

PontArc

**Newsletter of the Pontefract & District Archaeological Society,
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ST RICHARD'S FRIARY:

A brief résumé of the first season's work on site



The Dominican Order was founded in 1216 at Toulouse S W France. The Dominican mission to Britain arrived in 1221, with the first Friary founded at Oxford, then York by 1227, and Pontefract by 1256.

St Richards Priory was founded on land donated by Edmund de Lacy at the edge of the new town, or West Chepe, Pontefract. In contrast, St John's Priory the older Cluniac house, was situated in the original town area to the east.

The Pontefract black friars were allocated a territory in which to preach and beg, encompassed by Pontefract, Rotherham and Wakefield. From 1330 onwards the Pope awarded the Friars the power to preach, hear

confessions and bury the dead. Many townsfolk in Pontefract left small legacies to the Friars and requested burial in the priory lay cemetery.

The house apparently comprised a large `preaching box` church with narrow chancel and large nave, cloister, dormitory, chapter house, refectory, kitchens, lavatories and guest accommodation. All the priory buildings lay south of the church ranged around the cloister, today lying beneath the demolished former hospital site.

The priory was dissolved by King Henry VIII in 1538 and surrendered to the crown. The two bells and roof lead were stripped and sold as was the entire site; the buildings were demolished for their stone, wood, glass and fittings. The site reverted

to agricultural use as pasture and later became liquorice fields. The hospital eventually spread over it after the foundation of the dispensary in the late 1890's.

When the hospital was expanded in 1963, the Society excavated a series of trenches to locate the priory buildings (Wilson K in *Pontefract Archaeological Journal*, 1964). Further exploratory work was done by West Yorkshire Archaeological Service in 1989-91. When the present demolition and re-building was proposed, the Society, with the Pontefract Civic Society, contacted the Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust with a view to locating the surviving priory buildings. The Trust donated a sum of money together with use of contractors' facilities, all to be overseen by The West Yorkshire Archaeology Service. Society members and experienced volunteers from the whole region were recruited. The dig took place during August and September 2011.

RESULTS:

The excavation found the north wall of the Friary church nave. The wall is 75cm wide and set on a deep rock-cut foundation. The wall was later buttressed to bear the weight of additions, possibly the construction of a nave clerestory. The east wall of the nave north aisle survived. This too was later buttressed (twice) re-using a broken grave cover slab. Part of an altar (there would have been several) base survives within the church against the whitewashed east wall.

Both walls show signs of robbing, presumably post-Dissolution. Multiple fragments and whole pieces of stone window tracery from one of the north wall gothic windows, the interior faces of which are whitewashed, were discovered. Fragments of painted window glass and the lead canes into which it was set have been found too.

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Frontispiece: Ron Wilson's beautiful reconstruction picture of St Richard's, as it may have appeared in about 1400 AD.

The 1963 dig, Lower Left: What was believed at the time to be the south wall of the monastic church. The recent work has disproved this theory. It may be the north wall of the cloister garth, but continuing excavation will eventually give us more idea.

Outside the walls, graves of the lay cemetery lying north and east of the church were located. There is a particularly dense cluster of graves outside the east wall of the church while some on the north side are almost touching the wall.

Inside the church was a rare Purbeck marble sarcophagus, once set into a wall niche, later pulled out, broken open and ransacked. The bones of the occupant were left scattered around it. The tomb had once held a high status burial. Fragments of fine decorative stonework, probably from the tomb niche décor, were also found nearby.

A single burial had been cut into the demolition debris from the church; it is possible that this individual may have been a Civil War casualty, 1644-5 or 1648-9.

A deep cultivation soil covered the site of the former church, this soil was improved and manure with waste from the town and used for the cultivation of liquorice from the 18th to the 20th century. The deep harvesting trenches were visible in the soil section on the northern edge of the excavation.

Also found was a significant amount of medieval pottery, painted window glass, clay pipes covering 400 years of history, metal objects, animal bones oyster shells etc.

