulated for their good judgement, careful editing, and consistently high production values including an excellent index and consolidated bibliography. It is a pity that the high price did not allow any colour plates, but this is a minor niggle. I'm just sad that the book could not have had a snappier and more memorable title; *Mortuary Practices and Social Identities in the Middle Ages* conceals a really good read.

*Helen Geake is a finds  
advisor for the Portable  
Antiquities Scheme*

Wallis, H and S. Anderson, 2009,  
*A Medieval Cemetery at Mill Lane,  
Ormesby St Margaret, Norfolk*,  
East Anglian Archaeology 130

*English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages, History and Representation*

Saul, N, 2009

Oxford University Press

ISBN 978 0 19 921598 0

Hb 413 + 17pp, 78b&cw figs and plates, £65

*David Stocker*

Do you often make unwise commitments? Have you been asked by a stern journal editor, for example, to finish that review you promised a year ago (and haven't started yet) and, thinking that you can skip quickly through the book, have you agreed to complete the review in a day or two? Behold your reviewer with this book! But, unfortunately, a rapid skip through Nigel Saul's latest book proves impossible. It is just too interesting, too well-written, too insightful, to be accorded formulaic treatment. This book demands respect and engagement, and it does so in such a reasonable tone, that there is little prospect of quickly skimming it.

Nigel Saul sets out to provide the modern summary of medieval church monuments in England (though useful and informative references to continental examples and to monuments in other British countries are made, where relevant). This locates the book on the shelf next to F H Crossley (1921) and Brian Kemp (1980); but it is much more satisfying than either. Crossley's book was more fully illustrated, of course (with pictures of about 280 monuments), and following Prior and Gardner's example (1912), he treated brasses

as a distinct category of artefact. Kemp's book dealt with the medieval period in about 40 pages and so, even though he considered monuments of all materials together, his work cannot compete with Saul's offering. He is absolutely correct, of course, that 'where the social and cultural significance of monuments becomes the centre of attention it makes far better sense to look at all types of monument together'(6). So Saul learns from various recent, more archaeological, studies (for example by Jon Finch – 2000) and brasses are considered alongside monuments in all other media throughout, in his effort to throw light on many different aspects of medieval society, and not just on matters of dress, arms and sculptural style. Quite right too; all societies reveal a great deal about themselves in their monumental sculpture, though they often reveal something quite different from what was intended. The model for Saul's approach was established in his earlier (2001) book, in which the famous series of monuments at Cobham (Kent) were the starting point for a detailed analysis of the social milieu of the Cobham family in the 14th and 15th centuries.

For discussion purposes Saul divides the subject into novel blocks, only one of them defined by chronological period (the early medieval). In fact, I thought this the weakest part of the book. Saul is dependent here on other publications for views and opinions and, possibly as a result, the references are not always satisfactory, and some of the views reported are decidedly ill-digested. Paul Everson and I are said to be

responsible for proving that 40% of pre-Conquest monuments in Lincolnshire were found at Minster sites, for example, and that monuments can therefore assist to bolster the 'Minster' thesis of parochial church foundation (24). Far from it! In fact we were puzzled, not only that we could not associate later pre-Conquest monuments with known Minster sites, but that we had great difficulty detecting any Minster sites at all. But to this alien period Saul also brings worthwhile insights, such as the revolutionary character of the bust-monument at Whitchurch (Hants); although, like most of the commentators on whom he is relying, he is unable to explain how this remarkable stone worked as a monument.

But when Saul reaches more familiar, chronologically later, ground he engages us with beautifully written compelling narratives, always starting from the fundamental observation emerging from studies of the last 20 years: that the whole point of monumental sculpture after the 12th century was to elicit prayers for the deceased to help their souls through purgatory. Purgatory was not elaborated and codified until the early 13th century, of course, but Saul stresses that, thereafter, eliciting prayers was always the primary motivation for the erection of monuments. Chapter 3 is a very useful geographical round-up of regionality in monumental design and also contains useful sections on iconoclasm and patronage, whilst chapter 4 is an important development and synthesis, once again taken from the work of many different authors, disposing of old

