

## Cathedral Classicism: a Nineteenth-Century Claudia in St. Nicholas' Cathedral

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On a flea-market stall in the north of England in 2014, four oak statues of extraordinary quality and subject matter were spotted by a local couple. They purchased the statues and began to investigate. Their research led them to St. Nicholas' Cathedral in Newcastle, from which the statues had been stolen ten years earlier, and led to the return of the statues to the cathedral in 2015<sup>1</sup>.

Although inscribed with the date 1394, the statues were in fact part of the Gothic Revival redecoration of the Cathedral which was carried out in the 1880s and 90s. Until their theft they had remained almost unnoticed, and certainly unremarked, in a small and mostly unused chapel, known as 'St. Margaret's Chantry', on the south side of the Cathedral; their theft, however, raised an outcry from members of the congregation, whose distress at their loss demonstrated a sense of personal connection with the distinctive figures. The statues are remarkable not just for their workmanship, but also for their sophisticated interaction with the history of the region, the Cathedral and the spread of Christianity as it was perceived by Victorian Anglicans. This article will focus primarily on one of the four statues – 'Claudia' – tackling problems of identification and interpretation raised by the presence of a respectable Roman matron in a very Gothic church interior.

St. Nicholas Cathedral in Newcastle upon Tyne, the most northerly Anglican cathedral in England, is notable today for its elaborate Victorian refit. Although the structure itself had been built in the twelfth century, its medieval interior fittings had been completely stripped over the centuries as a result of religious reforms<sup>2</sup>, military invasions<sup>3</sup> and changing tastes<sup>4</sup>, so when the church was given cathedral status in 1882 a programme of extensive renovations to the interior was ordered, with the aim of achieving a pseudo-medieval grandeur in keeping with the principles of the Gothic Revival. The Gothic Revival was fashionable in North-East churches of the time, with even humble parish churches acquiring retables, riddle posts and rood screens, so the style was an uncontroversial choice for the 'new' cathedral. However, the architects responsible for the renovation had to walk a fine line; Newcastle already had a Catholic Cathedral, St. Mary's, which was fitted out in the Gothic style and which had been designed thirty years earlier by none other than the great exponent of the Gothic, Augustus Welby Pugin, God's Architect himself. The challenge for the designers of the St. Nicholas refit, therefore, was to create an impressive medieval-inspired interior while also somehow identifying it as an Anglican cathedral, distinct from the Catholic cathedral just along the road.

The Newcastle firm of Ralph Hedley, already well known for its work on many local churches<sup>5</sup>, was given the contract for the carvings in wood, which formed the bulk of the renovations. Hedley, a local craftsman and painter of local scenes, was an appropriate choice for the cathedral carvings, which took as their theme the history of the church in particular and the area in general.

The redevelopment of the chantry from which the Hedley statues were stolen is an example of this focus on local history. A small porch off the nave of the cathedral, traditionally known as 'Bewicke's Porch'<sup>6</sup> after the eighteenth-century tombstones of the Bewick family which were set into the floor, it was an area identified by historical parish records as the Chantry of St. Margaret, one of nine or ten<sup>7</sup> medieval chantries which had been set up in the church to finance masses for the souls of the wealthy donors. Chantries, abolished during (and shortly after) the Reformation, drew an uncomfortable link with the Catholic church and the concept of purgatory which made them the target of Victorian historians' derision. One historian of Newcastle condemned the St. Nicholas chantries as 'recesses of ignorance and mistaken devotion' which were 'discovered to be completely ridiculous' at the Reformation (Baillie 1801: 240), and then refused to describe them on principle. The decision to restore a chantry in the 'new' cathedral was therefore a bold one.

The emphasis of Hedley's nineteenth-century restoration<sup>8</sup>, however, was not on the controversial religious significance of the chantry, in its role as 'a personalised strategy for the afterlife' (Roffey 2008: 29), but on the history of this particular space and the individuals who commissioned it to be built, going back to the fourteenth century. Significantly, this was a history which the nearby Catholic cathedral of St. Mary's, built entirely in the mid-nineteenth century, could not claim.



Figure 1: Statues of St. Margaret, Mary Whitgray, Stephen Whitgray and Claudia. Photograph © Cora Beth Knowles 2015.

Hedley's design for the restoration of the chantry took him back to the old parish records, which recorded the names of 'one Stephane Whitgrave and Mary his wyffe'<sup>9</sup> as donors of the chapel, its altar and the wages for a priest, as well as stating the name of Saint Margaret as the patron saint. In reconstructing the chantry according to the information preserved by the church, Hedley carved oak statues of Stephen Whitgray, Mary Whitgray and Saint Margaret, identifying them as such by a name in Gothic lettering carved into the base of each statue, accompanied (in the case of Stephen and Mary) by '*founded this chantry AD 1394*'. This element of the reconstruction was a plausible one; donor statues were common features of medieval chantries, while the presence of saints was both expected and significant. Roffey (2008: 74) notes, 'Such imagery should not be viewed as mere decoration or didactic ornamentation; in many ways it was visible proof of the presence of saints and their intercessory powers'; most importantly, the patron saint of the chantry was expected to take an active role in assisting the passage of the donors through purgatory, and therefore needed to be visibly represented in the chantry as a focus for prayers. The combination of donors' statues and a statue of the patron saint in the 'new' Chantry of St. Margaret made this reimagining of the chantry space convincing<sup>10</sup>.

