

HYDE ABBEY - REDISCOVERING THE LOST MINSTER OF ALFRED THE GREAT

A proposal to 're-imagine' digitally and in situ, the abbey church where King Alfred was buried - the 'Hyde Abbey King Alfred' project

STARTING POINT

Between 1110 and 1539 Hyde Abbey was one of the glories of Winchester. It housed the remains of two Anglo-Saxon Kings - Alfred the Great and Edward the Elder - and, thanks to

its collection of important relics, it was a focus for pilgrims. Its library contained beautiful books and it was a centre for music and prayer. Its 'mitred' abbots were among the most

important clerics in the land. And the abbey buildings - the church, the cloisters, the almoner's hall, the abbot's residence - constituted a large but delightful architectural treasure.



Bird's eye impressions of Hyde Abbey by Nick McPherson

This all came to an end abruptly in 1539 when the abbey church was 'dissolved' as part of Henry VIII's reformation of the English Church. All the principal buildings were demolished and the stone and wood materials were rapidly recycled across Winchester and the surrounding area. The abbey was effectively erased at an astonishing pace and little remained 'above ground' to show that the abbey had ever existed.

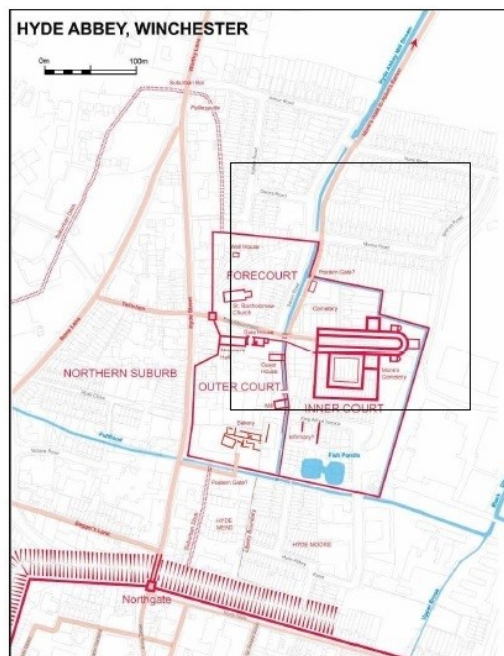
In due course the area became so degraded that it was chosen as the site of a small prison - a bridewell - prompting William Cobbet, the famous polemicist, to comment in 1825:

"How am I to describe what I felt when I saw in Hyde Meadow, a county Bridewell, standing on the very spot, where stood the abbey which was founded and endowed by ALFRED, which contained the bones of that maker of the English name, and also those of the learned monk Saint Grimbald whom Alfred brought to England."

In due course the Bridewell too was brought down and housing erected on some parts of the site. Despite being a place of national significance in the heritage of England the abbey precincts were in danger of being lost entirely. But that is now changing.

RE-DISCOVERING WHAT WAS LOST

A combination of recent excavations, the development of the Hyde Abbey Garden and media interest in Alfred the Great and his burial site creates an opportunity to 're-imagine' the abbey for the benefit of local people and visitors.



Plan of Hyde Abbey overlaid on today's street plan

The challenge is to stimulate visitors' imaginations so that they get a sense of the majesty which once covered this site between a car park and the former road to London.



Can recycled building materials, like these, from Hyde Abbey provide a clue to the original 'architectural DNA' of the abbey buildings?

THE VISION

Our VISION is to put in place an exciting infrastructure of information and interpretation around the site physically and digitally so that local people and visitors can engage with the abbey as it would have been at the height of its glory. The aim is to create an understanding of both Alfred and his legacy and the story of the abbey church in which he was buried and where his remains, almost certainly, still lie - scattered under the Hyde Abbey Garden. It will enable people to understand how Hyde fits into the bigger picture of Winchester's major exhibition programme, 'Kings & Scribes'.

For too long the site of Hyde Abbey has been overlooked. Now it can get the recognition it deserves.