

The Church of St Mary de Stall, Bath

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Fig. 1: **Site of The Church of St Mary de Stall, Bath** - From a private collection

I have previously described how Bath's four intra-mural medieval parish churches vanished one by one after the Dissolution when the old cathedral church, the present 'Bath Abbey', became the parish church of most of the town.¹ Three were closed as churches by the end of the sixteenth century, and their physical traces gradually disappeared. St Mary de Stall was the most important of these churches, being the one where the city corporation met for religious services and where the chapel to the city's patron saint, St Katherine, was situated. It seems to have been the last to have held services, remaining in use until 1593 or even later.² After this the shell of the church survived, first used as shops and workshops during the first half of the seventeenth century and then demolished and redeveloped. The tower was reported as being 'much fallen into decay and cannot be repaired' in 1656 and was

1 Peter Davenport, 'The Church of St Mary, Northgate, Bath', *Bath History*, Vol. XIII, (2013), p.20. St James' survived until the Bath blitz and was finally demolished in the late 1950s.

2 J. Wroughton, *Tudor Bath Life and Strife in the Little City 1485-1603* (Bath: Lansdown Press, 2006), pp.82-4.

demolished to roof level: the rest demolished in 1669.³ The site of the church has always been generally known (see **fig. 1**), but the exact position, plan and layout was lost. This article will outline the history of the church, attempt to reconstruct the plan and exact site of the medieval building and investigate how it gradually disappeared.

Origins and History of the Church

Parishes are a relatively late development in the history of the church. Prior to the tenth century or so, groups of communities were served by secular priests from central churches called minsters. Wessex was one of the earliest areas to be 'parished'.⁴ A date in the eleventh century is most likely for the creation of the parishes in Bath, although it is not until c.1190 that the chapel of St Mary in the Churchyard is first mentioned.⁵ The chapel in the churchyard could have pre-dated the creation of the parish; multiple churches in monasteries were not unknown in Saxon England. Alternatively, it may have been set up to provide a place of worship for the laity and only later became the parish church.

Much ink has been spilled in trying to explain the name of the church. It probably has a very simple explanation. Bishop John of Tours created Stall Street after 1092. The row of small tenements along the street all backing on to the wall of his new palace, indicates that Bishop John had intended this street to be for commerce - a row of shops.⁶ It evidently took its name from the fact that it was lined with stalls, quite literally market stalls, which, during the thirteenth century developed from light-weight booths, rented from the landowner, into 'shoppes' with cellars under and residences over and behind.⁷ Stalls were bought and sold from the early thirteenth century. The church was simply St. Mary at the stalls, and was first referred to under this name in 1220 where Richard de Forda (i.e. Bathford) grants 'three stalls in Bath, one next the door of the Church of St Mary de Stalls'.⁸ By the end of the thirteenth century the stalls were commonly shops, as in 1280, when

3 *Ibid.* p. 82.

4 N.J.G. Pounds, *A History of the English Parish: the Culture of Religion from Augustine to Victoria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

5 Peter Davenport, *Medieval Bath Uncovered* (Stroud: The History Press, 2000), p.89.

6 E. Lucas, cited in Peter Davenport, (ed.), *Archaeology in Bath 1976-1985* (Oxford: OUCA, 1991), pp.96-9.

7 Peter Davenport, *Medieval Bath Uncovered* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002), p.72 (**Fig. 26**).

8 C.W. Shickle, *Ancient Deeds of Bath* (Bath: Bath Records Society, 1921) Bundles 4, 10, p.74.

Geoffrey House granted 'all of his land in Stall Street ... together with the shop built upon it.'⁹ It is intriguing that the earliest references to stalls in Stall Street, in 1218, and 1230, place them 'south of the stalls of Bath'.¹⁰ The most probable explanation is that the 'stalls of Bath' were a group owned by the Priory or the Bishop, perhaps at the north end of Stall Street, but this is little more than a guess.

The 1220 reference is the earliest to the *church* of St Mary de Stalls, although the *chapel* of St Mary de Stall in Bath was granted by Prior Robert between 1198 and 1210.¹¹ That it could be granted away by the prior indicates that it was owned and probably founded by the brothers. The priory took it back in 1262/3 as it tried to increase its income - a regular monastic manoeuvre. The chapel at Widcombe (now St Thomas à Becket) was dependent on St Mary's for supplying a priest and services and, in return, St Mary's was entitled to considerable income from its tithes. The parish was clearly set up with some thought to its having adequate resources, the tiny urban area not being enough to be self-supporting (see **fig. 2**).

