

Slater Fellowship Report, Epiphany Term 2022

Dr John Munns

The Research Project

The primary purpose of my Slater Fellowship was to enable early-stage research toward a major project on 'The Art of Norman England'. This stage (currently projected as forming the basis of the first chapter of the monograph) is focused on the immediate post-conquest period to ca. 1090 and, for the most part, on architecture. It had two key elements: first, an opportunity, freed of routine distraction, to work my way through a substantial amount of secondary scholarship; and secondly, an opportunity to conduct primary research at important sites in and around Durham.

For the first of these, I was able to make extensive use of the University and Cathedral libraries. They were refreshingly easy to use and the ready availability of the material I needed was extremely impressive; the vast majority of it on open shelves. The availability of necessary online resources was impressive too.

With regards to the primary research, it could probably go without saying the opportunity to reacquaint myself with the cathedral, castle, and other relevant buildings and artifacts in Durham was invaluable. In particular, the access I had to the Norman Chapel led me to rethink my views on its original form and function; arguments that will be presented in a paper in due course and which will contribute in time to the broader arguments of my monograph.

Otherwise, I decided to prioritise that research which could least easily be undertaken from a distance or by means of short return trips to Durham itself. Essentially, this meant field work, so a good degree of my time was spent visiting churches and other sites in the North of England, for which Durham offered a perfect base. Particularly useful visits included those to Norham, Carlisle, Corbridge, Hexham, Norton, Old Bewick, Ponteland, Warkworth, Halton, and Seaton Delaval. Some were sites I had visited before (although not for some years), but many I saw for the first time. I was able not only to explore the architectural material but also to build my own photographic record, which will be of continued use for reference. I hope it will also expand my options for the presentation of my arguments (or, in rather baser terms, reduce the potential image costs of the eventual publication).

Perhaps inevitably, the two months of the fellowship passed very quickly. Because of the time spent in the field (and a related need to adapt to the vagaries of the weather), I had to sacrifice the chance to consult some of the manuscripts I had hoped to view in the Durham collections, but there will be opportunity for that in the future. The architectural field work was more important at this point.

Dissemination

The research undertaken during my fellowship will be vital to my developing project; but it is early-stage and represents only a fraction of the material I need to explore. The major

projected output (a monograph) is unlikely to see the light of day before 2026/7. However, my time in Durham also prompted fresh ideas for a number of papers that I plan to develop, write up, and (in some cases) present at conferences and in lectures over the next eighteen months (including that on the Norman Chapel, mentioned above). One or more of these may also be developed to publication.

Most importantly, the fellowship allowed time for the focused reading and reflection that I needed in order to develop the 'shape' of the eventual monograph. As a consequence, I now have a structure that I think will work well and will allow me both to cover the necessary ground and to make the key arguments that I hope to. This represents a major step forward for the project and will enable my ongoing research and writing to be increasingly well focused.

Other activities

It was particularly pleasing, given the nature of my research, that my fellowship coincided with the 950th anniversary of the foundation of the Castle in 1072. I agreed with the College Officers and the Director of IMEMS that in place of the usual fellowship lecture focused on my research, I would offer the first in a series of talks marking the 950th anniversary. This took place on 9 March, and was well attended. I very much enjoyed putting it together. I also very much enjoyed leading a workshop for research students the following week. We looked at some of the ways in which COVID has changed the early-career landscape, how they might navigate it, and what opportunities it may bring. This too was well attended by postgraduates across a range of disciplines and stages of research, all of whom engaged in the lively and insightful discussion.

The other great joy and benefit of my Slater Fellowship was the opportunity to reconnect with old friends and colleagues and to meet new ones. A particular highlight was the chance to meet and talk with Dr Barbara Drake Boehm, curator emerita at The Cloisters Museum in New York, who stayed in University College in order to give the Epiphany Term Castle Lecture on the travels of Bishop Antony Bek. It was also very good to meet Drs Sargan and Davis, the current ZKS-Lendrum Postdoctoral Fellows, and to learn something about the Institute's ongoing research into the scientific study of manuscripts. I hope that hugely enjoyable discussions with Professors Taylor and Gasper will lead to a number of exciting research collaborations over the coming years. Within University College, discussions with the Curator, Gemma Lewis, about the conservation work beginning on the Norman chapel, as well as about the building and collections more generally, were extremely helpful.

Practicalities

I have only positive things to say about the practicalities of the Fellowship. Contact ahead of my arrival, led by Elizabeth Alpass for IMEMS and Ellen Crabtree at Castle was superb. I was well informed throughout, and they both (alongside the College Office team) did everything necessary to make my planning and arrival as straightforward and stress-free as possible.

The accommodation and catering provided by University College was excellent. The set on Hall Stairs is large and extremely well equipped (and probably has one of the best views in England). It provides ample space for working as well as living. The welcome in the College

was quite extraordinary: from the Principal, Deputy Principal and other College Officers to members of the SCR and the College staff, all went above and beyond to make me feel at home and to be helpful. The food was excellent and easy to access. Similarly, the welcome and attention offered by Professor Taylor and staff of the IMEMS office was wonderful. I can only express my deepest gratitude.

Future Collaboration

As much as it offered an invaluable period of consolidated research, I hope that my period as Slater Fellow will also mark the start of a longer-term working relationship with IMEMS and a renewed engagement with Durham. A number of possibilities have been discussed:

- In light of the immanent conservation works, I have offered to organise an academic on-site conference on the Norman Chapel that will bring together archaeologists, art historians, curators, and conservators in conversation. Most probably (given the likely timescale of the works and allowing for other events already planned in Castle) this would take place in 2024.
- At his suggestion, I have had initial discussions with Professor Taylor about making an editorial contribution to the Durham University IMEMS Press, probably in the development of a series concerned with material culture.
- Looking further into the future, I was able to discuss with Professor Gasper a long-held ambition to built virtual recreation of Durham Cathedral as it would have appeared at the enthronement of Bishop Hugh du Puiset in May 1154. It is possible that this could tie in with some IMEMS research plans already in development.
- Professor Taylor has offered to nominate me for appointment as an Honorary Fellow of the Institute in order to enable me to develop these and other potential collaborations. It an offer I would be delighted to accept.

To conclude, I simply want to express my gratitude again, not only for the opportunity to take up the Slater Fellowship, but also for the way the visit was organised, for the huge generosity with which colleagues at both IMEMS and University College gave up their time, for the interest and enthusiasm shown for my research work, and for the wonderful warmth of the welcome. As a result, I look forward to continuing an enjoyable and fruitful research collaboration with Durham in the years ahead.

John Munns
May 2022