



Fig. 1: St Andrew's Old Church, Kingsbury, summer 2006 (Photo: A. Agate)

Saxon Kingsbury and St Andrew's Old Church

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Introduction

In 2005 I reported on an archaeological project undertaken at Kingsbury High School in the London Borough of Brent.¹ Running over three seasons, this project enabled pupils to take part in an archaeological excavation centred around a 16th-century cottage demolished in the 1950s. While researching the site's broader historical context it became clear that Kingsbury has received little archaeological attention over the years, but that the parish contains a largely forgotten and intriguing site: St Andrew's Old Church and churchyard² (Fig. 1). A new project was initiated, which aimed to examine the topography of the site and conduct a limited archaeological evaluation in and around the church, which is Brent's only Grade I listed building. The

objective was to evaluate the past and present significance of the site. The work took place over the winter and summer of 2005/6 and was conducted by archaeology students from UCL Institute of Archaeology and members of the Hendon and District Archaeology Society (HADAS). The project enjoyed broad support from English Heritage, the Church of England, the local community and the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT), to whom I am particularly grateful for their generous funding. The project culminated in a Master's degree dissertation³ from which this report is drawn. The purpose of this article is to report upon the topographical investigation. While results from the archaeological excavation will be touched upon these will be the subject

of a future publication. First, however, it is relevant to sketch the site's recent history and to outline past research.

Background

Kingsbury is one of those once rural parishes engulfed by London during the inter-war years. Historically the population was small. The 98 communicants recorded in 1547 grew to only 209 inhabitants at the 1801 census: by 1951 the population stood at over 42,000.⁴ The result is described by Cherry and Pevsner as:

*"Uneventful hilly early 20th century suburbia stretch[ing] north from the Brent reservoir by the North Circular Road, enveloping a tiny ancient church."*⁵

Today that church, St Andrew's Old Church, stands isolated in its overgrown

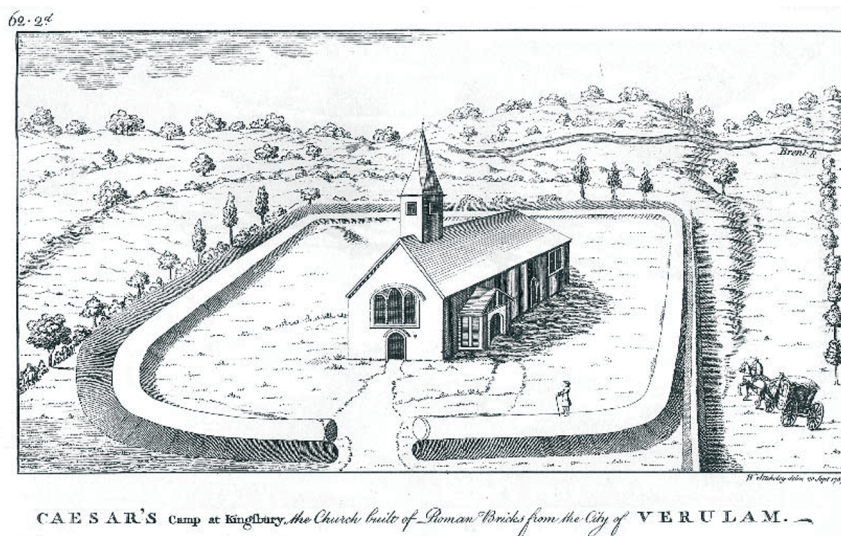


Fig. 2: William Stukeley's engraving of St Andrew's in the centre of a 'Roman' earthwork

churchyard masked by a curtain of mature trees. Declared redundant in 1977, it was originally closed in 1884 after a new church, Holy Innocents, was built nearer to Kingsbury's growing centre of population. The local newspaper reported on the closure commenting that, 'there is something more than sentimental in the objection to closing so ancient an ecclesiastical building as that of St Andrew'. In protest about 30 parishioners held 'illegal' services.⁶ This anecdote reminds us that to these parishioners it was not only the Christian rite that was important; the place of its practice was also significant. Hugh Braun, referring to parish churches, has expressed this succinctly, suggesting, 'buildings grow out of the wants of men and are the embodiment of their wishes.'⁷ By the mid-1930s Holy Innocents itself was too small and a new St Andrew's church was built barely 100 m north of the old church.⁸

An inspection of the old church in 1976, by the Council for Places of Worship, perceived a lack of 'historical quality' and demolition was considered.⁹ In 2003, after a period in the care of the Wembley History Society (WHS), St Andrew's Old Church was finally vested in the CCT. Despite recent works by the CCT, an ongoing vulnerability to vandalism keeps the building on English Heritage's 'Buildings at Risk' register.

