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The Shrewsbury Quest Centre: An Interim Report on the Archaeological Investigation of the Groundworks for the Drainage and Garden Schemes

by

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1. Introduction

Between January and April 1994 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit undertook the archaeological monitoring of the groundworks for the drains and gardens of the new Shrewsbury Quest Centre. The design of the scheme involved the refurbishment of the only significant upstanding building in the Outer Court of the former Benedictine Abbey (the so-called 'Old Infirmary') and the adjacent 18th century 'Queen Ann House', together with the building of a new visitor centre, a timber-framed realisation of Brother Cadfael's Herb Hut, a cloister around the perimeter of the Abbey Foregate frontage, and the laying out of a formal 'medievalstyle' garden.

Since the Abbey and its former medieval precinct is scheduled as an Ancient Monument, permission to carry out the groundworks associated with the scheme was subject to conditions specified by the Secretary of State, Department of National Heritage. Accordingly, BUFAU were commissioned as archaeological contractors through the architects for the scheme (Arrol and Snell) acting for Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council in cooperation with Beringar Limited.

Archaeological excavation and recording was specified as the principal requirement of the Scheduled Monument Consent in advance of pipe-laying and other groundworks in potentially archeologically sensitive areas highlighted by the 1993 BUFAU evaluation (Litherland 1993) with a watching brief in less sensitive areas.

2. The Site (Figs.1 and 2)

The site of the Centre lies within the Outer Court of the former Benedictine Abbey. The abbey precinct lay mainly to the south and east of the Abbey Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, and faced the main eastern route exiting from Shrewsbury across the River Severn. The route, Abbey Foregate, passed alongside the north side of the precinct and its church, and was the focus of a suburb to the medieval town. In 1836 a new and more direct route for this road was cut by Thomas Telford through the former precinct, passing the south side of the church and involving the demolition of the former north range of the 'Old Infirmary'. The western side of the abbey precinct was bounded by a mill leat, fed from two large ponds now buried underneath a carpark, and the Rea Brook which flowed through the Monk's Bridge to join the River Severn.

Previous work in and around Shrewsbury Abbey has included limited excavations and a hypothetical reconstruction of the Abbey plan in the early 19th century (Owen and Blakeway 1825), and what we would call today a watching brief of the sewer cut along Abbey Foregate in 1896 (Cranage 1912). No further archaeological work is recorded until 1985-7 when a programme of rescue excavation was carried out by BUFAU. This included the excavation of the 'kitchen block' to the rear of the 'Queen Ann House', and on the site of the former Abbey Mill, together with structural recording of parts of the 'Old Infirmary' and the abbey transepts. More recently, there have been excavations along the western precinct wall (Jones 1989), excavation of the new Abbey church drains (Leach 1992), a watching brief along the line of the perimeter wall of Abbey Foregate (Watson 1993), completion of the building record of the 'Old Infirmary' and evaluation of the site of the Cadfael Centre, as the development was then called (Litherland 1993).

3. Strategy and Method (Fig.2)

In discussion with the architects for the scheme (Arrol and Snell) and other interested parties including English Heritage, the main building contractors (Linford Bridgeman), and representatives of Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council, proposals for the design and monitoring of the groundworks were worked out using the results of the previous archaeological evaluation (Litherland 1993), in order to minimise the anticipated disturbance of archaeological remains. Some degree of flexibility was required as the work progressed, and so a combination of archaeological excavation and watching brief monitoring was agreed upon.

The detailed groundworks scheme is depicted on Figure 2. Certain modifications to the scheme were necessitated by a number of factors, modifications being referred to more specifically within the discussion of the results of the excavations (Section 4 below).

The drainage trenches and manholes were opened using a mechanical excavator to remove superficial modern deposits and then excavated by hand to the required depth. The French drains, post-pads, Cadfael Hut foundations and garden works were monitored while being excavated by the groundworks contractors after sample excavation had established that significant archaeological deposits were unlikely to be affected.

Throughout, features and deposits of archaeological significance were identified and recorded by a combination of written pro-forma field records, photography, and detailed scale drawing. Finds in association with identified features or deposits were collected and recorded, and processed at the University of Birmingham. These records comprise the site archive which will be deposited with the remainder of the abbey archive at Rowley's House Museum, Shrewsbury upon completion of the project.

