Beverley Minster is one of the great medieval churches of Yorkshire which served as a sub-cathedral for the diocese of York, pilgrimage church for the shrine of St. John of Beverley, and parish church for its city's seven parishes. The title question, "Who built Beverley Minster?" indicates the common thread of focus on the craftsmen and women who had a hand in its construction, but the book covers far more ground than artistic identity alone. Indeed, given the lack of documents on the subject, very little is known about the individual craftsmen at Beverley Minster. Instead, this study demonstrates the current state of knowledge about the building's creation and renovation, based on both documentary and archaeological data.

The introduction, by editors Paul Barnwell and Arnold Pacey, sketches a basic history of the Minster and the state and types of the evidence used for analysis. The next three chapters (2-4) deal with the medieval building campaigns; the final three chapters (5-7) treat modification and restoration work down through the nineteenth century, and the book concludes with a short discussion of contemporary works at the Minster.

Besides the orientation of the introduction, chapter 2 (Jennifer S. Alexander, "Masons' marks and the working practices of medieval stone masons") provides additional clarification of the purposes and types of masons' marks. This chapter provides a useful orientation to the differences between quarry marks, assembly marks and banker marks (the latter are finished blocks that bore the mark of the mason who was to be paid for completing the piece), and a short discussion on the uses and limitations of these marks. While it is usually not possible to identify individual personalities or the origins of the masons, mark analysis can help significantly in establishing building chronology and history of construction.

Chapter 3 (John Phillips, "Beverley Minster nave: the evidence of the masons' marks") illustrates the application of this type of evidence, using 700 banker marks found on the nave arcade piers. Though the survey of the nave is not yet complete (the stonework has not been mapped above 4.5 meters), the resulting mark patterns demonstrate two phases of nave construction. Phase one began in the second bay of the nave and ended at the north and south porches, beginning in the early 1300s and interrupted in the 1340s (possibly by the Black Death). When work resumed, the use of larger stones, irregular coursing, and the disappearance of most banker marks indicates that stone was finished on the quarry site to reduce shipping charges. Patterns of marks in the nave and aisles indicate that a core body of five or six masons remained in the Minster's employ; their work is found all throughout the nave, and contrasts notably with work done by additional hires during peak building times.

Chapter 4 (Alison C. Armstrong and David Cant, "Carpenters of the nave roof") focuses on the timbering above the nave vaults, as this roofing section was the least altered during eighteenth-century restoration campaigns. From analysis of
assembly marks, the authors demonstrate that three different groups of craftsmen working on the roof timbers, each following a "distinct style" of working (66), built the nave roof largely from west to east, beginning with the porch area in the nave, and then later expanding westward as the old front was removed and the last bays put in place. The well-integrated illustrations help orient a non-specialist here, although given the basic explanatory style prevalent throughout the book, this reviewer found it surprising that the authors did not include definition for terms such as wall plates or sole plates. Though the evidence presented here helps shed light on construction organization and timing, the question of individual identity is again unanswerable: the medieval carpenters, even more than the masons, were not identified or identifiable.

Chapter 5 (Arnold Pacey, "The social background and organisation of the late medieval craftsman") attempts to compensate somewhat for this lack by examining what is known about individual workers, and the different roles of the building organizers from administration to labor. Table 5.1 provides a succinct and clear layout of the latter, distinguishing roles and their relationships (such as the difference between the master of works and a master mason). Much of the chapter is given over to the pursuit of the "new designer" of the 1330s, a well-worried question in the literature (and here identified with William de Malton, the master mason). Pacey's summary and discussion of tracery designs is succinct rather than exhaustive, in keeping with the tenor of the rest of the book.

Chapter 6 (Arnold Pacey and P.S. Barnwell, "The 16th and 17th centuries: furnishings, monuments and repairs") is largely a transition piece, noting the late construction of the choir stalls (ca. 1520), the changes wrought by the dissolution of the Beverley priests' college, and the purchase of the church by the town to serve the parish. Building maintenance funds dropped greatly, despite the creation of an endowment grant in 1579 (which paid priests' salaries but could not stretch to repair funds). By the eighteenth century the church was in pressing need of repairs.

Chapter 7 (P.S. Barnwell, "Craftsmen and women of the 18th century restoration") sketches the much needed restorations made to stabilize the Minster (and in particular the north arm of the west transept) as well as the interior renovations made to suit religious preferences at the time (including galleries in the aisles for pew placement; these were taken out in the nineteenth century). This chapter, as its title indicates, is able to include a more substantial section on the workers, some of whom are mentioned by name. There is evidence for the employment of women, not only as heads of supply companies (like the widow Ann Waite, who headed a family-run business selling nails to the Minster works from 1718 to 1723) but also as site workers. Stone sawyers' wives were paid the same piece rate as their husbands, but unskilled women received a lesser rate of pay than their male counterparts (122). The account book details create not only a vivid picture of restoration work, but they show a strong continuity with many medieval practices, although carpenters rather than masons are more prominent in the rebuilding records.

Chapter 8 (P.S. Barnwell and Geoff Brandwood, "Architects and craftsmen of the 19th century") is a summative discussion of the current state of knowledge on the nineteenth-century work programs at the Minster. These were mostly the removal and reappointment of church furnishings to fit Victorian taste rather than structural repairs. The shift from a local work force to consultation of national experts (such as renowned Gothic Revivalist George Gilbert Scott) was a consequence of improved transportation and work specialization, which continues to this day.

The book closes with an epilogue (Ian Stewart, "Craftsmen and women of today") noting the roles and responsibilities of the Minster staff and workers, providing a sense of continuity for the theme of "Who built Beverley Minster?"

The style of this short book is direct and explanatory without being overly reductive. The illustrations are clear and well organized, in particular the first three plans, but, especially for readers who have never visited the Minster, two or three more images to orient the general reader would have been helpful. There is no general view of the nave interior elevation other than a section drawing (not to scale) demonstrating the number of masons who worked on each pier (fig. 1.2), nor is there any illustration of the famed Percy tomb, or details of the musician figures in the north nave dado executed by the Clifford Master. However, the authors and editors have done a fine job in illustrating aspects of the building that would not be found easily in a google search (and indeed would be difficult to find even in specialized literature), especially in including rubbings of pertinent carpenters' marks and masons' marks. There is no specific bibliography for this work, but the end notes section, though compact, provides some further direction for the interested.

As a whole, this book is attractively and neatly presented, and has much to recommend it. Although specialists will find the discussion on the "new" designer of 1335 and the nave dating of interest, the book will also be appealing to medievalists of all fields who take an interest in social history or church construction. The clear style of writing should make it approachable for students as well. The case-study presented herein goes beyond Beverley Minster itself to serve as an excellent introduction to the construction story of medieval great churches and their post-medieval life.
Beverley Minster in Beverley, East Riding of Yorkshire, is a parish church in the Church of England. It is one of the largest parish churches in the UK, larger than one third of all English cathedrals and regarded as a gothic masterpiece. It is part of the Greater Churches Group and a Grade I listed building. Every year it hosts events in association with local schools, including the Beverley Minster Primary School Nativity Performance and the Beverley Grammar School Speech Night. History. The minster owes its origin and much of its subsequent importance to Saint John of Beverley, who founded a monastery locally around 700 AD and whose bones still lie beneath a plaque in the nave. The institution grew after his death and underwent several rebuildings.