

Peterborough Cathedral
**Archaeological Monitoring of Works Relating to New Shop in North-
West Transept and West Bay of North Aisle**

Archaeological Contractor's Site Code: PCS 21



**Prepared by Jackie Hall
for Peterborough Cathedral
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Peterborough Cathedral Shop: Archaeological Report

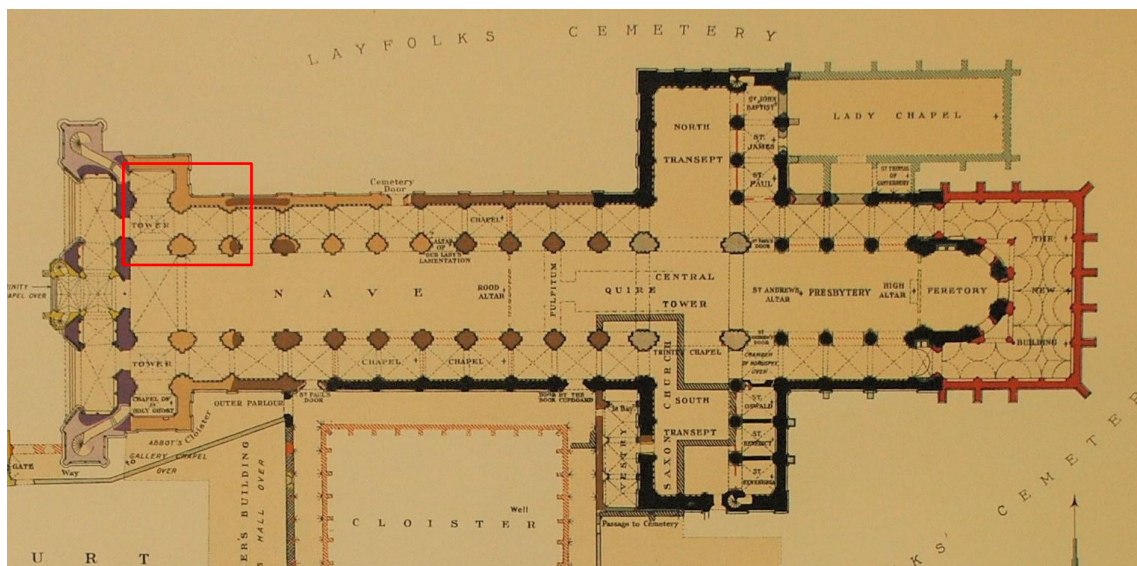


Figure 1: (upper) Site location, with 1885 OS as background); (lower) VCH plan showing new area of shop

Peterborough Cathedral

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1 Introduction

1.1 Summary

Excavations for new electrical services, and for the foundations for new gates, were made in the north-west transept and in bay 10 of the nave north aisle (bays 20–22 on the architect's plans). Below the 1930s Clipsham stone floor slabs, and the limecrete sub-base, the excavations came down onto firm orange sandy silt with stone rubble. This was interpreted as the late 12th-century sleeper foundations of the cathedral church and probable contemporary terracing in the open areas, although no dateable finds were available to confirm this.

In most of the trenches the archaeology was not disturbed, but in two areas, in preparation for the gates, shallow incursions were made into the 12th-century foundations. This showed the presence of frequent large Cornbrash rubble (up to 190mm) in the silty matrix.

Clearing the area in readiness for the shop allowed for the recording of two late medieval polished limestone ledger slabs (one Purbeck, one Alwalton marble), which had not been recorded in the Cathedral Inventory. A further ledger or part of a constructed tomb, of early 18th-century date, was found when two of the floor slabs were turned over – after recording, they were reused in the floor again.

1.2 Site Location and Brief Description

The site is centered on National Grid Reference 519352 298656, within the cathedral church (Fig 1). The west bay of the nave and the north-west transept have a complex building history (see below) but belong to the late 12th- and early 13th-century phases of the church.

In later periods, the west end of the nave north aisle was used to house a font, while the north-west transept was used as a baptistry from 1937 to 2007. Some time after the font was moved into the nave, the north-west transept was used as a shop.

