

Fig. 1: plan of St. Saviour's Cathedral showing position of Harvard Chapel, formerly the medieval chapel of St. John (Jarrod Publishing 1990)

# The early history and development of St. Marie Overie Priory, Southwark: the 12th-century Chapel of St. John

Simon Roffey

## Introduction

DESPITE ITS cathedral status and its long history -- dating back to perhaps as early as the 7th century -- the cathedral of St. Saviour's in Southwark, "apart from Lambeth, one of the most important medieval monuments in south London"<sup>1</sup>, has received comparatively little archaeological attention.

In the 12th century London's first Augustinian house, the priory of St. Marie Overie, was founded on the site and, despite restoration throughout the 19th century, much of the medieval fabric from the former priory church remains. As a result the

Southwark Cathedral Archaeological Recording Project (SCARP) was set up in 1996 with the role of both recording the medieval remains and consequently interpreting the early history and development of the priory church.

An initial phase of the project (SCARP 2) concentrated on the recording of the former chapel of St. John, now the Harvard Memorial Chapel, (Fig. 1) in October/November 1997<sup>2</sup>, with a team of students from University College London Institute of Archaeology, under the direction of Simon Roffey (Institute of Archaeology) and Nathalie Cohen (Museum of London).

1. N. Pevsner *The Buildings of England*, London (1952) vol 2, 389.

2. S. J. Roffey (1998) *The Early History and Development of St.*

*Marie Overie Priory, Southwark: The 12th Century Chapel of St. John and Associated Cloistral Buildings* unpublished University of London dissertation.

## The Augustinian Priory of St. Marie Overie, Southwark

Like many other medieval foundations, the origins of the Priory of St. Marie Overie are obscure. Tradition has it that there was a nunnery founded on the site in the 7th century which later, in the 9th century, was re-founded by the Bishop of Winchester as a college of priests.

Whatever its early history, the Domesday book of 1086 mentions that there was a *monasterium* on the site during the reign of Edward<sup>3</sup>, and it would appear that it was re-founded as an Augustinian priory in 1106 by William Giffard Bishop of Winchester and two Norman knights, William de Pont de l'Arche and William Dauncey<sup>4</sup>.

Little is known about the 12th-century church. However, certain medieval features do remain

3. *Victoria County History: Surrey* (ed.) H. Malden 4 Vol. (1902-14) 154-5.

4. M. Carlin *Medieval Southwark* (1996) 67.

within the later rebuilding, particularly in the north side of the church, where fabric dating to the 12th century can be witnessed in the north of the present nave (Fig. 2), and within some elements of the 13th-century east end. Most important, though, there are more substantial remains, which have stylistic features pertaining to the 12th century, within the former chapel of St. John and on the exterior of its north wall, on the east side of the north transept.

## The medieval Chapel of St. John (Fig. 3)

The chapel has been said to be one of the oldest, if not the oldest part of the surviving church<sup>5</sup>. The present chapel interior was restored in the 'Gothic' style, so beloved by Victorian 'restorers', in 1907 by C. Blomfield the cathedral architect. The cost was

