



sca Newsletter

FROM THE SOCIETY FOR CHURCH ARCHAEOLOGY

Spring 2006
Issue No. 7

Foreword from the Chair

This is my first Foreword as Chair of the Society for Church Archaeology, although I have been involved with the Society since its inception in 1996. I succeeded Nancy Edwards as Chair at the AGM in October last year. Nancy has given sterling service to the Society. She and I were both members of the Council for British Archaeology Churches Committee, from which the Society developed as a fully independent charity. Nancy was the first Chair, who oversaw the setting up of the Society and then six years ago returned to put the Society firmly on the road to success. I very much hope that I will be able to carry on the work to the same high standard that Nancy has set.

The Society is fortunate to have an active and dynamic Committee committed to developing the work of the Society and to raising its profile and increasing its membership. After a successful conference in Jarrow last year, we

are holding this year's conference in Exeter, which will be on the theme of precincts, parks, ruins: the archaeology of ecclesiastical landscapes. Further details are given on page two and we hope to see as many members there as possible. We will then move north again to Scotland for our 2007 conference and have also already started actively planning the 2008 conference.

As foreshadowed in Nancy's foreword to the 2005 newsletter, at its last meeting the Committee considered the Society's Mission Statement. The objects of the Society as a charity are '*to promote the study, conservation and preservation of churches and other places of worship and associated monuments in all their aspects*' and this has also been our Mission Statement. The objects will continue unchanged, but we have reworked the Mission Statement to read '*established in 1996, the Society for Church Archaeology was formed to promote the study, conservation and preservation of places of worship of all faiths and denominations*' to reflect the changing interests in the field of church archaeology.

The Committee is also hoping to develop some campaigning work. We are currently looking for someone to join the Committee to carry out this role and also to deal with the work of organising conferences. If anybody reading this would be interested in undertaking either of these roles, we would be delighted to hear from you.

In concluding, I should like to pay tribute to the dedication of the members of the Committee. In particular I should like to mention our Editors, on this occasion Evelyn Baker assisted by Jackie Hall and Duncan Sayer, who continue to maintain the high standard of our journal, Church Archaeology, and have worked hard to bring out a bumper triple volume to enable us to catch up the volume numbers with the subscription years; our Honorary Treasurer, who has temporarily also taken on the responsibility of being Acting Membership Secretary; and our Honorary Secretary, Nicola Smith, who has undertaken the great majority of the work of organising this year's conference in Exeter.

Margaret L. Faull

2006 conference

SCA 2006 Annual
Conference & AGM:

Precincts, Parks, Ruins: The Archaeology of Ecclesiastical Landscapes

Friday 15th–Sunday 17th
September 2006

This year we have teamed up with the Association of Diocesan & Cathedral Archaeologists to organise a conference which focuses on places of worship in relation to their wider surrounding human and physical contexts. The ideas and beliefs which shaped both social and sacred changes in ecclesiastical landscapes, and the role of religious centres in influencing these changes, will be considered through the findings of excavation work, analytical investigation and academic studies.

The conference and AGMs will be held in the Hunter's Suite at The Loop Centre, Exeter. AGMs on the Saturday, together with a fascinating line up of speakers including Can-



West front, Exeter Cathedral

on Professor Nicholas Orme, Professor Roberta Gilchrist, Dr Sam Turner, Mr Graham Keevill, Dr Joseph Elders and Dr Stephen Rippon. Conference Dinner at the Queen's Court Hotel, Exeter, on Saturday evening. Guided tours around Exeter Cathedral on Friday afternoon. Field trip to churches in the Teign Valley on the Sunday.

