



When is a Princess not a Princess?

The Curious Case of Princess Claudia

From Newcastle to South Shields

...and back again











Stephen and Mary Whitgray

Offices Held

Bailiff, Newcastle-upon-Tyne Mich. 1369-72; mayor 1384-5.3

Collector of taxes, Newcastle-upon-Tyne Nov. 1377.

Collector of customs, Newcastle-upon-Tyne 24 Aug. 1386 Nov. 1392.

From the time of his election as bailiff of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1369, Whitgray played a prominent part in local affairs. He owed much of his influence to his position in the mercantile community, where for many years he was a leading figure. He dealt in a wide variety of products, including iron, dye-stuffs, salt and cloth; but his principal interest lay in wool, which he shipped in large quantities down the Tyne. Between July 1373 and September 1374, for example, he and a small group of merchants obtained licences from the Crown for the export of 420 sacks of wool; and the customs accounts for the next ten years reveal that he also dealt extensively in hides and sheepskins. Without doubt, his appointment as a collector of customs at Newcastle in 1389 worked greatly to his personal advantage, since he was thus ideally placed to further his own commercial interests.

As befitted a former mayor of Newcastle who had represented the borough in at least three Parliaments, Whitgray was anxious to leave a lasting memorial behind him. In April 1393 an inquisition *ad quod damnum* was held to determine if he and his wife, Mary, could alienate property worth ten marks a year for the foundation of a chantry in the church of St. Nicholas. The jury found that since the Whitgrays would be left with tenements to the same value, held of the Crown, there would be no loss of royal rights; and in the following February Richard II granted the couple formal authority to make their endowment, in return for a substantial cash payment of 40 marks. No more is heard of Whitgray after this date, and we do not know when he died. Some years later, in 1414, references occur to property in the Northumbrian villages of Whitburn and Boldon previously occupied by Stephen Whitgray and an associate in the right of their wives as feudal tenants of the bishop of Durham, it looks as if he was able to make a good marriage.





Stolen Newcastle Cathedral figurines found at South Shields flea market 10 years on

The nineteenth century oak statues have been returned to St Nicholas Cathedral after a couple found them for sale in South Shields



Four 19th Century figurines carved by expert craftsman Ralph Hedley between 1882 and 1889 were stolen from St Nicholas Cathedral a decade ago but have now been recovered

Unique nineteenth century figurines stolen from a cathedral 10 years ago have been found at a local flea market.

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St Nicholas Cathedral figurines returned 10 years after theft

