GLASTONBURY ABBEY
GARDENERS' COMPOUND DRAIN

SUMMARY
A foul water drainage pipe was installed in the Gardeners' Compound, where a watching brief on the removal of topsoil and spreading of gravel in 2008 uncovered large quantities of archaeological finds including over 3,000 fragments of medieval encaustic decorated floor tiles and pottery from the Iron Age to the medieval period. The excavation of the drain trench revealed the probable medieval horizon below 1.3m of thick dump deposits of the late 19th and 20th centuries. This recent dump has been interpreted as spoil from groundworks within the modern Abbey precinct deposited within a depression in the orchard. A theory is presented that this depression represents the southern extent of the enclosure defined by the large ditch identified by C.A. Ralegh-Radford as the '*vallum monasterii*'. The drain will continue through property in private ownership at a later date.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Glastonbury Abbey sought permission from English Heritage to excavate a trench extending from the Gardeners' Compound on the western boundary of its precinct to mains drainage in Magdalene Street. The trench would pass from the rear of the compound maintenance building to the boundary wall at the western side of the abbey site (a distance of 10m), then descend below the wall, rising to the west side of the wall, then extend a further *c.* 12m to connect with mains sewerage to the rear of 3A Magdalene Street. (Allan 2012)

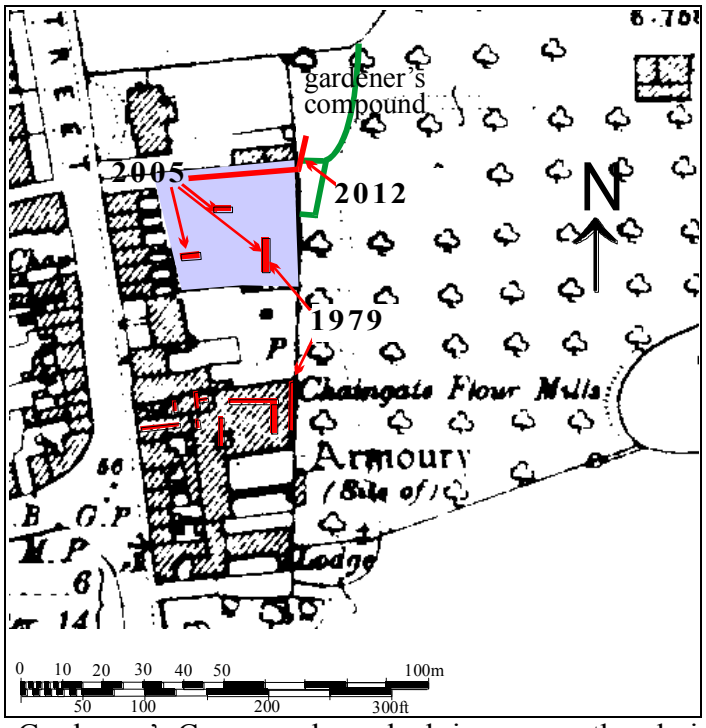


Figure 1. The Gardeners' Compound marked in green, the drain and previous evaluation trenches mentioned in the text marked in red. Orchard Court is coloured mauve. The base map is the 1904 O.S. map.

1.2 The archaeological background to this work has been reviewed by John Allan, the archaeological advisor to the Trustees. The design of the works has been provided by Alan and Ann Thomas, architects. C. & N. Hollinrake Ltd., consultant archaeologists, provided a method statement describing the procedures they would employ in the excavation of the trench.

1.3 The course of the drain passes through two different properties: as well as the modern Abbey precinct, it passes through a private property known as Orchard Court, currently undergoing development as a small housing estate. This plot formerly lay within the medieval Abbey precinct and, therefore, forms part of the Scheduled Monument of Glastonbury Abbey. The entire length of the proposed trench, both within and outside the lands of the Trustees, falls within the Scheduled Monument of Glastonbury Abbey (No. 196705). The method statement, therefore, applies equally to both parts of the drainage trench.

1.4 English Heritage granted Scheduled Monument Consent on the basis of the method statement agreed with C. & N. Hollinrake. The excavation of the drain trench was undertaken by Arthur Hollinrake and Nici Brooks of C & N Hollinrake Ltd. between 3rd and 14th December 2012.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 *previous archaeological recording in the area (*Allan 2012*)*
The following standing remains and archaeological recording exercises provide information about the survival of archaeological evidence in this area:

