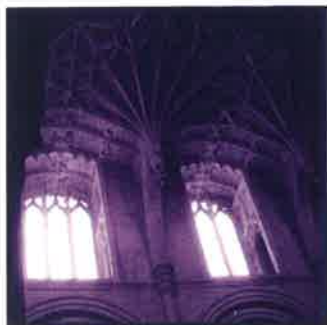


St Frideswide's Shrine
Christ Church Cathedral
Oxford
Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief



Oxford Archaeology

21st February 2002

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Chartered Architects

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St Frideswide's Shrine Christ Church Cathedral Oxford

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING ACTION

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SUMMARY

In November 2001 and January 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological recording action in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford (NGR SP 5145 0600), during the re-positioning of St Frideswide's Shrine to its original approximate medieval location in the Latin Chapel. Howes Allen & Montgomery, Chartered Architects commissioned the work.

The work revealed that the shrine had been rebuilt at least once, with replacement stones incorporated in the original structure. The shrine had previously been moved to the Lady Chapel in 1889, where it overlay a grave slab dated to 1632. Excavations through the cathedral floor for the new site for the shrine revealed layers of mortar and concrete.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In November 2001 and January 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA, formerly Oxford Archaeological Unit, OAU) carried out an archaeological recording action at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford (Fig. 1).
- 1.1.2 The work was commissioned by Howes Allen & Montgomery Chartered Architects in respect of the re-location of St Frideswide's Shrine after restoration, to as near as possible its original 12th century position.
- 1.1.3 A programme of archaeological work was prepared by OA and was agreed by John Blair, the Curator (OA 2001), and submitted to all relevant parties.
- 1.1.4 The shrine was to be moved 7.8 m north of its present location in the Lady Chapel to the Latin Chapel.

1.2 Historical background

- 1.2.1 In the 8th century St. Frideswide was a Saxon princess who is reputed to have founded a monastery (or Minster) on or near the site of the present cathedral.
- 1.2.2 The monastery was used by monks and nuns and is first referred to in 1004 as having been burnt down two years previously during a massacre of the Danes in Oxford. St Frideswide, most likely a Mercian noble-woman, is presumed to have been the first abbess of the monastery.
- 1.2.3 According to the Life of St Frideswide, probably written by Master Robert of Cricklade c 1140-70, the saint is believed to have been buried in the church of St Mary which would have been under the north side of the present cathedral (Hassall 1972, OAU 2001).
- 1.2.4 The square four-bay north chapel housed St Frideswide's relics from 1180 onwards and the shrine was moved a little in 1289, but essentially was always within the north-east chapels until the Dissolution (Blair, 1988, 221).

1.3 Christ Church Cathedral

- 1.3.1 Christ Church Cathedral stands on the east side of St Aldate's. Despite the legends and inferences from topographical analysis and historical sources, no archaeological evidence of either an early monastery or an Anglo-Saxon church has been found at the cathedral.
- 1.3.2 The existence of a Minster is, however, recorded in Domesday, which notes that the canons of St Frideswide held their land in King Edward's day. The Minster was refounded as a house of regular Augustinian canons during the reign of Henry I in c 1120 and survived until suppressed by Cardinal Wolsey for the establishment of his new foundation, Cardinal College, in 1524.
- 1.3.3 Upon his death in 1529 the college reverted to Henry VIII who refounded it as Henry VIII's College in 1532. Having thus remained unscathed during the Reformation the priory church became the cathedral (refounded as Christ Church) of the new Diocese of Oxford in 1546 (Sherwood & Pevsner 1974, OAU 2001). The cathedral was constructed towards the end of the 12th century although there is no precise documentary evidence of the work.
- 1.3.4 The walls are of rubble with local Oxfordshire stone ashlar and dressings and the roofs are covered with lead and slate. The Latin Chapel contains original sculptures, a cruck roof and stained glass windows, of which one, the second window from the east features St Frideswide. The presbytery, which dates from around 1500, is a remarkable example of late Gothic lierne type vaulting with elaborate pendants normally associated with fan vaulting. The side vaults of the presbytery are additionally roofed by cross barrel vaults. Following the Reformation some bays of the nave were removed and Tom Quad was added. Overall the cathedral is unusually small, at around 50 m long (Sherwood & Pevsner 1974).