Plans are already in hand for a season of excavation in 2012, and funding is being sought for this. The Society acknowledges with gratitude the assistance of:

Real Life Options (RLO); Balfour Beatty; Consort Healthcare; Wilko Hardware; the late Roger Metcalf; the Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust. The very many volunteers – over 200 in total – who took part in what became the second largest excavation in Yorkshire.

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2 Lower Right: *The 1963 diggers, outside the garden shed which formed dig HQ.*



The 'eighties digs. Left: Dig group on site as darkness falls.



Right: Looking south with Bluebell Steps on the right. The diverted monastic culvert visible bottom centre right shows how the friars' hydraulic engineering survived into the twentieth century.



THE 2011 DIG

Left: General view across the site towards the end of the season..**Right:** The purbeck marble sarcophagus. **Below left:** 2011 diggers receive their certificates at the end of dig party. On the extreme right may be seen Chairman David Wandless - front, and deputy site director Matthew Webster, behind. **Below right:** Field Director Simon Tomson cuts the site cake, made by Programme Secretary Janet Niepokojczycka.



IN MEMORIAM

Sadly, we have recently lost a number of members, friends and people connected with the Society. The Editor is grateful to Sibyl Leach, Jean McNaught, Liz Love, Margaret Lound and David Wandless for supplying the details to enable us to pay tributes to Huw, Oriel Paul and Don. The Society offers its sympathy to their friends and relatives.

Huw Pickard. A well known figure at Society meetings for many years, Hugh will be remembered for his many contributions to local history.

Huw spent several years as Vice Chairman of Pontefract Local History Society, and was also treasurer for many years. However, he will be best remembered in the future for his painstaking and thoroughly researched books on the Rev. Thomas Heron, and the *Pontefract Advertiser*, the newspaper which preceded the *Pontefract and Castleford Express*.

Oriel Jessop. January 27th aged 80. Born in Cornwall, she was immensely proud of her heritage, though she spent thirty years of her life in Yorkshire, and the last seventeen in Featherstone.

Oriel had had a fulfilling life which included a spell in the WRENS, and some years as a nurse.

Her funeral service was a celebration of her life, and fittingly closed with a quartet playing *The Floral Dance*.

Afterwards at the King's Croft, her friends had a real Cornish tea, with Cornish pasties from Cornwall, scones, cream and jam and saffron cake. A lovely touch was the gift of a snowdrop (her favourite flower) plant to all those who attended, which will give a lasting memory of Oriol, renewed each spring.

Her favourite Yorkshire location was the Dales, and fittingly her ashes are interred there in Brooklands Burial Ground, where a tree will be planted in her name.

Paul Wandless. Though Paul left the Society when he departed the area almost forty years ago, his twin brother, David, is currently Chairman and joined with him in 1968.

Those were the formative years of the Society, so that Paul was able to dig at Welbeck Street in Castleford - Castleford's first ever dig, St John's Priory Pontefract, Holywell Wood Glasshoughton, Glasshoughton Manor Farm, Fairburn Ings railway, and several other sites, mainly under the direction of your Editor.

He maintained his interest in archaeology and visited the Hundhill site whilst in the area.

Jean Le Patourel. Jean Le Patourel was an eminent historian, Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and pottery expert whose recent death at the age of 95 severed yet another link with Pontarch's origins. When

Priory in 1957, medieval archaeology was something of a Cinderella subject, not quite accepted in some quarters. In particular, though Romano British archaeology was seen as respectable and had pottery corpuses, the pottery of medieval sites was hardly studied, making dating extremely difficult.

Jean was a pioneer in this field, assisted in no small way by the fact that her husband, Professor Le Patourel who died in 1981, was an acknowledged expert on the period. This is not to detract in any way from the work that Jean did to establish medieval archaeology at Leeds University. She was founder Chairman of the Medieval Group of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society, and prominent in the Ilkley Archaeological Society.

Name any important medieval dig from the 'fifties onwards, and Jean's name is prominent amongst the acknowledgements. Wharram Percy, the iconic DMV (deserted medieval village) dig was one of the first, and certainly not the last.

