

Architecture & the Medieval Mind

A six-part series of talks on the important role that architecture – both physical and representational – played in the imaginative, artistic, and theological life of early medieval England.



Talks will range from the layout and construction of actual early medieval buildings to the symbolic use of architecture in literary texts in order to demonstrate the pervasive importance of architecture in early medieval thought. Wednesdays, 7.30-8.30pm in the Old Library, University Church (above the Vaults and Garden Café).

3rd May: Hannah Bailey and Daniel Thomas – The Architectural Imagination in the Early Medieval Period

Dr Hannah Bailey and Dr Daniel Thomas, both lecturers in Old and Middle English literature, will introduce the series, touching on the importance of architecture and architectural representation as sources of evidence for the medieval cultural, literary, social, and religious imagination. They will then look in more detail at examples of the significance of architectural imagery in some of the earliest surviving English poetry.

10th May: Helen Appleton – The Long Home in the Narrow House

Dr Helen Appleton, Career Development Fellow in Old and Early Medieval English, will look at the (sometimes playful) use of architectural images in association with death as a prompt to contrition in the early medieval lyric tradition. It will address questions such as: 'When the turf is your tower and the pit is your bower, what help to you then are all the world's joys?', and will also examine what the worms think about it all.

17th May: Clifford Sofield – Shaping buildings and society in Anglo-Saxon England

Dr Cliff Sofield, Anglo-Saxon archaeologist, will talk us through the architecture of Anglo-Saxon houses and 'great halls'. He will consider whether the way in which people shaped their buildings in the early medieval period mirrored the way they shaped their society, and consider the questions of 'funerals' for Anglo-Saxon buildings.

31st May: Mark Clavier – Holy Places, Holy People, and Holy Time: Sacred Space and the Medieval Social Imaginary

The medieval landscape was interwoven with imaginative engagements with the Christian story. Drawing on the philosophy of Charles Taylor, Dr Mark Clavier, Vice Principal of St Stephen's House, will offer a way of understanding how this interplay between sacred places (such as parish churches, monasteries, and shrines) and sacred time (daily worship and the liturgical year) shaped the medieval imagination and how people engaged with their world.

7th June: Meg Boulton – 'Set in Stone': Constructing Christianity in the Anglo-Saxon Crypts of Hexham and Ripon

Dr Meg Boulton, art historian focusing on representations and interpretations of sacred space, will take us into the underground world of the rare seventh-century crypts attached to the important Anglo-Saxon monastic foundations of Ripon and Hexham. Constructed by Wilfrid, the controversial Northumbrian bishop and saint, these crypts provide a dramatic example of the symbolism of architectural space in the early medieval imagination.

24th May: Karl Kinsella – Reading the Church through 12th-Century Eyes

Taking the University Church itself as a model, Dr Karl Kinsella, medieval art historian, will use the work of the twelfth-century theologian Honorius Augustodunensis to unlock the symbolic meaning of ecclesiastical architecture. He will move through the church and discuss why the windows were like the doctors of the church and how the altar emulated the figure of Christ, amongst other things.

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