

# ANCHOR CHURCH DERBYSHIRE: CAVE HERMITAGE OR SUMMER-HOUSE? A CASE STUDY IN UNDERSTANDING A ROCK-CUT BUILDING

by

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## ABSTRACT

Anchor Church is an artificial cave at Ingleby in Derbyshire, it is cut into a cliff on the south side of a tributary of the Trent. The site has been long suspected to have been a hermitage and has been identified with Saint Hardulph, a deposed Northumbrian king who seemingly retired as a hermit at this site. The fabric of the cave itself has been presumed to largely relate to its use in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century by the inhabitants of nearby Foremarke Hall. Analysis shows that such a late origin for the structures is very unlikely and that modifications in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century were on a small-scale and saw no significant enlargement of the existing caves.

The phasing, the known history, comparison with similar sites, architectural analysis and the few surviving diagnostic features strongly suggest an early medieval origin, probably dating back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. This may be a unique example of an almost intact early medieval domestic interior and requires further study.

## INTRODUCTION

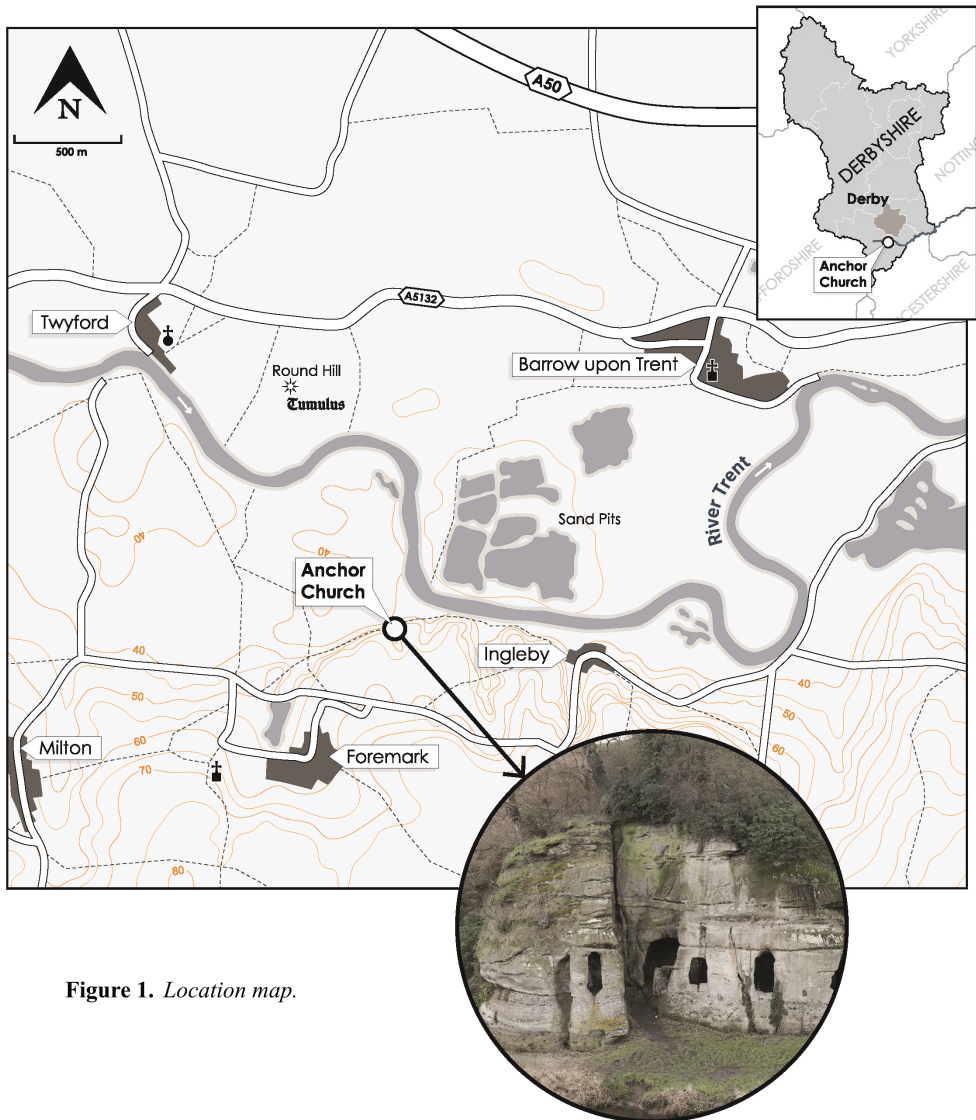
Habitable artificial rock-houses, rock-shelters, cave-houses and similar structures are found scattered all over England, they are particularly concentrated in the Permian and Triassic sandstones of the Midlands, but there are significant outliers as far away as Sussex and Cumbria. When looking at their origin there has often been a presumption that they date to when they are first known to have been inhabited and their archaeological potential has perhaps been somewhat discounted. There has also been little attempt to relate similar sites to each other, either regionally or nationally. This means that sites are often considered in isolation and the lessons learnt from studying one site have not been applied to another.

