

ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL, MEDWAY, KENT

NEW MEMORIAL FOR THE ROYAL ENGINEERS IN THE NAVE SOUTH AISLE.
PROJECT CODE RCREM 10, NGR TQ 7424 6853

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

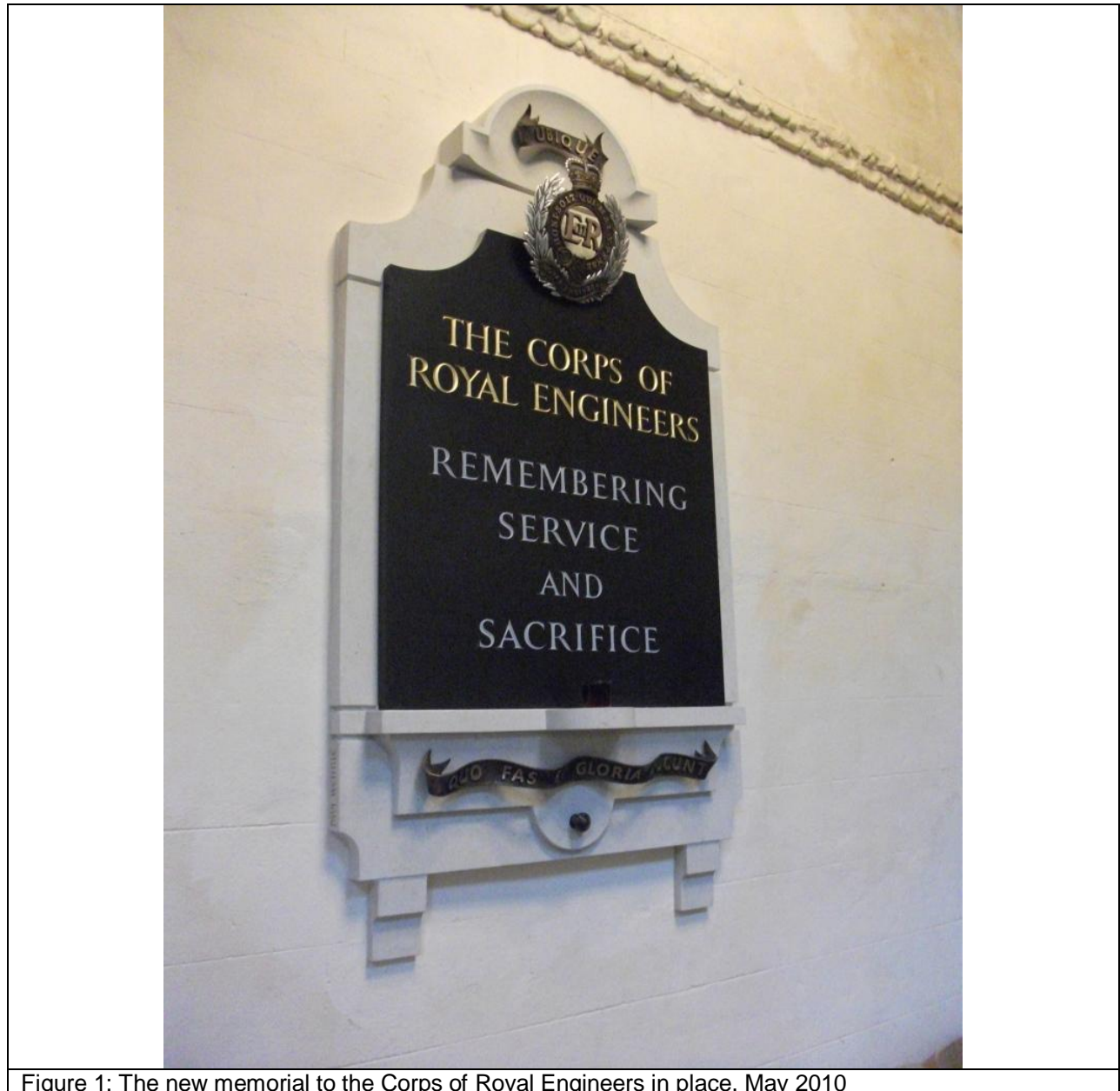


Figure 1: The new memorial to the Corps of Royal Engineers in place, May 2010

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For the Dean and Chapter of Rochester

Rochester Cathedral, Medway, Kent. New memorial for the Royal Engineers in the Nave south aisle. Project Code RCREM 10, NGR TQ 7424 6853. Report on an archaeological watching brief.

