

ART. IX. – *Farmery Field, Cartmel*  
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THE excavation of a 29.6m length of pipe trench across the southern side of “Farmery Field”, Cartmel (Figure 1a), by British Gas Northern in 1983, disturbed burials within the area of the former lay cemetery of the Augustinian Priory.

### Background

Burials were discovered immediately to the north of Priest Lane and east of Farmery Field when water mains were inserted after the Second World War. Dickinson<sup>1</sup> has suggested that they formed part of “the lay cemetery which was on this (the north-western) side of the church until the cloisters were removed” in the mid-fifteenth century.

### Description of the trench

The site lies to the north-west of the Priory Church, on the north side of Priest Lane in Cartmel village (Figure 1b). Initial examination of the trench was by T. Clare, for Cumbria County Council and subsequent work was undertaken by the Central Excavation Unit, for the Department of the Environment (now English Heritage). The sections revealed in the sides of the trench were examined with the north facing side being drawn and the locations of features recorded on plan. There was little opportunity to cut back the edges of the trench and in no case was a grave fully defined.

A total of seven, or perhaps eight, certain or probable graves were cut by the machine excavated trench (Figures 1c and 2). All of the burials were orientated in the normal Christian manner, that is with the head to the west and feet to the east. Three of the graves (7, 11 and 14) were cut directly into the natural subsoil, and it is possible that grave 27 may also have been, however, it was severely truncated by feature 17 and it was not possible to be certain on this point. All of the other graves that could be defined with certainty were cut into layers above natural, notably layer 20 (Figure 2). Given the circumstances of the recording there is little that can be said about the individual graves, although grave 7 contained a layer of stone slabs that served to define the top of the surviving part of the grave (Figure 2). The only finds to be recovered from the trench were two undiagnostic body sherds of a medieval coarse ware, one of which derived from grave 11.

In addition to the graves the trench cut through at least three, and perhaps six, other features. At the western end of the trench there was a substantial, vertical sided linear feature that crossed the trench at an oblique angle on a north north-west to south south-east line, feature 23. This feature, which was 2.70m wide and 0.36m deep, contained some fragments of flat stone slabs, bigger than those recorded in grave 7 and similar to some seen amongst the spoil on the trench edge close to grave 11. It is possible that feature 23 represented a robbing trench; and as it was only sealed by topsoil it is possible that it may have a relatively recent origin. A second linear feature was recorded crossing the trench on a north-west to south-east line, this feature (17), which was not bottomed in the area of the trench, had sloping sides and was 0.70-0.80m wide. On its eastern side

