

A Survey of Lilleshall Abbey, Shropshire

Third Interim Report

by

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with a Documentary Assessment by

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Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit 1990

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Introduction

In January/February 1990 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (B.U.F.A.U.) was commissioned by English Heritage to undertake a third season of building recording work at Lilleshall Abbey (SJ 738142), a survey that has been running in tandem with a programme of consolidation and repair at the monument.

The methodology used for the survey has already been described in detail in an earlier report (Ferris 1988) and will not be discussed again here.

The 1990 Survey

The previous two seasons of survey at Lilleshall saw the recording of the Abbey Church and its associated chapels, in addition to the profiling of architectural mouldings from around the whole complex of monastic structures, and the proposal of a model for the development of the plan.

The third season, herein reported, considered the cloister, the sacristy, the slype and chapter house, the refectory and day room, and the low stone walling belonging to structures to the west and south-west of the cloister. This proved to be very much a case of completing the survey record rather than extending the interpretation of the phasing of the abbey's development, and indeed the suggested broad phasing outlined in the second interim report of 1989 stands more-or-less unchanged. (Ferris and Hutchinson 1989).

The Cloister (Figures 2, 3 and 7)

The north side of the cloister, formed by part of the outer face of the southern wall of the nave of the church, was surveyed in 1989. In 1990

recording concentrated on the other three sides of the cloister; the east side would have been formed by the west walls of the sacristy, slype and chapter house, though the walling of the latter structure now no longer stands; the south side was formed by the north wall of the refectory; and the west side would have been formed by the east wall of the west range which would have been taken up by lodgings, but only a single stretch of low walling now survives of this range.

The series of putlog holes that was noted on the north cloister wall can be seen to continue around both the east and the south walls, and, certainly on the east wall, to include a regularly spaced line of holes beneath the chamfered stringcoursing (SE1213 on the east wall, SE1287 on the south wall) that would have acted as a support for the lean-to timber roof over the claustral walk. On the south wall these putlog holes are not so numerous or regular but this can be accounted for by the fact that much of the face of this wall has been rebuilt, having doubtless at some stage been stripped bare to its very core; on the inner face of this wall (drawing not reproduced here) the backs of putlog holes are more visible.

At the north end of the east wall a deep scar (AE357), angled at roughly 45 degrees, (a return of the scar being visible also on the north cloister wall) represents the former roof line over the processional doorway through the north wall into the church. At both the east end and the west end of the south wall the chamfered stringcourse rises at a 45 degree angle, again to accommodate the angle of the junctions of the cloister walk roof. Such a rise would also have been expected at the south end of the east wall but this stretch of walling no longer stands.

Because of its need to support what must have been quite a high structure the east wall is buttressed (AE257, AE258, AE259), these buttresses being built in a form consistent with the main fabric of the wall (SE1221) and with the stringcoursing, of which there are three lines in all (SE1212, SE1213, SE1214). In the first, northern bay of this wall is an extremely fine book-locker (AE251), divided into two compartments by a stone mullion which bears various marks from the fittings for a pair of wooden doors. The tympanum beneath the arched head of the locker has saw-tooth

decoration, a Romanesque detail in keeping with the decoration of the processional door. In the second bay, at the lowest level, there has evidently been a considerable amount of rebuilding in post-monastic times with the doorway (AE253) being the most recent insertion, giving access into a small storeroom created out of part of the space for a medieval passage or doorway(?) which might have been expected here, giving access into the south transept. The doorway is set into a large area of evident blocking (SE1226), which was also seen on the equivalent portion of the wall face inside the transept. A window (AE252), to the north of doorway AE253, may be 17th or 18th century in date. The third bay is blind, and forms the back or rear wall of the sacristy, while the fourth bay is pierced by the large doorway (AE267) that leads into a vaulted slype or covered passageway. There are similar doors at the eastern and western ends of the southern cloister wall respectively. These doors are quite elaborate constructions in the Romanesque style, but are devoid of decoration, each having a crescent-shaped, plain tympanum.

The walling on the upper level of the east wall, above the roof line of the cloister, does not stand to its full height. A portion (AE457) of one of the upper tier of windows lighting the south transept does survive. A single, small, arch-headed window (AE254), lighting what was probably the sacrist's chamber is seen on the upper level of the third bay.

Of the chapter house little can be said, as this structure has suffered greatly through time from destruction and stone robbing. Only a fragment of a small window (AE256) survives of its western end. The other walls of the chapter house were recorded during the survey, and two decorated grave slabs inside were drawn, but these drawings are not reproduced in this report.

The southern cloister wall, as has already been stated, has, to a very great extent, been rebuilt and refaced, at least on its northern elevation. The Romanesque doorway (AE307) at the east end of this range leads into a passageway, probably formerly vaulted, giving access to a courtyard(?) or to other buildings(?) to the south. The matching doorway (AE304) at the west end gave access into the large refectory which, as Rigold points out

was at some stage sub-divided to create a day room at the east end (Rigold 1969, 16). The interior of the refectory has either been heavily consolidated or is in the process of consolidation; the survey here included preparing interpret-ative overlays of the walls and the stone-by-stone drawing of those low walls not covered by the photogrammetric survey. These drawings form part of the archive and are not, with the exception of the inner and outer faces of the west wall (Figures 5 and 6), reproduced here, as their full interpretation must await comparison with the photographic records of the refectory made before consolidation commenced. The interpretation of this southern range by Rigold cannot therefore at the present time be supplemented (Rigold 1969, 16).

Of the west range, which presumably would have housed the lay-brothers quarters, very little remains, apart from a 13 metres long stretch of low walling (Figure 7), aligned north-south, and perhaps the north-west corner of the building. The style of construction here, and of those walls to the south-west of the west range (perhaps running off it westwards at right angles), is very different from elsewhere in the complex, and though Rigold assigned all this walling a 14th-century date it is possible that it could be of a later date, perhaps being post-monastic. As none of these walls were included in the photogrammetric survey they were drawn stone-by-stone in the 1990 survey (Figures 7-9).

Other Buildings

The final elevation to be considered is that which gives a cross-sectional relationship between the chapter house, slype, sacristy and south transept (Figure 4). Just as the west gable end of the chapter house has been destroyed, so has the east gable end, with only the north and south walls being caught here in profile. To the north of the chapter house is a vaulted through-passage or slype, with its eastern doorway (AE283) matching that at the west end of the passage. A slit window (AE282) in the walling (SE1258) above the slype is related to a newel-staircase that would have given access from the ground-floor vaulted sacristy to rooms above. The sacristy would have been entered from the south transept or from the

chapels leading off the transept to the east. Above there would have been a sacrist's chamber with windows allowing a view both into the church - this window no longer survives - and into the cloister. The staircase leading up to this chamber survives up to first-floor level and is similar to the staircase leading off the west end of the nave and reported on as part of the 1988 survey. The staircase was housed in an eastwards-projecting buttress (AE281), a low level window (AE284) associated with which only partially survives, and these can both be seen on the elevation Figure 4. The wide, large arched doorway (AE286) leading from a side chapel into the sacristy is now blocked off at its lower level by a 2 metres high sandstone-block wall (SE1254). To the north two similar sized doorways (AE287, AE288) in the same style, though largely now stripped of their facing stones, gave access into and out of the south transept of the church. The southernmost of these (AE287) is blocked across its lower level (SE1253).

Above doorway AE286 is an opening (AE285) associated with modern drainage arrangements. In the walling above doorway AE288 is a portion of a window (AE457), lighting the south transept.

Excavation of Test Pits

Two test-pits (see Figure 10) were dug in an area to the east of the eastern door of the slype in order to evaluate the depth of deposits here above natural, and to assess any archaeological implications for the proposed digging of a pipe-trench and sump here as part of a planned rearrangement of the drainage facilities. In Trench 1A the line of an existing pipe-trench was shown to cut across this area, connecting with a down-flow pipe at the north corner junction of the slype and sacristy wall. Because of this the trial trench was realigned (Trench 1B) and excavated to a depth of 0.50 metres before natural was encountered. A thin spread of white mortar, cut by a possible posthole, was the only deposit between topsoil and natural.

In Trench 2, in the angle formed by the junction of the slype and chapter house, a human burial was exposed in the north section face at a depth of 0.30 metres below the present ground surface. The burial was not removed or further exposed.

**A Brief Evaluation of the Illustrative Documentary Sources
Relating to Lilleshall Abbey**

Pictorial Evidence by Steve Litherland

Introduction

This brief survey was made of the existing photographic, illustrative and cartographic evidence relating to Lilleshall Abbey, in order to complement the findings of the detailed architectural survey that has recently been completed at the abbey, and also because these sources could help to both enliven and enrich the public presentation of the history and development of this monument in care. It is perhaps an aphorism, but the history of Lilleshall Abbey did not end with its dissolution in 1538, nor when, at the height of the Civil War in Shropshire, Parliamentary ordnance finally breached the north transept and the beleaguered Royalist garrison under Sir Richard Leveson surrendered. Thereafter, the ruins continued to be used as a resource; sometimes only as a useful supply of building stone, or as an area in which to pen animals, but increasingly the abbey came to be appreciated as a picturesque monument, symbolic of the values and the ethos of a previous age.

