Excavations at the Church of SS Peter and Paul, Healing, South Humberside

Hal Bishop

SUMMARY

Excavation beside the parish church of Healing in advance of alterations revealed the former medieval south aisle and produced evidence which suggests that the church had a pre-Conquest predecessor. Among the finds was an ecclesiastical vessel of uncertain purpose.

THE SITE

The parish church of SS Peter and Paul, Healing, S. Humberside, in the diocese of Lincoln, lies about 6.4 km (4 miles) west of Grimsby at a height of c. 17 m (c. 55.8 ft) above Ordnance Datum. The church stands apart from the modern village, which is of the era of railway expansion and extends south from the railway which runs 1.2 km (c. ¾ mile) to the north. Traces of the former village, of which the church, manor site and associated moat are the major relics, are visible in adjacent fields, together with numerous ridge and furrow survivals. To the west of the church there appears to be a hollow way which leads to within c. 20 m (c. 65 ft) of the west door. Both the church and manor house are close to the main A1136 road from Grimsby to lmmingham to which they have a common egress.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE INVESTIGATION

In July 1975 proposals for alterations to the church were submitted by the parish to the Lincoln Diocesan Advisory Committee for approval. In its original form the scheme would have transformed the existing church by abolishing the old arrangement of nave and chancel and by shifting the ritual focus of the building out of the tiny chancel into a new, extended nave. To accomplish this the south wall of the nave was to be removed in order to connect the old church with a new rectangular extension. In the event, however, the south wall was retained and the full scheme was not realised. As a result archaeological investigation was confined to the area of churchyard alongside the south wall of the church.

The Diocesan Advisory Committee recognised the archaeological implications of the proposed alterations, and with the ready cooperation of the incumbent and architect an excavation was organised in advance of development. The work was funded by the Department of the Environment and arranged with advice and assistance from the Churches Committee of the Council for British Archaeology. Before excavation began the gravestones in the affected area were recorded by Mr. G. F. Bryant. Copies of the inscriptions have been deposited in the Lincoln Diocesan Registry. Excavation took place throughout September 1975, with a brief return to the site in October.

HISTORY

References to the church and village of Healing are sparse until the eighteenth century. There is no mention of a church in Domesday Book, and the Lindsey Survey of 1115-18 is likewise silent. Neither of these documents was intended to include a comprehensive catalogue of churches, however, and as we shall see there are indications that a church was already in existence on the site at this time. In 1220-1221 Master Alan de Kelsiea was presented by Ralph de Heiling, Knight, to the vacancy caused by the institution of the last rector of Heiling to another church. Following this the line of rectors and patrons can be traced through the registers of the bishops of Lincoln.

THE CHURCH

Prior to the alterations of 1975-76 the church consisted of three cells: tower, nave and chancel. The fifteenth century tower is the most attractive feature of the structure; this is built of well-dressed ashlars of Ancaster stone. The nave dates from the eighteenth century. J. Fowler, the Louth architect, made a series of drawings of the church in 1873, before a restoration carried out under his supervision in 1874-76. They show two square headed windows on the south side and one on the north; a round headed window in the east wall is recorded but not drawn. The chancel is of uncertain date. The walls have been partly rebuilt in their upper courses, but it seems that much of the extant fabric is late-mediæval and that the footings are a good deal earlier. Internally the tower arch appears to be of early thirteenth century date. Presumably this was embodied in the east side of the present tower by the fifteenth century builders. The exact relationship, however, is now obscure, since the masonry is cloaked with plaster. Early in this century a vestry was added to the south side of the tower.

The nave and chancel are now aisleless. This was not always so. The rector, churchwardens and parishioners petitioned for a faculty which was granted on 11 August, 1774:

'... the parish church of Healing is a very antient building, and about twenty years ago the parishioners and inhabitants repaired their said church and put thereon an entire new roof; that upon a survey and view lately made and taken of the said church it is found that the two arches that support the said roof are gone from the perpendicular many inches and must be taken down in order to save the church from falling; that the south aisle adjoining to the said arches is very ruinous; that the said church is larger than necessary to contain the parishioners that assemble to hear divine service who are all tenants at rack rent and unable to bear the expense of repairing their said church without injuring themselves and families, and that there is a small bell belonging to the said church which has been down and useless for a long time... Your said petitioners humbly pray a licence or faculty to be granted... to take down the said south isle and to wall up the vacancy for the better support of the building and to make the same decent as becomes a place of religious worship, and to sell and dispose of the said small bell in aid of the expense thereof...'

