

PREFACE

In 1954 proposals were put forward to build houses across much of the gardens of Abbey Lodge, Chertsey (fig 1). Excavations in 1861 (Angell 1862) had demonstrated that the monastic church and cloister lay beneath the lawns and flower beds, and for this and other reasons the plan provoked much opposition. The proposals were approved but not before the site had been hurriedly scheduled as an Ancient Monument (Surrey no 114) so as to allow time for a rescue excavation to be mounted by the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate of the Ministry of Works. Mr R Gilyard-Beer was in overall charge of the work, but the day-to-day responsibility for directing the excavations lay mostly with the late Group Captain G M Knocker. The excavations, carried out between 20 September and early December, were brought to a hasty end by severe flooding. The layout of the new houses was amended, partly as a result of the excavations, so that they avoided the area of the church and cloister; the site of the major part of the excavations, therefore, remains undeveloped. Soon after the excavations were completed Knocker prepared a draft report. For a variety of reasons (which it would at this date be tedious to enumerate) the report never made any further progress. Consequently, in 1983, I was commissioned by the DoE (and subsequently HBMC), successors to the MoW, to complete the report for publication. This presented a number of problems, both logistical and practical. The latter lay mostly in gathering together, after such a lapse of time, all the relevant material. The logistical problems lay in the organisation and presentation of the report, since Knocker's text was very much a first draft and he would himself have revised it considerably before committing it to print. The alternatives were to edit or rewrite: the former involving a cumbersome editorial apparatus, the latter seeming rather impious. Fortunately, it has proved possible to do both and I have turned Knocker's draft manuscript into the basis of the full microfiche publication and reorganised the material for the printed text of the excavation report proper. The introductory and concluding material is my own. I have also taken the opportunity to include here the results of geophysical survey work carried out in 1984 and of a small excavation in 1985, as well as to publish, for the first time, a series of photographs and drawings of the 19th century excavations.

It may be helpful to readers of the report to say something about its structure. The use of microfiche has occasioned considerable criticism from some archaeologists because it makes part of the published information less accessible. The attitude taken by the present author is rather that its use presents an opportunity to make the report palatable to a wider audience than would otherwise be possible, and the text has therefore been organised so that it may be read in three different ways. Firstly, the microfiche element will give the specialist reader the type of full technical information which he requires. Secondly, Chapters 1-4 will present sufficient detail for most readers to appreciate the background to the investigations, the manner in which they were conducted, and the nature of the evidence upon which the interpretations are based. Thirdly, the general reader (the majority group in a County Society publication of this sort) can simply turn straight to Chapter 5 and read that, in conjunction with the illustrations, to obtain an overview of how archaeology has developed our understanding of Chertsey Abbey. The author believes that the benefits of this form of presentation more than outweigh the disadvantages, including that of occasional repetition.

The archive of the excavation will be deposited in Guildford Museum.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE 1954 EXCAVATION

Mr C H Coates; Capt L Williams; The Rev P R W Blewett; Mr Bradley, agent for Messrs Jones; Mr A Way, County Planning Officer, Surrey County Council; Dom D Knowles; Mr J S Gardner; Mrs F Russell-Smith; Mr W M Campbell, Curator, Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew; Miss M Morris, Geological Survey and Museum. (*Note: these acknowledgements are reproduced as prepared by Group-Captain Knocker in 1955, and no attempt has been made to update them.*)

1983 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

The geophysical survey work was financed by the DoE (HBMC). I am especially grateful to Joanne Davinton who directed the survey, processed the results and prepared a draft report. Thanks are also due to the University of Bradford School of Archaeological Sciences, and in particular to its director, Mr A Aspinall, for the use of its equipment for both survey and data processing. Dr G A Hobbs and Paul Larkin also assisted with the survey and the latter additionally provided temporary storage in Chertsey Museum. The willing co-operation of the landowners — Runnymede Borough Council, Dr G A Hobbs, Mrs Jones, Mr R K Gerbert and Mr J W Colleson — made the survey possible.

THE 1984 EXCAVATION

The excavation work was financed by HBMC and Runnymede Borough Council and directed by the author for the Conservation & Archaeology Section, Surrey County Council. Assistance on site came from Amanda Chadburn, Kate Pontin and Paul Larkin.

