

Henry VII's Lady Chapel

Both Henry III's Lady Chapel and the (possibly detached) chapel of St Erasmus were demolished in 1502 to make room for the new Lady Chapel. The footings for this new chapel were partially revealed and comprised a Reigate stone raft which, at the W end, incorporated part of an earlier chalk footing for a flying buttress of Henry III's chapel (see above). Subsequently, a row of shops was built along the S wall of the new Lady Chapel, of brick construction or else timber-framed buildings resting on brick foundations. Cartographic evidence suggests that these shops were demolished by the 1740s.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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YORK, YORKSHIRE

SHALLOW SUPPRISES: EXCAVATIONS IN THE RUINS OF YORK'S ST MARY'S ABBEY

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135. ST MARY'S ABBEY, MUSEUM GARDENS, YORK (SE 59941 52176). Improvements to the accessibility of parts of the Museum Gardens, York (under the management of York Museums Trust) in 2014–15 necessitated three watching briefs (consisting of a total of five trenches undertaken in March, April and November 2015) in the Abbey Church. These excavations encountered in situ architectural remains previously unrecorded by modern archaeological techniques and a range of relevant, albeit residual, small finds.⁶

Site history

The site of St Mary's Abbey in the centre of modern day York occupies an historically significant location abutting both the city walls on the E side of its precinct and the River Ouse on its south, while the precinct's NE flank is bounded by one of the main Roman approach roads, which entered Roman *Eboracum* by the NW gate on the site now occupied by Bootham Bar.⁷ Inhumations and cremations of Roman date are recorded further west along this road. A feature, about which there has been some speculation, is proposed as an 'annexe' or 'fortified enclosure' on the NW side of the fortress.⁸ Within this, discoveries include those by S E Miller in 1928 in the garden of King's Manor, tracing a Roman street running NW–SE, building remains and occupation deposits. Excavations (never formally published) in the early 1950s by George Willmot, then curator of the Yorkshire Museum, identified a series of Roman layers and structures dating from the late 1st century AD beneath the church's S aisle.⁹

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⁶ The excavation results are archived with York Museums Trust under the accession codes YORYM : 2015.126, 2015.127, and 2015.596. OASIS IDs: yorkmuse1-208456, yorkmuse1-209702, and yorkmuse1-233470.

⁷ RCHME 1962, 2–3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 45–7.

⁹ Willmot 1953, 22–3. Excavation archive in the Yorkshire Museum.

Little is known of the abbey precinct between the end of the Roman period and the foundation of St Mary's Abbey in the late 11th century. In the Anglo-Scandinavian period (c 866–1066) it is thought that the precinct was the site of *Earlsburh*, referred to in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in connection with Siward, Earl of Northumbria, who died in 1055. He was buried in the nearby church of St Olaf in Marygate which he is said to have founded. During excavations of 1952–56, George Wilmott claimed to have found some Anglian potsherds including one of Ipswich ware; in addition, there was 9th-century metalwork, notably a strap-end, pin, buckle and ring.¹⁰

St Mary's Abbey was founded in 1088 on land given to monks of the Benedictine Order by William II. The plan of the Norman church and some of the claustral buildings were revealed in excavations in the 1820s.¹¹ In the 13th century came major rebuilding campaigns under Simon de Warwick and there was later renewal and expansion of the surrounding buildings and infrastructure. Dissolution in the 16th century reduced much of the abbey structure; subsequently the land was used as private gardens as part of the King's Manor complex. The Yorkshire Philosophical Society acquired the gardens in 1828 in advance of construction of the Yorkshire Museum on the site in 1830. The gardens were landscaped by architect Sir John Murray Naysmith and opened to the public in 1835. In 1960 the gardens and abbey site passed into the trust of the City of York Council, and it became a free public park. Since 2002 the Museum Gardens site has been managed by York Museums Trust.

