Bristol Cathedral
Chapter House 2014
Archaeological Investigation

By
Dr Kevin Blockley MIfA, MPhil, FSA
Report No. 682
Bristol Cathedral
Chapter House 2014

Archaeological Investigation

Prepared for: Dean and Chapter, Bristol Cathedral

By
Dr Kevin Blockley MIfA, MPhil, FSA

Report No: 682

Date: 1 May 2014
CONTENTS

1 Introduction ............................................................................................................. 3
1.1 Location and scope of work .............................................................................. 3
1.2 Geology and topography .................................................................................. 3
1.3 Archaeological and historical background ....................................................... 3
2 Aims and Objectives ............................................................................................. 4
3 Methodology .......................................................................................................... 4
3.1 Scope of Fieldwork ............................................................................................ 4
3.2 Finds .................................................................................................................. 5
3.3 Palaeo-environmental evidence ......................................................................... 5
4 Results of the work ............................................................................................... 5
4.1 Soils, ground conditions and contexts ............................................................... 5
4.2 Archaeological investigation ............................................................................. 5
5 Discussion and Interpretation .............................................................................. 6
5.1 Reliability of field investigation ........................................................................ 6
5.2 Overall interpretation ........................................................................................ 6
5.3 Significance ........................................................................................................ 6
6 Recommendations for future work ................................................................. 7
7 Acknowledgements ............................................................................................... 7
8 Bibliography ........................................................................................................ 8

Figures 1 & 3
Plates 1-4

Appendix I List of context
Appendix II List of site photographs
Appendix III Archive cover sheet
List of Figures

Figure 1  General location plan  
Figure 2  Plan and section of investigation  
Figure 3  Illustration of Chapter House interior around 1835, looking east

List of Plates

Plate 1  Wooden floor prior to investigation  
Plate 2  Location of work in Chapter House  
Plate 3  Plan view of investigation showing vent pipe 4  
Plate 4  East facing section showing wall foundation 9 and vent pipe 4

Copyright Notice:
Cambrian Archaeological Projects Ltd. retain copyright of this report under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, and have granted a licence to the Dean and Chapter of Bristol Cathedral to use and reproduce the material contained within.

The Ordnance Survey has granted Cambrian Archaeological Projects Ltd a Copyright Licence (No. AL 52163A0001) to reproduce map information; Copyright remains otherwise with the Ordnance Survey.
Non Technical Summary

This report results from a two-day investigation of levels below the Chapter House floor to determine what was making the newly-lain wooden floor lift in one area. The work was undertaken by Cambrian Archaeological Projects Ltd (CAP) under the direction of the Cathedral's Archaeological Consultant, Dr Kevin Blockley. The work involved lifting a small section of floor and excavating down to the level of the natural bedrock. The investigation revealed the foundation for a 19th century fireplace on the south wall of the Chapter House, cut through in the 1920s when a ceramic pipe was added to ventilate the area below the contemporary floor.

1 Introduction

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 The site is located within the Chapter House of Bristol Cathedral (Figs 1 & 2).

1.1.2 The work is situated at National Grid Ref: ST 58360 72663.

1.1.3 The work was undertaken on the south side of the Chapter House where an area of newly-laid wooden floor had "lifted". The work was undertaken over two-day period following professional assistance lifting the wooden floor (Plates 1 & 2).

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site of the work overlies Triassic mudstones (British Geological Survey 1979). The archaeological investigation uncovered an area of red mudstone.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The general history of the abbey and subsequent cathedral has been outlined by Joe Betey (Betey 1996; 2000; Rogan 2000).

• The cathedral lies on the site of an Augustinian Abbey founded by Robert Fitzharding in 1140

• The eastern end of the church was complete and in use by c.1159

• The church, cloisters and associated buildings were complete by c.1170

• The nave, chancel, Lady Chapel, cloisters, and frater (on the south side of the cloister) were rebuilt by Abbot Knowle (1306-32). Work on the chancel and associated chapels was probably started by Knowle in 1298 and completed by c.1350

• In 1480 William de Wyrcestre gave a description of the cathedrals and its associated buildings, which are reported to have been 'rebuilt' in 1480

• The transepts were heightened and vaulted and the tower built during the fifteenth century, during which there was much construction, especially under abbot John Newland.
The cloisters, upper level of the gatehouse, dormitory, frater and prior lodgings were rebuilt by Abbot John Newland (1481-1515). The rebuilding of the nave was started by Newland but never completed. In 1515 the new walls were up to sill level on the north and west sides of the cathedral.

