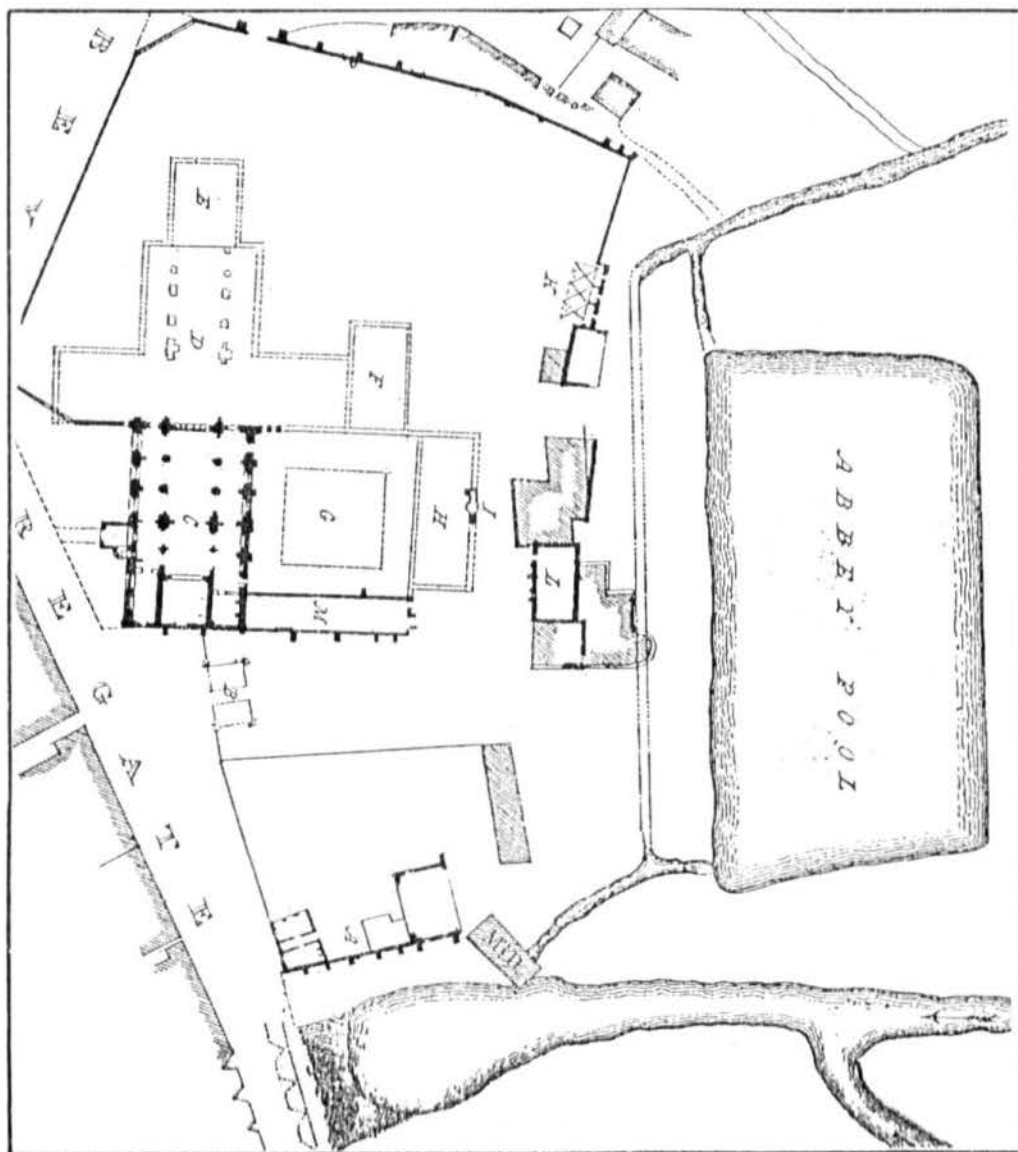


SHREWSBURY HERITAGE PROJECT



SHREWSBURY
ABBAY

Revised Research Design

SHREWSBURY ABBEY:

A REVISED RESEARCH DESIGN.

Shrewsbury Heritage Project

June 1987

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 1985, at the request of Shropshire County Council, and the landowners, British Rail, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit began a programme of excavation, survey and research in and around the former precincts of Shrewsbury Abbey. Eighteen months later, with the conclusion of the first major area excavation (representing a sample of 26% of the known precinct area), an enormous amount of information bearing on the medieval abbey's development, buildings, economy and environment, has been generated, but many problems remain to be resolved by selective investigation in advance of redevelopment and restoration. This document, a revision of the January 1986 Research Design, presents an interim account of some of the results of this first phase of the investigation, together with a statement of what are felt to be the outstanding unanswered questions.

Detailed recommendations for the excavation of particular threatened areas where redevelopment proposals or foundation designs have been finalised are contained in separate research designs for those areas. Proposals for the processing of data and artefacts resulting from the excavations are contained in the Post - Excavation Research Design.

Redevelopment Proposals

The area between Telford's Abbey Foregate and the Rea Brook, currently owned by British Rail and including a substantial area of the former abbey precinct, is the subject of a proposed major redevelopment. At the time of writing (May 1987), the details of the scheme have not yet been finalised, but in general terms the proposals are for:

1. A superstore and car-parking, on the site of the Abbey Pool and fishponds to the south of the precinct area.
2. A hotel complex and housing, with car-parking, within the southern fringe of the precinct area.
3. New access roads (the English Bridge Gyratory System) to the west of the precinct area, to link the site with existing roads to the north, west and south.

Current indications are that ground disturbance associated with new buildings within the precinct area will be minimised through the use of raft foundations and the location of the underground services in previously disturbed ground, and that standing elements of the monastic buildings will be retained (the refectory pulpit within an open area, the 'Old Infirmary' restored and returned to use as a functioning building). Foundations for the Gyrotory System will be substantial, due to unstable ground conditions, and will destroy all archaeological deposits and structures on its route. Proposals for the excavation of selected sites in advance of the construction of the road scheme are contained in the English Bridge Gyrotory System Research Design.

At the time of writing, a large proportion of land under threat is leased to a number of businesses, and the re-siting of these tenants is a necessary pre-condition of further archaeological investigation.

The former precinct area has recently been included in the Schedule compiled and maintained by the Secretary of State for the Environment under Section 1 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act of 1979, as amended by the National Heritage Act of 1983.