ideas about monumental production that have stood for several generations, and demonstrating the importance of quarry centres in the production of certain sorts of monument. Then follows an expert assessment, drawn mostly from documentary sources, attempting to cast light on the processes by which patrons' commissioned monumental sculpture (chapter 5). And not just its technicalities either. Following writers such as Paul Binski (1996), Saul is equally interested in the intellectual background against which contracts were drafted, and in the liturgical context for which they were assembled. What influenced the thinking of those who commissioned Sir Richard de Stapleton's monument in Exeter cathedral in the 1320 or 30s, for example, with its dominant sculpture of his horse and his page? Liturgically speaking, the suggestion that monuments were often provided for services marking the year's 'mind', the anniversary of death, is very plausible (112). This assessment leads into chapter 6 – perhaps the best in the book – exploring the many ramifications of our recent understanding that monuments were intended as 'generators of prayer' (121). Here Saul has a larger canvass on which to develop some of the ideas brought forward in his 2001 book. Against such an intellectual background, for example, it is immediately obvious why Oxford don Ralph Hamsterley commissioned five brasses to himself in different churches c.1517. It was not a matter of self-aggrandisement (Hamsterley was represented as a skeleton, after all),

but simply a way of maximising the number of passers-by who might be impressed, or shocked, into offering prayers for his soul on its perilous journey through purgatory. The same impulse drove wealthy individuals, of course, to commission monuments for their parents and children and other relatives as well as for themselves.

The second half of the book is more conventional in some ways, discussing monuments in more traditional categories. Thus, after a polished summary of the development of composition and design, there follow five chapters on ecclesiastics, military monuments, civilians, lawyers and women. Some of this material is familiar, treating much discussed themes (the development of armour, women's dress etc.), nevertheless it is a refreshing account, offering many new insights. I found the section on women particularly interesting, as Saul set himself the task of understanding whether there is anything distinctive about the presentation of women on their tombs. Despite the possibility that the magnificent monument to Alice De la Pole at Ewelme might reveal her own hand, and therefore the frame-of-mind of a fifteenth-century dowager duchess, in general the answer to Saul's question appears to be in the negative. Few medieval women were presented as quite such nonentities as Agnes Gate (at High Easter, Essex), however, whose inscription runs to nearly 100 words, of which fewer than 20 actually relate to her (294-5); the remainder are devoted to her husband's career, even though he

was not commemorated here. In this fine chapter Saul also brings together previous discussions of the 'Philip Larkin' group of memorials which depict husband and wife holding hands, and he finds some ground for thinking, along with Larkin, that all that survives of them is indeed love (304)!

In similar ways, Saul brings fresh material to bear on the discussion of 'cadaver' monuments and, as this topic is so much discussed (e.g. by Pam King), this is also an achievement. Starting from his fundamental view of the monument as a prayer generator, he must be correct to note that such *memento mori* would be at their most effective when being viewed by their own patrons, though he does not labour the possibility that they were intended to shock prayers out of their audience. We are guided instead through the poetic and theological world of John Baret, whose wonderfully integrated tableau of chantry chapel and monument at St Mary's Bury St Edmunds was carefully conceived around the image of his own cadaver (319-21). In such explorations we glimpse a network of family ties linking the patrons of such monuments, and indeed the possibility of continental influences acting upon them all.

The book closes with a section on the semiotics of inscriptions. Apart from some rather dodgy material about the period prior to the 13th century, this is another cracking chapter which explores more new ideas, such as that a growth in the content of inscriptions in the 14th and 15th centuries corresponds with the shift from burial within monasteries



(where biographical details of the deceased could be preserved in the conventual memory, probably in written documents), to burial within parish churches (where a monument's identity could easily be lost within a few generations unless clearly labelled). His consideration of these matters leads Saul into a skilful summary and discussion of late-medieval literacy in general, arriving at the surprising conclusion that the monumental evidence must indicate a much larger literate population than is often proposed. For the monument to work as a stimulus to prayer, after all, large numbers of the laity must have been sufficiently literate to read the name of the deceased, otherwise they would not know for whom to pray. Even the increasingly lengthy biographies being offered in monumental inscriptions, then, were aimed at arresting attention and soliciting sympathy, in order that the prayers of the living would be offered for the souls of particular individuals. In adopting this view, of course, Saul is following the long-term trend in medieval studies, enunciated in this field by Philippe Ariès (1981), to understand medieval people as increasing in self-awareness as the medieval centuries went on; a stance opposed to Burckhardtian notions of the reawakening of individuality at the Renaissance. Such a discussion of Burckhardt and Ariès towards the end of his book, demonstrates that Saul has indeed achieved his high-level ambition. He has integrated evidence from monumental sculpture with the broadest and most profound discussions of the character of medieval society.