When the Priory acquired the church, the prior became the rector and was responsible for appointing a vicar to run the parish. This led to disputes over the apportioning of the income, which was eventually resolved in 1322. The agreement describes in detail who shall have what, but is useful in telling us that there was a 'manse with curtilage' for the vicar, and that the priory was responsible for the upkeep of the chancel.¹² It was normal for the parishioners to be responsible for the nave. The vicarage of Stalls was on Upper Borough Walls, between Parsonage Lane and Bridewell Lane (see **fig. 2**).

We know very little more about the history of the church until the later sixteenth century. There is a partial list of incumbents of St Mary's which starts with Henry, before 1191, but only becomes continuous after 1275.¹³ Most are simply names, apart from the standing of the vicar which is indicated by the courtesy title, 'Sir', and their appearance as witnesses to legal documents

9 *Ibid.* Bundles 4, 11, p.74.

10 *Ibid.* Bundles 4, 9, 10, pp.73-4.

11 Grant to Nicholas de Forda 1198-1210. F.W. Weaver, (ed.), *Somerset Medieval Wills 1383-1500*, Vol. 7 (London: Somerset Records Society, 1901).

12 Register of the Dean and Chapter of Wells I, 386, 1322/3 (ordinance of John, Bishop of Bath and Wells concerning the vicarage of the church of St Mary de Stall).

13 There is a list of incumbents in the porch of St Thomas à Becket at Widcombe. This is being further researched by Alistair Durie (pers. comm. Eizabeth Holland).

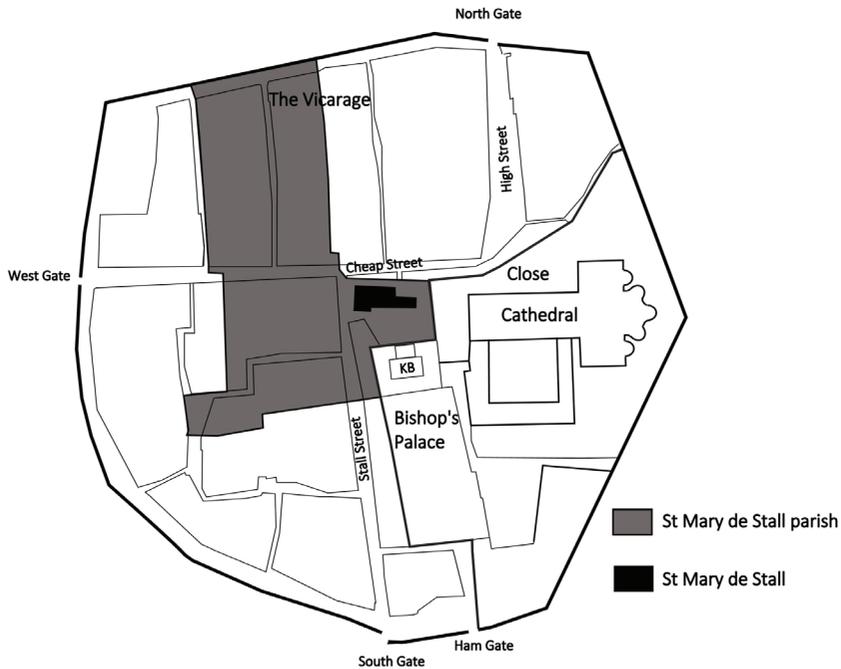


Fig. 2: **Simplified map of Medieval Bath with St Mary de Stall and its parish**

or in wills. We have mention of Sir Robert in 1309/10, Sir John in 1326, Ralph in 1356, John Baret in 1403, Richard Estynton in 1512 and William Rogers in 1524. After the Dissolution, Nicholas Jobbyn, an ex-monk at Bath, held the vicarage until 1552 and the last vicar of Stalls was another Henry: Henry Adams who died in 1577. However, unless they had independent means, they were dependent on the portion of the tithes allocated, as well as income from bequests, marriage and burial fees, and fees to sing masses for the dead. Jobbyn was chaplain to the Corporation and it seems likely that this post went with the position of vicar. The vicar of St Mary's had to support a curate for Widcombe from this income.

The Closure of the Church

At the Dissolution the advowson went to the Crown but, as part of the parish rearrangements, it was acquired by the Corporation. The last vicar of St Mary's remained until his death and the city parishes were finally

amalgamated in 1583.¹⁴ The incumbent of the new parish of Bath was then the Rector, there being no intermediary. The first Rector of Bath was John Long, who had informally led divine service for the Corporation since 1574 in various of the old churches.¹⁵ The new abbey church was not ready for services until around 1600, and while burials took place there earlier, the smaller churches remained open, but minus clergy. The exact date that St Mary's was closed is unclear but it was certainly between 1593 and 1600. The properties around the church and its churchyard were immediately rented out by the Corporation, starting the process that led to its disappearance. The church itself may have been held by the Crown, however, as in 1612 the City Chamberlain's accounts record a large payment of rent out to 'mr ffowkes for the Rente of Stalls Church lande and for other acquittance: xlvs viii.d' Mr ffowkes was the King's Receiver, the money going to the crown. The following year rent for 'St Maryes Lands', which may not have been the church, was xliii.s vii.d. In 1614 both payments were made.¹⁶ It seems probable that the larger payment was for the site of the church and the smaller for property that St Mary's had owned. There is no record of a later payment, however.