Details from Nicola Smith, SCA Secretary, 38, Millstream Road, Heighington, Lincoln. LN4 1TY. Tel. 01522 851340. Email: nicolasmith_sca@yahoo.co.uk. Alternatively, please download a conference programme and booking form from <http://www.britarch.ac.uk/socchurcharchaeol>

Nicola Smith

events

The Church in Place-Names

Saturday, 3rd June 2006
Room A46, English Studies,
Trent Building,
University of Nottingham

Provisional Programme

10.00am Coffee & Registration

10.30am Introduction by David Parsons: the problems and possibilities of Church place-names

Steve Bassett, 'Prestetone: the land of the priests of Wootton Wawen, Warwickshire'

Tom Pickles, 'Bishopton, Monkton and Preston'

Allan McKinley, 'What was Leominster the minster for, and when?'

1.00pm Lunch

2.00pm Examining Eccles (Nicholas Brooks, convenor)

Chris Scargill, Eccles in West Yorkshire and Derbyshire
Carole Hough, 'Eccles in English and Scottish place-names'

Alan James, 'Eclēs in Northumbria: a perspective on its meaning'

3.45pm Tea

4.15pm General discussion (John Blair, convenor)

An examination of points raised during the day. Also an opportunity for further short presentations of material (5-10 mins; bring a handout or a couple of slides!)

5.30 Disperse

Please send reply slips and registration fee of £20 (£15 for students) to Dr. Eleanor Quinton, Institute for Name Studies, A64, English Studies, University Park, University of Nottingham, NG7 2RD. All cheques are payable to the 'University of Nottingham'.

Round Tower Churches Society Tours:

Saturday Tours - first church 2.30pm

3rd June Dilham (I33 TG 326 259), Witton, Edingthorpe

1st July Bramfield (I56 TM 399 738), Holton, Spexhall

5th August Merton (I44 TL 912 981), Threxton, South Pickenham

2nd September Letheringsett (I33 TG 061 389), Stody, Matlaske

All the Tours are in Norfolk, except for the one on 1st July which is in Suffolk.

Sunday tours, first church 2.30pm

21st May Haveringland RT, Brandiston RT, Cawston, Oulton (tea at Cawston Church)

18th June Wereham, Stradsett, Fincham, Marham (tea at Fincham)

16th July Hethersett, East Carleton, Mulbarton, Swainsthorpe RT (tea at Mulbarton)

Church Tours, visiting Norfolk Churches, have been organised by Richard Butler-Stoney from 1970 till 2003. This year three Round Tower Churches (RT) will be included. These Sunday Tours end with a Service, usually Evensong, at 6 or 6.30pm,.

Everyone is welcome to attend either Tours, which are free. Any queries about either Tours phone 'Lyn Stilgoe on 01328 738237

Christchurch Priory, Dorset.

Researching a Conservation Plan for the Priory Church at Christchurch in Dorset, Michael Heaton has found references to what appears to be an abnormally high number of major repair and refurbishment contracts in the early to mid 19th century awarded to female contractors.

Whilst female participation in the building trades of 18th and 19th century Britain is known, it was normally in menial or purely decorative roles: the women at Christchurch, one of whom was repeatedly engaged in contracts for nearly 30 years, were acting as Contractor Managers employing their own trades and sub-contracting others, in contracts as large as the complete re-roofing and re-pewing of the church.

Wider research, to investigate the social, economic and legal contexts in which this phenomenon began and - apparently - suddenly ended,

is underway. In the interim, Heaton and Dr Nina Baker of Strathclyde University would like to know of churches or other civic buildings for which there are good records of 18th or 19th century contracts to which women were parties.

Correspondence to:
Mike@archaeology.demon.co.uk
Nina.Baker@Strath.ac.uk

Michael Heaton

Saint Mary's Church, North Marston, Bucks

As part of planning consent for a new French drain around the foot of the tower, Network Archaeology Ltd. undertook an archaeological watching brief in March and December 2005. In addition, funding from English Heritage enabling stonemasons to re-face the tower provided a rare opportunity to investigate the foundations.

The buttress connecting the north aisle and the tower is known from early sources to have been one of the first phases of the church. Built in the thirteenth century it is the only area investigated where there is an absence of mortar. This presents a number of scenarios; a) that the mortar had leached out and that earth had replaced it; b) that the blocks were bound using earth or; c) that the blocks were dry set (no bonding agent at all) and over time the gaps filled with earth.