🕒 14 August 2015

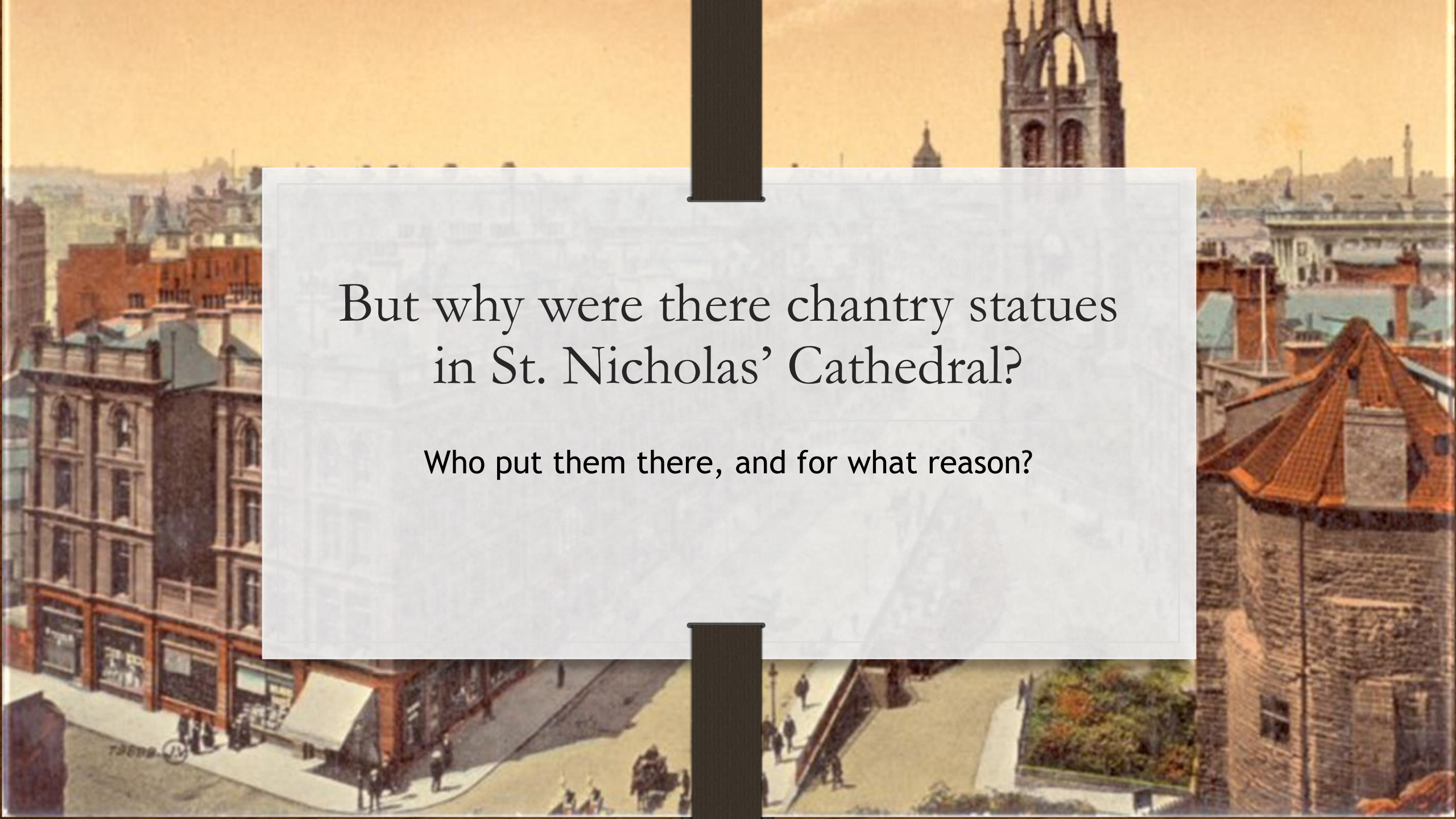


ST NICHOLAS CATHEDRAL

| The figurines were made by local sculptor Ralph Hedley

Four figurines which were thought to have been lost forever have been returned to a cathedral in Newcastle, 10 years after they were stolen.

The oak figures, carved between 1882 and 1889, were taken from St Nicholas Cathedral by thieves in July 2005.



But why were there chantry statues
in St. Nicholas' Cathedral?

Who put them there, and for what reason?

Church History

- St. Nicholas' Church was built in Newcastle in the twelfth century.
- Nine or ten **chantries** (chapels financed by a family, in return for prayers) were added in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, some requiring alterations to the building itself.
- The **Chantries Act of 1547** made chantries illegal, so the church was stripped of its chantry fittings.
- The church remodelling in 1783 stripped all interior fittings, leaving just the shell of the old church.
- St. Nicholas' Church was **granted Cathedral status in 1882**, at which time a grand programme of renovations was devised, in keeping with its new importance.

Problems for the Victorian designers...

