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The Cadfael Centre Development, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury: A Building Survey and Archaeological Evaluation

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1. Introduction

Archaeological enquiry has been compared to forensic science without the criminal detective work, its aim being to try and establish something of the truth about the people of the past, conjuring, without fantasy, buildings from lines of stones and people from the trinkets they wore or the rubbish they threw away (Barker 1986,9). Perhaps, today Brother Cadfael would be an archaeologist, and not a detective.

In June 1993 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned to conduct a survey of the only surviving precinct building of Shrewsbury Abbey together with an archaeological evaluation of its adjacent ground, the work being sponsored by Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council on behalf of the Cadfael Centre Development, undertaken in cooperation with Beringar Ltd

The so-called 'Old Infirmary' building (NGR SJ 4975 1242), a Grade II* listed building, forms part of the western boundary of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Shrewsbury Abbey and Precinct (SAM 359)(Fig1) and is situated on the west side of 193 Abbey Foregate, a plot measuring c.70m north-south and c.50m east-west fronting onto the south side of Abbey Foregate and skirted by the English Bridge Gyratory Road to the west. The building is currently unoccupied and in a somewhat dilapidated state, with the windows and entrances secured against vandalism which has occurred since the former timberyard on the premises was closed down five years ago. In addition, remedial work has recently been carried out on the west wall of the lower added wing on the north-west corner of the building, this being in danger of collapse due to movement of the roof weight. It is proposed that both the 'Old Infirmary' building and a second structure, the so-called Queen Anne House, an 18th-century Grade II listed building, which also occupies 193 Abbey Foregate, will be renovated and incorporated into the 'Cadfael Centre'.

2. Previous Work

Previous archaeological work in and around Shrewsbury Abbey has included limited excavations and a hypothetical reconstruction of the Abbey Precinct in the early-19th century (Owen and Blakeway 1825), and what we would call today a watching brief for the construction of a sewer along Abbey Foregate in 1896 (Cranage 1912). No further significant archaeological work is recorded at the Abbey or around its precinct until 1985-7 when a programme of rescue excavations was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. The findings of these and later smaller-scale evaluation excavations in the vicinity of the 'Old Infirmary' have particular relevance for this present project and allowed both the number of trial trenches required to be minimsed, while also providing clues to the possible relationships between the 'Old Infirmary' building and other, now demolished, structures in the south-western quarter of the Abbey precinct. These relevant excavations included work on a 'kitchen-block' at the south-west corner of the outer court behind the Queen Anne House, and on the site of the former Abbey Mill, now underneath the English Bridge Gyratory Road. At the same time building recording was undertaken of parts of the 'Old Infirmary' and on the transepts of the Abbey church. More recently, small-scale excavations have been carried out on the western precinct wall (Jones 1989), as part of drainage improvements around the Abbey church (Leach 1992), and along the perimeter wall of 193 Abbey Foregate, the latter work being monitored as part of an archaeological watching brief (Watson 1993).

The present building survey was commissioned prior to any new renovation work. Its aims were twofold: firstly, to provide a detailed record of the earlier phases of sandstone build as an aid to the building's conservation and management; and secondly, to provide a more general survey of the whole structure to serve as a basis for analytical interpretation of the building. Simultaneously, an archaeological evaluation of the development area was also carried out to examine the survival, nature and depth of archaeological deposits across the development area in order to establish what constraints upon development may be posed by the presence of below-ground archaeology. The results of the building survey and excavation form an archive of drawings, photographs and pro-forma recording sheets.The present account, based on that archive, is intended to present a factual summary relevant to the needs of the development scheme, as well as providing the opportunity for a wider discussion of the results in an academic framework.

3. The Building Survey

Methodology

The main aim of this programme of building survey was to complete the recording begun in 1988 and to provide a holistic record of the structure through; measured drawings of the surviving stonework (at a scale of 1:20), provisional phased floor plans (at 1:50), monochrome photographic coverage, supplemented by colour slide and print where necessary, of all wall faces and details of architectural features, and completion of the 'stratigraphic' record of the building using pro-forma sheets to record each separate constructional entity and feature. The pro-formas were designated either as Structural Elements (SE; numbered in a continuous sequence from SE 1000), that is each discernible phase of building activity, be it a major constructional phase, repair, or bricklayer's or mason's rise or as Archictectural Elements (AE; numbered in sequence from AE1), that is, doors, windows, chimneys, etc.

The majority of this work was directed towards the lower added wing of the building, an area which had been too unstable to record in safety in 1988, although other major areas recorded also included the internal and external elevations of the north wall and the external gable of the west wall of the main range. All drawings, including those from the 1988 survey, were related to a 52m level above the Ordnance Survey Datum (A.O.D.). Modern concrete and brick elements were shown in outline, excepting those forming part of a specific archictectural feature or build which were otherwise shown in detail. All measurements are in metric notation, excepting brick dimensions. Because it was the opinion of English Heritage that removal of the plaster-cladding which has been spread over much of the rough stonework situated on the south wall of the first floor of the main range of the 'Old Infirmary' building may have involved damage to any surviving medieval features beneath, Scheduled Monument Consent for this work was not granted. Therefore a stone by stone examination and recording of the south wall in particular was not possible and the survey was here confined to photographic coverage, backed up by written notes, although the north, east and west walls were surveyed stone by stone.

Building Description (Refer to appropriate elevations in envelope file)

The so-called 'Old Infirmary' building is a two-storeyed structure consisting of a main range of three bays aligned east-west with a lower wing added to the western end of the north elevation, also of two storeys. The main double-doored entranceway is on the north elevation which has been largely rebuilt to serve the timbermill and store, the last function of the building. In addition, a single-doorway provides ground floor access only to the lower added wing.

The ground-floor of the main range is open in plan. The floor, which is at a height of c.51.30m A.O.D., measures 14.70m east-west by 6.95m north-south and is paved partly with brown quarry tiles which survive in patches, between later concrete spreads. Another roughly square, smaller room, measuring c.5.3m by c.5.45m across a central axis, is situated inside the lower added wing, with no access internally to the main range. Here there are steps down to the floor surface made of blue/black brick set on an ash bed, at a height of 51.10m A.O.D.

Several internal features are not reflected on the outer elevations, including a large stone rounded arch (AE18), measuring 2.55m in height and 6.62m in length internally, now blocked with red sandstone (SE1026). The voussoirs are two courses thick and stylistically the arch resembles the massive Romanesque arches of the earliest build of the Abbey church. The stone build above arch AE18 is bonded into the east wall and therefore appears to be contemporary in build; however, the base of the arch is also partly hidden behind the lower courses of the east wall. Therefore, the precise relationship between the arch and the east wall remains unclear.