The Churchyard

The churchyard is mentioned in several medieval wills (e.g. 'I bequeath my body to holy burial in the churchyard of St Mary de Stalls of Bath') and leases. Excavation in 1980, immediately north of the Pump Room, revealed some of this burial ground, dating from later Saxon times to the sixteenth century, and contained a non-monastic population of both sexes and all ages.¹⁷ By the time it was abandoned the ground level has risen nearly 1.5m. The exact boundaries of the churchyard are not clear. There is evidence that it ran around the north side of the church and that it ran south from the church is evident. A lease of 1280 refers to a plot on Stall Street with the churchyard immediately behind.¹⁸ Another dated c.1249 shows that there were stalls

14 Except for St James which survived until the Second World War.

15 J. Wroughton, *Tudor Bath, Life and Strife in the Little City 1485-1603* (Bath: Lansdown Press, 2006), p.80.

16 Bath Record Office (Hereafter BRO) BC/2/1/1, City of Bath Chamberlain's Accounts 1612 *sub regno* James I. p.2 of transcription by Shickle.

17 The will of Robert Carter 1411. F.W. Weaver, (ed.), *Somerset Medieval Wills from 1383-1558*, Vol.16 (London: Somerset Record Society, 1901), p.45.

18 C.W. Shickle, *Ancient Deeds of Bath* (Bath: Bath Records Society, 1921) Bundles 4, 11, p.74.

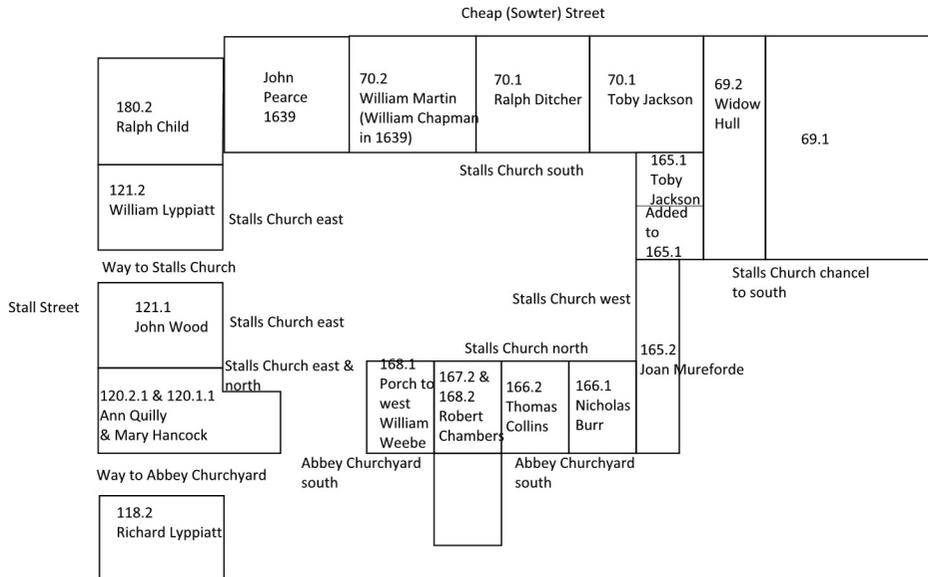


Fig. 3: Schematic plan of the leases from 1641 that reference the church of Stalls

facing on to the churchyard at the rear of these properties.¹⁹ A property, only 'eight and a half feet in length', is mentioned in the 1641 survey and seems to be one of those, on the south side of the 'way into the churchyard from Stall Street'²⁰ (see **figs. 3 and 4**). This way into the churchyard survived until the late eighteenth-century improvements and was mapped (see **fig. 4**). North of it were properties that backed on to the west end of the church.²¹ The medieval burial ground continued under the Pump Room. Graves of eleventh-century date were found in 1981-3 as much as 23 metres (75' 6') from the south side of the church.²² These and the earliest burials to the north suggest the probable existence of a chapel or church by this date, pre-dating the documentary references, although a burial ground without a church is possible, or a lay cemetery related to the abbey with a chapel that later became St Mary's.

In the twelfth century, the cemetery was bounded on the south by a substantial

19 *Ibid.* Bundles 4, 16, p.75.

20 BRO BC/6/2/3, Lease 118.2, Furman's Repertory.

21 BRO BC/6/2/3, Lease 120.1, dated to 1637, Furman's Repertory.

22 Barry Cunliffe and Peter Davenport, *The Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath*. Vol 1(I): The site (Oxford: OUCA, 1985) fig. 48.