PREPARATION OF THE REPORT

Work on the 1954 excavations was financed by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission (HBMC) as part of their 'backlog' programme and carried out within the Conservation & Archaeology Section, Planning Department, Surrey County Council. Particular thanks are due to Margaret Wood of HBMC for assistance in obtaining the archive material and in many other ways. The typing and other facilities provided by Surrey County Council were invaluable, as was the constant advice and encouragement of Dr D G Bird, County Archaeologist, and in the latter stages Phil Jones, Archaeological Field Officer. Paul Larkin (curator, Chertsey Museum), Julia Arthur (assistant curator, Guildford Museum), Pat Ashworth and Janette White (successively librarians at the Surrey Archaeological Society's Library at Castle Arch, Guildford) also deserve thanks for their advice and assistance. The Trustees of the British Museum have kindly allowed artwork originally prepared for Eames 1980 to be used as the basis of figs 33-43; the copyright in this rests with them. I am grateful to the following for discussion of finds from the site: John Cherry, John Clark, Phil Jones, Richard Lea, Jeffrey West and Paul Williamson.

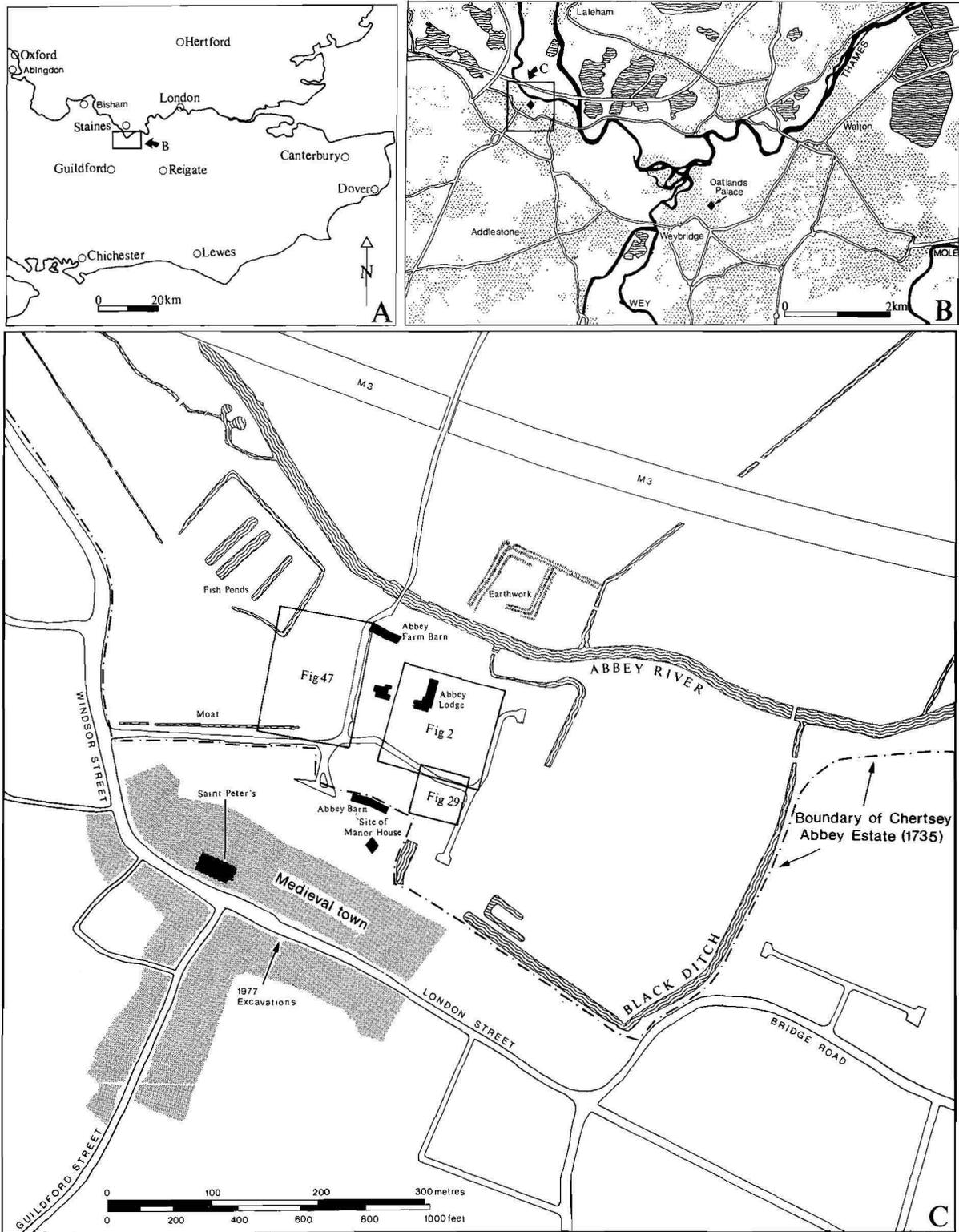


Fig 1 Location of excavations at Chertsey. For detailed plans see figs 2, 29 & 47. The 19th century house called 'The Abbey' has been marked to the west of Abbey Lodge but its name omitted to avoid confusion of nomenclature