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**Traces of Romano-British Christianity in the West Country**

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'Whosoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you, for I trust to see you, and to be brought on thither by you.' These words of St. Paul, written from Corinth to the Christian community in Rome about the time when the Roman army was consolidating its position in the West Country, show that the faith was already widespread in the settled Graeco-Asiatic trading diaspora of the western Mediterranean. However, these Greek-speaking groups kept themselves to themselves and so remained over a century later, when they were subjected to an outrageous pogrom at Lyons in the year 177.

It is difficult to say when Christianity first entered Britain; easier to say that it is unlikely to have been introduced by missionary effort. St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, writing about 180, does not include Britain among the regions which knew the faith; on the other hand, Tertullian, writing about 200, does make that claim.\(^1\) The late 2nd century, then, may reasonably mark the earliest Christian worship in this island; and 150 years after St. Paul, it would hardly be surprising. Archaeological proof, nevertheless, is wholly lacking before the fourth century, and is indeed scarce for that period throughout the peripheral European provinces. Objects which may well have been fashioned by Christian hands occur, notably a series of drinking-glasses with Christian emblems such as the fish and the palm, and bearing inscriptions perhaps of a Christian character – we have only fragments; but these glasses were made in the Rhineland and, accordingly, nothing can be said of their users here, a soldier of the legion at Caerleon among them.\(^2\) Other things have wrongly been called 'Christian' – an early tombstone from Sea Mills,\(^3\) and a small terracotta lamp of local make from Caerleon, having raised dots on its base in which a Chi-Rho was mistakenly discerned.\(^4\) The Christian Chi-Rho is scarcely known before 300.\(^5\)

An object of a type which has provoked a bibliography of well over 200 items\(^6\) is the word-square scratched on a fragment of red-painted wall-plaster with a black band, about 5 by 7 in. to be seen in the Corinium Museum. It was found in 1868, the first recorded from a Roman context anywhere.\(^7\) This clever invention of five lines of five letters based on the perfect palindrome TE NE T reads the same forwards, backwards, up or down; or as an (imperfect) iambic trimeter in two identical phrases when taken (appropriately!) houstriphedon. It was the subject of an article by Professor Donald Atkinson in our Transactions for 1957.\(^8\)

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
\text{Rotas} & \text{Opera} \\
\text{Rotas opera tenet arepo sator} & \text{TE NE T} & \text{Sator opera tenet, tenet opera sator} \\
\text{Arepo} & \text{Sator}
\end{array}
\]

The limitation of choice of words in composing this device was daunting, and it was a triumph to
incorporate a ‘meaning’ – ‘Arepo the sower holds the wheels as his work’, etc., or ‘the Sower maintains his works, the Sower maintains his works’. But it is uncertain whether arepo is significantly other than merely and necessarily opera backwards, even though it was glossed in Greek as arator (‘plough’) by the 15th century, and so long before scholars noticed the Gaulish word arpennis, giving French arpent, in Columella as a measure of land. Likewise uncertain is the celebrated crypto-Christian ‘solution’ of PATER NOSTER in a cross about the central N, with A and O twice left over. The discovery of two examples at Pompeii raised awkward questions – less as to whether there were Christians there (after all, St. Paul stayed with Christians in Puteoli, on the other side of the Bay of Naples, after his eventful voyage) than as to the possibility of a Latin-speaking Christian community. Various other ‘solutions’ have been championed, of which the Jewish (which has the concept of God as Our Father and of the first and last letters of the alphabet as symbols of First and Last) is perhaps the most likely. But the beauty of the device is in its perfection, and in the important number-magic which it embodies. It was widely used as a protection against evil in antiquity, and later; and we should err in attributing to the Corinium piece any further significance. Thus Roman soldiers scratched it on the walls of a disused temple at Dura-Europos, where they were billeted, and together with another but imperfectly-remembered linear palindrome it was written before firing on a roof-tile found at the commandant’s house at Budapest fortress.

If traces of Romano-British Christianity before the Peace of the Church in 313 are lacking, those of other substantial cults are scanty too. The worship of Isis existed in 1st-century London, but we know of it only from a jug inscribed Londini ad fanum Isidis, ‘London at [or near] the temple of Isis’; other relics are few.

The lack of archaeological material for 3rd-century Christianity in Britain does not extend to the documentary record, in which we have an authentic memory of three protomartyrs, Alban, Julius and Aaron, who are mentioned by Gildas, c. 540. Of Alban he possessed a standard hagiography; of the other two, mentioned together as ‘citizens of the city of the legions’, he knew but their names, and a location which was most probably derived from the existence of a chapel in their memory at Bulmore, a little upstream of the legionary fortress of Caerleon, on the opposite bank of the Usk; later piety was to erect a handsome wheel-headed cross-slab there, of which a fragment remains in the National Museum of Wales. In placing the sufferings of these martyrs at the time of the great persecution instigated by Diocletian in 303 in an army already deeply penetrated by Christianity, Gildas uses the phrase at conjicmis (as we conjecture); but Eusebius and Lactantius tell a different story of the regions of the west controlled by Constantius I, father of Constantine the Great. It seems that he did not apply the persecution in anything like full rigour, perhaps only closing churches and seizing sacred books. Most commentators have therefore concluded that Julius and Aaron – to limit consideration to them – suffered in the persecution of Decius and Valerian in the middle of the 3rd century. An important limiting factor is that the Caerleon fortress was given up c. 290 and was soon in the hands of demolition-gangs.

