

ST MARY, HARROW-ON-THE-HILL: LANFRANC'S CHURCH AND ITS SAXON PREDECESSOR

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SUMMARY

Examination of the fabric of the nave at St Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill, indicates that the remains of a church documented as having been built by Archbishop Lanfranc (1070–89), thought to have been lost, still survive. The indicators are of a large but simple church consisting of an aisleless nave. The suggested plan-form is paralleled by the early Romanesque church of Pagham, West Sussex. A burial in the north aisle of the present church uncovered in 2007 dates to the late 10th to mid-12th century, which provides a terminus ante quem for the predecessor of Lanfranc's church. However, there is circumstantial evidence that Harrow originated as an 8th- or 9th-century minster. While the place name is indicative of a pagan Saxon cult focus, it is argued that 'Christianisation' of the site was not the primary motive for the establishment of the putative minster. It is suggested that a church was founded on this prominent hilltop by the Archbishops of Canterbury as a way of demonstrating the supremacy of their see.

INTRODUCTION

Despite 20th-century suburban encroachment, the parish church of St Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill in the London Borough of Harrow (NGR TQ1531 8745) is arguably the most spectacularly sited religious building in Greater London. No less significant is the fact that it occupies the site of a pagan Saxon cult focus, the *Gumeninga hergae* or 'shrine' of the *Gumeningas*, an otherwise unknown people (Watts 2004, 282). It has been described as 'the most impressive site of heathen Germanic worship in the whole

of England' (Stenton 1971, 54). The Harrow place name is a corruption of *hergae* (OE *hearg*); in 1398 it was recorded as 'Harowe atte Hill', and 'Harrow-on-the-Hill' in 1426 (Watts 2004, 282).

The church is mentioned in Eadmer's life of St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury (1093–1109). The latter, in 1094, consecrated a church which his predecessor, Lanfranc (d 1089), had built (Southern 1962, 67–8). It has been assumed that all the fabric of Lanfranc's church has vanished (Bolton *et al* 1971, 255), and that the earliest surviving portion of the present church is its 12th-century west tower (Fig 1).

Examination of the fabric of the church by this writer back in 2007 suggested that the structure of Lanfranc's nave might after all survive. This research was the subject of an unpublished paper (Secker 2007). This paper develops my previous research, but the interpretation of the plan-form of Lanfranc's church has been revised. Since that paper was written, a radiocarbon date has been obtained for a burial within the north aisle, confirming that the burial is of late 10th- to mid-12th-century date (discussed later). Though this provides a *terminus ante quem* for the establishment of a church at Harrow, there is compelling circumstantial evidence, discussed below, for the establishment of an earlier minster here.¹ Another important development since 2007 is the reconsideration of *hearg* sites. These are now regarded as sacred landscapes rather than shrines (Semple 2007; 2010).



Fig 1. St Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill: general view of church from south-west

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Harrow-on-the-Hill is fortunate in being documented in a number of authentic 8th- and 9th-century charters (Clarke 1989). Clarke's interpretations are summarised here and discussed in relation to the origins of the church. The earliest charter is the grant of AD 764 for 767, made by Offa, King of Mercia to Abbot Stūðberht, of 30 hides of land between *Gumeninga hergae* ('the [pagan] shrine of the *Gumeningas*') and the Lidding River. In addition, Offa made a gift of six hides of land east of the Lidding and a *habitatio* (dwelling) to Abbot Stūðberht (Sawyer 1968, no. 106). Clarke has suggested that this grant did not include Harrow Hill itself (Fig 2), but covered the land to the east of it. The key question is: did the name denote an area larger than the hilltop? Given that the word *Herga* means 'holy place' this can hardly have been the case (Clarke 1989, 180). However this interpretation of

the place name was made without the benefit of Semple's research, which suggests that *herg* place names refer to landscapes rather than individual structures or sites (Semple 2007). This would imply that at this date, the possession of Harrow Hill remained with Offa himself. Clarke further suggests that the land granted to Stūðberht included the present districts of Kenton, Alperton and eastern Sudbury, but not Wembley (1989, 179–80). Why did Abbot Stūðberht want to acquire this land? One possibility was that he was seeking to regain possession of a minster at Harrow, which had been established by Offa or one of his Mercian predecessors, but that this minster and its endowment had very quickly returned to lay ownership. In fact in AD 801 it was granted to Pilheard, a *comis* (companion) of King Coenwulf of Mercia (Sawyer 1968, no. 106). Clarke notes that it was unusual for land to be transferred from ecclesiastical to lay hands and that Pilheard's estate was an early example of a private lordship (1989, 180).

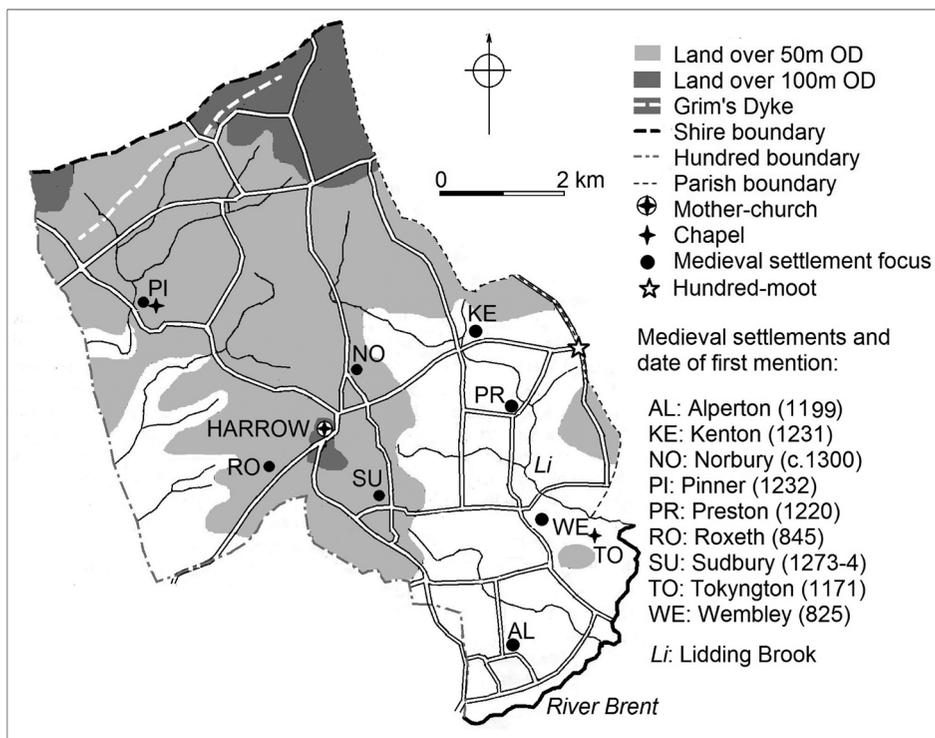


Fig 2. The parish of Harrow: medieval topography (scale 1:125,000)