This is a terrific book, then, and is only held-back by OUP's lack of consideration towards their potential readership. This book should be accessible to everyone with an interest in churches, yet it is published at an inaccessible price, in hardback. Furthermore, although the small number of black-and-white images are all perfectly clear (with the possible exception of fig.62), the book is hardly glamorously produced, and many interesting monuments are mentioned which deserve illustration here. Come on Oxford! Why not bring this excellent book out in paperback, in an edition with treble the number of illustrations? But even presented in this manner, Nigel Saul's is still the best general book available on church monuments and those who can, should break open the piggy-bank to buy a copy.

*David Stocker is SCA's current chair. He works for English Heritage and is Hon. Visiting Professor of Medieval Studies at the University of Leeds.*

Ariès, P, 1981, *The Hour of Our Death*, London.

Binski, P, 1996, *Medieval Death, Ritual and Representation*, London.

Crossley, FH, 1921, *English Church Monuments A.D. 1150-1500*, London.

Finch, J, 2000, *Church Monuments in Norfolk before 1850: An*

*Archaeology of Commemoration*, BAR BS 317, Oxford.

Kemp, B, 1980, *English Church Monuments*, London.

Prior, ES and Gardner, A, 1912, *An Account of Medieval Figure Sculpture in England*, Cambridge.

Saul, N, 2001, *Death, Art and Memory in Medieval England: The Cobham Family and their Monuments, 1300-1500*, Oxford.

*Medieval Military Monuments  
in Lincolnshire*

Downing, M, 2010

Archaeopress, BAR British

Series 515, Oxford.

ISBN 978 1 4073 0644 5

Pb, vi + 124 pp, b&w figs, £32.

*Rhianydd Biebrach*

Mark Downing's latest county guide to medieval English military memorials deals with the 62 surviving examples in Lincolnshire, a group which have received little scholarly attention hitherto. This is all the more surprising as Lincolnshire contains the largest number of this type of effigy after Yorkshire, some of which are extremely fine examples of their kind. The collection ranges from the mid-13th century to the 1470s and is arranged chronologically, allowing for a clear demonstration of the developments in armour with which the book is primarily concerned. Four short but informative chapters provide contextualisation for the bulk of the study, a lavishly illustrated gazetteer of the county's military memorials, which deals exclusively with sculpted monuments and so brasses and incised slabs are not discussed.

The book, although clearly aimed at students of the monumental effigy, and particularly of sculpted depictions of armour, presupposes no prior knowledge of such artefacts and is therefore equally accessible to non-specialists. A glossary of technical terms is provided at the back, along with four very helpful labelled diagrams to illustrate the

descriptions given in the glossary itself. With the non-specialist further in mind the introduction gives a brief account of the commemorative function of medieval memorials and the way armour and costume were used to communicate status as well as vocation. In the following chapter is a short account of the varying ways in which the monument industry was organised and monuments produced, which succinctly summarises the latest thought on this elusive issue. In a Lincolnshire context, the military monuments can be arranged into 3 groups by material. There are 3 Purbeck marble monuments imported from Dorset and 8 are from the midlands alabaster workshops. The remainder are local limestone products indicating that a number of well-established workshops must have been in operation in the county in the later Middle Ages. The author is also correct to remind us that the bare stone we see today is not what the medieval mind would have regarded as appropriate and that different surface finishes of gesso, paint, gilding, glazes and fictive jewels would have been routinely applied.