5. W. Thompson *The History and Antiquities of the Cathedral Church of St. Saviours (St. Marie Overie)* (1910) 130.

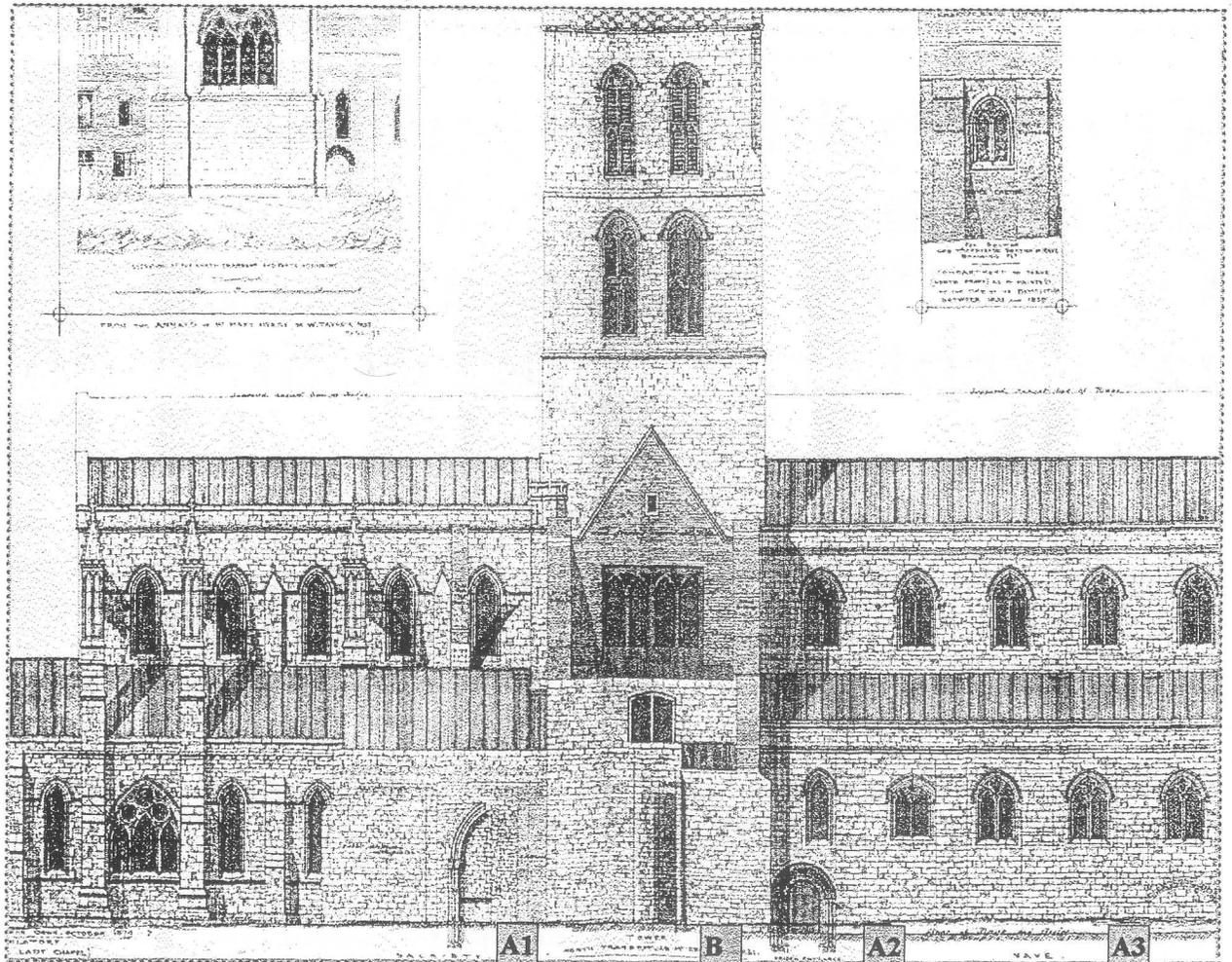


Fig. 2: north elevation of cathedral showing medieval features visible before restoration: (A1) on north chapel wall; (A2) Priors entrance; (A3) round headed doorway leading to cloister and (B) traverse wall of indeterminate date but could have been a partition wall sectioning off chapter house from vestibule (see Fig. 6) (Dollman 1881 plate 7, see fn 6)

borne by Harvard University whose benefactor, John Harvard, was baptised in the church in 1607.

Work carried out in the chapel interior in the 19th century revealed the foundation of an apsidal terminus underneath the chapel floor<sup>6</sup>. Taylor dated this feature to the late 12th or 13th century<sup>7</sup>, though as will be seen later, this is doubtful and an earlier date is more probable.

With regard to other existing features within the chapel, Canon Thompson noticed, in the late 19th century, two round arches covered with plaster and whitewash “on the west side...”. He goes on to state that this is “Norman work disguised by restoration”<sup>8</sup>.

Part of the fabric of the apsidal chapel had also been revealed in elevation on the exterior of the chapel north wall during restorations in 1847 under George Gwilt. The removal of part of the external wall revealed “part of a circular building faced over externally with flat rubble work”, which upon removal of the latter, “much ornamental work of the Saxon, or Anglo-Norman period became exposed”<sup>9</sup>.

### Survey of the former medieval Chapel of St. John 1997 (SCARP 2)

#### *Interior fabric*

#### **Vaulting shaft in north-east corner of chapel**

The remains of a column from the former medieval chapel was found to be encased in the fabric of 19th-century restorative work. The column, constructed of Caen stone, as found, exists to a height of 2.91m and is compound in form, with a central circular shaft with double roll moulded base set within a diagonally placed square plinth.