In 1539 the abbey was given over to the King

In 1542 the cathedral was established, comprising chancel, transepts and central tower

The cloister is said to have been 103 feet square

The nave had disappeared by the 1580s

In 1649 the bishopric, cathedral, dean and canons were abolished

In 1660 the monarchy was restored and the bishop, cathedral, dean and canons re-established. The cathedral was repaired

1714 level of floor in Chapter House raised

By 1788 the south and west walks of the cloister had been demolished

In 1831 rioters sparked by The Second Reform Act destroyed the cathedral’s archives and library, damaged the Chapter House and destroyed the Bishop’s House

In 1832 the Chapter House was restored and the floor lowered

The north cloister walk was rebuilt when the nave was built in 1868 by G E Street.

Remodelling of the Choir and Lady Chapel in c.1895 by Street and the building of Pearsons Reredos in 1899

In 1912 R W Paul published his plan of medieval and later foundations recorded during rebuilding of the nave (Paul 1912)

In the early 19th century the frater, on the south side of the cloister, was refaced by architects RS & T S Pope and much of the east cloister range rebuilt

1.3.2 Early pictorial evidence has been reviewed to see what information has been recorded in the Chapter House.

2 Aims and Objectives

2.1 The archaeological investigation

2.1.1 The main scope and objectives of the archaeological investigation was to discover what was making the wooden floor lift (presumably with the introduction of moisture), and to look more generally at below floor levels.

2.1.2 The work was conducted in accordance with standards and guidance laid down by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA).
3 Methodology

3.1 Scope of Fieldwork

3.1.1 The investigation was directed by the Cathedral's Archaeological Consultant, Dr Kevin Blockley, with an assistant from Cambrian Archaeological Projects (CAP).

3.1.2 Once the affected area of wooden floor was lifted the area of concrete below the floor was broken up and excavated, layer by layer to the level of the natural bedrock.

3.1.3 At the end of the archaeological work further areas of wooden floor which had been affected by damp (to east and west of the investigation trench) were lifted and the concrete broken up and removed (see Fig 3).

3.1.4 All works were undertaken in accordance with both the IfA's Standards and Guidance and current Health and Safety legislation.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 No finds were made during the investigation.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental evidence

3.3.1 No palaeo-environmental samples were taken from the site.

4 Results of the work

4.1 Soils, ground conditions and contexts

4.1.1 Conditions in the Chapter House were good, with ample room to work, but poor lighting. This was supplemented by additional tungsten lights.

4.1.2 All numbers in brackets within the text refer to context records in the investigation. The context records, along with 1:20 scale site plan, 1:10 scale section, and digital photographs are held in the archive.

4.2 Archaeological investigation

4.2.1 A 0.8m x 0.4m trench was excavated to investigate the principal area of damage to the floor, with extra areas to east and west where further concrete was removed to aid relaying of the floor (Fig 2).

4.2.2 The stratification recorded in Section A-B and in plan (Fig 2) provides a good review of sequence of deposits below the floor. Four phases of levels were recorded:

- Phase 1: 19th century levels
- Phase 2: 1920s levels
- Phase 3: Second half 20th century levels
- Phase 4: 2013 levels
4.2.3 **Natural bedrock.** The earliest level was the natural red mudstone bedrock (10) at a depth of 0.8m below floor level.

4.2.4 **Phase 1.** Sealing the bedrock was a spread of building rubble (8) 0.18m thick and containing fragments of red sandstone and sandy silt. This is presumed to be a spread of construction rubble associated with the construction of wall foundation (9). Foundation 9, the northern side of which was visible, stood to a height of 0.47m, and was built of large angular fragments of red sandstone bonded in mid grey mortar with flecks of ash and white lime (Plate 4). The foundation extended 0.95m from the south wall of the Chapter House. To judge from the mortar type used in the foundation this wall is most likely to have been built in the 18th or 19th century. Two candidates for a foundation in this location are as follows: A small fireplace was inserted into the south wall of the Chapter House when the floor was raised in 1714; and a larger fireplace is also recorded in an illustration of around 1835 (Fig 3) soon after the Chapter House was rebuilt (in 1832). Given the size of the 19th century fireplace this is perhaps the most likely date for the construction of foundation 9.

4.2.5 **Phase 2.** Cutting through foundation 9 was a cut (6) filled with a 0.24m diameter ceramic pipe (4), surrounded by red, silty sand, angular fragments of red sandstone and fragments of ash and clinker (5). See Plate 3. North of this backfill was a deposit of black ash and clinker 0.47m thick levelling up the area to the top of foundation 6. Sealing layer 7 and wall foundation 6 was a spread of grey-black ash and clinker 0.23m thick, sealed by a layer of light yellow cement mortar. These deposits are thought to have been associated with the 1920s work when the east range of the cloister was extensively rebuilt and the Vestibule floor returned to its original level. This is also a likely date for the refurbishing of the Chapter House and insertion of a pipe to provide ventilation to the below floor area.

4.3.6 **Phase 3.** Layer 1 was a hard cement repair to layer 2. This was probably laid sometime in the second half of the 20th century.

4.3.7 **Phase 4.** The wooden floor (0) was laid in 2013 to replace an earlier parquet floor.

