

## AUTUMN MEETING, 2016

### **The City and Cathedral of Exeter**

The Meeting was held in the Mercure Southgate Hotel in the centre of Exeter, where the Seymour Suite provided the venue for our lectures, coffee and evening dining. The excellent buffet lunch on Saturday was in the main dining room. The organisers were Heather James and Frances Griffith. Thirty three members attended.

#### **Friday 23 September.**

At mid-afternoon members set off on foot to walk the short distance through the Cathedral Close and onto the High Street to meet up with those who had arrived earlier and visited the Royal Albert Memorial Museum. We were welcomed at the **City Guildhall** by the Mace Sergeants and introduced to the long civic history of what has been the centre of Exeter's government for at least 800 years. They explained that the Guildhall is still very much at the heart of the City's civic life with the Lord Mayor hosting a variety of functions. Heather James then introduced John Allan who began what was a remarkable series of talks, lectures and guided tours for the Cambrians over the course of the weekend. During his long career at Exeter City Museums and with the former Exeter City Archaeology Unit, and now serving as Cathedral Archaeologist, John has built up an unrivalled knowledge of the historical sources, archaeology, architecture and artefacts of the city. He outlined the development sequence and dates of build of the surviving components of the Guildhall. Then he pointed out to members the fifteenth century oak roof of the medieval hall in which we were seated. It is one of a small surviving group of high-quality roofs built by local carpenters in and around Exeter with some distinctive characteristics, most notably a 'coved' apex along the length of the roof and the alternate use of main trusses supported by arch braces with stone corbels in the form of grotesque animals at their feet and slighter trusses that have slight cusped bases. Equally impressive, the late sixteenth-century oak panelling of the Hall with the coats of arms of the city guilds has been reset and repainted in later centuries. Despite its medieval appearance, the Gallery at the entrance end of the Hall was added in 1863. John pointed out the subjects of the series of large oil paintings in the Hall, the most notable of which is the portrait commissioned by her brother King Charles II of Princess Henrietta Anne, who was born in Exeter. Cambrians were then free to explore the rooms to the rear of the main hall and ascend the staircases to the Mayor's Parlour above the Elizabethan portico through which we had entered. John and the Mace Sergeants were on hand to describe the many items of civic regalia and the displays of silver given by past mayors and sheriffs to the city. The Cap of Maintenance and Ceremonial Sword presented to the city by Henry VII were of particular note. Leaving the Hall through its magnificent sixteenth century oak door to view the exterior, John explained how recent detailed study has thrown light on the building stone and decoration of the once brightly coloured façade of the Elizabethan mayor's chamber above its porticoed ground floor. The antiquity of the mediaeval buildings in the High Street opposite the Guildhall was described. Despite what is in some cases their unprepossessing modern exteriors, detailed building recording by the Exeter Unit has shown that nearly all of these are late mediaeval or early modern in origin: one of the best such groups in any English town. (This part of our visit was given added poignancy by the fact that these houses only narrowly escaped destruction when the

buildings backing onto them from the Cathedral Close were lost in the major fire at the Royal Clarence Hotel only a few weeks after our visit.)