The next reference to Harrow concerns a dispute at the Council of *Clofesho* in AD 825 (Sawyer 1968, no. 1436). This dispute concerned Archbishop Wulfred of Canterbury and the property of the heir and daughter of Coenwulf, King of Mercia (d AD 821), Cwoenfrīð, Abbess of *Sudmynstra* (Minster in Thanet, Kent). This longstanding dispute between the archbishops of Canterbury and the kings of Mercia was resolved by Cwoenfrīð ceding land in Harrow and its environs to Wulfred. This land included Harrow, *Herefrithingland*, Wembley and Yeading (Sawyer 1968, no. 1436). The land was ceded in two parts. The first grant was 53 hides comprising Harrow and Yeading, the second Wembley and *Herefrithingland*. The latter estate has been equated with the 36 hides granted in AD 767 to Stīðberht (Clarke 1989, 182). The estate of Harrow now amounted to a hundred hides in addition to four hides which Cwoenfrīð added as compensation for her delay in conveying the land to the archbishop.

The charters need to be seen in the political context of the time and the tensions between the Mercian royal house and the See of Canterbury (Brooks 2000, 112–21). At this time, Archbishop Jænberht (AD 765–92) was pressing for Kentish independence, while the Mercians were establishing control over south-eastern England. Upon his death, he was replaced by the Mercian Æthelheard, who fled from Canterbury to his native Lindsey upon Offa's death in AD 796. Offa's successor, Coenwulf, however, forcibly reinstalled Æthelheard at Canterbury. While Æthelheard was very much a Mercian puppet, his successor, Wulfred (AD 805–32) was more independent-minded. As a result of various transactions, he built up a large group of estates of which Harrow was part. As outlined above, the 104-hide estate granted to Wulfred by Cwoenfrīð had been assembled from two blocks of land, the junction of which was near Harrow Hill. One way of consolidating the estate in perpetuity would be to found a church near

that junction. Moreover, a church on a site as prominent as Harrow Hill (Fig 1) would be a very visible reminder of the supremacy of the see of Canterbury.

The next mention of Harrow is in the will of Werhard of AD 832 x 850, when the estate again comprised 104 hides (Sawyer 1968, no. 1414). Werhard was probably a Mercian kinsman of Wulfred (Brooks 2000, 116). Though only a deacon when he appeared in a witness-list in a charter of AD 824 (Sawyer 1968, no. 1266), he described himself as *presbiter* in the above-mentioned will. In a charter of AD 825 x 832 however, he is described as *presbiter abbas*, priest and abbot (*ibid.*, no. 1268). He must thus have been appointed abbot, presumably of Christ Church, Canterbury, by the time he was in possession of Harrow. The charter indicates Werhard was a very extensive landowner. As well as Harrow, he held by gift of Wulfred lands in Kent totalling 225 hides as well as a *mansio* in Canterbury, while 70 hides in Middlesex, the most important of which was the 32-hide estate of Hayes, were from his own patrimony (*ibid.*, no. 1414). It has been suggested that Werhard was a failed candidate for the Archbishopric of Canterbury (Brooks 1984, 141). At Harrow, there was provision for five paupers, an early example of poor relief. It has been suggested there was a church at Harrow at this time to distribute alms (Clarke 1989, 184).

The last Saxon charter to mention Harrow dates from AD 845 (Sawyer 1968, no. 1194), when Werhard exchanged a hide of land in Roxeth with a hide in neighbouring Greenford. The records are then silent until the Domesday Survey of 1086, when Harrow was listed as a 100-hide estate or manor belonging to the archbishop. Harrow had been held by Leofwine Godwineson before the Conquest. Amongst the population of Harrow was a priest holding a hide of land (Williams & Martin 2002, 358). How the manor had passed into Leofwine's hands is uncertain, but the most plausible explanation is that it had been acquired by Earl Godwine from Archbishop Eadsige (1038–50), as was certainly the case with some of Christ Church's possessions in Kent (Clarke 1989, 186).

The church at Harrow is next mentioned by the chronicler and monk of Christ

Church, Eadmer, when it was consecrated by Archbishop Anselm (1093–1109) in 1094. Eadmer stated that Archbishop Lanfranc (1070–89), built the church, but was unable to dedicate the building before his death (Southern 1962, 67–8). Eadmer recounts how a clerk of (the see of) London stole the chrism (consecrated oil) and attempted to take it to London, but lost his way and accidentally returned to Harrow, whereupon the stolen chrism was discovered. This misdeed was however forgiven by Anselm. This episode illustrates the tensions between the Sees of Canterbury and London over Harrow. There is also the question of why Lanfranc chose to rebuild the church. Earl Godwine had a reputation as a despoiler of the Canterbury estates and though such claims were partly Norman propaganda, they had some factual basis. Even Godwine's own daughter, Queen Edith, admitted right was on the side of the archbishops (Williams 2012, 237–8). Therefore, Lanfranc's new church might be seen not just as an architectural improvement, but as a symbol of Harrow being returned to its rightful owner.

From the later medieval history of the church some points are worth mentioning (Bolton *et al* 1971, 249–55). As a peculiar of the see of Canterbury, Harrow is mentioned in the *Domesday Monachorum*, when it rendered £54, seventh in the ranking of the 24 Canterbury estates assessed for taxable value. Harrow was thus worth little more than a third of the value of Canterbury's most important farmed estate, Lympe, which was valued at £160. Conversely, Harrow was considerably more valuable than the venerable minster of Reculver, assessed at £32 less 100d, or Croydon, which was worth £32 and 40 shillings (Page 1932, 265). The last, a minster documented in AD 809 (Sawyer 1968, no. 164), became the head of a deanery of which Harrow was a member (Bolton *et al* 1971, 249). This development possibly occurred in Lanfranc's time, but it is uncertain whether the deaneries were established before the 12th century (Cowdrey 2003, 138). There is no evidence that Harrow's dependency on Croydon pre-dates Lanfranc's tenure. Harrow's dependent chapels of St John the Baptist, Pinner and St Michael, Tokyngton are first mentioned in 1233 x 1240 (Bolton *et al* 1971,

151). In the *Taxatio* of Pope Nicholas IV, St Mary's church at Harrow together with its dependencies were valued at £46 13s 4d (Denton 2003, 'Harrow on the Hill'). At this time, Harrow was the second wealthiest church in Middlesex after Staines, which was valued at £54 13s 4d (*ibid.*, 'Staines'). A chance reference in Domesday under the entry for East Burnham, Buckinghamshire, indicates the church at Staines was a minster (Williams & Martin 2002, 401), probably of some antiquity (Bailey 1988, 173). On 30 December 1545, Henry VIII achieved what the House of Godwine had not, the permanent appropriation of Harrow from the archbishop into lay hands (Bolton *et al* 1971, 203).