The church is rectangular in form, has no aisles and no structural distinction between the nave and the chancel. Internally it measures approximately 18 by 5.5 m, while

externally the west end, which escaped a covering of render, has examples of Roman pottery and roof tiles in the fabric. In addition, there are six complete box-flue hypocaust tiles in the interior of the building. The church underwent three restorations in the 19th century, when, amongst other things, a 14th-century south porch was demolished and a north vestry built; today the exchange hardly seems fair! The somewhat inadequate listing entry, from the mid-1950s, notes a 12th- to 13th-century construction date for the building.¹⁰

Past investigations

Antiquarian William Stukeley, who visited St Andrew's in September 1757, was first to consider the site as an historical monument. Stukeley observed an earthwork around the church which he recorded in an engraving, shown as Fig. 2. He noted the Roman tile and published a brief description.¹¹ Believing the site to be one of 'Caesars' Camps' he wrote:

"His next camp was at Kingsbury: it is now the churchyard and still visible enough. Its situation is high and near the River Brent. The church stands in the middle of it."

Stukeley's interest lay in the wider setting of the monument he observed. The landscape setting of the church remained a feature of various descriptions. In the early 20th century the church was recorded as being 'on highish ground commanding what is still a charming and extensive view. [With] mounds close by [which] look

like earthworks.'¹² Latterly, however, the focus of interest has narrowed to the standing remains: assigning a Saxon or Norman origin has become a particular preoccupation with researchers.

A 1920s publication confidently asserted a Saxon origin, based upon architectural style, and other local writers agreed.¹³ The architectural evidence rests upon the supposed long-and-short work of the quoins at the west end and on a round-headed door in the south wall, often referred to as the 'Saxon Door'. However, this evidence has not been compelling for more recent researchers. The most authoritative description of the building is found in the Middlesex volume of The Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME).¹⁴ Here the doorway is dated as 12th century and the Saxon provenance of the quoins questioned due to the northwest corner resting on a 13th-century coffin lid (although this may be underpinning). Taylor and Taylor are in broad agreement with this view, and the church is excluded from Taylor's final list of Saxon churches.¹⁵ For Pevsner the quoins are 'only similar' to long-and-short work and the 'Saxon Door' appears 'much restored', while Alan Vince dismisses the church as having no early features.¹⁶ Finally, Stukeley's earthwork is given short shrift by the RCHME, who observed 'no trace of such a work'. Pervading the literature is a sense that the church would be somehow more significant if it had a Saxon provenance, while the continued focus on typological analysis based on architectural style has detracted from an appreciation of the site in its wider setting.

An excavation project, carried out in 1973/4 by the WHS, recovered no evidence for Saxon occupation. Sadly, this archive is now lost and the location of the trenches is unknown. A small collection of summary excavation reports suggest that Roman pottery was recovered (there is speculation of a nearby, but lost, Roman villa) and that post-Roman occupation resumes only in the 13th century, at which time the enclosure ditch is cut.¹⁷ Recently, prior to repair works, a desktop assessment was undertaken by the Oxford Archaeology Unit.¹⁸ Confined to a radius of 250 m around