5 **Discussion and Interpretation**

5.1 **Reliability of field investigation**

5.1.1 The results of the work and interpretation of the remains found are considered reliable.

5.2 **Overall interpretation**

5.2.1 Phase 1 remains recorded are most likely to have been part of the 19th century rebuild of the Chapter House when a new fireplace was added, replacing the smaller fireplace set into the south wall in 1714. The most likely date for this work was in 1832 (as shown in Fig 3), after the Bristol Riots in 1831, which seriously damaged the Chapter House.

5.2.2 Phase 2 levels, with the introduction of a large vent pipe was most likely to have been undertaken after the fireplace went out of use and the east range of the cloister rebuild and remodelled in the 1920s.

5.2.2 Phase 3 repairs to the bedding cement are most likely to have been undertaken in the second half of the 20th century, to judge from the type of cement used.
5.2.3 The Phase 4 parquet floor was laid in 2013.

5.3 **Significance**

5.3.1 The remains found in the archaeological trench show that no 12th century floor level survives in the area of the investigation, although this may not reflect the level of survival elsewhere in the Chapter House. The large hole excavated to insert the Phase 2 vent pipe was extensive and covered an area larger than the current investigation. The location of a probable 1832 foundation for the large fireplace on the south wall of the Chapter House is a significant discovery.

6 **Recommendations for further work**

6.1.1 The results will be held in archive, and it is recommended that a copy of this report be made available on the Cathedral's web site.

7 **Acknowledgements**

7.1.1 My thanks go to cathedral staff for being so accommodating whilst part of the floor was up and the Chapter House out of use.
8 Bibliography

Bettey J 1996  *St Augustine’s Abbey, Bristol*, Bristol Historical Society Booklets, 88

Bettey J 2000  ‘St Augustine’s Abbey 1140-1539’ in J Rogan (ed) 2000 *Bristol Cathedral: History and Architecture*, 15-37

Bettey J 2007  *Records of Bristol Cathedral* (Bristol Records Society) 59

Bettey J 2011  ‘The Conversion of St Augustine’s Bristol, to a Cathedral, in Cannon J & Williamson B, 263-76


British Geological Survey 1979  *Geological Survey Ten Mile Map: South Sheet*

Cannon J & Williamson B 2011  *The Medieval Art, Architecture and History of Bristol Cathedral: an Enigma Explored*

Paul R W 1912  ‘The Plan of the church and monastery of St Augustine, Bristol’ *Archaeologia*, 63, 231-50

Rogan J 2000  *Bristol Cathedral: History and Architecture*
PLATES

Plate 1: Wooden floor prior to repairs, looking north. Scale 1m

Plate 2: Location of excavation close to south wall of Chapter House, looking south
Plate 3: Plan view of archaeological investigation, showing vent pipe 4, looking north. Scale 0.5m

Plate 4: East facing section showing foundation 9, and vent pipe 4, looking west. Scale 0.5m
## APPENDIX I: Context List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Parquet floor</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Layer of hard cement base to floor</td>
<td>2nd half 20th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Layer of light yellow mortar</td>
<td>1920s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Layer of ash and clinker</td>
<td>1920s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ceramic vent pipe</td>
<td>1920s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fill of pipe trench 06</td>
<td>1920s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cut for pipe 04</td>
<td>1920s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Black ash and clinker</td>
<td>1920s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Layer of construction rubble</td>
<td>19th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Wall foundation for later fireplace</td>
<td>19th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Natural red mudstone bedrock</td>
<td>Natural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX II:
### Site Photographs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>direction</th>
<th>scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Floor before lifting</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>1m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Floor during lifting</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Floor during lifting</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Work in progress</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Work in progress 3</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Work in progress</td>
<td>se</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Work in progress</td>
<td>se</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Work in progress</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Work in progress and s wall chapter house</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Work in progress and s wall chapter house</td>
<td>sw</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Work in progress</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Work in progress</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Work in progress</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Plan view of vent 4, fill 5 and natural 10</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>0.5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Finished trench down to natural 10</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>0.5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Finished trench, note foundation 9 in left corner</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0.5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Finished trench down to natural 10</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>0.5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Finished trench, note foundation 9 in left corner</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>0.5m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX III:
Archive cover sheet

Bristol Cathedral Chapter House

Site Name: Bristol Cathedral Chapter House
Site Code: BCCH/14/INV
PRN: N/A
NPRN: N/A
SAM: N/A
Other Ref No: CAP Project No. 1078
NGR: ST 58360 72663
Site Type: Urban
Project Type: Archaeological Investigation
Project Officer: Kevin Blockley
Project Dates: April 2014
CAP report number: 682
Categories Present: N/A
Location of Original Archive: CAP Office
Location of duplicate Archives: N/A
Number of Finds Boxes: N/A
Location of Finds: N/A
Museum Reference: N/A
Copyright: CAP Ltd
Restrictions to access: None