THE TOPOGRAPHY OF THE PARISH OF HARROW AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

The medieval development of Harrow has been detailed elsewhere (Bolton *et al* 1971, 172–98) and the Saxon topography has been discussed by Bailey (1996). It is probable that the boundaries of the later parish of Harrow were those of the 53-hide estate surrendered by Cwoenfrīð to Archbishop Wulfred in AD 825 (Clarke 1989, 183). The south-east boundary of the parish follows the River Brent and its north-western boundary is defined by the marginal upland of Harrow Weald (Fig 2). The interfluvium between the rivers Pinn and Brent runs south from Harrow Weald to form the ridge upon which Harrow Hill itself is situated. The latter is the (pagan) focus of the *Gumeningas* (discussed earlier). The transformation of Harrow Hill from pagan site to Christian church is more fully discussed later.

As has been noted, four place names within the parish were documented by AD 845: Harrow itself, Lidding Brook, Wembley and Roxeth (Fig 2). Other settlement foci emerge in the documentary record from the late 12th century onwards. Preston is only documented in 1220 (Bolton *et al* 1971, 180), but it appears to have developed within the vicinity of the gift of six hides and a dwelling-house made by Offa to Stūðberht in AD 767. This medieval settlement was situated on the western side of Lidding Brook, whereas the Saxon *habitatō* was to the east of *torrentis Lidding* (Sawyer 1968, no. 106). Interestingly,

'Preston' names may refer to estates which provisioned priests rather than where the priests actually lived (Gelling 1997, 184–5). Possibly, the settlement of Preston originated during the late 8th century with the purpose of supporting Stūðberht's *habitatō*, but that the Saxon foundation was situated to the east of its medieval successor. It has been noted above that Stūðberht only held the estate for a short while, perhaps his lifetime, before it was acquired by the thegn Pilheard. This would suggest the implied priest's or priests' estate is of later origin. It would however appear to pre-date 1066, when the evidence suggests the glebe was centred around the later rectory (Bolton *et al* 1971, 249). Preston was also one of four *-tun* settlements in the south-east of the parish. Tokyngton, Alperton and Kenton are first documented in 1171, 1199 and 1231 respectively (*ibid.*, 180–2), but personal *-tun* names such as the aforementioned are suggestive of later Saxon origins (Gelling 1997, 182). Pinner is first mentioned in 1231 (Bolton *et al* 1971, 175). Saxon pottery of 6th- and 7th-century date has been found at the junction of Waxwell Lane and Love Lane (NGR 51200 19000) some 450m north-west of the church. Mid-12th-century and later pottery was also found on the same site (Borrill 2009). Sadly the context of these finds is unknown, but they probably represent occupation within a tenement fronting onto Bridge Street (Borrill 2009, 153). Sudbury is only first mentioned in 1273–4 (Bolton *et al* 1971, 183) and Norbury alias Greenhill in 1300 (*ibid.*, 186).

Though the last two places are only documented at a relatively late period, the directional 'bury' names are of interest, since they are sometimes associated with minster estates (Blair 2005, 251). 'Preston' settlements are often appurtenances of minsters. Examples are numerous, but a well-documented example is Preston in Hampshire which was a possession of the important minster of Twynham, alias Christchurch (*ibid.*, 515–16). A priest endowed with a hide or more of land, as was the case at Harrow, is also an indicator of minster status (Blair 1985, 106). Dependent chapels in Domesday are also suggestive of a minster (*ibid.*). Though Harrow's chapels of Pinner and Tokyngton are only first

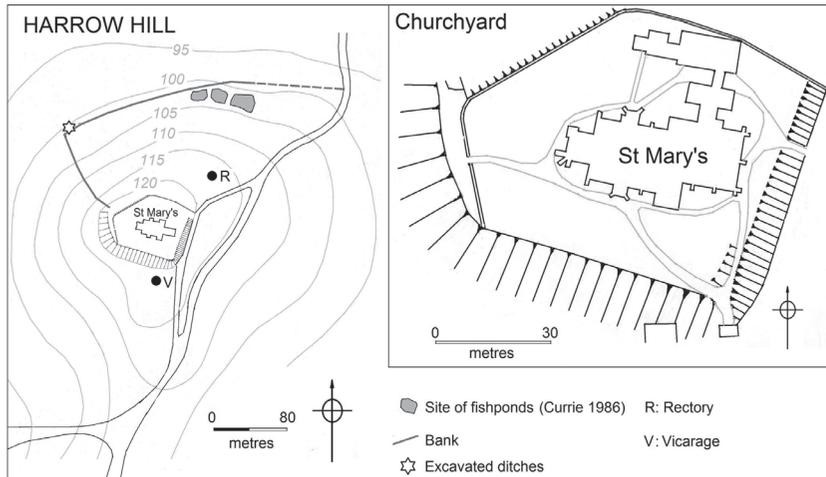


Fig 3. Harrow Hill (inset: not to scale) and churchyard (1:2000)

mentioned in the 13th century, it is possible they have earlier origins.

HARROW HILL AND THE CHURCHYARD

Harrow Hill reaches an altitude of 125m OD (Fig 3). The solid geology of the hill is Eocene London Clay and it is capped by deposits of Eocene gravel (Bagshot Beds) (Bolton *et al* 1971, 169). On the basis of Roman bricks reused in the fabric of the church (discussed later), the hill has been postulated as a Roman temple site (*ibid*, 172, n58). While the former existence of such a feature cannot be ruled out, the evidence is lacking: the bricks may well have come from elsewhere (Thompson 2009, 70). Grove Manor, the rectory, is perhaps on or near the site of the dwelling of the priest mentioned in 1086 (Bolton *et al* 1971, 249). Earthworks on the northern slope of the hill have been identified as fishponds associated with the Rectory Manor first mentioned in 1323; the unusual position of the fishponds was sustainable due to their being fed from springs emanating from below the gravel capping of Harrow Hill (Currie 1986). The garden of Grove Manor is defined by a bank about 2m high. The latter may be of similar date to the fishponds. In 1990, fieldwork at Harrow School (some 250m to the south of the site) revealed a ditch containing abraded pottery of possible Saxon date, plus another ditch and a pit containing medieval pottery.² To the south of the churchyard,

documentary evidence indicates the present vicarage is situated on the site of the one that was endowed in 1233 x 1240 (Bolton *et al* 1971, 249).

