

THE HYDE900 INVESTIGATION 2010-2014: SETTING UP

The year 2010 marked the nine hundredth anniversary of the establishment of Hyde Abbey and the arrival in Hyde of the bones of the Wessex Royal family of King Alfred the Great, his wife Alswitha and their son King Edward.

In order to mark the occasion a group of local residents set-up Hyde900 as a community-based charity to organize a wide series of events to celebrate the history of the area, its environment and the character of its residents. A range of activities followed including, notably, a re-enactment of the procession which brought the royal bones to Hyde. But there were also a number of exhibitions organized, books written and published, literary groups established, concerts held and social events set-up.

With so much focus on the legacy on the abbey, the question was raised whether advantage should be taken of the latest technology to examine the contents of the Unmarked Grave (now popularly regarded as containing the royal bones).

With the encouragement of the Revd. Cliff Bannister and the support of the University of Winchester, a Grave Investigation Group (made up of a doctor, a scientist, a lawyer, a journalist, a local studies librarian, an artist and an archaeologist) undertook the complicated tasks of persuading the Diocesan authorities to give approval for the exhumation and testing of the bones. Following two years of work and discussion with various partners – and against a background of renewed national interest in royal bones following the discovery of Richard III in Leicester – a ‘faculty petition’ (that is, a request for permission) was submitted to His Hon. Judge Christopher Clark, Q.C. the Chancellor of the Diocese of Winchester in connection with the bones in the Unmarked Grave.

*Plan of Hyde Abbey overlaid on the contemporary street layout.
Image: Dr Christine Grover*

In Spring 2013 approval was given for the Hyde900 project to go ahead and on Monday 25th March, in the presence of a BBC film crew, the grave was opened by a team from the University of Winchester led by osteo-archaeologist Dr. Katie Tucker. This revealed a large collection of bones including those which appeared to be those found by Mellor.

These were then taken to the University of Winchester and stored until August when permission was given by the Diocese for Dr. Tucker to clean and examine the bones and prepare them for radiocarbon dating by Dr. Tom Higham of the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit at the University of Oxford. What would the analysis reveal?



*Scene from the Hyde900 community procession in 2010, from the site of New Minster to Hyde, to mark the 900th anniversary of the arrival of the remains of Alfred the Great and his family in Hyde.
Photo: Joe Low.*



Prayers were led by the Bishop of Basingstoke before the opening of the Unmarked Grave. Photo: BBC/Hyde900.