The tower was originally built during the fifteenth century. Refacing work revealed that its north and south foundations had been constructed using ashlar blocks of the local Oving limestone and bound with mortar. Limestone rubble, concentrated under the buttresses and other parts of the tower, was probably a stabilising or levelling material for the tower.

In conjunction with the construction of the French drain, a new soakaway was excavated to the north-west of the tower. Small amounts of pot-

tery spanning the medieval to modern periods was recovered, as well as a number of disarticulated human remains, mostly long bones and skull fragments, of between four and six individuals. This indicates the possible re-internment of charnel and/or the repeated disturbance of the soil over a long period of time. At the base of the soakaway, roughly 4' 3" / 1.3m deep, the western ends of two partly-waterlogged, parallel wooden coffins were discovered.

Both coffins were oriented roughly east to west but the internments were laid in different directions; one burial with the skull to the west, and the other with the skull to the east. It is possible that the coffin of the latter individual was plain and straight-sided, resulting in a back-to-front burial as neither end of the coffin was distinctive. No trace of the graves could be seen from the surface, and it is suggested that these burials may be from the late post-medieval to early/modern periods.

Anni Byard

Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Christian Burials in England

In January 2005, English Heritage and the Church of England published a guideline 'Guidance for Best Practice for Treatment of Human Remains Excavated From Christian Burial Grounds in England' (www.english-heritage.org.uk/upload/pdf/16602_HumanRemains1.pdf).

One of its chief recommendations was that a panel should be set up to provide advice on the archaeological treatment of Christian burials in England and related matters. This panel, the Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Christian Burials in England (APACBE), has now been set up. It is sponsored by the Church of England, English Heritage and the Department of Constitutional Affairs. In addition to representatives from these three bodies, its membership

includes osteologists, archaeologists and museum staff. The purpose of the Panel is to provide well-informed advice on the archaeological treatment of Christian burials in England and related matters, with appropriate consideration of relevant religious, ethical, legal, archaeological and scientific issues. The Panel may give advice on specific matters and may also advise and comment on general issues of principle or policy. The Panel will either give advice itself or refer the enquirer to the relevant expert organisation or individual(s).

The Panel's advice is free. Enquirers are encouraged to use electronic methods of communication such as e-mails, Word and PDF attachments.

Contacts: Joseph Elders (Chair) E-mail: joseph.elders@c-of-e.org.uk or Simon Mays (Secretary) E-mail: simon.mays@english-heritage.org.uk

Further details can be found on the Panel's website: <http://www.britarch.ac.uk/churches/humanremains/index.html>

Colonel Bidder (1875-1968) and the High Altar Site of Merton Priory

George Parker Bidder, the "Calculating Boy", was born in 1806 in Moretonhampstead, Somerset, the son of a stonemason. He rose in stature to become President of the Institute of Civil Engineers (1860-61) eventually settling in Mitcham. Whilst a student at Edinburgh University he had befriended Robert Stephenson and they became lifelong companions, sharing an office at 24 Great George St. Westminster. He worked with Stephenson as an engineer on the London to Birmingham Railway and was the first to design a railway swing bridge. His most important work is London's Victoria Dock. He also founded the Electric Telegraph Company.

Ravensbury Park, Mitcham, became the family home from 1864 and his son, George Parker Bidder Q.C., was responsible for preserving Mitcham Common for the public. George Parker Bidder died in Dartmouth on the 20th September 1878.

His grandson, Col. H.F. Bidder, was born at Ravensbury Park, Mitcham, on Christmas Day 1875 and studied at Trinity College, Cambridge.