The cathedral church stands well above natural deposits in this area.

1.3 Planning Background, Methodology and Timing

The cathedral lies within the 'red line' as defined by the Care of Cathedrals Measure (2011) and, under the Ecclesiastical Exemption Order 1994, the works therefore did not require Listed Buildings Consent. Since the work was additive to the cathedral, and since the archaeological impact was deemed to be low, the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England agreed that consent from the cathedral's Fabric Advisory Committee was sufficient. This was duly obtained.

The service trenches were dug by John Lucas Ltd between October and December 2022 and visited on five occasions by the archaeologist, at what was felt to be the most useful times, on 6, 12, 22 October and 16 and 25 November.

As usual for monitoring projects, the archaeological aims were to investigate and interpret the exposed evidence for previous use of the site and to record that evidence, which might otherwise be destroyed by the proposed groundworks, and to record other exposed deposits. The specific objectives of the project were:

- To identify and record all archaeological features and artefacts exposed during the excavation of service trenches.
- To determine the form, function, spatial arrangement and sequence of the archaeological features encountered.
- To recover dating evidence from the archaeological features.
- To retrieve environmental evidence relating to the environment and economy of the site.
- To interpret the archaeological features and finds within the context of the known archaeology of the site and surrounding area.

The archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the development timetable. All archaeological features were located on a copy of the architect's plan, at a scale of 1:50. No significant features were encountered that required drawing at a finer scale. A digital photographic record was made, and general views of the site were taken to record the context. No finds were made that required later analysis by the appropriate specialists. Modern artefacts were noted but not retained.

1.4 Historical and Archaeological Background

The references used for this section are Peers 1906; Hall and Wright 2015, Fergusson 2019 and Fernie 2019 as well as the author's own observations. Other sources are referenced individually. Because the works were internal, the exterior is not covered here.

1.4.1 The Late 12th and Early 13th Centuries

The western transepts are almost the final stage of a long building programme, which started at the east end in 1118, and continued fairly steadily for over a century, with the initial intention of building nine bays, with twin western towers in the ninth bay. Abbot Benedict (1177–93), who came from Canterbury, carrying some of the relics of St Thomas Becket, '*built the whole of the nave of the church in stone and wood from the tower of the choir right up to the front and built the pulpitum*'. By now, a ten-bay nave with a transept and western towers was planned. In fact, Benedict's predecessors had already built some of the south side of the nave and a little of the north side, partly to shore up the crossing tower and partly to enclose the cloister. Archaically, the fundamental style and proportions of the Romanesque nave were retained in the new work, but Gothic features appear for the first time, for instance in some of the capitals and bases of the nave arcades (Fig 2).

One result of this building programme is the great difference between the wall arcading in the south nave aisle, compared with the one-to-two-generations later arcading on the north side. The arch mouldings here are clearly copied from the south side, but the capitals are a wonderfully varied and important series of late Romanesque – and occasionally Early Gothic – sculpture. Since the east end of the aisle is partially blocked by storage and not accessible to the public, it was especially important to retain at least visual continuity of the series at the west end of the north aisle, above the new shop fitting in this area.



Fig 2: (above) Looking from bay 9 to bay 10 of the north wall arcade; (left) two examples of capitals from the wall arcade: (upper) volutes in Late Romanesque style and (lower) waterleaf of the same date but 'transitional' or very early Gothic style