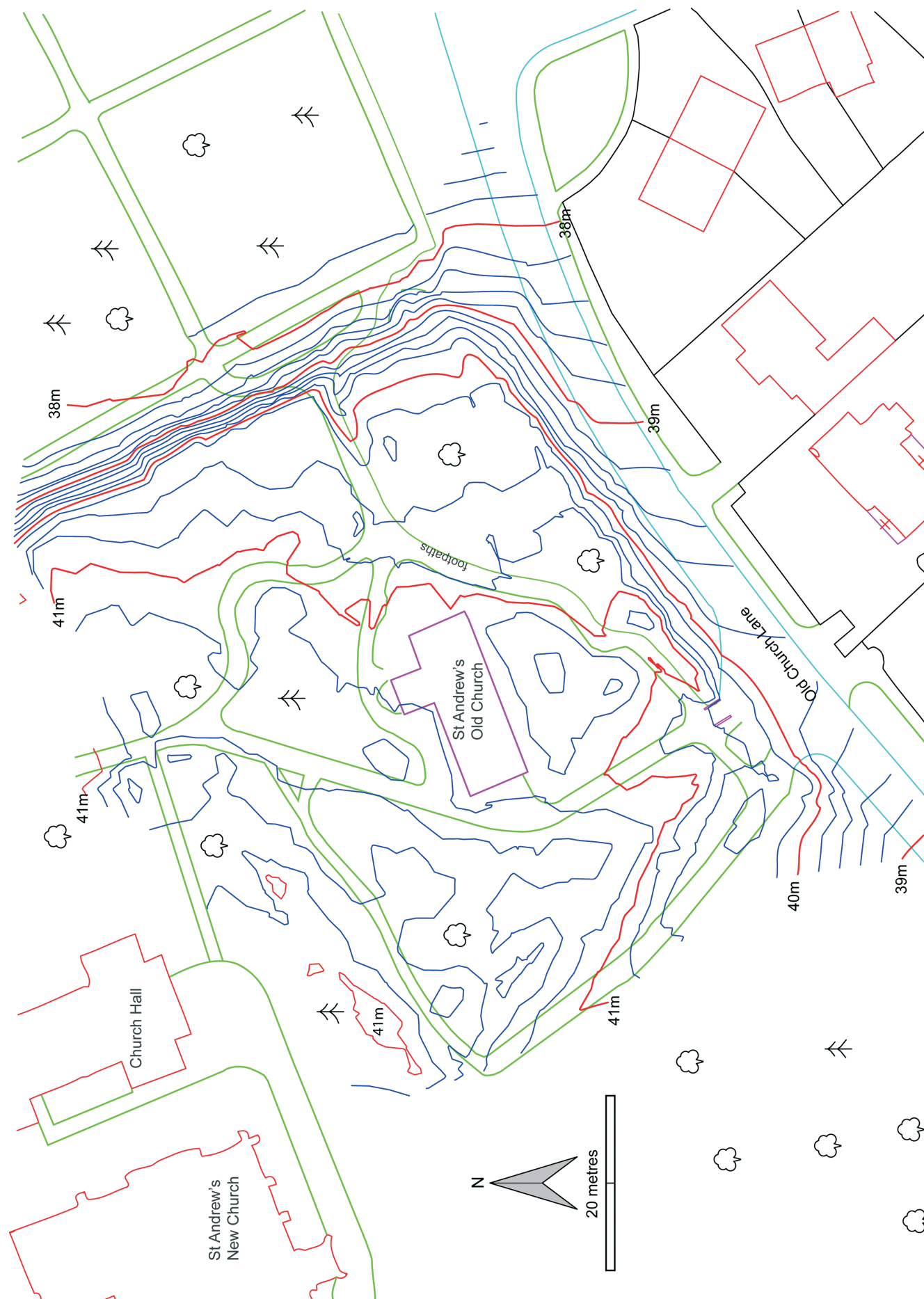


Fig. 3: contour map of St Andrew's churchyard. The blue contour lines are at 0.20 m intervals and the red contour lines indicate 1 m intervals (base map © Crown Copyright/database right 2008. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service, contour data processed by Tim Sly)

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the church, the report noted the archaeological potential of the site, concluding that the character and date of the earthwork and the origin and development of the church – including its earliest phase – had yet to be established. It was evident that there were many unanswered questions at St Andrew's.