After dinner John Salvatore gave the first of the weekend's lectures on '***Isca Dumnoniorum: The Roman fortress and city of Exeter***'. He explained how he had 'cut his archaeological teeth' and developed an absorbing interest in Roman legionary fortresses when working for Paul Bidwell and the late Chris Henderson, the Director of the Exeter City Archaeology Unit, on the major excavations of the legionary bath-house in the Cathedral Green between 1971-1976 and many subsequent excavations in and around the city. He had decided to concentrate for this lecture on the legionary fortress itself but pointed out that there continue to be exciting new discoveries on the Roman port at Topsham and complex military installations along the Roman Road from the port to the fortress and later city. He began by describing the strategic advantages of the site of the fortress and later Roman town and medieval city commanding the lowest crossing point of the river Exe and defended on two sides by steep sided valleys. He did not need to point out to a Welsh audience that the name chosen by the Second Augustan legion in the early AD 50's for their new campaign base in south-west Britain was *Isca*, Celtic for river – in this case the Exe. When the Second Augustan legion moved to Caerleon in South Wales in AD 75, the same generic name was applied to the new fortress. Undoubtedly the most important and impressive remains discovered in Roman Exeter are those of the legionary bath-house excavated between 1971-6 on a large scale occasioned by the demolition of St Mary Major church on the cathedral green for an underground carpark. This was never built and the bath-house remains are covered over but preserved *in situ*. Constructed c AD 60 the bath-house is the best preserved in northern Europe and as the earliest stone building in the South-West, with every Mediterranean refinement of marble, window glass and polychrome mosaics, its impact on native sensibilities must have been startling. It is estimated that the hypocaust system was capable of heating 70,000 gallons of water per day. By studying units of measurement in the surviving texts of the Roman *agrimensores* or land surveys and the plans of bath houses across the empire the late Chris Henderson was able to extend the likely plan and scale of the whole bath-house beyond the areas excavated and his reconstruction has been confirmed by more recent excavations. When the Legion moved to South Wales, the bath-house was converted into a *forum* and *basilica* for the successor Roman town now under civilian rule. Excavations in other parts of the city had produced the remains of several barrack blocks. Another building part-excavated on the site of the Guildhall Shopping Centre whose function could be identified partly by its location within the standardized layout of the fortress and partly by its structure and finds was a military workshop or *fabrica*. There was much evidence of metal working, particularly in bronze, and fragments of military fittings were recovered, some for cavalry units. The earth and timber rampart of the fortress, fronted by a deep ditch has been explored at several points. John pointed out that the City walls that we now see are of Roman origin but they enclosed the later Roman city which covered a greater area than the fortress. Of particular interest to an audience of Cambrians was John's illustration of fragments of ceramic antefixes from roof eaves featuring a pair of dolphins. In the 1970s the late George Boon recognised that antefixes from the same mould have been found at Caerleon demonstrating for the first time that the same legion was stationed at Exeter and subsequently at Caerleon.

Saturday morning was devoted to three excellent lectures on Exeter's history and archaeology. Introducing Dr Robert Higham, Frances Lynch Llewellyn said that he would probably be best known to Welsh audiences as the co-excavator with the late Philip Barker at Hen-Domen but that he has a distinguished record in castle, historic landscape and historical studies in the South-West. Bob Higham said that his lecture, entitled '**The City of Exeter, 900-1200**' would concentrate on the archaeological evidence and physical remains although he said that there were in addition valuable documentary sources for the latter part of the period. The principal legacy of the Roman city was the Roman city walls, which enclosed a larger area than the defences of the legionary fortress. Very little is known of the city between the fifth and seventh centuries and large parts may have been unoccupied. Although its extent could not be established due to later graves and Victorian building, a Christian cemetery, with an apparent long date range of between the fifth and eighth centuries, was discovered overlying the long abandoned forum and basilica in the 1971-1976 excavations in the Cathedral Green. Noting that the alignment of six graves of found reflected that of the Roman buildings (north-west to south-east) the excavators had argued that the graves were associated with a late Roman structure, possibly a church. In addition an eighth century radio-carbon date from one of the graves suggested that this cemetery had continued in use after the establishment of Anglo-Saxon rule in Devon, indicating a degree of continuity in the city under 'British' and 'Saxon' rule. The *Vita* of St Boniface ('the Apostle of the Germans') records the saint's boyhood education at Wulfhard's monastery in Exeter in the 680s. Conceivably this monastery may have been one and the same as the late or sub-Roman church. The monastery or minster of St Peter given by Alfred c 887-892 to Asser (recruited by the king from St Davids) was probably a new building of ninth century date associated with a later cemetery on an east-west alignment whose principal dimensions were established from fragmentary remains in the 1971-6 excavations. A more continuous narrative is possible from the ninth century onwards due to the detail of Alfred's campaigns against the Danes in Asser's *Life of Alfred* and in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and from archaeological evidence. In the 870s the Danes had occupied Exeter, described as a 'fastness' in the Chronicle but they were expelled by Alfred in 893 who repaired the Roman walls to defend his newly organised 'burh'. Although more research is needed on the Anglo-Saxon street pattern, it is clear that it did not respect the Roman grid pattern of streets but was more irregular in form, comparable with the Winchester model. Regression analysis from late medieval property boundaries can only be taken so far in trying to establish Anglo-Saxon urban properties but the place-name element 'hag' from OE 'haga' probably indicates the location of some larger pre-Conquest units. By the tenth century Exeter was well established as a royal administrative centre as well as containing an important minster church. The mint established by Alfred flourished into the tenth and eleventh centuries. A number of medieval city churches are known to have Anglo-Saxon origins, some even having Saxon architectural features which further allows reconstruction of the plan of Anglo-Saxon city in the ninth to eleventh centuries. Archaeological evidence indicates a range of crafts and industries in the late Anglo-Saxon city. The eleventh century was a period of upheaval and destruction as well as growth. In 1003 the city was sacked and burnt by the Danes and came under the rule of Cnut. The powerful Godwin family had strong economic interests in the city and after the Norman conquest in 1066, Gytha, mother of the defeated King Harold Godwinson, was living in the city. The citizens defied William the Conqueror in his demands for increased taxes and he besieged and captured the city in 1068. William consolidated his conquest by the construction of a castle in the north-west

