

## Introduction

*Only those who have experienced the solitude and silence of the wilderness can know what benefit and divine joy they bring to those who love them... There, for their labour in the contest, God gives his athletes the reward they desire: a peace that the world does not know and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

St Bruno to Raoul le Verd<sup>1</sup>.

The need for solitude fuelled the unique lifestyle of the Carthusian Order. This ideal was incorporated into the founding institution at La Grande Chartreuse, as seen by the above letter, and promulgated throughout the Carthusian Order, which, out of all the monastic orders, carried the need for isolation to the extreme. However, their existence would have been impossible without a select group of men known as the lay brothers, to enable this life of silence and solitude. Despite the lay brothers' invaluable contribution to the Order, they have been overlooked in both historical and archaeological studies: an imbalance this study seeks to redress.

This study aims to examine the role of the lay brother in Carthusian communities by examining the monastic houses of the Order in Great Britain and Ireland and combining a wide range of information to give context for the archaeological evidence that follows. A historically contextualised study of the Carthusian lay community will be provided through two research questions:

1. Is it possible to identify the lay brethren as an archaeologically distinct element of the community?
2. How was the lay brothers' precinct arranged and organised?

This research will examine the material remains, the surviving documentary sources, previous excavations, and available cartographic data to understand how the lay brothers shaped their landscapes and environments. These research questions will be answered using previously excavated material assemblages and new geophysical surveys at the two correries of Witham and Hinton Charterhouses.

### 1.1 Data Set and Chronology

The sites included in this study are all those from Great Britain and Ireland<sup>2</sup> (fig. 1.1) and were selected based on regionality, rather than the provinces they were assigned to by the Carthusian Order. The reason for the dates chosen is that it encompasses the foundation of the first charterhouse

at Witham in 1178 (table 1.1), up until the formal suppression of the Perth Charterhouse in 1569. These dates do not in all cases account for post-Dissolution activity at the sites, although this is addressed where necessary. The two key research sites are Witham Friary<sup>3</sup> and Hinton Friary, both in Somerset, and the first two English charterhouses. These were chosen for further archaeological research as they are the only two Carthusian 'lower houses' known to have existed in Britain, and therefore give a singular opportunity to examine the lay brethren.

### 1.2 A Brief History of the Carthusian Order

The beginnings of the Carthusian Order lie within a broader phenomenon of twelfth-century religious revival. Their reversion to the early Christian hermitic lifestyle was not unique, being contemporary with the Camaldolese (f. c.1012) and the Vallombrese (f. c.1036), all three of which addressed an increasing disenchantment with the current monastic lifestyle and challenged the existing Benedictine monasticism. These three orders were part of the 'New Hermits', along with the Grandmontines (f. 1076), the Cistercians (f. 1098), the Tironensians (f. 1109), the Savignacs (f. 1112), and the Premonstratensians (f. 1121) (Leyser 1984, 113-118). In contrast to traditional hermits, the New Hermits saw solitude as excluding secular society, not fellow religious, and thus sought to create communities of hermits (Monti 2003, 245). In this sense, the Carthusians, Camaldolese, and Vallombrese most similarly mirror each other, living in individual cells and coming together for worship, while the day-to-day running of the house was left to the lay brothers (Monti 2003, 246-247). The over-arching aim of the New Hermits was to relive the *vita apostolica* (life of the apostles) and the *vita primitiva* (the early Church) (Leyser 1984, 26). In this way, they hoped to counter the lax lifestyle that had come to be associated with monasticism.

The Carthusian Order was founded in 1084 by St Bruno, who decided to take up the solitary life permanently after spending some months in a remote hermitage. With six companions, he travelled to the wilderness of the Chartreuse mountains, near Grenoble, arriving in June 1084. The site chosen for the new hermitage was in the

<sup>1</sup> *Lettres des premiers chartreux* I, 71

<sup>2</sup> As concerns the location of the houses within the Carthusian provinces, all the English charterhouses were included in the *Provincia Anglie*, but the house at Perth was first attached to the *Provincia Picardie*, then from 1456-1460 became part of the English Province. Since this move was somewhat unpopular, the house then moved to the *Provincia Gebennensis*, where it remained until the Reformation (Fawcett and Hall 2005, 49).

