

# Reviews

*Edited by Duncan Wright*

*The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*

Edited by Hamerow, M, Hinton, DA, and Crawford, S, 2011  
Oxford University Press, Oxford  
ISBN 978 0 199212 14 9  
Hb, 1,112pp, 104 illustrations, £95

*Duncan Wright*

It is 35 years since the last appearance of a multi-author compendium of Anglo-Saxon archaeology (Wilson 1976), and thus the publication of the sizeable *Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* represents a particularly welcome addition to current early medieval scholarship. Indeed, it is almost certain that the latest piece will, in similar fashion to its predecessor, be rapidly viewed as a seminal series of papers and provide an invaluable resource for all scholars and students of Anglo-Saxon England. Rather than an encyclopaedic compendium or practical handbook, the editors hope that the *Oxford Handbook* will emphasise aspects of Anglo-Saxon society and culture in which archaeology has made a particularly significant contribution.

Whereas in 1976, seven chapters were sufficient to summarise current understanding of Anglo-Saxon archaeology, the extent to which the scope and depth of study has since been transformed is reflected in the 52 papers included in the *Handbook*. Divided into ten broad themes, although the character of religious life is referenced in almost all of the chapters, there are several which deal specifically with the Church and its development throughout the period. Included in the 'Rural Settlement' section, Richard Morris discusses our changing perception of the local church network in England, and in particular highlights the remarkable new insights brought about by landscape-orientated approaches. Moving away from text-based scholarship which dominated the discipline until the 1970s, methodological improvements have been made within local, regional and thematic studies. Morris explores this evolution through four groups of themes, providing a sharp and succinct summary for each key area.

The first theme, that of attributing dates to churches in the countryside, reveals how many

buildings previously viewed as 'Anglo-Saxon' seem on closer study to have been built after 1080. The work of David Stocker and Paul Everson for instance has shown that an entire corpus of structures, the so-called 'late Saxon' towers of Lincolnshire, appear to be works of the earliest generations after the Conquest (Everson and Stocker 2006). Such studies illustrate that there is much still to learn about the timing and processes by which local churches were founded, but Morris is correct in stressing that location-specific research cannot be taken as representative of the nationwide picture. There remains a strong evidential bias towards the south and east of England, and research is increasingly revealing considerable regional variation in early medieval church development. Similar divergent trends, Morris notes, are also apparent in the burial practices of the 8th to 10th centuries, which forms the second theme of the chapter. The traditional view of non-Christian forms being quickly replaced by interment in cemeteries is now widely regarded as untenable, and despite excavated examples featuring a southern but particularly eastern bias, a plurality

of practice even on a local level is the increasingly prominent theme. The final two themes of the chapter discuss building materials and aspects of Anglo-Saxon church archaeology that extend beyond the traditional 'Anglo-Saxon age', as various strands are expertly drawn together.

Whilst Morris' chapter is primarily concerned with the development of local churches in the landscape, the section on the 'Archaeology of Religion' is focussed more towards detailing the archaeology of religious practice itself. John Blair's precise introduction delineates some of the persisting challenges but also recent advances made in research, highlighting again the increasing prominence of landscape-based approaches. Inspired by the work of prehistorians such as Richard Bradley, early medievalists are increasingly aware of the natural world and its role in shaping the perception and utilisation of locations for 'religious' activities, a line of enquiry extrapolated further by Sarah Semple, whose chapter presents a phenomenological approach to the study of early medieval holy places. Blair also notes the increased knowledge amongst scholars of the range and variety of material culture associated with Anglo-Saxon religion, demonstrated in the *Handbook* by chapters such as Elizabeth Coatsworth's. In addition to the notable expansion of investigation of church sculpture and its iconography, studies of materials that have survived rarely, such as textiles, are providing a broader insight of the way in which churches, and indeed high-status secular buildings, were likely furnished.

Whilst there is clear agreement amongst the contributors regarding most aspects of study, there remain some detectable divergences of opinion in other areas. Perhaps most significant is the debate surrounding the way in which we may detect minsters through archaeological evidence alone, and indeed if this is possible at all. Whereas John Blair continues to argue that a strong and distinctive ecclesiastical material culture is observable on some sites such as Brandon (Suffolk), and in some phases of Flixborough (Lincolnshire), this assertion is directly challenged in a chapter by Helen Gittos. The problem has been discussed at least since the 1970s but recent debate has intensified. Gittos herself develops upon the reasoning of scholars such as Tim Pestell (2004) by suggesting that the activities of high-status secular and ecclesiastical groups were so similar it renders them archaeologically indistinguishable. It is therefore rather ironic that although we have a far greater quantity of elite sites for study than thirty-five years ago, the evidence as it stands appears all the more difficult to interpret. Such conditions, however, should not restrict further research as Blair rightly cautions, and one needs only to observe the investigations led by Gabor Thomas at Bishopstone to witness the advances that are still being made through large-scale and thoughtfully targeted projects.