Archaeological Response and Excavation Programme

Excavation of the Queen Anne House site, by M.A.Cooper and J. Darlington, an area of 370 square metres on the southern boundary of the monastic outer court has been completed, and the post-excavation programme for this site is now in progress. The excavation of sites outside the precinct in advance of the construction of the Gyrotory System began in July 1986 with a trial excavation on the Severn Villa site on Coleham Island. No medieval deposits were found within the threatened zone. A trial area within the former Goode and Davies premises to the west of the 'Old Infirmary' has not found medieval deposits within the limitations on depth and area imposed by the unstable condition of the medieval building. The investigation of this area has been suspended, and further excavation of the Gyrotory System sites (Goode and Davies North Area, and the Abbey Mill site) awaits the re-location of the present tenant. (See figure 4.)

In the absence of detailed proposals and foundation designs, it is not yet possible to assess the extent of the threat or the archaeological response required elsewhere within the precinct area.

Watching-briefs are proposed for construction work in the former pond area to the south of the precinct.

2. THE MEDIEVAL DEVELOPMENT OF SHREWSBURY (Figure 2.)

The shape of the later medieval town and the direction of its growth were determined, above all, by the natural topography. The town occupied an area of high ground (gravel-capped sandy clays) within a broad loop of the river Severn, bounded on either side by an alluvial zone of varying width and impassibility. The high ground was split between two hills by a shallow, boggy valley in the High Street area, out of which rose a water course flowing westward towards the river.

Shrewsbury made its first documentary appearance as Scrobbesbyrig in the Wenlock charter of 901. By the end of the 10th century it was clearly regarded as the chief settlement of the shire; these facts, and the minting of coins in this period, suggest that it was a defended place with some urban characteristics.

The origins of the town are obscure, but its early development is likely to have been polyfocal. Artefactual evidence and historical supposition point to a middle Saxon origin for the Old St. Chad's site; the three churches to the north, St. Alkmund's, St. Julian's and St. Mary's, were all established within the Conquest period, and late Saxon domestic activity has now been defined on three sites - St. Alkmund's place, Pride Hill Chambers and Rigg's Hall - through the discovery of pits containing Stafford-type ware. A further focus of late Saxon activity is known, from documentary evidence, on the east bank of the river around a chapel dedicated to St. Peter, with an associated homestead and possible mills.

Norman control in the late 11th century is represented in the archaeological record by the construction of a motte-and-bailey castle across the neck of the peninsula, by the foundation of the Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter, and by the creation of transpontine suburbs to the east and west (Abbey Foregate and Frankwell). The eastern suburb was administered by the abbey and became a seigneurial borough. The feudal monopolies bestowed on the abbey soon after its foundation were a recurrent source of friction with the growing town.

By the 13th century, the regional dominance of the town was unchallenged. Shrewsbury merchants monopolised the buying and processing of raw wool, cloth and hides over a wide area, and they controlled the marketing of finished products. A century later, Shrewsbury had become one of the staple towns for wool and leather for the whole of Wales, and controlled trade with the Welsh Marches as far south as Hereford. The early/mid 13th century also saw the concerted acquisition by the abbey of properties in the Abbey Foregate - Coleham area, a growing industrial suburb where cloth, hide processing industries, and other trades were located. The abbey's precise role in the stimulus of these has yet to be defined.

The built-up area is known to have expanded during the course of the 13th century. There are, however, only two surviving physical manifestations of this period of increasing urban wealth; the town walls, whose surviving remains are conventionally dated to c. 1220 - 1242, built around the edge of the high ground; and a series of high status domestic stone halls of the middle and late 13th century. These developments were paralleled by the growth of urban institutions, with a consequent increase in the level of the surviving documentation.

3. THE BENEDICTINE ABBEY (Figure 4.)

Shrewsbury Abbey was a medium-sized Benedictine house, founded between 1083 and 1087 in an area described by contemporaries as being in the eastern suburb, outside the town's east gate. The site that was chosen lay at the end of a raised peninsula of gravel-capped clay that projected into an alluvial zone, probably subjected to periodic flooding, around the confluence of the Rea Brook with the River Severn. The area was a focus for routeways approaching the town from the south and east, converging on the wide, shallow river crossing.

Today, the only traces of the abbey above-ground are the western half of the Abbey Church, preserved as a parish church at the Dissolution, the refectory pulpit, and part of a complex of buildings known as the 'Old Infirmary'. From these buildings, and from descriptions, illustrations and maps published in the 18th and 19th centuries it is possible to reconstruct, in general terms, the boundaries and internal geography of the former precinct.

These sources reveal an enclosed area of c. 14,000 square metres, within which were the Abbey Church, its west front projecting into the public street, cloisters to the south, arranged in the Benedictine tradition, and an outer court to the west.

The claustral buildings suffered particularly badly during the two most destructive episodes known in the site's later history. The east range certainly did not survive the Dissolution in 1540: contemporary plumbers' accounts record the quantities of lead stripped from the buildings, and the dimensions of the buildings. The refectory, too, may have been demolished in 1540; the survival of the pulpit can possibly be accounted for by its conversion (roofing and glazing) to a garden summer-house in the 16th century. The west range, identified by the historians Owen and Blakeway as the dormitory range, survived largely intact until 1836, when Thomas Telford re-routed the main road (Abbey Foregate) across the precinct and through the claustral area. Early 19th century illustrations, especially that by Buckler, show the west range to have been a mainly Norman structure with later inserted openings and timber-framing of probable post-Dissolution date at second floor level.

Owen and Blakeway also describe two further monastic buildings to the south of the cloisters. The first of these, a high, gabled, sandstone building, they identified as the 'Guesten Hall'. It formed the nucleus of a cluster of post-Dissolution buildings, including a jettied, timber-framed building immediately south of the refectory site known as Abbey House. The complex was restored and enlarged by Henry Powys in c. 1765 and demolished in c. 1860. The second building, a ruined, vaulted structure to the east, they identified as the 'Abbot's Lodgings'.

The 'Old Infirmary'

The group of buildings collectively referred to as the 'Old Infirmary' consisted, at the end of the middle ages, of parallel north and south ranges linked by a heavily buttressed west range. These buildings formed the western end of the outer court and overlooked the northern channel of the Rea Brook, (widened to form a dock at this point), and the site of the Abbey Mill, at the south-west corner of the precinct. The 'Old Infirmary's' west elevation was pierced by six arched doorways that may have given access to a waterfront.

The north range, against the old Abbey Foregate frontage, and the northern half of the surviving wall of the west range, were demolished by Telford

in 1836 and the stonework re-used to build cellars for two houses on ground reclaimed following the filling-in of the northern Rea Brook channel.

