

Nicholas Orme, *The Churches of Medieval Exeter* (Exeter: Impress Books, 2014), xiii+210 pp., ISBN: 978-1-907605-51-2 (pbk), £14.99, ISBN: 978-1-907605-52-9 (ebk), £7.50

The Churches of Medieval Exeter is an extended introduction and gazetteer of religious houses, churches and chapels in Exeter during the period 400-1550. A prolific and expert historian of the south-west, Nicholas Orme provides a fascinating insight into the foundation, fortunes, and locations of these institutions.

The book sets out to explain why nearly seventy church buildings came into being from the eleventh century onwards and also to examine 'how they interacted with one another' and with the lay population. Orme identifies that 'this array of religious foundations has not escaped the attention of historians' but argues that he intends to provide an inventory which explains their nature and activities, 'clearing up some confusions that have arisen' (p. 3).

The introduction provides a clear and accessible overview of the development of the buildings, both chronologically and also with consideration for the changing nature of the types of foundations which appeared. The book starts by providing maps of the religious sites prior to and post 1222 and explains the relevance of this date. Up until this point the Cathedral had been the parish church with rites of funeral and burial while the lesser churches functioned like parish churches in most respects apart from possessing their later parishes.

With regard to the early medieval period Orme clarifies some confusion among historians regarding a belief that the city's population had been divided into Cornish Celts and Saxons prior to the reign of Athelstan in the tenth century. This was caused by a writer from the nineteenth century who had based his view upon a statement by William of Malmesbury in the twelfth century and cited the number of churches in the city dedicated to Celtic saints as evidence to support the idea. Orme notes that this division is unlikely given that a large Cornish population in Exeter at this time is incongruous with other knowledge of Exeter. No evidence, either

documentary or archaeological has yet been found to suggest these churches (St David, St Kerrian and St Petroc) had been established this early.

The source material for the whole volume is largely documentary. However, until the mid-twelfth century it appears that, apart from the Domesday Book, available documentary information is limited and although there is some other written material, masonry and burials are used to provide indications of some earlier foundations. After this point, the Cathedral Archives provide greater detail. From 1200 the survival of two lists provides information not only on the number of religious buildings, but also their locations. Orme has scoured numerous deeds charters, maps, registers, accounts and related similar records to provide a rigorous grounding for the research he has presented.

Orme also describes the creation of the parishes, the nature of their administration, and their relative wealth or lack of it; something which resulted in the closure of some churches and joining of parishes towards the end of the thirteenth century (pp. 28-34). The book also covers the four monasteries, one nunnery and three hospitals around the city and the Dominican and Franciscan friaries which were founded in the mid-thirteenth century. It seems that the religious houses of Exeter were neither particularly wealthy nor large but all had some degree of involvement with the city around them, particularly the friaries. These were free from episcopal authority and consequently claimed funeral and burial rights for people who were not members of their house, which led, unsurprisingly, to disputes with the Cathedral. Orme wisely avoids much discussion of the Cathedral itself, except where it is directly involved with other foundations. This subject would fill a volume in itself, and indeed he has already written one explicitly on the cathedral, and numerous other books, chapters and papers on various related aspects.

Following the creation of the parishes in 1222, there were apparently no new churches created for several centuries, although a number of patrons built private chapels, bridge chapels and

later, chapels attached to almshouses. Orme discusses these and also briefly touches on private oratories, holy wells and holy crosses. He goes on to detail evidence from buildings, wills and church records from the fourteenth century onwards: these sources provide information on building changes and also the involvement of people who were occupied with the parish administration such as rectors, as well as activities of parishioners, companies and guild fraternities. The introduction concludes with a section on the Reformation, and the consequent reduction in places of worship. Orme tells us that while the parish churches survived (twenty-one are left by 1560), other buildings were adapted or dismantled with only a small number of chapels surviving in private use.

The large gazetteer section inevitably repeats some information from the introduction, but provides a useful breakdown of the foundation, background, related documents and, where possible, locations or former locations for each religious building. Orme advises that his information is more historical than archaeological, but the entries provide enough information on a site to identify it for further detailed study. For example, it is interesting to discover that a hall in a restaurant off the Cathedral Close, was in fact the former annuellers' (chantry priests) dining hall (p. 71). The many photographs, maps and illustrations which are included throughout are impressive. These are often of buildings that are no longer extant and provide valuable insight into the religious landscape of medieval Exeter.

For both local historians and students of English urban Christianity, this book clearly describes how the religious facilities in the city developed, what they were used for and by whom, as well as their relationship with the Cathedral Administration and its bishop. The particular strength of the volume is the familiarity of the author with the city, both in the medieval period and today. In this book, the medieval churches of Exeter are truly brought to life and made tangible in a manner that ensures their contemporary relevance as a topic of study and enjoyment.

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