

A CENTURY OF SCEPTICISM

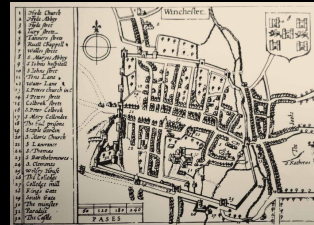
The storm of controversy brewed up John Mellor's showmanship gradually subsided. There were still many sceptics but, nonetheless, the fascination with the site of Hyde Abbey persisted.

The first major renewal of activity came in the 1890's. By this time public interest in King Alfred had soared on a wave of imperial idealism and, with the approach looming of the thousandth anniversary of his death (mistakenly to be believed to be 901 although actually it was 899), Winchester worthies decided to revisit the grave site. The key mover was Alfred Bowker, Lord Mayor of Winchester from 1897 to 1898, who was responsible for the installation of the statue of King Alfred in the Broadway and heavily involved in the 1901 Millennium celebrations for Alfred. Under his auspices in 1897 there was a fresh excavation in the area of Mellor's work and various smaller bones appear to have resurfaced and been reburied in the 'backfill'. Their significance was not, perhaps, fully understood.

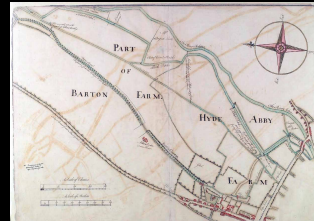
Community archaeology and 'The Search for Alfred'

Between 1995 and 1999 a community project - 'The Search for Alfred' - was led by the Winchester Museum Service. This ranged extensively over the whole site of Hyde Abbey (not just the abbey church) and achieved significant results in clarifying details about the abbey buildings. There was also much excitement at the discovery of fine sculpted female head, probably a corbel, which highlighted once more the quality of the carving in the abbey.

When it came to an examination of the choir and altar area of the church, the excavators were able to get a better understanding of the possible location of the royal graves. Meanwhile, at the upper level, a female pelvis was found which proved to be of the late medieval period. But, as far as human remains were concerned, nothing else of significance was noted at the time.



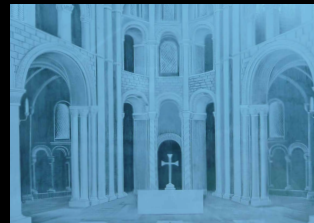
Eighteenth century map illustrating the suburb of Hyde and the site of Hyde Abbey and the church of St. Bartholomew. Source: Hampshire Archives and Local Studies.



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1999 Hyde Abbey Community Archaeology excavation. Photo: Winchester Museums.



A representation of the choir of the abbey church from the glass engraving by Tracey Sheppard on Hyde Abbey Garden. Photo: Sophie Cunningham Dawe

Artist Kate Dicker's painting of Hyde Abbey Garden from the Hyde900 exhibition, 'Reimagining Treasures of Hyde Abbey', 2010. Image: Kate Dicker.