The south range survives. A wide arch at the east end of the south wall suggests either that it was formerly L-shaped, or that it was a gatehouse giving access to the outer court from the south and from the area of the mill. The floor above appears to have been a first floor-hall, with an external doorway in the east gable wall and a large window in the west wall. The tracery shown in illustrations of this window before c. 1800 suggests that the building may date to the mid to late 13th century.

One and a half bays of the west wall of the west range survive. The tops of two of the arches shown in the 18th century views of the west elevation are visible, together with small rectangular windows lighting the first and second-floor levels.

Initial recording and structural analysis of the west elevation by, C. Moffett, have begun to demonstrate that the 'Old Infirmary' complex underwent a long sequence of structural changes and, doubtless, changes in use. The surviving south range began life as a free-standing building, built with red and purple Keele Beds sandstone, and buttressed at each corner. Later, a wall composed of green sandstone rubble was built northwards from its north-west corner, probably linking it with the parallel north range on the street frontage, and enclosing the west end of the outer court. This wall was then pierced by the insertion of the ground-level arches and, possibly at the same time, possibly later, the wall was buttressed and a two-storey structure built on top, using a soft brown sandstone.

The Precinct Boundaries.

The structural sequence observed in the west elevation of the 'Old Infirmary' can be compared with the excavated evidence from the Queen Anne House site and with documentary evidence, to suggest a tentative outline for the development of the precinct boundaries. The earliest features on the Queen Anne House site were post-holes and an east-west linear feature cut into the natural gravel slope above the pond deposits that marked the southern limit of the pre-14th century precinct. These features represent timberwork of an uncertain character, roughly on the alignment followed later by a green sandstone rubble wall. This ran approximately east-west along the slope, was buttressed on its outer face, and its

construction was followed by the raising of the ground surface level inside it to the north. At the time of writing it is undated. The wall was demolished to its footings and replaced by a successor a short distance to the south, encroaching slightly into the pond area. This was built in red sandstone rubble and, again, the ground level to the north was raised. These walls are interpreted as successive precinct boundaries following the natural topography.

Illustrations of the east and north-east sides of the abbey that pre-date Telford's activity in the 1830's show a crenellated precinct wall, buttressed on the outside with a postern gate giving access to Abbey Foregate. These features were described and mapped by Owen and Blakeway, who commented that the upper crenellated part of the wall was built in red sandstone while its footings were composed of 'very small pieces' of much-decayed soft 'grey' stone. Their suggestion that the 'grey' stone footings represented an earlier wall receives strong support from the other evidence now available.

These sources suggest that there is some evidence for the enclosure or definition in timber of at least part of the precinct area. The first comprehensive enclosure wall was built in green sandstone rubble (when dry it appears light grey-green), linking existing buildings in peripheral locations. This wall was replaced by a red sandstone wall on a similar but not identical circuit, some or all of which was crenellated. On stylistic and historical grounds, this may well have been built in the 13th or 14th century. The new precinct wall was subject to localised repairs and alterations, to colonisation by buildings, and to complete replacement where building activity was particularly intense.

The Monastic Fringe

The abbey was bounded to the north by public streets, to the east by private tenements, and to the west by the Rea Brook. To the south lay the floodplain of the Rea Brook, and maps published between 1746 and 1855 give some indications as to how this area was used in the middle ages. Rocque's map of 1746 and Owen and Blakeway's plan of 1825 show the monastic mill-stream, a leat diverted off the Rea Brook 2 km upstream, forming a southern boundary to the precinct area and driving the Abbey

Mill. To the south lay the abbey's fish-ponds, shown by Rocque in what is thought to have been their final medieval form, and by Owen and Blakeway in their amalgamated form, known as the Abbey Pool. Excavation of the Queen Anne House site has shown that this simple picture disguises a considerably more complicated reality, with a third previously unknown pond area immediately to the south of the outer court, encroached on by buildings in the late middle ages. This pond may have been the monastic mill-pond. Water-lain silts were also found c. 90m to the east in a trial excavation in 1985. It is conceivable that these silts were formed in the same feature as that sampled on the Queen Anne House site, possibly a third fish-pond or even a silted-up stream bed.

Although the inaccuracy of the pre-Ordnance Survey maps leaves some room for doubt, it is probable that the water-channel shown flowing along the southern edge of the precinct area can be identified with the excavated water-channel or drain on the Queen Anne House site, a late medieval feature associated with the construction of buildings over part of the former pond area. This is unlikely to have been the only water-channel flowing through the late medieval precinct, but the extent of the later water-supply and drainage system and its development from earlier arrangements cannot be understood without further excavated evidence from the southern fringe of the precinct and from the mill site.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS

Until 1985, the archaeology of Shrewsbury Abbey was almost completely unexplored. The earliest recorded excavation took place in 1819 on the site of the west cloister walk; Owen and Blakeway recorded the discovery there of Norman and 13th century capitals and other architectural fragments. In 1896 a sewer was constructed along Telford's Abbey Foregate, and the excavation was watched by the Rev. Cranage. He recorded the progress of the digging across the foundations of the west range and cloister walk, through the garden soil of the cloister garth and across the foundations of the chapter house. The chapter house itself was found to have had an apsidal east end; beneath it were found charcoal burials of the type found six years earlier in Shrewsbury during the excavation of Old St. Chad's site in the town centre. In 1973, two inhumations were found behind Abbey Terrace, on the eastern edge of the precinct (figures 3 + 4).

In 1984 and 1985, a programme of archaeological evaluation began. Two trial trenches by A. Roe (BUFAU) were followed by a watching brief on an engineers' test-trench at the south west corner of the 'Old Infirmary', by M.D. Watson (Shropshire County Council). The first trial-trench revealed 3m of deposits in the area behind the Queen Anne House. The second trial-trench, in the eastern area of the precinct, showed 2m of the make-up for the railway station of 1860 sealing deposits containing sandstone walls of probably monastic origin. Pond deposits were encountered at the south end of the trench, though the instability of the ground prevented undisturbed natural ground from being contacted. The 'Old Infirmary' test-hole straddled the precinct wall at its junction with the standing building. Natural gravel was recorded 1.4m below the modern ground surface within the precinct wall, 3m below the surface outside the precinct wall.