The statues of Mary and Stephen Whitgray, two solid oak figures approximately twenty inches tall, originally placed on riddle posts<sup>11</sup> flanking the entry to the chantry, are extraordinarily detailed in comparison to similar sized statues elsewhere in the cathedral; this can perhaps be accounted for by the unusual positioning of the statues, which allowed them to be seen from the back as well as the front. They are also very different in style and appearance from any other statue in the cathedral, emphasising the fact that they were associated with the church primarily through their financial contribution. Both are

dressed at the height of fourteenth-century fashion, with embroidered garments and fur-trimmed robes proclaiming their wealth. Mary Whitgray, though richly dressed, has her eyes modestly downcast; Stephen, in contrast, is stepping forward, looking straight ahead, with his hand resting on a bag at his waist. Although the output of Hedley's workshop was vast<sup>12</sup>, and figures could be ordered from a book of standard designs, nothing about these two figures is generic; their distinctive dress and expressive poses suggest that they have been designed for this spot, to reflect an interpretation of the recorded information.

The statue of St. Margaret is rougher and less detailed, perhaps because it occupied a corner spot on the altar rail and could not be seen from behind. Its carving is slightly less smooth, suggesting that it may have been carved by a different workman: Hedley had a number of talented woodcarvers in his workshop, and the cathedral refit required the attention of many of them<sup>13</sup>.

The identification of Saint Margaret is a particularly interesting feature of this reconstructed chantry, and presumably prompted some debate at the time the work was done, since the records do not specify *which* Saint Margaret was the patron saint of the original chantry. The iconography of Hedley's version is difficult to decipher. The statue has a dragon at her feet, suggesting that it is St. Margaret the Virgin of Antioch, who escaped the belly of a dragon when the cross around her neck burned the creature. However, the dragon at Margaret's feet is small and unthreatening, while the figure is of a mature woman wearing a crown, and the inscription states 'Saint Margaret, Queen'. These elements encourage her identification as Queen Margaret of Scotland, an eleventh century saint. An English princess who married King Malcolm III of Scotland in 1070, Margaret was seen as a civilizing influence on her husband and sons, and was known as 'a pattern of active piety and politeness' (Timpson 1846: 9). She was also a force for reconciliation between the Scots and the English, working to achieve a common religious language and supposedly securing the release of English hostages<sup>14</sup>. Unlike Saint Margaret of Antioch, whose legend was accepted to be apocryphal, the life and works of Saint Margaret of Scotland were part of the historical record, giving them a prosaic credibility; also unlike Margaret of Antioch, Margaret of Scotland was not just a Catholic saint, but also an Anglican one. The original decision to reconstruct a chantry may have had Catholic undertones, but by careful interpretation of the historical evidence Hedley gives it an Anglican spin.

Three statues, however, did not lend themselves to a symmetrical arrangement. To balance out Saint Margaret, placed at one end of a carved oak altar rail, Hedley needed a fourth statue, but the records did not have any suggestions to make about other characters who were associated with this chantry in its original fourteenth-century form, so something needed to be invented by the Victorian craftsmen. Hedley's solution was a figure of a woman in Roman dress, named simply 'Claudia' by the inscription on the pedestal. The figure is of a mature and dignified woman, dressed in the traditional Roman *stola* of a married woman, with elaborate drapes and folds created by the two belts, one around the waist and one below the breasts. Over the *stola* the figure wears a bordered *palla*, the wide decorated border being a sign of wealth and status; the *palla* is thrown over her shoulders, leaving her head exposed to show curled hair clasped at the back, surmounted by a diadem or stephane similar in style to that of Roman empresses and goddesses in imperial iconography. The figure, head raised and face impassive, gazes into the distance, in the direction of the nave. Her posture suggests paused movement, with one knee bent and a foot slightly raised, as if she is merely passing through the chantry on her way to somewhere else. One hand rests between her breasts, with her cloak draped over her arm; the other hand clasps a fold of the cloak, and in the crook of her arm she holds something roughly carved, with stems and leaves or ears, perhaps a sheaf of wheat. Her finish is much rougher than that of the polished figures of Stephen and Mary, even more so than the figure of Margaret, to the extent that it is unclear what she is holding in her arm. Her inscription is also much less precise and detailed in its wording than the others, providing no information about the figure beyond the cryptic 'Claudia'.



Figure 2: Ralph Hedley's statue of Claudia, detached from its original riddle post. Photograph © Cora Beth Knowles 2015.

