

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)

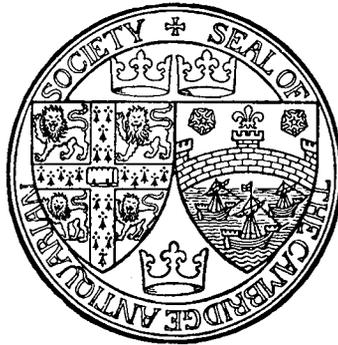


VOLUME LXXIV

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Volume Editor: Alison Taylor

Published by the Cambridge Antiquarian Society 1987

ISSN 0309-3606

CONTENTS

Officers and Council of the Society, 1984-5

Prehistoric, Roman, Saxon and Medieval artefacts from the Southern Fen Edge, Cambridgeshire. ALISON TAYLOR	1
The Musical Establishment at Trinity College, Cambridge, 1546-1644. IAN PAYNE	53
Cambridgeshire Earthwork Surveys V. A. E. BROWN and C. C. TAYLOR	71
Archaeological Survey at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, 1984. KENNETH RAINSBURY DARK	81
A Gold 'hair-ring' from Wimblington Parish, Cambridgeshire. COLIN F. PENDLETON	85
<i>Index.</i>	87

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AT SIDNEY SUSSEX COLLEGE

CAMBRIDGE 1984

KENNETH RAINSBURY DARK

It has long been known that a medieval Franciscan Friary occupied the site of Sidney Sussex College, prior to the foundation of the College in 1596. Despite the historical evidence for this monastic establishment the layout of the Friary has remained unknown. Chance finds of structural remains in South Court and of burials in Cloister Court (during the construction of the modern buildings) are of little use in reconstructing the Friary plan.

The only archaeological approach to the problem was made by Peter Salway who, excavating for the College in Cloister Court during 1959, dug a single trench across the centre of the Court along the line of the present (1984) north-south pathway.

Salway interpreted the results of this excavation as a transect across the Friary Church, revealing the walls of the church and a side-chapel to the South. He observed that a change in the alignment of the Sidney Street perimeter wall of the College could have been influenced by the west end of the medieval building, and that the modern layout of Hall Court could have been based upon the plan of the monastic cloister. Salway's excavation left many important questions unanswered, for example, the length and outline of the monastic church. In order to attempt to answer some of these questions an archaeological survey of the College was carried out during the Summer of 1984. The survey used a Martin-Clark resistivity meter to pass small electrical charges through the ground at one metre intervals, on a grid pattern, recording the resistance of the ground to these charges at each metre interval. Using this method buried walls may be detected and their outline established without disturbing the soil.

Whilst this was being carried out a visual examination of the College gardens was undertaken to establish whether any surface features, slight mounds or depressions, were visible which might relate to the monastic occupation of the site. Obviously considerable problems were posed by post-medieval activity on the site and it might well

have been feared that little would be found; happily this was not the case.

Four resistivity anomalies and two surface features may tentatively be attributed to the monastic period. In Cloister Court the plan of the building trenched by Salway was delineated. It was found to be much smaller than Salway envisaged, occupying only the south-east corner of Cloister Court. This rectilinear anomaly had a north-eastern annexe. Evidence from Salway's trench seems to show that the main anomaly was a major masonry building associated with fine window-glass and burials, and it is probably to be interpreted as the Friary Church. If so, the annexe may be a chapel or transept.

On the south-west side of the probable Friary Church a smaller anomaly may represent the north-west end of the Friary Cloister perhaps abutting the south-west end of the Church. If this is so, the hypothesis that the plan of Hall Court reflects the layout of the medieval Friary Cloister may be correct. Survey revealed no major resistivity anomalies in Hall Court, suggesting that if this were the case the medieval buildings may exactly underlie their modern counter-parts.

The east end of the Friary Church must underlie the modern Cloister Court north-south range, as it was not found in total resistivity survey of the area between the Cloister Court buildings and the medieval King's Ditch (visible as a shallow depression in the Master's Garden, running north-south on about the line of the Garden Court library).

To the north-east of the probable church site a broad north-south bank was located to the west of the King's Ditch running parallel with it. This survives as a very slight surface bank in the south-west of the Fellows' Garden, on the line of the first modern gravel path, running north-south. This bank may continue as a resistivity anomaly beneath the modern north-south path and there is a sharp drop in the modern ground level from the path to the medieval line of the King's Ditch. As it

underlies all modern garden features, and is not visible on any plan of the College back to 1688, this bank may well be medieval and, indeed, compares well with known monastic boundary banks in scale. The bank may then have been the boundary, either of the cemetery around the Friary Church, or of the monastic precinct itself.