The wall to the north of the column has been said to be of early-12th-century date<sup>10</sup>, whilst that to the east of it is modern, though a chip-carved moulding, datable to the early 12th century, can be seen to run behind it. Though no evidence remains for the capital or spring for a vaulting component, it could be conjectured that the column formed part of an original vaulting shaft of the 12th-century chapel.

The RCHM report states that it is a vaulting shaft for the original apsidal chapel (ovid), though due to its position, with regard to evidence for the position of the apsidal terminus on the north

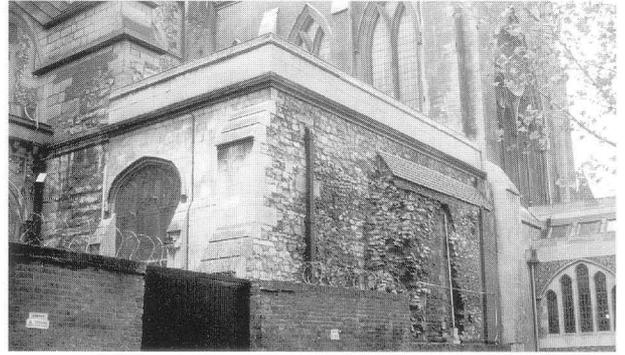


Fig. 3: the Harvard chapel looking southwest. Note off-set of former east wall of chapter house and apsidal feature and buttress key stones partially visible underneath later medieval re-facing. (photo: SCARP)

elevation, this is unlikely, and in all probability it was a vaulting shaft for the later rectangular, extended, chapel.

#### **Elevation of west side of chapel**

The main features of the west side of the chapel under investigation comprised both the northernmost and central piers of the open arcade which formed the original entrance to the chapel from the north transept (Fig. 4).

The height of the northernmost pier is around 3.30m. The pier itself, as can be seen by the respective drawing, is in fact leaning northwards and has been encased within the later fabric of the north wall of the chapel. The height of the central pier is around 3.25m. The northern edge of this pier also appears to lean slightly to the north, though its southern edge, in comparison, is relatively vertical.

It seems that this factor, and the fact that both the masonry and coursing of the northern edge is comparatively different to that of the rest of the pier, suggest that it was reconstructed during the general restoration of the 19th century, or during the chapel's restoration of 1907.

The northernmost section of the central pier has 13 stages of courses, as opposed to 15 from that of the reconstructed section. The northern pier also has 13 stages of coursing and it seems that this factor, coupled with the fact that both the northern side of the central pier, and the northern pier itself, are leaning northwards could suggest that they are of contemporary date.

6. W. Taylor *The Annals of St. Mary Overy, An Historical Descriptive Account of St. Saviours Church and Parish*. Nichols and Son (1833) 37; F. T. Dollman *The Priory of St. Mary Overy, Southwark* (1881) 22.

7. W. Taylor *op cit* fn 6, 37.

8. W. Thompson *The History and Antiquities of the Cathedral Church of St. Saviours (St. Marie Overie)* (1884) 130.

9. S. Benson *St. Saviours, Southwark* (3rd edn, 1885) 2.

10. *East London* Royal Commission for Historic Monuments (1930).

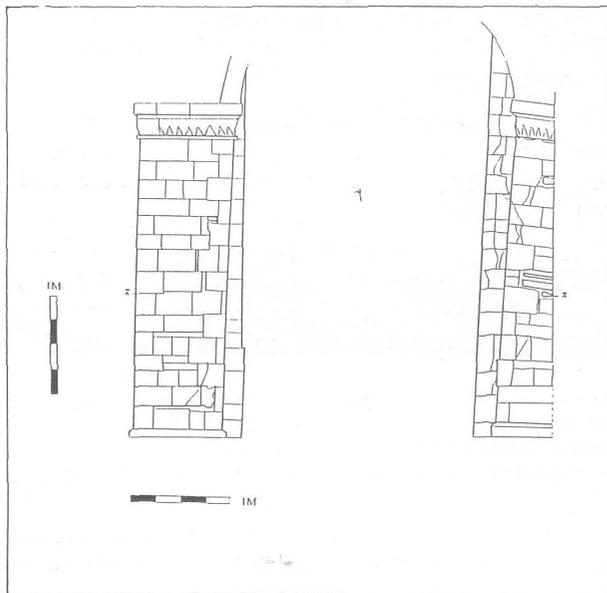


Fig 4 : elevation of early-12th-century piers on west side of chapel, looking west. Note relationship of chapel piers and that of the possible later 12th century transept piers visible behind inside edges of the former.