In 1922 Col. Bidder's gardener (see photo) was employed in uncovering parts of the priory



Colonel Bidder's gardener uncovering the north wall of the church, Merton Priory, 1922. From Where London Sleeps by W.G. Bell (1926)

church belonging to St. Mary's Priory, Merton. A local industrialist, Mr. John Corfield, had unearthed some ancient stones on his factory site. The newly formed Southern Railway which ran through this site also arranged for diggings to be undertaken between the sleepers in the sidings to look for the Chapter House foundations. This was possible as after World War 1 passenger services were not resumed until October 1923. Abbey Station buildings were found to cover the south transept, and the platforms and railway line covered the Chapter House.

Over a two year period Col. H.F. Bidder excavated extensively with his friend Rev. Westlake (see "Excavations at Merton Priory" by Lt. Col. H.F. Bidder DSO MS FSA and the late Rev. H.F. Westlake MVO MA FSA, in the Surrey Archaeological Collection Vol. XXXVIII parts 1 and 2) and produced a suggested plan of the priory. It was discovered that 19 and a half inches was the unit used for the building. The Medieval foot was approx. 11 and a half inches as were the Roman, Celtic and British

foot. 19 and a half inches was therefore approx., two medieval feet.

The High Altar Site

Colonel Bidder was able to pinpoint the site of the High Altar of St. Mary's Priory. It was eventually bought for the London Borough of Merton by Mr. Gilliat Hatfield of Morden Hall and given to the local council as a public garden. Mr. Kenneth E. Blackwell sculpted a commemorative stone incorporating a plan of the priory, and a flint setting for the stone was designed by a former councillor of Merton and Morden Council, Mr. G.H. Gurney. The stone itself was given by Merton College, Oxford, and the Merton and Morden Historical Society and laid ceremonially on the site of the High Altar on the 29th July 1959. Colonel Bidder took part in this ceremony as he was President of the Historical Society at the time. It was to remain in its place 'for all time'.

The stone became the centrepiece of the small garden which remained for about

twenty five years when it was demolished by the owners of the present Scheduled Ancient Monument Site of St. Mary's Priory Merton. Little care was taken in dismantling it and it was thrown away and broken. Fortunately the stone was rescued in time to be reassembled and it is now in the Chapter House, an anachronism and out of place. It has become a constant reminder that unless history is taught consistently and repeatedly people have very short memories! In spite of the stone having been given in "perpetuity" to mark the site of the High Altar, there is nothing there now to say where it stood. Henry VI was crowned there and worship had been practised at Merton unbroken for 400 years before the dissolution.

Sheila Fairbank

Extract from a longer article published in the May 2002 London Topographical Society Newsletter. For information on the friends of Merton Priory, please email mertpri@aol.com.

Excavation of St. Peter's Church and Graveyard, Leicester

A series of phased archaeological investigations were undertaken on the site of the former St. Margaret's Baths, Leicester by University of Leicester Archaeological Services on behalf of Shires GP Ltd, as part of the new Shires West Development. This development has provided a tremendous opportunity to investigate the archaeology of the north-east quarter of the Roman and medieval walled town of Leicester. This site is one of a number currently being investigated by ULAS. The evaluation started in early 2003 and the excavation ran from April to December 2005.

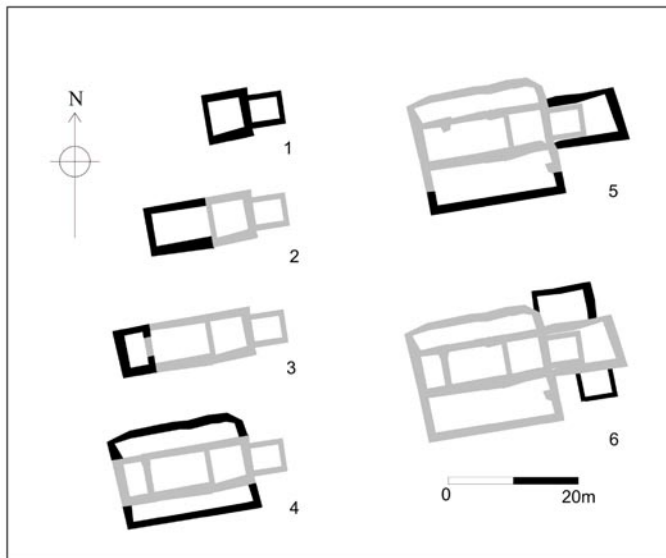
The excavation was focussed on the medieval church and cemetery of St Peter's. This is one of the four 'lost' churches of Leicester, whose position has been forgotten since c.17th century. The church is probably of at least early Post-