This short paper details the results of a case study which forms part of a larger project being carried out by the author on rock-cut sites nationally. The wider study aims to create a methodology and typology for understanding and analysing rock-cut structures and to understand their distribution, origins, and significance. Anchor Church, a Grade II Listed Building, has been chosen as the subject for this separate paper, as it amply illustrates many of the problems in meaningfully analysing such sites as well as exemplifying the archaeological potential they may have.

One of the problems with understanding rock-cut dwellings, is that there is little or no conventional stratigraphy, one is looking at negative features cut into negative features, it is a standing archaeology based on understanding voids.<sup>1</sup> In addition stratigraphy in rock-cut structures may be inverted with the older elements above later. This does not preclude analysis, however, which can be carried out in much the same way as one would a conventional building. Using simple recording and deduction as well as understanding the rock-cut features, it is generally possible to work out the sequence of events within a rock-cut space.

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<sup>1</sup>See particularly Craddock, 1995 and Higgins, Wain and Willis, 2011 for excellent examples of ways of analysing negative spaces.



**Figure 1.** Location map.

Rock-cut sites are constrained by the depth one can safely excavate, either to create or to enlarge a space; unlike a conventional building a rock-cut structure can only get bigger, never smaller. This means that early features may often survive and are not swept away by changes in taste or purpose. It also means that when rock-cut buildings become unsafe they are abandoned, and a new site may be dug nearby, thus often preserving intact spaces.

The most important factor is whilst rock-cut structures are buildings, often with features such as doors, windows, fireplaces even beds cut into the rock they can have the preservation qualities of caves. If the site is stable and not vandalised or too exposed, features

can remain undisturbed for many centuries and unlike conventional buildings, features within rock-cut structures may preserve architectural elements for many centuries after abandonment.<sup>2</sup>

Anchor Church was chosen for the subject of this short paper as is an ideal test case to illustrate how these factors work. The analysis is based on understanding the sequence of events in the negative stratigraphy and has identified diagnostic features (as one would in a conventional building). The analysis has been compared to the known historical evidence for the site and a scenario for the phasing has been developed. There has, as yet, been no excavation, no landscape survey and no detailed recording or scientific analysis of material or fabric, it is hoped this will happen as the next phase of work (Simons and Coles, *in prep.*). Only readily available historical sources were consulted as the work was carried out during Covid 19 restrictions.

## HISTORY

The “church” is a remarkable group of rock-cut buildings in a river cliff overlooking what is now a tributary of the River Trent. It lies in the parish of Repton Derbyshire between the hamlets of Foremarke and Ingleby. It has been called “Anchor Church” since at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this has long been known locally as the former dwelling and a hermit. The name also indicates a medieval eremitic origin, with “Anchor” referring to an anchorite.<sup>3</sup>

It is one of a number of known or suspected rock-cut hermitages in the Midlands which are included in the wider study, these include Dale Abbey (Derbys), St Mary Le Roche and Sneinton Hermitages (Notts), Redstone, Southstone and Blackstone Rocks (Worcs) and Bridgnorth Rock Hermitage (Shrops). All these sites are 9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century in origin and have many features in common with Anchor Church.

As well as the suggestive name, we have additional evidence for occupation by a hermit. A fragment of an early printed book preserved as a flyleaf in a later, 1545, volume details a story of Saint Hardulph, an early medieval hermit who “that tyme saynt Hardulche has a celle in [a c]lyfee a lytell frome trent” (Joyce, undated). Hardulph, has been identified with some certainty with Saint Eardwulf (fl 790-830) a deposed Northumbrian king who seemingly spent his exile as a hermit and achieved sainthood before being buried at Breedon on the Hill (Rollaston, 2004).