The natural interpretation of Gildas’ phrase is that Julius and Aaron were serving soldiers or connected with the legion. Julius is a Roman family-name well represented at Caerleon, as indeed everywhere: it was the rule to adopt the name of one’s benefactor on being made free, and Caesar, most famous bearer of the name, had given many Gauls the citizenship. By natural increase they had spread far and wide. Aaron is in a different category; his is not a Roman family-name, but a very distinguished biblical one. He is usually thought to have been a convert from Judaism; but the name is very rare in Roman times, and it seems possible that it was baptismal, replacing an unsuitable pagan name. For this parallels can be cited, both among the victims of 177 at Lyons, and among the martyrs of Palestine in the early 4th century. If, then,
Julius and Aaron were serving soldiers, one further important point can be made. It is that there is a body of improving literature, known as the Acts of the Christian Martyrs, which, however altered in the telling and record, fundamentally seem to be telling a plain tale. Several of these martyrs were soldiers, and they were not condemned specifically for being Christian at all, but for violating their military oath and for conduct unbecoming to their position. Thus Marcellus, a centurion of the legion based in Spain, jumped up at a camp-dinner for the emperors' accession-day, threw down his military belt and the vine-stock that together symbolized his status, and declared – this in front of the standards which had been paraded – that he was a soldier of Jesus Christ and would no longer serve the emperors or worship gods of wood and stone. He refused to recant, and in due course was brought before the governor of the group of provinces of Spain, when his renewed refusal left the governor no alternative but to pronounce that what Marcellus had done merited punishment according to the military code: 'he has disgraced himself by publicly renouncing his oath and further by using intemperate language, as appears in the official report. I sentence him to death by the sword.'

The relevance of this tale is clear. Julius and Aaron, like Marcellus, may have proclaimed their faith on some public occasion, and renounced their oaths in the same manner. Indeed, when Diocletian came to power in 284, he began to introduce rather simplistic notions championing the old state religion after some fifteen years of effective tolerance; it may have been then, in the last few years of the legionary base, that these martyrdoms occurred. The two may have been sentenced at Caerwent, which was probably an 'assize-town' or conventus, periodically visited by the governor to discharge his judicial duties; or indeed at Caerleon itself, where the commandant may, in certain circumstances, have had the power of the death-penalty delegated to him. But no doubt the executions took place at Caerleon. The condemned would have been led out through the shameful rear gate, the porta decumana, and killed either just outside – there was a slang word, 'to be ramparted' – or perhaps brought round to the amphitheatre that way; and it would have been in the amphitheatre, in any case, that they would have suffered if not indeed soldiers but civilians. It was a passing thought of the late Sir Ian Richmond's that the chamber on the short axis of the amphitheatre, east side, with its brick niche, served as a memorial chapel; if so, however, the structure was in its final stage long before the end of the 3rd century, and no tradition of martyrdom or of a memoria there reached the ears of Giraldus Cambrensis when he visited Caerleon, with his head full of Geoffrey of Monmouth's nonsense, in 1188.

Our first glimpse of church-organization comes in the record of the Council of Arles, summoned by Constantine in August 314 to deal with heresy in Africa a mere 18 months after the Milan edict of toleration for the faith. This record shows the church in Britain already well enough established to play a useful part in theological discussion – a position in which it was to remain eminent into the 5th century. Secondly, the list of participants is arranged according to the provinces and cities which formed the basis of the ecclesiastical organization, conterminous with civil divisions, and modelled upon the civil administration. In this, Britain did not differ from other regions. However, only bishops of York, London, and (probably) Lincoln are named as participants, together with a priest and a deacon with no given territorial affiliation. The record is defective; and it is uncertain whether the name of a fourth city has fallen out, or whether these two were part of the Lincoln delegation. The three named cities were capitals, it is agreed, of three of the four small provinces into which Diocletian had divided Britain; and it is tempting to suppose that the priest and deacon represented that of the fourth province, in all probability Cirencester. Corinium was certainly the richest city in the west country and south Wales, second in size only to London, and epicentre of a region unsurpassed in the number and wealth of its country-houses; it would have been a worthy capital. It was here that Lucius Septimius,
Governor of Britannia Prima, restored a Jupiter column erected ‘by the piety of our forefathers’ (prisca religione), and the assumption is – though it is not necessarily correct, for he may have been a visitor – that Corinium was his seat. In the early Church, the provincial bishop would have served his flock from this centre; his, for example, was the responsibility, then, for baptism. The ministry, accordingly, was at its highest level peripatetic, involving the bishop in long journeys, as sometimes confirmation still does today.

The interpretation of archaeological evidence is never more delicate than when answers are sought in questions of motive and spirit. In much of what follows, that must be borne in mind; and in claiming that Caerwent offers a trace of the earliest stage of the open practice of Christianity in Britain, especially. Indeed the evidence from House VII South, in Insula XI near the west gate, is pagan, and only implies Christianity. Like its neighbour to the east, this house had been rebuilt early in the 4th century; and on that side, at the furthest extremity of the grounds, a small square chapel was found, built over the ruins of some earlier buildings, and presenting an open, balustraded front towards House VII. On a stepped platform within was found an austerely-carved head of local sandstone, perhaps of a considerable age; as a tête coupée it enshrined, in Celtic belief, the soul. How it was mounted we do not know, but it was apparently the principal object of veneration, open to public gaze; and a circular stone just inside the barrier may have been placed there to receive offerings. A similar chapel (with platform, but lacking its focus of worship) was discovered in the Springhead (Kent) temple-complex.