Readers of *Church Archaeology* are also likely to be interested by the decent proportion of text given over to the archaeological evidence for non-Christian religious activity. Aleks Pluskowski's chapter provides an enlightening overview of alternative religious practice, after first highlighting the pitfalls of employing pagan-Christian dichotomies. The

possibility that certain animal representations were associated with particular artefacts or social groups is especially intriguing, given that the use of nature as an active mediator between the natural and supernatural worlds is often indicative of shamanic religious systems. Pre-Christian practice is also explored by Sarah Semple, using a range of disciplines such as place-name studies, art history and linguistics, to demonstrate the significance of the landscape in shaping the belief of populations in the 5th to 8th centuries and after. Indeed, it is clear that the academic interest in exploring the broader issue of 'belief' in early medieval England is proving fruitful, offering a more comprehensive understanding of people's lived experience than the signing of arbitrary labels to what is considered 'Christian' or 'pagan' practice. Whilst the evidential bias is heavily weighted towards the period after the Augustinian mission, research into alternative religious practice represents a vital component for understanding the Anglo-Saxon and later Church.

In addition to the chapters that deal specifically with the Church or religious practice, the remaining contributions of the *Handbook* contain a vast quantity of material to interest even the casual reader. The text is far from flush with illustrations, but the figures that are included provide useful orientation of some of the key material. Credit must go to both contributors and editors for creating such a consistently accessible volume, which covers huge amounts of ground as well as providing valuable references for those conducting more detailed research. Welcome too is the mixture of papers from established academics and early

career researchers, which creates a feeling that the edition has captured something of the zeitgeist of the present study of Anglo-Saxon archaeology. Given the quality of work on show, it seems highly likely that many of the younger contributors will be writing papers for a similar compendium in the future: considering how invaluable the present effort is already becoming, let us hope it is less than 35 years before we see one.

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Pestell, T, 2004, *Landscapes of Monastic Foundation: The Establishment of Religious Houses in East Anglia c.650–1200*, Woodbridge

Stocker, D and Everson, P 2006, *Summoning St Michael: Early Romanesque Towers in Lincolnshire*, Oxford

Wilson, DM, 1976, *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, London

*The Archaeology of Medieval Europe, Volume 1: Eighth to Twelfth Centuries AD*

Edited by Graham-Campbell, J with Valor, M, 2007

Acta Jutlandica LXXXIII:1/  
Humanities Series 79  
ISBN 978 8 779342 90 3  
Pb 479pp, 320 figs, £35

*The Archaeology of Medieval Europe, Volume 2: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries AD*

Edited by Carver, M and Klápšt, J, 2011

Aarhus University Press, Acta Jutlandica Humanities Series 2011/9  
ISBN 978 8 77934 291 0  
Pb 60 pp 412 figs, £50

Michael Shapland

The completion of the *Archaeology of Medieval Europe* series four years after the publication of the first volume is hugely welcome for students of the discipline. The geographical scope of these volumes equates to medieval Roman Catholic Christendom; chronologically they span the widespread acceptance of Christianity across much of the study area in the 8th century to the Reformation in the 16th. Christianity therefore is the essential aspect which binds together this geographically, culturally and linguistically heterogeneous area across both volumes, making them of particular relevance to church archaeology. Their approach is explicitly international – specialist scholars from different countries collaborate to write every chapter – meaning that the reader is as likely to be furnished with an example from Estonia as from England to illustrate a particular point. The second great strength of these books

is their intention to summarise in one place research from across the discipline, from housing and rural settlement to material culture and trade, with useful chapters on theoretical frameworks and methodological advances. Those chapters encompassing religious practice and buildings will be discussed here, as they are most relevant to this journal: I say ‘religious’ rather than ‘Christian’ since Judaism and Islam, together with ‘paganism’, are usefully covered, which also accords with the scope of the SCA.