We know that the church was already occupied at least temporarily in 1658 by a “foole” (Repton parish records quoted in Hipkiss, 1899), but then there are no mentions again until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The cave lies near, but not within the grounds of or ownership of, Foremark Hall, home of the Baronets of Bramcote and rebuilt in 1759-61 as a grand Palladian mansion. Sir Robert Burdett the 4<sup>th</sup> Baronet (1716-1797) is known to have used the cave for entertainments; in 1899 it was noted that “In later days it became the favourite retreat of Sir Robert Burdett, who had it fitted up so that he and his friends could dine within its cool, and romantic cells. It has been enlarged at various times” (Hipkiss, 1899). A painting of 1745 by Thomas Smith shows the Baronet and guests enjoying the cave accompanied by a piper, this

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<sup>2</sup> This is best illustrated by the antiquary William Stukeley who drew three rock-cut medieval hermitages in the 1720s, all three of which are part of the main research project, and all three of which are remarkable]y very little changed some 300 years later (Stukeley, 1776).

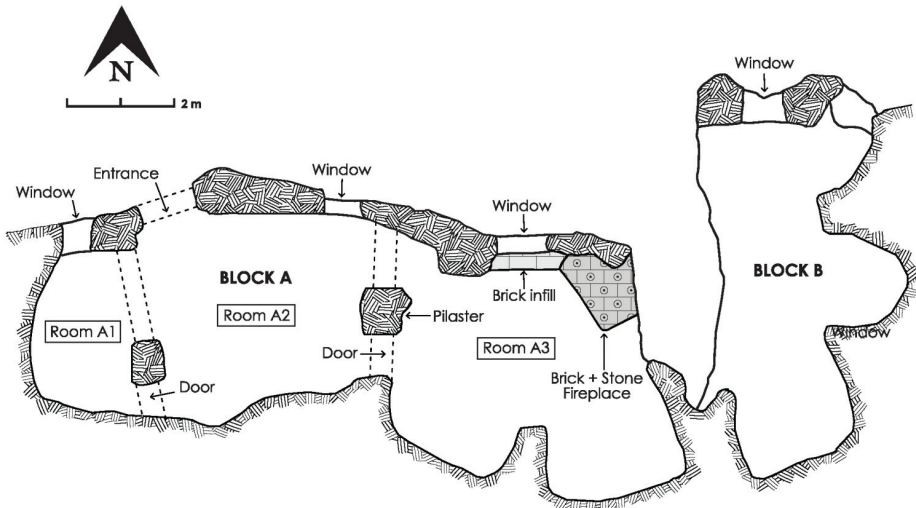
<sup>3</sup> There are other sites which retained the name “Anchor” attesting to the presence of an early anchorite. Two are sites associated with early monasticism are “Anchor Church Field” at Crowland (Leics) and relating to St Gulthlac (674-714), (Moore, 1879, p133). Another is at “Gallt yr Ancr” (Hill of the Anchorite) inhabited by St Gwyddfarch founder of nearby Meifod Monsatary c.550 (Rees, 2003 p121).

painting was later reproduced as engravings. A description of 1817 does not appear to describe a folly or banqueting house “There is a singular rock, about a quarter of a mile north-east of Foremark, having at a distance the appearance of a ruin, with a rude door-way which leads to several cells or excavations: it is called Anchor-church, and is said to have been the residence of a hermit. Human bones have been found on this spot” (Lysons and Lysons, 1817)

In the 1840s it was noted that “this spot is a favourite resort of gypsy parties from Derby and the neighbourhood” (in Bentley (ed), 1845). There are photographs from the later 19th century that show window frames, the brick walls and a stout door, these tally with the description of 1899 (Hipkins, p120). By 1914 a photo in Clay (Clay, 1914, p48) shows that the door and window joinery have already been lost and the site looks much as it does today.

### DESCRIPTION

The site sits just above what is now a tributary of the Trent, but was formerly the main channel. This river cliff is composed of bands of a hard pebble conglomerate alternating with a soft sandstone and in a space where the cliff is stepped back a little from the water the structure has been cut into the sandstone bed, using the conglomerate below as a floor and the conglomerate band above as a roof.