There is, however, little or no information on the depth or quality of archaeological deposits in most of the precinct area. The southern fringe alone is well-known, and 3m of stratified deposit with extensive waterlogging and good preservation of environmental evidence can be predicted for this strip with masonry structures surviving only 0.45m below the modern ground surface. The Queen Anne House site suggests that the southern half of the outer court may have deposits approaching 2m in depth, though this figure is likely to decrease northwards. No information is available for the claustral area, though the evidence of thresholds and architectural details on the south side of the Abbey Church suggests that there has been a negligible accumulation of post-11th century deposits in this area. There is no available borehole information for the area within the precinct boundaries.

There are few known major disturbances to the archaeological deposits within the precinct. The 1896 Abbey Foregate sewer, and other sub-road services, and another sewer running east-west across the precinct, represent the most destructive intrusions. The construction of the Queen Anne House and its cellar in the early 18th century is likely to have removed all deposits from its site; excavation of the area to the south has shown that some reduction of the ground level took place in the post-medieval period, possibly at the same time. The basements of Abbey Terrace, an early 19th century development in the south-east corner of the precinct, represent another deep, compact intrusion. With the exception of oil storage tanks in the central precinct area, all modern buildings are lightly founded and uncellared.

The immediate environs of the precinct, and part of the precinct itself, have been subject to major land-fill operations. The northern channel of the Rea Brook was filled-in by stages after 1770. The Abbey Pool and the floodplain around it was reclaimed in c. 1860, and a strip of ground extending into the eastern precinct area was raised further to accommodate the Abbey Station.

5. RESEARCH AIMS.

Standing buildings, documentary evidence and cartographic evidence, allow the construction of a general model for the internal geography of the abbey precinct in its final form. Excavation, survey and research over the last 18 months have refined this model, and have begun to show how aspects of the abbey have changed through time, particularly in the later middle ages. The principal research aim of the project remains that of understanding the form and development of the abbey and its economy, and its relationship to the medieval town. As new data have been generated, the strategy adopted to answer these broad questions has inevitably changed, new detailed questions are being asked of the evidence, and new models have been formulated that may be tested by further work within the constraints of a response to defined threats to deposits and structures.

The Late Saxon Background.

As outlined above, the abbey was not a fresh plantation within an unoccupied agricultural landscape. It was established around a pre-existing chapel, with some sort of parochial status, possibly in the area of, and associated with, the charcoal burials recorded in the 19th century beneath the chapter house. The chapel had been built as part of the 'homestead' of Siward, a wealthy English landowner. It is known from several documentary sources that the construction of the abbey in the 1080's got off to a slow start, with an initial endowment that was barely adequate. However, within three years of Roger of Montgomery's decision to establish the abbey, Domesday Book records a substantial income from burgesses and from mills. It is extremely likely that the mills had been part, possibly an important part, of the pre-abbey settlement. A primary target for the proposed excavation of the Abbey Mill site is the examination of any mill-structures of this period

and the elucidation of the development of associated channels or ponds (see revised English Bridge Gyrotory System Research Design).

The appearance of the abbey precinct in relation to the medieval course of Abbey Foregate suggests the possibility that the abbey represents an encroachment over the earlier approach road to the town, carrying traffic from the Midlands and the Severn Valley towards the river crossing. Further excavation, even on a small scale, in the outer court or central precinct area could confirm this possibility and add to our extremely limited understanding of the form and function of this late Saxon suburbium. The geography of the area in which the abbey was established and, in particular, the road system and its relationships to the river-crossing, are major problems that are probably beyond solution by the present project. Excavation in the area immediately south of the Abbey Mill site may, however, be able to test the hypothesis that a north-south causeway with possible pre-abbey origins awaits discovery along the east bank of the Rea Brook (see revised English Bridge Gyrotory System Research Design).

The Outer Court and the Monastic Economy.

The documentation associated with the abbey's rural possession shows that, in common with other monastic and lay estates, from the early 14th century the abbey followed a policy of reducing the extent of its demesne land. Direct control by bailiffs gave way to a 'preference for rents' and, by 1509 the Abbot was claiming that he spent 400 marks annually on food and drink in Shrewsbury's markets. The 1986 Research Design suggested that this change was likely to have effects that would be archaeologically detectable in the fabric or the deposits of the outer court - the monastic service area - either through the general level of investment or in more specific functional changes within or between buildings. It was speculated that under-used assets in this area could have been used, directly or leased-out, for industrial purposes. The appearance of the Abbey Mill in a later medieval rental suggests that this, at least, was no longer under direct monastic control, and the presence of cloth-finishing, leather-finishing and other trades in the Coleham, Coleham Island and Abbey Foregate areas raises the possibility that the mill have undergone conversion to fulling or other industrial use. Such a change should be archaeologically

detectable, through residues if not from the actual structure and its machinery, and the testing of this hypothesis remains one of the aims of excavation of the mill site (see Revised English Bridge Gyrotory System Research design).

Excavation of the Queen Anne House site on the southern edge of the outer court has shown the stages by which this part of the monastery was enclosed, and expanded southwards. The latter process culminated, in the late 14th or 15th century, with the construction of a new, square, sandstone building with a water channel or drain outside its south wall. The earlier pond was reduced in size and the portion that remained, to the west of the new building gradually went out of use and began to fill up with rubbish. The plan of the new building, and the presence of dripping-pan fragments, butchered animal bone, wooden bowls and part of a stone mortar, in the rubbish accumulating outside it, suggest that it was a kitchen. There is little evidence for its internal arrangements, though there was provision for a fireplace in the centre of its west wall.

This kitchen is unlikely to have been the principal monastic kitchen, being too far from the claustral buildings, but it may well have served either the Abbot's Lodgings, though their identification/location is uncertain, or guest accommodation within the outer court. The latter explanation is, perhaps, the more probable, and circumstantial evidence in support of this can be found elsewhere in the abbey, and outside the county.

As a Norman plantation on a previously secular site, Shrewsbury Abbey did not inherit a well-known cult centre, or relics. It sought to remedy this when, in c. 1138, it 'acquired' the bones of St. Winifred, whose burial site at Gwytherin in North Wales and well at Holywell were already the subjects of devotion and pilgrimage. The cult of St. Winifred grew in popularity in the 14th century, and the monks of Shrewsbury added a further attraction to the abbey through the theft of the relics of St. Bueno, St. Winifred's confessor. In the late 14th century, the feast day of St. Winifred was established as a major feast at Canterbury, and successive kings paid their devotions to the saint, Henry V making a pilgrimage on foot from Shrewsbury Abbey to Holywell in 1416. The cult prospered further in the 15th century, attracting gifts, offerings and pilgrims to the abbey

and to St. Winifred's shrine 'near the high altar of St. Peter and St. Paul'; in the third quarter of the 15th century a guild was established in her honour with an altar in the nave of the Abbey Church.

