

Last Orders? The Art and Architecture of Religious Orders in England, c.1350–1540



10.00 – 18.15, Tuesday 17 May 2011 (with registration from 9.30)

Kenneth Clark Lecture Theatre, The Courtauld Institute of Art, Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 0RN

ABSTRACTS

SESSION 1

Michael Carter (The Courtauld Institute of Art)

The Monument of Abbot Robert Chamber at Holm Cultram,

Abbot Robert Chamber (1507-c.31) of the Cistercian monastery of Holm Cultram, Cumbria, was a prolific patron who was responsible for extensive building work at his monastery. The grandeur of his fragmentary monument is in keeping with the scale of his architectural patronage and reflects his exalted ecclesiastical and social status. Discovered in the mid nineteenth century, but has since been overlooked by scholars, it is the most remarkable surviving tomb of an English Cistercian abbot. Unlike the slabs which commemorated other Cistercian abbots, Chamber's monument was a chest tomb. Its three surviving sides are decorated with heraldry and show Chamber wearing the *pontificalia* and surrounded by his community. Unusually for a high-ranking cleric, the epitaph is in English.

This paper will consider the monument within the context of Cistercian commemorative practice, and explore precedents for the tomb's iconography. The insights it provides into late medieval Cistercian patronage will also be discussed. A possible location for the monument within the abbey church at Holm Cultram will be proposed, and the use of English in the epitaph will be explained.

Pnina Arad (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

'Made in the Likeness of the Holy Sepulchre': A Fifteenth-Century Holy Land at Edington Priory

William Wey, an English scholar at Oxford and a priest at the Augustinian Priory of Bonhomme at Edington, Wiltshire, undertook two pilgrimages to the Holy Land in the 1460s. According to what appears to be his will, after his return to England, Wey established at his monastery a chapel modelled after the Holy Sepulchre, where he displayed several objects that he had brought from the Holy Land. Among these were paintings of sacred sites or events, stones from various *loca sancta*, measurements of sites, and wooden models of churches in Jerusalem and Bethlehem; as well as a *mappamundi*, a map of the Holy Land and a manuscript of his *Itineraries*. Composed of architectural, pictorial, vestigial, mimetic, cartographic and textual components, this installation was able to transmit a perception of the Holy Land and lead to a high level of "mystical witnessing".

As the church at Edington Priory served also the local laic community, Wey's presentation could have served not only the mystical practices of the monastic congregation but also those of the parishioners.

Through a comparison with fifteenth-century pilgrimage imagery and other *devotionalia* the paper will attempt to restore the vanished installation. I shall also touch on several general issues, such as the English monastic tradition of meditation on the Holy Land through visual aids; art as a meeting point between monastic and laic spirituality; and imagined pilgrimage on the eve of 1500.

Jayne Wackett (University of Kent)

"unum bonum missale et grande" : Revelations of an Abbot and His House Through the Iconography of Westminster's Litlyngton Missal

The Litlyngton Missal, created c. 1383-1384 under the patronage of Abbot Nicholas Litlyngton for the Benedictine Westminster Abbey, is an extremely rare example of a lavishly decorated large service book from the later Middle Ages. The manuscript is particularly precious as very few monastic missals survived the Reformation. Although famed for its Crucifixion miniature and despite appearing in most catalogues and books on medieval art, very little in-depth study has been published regarding the extensive illuminations and their iconographic significance. Through the kind permission of Westminster Abbey Library, I have been privileged to study in first-hand detail the artwork of the entire Missal.

This paper will show how detailed attention to the pictures and their placement within the book reveals an understanding of the role of the patron in the artwork of the Missal. In particular, the inclusion of the abbot's own monogram and heraldry at specifically selected points in the manuscript shows a distinct motivation on the part of Abbot Litlyngton beyond his mere identification as patron. An exploration of iconography used in conjunction with the abbot's patronal marks provides further evidence of Nicholas Litlyngton's intentions when commissioning the illuminations of this sumptuous bespoke book.