4. Results

For the purposes of archaeological recording and for this account it is convenient to group the trenches according to their location within the development area and the chronological order in which they were dug. The information recorded in these trenches is considered here, and its significance is considered in more length in Section 5 of the report. Deposits will be described from the top downwards.

Trench 1 (Figs. 2, 3 and 4)

The first trench to be opened by machine was at the northern end of the main storm and foul drain system that exits into the public sewer underneath Abbey Foregate, through the site entrance. Because the river was in flood at the time it was not possible to ascertain the exact location of the existing main-sewer connection. This necessitated further groundworks later in the course of the scheme to find the connection. After Trench 1 was cut, two areas were opened for the storm and foul collector manholes at the southern end of the trench. In addition a small section of trench to the west of Trench 1 was aborted when a sandstone wall footing was encountered. The location of Trench 1 was therefore altered slightly to the east to follow the edge of the wall to preserve it *in situ*. The results of all these groundworks are discussed together as 'Trench 1' in this section.

Removal of the modern yard surface (1000) revealed the foundations of a roughly built, north-south aligned sandstone wall (F1), seen along most of the east-facing section. The footings were between two and three irregular courses deep, and

reused all the various types of sandstone seen in the build of the 'Old Infirmary' and described by Baker (1993). These included the hard pinkish Keele Beds sandstone associated with the earliest build of the 'Old Infirmary', finer-grained redder sandstone seen in the later extension along the west wall of the 'Old Infirmary, and softer green sandstone seen in patchwork repairs to the later build and in foundation courses for red sandstone walls. One of the red sandstone blocks in wall F1 had evidently been reused as it had a chamfered face.

Because the majority of the west-facing section of Trench 1 was truncated by a Victorian drain cut (F7), the stratigraphic description which follows is mainly discussed with reference to the east-facing section, and proceeds up the trench from its northern end.

An east-west aligned Victorian drain cut (F2), along the Abbey Foregate frontage, and other modern disturbances had severely truncated archaeological deposits in the northern end of Trench 1 to a height of 50.00m AOD. Only a small area of archaeological deposits survived intact under these disturbances. A band of charcoal-flecked, light brown clay (1019) overlay the natural gravels, exposed at a depth of 49.80m AOD, and was in turn overlain by a layer of reddy-brown sandy clay (1023), which contained red and green sandstone fragments and a few sherds of 13th century pottery. A distinct layer of 19th century demolition material (1021) overlay 1023, and may have been related to the demolition of the north range of the Infirmary for Telford's Abbey Foregate. The other deposits above 1021 were too badly mixed to discern any particular event or feature.

Excavation of the fill of F2, to try to find the main sewer connection revealed that the drain cut had truncated the northern face of a sandstone wall (F3), set on the natural gravel. Three courses of the later red sandstone facing blocks, with a mixed green and red sandstone core, were exposed, bonded with light brown clay. Although any archaeological relationships on the north (?internal) side of the wall had been completely destroyed, a small sondage against part of the southern face established that the foundation cut for F3 was from the top of a thin band of burnt material (1018), through 1023 and 1019. A cobbled surface set in clay (1022) overlay the construction cut, and suggests a contemporary exterior floor surface here at a height of 50.30m AOD.

South of the sandstone wall (F3), the cobbled surface (1022) was overlain by an extensive spread of mixed reddy-brown sandy clay which contained a large quantity of eroded sandstone chips and fragments (1004). Similar deposits have been seen in several trenches over the site, and are almost certainly associated with the demolition of the sandstone buildings within the Outer Court.

Excavation ceased at this level (c.50.35m AOD) over most of Trench 1 and 1004 was not excavated because the required depth for the drainage scheme was reached. Some iron and bone, together with a few 14th/15th century sherds, were recovered during cleaning of 1004. However, the dating of this context from the pottery is problematic because of the small size of the sample of 1004 excavated.

Overlying 1004 was a very mixed layer of dark brown clay silt (1012). The foundations of the boundary wall (F1) were set on 1012.

A large pit (F4) cut 1012, and itself was truncated by F1. The fill (1005) of F4 contained 18th century pottery and a large number of Harnage slates, which may indicate an 18th-century phase of demolition in the Outer Court, possibly contemporary with the construction of the 'Queen Ann House'.