The steep scarp slopes to the south and east of the churchyard are noticeable. They are certainly artificial as Harrow Hill has been subject to much terracing. Most of the latter activity is of post-medieval date, as at Bill Yard, Harrow School (Lerz 2013). However, there is some evidence, discussed below, that the boundaries of the present churchyard are Saxon in origin. Therefore, it is possible the adjoining scarps are of equally early date. The churchyard has maximum dimensions of 90m north-west to south-east and 70m north-east to south-west. The medieval church is six degrees out of alignment with the southern and eastern churchyard boundaries.

THE CHURCH

The church was described by Lysons (1795, 561–4), but the first serious studies of it were made by Samuel Gardner and the Reverend William Done Bushell (Gardner 1895; 1918; Done Bushell 1901). A further survey of the church was conducted by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments for England (RCHME 1937, 64–6). The present church is fundamentally an early 13th-century building incorporating a 12th-century west tower, a font (*ibid*), and the fabric of an earlier nave (Secker 2007, 9–12). Its external appearance is however that of

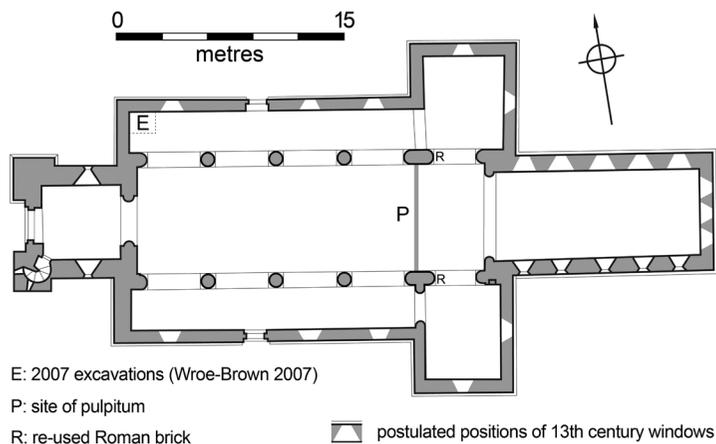


Fig 4. St Mary, Harrow-on-the-Hill: reconstructed plan of 13th-century church (scale 1:500)

a 15th-century building drastically restored during the 19th century (Fig 1). The 15th-century and later work is largely irrelevant to this paper, but the early church can only be understood with reference to the 13th-century building.

The 13th-Century Church

The plan of the 13th-century church can be reconstructed with confidence (Fig 4). It was a substantial, aisled cruciform building with a nave of five bays, plus an earlier west tower. The fabric interior has been largely covered in limewash plaster, but it can be seen that the 13th-century details are in Reigate stone. Exceptions are the eastern parts of the bases of the compound piers between the two eastern bays which are constructed of reused Roman brick. Survival of the 13th-century fenestration is confined to the lancet windows of the south wall of the chancel, and even these have been drastically restored. It can however be assumed that there were corresponding windows in the now-destroyed north wall of the chancel. The north and south aisles and transepts were entirely refenestrated in the 15th century; it is assumed that the present windows occupy the positions of 13th-century predecessors. The design of the easternmost arch of the north arcade is unusual (Fig 5). It has been interpreted as the result of an attempt, probably undertaken during the 14th century, to widen the entrances to the transept. Likewise the easternmost arch in

the southern arcade is generally regarded as a later alteration (Gardner 1918, 10, 18; RCHME 1937, 65). The later date for the eastern bay seems to have been assumed on the grounds that these bays are narrower than their more westerly counterparts. Moreover, whereas the columns of the western four bays of the nave arcade have water-holding bases, the respond bases of the eastern bay are not water-holding. A later date for the eastern bay is however unlikely. Instead, it seems more plausible that the reason why the eastern arches are narrower and that there is a difference in the mouldings is that the eastern bay of the nave was a liturgically separate area.

West of the arches was a congregational nave, while the eastern arches formed the first bay of a choir-space separated by a pulpitum.³ Evidence for the pulpitum survives in the form of grooves just below the capitals at the western ends of the straight edges of the compound piers (Fig 5) which probably accommodated a horizontal fitting which was attached to a former pulpitum screen to its west. If the earlier 13th-century date for the eastern nave arcade bay is accepted, this might imply that the transepts (Fig 4) are at least this early, though their earliest details are the 15th-century windows. The aisles are contemporary with the transepts, as evidenced by the bonding-in of the eastern wall of the south aisle with the west wall of the south transept. The chancel was heavily restored in 1895 (RCHME 1937, 64). The external facing and the dressings

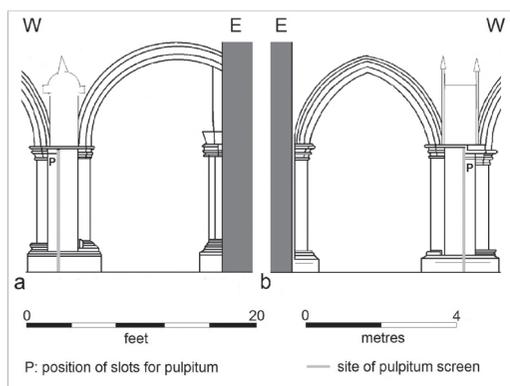


Fig 5. Elevations of (a) nave and (b) south eastern arcade bays, showing position of former pulpitum screen (scale 1:200)

of the lancet windows date from this time, but the internal splays are original. It would appear that there were originally five lancets. The north wall of the 13th-century chancel was demolished when the north chapel was built in 1846–9 (*ibid*). The chancel is situated on sloping ground, its east end being 1.08m below its western end. Also notable is the fact that the chancel is aligned 2° north of the nave. This may be an intentional attempt to place the chancel in a more liturgically correct position which is paralleled at a number of churches (Hinton 2010, 141–8).

The 12th-Century Tower

The tower is usually regarded as the earliest surviving part of the church's fabric (RCHME

1937, 64). It is 7.5m square externally. Where the tower is not rendered, it is seen to be constructed of Reigate stone, brown ironstone and flint. At ground floor level is the west doorway (Fig 6a). This is constructed of Reigate stone and has jambs of two orders with intervening engaged nook-shafts supporting an arch of two orders above which is a quirked and chamfered label. The capital above the north nook-shaft is of waterleaf form (Fig 6b), its southern counterpart is voluted (Fig 6c). The capitals of the inner jambs, which support the segmental-headed tympanum arch, have T-shaped mouldings with inverted semi-circular lobes. The tower has been ascribed to c.1140 (Bolton *et al* 1971, 255). The waterleaf form of the north nook-shaft capital, however, clearly signifies a later 12th-century date. The mouldings are strongly reminiscent of those in the lowest stage of the central tower at St Clement's Church, Sandwich, in Kent, also a possession of the Archbishops of Canterbury. The Sandwich mouldings have been attributed to the 1160s (Clarke *et al* 2010, 46–7 and fig 4.8). A similar date is proposed for the lower stage of the tower at Harrow, which would place it within the archbishopric of Thomas Becket (1162–70). The windows of the first stage of the tower are plain and round-headed. The rendering over of their external lights makes the building material impossible to ascertain. Those of the second stage, however, are slightly pointed and have voussoirs of brown ironstone; they have been ascribed to the early 13th century (Gardner 1918, 9). They could however equally be late 12th century.