Of the house itself little can be said. Its ‘seasons’ mosaic has the feature, unusual for Britain, of figures of putti carrying torches or cornstalks (it is coarsely done), but the centre had gone and with it much hope of an insight into the religious notions or faith of the owner. ‘Seasons’ show a cosmic, or perhaps only an agricultural, order, suitable enough for the home-farm which House VII was. Earlier, perhaps, the family had worshipped Isis: not far away, in one of the yards, part of an Egyptian alabaster bottle for purificatory Nile-water was found. Thus a Christian interpretation of the shrine depends on the consideration that it was erected at the most distant point from the house, yet looks towards it: one may wonder whether the 4th-century owner was Christian, while his domestics and farm-workers, his familia, remained true to an aboriginal faith in the spirit of the household, the Celtic equivalent of the Roman domestic Lar: it appears from a canon of the Council of Elvira, held in southern Spain c. 309 while the Church was as yet feeble, that a master should prohibit his slaves from worshipping ‘idols’ in the house, as far as he could; and if he feared violence as a result, he was to keep himself ‘pure’ – quite apart. The circumstances answer this requirement, perhaps better than any other interpretation, especially in view of the late date.

For much of the 4th century, Christianity was a minority religion with its strength in towns and in the country villas of the rich. Next to the Forum at Caerwent, a temple was built after 330; the deity worshipped there is unknown, but about this time the rural temples of Nodens, deity of the Severn Bore at Lydney, and of Apollo (?) at Pagans Hill near Chew Stoke were flourishing, not least because they were the equivalent of the modern health-centre, where medical conditions could be eased by divine intervention or by more practical means. As such they were to remain frequented for very many years. The great admixture of religions which was a feature of 4th-century life is exemplified by a prayer to Sulis Minerva, scratched on one of the many lead tablets cast into the reservoir of her hot spring at Bath: it concerns the theft of money, and ends with a long list of suspects – the goddess would know which of them was the culprit – ‘whether Christian or gentile. Gentilis is a Christian name for a pagan; the writer must, it seems, have been a lapsed Christian. The text shows Christianity to be a commonplace of urban life, and doubtless many of those frequenting the baths had little respect for anything but the therapeutic qualities of the waters. Another instance is the Lydney tablet, calling on Nodens for help in the
case of a ring stolen by one Senicianus. It has often been thought that a gold ring found near Silchester, with a head of Venus and her name engraved on the bezel, is the one in question, because it carries a later inscription around the hoop, Seniciane, vivas in De(o), 'Senicianus, mayest thou live in God'.

Under the Christian emperors there was a strong pagan party even in Rome, late into the 4th century; and indeed throughout the empire paganism remained very strong. But in the Romano-British countryside Christianity was making progress, from villa-centres like Hinton St. Mary and Frampton in Dorset, and Lullingstone in Kent, where no secret was made of the owners' adherence to the faith: the first Chi-Rho and praying figures from the painted chapel at Lullingstone, now beautifully conserved and fitly exhibited at the British Museum, I had the privilege of seeing put together by the late C.D.P. Nicholson in the basement of the Institute of Archaeology in its St. John's Lodge days. There were many other villas where paintings and mosaics carried no overt message. Chedworth is one; but there a pool at the north-east corner was Christianized, presumably for baptismal purposes, by monograms cut on the massive coping-stones which appear to have come from it; and a stone candle-holder (Fig. 1) bears engraved crosses, a chi, and on the front a monogram of I and H, iota and eta, for Iesus – a monogram known in the Roman catacombs. Other villas again, such as that at Great Wemberham (Yatton), with a great floriated cross as the main design of its principal floor, could be interpreted thereby as the seat of a Christian owner. The frequent appearance also of pagan mythological subjects – the cultural background of antiquity – on mosaics suggests interpretation at various levels according to the faith or inclination of the viewer. These floors may sometimes thus have carried a Christian message, notably the Orpheus pavements in which our region is rich, with examples at Barton Farm (Cirencester), Newton St. Loe near Bath, Withington and Woodchester.

At the same time, a flourishing paganism ensured that the Christianizing of the countryside may not always have been accomplished without setback. On the one hand, at Pagans Hill the axial, cultic well, kept scrupulously clean, was contaminated by rubble from the building and