Certainly from the early 18th century, when the first surviving documentation begins to appear, (and, of course, possibly earlier,) the haunting remains of the abbey have proved to be a popular subject for antiquarian engravers; other artists, compilers of travellogues and, later, photographers were drawn here, to this archetypal 'gothick' ruin in the countryside. For example, in an anonymous 'Journal of an Excursion into Wales' made between 1767 and 1768 (ST.R.O. MF13), the following description of the abbey appears:

'On the way home passed through Lilleshall Abbey, which seems to have been a very large one, tho' now almost entirely in ruins - all about the square stone having been at various times taken out of it and used for other buildings here. There are, however, two saxon gateways left a good

deal ornamented, and some vaults turned out with great art, the whole stress laying upon the single stones from the corners meeting a cross-key stone in the centre.'

Prints and Engravings

The following prints and engravings have been chosen as being representative of the development of the abbey, and range in date from the Buck print of 1731 to the late 19th century.

Figure 11 Samuel and Nathaniel Buck (1731). 'The West View of Lilleshall Priory' (sic). This is a stylised representation of the abbey viewed through the west door. While the engraving is obviously not an accurate representation of how the abbey looked in the 18th century, because the perspective has been foreshortened and the view is taken from an artificially high point in order to accommodate the full length of the church, the inclusion of the remains of the roof vaulting above the crossing and of three mullions in the east window, is of interest.

Figure 12 Engraved by J.Greig, drawn by Pye (1810). 'The Norman West Entrance of Lilleshall Abbey'. This small print, drawn from an adjacent field shows the west entrance to the church before the ruin became colonised by ivy and moss in the latter part of the 19th century.

Figure 13 Drawn by W.Pearson (for publication in either 1807 or 1824). Another view of the west entrance in more detail than Figure 12, showing the remains of part of a partition wall across the nave.

Figure 14 Another etching by W.Pearson (1807 or 1824). This shows the east window of the church with substantial fragments of the tracery of the great window still in situ.

Figure 15 Drawn by W.Carter, etched by Matthews (1830). An interior view from the quire, of the east window, curiously not showing the wall forming its base and sill, although this is possibly obscured by undergrowth. All the sketches made of the abbey in the 19th century appear to indicate that for a time this wall was not in situ. These include a set of sketches made in 1882 by C.W.S. Dixon (S.R.O. 288/10) which are not included in this present survey as they are bound in a sketch book and were therefore not available for photocopying. The absence of the basal wall is also apparent in 19th-century photographs of the abbey church. It appears that for some time there was a track leading through the east window, one explanation for which may be the proximity of the canal with its nearby bridge just to the south-east. (Figure 16)

Figure 16 Drawn by F.Calvert (1822). This print shows the canal close by the abbey church, with the east window looming in the background. Although the tow-path of the canal appears to be immediately adjacent, the bridge obviously indicates the presence of a road, with which the track through the church may here have converged.

Figure 17 Another print by F.Calvert (probably of 1830). This print of the interior of the church once again depicts the east window with substantial amounts of tracery still intact, if now looking somewhat precarious. The picture shows the encroachment of nature as the masonry became increasingly obscured by a cover of undergrowth, such that when H.Thornhill Timmins wrote 'The Nooks and Corners of Shropshire' the condition of the abbey was described in language recalling a Pre-Raphaelite painting inspired by Walter Scott:

"All is now far gone into a state of ruin and decay, over which Nature has spread her mantle of luxuriant ivy; while wind and weather have combined to add the softening touches. Set in the midst of a green, tranquil landscape, 'the world forgetting, by the world forgot,' this venerable pile seems redolent of memories from dim, medieval days, when life went forward in

quite another fashion from these hard-driven, high-pressure times."

(Thornhill Timmins 1899)

Figure 18 The name of the artist on this illustration is indecipherable, and therefore this print is not datable. However, the state of the undergrowth is somewhat less wild than in Figure 17, so, assuming that it was not drawn in winter, it is probably slightly earlier than 1830.

Figure 19 Again not attributable to any artist. This shows the track to the north of the church and the west entrance.

Photographs

There are a number of photographs of the abbey ruins from the mid-19th century onwards. They have not been included in this report because they are simply too numerous, and add little more to the interpretation of the ruin than can already be discerned from the prints. However, careful inspection of this collection may be repayed by insights into the phases of repair to the ruins made from the late 19th century onwards.

Cartographic Evidence

The history of the abbey has already been covered in some detail by historians (Rigold 1969; Victoria County History 1985). The V.C.H. account includes an analysis of the plentiful cartographic information about the area from the 17th century onwards. Therefore the extent of the abbey's holdings immediately adjacent to the abbey itself can be firmly located. These holdings basically consisted of four granges from which the estates would have been managed and farmed: Cheswell Grange to the north-east, Willmore Grange to the north-west, Home Grange right by the abbey, and Watling Street Grange to the South, with Lilleshall Park in between.

However, further analysis of these maps from a more topographical viewpoint, together with a field survey, may allow a more detailed picture of the workings of the old estate of the abbey, before and after the dissolution, to emerge.

It has not been possible to reproduce, as part of this report, any of the following maps, either because they are too large or are too detailed, but their location, and a brief description of the information they contain, is given below.

- Map 1 A plot of the demesne land of the manor of Lilleshall (1634). Scale 13.3 in. to the mile. 653 acres, including field names and buildings in perspective by William Brown of Roden (S.R.O. 38/13).
- Map 2 Map of Watling Street Grange. (c.1642). Scale 13.3 in. to the mile. 291 acres, including buildings in perspective, and field names (S.R.O. 972 bundle 242).
- Map 3 Map of Lilleshall Park (1679). Shows enclosures, glebe, and has a reference list of occupiers, by William Cartwright (S.R.O. 972 bundle 233/1).
- Map 4 Map of the north part of the parish of Lilleshall (1717). Scale 20 in. to the mile. 1605 acres, giving occupiers' names, field names and buildings in perspective by Thomas Burton (S.R.O. 972 bundle 234/3).
- Map 5 Map of Lilleshall Park (1720). Scale 20 in. to the mile. 1341 acres, showing extent of the park (794 acres), buildings, occupiers, wood names and reference list by Thomas Burton (S.R.O. 972 bundle 234/1).
- Map 6 Middle map of Lilleshall parish (c.1720). Scale 20 in. to the mile. 890 acres, showing buildings and abbey foundations, again by Thomas Burton (S.R.O. 972 bundle 234/2).

Map 7 Plan of the canal (1767). (S.R.O. 972/259.6).

Map 8 Survey of enclosures recently made to the park by the Earl of Sutherland (1774). Scale 26.6 in to the mile. 890 acres. (S.R.O. 972 bundle 233/2).

Summary

The third season of survey work at Lilleshall Abbey has seen the completion of the survey of the standing remains, as a supplement to the extensive photogrammetric coverage. An assessment has also been made of the pictorial sources relating to the site, which will be useful in compiling any presentational material for the site or for display boards.

There are obviously a number of further potential avenues of research that may still be considered, relating first to the abbey complex itself and secondly to the more general setting of the site within its contemporary landscape.

Further evidence, relevant to the 1988-1990 survey, could come from a detailed examination of the photographic archives, both in private collections (as discussed by S.J. Litherland above) and in the hands of English Heritage and relating to the consolidation of the monument. Likewise, a fuller understanding of those no-longer-visible parts of the site would come from an examination of the records of the excavations of 1891 by C.C. Walker and those of 1984/1985 by T.J. Crump in the refectory. Finally, a search for documents relating to the post-Dissolution history of the site, before its taking into care, could add further knowledge about this crucial and somewhat shady era of the abbey's history.

In more general terms, the abbey is part of a wider landscape and it would be a very valuable exercise, if permission could be obtained from the relevant landowners, to survey this landscape (as was done, for instance, at Halesowen Abbey where the on-going survey worked from the general to the specific, rather than the other way around), for which task the detailed map evidence listed above would be a most useful guide. Such surveys have great potential (see for instance Astill 1989; Moorhouse 1989), especially when undertaken in tandem with documentary research, sources for which, in respect to Lilleshall, have recently been considered by the Victoria County History for Shropshire. Such survey can be taken a step further by analysing the economics of the monastic estate within the broader framework

of the medieval economy, and a number of such studies of Cistercian houses have been undertaken (Donkin 1978).

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Acknowledgements

The survey of the abbey buildings was supervised by Jon Sterenberg. The survey team was Quentin Hutchinson, Laurence Jones and Paul Sewter, the team also being responsible for some of the drawings produced in this report. Other drawings were prepared by Iain Ferris, Caroline Gait and Liz Hooper.

We would like to thank the English Heritage masons at Lilleshall for, once again, providing help and equipment, and Mr. David Zeizer for the loan of a scaffold tower.

The assessment of the background historical material was undertaken by Steve Litherland in the County Record Offices in Stafford and Shrewsbury, the Local Studies Library in Shrewsbury, the National Buildings Record and the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts National Directory of Archives, in London. Thanks are given to the staff of all these repositories for their help.

The text was typed by Ann Humphries and edited by Simon Buteux.