The possession of such a popular cult-focus may have had a considerable effect on the Abbey's revenues, and may well have encouraged the expansion of facilities for guests in the outer court. At Basingwerk Abbey in Flintshire, confirmed in the possession of Holywell in 1240 and closely associated with the cult, a late 15th century poem describes new houses for the guests who were said to be so numerous that 'they had to be accommodated at meals at two sittings, when they have a choice of wines from Aragon, Spain and Brittany'. Such a development might well provide the context for the provision of a new kitchen in the expanding outer court at Shrewsbury. Further, it might also provide an explanation for the function of the upper storeys of the late, west range of the 'Old Infirmary' complex, built in the same soft brown sandstone as the west face of the kitchen, and resembling a lodgings-block in the repetition of the openings in its west elevation. The identification of the building as the 'Infirmary' (unlikely if only because of its location) may well have resulted from a continuing tradition that this had been the hospitium, the monastic hostel, from which a mistaken association was made.

In summary, there are some indications that, in the later middle ages, at least the west end of the outer court was used for the accommodation of visitors. A plausible historical context for this is the promotion by the abbey of the cult of St. Winifred in the 14th and 15th centuries. There is less evidence for earlier uses of this area, and there is clearly a need for further excavation before definitive conclusions can be drawn. In particular, excavation in advance of ground disturbance in and around the 'Old Infirmary' must be a priority, as this group of buildings may well encapsulate evidence of changes of function that are representative of changes taking place in the outer court as a whole, and there is an opportunity here to integrate excavated evidence with the structural analysis of the standing buildings. Examination of the internal arrangements of, and access to, the west range alone would make a valuable contribution to our understanding of the late medieval abbey.

The Abbey and the Town.

The problem of the relationship of the abbey to its parent town can be approached from a number of different directions, using different sources of evidence. Historians have described in detail the documentation that shows the abbey as an institution at loggerheads with the burgesses over a variety of issues: boundaries, tolls and, in particular, the abbey's right to the monopoly of milling over the town. Some of these issues reflect the abbey as an urban competitor, particularly those associated with its three-day annual Fair of St. Peter. Less attention has been given to the abbey as a consumer of goods and services, as a local employer, and as a stimulus to local industries, functions which should be observable in documentary sources recording the employment structure of the suburbs around the precinct. The published charter evidence reveals people following a wide variety of trades and professions living, or owning property in, the Abbey Foregate, Coleham Island and Coleham suburbs in the 13th century. The potential of other documentary sources for confirming and amplifying this evidence, and extending it in to later periods, will be investigated.

The clearest archaeological evidence for the abbey as urbanising agent can be found outside the precinct, in the landscape of the Abbey Foregate area, the 'eastern suburb' that formed part of the original endowment of 1083, and over which the abbey maintained an administrative and legal jurisdiction that was entirely separate from the town. Although encroached-on in the post-medieval period, it is clear that Abbey Foregate itself, for a distance of about 600m to the east of the precinct, was a wide (or widened) street of a type seen in a variety of planned medieval settlements and extensions (figure 5.). This street was burgaged on both sides; the properties to the south backing on to the monastic mill-stream, with one of the abbey's three mills at the bottom of a lane between plots; the properties to the north backing on to a discontinuous fence-line that suggests the partition of a number of larger fields. Project staff have recently measured surviving plot frontages in the hope of quantifying the 'planned' element in this system, and identifying the units of measurement involved.

Immediately to the north of the precinct lay a rectangular open space of approximately 1,500 square metres, known since the 17th century as Horsefair. This area, encroached-on by the time of Speed's map of 1610, was the site of the abbey's annual fair of St. Peter, and another

planned element in the monastic suburb.

The problems of the relationship of the early monastery to the river-crossing have already been referred to. The form of the early crossing is uncertain, though it is likely to have been the ford, still passable in summer, a short distance to the south of the present English Bridge. The medieval bridge is well documented, and consisted of two separate structures, end-to-end, in excess of 230m in length; the Stone Bridge, crossing the Severn from the bottom of Wyle Cop to the tip of Coleham Island, and the Abbey or Monks' Bridge, from Coleham Island across the norther channel of the Rea Brook. A bridge here is implied by further documentary evidence in the very early 12th century, and further research may be able to determine whether this was the stone structure known from later maps and drawings, and possibly, the agency behind its construction.

The Excavation of the Queen Anne House Site: A Summary.

Excavation work on the site began in November 1985 and lasted for some 18 months. Six main phases of occupation were identified covering the period from c. 1200 until the present. A summary of the phasing of the site is contained within the Post-excavation Research Design and will not be repeated here.

The general picture is one of the expansion of the monastic precinct southwards, with a series of boundary walls being replaced in the 14th century by a large square sandstone building of high quality construction. As the expansion extended the occupation area from the gravel and marl spur down onto the wet floodplain area, the building was raised on timber piles of various sizes, preventing the subsidence which caused the collapse of at least one of the earlier precinct walls.

Although the controlled demolition of the building at the Dissolution led to the removal of the floor surface together with associated deposits to the north, a low wet area to the west was used periodically as a refuse disposal area. A large variety of artefacts including leather, bone, metalwork, wood and pottery from these dumps together with the ground plan of the building allow the tentative suggestion of the building's function as a kitchen block serving guest accommodation in the outer court of the monastery.

Following the demolition of the building at the Dissolution of the monastery in 1540, the site was turned over to private ownership and was the site of a tanning industry in the late 16th to early 17th century. With the construction of the Queen Anne House in the early 1700's the area was turned over to a garden which survived until the present.

By far the majority of deposits were waterlogged and a wide variety of organic artefacts survived to compliment the more usual pottery and metalwork. Leather, wood, and a variety of plant remains have been recovered from the medieval deposits allowing the reconstruction of both activity within the monastery and the environment. Most remarkable amongst the artefacts recovered was a complete and undamaged hallmarked silver bowl of probable 14th century date. The bowl, of a high quality silver, is likely to be of great significance not only for the abbey, but also for the study of English silver.

The analysis of material from the excavations is due to be complete in the summer of 1988, and the excavation archive is to be held at Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council's Rowley's House museum.

