

**A Watching-Brief at  
Lilleshall Abbey, Shropshire**

by  
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## Introduction

In October 1990 B.U.F.A.U. was asked, at short notice, to undertake a watching-brief along the line of water pipe-trenches being dug close to, but outside, the Guardianship monument of Lilleshall Abbey. Two stretches of trench (Trenches 1 and 2) were observed during their excavation by mechanical excavator (see Figure 1), while further stretches of trench to the east of Trench 1, running uphill to a nearby farm, were inspected when open. A further stretch of trench was excavated and backfilled by the contractors before it could be viewed.

The contractor's driver undertaking the work appeared to have received no instructions relating to contingency plans for rerouting the trenches should sensitive archaeological features or deposits be encountered nor had the writer received any notification that this was an option; therefore, the trenches were dug along a pre-set course, in places cutting through medieval stone walling. Recording was hampered by the presence of 'live' field drains, towards the east end of Trench 1 and the north end of Trench 2, which were broken during the excavation.

## Observations

### Trench 1

Aligned east-west, 100m long, 0.50m wide and 0.70-0.80m deep, Trench 1 ran almost parallel to the line of the abbey church's nave. The topsoil was of a constant, 0.35-0.40m, depth along the whole line of the trench, and overlay the following deposits and features, (described from east to west). From 0-3m was exposed a red natural clay; from 3-9m a spread of stone and mortar rubble, set in a feature cutting the clay; from 9-19m the same red clay as seen to the east; from 19-28.70m was a streaked white clayey mortar mixed with floor tile and building stone (not bottomed) which at its west end partially sealed a well-built stone wall running on an east-west alignment almost down the centre of

the pipe-trench, between 28.70-35.40m, one course off the top of the wall being removed by the JCB; from 35.40-39.30m, butted up against the east face of the wall, as seen in section, was a mixed yellow clay and mortar, probably the screed for a floor; from 39.30-45.30m was a mixed white clay mortar overlying, at its west end a 0.70m wide north-south aligned wall, seen briefly in plan at the base of the trench; partially overlying the mixed white mortar was a mortary brown grey clay between 45.20-54.10m; from 54.10-80.90m was a further spread of white clayey mortar mixed with some glazed floor tiles and at 59.20m human long bones; from 80.90-102m was a spread of mixed rubble and hardcore including modern brick and cinder.

### Trench 2

Trench 2 was aligned north-south, c.70m long, 0.50m wide and 0.70-0.80m deep. At its north end it cut into, and ran along the face of, an upstanding linear earthwork bank which was seen to be constructed largely of building-stone rubble, including a very large fragment of medieval window tracery; from 0-c.9m the trench followed the bank which was seen to overlie natural clay; from c.9-19.50m was a spread of white clayey mortar, very similar to those encountered in Trench 1; at 19.50m was seen in plan an 0.80m thick wall, partially overlain by the white mortar, built of irregular sandstone blocks; between 20.30-51.90m, partially overlying the mortar and the wall to the north, was a dirty mixed mortary silt deposit, from which came numerous fragments of post-medieval and modern pottery; at 51.90m and 58.50m were encountered two well-built sandstone walls, only c.0.10-0.15m below the turf, the JCB removing two courses off the top of the walls, the southernmost wall already having been disturbed by the insertion of service cables; between the walls was a deposit of mixed mortar and rubble; to the south of the southern wall was a thick deposit of modern brick, pottery and

cinder etc., perhaps infilling a large disturbance associated with a nearby soakaway.

### **Discussion**

Interpretation of the observations made during the digging of pipe-trenches at Lilleshall is difficult due to the limited size of the trenches and the difficult circumstances of their excavation. In Trench 1 a fragment of walling of the probable Lady Chapel was exposed in plan, while a portion of wall seen in section further to the west could relate to the northern transept of the church. Considerable spreads of mortar, worked stone, glazed tiles and architectural fragments are probably related to the destruction of the transept. Human remains found towards the west end of

the trench possibly could be connected to the Civil War action at Lilleshall.

In Trench 2, again, much material from the demolition of buildings in the abbey complex was encountered. A wall at the north end of the trench does not tie in with the ground plan of known medieval structures while the two walls at the southern end of the trench are undoubtedly part of the now-truncated building inside the guardianship area to the east.