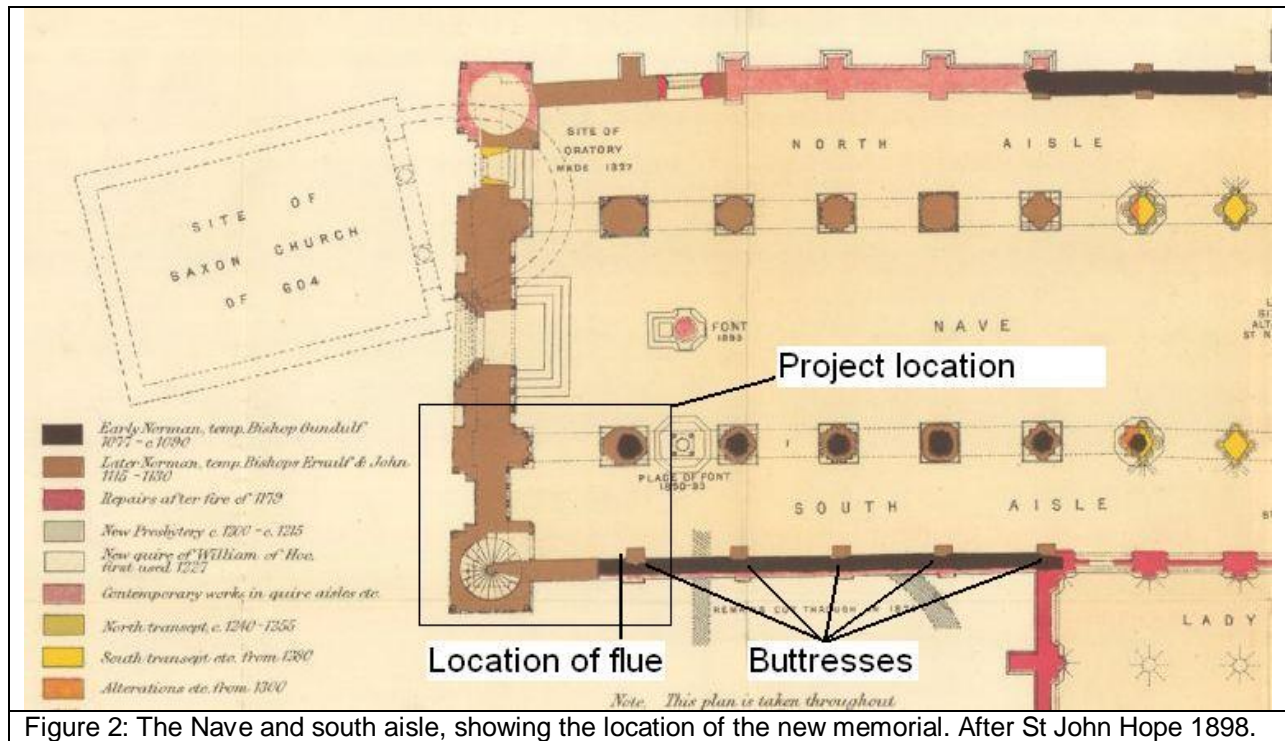


Figure 2: The Nave and south aisle, showing the location of the new memorial. After St John Hope 1898.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was maintained during conservation and construction work to erect a new memorial to the Corps of Royal Engineers in the south aisle of the nave at Rochester Cathedral. This revealed evidence for Norman and 17th-century building work at the west end of the nave. It also showed that the westernmost internal pilaster buttress at least is a rebuild (probably part of the 17th-century work) rather than an early 12th-century feature, as suggested on St John Hope's plan of the cathedral (see Figure 2, above). This report provides a brief description of the watching brief and its results.