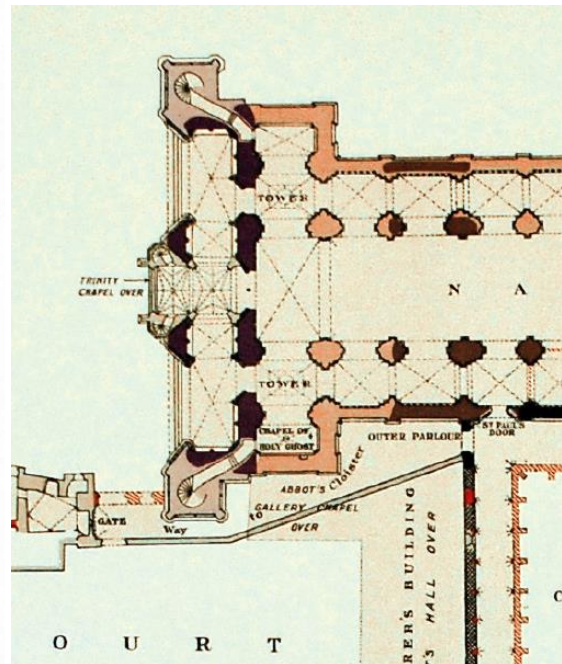
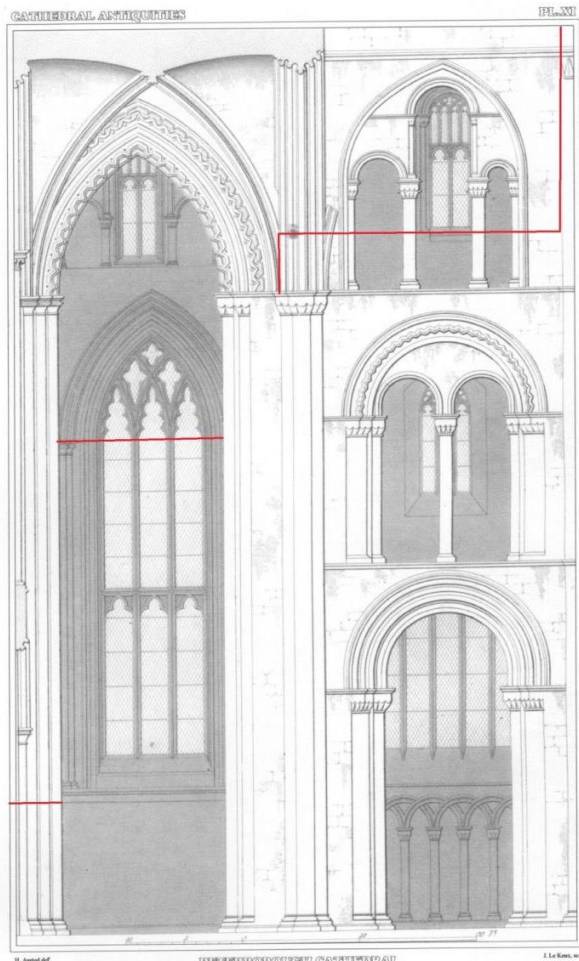


Fig 3: (left) Building break observed by Peers (1906) marked in red on engraving from Britton (1828); (above) Peer's interpretation of building phases at the west end in plan form

In the Victoria County History, Charles Peers identified a key building break, recognisable through a change in tooling (diagonal to vertical on ashlar blocks), that runs around from the tenth nave bay, the east walls, the north/south gables, and west walls of the western transept, dropping as it goes to provide support for the earlier, completed work. This may also be (unprovably) coincident with the death of Abbot Benedict. From here, the building programme is both complex and no longer well documented by the abbey chroniclers. There are numerous possible building breaks, the tooling marks in the stair towers tell a different confused story from the western transept, while the masons' marks are even more complicated. At the very least, there is one major change of plan (Peers suggested two), namely the decision to create the west front that we see today, with its Galilee, three giant arches, ornate gables and projecting towers. It is possible that this may have coincided with the enforced building break created by the papal interdict against King John. More certainly, we know that the west front, with the western transept, was essentially complete when the roof of the north portico was erected c.1224-34, as dated by dendrochronology.

In short, the area of the shop contains within it complex information about key and, as yet, insufficiently understood, phases in the development of the abbey, now cathedral, church.

The western transept is a glorious conceit, connecting the restrained and archaic Romanesque of the nave to the exuberant, ornate, and very Gothic west front on the exterior. In the interior, every effort is made to mix up the two styles: round arches over pointed arch doors; thick chevron on pointed arches standing on moulded capitals; Romanesque clerestories over grouped lancets (originally) in the gables. The original 13th-century doors survive, the northernmost of which opens directly into the shop (Fig 4). The vault above the north bay preserves both the hole to haul up bells and the small holes for bell ropes, since originally Peterborough had a 'long ring', with the bells rung from the ground.