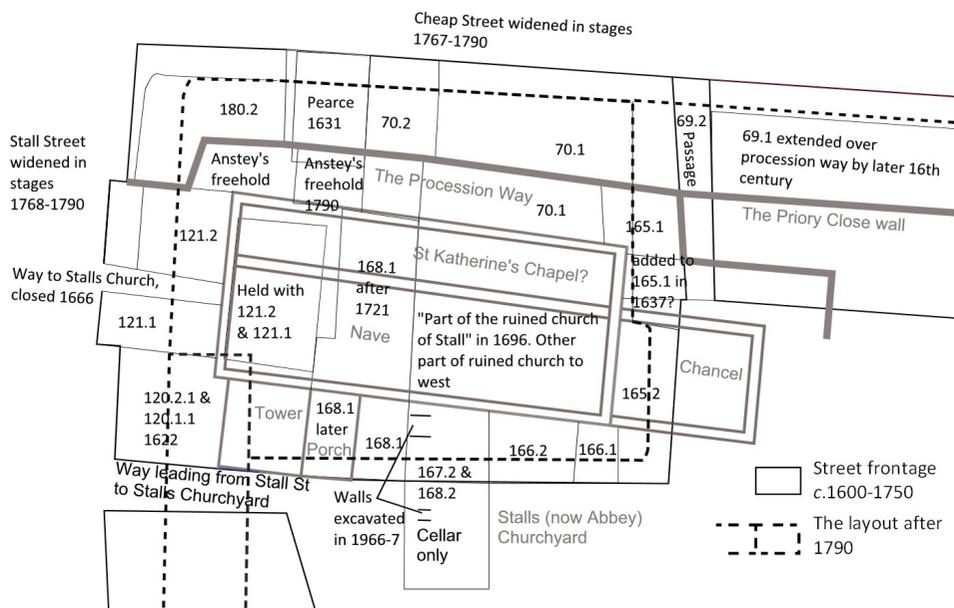


Fig. 4: Plan of the church derived from the later lease descriptions with dimensions

masonry building (see **fig. 2**), possibly an infirmary or other claustral building and part of the King's Bath complex in the priory.²³ This building cut through some of the earlier burials and seems to have formed the southern boundary of the churchyard until the present Pump Room was extended into it in 1790. The churchyard north of the church is indicated by a lease of 1412 that describes the property running back from 'Sowter Street (i.e. Cheap Street) to the churchyard of St Mary, behind'.²⁴ The churchyard here was barely more than a strip of land and it is thought to be the procession way that passed around the church.

The Church

We know the church had a door on the south side, and it is clear that later this had a porch.²⁵ A substantial porch is shown on the early seventeenth-century maps of Bath which, although small scale, show St Mary's in some

23 Peter Davenport, *Medieval Bath Uncovered* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002), p.86.

24 C.W. Shickle, *Ancient Deeds of Bath* (Bath: Bath Records Society, 1921) Bundles 3, 83, p.67.

25 The will of Sir Robert Waspray, 1416. F.W. Weaver, (ed.), *Somerset Medieval Wills 1383-1500*, Vol.16 (London: Somerset Records Society, 1901), p.78; William Weebe held a lease in

detail, in a bird's eye view (see **fig. 1**). There was a tower and a chapel to St Katherine and, of course, it was divided into nave and chancel. The chapel of St Katherine was important, St Katherine being the patron saint of the city and the chapel, that of the Guild. It appears as early as 1249, when the Guild gave money for the saying of masses.²⁶ That St Katherine's functioned as a chantry (for the singing of masses) is also indicated by the instructions for completing its rebuilding in the 1444 will of William Phillips, which included masses for the dead. The chantry 'of the city's mass' and of the 'masses of the commonality' in St Mary's is also mentioned in 1302, 1326 and 1355.²⁷ This makes it clear that the Guild had a special relationship with St Mary's from the earliest periods. A chapel need be little more than a space with an altar, set aside within the church, but the references to rebuilding and its status suggest it probably occupied a purpose-built aisle or extension to the church, with room for the 'mayor and commonality', i.e. the Guild, later the Corporation, to be accommodated. That it had a physical extent is also indicated by both Phillips's instructions to his executors in 1445 to 'finish with all possible haste a certain chapel of St Katerine at Bath, lately begun anew by me', and requests in wills to be buried in the chapel, in 1455, 1512 and 1513.²⁸ The 1512 will is that of the vicar, Sir Richard Estynton, who asked to be buried 'before St Mary Magdalen', i.e. in front of her image, presumably a statue.