Hedley's choice of a Roman figure is in keeping with the conspicuous classicism of the other cathedral monuments, both earlier and later, which emphasised and celebrated the connections between the people of north-east England and Hadrian's Wall. The monuments to Matthew Ridley, described by John Baillie in his inaccurately titled *Impartial History* as 'worthy of a place in Westminster Abbey' (1801: 230), and Sir Matthew White Ridley, an eighteenth century father and son active in the political life of Newcastle, showed both men dressed in Roman togas. Hingley points out that there was 'a tradition that the Roman Wall ran directly under St. George's porch, near the north-west corner of St. Nicholas'

Church' (2012: 124); this is mentioned by John Baillie in 1801 in his compilation of Roman-related local legends: 'from the west end of the narrow street called the Low-bridge, to the east-end of St. Nicholas' church-yard, a bridge, constructed of large and massive stones, of vast height, and evidently of Roman architecture, was thrown over a frightful dean, now a spacious and beautiful street, full of splendid shops and dwelling-houses' (1801: 22). The toga-clad Riddleys were therefore identifying themselves with the origin myth of both the city and the church itself. Their monuments also 'played on an international association with the culture of classical Rome that was widely admired in eighteenth-century England' (Hingley 2012: 124). By casting themselves as Roman senators, the Riddleys presented themselves as cosmopolitan and at the same time as having a close connection with local history: not only did they present themselves as the natural heirs of 'that mighty people... as boundless in their ambition, as they were irresistible in their arms' (Baillie 1801: 9), they also tapped into a local interest in Roman heritage which was on the rise.

A more direct association between the cathedral and Roman history is seen in the sarcophagus monument of Rev. John Collingwood Bruce, well-known antiquarian and 'the great interpreter' (Breeze 2006: 8) of Hadrian's Wall, who died in 1892, at a time when the cathedral renovations were in their final stages<sup>15</sup>. His marble effigy lies in state with his 1851 book *The Roman Wall* at his feet, open at the dedication to another well-known local figure, landowner John Clayton, who was instrumental in the preservation of Hadrian's Wall. Although Bruce was best known in the nineteenth century for his work as a non-conformist minister, and 'much of his considerable reputation in the North of England during his life-time rested upon his church activities' (Breeze 2003: 3), his monument in the new cathedral celebrated his success as an antiquarian, and linked him to a community of archaeologists and enthusiasts working to rediscover and understand the remnants of Hadrian's Wall and its associated communities. The chantry of St. Margaret too has a connection to Bruce, although this certainly post-dates Hedley's reconstruction: in 1896 the sons of John Collingwood Bruce installed a window in honour of their mother Charlotte in the long back wall of the chantry, depicting achievements of female saints<sup>16</sup>.

Another Roman connection is the glass case currently in the South Choir Aisle, which displays a fragment of timber thought in the nineteenth century to have been taken from the original Roman bridge over the Tyne. Although regarded with some scepticism by historians today, the current Cathedral Guide Book still states, 'This piece of wood probably formed part of a tree that grew during the earthly life of Christ' (Lovie 2005: 19), a connection popularised by Bruce himself. In a letter to his son in 1875 he described a chair made out of the recently-discovered timber, stating confidently, 'we can prove that the oak of which it is made was growing on the banks of the Tyne in the year 120, and therefore the sap must have been flowing in its veins when throughout the Holy Land there "walked those blessed feet which eighteen hundred years ago were nailed, for our advantage, on the bitter cross"' (Bruce 1905: 334). This use of the classical past and the Roman heritage of Britain to make the life and times of Jesus Christ more immediate and personal, and to provide a local connection, is an unusual feature of St. Nicholas' Cathedral, and one which may help to furnish an explanation for some of Hedley's choices in relation to the puzzling fourth figure of Claudia.

It is clear from the physical context that Ralph Hedley's design for St. Margaret's Chantry required a fourth figure for symmetry, and from the Cathedral context that the Roman associations would suggest a Roman figure: but why 'Claudia', and which Claudia is this meant to be? There are numerous historical Claudias, and three Saint Claudias from the early church, all three notable for their roles as wives and mothers, all with Roman connections and all in some way appropriate to St. Margaret's chantry, so determining which Claudia is the subject of Hedley's statue is a difficult task, requiring some consideration of the late nineteenth century academic, theological and cultural context.

