

Society for Medieval Archaeology Newsletter

Issue 35 September 2006

ISSN 1740-7036

EDITORIAL

Issue 35 of the newsletter proudly commences the drum role for the fiftieth anniversary of the Society for Medieval Archaeology in 2007. By way of this organ's contribution to a series of celebratory events and initiatives, look out for the glossy anniversary edition to be distributed alongside the Journal in December which will carry a selection of special features with further information on events scheduled for the coming year. With such highlights as a spring anniversary conference to be held at Rewley House, Oxford, Society-sponsored sessions and a glittering reception at *Medieval Europe* in Paris, and a programme of special lectures in venues across England, Wales and Scotland, there are plenty of opportunities for members to take part in the birthday festivities. The passing of 2007 will also see the institution of longer-term, strategic developments, including the launch of two new Society awards, on-line publication of the Medieval Britain & Ireland section of *Medieval Archaeology* and a major revamp of the website. All in all, 2007 promises to be an exciting year for medieval archaeology and, in more than purely chronological terms, a milestone for the Society.

Sharp-eyed readers will notice that, quite by chance, the awe-inspiring bastion of Tantallon Castle, East Lothian, makes two appearances in the current issue – enough of a coincidence to spark off yet another medieval conspiracy theory?

All comments, reports and news to **Gabor Thomas, Classical & Archaeological Studies, School of European Culture & Languages, Cornwallis Building, University of Kent, Canterbury, CT2 7NF, Email G.Thomas@kent.ac.uk**

COMMENT with Duncan Brown

Popular Contemporary Culture and the Medieval World, No. 2, in an occasional series. I can't be the only reader of this august organ to have sought occasional refuge among the uneven charms of 'The Hole in the Wall' public house at Waterloo

Station. There's usually some sort of educational experience to be had there, and this time was no exception, for glowing temptingly in a corner was 'Ye Olde Medieval Madness Pinball'. This gaudy machine is a triumph, and the warped medieval world it purveys is almost exhilarating.

I'm sure I don't have to explain pinball at any great length; suffice to say that a steel ball is sprung into a maze of tracks, lighted pathways and targets that accumulate points for the player who tries to keep the ball in play by preventing it from exiting through the bottom of the playing area. Among the proud features of 'Ye Olde Medieval Madness' are the 'Wam-Bam-Slam Catapult', and points can be scored for 'Joust Victory' and 'Save the Damsel'. You can also 'destroy castles to light an extra ball' and encounter such characters as 'Francois de Grim', 'Earl of Ego', Lord Howard of Hurtz' and 'King of Payne'. It's not all the romance of chivalry, however, for one light-up path leads to a jackpot via the 'Rabble Rouser', the 'Angry Mob', an 'Ugly Riot' and 'Revolting Peasants'. Those were the days eh? When revolting peasants really could dream of hitting the jackpot!

I must say I've got mixed feelings about 'Ye Olde Medieval Madness Pinball'. The humour and inventiveness of it more or less compensates for the cliché, and make it infinitely more preferable to the dull ignorance displayed in, for instance, the film 'Braveheart'. I suppose, also, that it's good to see a medieval theme incorporated into a popular gaming machine, or any other piece of contemporary culture. I could make portentous points about trivialisation of the past, and the societies that specialists such as ourselves seek to study, but then do I really need to do that? Perhaps it's more instructive to view this machine as a mirror against which we should consider the success (or not) of our efforts to teach and illuminate, and in which also, we can observe reflections of the society in which we live. I'd be missing the point though. Wouldn't I? By the

way, where are the revolting peasants when you need them?

50TH ANNIVERSARY EVENTS

Weekend Conference on Medieval archaeology, Oxford

23.03.07-25.03.07

As part of the celebrations of the 2007 fiftieth anniversary of the Society's foundation, there will be a joint weekend of lectures staged by the Society for Medieval Archaeology and Oxford University Department for Continuing Education (OUDCE), at Rewley House, Oxford, on 23-25 March. This is a landmark event, so members of the society are strongly encouraged to attend.

'Medieval Archaeology: from Dark Age to Renaissance'

The last half-century has seen a transformation of the way in which we see and understand the archaeology and history of the medieval centuries. This weekend will review the development of medieval archaeology, including a look at some of the most exciting recent and current excavations and research projects. With an emphasis on changing themes, technologies and ideas, it will provide a unique look forwards to the next 50 years.

The speakers will consist of members of the Society's council and other senior medieval archaeologists, including: Martin Carver, Roberta Gilchrist, Christopher Gerrard, Andrew Reynolds, David Griffiths, Dawn Hadley, Niall Brady, Stephen Rippon, Paul Barnwell, Peter Yeoman and Tom Beaumont-James. We also plan to have a stall from at least one major bookseller.

As a joint event, attendance at this weekend is not restricted to members of the society, and it will therefore also be advertised in OUDCE's own publicity in the autumn of 2006. Standard OUDCE weekend fees apply. To be sure of securing a place, Society members are encouraged to book as early as possible.