Topographical investigation

A focus on dating the standing remains distances the building from its landscape setting and, crucially, from the people who had viewed the site as significant. It was decided that the initial phase of a new investigation should examine the topography¹⁹ of the site and its locale in order to situate the church within its broader context. Accurately assessing the existence of an

earthwork around the church was problematic; thus, the first step was to undertake a total station survey of the site. From this a contour map (Fig. 3) and 3D model of the churchyard were constructed. The contour survey suggests that there may be a bank on the southern and eastern sides of the churchyard. However, profiles of these features suggest they have differing characters, with the southern bank being much steeper. There is no topographical evidence for a western or northern bank and no evidence for a ditch around the churchyard. Trenches across the two possible earthwork features revealed no trace of either a bank or ditch. Extensions to the original churchyard, including evident landscaping works, together with the numerous graves, may have contributed

to the erosion of any surrounding earthwork. The 3D model of the graveyard did, however, yield a clue as to what Stukeley may have seen. The model suggested that Old Church Lane, which runs parallel to the southern perimeter of the churchyard, is a hollow way. This section of Stukeley's perceived earthwork may not be the result of up-cast from a ditch but instead be an illusion created by the erosion of the lane. The result is that when approaching the church along Old Church Lane it appears to occupy the high point of a mound.

Having examined the local topography it was appropriate to broaden the approach. In order to gain an appreciation of the wider setting the Ordnance Survey (OS) contour data was superimposed onto the 1896 OS map of the area as shown in Fig. 4. Meanwhile, historical sources were considered with a view to gaining a perspective on how the site may have developed. The contour survey reveals that the church sits at the edge of the 41 m OD contour. Furthermore, it can be seen that the site occupies the edge of the highest point of a short spur overlooking the valley of the River Brent. This spur is geologically different from the surrounding area, being an outcrop of Lynch Hill gravel.²⁰ The spur is created by two parallel streams running along its eastern and western sides, which drain into the River Brent. These waterways define a 'finger' of land, protected by natural barriers on three sides. At the base of the spur, where the streams first run parallel, there is a field boundary. One might speculate that the addition of a palisade or earthwork at this point would fully define an enclosure featuring St Andrew's Old Church at its central and highest point. The place-name 'Kingsbury' is taken to mean the 'King's manor or stronghold'²¹ and this location must be a candidate for that site. There are further topographical features which make this site significant.

The earliest documentary reference to the Kingsbury estate is an Anglo-Saxon charter of AD 957 in which King Eadwig (AD 955–959) grants the manor of *Tunweorthe* (Tunworth) to a minster.²² The bounds given in the charter are certainly those of the later medieval manor which is referred to as