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- Figure 6 The Frater; West Wall, East Interior Elevation. (Stereberg et al.)
- Figure 7 The Cloister. Remnant of Walling at North End of West Range. East Elevation. (Stereberg et al.)
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- Figure 16 F. Calvert (1822)
- Figure 17 F. Calvert (1830)
- Figure 18 Anon. (No date)
- Figure 19 Anon. (no date)

LILLESHALL ABBEY

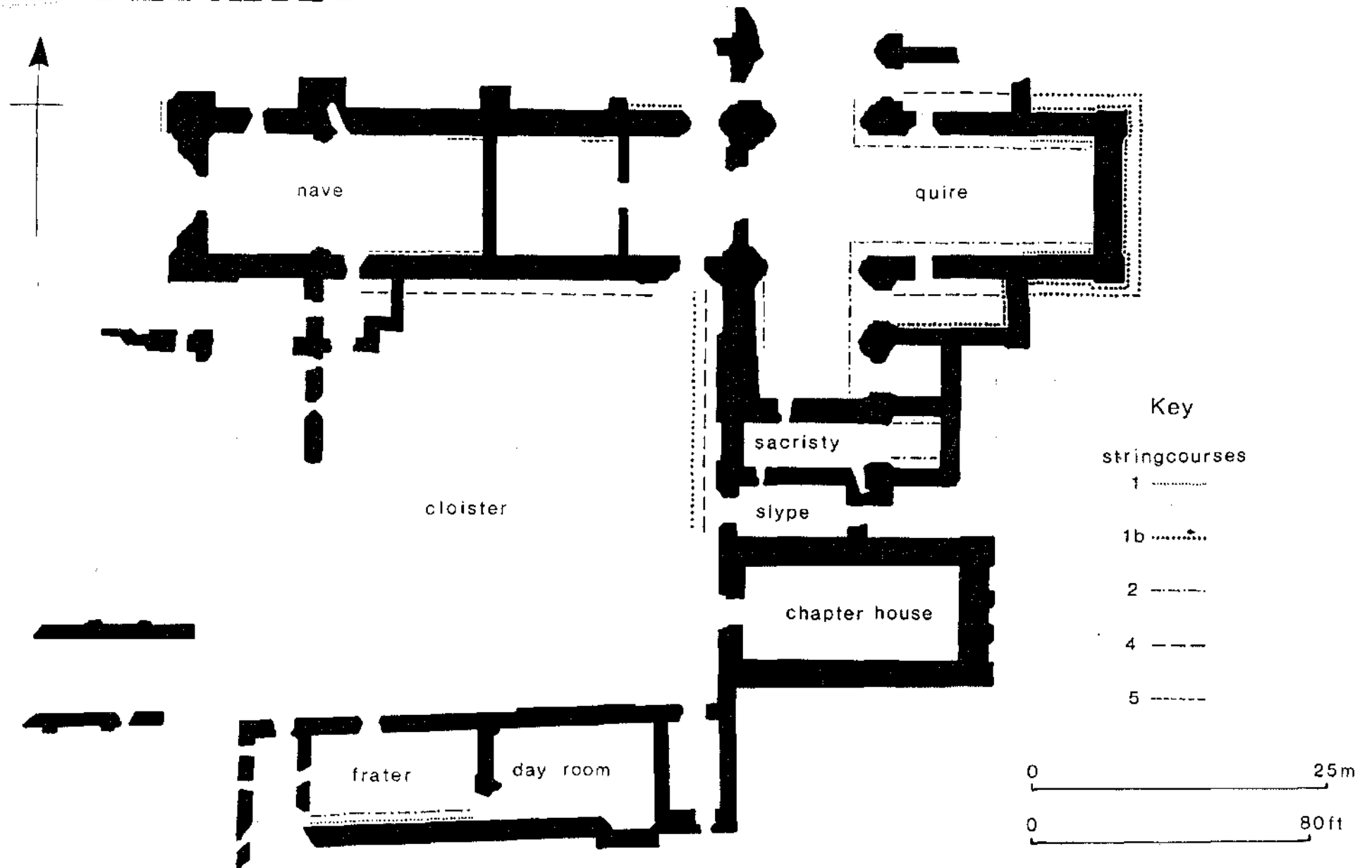


Figure 1 Plan of Lilleshall Abbey. (Ferris)

LILLESHALL ABBEY

SCALE 150

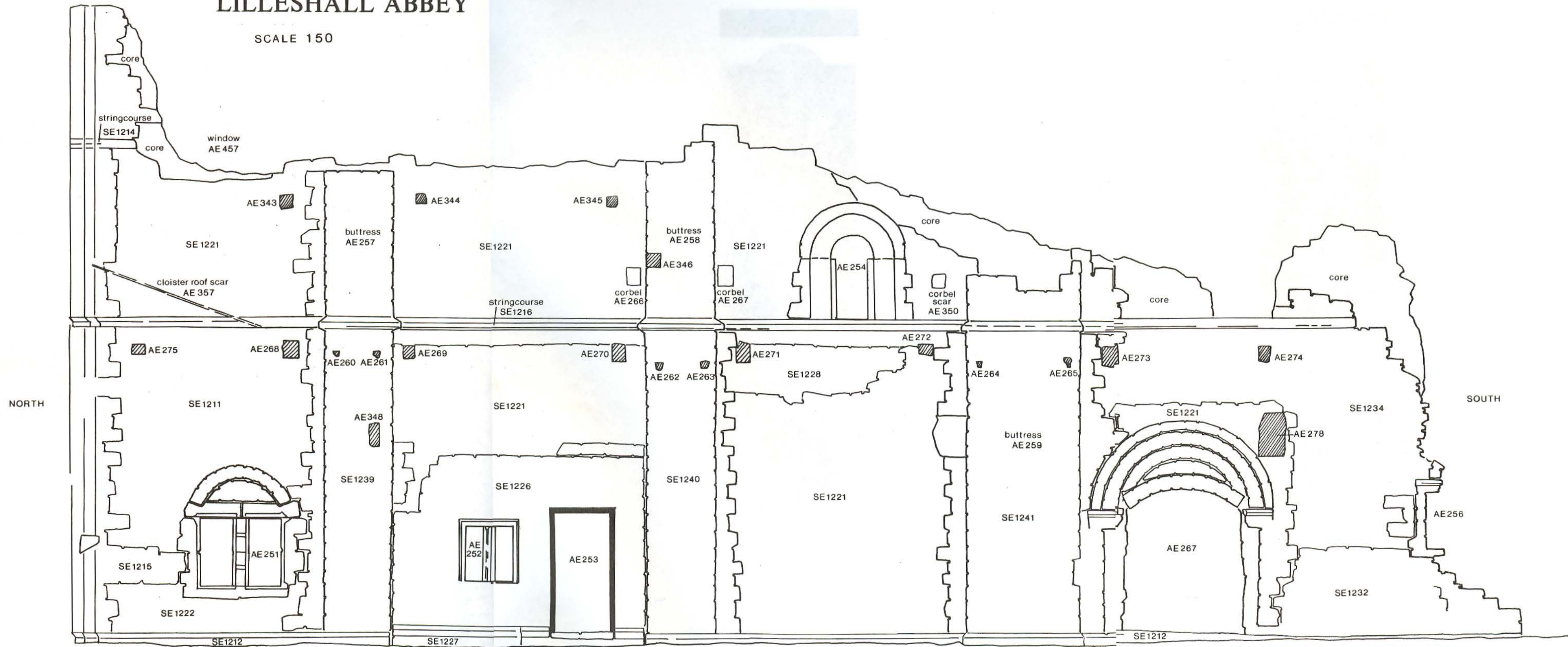


Figure 2 The Cloister; East Side Elevation. (Ferris)

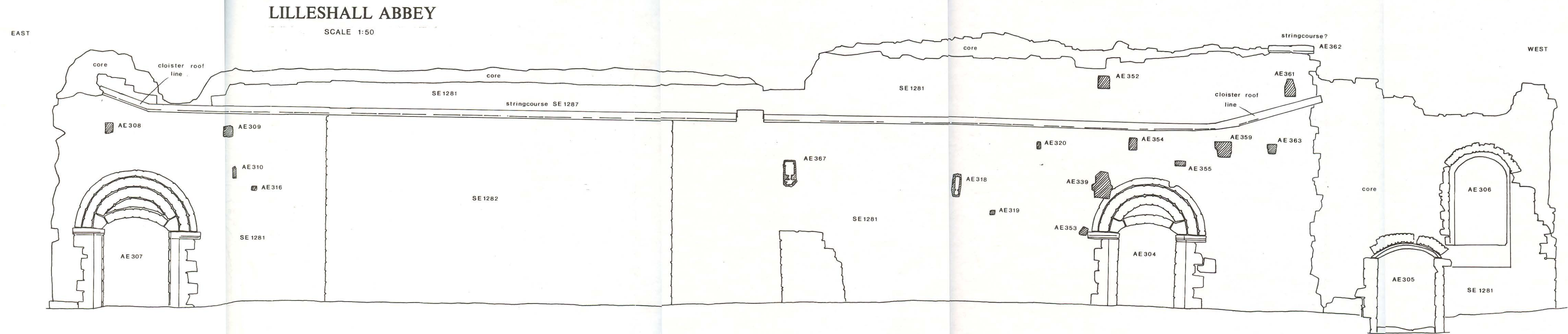


Figure 3 The Cloister; South Side Elevation. (Ferris)