Before turning to each volume’s chapters on religion, it is worth discussing apparent differences in their stated intention. Volume one purports to be a synthesis of medieval archaeology across Western Europe from the 8th to the 12th centuries, and is marketed as a ‘complete account’ across the Continent. This is gilding the lily: to do justice to every aspect of medieval archaeology across this vastness of space and time for numerous national traditions would be a Sisyphean task requiring more than the few hundred pages presented here. In his introduction to volume two, Martin Carver recognises that total coverage is impossible, instead making it explicit that this is a pan-European showcase of how medieval archaeology has been applied and what its potential is for our understanding of past societies. The keys are in the ignition, he wants to show us what this comparatively young discipline can do. I mention this not as a pedant, but to absolve myself as a reviewer from tediously labouring every gap in coverage and every absent *cause célèbre*. I also mention it because it is otherwise difficult to know how to review works which are summaries

of existing research rather than research in themselves, other than to relate whether the synthesis is well-organised, well-written and whether it has any obvious gaps. These books *are* well-organised, well-written and extremely nicely put together, but a bus could be driven through the gaps in their coverage of *The Archaeology of Medieval Europe* (note, not even ‘Western Europe’). I will treat these books as a showcase of the archaeology of medieval religion, and whether they have the potential to excite readers into taking the subject further.

Chapter 13 of volume one, ‘Religions’, is by Leszek Stupecki (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Warsaw) and Magdalena Valor (University of Seville). It begins with a section on paganism, a welcome corrective to notions that Christianity was unaffected by existing religious practice. Few pre-Christian religious buildings are attested archaeologically across Europe; these appear to have been ‘houses for the gods’ rather than congregational spaces, with ritual emphasis instead on natural places in the landscape. Discussion of Christianity opens with the valuable assertion that study cannot be undertaken with written sources alone: the archaeological study of churches and material culture is needed to question accepted narratives. The succeeding sections on pilgrimage, monasticism and artefacts, however, do not fully bear this out, mainly providing an historical framework illustrated by archaeological examples.

Considerable space is given to Islamic Spain and European Judaism, which is often unfamiliar to students of church archaeology in the British Isles. The role of archaeology in the study of Islam is well emphasised here,

as in a compelling discussion of the conversion of churches into mosques after the Muslim conquest of much of Spain in 711, and their conversion back into churches after the *Reconquista*. Until 786, half of St Vincent's cathedral, Córdoba, was rented for use as a mosque, which sounds remarkable to modern experience. Turning to Judaism, few synagogues from the period have been excavated across Europe: as with pagan practice, buildings were not sacred in themselves but convenient places to worship, and rooms in private dwellings were often used, which has obvious consequences for archaeologists. More visible in excavation are the *mikva'ot* – ritual baths – of the type so splendidly illustrated on the cover of *Church Archaeology* 13. Here again, however, documentary evidence implicitly plays lead fiddle to archaeological interpretations.

Chapter 14, 'Religious Buildings', by Tadhg O'Keeffe (University College Dublin) and Matthias Untermann (University of Heidelberg), is analytical rather than descriptive, and alive to symbolic meaning. It covers the influence of Roman architecture on church buildings, Carolingian innovation, and critiques the 'Romanesque' as a modern categorisation too often back-projected onto medieval thought. Emphasis on regional variation, topographical contexts and the development of individual buildings through time will please archaeologists, as will that placed on lesser churches and their localities rather than the famous cathedrals beloved of art historians. There is, however, too little on the social context of churches, and change is mainly ascribed to liturgical reform imposed from above rather than wider social processes in the secular world. The authors (p 417) bemoan

a-theoretical approaches to church archaeology – the 'loss of innocence' has yet to flourish in the discipline – but more effort could have been taken to redress this here.

Martin Carver's introduction to the section on 'Spirituality' in volume two is typically engaging, noting the importance of parish churches as the material culture of local identity, and as 'theatres' rather than inert scenery for ritual practice. He also supplies a useful guide to Christian worship which emphasises continuities with the past: I was fascinated with the notions that priestly garb is based on late Roman aristocratic garments, that incense boats were originally swung by Roman domestic servants, and that Estonia remained essentially pagan until the early modern period. Chapter 10, 'Archaeologies of Belief', begins with a section by Christina Vossler, 'Religious Life in Public and Private'. As both Vossler and Carver state here, only recently has private religious practice come into focus, mentalities and daily interactions with material culture and buildings, including pilgrimage. As in volume one, too often archaeology is relegated to illustrating rather than challenging the picture provided by documents: an interesting section on tracing European pilgrimage routes through distributions of pilgrim badges, for example, only reveals these networks, it does not go on to discuss what they mean in terms of personal belief and religious observance. An exception is her discussion of the Reformation, when symbolism is replaced in church buildings by renewed focus on the word of God.