<sup>3</sup> 'Friary' here does not refer to the religious houses of Friars, but is an anglicisation of 'frérie', meaning a house of brothers. This will be explained in further detail on page 64.



**Figure 1.1.** Map of all the charterhouses included in the present study.

**Table 1.1. Charterhouses founded in Great Britain and Ireland, with their foundation and dissolution dates and founders.**

|              | Foundation Date | Founder                        | Dissolution Date                                       |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Witham       | 1178            | Henry II                       | 15 March 1539  |
| Hinton       | 1222            | William Longespée              | 31 March 1539  |
| Kilnalahanin | 1249            | Richard de Burgo               | 1321   |
| Beauvale     | 1343            | Nicholas de Cantilupe          | 18 July 1539   |
| London       | 1370            | Sir Walter Manny               | 10 June 1537 (formally suppressed<br>15 November 1538) |
| Hull         | 1377            | Michael de la Pole             | 9 November 1539  |
| Coventry     | 1381            | William la Zouche / Richard II | 16 January 1539  |
| Axholme      | 1397            | Thomas Mowbray                 | 18 June 1538   |
| Mount Grace  | 1398            | Thomas Holland                 | 18 December 1539                                       |
| Sheen        | 1414            | Henry V                        | 20 August 1539   |
| Perth        | 1429            | James I (of Scotland)          | 9 August 1569  |

centre of a valley, and surrounded by high cliffs, making it particularly inaccessible to outsiders and thus ensuring the monks' solitude (Jotischky 1995, 42). The monastic precinct was called the 'desert,' drawing directly upon the experiences and teachings of the first Christian hermits (Brantley 2007, 33; Gilbert 2014, 378).

The monks' cells were situated slightly higher up the mountain than the lay-brothers' quarters, hence earning the names 'upper house' and 'lower house'. The lay brethren enabled the monks' way of life, providing food and fuel and working the land around the monastery. The lower house also functioned as a gatehouse, so any visitors to the charterhouse had to be received there first (Bligny 1986, 8). This further increased the monks' inaccessibility and ensured that unwelcome or unexpected visitors would not disturb their silence. From the beginning, the Carthusian monks relied on lay brothers and hired servants to provide for the community through growing food, tending livestock, and maintaining the smooth running of the house; indeed, two of the first companions, Andrew and Guarin, are noted as being lay brethren (Thompson 1930, 7).

The distinctive Carthusian layout, a central cloister surrounded by individual cells, began to emerge in around 1104, as extensions were made to the first two charterhouses, and the way of life was consolidated (Aston 1993, 141). Guibert de Nogent, who visited La Grande Chartreuse in 1112, described thirteen monks living around a central cloister, each with their own cell, where they worked, slept and ate (Bruce 2007, 158).

Until 1115, only three charterhouses existed: La Grande Chartreuse in France, and La Torre and St-Stephen-in-the-Wood in Italy<sup>4</sup>, which Bruno founded while acting as an

advisor to Pope Urban II (Rowntree 1981, 3). Between 1115 and 1116, six new charterhouses were founded: Portes (1115), Saint-Sulpice en Bugey (1115), Meyriat (1116), Les Écouges (1116), Durbon (1116) and La Sylve-Bénite (1116) (Coppack and Aston 2002, 17). These new houses stimulated the expansion of the Carthusian Order in Europe, and by 1200, 37 houses had been established in France, Italy, England, Slovenia, Spain and Denmark (Braunfels 1972, 117). By 1521, at the Order's peak, there were 195 Carthusian houses across Europe, having expanded into countries including Germany, Sweden, Hungary, Belgium and Switzerland. Each of the houses belonged to one of eighteen provinces from which visitors were chosen to report on the condition of the relevant houses to the General Chapter and ensure that capitular decrees were enacted (Knowles 1955, 135).