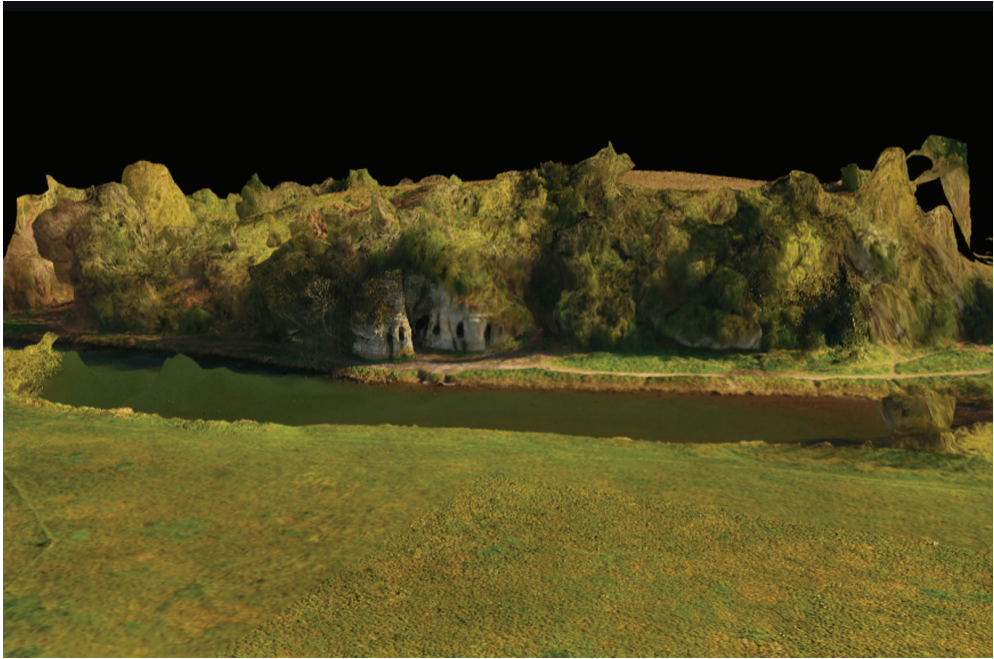


**Anchor Church**

**Figure 2.** *Sketch plan of Anchor Church showing blocks and rooms.*

There are now two main spaces within the rock, to west is the largest cave (Block A) which now houses an irregular single chamber supported by two pillars. To the east is a smaller cave (Block B) which houses an irregular sub-rectangular chamber and is divided from the main cave by a natural vertical fissure in the rock face (Figure 3).





**Figure 3.** *Rectified drone image of the site, showing site and surrounding river cliff setting.*  
 Image courtesy of Professor Mark Horton

#### *Block A.*

The structure is lit by several windows and Block A is accessed by an arched doorway with steps cut into the ground inside the threshold. The openings are high above the ground level, but historic paintings and photographs show that the ground level is higher now than in the 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

What is clear from inspection and from an historic description (Hipkiss, 1888 p120), is that the west cave (Block A) was formally made up of three rooms or chambers with dividing walls which have been partly removed leaving a hole on the outer (northern) side and the two intact doorways on the inner. This has given the appearance of two pillars, with a wide splay on the northern side and a narrow one on the south (the former doorways). Although this is now one space the former rooms are described in the following section as Rooms A1, A2 and A3

Room A1 is at the west end of the structure and was entered from room A2 by a narrow arched headed doorway on the inner (south wall). This doorway retains a channel for a timber door frame and a bolt hole on the inner side. It has an irregular curving outer (west) wall pierced by a single small rectangular light in the outer wall. The former stone partition wall between this room and A2 is now lost but can be traced on the floor and roof (Figure 5). This wall was later replaced in brick (1888), but there are a number of horizontal scars and sockets on the sides of the pillar and on the external wall. These look very like scars seen at other rock-cut sites which housed shelving, this does not appear to be the case here however, and they may relate to an earlier wooden partition which predated the brick wall, but post-dated the loss of the stone partition.

Room A2 houses the principal entrance to the structure, through the substantial rounded headed door and steps leading up from below. The room is lit by a large rectangular window on its outer (northern) side which has channels for a timber window frame and 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century brick at the base. On the external face the neatly dressed jamb and half the arch of a very much smaller and higher window can be seen (Figure 6). There is an L shaped channel in the floor which may relate to a former fixture or fitting.

Room A3 is the largest and most complex space in the structure. It is accessed from A2 through either the narrow-arched door on the south side or through the large gap created by the loss of the dividing wall. The former dividing wall has an arched door with a narrow splay on the south side and has an irregular arched head and a channel for a timber frame on the east side. The door has an irregular base caused by digging out of floor levels.