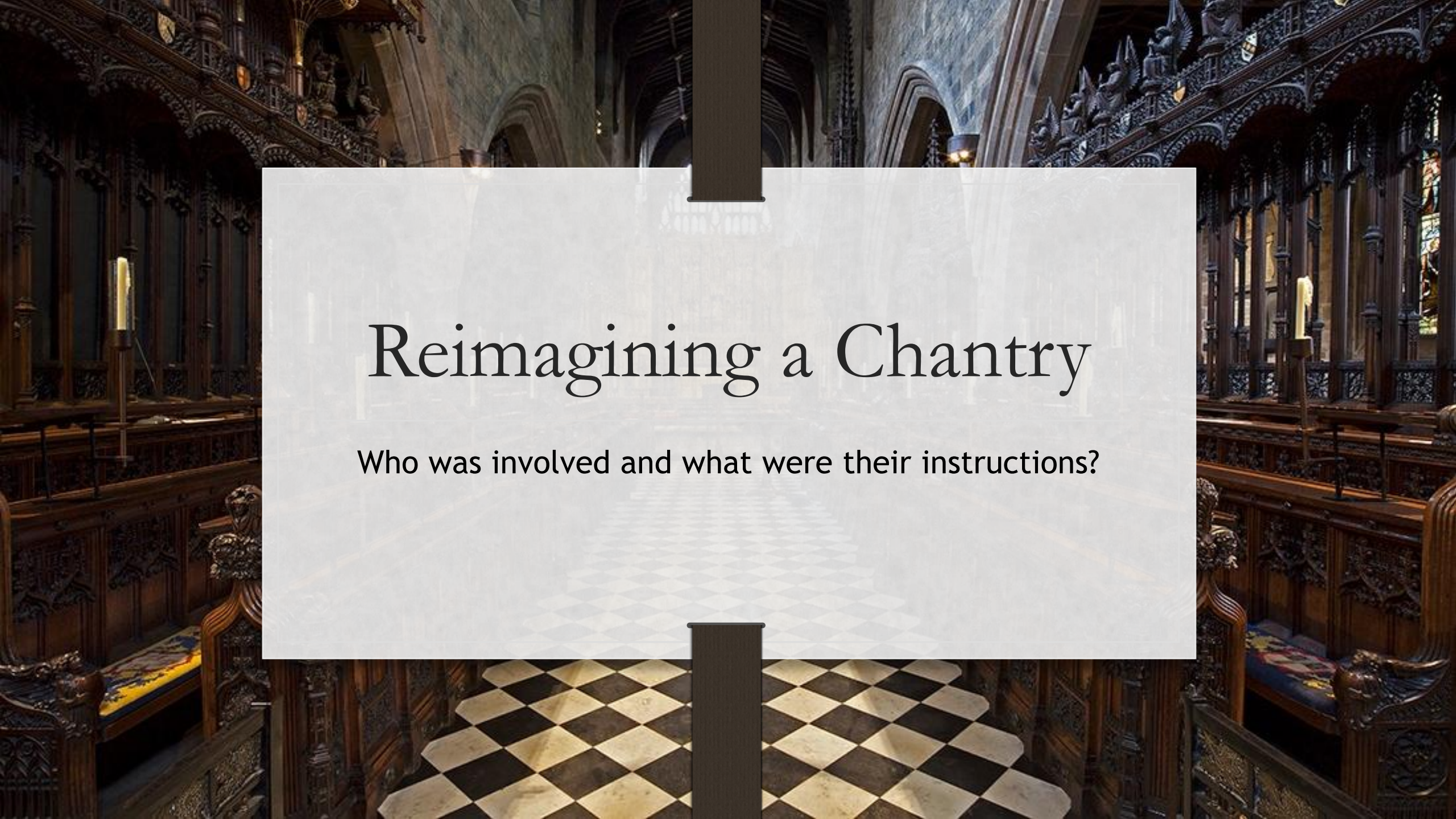
- The Gothic Revival style clearly seemed appropriate for the nineteenth century refit, because of the medieval origins of the church - and it was also the current fashion.
- However, the Catholic cathedral of Newcastle, built thirty years earlier, had been designed by the famous Gothic architect Augustus Welby Pugin. How could north-east designers compete with that?



