

Guildford Cathedral

EDWARD MAUFE AND THE SETTING OF THE NEW CATHEDRAL

Introduction

This paper summarises what is known of the architect's plans for the setting and landscaping of Guildford Cathedral. It has been prepared following extensive searches in the Cathedral archives, RIBA library and drawings collection (Maufe papers), and contemporary secondary sources, including articles and reports in *The Architect and Building News* and *The Builder*. Reference has also been made to other sources relating to proposals for the road network, housing development and townscape around the Cathedral, including those which formed part of G.A. Jellicoe's *Outline plan for Guildford* (1945) and his later proposals (1954) for the creation of a 'garden' suburb in Onslow Village West, outside the Cathedral boundary.

Summary

1. The Cathedral stands on land which was once a royal forest and later formed part of the estates of the Onslow family.
2. The Onslows began to sell land to the north-west of Guildford for house-building in the late-nineteenth century, including (1921) land on the lower slopes of Stag Hill.
3. Lord Onslow gave the Diocese of Guildford a rectangular plot on the crown of the hill for the new Cathedral, conveying the land in 1936; the Diocese also acquired a further plot to the west and a narrow strip to the south to provide access to the Cathedral.
4. The brief for the architectural competition (1930) made no reference to landscaping and the competitors were restricted to putting forward proposals which could be accommodated on the original plot on the crown of the hill.
5. The successful candidate, Edward Maufe, none the less proposed a broad avenue to the west for vehicles and a narrow pedestrian approach to the south which dominated his thinking about the setting of the Cathedral throughout the project.
6. Maufe had discussions with Geoffrey Jellicoe who had been commissioned to produce a planning document for Guildford's post-war development about constructing a new road to give access to the Cathedral (1945).
7. Maufe was later affronted when Jellicoe proposed a grand entrance to the Cathedral grounds as part of proposals for the development of Onslow Village West and the Guildford bypass (1954).
8. The planting of trees to delineate the two approaches to the Cathedral was an integral part of Maufe's thinking, though this was never achieved as he envisaged because of the difficulty of growing trees in clay.

9. Various site plans from the 1950s and 1960s include outline proposals for ancillary buildings to the west of the Cathedral, grouped either side of a forecourt.
10. A site plan of 1957 indicates the areas around the Cathedral and western approach 'not to be built upon' but leaves the remaining parts of the site free.
11. Maufe's final site plan (1964) includes an elaborate terrace and approach on the south side of the Cathedral with further proposals for ancillary buildings.
12. The conclusion of the current research is that Maufe never produced a comprehensive plan for landscaping the setting of the Cathedral but concentrated on the design of the two approaches, from the south and west. There is no evidence that he regarded other parts of the site sacrosanct or that he would have opposed appropriate development.

Chronological narrative

1. During the later middle ages, the site of the future Cathedral on Stag Hill formed part of Windsor Great Forest, the hunting ground of the Plantagenet kings. Together with other land from the royal 'park' to the north and west of Guildford, it later passed into the possession of the Onslow family. Over the years, most of this land was converted to agricultural use; a farm-house and associated farm buildings were established on the south-east flank of Stag Hill in the eighteenth century or possibly earlier. (Latterly, this was known as Guildford Park Farm, and the Deanery now stands on the site of the original farm-house.)
2. With the coming of the railway, the population of Guildford grew, and the Onslows began to sell off parcels of land for housing from their holdings to the north-west of the town. From the 1880s, terraces of Victorian brick houses began to appear along what is now Guildford Park Road; a further disposal of land in 1921 led to the construction of Ridgemount with its modest detached and semi-detached houses on the lower slopes of Stag Hill. Shortly afterwards, more land was sold for an extensive new suburb, Onslow Village, located to the north of the Farnham Road. By the 1930s, therefore, the development of the whole area was well advanced, and the proposal to build the new Cathedral of the Diocese of Guildford on Stag Hill has to be understood in this context.
3. The land for the Cathedral was given by Lord Onslow; it consisted of a rectangular plot on the crown of the hill (Illustration A below). In due course (1936), a further plot to the west, and a narrow strip of land to the south, were also given, for vehicular and pedestrian access. The remainder of the land that had not already been allocated to housing was retained by the Onslows. Consequently, at the time the plans for the Cathedral were conceived, the Diocese had no reason to expect that this remaining land would come into its possession; it is a reasonable assumption that the Onslows would have continued to dispose of land for housing had not the war intervened.

