



Society for Church Archaeology Annual Conference 2026

31st October – 1st November 2026

Church Archaeology in 2026

Chester Cathedral

Saturday 31st October 2026

Walking Tour of Chester Churches on Sunday 1st November

The Society for Church Archaeology is pleased to announce its annual conference for 2026, on the theme of 'Church Archaeology in 2026'. 2026 marks 30 years since the founding of the Society for Church Archaeology. During this time, the field has become increasingly diverse. New techniques and technologies have combined with traditional approaches and resulted in ever-increasing knowledge about ecclesiastical sites of all denominations. The theme for this year's annual conference reflects this diversity and the conference programme appears below. Our keynote will be given by Professor Howard Williams. The conference venue is Chester Cathedral, in the heart of Chester.

For enquiries about the conference and bookings: churcharchconference@gmail.com

For further details please see: www.churcharchaeology.org/current-conference .

To make a booking:

1. Our preferred booking method is through [Eventbrite](#). We can accept online payments through our [Eventbrite page](#) or visit <https://www.churcharchaeology.org/current-conference>
2. However, if you are unable to book via Eventbrite AND you are paying by cheque, you may use the printed booking form below. We are unable to accept online payments via the printed booking form. Please use our Eventbrite booking form for online payments.
3. Eventbrite online payments will close on Friday 24th October 2026.
4. All cheque payments need to be received by Friday 9th October 2026. You can notify churcharchconference@gmail.com to expect a printed booking if you wish, but we cannot confirm your place(s) until we have received the form and cheque.
5. Booking will close earlier if all places have been allocated prior to the aforementioned dates.
6. Bookings are registered on a first-come, first-served basis.



Society for Church Archaeology

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Your booking will only be registered once the form has been received by the SCA Treasurer. You will be notified via email with booking confirmation (please include an email in the box below)

Event	Price	Quantity
Annual Conference + AGM (members)	£30	
Annual Conference (non-members)	£55	
Conference Dinner (limited spaces). Your £5 will be a deposit and will be taken off your bill on the night	£5	
Walking Tour of Chester Churches	£15	
TOTAL TO PAY		

Name(s) of attendees:

Contact email address (so we can confirm your booking):

If you have not already joined, would you like to be added to the Society's email list?

Yes

☐

No

☐

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Please make cheques payable to: **The Society for Church Archaeology**

Please print and post your completed booking form with **(a) your cheque (b) the name(s) of attendees being paid for (c) a return postal address to:**

Treasurer SCA, Pandy Treban, Bryngwran, Holyhead, Anglesey, LL65 3YW

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Society for Church Archaeology Programme

Saturday, 31st October 2026, Chester Cathedral

9.40-10.00	Registration
10:00-10.20	<i>Vikings in the North: New radiocarbon dates from Bede's Jarrow</i> (Megan Leake)
10.20-10.40	<i>Unpacking Winchester Cathedral's Mortuary Chests</i> (Barbara Yorke)
10:40-11.00	<i>Beyond the Visible: UAV Thermal Imaging at Meaux Abbey, East Yorkshire</i> (Tony Hunt)
11.00-11.20	<i>A Spatial Approach to Managing Medieval Fabric at Heritage Sites: Monasteries in Their Regional Maritime Context</i> (Vaughn Ortnner)
11.20-11.30	Q and A with Speakers
11.30-11.45	Break
11.45-12.05	<i>The Puzzling Case of Stained Glass 'Probably From the Chapter House of Exeter Cathedral, Devon, England'</i> (Diane Walker)
12.05-12.25	<i>Troubled Waters: Fonts and Baptism in Late Medieval and Reformation Leicestershire Churches.</i> (Elizabeth Tingle)
12.25-12.45	<i>Sydney's Early Protestant Churches: A Colonial Archaeological Case Study</i> (Gabriella Price)
12.45-12.55	Q and A with Speakers
12.55-13.45	Lunch
13.45-14.30	AGM for the Society for Church Archaeology
14.30-14.50	<i>Fragments of Solitude: Deconstructed Photography and the Archaeology of Anchoritism at St John the Baptist, Chester</i> (Emily Bowyer-Kazadi)
14.50-15.10	<i>Lives of the Saints and Imaginative Interpretation in North Wales</i> (Wendy Ferneyhough)
15.10-15.30	<i>'The Art of Looking': Using Old Ideas to Find New Ways of Engaging Non-Specialist Audiences with Early Medieval Carved Stone Monuments</i> (Siobhan Wordingham)
15.30-15.40	Q and A with Speakers
15.40-16.00	Break
16.00-16.45	Keynote Lecture: Prof. Howard Williams
16.45	Closing Remarks
19.00	<i>Conference Dinner. Venue: Olive Tree Brasserie, 39-41 Watergate St, CH1 2LE</i>