Turning to the local past

- The 'new' cathedral's unique selling point was its long and local history, so designers turned to old records and stories for their inspiration.
- They moved away from the generic Gothic Revival style, towards a revival of the specific history of the area.
- There was also an emphasis on the heritage of the site, going all the way back to Roman times.



The background image shows the interior of a Gothic church, likely a choir or chancel. On the left and right sides, there are rows of dark wooden choir stalls with intricate carvings and Gothic arches. The floor is made of light and dark stone tiles in a checkered pattern. In the center, there is a semi-transparent white rectangular box containing text. The overall lighting is dim, with some light coming from windows or candles, creating a solemn atmosphere.

Reimagining a Chantry

Who was involved and what were their instructions?

Chantry Reconstruction

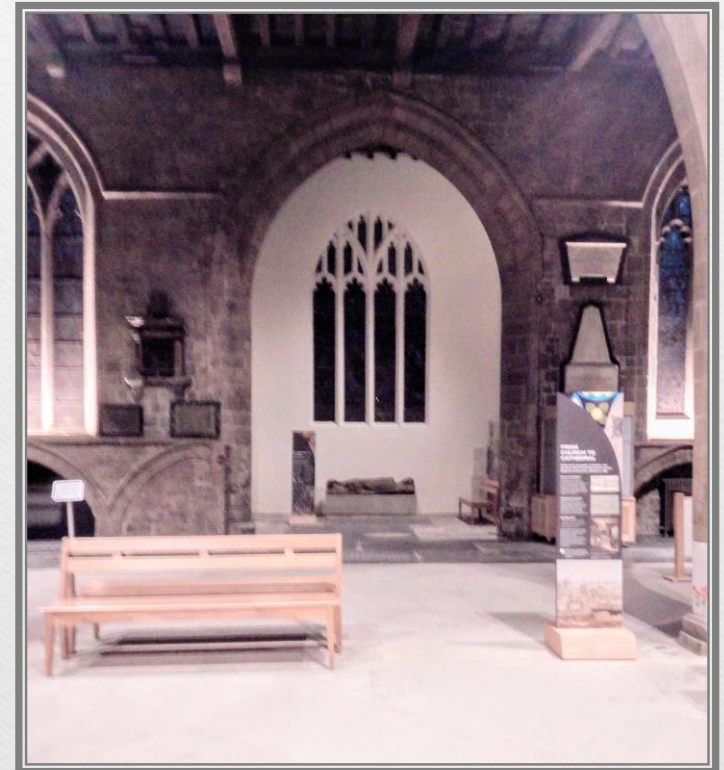
The Newcastle firm of Ralph Hedley was hired to take charge of the woodwork in the new cathedral.

(This is Ralph's cat.)



The Chantry of St. Margaret

- One of the original chantries left a quirk in the structure of the church: an alcove created by knocking a hole through the regular arches of the south wall.
- Records of this chantry were preserved: it was set up by a married couple, Stephen and Mary Whitgray, and dedicated to St. Margaret in 1394. The bequest included fixtures and fittings, and money for a priest.
- The chantry was decommissioned in 1547, and all of its fittings were removed and either sold or destroyed. Nothing was left but a hole in the wall.
- At some point in the nineteenth century refit, the decision was taken to restore this chantry, with appropriate fittings and with statues to commemorate the original local donors, the Whitgrays.





Chantry Reconstruction

- Hedley reconstructed St. Margaret's chantry with a heavily carved altar, rails, riddle posts and four oak statues, accompanied by inscriptions in Gothic lettering.
- The statues were named 'Stephen Whitgray', 'Mary Whitgray', 'St. Margaret, Queen' and 'Claudia'. Only the first two are straightforward!

Who is St. Margaret, Queen?