To the north, another pit (F8) containing 17th and 18th century pottery in its fill (1007), appeared to be sealed by a layer of cobbles (1020). Truncated by the

southern edge of F4 to the north, and by another, modern pit (F6) to the south, at the bottom of the cut of F8 a square-sectioned lead pipe was sealed with a deposit of red clay forming a lining (1014). F8 cut through and disturbed a number of layers, including a thin band of garden soil (1009) which overlay a compact reddy-brown ?yard surface (1015). Beneath 1015 a thin band of burnt material (1016) was possibly equivalent to layer 1018 as seen in the sondage against the southern face of the sandstone wall F3. The final layer to be cut by the pipe trench (F8) was only seen in the excavation of the storm manhole which was slightly deeper than Trench 1 and consisted of a dirty brown clay-silt deposit containing flecks of charcoal and smears of denuded sandstone (1017). In the bottom southeast corner of Trench 1 a light brown clay layer (1011) overlay 1017.

Trench 2 (Figs. 2, 4 and 5)

Trench 2 was dug after the drains in Trench 1 were laid, and the trench backfilled. A 2m gap between Trenches 1 and 2 had to be left to allow site access. For safety reasons ground disturbances here could not be recorded. The numbered sequence of contexts and features recorded in Trench 1 was continued into Trench 2, and into Manhole 2 located at its southern end, because together Trenches 1 and 2 provided a section across the site. Discussion of the stratigraphic sequence is from north to south, and is almost exclusively based upon the recording of deposits seen in the east-facing section, because a Victorian drain cut (F6) truncated the archaeological sequence along most of the west-facing section.

No trace of the reused sandstone footing (F1) recorded in Trench 1 was seen in the east-facing section. This is consistent with the 19th century cartography which shows a dog-leg in the boundary around the east gable of the 'Old Infirmary', presumably to allow cart access to the rear of the property.

Under the modern gravel surface (1000), a band of garden soil (1028) extended along most of the length of Trench 2, and was cut by several 19th/20th century service trenches (F9, F10, and F16).

Near the north end of the trench a pit (F11) was seen to be sealed by 1028. The fill of the pit (1024) contained a quantity of bone and one 17th/18th century pot-sherd, and seemed to be a mixture of the two contexts which the pit cut through, a red sandy clay (1058), and a patchy green-brown clay (1020). The pit was sectioned, and was found to truncate a cobbled surface (1045). Two sherds of 13th/14th century pottery were recovered from between the cobbles.

The middle section of Trench 2, roughly opposite the east gable of the 'Old Infirmary', was the most interesting. Here, the cobbled surface (1045) abutted a line of large red sandstone blocks bonded with red clay, which may have been the foundations of an east-west aligned ?wall (F13). However, no face for the ?wall could be seen, and in addition the area was disturbed by the cut of a drain (F10).

The southern edge of F13 cut an eroded sandstone surface (F14). This was built of lumps of a type of soft yellow sandstone not seen previously in excavations here. An electric cable trench (F9) dissected the trench diagonally here, cutting away the southern edge of F14. The superficial deposits between the service cuts F9 and F10 were very mixed and it was not possible to identify any archaeological sequence here.

However, south of F9 a second band of dark brown garden soil (1029) was observed and seen to underlie 1028, as far as the southern end of the trench. Underlying 1029 a spread of reddy-brown sandy-clay containing fragments of red and green sandstone (1027) resembled the ?demolition layer 1004 in Trench 1.

Under 1027 an east-west aligned, mortar-bonded, red sandstone wall (F12), 0.8m in width, was observed. North of F12, 1027 overlay a thin, dirty layer of clay (1042).

A half-section was excavated through 1042, between F12 and F14, to establish the relationship between the wall and sandstone surface. Underlying 1042 was a charcoal-flecked burnt clay (1025) which contained a large number of 13th/14th century sherds. Unlike the ?demolition deposits (1004 and 1027), the number of pot-sherds and the burnt nature of 1025 may suggest that 1025 was formed by a sudden fire, rather than a planned demolition.

Immediately north of the sandstone wall footing F12, 1025 overlay a damaged cobbled surface set in a reddy-brown clay (1026). Despite disturbance by F9, the sandstone surface F14 appeared to overly 1025 which suggests that F14 and the ?wall F13 belong to a later phase of activity.

It was not possible to determine which were the internal or external faces of F12, although its southern edge was abutted by red sandstone flagging at a height of 50.50m AOD. Continuing southwards, about 5m from the southern end of Trench 2, another demolition layer (1036), containing a large quantity of Harnage slates, overlay 1027, possibly associated with a re-roofing of the 'Old Infirmary'. Near the south-east corner of the 'Old Infirmary' a cut from 1029 was observed in the east-facing section of Trench 2. This cut (F15) may have been associated with the robbing or demolition of a boundary wall here. South of F15, a sequence of gravel yard surfaces (1031 and 1033) was recorded, set on bedding layers (1032 and 1034 respectively). These surfaces continued into Manhole 2 to the south.

