

The Interview: Professor Richard K Morris

Interviewed by David Baker

Our past President Richard Morris is a polymath – he read English at Oxford, studied music at York, and then turned to archaeology. He served as the Churches Officer for the CBA, responsible for setting up archaeological advice networks for churches and cathedrals, and later became its Director. He was Director of the Institute for Medieval Studies at the University of Leeds, Visiting Professor at the University of York and is currently Professor of Conflict and Culture at the University of Huddersfield where he supervises research topics on church archaeology and ecclesiastical geography. He is also the Archaeological Consultant for Beverley Minster. From 1996 to 2005 he served as a Commissioner of English Heritage. He has chaired the Ancient Monuments Advisory Committee for England, the Expert Panel of the Heritage Lottery Fund, and is a former trustee of the National Coal Mining Museum for England. Today he is a trustee of the York Archaeological Trust, the Landscape Research Centre, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, a member of the North-East Committee of the Heritage Lottery Fund and chair of The Blackden Trust in Cheshire, a research centre based on Toad Hall and The Old Medicine House. He is a Frend Medallist of the Society of Antiquaries of London and in 2003 was appointed OBE for services to archaeology.

Richard has written extensively on the archaeological study of churches and buildings, and on the historical geography of parish churches. In recent years he has collaborated with Glenn Foard on approaches to the archaeology of medieval and early modern battles. In parallel, he has worked as an historical biographer, and on themes relating to aviation and warfare. As composer and actor, he is one of the key figures in the Abbey Shakespeare Players who have performed each summer for the last 26 years in the ruins of St Dogmael's Abbey near Cardigan in West Wales, where the west range is the stage and the audience sits in the cloister garth.

Your seminal Churches in the Landscape was first published in 1989. What would be the key revisions in a 2014 second edition?

That book is not really susceptible to revision. This not because it doesn't need amendment, but because almost everything in it does. How do you re-write everything? To take one example, there has been fundamental work on the context, character and chronology of the emergence of the local church between the 9th and 12th centuries – I am thinking of papers by Paul Everson and David Stocker, and game-changing work by scholars

like John Blair and Helen Gittos. My solution would be to leave the book as it stands but add an additional chapter that surveys development of the subject and brings thinking up to date.

What research strategies do you feel could most usefully inform difficult debates about conflicting claims of worship / mission and conservation?

While mission and conservation are often supposed to be in tension they are really mutually reinforcing. It is easy to blame problems in mission on something



Fig 1
Richard Morris at the 2012 SCA Cork conference, pictured here on the field trip at Leacanabuaile (Photo: Jackie Hall)

impersonal – the roof leaked, the coffee was cold – and in result the building is made a scapegoat. But Christianity is an historical religion, and why should care for one area of history threaten another?

Simon Jenkins has a Thousand Best Churches. What's your Baker's dozen, and why them?

St Mary, Kempley (Gloucestershire), for wallpaintings, dates and woodwork;
 Holy Trinity, Wensley (North Yorkshire), because it is rich, eventful and poses many puzzles;
 Holy Trinity, Blythburgh (Suffolk – the Cathedral of the Marshes), for its angel roof (there could be a lot of these; Fig 2) and Britten [the composer];
 St Mary, Lasingham (North Yorkshire), because I have been working there;
 SS Mary and Barlok, Norbury (Derbyshire), for its space, glass and monuments;
 St Gregory's Minster, Kirkdale (North Yorkshire; Fig 3);
 St Andrew, Weaverthorpe (North Yorkshire), because when I was there in July three years ago the churchyard was full of Marbled White butterflies (Fig 4);

Nearby Rudston (East Riding of Yorkshire), because of the connection with Winifred Holtby;
 St John the Baptist, Longbridge (West Midlands), 1957, for reasons you will find in my latest book, *Time's Anvil*;
 SS James and Paul, Marton, (Cheshire) – timber-framed, linked to Alan Garner's novel *Strandloper* ;
 Christ Church Spitalfields (London);
 St Peter's Harrogate (North Yorkshire), because that is where I sing on Sundays and the choirmaster is the finest musician for whom I have had the privilege of working.

Fig 2
An angel on the roof of the church of the Holy Trinity, Blythburgh, Suffolk (Photo: GothicBohemian)

Fig 3
St Gregory's Minster in Kirkdale (Photo: Doc Brown's Pictures)

In reviewing Richard Morris' latest book, Time's Anvil: England, archaeology and the imagination, for The Times, Francis Pryor observed it 'allows us to regain possession and to make archaeology personal again'.

*Fig 4
A marbled white butterfly (Photo: Notts examiner)*

Other recent publications include Twentieth-century England: an aerial history (2013); The archaeology of English battlefields (with Glenn Foard, 2012) as well as numerous papers on subjects ranging from Jarrow and Lastingham to Second World War battlefield sites.

David Baker is a partner in Historic Environment Conservation with his archaeologist wife Evelyn. He has served on St Albans DAC for many years and is a member of Rochester Cathedral's Advisory Committee. He was appointed in 2012 to the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England as the nominee of the Society of Antiquaries of London and the Council for British Archaeology.