Saint Claudia Procula (also Claudia Procles) was a popular character in the middle ages, and as a saint, would be an appropriate addition to Hedley's chantry line-up. Mentioned in the New Testament as the wife of Pontius Pilate, she sent him the message, 'Have nothing to do with that innocent man, because in a dream last night, I suffered much on account of him' (Matthew 27:19), when Pilate was sitting in judgement of Jesus. That was her only claim to fame; her name, life and religious significance were constructed by later writers. In the medieval York mystery plays she featured as a key character<sup>17</sup>, going by the name 'Dame precious Percula', and in the nineteenth century she was the subject of several paintings by well-known artists<sup>18</sup>, and of Charlotte Brontë's poem *Pilate's Wife's Dream*<sup>19</sup>, which portrayed her as the idealistic young wife of a brutal husband. She was therefore relevant both to the Victorian refit and to the original chantry<sup>20</sup>, and her role in art and literature as a pious influence on a

pagan husband matches the reputation of St. Margaret of Scotland, suggesting a theme for the chantry of the good influence of wives. However, although suitable, the identification is by no means conclusive. Claudia Procula was rarely called simply 'Claudia', in the manner of Hedley's inscription, and without any other identifying features it would be asking a lot of Victorian churchgoers to pick up on the reference to an obscure saint of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

A second possible identification is Saint Claudia the Martyr, mother of Saint Eugenia (a colourful saint who, while a young woman, lived in disguise as a monk, until she/he was accused of rape), and was converted to Christianity along with her husband Philip, governor of Egypt by their daughter. After Phillip was killed for his beliefs, Claudia travelled to Rome with her daughter, and there she looked after orphans and young women, converting them to Christianity<sup>21</sup>. Like Queen Margaret of Scotland, she was seen as a pious Christian queen, a devoted mother and a patron of orphans.

Both of these identifications are possible, but neither is compelling, because neither Saint Claudia was famous enough to be presented as merely 'Claudia', with no additional information (as is provided in the case of Margaret) to confirm their identity. The third Claudia, however, meets that criterion.



Figure 3: Detail of the base of the 'Claudia' statue, with a single name written in Gothic script. Photograph © Cora Beth Knowles 2015.

In the nineteenth century another Saint Claudia became well known through a combination of academic treatises, school textbooks, works of fiction and epic poetry. Her character was extrapolated from several sources which mention only a name, and a whole back-story was engineered to cast her as the first great Christian princess of Britain, or even the origin of British Christianity. The implications of her story were stressed by writers like John Williams, Archdeacon of Cardigan, who stated in 1848 that in

the light of revelations about Princess Claudia, 'it will be necessary to open anew the investigation of the "Origines" of the mighty British nation' (1848: viii)<sup>22</sup>.

The life and character of 'Princess' Claudia was based on a similarity of names and dates across a range of first and second century sources. Most notable is the correspondence between St. Paul's letter to Timothy (2 Timothy 4.21), 'Eubulus greets you, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brothers'<sup>23</sup>, and Martial's *Epigrams*, in which some of the same names are mentioned.

St. Paul does not mention any of these people again, or offer any further details about them. It was the Roman poet Martial whose information excited the interest of British scholars. According to his *Epigrams*, a woman of his acquaintance named Claudia was married to a man called Pudens, activating a connection with St. Paul's friends, and adding the significant detail that this Claudia was a British woman. This picture of a British Christian lady in Rome required two of Martial's poems to be combined. *Epigrams* XI.53 introduces Claudia Rufina, a beautiful British lady praised for her intelligence and erudition, and makes reference to an unnamed husband<sup>24</sup>. This intelligent, attractive and married British woman was usually identified as the same Claudia as the Claudia Peregrina of *Epigrams* IV. 13, who is about to be married to Martial's friend Pudens. The connection of the two epigrams was used to make a cumulative case for a noble British lady called Claudia, married to Pudens.<sup>25</sup>

St. Paul does not give any information about the nationality of *his* Claudia and Pudens, nor does he say that they were married<sup>26</sup>, so it was impossible for scholars to confirm that Martial's British Claudia and Pudens were the same people St. Paul mentioned as (presumably) Christians. The impossibility of proving this conjecture, however, was no barrier to its acceptance in the nineteenth century, and plenty of flimsy evidence was created to support it. Williams, for instance, explained in 1848 that the tone of Martial's epigrams about Claudia suggested a certain spirituality: 'it would seem to me that Martial thought, that the nuptial bond of Pudens and Claudia was confirmed by the doctrines of a creed, according to which death alone could dissolve the sacred tie' (1848: 35)<sup>27</sup>. It was therefore presented as a reasonable inference that Pudens and Claudia were Christians at the time of their marriage, and that Martial knew about their religion and appreciated it.

The connection between Martial and St. Paul through the figures of Claudia and Pudens was not originally a nineteenth-century one, having been first proposed in the sixteenth century and backed by the Archbishop of Canterbury<sup>28</sup>. For over two hundred years it was regarded as a curious but unconvincing theory. In 1799 William Alexander roundly condemned it, based on a number of considerations including the chronology (which by his reckoning would conservatively make Pudens and Claudia 50 years old at the time of their marriage), the character of Martial and his friend Pudens, and the inappropriateness of Martial's comments on the marriage of two Christians, and concludes, 'These considerations appear decisively to show that the Pudens and Claudia of the poet must have been entirely different persons from the Pudens and Claudia of the apostle. The hypothesis, accordingly, of the British Claudia's being a Christian and taking an interest in the spread of Christianity in the land of her fathers, as it rests entirely and exclusively on this disproved identity, must be discarded' (1799: 113). The hypothesis was not, however, discarded; on the contrary, the nineteenth century saw its development and extension into a coherent, if improbable, narrative.