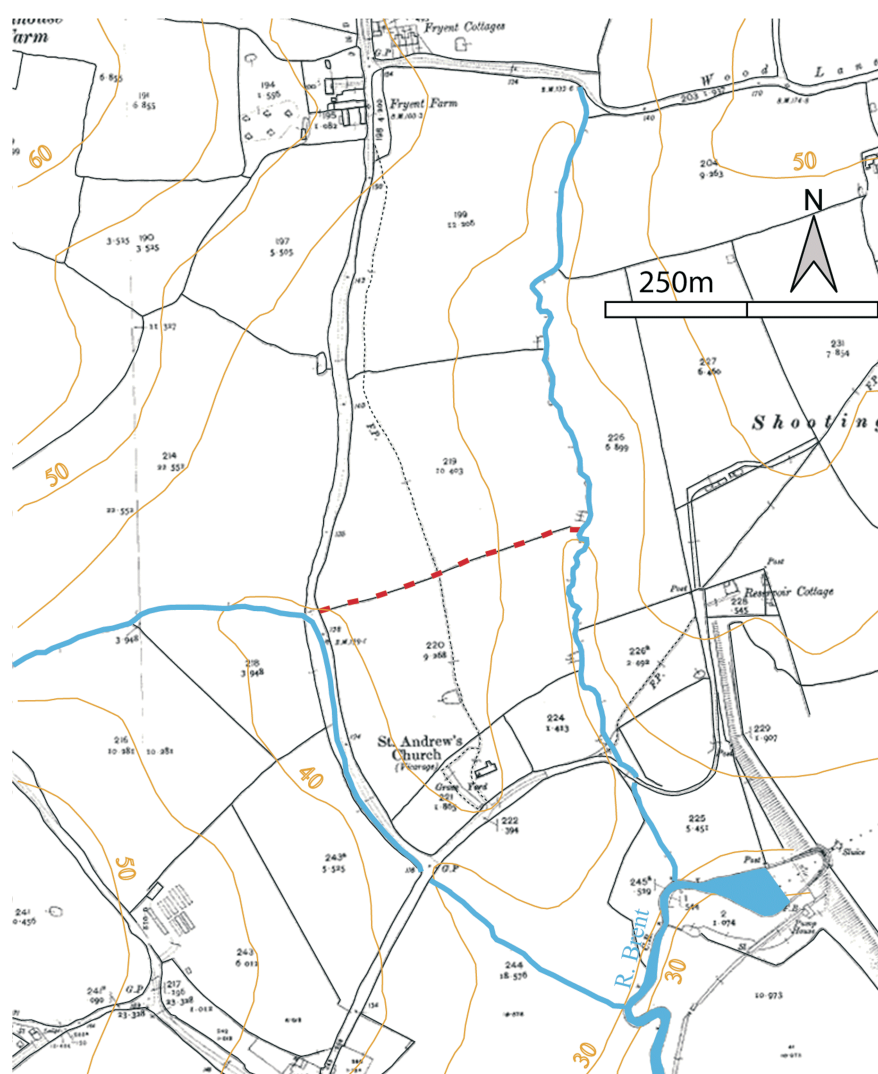


Fig. 4: St Andrew's Old Church at the centre of a possible enclosure.

The site sits on the highest point of a short spur; the streams and river are detailed in blue and the field boundary which completes the 'enclosure' is highlighted as a broken red line (© Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited (2008). All rights reserved (1896))

Kingsbury by 1004.²³ The English Place-Name Society resolves Tunworth as '*Tunna's farm*', placing it in the north of the parish, based on a 1536 field-name High-Tunworth.²⁴ However, recent research into – *worth* place-names suggests that a common feature of such places is that they occur at locations where the local geology is 'at variance to the dominant geology'. Additionally, such places often overlook flat-bottomed valleys. The location of St Andrew's fulfils both requirements; the Lynch Hill gravel is at variance to the London Clay which predominates and the site overlooks the flat valley of the Brent. There is no other such site in the parish, suggesting St Andrew's as the prime candidate for the location of '*Tunna's farm*'. – *worth* place names first appear in the 8th century and may indicate the spread of arable agriculture and settlement into previously less favourable areas.²⁵ So how did the farm become a Royal stronghold? The local communications network offers some clues.

The charter of AD 957 details the eastern and western boundaries of Kingsbury as Watling Street (modern Edgware Road) and *Wic Stræt*²⁶ respectively. Fig. 5 shows the local estate boundaries and roadways and demonstrates how Roman Watling Street may not have been a major route-way through the area during the Saxon period. Roman Watling Street required two bridges spanning the River Brent and the Silk Stream. It has been suggested that un-maintained Roman timber bridges would have been unusable by the end of the 5th century, requiring traffic to divert to nearby fords.²⁷ The well-documented ford of the Brent on *Wic Stræt* would have provided such a diversion.²⁸ The estate boundary for Hendon provides more evidence; Watling Street acted as an estate boundary for all Middlesex estates except between the two bridges.²⁹ Here the road was clearly not significant as a landscape marker, perhaps because it was not in use, and the estate boundary crosses the road. Further evidence of the importance of *Wic Stræt* during the Saxon period is provided by the location of the hundred meeting place, which is situated in Kingsbury on *Wic Stræt*.³⁰ If *Wic Stræt* was the primary route then the ford