To book a place (and accommodation/meals if required), please contact Mrs Hazel Richards, Department for Continuing Education, Rewley House, Oxford OX1 2JA.

Tel. 01865 270380; email: ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk

Scottish repeats of AGM lecture

14.05.07-15.05.07

Members not able to attend the AGM in London (see leaflet enclosed), will be delighted to hear that, in association with the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, Professor Roberta Gilchrist will be taking her Presidential Lecture, 'Magic for the Dead: the archaeology of magic in later medieval burials' on a mini Scottish tour, with dates in Edinburgh and Aberdeen on Monday 14th and Tuesday 15th May respectively.

Cardiff Lecture

06.09.07 & 08.09.07

University of Cardiff

Professor John Hines will be delivering the following lecture (in both Welsh and English)

'Treftadaeth archeolegol a'r Canol Oesoedd Caerdydd a'r cylch' (Thursday 6th)

'Archaeological heritage and the Middle Ages in the Cardiff region' (Saturday 8th)

Perth Lecture

22.06.07

Perth Museum and Art Gallery

A lecture by **Professor Tom Beaumont James** (former Deputy Director Perth Excavation Committee 1976) *'Hunting for Heritage: the Perth Excavations of 1976'*, designed to coincide with Perth Archaeology Month 2007.

Tickets offered on first come, first-served, basis. Contact: Mark A Hall, History Officer, Perth Museum & Art Gallery, 78 George Street, Perth, PH1 5LB, Tel: 01738 632488, email: mahall@pkc.gov.uk, Fax: 01738 443505

SMA sponsored sessions and major reception at Medieval Europe Conference, Paris

03.09.07-08.09.07

The sessions will cover medieval landscapes, buildings and material culture; medieval health and diet; and medieval people. Further details will be announced in a forthcoming newsletter; preliminary details on *Medieval Europe, Paris* can be found at the following link:

http://medieval-europe-paris-2007.univ-paris1.fr/MEP%202007_fichiers/frame.htm

OTHER CONFERENCES & EVENTS

Fields of conflict

29.9.06-3.10.06

In association with the Institute for Medieval Studies, University of Leeds, English Heritage, the Royal Armouries, the Battlefields Trust and Leicestershire County Council. The 4th biennial international conference on battlefield archaeology will take place in England at the award-winning Royal Armouries Museum, Leeds. The optional final two days (2-3 October) will comprise visits to several major English battlefields, including Towton and Bosworth, where investigations are in progress. For those not able to present a paper there will be the opportunity of poster presentations. Reporting new methodological applications, substantive new work on major investigation projects, and important conservation and interpretation initiatives to which battlefield archaeology is making a contribution. Papers will be broadly grouped under the following headings: Britain and Ireland: Paul Stamper or Glenn Foard (g.r.foard@leeds.ac.uk) also for general enquiries. USA: Charlie Haecker, National Park Service (charles_haecker@nps.gov). All other areas: Tony Pollard, University of Glasgow (t.pollard@archaeology.gla.ac.uk). Following the successful precedent in Nashville, papers will normally be restricted to 25 minutes. For more information contact Glen Foard, email: g.r.foard@leeds.ac.uk, web: www.leeds.ac.uk/ims/fieldsofconflict/.

'Ou est les dishes de chafing?'

A study day in memory of Bob Thomson
07.10.06

Tudor Merchant's Hall, Southampton

This day-school will honour the memory of Bob Thomson, who died a year ago. The aim is to hear papers from Bob's friends and colleagues that reflect the variety of subjects that interested him. Speakers include Jon Adams, Mark Brisbane, Lawrence Butler, Jean Cook, David Hinton, and Clare McCutcheon.

The presentation of papers will be followed by a more Thomsonsque celebration of his life in the Duke of Wellington public house.

There will also be a sale of books from Bob's archaeological library, the proceeds to go to his widow.

This event is free, but you will need to book your place. Please contact Lisa Moore on 02380 635904, or Duncan Brown on 02380 915728, or

Duncan.brown@southampton.gov.uk.

Pagan belief: burial and beyond

14.10.06

The Sutton Hoo Society conference will be held at The Royal Hospital School, Holbrook, near Ipswich, Suffolk. Speakers include Martin Carver, Tania Dickinson, Aleks Pluskowski, Sarah Semple and Howard Williams. Chaired by Angela Care Evans. For more information contact the Treasurer, tel: 01728 747716, web: www.suttonhoo.org.

FRESH PICT: problems revisited in Aberdeen

18.11.06

King's College, Aberdeen University
Sponsored by The Research Institute for Scottish and Irish Studies, Aberdeen University and The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

This conference brings to Aberdeen some of the papers delivered earlier this summer at the Leeds International Medieval Conference, and adds extra papers relevant to those interested in the early art and history of north-east Scotland. It is concerned with recent research on the society and art of the Picts.

