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Book Reviews



ST PETER'S BARTON-UPON-HUMBER, LINCOLNSHIRE. A PARISH AND ITS COMMUNITY. VOLUME 1: HISTORY, ARCHAEOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURE PARTS 1 AND 2. By Warwick Rodwell. Pp. xxviii and 543, xiv and 379, Illus 119. Oxbow Books, 2011. Price: £75.00. ISBN 978 184217 325 1.

In 1972, St Peter's Church, Barton-upon-Humber, was declared redundant. After entering guardianship of the Department of the Environment, a major programme of archaeological work began in 1978. Following on from the publication of volume 2 by Waldron (*The Human Remains*, 2007), this lavish two-part volume, incorporating a raft of specialists, represents the culmination of over three decades of research. This is a detailed and richly illustrated pair of books reporting on the results of excavation and building survey between 1978 and 2005.

St Peter's is unquestionably the most extensive and intensive archaeological project to have been conducted on any English parish church. Through the evidence of its architecture, burials and other material remains, the report explores its late tenth- or early eleventh-century origins and development around a surviving Saxon tower and western annexe, through to the twentieth century. As a comprehensive study, and for its expert constituent elements, this book is essential reading for anyone interested in church archaeology, hitherto previously only available in an interim report by Rodwell and Rodwell (St Peter's Church, Barton-upon-Humber: Excavation and Structural Study, 1978-81, *Antiq. J.* **62**, 284-315, 1982). While few will read it from cover-to-cover, each section is written and structured to allow easy access for layperson and scholar alike to a wealth of archaeological evidence from below and above ground.

During a comprehensive introduction, Rodwell notes that the area of Barton (as with most parts of England) is a 'catalogue of missed opportunities' (p. 20) through the 'insidious tide of new building' (p. 68) from the 1960s, meaning that the detailed archaeology of the church stands in stark contrast to our knowledge of its environs. This book does its finest to remedy this situation and place the excavations and survey of the church in context. This is achieved through the analysis of the topographical, place-name and documentary sources for Barton's origins and development (Chapter 2) and the architecture and archaeology of the neighbouring church of St Mary's (Chapter 3). The physical environment, prehistoric, Roman and early and middle Anglo-Saxon archaeology of the area is then reviewed, together with the argument that the Anglo-Saxon estate of *æt Bearuwe* comprised of an eastern monastic focus (Barrow) and a western high-status settlement (Barton) (Chapter 4).

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Many will be interested in this volume first and foremost for the detailed appraisal of the early burial practices dated to the mid-tenth to mid-twelfth centuries, including the placing of stone ‘ear-muffs’, charcoal, riverine mud and rods in graves and the details of the exceptionally well-preserved timber coffins (Chapter 5). Of equal interest is the detailed comparative analysis of the Anglo-Saxon architecture of the tower-nave, its western annexe (‘baptistry’) and the demolished chancel, including evidence that graves were systematically exhumed to make way for the building of this first stone church (Chapter 6). However, the subsequent chapters also merit close attention. The complex succession of church building and renovations is charted throughout the medieval and post-medieval phases (Chapters 7–9). The detailed attention to past and present church fittings and furnishings (Chapter 10), the archaeology of the churchyard (Chapter 11) and medieval and post-medieval burial practice and commemoration from above and below ground (Chapters 12 and 13), as well as a review of the human remains evidence (Chapter 14), each deserve their place in the book. The final chapters address specialist studies: the chronology assisted by Bayesian statistical analysis is discussed in Chapter 15, and Chapter 16 presents a range of studies of structural and decorative materials, including the study of stonework, masons’ marks and graffiti, floor tiles, window glass and bell-casting and other metalworking debris.

In summary, this study marks a key moment in the development of church archaeology. The exemplary investigation of a single building and its environs is to be highly applauded, not only in terms of the quality of the material reported and the archaeological methods employed in the work, but also the scholarly depth and comparative analyses presented in the report. This is a book that is far more than the sum of its superb elements. Still, one wonders when and where comparable analyses of other parish churches will emerge that match Rodwell’s study in terms both of its detail and breadth.

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