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**Fig. 1** Stone candle-holder, Chedworth villa, with Christian symbols (after G.E. Fox, 1887). Scale: 1/3.
domestic refuse towards 340, and its principal statue-group, with a large figure of an adoring hound, was badly damaged. It was the late W.J. Wedlake's view, too, that the Apollo-temple at Nettleton-on-the-Fosse was briefly converted to Christian uses by blocking off three of its seven side-chapels to make, with the entrance, a cruciform plan reminiscent of the ‘Mausoleum of Galla Placidia' at Ravenna; very bold diagonal crosses, with central roundels, of the new wall-decoration add some colour to the notion. Later, in the last quarter of the century, the temples on Brean Down and Lamyatt Beacon near Yeovil were pulled down, and small rectangular buildings erected near by, as if they were the dwellings of anchorites, though of the monastic life we have little sign otherwise at so early a date in Britain. The same levelling of a pagan *sanum* is witnessed at West Hill, Uley; as if to echo the words of Sulpicius Severus in his *Vita S. Martini*, a church was built on top – this, at least, is the interpretation placed by Ann Woodward on the remains of a timber building with nave and double aisles. We would do well to bear in mind the wise words of W.H.C. Frend that Christianity was indestructible, when once it had penetrated the countryside. On the other hand, however, the Emperor Julian (360–63) strove to reverse the onward march of the faith. The restoration of the Jupiter column at Cirencester is reasonably assigned to those years, and only eight miles away at Chedworth the displacement and structural re-use of the Christianized coping-stones conveys a similar tale of pagan revival. Lydney, and the forehall at the Caerwent temple, were refurbished after 367; Pagans Hill temple was rebuilt, and its statue-group repaired; Nettleton resumed its pagan character, though on a reduced scale.

Such, in the broadest strokes, is a picture of Christians and pagans in the 4th-century west country. In detail, it is again Caerwent that provides an insight into the life of a Christian community, and in the first place a building which may colourably be identified as a house-church, the original kind of Christian meeting-place from apostolic times. Insula V, House XXII North, as the excavators of 1909 observed, contains a group of rooms ‘the plan of which resembles somewhat that of an early church', but the absence of a street-doorway turned them against the notion, and they do not seem to have had the possibility of a house-church in mind; no wonder, for the first positive identification, at Dura-Europos, lay many years ahead. The group of rooms is at the north end of a courtyard or atrium (Fig. 2, Area 3). It centres on Room 7, into which a massive easterly apse has been inserted, to give a hall 23 ft. long and 13 ft. wide overall, dimensions comparable with the nave of the church at Silchester, which ran 30 ft. into the (westerly) apse and was 10 ft. wide. The flooring in both cases was red tessellation, with a panel of fine mosaic in the apse, though of this only traces remained at Caerwent; the wall-decoration was pink, speckled in imitation of marble, in both buildings. Room 2 is manifestly an ante-chamber or narthex, where the catechumens would gather to take part in the service before the doors were closed behind the full members of the community for the Eucharist. Rooms 6 and 8 (north part) are subdivided in a similar way and go together, possibly as sacristies; and Room 1 may perhaps have served as a baptistery from time to time. Coins from the building run down to Valentinian I (364–75), and there is some affinity of plan with late Roman garrison-churches on the Rhine, notably Kaiseraugst near Basel, with its cramped baptistery to one side.

Structural fonts have been recognized in Britain at Richborough, within a timber building, and (as generally accepted) at Icklingham (Suffolk). The tumbled of stone depicted on the plan of the Caerwent chamber calls, in this light, for re-examination, but may have been no more than a base for a moveable basin, as has been suggested was the purpose of the square base axially in front of the Silchester church, with adjacent deep soakaway. It has often been maintained that the large round lead tanks, wider than deep, sometimes bearing Christian monograms or symbols, and in one case a scene colourably interpreted as connected with the rites of baptism, served as moveable fonts, or at least for ritual ablutions connected therewith, such as foot-washing.
(pedilavium), a gravestone at Aquileia shows a neophyte standing in a basin (though it is not cylindrical), apparently receiving baptism by affusion. Two tanks, one 33 ins. in diameter and 14 ins. deep, the other 39 ins. in diameter and 16 ins. deep, were found in 1934 at Bourton-on-the-Water, in a Roman building excavated by the late Mrs. H.E. O’Neil. They bore panelled decoration of cbi-crosses (the so-called crux decussata) and in each case a Y-shaped symbol formed of raised discs or pellets (Figs. 3–4), which has a Christian significance. These vessels like most others, however, had undoubtedly been gathered together as scrap: one was badly damaged, and both were crushed (Cheltenham Museum, now restored). The Bourton tanks, moreover, were so little regarded, even as scrap-metal, that they were left lying on a floor laid about 370, when a last floor was made above, about 390. Other tanks have been recovered from wells or in circumstances which suggested that they, too, had been discarded. The Watesby tank, with its ‘baptismal’ scene, is a mere fragment, intentionally defaced at that spot. Obviously we
Fig. 3 Lead tanks, Bourton-on-the-Water: above, Tank no. 1; below, Tank no. 2. Note Y-motifs. By permission of Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum, photographs of 1935.
have more to learn about the tanks and their purpose, and their apparent discontinuance. A pagan revival offers one explanation, and in the Bourton case at least would coincide with the renewal of the Jupiter column at Cirencester and the restoration of temples in the region, as indicated above; if so, it would have been a very thorough and far-reaching revival. A better notion, perhaps, might be a discountenancing, on the part of the Church, of their use. There is, for instance, no sign of the rite of *pedilavium* in what can be reconstructed of Romano-British baptismal ritual.