To the centre of the former wall, the pillar created by the removal of the north part of the wall includes a small part of the thin dividing wall which survived demolition (the marks of crowbars or picks relating to the removal of the wall are still visible here). To the centre of this wall is a pilaster, this has suffered much at the base, but it retains a pilaster capital from which spring two arches, one containing the narrow door and the other what was clearly once a blind arch the rear of which was formed by the lost thin partition wall. The capital has a faint roll moulding along the top and despite damage both above and below it remains remarkably intact (Figure 7).

This room is lit by a large window opening, the base of which is made up of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century brick and two large dressed sandstone blocks. On the east side there is a large gap in the external wall, which is partly blocked by a crude fireplace and wall made up of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century brick, complete with some reused sandstone blocks and rubble. This gap in the external wall is clearly caused by the loss of a thin rock-cut wall, parts of which are still visible, the flue for a chimney associated with the fireplace is cut into the rock face above the void. On the rear (south wall) are two shallow niches, the east one retains its higher floor level, whereas in the west one the floor has been cut away apart from a fragment in the corner of the room.

### *Block B*

This block is detached from Block A by an indent in the cliff face, there appears never to have been direct access between the two blocks. There is a single narrow room oriented almost north-south with two tall irregular openings on the north side and an entirely open west side. There are three large niches on the inner (east) wall, these are similar to those found in A3, but the northern niche houses an opening which may have been a window. There are very shallow horizontal and vertical marks on the east face of the central niche; any pattern made by these may become more discernible with detailed survey. The floor level appears to have not been lowered as in has in parts of Block A.

Historic illustrations show that Block A retained its west wall (with a now lost large arch) until 1745. The wall has been deliberately cut away after this date and the straight scar caused by its removal can be seen on the north-west corner of the opening (Figure 8).

## PHASING AND DEVELOPMENT

At Anchor Church it has been possible to analyse the negative stratigraphy and surviving features and to create a credible sequence of events which formed the structure. When combined with an understanding of the history of the site and with comparison to similar sites

elsewhere in the UK we can gain a much better understanding of the building and its potential archaeological and architectural significance.

Before analysis, it is worthwhile addressing a common misunderstanding about the site. It is stated in the listing description (and numerous earlier) sources that this is a natural cave, made by the Trent which was enlarged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This is clearly not a natural cave, it is an anthropogenic structure with external walls, doors and windows, if any elements of it were “natural” they would, by necessity, have been very small, and unless there was a natural cave behind the external rock surface, any putative natural cave could be no bigger in height and width than any of the surviving openings. Such tiny natural cave-like fissures do exist elsewhere on the river cliffs, but there is no sign in the visible geology of one having existed here. Based on likely recent geomorphic history as a river cliff cut by fluvio-glacial melt water in the down wasting stage of the last glaciation there is no reason to suppose this is a natural cave.



**Figure 4** *A View of Anchor Church, published 25 August 1745 After Thomas Smith of Derby.*

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If we accept the obvious fact that this is entirely an artificial structure, how much of what we see now belongs to a primary phase? In Block A there is only one entrance and no sign of rock-cut features relating to other possible entrances through the larger windows on the north face. It is almost certain, therefore that the main doorway relates to the earliest occupation of the rock and unless this was merely a tunnel, room A2 must be primary to construction. It



seems highly likely that the stylistically identical rooms A1 and A3 were constructed in or about the same time and logically probably Block B.

Whenever this initial construction was, it must be before the site was mentioned as being inhabited in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century and therefore most of the spaces must predate any 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century polite interventions. The hypothesis of an early origin is supported by the fact that both the outer door and the two very narrow small round headed doors are very similar to those found in other pre 12<sup>th</sup> century rock-cut hermitages and a great many conventional buildings of similar date.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 5.** Former dividing wall between rooms A1 and A2. The door (complete with bolt hole and channel for frame) is on the left side, the opening on the right is the result of demolition.

If one dismisses the historical evidence of pre-18<sup>th</sup> century occupation, it could be suggested that the doors were part of a Gothick fantasy, but, before the demolition of the partition walls, they were the only way to get from room to room and even without frames, are very narrow. We know that Robert Burnett used the space for dining and entertaining and even excluding stylistic and architectural grounds, it is difficult to see how even the most practical of mid-late 18<sup>th</sup> century gentlewomen's dresses (and women are shown on the 1745 picture) would have fitted through these narrow spaces.