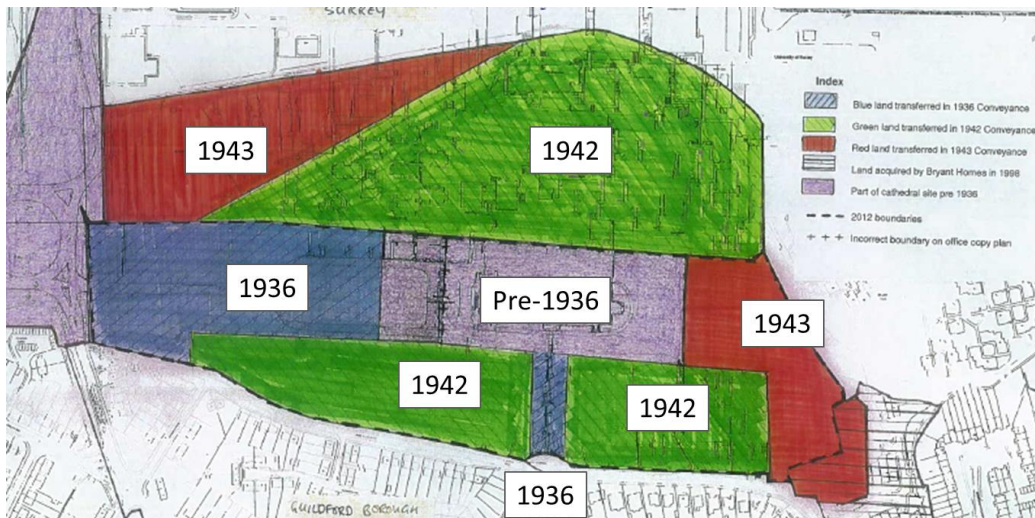


Illustration A: Guildford Cathedral – Land Ownership

4. The architectural competition was launched in 1930. The only guidance given to the competitors concerning the setting of the Cathedral was that ‘the total length of the Cathedral should not exceed 450 feet nor should any part exceed the width of the site’. It is fair to assume that Edward Maufe (who was announced as the winner of the competition in July 1932) had no site plan at this stage – none was included in the brief – and so pictured his design within a theoretical landscape not based on any defined boundaries; the drawing reproduced in *The Architect and Building News*, for example, does not include the houses that already existed on the south side of Ridgemoor, at the very bottom of the sketch (Illustration B). The Cathedral stands on a massive plinth (intended by Maufe to allow a road to circumnavigate the building) in a rugged landscape which bears little resemblance to aerial photographs of the farmland.

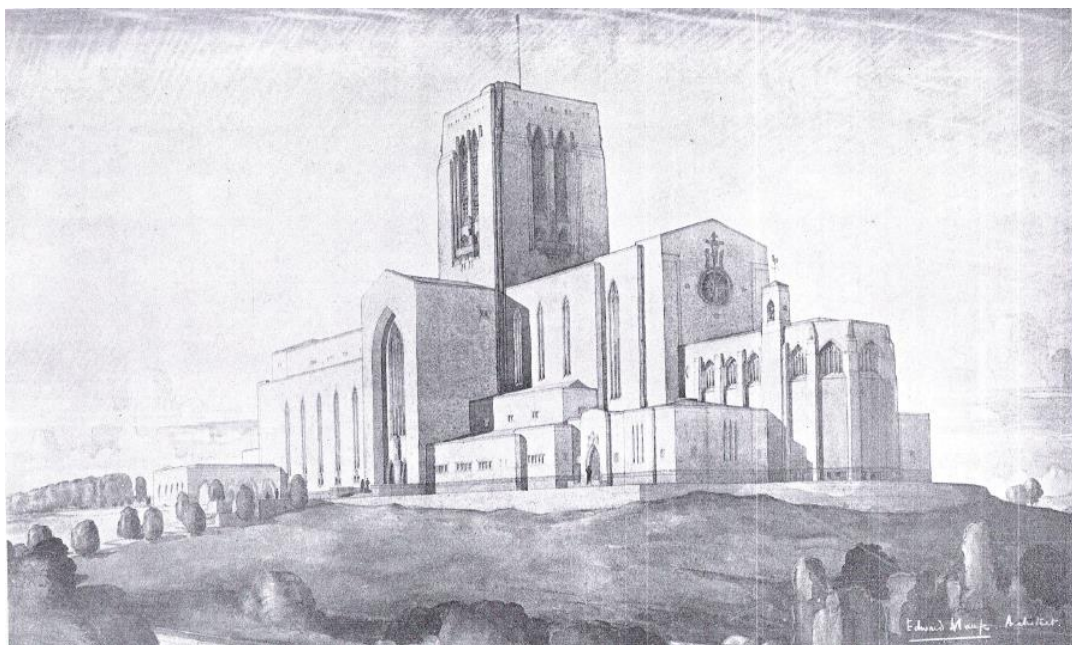


Illustration B: The Architect & Building News- July 1932- Perspective of the Winning Design by Mr E. B. Maufe