Chapter 3 deals with losses and methods of dating medieval memorials. The debate over the former issue is a very interesting one and it is too often popularly assumed that losses and damage may be ascribed to iconoclasm during either the Reformation or the Civil War. The author makes it clear, however, that later maltreatment and modern mishaps have been just as blameworthy. The dating of monuments is a point

which greatly preoccupied earlier generations of antiquarians and historians, but it is also a process which the modern student must go through if a monument is to be put in its correct historical context and appropriately analysed. Although Downing is aware of the pitfalls of dating by arms and armour he claims that this method 'is a good starting point' (13). Even so, it should be pointed out that additional details such as decorative motifs and the attitude of the body must also be taken into consideration.

The fourth chapter examines the Lincolnshire corpus in more depth prior to the detailed individual accounts given in the gazetteer. Here the focus on the development of armour is more sharply drawn than hitherto and the monuments are grouped into 4 stylistic groups defined by their military attire. Group A is the earliest and largest of the 4, formed by the mail-clad, long surcoat, cross-legged and often sword-handling type seen from c.1250 to the middle of the 14th century. B confines a short-lived transitional period from c.1340-60 where elements of plate armour appear, leading to group C, characterised by straight-legged, praying warriors clad in a mixture of mail, plate, leather and textile. From the 1420s to 1500 group D appears, whose armour was entirely of plate. There are only 4 effigies in this later group, a situation for which the author offers no explanation, but which is likely to be linked to the rising popularity of brass memorials and incised alabaster slabs in the period.



The vast bulk of this study is taken up by the gazetteer itself, in which each of the 62 monuments is subjected to a rigorous descriptive critique. Each effigy is illustrated twice, sometimes a general and a closer shot, sometimes from two different angles. The photography itself is a major contribution as monuments are often inaccessible within locked churches, and it is of no matter that the images are all monochrome as so few of the effigies retain their polychromy. The current position, condition, heraldry, length and posture of each monument is described, its identity is discussed, and a commentary is given on its significance, similarity to other examples in Lincolnshire and elsewhere, any notable or unusual features and other relevant concerns. This information is arrived at from a variety of sources, not least the author's own deep and encyclopaedic knowledge of armoured effigies. He has also, however, taken into consideration other historians' work, antiquarian accounts and a range of contemporary documentation which he uses to question traditional assumptions and suggest possible candidates where the identity of the commemorated is unknown. Each monument is therefore given a thorough 'going over' and as a whole the gazetteer represents the culmination of an enormous amount of research. Unfortunately however, it is only right to point out that the text is occasionally marred by minor issues such as typos and incorrect punctuation, errors which should have been picked up in the editing process.

These are minor quibbles with an otherwise highly informative and accessible study which will be indispensable to students of medieval armour and military effigies, and of considerable utility to future historians, for whom Downing has done much of the leg-work.

*Rhianydd Biebrach has recently completed a PhD on monuments and commemoration in the diocese of Llandaff c.1200-c.1540, at Swansea University and is now extending this research to the rest of south Wales.*

*Military Effigies of England and Wales. Vol. 1: Bedfordshire – Derbyshire.*

Downing, M, 2010

Monumental Books, Shrewsbury

ISBN 978 0 9537065 1 8

Pb, 149pp, 266 b/w figs, £20

*Sally Badham*

There are 978 carved military effigies in England and Wales which date from the period up to 1500. Mark Downing knows, as he has devoted much of his leisure time over some twenty years to examining and recording all of them bar two (of which one is smothered with cement and hidden under an organ and the other has been walled up). This total includes both complete and fragmentary examples and Downing's quest has taken him to museum and archaeological stores as well as churches. He has already published full accounts of those in Shropshire, Worcestershire and Lincolnshire. With this volume he has started a new project to publish county guides with a summary catalogue of every example. This volume covers the 131 effigies in Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Cumberland and Derbyshire. Volume 2 covering Devon, Dorset and Essex will have been completed by the time this review is published, with a further six volumes expected within the next four years. Scotland and Ireland are excluded for now, but may be the subject of further studies later.