Coffee, registration (£7) and lunch (£10) are in the James Mackay Hall, straight ahead in the King's College quadrangle. The papers are delivered in KCG7, (ground floor, right, as you enter the quad). For booking contact Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, Museum of Scotland, Chambers St, Edinburgh, EH1 1JF. Tel: 0131-247-4133 or email: administration@socantscot.org

Draft Timetable

Coffee, Registration

Text and Society: Nicholas Evans, *Ideology, Literacy and Matriliny*; David Dumville, *Matriliny*

The World of Work: Lloyd Laing, *Workshops and Patronage*; Andrew Heald, *The Role of the Smith*

LUNCH in Mackay Hall

Landscape, wide and narrow: Simon Taylor, *Pictish Place-Names revisited*: Strat Halliday
The Strathdon Survey of Pictish Landscape; Gordon Noble; *'The ground beneath his feet': the landscape context of Rhynie Man*

TEA

Art and Meaning: Jane Geddes, *The problems of Pictish art: today*; Mike King
The Christian meaning of the Pictish crescent and V-rod symbol

OTHER ANNIVERSARY INITIATIVES

Glittering Prizes: introducing two new SMA Awards

The John Hurst Award for the best undergraduate dissertation in medieval archaeology

The John Hurst Award will be made annually to the undergraduate dissertation that makes the most original contribution to medieval archaeology (from AD400 to 1500), submitted to a United Kingdom or Republic of Ireland university. The first award will be made in 2007 for a Dissertation completed in the years 2006 or 2007; subsequent awards will be made annually.

Each Department of Archaeology are invited to submit their best candidate to Dr Stephen Rippon (address below) by the end of July 2007. The Dissertations will be read by Dr Stephen Rippon and the Society's Secretary (Dr Andrew Reynolds), with a short list of four also being read by a third member of Council (currently Prof James Graham-Campbell).

The winner will be offered three year's free membership of the Society, and one of the Society's in print Monographs (to be chosen by the winner). The first recipient will also be offered a bursary to attend the 2007 *Medieval Europe* conference in Paris. An abridged version of the Dissertation will be considered for publication in the Society's journal, *Medieval Archaeology*. The other short-listed candidates will be commended.

Dr Stephen Rippon,
Department of Archaeology,
University of Exeter

The Martyn Jope Award for the best article in the journal *Medieval Archaeology*

The Martyn Jope Award will be made annually for the article selected by the Editorial Committee that is judged to make the most significant contribution to the discipline of medieval archaeology, through novel theoretical interpretation, application of analytical method, or presentation of new findings. The award will be announced in the journal and the author(s) will receive a prize of £200. The first award will be made in 2007.

Website developments

One of the major strategic initiatives designed to coincide with the anniversary celebrations next year, spearheaded by archaeological consultant and website developer, Alex Langlands, is a radical overhaul of the SMA website, to be launched this November. In a bid to expand our membership/profile we are keen to make the site as visually informative as possible, whilst structuring content as much as possible around the needs of existing members. To this end, we would like to encourage you to submit information - pictures, plans, drawings, links, reviews, webcasts and any other relevant details - concerning your research. Also, if you have any ideas on how the content of the website could be made more relevant, functional and interactive, then please contact Alex with your suggestions on:
alex@alexlanglands.com.

Current Research in Early Medieval Archaeology: student symposium Easter 2007

The last two decades have seen tremendous advances in Early Medieval (AD 400 – 1100) archaeology. Numerous major excavations and new publications have defined the Early Medieval period in Britain as a dynamic and complex period of dramatic social change. Archaeological discoveries have been accompanied by theoretical and methodological advances, which together have created a vibrant and expanding

research culture with a promising and exciting future.

As part of the Society for Medieval Archaeology fiftieth year celebrations this symposium proposes to create a constructive and multi-disciplinary forum for post-graduate researchers to express, discuss and explore *new* research and ideas in a positive, informal and interactive environment. The symposium will explicitly aim to cross traditional period/institutional/theoretical divides, and to allow discussion between researchers of diverse expertise and perspectives. Rather than the traditional presentation of complete research this symposium aims to provide a forum for researchers to present ideas and thoughts more informally without the pressure of producing complete research suitable of fall publication.

Sessions will consist of 20 minute papers followed by open discussion and debate chaired by leading specialists in each field. A wide as possible range of topics are encouraged, and papers may cover all areas of Early Medieval research and discourse. Abstracts are particularly welcome from post-graduate students and professional practitioners engaged in active research into Early Medieval Britain. Academics, professionals and undergraduates are invited to attend and give support and comments. A guided afternoon field trip to the post-Roman hill fort at Dinas Powys will also take place.

Sessions (working title; our intention is to structure the sessions around the papers that delegates submit):

- Communities in life and death
- Archaeology ritual and religion
- Communities in the landscape
- Thoughts about the future: Early Medieval archaeology in the 21st-century

Grŵp Ymchwil Archaeolegol Yr Oesoedd
Canol Cynnar Prifysgol Caerdydd
Cardiff University Early Medieval
Archaeology Research Group
HISAR, Cardiff University, Humanities
Building, Colum Drive, Cardiff, CF10 3EU
contact: seamanap@cf.ac.uk.