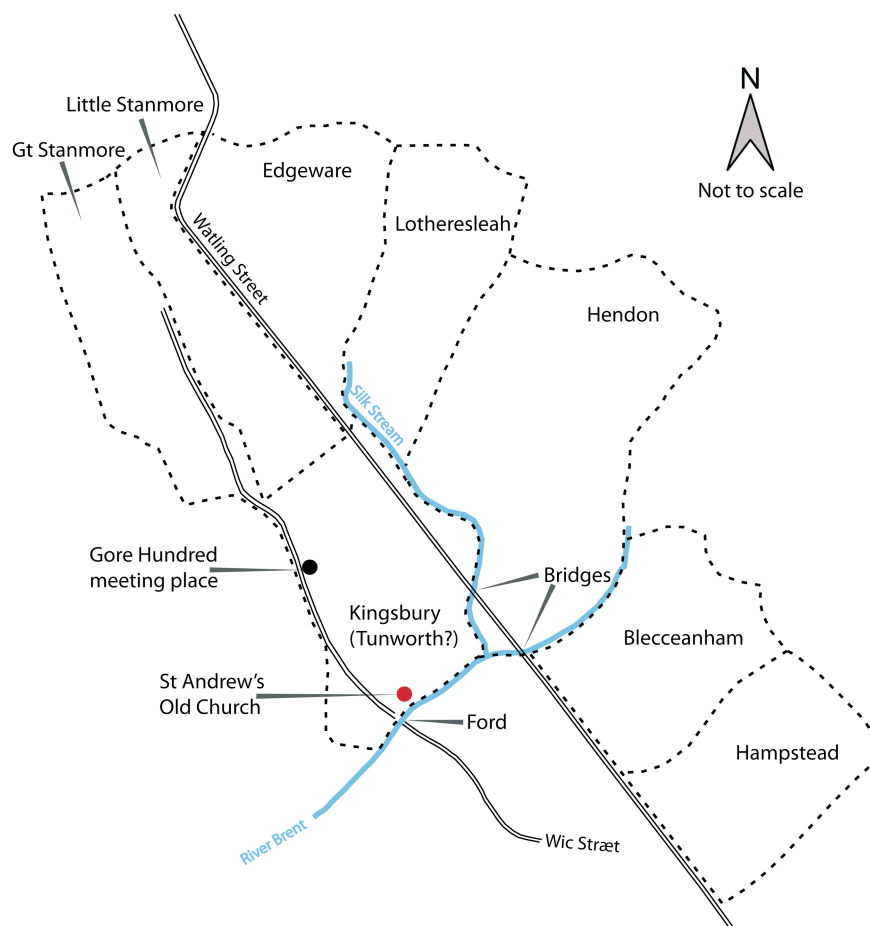


Fig. 5: Kingsbury c. AD 957 (redrawn from Vince 1990; see fn. 28)

would have been a strategic crossing point of the River Brent. The defensible site of St Andrew's is barely 400 m from the ford and in the past would have overlooked it: it is in a ideal location from which to control the crossing.

Conclusion

From this topographical investigation and associated research it is possible to tentatively advance a model of development for the site of St Andrew's. The model situates the site within a broad context and suggests why people viewed this site as a significant place in the past. Eighth-century populations expanded into areas previously thought unsuitable for farming. A well-drained gravel spur, overlooking a river valley, may have provided a favourable environment where a small farm could be established, its owner lending his name to the location. During the 9th and 10th centuries political organisation developed: the shires were established and, for legal and administrative convenience, subdivided into smaller units known in southern England as 'hundreds'. Kingsbury, lying

at the centre of Gore Hundred, was also home to the hundred meeting place, or *moot*. This important centre was served by *Wic Stræt*, a route established during the post-Roman period as traffic diverted to a convenient ford, following the collapse of Watling Street's bridges. *Wic Stræt* formed the spine of Gore Hundred and passed close to *Tunna's Farm*, which itself overlooked the ford. The site attracted royal interest and assumed a strategic defensive role. By the first half of the 11th century, ownership of a church had become one of the necessary trappings of *theignly* rank and the 'aristocratic urge to own a church'³¹ seems to have been satisfied at the site of St Andrew's. By 1086 Domesday Book records a priest with a virgate of land (approximately 30 acres) in Kingsbury. While no church is recorded, it is interesting to note that Church Fields,³² which lie to the north of St Andrew's, constitute an area of 32 acres, perhaps linking the site to the Domesday entry.³³ The site's function transformed once again from defensive to ecclesiastical. Unfortunately, supporting primary archaeological