The results of this work are to be seen in the series of drawings made by Fowler a century later. In 1848 it is recorded that: 'The tower window and tracery were taken out and door under it inserted.' The present west portal with its external ogee and crocketed pinnacles is probably the result of this work.
On 2 July 1874 a faculty was granted to:
‘take down the roof of the nave. To take down the north and south walls of the nave and east gable of the nave and rebuild the same. To cut away the old walls of the arch to the chancel and for new windows in the south wall of the nave and east wall of the chancel. To clear the whole of the present seats and take up the present floors and to re-floor and re-heat the whole of the present church . . .”

As a result buttresses were added to the nave; two windows were inserted into the south nave wall (which was not dismantled) and two were inserted on the north side. All four were pointed, as was the six light east window which was installed at the same time.
THE EXCAVATION

The excavation bared the footings of the old aisle (Figs. 1 and 2) and exposed the substructures of the south walls of the nave and chancel. The aisle foundations consisted of roughly-dressed limestone blocks laid in courses and bonded together with a matrix of local boulder clay. In plan the aisle had extended beyond the east end of the nave, returning to meet the chancel wall about 1m beyond the present nave gable end. At this point the footings of the aisle were found to ride over the footings of the chancel. No trace was found of a pier base below the present south nave wall; however, a former roof line on the east face of the tower betrays an earlier nave which was narrower than that of the eighteenth century. It will be seen from the plan that the present south wall is out of alignment with both the church and the former aisle.

The construction of the late-Victorian boiler house and the modern vestry destroyed all stratification in the critical angle between the aisle, nave and tower. However, there were signs of a south door at the west end of the aisle. The eastern jamb of this entrance appeared below the level of the threshold and continued downwards for the six courses that remained; the foundation did not continue below the threshold itself.

Pockets of chalk chips and boulder clay were encountered within the aisle. These may have been the relics of a more continuous feature, such as a trench, but their significance was obscure and one can only guess at their function. They might indicate the line of an earlier nave or aisle wall, or perhaps support for a timber shuttering or revetment erected while the aisle was under construction. A further possibility is that they were foundation pads for monumental tombs of the Mussenden family which are known to have existed in the church in the seventeenth century. A number of monochrome tiles and fragments (yellow, dark green, black and brown) were found in dumped material of the robbing of the aisle wall and indicate a floor of this material in the later period.

A bone pit was found in the north-east angle of the western trench (Fig. 2). The contents of the pit may have represented clearance within the aisle, or even remnants of bones collected after the dismantling of the Mussenden tombs. The pit was interrupted by the foundation trench of the present nave, which in turn had been cut into a bank of re-deposited natural material, presumably upcast from earlier foundations or levelling. A small pit had been dug into this bank which contained a curious vessel (see The Healing 'Chalice').
Fig. 4  Section a-b (for location see Fig. 1)

Key to layers and features:
1  Topsoil and turf
2  Light brown soil with mortar, brick and chalk
3  Yellow-brown sandy soil, mortar and chalk flecks
4  Debris of aisle robbing, sands, chalk and limestone chips
5  Burial
6  19th century drain and construction trench
7  Dark brown clean soil, undisturbed in 19th century rebuilding
8  Construction trench of 19th century buttress
9  Soil of pre-aisle burials
10  South aisle wall.

The foundations of the chancel and nave were uncovered. Those of the chancel were the more substantial (see Fig. 3). Immediately to the east of the Victorian nave some courses below ground level had been removed in order to facilitate the rebuilding. The space was found to be filled with an amalgam of chalk, bricks and mortar. Elsewhere along the chancel footing some of the larger blocks had been removed from the first course below ground level; this revealed the original core, from which fragments of pre-Conquest pottery were recovered.

The foundations of the nave extended to four or five courses beside the tower, but along the length up to the gable end they were reduced to one course only below ground level, resting upon natural at the west end and upon redeposited material towards the east.

The whole area had been intensively used for burial. The majority of the burials were of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century. These had clearly been cut through the debris produced by the removal of the aisle wall. East of the aisle and south of the chancel was the last resting place of an entire family; the tablet commemorating them had been re-erected against the gable buttress in the angle it formed with the chancel. Coffin plates were found in association with the grave of a child belonging to this group (see below). Six, or possibly seven of the skeletons recovered clearly pre-dated the aisle, since they had been cut by its foundations (see Fig. 2). Here burial had been dense, with burials stacked one over the other in tiers.