To the south-west of the bank another large rectilinear anomaly may also represent a stone building. Its function cannot be ascertained, but if it is contemporary with the bank it must have stood partly on or against it. This may, however, have been the area of the medieval Friary cemetery, and the possibility exists that the building is earlier in date, preceding the bank. If so it may be medieval, Anglo-Saxon, or Romano-British. Its apparent north-south alignment suggests that it is *not* an earlier church.

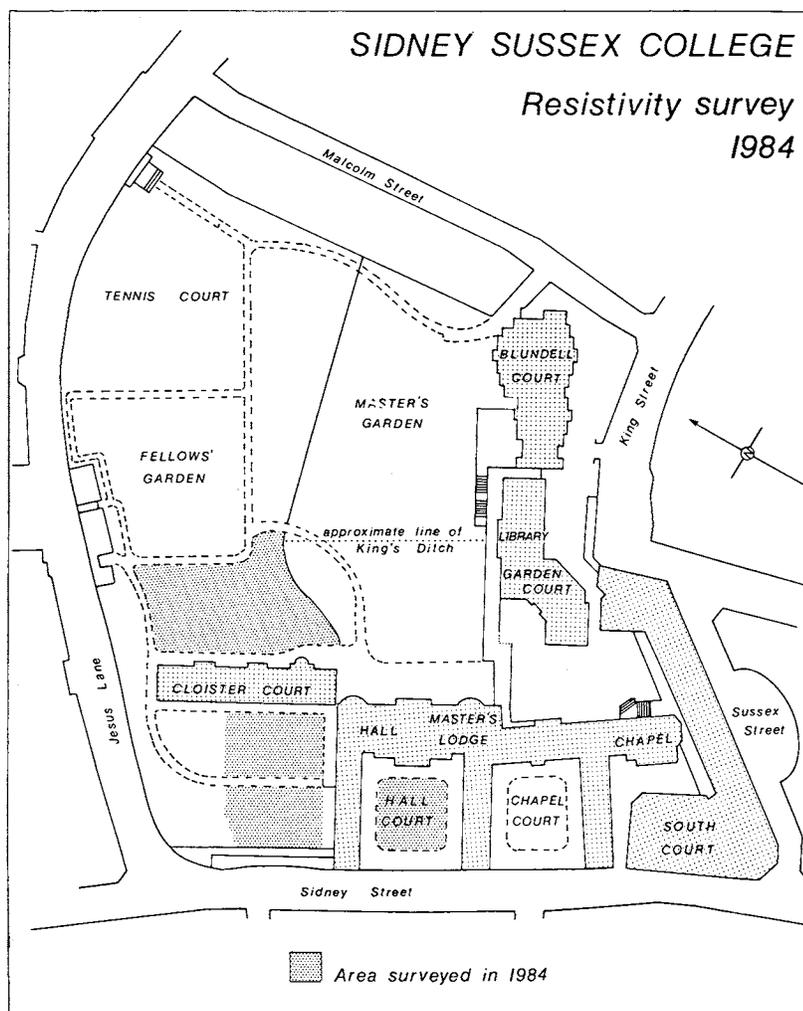
Finally, a low sub-rectangular mound running east-west across the line of the King's Ditch in the north-west of the Master's Garden may be a bridge, possibly that visible on the 1688 print of the