corner of the walled city, known as Rougemont from the reddish rock of the area. During the Anarchy Baldwin de Redvers, sheriff of Devon seized the city in defiance of King Stephen who in turn besieged the castle from a siege-castle ('Danes' Castle) outside the walls on high ground to the north, but despite such excitements the city prospered. Dr Higham concluded by briefly listing the streets, additional churches, hospitals, guild buildings and probably the early City Guild Hall in existence by 1200 as evidence of the city's growth.

After coffee Professor Mark Stoye of Southampton University spoke on '**The Civil War in Exeter 1642-1646**' combining historical and archaeological evidence in a narrative of events that brought home the perhaps often under-estimated scale of violence and destruction of the Civil War. He began by exploring how a radical puritan preacher, Ignatius Jurdain undermined the allegiances of the hitherto staunchly royalist city and the power of the Anglican cathedral's clergy in the years leading up to the Civil War. Jurdain was made mayor and dominated the ruling Council of 24. A staunch anti-Catholic he (and many other puritans) suspected Charles I of Catholic sympathies especially after his marriage to the French Henrietta Maria. Although Jurdain died in 1640, his cause was taken up an equally extreme puritan John Bond, resident in the suburb of St Sidwells, who increased tensions and prejudices by a series of inflammatory sermons. Exeter can be seen as an exemplar of the escalation of tensions and divisions that led to civic disorder and finally open warfare between King and Parliament. Drawing on his extensive work on contemporary propaganda and political stereotypes, Mark showed a contemporary woodcut showing two long haired Cavaliers with an equally long haired dog (modelled on Prince Rupert's dog 'Boy') taunting a group of Roundheads and their short haired mastiff – a subject explored in his book *The Black Legend of Prince Rupert's Dog: Witchcraft and Propaganda during the English Civil War*. He also drew on the extensive work by the Exeter Field Unit and his own studies on the use of Exeter's City Walls and the construction of extensive outer defences, in the Civil War. In 1642 the puritan-dominated City Council repaired the city walls and gates in the Northernhay, Southernhay and castle areas and prepared earthen platforms behind the walls to mount artillery pieces, many within the shells of the old medieval interval towers. Strengthened by the arrival of Pym's forces in the city, the puritan Council actively harassed prominent royalists and continued its military preparations. Despite a series of attacks and for a time control of Topsham, the royalist general Sir Ralph Hopton failed to quell the city, retreating back to Cornwall in early 1643. Exeter's parliamentary garrison was strengthened by the arrival of 1000 London Greycoats. Within the city intimidation and violence against any suspected royalists and the cathedral clergy escalated and the Cathedral itself was vandalised by iconoclasts. Archaeological excavations near Eastgate showed how the City defences were strengthened by external 'dikes' and areas outside cleared of buildings for better lines of fire. Later in 1643 the Royalists besieged the city and, despite a temporary check by the defenders, a renewed assault led by Prince Maurice forced its surrender. The Royalists rapidly repaired the city's defences, their work visible today through the use of distinctive stone in parts of the City Walls. During 1644-45 defensive preparations intensified as the likelihood of an assault by Cromwell's New Model Army increased. The destructive scale of this siege warfare was graphically explained by Mark when he showed how large areas of houses in the suburbs were rased to the ground by the defenders to deny their occupation by the advancing parliamentarians. Finally in March 1646 the royalist