THE POTTERY*

About twenty five sherds were stratified below the debris of the eighteenth century robbering of the aisle. Fragments of early glazed and shelly wares came from the foundations of the aisle. The glazed sherds have either a red or grey fabric. Another, unglazed, is a red rouletted piece (Fig. 5 i). All are of a ‘Lincoln’ type, dating to the twelfth or thirteenth century. When considered together with a fragment of a Purbeck marble half-shaft, this group would point to a thirteenth century date for the construction of the aisle. By contrast, the pottery found within the core of the earlier chancel footings is without exception all shelly, with a much greater proportion of shell than later wares of this type. It may be assigned to the pre-Conquest period (eighth to tenth century) and would suggest that the foundations of the present chancel formed part of an Anglo-Saxon building. Sherds from the surface of the natural and from the redeposited material contained even greater concentrations of shell and are regarded as being of Middle Saxon date.

Fig. 5  Pottery (All 1:1, except vi at 1:5)

i  Shoulder; ii. red rouletted
ii  Bowl base; black shell-flecked
iii  Rim; black few shell flecks
iv  Handle; grey few shell flecks
v  Skillet rim (?); fine red traces of brown glaze
vi  Architectural fragment probably from window surround.

Other finds included lead calms, with fragments of window glass, and an architectural fragment (Fig. 5 vi), probably a moulded jambstone or window surround.

THE HEALING ‘CHALICE’
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When this object was submitted to the Laboratory it was described as a chalice with the crushed remains of a paten.
However, preliminary cleaning soon demonstrated that it was nothing of the sort.1

There are three main elements (Fig. 6).16 (a) The cup-like body which is made from a copper/zinc alloy with a zinc content of approximately 16% and with significant amounts of tin and lead present (2% and 6% respectively). (b) ‘Handles’ attached to the rim of the vessel and formed from copper tubes filled with lead; the copper being comparatively pure (with tin and antimony present in amounts of less than 1%). (c) A cross with arms made from sheet brass (approximately 11% zinc) edged with a brass of a much higher zinc content (around 30%) attached with rivets of similar composition. The cross is attached to the vessel base by means of an iron rod which passes through it and opens up to form a small cup on the inside of the vessel bowl. There is a decorative opening17 at the centre of the cross and there are indications that the whole object had been given a coat of gesso and then gilded.18 The total weight is approximately 2500g.

Close examination of the object leads to the impression that it is made up with re-used materials or has at least been modified. The two supposed handles were crudely soldered to the rim (one is now detached), a rough notch being cut into the lead filled tube to fit it over the edge of the rim. Marks on the rim (and a surplus hole for a large pin or rivet) indicate that these handles have replaced an earlier fitting of unknown form.

Further, the two handles do not join to form a complete loop; nor apparently were they intended to. The free ends are not broken but terminate in an oblique cut face with a rivet hole passing through the wall of the tube and emerging in the cross section. There are spare sections of the tube with similar oblique cut ends carrying a rivet hole. One explanation might be that these were attached to the two handles to form an S-shaped curve extension, but this is by no means certain.

As for function, there appears to be no parallel to aid interpretation, but a number of suggestions have been made. These fall into two categories depending upon which way up the object was used; i.e., whether the cross was uppermost (as in Fig. 6) or hung downwards. In the former case one suggestion is that it took the form of a finial either surmounting a piece of wall furniture (high on the wall) or serving as a staff head (although the ‘handles’ would have obstructed its attachment to something else). A specific suggestion to fit the possibility that the cross hung downwards is that the vessel was a sanctuary lamp, but there is no direct evidence to support this.

The age of the object is also uncertain and it had been hoped that the chemical analysis would help to resolve this since in medieval and earlier times brass was made by the cementation process and it is not possible to exceed a zinc content of 30% using this process.

From the analysis quoted earlier in this note it will be seen that much of the brass used in this object has a zinc content of 11-16% which is not inconsistent with a medieval date. However, that used for the edging of the arms of the cross (and the rivets with which it is attached) has a zinc content of around 30% and this may be just outside the limits of what would have been possible using the cementation process. Cameron19 has published a series of analyses of medieval monuments brasses which also show this change of zinc content with time. He suggests that there was less than 20% zinc in fourteenth century brasses, a wide range of compositions in the early sixteenth century and then a marked increase in zinc content to around 30%. The balance of archaeological opinion has been that a late mediaeval date was likely for the Healing ‘chalice’ and, in light of the analyses it may be necessary to allow the possibility of a slightly later date. However, it is to be noted that Cameron also detected variations in the amounts of tin and lead present in the brasses he studied, again as a function of time. Suffice it to say that the tin and lead present in much of the brass of the Healing objects are in amounts consistent with those found by Cameron in brasses of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.
Fig. 6  The Healing 'Chalice', 1:2.
THE COFFIN PLATES