The general layout and plan of the church was lost after its demolition, but its plan and situation can be recovered from an unexpected source. Various leases in the city's past ownership are recorded as far back as the thirteenth century. Several of these, as we have seen, refer to the church and its churchyard as boundaries. Some of these properties can be located, but not accurately, so, while they provide strong clues to the site of the church, they do not allow it to be fixed with any certainty. However, a non-metrical plan of the church can be achieved by detailed study of the leases in the 1641 survey of properties in central Bath.²⁹ These leases, which are of various dates

1627 for a 'message built up against Stalls Church between the porch of Stalls church, west'. BRO BC/6/2/3, Lease 168.1, Furman's Repertory.

26 C.W. Shickle, *Ancient Deeds of Bath* (Bath: Bath Records Society, 1921) Bundles 3, 35, p.55.

27 *Ibid.* Bundles 6, 34, p.133, Bundles 4, 41, p.81 and 4, 49, p.83; F.W. Weaver, (ed.), *Somerset Medieval Wills 1383-1500*, Vol. 73 (London: Somerset Record Society, 1901), p.1355.

28 F.W. Weaver, (ed.), *Somerset Medieval Wills from 1383-1558*, Vols. 16, 19 and 21 (London: Somerset Record Society, 1901).

29 BRO BC/6/1/1/1, 1641 *Survey of Bath*.

before 1641, some as far back as the 1580s, have no plans or dimensions, but positioned themselves by referring to neighbouring properties and streets. It is, therefore, theoretically possible to locate the positions of the properties leased out that backed on to the church or churchyard (derelict but still standing at the time) relative to the church and to each other. This has been laid out in **fig. 3**. The numbers on the plan are the reference numbers ascribed by researchers to the leases in the manuscript. Thus, along Cheap Street, we find several properties abutting the church to the south and some backing onto the chancel (see **fig. 3**). 165.1 was a 'kitchen and buttery' probably on the redundant procession way. To it was added a small property that seems to have occupied the 'procession way' as it turned around the east end of the nave and the north side of the chancel, given its position vis-à-vis lease 165.2. This last was described as 'a shop, chamber and a little buttery' and must have been in the chancel of the church; by 1641 it is described as 'in Stalls churchyard, ruined church west, churchyard south and east'. This probably means that the chancel had already been built over.³⁰

This brings us to the south-east corner of the nave. The properties to the west of it backed on to the south side of the church and faced on to the churchyard. Plots 167.1 and 168.2 had a cellar 'under the footway' i.e. in the churchyard. The next property, 168.1, was interesting as it had the 'porch of the church [to its] west'. They were all 'little shops'. Next again was lease 120.1.1. This seems to have clasped the south-west corner of the church³¹ and must have been west of the tower, perhaps including it. This property was later amalgamated with 120.2 which was Mary Hancock's in 1641³² and was described as between Stall Street, the west end of the church and south of the 'way to Stalls Church', a short passage from Stall Street to the west door of the church. North of this way was (121.1), likewise stretching from street to church. This property seems to mark the northern wall of the church as the next house north, on the Cheap Street corner, does not back on to the church. (Ralph Child, 180.2).³³

The properties north of the church were certainly there and running back to the churchyard from the middle ages but none of the properties listed in the 1641 survey along the southern side of the church appear in the early seventeenth-

30 BRO BC/6/1/1/1, 1641 *Survey of Bath*.

31 BRO BC/6/2/3, Furman's Repertory.

32 BRO BC/6/1/1/1/120, 1641 *Survey of Bath*.

33 BRO BC/6/1/1/1/180, 1641 *Survey of Bath*

century maps of Savile or Speed (see **fig. 1**). The southern property along the west end is perhaps shown on these maps. Thus, the church was in the corner of Stall Street and Cheap Street, set back from Stall Street (behind the later properties). There was a tower, a 'procession way' around the church occupying the space between the church and the back of properties on Cheap Street. It is thought that this boundary was the cathedral close wall. There was a way to the churchyard on the south, from Stall Street, and the main entrance was via a porch in the south side of the nave, reached from the churchyard (**figs. 3 and 4**). Incidentally, the porch was a more important part of a medieval church than today. It was where marriages were solemnised, contracts sealed, and penance served. Important churches would often have a treasury, or another chamber, over the porch.

To the east was a chancel, which seems to have extended along the southern boundary of the present 11-12, Abbey Churchyard. In the late sixteenth century this property (69.1) was described as abutting the chancel (see **fig. 3**) but by 1631 the area south of 69.1 was described as 'churchyard', east of a property with 'the ruined church [to the] west'.³⁴ We have seen that this probably means that by this date only the nave was left standing.

