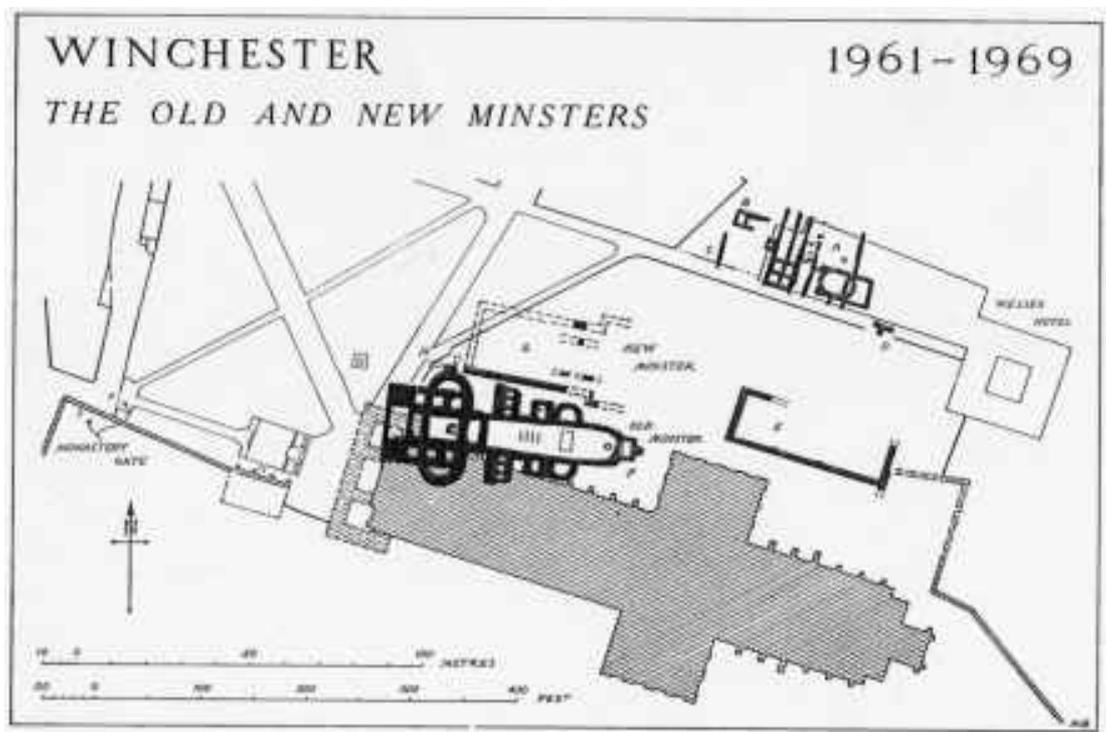


Martin Biddle: "Winchester, Charlemagne and Jerusalem"

The choice of Professor Martin Biddle as the speaker for the first June Lloyd Memorial Lecture was inspired. June worked tirelessly to document and prepare for publication much of Martin's work, and in the years also of our group, the work of both will be inextricably linked.