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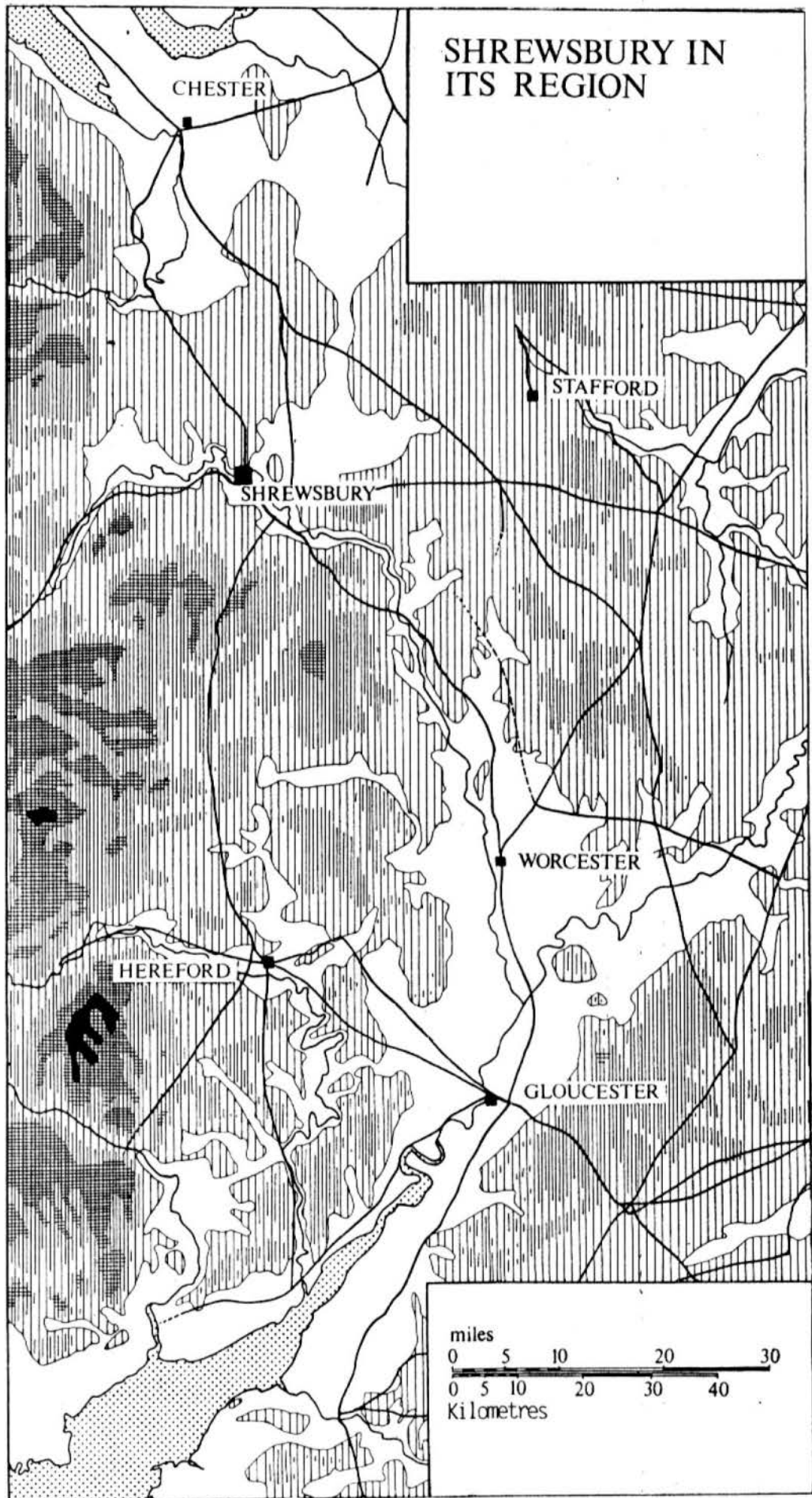


Figure 1 Shrewsbury and its region.