Medieval Britain and Ireland on-line

We are proud to announce that plans to publish MB&I on-line will come into effect from Volume 51 (2008) of the journal, the first annual UK archaeological listing to go electronic. With the 'find' facility offered on internet browsers, the digital version (to be hosted by the Archaeological Data Service) will be fully searchable and will allow the inclusion of many more entries than currently permitted under the editorial constraints of the printed journal. MB&I will not be fully removed from the printed volume itself, however, since future volumes of the journal will carry extended illustrated summaries of discoveries and work at a key selection of sites; we will also continue to reproduce in full the MB&I index in its usual hard-copy format.

NEWS & VIEWS

Baldred's Auldhame: A medieval chapel and cemetery in East Lothian

In early 2005, AOC Archaeology Group were called in to investigate some human skeletal remains unearthed by ploughing near Auldhame, East Lothian. Subsequent excavation under the Historic Scotland Human Remains Call-off Contract revealed the remains of a previously unknown early medieval chapel and an extensive burial ground, which overlay an Iron Age promontory fort, the ditch of which came to define the boundary of the later graveyard.

Situated on the Firth of Forth, Auldhame has historical associations with the 7th-century saint, Baldred, who founded a monastery at nearby Tynningham and lived a life of solitude on Bass Rock which is visible from the site of the recent excavations. Preliminary comparative evidence indicates the chapel at Auldhame may date from the 9th century but there are burials which clearly pre-date the chapel and which, together with other partial structural remains, may be contemporary with Saint Baldred. The graveyard appears to have gone out of use during the 17th century.

Within the burial ground some 240 individuals were recovered and a further 66 burials were identified which were deemed



The excavation in progress with Tantallon Castle in the background. The foundations of the chapel can be seen to the right of a group of burials under excavation. © AOC Archaeology Group.

'safe' from ploughing and therefore left *in situ*. At least three phases of burial activity are clear from the alignment of the graves. The majority of graves lay west to east on the same alignment as the chapel remains, including those which clearly predate the chapel. C14 dating of a grave which had been cut by the chapel has provided a *terminus post quem* date of between 680-900AD for construction of the chapel. However, two other groups of graves with differing alignments was also noted. The first of these had an alignment of northeast to southwest and were located amongst the east to west burials but were seen to be at the base of sequences of inter-cutting graves. Provisional C14 dating suggests a date-range spanning 680-880 AD for these burials. This early date may support the supposition that there was an earlier chapel built on the same alignment as this group of interments. The second distinct group of graves was located toward the west end of the chapel and consisted almost entirely of juveniles. These were orientated on an axis closer to southwest to northeast but had no stratigraphic relationship with any other group of graves. C14 dating of this group suggests a date of 1280-1400 AD. It should be noted that the C14 dating is from a very small sample of the skeletons and further skeletons will be dated in due course.

The type of burial also varied across the site. The majority were simple earth-cut graves but distinctive cists and coffin burials were also present. Grouping of graves with regard to demography has yet to be analysed but a

significant number of neonates had been buried very close to the central south wall of the chapel - perhaps a way of sanctifying unbaptised burials. A deposit rich in beach shells was identified over part of the site, indicating perhaps that the graves were once marked with cairns of shells before being ploughed away after the graveyard ceased to be used.

Finds from the site include Iron Age and medieval pottery, brooches and other metal objects found using metal detectors. Very few grave goods were found but of particular note are an iron blade, two strap ends and possible stirrups from a single burial. Analysis of the artefacts and the shell-rich deposits will form part of the post-excavation programme but the bulk of the work will be concerned with the skeletal assemblage. Samples from six skeletons have already been submitted for radiocarbon-dating which will provide a chronological framework for burial activity on the site.

An assessment of the human bone has just been completed. The Auldham assemblage consists of 240 individuals, one of the largest recovered assemblages of such an early date to be found in East Lothian. The assemblage consists of 30 neonate/infant individuals, 44 juveniles and 166 adults. Within the adult assemblage there was an approximate ratio of 1:1 in terms of gender. Generally the remains displayed good or moderate surface preservation and were relatively complete. A number of pathologies were observed in the sample including fractures, klippel-feil syndrome, osteoarthritis, rotator cuff disease, intervertebral disc disease and periostitis.

Due to its size, date and the association with St Baldred the assemblage is considered to be of local, regional and national significance. The material will undergo a population-based, detailed osteological analysis and further studies are proposed, in particular isotope analyses to examine issues of diet and population origins. We hope that the data from this assemblage will contribute to a number of current osteological research projects.