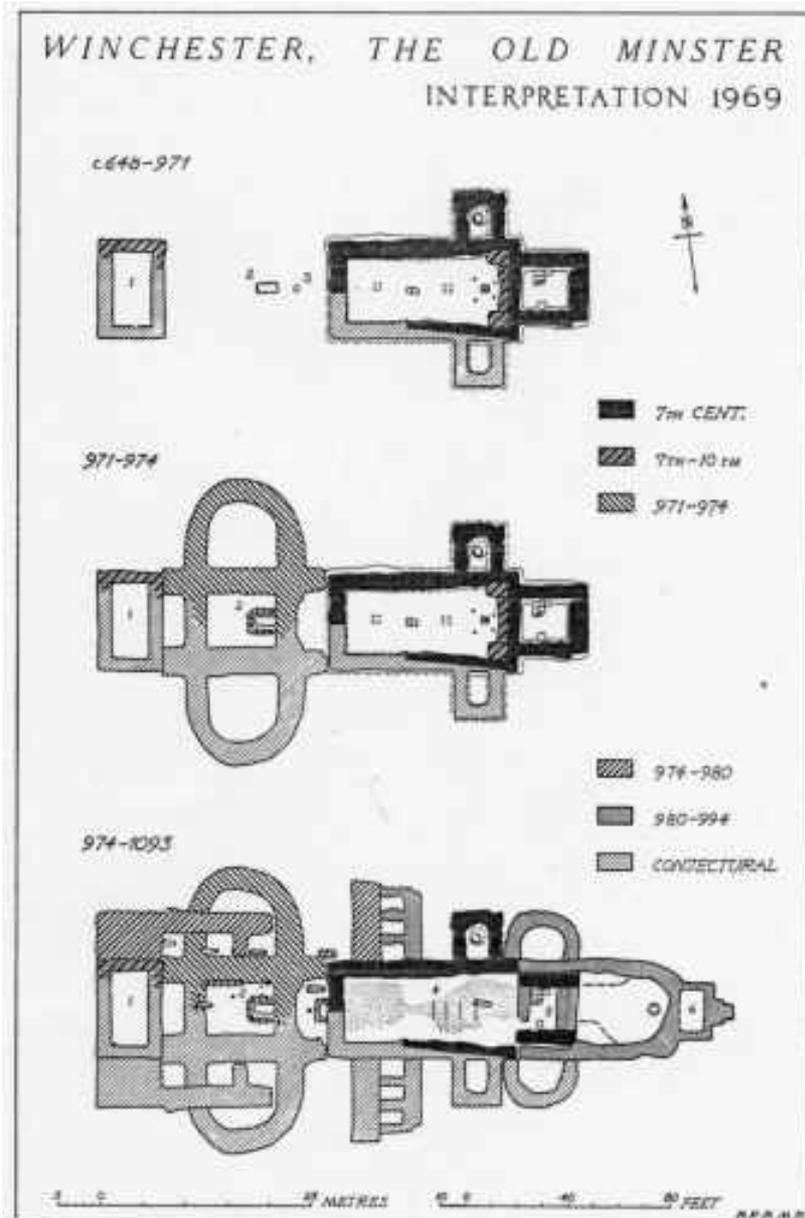
While many in the audience may have been intrigued by the title of Martin's talk, "Winchester, Charlemagne and Jerusalem" a complex, perfectly elucidated, if controversial argument unfolded, told with clarity and not a little humour.

His main theme was to show how the architecture of the earliest minster of Winchester had been influenced by continental themes, and that this was clearly demonstrated by the plan forms of both the Old Minster, excavated in the late 60's, those of the Church of the Holy Apostle in Constantinople and the palace of Charlemagne at Aachen.



The first church on the present cathedral site (Fig. 1, above) was founded by Pope Honorus' envoy, Berinus, in 638. This church went through a long development sequence over 400 years as shown by Martin and Birthe Biddle's long term excavation of the 1960's and 70's (Fig. 2, below).

In the 960's, Bishop Ethelwold declared the church should be extended to cover the grave of St. Swithun and create a martyrium. This was achieved with the building of north and south apses which were structurally unsound. Their failure led to the laying of massive foundations which began to show continental influences.



The major change from the wooden Anglo-Saxon structure was building in stone, but also the use of clear ratios of length and width which would be found in other, continental, structures.

Similarly these standardised ratios, which allowed a modular design and rapid transfer of ideas in architecture, were paralleled by a standard measure of 99 Roman feet. This is seen in the distance between the north and south apse of the inner walls and is further evident in the octagonal rotunda of Charlemagne's palace at Aachen (Fig 3, below), and also the rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.



King Charlemagne (crowned in 800) had a deep interest in Jerusalem, being a stopping point between Rome and Baghdad. He held a piece of the True Cross at Aachen and the layout and measurements of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre transfer to the palace at Aachen. Thus the ratio, plan and to a degree, dimensions of the Old Minster were a direct connection between Winchester and the centre of the Christian world.

The foundations of the eastern end of the Old Minster suggest a wooden tower structure, reminiscent of the idea of the tomb of Christ. Its position above the altar represents the resurrection physically above the body and blood of Christ.

Is this staged wooden tower, which also shows evidence of bell ropes, a model for the later traditional English spire? Our Old Minster, with its twin apse structures around the martyrion of St. Swithun predates some of the great continental buildings such as the cathedral at Köln, perhaps showing that architectural influence was not limited to that from the continent to Britain, but, dare it be said, back to the continent.

The first biannual June Lloyd Memorial Lecture was a huge success with a highly popular speaker who proved that excavations done in the 60's and 70's continued to provoke new ideas and interpretations.

CS