In a Pontefract context, her name appears in the acknowledgements of Vince Bellamy's first report on the St John's Priory Excavations, in a much more prominent position than those of your Editor and Vice President - and deservedly so.

When Jean dug Newstead Moat near Saxton, our members were invited to participate, and a number including your Editor did so. To many of us, this was our first experience of Open Area Excavation, but Jean made everything clear, and in fact gave us the valuable background to move on to other Open Area sites with complete confidence.

Dr Richard Hall. Richard was Deputy Director of the York Archaeological Trust, and Director of Archaeology. Aged 62, he was a friend of several members, and a valued speaker when he visited the Society. He will be best remembered for directing the Coppergate site in York, which brought him world acclaim. Nevertheless, he was always friendly and approachable. He will be missed.

Don Prince. As we go to print, the news of Don's death has just reached us. Don was a founder member of Castleford and District Historical Society, together with your Editor, member Margaret Lound, (who is Secretary of C&DHS) and several others. This was 1967, when there was a great interest in founding local societies. As an expert on ancient coins, Don's knowledge was invaluable during the first ever dig in Castleford, on Welbeck Street, beginning in 1968. He rose to be President of the Castleford society, and in spite of his illness continued to attend meetings whenever he could. Your Editor was touched when, at great personal effort, Don attended a lecture which he gave there in February 2011. Our sympathies go out to Mavis, his wife and their family.

HU PICKARD - AN APPRECIATION

On 20th February we received the sad news that Hu Pickard had died.

Hu was a long-time member of Pontefract & District Local History Society, and of this Society. Indeed, for many years he was Treasurer of the former, a job which he carried out very efficiently. He was a staunch supporter of St Giles' Church, and at one time was Churchwarden there. Hu knew everything there was to know about the building and its history - he knew every stone and pane of glass.

His interest in the history of Pontefract resulted in a book he wrote in 1989 about the Rev.

Thomas Heron - vicar of St Giles' in the Eighteenth Century. Very little had been written about C18th Pontefract, so Hu's research for his book was a very useful addition to the history of not only St Giles', but of Pontefract.

Hu very much enjoyed day trips and weekends away to places of interest organised by this Society.

He will also be remembered for his lovely sense of humour and his dry wit. Hu is already sadly missed.

E. Love.

A PRE-TURNPIKE MILESTONE

Dr Lionel Scott

My wife and I are members of the Milestone Society (www.milestonesociety.co.uk; for its vigorous Yorkshire Branch go to www.yorkshire-milestones.co.uk.) It is a registered charity devoted to the recording and care of milestones and a range of other waymarkers, fingerposts, and toll houses. A friend who knew of this interest put me in touch with his friend, who owned a milestone, a general view of which is fig 1. I should add that most milestones are owned by the Highways Authority, but this one is in legitimate private ownership. Its history, I was told, is that it was by the side of the A1 at Robin Hood's Well, near Skelbrooke; when the road was made into a dual carriageway in the early 1960s it was rescued by a local inhabitant, from whom the present family acquired it some years ago. It is now in the possession of my informant's son "somewhere in the West Riding". The Well used to be on the west side of the road. After it had been made into a dual carriageway the Well was re-erected on the east side. It is accessible from a service road a little south of the turn-off to Campsall and Askern; Google has both pictures and details of it. It was and is a fraction over 7 miles from the centre of Doncaster.

What was the upper destination on the stone? Fig 2 shows the mark on it next to the "6", and it is so much like the "7" below that it is hard to treat it as a scratch or weathering. (6 miles would take one to Darrington, but I do not think that the top destination can be reconstructed as Darrington.) We are therefore looking at somewhere 67 miles north of the Well, 74 miles from Doncaster – common sense tells us that we can rule out

