

NEW LIGHT ON THE “EXETER BOOK” AT CITY’S PUBLIC LECTURE SERIES – PRESS RELEASE

The Mediaeval *Exeter Book* will be examined as it has never been before, at 7.30 pm on Wednesday 27th September. Theoretical physicist Dr Felix Flicker will illuminate the paradoxes contained in the manuscript’s famous riddles by comparison with scientific problems, at the St Michael’s Lectures – a monthly series of public events held at the Church of St Michael and All Angels, Mount Dinham in Exeter.

Dr Flicker grew up in the Exeter area, in Ottery St Mary, and was educated at Colyton Grammar School. After reading physics at St Catherine’s College, Oxford, he moved to the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics, in Canada. Returning to the UK, he completed a PhD in theoretical physics at Bristol. He then moved to the University of California, Berkeley, as a Lindemann Trust Fellow of the English-Speaking Union, before taking up his present position as Astor Fellow of Physics at New College, Oxford.

It was while at Berkeley, through membership of a co-operative called Lothlorien, in which he was assigned the role of Riddle Setter, that Dr Flicker began to realise that there was much overlap between the structure of riddles and the process of seeking knowledge within modern scientific enquiry.

He has since been publishing ground-breaking papers in theoretical physics, the methods of which are based on his notions of “paradox”. In a lecture accessible to people at all levels of knowledge of the subject, he will compare paradoxes in theoretical physics with jokes, Zen Buddhist thought and, for the first time, the ancient riddles contained in the *Exeter Book*.

Said Dr Flicker, “Ultimately, all learning takes the form of setting up two sound lines of reasoning which result in an apparent or actual contradiction. It is through resolving paradoxes that we have been able to continue to update our understanding of the world.”

The *Exeter Book*, a tenth century anthology of Anglo-Saxon poetry, has been given Unesco status as “the foundation volume of English literature”, and placed on the organisation’s “Memory of the World” register. Held at Exeter Cathedral Library, the book (or codex) contains a famous group of riddles, some of which are represented in Michael Fairfax’s iconic “Riddle Sculpture” on Exeter High Street.

Said Dr Stuart MacWilliam, Assistant Librarian at the Cathedral Library, “The Exeter Book is the largest and oldest of four surviving anthologies of Old English (Anglo-Saxon) poetry. It has been at the Cathedral since the mid-11th century. It was the gift of Exeter’s first bishop, Leofric (d.1072), and contains some 40 poems of varying lengths, of different types and ages. Significantly it also includes nearly 100 poetic riddles which are virtually all that survive in Old English.”

The St Michael’s Lectures have been running monthly since 1992, and are given by thinkers and experts who discuss current issues which are related to faith, Christianity and society, but which one might not necessarily expect to hear discussed in a church. Everyone is warmly invited, regardless of faith or educational background, to come and join in with the discussion that follows each lecture.

In recent years, the lectures have also collaborated with a number of heritage projects at the church – most notably the Heritage Lottery-funded Music and Heritage Project, during which a pipe organ was installed in the church and cameras were set up in the spire, in order

to live-stream the resident peregrine falcons on the church's website annually, during the nesting season.

Exciting forthcoming events include a lecture to be given on the concept of charity by Dr Ed Skidelsky (University of Exeter) at 7.30 pm Weds 22nd November in memory of the Reverend Dr John Hughes, who ran the lectures while Curate at the Parish of St David's with St Michael and All Angels in Exeter, and who was tragically killed in a car crash, at the age of 35, in 2014, while working as Dean of Chapel at Jesus College Cambridge.

Said Dr David Beadle, Coordinator of the St Michael's Lectures, "We are delighted to host Dr Flicker to present these ideas, which are not only at the cutting edge of scientific thought, but which are also so in keeping with the ethos of the St Michael's Lectures: entertaining, educational and accessible. We have always looked to involve the public in discussions about subjects which push all the boundaries of conventional knowledge. And, month after month, our audience rises to the challenge."

In keeping with the lectures' aim of warmly welcoming everyone to join the debates on current issues, and local history and heritage, an entrance fee is never charged. Instead, retiring collections ensure that the series can continue to run, and audience members are invited to put into the pot whatever they would be willing to pay on the door. The venue seats a large number of people, so there is no need to book in advance.

The lectures are held in the beautiful Grade 1 listed Church of St Michael and All Angels, Dinham Road, Mount Dinham, Exeter, EX4 4EB. Please contact David Beadle at dnb201@exeter.ac.uk with any questions or if you have any accessibility requirements, including wheelchair access.

Further information can be found on the church's website at www.stmichaelsmountdinham.org.uk



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