1. The proposed trench lies 50m south of the standing 14C Abbot's Kitchen. This magnificent structure was evidently the central component of a group of 14C (?and later) kitchen buildings serving a newly built Abbot's Hall. Clear structural evidence of at least one further large 14C building to the south (i.e. closer to the proposed trench) is embedded in the kitchen.
2. In the dry summer of 1989 parchmarks were recorded by N. and C. Hollinrake in many parts of the precinct. One was found 35m north of the proposed trench and 15m south of the Abbot's Kitchen; it was interpreted as indicating a building at about 45 degrees to the alignment of the kitchen (Hollinrake & Hollinrake 2002, Plan 6, structure Q). Parchmarks of two further substantial buildings of unknown date were recorded 30–5m to the east (*ibid*., plan 7, T8–9). A spread low bank running east-west was also recorded in this area in 1989 (*ibid*., plan 7, T5). The most westerly point where it forms an upstanding feature is about 44m to the east of the proposed pipe trench but if projected this would run below the pipe trench. (Figure 2)
3. In 2000 N. and C. Hollinrake undertook a watching brief when an electricity cable trench 0.5m deep was excavated to the south, west and north of the Abbot's Kitchen. For present purposes the most relevant observations were those made in features immediately to the south; they included portions of the footings of medieval building(s) on this site (Hollinrake and Hollinrake 2000, Fig. 15). The features closest to the proposed pipe trench were believed to be spreads of robbed walls (*ibid*., Plan 1, 333, 334).
4. In 2008 N. and C. Hollinrake undertook a further watching brief when the grass of the Gardeners' Compound was replaced with a hardstand surface. Although only 20th-century deposits were encountered, the results were of

great importance, since the site had been used as the place where previous excavators had disposed of unwanted finds. The large collection of medieval objects recovered included about 1500 fragments of medieval floor-tiles, important fragments of elaborately carved Romanesque cloister shafts in blue lias, and – most important – an assemblage of Middle Iron Age pottery, extending the site's chronology back into the prehistoric period.

5. Outside the precinct, Peter Ellis undertook small-scale excavation and a watching brief in 1979–80 at Chaingate Mill (Figure 1), mainly 20-25m to the south of the proposed sewerage trench to Magdalene Street (Ellis 1982, 33–7). Ellis also observed an outlying contractor's trench at 3A Magdalene Street, to the north of the main site and much closer to the proposed new work (Ellis Trench IV) – only *c.*8m away from our proposed new trench at the closest point. Here he noted 'late medieval waterlogged deposits to a depth of 1.2m' (*ibid*., 37); they lay to the north of features which probably represent an infilled medieval pond.

Figure 2. Extract from the parchmark survey. Hachures arranged at the top of the plan show the low spread bank mentioned in the text. (**2.1.2** above)

2.2 C & N Hollinrake research (Hollinrake 2008a)

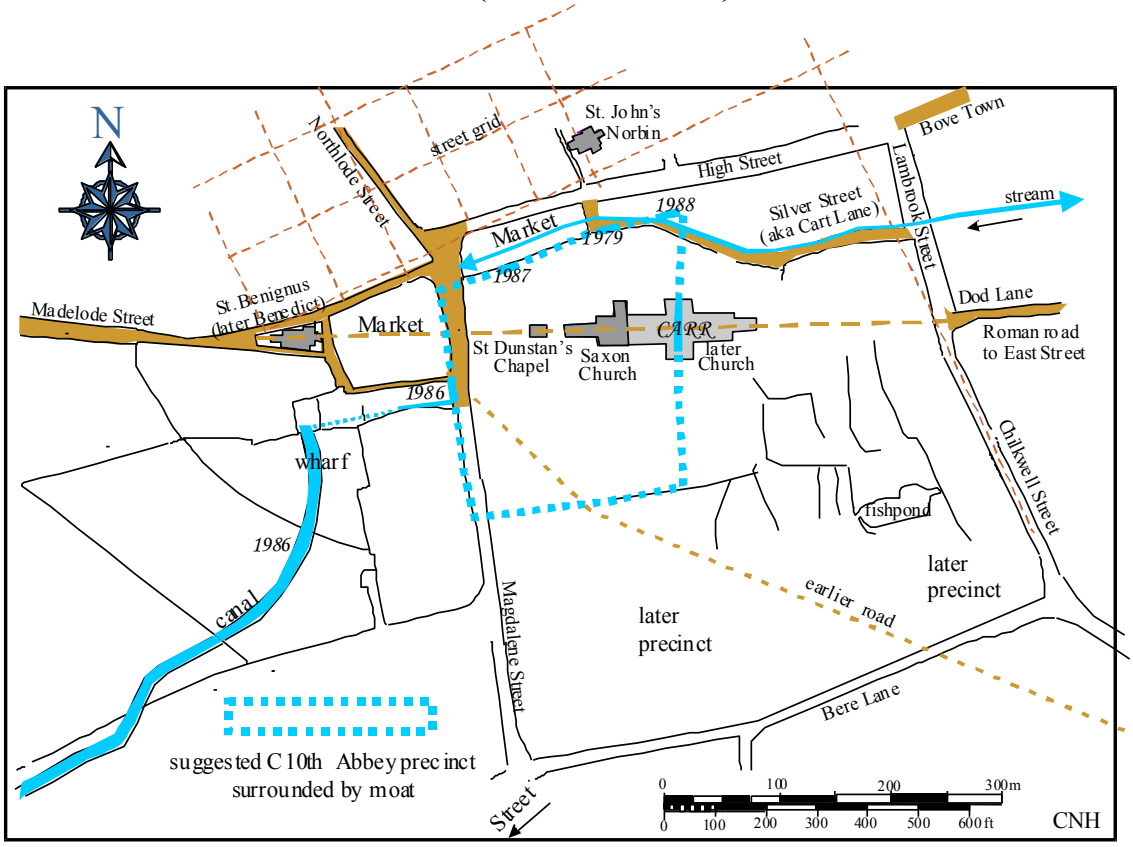


Figure 3. Map of Glastonbury town showing the location of large ditches indicated by date of discovery. Roads not in use in the tenth century are blank. The suggested earlier road was revealed during the parchmark survey (Hollinrake in Rahtz 2003).