5. Maufe's competition plan (Illustration C) is a further imaginative exercise. He shows the Cathedral set in a wider landscape that included land that was not in the Cathedral's ownership; a new road, for example, runs from Alresford Road to a roundabout to the west of the building across land that remained part of the Onslow estate. However, it is interesting to discover that the construction of tree-lined approaches from the west (for vehicles) and south (for pedestrians) had already entered Maufe's thinking, and in practice these were the only parts of any landscape development over which he might have expected to have some control. The clear impression of a building set in a landscape that included extensive planting of trees is reinforced by Raymond Myerscough-Walker's coloured drawing (1936) of the Cathedral seen from the west (Illustration D) in which mature trees frame the approach.

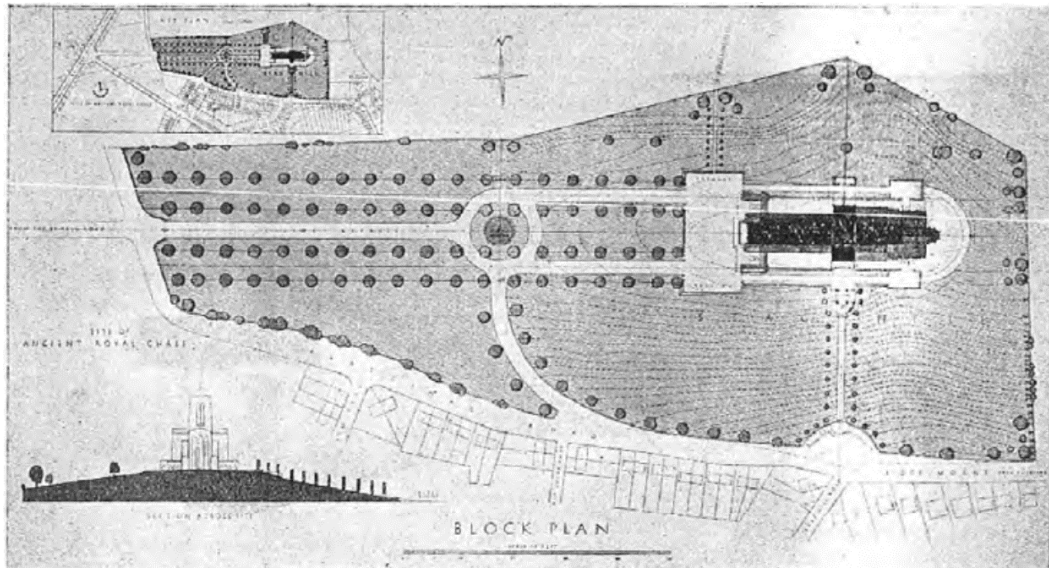


Illustration C: Block Plan of the Winning Design by Mr E. B. Maufe

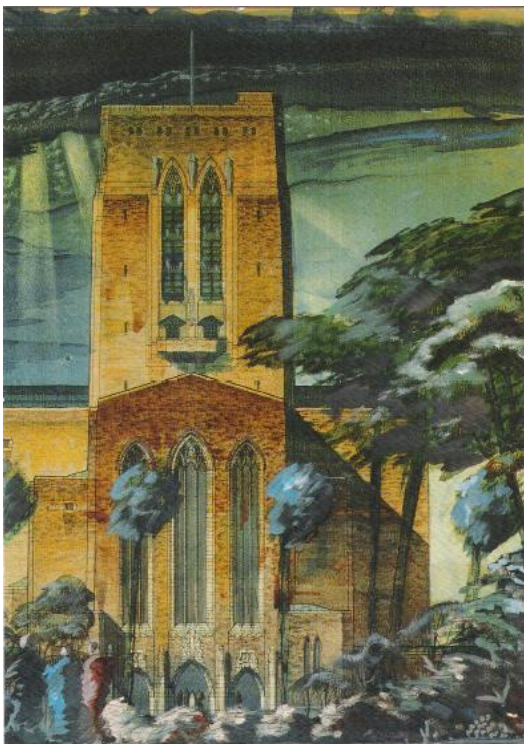


Illustration D: Guildford Cathedral from the West - Raymond Myerscough-Walker (1936)