1 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological watching brief was maintained during conservation and construction work prior to the installation of a new memorial to the Corps of Royal Engineers in the south aisle¹ of the nave at Rochester Cathedral. The work involved stripping off and replacing areas of recent render to the interior of the wall, demolition of a late 19th or early 20th-century flue for a long-since removed Gurney stove, repair of the adjacent buttress once the flue had been removed, and of course erection of the new memorial (see Figure 1, front cover). The project location and various features mentioned in the text are shown on Figure 2.

The proposal in 2009 that the Corps of Royal Engineers should have a new memorial at Rochester Cathedral seemed appropriate in a number of ways. The Corps has been based at Brompton for much of its history, and regards Rochester Cathedral as its home church. The Cathedral, city and wider community of Rochester and the Medway feels this relationship equally strongly, taking pride in the presence of the Royal Engineers in their midst. It also seemed appropriate to add a new memorial specifically to the Corps (as distinct from individual members of it) to the existing stock within the Cathedral, thus adding to a venerable tradition of memorials here. The chosen location in the westernmost bay of the Nave south aisle had become available in 2009. It had been used previously for the Cathedral Shop, but relocation of this and welcoming facilities to the North Transept freed up the space for the new memorial, which was funded by the Royal Engineers themselves. The Fabric Advisory Committee of Rochester Cathedral approved the proposal, with a condition that an archaeological watching brief should be maintained during the work, which was in a sensitive area of the Cathedral.

Associated improvements included the removal of a modern flue rising up to the roof. This had serviced a long-since removed Gurney stove (Figure 3). The flue interrupted a finely decorated Romanesque string course, the only part of it to be so decorated on this side of the nave (the rest is of plain rectangular profile). It was not clear whether construction of the flue had cut away part of the decoration, or whether it had stopped at this point already. The existing rendering on the wall face to the west of the flue was also in poor condition, and was thus replaced as part of the project. Demolition of the flue also exposed the wall face fully to roof height, as well as the west face of the pilaster buttress against which the flue had been built. This was the westernmost of five such buttresses, identified by St John Hope as being early 12th century additions to the late 11th-century south wall of the Nave. He also suggested that the western bay of the south aisle was also part of the early 12th-century work to build the Cathedral's magnificent West Front. The work thus offered an opportunity to examine and record several areas of potentially early fabric, and so an archaeological watching brief was maintained. The area had also been recorded photographically in advance of the project to ensure that its existing condition was documented.

¹ Rochester Cathedral is oriented from north-west to south-east. The orientation largely reflects the pre-existing topography of the Roman town. It is a broadly accepted convention, however, to describe church buildings with reference to a 'standard' east-west orientation even when the reality is significantly different from this, as at Rochester. This convention is followed throughout this report.



Figure 3: The Nave south aisle looking west – note the Gurney stove in the background behind the railings. Photograph by Bill Brandt, 1942. National Monuments Record ref AA43/00169.

2 DESCRIPTION

Stripping the render exposed the lower part of the Nave's south wall internally, allowing an invaluable opportunity to examine the fabric at this important location. As noted above St John Hope considered that there was a junction between two phases of Norman work here (see Figure 2). This is an over-simplification, and the fabric is more complex than this. Halsey (2006, 65) points out that the Nave foundations are Gundulf's work of the late 11th century, so the overall form of the structure was devised in his time. The inside was refaced with new masonry in the mid-12th century, however, probably working from west to east. The south wall of the nave was completely rebuilt in the late 17th century, but the north wall, despite much later repair, still retains some internal and external carved decoration of the mid-12th century. Despite the 17th-century rebuilding of the south wall, the westernmost bay appears to retain some original fabric. It is difficult to account for the survival of the Romanesque string course otherwise. Observation during the watching brief appeared to confirm that this is *in situ* within the fabric around it.