Sunday, 1st November 2026 Walking tour of Chester churches

Paper Abstracts

Megan Leake: *Vikings in the North: New radiocarbon dates from Bede's Jarrow*

Scandinavian raiders and the Viking Great Army have long been blamed for the decline of monasticism in Northern England. Pagan raiders on the beaches at Lindisfarne no doubt sent shockwaves through monasteries in the Kingdom of Northumbria. Given its proximity to the assailed island, there can be little doubt that the monastery at Jarrow, part of the twin monasteries of St Peter and St Paul, felt threatened. Whether they themselves experienced a raid in 794AD is still unknown, but the raids were almost certainly happening around them, and there is evidence of burning at the site. Rosemary Cramp's twentieth century excavations suggested that Jarrow may have survived an earlier raid, before being abandoned in the mid ninth century, likely due to the activities of the Viking Great Army.

As part of a wider project to reconstruct the role of animals within the monastery and its landholdings, new radiocarbon dates have been taken. These were specifically chosen to reconstruct what happened at Jarrow during the ninth century, a task Cramp herself described as complicated due to the complex stratigraphy of the site. The results are initially surprising. Instead of mid-late ninth century abandonment, the radiocarbon dates suggest a much earlier period of decline and possible abandonment at the end of the eighth century. This would likely rule out the Vikings as a cause or factor in the monasteries fate, and instead raises questions regarding the cultural and political situations these monasteries existed within.

Barbara Yorke: *Unpacking Winchester Cathedral's Mortuary Chests*

Now that the long-running programme to study the bones of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman kings and bishops (and Queen Emma) interred in Winchester Cathedral's Mortuary Chests is nearing completion, we can begin to present some of the results. The scientific evidence is still being collated, but this paper will consider the intriguing history of how the bones came to be in the chests and what has happened to them since their first inclusion within them in the late 15c/16c. This involves considering where the bodies were originally placed in Old Minster and in the medieval cathedral in Winchester, how they have been shifted around, and the changing purposes behind their public display in different periods. It raises questions about how, and how effectively, burials were labelled in the medieval past, and why some burials made in Old Minster were included or remembered while others apparently were not. One of the things that emerged at an early stage of the project is that the names recorded on the chests are only part of the story.

Tony Hunt: *Beyond the Visible: UAV Thermal Imaging at Meaux Abbey, East Yorkshire*

Recent advances in unmanned aerial vehicle technology have transformed the capture, analysis and interpretation of archaeological and architectural sites. Since 2016, Yorkshire Archaeological Aerial Mapping has been exploring the potential of aerial photogrammetry as a tool for recording and understanding historic landscapes. More recent work has focused on the use of aerial thermal imaging to detect buried archaeological remains, with particular attention to the identification of sub-surface stone structures.

In summer 2023, with the cooperation of the site trustees, YAA Mapping undertook an aerial thermal imaging survey at Meaux Abbey in East Yorkshire. The survey tested the effectiveness of drone-mounted thermal systems in identifying buried masonry and related archaeological features

across the former monastic site. The results were significant, demonstrating the potential of thermal imagery to reveal traces of structures not readily visible through conventional visual survey or standard photographic recording.

This paper will present the methodology, results and implications of the Meaux Abbey survey. It will consider the practical challenges of aerial thermal imaging, including timing, ground conditions, environmental factors and data interpretation. The paper will also place the survey within the broader development of drone-based archaeological recording, arguing that thermal UAV survey offers a valuable additional method for the investigation of complex historic sites, particularly where buried stone remains are suspected.