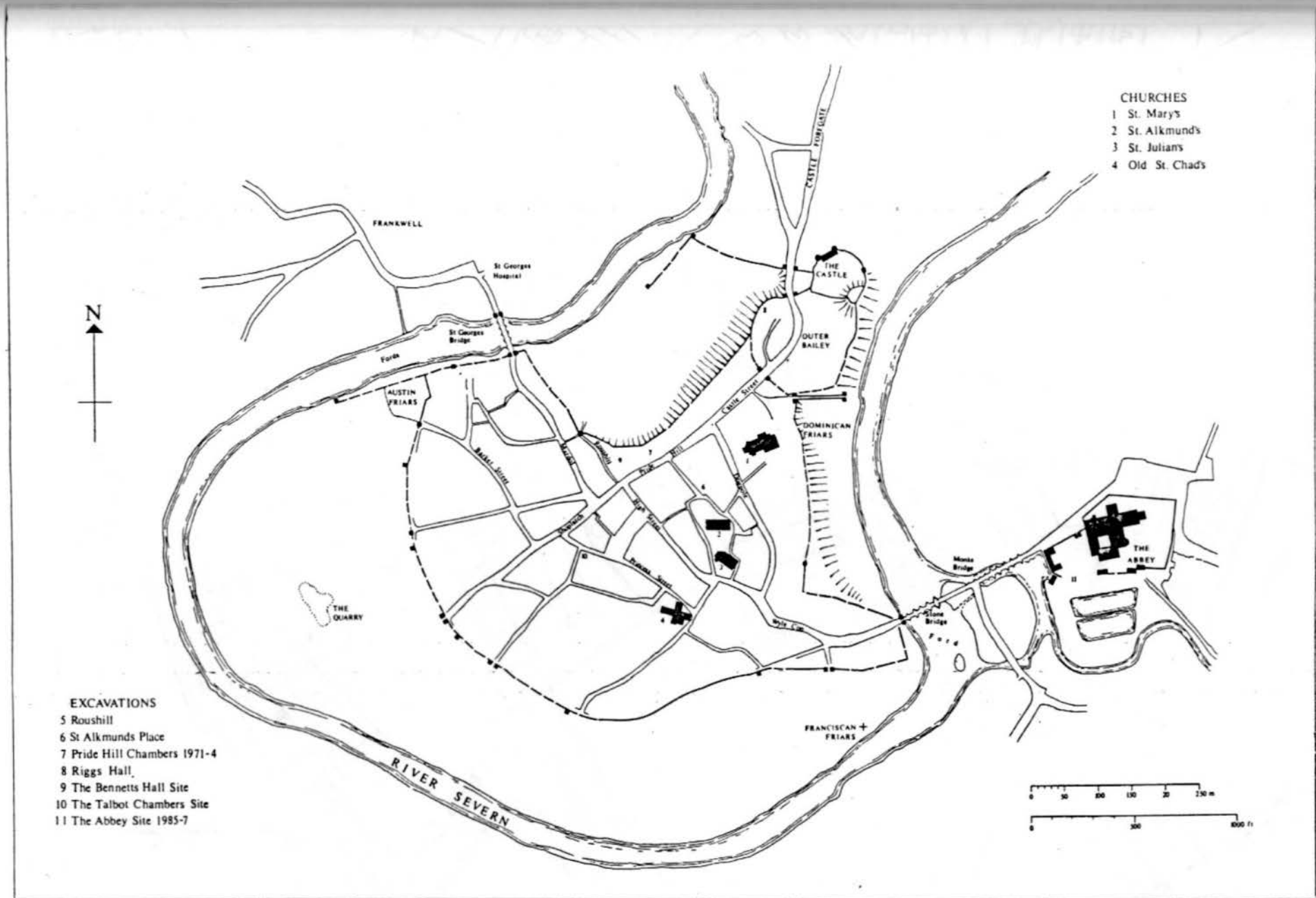


Figure 2 Shrewsbury: the Medieval Town.

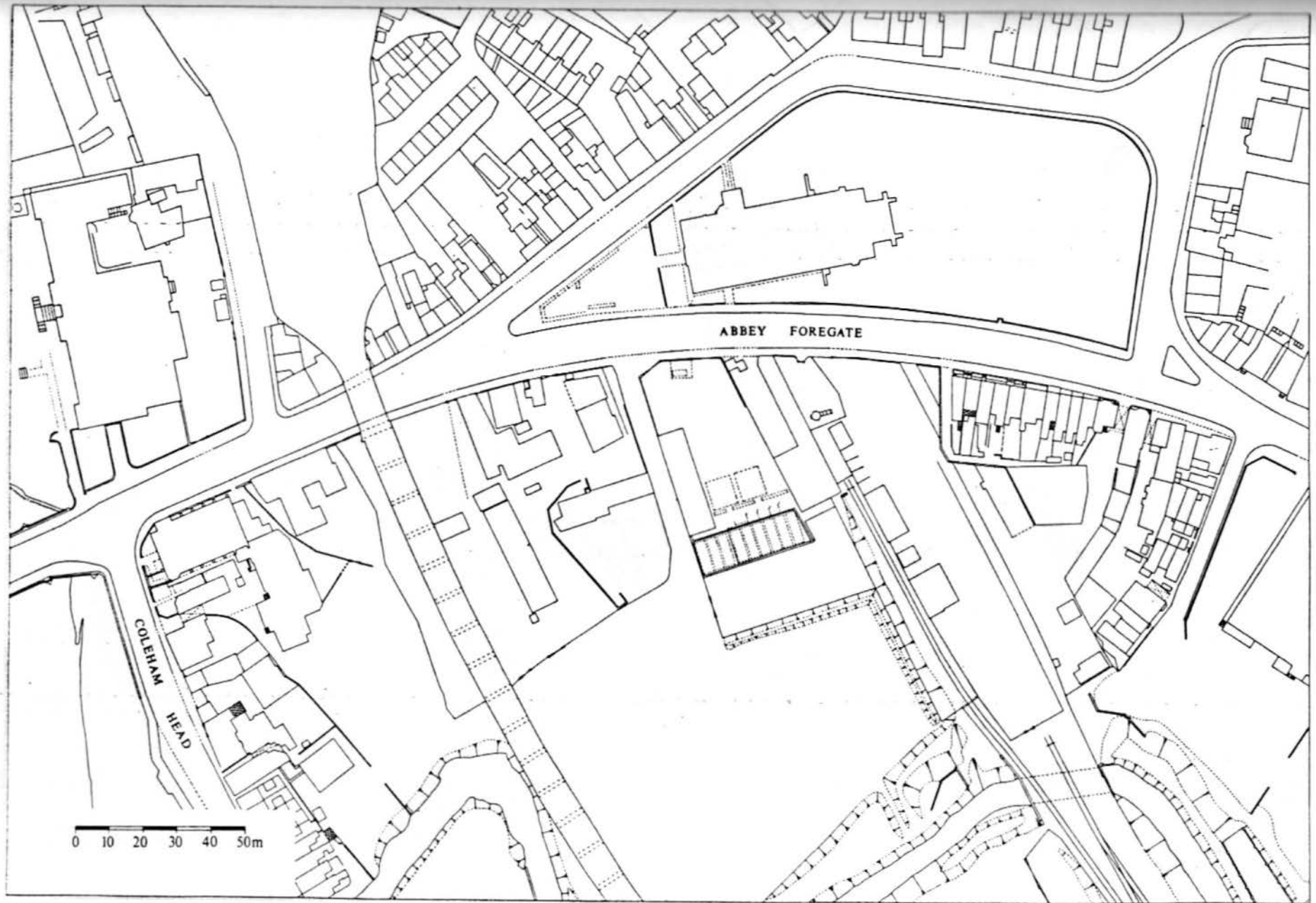


Figure 3 The Modern Abbey Area.