The leaning of the piers could be due to either the fires of c. 1212, or the 1390s, or general land subsidence caused by flooding. The *Annals of Bermondsey* relate the regular occurrence of floods from the 1090's onwards which eventually led to the canons petitioning the king against "the violence of the river"<sup>11</sup>. Excavations of the former chapter house site revealed evidence for a "very destructive flood" at the end of the 13th century<sup>12</sup>.

Architecturally the two piers are of 'square type' and though comparatively unusual, do have similarities to those found in the choir aisles of St. Bartholomew's, Smithfield. However, it can also be noted that the piers have some similarities to piers of Anglo-Saxon date. Examples from the Anglo-Saxon period of similar designs of pier and arch can be seen at Worth, Sussex; Skipwith, Yorks; Breamore, Hants and St. Mary's Stoke d'Abernon in Surrey<sup>13</sup>.

The *abaci* of both piers bear a simple hatchet design (though that on the central pier is restoration). This particular type of moulding, assigned to the Norman period, can be seen at Winchester Cathedral and on the square piers of the choir of St. Bartholomew's. It is a possibility that the hatchet ornament at Southwark was added at a later date.

11. A. Graham 'The Bonded Warehouse, Montague Close' in *Southwark Excavations 1972-74* London Middlesex Archaeol Soc and Surrey Archaeol Soc Joint Pub no. 1 (1978) 102.

In this respect, the *abacus* of the northern pier especially, appears to be constructed of a different stone type, possibly Caen stone.

It could be conjectured therefore that the arches show some Anglo-Saxon elements in their design. It is possible that they date from before the Augustinian foundation of 1106, perhaps being the remains of the Anglo-Saxon Minster church. But more likely they represent the work of local masons still influenced by pre-conquest architectural tradition.

### Elevations of exterior fabric

Initial investigation of the exterior fabric of the north chapel wall revealed several related features. These included an apsidal feature, an associated buttress, and part of a shaft with the spring of an arch or wall rib. The latter also appeared to be related to the remains of an off-set of a former east wall directly abutting the chapel wall. Unfortunately, it was not possible to record this offset because it was inaccessible at the time.

### The Apsidal Chapel

The earliest features of this elevation appear to be the remains of the original eastern apse of the original chapel and an associated buttress directly to the west (Fig. 5). The apse is made up of randomly coursed ragstone rubble. The lower part of the revealed feature has the remains of a string course made from Reigate stone. One particular moulded portion of this course remains and, though now badly eroded, still shows the remains of a chip-carved design. Interestingly this is of the same design as that found within the chapel, which could suggest that the chapel was rebuilt and extended at a time not too distant from its original apsidal construction.

Evidence for the buttress can be inferred by the remains of its eastern Caen key stones seen within the fabric. The western part of the buttress is now gone, its key stones probably hidden behind the later wall re-facing. Where some of this facing has been removed, evidence for the buttress's chalk rubble core can be seen.

The apsidal chapel terminus and associated buttress appear to have been covered over at a later date by a random coursed ragstone rubble facing which is still in existence at the west end of the elevation. This is probably due to the fact that the chapel was extended by about 4.0m and provided with a square end.

12. G. Dawson 'Montague Close excavations 1969-1973' *Res Vol Surrey Archaeol Soc* no. 3 (1976) [37-58] 39.

13. H. M. Taylor & J. Taylor *Anglo-Saxon Architecture* (1965).

The existence of comparative mouldings on the apsidal feature and on the later extended chapel end could suggest that the dates for the origins of the apsidal chapel and its later extension are not too far apart. Though it could be claimed that the string course within the chapel is re-used, it must be conjectured that this style was, to some extent, still in fashion.

### The Chapter House

The compound column with its three shafts are constructed from Reigate stone (though the *abacus* of the capital could be made from Caen stone<sup>14</sup>).

The circular shafts are formed in orders and the outer edges of the respective *abaci* are rounded off by a simple roll moulding. These are features which could point to a late 12th century or early-13th-century date<sup>15</sup>. A comparative type, for example, can be seen at Winchester, and on the base of the 12th-century door at Sempringham, Lincs<sup>16</sup>.