somewhere south of Doncaster. On that basis, it is almost certainly a pre-turnpike milestone, and so older than 1741, the year in which Parliament gave authority to turnpike the Great North Road from Doncaster to Boroughbridge (14 Geo2 c28). In general, turnpike trusts did not show distances on their milestones to places outside the limits of their own trust. One exception is theoretical: this trust would show the distance to the centre of Doncaster, even though the first toll gate would be at the outskirts of the town. Also, trusts often showed distances to London on roads leading there; and, especially in the south, to places beyond the limits of their own trust. As an example, on the Bath Road, the Reading to Maidenhead trust showed distances to Newbury and Colnbrook. But a turnpike stone at the Well would not show the distance to the north beyond its limit, Boroughbridge, about 46 miles, though it would show the distance to, say, Wentbridge or Wetherby. An interesting sidelight on the parochialism of trusts is shed by the stone in fig 3, found on the left hand side of the A61 going into Harrogate from Leeds, opposite the Comet store. It is inscribed: "Boundary of the Leeds to Ripon Turnpike Trusts". Each trust was interested only in its own bailiwick.

But the 67/74 miles to somewhere is problematic. A map shows only three large places around 74 miles from Doncaster. By modern roads, Catterick is 68 miles from Doncaster; Richmond 75; and Darlington 82. There is, however, one other factor: on what basis was 67/74 miles "known"? Was it from a survey, reasonably accurate by modern standards, or by general

repute; or even by adding up various reputed distances (e.g. we "know" that Wetherby is x miles away, and Boroughbridge is said to be y miles further on, and so forth)? If the latter, was the reputation one of statute miles, or local customary miles, which lingered in many parts of the country right into the turnpike era? Customary miles varied from area to area but were usually longer than the statute mile of 1760 yards established by Parliament in 1593.

Fig 4 shows the top in high definition, and at the end of the day, we have three choices for the original. One possibility is Richmond. The distance is a close fit in statute miles, but the letters of the name do not really fit what is on the stone. The second is Darlington. The stone suggests that the name ended in -ton, and the word can perhaps be reconstructed with a little imagination; though we would have to assume that the stone cutter did not extend the tail of the "g" below the line. We could explain the distance as based on hearsay and reputation, perhaps based on customary miles, rather than an accurate survey. In the early 18th century, a traveller had two basic routes there from Doncaster. In modern terms, one was up the A1 to a few miles south of Darlington, where the old A1 into the town is now a minor road through Barton, joining the A167 about 1½ miles south of the town centre. The other is harder to follow nowadays, but one could fork right at Boroughbridge, go by RAF Dishforth, and from Asenby reach the A167 and thence into Darlington. Either route was about the same

distance. The third is to concede that we cannot recover the distant place; what remains of the letters is too little for epigraphical reconstruction. The fluting on the back, fig 5, is unusual. If not original decoration, it is possible that the stone was a reject from a local stonemason, who had made an error in cutting a series of fluted stones for the columns of the portico of some gentleman's house. It could be bought cheaply and used as a milestone by whoever put the stone up; possibly the same gentleman as a gesture of public service. The top of the Well is said to have been designed by Sir John Vanburgh, and it could have been the same person who offered to pay his fee. If the fluting was put on later, after the turnpike trust erected their own stone, it would originally have been an unusually thick milestone from back to front. The top, fig 6, is also a mystery. Without the triangle, one could guess that the top was broken off when a cart or carriage came off the road and collided with it; a fate that still continues to happen to street furniture. We can only speculate that at some time after such an accident, someone wanted to use the resulting flat surface for a purpose that involved incising the triangle. Or perhaps the top was deliberately removed to create a surface for the triangle. Perhaps one of the readers of this Newsletter has an inspiration as to the use of such a triangle. It has baffled the members of the Milestone Society, whose input I gratefully acknowledge in putting this article together.

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Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Above: Figure 4.

Below Left: Figure 5. Below Right: Figure 6.



EDITORIAL



Hopefully, this newsletter will reach you early in 2012. The 2011 AGM has long gone, and much has happened since, particularly the Society's first dig for several years. At the AGM, I relinquished the Chair, and David Wandless was elected in my place.

David joined PontArch in the late '60s as a schoolboy, with his twin brother Paul. Sadly, Paul died earlier this year. The brothers participated in all the local digs which were taking place at that time, like St John's Priory, Welbeck Street, Glasshoughton Manor, the Fairburn cut railway, etc. More recently, David and Ann his wife, dug on the Roman road at Hundhill. In my opinion, it is good that we maintain continuity in our society.