West of arch AE18 are two blocked doorways (AE19 and AE21) cut into the regular coursed and cut red sandstone fabric of the south wall (SE1030). Doorway AE 19 appears to cut the lower voussoirs of arch AE18 and is clearly a later insertion. Between the two blocked doors, in a disturbed area of the south wall, is another rectangular feature (AE20), which may represent a blocked fireplace. In addition, near AE20 the remains of a cut-off, smoke-blackened timber suggest that there existed another intermediate floor level at some point in the history of the building.

The west end of the north wall of the main range is extremely complex. It is only when the wall is viewed from inside the lower added wing that some sense can be imposed upon the various components. Essentially, the north wall behind the lower added wing consists of areas of noticeably reused sandstone blocks (SE1038 and SE1034). Three blocked openings (AE29, AE30 and AE31) cut the north wall inside the lower added wing. Each opening is topped by a brick arch externally and blackened wooden lintels internally, although the lintel over AE29 is not blackened. AE29 and AE30 appear to be doorways, while AE31 is probably a window. Doorway AE29 has two phases of blocking, the latest in brick and probably post-dating a recorded fire. At first floor level the top of a fourth opening (AE38), probably another window, is just visible where later brick repairs have fallen away. The rest of the north wall is modern brick, apart from a small area of sandstone walling (SE1048) situated under the ground floor window at the east end of the north elevation which is probably part of SE1034 and SE1038.

Access to the first-floor is by a rickety staircase situated immediately west of the main doorway against the north wall. At first-floor level the main range is again open in plan, a stairway giving access down to the first-floor level of the lower added wing. A partially-encased access hole to the lower floor is built roughly midway against the south wall. Long timbers were passed through this from the first floor store to the ground floor, where the mechanised-saws of the timberyard were located. A small arched recess can be seen in the south wall above the opening in the floor, although this is built into the modern brick fabric and is probably a deliberate archaicism. The modern timber floor is set on I-section iron girders which may be tied into the concrete cladding visible on the external elevation of the south wall. The floor can be seen to re-use an earlier internal recessed footing, 0.20m deep, along both the west gable wall and the southern half of the east gable wall, at a height of 54.40m A.O.D.. The roof timbers, open to the first floor, are also of recent construction, set on a modern brick rise above sections of the earlier stone and rubble build of the north and south walls. Scars of an earlier, lower, roof-line can be seen on the internal elevations of both east and west wall gables, at first floor level.

An examination of the internal elements suggests a complex composite structure with many phases of alteration, and this is borne out by an examination of the individual external elevations. The north elevation provides the main frontage of the building onto Abbey Foregate today. Few indications of the earlier history of the building are presented, instead the impression is rather one of a late-19th/early-20th century small industrial workshop. The main central section of the north elevation has been substantially rebuilt in brick with three large workshop windows and a double-doored entrance on the east side built between two load-bearing brick stanchions which flank the main entrance and run from ground to rafter level. The west end of the north elevation is less regular, with an access door with winch still in situ set above another window between the entrance and the lower added wing. Surmounted by a plain tiled roof, with a row of skylight windows cut into the apex near the ridge, only isolated patches of stonework, represented by scars at either end of

the building (SE1031 and SE1032), together with a central section of stonework (SE1034), excite attention to investigate the other elevations of the building.

The rear elevation of the building provides a few more clues to the original stone structure, but is nonetheless fairly dull. Dominating the wall is a large spread of ugly concrete cladding (SE1005), extending two thirds of the way up the wall, giving way to a single modern brick build up to the rafter line (SE1062). A blocked-in opening (AE39) is visible in the brick work immediately above the concrete, as are patches of irregular coursing providing a regular horizontal plane for the brick courses. Again, at either end of the building, stonework is visible. At the east end only a scar (SE1064) above the concrete cladding remains, but to the west a larger area of coursed and squared red sandstone (SE1008), although much patched and repaired, has the unmistakable profile of the west-facing buttress (AE6). Closer inspection reveals that the stonework appears to continue behind the concrete cladding.

Both the west and east external gable-end walls exhibit the best-preserved stonework. The east elevation contains two roughly stone-blocked windows at first floor level and the scar of a blocked doorway at ground floor level. The largest feature, a chamfered and arched 'window' (AE2), which measures 2.8m by 1.40m externally, is large enough to serve as a doorway, either to an outside staircase or to a now-demolished timber-framed structure abutting the 'Old Infirmary'. There is some evidence to support the latter hypothesis, including the inner blocking of the window which continues to the level of the original first-floor recess, and the abrupt ending of the recess near to the northern edge of AE2 on the inner east wall which may indicate the former presence of an inner staircase north of AE2. If this hypothesis is correct it is likely that AE2 provided access to another building, rather than to another outer staircase. Further possible corroborative evidence for the former existence of an abutting building is provided by three large beam-slots set along the east wall just below the bottom of the window AE2, which appear to indicate the former presence of a more substantial structure than the flimsy lean-to buildings seen on the 19th century plans of the area However, it must be noted that this evidence is problematic, for the beam-slots may be related to six smaller, clearly later, putlog-holes, higher up the wall, one cutting the blocking of the window AE2.

The smaller window AE1, in the east external elevation, is a different style to AE2, being narrower, though still arched, with deeper internal splays. The window has a square, rather than arched internal lintel, not dissimilar to the smaller rectangular windows (AE7, AE8, AE10 and AE15) seen in the west wall, although the red sandstone is very badly eroded here. Below AE1 is a blocked-off opening at ground level (AE4). The blocking is part of a recent attempt to secure the building against vandalism. However, given its incongruous position, which denies any symmetry with AE1 above, it is tentatively suggested that this feature may be a later insertion to provide access to the now-demolished 19th century lean-to structure already mentioned above. Below AE2 there is a somewhat haphazard build (AE3), roughly similar in dimensions to the opening AE4, which incorporates a few green sandstone blocks. These in general are associated with later phases in the building and may therefore represent repairs made to the main fabric.

The west external elevation of the 'Old Infirmary' is the most impressive. The gable-end wall of coursed and well-cut red sandstone blocks is flanked by two substantial buttresses (AE6 to the south, and AE9 in the middle of the elevation). Each buttress has four angled run-off blocks demarcating the individual rises of the buttress. In the middle of the gable-end is a large chamfered arched window (AE5), measuring 4.2m by 1.8m externally, the lower portion of the window being partially blocked with brick, with modern wood and glass fenestration above. The inner arch is taller by c.0.60m, following the line of the deep internal window splays. Like AE2, which it resembles stylistically, this window would also have conditioned down to the original first-floor level. Beneath AE5 at ground-floor level are two smaller rectangular paired brick-blocked windows (AE7 and AE8), now slightly different in internal appearance, perhaps as the result of later repairs.