Fig 6. Late Romanesque west doorway (a) general view (b) waterleaf capital above northern nook-shaft (c) volute capital above southern nook-shaft

It is tempting to interpret the tower as having been begun by Becket, but its construction was interrupted by his martyrdom. Work might have been completed under Archbishop Richard of Dover (1173–84).

EVIDENCE FOR LANFRANC'S CHURCH

There is evidence that the nave, despite being pierced by 13th-century arcades, originated as part of Lanfranc's church. This is evidenced both in the upper part of the nave below the clerestory and in the pier bases. At the head of the spandrels between the 13th-century arcade arches, plastered-over stones are visible (Fig 7). They are unclear on photographs, but visible to the naked eye. The stones occur either singly or in small stacks two to three stones high. It is also notable that they frequently occur in pairs consistently 1.5m apart, between which are wider gaps generally 3m apart. It would

appear that the narrower gaps represent the positions of the quoins for the internal splays for the blocked Romanesque windows, the height of which can only be conjectured (Fig 8). Most importantly, the westernmost stones are only 0.9m from the east wall of the tower. This suggests that the former westernmost windows, and clearly the wall of the nave, were truncated when the tower was built, probably in the 1160s. Judging by architectural evidence, the nave need be no older than the mid-12th century. The documentary evidence, however, states that a church was consecrated in 1094 (Southern 1962, 67–8). Therefore, it appears that two arcade walls originally formed the nave of the late 11th-century church.

RECONSTRUCTING THE PLAN OF LANFRANC'S CHURCH

While the construction of the tower has obliterated the western end of the nave of

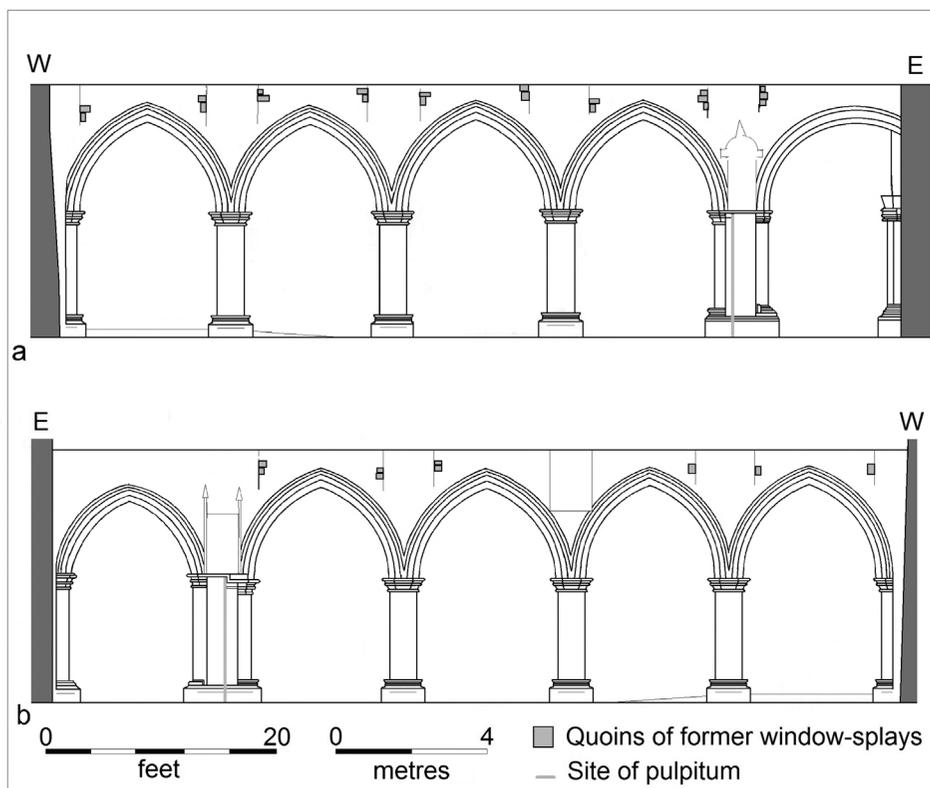


Fig 7. Elevations of (a) north and (b) south nave arcades below clerestory level (scale 1:200)

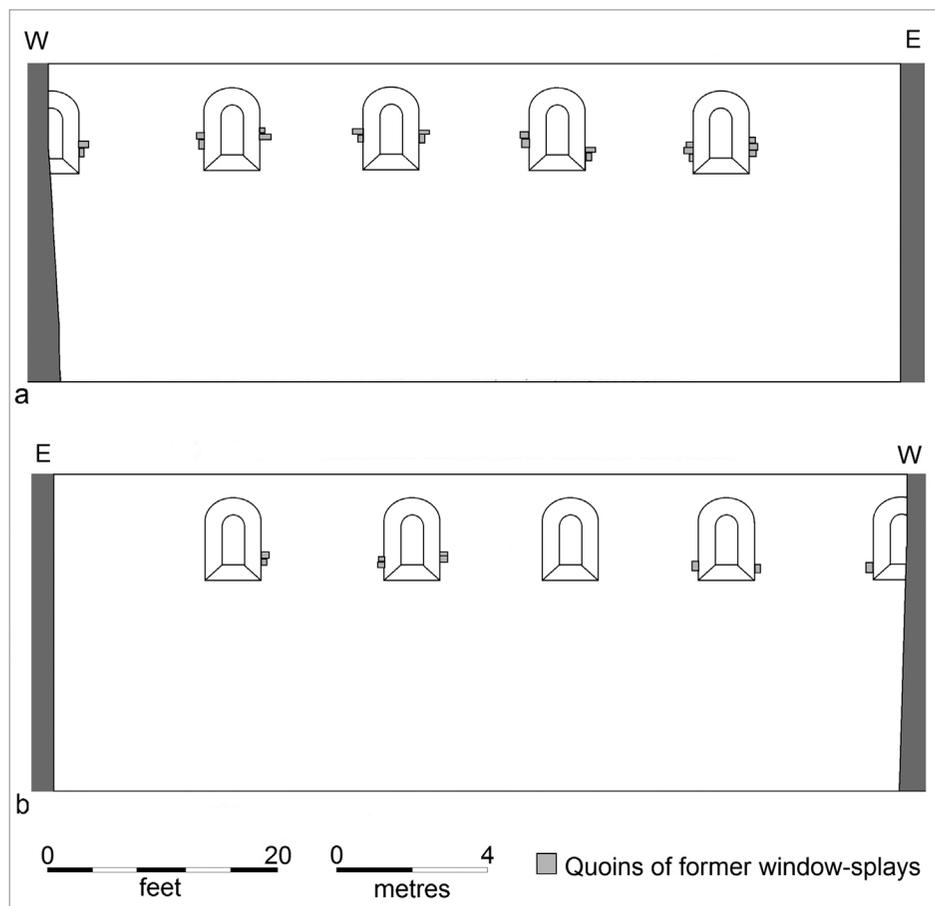


Fig 8. Reconstructed (a) north and (b) south elevations of Lanfranc's nave. NB: levels of reconstructed windows and wall-head are conjectural (scale 1:200)