Vallum monasterii (Figures 3 & 5, CARR)
Outside of the churches, Dunstan "enclosed the monastic bounds of the cloisters, together with the buildings and other offices" (Vita Dunstani B, 7). He also enclosed the cemetery south of the church with a high wall, having raised the graveyard (Malmesbury VD, 271-72). When Radford encountered a large ditch running north-south through the transept of the medieval abbey church, he identified it as the monastic enclosure boundary for the early churches (Radford 1981). Since that time, various other ditches have been recorded in the vicinity of the precinct and various proposals for the course of the boundary ditch have been proposed (Rahtz 2003, 94, Fig. 64).

1979: Silver Street (Ellis 1982) (Figures 3, 4 & 5)
The Committee for Rescue Archaeology in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset (CRAAGS) excavated a thin strip to the south of Silver Street in 1979 in advance of road widening. The earliest phase constituted a ditch (F223) and bank, interpreted as an extension of the feature recorded by Ralegh Radford (Ellis 1982, 24; Radford 1981, 113-4). Stakes recovered from a clay fill, probably representing a bank which had been pushed into the open ditch, produced radiocarbon determinations of 670AD +100/-30 and 610AD +50/-70 and these dates were used to date the ditch itself (Ellis 1982,17). Figure 5 suggests, however, that this ditch under Silver Street was too small to be the same feature, and it required some ingenious reasoning and some

special pleading to explain why it was not on the same line as Radford's ditch (Figure 4).

Another feature (F222) (Figure 5) was so large that the base and sides were not seen. Branches of wood near the base produced radiocarbon determinations of 590 AD +60/-160. Both ditches have been reproduced in Figure 5, where the sections of these ditches, reduced to the same scale, have been assembled for comparative purposes. The only published sections of Radford's ditch were presented without north point or scale; the size has been estimated from descriptions in the text.

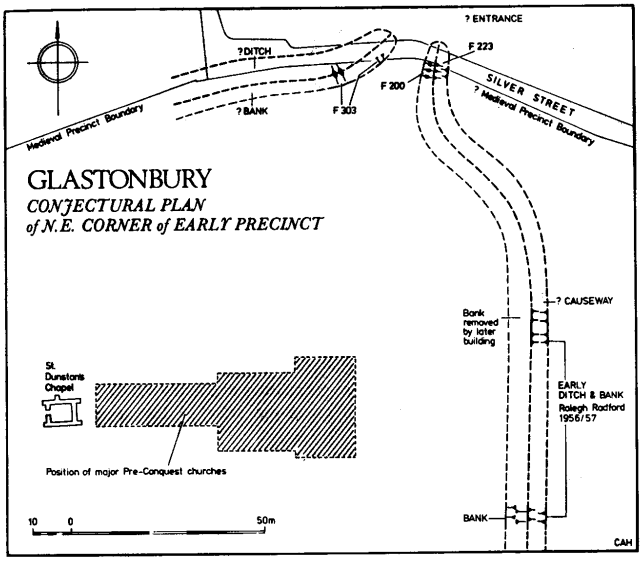


Figure 4. Suggested plan of relationship of ditches discovered by Radford (1981) and Ellis (1982).

1986: Saxon Canal and Moat (Hollinrake, 1992) (Figures 3 & 5)
In 1986, limited rescue excavations in advance of a Safeway supermarket development on the Old Fairfield at Glastonbury investigated an artificial watercourse which ran from a point adjacent to the River Brue to the possible Saxon market place by Glastonbury Abbey, a distance of approximately 1.75 kilometres (Figure 3). The feature was interpreted as a closed end canal by the Inland Waterways Board, who pointed to the flat base and sloping sides, battered to 45 degrees, as diagnostic features.

The canal commenced at the southern tip of Glastonbury at Northover in the vicinity of a modern tanning factory which has masked its south end. From Northover, the canal runs along the northern edge of Wearyall Hill following the 10 metre contour. This part of the canal was filled in during the earlier part of the 20th century but is still visible over a length of about 500 metres north of the factory as a slight depression at the base of hill, most of which has been backfilled by modern rubble within the last 15 years. Although the canal follows the 10metre contour, it also follows the edge of the hard clay of the hill; beyond this clay lie the soft alluvial silts and peat deposits of Wirral Park.