6. By the time work resumed on the new Cathedral after the Second World War, the unanticipated gift of further plots of land to the north, south and east of the incomplete building (1942, 1943) encouraged further thought about the landscape setting. Interestingly, there is no evidence that Maufe's ideas developed beyond the provision of western and southern approaches, much as had been suggested in the 1932 competition plan. However, in the immediate post-war years he was obliged to engage with Geoffrey Jellicoe who had been commissioned by Guildford Borough Council to prepare his *Outline plan for Guildford* (1945). Jellicoe had been asked to make recommendations for the provision of housing, maintenance of what would now be termed 'green belt', the development of the bypass and elimination of the industrial zone to the north of it. One of the areas he proposed for housing expansion was Onslow Village. Maufe and Jellicoe clearly discussed road access to the Cathedral. In July 1946, Maufe expressed himself 'really very disappointed that you have not found it practicable to bring the road either North or South of the Cathedral for it rather hurts me to think that the Cathedral should only be regarded as an ornament'.¹ A day or two earlier, he had received another disappointing letter from Jellicoe who confessed that he had been 'unable to design appropriately a direct East approach to the Cathedral',² evidently something they had discussed face-to-face. It is illuminating to discover that Maufe was keen to link the Cathedral more effectively into the surrounding road network and (presumably) to bring a road up onto the hill from the east.
7. Jellicoe was again in touch with Maufe in 1954. He had been commissioned by the Onslow Village Trust to prepare a development plan for the land west of the bypass. In considering the landscaping of the road, he rashly allowed himself to put forward a scheme for redesigning 'the area where the approach to the cathedral joins the bypass'.³ Jellicoe proposed to create a formal entrance to the Cathedral grounds in the form of lodges and terraces fronting the roundabout on the bypass; he also showed terraces and buildings on the southern slope of the hill below the Cathedral (were these Jellicoe's invention, or had Maufe shared his own thoughts?). Maufe's indignation is captured in the words he scribbled on Jellicoe's plan: 'I can only be astonished at the effrontery. E.M.'⁴ (Illustration E).

¹ RIBA drawings archive (Victoria & Albert Museum), Maufe Archive, Box 83, MaE/83/5, Maufe to Jellicoe, 24 July 1946.

² Ibid., MaE/83/4, Jellicoe to Maufe, 22 July 1946.

³ Ibid., MaE/83/4, Jellicoe to Maufe, 18 May 1954.

⁴ Ibid., MaE/83/4; Jellicoe's plan dated 13 December 1954.