garrison under Sir John Berkely marched out of the City safeguarded by the terms of surrender and Cromwell at the head of the New Model Army marched in.

The final lecture of the morning, **'An Introduction to Exeter Cathedral'**, was given by John Allan, Cathedral Archaeologist. He took up his narrative where Dr Bob Higham had left off in the mid eleventh century when Leofric persuaded Edward the Confessor to move the seat of his bishopric from Crediton to the minster in Exeter and to unite the dioceses of Cornwall and Devon. The 'diploma' recording this is preserved in the Cathedral archives. The minster church had been built under the patronage of Athelstan and its traces partially underlay the demolished St Mary Major church. It continued in use during the episcopate of the first Norman Bishop Osbern fitzOsbern but a new cathedral was begun in 1114 by Bishop William Warelwast sited to the east of the minster. The main survivors of this cathedral in the later medieval fabric are the two Norman towers and parts of the nave walls. During Scott's restoration of the choir the foundation of what was identified as a polygonal apse of the Norman church was observed. If this is indeed the correct interpretation Exeter's Romanesque Cathedral would have had an apsidal design unique in Britain. The construction of the Norman cathedral was begun at the east end where the main liturgical offices took place. As with all cathedrals building took time and work by John and colleagues closely examining the South transeptal Tower shows that it was stylistically more elaborate and later than the North Tower. Not until 1133 could the Annals of Tavistock record that 'the canons went out of the old church and entered the new one'; even so this could have predated completion of the nave. In 1258 Bishop Bronescombe, together with many others, was present at the consecration of Salisbury Cathedral – the first to be built in the new Early English style. Thereafter everyone wanted a new cathedral in the new style. However by the time building got underway at Exeter architectural styles had evolved and the eastern half of the cathedral (1270-1328) is Early Decorated. The nave is of Late Decorated style and together they make Exeter the exemplar of the English Decorated with the richest decoration of any cathedral in this style. John gave examples of the detailed recording and analysis of surviving features of this late thirteenth and fourteenth century interior and exterior decoration, work aided by the documentary information provided by the wonderful sequence of Fabric Rolls – another glory of the Cathedral. He gave examples of the varied roof bosses and their stylistic development and original colour schemes and briefly described the dendrochronological work that has been carried out on the roof timbers. Exeter now has 400 samples, second only to Lincoln, and these indicate, in the main, a late thirteenth century felling date for the timbers and an indication that these were stockpiled for ongoing and repair work. As a result of the stone-by-stone recording (now much aided by computer software) carried out in advance of repairs to the Cathedral fabric and work by himself and his colleagues he explained that he can now recognise at least 20 different kinds of stone used by the cathedral's masons. Stone came from quarries on the Episcopal manors some close by, others from a distance such as Salcombe, Beer and Portland. After a buffet lunch, members proceeded on foot into the Cathedral Close and John Allan continued his description and analysis of the fabric of the Cathedral as we paused to examine the variations in the tracery of the sequence of Decorated windows of the east end of the Cathedral – the work of Master Mason Thomas Witney. We then paused outside the magnificent West Front of the Cathedral and members' understanding of the complexities of the design and phasing of the screen with its three registers of figures was

helped by the reproduction of John Allan and Stuart Blaylock's detailed analysis shown in a coloured elevation drawing in the Programme Booklet.