Erlend Hindmarch & Melissa Melikian

AOC Archaeology Group, contact: Ronan Toolis, tel: 0131 440 3593, email: ronant@aocscot.co.uk

SMA Session, Leeds International Medieval Congress, July 2006

The society recently sponsored a session of papers at the annual Leeds International Medieval Congress. The theme of the Congress this year was 'Gesture and Emotion', and the three speakers in the Society's session all tackled this theme from archaeological perspectives. The session featured papers by Dr Howard Williams, who spoke about 'Death, Emotion, and Gesture in Early Medieval Britain', Society President Prof. Roberta Gilchrist, whose paper was entitled 'Nurturing the Dead: Medieval Women as Family Undertakers', and Dr Kate Giles, who rounded off the session with her paper on 'Gesture, the Built Environment and the Middle Classes in Late Medieval England'. The session was organised on behalf of the Society by Council Member Dr Dawn Hadley, and was chaired by Prof. Tom Beaumont James. The session was extremely well attended and it was particularly pleasing that it attracted an inter-disciplinary audience. The Society hopes to sponsor a session each year at the Leeds IMC, which offers a great opportunity to raise the profile of archaeology at what is the largest annual gathering of medievalists in Europe.

Dawn Hadley
University of Sheffield

More Medieval Movie Madness

My fieldwork this summer included several excursions into the trench of popular culture, where I unearthed three noteworthy cinematic excursions into medieval Europe: *Tristan + Isolde*, *Mission: Impossible 3* and *The Da Vinci Code*. Alas they are largely noteworthy for disappointing reasons. None of them lives up to the best that the medium has delivered in the past; *Andrei Rublev*, *Seven Samurai*, *The Seventh Seal*, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *The Navigator*, *The Warlord* and *Hour of the Pig* amongst them.

Whilst the Romance of Tristan and Isolde could alternatively and reasonably be

described as High Tragedy, the film version under scrutiny is alas merely tragic – that is a sad waste of time and effort that has little in the way of merit to recommend it. Risible soap opera dialogue is aided in its plundering of the Romance by woefully inadequate period detail (or rather non-period detail) be it the physical material culture and architecture on show or the film's conceptualisation of politics and its sense of geography. The alarm bells went off quite early when I realised that directing it was Kevin Reynolds, whose previous 'triumph' was *Robin Hood Prince of Thieves*, in which, amongst other things, Sherwood Forest was relocated to Hadrian's Wall. The catalogue of woes is, if anything, even longer with *Tristan + Isolde*. Without being exhaustive they include the spatial and temporal relocation of Tantallon Castle from late medieval SE Scotland to the coast of North Wales. Its lord or baron is Aragon, a Pict and Picts are clearly suggested to come from Wales (though in the film's confused geography they may also be equated with Jutland). Dunluce is moved from the northern Irish coast of Co. Antrim to that of the eastern seaboard of Co. Meath. The geography is helpfully laid out for us on a convenient wall-size drop-down map kept suspended in its rolled-up state above Aragon's throne. This map depicts Britain as England and Wales, with the tribal names marked upon it: Jutes (in the NE!), Celts, Saxons and Angles (and by implication Picts), all of them dis-united English tribes led by barons. King Mark of the Romance, becomes Lord Marke. His Cornish residence (which appears to be in Devon on the film's map), Castle D'Or is burnt by the Irish but rebuilt quickly, in one of the film's absurd flights of fantasy as a stone keep or donjon. It is built beside a river and screened on its landward sides by a wooden palisade, entered through a log-built gateway which readily by-passes the main entrance, a huge timber gate-house (modelled on late medieval timber-framing) built partially over the river on stilts. Its absurdities include a stone built central hearth, which has four arches supporting a free-standing chimney. I will resist listing the woes of the costume styling and the myriad of synthetic dyes clearly employed by Isolde in particular. Actually this seems plausible when one realises that Isolde also has access

to John Donne's *The Good Morrow*, which she reads from a pocket-book of poetry.

Some of these faults might actually have been forgivable had the story something to say, it does not. It feels much less like a re-telling of Tristan and Isolde than a derivative fusing of Romeo and Juliet ("Before Romeo and Juliet there was..." is the film's tag-line) with the Arthurian love triangle of Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevre and the classic 1960s film, *The Warlord* (a far more convincing Romance tale set in the 11th-century coastal borderlands of NW France/Flanders). It thus demonstrates that it does not justify any regard as the latest re-telling of a Romance that has innumerable re-tellings to its name. But the previous re-tellings (most of them medieval) remain compelling because each is an updating in a contemporary setting or a significant new artistic expression of the story. This film is neither. It is no more than a piece of misinformed-hindsight applied to the past, the only contemporary value I can discern in it is in reminding us how profoundly ignorant and unethical some of our modern-day tellers-of-tales are. That it does not quite plumb the depths of *Arthur* (reviewed previously in this column) is down to the performances of Sophia Myles (as Isolde) and Rufus Sewell (as Marke) - both find notes of authenticity in their characters - and to the film's evocation of a sense of a Roman past. This is achieved, despite itself, through its landscape of Roman ruins (with half glimpsed mosaics and painted wall-plaster). I say despite itself because it manages to get most of the details wrong, with a villa up in the Welsh mountains and a secret Roman tunnel (its walls decorated with images taken from ancient Greek Attic pottery) leading to the basement of Castle D'Or from the ruins of a Roman temple (?) beside a Roman bridge. This tunnel seems to have been inspired by the common myth of secret tunnels from past-times (itself based on the unexpected discoveries of crypts, drains, cellars, souterrains etc in later times) though it is also clearly there as a convenient, creaking, plot device by which the climax can be reached.