Of the mass produced coffin furniture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were three main grades: 'white metal' (tin or silvered tin), 'black' (painted brass) and 'gilt' (in ormulu). The plates and trim from Healing are of white metal, the cheapest of the grades. They show a design characteristic of the period: two putti or cherubs. The handles are of iron, though they too have been silvered. One set of dies would be used whatever the grade selected, since the manufacture was a simple stamping process.

There are two pattern book for these items in the Victoria and Albert Museum's Prints and Drawings Collection. One dates to 1783, the other to 1826, yet the excavations undertaken in 1975 have sketched in two stages of the history of the church which were previously unknown: the origin of the south aisle in the thirteenth century, and the probable existence of a pre-Conquest church on the site.

Building activity at the church in the thirteenth century was already indicated by the tower arch (above, p.25), and it may be that a tower and aisle were added as parts of one campaign at this time. The aisle is of particular interest for the way in which it embraces what was formerly part of the exterior or the chancel. Without knowledge of the layout of the nave in the medieval period it is not easy to visualise how this would have worked out in practice, but presumably the semi-enclosed space at the east end of the aisle would have contained an additional altar or small chapel.

As for the pre-Conquest origins of the church, the evidence available does not permit us to speculate on the form of the Anglo-Saxon building, but it is certainly sufficient to indicate that further investigation inside the church and to the north would be worthwhile if the opportunity ever arises. Such work is necessary not merely to fill in the blank areas of the building history of the church, but to ascertain the date of the earliest place of worship on the site. The expansion of parochial provision in Lincolnshire is still seen largely as a phenomenon of the eleventh century and while this may well have been the case, it is an assertion that can and should be tested archaeologically where it is possible to do so.

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FOOTNOTES
3 Drawings in the possession of the Rector.
4 Lincolnshire Archives Office FAC 3/41. My thanks to Mr. R. W. Ambler for drawing my attention to this document.
5 N. S. Harding (ed.), Bonney's Church Notes being Notes on the Churches in the Archdeaconry of Lincoln 1845-1848 by The Venerable H. K. Bonney, Lincoln, 1937, p.46.
6 Faculty in the possession of the Rector.
8 The pottery has been identified with the assistance of Mr. G. Coppack.
9 While the investigation of the object was in progress it was exhibited at a Society of Antiquaries' ballot by one of us (J.M.), and a preliminary note describing this will appear in the Antiquaries Journal. The present publication includes the more detailed analytical results which have been obtained subsequently but the main conclusions remain unaltered.
10 Reconstruction drawn by Mrs. Heeser.
11 Opinions have been expressed that this may have been the setting for a large stone.

Fig. 7 Coffin plate pattern: No. 76 from an unknown warehouse, 1826

Plate V Coffin plates and trim, Department of the Environment — Crown copyright.

designs in both are remarkably similar. Number 76 of the later pattern book resembles the plates found at Healing (Fig. 7). 14

DISCUSSION

Healing is a good example of a church in which the enlargement and contraction of the building mirrors the changing circumstances of the community it serves. The limited
The metal analyses reported here were determined by Miss J. Bayley of the Ancient Monuments Laboratory using X-ray fluorescence and atomic absorption spectroscopy. In addition we are indebted to the National Gallery Research Laboratory and the Government Chemist for investigations of the gesso layer which show that a calcite gesso has been used and indicate the possible use of an egg tempera with a drying oil. Such a technique is one which is normally applied to wood not metal and its use tends to support a medieval rather than a much later date and also, because of lack of durability, indicates that the object was displayed inside a building rather than outside.


Victoria and Albert Museum, Prints and Drawings Collection M63E and M64E. I am grateful to Mr. J. W. S. Litten of the Museum for providing this information.

See for example Dorothy M. Owen, Church and Society in Medieval Lincolnshire, Lincoln, 1971, pp. 1-2.

Book Reviews


It is rare for a scholar to make an important contribution to medieval history which is so readable as Professor J. B. Gaven’s book and though few students of Lincolnshire history will be able to buy it, it is to be hoped that all libraries will acquire a copy. After reading it Lady Stanton’s ‘Earliest Lincolnshire Assize Rolls and Rolls of the Justices in Eyre for Lincolnshire 1218-9’ will be found even more rewarding than they are at present.