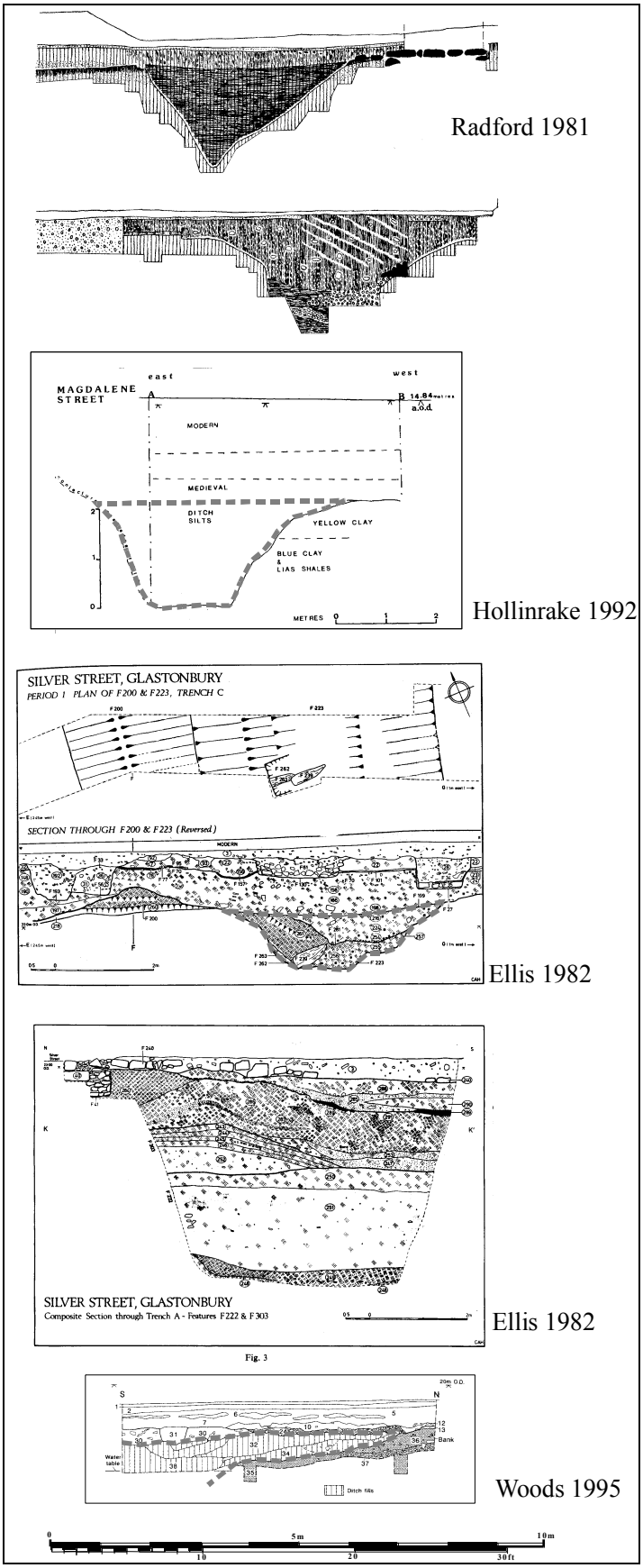


Figure 5.

Comparative sections of ditches in the precinct of Glastonbury Abbey at the same scale (Radford's ditches are approximate.)

Near to the northern terminus of the canal, the watercourse had been cut through soft, silty clays and the sides were revetted by numerous sharpened oak stakes. A radiocarbon14 determination from one of these provided a secure pre-conquest date (HAR-9207, 690-1030AD at 2sigma and 830-990AD at 1sigma). The remains of more wooden stakes and timbers rammed into the base at this location indicated the probable location of wharves or landing stages. Twelfth to fourteenth-century pottery sherds in the upper silts of the feature, above lower fills containing no pottery, also suggested that the canal was constructed in the pre-conquest period.

The development of a property fronting on Magdalene Street allowed for a watching brief to monitor the location of the Abbey precinct boundary. When the expected ditch was observed, it turned out to be half under the road, making it impossible to draw a full profile (Figure 5). A twig of dogwood recovered from the base of the ditch was sampled at either end to provide two radiocarbon determination of 970-1230 AD and 780-1040AD at two sigma. The south boundary of the property was defined by a silted-up ditch connecting the precinct boundary with the canal, already dated to the nineth century.

1987: The Abbey Almshouses (Woods 1995) (Figures 3 & 5)
In 1987 yet another large silted-up ditch was observed below the remains of Abbot Bere's almshouses in the Abbey (Figure 12,14). The trench was not large enough to excavate a profile through the ditch, but the silty organic-rich fill was similar to that seen in Magdalene Street and the upper silts were filled with pottery dated to the tenth to twelfth-century. Attempts to find the base of this feature with an auger were abandoned after boring to a depth of 2metres still brought up black mud (Woods 1995, 16-17).

1988: Otton's (Leach 1988) (Figure 3)
The last large ditch section was seen in 1988 during excavations by Peter Leach for Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in a property between Silver Street and the High Street. A stone wall set into the northern edge of the ditch aligned with the medieval Abbey wall and the ditch itself, although too large to profile within the trenches, carried the dark organic silts with twelfth-century pottery on the surface familiar from other ditch segments (Leach 1988, 230-31).

Discussion
There are many problems with accepting these various features as part of the same ditch system. Only Radford was able to produce full profiles, so comparisons are limited at best, and neither ditch feature recorded by Ellis seems to match it for size. The radiocarbon dates do not match. The ditches are alike, however, in being filled with very soft, moisture retentive, dark organic silts lacking in artefacts apart from the upper silts, which contain pottery dating from the tenth to the twelfth centuries. The silts appear to have formed in stagnant water.