Finally, Insula IX, House VII North at Caerwent produced a remarkable deposit of vessels concealed in a large urn buried level with the floor as a place of safe-keeping. Its mouth was
sealed by a mixing-bowl cemented into place. Inside were, at the bottom, two pewter vessels—a plate of which little remained, and a large piece of a flanged bowl (Fig. 5), on the underside of the base of which was cut a Chi-Rho (or rather Chi-R) monogram, devoting the vessel to sacred use. Above came two cooking-pots, one of a late 4th-century ware, and finally three small bowls for the table, of Oxfordshire red-coated ware. Also found were the remains of a knife-blade, a coarse iron swivel-hook, and in one of the cooking-pots some scraps of fine woollen twill. Accidental contaminants were bones of mouse and mole, and a water-snail shell, showing that the urn had not remained hermetically sealed. A fish-vertebra, on the other hand, presumably represents the last meal in which these vessels were used.

It may reasonably be claimed that every single occurrence of a Chi-Rho or other Christian symbol, such as the monogrammatic cross on a fragment of a cooking-pot from Exeter, designates that object as special and sacred. It may reasonably be claimed that the Caerwent vessels, so carefully put away, were reserved for the supper known as the agape, held after Eucharist at the invitation of some well-to-do member of the congregation at his own house, as custom had directed from an early period, and as survived until a late date despite the efforts of the Church to end it on the grounds of the unseemly behaviour likely to arise. Some of the sorest critics suggested that fare had become more important than faith, ‘boiled up in saucepans, fomented in kitchens . . . etc.’ Housewifely emulation was not approved. But since some Christian catacomb murals show repasts of considerable jollity with diners calling out for mulled or mixed wine to the accompaniment of shouts of Irene! (Peace) and Agape! (Love), there was no doubt case-history behind attempts to suppress what must have been in most cases a modest and seemly parish supper with its own little ritual of blessing and breaking bread.

Since the pewter bowl with the Christogram is not a Eucharistic chalice, one may ask why such care should have been taken to isolate this group of vessels, or indeed others such as the great Appleshaw (Hants.) deposit of pewter-ware. The answer may well lie in the ‘kosher’ attitude of many early Christians, arising from the Jewish foundations of their faith. In St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians we read ‘whatsoever is sold in the shambles [in the macellum], that eat, asking no question for conscience sake; for the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof.’ Enquiry as to the origin of the meat—whether it came from sacrificial beasts and had been sold off to the butchers—was unnecessary; and indeed if one were invited to dine with pagans, one should eat what was put before one without troubling one’s conscience as to the source, unless it was indicated that it was indeed from a sacrificial animal, when it should be refused. But there is a letter to Augustine which shows that at the end of the 4th century the matter was still causing anxiety, and not only where sacrificial meat was concerned, but even over corn and vegetables grown on temple-land, and timber from sacred groves. The reply was common-sensical. In the Caerwent case, the most unusual item—the hook—may thus be seen as one specially kept for hanging the joint, the fish or the fowls intended for the agape and nothing else, and the knife would have been kept to cut it—guests would have brought their own spoons.

Our last glimpse of Romano-British Christians comes in 429, when Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre and Lupus, Bishop of Troyes, came in response to an appeal to the Pope from the orthodox in Britain, in an attempt to settle the Pelagian heresy, which, with its denial of original sin and its emphasis on human free-will, had won many hearts here as elsewhere. That glimpse is of villa-owners, conspicuously well-to-do, gaily clad, surrounded by their tenantry, forming the congregations in the churches and gathering to hear the visitors preach not only there, but at the cross-roads, along the byways, and in the depths of the country. Links with the continental Church were maintained down to 455, when the British Church adopted a new reckoning for the computation of Easter, and doubtless for some years after that. But here and there in the west—where Gildas finds his detail—there still glowed inside or outside the walls of deserted temples
what he calls diabolical idols; and if they were no longer cultivated in his mid 6th century, they
cannot have been abandoned for long if Gaulish experience is a guide.69

There is in this latter regard one very strange feature of sub-Roman Britain, and that is the
focusing of Christian graves, with their west–east orientation and general absence of goods for the
next world, upon sites already long hallowed by pagan piety. The most striking of these in our
region is the temple at Henley Wood near Clevedon; other instances are at Brean Down and
Lamyatt.70 But countryside and town also yield impressive evidence of cemetery-burial. At
Cannington near Bridgwater, which was of at least 1,000 graves, a Christian phase seems to have
succeeded a pagan one, the Carbon-14 dates ranging from early or mid-Roman times down to the
7th or 8th century, as at Dorchester-Poundbury and Winchester-Lankhills. At Caerwent, great
numbers of west–east graves have been excavated outside the east gate of the town, and in some
cases were inserted over the site of a great mausoleum or temple; another was cut across the
walling of an extramural shop;71 and inside the town large numbers again occurred, so thickly
indeed that Lord Tredegar, who was both landowner and president of the Exploration Fund,
ordered work to cease in the field next to the parish church – a long way from the supposed
house-church described above. Some of these graves again cut across Roman walling and must
therefore be assigned to a period when the buildings had become ruined below ground-level and
covered over with soil. The earliest Carbon-14 date from the east-gate cemetery is 410±80;
others went on to 860±70, much as the later phases of Cannington, and a range within which the
few dates from elsewhere fit.72,73 The practice of interment in rough stone cists lingered long at
Caerwent: a 13th-century priest’s burial, south of the chancel of the parish church, yielded a
pewter funerary chalice and an iron buckle; the paten was not observed, or missing.74