Vaughn Ortnner: *A Spatial Approach to Managing Medieval Fabric at Heritage Sites: Monasteries in Their Regional Maritime Context*

Archaeologists contribute to the preservation of medieval ecclesiastical sites through heritage management, which is especially challenging in maritime regions, where additional threats are posed to the standing architectural heritage by unique environmental conditions. Since sites are experienced as part of interconnected landscapes, archaeologists should consider regional maritime contexts (RMCs) as management units in regions where the human activity-scape is intertwined with the sea. In this paper, a simple, fast, and inexpensive methodology for collecting site condition data across a RMC, using structure-from-motion (SfM) photogrammetry in the field, 3D modelling, and topographic elevation and slope functions of GIS, is implemented in a case study examining the weathering of medieval monastic architectural fabric across the maritime landscape of north-eastern England. Comparing the visualisations and quantitative data produced by spatial analysis on the walls of these structures reveals that frameworks which govern heritage management within this RMC fail to account for wind erosion, placing coastline sites at greater risk of loss than those located elsewhere within the maritime landscape. One mitigation strategy involves organising and training local citizen scientist and stewardship groups in these methods so up-to-date site condition data from across a RMC can be generated and shared with archaeologists in heritage management, contributing to more timely and informed decision-making.

Diane Walker: *The Puzzling Case of Stained Glass 'Probably From the Chapter House of Exeter Cathedral, Devon, England'*

In 1952, three stained glass shields 'probably from the chapter house of Exeter Cathedral, Devon, England' were donated to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. They had previously been part of a collection of armorial glass imported from England and installed in Ronaele Manor, Elkins Park, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, which was completed in 1926. Three shields of the same subjects with unusual identical details and some awkward identical leading can be seen in Exeter Cathedral. They are part of a collection of glass returned to Exeter Cathedral from the Architectural Association in 1921 and also believed to have originated from the chapter house. This paper looks at possible histories of these panels, including the work of members of the Drake family, glaziers of Exeter Cathedral where their window repairs included the application of medieval styles of decoration which have only recently been attributed to them. As a partner in the dealership Thomas and Drake, Wilfred Drake was also active in the international supply of vast quantities of historic stained glass, including the armorial glass for Ronaele Manor. Could all six shields originate from the mid-15th century glazing of Exeter Cathedral's chapter house or might there be another explanation for these three identical pairs of shields?

Elizabeth Tingle: *Troubled Waters: Fonts and Baptism in Late Medieval and Reformation Leicestershire Churches.*

Every parish church in England has or had a font, which in the Middle Ages and early modern period was mostly a monumental fitting made of stone. The font was the place where an individual's Christian journey and community membership began, and the ritual of baptism was one of performative reinforcement of orthodoxy or conversion. For this reason, the use, placement, and decoration of fonts were contested in the religious changes of the English Reformation. In this paper, the interaction between ritual actions and material culture in the rite of baptism in the later Middle Ages, and across the Reformation, will be examined. This will be achieved through a discussion of fonts and their settings in Leicestershire parish churches. There is no systematic survey of Leicestershire fonts. The Romanesque (Norman) fonts are well known, but there are few studies of later baptismal fittings. This article therefore takes a case study approach, drawing on specific examples rather than surveying an entire corpus of fittings. The aim is to discuss the relationship between the liturgical context and physical patrimony of baptism in the medieval parish church, with a consideration of the impact of the Reformation on its theology and materiality, grounded in local examples. While the county's material culture associated with baptism is typical of most of Midland England, a study of fonts and associated material culture offers a valuable means to consider the impact of the Protestant Reformation on local communities.

Gabriella Price: *Sydney's Early Protestant Churches: A Colonial Archaeological Case Study*

Churches in Australia are an untapped resource for archaeology. There is a profound lack of research into most aspects of these colonial structures outside studies done by theologians, historians, and one archaeological study conducted in a Catholic church in the New South Wales town of Goulburn (Wright et al., 2022). Here I seek to start to fill this gap. Australia's early Protestant churches are distinct markers of primarily British colonial immigration and transplantation. Mainly constructed from the 1836 Churches Act, these buildings both reflect and are distinct from their British predecessors (Prentis, 2010). My research intends to surmise how the substantial social and demographic changes in Sydney's society are reflected in structural changes to early Protestant places of worship. I consider five churches consecrated before 1850 (three Anglican, two Uniting (Formerly Presbyterian and Congregational) both structurally and archivally to examine how the buildings were renovated and adapted for or perhaps against change in the wider communities. My research considers changes including demographic shifts during the expansion of Sydney's suburbs and the world wars, social shifts such as developments in religious diversity and changing attitudes to church attendance, and environmental shifts such as the use of gas and electric lighting and new technologies. Through this comparative study of archaeological adaptation in extant structures, I show how church archaeology can be used as a tool to understand how our originally British colonial heritage has transformed under a diverse and eclectic history and has adapted to a rapidly changing world, especially in these important centres of community.