This assessment of the relative positions of the leases and the church can be given a degree of cartographic precision by following the descent of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century leases into the eighteenth and nineteenth century when more detailed dimensions are recorded and, eventually, plans. Long after the church fabric has disappeared, these leases still refer to the churchyard, the church and church land. These dimensions and plans allow the actual mapping of the church, as the void left by the surrounding properties, and as the properties that were carved out of the church itself. There are problems with fitting the jigsaw of plans together as they were not surveyed to modern standards and do not always slot together smoothly. Wall thicknesses are never given, for example, and sometimes internal and sometimes external dimensions are given. Improvements in 1788-90 led to fundamental changes to the properties consequent upon the total rebuilding of the block by Thomas Baldwin (see **fig. 4**). This required the compilation of complex plans of existing properties, showing the old and new property boundaries. This has proved very useful in locating the older boundaries. The result of this process is presented in **fig. 4**.

34 BRO BC/6/1/1/1/169, 1641 *Survey of Bath*.

The Body of the Church

This is the area of ground surrounded by the properties listed in the leases. We saw above that the Corporation paid a large rent and an acquittance (usually in effect a sale) for 'Stalles Church lande' in 1612 to 1614 and this may be a record of its purchase. It is only certainly documented in its own right in 1696 when the eastern part of the nave was described as 'part of the ruined church of Stall' in a lease for a 'parcel of ground' i.e. not built on.³⁵ This amounted to just over half of the nave. In Savile's depiction (see **fig. 1**), the south side of the nave, east of the porch, is shown with buttresses and crenellations. What appear to be buttresses at the east end of the building may be the stubs of the chancel walls. Speed seems to show the same wall reduced in height as if already being partly demolished, but it also appears to be roofed. This may be a sign of the nave being refurbished for use, but relapsing into waste ground by the end of the century.

The next section to the west was the back yard of 168.1 after 1721.³⁶ Prior to that 168.1 was regularly described as backing on to the ruins of the church (in 1704 rather oddly described as the 'ruins of an old church, formerly called Stalls church').³⁷ It is evident from these references that the church was a visible and presumably roofless empty ruin until the very end of the seventeenth century, or later. This is corroborated by Gilmore's depiction of this area in 1694, showing houses surrounding an open space (**fig. 5**). However, the reference to the demolition of the tower 'down to the roof of the church' in 1656 rather suggests at least that part of the nave was standing then, and still roofed. Total removal then seems to have taken place in the last decades of the century. The west end of the church can be recognised in a 'brewhouse with a room over ... and a little back parlour with a kitchen' in a lease in 1780.³⁸ This doesn't quite stretch the full width of the church, but was probably built after the church had vanished, was aligned on the southern side of 121.1 and left a narrow yard/lightwell around its eastern and northern sides (see **fig. 4**).

Putting all this information together gives us a nave about 75' 3' (c.23m) long and approximately 35' to 33' 9' (10.7-10.3m), externally. These measurements

35 BRO BC/6/2/3/ 152/888, to Benjamin Baber, Furman's Repertory.

36 BRO BC/6/2/3/1055, Furman's Repertory.

37 BRO BC/6/2/3/1399, Furman's Repertory.

38 BRO BC/6/2/3, Furman's Repertory.

are misleadingly precise, but must be a very close approximation. The position of the chancel, as described in the next section, suggests the possibility of a northern aisle in the nave. This possible aisle is, of course, a candidate for the site of the Corporation's chapel of St Katherine. If it was set in the eastern half, then its altar would be on the east wall, and it would be plenty big enough (c. 12' or 3.6m wide) to accommodate the Mayor and Corporation/Guild of St Katherine.

The Chancel

The chancel cannot be plotted so precisely. Its northern wall can be no further north than the southern extent of 69.1 and 69.2, which backed on to it, but these extents are a little unclear. A chancel as long as these properties are wide would also be beyond acceptable limits for a post-Conquest church. The shape of 165.2 suggests that the north side followed the north chancel wall, and the southern chancel wall continued the south side of the nave. This gives a chancel offset to the south, which suggests the possibility of a nave aisle to the north. The width in this case would be 22' (6.7m). The length is unknown except that it overlapped with 69.1. I have made it longer than the width by the square root of two, a known medieval ratio, but this is no more than a guess (fig. 4). The chancel is not shown on the Speed or Savile maps so had clearly gone by the first decade of the seventeenth century.