1.4 Archaeological evidence

- 1.4.1 In 1963 excavations in and outside the NE chapels uncovered several phases in the development of that part of the cathedral (Sturdy 1990). Evidence of Anglo-Saxon activity was absent, but a few graves, mostly stone lined, were truncated by late 12th-century footings: the northern and eastern walls of the 'pre' Latin Chapel.
- 1.4.2 Subsequent changes to the fabric were noted including the northern wall of the early 13th-century Lady Chapel and the existing mid 14th-century Latin Chapel. Such changes were probably associated with St Frideswide's shrine. Later phases in the development of the Latin Chapel were defined including the lowering and raising of the floor and the installation of wall benches. Decorated tiles from successive medieval floors were found and a partial reconstruction of the pattern of the c. 1500 floor was undertaken; the existing floor surface of the Latin Chapel post-dates the excavations.
- 1.4.3 Further excavations in 1998 immediately outside the south-east end of the cathedral revealed a further 37 burials. The earliest of these cut natural gravel and bone samples have been radio carbon dated to 620-690, the earliest yet for Saxon Oxford. The skeleton came from the bottom of a sequence of graves indicating that the area

had been re-used intensively for burials through the mid and late Saxon period. This constitutes the first unequivocal 7th century date and suggests the presence of a late 7th-century Saxon cemetery on the site of St Frideswide's Priory (OAU 2001).

- 1.4.4 Oxford Archaeology has previously made detailed drawings of the shrine as part of the restoration and relocation project (OAU, 2000).

1.5 Acknowledgements

- 1.5.1 OA extends its thanks to the stone mason, Michael R Eastham and his assistant for their assistance during the project. Architects Howes, Allen and Montgomery of Oxford provided plans of the restoration.
- 1.5.2 John Blair as curator read and commented on OA's WSI for the project and was helpful at all times.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To determine the character and survival of any remains of the medieval church inside the present one
- 2.1.2 To investigate the sub-floor deposits of the east bay of the Latin Chapel, record the position of burial vaults and note any other post-medieval building activities.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 An OA supervisor was in attendance during all refurbishment and excavation works. Recording took the form of a digital colour and standard black-and-white photographic record of all new installation work and some minor excavation work. Plans were also made of the location of ground intrusions, and brief context recording undertaken on the limited excavations.
- 2.2.2 Site recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 COMMENTARY ON THE PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

3.1 Excavation for new shrine location

- 3.1.1 An area measuring 3.6 m by 2.8 m (Fig. 2) was excavated by the contractors under archaeological supervision. The stone slabs of the floor were lifted (Fig. 3, Plate 1). The slabs were of varying sizes, generally measuring 0.6 m by 0.35 m, with a combined thickness of 0.04 m. In the area opened, no bond between the stones was observed though a thin mortar was noted elsewhere.
- 3.1.2 Beneath the slabs were two layers of material. A layer of compact creamy white mortar 0.02 m thick was overlain by a spread of concrete that was 0.02 m thick. A

further layer of concrete beneath was not excavated. No archaeological features or finds were reported from the trench excavation, and the revealed concrete was to be used as the bedding for the relocated shrine structure.

3.2 Dismantling of the shrine

- 3.2.1 The monument was dismantled by the stone masons for restoration, prior to being erected on the new site. The shrine was recorded photographically and the elevations and surfaces were drawn to scale.
- 3.2.2 When the top of the shrine was removed a visual inspection of the monument was undertaken. The structure had clearly been rebuilt and up to three courses of brick forming crude interior walling had been inserted to provide support for the external carved stones (Fig. 3, Plates 2 and 3). The rebuild, probably attributable to the 1889 restoration had seen the corners of the tomb remade with replacement stones (Fig. 3, Plate 4 and Fig. 4, Plate 5). A quantity of builder's debris (Fig. 3, Plates 2 and 3) had been left inside the tomb, which had been constructed on a stone plinth on the cathedral floor.
- 3.2.3 Beneath the plinth was a slate memorial slab measuring 1.8 m by x 0.8 m. The inscription reads

IO:WESTON
LL D
DORMIO IN CHRISTO
ANNO DN̄I MDCXXXII
IVL XX

indicating that the burial dates to 20th July 1632 (Figs 2 & 3, Plates 6-8).