LILLESHALL ABBEY

SCALE 1:50

SOUTH

NORTH

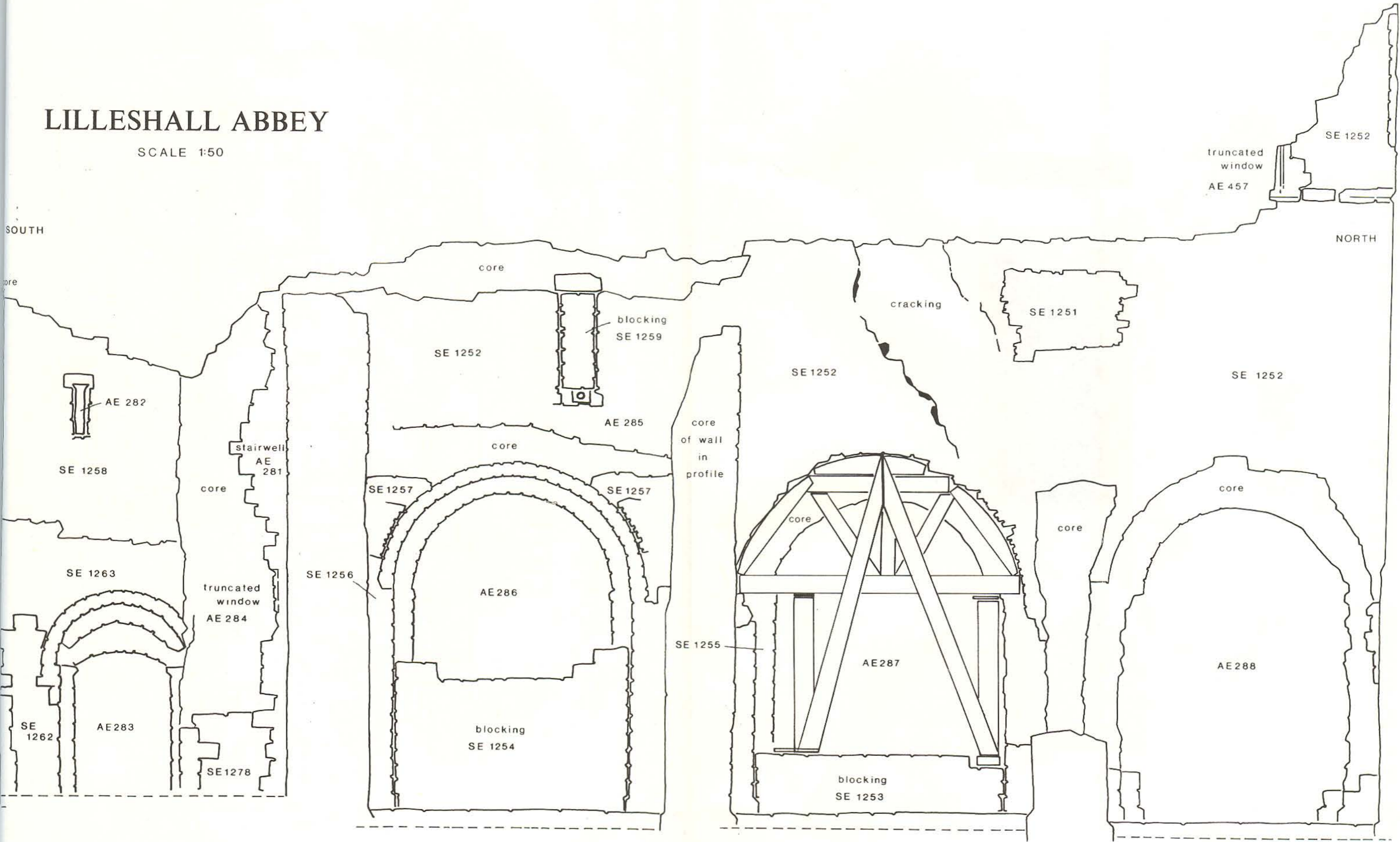


Figure 4 The South Transept, Sacristy and Slype; East Elevation.
(Ferris)

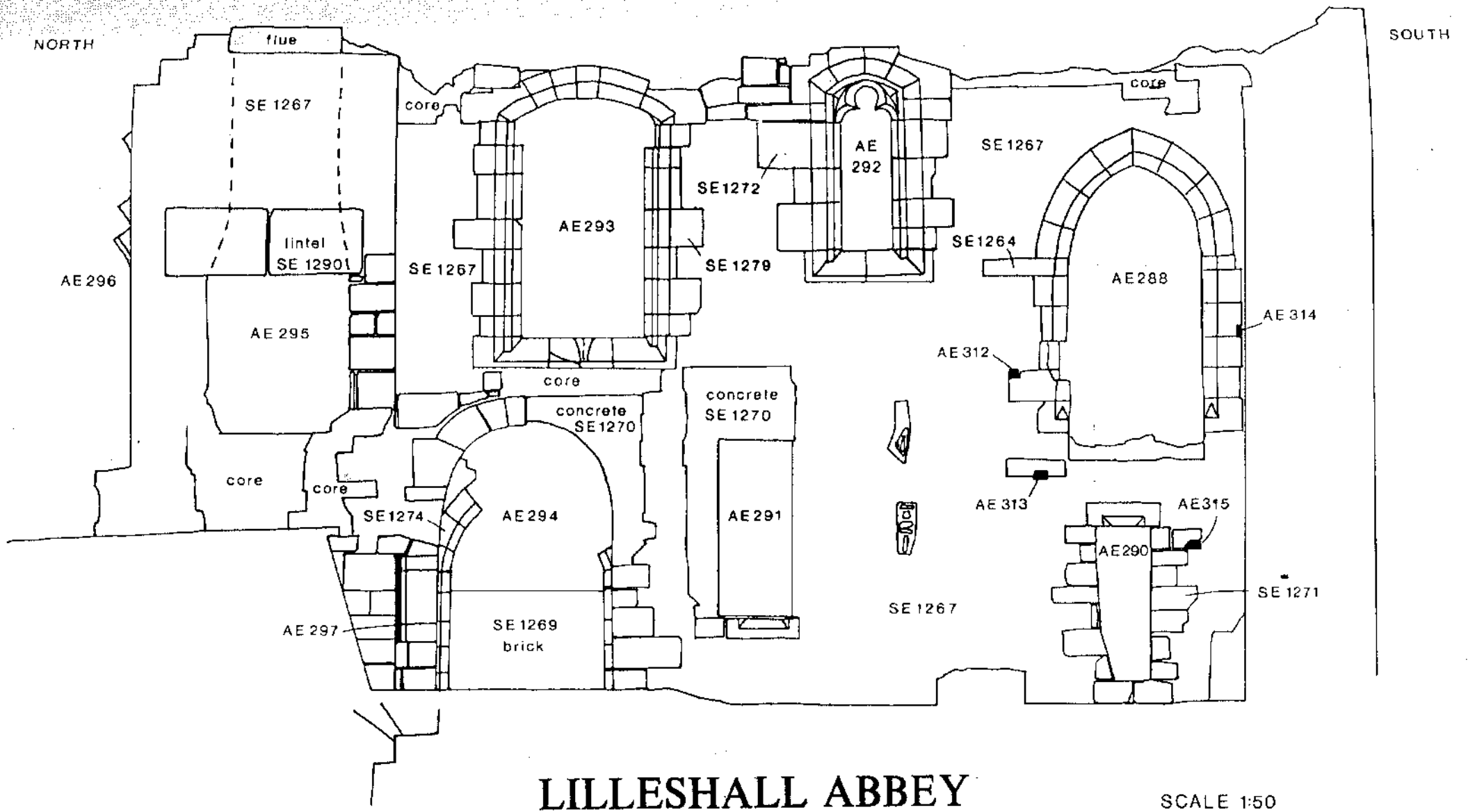


Figure 5 The Frater; West Wall, West Exterior Elevation. (Sternberg et al.)