Butted up against the north side of buttress AE9 is a truncated section of red sandstone wall, supported by a third smaller buttress (AE13),

which forms the west wall of the lower added wing. Whilst superficially of similar build to the west wall of the main range, being made of regularly coursed and cut red sandstone blocks, closer inspection reveals that the wall is of a different build, as a butt-joint against the buttress clearly indicates. The wall has been susceptible to movement over time and bears the scars of numerous repairs including quite recent consolidation work. Several features cut or abutt the wall face. The tops of two blocked red sandstone arches (AE12 and AE14) can just be seen above the present ground level, one on either side of buttress AE13. These once formed part of a more extensive arcaded wall running north from the main range of the 'Old Infirmary' This has since been obscured by the revising of the ground surface in modern times. Both arches are roughly blocked with irregular fragments of red and green sandstone, and this blocking is not dissimilar to the builds around and above the arches, (SE1069 and SE1070) a style of construction very different from the regular coursed and cut red sandstone of the main build of the wall above (SE1014). Two explanations for this apparent anomaly may be suggested: either that the arches are later insertions - and it is worth noting the lack of symmetry between arches and windows; or, alternatively, that SE1069 and SE1070 represent later repairs made around the arches. Between buttresess AE9 and AE13, at first-floor level, despite extensive repairs, elements of a blocked rectangular window (AE10) can still be seen. While no internal features are discernible, it is probable that AE10 would have formed a pair with window AE15 below. This window is better-preserved and rectangular with deep internal splays on each side and a squared stone-lintel above. Finally, the remains of a brick fireplace (AE11), which would have served an abutting lean-to building are visible against the north face of buttress AE9.

Once again the internal features of the building present a more complicated picture, for inside the lower added wing there are several features in the internal elevation of the truncated section of the west wall which cannot be seen from outside. Definition of the earliest feature is somewhat ambiguous because of the severely eroded nature of the stonework, but, nonetheless, it would appear that there is a scar caused by the removal of voussoirs of an arch (AE40) for a large window or even a gateway at the back of buttress AE9. Comparison between the stone build above and below the scar supports such an interpretation. Below, there is a splay for a jamb, whilst above the scar of AE40 the butt-joint between the sandstone of the main west wall and the later truncated wall is uneven, which may indicate that the earlier main build above the arch AE40 had collapsed. In the north-west corner of the first floor inside the main range there is evidence to suggest that another arch may once have existed at right angles to AE40. In the return of the north wall there is a small stub of original stonework at the end of the north wall (SE1051) which is bonded into the main build of the west gable wall (SE1007), surviving above a height equivalent to the bottom of AE40 (i:e first-floor level). This second arch may have provided an easy accessway from the north-west corner of the main range, which then allowed access to the waterfront via AE40.

Within the internal elevation of the truncated west wall there are also a number of features which may suggest that the truncated wing may have originally been two-storeyed and even subdivided into small rooms or cells. Three beam-slots (AE45), large enough (0.3m square) to support substantial floor joists, are cut at the same height as the top of the ground floor window AE15; one has been reused by a smaller floor-joist of the later added wing, while another, just south of AE15, is much obscured by later repairs. Just above the beam-slots is a stringcourse (AE44) which may have been contemporary with the original floor. Another stringcourse of green sandstone, presumably decorative in function, runs north from just below the first floor window AE10, although much mutilated by later repairs. Two sets of small putlog-holes cut into the stone-build of SE1014, are set between the two string courses. There is no evidence for the contemporaneity of the smaller putlog-holes with either the beam-slots or the string courses, therefore these may be later features. The north and east walls of the lower added wing form part of the later brick build.

4. The Archaeological Evaluation (Fig 2)

Aims and Methodology

The evaluation area was set within the curtilage of the 'Old Infirmary' building, in rough and overgrown land formerly occupied by a timber merchant's yard, the surfacing of the site consisting of clinker and scrubby grass. The aims of the archaeological evaluation were specific, concerned with establishing the depth of any surviving archaeological deposits and the nature of their survival across the site, in order that design-options for the proposed 'Cadfael Centre' could be adopted which would retain the integrity of the below-ground archaeology, or react positively to its presence. Scheduled Monument Consent was required for this work because of the designation of the site as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM359) inside the precinct of the former Shrewsbury Abbey, and the granting of SMC was subject to the conditions specified by the Secretary of State, Department of National Heritage.

The archives of archaeological excavations conducted in the area since 1985 were consulted in order to minimise the number of trial trenches required. No specific design options had been formulated at the time of the initial commissioning of the archaeological SMC application. In the event eight trenches were opened in total. Three trenches (A-C), measuring 1m square, were hand-dug inside the 'Infirmary' building in order to test for early floor levels, and a further five trenches (D-H) were opened using a JCB-machine to remove the modern overburden and then excavated by hand to examine any in situ archaeological deposits. A full written, drawn and photographic record was maintained throughout. Finds in association with identified features and deposits were collected and recorded, to be processed and identified at the University of Birmingham.

Two trenches (D and E) were opened in front of the 'Infirmary' building in the northwest corner of 193 Abbey Foregate, these trenches having to be placed slightly further east than shown on the application for Scheduled Monument Consent due to the discovery of a hitherto unidentified service route, found during preliminary safety testing. A further pair of trenches (F and G) was opened running north-south from the front of the Queen Anne House towards Abbey Foregate. A gas pipe was cut during the excavation of Trench F, which necessitated unauthorised excavation linking this pipe to the main service trench on Abbey Foregate. This remedial work was carried out under archaeological supervision. No archaeological deposits or features were encountered. Finally, a single trench (H) was inserted between the 'Old Infirmary' and the Queen Anne House because there was insufficient space here to open two trenches as originally planned.

Two further trenches originally planned to test the north-east corner of the site, were not required once the results of a watching brief conducted during the construction of a new perimeter wall in early 1993 were made available (Watson 1993).

Results

For the purposes of archaeological recording and for this account it is convenient to discuss the trenches separately according to their locations within the evaluation area (fig 2). The structural information recorded in Trenches A-H is represented on this plan and is reviewed briefly here, particularly in relation to the depth of in situ archaeological deposits or features, and its significance is considered in the following section of the report. Full details are available in the site archive.

Trench A

Trench A was cut through the modern brick floor surface at the east end of the main range of the 'Old Infirmary' (height 51.30m A.O.D). No trace of a medieval floor surface was found before excavation ceased; instead the foundation courses of two red sandstone walls were found after removal of 18th/19th century demolition/ levelling deposits. The tops of the walls were exposed at a height of 51.06m A.O.D. The earliest wall (F100) was mortar-bonded with regular courses and was faced on the east side. The wall, which was of a single block thickness with a north-south alignment, ended in the middle of the trench at a point roughly equivalent to the 0.2m recess thought to represent the location of an internal staircase, and may be associated with

this feature (see above). In plan, the wall may be equivalent to a wall of similar build (F400) found just to the north outside the Infirmary building in Trench D. Abutting F100 was another later red sandstone wall (F101), of notably rougher build, running east-west towards the east gable wall of the main range. This, in turn, was cut by a later Victorian brick wall (F102) which ran north-south along the eastern baulk of the trench. The foundations of these walls were not located before excavation ceased at a depth of 50.41m A.O.D. (about 0.9m beneath the modern floor surface).