It was in the 6th century that the Irish monk Tatheus landed in Gwent and obtained from
King Caradoc a grant of land; he later received the Roman walled town, and would have built his
oratory and monastic clas on the site where the Norman church was to rise.75 It is noteworthy
than Ĉaradoc is not represented as requiring conversion, but encouragement in the faith at
Tatheus’ hands – evangelica bortamenta. And this is not surprising, for only a generation or so
earlier Gildas had written of western British kings who, however objectionable in themselves,
were nominally Christian, as their forefathers had been. Even the western Cotswold region did
not fall to the West Saxons until the British defeat at Dyrham in 577; the population would have
retained its Christianity down to that date and beyond.76 There is an intriguing possibility that
the age-long tradition of sanctity at West Hill, Uley, witnessed a final flowering in the form of a
small stone church, equipped, it seems, with a window glazed with panes of a very distinctive
glass. The building arose across the corner of the buried temple of Mercury.77 But this, and the
existence of the Celtic into the Saxon tradition in the west country, as perhaps at Wells,78
belong to another story. Suffice it to remember again the many hundreds of unmarked graves in
the late and sub-Roman cemeteries of the west country, and to recall the words, already then
ancient, of St. Irenaeus of Lyons who had written of the simple folk who ‘believed in Christ
without benefit of writings or ink, having salvation inscribed in their hearts through the Holy
Spirit’.79
Notes & References

Abbreviations

A Archaeologia or Miscellaneous Tracts
B Britannia
BBCS Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies
CIL Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum
JRS Journal of Roman Studies
MA The Monmouthshire Antiquary
PG Migne, Patrologia Graeca
PL Migne, Patrologia Latina
RIB The Roman Inscriptions of Britain

2. *RIB* ii.2, 2419.60.
3. *RIB* i, 137. The dead lady is personified as *Spec* (Hope), in a well-known Roman manner. The *nomen* suggests a freedman connected with Gna. Sentius Saturninus, consul in 41 and joint commander with Aulus Plautius of the invading Roman army of 43. A coin of Donitian was found near this stone, but part of the latter is missing.
7. E.C. Sewell, *TBGA* 57 (1955), 152–7, records his boyhood memory of the discovery, and says he arranged for the photograph, his pl. i, to be taken. But, pace Sewell, the man described as holding the piece, in that photograph, cannot possibly be doing so; what he holds is too small and of the wrong shape, and looks like a shard. The Girenchester piece is now *RIB* ii.4, 2447.20.
8. *TBGA* 76 (1957), 21–34. *RIB* 10 (1979), 353 no. 34, records a second British find, on the shoulder of an amphora, found in a 2nd-century pit at Manchester. The amphora is Spanish, but the inscription was added after firing and so perhaps in Britain.
10. *Not. degli scavi* 1929, 449, no. 112, imperfect on a fragment of black wall-plaster from the House of Paquius Proculus; ibid., 1939, 263–6, no. 159, with other graffiti on a column of the great *palaestra* (CIL iv, 8623). At Pompeii there is a doubtful record of a graffito cross, and another (CIL iv, 679) of a reference to Christians. Difficulties over the *PATER NOSTER* A and O solution are (1) whether first-century Christians in Italy had a Latin liturgy; (2) whether 'A and O', otherwise first known in *Revelation* 1, 8, was current before 79; and (3) whether the cross was used so early, as a symbol, when Barnabas, who refers to it as such, thought of the 'A form; and only Justin, c. 150, of a cross (not even a +). Cf. Sulzberger, loc. cit. n. 5, 350, 356–7, 361, 365, 368, 371.
12. Moeller, op. cit. 18, shows e.g. that *tenet*, if the E's are reckoned as *eta* rather than *epsilon*, works out as 300 + 8 + 50 + 8 + 300 = 666. And much else. However, in *tenet* the E's are short.
13. M.I. Rostovtzeff (ed.), *The excav. at Dura-Europos, prelim. report of the fifth season* (1934), 159–61, 481.
14. Moeller, op. cit. pl. iv, shows this piece. The other palindrome is Roma *ibi* SVB (ino motibus ibit amor. This is given by Sidonius Apollinaris (Ep. ix, 14.4) cf. the Loeb editor, W.B. Anderson's, note (Sidonius, ii, 582–3). The Budapest tile also has a trace of a third inscription. *ita* only.
15. *JRS* 12 (1922), 283: the jug would date before c. 75. G. Marsh (Trans. London & Mx Arch. Soc. 30 (1979), 128, note), points out that the Tooley St, Southwark, provenance is not reliable. If *ad* means 'at', then possibly the jug was intended to hold 'Nile-water', on which see below, n. 31. Other Issae material, my note, *Antiq. Journ.* 62 (1982), 356, 359 n. 1; M. Green, *Records of Bucks.* 25 (1983),
20. The most interesting of half-a-dozen tombstones is that of the veteran Julius Valens, a centenarian (RIB i, 363).
25. Vegetius, De re militari i, 23; Festus, De verborum significatione, s.v. ‘vallescit’.
28. RIB i, 103.
32. F. Lauchert, Die Kanonen der wichtigsten altkirchlichen Concilien (1896), 20 (canon 41).
36. RIB ii. 3, 2422.14; RIB i, 306. Possibly a component in the hoard of which other items, found recently, are published by M.G. Fulford et al., B 20 (1989), 219–28?
37. H. Bloch in The conflict between paganism and Christianity in the fourth century (ed. A. Momigliano, 1963), 193–218. A souvenir of an Isiac procession to honour the incoming consuls of c. 330 at Rome has been found at Caerwent – a small bronze coin for largesse, having the bust of Constantine II on one side, and a figure of Anubis, with the legend VOTA PUBLICA, on the other. Young men wearing Anubis-nasks took part in the procession.
39. RIB i, 128; G. Webster, TGBAS 101 (1983), 11–12, fig. 3. The ΙΘ monogram, Sulzberger, loc. cit. n. 5, 351. The Chedworth piece is also noticed by D. Watts, Christians and pagans in Roman Britain (1991),
175–6, accepting G. Webster’s unlikely suggestion that it was a portable altar. The Chedworth museum contains another such base, but it is plain. Both appear in R. Goodburn, *Chedworth Roman Villa* (1972), pl. 12, from the Fox Coll., Soc. Antiq. Lond. A similar base, but in lead, and with traces of an iron stem in the top, bears a Chi-Rho and other figures. It was recently found at Bottisham Lode, near Cambridge, and is mentioned here by kind permission of Prof. W.H.C. Frend.