The first extension to the theory was the use of the Roman historian Tacitus to provide an explanation for the presence of a presumably high-born British woman in Rome, marrying a Roman of high status; this was argued at length by William Lisle Bowles, Canon of Salisbury, in 1839, and picked up by Bishop Stillingfleet in 1840. Tacitus, in *Annals* XII, tells the story of the British King Caractacus' capture and transfer to Rome, and gives a version of his speech before the Emperor Claudius and the Senate<sup>29</sup>; he also states that Caractacus was released, along with his family. No names are given for the family members of Caractacus, and nothing more is known of them; but nineteenth century scholars seized on the mention of a royal British family in Rome at about the right time for Martial's Claudia. Bowles summarises the argument: 'Caractacus and his wife are departed – but Claudia, a British lady, supposed his daughter, afterwards married to Pudens, mentioned in the last epistle to Timothy – Claudia, in the Court of Nero – Claudia, supposed daughter of Caractacus – Claudia, so called from Claudius, who brought her father, mother, and herself captives to Rome, remained' (Bowles 1839: 4). A review of Bowles' publication, printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine* of 1839, describes it as 'a most ingenious and satisfactory piece of critical and classical reasoning' (Urban 1839: 278), despite its failure to address most of Alexander's objections from forty years earlier. The promotion of Claudia the British

lady to Claudia the Princess seemed to suit the mood of the 1830s and 40s, and readers were inclined to set aside objections in favour of ingenuity and romance.

The story of Princess Claudia went on to gain more Christian details, and a back-story. It was, explained Thomas Timpson, unsurprising that Princess Claudia and St. Paul would have become acquainted; 'as they had both been brought in the character of prisoners to Rome, their captive condition, and residence in the same district of the imperial buildings, would naturally prompt the apostle to seek intercourse with these foreigners, with a view to their own salvation, and to the evangelization of Britain' (1846: 56).

The speculation continued; perhaps Claudia was a Christian before her marriage, and she was the one responsible for her husband's conversion. It was suggested that Claudia was already a Christian when she left Britain, before she encountered St. Paul, and was therefore somehow responsible for bringing Christianity to Rome. If so, it was conceivable that the religion which became known as Christianity originated in Britain<sup>30</sup>, and was spread to other countries by a member of the British royal family. This heavy-handed strengthening of Victorian notions of empire was responsible for some fanciful works of fiction and epic poetry. Among these was *Claudia*, an epic poem in five parts from 1865 by Mrs Frederick Prideaux, which follows Claudia's journey from Rome, where she attends a dinner party with Martial, Lucan and Pudens and uncovers a plot to massacre the Christians, to Britain, where she rediscovers her Welsh roots. The poem ends by conscientiously pointing out the lack of verifiable information about Claudia:

But as for Claudia:- how she kept her vow  
Of service to her Lord:- whether apart  
From tenderer earthly ties she followed close  
Behind His bleeding feet, alone like Him;-  
Or whether bent beneath a homelier cross  
She moved in lower paths, and daily died  
In daily discipline of household cares,  
Sweetened by love whose sweetness symbols His;-  
We know not: only knowing that her name,  
Embalmed by purest saintship, lingers still  
In old traditions as a blessed name.  
Her tale is told: the legendary spring  
That trickled from the summits of the past  
Has poured its little urn, and all is still.'

F.A. Prideaux, *Claudia* (1865: 223)

The fate of Prideaux's Claudia is left as a mystery to the Victorian reader; conveniently, however, her mysterious obscurity begins only after she has saved many Christian lives and helped to set up the first Christian church in Britain<sup>31</sup>.

Not all 'Princess Claudia' theorists were comfortable with versions of the Claudia myth which positioned her at the heart of British Christianity; some required British Christianity to have been delivered personally by an apostle, rather than by minor royalty. Stillingfleet speculated that Claudia's role in early Christianity might have been to influence St. Paul: 'if this Claudia were St. Paul's disciple, why might not she excite that Apostle to go into her country to plant Christianity there, as he had done with so much success in other places?' (1840: 46).

Some academics and writers favoured an antiquarian connection, instead of the Tacitus-Caractacus link. In 1723 an inscription had been discovered in Chichester which mentioned a Pudens<sup>32</sup>, and in 1724 a connection was drawn by Stukeley between Martial's Claudia and Pudens, St. Paul's Claudia and Pudens, and the Pudens of the Chichester inscription. The assumption was that this was Pudens the husband of Princess Claudia – but the inscription associated him with King Cogidubnus, not King Caractacus. The story was therefore adapted to make Claudia the daughter of Tiberius Claudius Cogidubnus<sup>33</sup>; as client king of the Emperor Claudius, it was even more plausible that her father would have named her after the emperor than that Caractacus would. According to this theory, Claudia was still royalty, and still a Christian, although her acquaintance with St. Paul became rather more difficult to explain<sup>34</sup>. A further objection was that the British inscription tying together Pudens and Cogidubnus

was the dedication stone of a temple to the Roman gods Neptune and Minerva; however, this was easily explained<sup>35</sup> by attributing it to Pudens *before* his marriage to Claudia and subsequent conversion to Christianity<sup>36</sup>.