Emily Bowyer-Kazardi: *Fragments of Solitude: Deconstructed Photography and the Archaeology of Anchoritism at St John the Baptist, Chester*

This paper explores how deconstructed landscape photography can offer new ways of engaging with the archaeology and lived experience of medieval anchoritism. Focusing on the ecclesiastical landscape of the Church of St John the Baptist in Chester and its associated Anchorite's Cell, it examines how photographic fragmentation, layering, and reconstruction can move beyond documentation to interrogate absence, enclosure, memory, and spiritual isolation within the medieval church landscape.

Drawing on interdisciplinary approaches from archaeology, visual anthropology, and creative practice research, the paper considers how deconstructed photographic methods can reveal

overlooked relationships between anchorholds, parish churches, movement through urban space, and the surrounding ecclesiastical environment. Rather than presenting religious sites as static monuments, this approach foregrounds their sensory and experiential dimensions, exploring how anchoritic spaces mediated tensions between solitude and community, visibility and concealment, permanence and decay.

Using the surviving Anchorite's Cell at St John the Baptist as a case study, the paper examines how anchoritic enclosure functioned within a busy devotional and civic setting. Deconstructed photography is used to investigate the fragmented survival of the site and the layered temporalities embedded within Chester's historic fabric, highlighting the relationship between preservation, loss, and contemporary urban experience.

The paper also reflects on the value of creative methodologies within church archaeology more broadly. It argues that experimental visual practice can expand archaeological interpretation and public engagement by communicating complex narratives of medieval religious experience through alternative forms of representation and sensory engagement.

Wendy Ferneyhough *Lives of the Saints and Imaginative Interpretation in North Wales*

My research specifically assesses the Early Medieval ecclesiastical community at Gogarth and Cyngreawdr: The Great Orme in North Wales. My proposal discusses the nature of the historic and ecclesiastical landscape, along with the quasi-political and social circumstances from the 10th to 14th Centuries in Gwynedd.

My thoughts when writing this abstract are from an imaginative interpretation across the network of Early Churches in Gwynedd, based on the thoughts of 20th-century local Welsh authors, travellers and antiquarians who seemed to feel that the church strongholds in Gwynedd made a strong chain like the later Edwardian Castles became. Many an Eglwys Wen or white church sprung up: "gleaming in its coat of limewash" (Lloyd 2004:79; Carr 1983:46) and "the face of Gwynedd bespangled..as is the firmament with stars!" (Hyde-Hall 1952; Lloyd 2004:79).

The interpretation becomes relevant when we consider the Saintly heritage of North Wales, and the question of whether this is recognised within historical discussion in the public spheres.

There can be creative, memorial, religious and devotional aspects to reasons for public access and visiting of old churches, and I feel that the synthesis and promotion of this could be something to be discussed and will be included in this presentation. This proposal is with a view to new approaches for interpretation of the connection of the Saints' dedications in North Wales.

Siobhan Wordingham: *The Art of Looking': Using Old Ideas to Find New Ways of Engaging Non-Specialist Audiences with Early Medieval Carved Stone Monuments*

The relationship between public archaeology and art is especially pertinent to early medieval carved stone monuments. Traditionally scholarship approached these monuments as artworks, and interpretations were polarised as either 'Celtic', 'Anglo-Saxon' or 'Viking', with many pieces associated with mythological legends, kings and battles. The majority of these monuments remain in their original church settings; while others can be found in small local or national museums, and cathedrals and are displayed and interpreted with varying degrees of success. This is particularly true of local church displays where the interpretation of so-called 'Viking Age' monuments are often built on narratives of local legends and heroic deeds. Indeed, the very survival of these sculptures can often be attributed to the legacy these legends create in engendering a sense of community pride. These traditional interpretations have been superseded and it is now widely accepted that the commissioners of these monuments (including Viking Age pieces) understood the potential these stones had to convey multiple layers of meaning, and carvers used their expertise to draw on many

sources including, mnemonic landscapes, strategic locations and varied cultural beliefs to produce multi-valent monuments. How can archaeologists engage with non-specialist and church audiences to find an alternative strategy for communicating modern concepts and narratives to present a more contemporary nuanced understanding of early medieval carved stone monuments?