### 1.3 Primary Written Sources

The Carthusian Statutes or *Consuetudines Cartusiae*<sup>5</sup> (hereafter C.C.) were based on St Bruno's ideals of desert solitude but were enhanced with Guigo I's<sup>6</sup> own experiences of living as a hermit in the Carthusian Order, and his thoughts on solitude (Hogg 2014, 35; Ritchey 2014, 171). The Statutes were initially written as a set of guidelines for the six new houses established in 1115-1116 so they could continue Bruno's vision. The further editions gave additional information, reflecting current issues within the Order<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> All references to the Carthusian Statutes come from the 1984 Cerf edition. This edition has transcribed the 1121-1128 Carthusian Statutes. References from the later Statutes (1510 edition printed in Basel) are stated.

<sup>6</sup> Guigo I was the fifth prior of La Grande Chartreuse, from 1109 to 1137.

<sup>7</sup> The first edition of the Statutes was that written by Guigo I, the Carthusian Statutes, completed in 1127. Following this, three further revisions were compiled, the *Antiqua Statuta* in 1259-1271, the *Nova Statuta* in 1368, and the *Tertio Compilatio* in 1509. This last revision is considered the most complete, and the edition published in Basle in 1510 (Universitätsbibliothek Basel AK VI 21) is used as the basis for today's Statutes (Introduction to *Coutumes de Chartreuse* 2001, 125).

<sup>4</sup> These two foundations were at some point amalgamated into one community under the name of *Serra San Bruno* (Rowntree 1981, 3).

The Statutes covered a range of topics, designed to answer any queries members of the Carthusian community may have about how to conduct themselves, and also instructing them on how the divine office should be carried out. It is in the Statutes that specific instructions regarding the community began to coalesce, such as the number of occupants, limited by Guigo to thirteen monks and sixteen lay brothers; the maximum number which could be supported without asking for alms (C.C. 7:1-2). As a historical reference, the Statutes provide a vital source of information as to how the charterhouse was intended to be run. This set of rules influenced the construction and design of the charterhouses, ensuring solitude for the inhabitants, which has an important bearing on research into the architecture of Carthusian buildings.

The *Chartae* of the General Chapter, on the other hand, records the proceeds of the annual meeting at La Grande Chartreuse of the Carthusian Order. As a documentary source, it is invaluable. It lists the obits for every monk or lay brother who died that year, as well as the visitors to each province, and short reports from each charterhouse. To supplement the Statutes, it also gives ordinations which lay out explicitly how the rule is to be applied, often in answer to queries from different houses, or where the statutes do not address specific issues. The *Chartae* make it possible to track the most important issues for the Carthusian Order from 1217 into the eighteenth century and understand how they dealt with crises such as epidemic diseases and famines.

#### **1.4 Previous Archaeological Research**

Sir William Henry St John Hope (1854-1919) was one of the most important influences in monastic archaeology in England. He undertook excavations and academic research at many monasteries, including Mount Grace Priory (1905), and the London Charterhouse (published posthumously in 1925). The excavation at Mount Grace Priory allowed Hope to complete a plan of the building phases of the charterhouse, which consequently shaped the study of the earliest phase of research on the Carthusian houses in England. His work, however, is wholly surpassed by Coppack and Keen's 2019 monograph *Mount Grace Priory: Excavations of 1957-1992*, which provides much more detail from the excavations and long-running research they carried out. Likewise, some of Hope's work on the London Charterhouse has been superseded, first by Knowles and Grimes' (1954) post-war excavation, and later by Barber and Thomas' 2002 monograph on excavations at the site, although Hope's publication still stands as a beneficial source of documentary evidence relating to the charterhouse, as it gives transcriptions of the Charterhouse Register, documenting the early history of the monastery.

At the same time as Hope's studies, Beauvale Charterhouse was excavated by Du Boulay Hill and Gill (1908). The study revealed four cells, the church, little cloister and some other conventual buildings. The reconstruction was

based upon Hope's 1905 study of Mount Grace, providing a detailed plan of one cell and illustrating the partitions within the cell (Du Boulay Hill and Gill 1908, 75). Their detailed large-scale plan, also inspired by Hope's Mount Grace publication, illustrated the excavated areas as well as conjectural structures.