Despite controversy over 'Princess' Claudia's ancestry, her connection with St. Paul and her husband's religion, her legend continued to grow throughout the nineteenth century; as early as 1846 her name topped a list of famous British princesses, compiled to be taught to children and selected 'as exhibiting the most instructive example, and as affording the most useful practical lessons regarding both time and eternity' (Timpson 1846: iv). The same list, in the 'British Queens' section, also included St. Margaret of Scotland, the patron saint of Ralph Hedley's reconstructed chantry, and Queen Ethelburga, one of the saints featured in the 1896 window of St. Margaret's chantry.

It was not long before Princess Claudia of Britain started to decline in popularity, both as the subject of academic debate and as a romantic figure of myth. From the 1870s onwards, books and articles on Claudia and Pudens became much less common, and the flaws in the argument ultimately prevented it from being given a place in accepted British history. Even those who accepted the theory began to limit their conjectures: 'Whether this famous tradition be true or not, it is clear that it does not carry us beyond the existence of a British convert among the Christian companions of St. Paul at Roman, and that it is an entirely different matter to conclude from it that Christianity in any way prevailed at this time, or until long after, in Britain' (Howorth 1885: 132). The decline of the Claudia tradition followed the trajectory of the broader relationship between Classics and Anglican Christianity in this period, when 'the study of the texts of the classical past... was undermining the church's own history and, with it, its historical authority' (Goldhill 2011: 8). At a time when saints and miracles were being called into question by close examination of religious and historical writings, it is perhaps unsurprising that Claudia's claim to fame was simply dropped: as textual criticism brought 'a crisis in self-understanding, religious authority, and the institutional structures of the communities of Britain' (*ibid.*), the church had bigger battles to fight.

To Ralph Hedley's generation, however, schooled in the 1850s and 60s and influenced by passionate local antiquarians rather than the 'professional' archaeologists and classical scholars who took over the study of the Romans in Newcastle in the 1890s, 'Princess Claudia' would have been a well-known quasi-historical figure, and perhaps a natural choice when searching for a Roman figure to balance St. Margaret and to represent the relationship between the Roman heritage of Newcastle and the Christian religion. Both Margaret and the fictionalised Claudia were the daughters of British kings; both married men who were enemies of their wives' people, and who were not good Christians (perhaps not Christian at all, in the case of Pudens); and both influenced their husbands through their piety. Beyond these basic similarities, however, they both played an active part in reconciling key elements of North-East history. St. Margaret, an Englishwoman married to a Scot, worked to find common ground between the Scots and the English through Christianity, while Claudia, a British woman married to a Roman, found common ground between the British and the Romans through Christianity. Their royal heritage made them historically significant, their marriages made them ambassadors, and their actions made them agents of change.

'Princess' Claudia was not alone in having a British royal title conferred upon her by Victorian enthusiasts eager to connect Britain with the rise of Christianity in Rome. Saint Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, was also given British nationality and an improbable legend of royal descent from King Cole of Colchester. This was emphasised by Victorian architect John Belcher, who won the commission for Colchester town hall in 1897 with a design for an impressive and sculptural tower surmounted by a large statue of Helena. 'Princess' Helena, whose name had been associated with the town from medieval times, was embraced by Victorian developers, who named streets and public buildings after her. Harbus says of Helena's unlikely rise to fame in Britain, 'The process was self-perpetuating: her British origins, once established, allowed her to be included in national legends and this led finally to her acceptance by the Church as a British saint. This dissemination of the legend in turn led to a greater attention being paid to her by histories and a more general acceptance of the story as truth by both writers and congregations' (2002: 5). In the case of 'Princess' Claudia, this same process began in the 1840s, but, lacking Princess Helena's strong regional connections, the process stalled and reversed itself by the end of the nineteenth century.

Helena and Claudia were part of a wider Victorian trend, supported by the rise of the historical novel. As Goldhill explains, 'Novels about the distant past played a formative role in the construction of a nationalist history, and through it, a national identity. Britishness or Englishness emerges like a flag, and not just when Boudicca revolts. Several novels delight in finding Christian characters in early England' (2011: 158), including the Emperor Constantine, St. Paul, Lazarus and Pomponia Graecina. It is certainly the case that the development of the Claudia story, in both popular and scholarly literature, conspicuously waves the flag for Britishness. Notably, in the case of St. Nicholas' Cathedral, it also waves the flag for Anglicanism, for the Englishness of Christianity, borrowing the Roman connections of the North of England to assert the new Anglican cathedral's superiority over its Catholic neighbour.