After a brief introduction and list of the locations covered, the

main body of the text is devoted to the catalogue itself. A full A4 page is devoted to each effigy. Each entry lists the location, date, person commemorated, material used, position, length, condition, heraldry, posture, a description and references. Not all the information is available for every effigy. No attempt has been made to carry out detailed new research to establish the identities of those commemorated by effigies which have not previously been investigated in detail, as to do so would have taken many more years. For many effigies the stone type is not known; but reliable petrological analysis is rarely available and only Purbeck marble, alabaster and wood are easily identified by most people. Finally, the bibliographical references are limited to the main sources (although this does include manuscript sources as well as those in print). These points might be regarded as shortcomings by some, but a 'definitive' work is too often an unpublished work. In my view, having this information in the public arena now is greatly to be preferred.

It should also be mentioned that the descriptions are full of technical armour terms, which may initially appear off-putting to the non-specialist. However, readers are given to aids to help them at the back of the book. The first is a full glossary explaining the meaning of each technical term. The second is a series of four line drawings of military brasses from four successive periods of armour development, with the term for each item of armour labelled. Using these aids, even a novice will be

able to understand the description and learn in the process.

The entry on each effigy is complemented by two photographs – usually a side view and a top shot. These are mostly clear and of good quality, being printed on glossy art paper. The problem of obtaining a top shot without the use of professional equipment has regrettably meant that too often the bottom of the effigy is omitted in these photographs, but usually the detail of the feet and foot-support can be viewed in the side views.

Most locations boast at most two effigies, but there is an exceptional collection of six military effigies to members of the de la Beche family at Aldworth (Berks), known locally as 'the Aldworth Giants', all having been originally over 6ft in length. Usually such large numbers of effigies to a single family are the result of a gradual accretion over the centuries, but not here. They commemorate Philip de la Beche (living 1335) and his wife Joan de la Zouche and five of their six sons. The sons were not such good breeders as their parents; only two sired children and those of one died without issue. In 1364 the last of the sons, a cleric, died, with only a single nephew to carry on the name. The effigies were commissioned in one or two campaigns in the mid-fourteenth century. Most carvers would have produced a series of near-identical effigies, but the workman deployed at Aldworth provided effigies in different postures and wearing variations of the armour fashionable in the mid-fourteenth century, with exquisitely carved

detail. The finest figure, albeit sadly damaged, is at the east end of the north aisle; he is in act of the raising himself, resting his elbow on the slab, crossing his legs and facing the viewer. When undamaged and resplendent in their full polychrome this series of military monuments must have been an even more impressive sight than they are today.

Most effigies were more-or-less life-size; one exception listed here is that at Long Whittenham (Berks), which is only 2ft 2ins long. This is because it rests at the bottom of a piscina in front of the bowl. The cusped gable of the piscina is decorated by a pair of flying angels; they probably originally supported a winding sheet with a tiny image of the knight's soul. The strangest location for an effigy must surely be that at Chilton (Bucks) where the figure has been re-used and built into the outside east wall of the nave, above the roof of the chancel; a high ladder is needed to view and photograph it. At Kedlestone (Derby) the monument to Ralph de Curzan and his wife is buried beneath the floor, with just quatrefoil openings through which the faces can be viewed. Three other effigies – at North Wingfield (Derby) and two at Astbury (Cheshire) – are to be found outside churches; none of them are likely to be true churchyard monuments, but were probably ejected from the church at a restoration.

The volume features a number of other unusual effigies, some of national importance. This includes the alabaster wall-mounted monument at Bakewell (Derby)

which shows Sir Godfrey Foljambe (d. 1376) and his wife as demi-effigies emerging from clouds; presumably this represents their resurrected bodies in heaven. At Burrough Green (Cambs) a knight and lady of the de Burgh family are shown resting on a bed of stones, only two more with this imagery being known in the entire country. Possibly the finest alabaster effigy featured is that at Bunbury (Derby) to Sir High Calverley (d. 1394), which, although not mentioned in Downing's description, retains traces of original paint and gilding. Also worthy of note is the series of three alabaster monuments at Ashbourne (Derby) to members of the Cockayne family. The Purbeck marble effigy at Twyford (Bucks), dating from c. 1260-70 and possibly commemorating Ralph FitzNicholas, shows the figure wearing a closed helm. Wooden effigies were probably commonplace in medieval England, particularly from the late thirteenth century to the third quarter of the fourteenth century, but only 93 of all types are known to survive, with a further 27 documented but lost. They form a particularly vulnerable type of monument, being liable to destruction by wood beetle, damp rot and fire. The finest examples listed in this volume are two at Clifton Reynes (Bucks), although there are also other less well-preserved effigies.