Chapter 11, 'Religious Buildings', begins with Martin Carver's section on cathedrals and monasteries, which is surprisingly

dry and often descriptive. Cathedral construction and the economic exploitation of monastic estates are the order of the day; flashes such as the organisation of monastic precincts originating with the layout of Roman villas, and that eremitic monasticism is based in prehistoric practice, are mentioned but their significance is not explored. This is in contrast to Aleksandra McClain's excellent section on the archaeology of parish churches, which is alive to their role in daily life, as material manifestations of community, and as palimpsests preserving past practice. The appropriation of parish churches for elite identity is discussed, as is the importance of their landscape and settlement contexts. Their interior ornament can be eloquent about contemporary perceptions of space, light and spatial organisation: many of these topics are not nearly so well covered in volume one. Finally, Samuel Gruber provides a section on Jewish religious buildings and Juio Navarro Palazón and Pedro Jiménez Castillo on Islamic religious buildings in Spain. Again, the discussion of these religions alongside Christianity is extremely welcome, although the former conveys a greater sense that archaeology can question and expand historical narratives rather than merely illustrate them.

These volumes together represent a hugely impressive feat of scholarship, and their editors must be applauded for bringing together over a hundred archaeologists from across Western Europe to provide a synthesis that will stand on student bookshelves for years to come. Volume one is reasonably priced for students, volume two less so, but both are extremely pretty, lavishly illustrated and attractively laid out. Together they make it clear what a long way church archaeology has

to go as a discipline, how it must engage with medieval social practice and not merely stamp-collect churches and their furnishings or serve the work of historians, although in this last respect several contributors come unstuck. Will these volumes attract students into the discipline? Perhaps, but their authors often seem weighed down by the burden of trying to cover their topics across tens of European countries over several centuries. The result is invariably worthy, but they could have done with relaxing, getting enthusiastic about things which interest them, and in so doing truly showing what the discipline is capable of.

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*Canterbury Cathedral Priory in the Age of Becket*

Fergusson, P, 2011

Yale University Press, New Haven and London

ISBN 978 0 300175 69 1

Hb, 190pp, 50 colour and 100 b&amp;w illustrations, £50

*Aleksandra McClain*

This volume undertakes a detailed description and analysis of the extensive mid-12th century rebuilding programme at Canterbury Cathedral and its precinct that was carried out after the reconstruction of the Saxon monastery by Archbishop Lanfranc in the last years of the 11th century, and before the major fire in 1173 which required rebuilding of the choir and a considerable extension eastwards. Although the title suggests that the book will examine the cathedral in the period during Thomas Becket's archbishopric (1162–70), it is actually Prior Wibert (1153–67) who ends up being the star of the show. From an examination of both documentary and material evidence, Fergusson argues that this rebuilding took place in the 1150s, when Becket was still chancellor to Henry II. Instead it was Wibert, and his developing interests in art and architecture, hygiene and water technology, and the legal domain of the priory, that drove the rebuilding programme. The inclusion of Becket's name in the title seems to be more of a marketing device than a real indicator of his role in patronage, or his prominence in the book. Although Fergusson speculates that the tenor of Becket's '*flamboyant*' years as royal chancellor would have meshed well with Wibert's ambitions

and architectural innovations at Canterbury, the discussions of Becket's possible influence are brief and somewhat tacked-on rather than central to the book.

That is not to say, however, that the architectural and documentary analyses that sit at the core of the volume are anything less than thorough and original. Fergusson takes an admirably interdisciplinary approach, dedicating as much effort to an extensive exploration of the Eadwine Psalter, which features a uniquely detailed illustration of the mid-12th-century cathedral, as he does to a more traditional architectural history of the building. Due to the extensive rebuilding programmes of the later Middle Ages and destruction after the Dissolution, a total reconstruction of Wibert's cathedral and precinct necessitates more than an analysis of the extant buildings. Fergusson does an excellent job melding information from the psalter's text and images, remnant fabric (both standing and loose), antiquarian studies, and archaeological excavations in order to achieve for the first time a remarkably detailed, complete, and convincing description of the now-lost mid-12th-century priory. Additional strengths of the book are its extensive consideration of the Canterbury evidence in comparison with contemporary buildings in England and on the continent, and Fergusson's efforts to put the building programme, the Eadwine Psalter, and their patron into wider political, religious, and cultural contexts. It is in these analyses that the volume goes beyond a standard architectural history, and becomes relevant for a wider, multi-disciplinary audience with interests beyond the site of Canterbury itself.

The book is set out over nine chapters with appendices, and

begins with a review of the previous historical and archaeological work done at the priory and an exploration of what is known about Wibert and the religious and social milieu within which he served as prior. In chapter 3, Fergusson undertakes a detailed analysis of the Eadwine Psalter and its illustrations, treating the manuscript as both a source of information about the contemporary cathedral and its patrons, but also as an artefact in and of itself, which had a distinct purpose, meaning, and audience at the time of its writing. Fergusson convincingly argues that the psalter is not simply a religious and scholarly text which happens to include an illustration of the cathedral, but rather a deliberate propaganda piece for Wibert's ideas and accomplishments, and a depiction of Canterbury and its new precinct as the ideal *civitas dei*. It served as a chronicle and celebration of Wibert's renewal that operated on both worldly and spiritual levels.