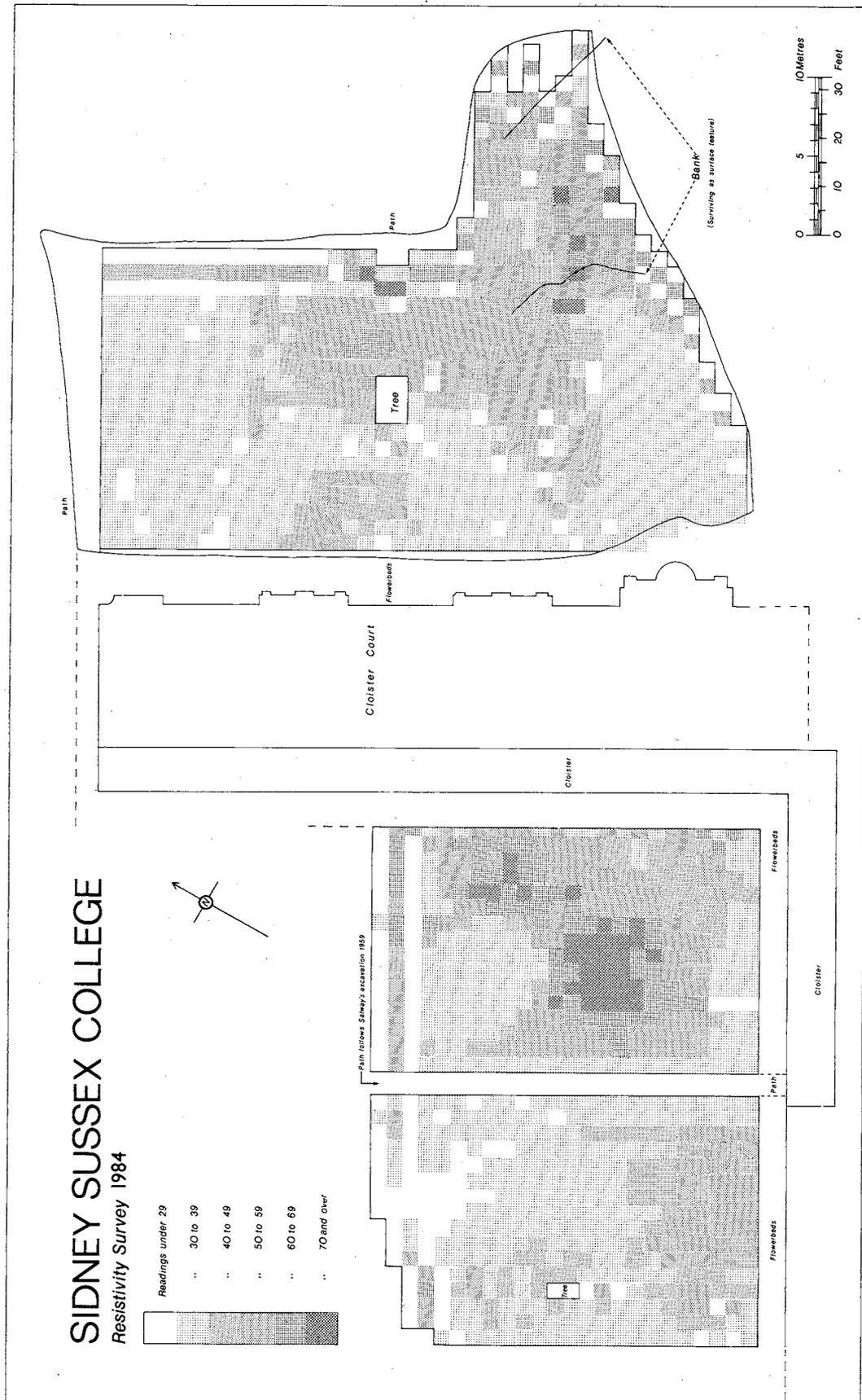
College. As it does not align with any of the College buildings, it too may date from the monastic period.