Lanfranc's church (Fig 9), it can be suggested that the traces of the blocked windows at the western end of the nave allow the missing portion to be reconstructed, assuming that their spacing was identical to those at the eastern end of the nave. This would give a nave of 4:1 proportions. The question arises as to whether Lanfranc's church possessed a cruciform plan. It has previously been suggested that there were small *porticus*-like transepts predating the 13th-century ones (Secker 2007, 9–12 and Fig 10).⁴ This is suggested by two pieces of evidence. First, the offset above the north aisle transept arch was thought to represent an earlier wall which may have been heightened during the 13th century (Fig 10). Secondly, there is the presence of reused Roman brick

on the eastern faces of the sub-plinths of the compound piers west of the eastern nave arcade bays (Fig 4, above). The latter were initially thought by this writer to be part of Lanfranc's church (*ibid*, 9). On reflection, there are however more plausible explanations for both features. The offset above the arch appears not to represent an earlier wall top, but instead where the wall has been cut back to accommodate the corbels of the 15th-century roof. The Roman brick of the respond bases may have been reused during the 13th century. The yellowish gritty lime mortar of the southern plinth appears to be contemporary with the base of the 13th-century respond above it. As discussed below, there is evidence that the floor was lowered to its present level at

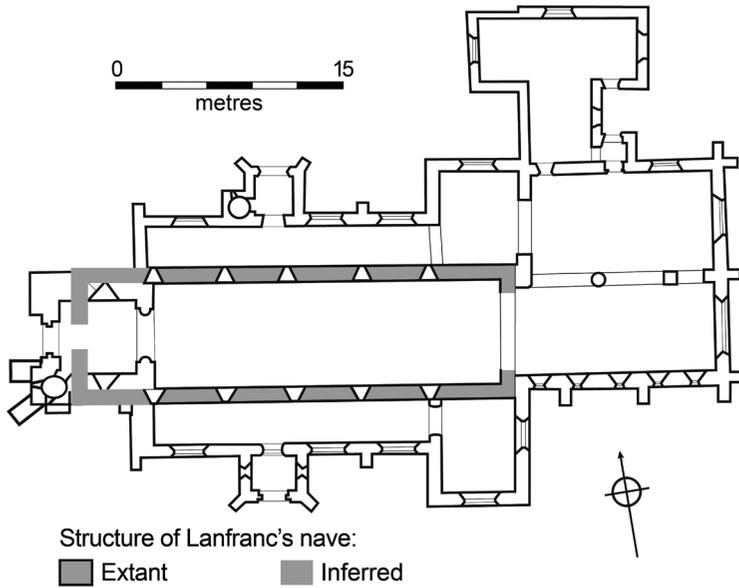


Fig 9. Reconstructed plan of Lanfranc's nave in relation to the modern church (1:500)



Fig 10. North aisle transept arch from east showing offset

this time. If the Roman bricks were reused for a second time in the facing of the bases, a more plausible provenance for the bricks would be that they originally were part of an

earlier chancel arch, which was replaced by the present early 13th-century one.

It appears probable that Lanfranc's church consisted of a long rectangular nave, entered by a western doorway (Fig 11). However, the design of the eastern end of his church is unknown. Possibly it possessed an apsidal chancel, like St Pancras's church in the City of London and many other Romanesque churches (Schofield 1994, 44, fig 16h). A minimalist interpretation would propose a single cell church. However, there is circumstantial evidence that Lanfranc would have favoured an apsidal chancel judging by the evidence from the Abbey of St Étienne, Caen, Normandy, where he was the first Abbot (1066–70) and Canterbury Cathedral, where he started a major rebuilding programme (Harper-Bill & Van Houts 2002, 221–9). Moreover it has been observed that in late 11th-century Ireland, where single-celled churches had previously been ubiquitous, chancels were added to existing churches or included as an integral part of newly built ones. This was at a time when Lanfranc was advising Irish bishops on liturgical practice (Ó Carragáin 2009, 144–5). It is thus postulated that the late 11th-century church at Harrow had an apsidal sanctuary with walls of equal width to the 13th-century chancel (Fig 11), though only geophysical survey or excavation can confirm this.

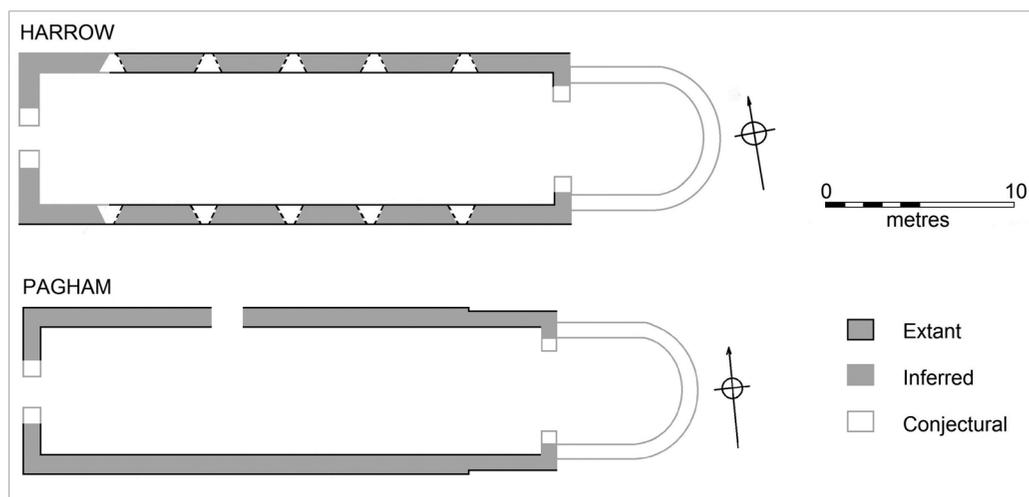


Fig 11. Reconstructed plans of early Romanesque churches at Harrow-on-the-Hill and Pagham (1:400)

LANFRANC'S CHURCH AT HARROW: THE ANALOGY OF PAGHAM, WEST SUSSEX

If the interpretation proposed here for the form of Lanfranc's church is correct, it would be paralleled at Pagham in West Sussex (Fig 11), where excavation has established that the present 11th-century church occupies the site of a Saxon predecessor (Freke 1980). The latter was demolished and replaced by a church with a nave of 4:1 proportions. The 11th-century date for the replacement church at Pagham is inferred from fragments of herringbone masonry preserved in the south wall of the 13th-century chancel (Masters 2001, 393). As at Harrow, the existence of an apsidal chancel is tentatively postulated.