1.4.2 Later Medieval

Only a little later medieval work is apparent in this space: the tracery of the late 13th/early 14th-century that occupies two whole stories of the gable and the 15th/16th-century tracery at clerestory level in the gable (Fig 4).

1.4.3 The Font and the 1930s Baptistry

The early 18th-century plan reproduced by John Bridges clearly shows the north bay (and the south) of the western transept screened off to create a chapel, which was almost certainly its medieval use as well. The font is not in this chapel but abuts the 9th pier of the nave north arcade i.e. also within the new shop area. The font is shown tightly screened and covered in early 18th-century drawings (Fig 5). In 1906, as identified by Peers, the remains of this font were to be found in the gallery on the south side of the presbytery, in which case it may be the small plain one of rather uncertain date still to be seen there.

The present, very fine, carved, late 12th-century font of Alwalton marble, was recovered from the gardens of the fourth prebend (Archdeaconry House) in 1826, with the intention of polishing it and giving it a new pedestal but this did not happen until 1848 (Act and Minutes, and Accounts of the Cathedral). It was placed in the, now unscreened, Chapel of the Holy Spirit (St Sprite) at the south end of the western transept, as shown in Roland Paul's later plan of 1891. It would be of considerable interest to obtain photos of this arrangement, if any exist.

The font moved again, around 1937, to the opposite end of the transept i.e. to the north bay of the shop area, where it served as the centrepiece for a newly designed baptistry in memory of George James Gray, Chapter Clerk (Fig 6). The entire set of drawings for this work, by the then Cathedral Architect, Leslie Moore, survives in the Northamptonshire Record Office. The works included not just the panelling that survives



Fig 4: Early 13th-century details: (above left) One of the three great 13th-century west doors of the cathedral, which can only be appreciated properly from the interior, since they have been refaced in the 19th century on their exterior faces; (above right) View above the shop area of the north-west transept, showing the architecture to its best effect (photo: Rom Baxter)

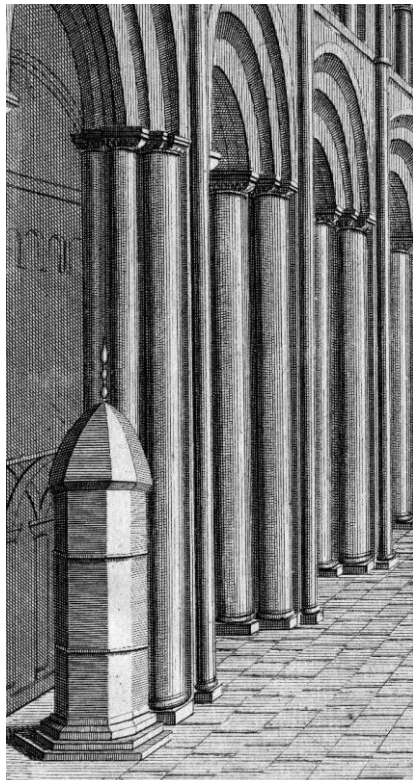


Fig 5: (left) Screened font and font cover at the west end of pier 9 of the nave north arcade, engraved from a Peter Tillemans drawing of c.1720 and published in Bridges 1791, (detail). (right) Peers believed this font to be the one enclosed within the screen



today ('in English oak'), but a new font cover 'in Austrian oak' and new 'wrought iron screen and gates to Baptistry', and even a new door to the stair turret in the corner.

Around the west, north and east walls of the Old Baptistry, nine complete and partial late medieval and early modern ledger slabs have been relaid. Since they are laid to fit in with the Clipsham stone slabs, which elsewhere in the cathedral have been dated to the 1930s, it is probable that they were moved here at that time, to both protect them and to deliberately line this space. It is also possible, but equally uncertain, that these ledgers were brought in from the outer porticos of the Galilee, where the central sections are now clearly paved with modern stone. In c.1930, there were at least some changes in the Galilee to create lighting at floor level, with ventilation ducts (NRO PDCAP 175). Seven of the ledgers around the Old Baptistry are well recorded in the Cathedral Inventory; the two obscured when that was made are recorded in this report.

