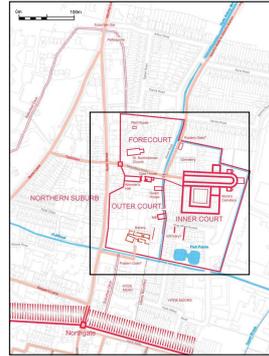


Hyde Abbey: A Typical Benedictine Monastery of the 12th Century



The translation of the bones of King Alfred to Hyde Abbey in 1110



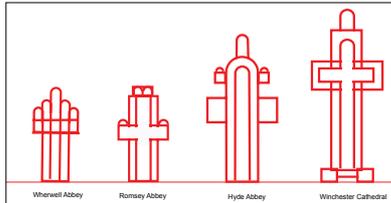
Plan of Hyde Abbey overlaid on to today's street plan

Hyde Abbey was exceptional in its age because it had the honour and responsibility of looking after the remains of King Alfred the Great and his family. It also acquired a number of relics, notably those of St. Josse (also known as St. Judoc). This made it in later years, an important

and early stopping off point on the pilgrims' way from Winchester to Canterbury. The royal graves were set before the High Altar while the side chapels might well have hosted the relics. Pilgrims would have processed around the side aisles to absorb the holiness which emanated from them.

In purely architectural terms, however, Hyde Abbey would have been very typical of Benedictine abbeys of the Norman era. By the 12th century what might be regarded as a standard pattern had emerged in the design of these abbey churches along with their associated cloisters, dormitories,

accommodation for visitors and other offices. Consequently the abbey church built by Henry I in Reading in the 1120s – inspired one can reasonably imagine by Hyde Abbey – was very much along the same lines as Hyde in its layout.



Comparative length of Hyde Abbey and other contemporary abbeys and churches



Capital example on display at St. Bartholomew, Hyde

Building Materials

Because of the predominance of chalk throughout much of Hampshire, builders have had to rely on the importation of stone in order to create imposing, high status buildings. Flint was widely available, as can be seen in the construction of more modest buildings such as St. Bartholomew, Hyde (originally the chapel for local laity built within the precincts of the monastery). Moreover, flint could also be used for the core of walls and this was probably the case with Hyde Abbey. However, for the exposed surfaces of the abbey, as with the

Cathedral, stone was necessary. The principal types of stone used in Winchester during the Norman period were:

QUARR STONE – from the Isle of Wight which also featured prominently in the cathedral

CAEN STONE – brought across from Normandy, which was particularly popular for fine carvings (such as the decorated capitals)

PURBECK MARBLE – might have been used in Hyde Abbey, although it is likely to have been recycled out of the immediate area after the Dissolution.

Decoration

Artistically, the plain solidity of Norman architecture with its rounded arches and sturdy pillars would have been relieved by the lively inventiveness of capitals and corbels in the cloister and elsewhere (done in the Winchester style). In the case of Hyde, a small number of distinguished examples remain of both of these features (on display in St. Bartholomew). These carvings are comparable to those from Reading Abbey in Reading Museum and might, conceivably, have been executed by the same craftsmen.

Today the Priory Church of St Bartholomew the Great in Smithfield, City of London, built in the 1120s, gives some sense of what the east end of Hyde Abbey would have looked and felt like. It is also clear from decorated carved remnants (found particularly in the external north wall of St. Bartholomew) that Hyde Abbey evolved over time and embraced other styles notably those from the Decorated period (roughly fourteenth century).

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