47. Cf. nn. 33, 42, 43 above. Hugh Williams, in his perspicacious edition of Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae* (Cymypradurion record. ser., 1899) i, 22–3, picks up the reference in ch.9 to Christianity being received with lukewarm minds by the Britons: ‘a solid historical truth lies in that curt tepide,’


50. My *Silchester, the Roman town of Calleva* (1974), 72–3, 173–83; S.S. Frere, *A* 105 (1976), 277–302. There is no satisfactory archaeological dating-evidence from the site. The plan, with its rudimentary transepts (projecting merely by the width of the side-wall) is clearly based on those of S. John Lateran or St. Paul Without-the-Walls in Rome (G. Bovini, *Edifici cristiani di culto d’età costantiniana a Roma* (1968), figs 6, 49). There is no sign of a 4th-century church of similar plan in Gaul as yet; even at Milan, S. Tecla has a non-projecting transept (R. Krauthember, *Early Christian and Byzantine architecture* (1965), fig. 22, erected c. 350–75). The closest parallel to the Silchester form seems to be the remote church of Kolokia in north-east Crete (I.F. Sanders, *Roman Crete* (1982), fig. 25, 5th–6th century). It would seem unlikely that the Silchester building could have been erected before the end of the 4th or in the 5th century. An open transept, such as there was at Silchester in its first state, is a diagnostically Christian feature, as some critics of the Christian identification have forgotten. The early 5th century, of course, was a flourishing period for Romano-British Christianity.


52. P.D.C. Brown, *B* 2 (1971), 226, fig. 1; Kaiseraugst, also *MA* 8, 20, fig. 4.


54. The most recent treatment of these tanks is by D. Watts, op. cit. n. 39, 158–73, suggesting *pedilavium* (a post-baptismal rite, known to have been important at Milan towards 400). The scene on the Wakesby tank has been well-studied by Thomas, op. cit., 221–5, fig. 41, cf. pl. 6. The neophyte is shown as a young girl, and the matron on her right is apparently placing a robe around her shoulders, presumably the white robe offered to neophytes after baptism; this episode may well explain why no
font is shown in the tableau (the tank is a mere fragment and another tableau, of the actual affusion, may perhaps have existed elsewhere around the circumference). The female neophyte possibly recalled Mary Magdalene, the first to encounter the risen Christ in John xx, 14–17, since baptism is considered rebirth into a new life.

55. E.g. Thomas, ibid. 205, fig. 39.

56. D.W. Herman, TBGAS 55 (1933), 377–81; H.E. Donovan, ibid. 56 (1934), 99–109. The v-shaped ornament is discussed by Watts, op. cit., 176–8. It is upside-down on Tank no. 2, across the upper band of ‘plaited’ panelling; the discs may have been made with a flat-headed tile-nail, the rest with twisted and plaited cord. Tank no. 1 has the maker’s name (appearing retrograde) cavvDIOI (?), RIB ii.2. 2416.1. It also has two balanced holes, in the weald, for rings whereby ropes could be attached to drag it into place; this is a provision known in the case of other tanks.

57. Decorated cylindrical tanks are known in bath-houses on the continent and such, probably, was the origin of the Romano-British shallower series: cf. M. Bossert, Jahresberichte aus Augst und Kaiseraugst 3 (1983), 81–5, Schleitheim and Izenore (Ain) – hunting scenes, etc. Add Castel di Sangro (baths?), G. Gatti, Bulletin della Commissione archeologica comunale 33 (1905), 322–4, fig. 2, tav. xii, 50 cm. high (Christian symbols); ibid., 325, mentions a lead tank (with star flanked by crosses), 78 cm. wide, 68 cm. high, found amid broken amphorae at the House of the Vestals, Rome, in the presence of St. Clair Baddely, whose sketch (with a rather poor one of the Castel di Sangro tank) is in the Bourton-on-the-Water file at Cheltenham Museum.

58. C.J. Guy, B 12 (1981), 275, suggests pagan revival and connects the Ashton (Northants.) tank, from a well, with the concealment only 3 miles away of the Water Newton Christian silver-plate. However, what can be seen of the (late) Romano-British baptismal liturgy (S. McKillop in The Early Church in western Britain & Ireland (ed. S.M. Pearce, 1982), 35–48) includes no pedilium.