LILLESHALL ABBEY

SCALE 1:50

SOUTH

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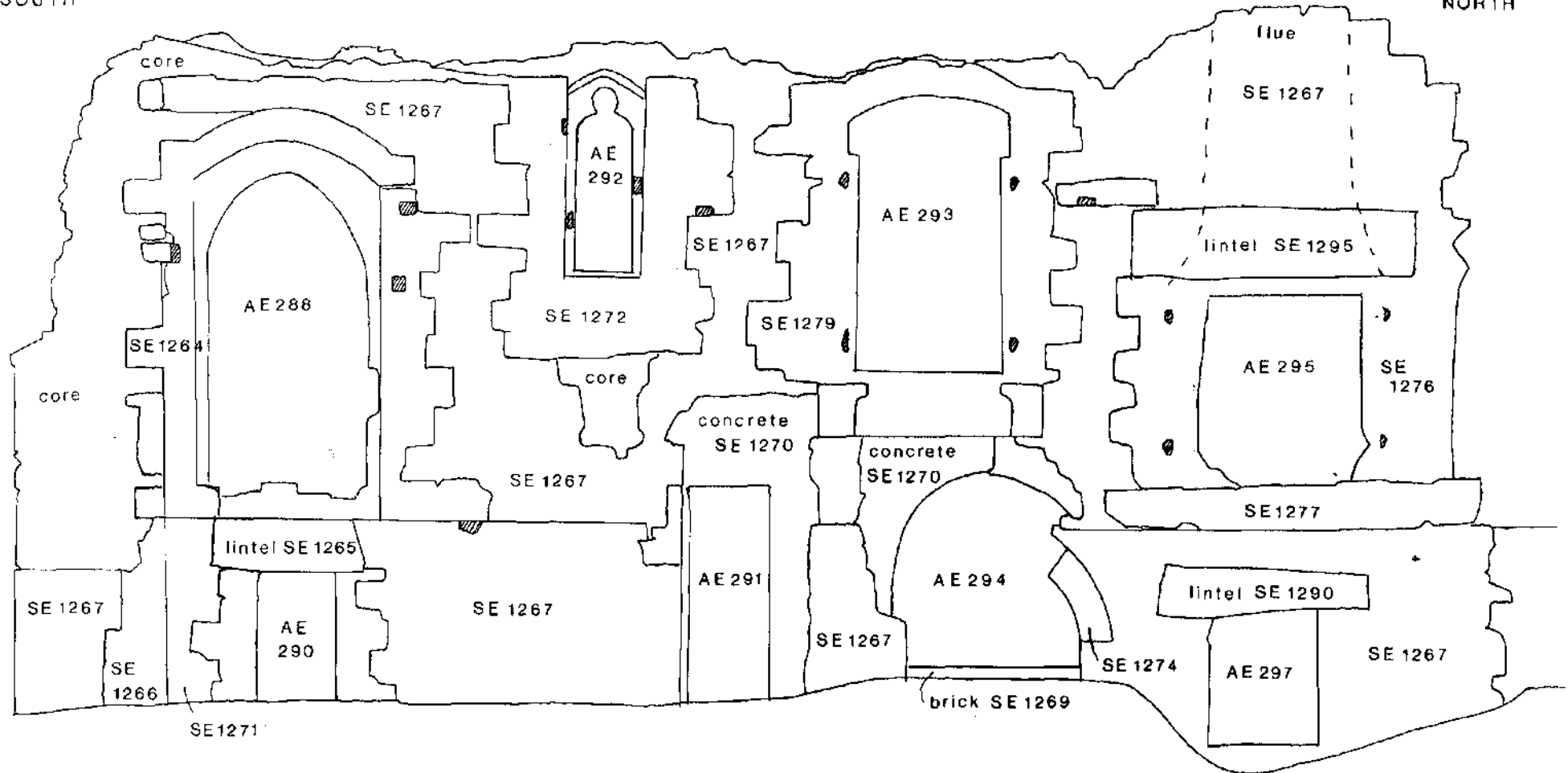


Figure 6 The Frater; West Wall, East Interior Elevation. (Sternberg et al.)

LILLESHALL ABBEY

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NORTH

SOUTH

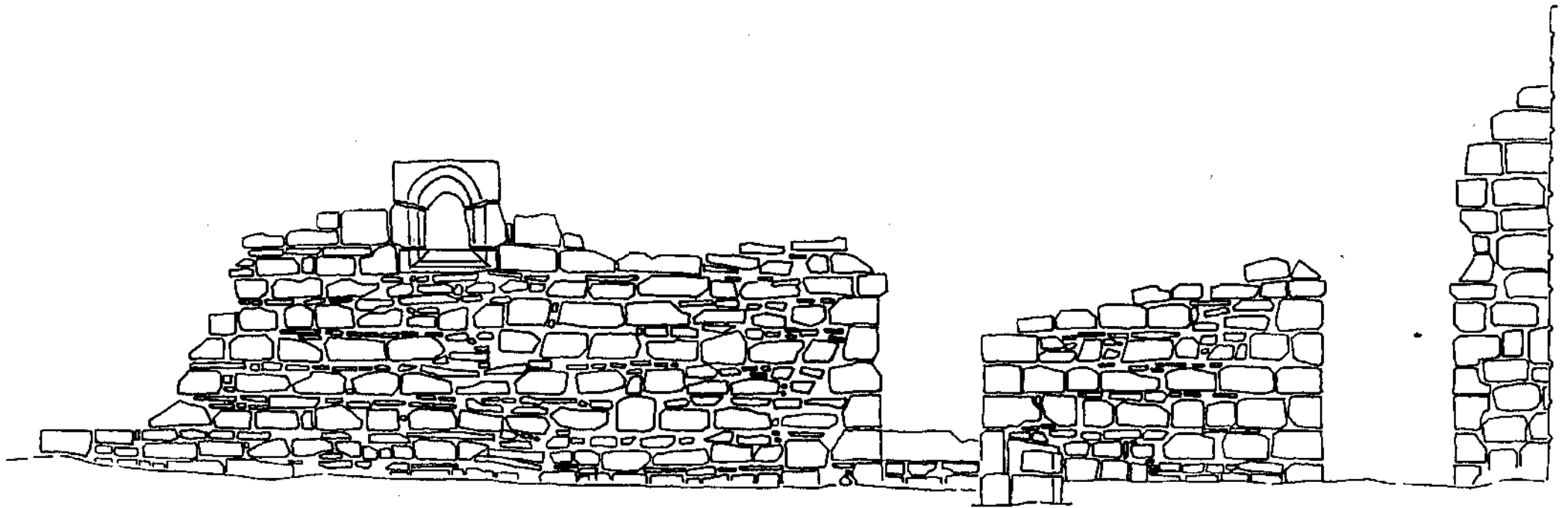


Figure 7 The Cloister. Remnant of Walling at North End of West Range.
East Elevation

LILLESHALL ABBEY

SCALE 1:50

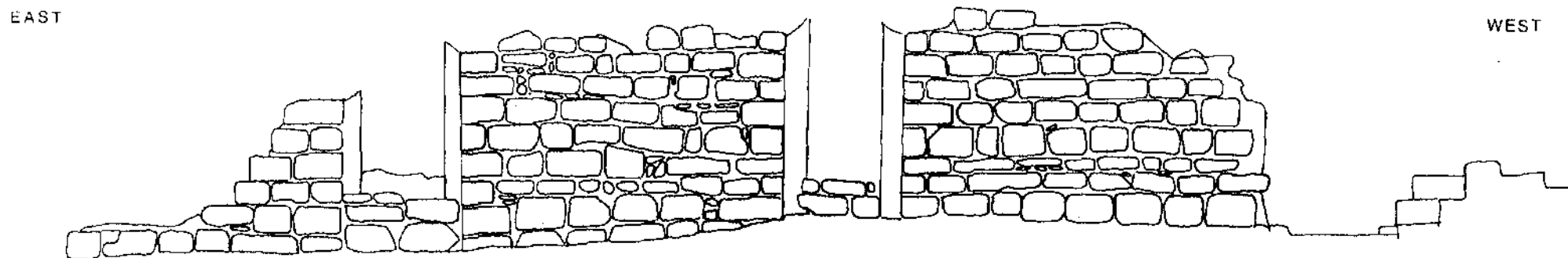
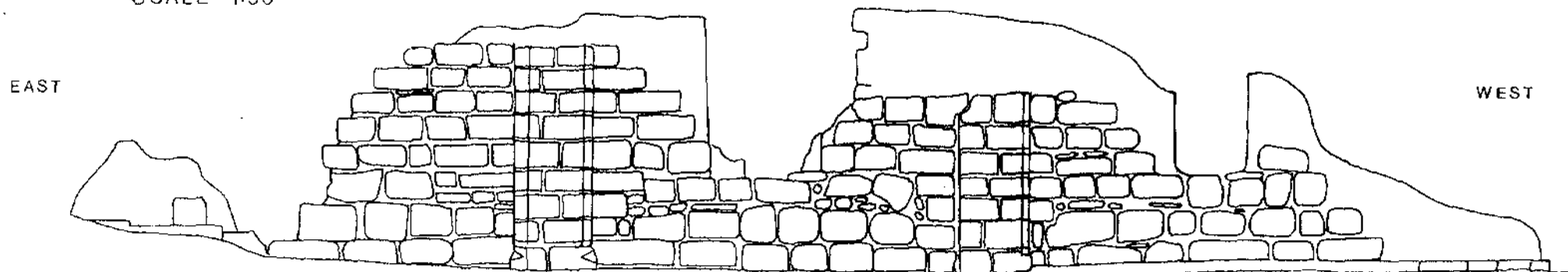
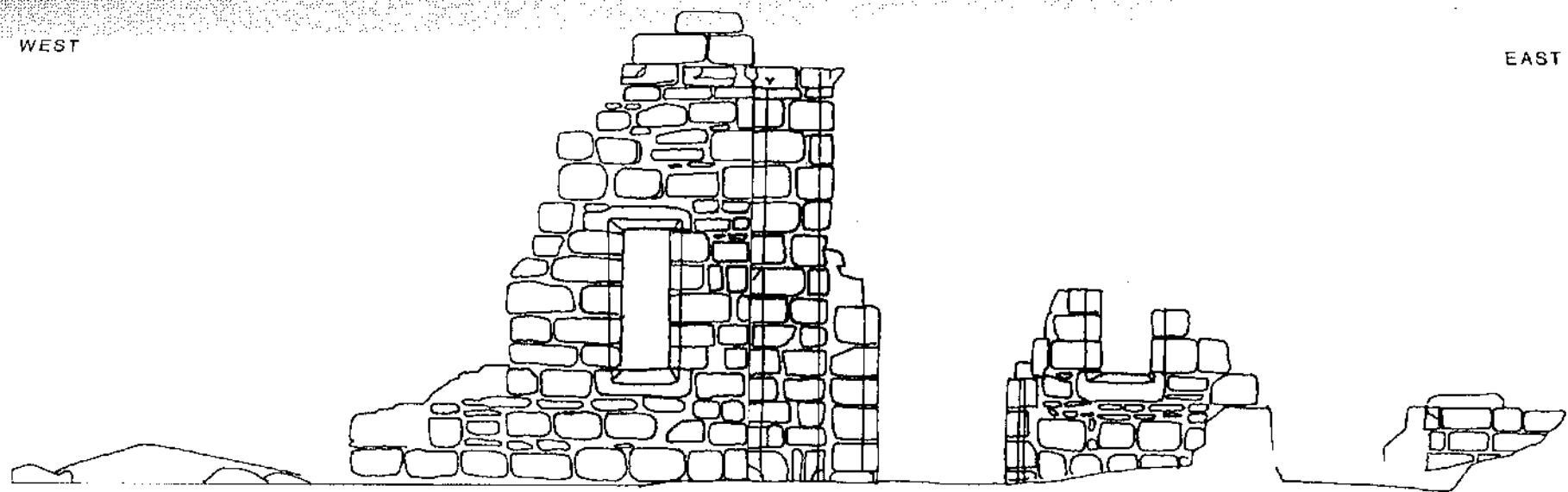