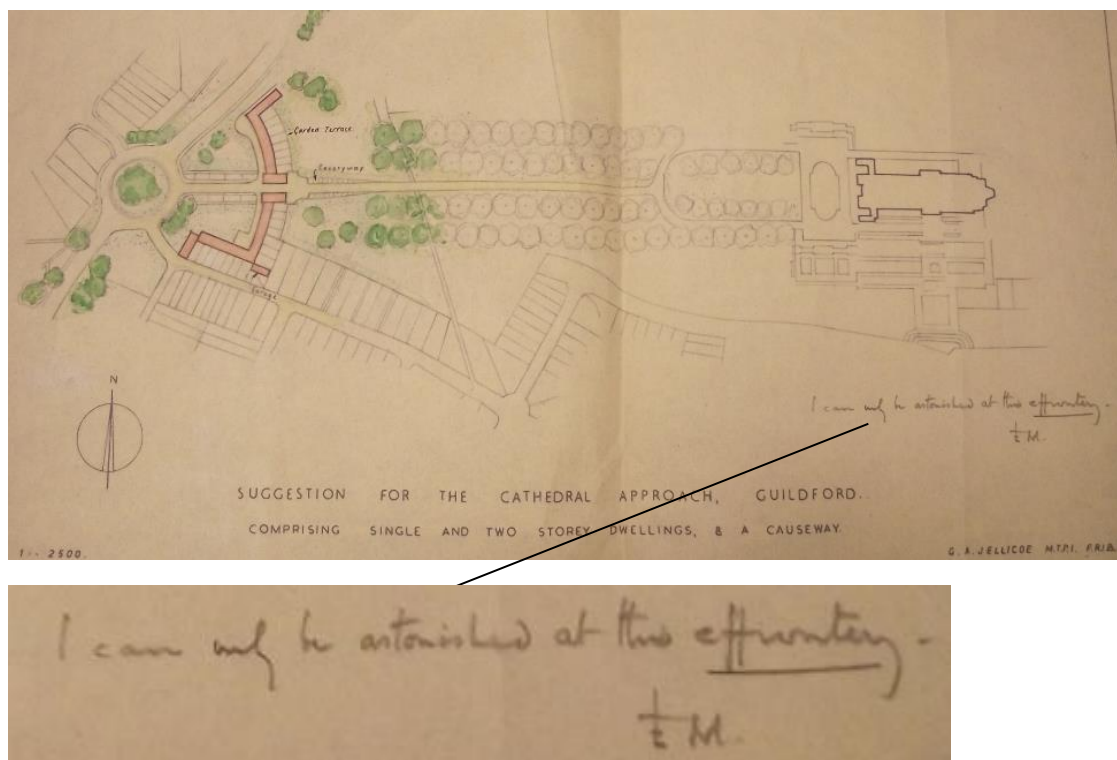


Illustration E: G.A. Jellicoe's 1954 Plan showing proposals for the western approach to Guildford cathedral with Edward Maufe's comments (December 1954)

8. Maufe's thinking about the setting of the Cathedral remained largely restricted to the creation of the two approaches from the south and the west as proposed in his competition site plan (Illustration C). Both were to be delineated by avenues of trees – a single avenue to each side of the pedestrian steps to the south, and a double avenue flanking the western approach and intervening roundabout. Some trees had been planted early in the project: according to Maufe, 'The Beeches and Cherries for the Main [west] Avenue and the Dawycks on the South approach were all I think planted in the autumn of 1936'.⁵ These trees and others planted later to realise the architect's proposals were to give Maufe a good deal of trouble; a file of letters survives in the Maufe archive with references to the difficulty of maintaining the trees and getting them to grow on the heavy clay of Stag Hill; they were also the subject of vandalism at the hands of local children, according to Maufe.⁶ However, the critical point for present purposes is that Maufe planned extensive, formal planting of trees along the two main approaches to the Cathedral. Had this plan been brought to a successful completion, and the trees reached maturity, the views of the Cathedral from the west and (especially) the south would have been radically different from today.

⁵ Ibid., MaE/83/4, Maufe to Knaphill Nursery, 5 July 1948.

⁶ Ibid., MaE/83/4-5, mainly correspondence between Maufe and Knaphill, 1947-55; also, extracts from a lecture given by Maufe to the Ecclesiological Society in *The Architect and Building News*, 21 January 1944, 67.

9. A number of site plans survive from the 1950s to confirm that Maufe adhered to his original proposals for the setting of the Cathedral, concentrating solely on the development of the two approaches. The earliest is dated July 1954 and may have been intended as a riposte to Jellicoe's 'effrontery' (Illustration F). Here, the site boundaries have been expanded to include land subsequently sold to the University of Surrey for development, as well as land to the west that was taken by Surrey County Council for a roundabout, and land to the east (the former farmyard) on which Cathedral Close now stands. Two lodges are shown below the south steps. More significantly, ancillary buildings are shown to the north and south of a west forecourt. A larger-scaled drawing (Illustration G) gives more detail. On the south side, Maufe proposed three substantial houses with gardens for a Provost, Precentor and Canon; to the north, there was to be a single building with wings accommodating 'Secretarys [sic] Rooms, Committee Rooms, Restaurant, Etc.'. An elevation for this latter building survives; it is a three-storied structure and now also includes accommodation for virgers as well as a Cathedral Hall. The plan and the elevation are important in demonstrating that Maufe expected there to be buildings in proximity to the Cathedral, albeit scaled in such a way that the Cathedral remained the dominant structure. A further proposal to build a choir school on the site never got as far as the drawing board, probably for financial reasons.