59. A 60 (1907), 459; my note, BBCS 19.4 (1962), 338–44; MA 8, 16–18, fig. 2.

60. A well belonging to the same house produced a pewter flagon and a plate with a central cross pattée in a medallion (A 60, 463, fig. 4). This form of cross occurs on the Oxborough (Norf.) tank, B 17 (1986), 403, pl. xxix.

61. A. Fox, Roman Exeter (1952), 92, pl. xa. A Chi-Rho appeared on a sherd from Gatcombe near Bristol, B 8 (1977), 444; but the monogrammatic cross is in general later; it appears on coins of the 330s but remains rare until the latter part of the century. On coins of Magnentius’ Victoriae type, of 352, the Chi-Rho is used above the shield on the reverse at Trier mint, and the monogrammatic cross, at Amiens mint.

62. J.F. Keating, The Agapé and the Eucharist in the early Church (1901). Abuses, Tertullian, De jejunio, 17 (PL ii, 977); Augustine, Ep.xxxii, 6 and xxix, 9 (PL xxxiii, 92, 118). Catacomb paintings, Cabrol-Lerclercq, Dict. d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie, s.v. ‘agapé’. There are studies of these scenes and their pagan counterparts by E. Jastrzebowska, Recherches augustiniennes 14 (1979), 3–90, and F. Ghedini, Rivista di archeologia (Brechneider), 14 (1990), 35–62. Agapé and Eirene are usually said to be the names of the serving-girls, but as they recur I think they must be acclamations.

63. W.H.C. Frend claims with some justification that the Water Newton treasure enshrines the earliest-known Eucharistic chalice among various other items. Cf. his Archaeology and history in the study of early Christianity (Variorum reprints, 1988), iii, 146–50. Woodward, op. cit. n. 45, pl. x, has a colour photograph of the Water Newton ensemble. There was no flanged bowl.


67. Constantius, Vita Germani, 14 (Sources chrétiennes, 112 (1965), 148).

68. Thomas, op. cit. n. 53, 334.

69. De excidio Britanniae i, 4. A prohibition was placed as late as the mid 6th century on Christians visiting funa in Gaul, Vita S. Eligii (PL lxxxviii, 528); note also the study by A. Rousselle, n. 34 above.

71. This was the supposed grave of S. Tathus, the translation of the remains being described in my presidential address to our Society (*T&GAS* 107 (1989), 15) as ‘pure theatre’ and more fully in my ‘Three bones of S. Tathus’, *MA* 4.3-4 (1981-2), 2-5.

72. Dates, ibid. 5 n. 23. A similar late- and sub-Roman range is reported from Sully, near Barry (H. James in N. Edward and A. Lane, *The early Church in Wales and the West* (1992), 96-8).

73. The latest addition, in 1990, to the late and sub-Roman cemeteries of the region, at Shepton Mallet, yielded from the pelvic region of a male skeleton, in a cist, a silver pendant lightly oxidized, of a form close stylistically to an unusual crossbow-brooch from Sussex, in the British Museum. Both have a pointillé monogrammatic cross of 5th-century type on a roundel, and beaded arms (*Som. Arch & N.H.* 134 (1990), 51); an authentic phylactery, recalling the passage in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Vita S. Magrinae* (*PG* xliii, 989/90) regarding the sign of the cross worn beneath the garments, would be an immensely valuable addition to the meagre *indicia* of Christianity from the late cemeteries. An enlarged colour photograph is given by Woodward, op. cit. n. 45, pl.6, but the caption is incorrect in stating that a Roman coin has been re-used.

74. *A* 64 (1913), 447, n. 1; *South Wales Daily News*, 16 Nov. 1912, for cist.


76. J. Knight in Edwards and Lane, op. cit. n. 72, 45-50, shows that the earliest (Class I) Early Christian Monuments were developed from styles in W. France, even perhaps Brittany, in the mid to late 5th century; on to this, the Irish Ogham tradition with its emphasis on filiation was grafted. But there is no trace of such monuments in the Romanised areas bordering the Severn, a point to ponder.

77. Woodward, op. cit. n. 45, 117, cf. fig. 83. The 7th-century glass jar and iron pail from the well at Pagans Hill suggest that the still standing building may have been appropriated to Christian use then, cf. Rahtz and Watts, *Arch. Journ.* 146, 365-6. There is perhaps something of a parallel in the construction of a timber ‘mausoleum or church’ over the levelled rubble of a Roman building on the site of St. Mary de Lode, Gloucester, apparently in the 5th-6th century, though the underlying building was certainly secular (R. Bryant, *Glevensis* 14 (1980), 4, 8).

78. No tradition survives to help our understanding of the Roman mausoleum in its extremely suggestive position in relation to the first Saxon structures at Wells. It is not dated and nothing survived of its original use. There was Romano-British occupation near by. Cf. W. Rodwell, in *The early Church in western Britain and Ireland*, 49-59, and in *Wells Cathedral, a history* (ed. L.S. Colchester, 1982), 3-5. What it was believed to be, however, is just as important as what it actually was, as has been observed of the ‘burial-place’ of St. Peter himself (D.W. O’Connor, *Peter in Rome* (1969), 209).

79. *Adversus haereses* iii, 4 (*PG* vii, 855/6).