Like conventional buildings, rock-cut buildings follow the architectural style of the era in which they are constructed. Redstone (Worcs) and St Mary le Roche (Notts) have some

<sup>4</sup> See Simons *forthcoming* for a discussion of diagnostic features in Early Medieval rock-cut sites.

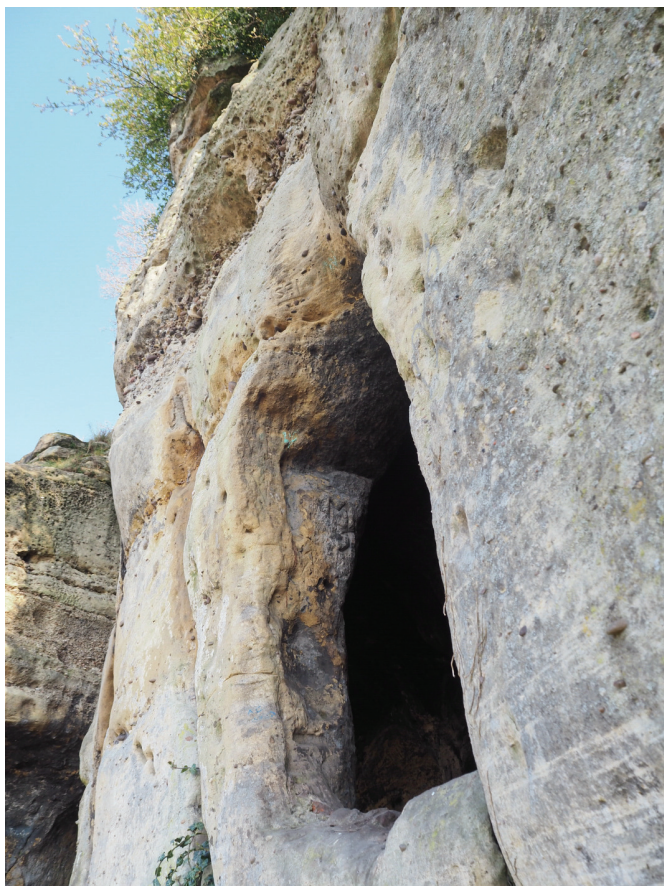
clearly, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century pointed arches and even a quatrefoil window, Nescliffe (Shrops), Warkworth (Northumbria) and Our Lady of the Crag (Yorks) all have clearly recognisable 15<sup>th</sup> century flat arches, vaulting etc etc. The three surviving doors at Anchor Church, although crude all appear to be a debased Romanesque and are probably therefore 12<sup>th</sup> century or earlier.

The suggestion of an early origin of the spaces is particularly reinforced by the pilaster capital in Room A3, this is again a Romanesque feature and points to at least a 12<sup>th</sup> century origin for the main structure.

The survival of fabric which demonstrates a medieval origin is also shown in what remains of the windows. Apart from the small rectangular window in A1, the other windows have clearly been enlarged and then reduced and altered on several occasions. The fragmentary, neatly dressed, small arch high on the window in A2 must, however, be a primary feature and seems to indicate that the space was lit by a small round headed light high on the wall.<sup>5</sup>

The niches in Room A3 and in Block B appear to also be primary features, this is demonstrated in their part retention of higher floor levels which were cut away elsewhere on the site probably in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Again, such niches are found in broadly contemporary rock-cut sites with known or suspected eremitic origins<sup>6</sup>.

There are no easily identifiable later Medieval or early Post Medieval features; at other sites inserted chimneys are common (either through or on the outside of the rock face), as are hearths with sockets for smoke hoods. When the site was reoccupied in the 17<sup>th</sup> century it seems that alterations were minimal, and the largest impact may have been the enlargement of some windows. Many rock-cut sites have been used and reused again and again, often by transient and marginal people who have left little evidence of their stay in the fabric.



**Figure 6.** Window to Room A2, note probable remnant of a small arched window on the top left-hand side of the opening.

<sup>5</sup> Similar examples are found in numerous confirmed or suspected rock-cut medieval hermitages including Blackstone (Worcs), Worfield and Bridgnorth (Shrops) and Saint Mary Le Roche (Notts) (see Simons, *forthcoming*).

<sup>6</sup> Particularly Nannies Rock (Staffs) and Bridgnorth Hermitage (Shrops).





