

# RE-UNITING THE STONES OF HYDE ABBEY

## Hyde Abbey stone – where did it come from and how did it get to Hyde?

The builders constructing an abbey in Winchester faced the problem of there being no local source of building stone except for flint. Whilst acceptable for foundations and infill of walls, this material was not deemed to be of sufficient quality for facework in major buildings; the builders of the abbey were aiming to build a new abbey at Hyde that would rival the best in Europe.

With the building of the new abbey, New Minster would become redundant. However, a fundamental tenet of the Benedictines was that there should be continuity of services that was unbroken day and night, 365 days a year. The abbey would have access, of course, to the building stone of the New Minster. However, this would not have been available until at least the east end of the new building and possibly the transepts as well, had been completed sufficiently for services to continue on the move to Hyde in 1110.

The nearest significant source of quality building stone was Selborne Malmstone but this was also unacceptable for facework. The nearest source of quality stone was from the Chilmark/Chicks Grove quarries. However these were 35 miles away and of limited availability. Thus the builders turned to such sources as Quarr on the Isle of Wight, Caen in Normandy and, to a limited extent, Purbeck. Despite the longer distances, the low (comparative) cost of sea transport made its use more economical.

Overland transport has been quoted as costing as much as the ex-quarry value of the stone for a 15 mile journey. This severely limited the use of stone where there was no access to navigable rivers or the sea. Whilst it is possible that the River Itchen was navigable for barges as far as Winchester during the period that the abbey was built, there could have been a five to ten mile journey by two wheeled cart to the Hyde site.

### Hyde Abbey stone under the microscope

The samples displayed here have been described and analysed by the Master Mason, Ross Lovett. The stones have been provided by Winchester Museums Service and arise from archaeological excavations of the Hyde Abbey site, which took place between 1995 and 2000.

### Future Research

It appears that no overall analysis has been made of the types of stone, and the relative quantities, used in the various buildings of Hyde Abbey. We aim to carry out future research in this area based upon the several hundred 'finds' that have been retained from the various excavations into the abbey.

### Routes to Hyde

The visualisation here, showing boats used to transport the stone from Caen, is based on a tableau in Bayeux Museum of stone being loaded for use in the building of Winchester Cathedral.