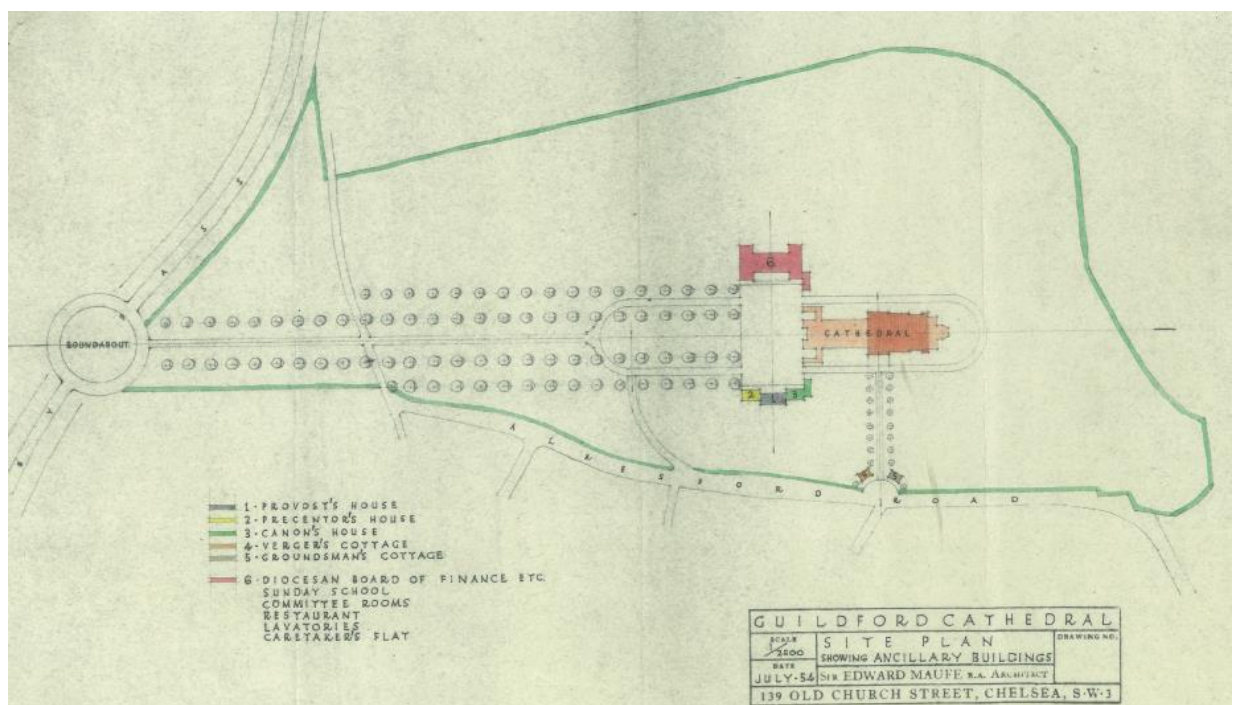


Illustration F: Guildford Cathedral Site Plan by Sir Edward Maufe (July 1954)

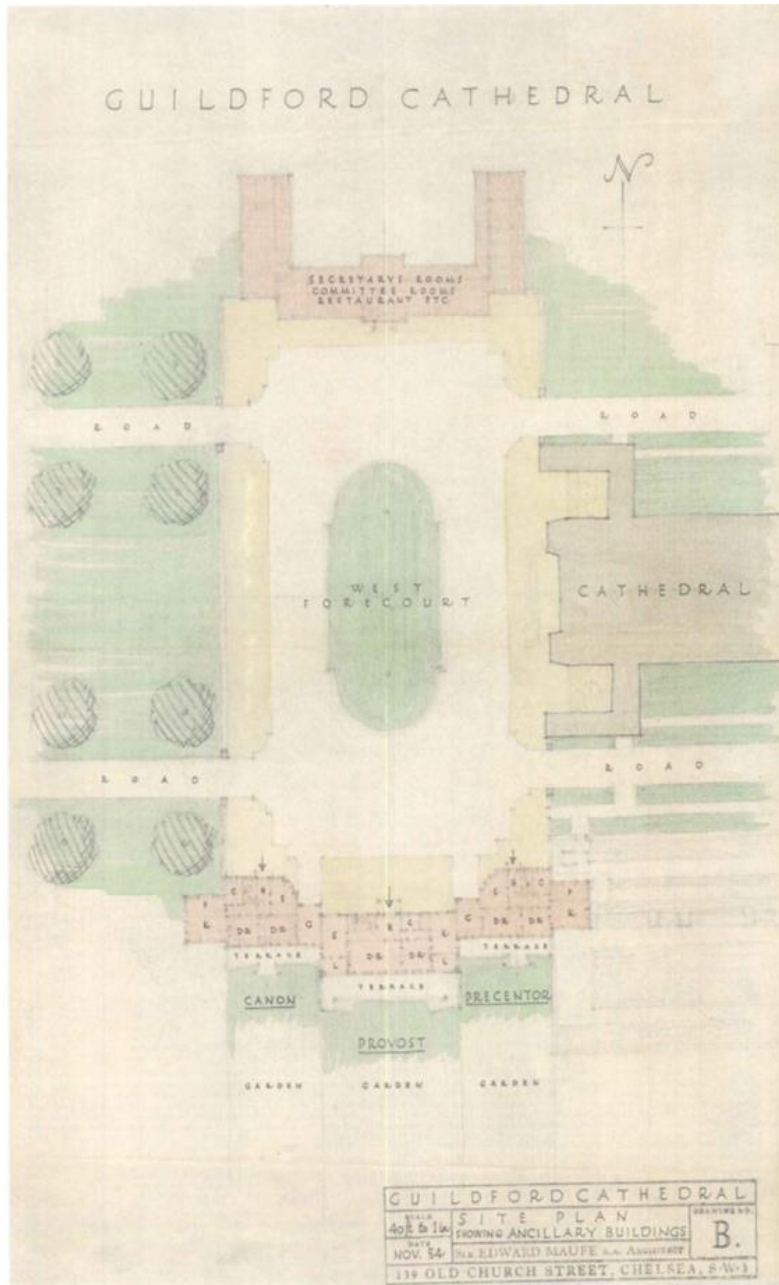


Illustration G: Guildford Cathedral Site Plan Showing Ancillary Buildings by Sir Edward Maufe (November 1954)