Conquest date and the Borough Records show that it was being dismantled in 1573 to provide stone and timber for the construction of the nearby Free Grammar School. It is likely that the cemetery would have gone out of use by this time.

The bulk of the ground plan of the church was revealed and this allows a tentative guess at the church's development. It probably began life as a simple two-celled building, the nave was extended and by the late 12th century a western bell tower had been added, with-

in which was found a large bell-casting pit. Aisles were added, the chancel extended, and a sunken-floored charnel house built. In its final phase, it was 32m or 105ft in length, a respectable size for an urban parish church.

Some 1340 burials were recovered from the cemetery. Historical evidence uncovered by Dr Paul Courtney suggests that the church may have only acquired burial rights in the 12th century. Interestingly, clearly early burials seem lacking from within the church.



Possible sequence of evolution of St Peter's church

Right: mass burial



A number of different burial practices were seen, especially with the earlier burials. These include charcoal burials, a high status Late Saxon/Early Norman practice of laying the body on a bed of charcoal, and variations on the use of stones as a linings and supports within the grave.

Twenty-five coffined burials were revealed inside the church, including some with a thin layer of ash within the wooden coffin. One of these included a bulla (lead seal) of Pope Innocent VI (1352-62) perhaps originally attached to an Indulgence. Whilst most coffins seemed well fitted to the corpse, a few were very constricting with the body seeming almost wedged in. Although no wood survived, the coffin nails were recorded three dimensionally, and it should be possible to reconstruct something of the form and the construction techniques of the medieval coffins.

In the southwest corner of the site, the corner of a mass grave was uncovered. The pit appears stratigraphically very early and probably pre-dates

the Black Death. As the analysis of the site progresses, the nature and date of this feature should become clearer.

We do not, as yet, know how many individuals are represented by the charnel house assemblage, but analysis may refine any demographic study on the cemetery. The assemblage appears to be composed of the larger bones retrieved during grave digging. The charnel house is an unusual feature for a simple parish church, and presumably indicates the pressure on space within the cemetery.

The size of the cemetery means that this is a rare opportunity to examine most of the population of a single medieval parish. Although the burials were inter-cutting, survival seems good enough to aim at suggesting prevalence rates

for different pathologies, and begin to reconstruct meaningful demographic data. This is enhanced by the number of clearly higher status individuals buried within the church.

In summary, the excavation has begun to show something of the varying land use within the Roman town, including a sizeable quarry and open area within an otherwise densely settled part of the town. The cemetery provides a rare opportunity to look at much of the population of a single medieval parish. Whilst archaeological folklore has it that medieval burials are all the same, this excavation has shown a number of practices, including evidence of covers or coffins and early practices such as charcoal burials and stone-lined graves.

Tony Gnanaratnam

society news

New President

Dr Richard Gem —President

Richard has been interested in church architecture since his boyhood, beginning with church crawls in Sussex. He went up to Cambridge to read archaeology and specialised in the Saxon period. This was followed by a PhD which examined the origins of Romanesque architecture in England in the period c.900–1100. His first job was in the Ministry of Works (ancestor of English Heritage), where he had historic building responsibilities and helped to introduce the new scheme of state aid for churches. Richard moved on from there to the Council for the Care of Churches, and stayed there to become the first Secretary of the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England when it was set up as a statutory body – ensuring proper archaeological arrangements for cathedrals was a major achievement of the new Commission.

Following his retirement, Richard has been able to devote his time to his ongoing research, and is currently working on a substantial book on the archaeology and architectural history of St Peter's basilica in Rome during the early middle ages. He has always remained committed to involvement with the voluntary societies, and therefore considers it both a pleasure and honour to have been invited to become President of the Society for Church Archaeology.