At least three major phases of excavation have occurred within the Abbey Church: in 1828–29 by Charles Wellbeloved in advance of the construction of the Yorkshire Museum; in 1901–2 by Walter Brierly who identified the earlier Norman phase in the N transept; and in 1912–14 by Walter Harvey Brook and Edwin Ridsdale Tate.

Excavation background

Developments in 2015 required the installation of services to provide lighting to new pathways and a new shallow ramp within the bounds of the Abbey Church of St Mary's. Three individual watching briefs were undertaken by the author in three phases. Phase 1 consisted of Trenches 1, 2 and 3 (Fig 6), positioned along the line of a cable trench running from the N transept of the abbey and across the nave at an oblique angle to the S transept. The trenches were located across the robbed-out remains of the N transept wall, and at two additional points. Phase 2 originally comprised a single small trench (Trench 4) at the NE edge of the S transept, but discovery of extensive in situ architectural remains caused this trench to be extended twice. Phase 3 was a single trench (Trench 5) placed at the N edge of the nave, immediately adjacent to the two columns marking the crossing. Given the nature of the investigations, all trenches were excavated to a variable maximum depth (max 600 mm) and architectural features retained in position, and so no terminal depths or full site phasing could be attained.

Results

The most striking result of these excavations was the discovery of in situ remains at remarkably shallow depths (Figs 7 and 8): for instance, Trenches 4 and 5 both encountered structural remains within 10 cm of the modern ground surface. Photographs from the 19th- and early 20th-century excavations did not point to such architectural survivals and yet all had

¹⁰ Tweddle et al 1999.

¹¹ Willmot 1953; Wellbeloved 1829.