It is well known that life was more liable to end in homicide in medieval England than it is at the present day. Anyone who sees the Ridford effigy in Broughton church and remembers that this speaker of the commons was twice pardoned for homicide will be well aware of this. He will be less aware, however, that in this important respect the risk to life is about as serious in large American cities as it was in Lincolnshire in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Oddly enough, Professor Gaven cites the less dangerous U.S. cities; but he is unusual among medievalists in that his interests extend to comparative anthropology and his statistics show that homicide is far more common in many present day Mexican villages than it ever was in England and that one’s chances of meeting a violent death are about six hundred times greater in a mestizo village than they are in Britain; while in the period 1494-54 the Amba of Uganda were about as homicidal as Italians, who commit murder and manslaughter only about three times as frequently as Britons.

He diagnoses the problem of medieval violence as derived from the nature of medieval society and unexpectedly comes to the conclusion that the habitual use of violent corporal punishment was the most serious factor. One would have been inclined to suppose that a society which derived from the conditions reflected in the Song of Roland and Folk Fitzwarin could not be anything other than homicidal.

The circumstances of many medieval crimes are recounted in detail in the course of a meticulous sociological analysis. One example will serve for many. In 1205 in Lincoln cathedral the subdean, William of Bramfield was killed by another clergyman in front of the altar of St. Peter; but William’s servants were near and having killed the murderer chopped him up and threw the pieces out of the minster.

The present reviewer has long been trying to teach his students to count instead of merely reading and noting. But some readers of this otherwise admirable work will be alarmed by Professor Gaven’s excessive numeracy. On page 144, for example, in a footnote on those killed by relatives we are told: ‘For this distribution Yates’s chi square = 188.21 with one degree of freedom; 0.001 (is greater than) p; phi = 0.28 . . . ’. This, however, is a minor blemish in an excellent book. Mathematical statistics are left in footnotes and an explanatory appendix which will explain little to those who have not done A-level statistics.

EDWARD GILLET

HULL

BANKING IN BOSTON by S. N. Davis, 44pp., illus., History of Boston Series No. 14, Richard Kay Publications, 1976, £1.20.

This book is the most comprehensive survey so far of banking in Boston. It was researched and written by Steven Davis whilst he was a teacher at Boston High School and he drew on the earlier work of Herbert Porter as well as using original material from the present banks which have branches in the town. His aim is to trace the progress of private and joint stock banking in and around Boston, relating this, where necessary, to national government policy, and to the commercial fortunes of Boston itself. In his introduction he gives a summary of the origins of banking, the main types of bank, and the relevant political and economic background to banking in the eighteenth century. His approach is wide-ranging and views the banks from several aspects.

He regrets the ‘very scanty material’ available on the local banks, and the consequences of this are apparent at several places in the book. He writes as much about the families as about institutions because the private banks were not required to publish accounts and much of the available material is genealogical rather than financial.

Boston had six private banks, Tour of which flourished in the period 1790-1826 and two of which lasted much longer. In addition the town had one of the earliest Trustee Savings Banks (opened 1817) and branches of two early joint stock banks, the Stamford, Spalding and Boston and the National Provincial (both opened in the 1830’s). Boston had one of the first five branches of the National Provincial and it would be interesting to know even more about the origins of this branch bank and about its first manager, William Barnard.

Most of the private banks in Boston were started by corn merchants who entered banking as an extension of their business, much as they were purchasing farm land and ships. Davis writes of their local activities in church and politics and their involvement in parliamentary elections but even here his researches could have been pushed further. He makes the mistake of referring to the local Tories as ‘Blue’ when an earlier booklet in this series (No. 8, Aspects of Nineteenth Century Boston and District) had indicated that in Boston this colour was used by the Liberals — ‘the Old Blue Cause’. Mr. Davis ‘found few references to Thomas Garfit’, of the leading banking family in the town, who was in fact elected an MP for the borough in 1878. Some other local historians have information on the Garfits and other banking families but unfortunately this has not been published and is not yet generally available.

The History of Boston Project is performing a valuable function not only by its publications but by the great stimulus it is giving to research into the town’s history. Davis’s book serves both for not only is it the most complete picture of banking in Boston to be published so far but it has also indicated some of those areas which require further enquiry.

NEIL R. WRIGHT

LINCOLN