Dollman's drawing of the shafts in the 19th century<sup>17</sup> also suggests slightly flattened roll-moulded bases, now lost or encased in the lower brickwork. This is a type introduced in some Cistercian churches and also in the second rebuilding at Canterbury in the later 12th century<sup>18</sup>. This might also correspond with the suggested rebuilding of the nave in the 'Canterbury style' during the later 12th century, suggested by Lethaby<sup>19</sup>.

The design of the shafts are also similar to the door jambs of the elaborate 'prior's entrance' within the north wall of the nave, datable to the second half of the 12th cen-

ture. Both features have jambs with recessed orders containing circular shafts with similar roll-moulded bases and *abaci*.

The fact that the shafts appear to be stylistically later than the vaulting shaft within the chapel could also suggest a date later than the early 12th century.

Careful examination of the column capital and spring seems to reveal that part of it would have projected northwards (this part having been broken off at some stage) and appears to be related to the remains of an off-set of an east wall. It could therefore be conjectured that this feature is part of a vaulting shaft for an adjoining building.

The column and shafts could provide the corner support, or jamb, for a vault. The remains of the voussoirs, or stone segments, within the wall could be from an arch or vault 'frame' providing one of

External Elevation of North Wall of St. John's Chapel

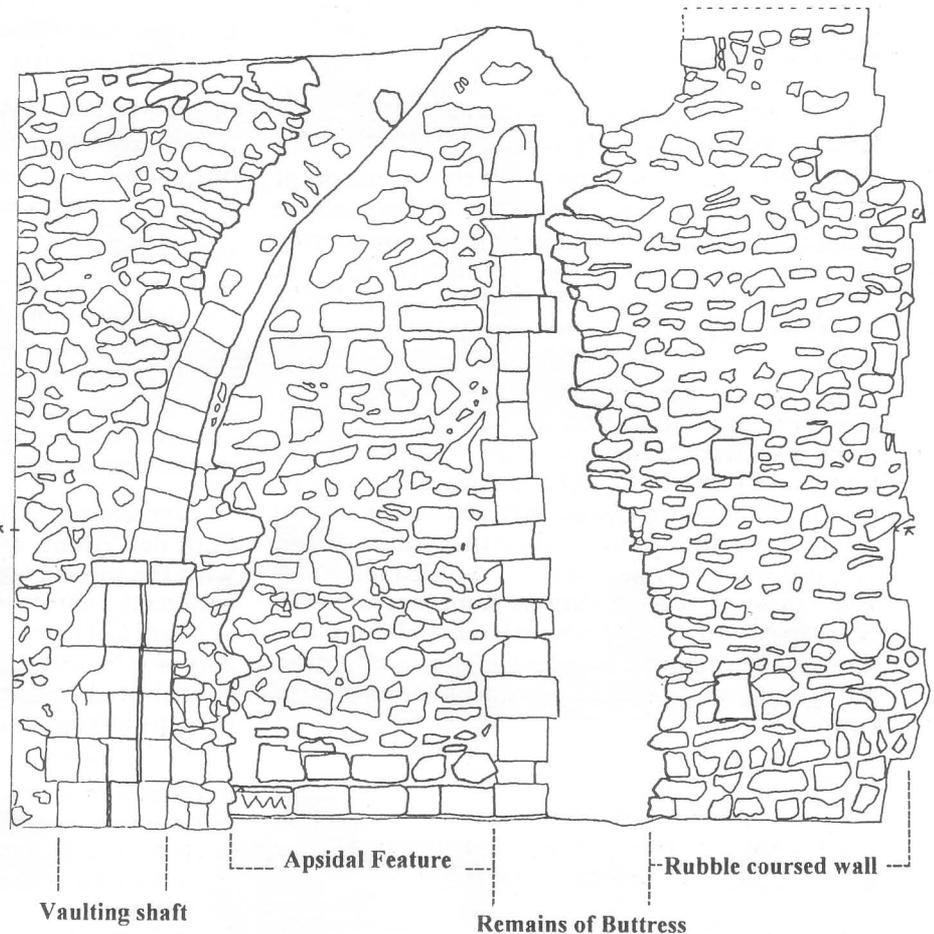


Fig. 5: elevation of external north wall of chapel showing medieval features.