Trench B

Removal of rubble levelling deposits in Trench B revealed the edges of two pits which upon excavation were both found to cut an upstanding wedge of clean red clay (2004) from a height of 50.70m A.O.D. The southernmost pit (F200) was filled with a dirty mixture of sand and rubble (2004). No dating evidence was recovered from this feature. The second pit (F201) contained 18th/19th century pottery and bottle glass in its fill (2005) of silt, brick and sandstone fragments. Both pits extended beyond the limits of the excavation; therefore their full dimensions could not be determined. Subsequent excavation of the red clay wedge revealed it to be set upon a layer of gritty yellowish sandy clay/silt (2009) containing fragments of red and green sandstone. Excavation ceased at a depth of 50.25m A.O.D. without any trace of an early floor level being discovered.

Trench C

Removal of a brick floor revealed the top of a series of rough red sandstone walls immediately underneath the floor bedding, at a depth of 50.98m A.O.D. These walls were reflected by bumps and depressions in the intact floor surface, and therefore a second small area of brick was removed just north of the main trench in order to trace the line of a return wall (F304) running east-west. Four walls (F300-304) were found in total, each of a similar build and clearly never intended to be seen. In plan, the walls appear to form a C-shaped flue which was backfilled with an homogenous mixture of sand, rubble and mortar. Excavation ceased at a depth of 50.30m A.O.D. without contacting the bottom of this feature.

The structure resembles the arrangement of a drying room for a malthouse excavated in Stamford (Mahoney 1982). Cartographic and illustrative evidence indicate the existence of a malthouse on the 'Old Infirmary' site in the 19th century, and a large chimney, possibly from a drying kiln can be seen on an illustration of a building in the same position as the lower added wing.

Trench D (Fig 3)

Trench D, measuring 8m in length, located just to the north of the 'Old Infirmary', was opened by JCB-machine. Two red sandstone walls (F400 and F402) were found at either end of the trench at a depth of 50.75m and 50.99m A.O.D. respectively. It has already been noted that F400 may represent a northwards continuation of F100 (seen in Trench A), while F402, which is more massive in build, appears to represent the remains of the foundation course of a continuation of the east wall of the main range of the 'Old Infirmary' building. Excavation continued between the two walls to a depth of 50.33m A.O.D., approximately 1.1m beneath the modern ground surface. At a height of 51.10m A.O.D. a much-disturbed cobbled surface (4003) was found, cut by a number of modern service trenches. This surface overlay, in turn, a series of very disturbed layers of dirty silt and clay/silt (4004, 4005, and 4006). Abutting the east face of F400 the truncated remains of a possible robbed floor surface (F406) were exposed, represented by a line of mortar with fragments of sandstone slabs set within it at a height of 50.51m A.O.D. Underlying F406 was another disturbed silty layer (4007) which contained small sherds of medieval cooking pot. Excavation ceased on cleaning 4007 at a level of 50.33m A.O.D.

Trench E

The ground cut by Trench E was noticeably more disturbed compared to that in Trench D, probably reflecting disturbance related to the demolition of the northern range of the 'Old Infirmary' by Telford's road in the early-19th century and by later building and provision of services along the street frontage. The only early feature found consisted of a much-disturbed wall

footing containing a number of green sandstone blocks in its build (F500). This was exposed at a depth of 50.48m A.O.D. and appeared to be comparable to the remains of the east wall footing (F402) seen in Trench D, although the presence of the green sandstone may indicate that the footing is, in fact, earlier than the build of F402 or the east gable wall (see Jones 1989). Levelling deposits consisted of mixed dirty sands, silts and black clinker/rubble bands (5000, 5001, 5003, 5004, 5005, 5006, 5007, 5008, 5009) cut by several modern drains.

Trench F

Trench F measured c.14m in length and ran from the front of the Queen Anne House towards Abbey Foregate. Excavated to a depth of c.1m beneath the modern ground surface, a series of four linear north-south aligned ditches or gulleys was found towards the north end of the trench (F600, F602, F603 and F604) Each gulley measured between 0.9m and 1.1m in width, and was filled with a mixture of brick and sandstone rubble. Both F600 and F602 were partially excavated; F600 appeared to cut a clean deposit of yellowy/brown clay (6013) which was also encountered in patches at the bottom of Trench G. The nature of the clay deposit suggested that it may be of alluvial origin, but the height of the deposit implies that in this instance, it may not be natural but rather a material used for levelling for natural deposits normally occur at lower depths. F602 was cut from a higher level, through a silty garden deposit (6012) to the north and a spread of red sandy clay (6015), containing very weathered fragments of red sandstone within it, to the south. Both F600 and F602 appeared to be post-medieval in date, although no function or purpose could be ascribed to them. Roughly 3m from the southern end of Trench F a semi-circular feature (F601), which ran under the eastern baulk of the trench, was sampled. F601 was also cut through 6015 which was uniformly spread over the south end of the trench. Excavation revealed that 6015 appeared to overlie a layer of mixed green, orange and black silty clay (6024). It is possible that 6015 may represent an extensive demolition layer from a large building originally located in the area of the Queen Anne House, as equivalent deposits were also found in Trenches G and H. Overlying 6015 and the linear features in the north end of the trench, were thick layers of brown silt (6002, 6007, and 6010) probably derived from the garden soil of the Queen Anne House. The sequence would imply that the linear trenches at the northern end of Trench F predate the building of the Queen Anne House, and may represent a phase of demolition prior to the establishment of the garden.

Trench G

Essentially the picture presented by Trench G was similar to that in Trench F. Five linear gulleys filled with rubble were exposed at the north end of the trench (F701-705). In plan, F701 may be a continuation of F600, and F702 may be a continuation of F603. The clean clay deposit (7023) into which the trenches were cut was more extensive in comparison to Trench F, although it also appeared to be banded when seen in the sides of F701 and F703. Towards the southern end of the trench the stratigraphic sequence was also similar to that in Trench F, with the red clay spread overlain by bands of silt, although a large pit (F700), cut from high up in the middle of the trench, disturbed this sequence.

Trench H (Fig 3)

The results from Trench H were of greatest interest. A single trench, 9m in length, was excavated here because of the limited space available between the 'Old Infirmary' building and a garden wall of the Queen Anne House. Immediately upon removal of the modern surfacing, a wall, running almost the entire length of the trench along the line of the north baulk was revealed. This was of a number of builds, with two roughly-blocked doorways (F806 and F809) being recorded. To the east of doorway F806 the stone build changed to a machine-cut-brick footing (F805) belonging to another structure. Both the brick wall and the sandstone walling can be related to two lean-to structures recorded on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 1:500 map surveyed in 1882.