We then entered the **Cathedral** and divided into two groups to be taken around by the knowledgeable Cathedral guides who concentrated on the interior fittings and monuments too numerous, varied and of interest even to summarise here. Many members attended Choral Evensong at which it was the turn of the Girls Choir to celebrate. Then after a break members reconvened outside the West Front to walk the short distance to **Exeter Cathedral Library** housed in the newly renovated west wing of the Bishop's Palace in an award-winning project managed by Canon Librarian Ann Barwood who welcomed us and had with her staff prepared a special exhibition with several items of Welsh interest. The greatest treasure which drew members like a magnet was of course The Exeter Book – one of the books given by Bishop Leofric in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. It contains several famous Anglo-Saxon poems, surviving only in this manuscript, such as The Wanderer and The Seafarer, other religious poetry and a number of riddles. A new exhibition in the entrance corridors to the main reading room was also studied in depth as we had to divide into two groups for the visit.



Members walked back to the Hotel and some managed to find time to look into the former Law Library in the Close, now the textile shop 'Chandhni Chowk' which has another fine fifteenth- century timber roof.

After dinner, the evening concluded with a lavishly illustrated lecture by John Allan on **The Golden Age of Exeter 1450-1780**. One of the features of the City's long history has been dramatic rises and falls in population and prosperity. The second half of the fifteenth century saw a sharp improvement in both which was due to the export of wool to France , particularly Rouen, Morlaix and La Rochelle and a burgeoning textile trade, again mainly for export. It is possible from documentary sources, such as the Lay Subsidy Rolls to chart a sharp rise in the number of Breton immigrants to Exeter and this can be observed in the architectural details of various buildings in Exeter and these cities. Not only was cloth produced in the city but large quantities of cloth produced in its rural hinterland came into the city for finishing. A blue serge was especially valued with measures put in place to maintain its quality. The surviving material evidence of prosperity was everywhere to be seen in churches in late perpendicular style, elaborate oak roofs (as in the City Guildhall or the Tuckers Hall). An impressive quantity of finds from numerous excavations have given a detailed picture of the new range and quantity of luxury goods in textiles, metalwares and ceramics. Archaeological evidence can be complemented by detailed lists of possessions in inventories accompanying wills. The 'china' of some inventories is probably the Ming porcelain of the late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries found in surprising quantities in Exeter. This all added up to a dramatic change in material culture for the mercantile elites.

Exeter had been a river port from the early medieval period and a stone bridge, the Exe Bridge, built by 1214 and undergoing many later repairs and additions, remained the only crossing until, at the second attempt, a new three arched bridge was completed in 1778.

The medieval bridge required a remarkable 18 arches and a total length of some 180 m in order safely to cross the wide floodplain of the river at that point. Using a series of maps, beginning with the coloured 'bird's eye' view of the City by Hogenberg, drawn in 1587, John showed how this low-lying area was slowly reclaimed (although always subject to flooding) for industrial production with mills and in other areas row upon row of cloth-drying racks on 'Shilhay', for example, in Roque's map of 1774. There have been a series of excavations on the riverside showing that stone-built houses were being constructed on a sandbank near the bridge as early as the 1240s.

There was constant pressure to improve the navigation of the Exe and at the remarkably early date of 1570, a ship canal was constructed to bypass the weirs, narrows and shallows of the Exe thus allowing deeper draught ships to load and unload at the quay, instead of at Topsham. Exeter was still a booming port in the late seventeenth century. Again using a combination of maps, topographical drawings and excavation, together with close analysis of standing buildings John showed how a clear picture has emerged of the continuing improvements put in place by the city's merchants. In 1680 a handsome brick Custom House was built and at the same time the quay was extended and a small dock constructed to allow the loading and unloading from barges of cargoes from deeper draught ships in the river. With the decline of the port in the late eighteenth century many of these seventeenth century features were preserved – unlike most other ports in Britain. Remarkably, the dock and associated structures survived within later buildings, to be recognised by the Exeter Archaeological Unit in the 1980's. They have been restored and are publically accessible on the Quay.