Manhole 2 (Figs 2 and 6)

Manhole 2 was situated at the southern end of Trench 2 to collect the storm and foul waste from a number of drains serving the 'Queen Ann House', No. 193 Abbey Foregate, and the new visitor centre. Manhole 2 was therefore larger and deeper than the individual manholes north of the 'Old Infirmary', measuring 2.5m by 2m, and was cut to a depth of c.50m AOD.

Excavation of Manhole 2 enabled a glimpse of the potential preservation of the medieval deposits beneath the various levels of demolition material in this area of the Outer Court.

The lower gravel surface (1033) seen in Trench 2 abutted a hand-made brick surface which was possibly contemporary with the western extension of the main block of the 'Queen Ann House'. Excavation of the layer underneath this surface (1034) recovered a quantity of animal bone, including a sheep metatarsal with a carved and decorated proximal end forming a gouge. Very similar objects have been excavated from post-medieval contexts in Norwich (Goodall 1993, fig 85 758-759) where they have been interpreted as 'apple-corers or cheese scoops' (Goodall 1993,120). A domestic rather than industrial context has been proposed for this example on the basis of the other finds recovered from 1034. These included 17th and 18th-century pot-sherds, and therefore 1034 may pre-date the construction of the 'Queen Ann House'.

Removal of 1034 revealed a 0.25m thick layer of red sandy clay with sandstone fragments (1048), possibly equivalent to 1027 in Trench 2, cut by a pit (F19) which contained 17th century pottery in its fill (1051). In turn, 1048 overlay another thin layer of red sandy clay (1052) which contained larger sandstone fragments and 14th/15th century pottery. Under 1052 a series of medieval features was revealed.

A linear spread of mortar, approximately 0.8m wide with large but eroded sandstone blocks set into it, may represent the very bottom of a comprehensively-robbed southeast-northwest aligned wall (F20) which would intersect with the south east corner of the 'Old Infirmary' building if it continued that far, but is certainly parallel to the line of the perimeter wall in this part of the Outer Court. The sandstone blocks, though badly eroded, were probably from the Keele Beds seen in the earliest build of the 'Old Infirmary'. Abutting F20 to the north and east an area squared red sandstone slabbed surface (F21) was observed which was at the same height and of similar build to the slabbing seen south of F12 in Trench 2, (and also in Trench H of the 1993 evaluation to the rear of the 'Old Infirmary', Figs. 2 and 8). Whether or not this slabbing was external or internal to a structure it was not possible to tell.

The cut of a Victorian drain (F17 - equivalent to F6 in Trench 1) was excavated in order to see a section through the medieval deposits. The sandstone slabs (F21) were seen to be set upon a red and green sandstone-streaked, light brown clay (1056), which overlay a band of charcoal-flecked plastic grey-brown clay (1057). This, in turn, overlay a very clean, light brown alluvial clay with darker brown mottling (1058), near the bottom of the drain cut.

Manhole 3 (Figs. 2 and 7)

Manhole 3 was located slightly east of the main drain trench to act as a catchment for the French Drain system running around the 'cloister'. Therefore Manhole 3 was smaller (1.8m by 1.3m) and shallower than the main drain manholes which it feeds into. Manhole 3 was given a new context and feature sequence, because it was separate to the main drain system.

Underneath the modern yard surface (3000), a modern pit (F304) full of brick and other demolition material, cut a layer of dirty brown garden soil (3001) which also contained demolition material. Pit F304 also truncated the top of the east side of the Victorian main drain cut F300 (equivalent to F6 in Trench 1, F17 in Manhole 2). Underlying 3001 was a thick band of friable brown clay-silt (3003), the 'garden soil' of the 'Queen Ann House' frontage. The garden soil merged into a dirty layer of gravel and green sand (3005), coloured pink in patches where sandstone lumps had weathered into the soil. The merging interface between layers 3003 and 3005 was labelled 3004.