A minster of St Andrew at Pagham is first mentioned in a charter purporting to be of AD 680 (Sawyer 1968, no. 230). Though this document is probably a 10th-century forgery, it appears to contain some genuine information (Masters 2001, 125). At the time of the Domesday Survey, Pagham was held by the Archbishop of Canterbury (Williams & Martin 2002, 38). Anselm visited Pagham in 1108, when he consecrated Richard de Belmeis as Bishop of London at a nearby chapel on the archbishop's manor of Nytimber (Masters 2001, 126).

Before Lanfranc was archbishop, the clergy at Pagham had obtained their chrism from the minster at Chichester, but Lanfranc transferred this to Canterbury (*ibid.*, 124). The increased interest in Pagham shown by Lanfranc and Anselm appears to have been linked with a rebuilding of the church.

SAXON EVIDENCE AT HARROW CHURCH

There is some archaeological evidence that Harrow Hill was used for burials during the Late Saxon or Norman periods. In 2007, the removal of the floor of the western end of the north aisle uncovered two grave cuts (Figs 4 and 12). The northern grave contained a supine female skeleton which had been decapitated during the construction of the west wall of the north aisle. Radiocarbon dating of a rib sample produced a date of cal AD 970–1160, at the 95% probability level, with a median date of 1065 (Wroe-Brown 2007, 18).⁵ The excavator suggested that while the burial was conceivably associated with Lanfranc's church, the alignment of the graves implied they are related to an earlier church. The shallowness of the grave was also noted; it was suggested the floor of the nave was lowered by 0.2m in the early 13th century when the aisle was built. It is however notable that an ironstone block,

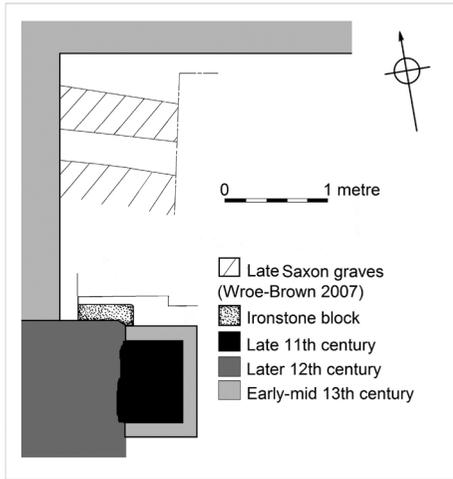


Fig 12. Plan of west end of north aisle (1:75)

which appears to form the foundation course of the north-eastern corner of the late 12th-century tower, is at the same level as the present aisle floor (Fig 12). It is therefore alternatively suggested that these two graves may have originally been external and that this area was truncated and levelled in preparation for the construction of the tower.

On the evidence of the radiocarbon date alone, the burials could be associated with either Lanfranc's church or its predecessor. However, on balance, the alignment of the

two graves suggests that they are associated with an earlier church. There is a discrepancy of about 9° between the alignment of the graves and the north wall of Lanfranc's nave. On the other hand, the graves are perfectly aligned on the present southern boundary of the churchyard (Fig 13a). Therefore it can be tentatively suggested that the present churchyard boundaries are also of Saxon origin and so the associated scarping on the northern and western sides could also be of Saxon date. However, it is possible that these slopes have undergone some later modifications as the present western terrace appears to be a post-medieval feature. Any Saxon church may have been on the same alignment as the churchyard boundaries and the graves, being situated south of the latter. Since, however, nothing survives of such a structure above ground, its position can only be approximated.

The earliest cartographically attested entrance to the churchyard is shown on Messender's map of 1759 (reproduced in Currie 1986), which shows it to the north-east. Possibly this was the original entrance as well.

DISCUSSION

The church of St Mary at Harrow-on-the-Hill is notable because it is certain that there has been a church here since 1094 and possibly earlier and that this succession of churches

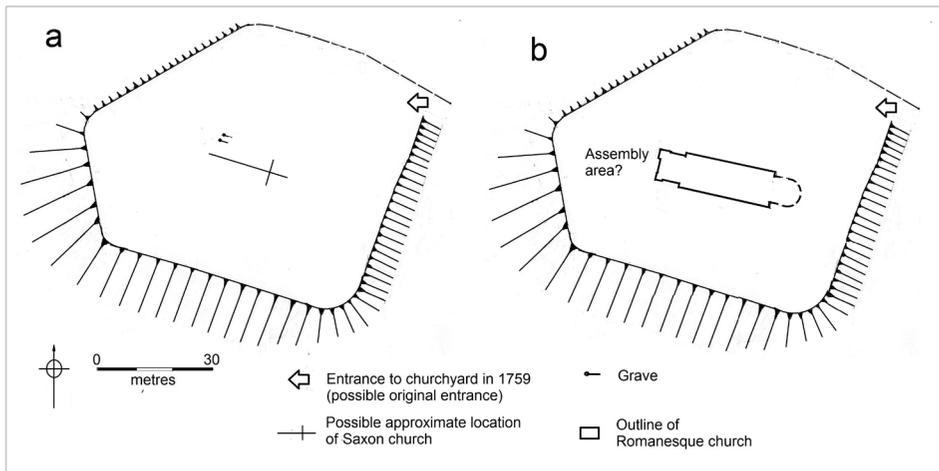


Fig 13. Reconstructed plans of churchyard (a) late Saxon (b) late 12th century (1:2000)

occupy an isolated hill in the Middlesex plain that forms a very prominent landmark, which is probably the reason it was also a site of pagan Saxon ritual significance. This coincidence evokes Bede's account of Pope Gregory exhorting St Augustine (d. c. AD 604) to convert pagan shrines or temples into churches (Sherley-Price 1990, 92). The degree to which Gregory's pronouncement should be interpreted as practical advice to his missionaries is uncertain. The problem is the ambiguous and very limited nature of the surviving evidence for the conversion of pagan Saxon sacred sites into Christian ones. For instance, the importance of water in pagan and Christian ritual is paramount and while it is possible that many holy wells were formerly venerated by pagans, their antiquity cannot be proven. At Knowlton Rings in Dorset a ruined Norman church exists inside the centre of one of three adjoining Bronze Age henge monuments, which looks like an attempt to Christianise an earlier sacred site (Rodwell & Bentley 1984, 30–1). A significant site is the royal centre at Yeavering in Northumberland, where excavations revealed a late 6th-century rectangular timber hall with some associated graves, interpreted as a pagan temple. It was superseded during the 7th century by another timber building (located in a different part of the site, next to a Bronze Age barrow), associated with Christian graves, which has been plausibly interpreted as a church (Hope-Taylor 1977, 277–9).