West of the disturbance created by the brick building, an extensive spread of red clay, similar to that found in Trenches F and G, merged into another red clay layer which contained patches of mortar and what appeared to be large sandstone fragments (8006). The sandstone wall against the north baulk of the trench opposite 8006 was

seen to contain a lower build of uncut, red sandstone blocks which were bonded with a lighter coloured buff white mortar (F811). The possibility that F811 represented the core of an earlier wall running approximately north-south was investigated by excavating 8006. The red clay of 8006 was peeled off to reveal that F811 was indeed the core of a good quality faced wall, probably medieval in date, the red sandstone facing stones of its west-facing side being found at a depth of 50.44m A.O.D. No faced blocks were discovered on the east side of F811 because excavation ceased when a spread of red sandstone blocks was exposed which may have been the demolition material from the wall F811. Two square slots (F816 and F817) were cut into the top of north-south wall (F811) filled with ashy/ clinker material from the overlying layer (8012), these were probably caused by the robbing of good sandstone blocks from the top of the medieval wall F811. Abutting and to the west of F811, was a surface of perfectly-cut sandstone slabs (F813). Only a small part of this feature was exposed because another later brick wall was built directly onto it (F812), but the quality of the build of the slabbing was consistent with that of the facing of the blocks, and in all probability represents a floor surface. These features indicate the possibility that a medieval building, abutting the perimeter wall of the Abbey, once existed here, with a floor depth of 50.22 A.O.D. Theoretically, if the concrete cladding on the south wall of the 'Old Infirmary' building could ever be removed, the scar of a butt-joint might be revealed.

5. Discussion

Introduction

This section of the report is intended to be a synthesis of the information derived from the building survey and that from the archaeological evaluation. This evidence will also be considered in relation to the cartographic and illustrative information about the building which sheds some light on its later history, from the early 18th century onwards.

Many of the wealthiest abbeys in England belonged to the Benedictine Order, which was the first major monastic order to become established in the country, and a number of the richest abbeys were located in the south west, for example at Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, and Evesham, Worcestershire, while two of the best-preserved are found down-river at Gloucester and Worcester. Shrewsbury, in common with many other monasteries, was founded in 1083 in the aftermath of the Norman invasion. The abbey buildings at Shrewsbury did not survive the ravages of the Dissolution as well as those at Gloucester, and in common with most urban monastic structures - and many Benedictine monasteries fall into this category - the majority of the claustral and other buildings in the outer precinct of the monastery were swept away by post-16th century development, with the exception of the so-called 'Old Infirmary' building and the nave of the abbey church of the Holy Cross. However, excavations around Shrewsbury Abbey have shown that below-ground preservation of archaeological deposits is better than may have been expected in several areas of the precinct, and excavations undertaken since 1985 have been able to add a great deal to the outline plan of the abbey and precinct proposed by Owen and Blakeway in the early-19th century (fig.1b).

Perhaps the first point to clarify about the so-called 'Old Infirmary' is one of semantics. Whilst the name has been retained throughout the report for convenience, it is unclear on what evidence the building came to be called an infirmary. The ascription appears to originate in the early-19th century and probably arose from the researches of Owen and Blakeway, two of the earliest antiquarian writers on the town. Today we are not privy to the information available in the early-19th century; nonetheless the excavation and study of Benedictine monasteries in the intervening years have shown that in general an 'ideal' plan may be applied to most Benedictine monasteries, especially those built after the Norman invasion, albeit with particular adaptations to the natural topography. The normal position of an infirmary is towards the eastern end of the complex, close to the chapter house and thus by inference to God. The Statutory Listing criteria for the building states that the building may have been a guest house or gate-house, and this function appears more likely than that of an infirmary. However, the advantages in

the location of the building next to the north channel of the Rea Brook with direct access to the river-trade up and down the Severn are obvious. Taken together with the proximity of the Abbey mill it is likely that some trading or industrial activity took place in at least part of the complex in the northwest precinct of the Abbey. The large arch in the south wall of the building must also have some bearing here, for its sheer size is suggestive of movement of bulk goods into and out of the building. One should, however, be wary of assigning a 'static' function to a monastic building that has obviously undergone major changes during its life.

Archaeology

The value and coherence of the archaeological results obtained during this project must necessarily be limited by the requirements of the brief. The preservation of those elements belonging to the abbey precinct was the main priority of excavation within the Scheduled Ancient Monument, although inevitably this has limited our understanding of those components which were revealed, to a certain extent. In particular, the results from the small trenches inside the building have not significantly furthered our understanding of the early history of the structure.

Nonetheless, several significaant observations can be made concerning the historical development of this part of the Abbey precinct. It is perhaps most surprising that no evidence of the underlying natural stratigraphy was encountered during excavation, particularly when the results of the 1992 excavations around the Abbey church are considered.

The results from Trench H were probably the most significant, for here was found evidence of a possible medieval building which may have abutted the outer precinct wall south of the 'Old Infirmary'. The discovery of a probable floor surface within this building at a level of 50.22m A.O.D. may also be important, providing evidence, hitherto lacking, of the ground level in part of the north-west of the Abbey precinct, although the question of the medieval ground level in the rest of the excavation area has by no means been answered. Has it been totally removed by later activity, or does it lie deeper? The findings of the 1992 excavation around the Abbey church indicated that a cobbled surface lay up to one metre beneath 18th and 19th century levelling deposits to the north of the abbey church and that the medieval level of the old Abbey Foregate road was probably at least one metre beneath the present road surface. Given that the Abbey church was built on a gravel spur, and that the ground level probably fell away more towards the River Severn in the medieval period, it seems likely that the medieval ground surface may lie deeper than the limit of excavation. Evidence of a cobbled surface was found in Trench D; however, this overlay disturbed later levels, including the possible floor surface of a room to the north of the present building. A cobbled surface, found in the 1989 excavations, was thought to be contemporary with a malthouse on the site and it is therefore likely that the cobbles in Trench D also relate to this activity.

A substantial wall continuing northwards from the east gable wall of the 'Old Infirmary' in Trenches D and E seems to indicate that the two ranges of the 'Old Infirmary' complex were once enclosed. The structural evidence for a collapsed archway running northwards from the west gable wall also indicates that a similar situation once existed on the west side of the complex as well. Archaeological evidence from work in 1989 correlates with this interpretation (Jones 1989,5). Taken together, the evidence implies that the present gable end walls merely comprise a rump of a much larger complex, although the precise phasing of this activity remains open, particularly in relation to the difference between the green sandstone foundation in Trench E and the red sandstone in Trench D.

The Building: Phasing

The building survey confirmed that the so-called 'Old Infirmary' is an extremely complex structure with many different periods of alteration and rebuilding. A provisional four-phase plan is offered for the building at this stage, although this is to a certain extent an over-simplification, particularly in regard to later phases of build.