The Tower

The site of the tower is shown on Speed and Savile, next to the porch. This seems to be an undocumented property west of the porch and east of 120.1.1, which is an acceptable size for a tower, about 16-17' (4.8 - 5.2m) square. If Savile can be believed the tower was three storeys with a battlemented parapet and a crocketed pinnacle at each corner. A low, two-light window with a circular light in the tympanum suggests thirteenth-century plate tracery in the first stage, with tall belfry windows in the top stage suggesting a later raising. The pinnacles and battlements suggest a fifteenth-century date. The church was involved in the bell ringing controversy of 1408-21 and three bells are recorded as being moved from Stalls Church into the 'greate church' in 1621.³⁹

³⁹ Peter Davenport, *Medieval Bath Uncovered* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002), p.120; BRO BC/2/1/1, City of Bath Chamberlain's Accounts *sub regno* James I. p.3 of transcription by Shickle

The tower was partly demolished in 1656 as it was so dilapidated and the stone sold to provide money for the Abbey Church.⁴⁰ In 1669 the south wall of the tower was to be taken down at the expense of John Parker's wife, 'leaving the stone to the use of the church and she to have the benefit of the ground the wall stood on'.⁴¹ This rather implies that Mrs Parker held the tower as a property and was able to extend it south by the thickness of the wall. No other property could benefit in this way.

The Porch

The site of this is clearly indicated by its position west of plot 168.1, which later absorbed it. Savile and Speed show it with a chamber over the actual porch and interestingly, while neither show the properties that soon after were recorded along the south side of the church, both show what appears to be a three-storey structure against its east side. This may be William Weebe's property 168.1, and if so was the first to be built against the south side of the church.

The Procession Way

The church of St Mary by the Northgate had a 'Procession way' around the church.⁴² There is no documentary reference to such a thing around this St Mary's, but one can be inferred from the shape of the properties on its west and north sides. The existence of properties on Cheap Street implies that the northern churchyard that medieval leases show us was present on the north side of the church must have been quite narrow, and the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century leases show that it was swallowed up by these properties by 1641 at the latest. The shape of this strip can be inferred from 180.2, the L-shaped property on the corner of Cheap Street and Stall Street and the northern part of 165.1, at the north-east corner of the nave. It implies a narrow strip (about 8 to 10' wide) running from an open space in front of the nave (properties 121.2 and 121.1) around its northern side. The northern boundary continues eastwards as the still existing internal wall that separates 11-12 Abbey Churchyard from 17-18 Cheap Street (all one property now after a long

40 BRO BC/2/1/1/2, Council Minute Book 31st March 1656: 'Agreed the tower of the Church of Stalls being much fallen into decay and cannot be repaired it is to be taken down as far as the roof of the church or so far as need be required. The profits thereof to be employed to the use of the Abby Church'.

41 BRO BC/2/1/1/2, Council Minute Book 11th January 1669.

42 Peter Davenport, 'The Church of St Mary Northgate, Bath', *Bath History*, Vol. XII, (2011), pp.15-25.

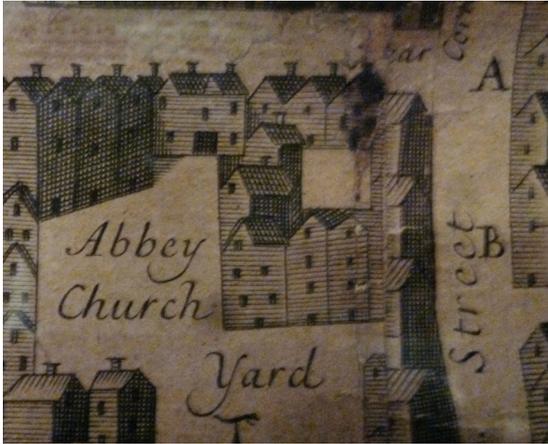


Fig. 5: Gilmore's depiction of this area in 1694, showing houses surrounding an open space

process of amalgamation). This must be the wall of the Cathedral Priory Close and the procession way must simply have been the space between the church and the pre-existing priory boundary. The procession way presumably continued around the chancel into the churchyard, but property 69.1 seems to have extended across it to abut the chancel by the time it is first recorded.

Archaeological Traces

It might be asked if any archaeological remains of the church have been found. We have already considered the burials in the churchyard. In 1845 a masonry 'vault' of 'ancient workmanship' was found under a cellar at 'Messrs Arnolds' shop at 2-3, Stall Street.⁴³ It was thought to be part of the church and this was accepted by Reverend Scarth in a lecture in 1856.⁴⁴ It was not reported where the cellar was exactly, and only a small section of the two properties (the rear of no 2) extended over the site of the church, so this vault may not even have been on the site of the church. I have a suspicion it might have been a post-medieval cess pit, as it was found by lifting a cellar floor slab and did not require clearing out. The church, when finally demolished would have been full of its own debris. No indication of size was given.

More certainly a medieval wall and a good candidate for part of the church is a structure found during excavation in 1966-7. Excavations by Barry Cunliffe, researching the Roman Temple Precinct, uncovered a short length of a substantial wall in a narrow trench on the site of property 168.2. It was undated but its stratigraphic position showed it must have been considerably later than the end of the Roman period. It had been

43 J. Tunstall, *Rambles about Bath and its Neighbourhood* (London and Bath: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., and R. E. Peach, 1848) p.39.