Figure 8 South West of Cloister. North Wall of Building. North and South Elevation. (Stereberg et al.)



LILLESHALL ABBEY

SCALE 1:50

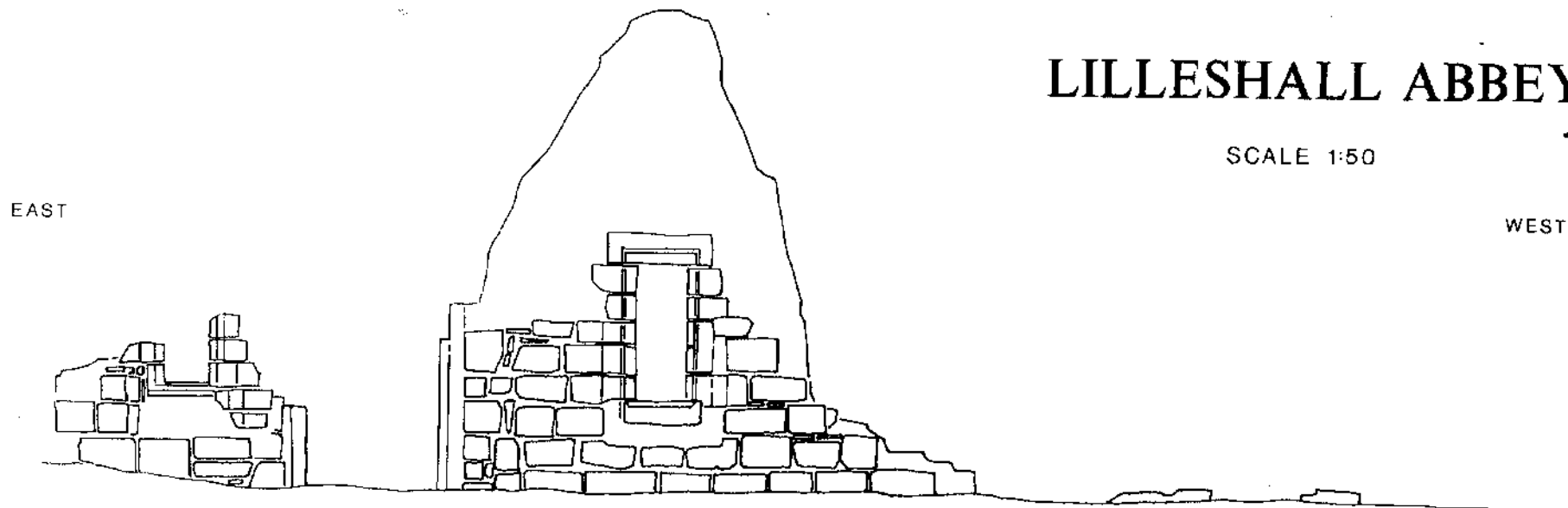
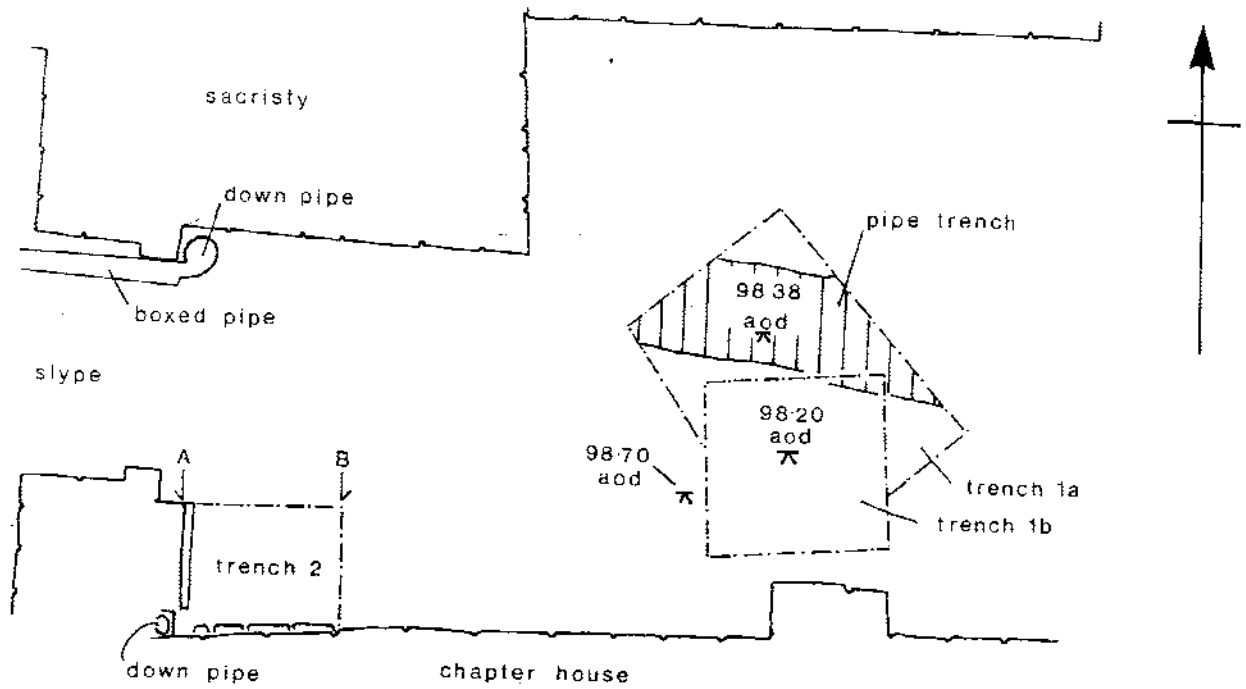


Figure 9 South West of Cloister. South Wall of Building. North and South Elevation (Sternberg et al.)