The plausible identification of Ralph Hedley's Claudia with the nineteenth-century reinvention of Princess Claudia of Britain suggests that this statue was not just an afterthought, included for symmetry. Rather, it combined with the statues of Stephen and Mary Whitgray and Queen Margaret to present a historical record in miniature, covering local church history, the Roman origins of Newcastle and the border wars with Scotland. When taken in combination with the chantry's slightly later stained glass window on the subject of female saints, there is no doubt that a theme of strong women gives this chapel a distinct identity; but the strong women need to be seen in the roles for which they were famous in the nineteenth century, as Englishwomen who united cultures through the influence of their religious beliefs.

Hedley's re-imagined chantry therefore had a message beyond the obvious praise of piety and acknowledgement of the importance of the wife and mother; it was also a statement about the power of English Christianity throughout history to transcend the boundaries between cultures, a statement which is particularly relevant to a city on Hadrian's Wall, defined for centuries by its liminal position. The identity of the viewer is critical here. The cultural significance of Hedley's chantry statues needs to be seen through the eyes of nineteenth-century North-East churchgoers, who would have been likely to read the statues as a reminder of their own proud identity and heritage: part Roman, part Scottish, but with an over-riding tradition of English Christian worship stretching back centuries in that very spot. Each element of the chantry reinforced the impression that there was nothing new about the 'new' cathedral, and offered a powerful appreciation of the significance of place. The parallels with Saint/Princess Helena, and the other early Christian figures reinvented in nineteenth-century popular culture, open up the possibility that late Victorian designers were bringing together the antithetical classical and gothic styles in a continuum, linking the medieval with the Roman in a national and nationalistic vision of British history that spanned 2,000 years and preached a message of continuity, heritage and connection, defying on a local level the prevailing trend of critical re-examination of the past which threatened assumptions fundamental to British Christianity.

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<sup>2</sup> Notably the Chantries Act of 1547, which ordered the abolition of all chantries. The Church of St. Nicholas had nine or ten chantries, a considerable number for a parish church, all of which were destroyed.

<sup>3</sup> The church was occupied by Scottish forces more than once in the seventeenth century.

<sup>4</sup> John Baillie mentions the remodelling of 1783, when the church was 'transformed into a kind of cathedral' (1801: 230), anticipating the status which was not given to it until 1882. Baillie comments, 'At that time, the pulpit, and the whole of the pews, galleries, &c, were taken away... In short, every old erection was levelled'.

<sup>5</sup> Hedley had also carried out some work for St. Mary's Catholic Cathedral.

<sup>6</sup> Mackenzie 1827: 241.

<sup>7</sup> The precise number is disputed by eighteenth-century historians.

<sup>8</sup> Hedley's ledgers and workshop records (housed in the Tyne and Wear Archives) indicate that the restoration was a complete decorative scheme, including a ten-foot platform, several eight-foot oak altar tables, kneelers and an arch, all heavily carved in the Gothic revival style. All of these features were removed in the 1929 remodelling of the space as a chapel for missionary intercession. The only feature which was left was the oak altar rail separating the chapel from the south aisle of the cathedral, surmounted by the four carved figures which are the subject of this paper. The figures themselves, stolen in 2005, have only recently been returned to the cathedral and have not yet been replaced.

<sup>9</sup> The certificate, from the Augmentation Office, is cited by John Brand (1789: 256).

<sup>10</sup> Hedley researched this job carefully. In addition to his extensive repertoire of Gothic revival fittings and motifs, he also studied carvings in Durham Castle chapel, Carlisle Cathedral and Hexham Abbey, and his misericord designs were inspired by Exeter Cathedral (Lovie 2005: 13).

<sup>11</sup> The medieval riddle posts surrounded an altar and supported altar cloths; the nineteenth century versions, however, appear to have been used in a variety of contexts, wherever a pole with a statue on the top might look impressive. Ralph Hedley's ledgers show that riddle posts were a popular order.

<sup>12</sup> As Millard (1990: 51) observes, 'by the end of Hedley's career there was hardly an Anglican church on Tyneside that did not have some of his carving in it ... and there are extensive and elaborate schemes by Hedley in churches from Bristol to Bury St. Edmonds'.

<sup>13</sup> Hedley's ledgers list the initials of around twenty of his carvers, most of whom worked on the Cathedral job.

<sup>14</sup> According to David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, in the eighteenth century, who stated with some emotion, 'Whenever their bondage appeared grievous, she secretly paid their ransom, and restore them to liberty, herself an exile from England!' (1776: 40).

<sup>15</sup> It is unclear whether the chantry was reconstructed before or after 1892. The bulk of Hedley's work on the cathedral took place in 1888 and 1889, but smaller projects were ongoing both before and after this time.

<sup>16</sup> None of the saints featured in this window are Roman, despite the celebration of Collingwood Bruce's classicism elsewhere in the church; perhaps her sons felt that Charlotte had had enough of the Romans for one lifetime.

