

LINCOLN CATHEDRAL

It was a fitting conclusion to an engaging tenure as Slade Professor that Paul Crossley conducted a guided tour of Lincoln Cathedral for thirty or so students and staff from the Cambridge History of Art Department at the beginning of Easter term. We had seen, heard and marvelled at Professor Crossley's masterful lecture series about the Gothic Cathedral. However, there was one aspect that was not so easy to replicate within the lecture theatre. This was the first hand experience of these remarkable and complex structures.

As Nikolas Pevsner, a former Slade Professor himself, mused, 'A bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture.' This assertion is difficult to contest when confronted with the splendour of Lincoln. Medieval streets wind towards to the Cathedral itself, which sits, resplendently ensconced within a subservient huddle of medieval and Georgian 'bicycle sheds'.

As an architecture student I myself have had the benefit of various instructional fieldtrips. Rome, Helsinki and, dare I say it, Majorca, have been sketched and contemplated. However, despite the exhilaration of this international jet setting, to my embarrassment, there are many English architectural landmarks that I have yet to experience.

'Experience' is the key here. To fully appreciate the scale, development and detail of architecture, it is necessary to encounter it. Despite this, it is all too easy to overlook the architectural wonders that are conveniently available.

Lincoln, with its long, languishing outline and riot of intricate detail is about as English as it is possible for a Cathedral to be. Potential architectural and structural problems were resolved in inventive and whimsical ways. As such, the complexity and variation of Lincoln's detailed masonry must be studied in person. A book of photographs, no matter how comprehensive, will simply not suffice.

As other visitors, noses buried in leaflets, marched briskly around the Cathedral, our party listened enthralled. Faces were, for the most part, were turned towards vaults, arcades and capitals as Professor Crossley's engaging commentary wove together the complex narrative of Lincoln's sequential building campaigns.

Professor Crossley, within a limited amount of time, incorporated the complex development of Lincoln into one seamless discourse. This was achieved whilst also focusing on specific, easily overlooked details and their significance. Starting with the solidity of the original, military-style Romanesque west front, we moved to the inventive lancet style of the transepts and quire, with their unusual sexpartite vaulted ceilings, to a pair of delicate and refined perpendicular chantry chapels.

This fieldtrip to Lincoln certainly rekindled my own enthusiasm for guided excursions. They should surely be an essential component within the education of any History of Art and Architecture student. Indeed, everyone on the trip was in agreement that it was hugely beneficial and returned with a heightened and changed perception. This was regardless of any previous level of understanding. Surely this alone is reason enough for more of these events to take place.

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Lincoln Cathedral Trip

On the second day of May the Art History Department made its way to Lincoln Cathedral with Slade Lecturer Prof. Paul Crossley. Having specialised in the Gothic Cathedral in a broader European context, Prof. Crossley constantly cross-referenced to both French and English examples. His European approach as well as having the privilege of seeing the objects he discussed first-hand was a unique experience.

Arriving at Lincoln, our pilgrimage towards the head and body of St. Hugh began at the West portal presenting the majestic dimensions of Constantine's Triumphal Arch. We then walked towards the choir pointed arches and shafts became organic starting and ending at different points. This unevenness was topped by the 'crazy vault' over the choir designed by Geoffrey de Noyers. Prof. Crossley made us strain our eyes to notice the intertwining network of Y ribs united at the middle by bosses. After trying to gain our balance we ventured into the cloister covered in an incredibly preserved wooden vaulting. To our right sprung the octagonal chapter house sustained by a central palm frond vault. Its radiating ribs seemed to interconnect us in a common stance of awe. Leaving I felt like a satisfied pilgrim satiated with the mysteries of St. Hugh.

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