LILLESHALL ABBEY

SCALE 1:50



SCALE 1:20

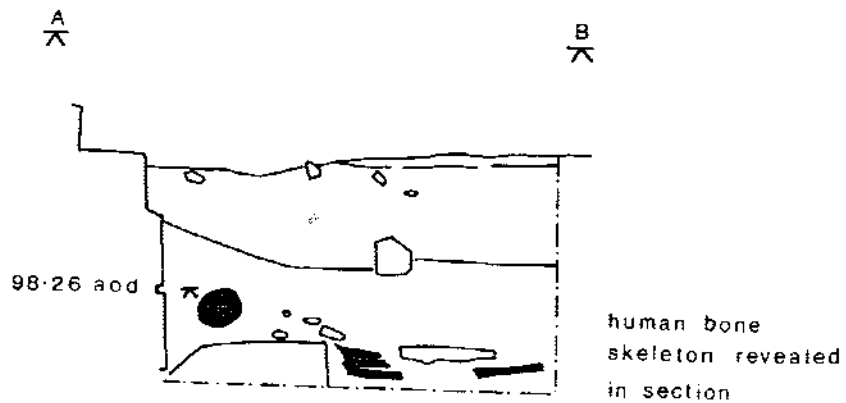
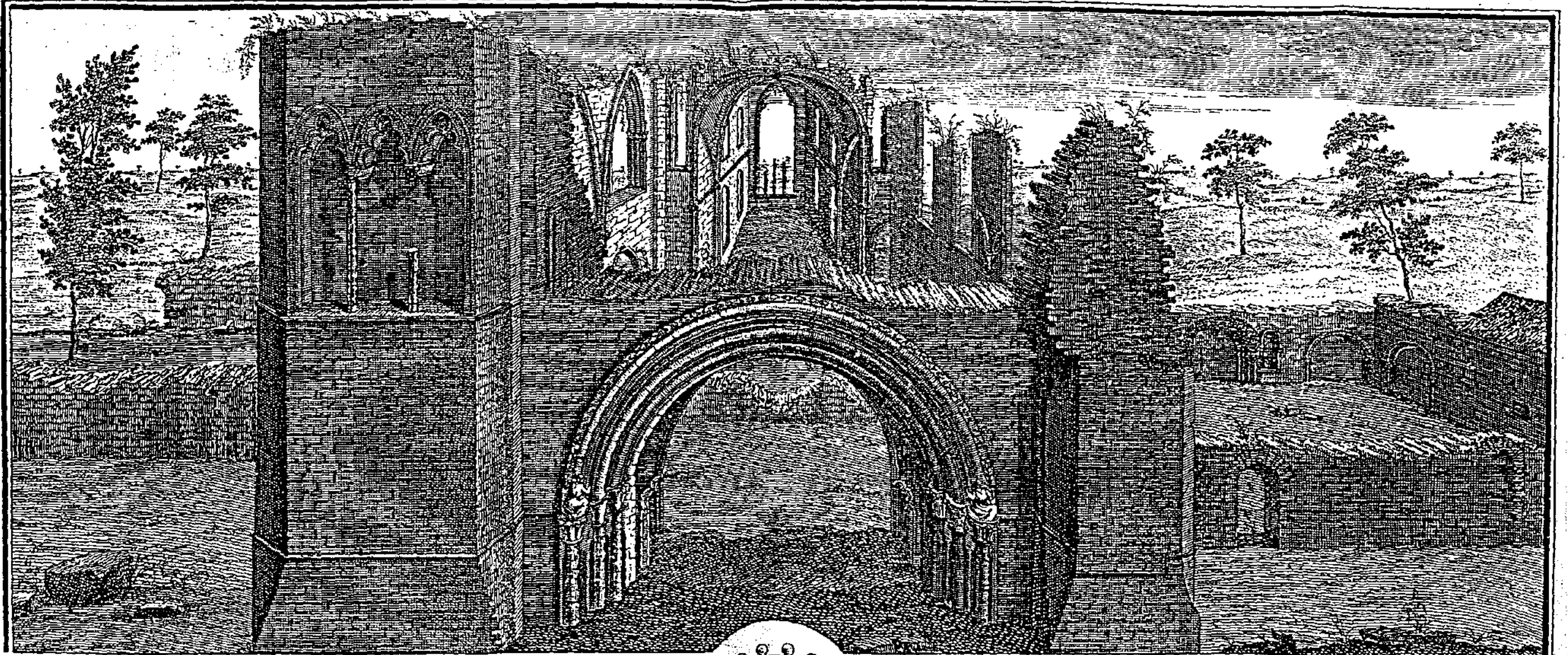


Figure 10 Location of Evaluation in Area of Proposed Sump and Drain (Ferris)

THE WEST VIEW OF LILLESUL PRIORY, IN THE COUNTY OF SALOP.



To the Right Honourable JOHN LEVESON GOWER, Lord Gower, Baron of Stattenham in the County of York, and Baronet, Proprietor of these Remains.

This Prospect is humbly Inscr'd, by
 My Lord,
 Y^r Lordships most Obedient Serv^t.

Sam^l & Nat^l Buck



LILLESULL or LILLESUL PRIORY Here was once a Church built as is supposed by Adelbald a Queen of the Mercians & dedicated to St. Almon and a progenitor of y^e Family whence King Edgar prevailed which last nam'd endow'd it with ten Prebends & enlarged it. In R. Stephens Reign Richard Beaumont (or Bedmeis) Dean of it did by y^e Kings consent & authority of y^e Pope give it to Canons regular of S^t. Austin who came from S^t. Peters Dorchester & the Monastery was then founded about the Year 1140. In y^e honour of S^t. Mary ever Virgin among y^e principal Benefactors we find Willm de Truxhill & Alan de Couche, who was Patron of it but by his Daughter it came to y^e Family de Holland. The Laurel leaves on the Lands of y^e two Statues upon y^e Gothic Columns at y^e Gate, show it to have been long in y^e Hon^{ble} Family of Leveson, which became at length united by marriage with the Noble Family of Gower, who now possess it.

Annual 1731. { 229. 3. 2. Dugd.
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J. & N. Buck delin & sculp^t 1731.

Figure 11 S. and N. Buck (1731)

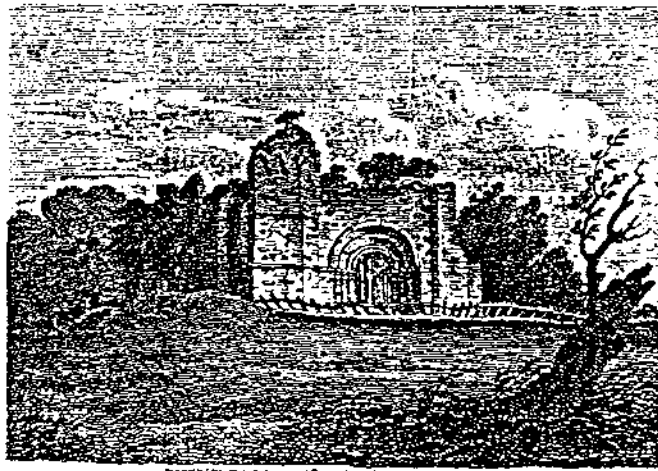


Figure 12 J. Greig and Pye (1810)

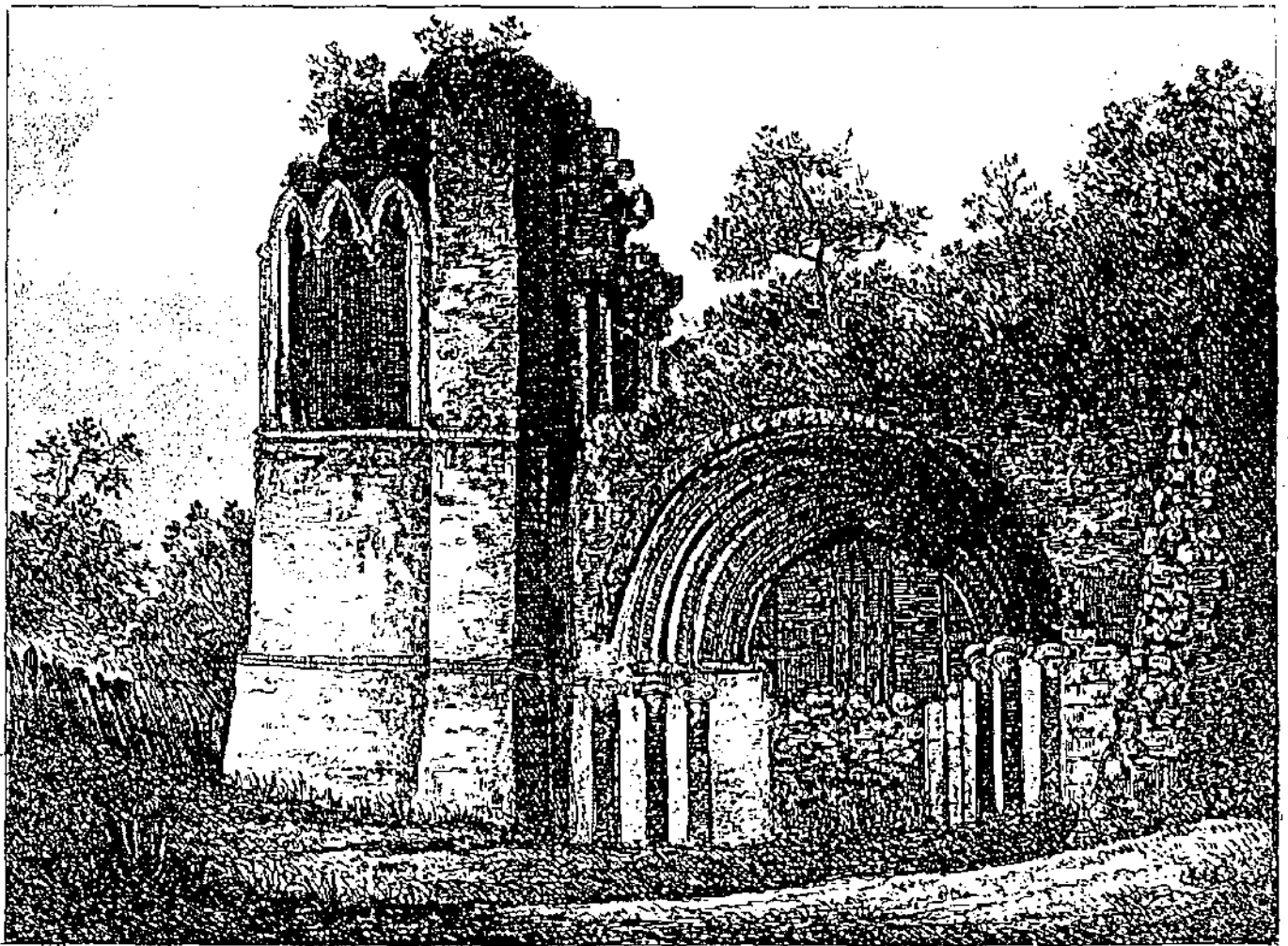


Figure 13 W. Pearson (1807 or 1824)



Drawn & Etched by W. Pearson.