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1.1 No archaeological features were discovered in the course of the excavation for the relocation of the shrine.
- 4.1.2 The rebuild of the shrine had seen plain worked stone used to reconstruct the shrine walls reinforced with crudely constructed brickwork on the interior. Presumably the original stonework had been damaged prior to or during the 1889 operation to move the shrine into the Lady Chapel.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 2 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford

Site code: OXFRID 01

Grid reference: NGR SP 5145 0600

Type of watching brief: Dismantling of St Frideswide's Shrine for restoration and relocation.

Date and duration of project: Four site visits from 2/11/01 to 28/01/02

Area of site: 2.2 x 1.75 m

Summary of results: The shrine had been built on the cathedral floor and with 19th century stone repairs filling in missing pieces.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: 2001.169



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Figure 1: Site Location

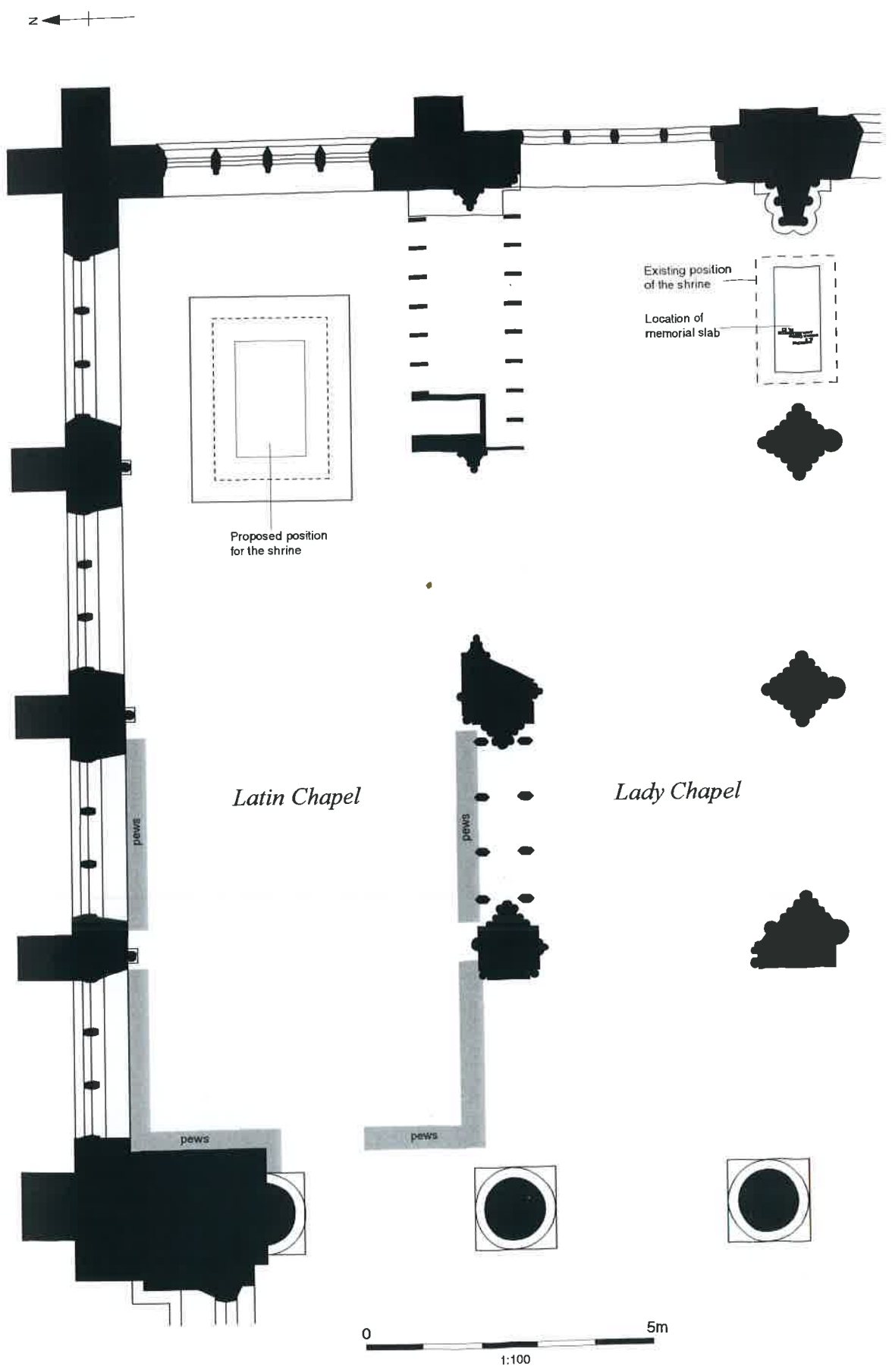


Figure 2 : Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, Showing position of memorial slab and proposed location of shrine



Plate 1: Slabs removed for new base for shrine



Plate 2: Internal view of shrine showing construction looking westward



Plate 3: Internal view of shrine showing construction looking Southward



Plate 4: Exterior of shrine, showing sides, steps and replacement stonework looking South



Plate 5: Exterior of shrine, showing sides, steps and replacement stonework looking North



Plate 6: View of memorial slab looking North west



Plate 7: View of memorial slab looking Southwards

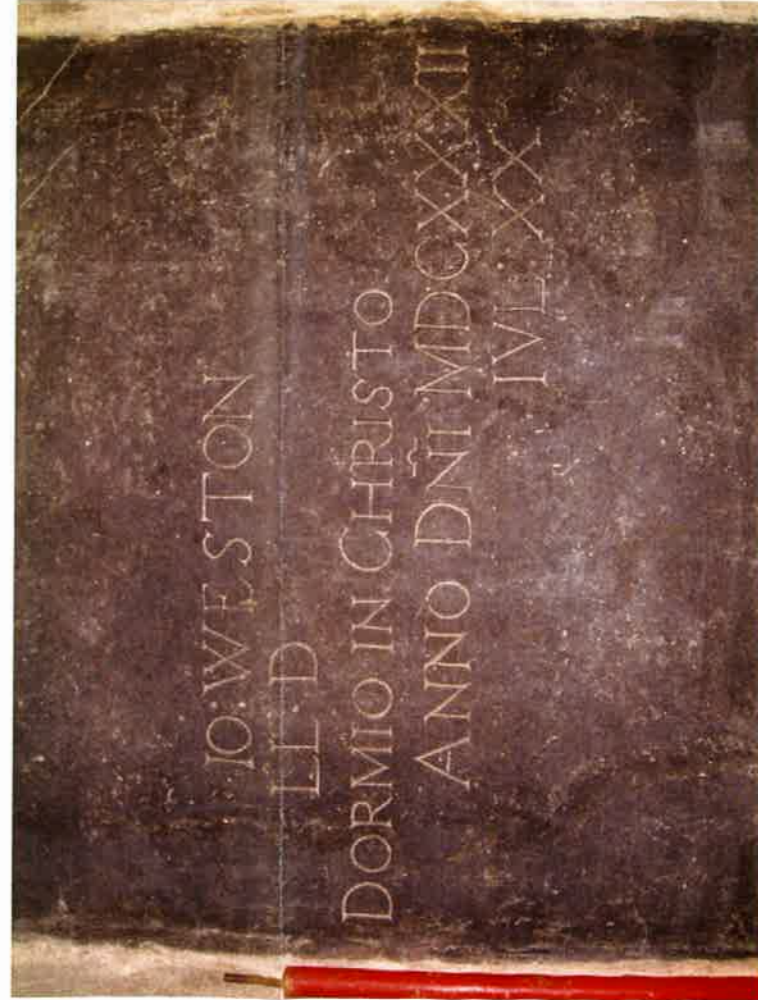


Plate 8: Inscription on memorial slab



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