The relatively short-lived baptismal arrangements of the mid 19th-century and the 1930s form part of changing liturgical practice in the cathedral, and thus have an importance beyond their architectural merit. Modern liturgical practice moved the font again, out of the small, tucked-away area at the end of the western transept and into the nave, near its west end. This took place in spring 2007, with a new area of Purbeck marble floor below the font, designed by Julian Limentani.

2 Archaeological Observations

2.1 Ledger Stones Missing from the Cathedral Inventory

Two stones were recorded additional to the Cathedral Inventory, to which they should be added at the appropriate time: a fragment of incised slab and a complete slab with the indent for a brass.

2.1.1 *Corpus sub lapide*

The stone fragment obscured by the sculpture is the top right hand part of a slab incised with a foliated cross and a marginal inscription (*sub lapide*) between two parallel lines; it is 610 x 390–395mm (Fig 7). The right hand side, with its inscription, is missing, although the inner line is present. It is clear from the style of the inscription and the matching cross elements that this is part of the same monument as memorial 082 from the Inventory. The whole inscription begins *Corpus sub lapide* and ends ...*Amen ... charite*.

The cross has rather trident-like tips, with a knop below, and in the angle of each pair of arms is a quatrefoil tipped with three leaves (or a bud and two leaves). It may be late 13th- or 14th-century in date.

The stone of this ledger is a pale brown polished limestone, probably the local Alwalton marble, but both the smooth surface and the lighting conditions made this impossible to confirm. The two fragments are badly damaged with many visible breaks and cracks, presumably as a result of their reuse.

2.1.1 *Indent for brass*

The stone fragment obscured by the setting for the font, lies adjacent to the centre of the north wall of the Old Baptistry (Fig 6). It is a massive ledger, probably complete at 1950 x 800mm, with just a single indent for a praying figure with an integral inscription below (Fig 8). The brass, which was 555mm high x 523mm wide, had six fixings, three in each of the figure and the inscription. The slab is blue-grey Purbeck marble.



Fig 6: The baptistry, in November 2006, just before the font was moved into the nave. This shows both the 1930s oak paneling and the locations of the hidden ledgers – below the font sub-base and below the sculpture



Fig 7: (left) Memorial 082 from inventory; (above) the fragment previously below the sculpture. Together they form the top half of an incised slab with a cross bottonée in the centre with a marginal inscription between parallel lines reading 'Corpus sub lapide [...] Amen ... charite'. The smaller fragment is 610 x 390-395mm. Note that apparent differences in the depth of the inscription are from differential photography, not differences in the stone themselves.