When joined together they form three sides of a plausible rectangle, the southern line of which follows a bank in the abbey precinct (Figure 2). Such an arrangement would form part of a working system which would use the water from a good spring in Bushy Coombe to fill a moat (Figure 3). The branch of dogwood providing the radiocarbon date from Magdalene Street probably grew in Bushy Coombe. The run-off from the moat could have been used to fill the canal before finally issuing from the

closed end above the River Brue to provide the lubrication for the slippery slope used to haul barges from the river into the canal and *vice-versa*. The canal and the Magdalene Street ditch both provided dates consistent with Dunstan's command of the abbey. Finally, if these are not part of the same complex of features, we are constrained to postulate the town criss-crossed by a series of very large ditches with little or no clear functions. Ockam's Razor suggests that it is more likely that they are all part of the same feature.

The recent survey of the abbey precinct did not indicate earthworks, but the contours on the map show a large linear depression passing east-west through the orchard, immediately south of the bank recorded during the parchmark survey (Figure 6). This depression falls towards the west. While the existing evidence does not constitute proof of what might be called the 'moat theory', outlined above, it is at least consistent with that theory. It is within this context that data collected from this part of the Abbey precinct should be viewed.

Figure 6. Topographic survey of Glastonbury Abbey precinct.

2.3 Evaluation in Orchard Court

In 2005 an evaluation was undertaken in Orchard Court (Robinson 2005). Figure 1 maps the evaluation trenches excavated by Ellis in 1979 and by Robinson in 2005. Two of the 2005 trenches were in the same confined space as one of the 1979 trenches. Both excavators identified deep deposits of waterborne silts in the vicinity of the linear depression (Figure 6).

3.0 Excavation of the drain: results (Context List and Finds List in Appendix)

3.1 topography and stratigraphy

The excavation followed the specifications laid down by Ann and Alan Thomas, architects. The entire trench was recorded as Trench 1 using a single context recording system, with context numbers from **(101)** to **(127)**.
There were two components to Trench 1:

- the pipe trench – for a gravity-feed foul water pipe, with the base of the pipe trench was graded down at 1:60 from north to south and measured 0.60m wide x c.8.80m long N-S and bottomed at from 0.47m deep (north end) up to 0.66m (in the centre);
- and a rodding pit at the south end of Trench1 for a down-pipe which will be passed through the base of the western boundary wall to connect with services in Orchard Court; the pit is often simplified as 'the south end of Trench 1'. This measured c.1.00m E-W x 1.00m to 1.50m N-S and 1.40m deep.

The trench was aligned c.NNE-SSW.

'The Gardeners Compound' has been used to refer to the plot which the gardeners hut is located – the northern half of the site and 'The Allotment' is used to refer to the plot on the southern half of the site. There is a hedge and a fence partitioning 'The Compound' from 'The Allotment'.

A watching brief was conducted in the Gardeners Compound in 2008 (GAG08, Hollinrake 2008b) while the area was graded down by c.0.15m. Iron Age (Morris 2008), Romano-British, Saxon, medieval pottery and medieval ceramic tiles recovered from the spoil heaps. A small sondage was excavated & recorded in the north-eastern quarter of the plot. The area of this watching brief is now covered in scalpings. Context GAG12(**102**) is the context truncated by the GAG08 work and also the context from which the finds appear to have originated.

The undisturbed natural geology has not been recorded in this part of the Abbey precinct, neither in the sondage of 2008 nor in this present exercise.