Architectural fragments collected during the watching brief, and subsequently by the English Heritage masons from the contractor's spoil, have been assigned code numbers, photographed, and left on site.

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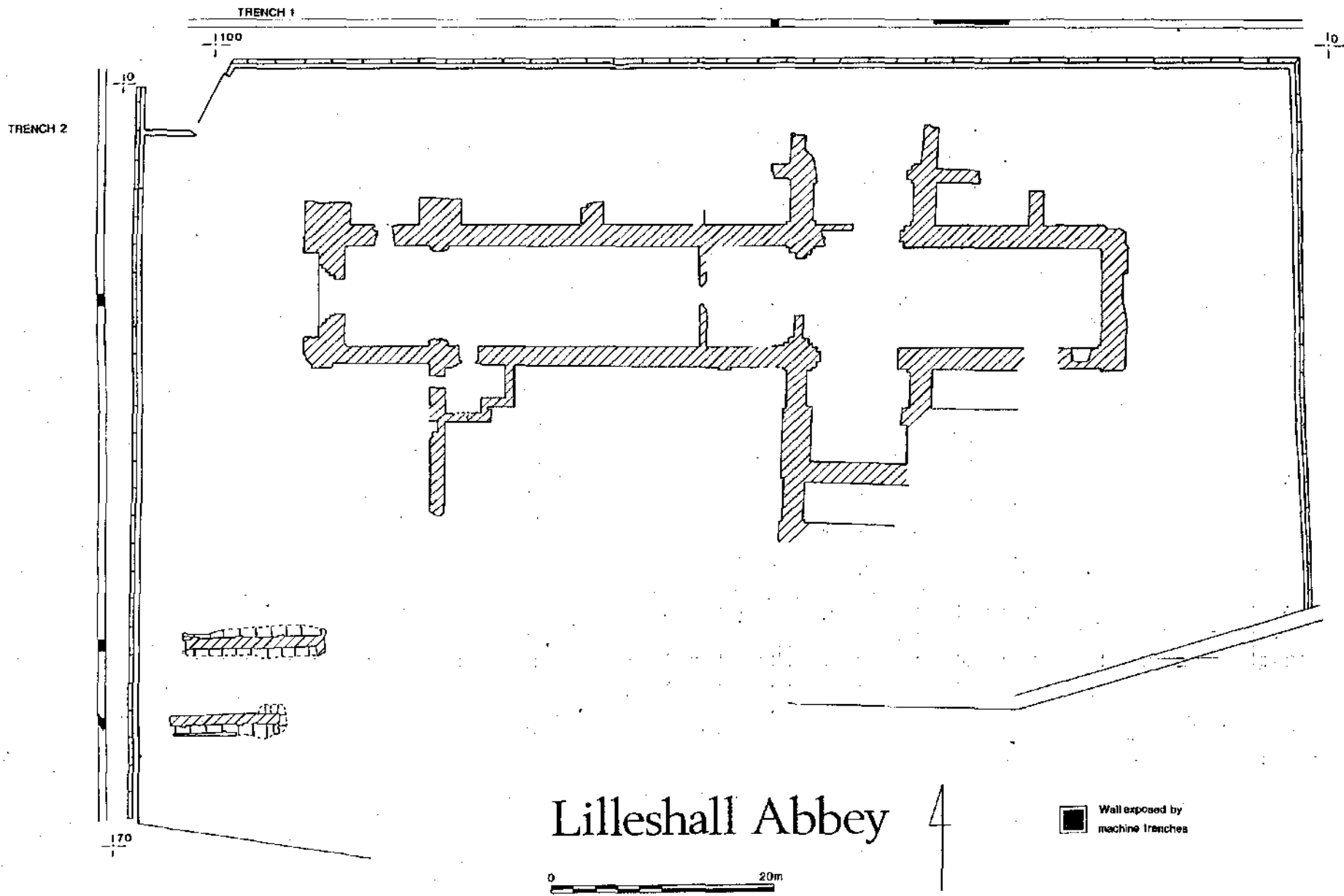


Fig. 1