Pilaster buttress
Flue

String course

Failing render



Straight joint at the base of the elevation

Brickwork

Figure 4: The westernmost bay of the south aisle in October 2009, before work started. Note the string course.

Figure 5: The same bay in March 2010 with the failed render removed to reveal the masonry behind it. Note the straight joint, highlighted.



Figure 6: The remainder of the westernmost bay of the Nave south aisle. Most of this is 12th-century fabric.



Figure 7: Abutment of the south wall with the door jamb of the West Front's south-west turret.

Once the render had been fully stripped, it was clear that there were indeed differences in the masonry behind it. Most of it was of coursed rubble (Figure 6) and is probably 12th-century fabric, but the section adjacent to the flue was mostly of more random character, and appears to belong to the 17th-century rebuild. The same mixture of roughly laid and poorly (if at all) coursed stone and brick was also observed behind the flue once it had been removed, for its full height (Figure 8). The junction between the early and later stonework was mostly quite ragged and indistinct, but there was a clear straight joint between them at the base of the wall (Figure 5). It is possible that this represents the junction (as suggested by St John Hope) between Gundulf's work and the early/mid-12th-century rebuilding of the West End, but fossilised by the 17th-century fabric, which seems to have replaced the earlier Norman work here. It is also notable that this point is a little to the west of the termination of the string course, which was found when the flue was demolished. The Romanesque string course only continued for c 100mm east behind the flue (Figure 9), but even so this places its end about 0.5m to the east of the straight joint. The 12th-century masonry also abutted the jamb of the door into the south-west turret of the West Front (Figure 7). These should be contemporary, so the abutment probably represents nothing more than a constructional relationship: it would make sense to work up the high-quality ashlar of the door frame before building the rubble walling up to it.



Figure 8: The pilaster buttress (left) abutting the masonry of the south wall. Note the frequent use of brick in both, but especially in the buttress.

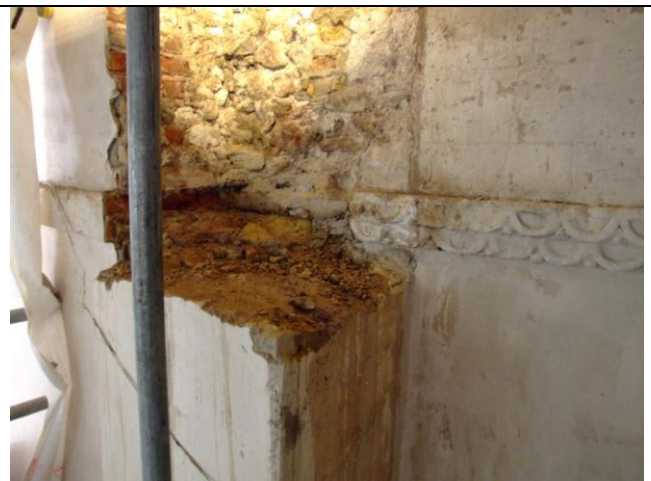


Figure 9: Demolition of the stove flue revealed a short extra length of the Romanesque sting course on the south wall of the aisle.

The final piece of evidence uncovered during the watching brief relates to the pilaster buttress. The stove flue had been built hard into the corner between this and the rebuilt south wall of the aisle. St John Hope showed the buttresses as cutting back slightly into what he perceived as Norman fabric (Figure 2). The watching brief demonstrated that the western buttress actually abuts the south wall, but in this case it is butting against the 17th-century rebuild. Large quantities of brick had been used both in the aisle wall and the buttress. Most of the bricks were of hard-fired types that became standard after London's Great Fire in 1666. Perhaps the buttresses had been forgotten when the south wall of the nave was rebuilt, and had to be added soon afterwards to balance up with the north wall.

3 CONCLUSIONS

This watching brief, though limited in necessity and extent, provided useful evidence for both the early fabric of the Nave's south wall, and also for its later rebuilding. It may be some time before similar opportunities to examine the masonry behind the rendered finish are available. This work has demonstrated the value in taking those opportunities.

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