Chapters 4 through 8 form the bulk of the volume, and consist primarily of a section-by-section reconstruction of the buildings and features of Wibert's priory, starting with the Great Cloister, moving through the Cellarer's and Green Courts, the infirmary, and finally the cathedral itself. While the majority of these chapters focus on detailed descriptions of each building in the precinct and the architectural, manuscript, and excavated evidence we have for their appearance, Fergusson livens up what could become tedious architectural detail with interpretative themes that structure the chapter layout and inform his explanations for why and how Wibert built the priory as he did. The themes focus on the responsibilities and concerns of a 12th-century monastery and

its prior, namely the provision of physical hygiene and spiritual cleansing for a large community of monks, the obligation of hospitality to various social classes of visitors and pilgrims, the care of the sick and aged, the establishment and practice of canon law and jurisprudence, and the practical and liturgical use of the cathedral church by the monastic community.

The description, analysis, and interpretation of each section of the priory precinct is thorough and enlightening, although a buildings archaeologist might wish for more discussion of the phasing and construction of the extant 12th-century fabric at Canterbury, rather than the primarily stylistic consideration of its features which predominates in the architectural analysis sections. It would also have been beneficial for there to have been a large-scale diagram of Wibert's precinct created out of the detailed analysis Fergusson undertakes, either in plan or in a full reconstruction drawing or digital model. We are given textual descriptions, 'footprint' plans of various parts of the later medieval precinct taken from Canterbury Archaeological Trust and Robert Willis' 19th-century study, and occasional reconstruction drawings or digital models of some sections of the precinct undertaken by other researchers, but this reader at least was left lacking a holistic visual understanding of the precinct as it existed at this particular point in the mid-12th century. It is a shame that Fergusson's exceptionally detailed and original architectural history has not been accompanied by a high-quality original visual reconstruction as well.

That being said, the volume is lavishly illustrated throughout, in an exceptionally handsome

presentation by Yale University Press. The reproductions of the Eadwine Psalter drawings are given full and double-page colour spreads, and the detail in these manuscript illustrations is sharp and clear. I would have liked to see the floor plan of the medieval cathedral precinct given full-page treatment as well, rather than the quarter-page it was given, considering its importance to the reader's understanding of the geography of the priory. Labels and other such detail are difficult to make out at the size that it has been reproduced. A large-size reproduction of a full phased plan of the priory buildings would also have gone some way towards helping readers understand the extent of the 12th-century phases, given the lack of a full visual reconstruction as mentioned above. Overall, this is an attractive and informative volume which at £50.00 is priced high, but not unusually so, for a well-illustrated academic hardcover. The price and content mean that it will primarily be of interest to medieval scholars, rather than those with a popular interest in Canterbury Cathedral, but there is plenty here for historians, art and architectural historians, and archaeologists alike.

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*Medieval Church and Churchyard Monuments*

**Badham, S, 2011**

Shire Library 611, Princes  
Risborough  
ISBN 978 0 747808 10 7  
Pb 64pp, £6.99

*Owain Connors*

Church and churchyard sculpture provides us with an interesting and highly accessible corpus of medieval sculpture, as well as a useful insight into the dress and customs of the social elite of this period, who were wealthy enough to commission such memorials. Sally Badham, who has also written a guide to monumental brasses for Shire (Badham 2009), has produced an insightful guide to the meaning and construction of the often bewildering variety of medieval tombs, such as 'cadaver' tombs, miniature effigies and military monuments, as well as covering some of the interesting philosophical and theological aspects of church monuments, such as the formalisation of purgatorial doctrine. Badham admirably demonstrates to the reader the development of these various types of churchyard monument, explaining the differing styles of tomb and exploring the myriad of symbolism contained within their designs.

The volume is lavishly illustrated, which is important when approaching such a visual subject, provides a wealth of examples and case studies, and is well structured into thematic chapters. However, the book does seem to lack a critical conclusion, ending instead with a brief description of the destruction of many of the country's tombs during the Reformation and the Civil War, although the author does

make mention of tomb destruction taking place during the medieval period itself and, shockingly, right up to the 20th century. Furthermore, from an academic point of view, the lack of referencing is frustrating, as this book would be a useful introductory volume for researchers interested in this aspect of medieval material culture. A fairly minor criticism can also be made of the title, which doesn't mention the geographic and temporal foci of this book. Geographically this work seems to be largely focused upon England – Wales is only mentioned to a minor degree and no mention at all is made of Scotland. Similarly the title does not entirely reflect the time period with which this volume is largely concerned; a much greater focus is made of the later centuries of the medieval period, presumably because of a greater survival rate of memorials from this period, although a brief mention is made of pre-Conquest tombs.