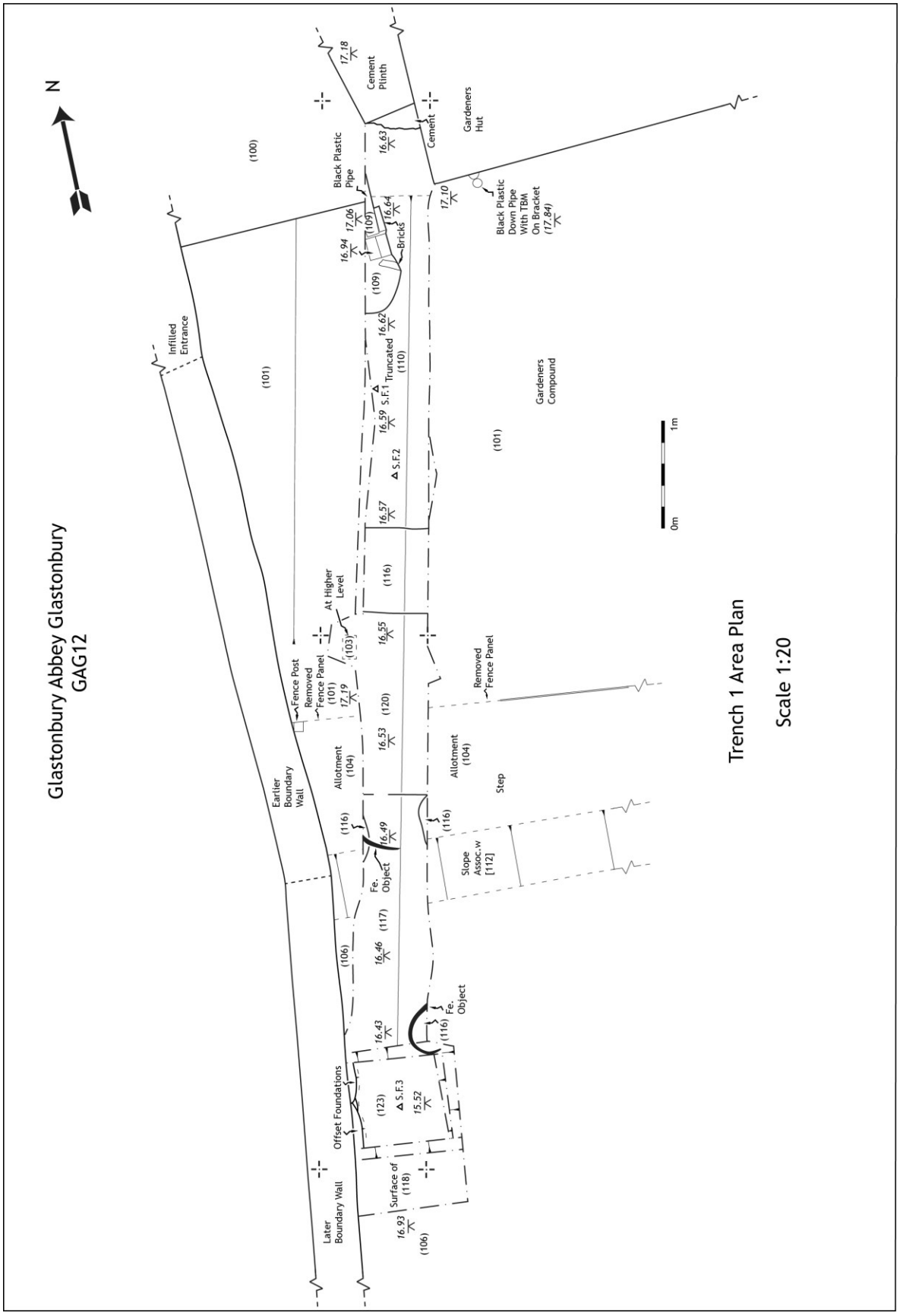
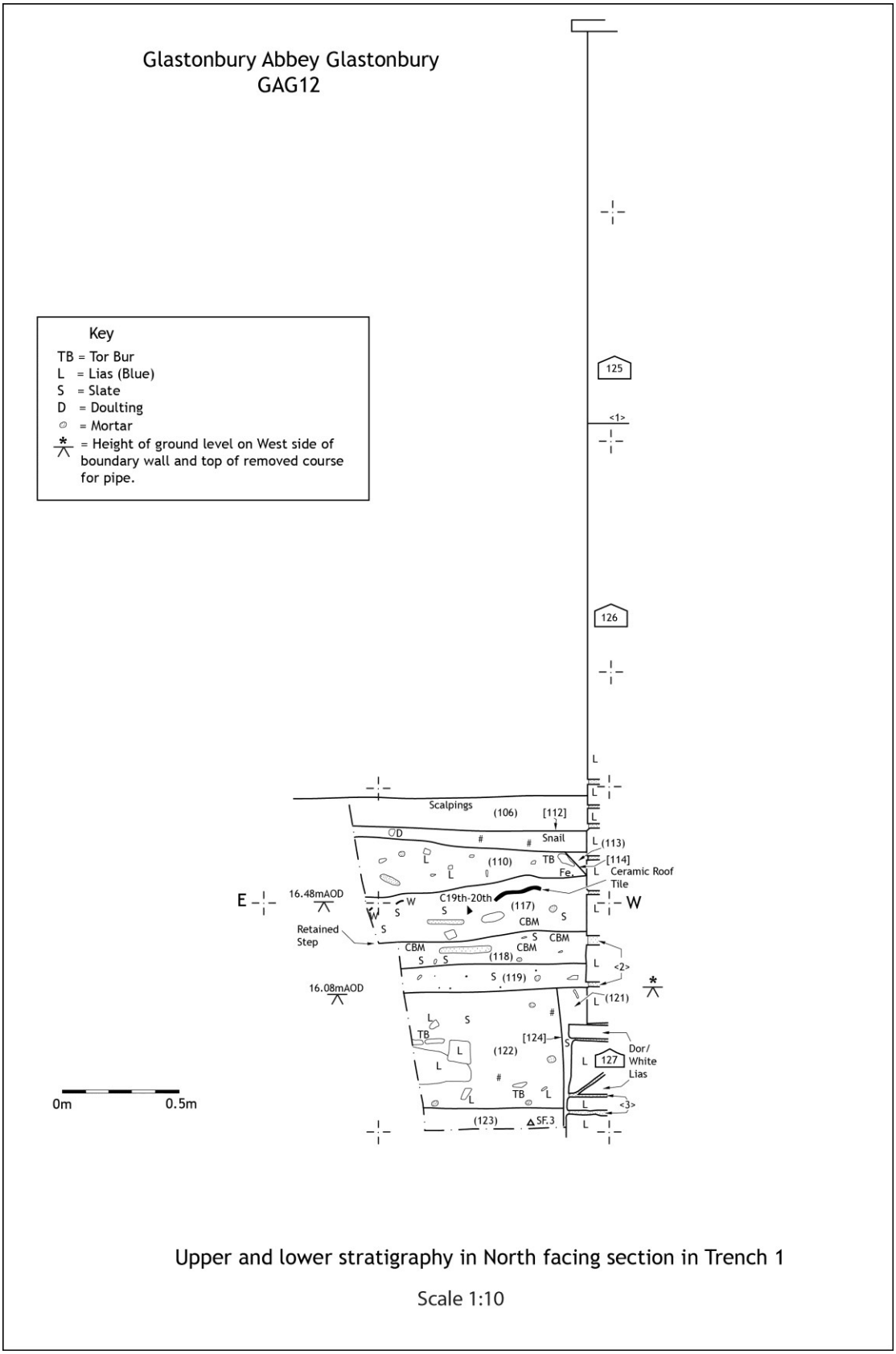