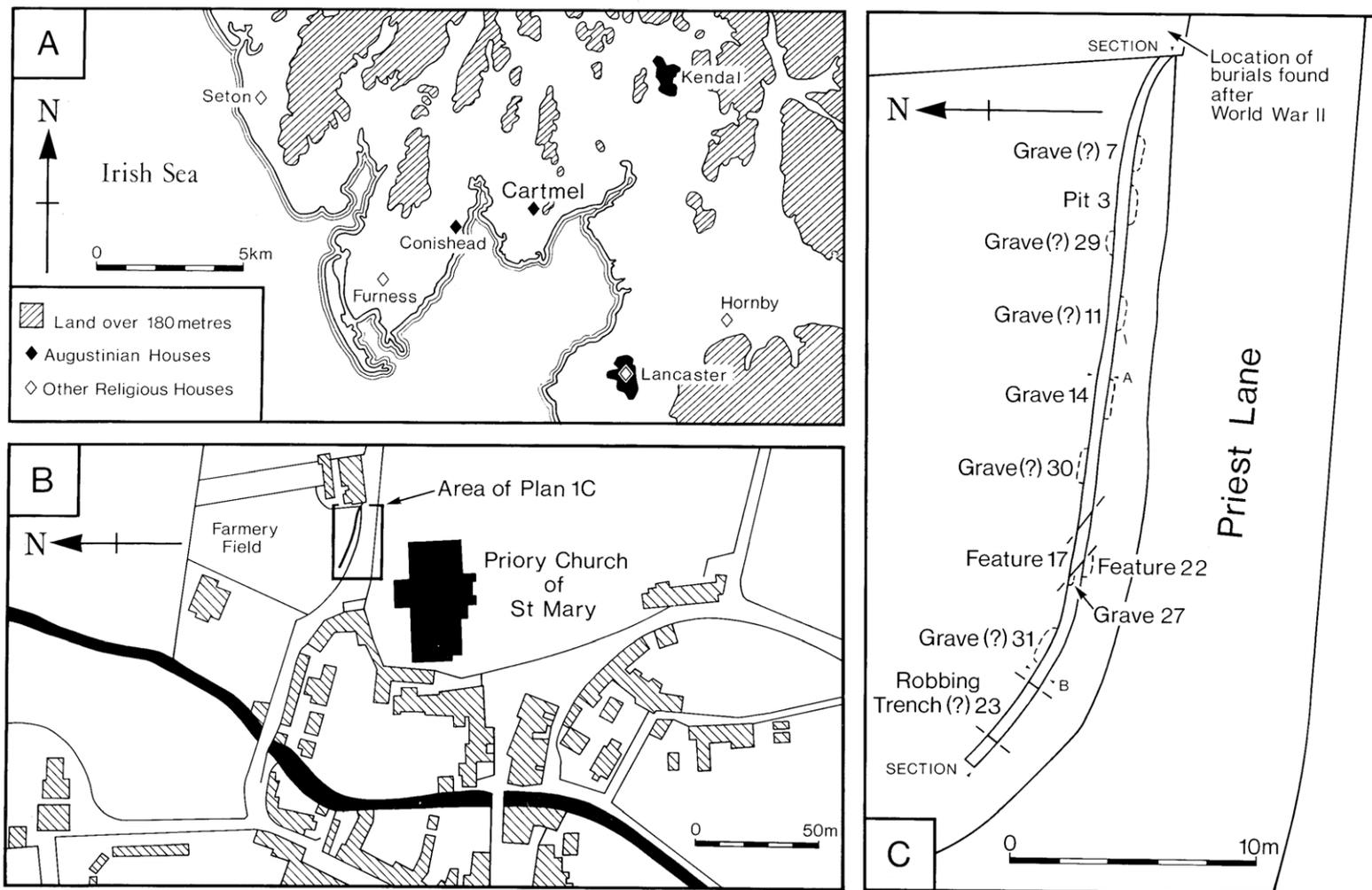


FIG. 1. – A. Location of Cartmel in relation to other Religious Houses in the area.  
 B. The location of the site.  
 C. Plan showing location of recorded features.