Obviously, at 56 pages, this is by no means a complete discussion of the topic, but is full of useful illustrations and clear depictions, making it ideal for those with a casual interest in the subject, or as a useful introduction to medieval church monuments, and the social aspects that surround them, for those with a more significant academic interest.

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Badham, S, 2009, *Monumental Brasses*, Princes Risborough

*The Medieval Art, Architecture and History of Bristol Cathedral: An Enigma Explored (Bristol Studies in Medieval Cultures)*

Edited by Cannon, J and Williamson, B 2011

Boydell Press, Woodbridge  
ISBN 987 1 843836 80 3  
350pp, 20 figs, 11 col pls, £55

Richard Parker

In the introduction to this collection of essays exploring the buildings of St Augustine's Abbey (now Bristol Cathedral) the editors ruefully admit that, as St Augustine's is small and 'looks like a railway station', it is under-appreciated both by Bristolian taxi drivers and cathedral enthusiasts. Nevertheless, they conclude that St Augustine's 'deserves to join Temple Meads and Clifton Suspension Bridge among Bristol's most celebrated architectural experiments'. This is rather a wry understatement, for one tradition, following Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, interprets the 14th-century choir and eastern chapels at Bristol as a precocious work of artistic genius and would propel the cathedral into the front rank not only of Bristolian, but also of European medieval architecture.

It is arguable that the glamour of the 14th-century work in the choir at Bristol has overshadowed other aspects of the monastic complex. Crucial aspects of the dating and design sources remain unresolved and a shortage of documentary and archaeological evidence only adds to the difficulties. One is struck by the way in which the available evidence is sometimes incredibly specific – according to one medieval source, the new work of the choir was begun on the 21st of August 1291, at nine in the morning – yet how,

upon further examination, these certainties seem to blur and recede. This volume is thus a very welcome step forward.

The book arises from a conference held at the University of Bristol in September 2008: eight of the essays presented here were originally read at the conference and these have been supplemented by two further essays and an introduction and epilogue by the editors. The essays explore aspects of the abbey from its foundation in the 12th century, to its surrender in December 1539 and subsequent conversion into a cathedral. The aim of the editors to produce an integrated study of the building is reflected by the diverse academic approaches adopted by the contributors. Some adopt an archaeological angle, based on close observation of the fabric and the topography of the site; others a more art historical approach, interpreting the building by comparison with contemporary buildings at home or abroad, or through the theology and symbolism behind aspects of its design and furnishings. The role of the Berkeley family as patrons of the abbey and the interests and activities of the monastic community are explored and there are also important analyses of modern scholarly reactions to the building. The possibility of multiple readings and approaches is a central theme of the book, and is developed both in the introduction, the epilogue and in a superb essay on Pevsner's influence by Paul Crossley.

Perhaps inevitably, the weightiest chapters deal with the interpretation of the choir and east end, particularly Christopher Wilson's rather waspish defence of 'Pevsnerian orthodoxy'. Pevsner had argued that the choir at Bristol was

a work of international importance, designed by an unknown 13th-century genius, identified as 'The Bristol Master', in around 1300. Research by Richard Morris, published in 1997 and based upon detailed archaeological examination of the fabric has challenged this, re-interpreting the east end of St Augustine's as a provincial eccentricity, later in date and long in development, which should be understood in the broader context of contemporary West Country architecture (Morris 1997). Neither Pevsner nor Morris are published in this volume, but their voices reverberate through it like that of Madeline Usher though another famously enigmatic medieval building, and with the same ominous sense that someone-or-other's carefully constructed edifice may be about to come crashing down.

Christopher Wilson's paper vigorously defends the concept of an individual genius of the late 13th century against Morris' interpretation of a group of west-country architects working over a longer period. He argues that the Bristol Master was directly influenced by collections of architectural drawings (now lost) in the possession of another inspired architectural genius: Michael of Canterbury, designer of such long-lost 'Court Style' masterpieces as the Eleanor Cross in Cheapside and St Stephen's Chapel at Westminster. Wilson provides many parallels between Bristol and other 13th- and 14th-century buildings but, like some other enthusiasts for the 'Court Style' his main interest appears to be in recovering English architectural heroes from undeserved obscurity and then speculating about their motives. We read that 'Michael....chose to

*treat St Stephen's as nothing less than the launch pad for a voyage of artistic discovery*', that the Bristol Master was engaged in 'a quest for formal diversity' and that, apart from Michael and the Bristol Master, 'The only artists working in Europe around 1300 who were invested with individual agency to the same degree were the major painters and sculptors of central Italy' (Giotto and Giovanni Pisano, no less). The paper is a brilliant piece of art historical scholarship but, when Wilson claims that 'an artist as ambitious as the Bristol Master' would surely have wanted to treat the reredos of the high altar 'as an architectural tour de force', and then proceeds to interpret this reredos (of which nothing survives) as 'a pioneering example' of the type 'now represented only by the Neville Screen in Durham Cathedral', one feels entitled to raise a quizzical eyebrow at the absence of physical evidence for this.