Figure 7. Plan of excavation.



Upper and lower stratigraphy in North facing section in Trench 1

Scale 1:10

Figure 8. Section of rodding pit including full height of the boundary wall.

3.2 Earliest contexts

Context No.	Type	Description	Interpretation	Suggested Date
123	deposit	Soft, friable, crumbly mixed brown green-blue humic, silty clay with occasional small mortar fragments, white grits and charcoal lumps. 1 x bone, 1 xmedieval pottery rim sherd (SF-3). 0.10m Continued beyond N & S-facing sections of pit. Below 122. Cut by 124. .	?Cultivated soil/ ?cess; more friable, greener in colour & fewer inclusions than 122.	Medieval

context	{__ qty	____pottery_____ fabric & weight	_____} surface	date	{__ qty	building materials} description	misc.
123	1	rim; reduced, quartz & grit temper, 11g SF3	oxidized surfaces	C12-14	1	Lias stone, 5g, disc.	1xanimal bone frag., 7g
					8	mortar frags. 18g	

Since the overlying context, (**122**) contained blue transfer ware, the upper surface of (**123**) probably represents the medieval horizon. Lying at c15.50m O.D. (see Figure 8), it is significantly lower than the medieval horizon recorded in the 2008 sondage, which was encountered at c16.20m O.D., some 36m to the north.

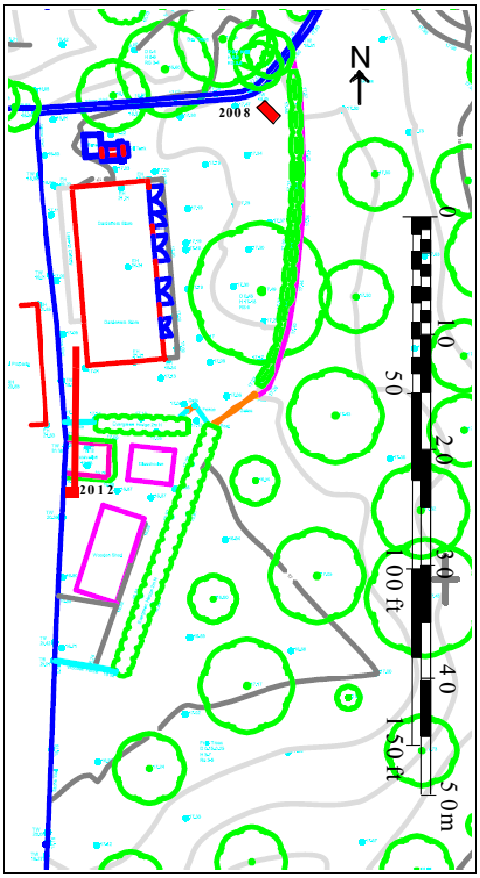


Figure 9. 2012 excavation trench and 2008 sondage marked in red onto the Downland survey.

3.3 the boundary wall

Context No.	Type	Description	Interpretation	Suggested Date
125	masonry	unfinished rough blocks Blue Lias (80-90%), (av. 90mm x 300mm, up to 160mm x 350mm); occasional re-used Doulting faced blocks (up to 220mm x 390mm.); & 5 x red brick. (av. 60mm x 160mm)... Bonded with hard, off-white, ashy lime mortar with coal inclusions, occasional small brick lumps & white lime flecks. c.13 courses with joints c.20mm thickness. 1.7m high x 9.5m length N-S. Overlay **126**.	Rough coursed upper wall. E-facing, the latest phase of the western boundary wall. This upper coursing seemed to run along entire length of wall. 125 was abutted to the S by red brick and to the N by red brick & rubble (assumed to be contemporary). Mortar sample <**1**>	C19-20th
126	masonry	Unfinished rough blocks of Blue Lias (up to 230mm x 580mm, av. 100mm x 320mm.), badly weathered, very crumbly. Random coursed Bonded with soft, inconsistent, off-white/off-pink buff lime mortar with small crushed Lias inclusions and occasional slate. Lowest 6 courses are bonded with mixed clay (50%) with buff & white lime mortar lumps and slate inclusions. Slate slabs used on occasion within wall to level courses. Appeared to have repointed rubble core. c.24 courses with joints up to 30mm thickness. 2.6m high. Abutted by **106, 108, 110, 117, 118, 119, 121**.	E-facing lower phase of western boundary wall. Continued S through allotment and abutted contemporary wall to the north. Mortar sample <**2**>.	C18-19th
127	masonry	Up to 5 courses of randomly coursed Blue Lias & ?Doulting,/White Lias. (70mm up to 230mm x up 360mm exposed). Bonded with soft, mixed green grey clay with frequent small lime lumps, flecks, inclusions & small angular Lias stone. with joints up to 10-20mm thick. 0.46m high (not bottomed). 80 - 100mm of offset width exposed E-W. 0.50m exposed N-S. Below **126**. Butted by **121 & 123.**	Offsets foundations for E-facing side of western boundary wall **126**. Continued beyond N & S-facing sections in pit. Mortar sample <**3**>.	C18-19th
124	cut	Linear. Aligned c.N-S. Up to 0.60m deep. 0.13m wide E-W. Up to 0.80m exposed N-S. Near vertical break of slope-top. Near vertical sides. Break of slope-base not seen not bottomed. Below **119**. Cut through **122, 123**. Filled by **121, 126, 127.**	?Construction cut for wall **126** and offsets **127**	C18-19th