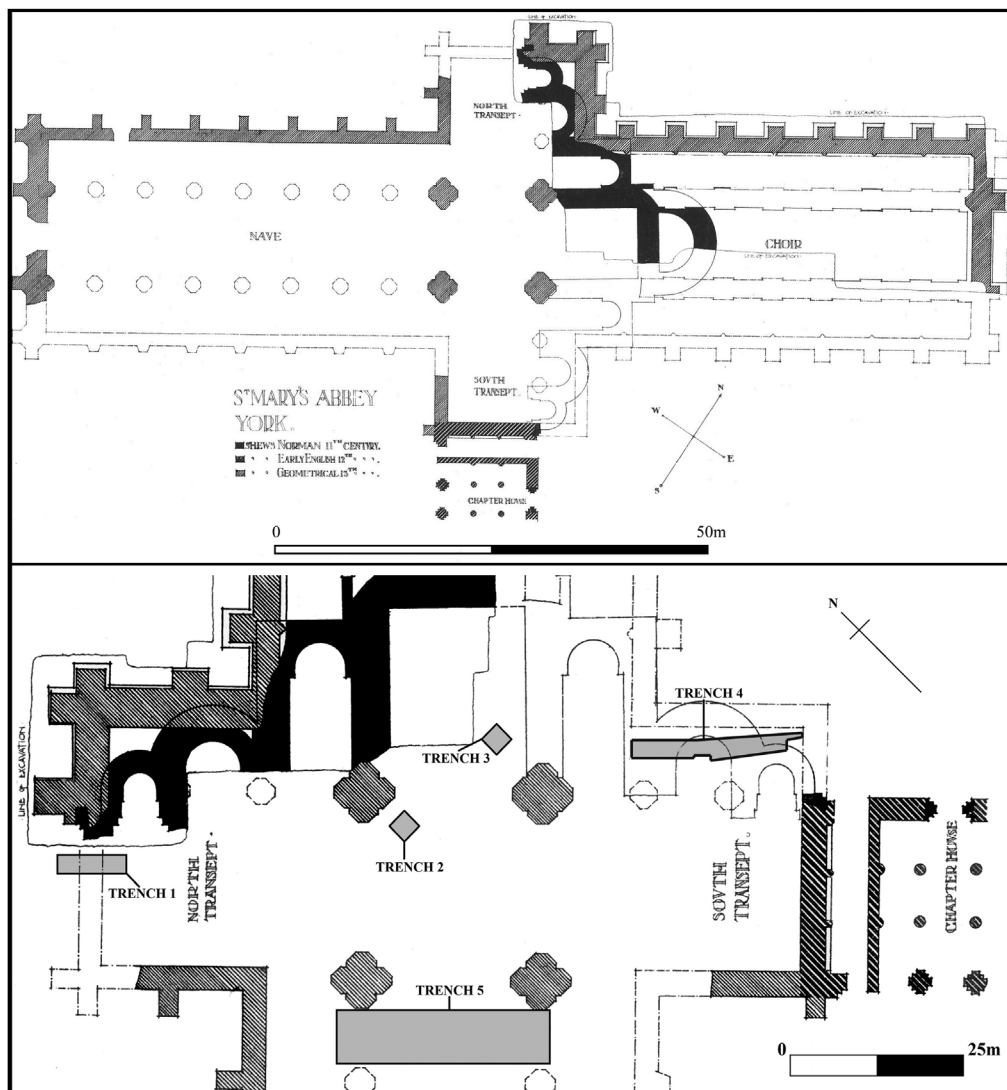


FIG 6

Top — 1902 plan of St Mary's Abbey Church showing assumed plan of the S transept apses (after Brierly 1902).
 Bottom — Locations of 2015 trenches within the Abbey Church. Plans © York Museums Trust.

presumably been encountered then but without formal recording taking place — stone robbing from the exposed building foundations in Trench 4 certainly suggests recent exposure. It is clear that the modern ground surface has been consolidated to a level contemporary with the 13th-century Abbey Church, but desk-based assessment in advance of excavation did not suggest that anything near the level of the underlying in situ archaeological remains were encountered.



FIG 7

The in situ architectural remains between the first and second piers of the S aisle. *Photo: author.*

Perhaps our most significant discovery was the curved structure of an apsidal feature in the S transept. 19th-century excavations in the N transept had mapped the location of the Norman church and its two apsidal chapels — a ground plan assumed to be accurate in 20th-century plans of the Abbey based on a 1914 drawing by Edwin Ridsdale Tate, who had used Brierly's 1902 plan (Fig 6). The discovery of a single apse, central in the width of the S transept, does not correlate with the previously published plans. The ground disturbance to the east of the surviving apse also puts into question the published evidence for the second smaller apse suggested in Figure 6.¹²

Extensive parts of the interior building foundation were recorded at very shallow depths (Fig 7). Trench 5 revealed substantial parts of the foundations between the first and second piers of the S aisle — in remarkably good condition considering the destructive nature of previous subsoil interventions in the area. The depth of Trench 5 shallowed from south-east to north-west, and so a similar survival between the piers of the N aisle was not encountered. Post-excavation investigations have uncovered a set of digital photographs of 2006 of the Museum Gardens in drought, in which these features are visible as grass marks. And a minimal report of a 1944 investigation by the Bootham School Archaeological Society around the first pier of the S arcade in the nave seems to confirm these findings — the modern excavations did not intercept the 1944 trenches. Both resources will help to inform future works on the site.

Small finds

The small finds assemblage was almost entirely residual in nature, with material of Roman to modern date. Nonetheless any datable indicators of the site's earlier phases are useful archaeological markers. The earliest elements comprised sherds of Nene Valley Colour Coated Ware,

¹² For full discussion of the apsidal feature see Parker, forthcoming.