SESSION 2

Julian Luxford (University of St Andrew's)

Considering the End

This talk considers in a broad way some of the questions and assumptions which confront scholars of late medieval English monastic art and architecture. Three main issues will be examined: decline, continuity, and (for want of a better word) the quiddity of monastic art. The brusque execution of English monasticism and the subsequent change in official religious temper have encouraged an assumption of late medieval monastic "decline". (The Black

Death provides a convenient *terminus a quo* of this decline: its effects also need to be considered). Inevitably, this has influenced the way monastic art and architecture is understood: the period 1350-1540 has been seen by historians as the “baroque” phase of monastic “style” in the arts. Such assumptions have recently been questioned, and it is appropriate to explore them further. The matter of continuity is less urgent but still important. It involves questioning the extent to which the Dissolution constituted an end-point for Anglo-Welsh monastic building and embellishment in light of art and architectural interaction between Britain and the Continent in the late Middle Ages, the afterlife of Anglo-Welsh monasticism in mainland Europe, and (of course) the uses to which residual building and embellishment was put. This issue relates closely to the third, that of the quiddity of monastic art. It is worth questioning whether there was anything distinctively monastic about it. If there was, then why have scholars been reluctant or unable to articulate the fact? If there wasn't, then how do art historians understand the validity of the category “monastic”? This question raises some of the tensions inherent in attempting to place physical objects in a fluid, often inaccessible historical stream, and also the awkwardness of trying to marry academic disciplines which have developed along distinct methodological lines.

Hildo van Engen (independent scholar; Regional Archives of the Land van Heusden en Altena, The Netherlands)

The End Justifies the Means: Late Medieval Carthusian Retables from the Netherlands

The Carthusian Order is famous for its ascetic and strict approach to the monastic life. Nevertheless, many precious late medieval works of art have been survived from charterhouses. In this paper, the seeming paradox between luxury artworks and the strict principles of the Carthusians will be discussed using four diptychs from charterhouses in the Netherlands. These diptychs show that works of art were present in the cells of Carthusian monks. Due to their intimate and personal character, diptychs would have been compatible with the individualistic way of living of Carthusian monks. However, the personal character of these devotional items meant that their iconographic programme also included indications of temporal status. The paper will also address what happened to a diptych after the death of its commissioner. There is some evidence that the context and function of these works moved from the devotional to the memorial.

Heather Cunningham (University of York)

Art in Everyday Life: Metal Dress Accessories in Cistercian Yorkshire

The “decline” of the Cistercian Order from its foundationally austere lifestyle has long been discussed by historians and archaeologists. Unfortunately, the only material culture which is usually cited in these discussions is related almost exclusively to building remains and architectural remnants uncovered in excavation. Most scholars have made little attempt to look at small artefacts as a representation of daily life for the monastic community. Indeed, as many monasteries have not been extensively excavated since the clearances early in the twentieth century, archaeological records for these sites often leaves much to be desired and research focusing on artefacts uncovered is difficult and piece-meal in nature.

This presentation will discuss recent research conducted on the small metal artefacts recovered at the Yorkshire abbeys of Rievaulx, Fountains, Kirkstall and Roche. Closer examination of belt buckles and strap-ends recovered at these sites has revealed that a trend toward decline is not discernable in this aspect of material culture. Rather than showing a movement from simple and plain dress accessories toward the more elaborate and ornately decorated, artefact based evidence demonstrates that no such trend existed. Rather the simple and the ornate seem to have existed side by side within the monastery complex, which can be seen in the wide variety of form and decoration present within the assemblage.

SESSION 3

Susan Harrison (English Heritage)

Heads and Tales: Marginal Sculpture and Identity at Rievaulx Abbey

What can a study of the ex-situ sculptured stone from a medieval monastic site inform us about the development of art and architecture beyond the “golden age”?

This will be explored using examples drawn mainly from the collections of Rievaulx Abbey, Yorkshire. Rievaulx underwent a large-scale clearance of deposits, accumulated since the Dissolution, directed by Sir Charles Peers from the 1920s. Our current understanding of the site, based mainly on research by Fergusson and Harrison, offers a comprehensive understanding of the site’s architecture; yet the vast collection of material culture has evaded a holistic study and interpretation.

The collection includes some twenty stone statues (or fragments of), two rebuses as well as fifty-five examples of architectural stonework decorated with human heads or animals amongst the 1600 recorded loose pieces of stonework from the site.

It is this latter group of “marginalia” which is the main focus of this presentation. Few examples have yet been securely dated; one factor all have in common – seemingly obvious – is that all were present at the Dissolution regardless of their date.