10. Another site plan prepared in December 1957 (Illustration H) removes the buildings around the forecourt, simply recording the Pilgrims' Hut which was already in place on the north side of the space, but indicating what in Maufe's mind were the overriding design concepts for the landscape. The site is tightly drawn around the Cathedral to the north, south and east with the now truncated avenue to the west. To the south is the narrow tree-lined pedestrian approach, framed by the lodges, but with the surrounding tracts of land on the south left out of the site design. The clearly defined site indicated by the stippling has a note stating 'Not to be built upon', and one possible interpretation is that Maufe recognised that further development might well take place on other parts of the site in the future.

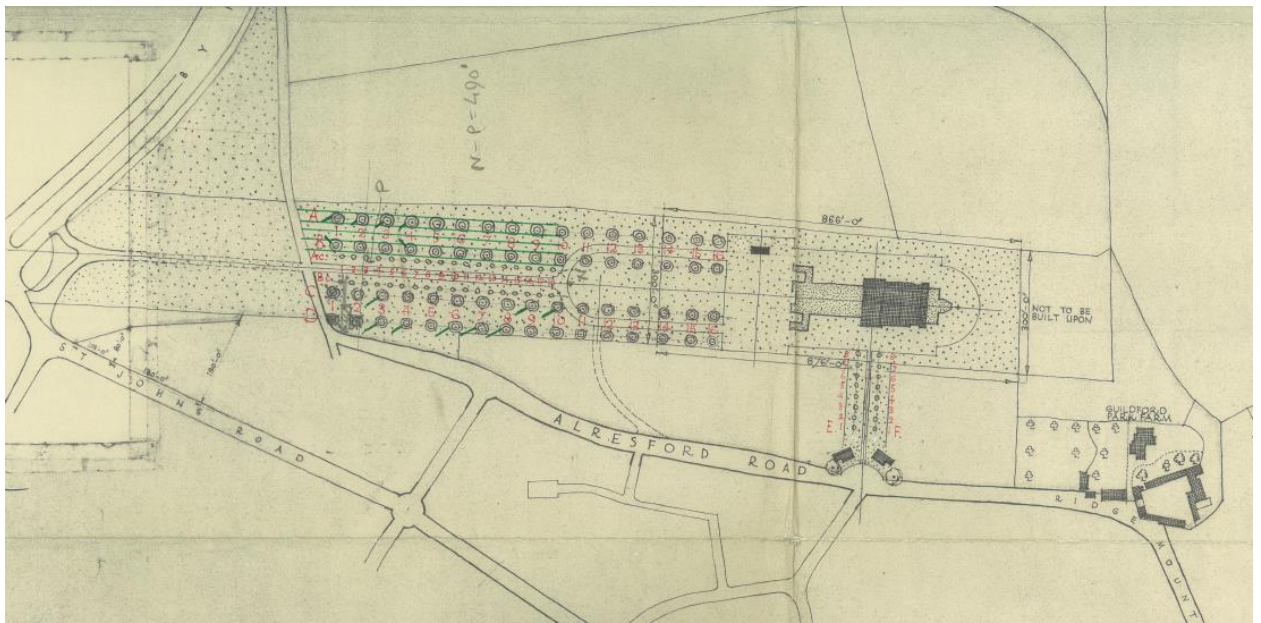


Illustration H: Guildford Cathedral Site by Sir Edward Maufe (December 1957)

11. The final Maufe site plan was produced in 1964 (Illustration I) and focuses on the area immediately surrounding the Cathedral. Proposals for buildings to the west have reappeared and also a car park on the north side of the building. A new proposal is for a 'south terrace' along the whole southern side of the Cathedral, with a double stairway leading from the steps of the pedestrian approach. Maufe referred to this in his Cathedral Guide of c.1966.⁷ Arguably, it reveals once again that Maufe's landscaping proposals were focused almost exclusively on the two approaches to the Cathedral. The plan never proceeded, perhaps because by the mid-1960s the Dean and Chapter were becoming wearied by the task of 'completing' the Cathedral. Maufe's influence may also have been lessened now the building was effectively finished (it may be significant that another architectural practice was brought in to design the Close housing in the south-east corner of the site).