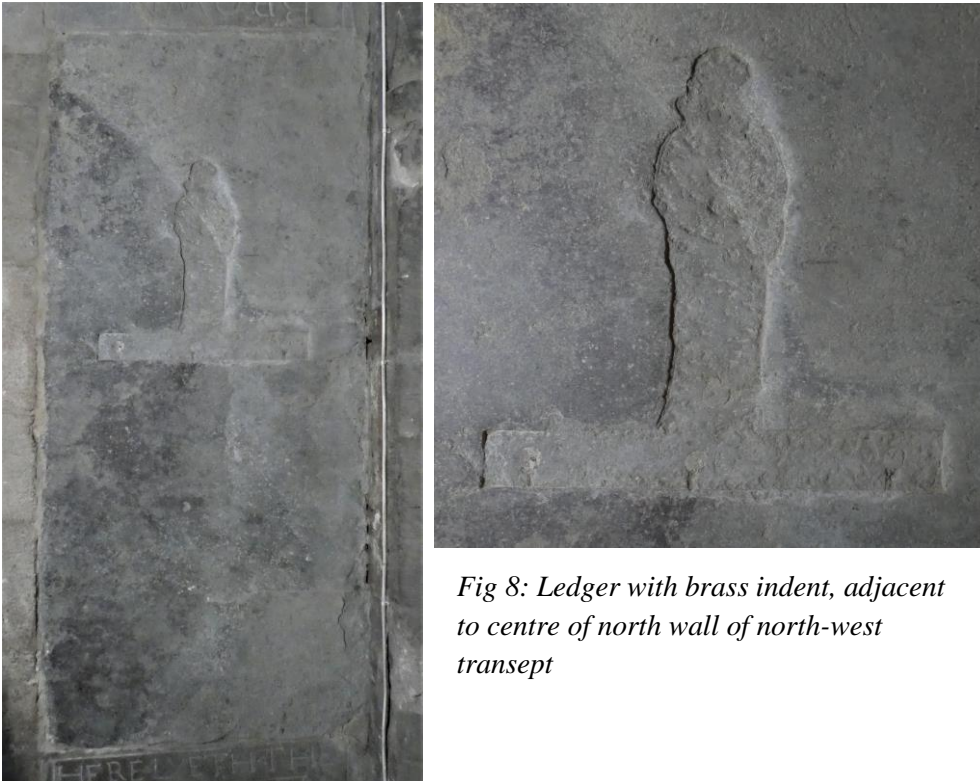


Fig 8: Ledger with brass indent, adjacent to centre of north wall of north-west transept