Other papers in this volume demonstrate a similar lack of focus on the physical evidence, notably Sarah Jane Boss' examination of the Elder Lady Chapel. Boss explores the influence of 11th- and 12th-century theology of the Immaculate Conception on the 'House of Wisdom' at Bristol, for which seven pillars (Proverbs IX) were hewn in the early 13th century. Boss identifies the House of Wisdom with the Elder Lady Chapel, but does not attempt to interpret the architecture of the building in the light of this symbolism. Where, for example, are (or were) the seven 'pillars', what did they look like and how, in a building pervaded with shafts and colonnettes, were this particular group of seven distinguished and their significance made clear to the viewer? These questions may have been answered in the paper on the

architecture of the chapel, presented by Tim Tatton-Brown, which followed in the original conference programme but it is, alas, not published here.

The illustrations of this volume are copious and, apart from a small group of colour plates, thankfully, distributed within the text. Some of the illustrations are frustrating, not necessarily through any fault of the editors or contributors. The modern digital plan of the church (Fig 0.2), for example, has neither annotation nor phasing and shows only the church and the eastern claustral range, which greatly restricts its usefulness. The only plan which shows the layout of all the surviving conventual buildings (Plate II) was drawn in 1912 by the architect Roland Paul and is apparently inaccurate, due to 19th-century confusion of the dimensions of the cloister at St Augustine's Abbey with that of the Augustinian Friary at Bristol. The horizontal section of the eastern claustral range on the modern plan of the buildings is taken at a different height from that of Paul's plan, making the two very difficult to compare. This volume would surely have benefited from an updated survey of the whole complex.

Each of the contributors points to the necessity for further research of a building which, all will admit, still remains too little known. This volume does not claim to be a definitive study, but to present and examine the existing evidence and point to areas and possibilities for further research. This magnificent book makes one yearn for more.

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Morris, R, 1997, 'European Prodigy or Regional Eccentric? The Rebuilding of St Augustine's Abbey Church, Bristol', in L Keen (ed) *Almost the Richest City: Bristol in the Middle Ages*, British Archaeological Association Conference Transaction Series 19, Leeds, 41–56

*St Pancras Burial Ground: Excavations for St Pancras International, the London terminus of High Speed 1, 2002-3*

By Emery, P, and Wooldridge, K  
Gifford Monograph Series, Gifford  
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& CD-ROM, £27.95

Howard Williams

In his short but important book *Ethics and Burial Archaeology*, Duncan Sayer explores the 2002–3 excavations of over 1492 human burials of mainly 19th-century date at St Pancras ahead of the construction of the High Speed 1 terminus (2010, 85–87). He regards it as an example where *‘the archaeological community made an important stand to protect the heritage of the nation... but significantly... they had couched that protest in terms of both scientific interest and the need for ‘human dignity’ or respect for the human remains they encountered’*. The circumstances of this project were indeed challenging because the work had to cease while archaeologists negotiated new methods amidst the systematic clearance of large parts of the burial ground.

Given these complex and challenging circumstances, there is little doubt that this high-quality, richly illustrated and detailed report based on a sample of the removed graves is a triumph. Accompanied by a CD-ROM, the report outlines the circumstances and methods of the archaeological work (chapter 1) and its historical context (chapter 2). The subsequent sections of the report are the result of detailed post-

excavation work, demonstrating how the results of the sample of the third extension to the original medieval churchyard around St Pancras church make an important international contribution to our understanding of death, burial and commemoration from 1792 through the early 19th century. Important themes include the detailed recording of coffins in three dimensions, strikingly reproduced in the report, to explore burial chronology and patterns of burial (chapter 3). The osteological evidence reveals the health and diseases of the community as well as evidence of dissection and the intriguing discovery of walrus bones (chapter 4). The funerary remains provide a detailed typology of gravestones and discussion of symbols and text (chapter 5). Also in this chapter there is a discussion of the coffin fittings including 172 breastplates which constitute a phenomenal assemblage in their own right, including the identification of French émigrés within the burial community. Meanwhile small finds and textile remains add to the picture of mortuary practices involved in preparing and clothing the dead. A shorter section outlines the coming of the railway and the conversion of the cemetery into a park (chapter 6). The Conclusions (chapter 7) are worthy of special note for their discussion of the methodology for rapid cemetery excavation as well as summarising the principal results.