**Figure 7.** *The pillar between Room A2 and A3, viewed from A3. The door is on the left and the opening on the right is the result of a later demolition, being punched through the thin wall of a former blind arch. The arches spring from a crude, but very obvious pilaster cap on what is now a column.*

The loss of the dividing walls between room A1, A2 and A3 may be the result of rustication in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, or simple vandalism at an earlier date. Thin internal walls are almost always the main target of vandals in rock-cut buildings as they are easily kicked out. The three horizontal scars high on the “arch” between A1 and A2 may relate to an earlier phase and may be the remnants of a partition to restore the lost wall. The slots may have provided a way to allow wattle or timber partitions to be slid into place.

There are probably alterations to windows and modifications over time, but the next major phase of work belongs to the use of the site as a garden feature in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Smith’s painting of 1745 shows that Block B had an intact west wall with a door at a high level; beneath this was an arch, now below debris.

The impact of the later 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century activity can be traced in the fabric. It involved lowering and flattening parts of the floors, creating external stepped access, opening windows up and probably partially removing the internal walls to create columns and a larger and accessible vaulted space. The west wall of Block B was also removed, possibly to allow guests a better view of the river.

What is clear from the 1745 painting (Figure 4) is that the cave is, externally, substantially much as it is today. We do know the site was used by the 4<sup>th</sup> Baronet and by his son the 5<sup>th</sup> (1770-1844). They are both credited with having constructed or enlarged the site and the general assumption has always been that the fabric is mostly 18<sup>th</sup> century in origin. The drawing is diametrically correct, and apart from some drafting errors, Smith was not prone to exaggeration<sup>7</sup>, what is significant is that he appears to be showing the site, before any suggested alterations in the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Such grottoes were a fashionable part of the picturesque movement and were intended for entertaining with music, storytelling, drinking and dining. It is notable Foremarke Hall had at Anchor a ready-made grotto, whereas neighbouring Calke Abbey had to build an artificial above ground one in 1809 (Simons and Watson, 2008).



**Figure 8.** Exterior view of Blocks A and B, looking from the west. Compare with Figure 4, to show the former entrance and the now buried base of the cliff.

The church was altered again in the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, but these changes were small in scale. The lost internal walls were reconstructed in brick and plastered over, the interior was painted blue, doors and window frames were added. The gaps in external walls were secured with brick walls and a fireplace and chimney added. The site changed from the Gothick party venue of 80 years earlier to something more akin to a summerhouse.

Later 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century impacts have been mostly caused by vandalism and decay, including the loss of brick features and woodwork.

<sup>7</sup> In 2007 the author worked on a survey of the folly at Belton Hall (Lincs), Smith's drawing of the site when in use was thought to be a fantasy or, at best, highly exaggerated in scale. When the results of the laser scanning survey and excavation were compared with the painting it was found to be a highly accurate representation.



## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

When the fabric is analysed the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century impacts on the structure are surprisingly small scale.

The evidence strongly suggests that the structure is largely medieval (12<sup>th</sup> century or earlier) in origin and that later additions were quite minor. This leads one to address what Anchor Church was actually for and when it may date from. The only diagnostic features are the external door, the two internal doors, the window in A1 and the partial light in A2 and the pilaster cap in A3. These are all crude and are all broadly Romanesque in form. The very narrow doors and the circular headed external door suggest an earlier Saxo-Norman or more probably pre-conquest date. In proportion and form they are similar to Early Medieval forms seen in conventional buildings.

Although battered and crude, the pilaster cap in Room A3 from which springs a simple double arch may be the most telling diagnostic feature. It has a very worn roll moulding along its top and is very Anglo Saxon in appearance. There are many similar examples, the nearest being in the same parish and supporting the early 7<sup>th</sup> century Baptistery/ Crypt at Saint Wystan's Repton. This may be a coincidence, but one must ask whether this pilaster imitated the crypt or was even constructed by the same hand.

The fabric alone strongly indicates a pre conquest date for this primary fabric, but the known history and place name allows us to explore more options for when and why this may have been created.

The story of Hardulph is somewhat obscure and the reference to him living in a "little cave" above the Trent is known from a single, fragmentary 16<sup>th</sup> century retelling of a much earlier story. Anchor Church is the only real contender for the location and the burial and shrine of the Saint at nearby Breedon on the Hill ties his story more firmly to this locality.