New Committee Members

Ash Lenton —Treasurer

Ash is a buildings surveyor specialising in restoration and refurbishment of historically significant buildings. He studied building surveying at Nottingham Trent University, archaeology at the University of Sheffield and Archaeological Heritage Management at the University of York.

His interests lie in monumental architecture, socio-political interpretations of the past and the archaeology and architecture of religion, persecution and intolerance. Ash will shortly begin teaching archaeological interpretation at Reading University and is about to embark upon a PhD in Architectural History.

Dr Kristján Ahronson — Publications Officer

Dr Kristján Ahronson is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow of the University of Edinburgh, and will shortly take up a Junior Research Fellowship at Wolfson College, Oxford. He has a growing interest in the history of archaeological thought, and his present research seeks to produce a history of scholarship studying early Christian cave use in Britain. Kristján's work locates him at the interface between early Christian and Viking Age archaeology and is avowedly inter-disciplinary and theoretically grounded, intergrating archaeological, Celtic and palaeoenvironmental materials.

Previous to his doctoral studies in Edinburgh, Kristján graduated from St Michael's College at the University of Toronto. In addition to his fellowship at the University of Edinburgh, he has held research posts at Jesus College, Oxford, as well as jointly between the University of Edinburgh and the National Museums of Scotland. As a field archaeologist, Kristján has worked professionally in Canada, Iceland and across the UK.

Alexandra Nickell — Acting Ordinary Committee Member

Allie has been the Cathedrals Assistant with the Church of England's Cathedrals Fabric Commission since 2002, and is involved with case work and policy for a variety of archaeological and conservation issues. She studied Mediaeval History and Archaeology at the University of St Andrews, and wrote her MPhil dissertation on the Pictish church and early church sites in Fife. She has previously worked as a museum curator and gravestone recorder, and has writ-

ten about churches for the Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network (SCRAN).

She is a member of the Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Christian Burials in England (APACBE) and is on the committee of the Association of Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists. Allie's current research interests include the Pictish church at Abernethy in Perthshire, Irish Round Towers and the archaeology of Early Christian sites in the British Isles.

2007 Newsletter

Contributions for next year's newsletter would be most welcome. We would like to hear of any relevant conferences, courses, or fieldwork taking place around the UK and Ireland. If you would like to contribute material please contact Geraint Franklin in early 2007 preferably by email: geraint.franklin@english-heritage.org.uk or by post; The Newsletter Editor, Society for Church Archaeology, Council for British Archaeology, 66 Bootham, York, YO30 7BZ.

2005 conference report

The Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Church

Last year's annual conference (30th September–2nd October) was hosted by Bede's World at Jarrow. The event was well supported and a total of seventy-six delegates registered for the Saturday programme, travelling to Jarrow from as far away as Germany and Denmark. The overall organisation and co-ordination of the weekend's events ran very smoothly. Feedback from participants during the conference itself, and also subsequently, has generally been very positive indeed. It is a shame that the standard of catering at the Conference Dinner fell rather short of the Society's expectations. The Committee would like to assure members that every effort has been made this year to ensure that the 2006 Conference Dinner at the Queen's Court Hotel in Exeter will be a most enjoyable experience in all respects.

The conference papers were well received and the Society is very grateful to the speakers. The guided tour around Bede's World itself (led by our former President, Professor Richard Morris), and also of St. Paul's church and monastery, Jarrow (led by Laura Sole, Archaeological Curator of Bede's World), were both enthusiastically attended. Fifty-five peo-

ple joined the field trip kindly led by Dr Eric Cambridge on the Sunday to Anglo-Saxon churches in the Tyne Valley. Visits were made to churches at Bywell and Corbridge, and also to Hexham Abbey, where Eric's animated tour of the Abbey crypt proved to be one of the highlights of the day.

Nicola Smith