Cleaning of 3005 revealed a series of in situ features -

F301 a drain channel, F302 a yard surface, and F303 the run-off surface into the drain. The drain channel (F301) was made of fine-grained red sandstone slabs, carefully squared and bonded with light brown clay. The north side of the drain had a slabbed lip to catch the run-off from F303 which was built of angled green sandstone blocks. Surprisingly, the direction of the drain-flow was to the east, towards the location of the cloister of the abbey, and not to the west down to the river.

North of F301, a rough ?yard surface of red and green sandstone lumps and large cobbles may have extended to the rear of demolished north range of the 'Old Infirmary'. Excavation ceased at c.50.04m AOD and the features were protectively covered before the concrete base of the manhole was laid.

Drainage to the rear of the Infirmary, Excavation of Cadfael's Hut, the French Drains, 'Cloister' Post-Holes, and the Garden Scouring Works (Fig. 2)

The locations of these groundworks are given in Figure 2. In general, the groundworks associated with the construction of these features were much shallower than the main drain system, and a watching brief was kept after sample excavation had established that significant archaeological deposits were unlikely to be threatened.

In the area to the rear of the 'Old Infirmary,' 19th-century buildings had disturbed the ground below the depth of the drainage trenches. However, where the trenches abuted the southern elevation of the 'Old Infirmary' the sections of masonry exposed were fully recorded. In the western trench, recording of a void in the outer-wall revealed that an adjacent blocked internal ground floor feature was a fireplace/chimney, its presence only suspected in the building survey. In addition, the dressed sandstone wall confirmed the notion that the ground level was once significantly lower.

The trench to the cast indicated that the build of the voussoirs of the large archway, seen in the east end of the internal southern elevation of the 'Old Infirmary', were significantly narrower (0.5m) than the earlier Keele Beds build in the west end of the southern elevation (0.8m in width). While many unresolved questions remain concerning the archway - given its narrowness it must now be questionable if this archway could have supported the weight of a two-storied external wall. The arch might therefore have been part of an internal partition.

Shallow foundations for a concrete raft for Cadfael's Herb Hut were excavated in front of the north elevation of the 'Old Infirmary'. These foundations did not penetrate beneath the extensive build up of modern levelling deposits here. Similarly, excavation of the French Drains, cloister post-holes, and groundworks for the garden, did not penetrate beneath relatively modern levels.

5. The Finds

The Medieval and Post-Medieval Pottery (by Stephanie Ratkai)

The medieval pottery from the excavations ranges in date from perhaps the 12th century to the 15th century. There appears to be no pottery from the early post-medieval period, ie roughly between the Dissolution and the Civil War. However, pottery from the later 17th century onwards is represented.

The pottery fabrics are of the same type as those recorded by Buteux from the Abbey, and by Ratkai from Haughmond Abbey, just outside the town. Most of the pottery seems to have been made from the local red/grey firing clays. There are differences in the degree of sandiness in the clay matrices, but it is difficult to determine how relevant these often slight differences in the fabric are both as regards date and place of manufacture. A smaller percentage of the pottery is made from the lighter firing coal measure clays. A source for these clays would not be far distant.

Only one sherd stands out as being a regional import. This is a jug handle from context 1004. The handle is an irregular strap shape, with a series of irregular 'ushaped' impressions running down its centre. It is a very distinctive ware with slightly lustrous sparse red and black surfaces and a dull brown core. It is moderately sandy with sparse red and black inclusions. This fabric has been called 'Warwickshire Grey/Black ware' by the present author (Ratkai forthcoming), and dated to the 13th/early 14th century. As the name suggests it is found primarily in Warwickshire, although odd examples have been found in Staffordshire. This is the only known occurrence of this ware in Shropshire, and may hint at some form of link between the abbey and Warwickshire.

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The range of forms in the medieval period is limited to jugs, cooking pots, and bottles, with one or two sherds which may come from bowls. In the post-medieval period the pottery consists of jars, pancheons/bowls, and drinking vessels. In the medieval pottery the dominant form is the jug. This is not the norm on domestic sites, where cooking pots predominate. However, both at Haughmond Abbey and previous excavations at Shrewsbury Abbey the jug was the most common form. This suggests different patterns of pottery usage on monastic sites. The second most common form was the bottle. This form is well represented elsewhere in Shrewsbury, and is also common in Cheshire. It is, however, not common in the more southern counties of the West Midlands, and may therefore be related to Shrewsbury's location in the Welsh Marches. The relative dominance of both forms in the assemblage from this excavation supports the notion that the 'Old Infirmary' formed part of a range of guest accommodation within the Abbey, and was almost certainly not an infirmary.