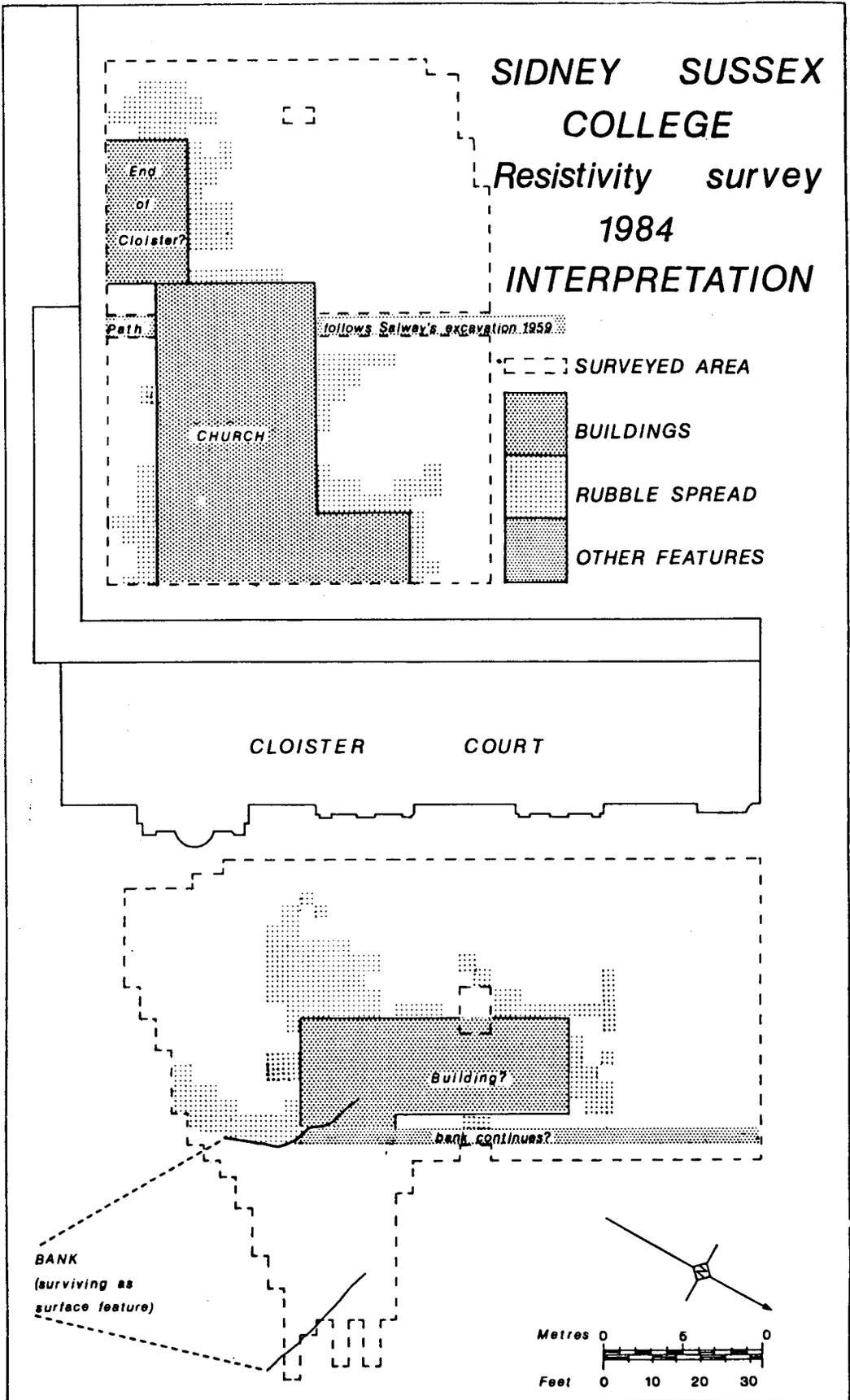
Whilst the layout of the monastic precinct remains imperfectly known, the 1984 survey has considerably added to our understanding of this important medieval complex. However, only excavation can further elucidate the nature of the features identified in this survey.

Acknowledgements

My thanks are due to the College and especially to the Master and Bursar for permission and encouragement to undertake the survey. Also to Misses Anna Armstrong, Julia Crick, Petra Day and Mr Andrew Gilbert for assisting in the work. Thanks are also due to Doctor Smail for his advice on the medieval history of the Friary, and for making available the records of Professor Salway's 1959 excavation, and details of other archaeological data on the College site.







THE PROCEEDINGS

- (1) The Editor welcomes the submission of articles on the history and archaeology of the County for publication in the *Proceedings*, but in order to avoid disappointment potential contributors are advised to write to the Editor, to enquire whether the subject is likely to be of interest to the Society, before submitting a final text. The Editor, if necessary with the advice of the editorial committee, reserves the right to refuse to publish any papers even when an earlier approval of the subject has been given.
- (2) Authors are reminded that the cost of printing is high and that, all other things being equal, a short and succinct paper is more likely to be published than a long one. It would also assist the Editor if contributors who know of possible sources for subventions towards the cost of printing their paper would inform the Editor of this when submitting their manuscript.
- (3) Illustrations must be high quality. They should not be more than twice the size intended for publication and they should be accompanied by a list of captions.
- (4) The copyright of both text and illustrations will normally remain with the author, and where relevant the photographer and draughtsman, but to simplify future administration contributors are invited to assign their copyright on a form that will be supplied by the Editor.

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CONTENTS

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Index.		87