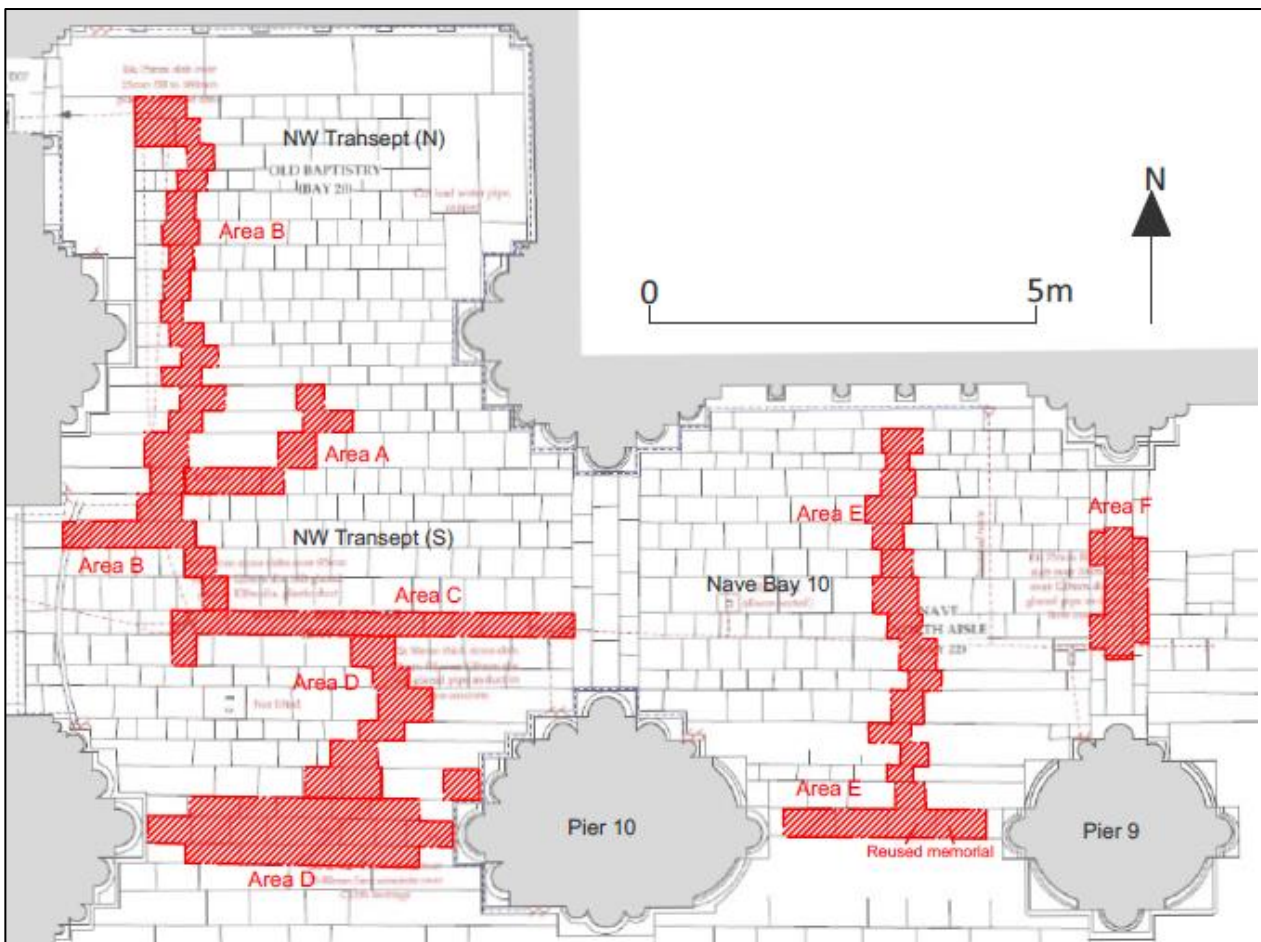


Fig 9: North-west transept and west bay of nave north aisle, showing areas of excavation for services and gates marked up on pdf of architect's plan

2.2 Excavations for Services and Gates

The deposits seen in the areas of excavation (Fig 9) were very similar, and therefore they will not be described individually. Furthermore, since this is an archaeological report, earlier services lying in the trenches are not described. Two of the floor slabs between the south-west transept respond and pier 10 were removed in February 2021 (Hall 2021), which gave clear evidence of surviving ‘sleeper’ foundations, only 140–180mm below the floor surface. These areas, then i.e. between piers and between piers and responds are described separately from the open areas, so that they can be more easily compared, following a brief description of the floor.

2.1.1 The Floor Slabs and its bedding

The 1930s floor slabs, of Clipsham limestone, were 45–60mm thick, sitting immediately on pale brown-grey limecrete of the same date. This was of variable thickness, from only 40mm up to 80mm, depending on the thickness of the stone and the height of the foundation below. In only two instances, both from the W-E section of Area E (between the nave piers) the floor slabs were found to be reused from either a ledger or, give the rebates along the sides, possibly from a built tomb of some kind (Fig 12). They were from the same stone, and commemorated Thomas Andrew and his son; the latter died 26 May 1711, aged 17 – ‘Both waiting For A Glorious Resurrection’.

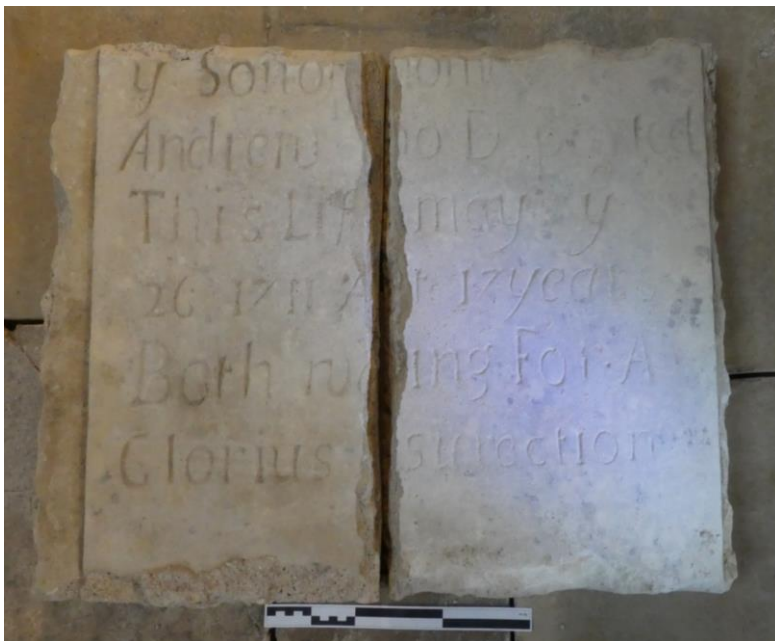


Fig 10: Fragment of ledger or element of built tomb turned over and reused as two floor slabs in area E. Together the stones measure c. 760 x 620mm, and 75–80mm thick