Figure 14 W. Pearson (1807 or 1824)

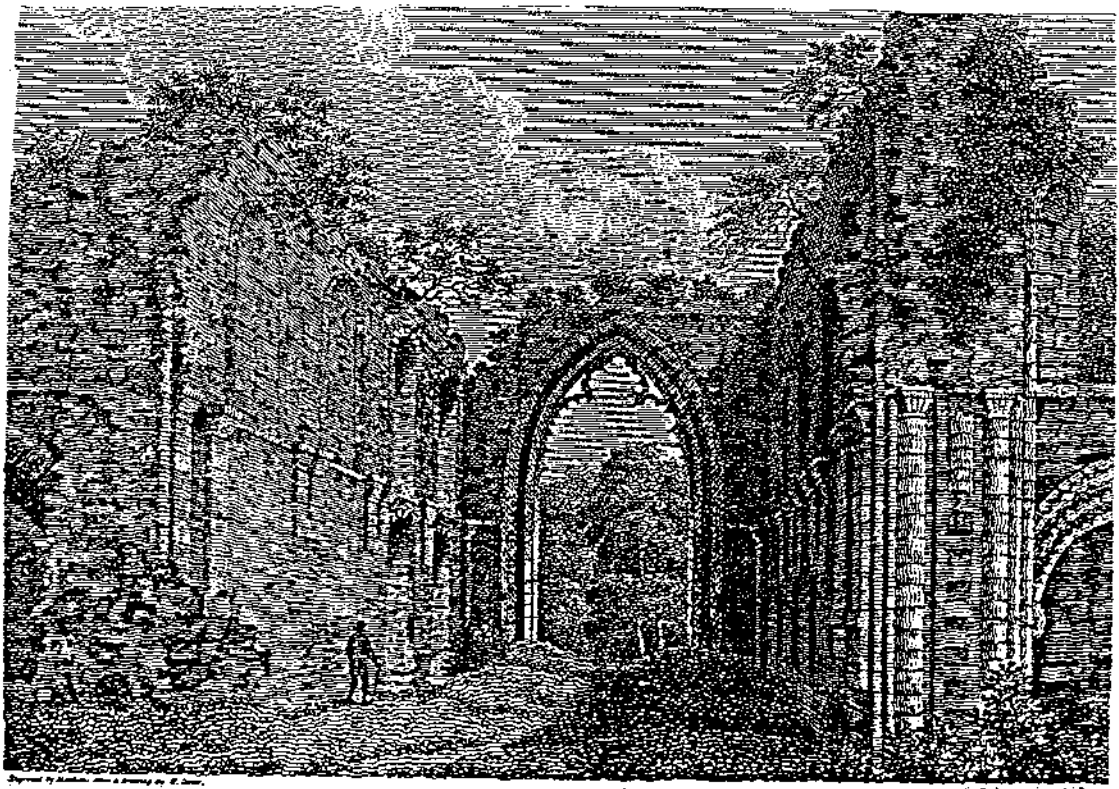
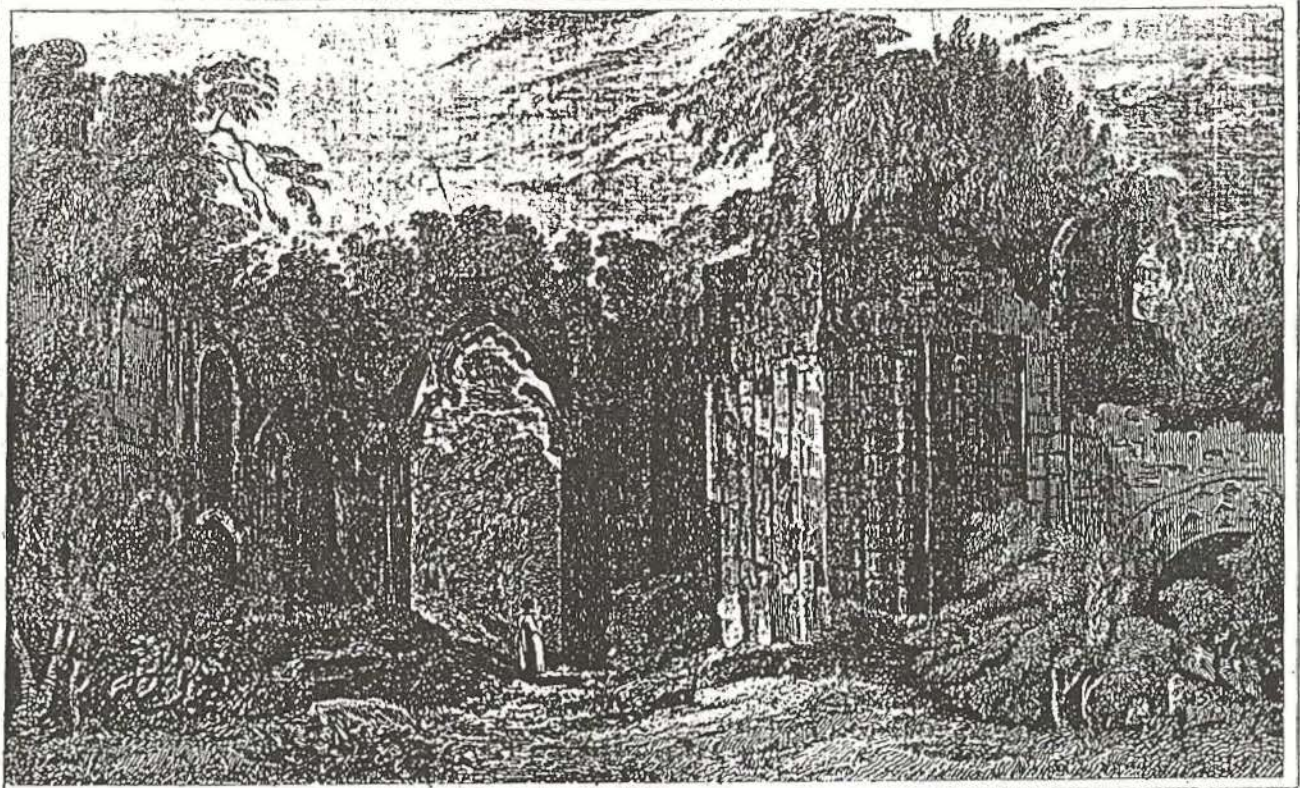


Figure 15 W. Carter (1830)



Figure 16 F. Calvert (1822)

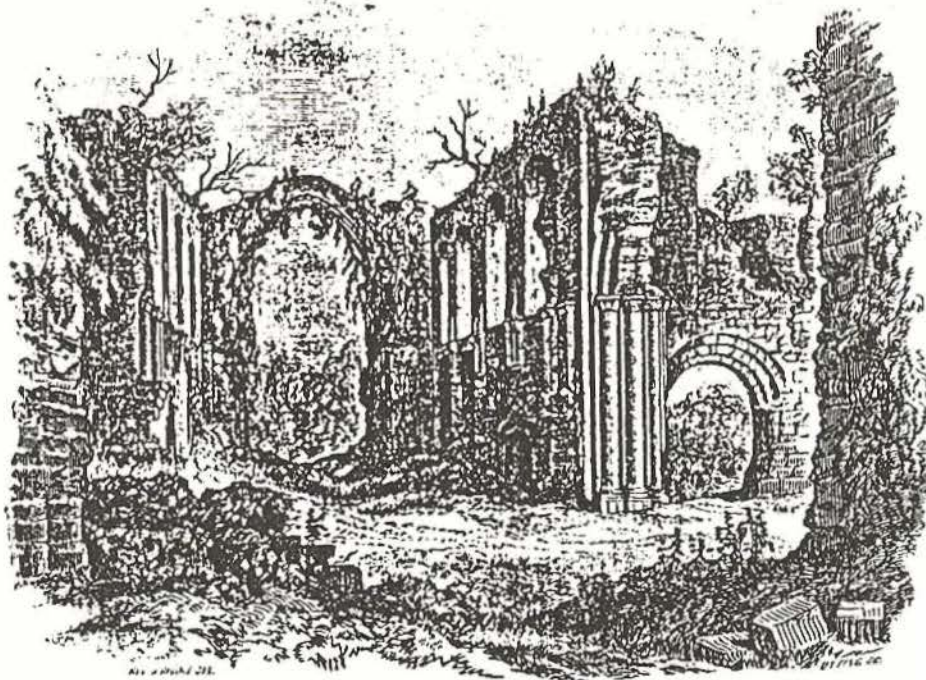


DRAWN BY F. CALVERT.

LILLESHELL ABBEY.

ENGRAVED BY T. RADCLIFFE.

Figure 17 F. Calvert (1830)



LILLESHELL ABBEY, FROM THE NAVE.

Figure 18 Anon. (No date)



Figure 19 Anon. (no date)