Given the increasing evidence that *hearg* place names denote sacred landscapes rather than discrete structures (Semple 2007; 2010), it is questionable whether there was ever a 'shrine' at Harrow to be converted. It appears that the vast majority of *hearg* sites were not supplanted by churches. This is partially due to the remote upland situations of many of these places. A few other *hearg* sites besides Harrow-on-the-Hill did however receive churches. One example is at Peper Harow in Surrey. There, the earliest architectural evidence in the church is the 12th-century chancel arch (Malden 1911, 52). The 1291 *Taxatio* valued the church of 'Peper Harow' at £5 when it was held by the lord of the manor, Henry of Guildford (Denton 2003). It is apparent that 'Peper Harow' church was a local proprietary foundation. It is

conceivable there was a pre-12th-century church, perhaps of timber, on the site but no church or priest is mentioned in Domesday, though references to churches in Surrey are otherwise frequent in that survey (Williams & Martin 2002, 71–88). Even if there was an earlier church at Peper Harow, proprietary churches of this type are unlikely to have been founded before the 10th century (Blair 1996, 12). The evidence suggests that when churches do occur on *hearg* sites, they may have been founded centuries after these places ceased to serve as pagan foci. Therefore these churches may have nothing to do with the 'Christianisation' of pagan sites as described by Bede.

When and why was the church at Harrow-on-the-Hill founded? The archaeological evidence of a single burial would suggest a 10th- or 11th-century origin (Wroe-Brown 2007). However, there is other evidence to be considered including the massive size of the parish, the presence of a priest holding a hide of land in 1086 and Harrow's dependent chapels of Pinner and Tokyngton. As outlined above, these factors taken together are suggestive of an undocumented minster. If this is the case, what is unusual is the church's hilltop situation. Minster sites are typically low-lying (Blair 2005, 191–3). There are however exceptions, including the Mercian minsters of Breedon-on-the-Hill, Leicestershire and Hanbury, Worcestershire (*ibid*, 190). Given that Harrow first emerges as a possession of King Offa, could the situation of the church be due to it having been a Mercian foundation? This is plausible but Breedon and Hanbury, unlike Harrow, were situated within former Iron Age hillforts (*ibid*). The use of the hillfort earthworks as ready-made enclosures, rather than their altitude, may have been the motivation behind the choice of sites at the first two. It has also been seen that at Harrow, while there is little circumstantial evidence for a church at the time of Offa's AD 767 grant to Stiddberht (Sawyer 1968, no. 106), it is perhaps more likely that one was founded following the acquisition of the 104-hide estate by Archbishop Wulfred in AD 825 following a long dispute with the Mercian royal house (*ibid*, no. 1436). If the postulated minster at Harrow was a foundation of Wulfred, or perhaps his kinsman Werhard, it

is suggested that their choice of site was not determined by the desire to 'Christianise' a former pagan cult focus, but because its prominent location would act as a highly visible reminder of the supremacy of the see of Canterbury.

The most important discovery is that architectural evidence of what appears to be fabric of the church consecrated in 1094 survives in the present nave walls. The evidence suggests this late 11th-century church was of a similar design to the one at Pagham, Sussex (Fig 11). In the late 12th century, the western end of Lanfranc's nave was apparently demolished and the present west tower built. The structural evidence discussed above indicates that the westernmost part of Lanfranc's nave was demolished when the tower was built, probably in the 1160s. The reason why this was done is obscure. It would make much more sense simply to append the tower to an entire nave, as happened at many hundreds of churches. There is no fall in ground level to the west of the tower, as there is along the present chancel. A possibility is that the western part of the churchyard was used for assemblies and processions into the church (Fig 13b). At Canterbury Cathedral, the constitutions of Lanfranc and Anselm specified that a station should take place in front of the cathedral doorway on Palm Sunday (Gittos 2013, 47). It is possible similar assemblies occurred at Harrow. This hypothesis might be supported by the presence of the broad and elaborate west doorway of the tower (Fig 6). The restricted space on the summit of the hill meant that any open area could not be expanded if the church was extended westwards by the addition of the tower, therefore it was necessary to sacrifice the west end of the nave.

CONCLUSIONS

Examination of the fabric of the nave of the church at Harrow-on-the-Hill has indicated that elements of the church commissioned by Lanfranc apparently survive. A minimalist interpretation of a simple large nave prior to the 13th century, partly on analogy with Pagham, is offered here (Fig 11). The nave, as remodelled in the 13th century shows evidence for a pulpitem dividing off the

eastern arcade bay (Figs 4 & 5). Does this preserve an earlier liturgical arrangement?

If some details of Lanfranc's church are unclear, practically nothing is known about its Saxon predecessor. The excavated female burial (Wroe-Brown 2007) implies the existence of a church in the 10th or 11th century, but circumstantial evidence suggests the presence of an earlier minster at Harrow. The presence of the latter, however, can only be established though future archaeological investigation. The possible Saxon pottery recovered nearby from Harrow School appears to be residual, but it hints at Saxon occupation in the immediate vicinity of the church. The presence of these sherds indicates that a minster community may have occupied the lower slopes of Harrow Hill (Fig 3), this is a hypothesis which future fieldwork could confirm.

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NOTES

¹ It has been suggested that during the 7th and 8th centuries the English parochial organisation consisted of a network of *parochiae* (originally dioceses, now parishes) established by acts of royal and episcopal policy. Pastoral work in these *parochiae* was carried out a territorial basis by a network of churches known as minsters, these churches were quite diverse, they included monasteries (both single and double houses) and communities of priests, see Blair 1988, 1–2.

² London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre online catalogue: (WSH90), Harrow School, 3 Yew Tree Walk, West Street, Harrow-on-the-Hill, <http://archive.museumoflondon.org.uk/laarc/catalogue/siteinfo> [accessed 28/6/16].

³ A screen dividing the nave from the choir, often incorporating a gallery or loft.

⁴ A *porticus* is strictly a covered or colonnaded walkway, but it is often used to describe entrances or porches.

⁵ Beta Analytic (229810) sample SMZ07-rib, conventional radiocarbon age 1000+/-40 BP, Ox Cal calibration (95.4% probability) is cal AD 970-1160, but there is also a 50.5% probability of a date of cal AD 980-1050.

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