

Mike Byrne's Nostalgia

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Inspiring life of a runaway

Peculiar design: Stone excavated from Cathedral Close

Carved with designs of axe and bones

RAMM item of the week

A MOST peculiar object, this stone is decorated with carvings of an axe and a pair of astragal or ankle bones.

It dates to the Roman period and was excavated from the Cathedral Close. It was found in the foundations of Exeter's Roman Basilica (the central administrative building) but might have originally belonged in the earlier military bathhouse.

We think it was originally part of a religious altar. It was common practice for an axe and a pair of knives to be found on altars as a representation of tools used in sacrifice.

The axe on our stone bears a striking resemblance to carvings of this type.

Similarly, carvings of the knuckle bones are also found on Roman altars. It is thought that knucklebones were used to invoke the protection of Venus, such as on a Greco-Roman anchor found off North Wales.

It could be that the carvings seen on our object are attempting the same ritual function and it is likely that both the bathhouse and Basilica would have had altars for conducting rituals. However, whilst such carvings have been found on other altars, they have never been seen together. Relatively few altars have been found in the South West, but one, from Tresco, in the Isles of Scilly, has strikingly similar imagery.

This altar also suggests that our object could have actually been erected with the axe in a vertical position. Regardless, what we have is a fine example of religious carving, rare in Britain at its time, and well worth a look at in RAMM's Making History gallery.

A NEW book, *Oft in Danger*, about an extraordinary Old Exonian has just been published. Anthony Farrar-Hockley (1937–1941) or TFH as he was always known, was in Raleigh House and a boarder at Exeter School.

Exeter School Classics teacher Nick Keyes, said: "If he'd had his way, his time with us would have been shorter: he ran away from school as soon as the Second World War broke out, at the tender age of 15, but his mother showed up at the barracks and brought him back to school.

"TFH enjoyed being a cadet in the Junior Training Corps, as the Army Section was then called, and he was a very good actor, often asked to play the female part, but by his own account: 'I was a lazy boy at



Life story: The book at former Exeter School student Anthony Farrar-Hockley

school'. The war was on, he knew the Army was for him, and in 1941 he got his wish.

"There followed an amazing career, and he ended up as one of the Army's best-known generals and a highly respected military historian.

He became a Para, fought the Germans all the way up Italy, made a combat drop into the South of France and won a Military Cross fighting communist guerrillas in Athens.

"He chose to stay in the Army after the war, and went to the Korean War with the Gloucestershire Regiment, where he won a DSO for bravery fighting at the battle of the Imjin River and spent nearly two terrible years as a prisoner of the Chinese, escaping six times.

TFH recovered from his ordeal, transferred to the Para-

chute Regiment and took part in just about every military campaign Britain fought until his retirement from the Army in 1982.

Mr Keyes said: "To those who met him and served with him, he was an inspiration. I met him at a dinner at Oxford University, as I was about to join the army, and have never forgotten that conversation.

"Despite his escapade in 1939, TFH had very happy memories

To those who met him and served with him, he was an inspiration

of Exeter School. He returned here frequently to tell us about his adventures.

"John Sampson OBE (1955) remembers him giving a talk to school boys soon after his return from Korea in 1953, and one of his last visits was to give the prizes on Speech Day in 1994.

TFH also sent his son Dair to this school. Dair followed his father into the Parachute Regiment, and won the Military Cross for bravery during the Falklands War, later rising to Major-General. Dair visited us most recently and gave us two fascinating talks.

"TFH was a legend in the Army and he wrote some excellent books - *The Edge of the Sword*, about what happened to him in the Korean War, is one you can't put down.

"But before you read that, try this new book *Oft in Danger* about his life. Written by Jon Riley, a general who has seen a lot of action himself and who knew TFH well, it's a gripping read from start to finish. You'll be astounded at the amount of action TFH saw, how well he performed in battle and in captivity, what an extraordinary leader he was - and you'll be amused at TFH's experiences at Exeter School.

It's a fitting tribute to a very great Old Exonian.