14. *Pers comm* Tim Tatton-Brown.
15. B. Fletcher *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method* (1946) 452.
16. *Op cit* fn 15, 454.
17. Dollman, *op cit* fn 6.
18. A. W. Clapham *English Romanesque Architecture after the Conquest* (1934) 120.
19. W. R. Lethaby 'The Cloister of Southwark Priory and Other Early Cloisters' *Archaeol J* 71 (1914) 155-160.

the bays of the mid-12th-century chapter house. Dollman refers to similar 'jambs' within the former refectory "where no opening exists"<sup>20</sup>.

## Discussion

The study of the medieval chapel St. John has shown that during the 12th century certain structural changes occurred that might reflect a wider scale of changes within the church itself. It has been claimed that "modifications or departures from the rule of the (monastic) order might result in changes that have left their mark in the archaeological record"<sup>21</sup>. The question is whether these changes witnessed within a localized area of the church topography actually reflect, or represent, overall changes within the priory itself? To answer this question the results of the archaeological study of the chapel and the chapter house need to be both compared with other structural changes evident within the church and within other priories, and also with documented events and circumstances which might establish these changes.

Dugdale's *Monasticon* states that the priory was founded by Bishop Giffard as a house of secular canons. William Giffard was for a time King William II's chancellor. Upon the assassination of William in the New Forest, and the ascension of Henry I, Giffard was exiled<sup>22</sup>. He did not return from exile until 1107<sup>23</sup>, so his part in the foundation of the priory in 1106 appears unlikely. Also the collapse of the tower at Winchester Cathedral in 1107 meant that his priorities probably lay closer to home.

However, a late tradition in the *Annals of Southwark* does state that he was the founder of the house of regular canons at Southwark<sup>24</sup> and therefore it could be suggested that a house of secular canons was founded in 1106, and that Giffard in his role as Bishop of Winchester re-founded the priory as a house of regular canons sometime after its original foundation. It is worth remembering that the first Augustinian house at Colchester, founded only a few years earlier, was originally a secular foundation.

The role of Pont de l'Arche in the foundation of the priory in 1106 also needs investigating. William Pont de l'Arche was one of Henry I's 'new men' who become increasingly influential from the late 1120s onwards<sup>25</sup>. He was Sheriff of Hampshire and Royal Treasurer during the later parts of Henry's reign, and therefore had close associations with Giffard. He seems to be more prolific during the second and third decades of the 12th century and certainly he features as a major witness for royal charters from 1127 onwards<sup>26</sup>.

Both Giffard and Pont de l'Arche had founded, or re-founded, other Augustinian houses during the second quarter of the century. Pont de l'Arche founded the Augustinian priory at Portchester in 1133<sup>27</sup>, and the priory at Taunton, Somerset, was regularised a few years earlier by Giffard<sup>28</sup>.

The role of William Dauncey in the foundation of St. Marie Overie is more enigmatic. He is claimed to have had some part in the foundation of the priory in 1106 with Pont de l'Arche, but unlike the latter he appears to have figured little in the political events of the early 12th century.

From the 1120's onwards many former religious houses were re-founded as houses for regular canons, such as Portchester; Haughmond, Salop<sup>29</sup>; and St Frideswide's, Oxford<sup>30</sup>.

What can be seen is that there is a connection between the archaeological and historical evidence for the development of the priory of St. Marie Overie in the 12th century. From the evidence it can be suggested that changes within the layout and structure of the priory reflect the changing circumstances of its founders particularly from the 1120s onwards.

The increasing influence and affluence of William Pont de l'Arche, and his documented association with the priory, could suggest that he remained a generous benefactor throughout this period. William Giffard on the other hand, though probably not having a role in the foundation of 1106, contributed to the later changes at Southwark, perhaps introducing some elements of reform, as

20. Dollman, *op cit* fn 6, 27.

21. J. P. Greene *Medieval Monasteries* (1992) 93.

22. J. C. Dickinson *Origins of Austin Canons* (1950) 120.

23. C. Newman *The Anglo-Norman Nobility in the Reign of Henry I* (1988) 184.

24. M. Tyson 'The Annals of Southwark and Merton' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 36 (1925) [24-58] 33.

25. *Op cit* fn 23, 96.

26. *Op cit* fn 23, 187.