The Tile (by Lynne Bevan)

The small collection of brick and tile from the excavations was mainly postmedieval in date, and mainly consisted of roof tile - with the exception of four fragments of glazed medieval floor tile (three of which came from context 1052, the demolition layer, of 14th/15th century date, which overlay the medieval features in Manhole 2). The two smaller fragments have retained traces of brown and yellow glaze, and the largest fragment is yellow-glazed with an incised decoration in the shape of a quatrefoil motif enclosed by a double circle from which 'v'-shaped elements radiate from ?four points. The fragment is unusual in that it is drawn freehand and is not a stamp, and was clearly one of a set. Dr. Sarah Lunt of English Heritage writes: 'The fact that it is a line impressed, monochrome design is in line with many late medieval tile designs from Shropshire, and there is nodding resemblance to quatrefoil designs in the regional repertoire, but this looks to be a one off oddity'. The fourth tile fragment, a corner piece with dark grey to black glaze and two curving yellow lines came from the core of the back wall (F3) of the north range of the 'Old Infirmary' in Trench 1.

6. Discussion (Figs. 8 and 9)

The value and coherence of the archaeological results obtained during this project must necessarily be limited by the requirements for the limited scale of excavations in the first place. Nevertheless, it was possible to interpret most of the features and deposits encountered and to relate them to an historical framework for the abbey and precinct. Wherever possible, preservation of those elements belonging to the medieval abbey and its precinct was the priority; additionally, disturbance to important post-dissolution features and deposits was also minimised, although inevitably this has restricted somewhat our understanding of those components which were revealed. All exposed sandstone walls and archaeological surfaces were protectively covered before the laying of the drains. In addition, it was fortunate that the drainage scheme retained sufficient flexibility to permit some variation in depth and route, where the most sensitive archaeological features were encountered.

The following overview of the results of the recent programme of excavations is based around a discussion of the presumed survival of archaeological deposits in the development area, and an attempt is made to link the stratigraphic phasing with the structural phasing of the Abbey Church and the 'Old Infirmary' as proposed by Baker (1993). It is suggested that significant 'islands' of archaeological deposits are preserved both between, and underneath 19th and 20th-century disturbances in this part of the outer court of the abbey.

In summary, it is suggested that five main phases of activity are represented. The latest activity relates to the 19th and 20th-century buildings, principally associated with small-scale industrial activity around the 'Old Infirmary' and the mill to the rear, excavated in 1985/7. The plan of these structures can be readily equated to the 19th-century cartography of the area. The colonisation of this area by the railways during the height of Victorian 'Railway Mania' in the middle of the 19th century undoubtedly lowered the social standing of the area, as reflected by the blocking of several of the rear windows of the 'Queen Ann House.

The next phase of activity is related to the late 17th and 18th-century development of the area around the abbey with the building of residential properties of some pretension, to which the original five-bayed 'Queen Ann House' relates. The boundary wall of reused sandstone seen in Trench 1 probably dates to this period, and would appear to indicate that a further phase of demolition of the sandstone buildings within the outer court occurred at this time. The wall also demarcates two zones of deposit survival. The survival of superficial archaeological deposits is much greater in the former garden of the 'Queen Ann House' to the east of the boundary wall, whereas, to the west 19th century industrial structures caused extensive disturbance.

Stephanie Ratkai highlighted the absence of early post-medieval pottery from the excavations, and no deposits or features relating to this period were recognised. This should not be taken as an indication of an absence of activity nearby at this period, intensive activity on a very localised scale being demonstrated all around by other campaigns of excavation round, but rather reflects the fact that the areas examined in 1994 were largely open or empty at the time.

The third phase of activity is associated with the demolition of a number of sandstone buildings, presumably shortly after the Dissolution. Extensive deposits of crushed and weathered sandstone exist across the site. The relative absence of datable artefacts associated with these deposits leaves the precise period of demolition open to question; however, it may also indicate that the demolition programme was both thorough and rapid.

The recent programme of excavation has provided further evidence for the survival of medieval deposits and features associated with the abbey, usually occurring beneath a depth of 50.50m AOD. In general, only substantial features such as sandstone wall footings and cobbled and sandstone slabbed yard surfaces have survived and not associated deposits. The survival of the walls and yard surfaces may be due to the obstacles these caused to later construction workers in the days before the invention of the JCB-excavator, as it was often seen that the cut of a drain channel would be modified to negotiate such features. However, the potential survival of these deposits and features is probably greater than might have been expected given the later history of the Outer Court.