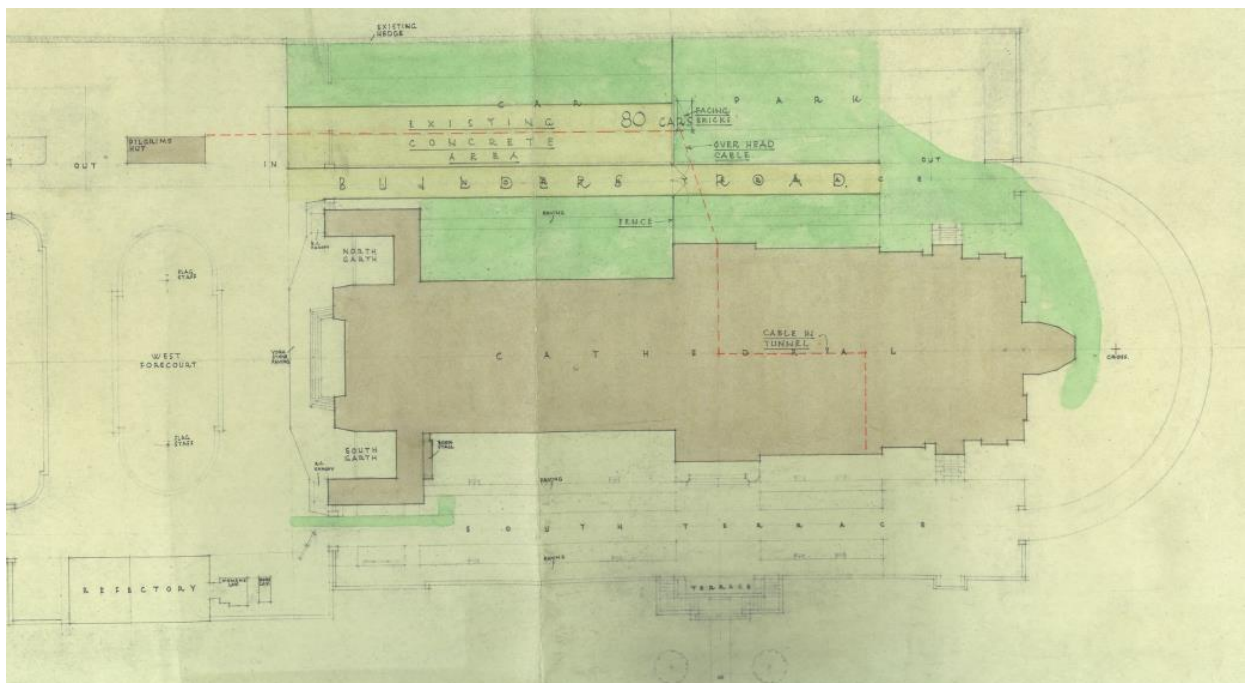


Illustration I: Guildford Cathedral Site by Sir Edward Maufe (June 1964)

⁷ Edward Maufe, *Guildford Cathedral* (Pitkin Pictorials, c.1966), 14.

12. In summary, the surviving documentation confirms that Maufe had no design intentions for landscaping outside the close confines of the western and southern approaches to the Cathedral. At no time did he produce an overall landscape design or master-plan encompassing any of the land which was not in the ownership of the Church in 1936. The Jellicoe drawings reinforce the view that there was an expectation on the part of the local planners that the surrounding land and the road network would be developed and that the Cathedral would therefore be seen within a suburban landscape. This might well have occurred in the 1940s had the remaining parcels of land on Stag Hill not been purchased by a third party and donated to the Cathedral. Maufe never had the opportunity or encouragement to develop fully his proposals for ancillary buildings, although the surviving sketches indicate that he expected there eventually to be housing for clergy and staff, offices, meeting rooms, a hall and a refectory. With the development, since the 1960s, of the University of Surrey on the north side of the hill, and the prospect now of housing on sections of land on the south and east of the site, there is the real possibility that the Cathedral will finally be seen within the type of landscape envisaged when Lord Onslow made his original donation of land in the 1930s.

This document has been prepared by John Bailey (Cathedral Architect) and Canon Nicholas Thistlethwaite (Sub Dean and Precentor); they wish to express their gratitude to Annabel Downs, Nick Doggett and Paul Velluet for their valuable contributions.

October 2015