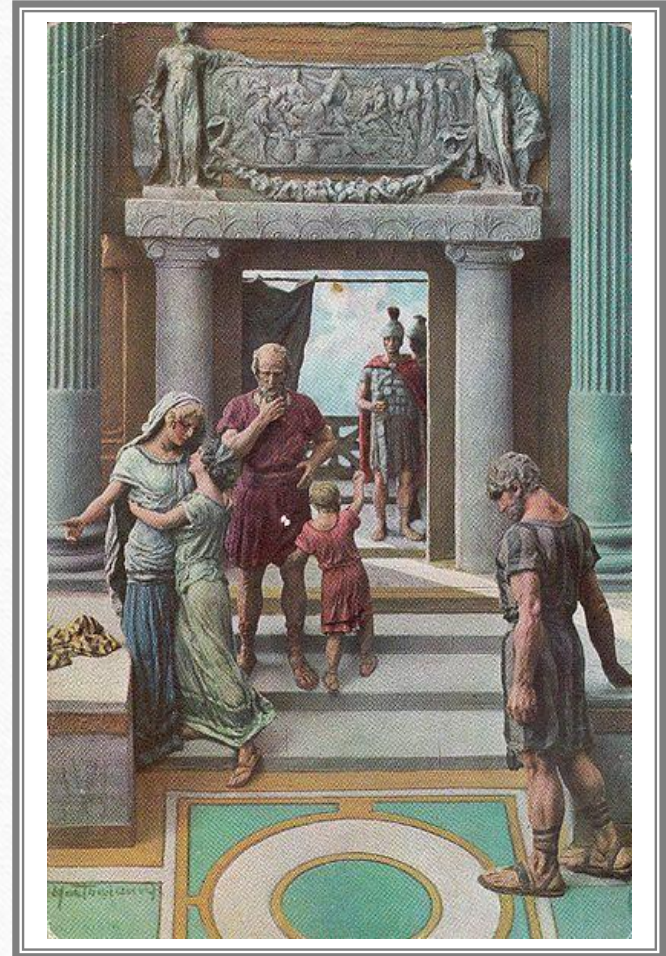


Who is Claudia?

- St Claudia Procula?
- St Claudia, mother of St Eugenia?
- St Claudia, also known as Princess Claudia, of Britain?

The case for Princess Claudia of Britain

Where did the 'Princess Claudia' idea come from, how did it catch on, and why did it disappear from the historical record?



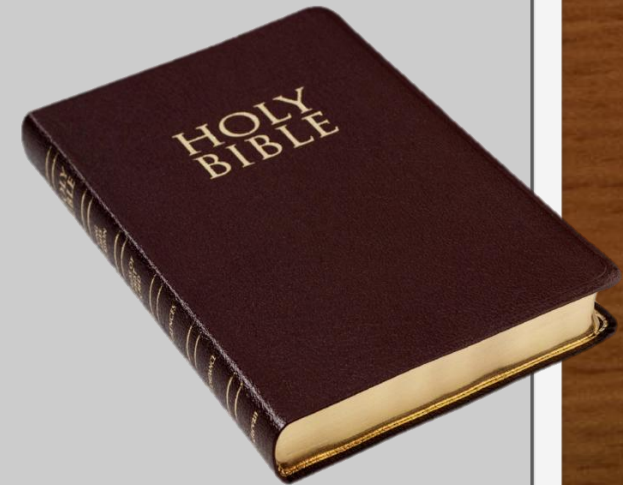
A Claudia in the Bible

St. Paul's letter to Timothy (2 Timothy 4.21):

Ἀσπάζεται σε Εὐβουλος καὶ Πούδης καὶ Λίνος καὶ Κλαυδία καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ πάντες.

‘Eubulus greets you, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brothers’.

The letter suggests that a woman named Claudia and a man named Pudens are known to Paul (although he doesn't mention them again). These two names pop up somewhere else...



A Claudia in Martial's *Epigrams*

IV.13: mentions a Claudia Peregrina, who is about to be married to Martial's friend Pudens.

Claudia, Rufe, meo nubit Peregrina Pudenti:

macte esto taedis, o Hymenaeae, tuis.