The primary medieval build of a two-storeyed building is taken to consist of the regularly-coursed and cut red sandstone best seen in the east and west gable ends of the main range,

including the two buttresses associated with this build on the west elevation. The arched windows on these faces are assumed to be contemporary with this build which stylistically places this phase of building around the 13th century in date. In addition to the gable end walls, the scar of the possible arch visible in the south-west corner of the lower added wing is included in this phase and appears to indicate that a large entranceway onto the waterfront was cut into the precinct wall of the Abbey, connecting the two main ranges of the complex. The provisional dating of this phase of building may be associated with the alteration of the west precinct wall of the Abbey, activity discovered in the excavations to the rear of the Queen Anne House. This implies the building of a second red sandstone wall, which replaced an earlier wall with green sandstone in its foundation build. The bonding of the massive arch visible in the southern wall of the main range to the east gable implies that at least some of the south wall under the concrete cladding is also contemporary with this phase, although later plaster cladding inside makes precise delineation of the build of the south wall impossible at present.

Chronologically the next phase of building is represented by the truncated red sandstone wall running north on the west side of the building, abutting the north-west gable of the primary build. Presumably this wall was built after demolition or collapse of an earlier wall. It is unclear whether the lower row of arches is contemporary with this phase or represents a later insertion. The heavy regular buttressing of this wall implies that problems with the stability of the wall immediately adjacent to the waterfront were anticipated by the builders.

The third phase of rougher stonework seen in the north wall of the main range in particular, although possibly also present within the higher sections of the south wall, is probably the most complicated to unravel. However, it is argued that this phase represents a reuse of red sandstone, possibly derived from other demolished structures in the vicinity in order to bring the south range back into use after a long period of ruination. The dating of this phase of rebuilding is probably in the early-19th century, possibly between 1815/6 and 1820. The reused stonework may even be from the northern range, taken down in 1818. This phase may comprise one or more periods of rebuilding, but the final structure can be seen on the illustration made in the early-19th century by J Holmes Smith of a three-storeyed malthouse, and this may therefore be the original function of the building. The final phase comprises the brick build, primarily of one phase and probably dating to the restoration of the building after the fire of the early-20th century which burnt down the abbey mill.

The Later History of the Building

Documentary, cartographic and illustrative evidence is particularly useful in reconstructing the later phases of the history of the building. Illustrative information can, with certain reservations, give an idea of how the 'Old Infirmary' building has changed since the 18th century.

The earlist print by Bowen, shows a prospect of Shrewsbury drawn from the tower of the Abbey church some time pre-1723. Only the tops of the 'Old Infirmary' buildings are visible, but, nevertheless the second, northern, range and most of the open castellated west wall are represented. While both ranges are shown rooved and in reasonable condition, this may be an elaboration so as not to spoil the proud prospect of the town for Lord Newport. The ruins depicted by the Bucks in 1731 confer with several other 18th century drawings in showing the 'Old Infirmary' range which has survived today as being then roofless and in a ruinous condition.

It would appear that the original profile of the roof line of the gable ends was more pointed than that on the building today, and that the roof timbers may have rested on an inner jutting support as depicted for the northern range. It also seems likely that the western arched window of the main range may have contained two lights surmounted by an uncut tympanum, this being broadly consistent with a 13th-century Early English style for the early windows around the building. It is also possible that the continued domestic use of the northern range in the 18th century may have reflected some continuation in function between the pre- and post-Dissolution period, whereas, perhaps, the southern range was not as readily adaptable and therefore fell into disuse after the Dissolution.

The Buck print appears to contradict the other 18th century views of the west elevation of the 'Old Infirmary', for it clearly shows six possibly-blocked arches running along the arcaded section of the west wall into the fabric of the northern range. No arches are depicted cut into the northern range on the other drawings, although it is possible these are obscured by a raised ground level. The architectural evidence tends to support the latter views, for the castellated range appears to be of a different, later, build to the two main ranges, although this does not preclude the possibility that the arches were punched through the earlier fabric of both buildings. Excavation of a section of the arcaded wall in 1989 suggested the possibilty that the arches may be later insertions (Jones 1989,5).

The early-19th century view of the malthouse by J.Holmes Smith is particularly interesting, and a number of points concerning the building have already been made above, although of particular note are the staircase at the front of the building, a stair up which bags of barley and malt would have been carried, and the profile of another, since-demolished, buttress on the south-east corner of the building. The lower roof line depicted can still be seen as a scar inside the east and west gable walls.

Whilst the earliest cartographic representations include the Speed map of 1610 and the Rocque map of 1746 the first sufficiently detailed is a parish map of Holy Cross surveyed in the 1820s. The block plan of the building corresponds closely to the illustration of the malthouse from roughly the same period. By the mid-19th century, when the Tithe Map was surveyed and the first plans were drawn for the proposed railway, Telford's new road of 1836 had swept away the northern range of the complex together with most of the arcaded wall, although the block plan of the malthouse still appears to be the same. However, by 1869, possibly influenced by the growing economic importance of the area, several lean-to structures can be seen abutting the main structure. These correspond to the foundations exposed in Trench H to the back of the malthouse/'Old Infirmary'.

The beautiful 1st edition Ordnance Survey plan of 1:500 scale made in 1882, whilst showing the remarkable colonisation of the area by the Victorian railway companies, even picks out the profiles of the remaining buttresses hidden behind the lean-to structures abutting the west wall, in addition to the presumed plan of the Abbey precinct derived largely from Owen and Blakeway's hypothetical reconstruction of the 1820s.

6. Implications and Recommendations

Archaeology

The proposed development scheme for the 'Cadfael Centre' will have to make provision not to destroy the archaeological features and deposits recorded during the excavations and interpolated as existing across a wider area. Any scouring of the ground surface around the 'Old Infirmary' building, to enable the proposed garden to be established, should not excavate below the limits of the upper surface of the archaeology. As this occurs less than 0.4m beneath the present ground surface in some areas, it is recommended that any scouring be minimal, confined to removal of the present clinker surface and that even this work be done under archaeological supervision. Inside the 'Infirmary' archaeological features are first found at a height of 51.06m A.O.D. The red sandstone walls uncovered during the evaluation have been subsequently protected with a layer of terram, and it is recommended that should further walling be uncovered across the site, then an operation of recording and protection should be carried out. The area to the south of the 'Old Infirmary', between the building and the Queen Anne House, is perhaps most sensitive. It is recommended that close examination be made of the excavation plans and sections in order to avoid disturbance to the vulnerable archaeology here which begins just under the present ground surface. If work in this area is unavoidable then provision must be made for the adoption of a design-option to minimise disturbance or to mitigate this disturbance. As the site is Scheduled, the preferable option would be to retain all archaeological deposits in situ.