evidence for Saxon occupation in Kingsbury has, until recently, been fugitive. However, both Kingsbury projects have produced evidence which begins to fill that gap. Saxo-Norman pottery was identified from the Tudor cottage site, while finds from the church appear even more significant. A trench was excavated abutting the northern wall of the church in order to investigate the building's foundations. Recovered from the backfill of the foundation trench were five sherds of Early Medieval Flint-tempered London Ware (EMFL, dated AD 970–1100).³⁴ The condition of the sherds suggests they are unlikely to be residual deposits and, coming as they do from a sealed context, suggest a late-11th-century date for the foundations of the stone-built church. This is the earliest archaeological evidence for post-Roman occupation in Kingsbury.

At this point in its history St Andrew's Old Church faces an uncertain future. While the CCT will undoubtedly continue to care for this redundant church, a more secure future probably lies in finding a new function for the building. If the model presented above has any basis then it may be concluded that the significance of the site has indeed grown from the 'wants of men', embodying their changing wishes at different periods. In its current circumstances, closed and largely forgotten, I think we should wish for more at St Andrew's Old Church.

Acknowledgements

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1. A. Agate 'Getting archaeology into class' *London Archaeol* 11 no. 1 (2005) 3–8; C. Maloney and I. Holroyd 'London Fieldwork and Publication round-up 2004' *London Archaeol* 11 supp. 1 (2005) 2.
2. TQ 2063 8686.
3. A. Agate *The significance of St Andrew's Old Church, Kingsbury*, Unpublished University of London MA dissertation (2006), available at <http://www.britarch.ac.uk/communityarchaeology/wikka.php?wakka=KingsburyHighSchool>
4. Victoria County History, *A history of the county of Middlesex: volume 5: Hendon, Kingsbury, Great Stanmore, Little Stanmore, Edmonton Enfield, Monken Hadley, South Mimms, Tottenham*, (eds) T.F.T. Baker and R.B. Pugh (1976) 55.
5. B. Cherry and N. Pevsner *Buildings of England, London. 3 North-West* (1991) 135.
6. G. Hewlett *Old St Andrews, Kingsbury: a struggle for survival*, unpublished pamphlet, Wembley History Society (1987) 15–17.
7. H. Braun *Parish churches: their architectural development in England* (1970) 220.
8. The new church is itself of historical interest (see *op cit.* fn 5 135–137). Designed by Dawkes and Hamilton it was originally built in Wells Street, central London, and is one of the first examples of the neo-gothic building style. Initially consecrated in 1847, it was moved stone by stone to its current location and re-consecrated in 1934.
9. Council for Places of Worship, *Kingsbury, St Andrew (Old Church)* (London), unpublished report, 1976, National Monuments Record BL 54764.
10. The listing entry can be found in the National Monuments Record number BL 54764.
11. W. Stukeley 'The Brill, Caesar's Camp at St. Pancras', *Itinerarium Curiosum II* (1776) 2–16 & pl 62. He also provides a rough measurement for the earthwork, '30 paces by 40 paces'.
12. J. Frith *Middlesex* (1906) 164. Earthworks in the vicinity of the church are also noted in E. Walford *London: A Narrative of its History, its People and its Places* (1883) 276 who states, "a field adjoining the churchyard exhibits evident marks of an artificial inequality of surface."
13. The publication is S. Potter *Old Kingsbury Church* (2nd edition, 1928). Other local opinion is from