The only Irish charterhouse, Kilnalahanin, was similarly the subject of a number of scholarly articles at the beginning of the twentieth century, but little has been written concerning the charterhouse since, and it is still relatively obscure. W. H. Grattan Flood (1907, 304) described the situation of the house's foundation and its location in the diocese of Clonfert, and was the first to publicise the site as one of particular historical significance. The paper was rather short and gave the most basic facts concerning the monastery, and in 1909, J. P. Dalton attempted to build upon Grattan Flood's work. Dalton (1909, 13) investigated the archaeology of the site much more thoroughly, indicating that due to later usage of the monastery as a Franciscan house, and more recently as a cemetery, the ground plan cannot be traced.

During the post-War period, Hinton Priory, in Somerset, was owned by Major Philip Fletcher, who was able to conduct his own excavations in the walled garden and the area around it, completing the first full excavation of the cloister and cells of any British or Irish charterhouse. The first report (Fletcher 1951) describes in detail the excavations from 1950 up to the point of this interim publication and makes some comparisons with the London Charterhouse and Parkminster, particularly the carved letters above each cell door (Fletcher 1951, 163). The additional report published in 1958 discussed the general layout of the house, as a complete plan could now be established (Fletcher 1958).

The late 1960s to late 1970s saw somewhat of a resurgence in Carthusian interest, with two substantial excavations carried out as well as an extensive academic study. Excavations at Witham Priory were conducted from 1965-9 by P. Barlow and R. Reid. The subsequent report, published in the *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society* in 1990, describes the excavations, as well as illustrating the artefacts found on the site (Burrow and Burrow 1990).

The charterhouse at Coventry was studied at a similar time, from 1968-1987 by Iain Soden. This excavation was slightly less ambitious than that at Witham but achieved excellent results, and the subsequent plans are very useful for understanding the architecture, as Soden (1995) ensured that each of the stones and the bricks in walls were drawn in the plan and included in the report. Compared with the report from Witham or some of the early excavations, this gives a much better idea of the ground plan as excavated.

Although unexcavated, the charterhouse at Sheen, in Richmond, was thoroughly studied by John Cloake (1977). Working backwards through estate maps, documentary

sources, and historical descriptions, Cloake was able to illustrate how the monastic complex at Sheen evolved from a fifteenth-century Carthusian house to being part of the Royal Gardens of Richmond in 1771 (Cloake 1977, 158-160, 182). With a full survey of the area, it would be possible to match up Cloake's conjectural plan with geophysical results, which may reveal new features. The Bradford geophysical survey (Gaffney 1997) covered only the area near the King's Observatory, to the north of the precinct, but unfortunately, given the area's current usage as a golf course, it is unlikely that a full geophysical survey will be completed in the near future.

In the early 1990s, the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) undertook surveys of eight of the British and Irish charterhouses, examining all but London, Hull and Kilnalahanin. The importance of these surveys is that they combine not only archaeological information but also geographical, topographical, historical and cartographic sources. In combination with the geophysical surveys carried out by Geophysical Surveys Bradford (GSB) under the same project, each site is provided with a well-rounded base from which to attempt further research<sup>8</sup>.

The geophysical surveys have not yet been re-evaluated in light of new survey techniques and equipment, but the original results still provide an excellent view of the sites and have revealed much that was missed in earlier excavations. GSB enhanced the data in a number of ways, to reveal as many of the features of the site as possible, using detailed relief plots, grey-scale plots and colour plots. Their interpretations are also a useful addition to the data, as it provides context for the results and their consequent plots.

The most recent publication on the subject, Glyn Coppack and Mick Aston's 2002 book *Christ's Poor Men* was the first study that successfully amalgamated the known archaeological information about the English charterhouses. However, it only discussed the English houses, despite Aston's original goal to also investigate Kilnalahanin and Perth (Aston 1993; 1997). An important point to note is that the publication also looks solely at the monks' environment and there is little discussion of the lay brethren and their place in the order.

Evidently, then, the Carthusians have been subject to some archaeological examination. However, these investigations have been somewhat sporadic, and there has been no attempt to amalgamate the data to gain better insight into the Carthusian Order as a community, rather than as distinct monasteries. Previous studies at the two main research sites of Hinton and Witham will be discussed in further detail in chapter 5, which will provide context to the rest of the content of that section.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 3 for further discussion of the surveys at Witham and Hinton