The second film I would like to consider, if only briefly, is *Mission: Impossible 3*. It has no prime concern with medieval Europe

being a contemporary spy-thriller, which, however tritely does encourage its US audience to question US intelligence policy. It does though have one key scene in relation to medieval architecture and art. As part of their break-in to the Vatican to kidnap an arms dealer the MI team has to blow their way through the catacombs beneath the Vatican palace. Thus we see the destruction of an entire catacomb-niche complete with a wall painting. It is presented matter-of-factly as a necessary and acceptable thing to do. It is, of course a plot device rather than a recommendation or an endorsement of such an act but with no self-questioning or regret it shows a disregard for the conservation of cultural resources and is unlikely to be widely recognised as a metaphor for US cultural destruction in foreign lands such as Iraq.

Our trilogy of medieval movie madness is completed by the long anticipated film version of *The Da Vinci Code*. I went to see it expecting the worse but with a faint hope that something more might be delivered by the film version of the story. On the whole it proved disappointing: boringly too long, sombre and pretentious, the film took itself far too seriously. Tacitus once wrote (*Histories* 1.22) 'By the eagerness of the human mind things which are obscure are more easily believed', an entirely apt description for this film and the book from which it derives (and one that finds an echo in Umberto Eco's line 'only suspect', in his brilliant novel *Foucault's Pendulum*). If the book had one saving grace it was that it had a sense of urgency in its pacing, this is not translated to the film version, which plods along at immense leisure. A genre piece of this type really needs urgent pacing to have any hope of success in holding the attention of a viewer in search of entertainment (compare for example the otherwise vacuous *Da Vinci Code* derived *National Treasure*, which at least bowls along at a furious speed). As one might expect given its source material the film's historical fabric is a ragged tissue of misinformation and dubious interpretation woven around the compulsion to credit conspiracy theories. Its huge lacunae of credibility and intelligence include ridiculous linguistic deductions (e.g. the derivation of 'Sang Real' or Holy Blood

from 'San Greal' or Holy Grail and the derivation of *Roslyn* from *Rose-Line*), the apparent absence of the Reformation from the film's narrative arc of a powerful Catholic Church, the proposition that tomb effigies are not part of tombs (unless on the tomb of Sir Isaac Newton), the wrong-headed interpretation of early Christianity and the characterisation of it and paganism within Roman politics and culture, the utter nonsense about the Merovingian royal bloodline being derived from Christ and Mary Magdalene and the twisted, hoary old interpretation of Templar history. The Magdalene revelation seems less rooted in medieval thought than in a 1960s/70s hippy reflex of free love as a way to interpret Christ – in which the film *Jesus Christ Superstar* over emphasise her harlotry and the book *Was Jesus Married?* (By Wilbur Phipps) speculated seriously that Jesus and Mary were married. There are late Antique kernels for these ideas (which were always liminal ideas) principally the Gnostic belief in a strong love between Mary and Jesus: in the apocryphal *Gospel of Mary* it is more spiritual than sexual and in the *Gospel of Philip* it has amore earthy feel, stressing the union of men and women as symbolic of healing and peace. Filmically these issues are treated far more intelligently in *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), Martin Scorsese's thoughtful adaptation of Nikos Kozantzakis's 1950s novel, when the marriage is presented as the final temptation felt by Christ as he dies on the Cross. None of them are concerned with hocus-pocus conspiracy theories and royal blood-lines. It is then, once again, very easy to get exercised about the film's abuse of history, archaeology and art-history and many of the comments I made in a previous piece [in issue 32 (March 2005) of this Newsletter] still stand. Rather than reiterate those thoughts in the context of the film I would like to draw the reader's attention to a noticeable difference about the film, or rather two, not unrelated differences and then deal with a wider contextual point which perhaps asks us not to get overly panicky about the threat to medieval studies.

The characterisation, plotting and pacing of the film have the effect of flattening out the clear premise of the book that it is somehow