2.1.1 The Sleeper Foundations

As usual in foundations of great (and smaller) churches of this period, the foundations were dug in strips so that ‘sleepers’ survive between the piers and responds. As expected, and as seen in very small areas in February 2021, the top of a foundation was seen only c.85–120mm below the floor level. It appeared to be a rammed foundation of orange-brown silty sand with large rubble and very little mortar, brought to a smooth surface. This is very similar to the glimpse of foundation seen at the apse in 2017 (Hall 2017). In two areas – Area D between pier 10 and the west respond and in Area E between piers 9 and 10, the excavation was taken deeper, up to 220mm below floor level, to accommodate the new gates (Fig11). This confirmed that the deposit was as seen from above, with a high percentage (30–50%) of Cornbrash rubble up to 190mm, small stones in an orange-brown matrix, probably a mixture of silt and sand, probably with some lime mortar content as well. In Area D, the excavation was carried right to pier 10 and to the west respond and it was



Fig 11: Deposits in the areas of sleeper foundation: (above left) Area E, southern section, looking east, immediately below bedding for 1930s floor slabs; (above centre) Area D, west end after deeper excavation for gates; (above right) Area D, east end after excavation, showing foundations disappearing below pier 10; (right) constituents of foundations, as excavated by builders



Fig 12: Deposits in the open area, bounded by foundations and sleeper foundations – here in area E, looking east. The grey area on the right side probably indicates an area of deeper limecrete bedding here

clear foundations continued below them, confirming that, despite the complete absence of artefactual dating evidence, we can be sure that these are the late 12th-century foundations. The top of the foundation is at c.8.97m OD, though originally presumably brought to floor level, as seen immediately below the piers.

2.1.1 Archaeological Deposits in Open Areas

We might have expected that the open areas – away from the foundation trenches – would have different deposits in them. However, this did not appear to be the case. The areas in question – Area A, Area B, Area C and parts of Area D and Area E – were only excavated to the bottom of the limecrete bedding for the floor slabs i.e. the top of potential archaeological deposits c.140–180mm below floor level. Areas A, B and C were only partially seen as they all had old services running in them.

They appeared (when there was the opportunity to clean them properly) more-or-less identical to the deposits in the sleeper foundations (Figs 11 and 12). Though they were not excavated, it was felt that they may have been slightly less stony than the sleeper foundations. In the centre of the north-to-south section of Area E, an area of smooth grey mortar and aggregate was seen, which probably related to modern interventions.

The close similarity of the open areas to the foundations makes sense when we consider the local topography of the 12th century. The west end of the cathedral still lies significantly above the ground level to its west, indicative of the natural slope to the watercourses on the west side of the precincts. Despite the more prominent north-to-south slope (heading to the river Nene), this must still have required some terracing for the westernmost bay of the nave and the west transept and Galilee. It would make sense for the same material to have been used both for the foundations and for the necessary terracing, though deeper excavations would be needed to prove the point.

In Area E, where there was clear disturbance by an old service trench, a few small animal and bird bones were found. They were reburied in the same area.

3 Conclusions

Despite the lack of artefactual dating evidence, we can be certain that the 12th-century foundations survive in this area. There is no evidence of Victorian underpinning. We can also be reasonably sure that there was some contemporary terracing, although this conclusion would benefit from deeper excavation over to be certain.

Only two stones were found to have been turned over and reused as floor slabs, despite the generous reuse of medieval memorials to line the Old Baptistry. Two of the latter were newly recorded as part of this project, and one was found to be a jigsaw fit with one previously recorded in the inventory.

4 Acknowledgements

My thanks go to Dave Cramp and Thomas Küpper of Peterborough Cathedral and Stephen Oliver, Cathedral Architect for organising the work, to Nigel Smith (of the cathedral) for helping out during the works and to the builders of John Lucas Ltd, who undertook the work in a helpful manner. As ever, I am particularly grateful to my friend and colleague Tim Halliday, for helping decipher the Latin inscriptions.

5 Project Archive

The project archive, paper and electronic, including drawn, written and photographic records will be deposited with Peterborough City Museum under the project code PCS 21.

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