Tam bene rara suo miscentur cinnama nardo,

Massica Theseis tam bene uina fauis;

Nec melius teneris iunguntur uitibus ulmi,

nec plus lotos aquas, litora myrtus amat.

Candida perpetuo reside, Concordia, lecto,

tamque pari semper sit Venus aequa iugo:

diligat illa senem quondam, sed et ipsa marito

tum quoque, cum fuerit, non uideatur anus.

- Claudia Peregrina, Rufus, is about to be married to my friend Pudens. Be propitious, Hymen, with your torches. As fitly is precious cinnamon united with nard, and **Massic** wine with **Attic** honey. Nor are elms more fitly wedded to tender vines, the lotus more love the waters, or the myrtle the river's bank. May you always hover over their couch, fair Concord, and may Venus ever be auspicious to a couple so well matched. In after years may the wife cherish her husband in his old age; and may she, when grown old, not seem so to her husband.

A Claudia in Martial's *Epigrams*

XI.53: mentions Claudia Rufina, a beautiful married British lady.

Claudia caeruleis cum sit Rufina Britannis
edita, quam Latiae pectora gentis habet!
Quale decus formae! Romanam credere matres
Italides possunt, Atthides esse suam.
Di bene quod sancto peperit fecunda marito,
quod sperat generos quodque puella nurus.
Sic placeat superis, ut conjuge gaudeat uno
et semper natis gaudeat illa tribus.

- Although born among the woad-stained **Britons**, how fully has Claudia Rufina the intelligence of the Roman people! What beauty is hers! The matrons of **Italy** might take her for a Roman; those of **Attica** for an **Athenian**. The gods have kindly ordered that she proves fruitful to her revered husband, and that, while yet young, she may hope for sons-in-law and daughters-in-law! May heaven grant her ever to rejoice in one single husband, and to exult in being the mother of three children.

A Claudia in Martial's *Epigrams*

- (there's another Claudia, in VIII: 60, but strangely she's never mentioned...!)

Summa Palatini poteras aequare Colossi,
si fieres breuior, Claudia, sesquiped.

You would have been able to match the height of the colossus on the Palatine,
if you had been shorter, Claudia, by a foot and a half.

Notable Publications



- Alexander, W. L. 1799. *The Ancient British Church: being an Inquiry into the History of Christianity in Britain previous to the Establishment of the Heptarchy*, The Religious Tract Society, London
- Bowles, W.L. 1839. *Pudens and Claudia of St. Paul. On the Earliest Introduction of the Christian Faith to these Islands, through Claudia, Certainly a British Lady, Supposed Daughter of Caractacus*, Bristol
- Camden, W. 1586. *Britannia*, London
- Howorth, H.H. 1885. 'Christianity in Roman Britain', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* Vol 2, pp.117-172, Cambridge University Press
- Stillingfleet, E. 1840. *Origines Britannicae: A New Edition*, London
- Williams, J. 1848. *Claudia and Pudens: An Attempt to Show that Claudia, mentioned in St. Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy, Was a British Princess*, Llandoverly and London

A Claudia in Martial's *Epigrams*

- IV.13: Claudia Peregrina, who is about to be married to Martial's friend Pudens.
- XI.53: Claudia Rufina, a beautiful married British lady.

Assuming the two Claudias are in fact the same woman, we have a Claudia married to a Pudens – and Claudia is British. If this is St. Paul's Claudia, she is presumably Christian. So there is a high-born, beautiful British lady in Rome, who is a friend of St. Paul *and* Martial.