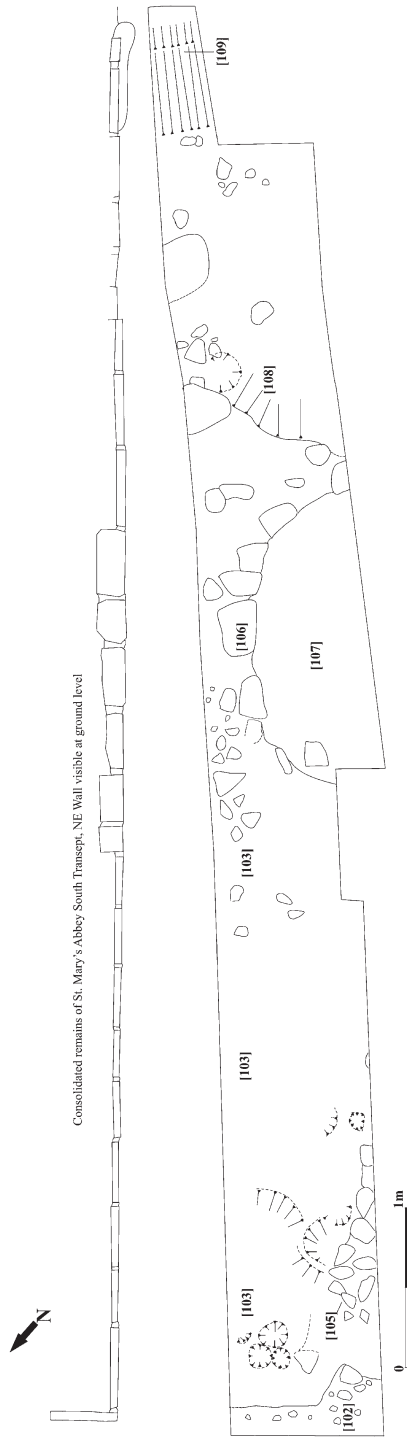


FIG 8
Plan of Trench 4 showing the medieval apsidal feature and areas of disturbance and stone robbing. *Plan: author.*

produced in the Peterborough region from the mid-2nd century onwards. The scant fragments of early medieval ceramics from the Abbey Precinct have been added to with the discovery of a rim sherd of a locally produced coarse ware bowl and a single sherd of Stamford Ware. Of the later finds, medieval floor and roof tiles were recorded, plus post-medieval Black wares, Sgraffitto Ware and blue and white transfer-printed porcelain.

There are at least four records of articulated skeletons having been excavated in situ within the nave of the Abbey Church in the 20th century,¹³ and the discovery in this area of 11 fragments of human remains, deriving from at least four adult individuals, re-inforces the view that additional, stratified human remains may still exist here. Since the location of a formal cemetery at St Mary's Abbey is not yet determined, the potential of such remains is significant.

Conclusion

The major conclusion of these small-scale but valuable investigations has been the good preservation of archaeological and architectural remains immediately beneath the modern ground surface in the church of St Mary's Abbey, York. The medieval apse in the S transept was recorded in a position different to that previously assumed and no trace of a second apse was found. Since the area is part of York Museum Gardens and subject to much public access and use, so any future intrusive works need to be wary of these remains in order to preserve their integrity. The site, generally, has excellent research potential because of the lack of understanding of the pre-Norman phases; while the extent to which stratified remains may be encountered beneath the Abbey remains conjectural, it promises much.

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PEMBROKESHIRE

NEVERN CASTLE 2008–2015: CLOSING IN ON THE FIRST WELSH STONE CASTLE?

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240. NEVERN CASTLE (SN 082 401). The history, geophysical survey and description of Nevern Castle, as well as the initial results from the first four seasons of excavations, were reported in *Medieval Archaeology* **55**. Excavations continue to be directed by the author for a partnership of Durham University Department of Archaeology, The Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and Nevern Community Council who are together researching, conserving and developing this site.¹⁴ Excavations are planned to continue until 2018, but, as will be reported here, seasons 2014 and 2015 have significantly changed our understanding of this castle, revealing evidence

¹³ A 1994 watching brief by York Archaeological Trust, see Marwood 1994; George Wilmot's excavation photographs, unpublished collection in the Yorkshire Museum.

¹⁴ All the annual Interim Reports are available on the Durham University website: <<http://www.dur.ac.uk/archaeology/research/projects/?mode=project&id=405>> [accessed 25 September 2016]