We are grateful to Dr Scott for giving us the opportunity to publish the newly discovered milestone, which may be not exactly local, but certainly within our sphere of influence. Since the last issue of this newsletter, both the Wakefield Archaeological Society, and the Doncaster Archaeological Society have been unable to continue. We welcome those members of both groups who have joined us, whilst deploring the circumstances in which they have joined. Welcome to you all!

Please note this change to our published programme:

March 16th 2012. In place of the advertised talk, Field Director Simon Tomson will report to

members on the first season's digging on the infirmary site – St Richard's Friary.

ADDITION TO THE PROGRAMME:

February 21st. A public meeting will be held in our usual venue in which Simon will report on the results of the excavation. Though the subject is the same, members will note differences in the presentations as the public has different priorities and levels of background knowledge.

If you have not visited our website yet, please do. It is constantly being updated by our Webmaster, Jane Hawkins, and will shortly have a collection of group photographs of every dig in which the Society has participated in more than a minor or voluntary capacity. You do not need a complicated web address – the Society's full name will get you there.

I was thrilled to be contacted by the National Trust Exhibition Organiser at Sutton Hoo a couple of months since. The winter Exhibition there is on the '60s dig, and will be based around the photographs taken by then Society Photographer Derek Thorpe, and myself. Fame at last!

Last winter, the exhibition was on the superb images shot by Mercie Lack ARPS, and Barbara Wagstaffe ARPS in 1939, and received publicity in the national press, and many plaudits. Derek and I are in good company.

COFFINS AND SECRET TUNNELS

Almost a year ago, there was some correspondence in the local paper about Roman stone coffins and secret tunnels. The controversy was compounded when a picture, supplied by the then *Chairman* mysteriously had the coffin edited out of the image when it appeared in the paper. This brief note attempts to give members the facts.



A reader of the *Pontefract & Castleford Express*, Mr Cartwright, asked for information about a stone coffin discovered by Ron Jeffries of Airedale. Your then Chairman

responded with pictures of the coffin being excavated by Geoff Radley and Dr R Butler, with details of the RCHM report on the coffin's contents.

Another reader then contacted the then Chairman, and it immediately became clear that there were **two** coffins. Our Field Director then added to the saga! Apparently, the 'official' coffin was the one observed by Society members in 1965, and the pictures and report referred to this one.

However, Ron Jeffries, unknown to the authorities and experts had illicitly 'excavated' another stone coffin in Holywell Wood, and had it transported to his home. Mr Cartwright's letter referred to this one.

When Ron Jeffries died, his sister contacted the West Yorkshire Unit, and our Field Director who then worked for the unit, arranged for the coffin to be taken into storage. Though Ron had opened 'his' coffin, he neither recorded nor reported the discovery, and to

compound the confusion spread stories of it containing the bones of 'a maiden.'

The 'official' coffin, investigated on behalf of the Society by the then Secretary - now Editor - and Charles Baines, was a gypsum burial containing a bone comb of Anglian design and the bones of an elderly female. The two experts from RCHM excavated the coffin in the presence of our two members, and forwarded their report to us and to Castleford library.

Gypsum burials are now believed to be late Roman Christian in origin, and usually can be dated to the final decade of the Fourth Century, or even the following decade.

Another letter in the same newspaper asked about a 'secret tunnel' discovered at North Featherstone crossroads during roadworks there.



Again, this was investigated and reported on by our then Secretary. At the time he came to the conclusion that the tunnel was the remains of an adit mine.

The Pictures:

Top Left: The original gypsum burial being excavated by Geoff Radley (L) & Dr R Butler. *P&C Express*.

Above: The original coffin ready for removal. Your Editor can be seen extreme left! This is the image which was cropped to show just the machine on the right in the newspaper! Picture by the late C Baines.

Left: Ron Jeffries (right) and the illicitly dug Gypsum burial, in his garden. Picture by Eric Papworth.



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