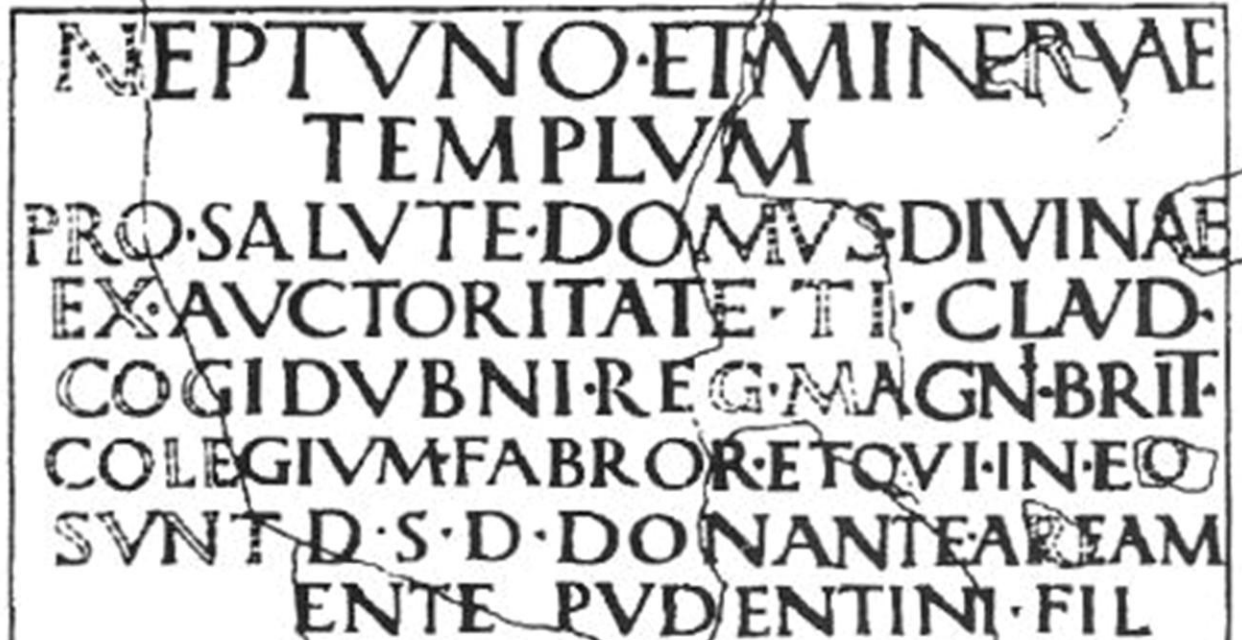
But what is she doing in Rome?...

A possible Claudia in Tacitus' *Annals*?

- Annals XII: British King Caractacus is captured and brought to Rome. He gives a speech before the Emperor Claudius. He is then released, along with his family. No more is said of them.
- So here we have a British king in Rome, with cause to be indebted to Claudius. Naturally he would name (or re-name) his daughter Claudia, and she would be of sufficiently high status to marry a member of the Roman elite.
- Could this be Martial's beautiful British Claudia, who marries Pudens? Could it also be the Christian friend of St. Paul? In that case she's British, Christian *and* a princess!

A Pudens in Britain

This inscription, found in Chichester in 1723, complicates the theory. It suggests that, contrary to the Caractacus connection, Pudens may have been involved with the client king Cogidubnus. However, that didn't prove to be a major obstacle: the theorists simply argued that Cogidubnus no doubt had a daughter too...!



NEPTVNO·ET·MINERVAE
TEMPLVM
PRO·SALVTE·DOMVS·DIVINAE
EX·AVCTORITATE·TI·CLAVD·
COGIDVBNI·REG·MAGN·BRIT·
COLEGIVM·FABRO·RE·FOVI·NE·EO
SVNT·D·S·D·DO·NANTE·AREAM
ENTE·PVDENTINI·FIL

Connections

All of these connections rely upon the names 'Claudia' and 'Pudens', neither of which is particularly unusual. There are lots of other objections to the theory: historically, the whole idea is highly implausible.

Nevertheless, in the nineteenth century 'Princess Claudia' became so well accepted that she topped lists of inspirational women in history.