The ability to connect historical records to memorials and coffin breastplates allows biographies of individuals to be written and correlations with the osteological data makes for fascinating results (chapter 5). These instances highlight the ability of archaeology to address the graves and memorials

as belonging to individuals rather than a faceless ‘population’, although ‘osteobiographies’ of particular individuals are not attempted in this report. However, if this report is a triumph, I remain an idealist who wishes to moderate this appraisal by noting that the losses in achieving this result cannot be glossed over. Sayer may be right in his appraisal of the implications of the St Pancras dig, but one cannot help but speculate what a phenomenal report could have been written by the authors had the vast majority of the burials not been removed without adequate archaeological investigation. This report should be judged both a successful outcome of the work undertaken and a significant contribution to knowledge, but it is also a shameful testament to the circumstances in which archaeologists had to operate and the vast amount of information lost. The authors and the British archaeological community can be proud of the results, but I remain unconvinced that the funders and the British public can be.

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Sayer, D, 2010, *Ethics and Burial Archaeology*, London

*Pews, Benches and Chairs*

Edited by Cooper, T, and Brown, S, 2011

The Ecclesiological Society, London  
ISBN 978 0 946823 17 8  
Pb, 500pp, B&W illustrations

Jackie Hall

Up and down the country, for decades, pews and benches have been moved out of churches, sometimes eagerly, sometimes after considerable resistance. Lately, this has been accompanied by worried heritage professionals and others, and an unfocussed amorphous debate on the rights and wrongs of the practice. Here, at last, is a volume that gathers together the threads of that debate and re-presents it with clarity.

The book is divided into six sections and 30 chapters written by numerous different authors, only a few of whom can be highlighted here. The first section sets the scene with chapters on significance and need, liturgy and seating numbers. Sarah Brown shows us that the debates are not new – the merits of pews versus chairs were being argued in the late 19th century.

Section 2 gives us a brief history of seating. Paul Barnwell's paper is a useful overview about what we know – and don't know – of pre-Reformation seating, showing that some form of seating in the nave started as early as the 13th century before becoming widespread from the mid-15th century, although the evidence is far from complete. The introduction of seating may have been due to lengthier preaching or increased private devotion eg at the Rood. Jerry Sampson, though looking specifically at Somerset, provides an invaluable guide to recognising medieval survivals,

mainly through technical features rather than stylistic ones, noting that the attrition of early seating is due to '*widespread misidentification*'. Without question, medieval survivals rate the highest level of significance. Other papers, including two reprinted from other publications, consider the social and hierarchical role of early modern pews.

The very substantial third section focusses on the 19th century and starts with a review, by Christopher Webster, of role the Cambridge Camden Society and its denouncement of box pews (as opposed to benches), followed by reprints of a number of important Victorian documents, and an assessment of GG Scott's work in re-seating churches using medieval precedents. There are case studies from Devon and Suffolk and a wonderful collection of bench and pew illustrations from 19th-century catalogues.

Section 4 returns us to the heart of the matter 'Considering Change', with seven heartfelt chapters looking at seats as impediments or promoters of spirituality (Maguire); the use of pews to disguise more fundamental problems and the place of creative compromise (MacKechnie-Jarvis); alternatives to pews; pew platforms; assessing significance and more. The section ends with two papers by the editors, the first detailing the steps to be taken by a church when considering change, handily presented as a flow diagram, and the second containing a self-assessment questionnaire. Both provide clear-headed and useful tools.

Section 5 is a single lengthy chapter with 15 illustrated case studies, specifically chosen to be interesting in themselves and for taking account of heritage value,

while section 6 reviews what has gone before. The case studies include the brilliant reversible conversion of medieval benches into something comfortable by Hugh Harrison (no mean feat) and often the choice of modern, beautiful, comfortable, moveable benches in place of pews.

An acknowledged flaw of the volume is that it only looks at Church of England seating – no non-Conformist churches are represented here, and only nave seating at that. It must be admitted as well that, with so many views expressed, there is both a degree of repetition and the absence of an editorial line (though we might guess at it). Properly referenced, highly knowledgeable and often academic, it is, however, not a conventional academic book in any way – although scholars of early modern and later social mores would ignore it at their peril. It is, however, an essential volume for DACs and churches considering change, and their professional advisors. It gives us no answers, but it does give us the tools to think clearly about the issues and multiple case studies to prompt the imagination, and the editors should be congratulated.

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