“true”, in favour of a more even-handed perspective that suggests not so much that the story is “true” as that some people could believe that it is true, that believe does not always depend on “truth” and evidence. The film is careful not to implicate institutions such as the Catholic Church and its sub-organisation, Opus Dei (probably for politically correct PR anxieties as much as anything), preferring to point fingers at crazed individuals. Indeed it is possible to view the film as a tract against fanatics (in tune with US political anxieties over fundamentalist Islamic terrorism) – it is, in large part, the extremists on both sides of the story that meet a bad end (there is no come-back on institutional behaviour, except that of the self-appointed and fanciful “Priory of Sion”). Had this side of things been more developed it might have made the film tolerable but it cannot significantly counteract its context of a film that only expects one thing from its audience, ignorance and has little real interest in the great human questions of what, where, when, who and why. And what does that say about the levels of education in our society? I hinted above at a sense of panic that has ensued over the popularity of the *Da Vinci Code*, in terms of its presumed threat to proper apprehension of the medieval period. This in part arises from an over anxiety about the film's medievalism. In fact this is just a trope that could have been interchanged, with variations, with any other period of history/archaeology. It is merely an adaptation of the template established by several 19th-century novels, notable amongst them Rider Haggard's *She* (1887), which (influenced by both Scott's *The Antiquary* (1816) and Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-7) – both of which stand to *She* as *Foucault's Pendulum* stands to *The Da Vinci Code*) set the pulp-fiction parameters of historical pretence using the ploy of historical evidence – documents, artefacts (in the case of *She* an inscribed pot-herd) etc – as a key plot device. This undoubtedly satisfies a human narrative thirst and, as the quote from Tacitus above indicates, has done so for at least 2,000 years. Teaching in response to *The Da Vinci Code* will not change this and the book will no doubt be replaced by another such source of anxiety in a few years time. The recent round-table discussion on

the phenomenon of *The Da Vinci Code* held at the Leeds IMC (June 13 2006) aired the issues and provoked a roughly 50-50 split between those medievalists worried and those not. In the final analysis I do not see the need for panic but the book/film does need to be criticised and challenged so that those interested can make a choice and can be led down the road of understanding.

Mark A Hall
Perth Museum & Art Gallery

OBITUARIES

John Charlton MA, FSA, LVO 7 June 1909 to 29 October 2004: a note on some medieval work

When John Charlton died in 2004 there were numerous tributes to him, which concentrated on his long association with Roman Archaeology and his work especially with Birley at Hadrian's wall. A redoubtable northerner, born at Gateshead and with a first from Durham in English and History, it is his exploits up north which claimed most of the column space after he died. However, both at the funeral oration and in the subsequent Obituary in the RAI Newsletter one aspect of his work, medieval and in the south, was overlooked: his work in Wiltshire. This was passed over with a reference to 'discoveries...at a Tudor palace near Southampton': what was meant, of course, was the medieval palace at Clarendon where Charlton arrived in 1933, aged just 24 to take part, and as it happened, to take command. This was in some ways John's finest hour, and in others his nemesis. The excavation was the brainchild of Tancred Borenius, professor of Fine Art in London, sometime Finnish Chargé d'Affairs in London, confidant of Queen Mary and her adviser in the matter of antiques (they communicated John told me by messages delivered by palace footmen on motorbikes!) and owner of Stocks Bridge Cottage at nearby Coombe Bissett. Sir Thomas Phillipps had excavated at Clarendon c. 1820 in advance of Sir Richard Colt-Hoare's *Modern Wiltshire* (1837/44), using a site director called Hensley who left some superb drawings of plans and upstanding remains at the palace. Borenius sought the permission of the recently widowed owner of the estate, Mrs

Christie-Miller, to excavate the palace site, bringing to bear his encyclopaedic knowledge of medieval wall-paintings, and hopes that they would be found amidst the ruins of the palace where Becket (another favourite topic of Borenius's) and Henry II had experienced their stand-off at the Constitutions of Clarendon in 1164. Mrs Christie-Miller was amenable, and a photograph, probably by Charlton, shows Borenius (in his homburg hat) and his wife Anne-Marie (in fur coat and hat), granddaughter of Runeberg, Finland's National Poet, at the site at the beginning of activity in 1933.

John Charlton had been involved at Old Sarum and was selected, as Hensley had been a century earlier, to be in charge on site. By the time war prevented further work on the site on 3 September 1939, Charlton was 30, soon to be appointed an inspector of ancient monuments during the war and thereafter for the rest of his career, extending his knowledge of royal palaces, which of course included 10, Downing Street, with its embedded fragments of Tudor palace. He learnt a great deal at Clarendon. With a busy life, Borenius rarely found time to visit the site. Indeed Charlton's regular correspondence keeping the boss up to date on what was happening in Wiltshire was a key source in reconstructing the excavations for the Antiquaries volume in 1988. Clarendon was very demanding. First there were the diggers, in early years unemployed Welsh miners who camped at nearby Alderbury, who dug in the morning and played football after lunch. JC joined them for singing round the camp fire. Second there was recording the site. Until shortly before his death, JC was still finding glass slides, prints and negatives and occasional artefacts in his possession. When he was required about 1990 to turn out his locker at the Athenaeum due to impending building works, this revealed, in an expensive cigar box, the splendid parrot-beak from a Laverstock jug found in layers sealing the kiln in 1937, and the amuletic, pierced, pilgrim, scallop shell containing azurite from Hungary used in manuscript illumination! These are now in the Salisbury Museum.