The medicval phase of activity is perhaps the most complicated and tantalising to unravel, because medieval features were often only scen in the very bottoms of the excavated trenches, except for where sectioning of later features allowed a glimpse of the underlying stratigraphic relatioships.

However, it is still possible to relate these deposits and features to our knowledge of the historical development of the Outer Court derived from previous excavations, and the evidence of the standing medieval structures. In Trench 1 evidence of the back wall of the 'north range of the Old Infirmary' demolished by Telford in the early 19th century was found. The former north range was not built parallel to the existing range, but, instead, appears to have been aligned northcast-southwest, reflecting the line of the original Abbey Foregate, at a more acute angle than that depicted by Owen and Blakeway (Fig 1b). The construction of this rear wall is similar to both the later elements seen in the truncated range of the west wall of the 'Old Infirmary' and the wall identified in the 1989 excavations (Jones 1989), being built of the redder and finer-grained sandstone with green sandstones in its lowest courses typical of the later medieval additions to the 'Old Infirmary'.

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It is interesting to note that the wall identified in Trench E of the 1993 evaluation is located at the junction of the back wall of the northern range with another wall continuing northwards from the eastern gable of the 'Old Infirmary' seen in Trench D of the 1993 evaluation(Figs 2 and 8). This junction may have accounted for the problems in defining any face of the wall in Trench E. The sandstone drain found in Manhole 3 is on the same alignment as the back wall of the former north range and is therefore probably broadly contemporary in date.

The discovery of the sandstone wall F12, and associated sandstone slabbing, in Trench 2 appears to indicate that there was a building, either attached to, or built very close to, the east wall of the 'Old Infirmary'. If F12 was built against or bonded into the east wall of the 'Old Infirmary' the different styled openings at the north and south ends of the wall, and the change in the wall thickness here (see Fig 8) may be significant. The change in the build of the east wall corresponds to the line of F12 if it abutted to the east wall of the Infirmary. The dating evidence from the adjacent burnt deposit (1025) suggests that this building was demolished in the 13th/14th century. This date may correspond with other modifications known to have been made within the Outer Court, identified in the earlier excavation of the 'kitchen-block' and perimeter wall. The slabbing also resembled that seen in Trench H of the 1993 evaluation, which, in turn, suggests that these two features may have been roughly contemporary.

A set of large put-log holes observed to be cut into in the east elevation of the 'Old Infirmary' suggests the possible presence of some form of lean-to building here. The possible wall F13, and floor surface F14, seen in Trench 2, might be related to such a structure, built after F12 was demolished. Map evidence suggests that this structure could be of a 19th-century date.

The most enigmatic feature discovered was the possible wall line (F20) seen in Manhole 2. Was there once another wall or structure on a similar alignment to the perimeter wall here, and if so, may it have run up to the south east corner of the Infirmary? The strengthening of that corner discussed above in relation to F12 might also therefore be related to the demolition of such a supporting wall.

The general picture emerging is of ranges of buildings either leaning-to or influenced by the orientation of different sectors of the outer court perimeter.

Natural deposits were only encountered in Manhole 2, at a depth of 49.90m AOD, and by the Abbey Foregate frontage, at a depth of 49.80m AOD. These levels should be compared with evidence from the 1992 excavation of the drainage system around the former Abbey Church, where not only was the sequence of archaeological deposits less complicated, but the natural gravels were often encountered less than one metre from the present ground surface. This would appear to indicate that activity within the Outer Court of the Abbey was more intensive, and that, certainly in the post-Dissolution period activity around the church was limited to grave digging, with the exception of Telford's demolition of the cloister area for his new road. The presence of a riverine clay deposit over the natural gravel in Manhole 2 also shows that this area next to the river was subject to periodic river inudation, possibly in the pre-abbey phase.

In retrospect, it is perhaps unfortunate that this area of the abbey precinct has been subjected to a number of small-scale campaigns of archaeological evaluation and excavation, on each occasion related to different developments, and that this piecemeal erosion of the archaeology of the site has made interpretation of the results of each stage of the archaeological work somewhat problematic. Nevertheless, cumulatively, these minor interventions have provided a great deal of information that supplements and enhances the larger-scale excavations carried out nearby in the 1980s.

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Fig.4







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Fig.7