<sup>17</sup> The Dream of Pilate's Wife, in the Tapiters and Couchers Guild's pageant.

<sup>18</sup> James Tissot's *The Message of Pilate's Wife* and Antonio Ciseri's *Ecce Homo* are among the most famous.

<sup>19</sup> Published under the pseudonym Currer Bell in 1846.

<sup>20</sup> The name 'Claudia' was in fact a post-medieval one, deriving from a separate tradition, so it would not have been used in a medieval chantry: however, it might have been known to, and used by, Hedley in the late nineteenth century.

<sup>21</sup> See McWilliams (2012: 109) for a summary of the myth.

<sup>22</sup> Williams went on to describe the mighty British nation in positive but less than flattering terms as 'a people "sui generis", formed by a wonderful and gradual intermixture of Races and blood, which render it a well-digested amalgamation between the lively Celt and the sluggish Dutchman'.

<sup>23</sup> BibleHub ([http://biblehub.com/commentaries/2\\_timothy/4-21.htm](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_timothy/4-21.htm)) offers a collection of commentaries on this line, ranging from the cautiously objective ('These names are of common occurrence in the works of the classic writers, but of the persons here referred to we know nothing', *Barnes' Notes on the Bible*) to the wildly imaginative (... 'Claudia, who seems to have been sent to Rome for education, as a pledge of the father's fidelity', *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*).

<sup>24</sup> Translated rather loosely into verse in the *Westminster Review* of April 1853 (quoted in *The Epigrams of Martial*, 1885): 'Though British skies first beam'd on Claudia's face,

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Her beauty far outvies the Latin race:  
 E'en Grecian nymphs her form cannot excel,  
 Or Roman matrons play the queen so well.  
 Ye powers, how bless'd must her possessor be!  
 What progeny will climb the mother's knee!  
 Kind heaven, grant her constant love to share,  
 And may three boys reward her tender care.'

The unnamed translator dodges the question of whether *caeruleis...Britannis* refers to the blue eyes of the Britons (as the more romantic Victorian writers took it), or to the tradition that the Britons were painted blue with woad, as the commentators suggested.

<sup>25</sup> The case is of course not conclusive; Claudia Peregrina may not be the same as the British Claudia of Book XI, and she may even be the extremely tall Claudia who is mocked in *Epigrams* VIII.60 as being taller than the colossus on the Palatine. Unsurprisingly, Victorian writers arguing for the connection between Martial and St. Paul chose not mention Claudia the Colossus.

<sup>26</sup> There is some controversy over whether or not St. Paul's greeting implies that Pudens and Claudia were married: the order of the names, with 'Linus' in between, makes this questionable.

<sup>27</sup> Williams was not the only Christian writer to mention with glee Martial's inadvertent involvement with Christianity. Bromby comments, 'How remarkably is heathen witness pressed into the service of Christianity, exhibiting fresh sources of British evangelisation' (1851: 11).

<sup>28</sup> William Camden suggested the connection in *Britannia*, published in 1586, citing the authority of Archbishop Matthew Parker.

<sup>29</sup> *Annals* XII, 36-38.

<sup>30</sup> Simon Goldhill, in his chapter on 'When things matter: Religion and the physical world', quotes Samuel Lysons, who stated in 1860 that 'Rome derives its Christianity from Britain, not Britain from Rome' (Goldhill 2014: 38). This chapter explains the basics of the Claudia – Martial – St. Paul argument, with a particular focus on Lysons' extreme views and his use of archaeological evidence to support his theories.

<sup>31</sup> Bowles, in his 1839 work, does lament the lack of information about Claudia's fate: 'We should be anxious to hear something of the fate of herself and her husband. Did they escape, as Christians, the mouth of the lion? ... Perhaps from particular interest they were saved in the second relentless persecution against the Christians – but scripture history and religious tradition are silent' (1839: 9).

<sup>32</sup> See Hingley (2008: 184ff.) for an account of the discovery of the inscription and its initial reception.

<sup>33</sup> The name is written in full in the inscription, giving further support to the theory.

<sup>34</sup> Williams glosses over this problem, suggesting that Claudia would 'be naturally removed to Rome, either for security, or as an hostage, during the terrible insurrection under Boadicea, A.D. 61' (1848: 25).

<sup>35</sup> Bill Cooper explains this differently: 'it could well be the case that Pudens, knowing that Caradoc's daughter Claudia, whom he already loved, was to be taken to Rome with her father, sought permission of his commander in haste to go with her, and having little time to sell his property, simply donated it to the temple project, thus investing, or so he might have hoped, in the favour of the gods' (2005: 10).

<sup>36</sup> Stukeley suggests that 'there may be the highest probability that St. Paul preached in this very city of Chichester, and that the Roman governor's family were some of the first fruits of the Gospel he here gathered' (1740: 233, quoted in Hingley 2008: 188).