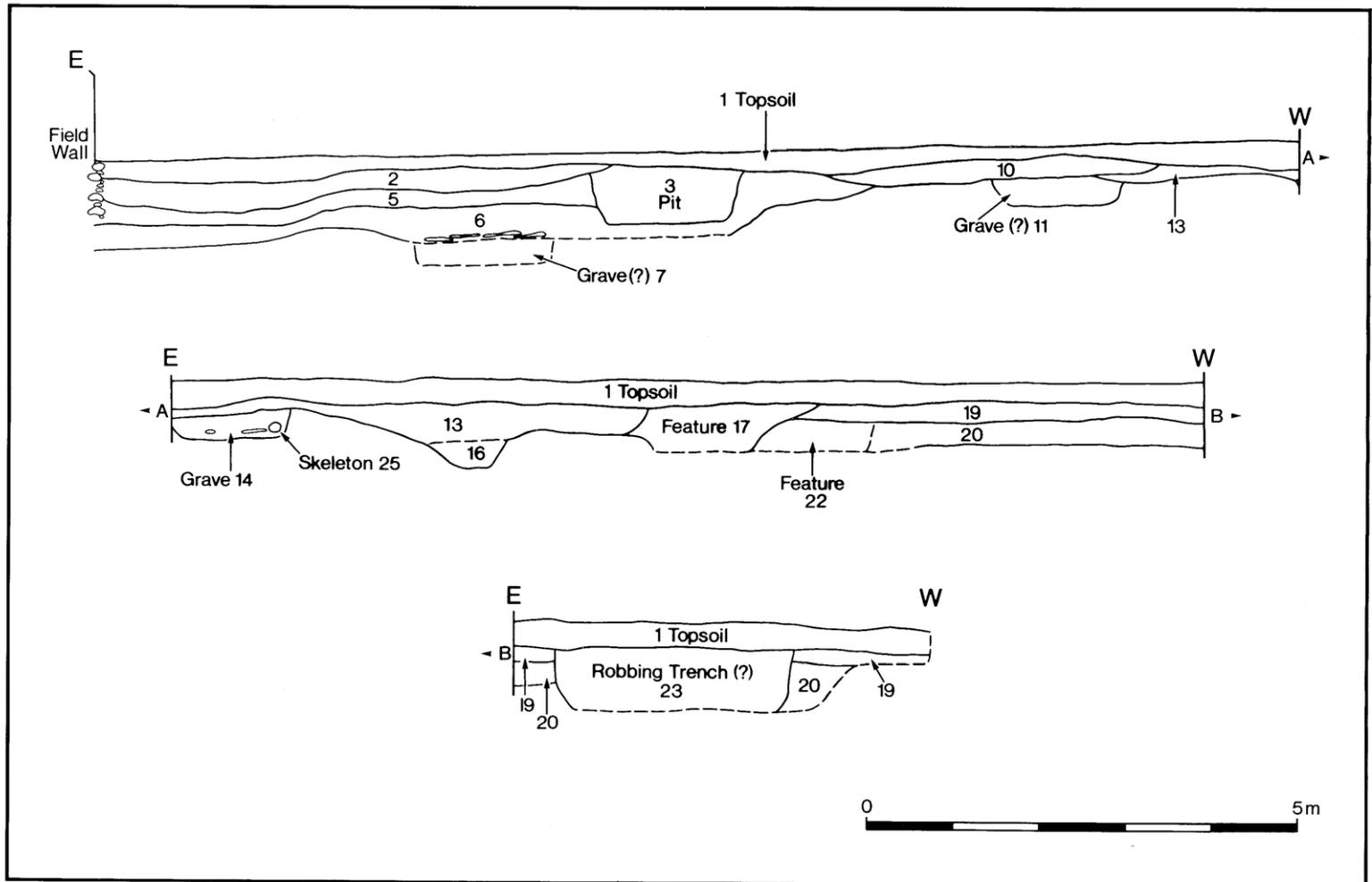


FIG. 2. - The north facing section (A and B refer to locations on FIG. 1. C)

it was cut away by what appeared to be a broad depression filled with layer 13, which overlay a small pit filled with very similar material, layer 16. Neither of these features appeared in the opposite section. A third possible pit, feature 22, was cut away by the western edge of feature 17. What survived of feature 22 suggested that it had vertical edges and penetrated beneath the bottom of the pipe trench. It is possible that it could represent an eighth grave, although it did not produce anything that would substantiate such an interpretation. A more clearly defined pit, 1.80m wide and 0.70m deep, was recorded near the eastern end of the trench, feature 3. This vertical sided, flat-bottomed feature was sealed by topsoil, except on its eastern side where it was overlain by the end of layer 2, a layer apparently associated with the construction of the drystone wall that defined the eastern edge of the field.

## Discussion

### *The cemetery*

It would seem certain that the burials found in the pipe trench formed part of the lay cemetery referred to by Dickinson, although the burials which he describes as being found "in Farmery Field"<sup>2</sup> appear to have come from an area immediately east of the present field boundary.

Despite some of the graves being cut directly into the natural subsoil and some into layer 20, it is not possible, on the evidence of the excavated trench, to demonstrate two phases of burial in the area, as, where graves were cut directly into the subsoil, layer 20 was absent.

Dickinson's suggestion that the lay cemetery went out of use when the cloister was moved to the northern side of the church<sup>3</sup> must be correct for those areas directly affected by the construction of the new cloister, including perhaps the western part of the trench described above. However, it is conceivable that the eastern part of the cemetery area remained available and in use beyond the mid-fifteenth century, unless Dickinson is correct and from that date all lay burials were concentrated in the new "public" cemetery to the south of the church, on the site of the demolished cloister.

### The other features

Despite the appearance of feature 23 it would seem improbable that it represents a robbing trench for the removal of part of the re-built cloister, as its alignment does not correspond with the alignment of the main group of cloistral buildings. As feature 23 was only sealed by topsoil it is possible that it may represent recent activity and be totally unconnected with the Priory, as might the other features that were only sealed by topsoil.

## Acknowledgement

The drawings accompanying this paper were undertaken by J. Vallender.

## References

<sup>1</sup> J. C. Dickinson, *The Land of Cartmel: A History* (Kendal, 1980), 21.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 20.