44 *Bath Chronicle* (4th September 1856).

robbed but its foundation trench was '0.6m deep and in excess of 1.2m wide, floored with a layer of limestone rubble, sealed by a layer of stiff blue clay. Upon this were set large slabs of limestone, apparently the base of the north face of a wall.'⁴⁵ This is a very substantial footing, in fact only just over 1.2m (4') wide, as shown by the next trench dug on the north. As Cunliffe noted, 'this could have been the south wall of the church'.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, plotted out, it falls 1.7 metres short of the south wall of the church as laid out above (**fig. 4**). Another, much slighter and shallower footing was noted in a trench dug at the same time 4.25m further south. This was a similar distance short of the south wall of 168.2. I checked if the trenches had been plotted too far south, but their position is securely related to still-existing late eighteenth-century cellars. The southern wall of the nave as calculated from the lease dimensions is also probably the most secure alignment we have and not likely to be even as much as 0.5m out.

That the large wall is not that of the medieval church is established by the fact that a north/south aligned burial was found cut across the top of this wall, well after it had been robbed. Such alignments are either pre-Christian or date to a rare and short-lived Nonconformity during the Civil War. The former is impossible here and the latter very unlikely, as it was the site of a house and business at that period. Another possibility is foul play; the body being interred in the cellar of 168.2. Apart from being earlier than 1790, it cannot be dated. The most likely explanation for the wall is that it belongs to an earlier version of the church, perhaps late Saxon. The construction technique was similar to a Saxon wall found under York Street in 1994, although there the slabs were laid in a mortar bed, not clay.⁴⁷ Another possibility is that it is the pre-Conquest alignment of the north wall of the Saxon abbey close. Further excavation would theoretically be possible in these cellars, but is not a practical possibility for the moment. The burial remains an enigma.

Conclusion

The site of the church of St Mary de Stalls has, in a general sense, been well-known for a very long time, indeed was never quite lost. Nonetheless,

45 B, Cunliffe, *Excavations in Bath 1950-75* (Committee for Rescue Archaeology in Avon, Gloucester and Somerset (Bristol: CRAAGS, 1979), p.91.

46 *Ibid.*

47 R. Bell, 'Bath Abbey: some New Perspectives', *Bath History*, Vol. VI, (1996), pp.7-24.

the plan has now been re-established exactly. The position of nave, tower and porch seems now as certain as it is likely to be. The chancel is less well fixed, but it was narrower than the nave, even if its length is unclear. This is probably because it was demolished relatively early on after 1583 and most of it was left as open ground. We only have 165.2 'in the chancel'. Its offset character, however, allows us to postulate the site of St Katherine's chapel in a north aisle of the nave. It can also be seen now that Speed and Savile show the church without the chancel. The procession way can be understood to have been the space between the church and the priory wall, leading from an open space in front of the church to its east end.

The date of the building abandoned in 1583 is unclear. The crenellations and pinnacles on the tower suggest a fifteenth-century date for some work there, and we can presume there was a tower with a belfry in 1408 when bells were rung competitively against the abbey.⁴⁸ If we can trust the detail on early seventeenth-century bird's eye views then the lower part of the tower may be older, a not uncommon occurrence. The oldest part is likely to have been the chancel, the upkeep of which was the responsibility of the rector. The nave was the responsibility of the congregation, and we have seen how William Phillips was paying for the rebuilding of St Katherine's chapel, which was perhaps the north aisle or part of it. The nave was probably of twelfth- or thirteenth-century origin, but we have no way of knowing whether it was ever rebuilt. We know that burial for the elite took place in the church, and there are likely to have been tombs and memorials, some plain, some elaborate, but all now lost. The physical remains of the church seem to have been gradually lost during the seventeenth century, but are still referred to in the early eighteenth. It is likely that, had the rearrangement of property boundaries not taken place in the 1790s, large elements of the church would have survived in standing fabric. This was not to be, but the removal of thick walls might still have happened, as is documented for the south wall of the tower in 1669.

That we have been able to recover so much information about this lost church is a tribute to the determination, hard work and tenacity of highly capable but amateur historians. It has been a privilege to be able to work on this material and prepare it for publication.

48 Peter Davenport, *Medieval Bath Uncovered* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002), p.120.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on original research carried out by Elizabeth Holland, itself based on the important topographical cataloguing work done on Bath's historic leases by the late Mrs Marta Inskip, and would not have been possible without it. I am extremely grateful to Miss Holland and the Survey of Old Bath for the encouragement to put this work together and permission to re-use it for this paper.

About the Author

Peter Davenport has been involved in the archaeological exploration of Bath for many years. He has participated in some the major discoveries in the very centre of the city. Even whilst working outside Bath he continues to reinterpret and update opinion on previous findings in the city as new evidence comes to light from various sources including *The Survey of Old Bath*.