Therefore questions to be considered will include: How does the marginalia, in particular, demonstrate continuity or change in taste? Is patronage evident through the sculpted stones? What tales are told through the marginalia and other sculpture? Does this shed light on confessional identity? Is there an institutional identity? How does the sculpture compare with examples from local Cistercian monasteries? Is there a similar body of material to study from other sites/orders?

David Reat (University of Strathclyde, Glasgow)

Order: the Architectural Language of English Monasteries in the Late Middle Ages

This is an investigation into the shifting language of late medieval monastic architecture, with particular reference to Fountains Abbey. Its buildings are some of most beautiful and best-known monastic ruins in England and housed a Cistercian community for over four hundred years. The architecture demonstrates the transition from Romanesque to early English Gothic and there are also important Perpendicular building works at the site.

In pursuance of their famous austerity, the Cistercians founded their houses ‘far from the concourse of man’, where they sought to live according to a pure and severe interpretation of the Rule of St Benedict. The architecture of Fountains Abbey provides evidence of the gradual softening of the early Cistercian ideal.

Instead the later Gothic work at Fountains has been interpreted as evidence of the worldly status and wealth of the abbey (displayed in the structural extravagances of Huby’s Tower for instance).

The architectural styles at the monastery have therefore been loaded with different meanings. The Romanesque and early Gothic architecture is associated with the perceived purity of the Order, whereas the later Gothic and Perpendicular phases at Fountains carry connotations of the Order’s decline,

The move from an aesthetic derived predominantly from the heavy load-bearing walls of the Romanesque into the framed structures of the Gothic at Fountains parallels debates on structural expression, ‘honesty’ and meaning throughout the later history of architecture, and has current relevance to architectural practice and pedagogy at a time when some are once again reconfiguring the relationship between style, structure and meaning.

AnneJule Lafaye (University College Dublin)

Friary Planning and Architecture in Late Medieval Ireland: Change and Continuity

Late medieval friary building in Ireland is usually associated with a wave of foundations in the west of the country in the fifteenth century, while the fourteenth century is seen as a period of general decline. This is traditionally linked with the waning of the Anglo-Norman colony and the Gaelic revival and land recovery. Whereas earlier foundations are seen as the expression of Anglo-Norman patronage, later ones are believed to be specifically Gaelic in location and in style.

However, recent scholarship has suggested that things might not have been so clear-cut; that some degree of continuity and sustainability existed, and that ethnicity was not always such a focal point.

In this paper I propose to present case studies of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century friary building in East Munster, a much colonized region, and one of interaction and frontier with the Gaelic world, in order to reveal the extent of change and continuity regarding the friaries planning, structural architecture, and landscape, in relation with issues of patronage, lordship and identity. Studies of friaries embracing a one-way approach (architectural or historical for example) might only reveal one side of the story, therefore a cross-disciplinary approach is necessary to unravel it, using history, architecture, building and landscape archaeology. Comparisons with Britain will also be drawn, all in hope to shed some light on the material world of the mendicants in late medieval Ireland.

SESSION 4

Zachary Stewart (Columbia University)

"The Cloister Ther Aboute": Architectural Planning, Monastic Precedent, and Lay Piety at the Long Melford Lady Chapel

Perched on a bluff at the north end of Long Melford, Suffolk, stands an impressive late fifteenth-century parish church dedicated to the Holy Trinity. The main body of the building, a timber-roofed hall of nine aisled bays terminated by a shallow chancel vessel, is large and lavish but of rather traditional layout. The Lady Chapel appended to the east end is, in contrast, altogether unique. Externally the structure takes the form of a small basilican hall; internally, however, it functions as a centralised chapel surrounded by a continuous rectangular ambulatory. This conflation of longitudinal and centralised planning suggests that the designer of the chapel was deeply familiar with prominent Marian sites across England. Indeed, the double-layered space he created can only be described as a chapel within a chapel, an arrangement that evoked the famous "House of the Virgin" shrine at Walsingham Priory. Existing scholarship on Holy Trinity, although slight, has emphasised its status as a paradigmatic late medieval parish church. What I hope to do is challenge such a narrative by examining the extent to which the erection of a semi-autonomous Lady Chapel actually set the church apart from its parochial counterparts. My analysis will suggest that this appropriative act of architectural innovation transformed the building into a dynamic vehicle for the development of new devotional practices among the laity derived from, but also potentially detrimental to, monastic identity; a shift that constituted one of the most significant changes within "traditional religion" leading up to the Reformation.