Building

The building survey forms one component of an on-going scheme for the conservation and management of the 'Old Infirmary' building,

and therefore no recommendations for further work are submitted at this stage, although further stripping of plaster etc within the building will require a recording input, as will any final programme of consolidation work.

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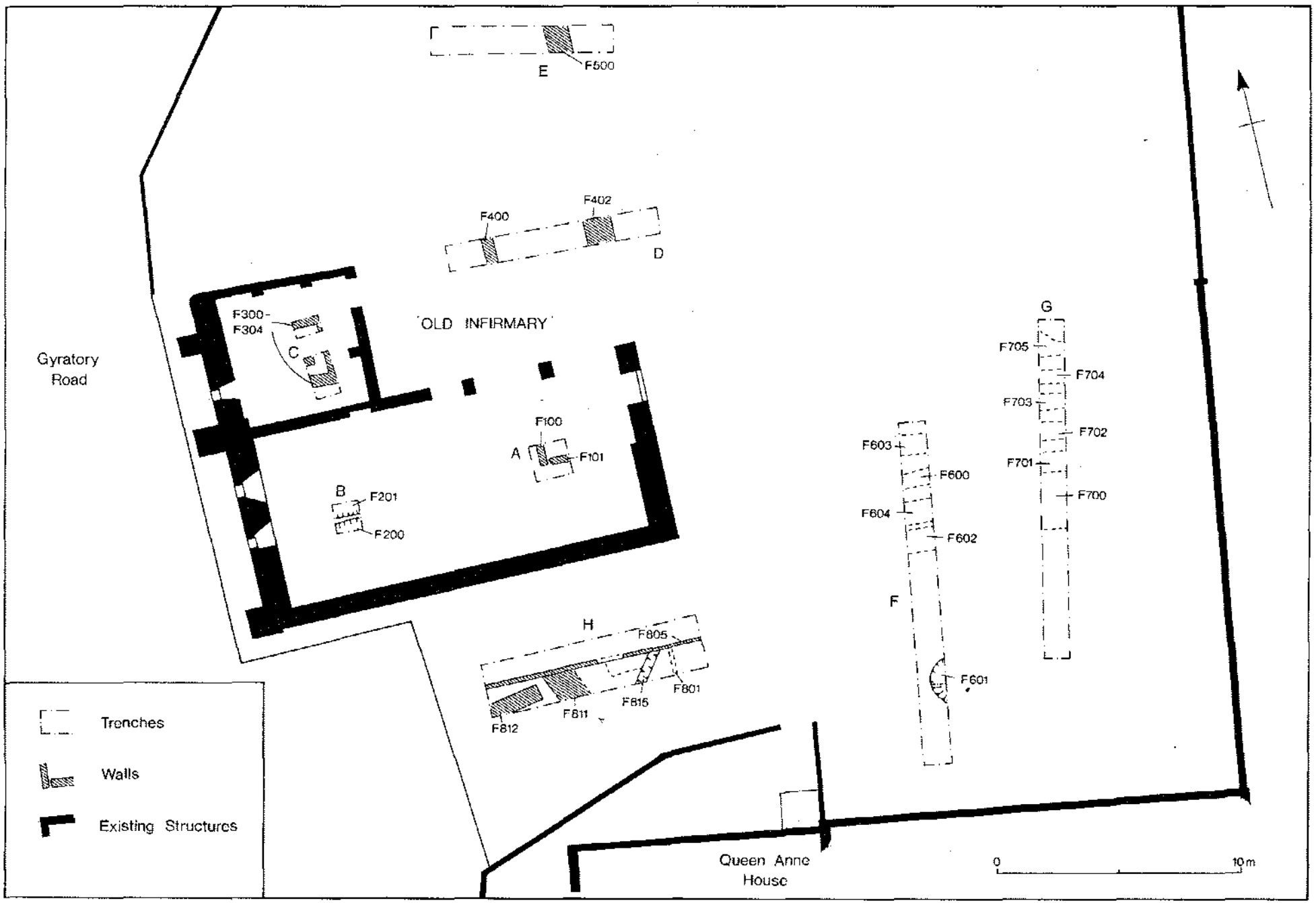

E
F500
F400
F402
D
F300-
F304
C
'OLD INFIRMARY'
Gyratory
Road
F100
A
F101
B
F201
F200
H
F805
F801
F815
F811
F812
G
F705
F704
F703
F702
F701
F700
F603
F600
F604
F602
F
F601
Queen Anne
House
0
10m
Trenches
Walls
Existing Structures