27. *Op cit* fn 21, 224.

28. *Op cit* fn 22, 118.

29. J. J. West 'Haughmond Abbey, Salop' *Medieval Archaeol* 24 (1980) 240.

30. J. Blair 'St. Frideswide's Monastery: Problems and Possibilities' in J. Blair (ed) *St. Frideswide's Monastery, Oxford* (1990) 221-259.

exemplified by the new Cistercian movement, and subsequently may have reorganised the canons under regular rule as a result. This might have coincided with a rejection of the original apsidal chapel in favour of a square extension. It is also possible that an original apsidal east end of the church itself was extended and provided with a square east end at this time.

Significantly, the archaeological investigation seems to show that the chapter house and claustral range were added in the mid- to late-12th century as Southwark moved from a secular to regular order. This shows that modifications to the rule of a monastic order can indeed leave their mark in the archaeological record.

Taking all the evidence into account a sequence of events could be suggested at Southwark:

the foundation of 1106 by the two Norman knights, William Dauncey and William Pont de l'Arche, involved the small foundation of a group of secular canons and involved the rebuilding of several parts of the former minster, including the addition of an apsidal chapel entered from the north transept through a double arch. The arch and its respective piers either being rebuilt or, more probably, constructed anew by local masons still influenced by Anglo-Saxon building techniques.

This relatively unimpressive foundation would reflect the early status of the founders and might explain why later foundations such as Holy Trin-