The size and layout of the site may support such a surprisingly early date. Other known or suspected Anglo Saxon rock-cut hermitages, such as Blackstone (Worcs), Bridgnorth (Shrops) and Holy Austin Rock (Staffs) have similar layouts of three cells next to what may have been an oratory (Simons, *forthcoming*). Conventional Anglo-Saxon surface hermitages could include an oratory and several buildings. Godrick of Throckenholt had an oratory and house and "consulting room" for visitors and a pen for his cattle (Licence, 2011, p99). Hermitages could have fields, gardens, orchards and have been a small community, probably with other hermits, disciples, and servants.

A hermitage with a number of buildings could be replicated in a number of cells. An interpretation is that Block B was almost certainly the church. The three roughly east facing arches almost imitate the sanctuary and side chapels of a number of broadly contemporary churches and the (now lost) entrance arch from the west would have allowed the hermits to access the small space inside. The rooms of Block A may have been a living space, a cell and a "consulting room" or the rooms may have changed use over time. A3 with its larger size, capital, niches and blind arch may have been an additional oratory or a space to meet guests.

The site could be related to Hardulph, but it is unlikely a hermitage was built specifically for him and it may have already existed for some time upon his arrival. An alternative but less likely scenario is that Hardulph may have lived in a very small cave behind one of the current openings, which was enlarged into the cave we see now later. It is important to remember that hermitages were not always tied to one person and then abandoned, they could continue for centuries, almost always under supervision of a larger monastic institution, in this case probably the nearby Benedictine Repton Abbey. Repton Church still owns the site.

The Benedictine abbeys at Repton and Breedon on the Hill were violently ended as institutions in 873 where the Great Heathen Army took Repton, looted the abbey and overwintered there. Any hermits at Anchor must have fled too, or a worse fate befell them. A later Anglo-Saxon date relating to the revival of hermetic lifestyles by Wulfstan of Worcester and others is possible, but this would have entailed extending and remodelling the earlier site, and even if this happened the constraints of creating rock-cut dwellings means that parts of the earlier structure must remain. There was no known monastic activity in the area until the 12<sup>th</sup> century establishment of Calke Abbey and Repton Priory and the fabric does not appear to belong to such a late date. The strong inference is that the hermitage may predate 873 and probably predates the tenure of Hardulph (ending c. 830?). It may even date as far back as the building of the crypt at Repton in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century.

It is surprising that an early interior such as this could survive unnoticed into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but, in this case, the evidence strongly suggests that the stability of the cave has preserved an intimate and domestic interior which may be associated with an 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century saint and king. There may well be more evidence and a survey of the surrounding landscape as well as more detailed investigation and scientific analysis of the cave will be the next steps. In addition, a statement of significance should be prepared and the Grade II listing reviewed at the earliest opportunity.

The site also represents an opportunity to explore how the buildings may relate to eremitic lifestyles. It may be worth exploring how and why a defeated king may have chosen to live here in the heartland of his enemies. There are many reasons why eremites and recluses took a form of voluntary exile<sup>8</sup> and here we have a chance to compare the historical evidence to the physical. The location of the site may also be significant, on the Trent and between the major abbeys of Breedon on the Hill and Repton, it may have been intended to be seen rather than hidden away and its location may reflect royal patronage and the status and well as the holiness of the occupant<sup>9</sup>.

In conclusion, rock-cut sites like this present some problems for traditional archaeological understanding and Require a revaluation of traditional archaeological thinking and the application of techniques more commonly associated with the analysis of negative spaces such as mines and tomb sites, they are generally cleared out by each occupant and thus lack sealed deposits, there are generally few diagnostic features and above all they are prone to idle destruction or gradual loss of fabric. Conversely, the constraints of digging into soft rock, particularly the difficulties of enlarging a site, mean that, in the right circumstances, the odds can favour the survival of primary features. Unless a site is quarried away, or massively enlarged (which is not always safe or easy) whatever was originally dug, tends to survive. The evidence strongly suggests that this is what has happened at Anchor Church allowing the survival of a remarkably early group of structures.

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<sup>8</sup> See Licence, 2011 for models of what exile meant for a recluse or hermit and what it was supposed to achieve.

<sup>9</sup> Petts (2009, p88) notes that Northumbrian island hermitages were paradoxically very visible from centres of power and that hermits received many visitors and supplicants.

concepts of caves and hermits and the brilliant Peter Lorimer of Pighill.co.uk for producing illustrations with no warning.

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