The connection was sanctioned by the church, as bishops for over three hundred years had promoted the idea of a British Claudia in St. Paul's Rome.

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Claudia in Literature

Some painful 19th century treatments



Claudia by Mrs Frederick Prideaux

'Tis said they speak of me at Caesar's court;
That Martialis framed an epigram
Touching the gold locks and the violet eyes,
And how the Roman and the British dames
Disputed for the honour of my birth.

Strange things have happened in these days.
Perchance

I yet might be Augusta...

Claudia and Pudens by Samuel Lysons

Claudia's beauty on the other hand was of a totally different style; it was of that indescribable sort which attracts without our knowing how or why. Without any remarkable regularity of features, there was a grace of expression, of amiability, and of cheerfulness, mixed with a calm serenity, which bespoke her whole character at once. Her fair hair, curling gracefully, hung in ringlets over her shoulders after the fashion of her country; her soul was in her countenance, and sparkled in her light blue eye. There was no mistaking it. To see her only was to love her. And yet, with all this, she combined great strength of mind and firmness of purpose, so that her influence was unbounded. In short, she was the idol both of the Court and of the common people: and well she might be; for this great love and admiration had not spoiled her, but she used her influence with the greatest tact and benefit to all around her.

Uncertainties

- By the 1880s, stories about 'Princess Claudia' were becoming unfashionable.
- This mirrored a wider trend, as classical scholarship called into question the details of the Gospels and the truth of miracles.
- The Anglican church was fighting a battle against the uncertainties opened up by the growing field of critical analysis.
- The Claudia story was a step too far: the church could not defend it, and so it was dropped. Not officially: but it was allowed to vanish.



Despite the problems...

- In the 1882 remodelling of Newcastle Cathedral, 'Princess Claudia' was a natural choice.
 - Stories of Princess Claudia would have been known to the congregation from childhood.
 - Claudia was an excellent match to Queen Margaret, as a married woman who united two cultures through Christianity.
 - The combination of St Margaret (uniting Scotland and England) and Claudia (uniting Rome and Britain) gives a potted history of the region of Hadrian's Wall.
 - It seems that the importance of local history and heritage won out over theological and scholarly insecurities.

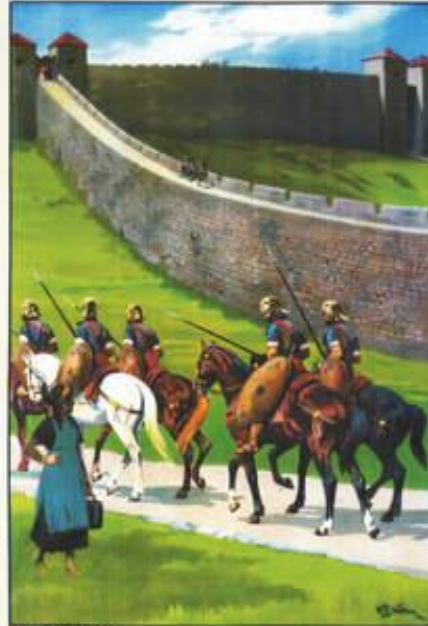


Further Reading

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- Knowles, C.B. (2016), 'A Nineteenth Century Claudia in St. Nicholas' Cathedral', *New Voices in Classical Reception*:
<http://www2.open.ac.uk/ClassicalStudies/GreekPlays/newvoices/Issue11/issue11index.htm>
- Claudia: an epic in Lego:
<https://classicalstudies.support/2020/02/20/international-lego-classicism-day-2020/>

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CLASSICAL ENCOUNTERS IN ENGLAND'S NORTH EAST



THE ROMAN WALL.

THE ROAD OF THE ROMAN

TOUR BY RAIL OR ROAD
FROM NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE

ILLUSTRATED GUIDE OBTAINABLE AT PRINCIPAL L.N.E.R. INQUIRY OFFICES
OR STATION BOOKSTALLS

ROUTLEDGE