- W.F. Bunyan *A history of St. Andrews Church Kingsbury*, unpublished pamphlet courtesy of Brent Archive, (undated but c. 1970) – Bunyan is a recent incumbent who suggests that the church is too simple in style to be Norman; and also from C.G. Johnson 'Old St. Andrews Kingsbury' *Wembley Hist Soc J* 1(1) (1956) 15–20, who assigns a late Saxon date based upon the small size of the stones used for the quoins. Wembley History Society Journals can be viewed at the Brent Archive.
14. *Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England): an inventory of the historical monuments in Middlesex* (1937) 88–89.
15. H.M. Taylor & J. Taylor *Anglo-Saxon architecture, Vol I* (1965) 351; H.M. Taylor *Anglo-Saxon architecture Vol III* (1978).
16. *Op cit.* fn 5; A. Vince *Saxon London: an archaeological investigation*, (1990) 68.
17. The excavation is recorded as NMR record 647842, which states that the archive rests with the Grange Museum. However, after making enquiries with the museum and the excavator himself it is clear that this archive is now lost. Summary reports of the excavation are B. Bloice 'Excavation Round-up - 1973' *London Archaeol* 2 (6) (1974) 133; P. Storr Venter 'Archaeological section round up Old St. Andrews Church, Kingsbury', *Wembley Hist Soc J* 3 (10) (1974) 187; P. Storr Venter 'Old St. Andrews Church, Kingsbury', *Wembley Hist Soc J* 3 (9) (1974) 174–9; P. Storr Venter *Old Saint Andrew's Kingsbury*, unpublished Wembley History Society pamphlet, (undated c. 1975).
18. Oxford Archaeology Unit, *Kingsbury, St. Andrew Old Church Archaeological Assessment*, unpublished (2000).
19. Topography is defined here as encompassing not only the natural and humanly created features of the landscape but also a more abstract notion of 'place' as evidenced by place-names, communication routes, cartographic evidence and field observations.
20. British Geological Survey, *England and Wales Sheet 256 North London, Bedrock and Superficial Deposits 1:50000* (2006).
21. J.E.B. Gover, A. Mawer and F.M. Stanton *The Place-names of Middlesex Apart from the City of London*, (1942) 61.
22. W. De Gray Birch *Cartularium saxonicum: a Collection of Charters Relating to Anglo-Saxon History* (1885) charter no. 994; P.H. Sawyer *Anglo-*

- Saxon charters: an annotated list and bibliography* (1968) charter no. S645; M. Gelling *The Early Charters of the Thames Valley: a catalogue* (1979) 109, charter no. 220.
23. M. Gelling *The Early Charters of the Thames Valley: a catalogue* (1979) 109; *op cit.* fn 20 (1942) 219–220.
24. *Op cit.* fn 20, 62–63.
25. J. English 'Worths in a Landscape Context' *Landscape History* 24 (2002) 45–51.
26. *Wic Stræt* was still in use in 1597 and is shown on the Hovenden map of Kingsbury, at which time it is called Hell Lane (All Souls College, Oxford. Hovenden Portfolio II No. 9). By 1746, when Rocque's survey was published, the road had gone out of use, suggesting Edgware Road was once again the primary route. The demise of *Wic Stræt* broadly coincides with the reconstruction of the Edgware Road bridges in the late 18th century as discussed in the VCH entry for Hendon; 'Hendon: Communications' *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 5: Hendon, Kingsbury, Great Stanmore, Little Stanmore, Edmonton Enfield, Monken Hadley, South Mimms, Tottenham* (1976) 2–5.
27. D. Harrison *The Bridges of Medieval England; Transport and Society 400–1800* (2004) 32.
28. A ford and bridge, at the site of the modern Kingsbury bridge, is clearly shown on the Hovenden map, see fn. 26. Also see the VCH volume, 'Kingsbury: Introduction', *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 5: Hendon, Kingsbury, Great Stanmore, Little Stanmore, Edmonton Enfield, Monken Hadley, South Mimms, Tottenham* (1976) 49–55.
29. D. Sullivan *The Westminster Corridor: An Exploration of the Anglo-Saxon History of Westminster Abbey and its Nearby Lands and People* (1994) 87–89 and map N; A. Vince *Saxon London: An Archaeological Investigation* (1990) 122.
30. H. Braun 'The Hundred of Gore and its Moot-Hedge' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 7 (1937) 218–228.
31. J. Blair *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (2005) 370.
32. *Op cit.* fn 27, 49–55.
33. My thanks to UCL colleague Duncan McAndrew for this observation.
34. The finds were kindly identified by Roy Stephenson at the LAARC; see also C. Maloney and I. Holroyd 'London Fieldwork and Publication Round-up 2004' *London Archaeol* 11 supp. 3 (2007) 58.