Figure 2

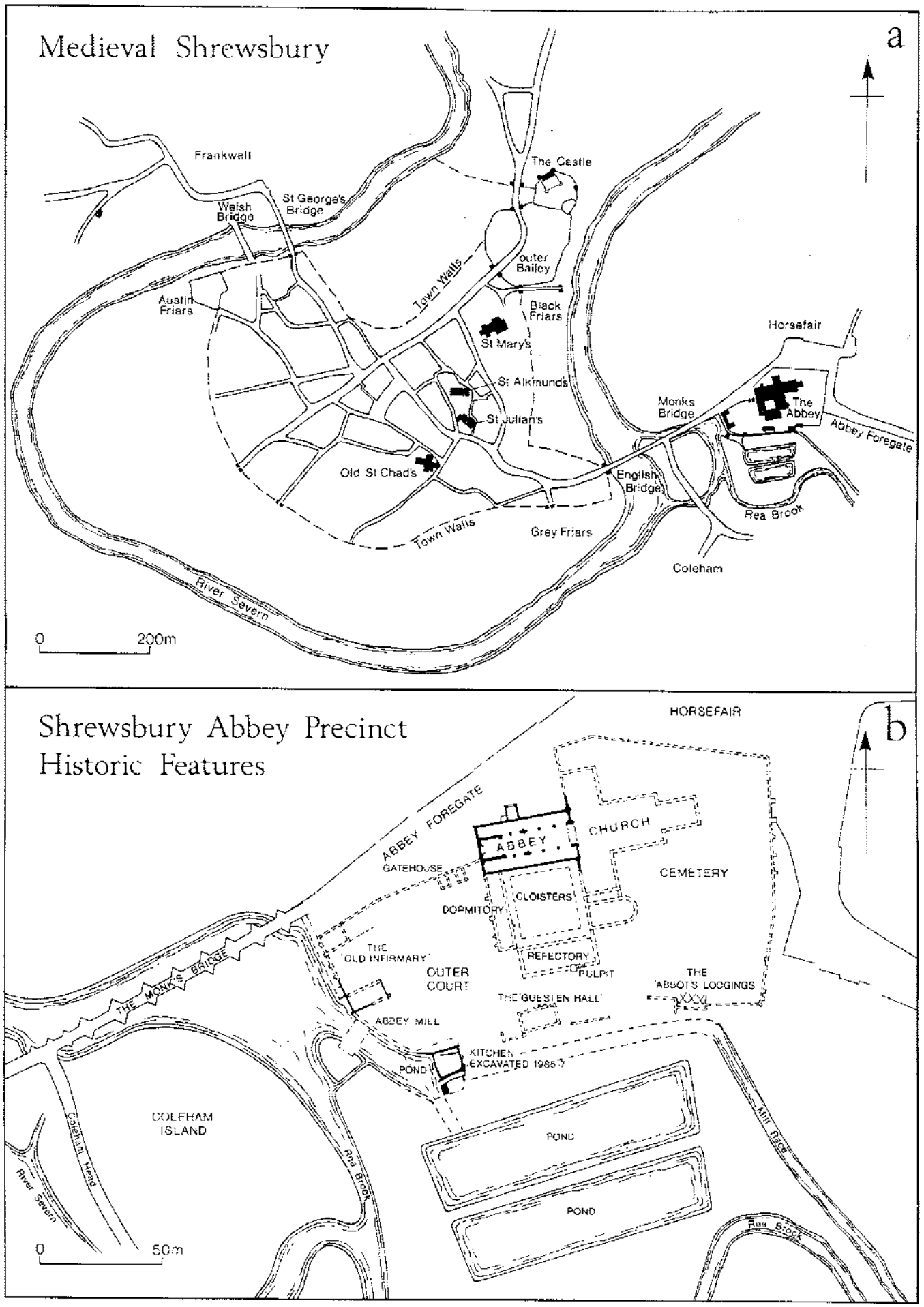
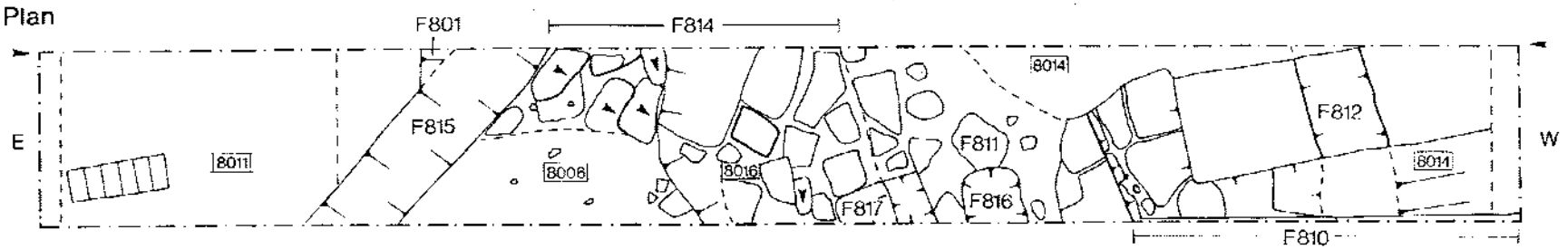

Medieval Shrewsbury
a
Frankwall
Welsh Bridge
St George's Bridge
The Castle
Outer Bailey
Town Walls
Austin Friars
Black Friars
St Mary's
St Alkmunds
St Julian's
Old St Chad's
Horsefair
Monks Bridge
The Abbey
Abbey Foregate
English Bridge
Rea Brook
Grey Friars
Town Walls
Coleham
River Severn
0
200m
Shrewsbury Abbey Precinct
Historic Features
b
HORSEFAIR
ABBEY FOREGATE
CHURCH
ABBEY
GATEHOUSE
CEMETERY
CLOISTERS
DORMITORY
REFECTORY
PULPIT
THE 'OLD INFIRMARY'
OUTER COURT
THE 'GUESTEN HALL'
THE 'ABBOT'S LODGINGS'
THE MONK'S BRIDGE
ABBEY MILL
KITCHEN EXCAVATED 1986-7
POND
COLEHAM ISLAND
Coleham Head
River Severn
Rea Brook
POND
POND
Mill Race
Rea Brook
0
50m

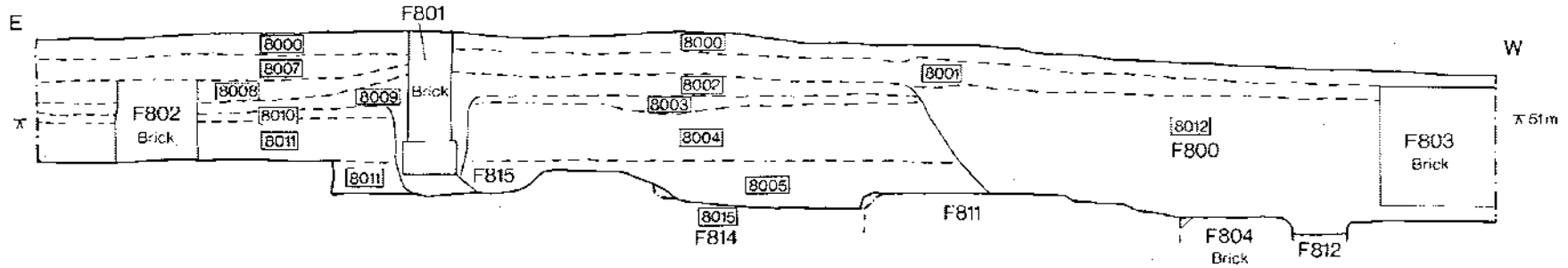
Figure 1

TRENCH H

Plan



North Facing Section



TRENCH D

North Facing Section

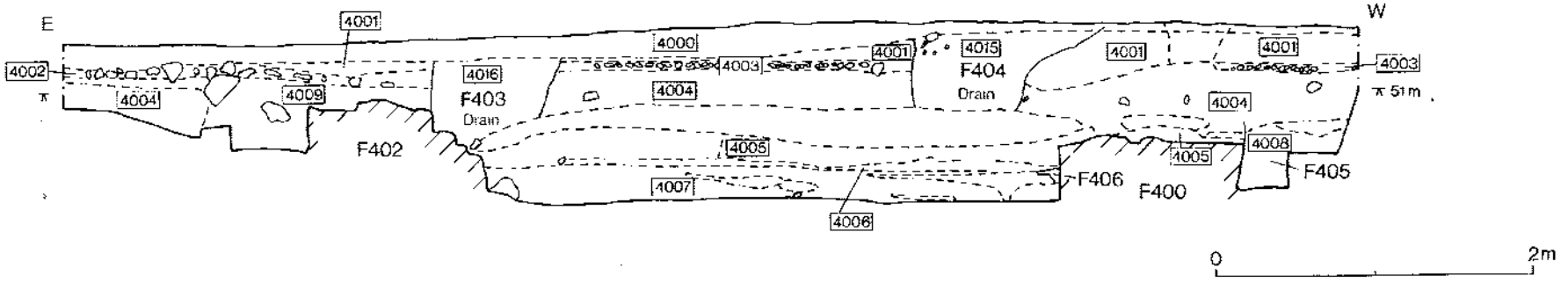


Figure 3