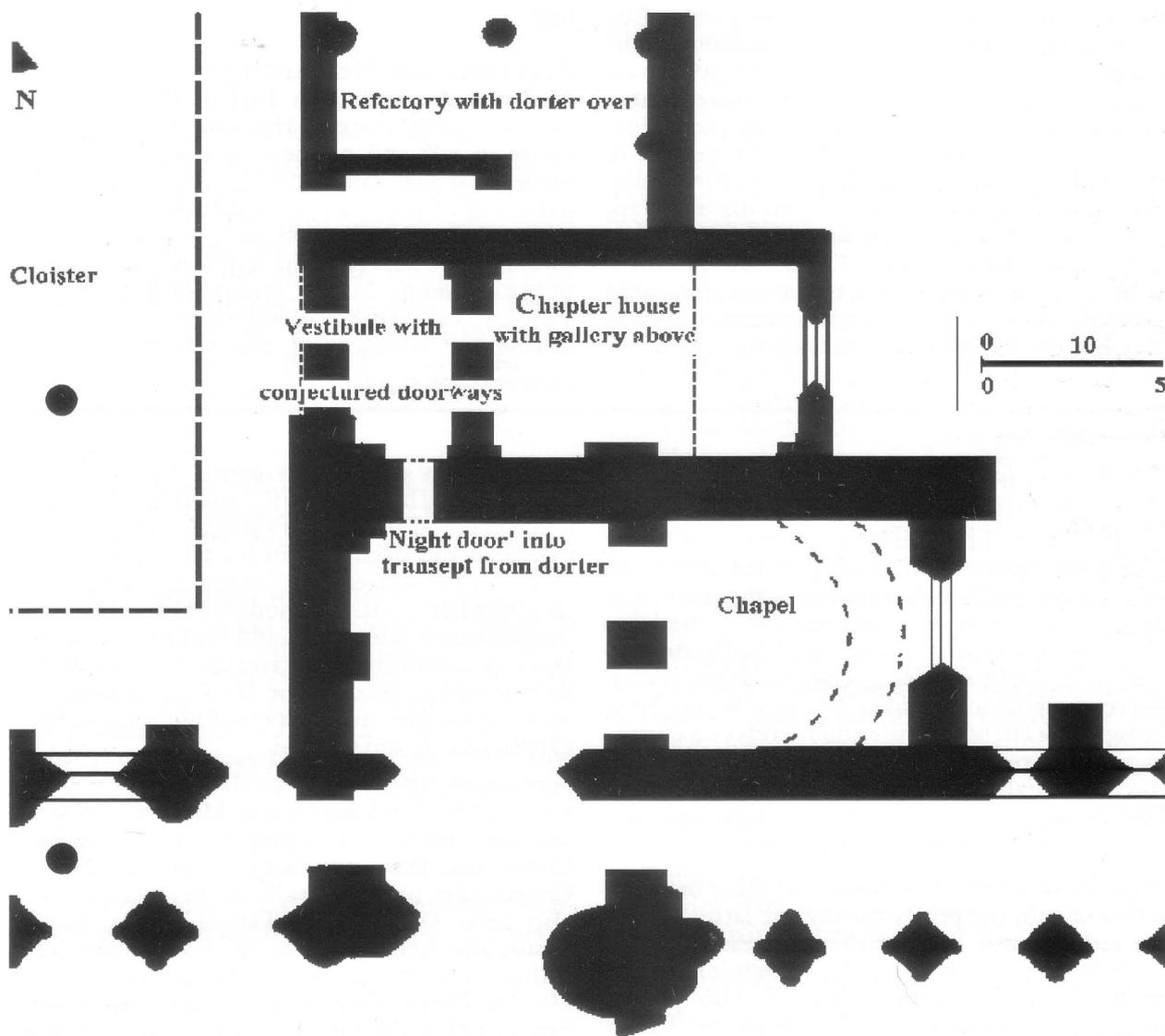


Fig. 6 : Chapel and associated claustral buildings from 120's onward. Note original line of apsidal chapel.

# Unidentified brick structure found at Cranford Park, Middlesex

Colin Bowlt  
Eileen Bowlt

## Background

THE MANOR of Cranford was divided in the 1230s, and the two halves became known as Cranford le Mote, the property of Thame Abbey until the Reformation, and Cranford St. John, owned by the Knights Templar from 1242 to 1308 and by the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem from 1338 to 1540. They were reunited in 1542 when they were granted to Andrew, Lord Windsor. Elizabeth, the widow of Sir Thomas Berkeley, bought both manors in 1618, and the Berkeley family remained in possession until 1932, when Cranford House and Park were sold to Hayes and Harlington Urban District Council. Middlesex County Council bought them in 1935 and leased them back to the UDC to be used as public open space. The house was demolished in 1945, but the stables and cellars remain. The medi-

eval church of St. Dunstan, which contains Berkeley family monuments, stands just to the east of the house site. Since 1965 the area has been divided between the Boroughs of Hillingdon and Hounslow.

## Berkeleys and Fitzhardinges

Frederick Augustus, 5th Earl of Berkeley (died 1810), allegedly married the same lady twice, secretly in 1785 and publicly in 1796. Because the earlier marriage could not be proved, the older offspring of the union were declared illegitimate and the earldom passed to Thomas Moreton Fitzhardinge Berkeley, the first son born after the public ceremony. Mary, Countess of Berkeley, had a life interest in the Cranford estate and lived there during her widowhood. She was buried in St.

*(continued on p. 263)*

---

*(continued from p. 261)*

ity, Aldgate (c. 1108); Merton (1117) and St. Bartholomew's (1123), were later to overshadow St. Marie Overie, Southwark.

The involvement of William Giffard, Bishop of Winchester, probably sometime in the 1120's, and perhaps in association with Pont de l'Arche, who was now an important curial in Henry's administration, brought a series of changes to the priory. Giffard might, as he did at Taunton in 1127, have instigated a change in rule and therefore a change in priory layout to accommodate communal structures essential to regular, monastic life. As at St. Frideswide's, Oxford, this may not have happened immediately, but over the next few decades.

These developments also heralded other developments within the priory during the latter part of the 12th century. Parts of the nave, east end, and cloister were rebuilt, using the French-influenced styles of the 'Canterbury School'. This period, perhaps, also witnessed alterations to the chapter house (Fig. 6).

It is perhaps during this period that St. Marie Overie priory had its *floruit*-- with the building of a hospital and the bishop's palace, and its church extended and decorated in the latest continental style. Unfortunately, prolonged flooding, a destructive fire in 1212, a period of stagnation during its subsequent rebuilding, and the growing importance of its sister houses across the river meant that its potential to become one of medieval London's most influential and prosperous houses was, to an extent, largely unfulfilled.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Gustav Milne (UCL) for his valuable support in setting up SCARP, Nathalie Cohen and the team: Alex Langlands, Neville Constantine, John Binns and Kathryn Thomas and also Peter Draper, Tim Tatton-Brown, Barney Sloane and Andrew Reynolds. Also thanks to the cathedral staff, especially the vergers -- Paul, Marcus, Derek, Graham and Aidan, my father, Brian Roffey, for the van and scaffold, and Mike Webber (MOL).