Sue Sharp (Birkbeck College, University of London)

The Battel Hall Retable and the Search for the Visual Milieu of the Late Medieval English Convent

The Battel Hall retable is a little-known circa-fourteenth-century English painted panel, which is now affixed to the wall of a private house dating to the late Middle Ages and as such, this rare and enigmatic painting is unlikely to be seen by the general public. The retable's

commission, location and preservation have gone unrecorded except for a few brief comments which appeared in nineteenth-century archaeological and travel literature. It has been suggested that it originated from Dartford Priory, the only Dominican nunnery in England, from where it was removed at the Dissolution. Although there is surface damage, which may provide clues about its post-Dissolution history, it is largely intact and a rare survival which offers multiple opportunities to investigate the material culture of the late medieval English convent.

Until recently, late medieval English nuns had been portrayed as playing hard and praying softly, hidden away in poor, scandalous, passive institutions of little intellectual or artistic merit. Scholars have recently challenged these assumptions, but an examination of the material culture of the English nunnery lags behind study of Continental convents. It is time to explore the visual milieu of English female religious communities through the images presented to and commissioned by these enclosed women – to gain a “view through the veil” – and a more complete and inclusive history of pre-modern society. Lack of primary evidence is often cited as a bar to such scholarship and any addition to the corpus is to be welcomed. The contribution of this neglected panel to scholarship is long overdue.

Maureen Mellor (independent scholar)

An Image-Conscious Queen: a Reinterpretation of the Chertsey Abbey Tiles

The re-identification of four well-known earthenware tile panels has led to a remarkable re-attribution. Probably designed to be set vertically in architectural niches, they were dated to 1290s, the queen depicted was identified as Queen Eleanor of Castile, Edward I's wife.

However, the depiction of a pet squirrel suggests that the queen is almost certainly Philippa of Hainault, wife of Edward III. Her husband commissioned stained glass for both St Stephen's chapel, Westminster and the royal chapel at Windsor c. 1350s, but Philippa was “not remembered for her artistic patronage”, nor “a great spender on building projects”. The pictorial tiles in question are attributed to a kiln at Chertsey Abbey, Surrey, and are now displayed in the Medieval and Europe gallery at the British Museum. These monumental panels reveal earlier ceremonial traditions, evolving architectural settings, providing visual confirmation that glass templates continued to lead artistic innovation in the late-medieval period, encouraging other craftsmen to copy their designs.

What were the motivations and connections of this image conscious queen with the Benedictine foundation at Chertsey? This paper sets the origins, inspiration and intended use of these monumental panels in their wider context and in the context of one of England's most important Benedictine houses on the Thames, midway between Sheen and Windsor.

Jessica Berenbeim (Harvard University/The Courtauld Institute of Art)

Charters and Continuity

Over the course of the Middle Ages, documents played an increasingly significant part in medieval society, and their importance loomed especially large in monastic institutional life and consciousness. Representations of documents in late-medieval monastic art express more than simply this significance in general terms: they also communicate particular conceptions of a document's essential nature and function. This paper will consider the interpretative possibilities when artists incorporate such depictions into the materials of documentary practice itself.

I will concentrate on one example: the later medieval conventual seal of the Benedictine Abbey of Evesham, near Worcester. On this seal, the abbey's foundation legend appears depicted in five scenes, including the image of its “ancient charter” – itself with appended seal. In a sense, the Evesham abbey seal stands at the fulcrum of the abbey's institutional history: it takes its subject matter from the abbey's earliest origins, drawing on a literary tradition going back to the Anglo-Saxon period, and it was still in use by Evesham's last abbot at the time of the Dissolution.

In the first instance, this paper will briefly explain the seal's history, specifically its recorded or surviving impressions and their relationships to one another. Then I will discuss the seal's sources and design in the context of medieval ideas about documents. Extended narrative imagery on a seal is itself rare, and the design is even more remarkable for its degree of self-referentiality. Through this design and its context, the Evesham seal intimates a specific point about both the authority of documents and their instability – the respects in which they constitute a powerful but precarious link with the past.