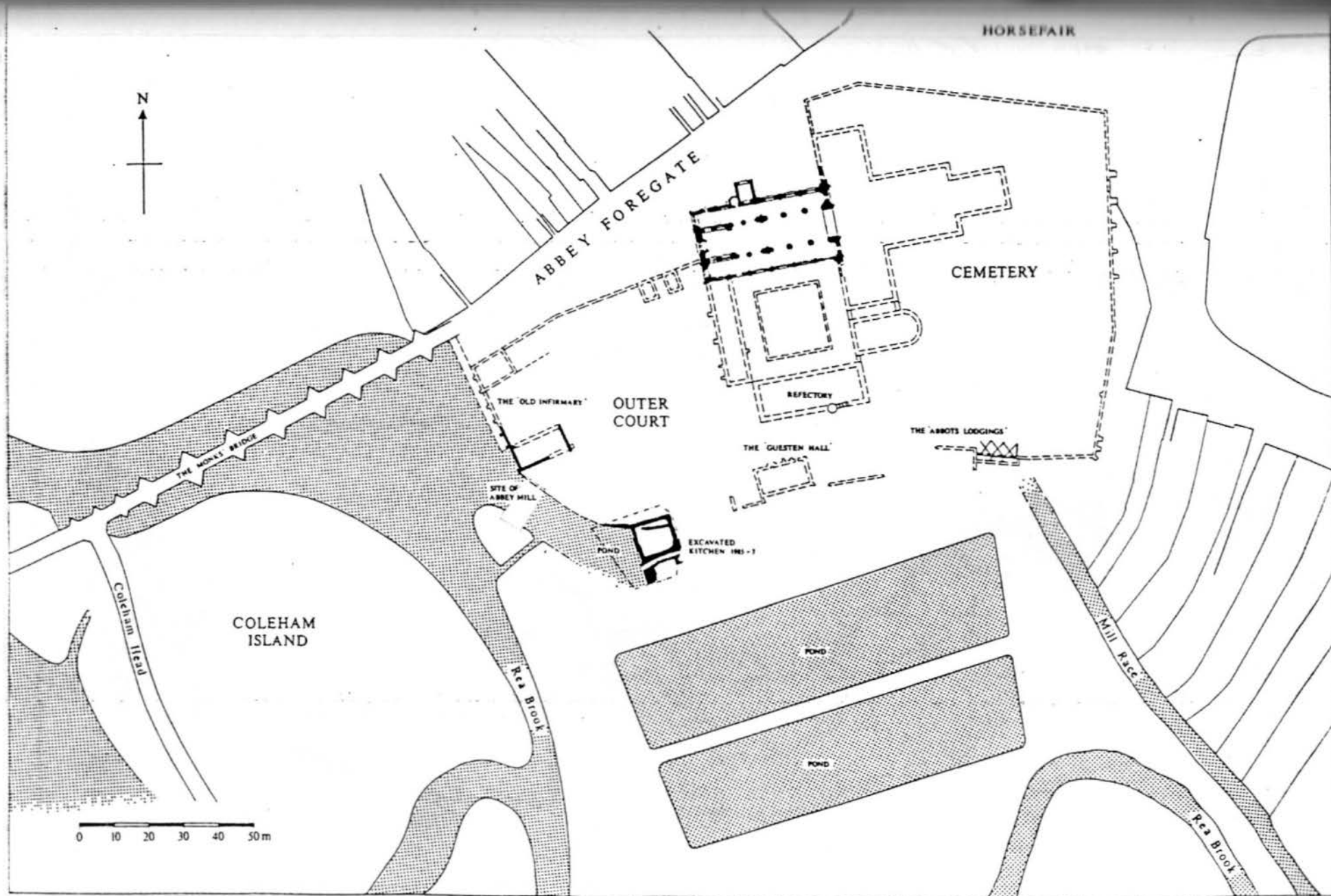


Figure 4 The Late Medieval Abbey.

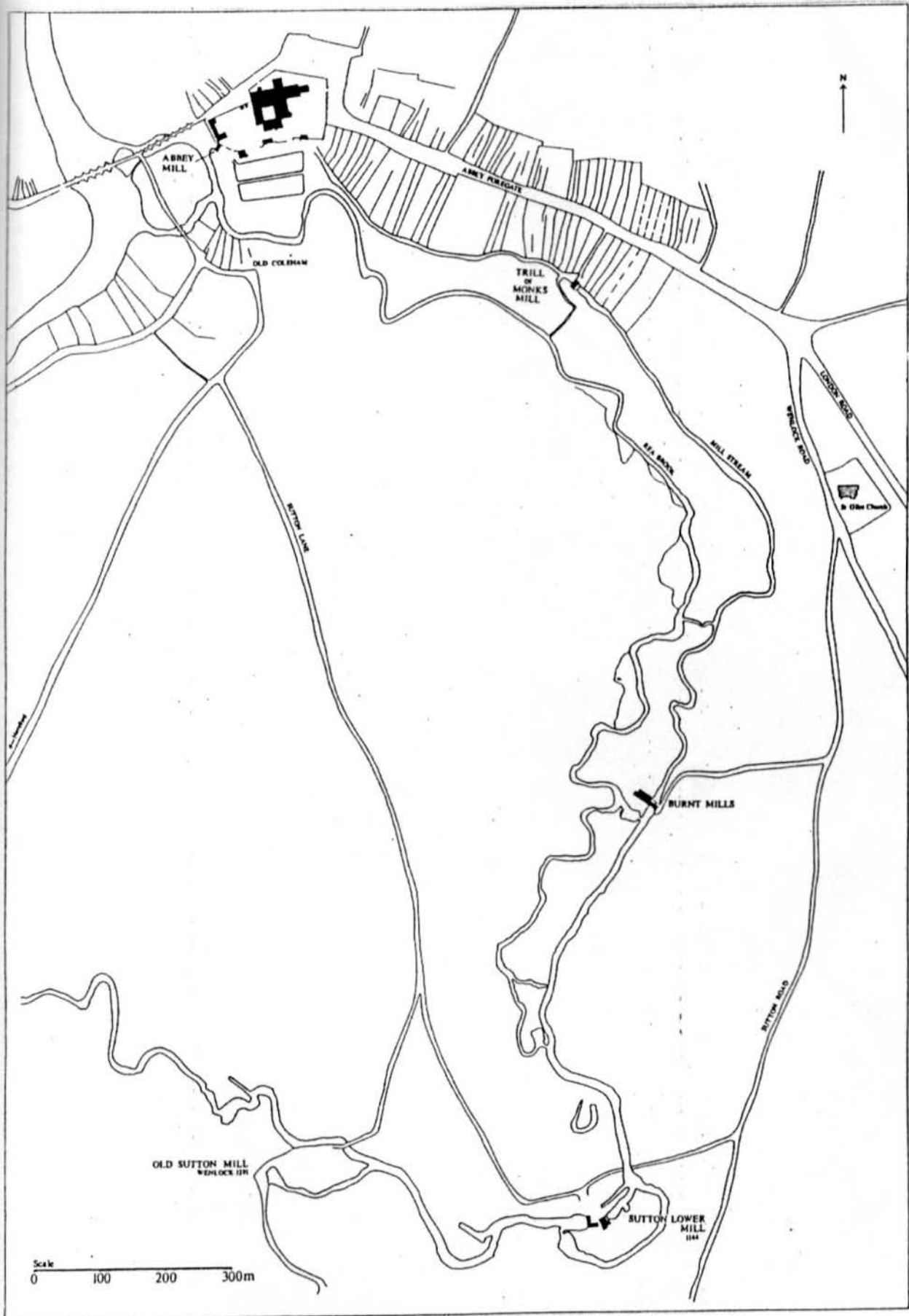


Figure 5 The Monastic Suburbs and the Mill Stream.