In conclusion, this well-produced volume will tick boxes for several categories of reader. It will be of great value to those already interested in either medieval armour or church monuments; even dedicated enthusiasts will be unlikely to be

able to match Downing's depth of knowledge and the photographs and references in particular will be considerable assistance to their studies. The volume is also accessible to non-specialists who will use the catalogue as a guide as to what military effigies are to be seen on their travels. The format, which has evidently been thought through with considerable care, makes it an ideal quick reference guide. It deserves a space on the bookshelves of any medievalist with an interest in ecclesiology and, when the series is complete, it will prove to be a reference work unlikely to be superseded for many years to come.

*Sally Badham (FSA) is President of the Church Monuments Society and the author of several books on medieval monuments.*

*The City Bunhill Burial Ground,  
Golden Lane, London  
Excavations at South Islington  
Schools, 2006*

Connell, B. and Miles, A, 2010  
Museum of London Archaeology,  
London  
ISBN 978 1 901992 91 5  
Pb 62pp, 62 b&w and col ills, £9

*Fiona Shapland*

This volume covers the excavation of part of the City Bunhill cemetery, Golden Lane, by MOLA (then MoLAS) in May-June 2006. The City Bunhill burial ground, on the edge of the City of London, was in use for only 20 years between 1833 and 1853, but in this short time was used for the burial of over 18,000 people. These individuals were drawn from a wide area of London, but were generally poor, as this was a very cheap place to be buried. They were also, it seems, nonconformists or dissenters from the Anglican church. The nonconformist nature of this burial ground is, frustratingly, never fully explored in this publication, but clearly marks the cemetery out from other excavated 19th-century burial grounds in the capital.

The availability of substantial documentary evidence has allowed the authors to include several interesting and unusual elements in part 1 of this report, which covers the site and its history. A section on the generally part-time undertakers who worked at City Bunhill is particularly fascinating; moonlighting undertakers in 19th-century London seem to have had day jobs as varied as milkmen,

tailors and publicans. Several contemporary accounts of the burial ground and the surrounding area are also included, and although some of these perhaps did not need to be quoted in full, problems with the burial ground vividly brought to life include grasping attendants, worries over the health effects on those living nearby and the incredible, at times illegal, density of burials at this site. This final point has now been confirmed by archaeology; the excavations in 2006 covered only 10m x 15m, an estimated 3% of the total cemetery, but uncovered the remains of nearly 250 individuals, often buried five or six deep in the same grave pit.

The osteological data on the skeletons recovered from this site is presented in part 2 of the publication. Skeletal analysis can be difficult to present to the layman, and some inclusions, such as those on skeletal indices, will be of little interest to the general reader. The information provided on age, however, reinforces the evidence from burial registers of a shocking level of infant and child mortality during this period, and some of the traumatic injuries found, including broken noses and jaws, echo the contemporary descriptions of this area as one of frequent brawling and domestic violence. The finding of rickets in the skeletons of several young children adds to the picture of urban deprivation.

The skeletons recovered from this site included unusual cases of tuberculosis and syphilis, and a particularly fascinating group of remains showing evidence of post-mortems and dissection (one of

which provides the striking cover image). The rare survival of hair in several cases provided an extra resource for investigation, and the publication includes a description of isotope analysis. Overall, part 2 of this report presents a thorough and detailed account of the skeletal remains from this site, which is especially important as the osteological remains have, in accordance with current guidelines, been promptly reburied, and will not be available for future study.

The excavation of a part of the City Bunhill cemetery has added considerably to a growing body of archaeological data on the lives and deaths of the poor in 19th century London, and this volume provides an unusually readable and well presented account of the archaeological evidence. The clear writing style, the many high quality images, and the inclusion of a satisfying amount of background and documentary information make this publication accessible to non-professionals and archaeologists alike.

*Dr Fiona Shapland is  
a Leverhulme Research  
Fellow at the Dept. of  
Archaeology, University  
of Reading*