Thus every Summer for six years Charlton ran the excavation and managed the social side (although he handed over management of matters to the schoolboy Howard Colvin in the Summer of 1939). His photographic record is exemplary. However, whatever plans there were largely disappeared when they were stolen (along with the camera) during the war. What has survived are his brief notebooks, with some drawings therein. This was one of the reasons the excavations were never written up, and when Borenius died unexpectedly in 1948 plans for publication faded. Correspondence in the WORKS 14 file at TNA reveals efforts to try to get Charlton's employers to give him time to write-up, a request they never conceded. But at Clarendon JC did much more than snap and record: he went to the mansion to help with the racing tips, and to play his flute, and he welcomed many distinguished society guests and archaeologists to the site. These ranged from Mortimer Wheeler (to advise where to dig the first hole) with Tessa, to Sir Bruce Richmond (founder of the *TLS*), Diana Cooper, Edith Olivier and a host of luminaries and archaeological experts, Rutland and Ponsonby on tiles, Kenneth Clark and others.

From 1977 when work began to write up the excavations, John Charlton was always at our side or willing to help: we visited the Athenaeum together for discussions, and even at nearly 90 he came to Clarendon and, from a director's chair, told Christopher Gerrard and me which spoil heap originated in which building. He was always available to advise young scholars, corresponding vigorously by email and by long-hand when he was recuperating in a nursing home.

He made a great contribution to medieval archaeology sustained by his ready wit and impish humour out in the field. Inside, the account of the silhouette of his hat passing across the screen at the Antiquaries en route to the exit early in a dull talk, and returning in the dark towards the end to make a brilliant observation on a lecture he had not heard, sums up the way in which he packed his life from start to finish. We miss him! And what of those wall paintings which inspired the excavation? A few fragments with human limbs, clothing and latticed

windows were found and were photographed in a bucket by Charlton: they have long since disappeared, but recent analysis of plaster has revealed evidence of new, imported, pigments: a triumph of science over art?

Tom Beaumont James
University of Winchester

Ian Goodall, Senior Architectural Investigator in the York office. Ian joined the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England in 1972. During a distinguished career he made major contributions to knowledge through his work on the Royal Commission books on the houses of the North York Moors, Yorkshire Textile Mills and Hospitals, and in recent years published important research on historic houses in Cumbria. True to his conviction that disciplinary boundaries can sometimes hinder historical understanding, and exist to be broken, Ian was also a much-published expert on archaeological ironwork. Always stimulating and supportive, Ian was a wonderful friend and colleague who will be sorely missed.

Dr Edward Impey
Director of Research and Standards
English Heritage

Richard Avent
We should also note with sadness the passing of Richard Avent, former chief inspector at CADW, whose obituary appeared in *The Times* for 9 August. Like Ian Goodall, RA combined a high-profile administrative post, in this instance within the inspectorate of Wales, with a distinguished academic career ranging across several subjects, chief amongst them being his lifelong passion, castle studies, for which he gained an international reputation. For early medievalists his name will be synonymous with publications arising from his early research into Anglo-Saxon disc and composite brooches which remain standard works on the subject.

NEW BOOKS

Leicester Abbey, medieval history, archaeology and manuscript studies

Edited by Jo Story, Jill Bourne and Richard Buckley. 314pp, many illustrations (some in colour), published by the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society. ISBN: 0-9542388-1-8 and 978-0-9542388-1-0. Price: £25.00 hb.

Leicester Abbey was founded in 1138 and became one of the most important Augustinian monasteries in medieval England. But it is one of the least known of the Midland monasteries because of the almost total destruction of its buildings and archives after its Dissolution in 1538. This is the first volume on Leicester Abbey for more than 50 years, produced to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society. The book presents eleven papers by leading scholars and local historians on the social, political and landscape history of the abbey as well as its archaeology, manuscripts, charters, urban rentals and library. Newly discovered charters are published here for the first time, as well as accounts of recent excavations in the abbey and gatehouse that formed the core of the post-Dissolution mansion known as Cavendish House.

Contents:

The archaeology of Leicester Abbey, Richard Buckley with Steve Jones, Peter Liddle, Michael Derrick and James Meek

An incense-boat cover from Leicester Abbey, David Dawson

The landscape of Leicester Abbey's home demesne lands to the Dissolution, Anthony Squires

Leicester Abbey after the Dissolution Richard Buckley with Steve Jones, Paul Courtney and David Smith

Henry Knighton and Leicester Abbey, Geoffrey Martin

The books of Leicester Abbey, Teresa Webber

Binding descriptions in the library catalogue from Leicester Abbey, Michael Gullick

Summary catalogue of surviving manuscripts from Leicester Abbey, Michael Gullick and Teresa Webber

On the outside looking in: the Abbey's urban property in Leicester Appendix: Bodleian Library Laud Misc. 625, ff. 185r-189r, David Postles

Abbot Sadyngton of Leicester Abbey and onychomancy: an episode of clerical divination in the fifteenth century, Anthony Roe

Early charters and patrons of Leicester Abbey Appendix: the charters of Leicester Abbey 1139-1265, David Crouch