**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> September.**





A series of perambulations were planned in order to see some of the sites and buildings highlighted in Saturday's lectures. With no distance to traverse in order to view part at least of the **City Walls**, since the Hotel abuts them, we began by looking at a stretch of wall behind Trinity Street under the guidance of John Allan and Frances Griffith. Here immediately we could see very clear differences in use of different types of stone – these had already been pointed out to us by John Allan in the Cathedral fabric. A substantial length of Roman masonry in the purplish volcanic 'trap' was noted in close proximity to the crenellated parapet constructed above in the Civil War. A warning that the normal rules of archaeological stratigraphy do not always apply was observed when traces of possible Alfredan work could be seen below Roman masonry – the result of repairs to the eroded out base of the Roman walls. With time at a premium our examination of the walls concluded at Princesshay and we moved rapidly across to see the Castle Gatehouse – all that survives of the medieval castle since the interior was swept away with the construction of the Law Courts in 1774. Dr Higham had drawn our attention to the combination of Norman and Anglo-Saxon work in this construction by William I – was this due simply to the availability of Anglo-Saxon masons or does it represent a more subtle attempt at reconciliation after William's subjugation of the hitherto staunchly pro-Godwinson city? There was time for a brief look in the interior courtyard of the former Law Courts where antiquarian record and, more recently, small –scale excavations have revealed part of a cemetery with a ninth century C14 date. Its date and location at a distance from the minster cemeteries is puzzling. Bob Higham and John Allan suggested that William's castle may have been constructed on a previous royal precinct (an *arx regia*) within the Anglo-Saxon city – and the presence of a cemetery is strongly suggestive of a royal church within this enclosure.

We returned to the Hotel for coffee and then set off again towards the historic quayside. En route we paused at the site of the medieval **South Gate** demolished in 1819 where Frances Griffith pointed out the outline marked out in the modern pavement of the foundations of the Roman city gate, revealed by excavation in 1989. The excavations had revealed the Roman Road leading to Topsham lying beneath Holloway Street and the hitherto unknown earth and timber defences which preceded the Roman stone city wall. Enough information was recovered to allow a reconstruction drawing of the third century Roman city gate with its twin towers. Proceeding down towards the Quayside we walked alongside one of the best preserved sections of the Roman City Wall.



The principal focus of our visit to the Quayside was **The Custom House** which had been introduced to us the previous evening in John Allan's lecture. A handsome brick building designed by Richard Allen, a builder from Barnstaple, it must have seemed a stylish novelty in a city still dominated by timber-framed buildings. Inside members examined the displays on the history of the customs and the building but few were prepared for the first sight of the magnificent plaster ceiling of the Long Room on the upper floor made by John Abbott in 1680, the scion of a celebrated family of Devon plasterers and one of a series of remarkable ceilings in the building. John Allan explained the details of the ornamentation and drew members' attention to the reproductions of John Abbott's notebook with over 300 designs – an unusual survival. Several of the Notebook's motifs could be seen in the ceiling.

The formal part of the Meeting then concluded with sincere thanks expressed to our local organisers and speakers. Members were at leisure to examine the other historic buildings on the Quayside and have lunch. Heather James then led some members back into the city for an optional tour of Exeter's unusual **Underground Passages**. Beginning in the Middle Ages the 'tunnels' were trenches dug and then covered over to take a piped water supply from (initially) St Sidwell's well to the Cathedral Close but were extended in later centuries to bring a water supply to the 'Great Conduit' in High Street. They finally went out of use after the great cholera outbreak of 1832.

Heather James and Frances Griffith.