121	fill	Firm, mixed, crumbly green blue-grey Lias clay with occasional silt and rare orange mottles. Contained occasional Lias grits, charcoal & buff lime mortar flecks, Tor burr & Lias pebbles (up to 3cm in diameter). Up to 0.60m deep. 0.13m E-W. Up to 0.80m N-S exposed. Only exposed in pit at S of trench. Continued beyond N & S-facing sections of pit. Sealed by **119**. Filled **124**. Butted wall **126** and offsets **127**.	Deliberate backfill of construction cut **124**. Redeposited natural Lias clay	C18-19th

The fill (**121**) of construction trench (**124**) produced no datable finds, only an animal bone fragment and a piece of slate. The construction trench does, however, cut through deposit (**122**) and, therefore, will be later than that deposit. As well as producing 2 sherds of pottery of medieval pottery, this deposit produced 6 sherds dating to the 18-19th centuries, suggesting a 19th century date for the foundation of this section of the western boundary wall, despite the complexities of the phases of this wall suggesting an older date.

The wall to the east, bordering 3 Magdalene Street, now known as 'Abbots Leigh', appears to be older.

3.3 Post-medieval contexts

As the drain trench progressed along the gradient required for gravity feed of the foul water pipe, successive deposits were revealed, all of which produced modern datable finds. The rodding pit showed the sequence more clearly: successive layers of 18th, 19th and 20th century deposits incorporating domestic rubbish and redundant building materials of various types (see the paragraph on Finds for further discussion). These deposits were usually high in humic content.

The post-medieval deposits throughout the area of the Gardeners' Compound display the rapid accumulation of large quantities of soil carrying finds dating back to the medieval period, capped by the large quantities of medieval floor tiles and pottery of all periods recovered during the 2008 watching brief. This quantity of material is probably best interpreted as the dumping of spoil from various groundworks –from landscaping to archaeological excavation - associated with the use of the Abbey precinct as a heritage asset.

High up in the strategraphic sequence a loose assemblage of Lias flagstones below the timber partition between the Compound and the Allotment probably are the remains of a flagstone path.

3.4 Finds

The above study of the stratigraphy suggests that most of the pre-modern finds were residual. The small number of medieval pottery finds (10 in number) add little to the corpus of medieval pottery from the Abbey. The identifiable medieval encaustic tile fragments will join the large body of this material recovered in 2008.

The building materials appear to originate from several different structures:

- ceramic building materials: brick, roof and floor tiles, some oxidized,
- roofing materials: ceramic tiles, slate,
- mortar lumps: hard, gray, gritty; white with black specks; soft off-white;
- window glass: blue

Three different types of mortar and two types of roofing materials suggest the demolition of buildings of several different periods, probably post-medieval, since medieval lime mortars were usually mixed with yellow stone dust, massive quantities of which would have been produced by the masons' yards. The one fragment of blue window glass might derive from an ecclesiastical building, although medieval stained glass does not survive well in the damp ground.

The copper alloy decorative strip carries a repoussée decoration of grapes and vine leaves which are not in a medieval style.

4.0 DISCUSSION

4.1 The excavation of the pipe trench for the Gardeners' Compound only encountered the medieval horizon in the base of the rodding pit (**122**), causing only minimal damage. It remains a possibility that further investigation of this layer would reveal that the medieval pottery is residual and that this, too, is a recent dump.

4.2 Quantities of important finds similar to those encountered in the 2008 watching brief were largely absent from this part of the Gardeners' Compound.

4.3 The archaeological profile of this part of the Abbey precinct is characterised by the rapid accumulation of large quantities of late-19th and 20th century dumping, which has significantly modified the medieval topography. This is probably the spoil from groundworks within the Abbey precinct.

4.4 This area was probably chosen for dumping because is was the lowest, dampest part of the precinct. Assuming that we have indeed identified the medieval horizon, it falls by at least 1.3m within 36m. The contour survey indicates a large linear east-west depression in this part of the precinct, much of which might be modified by similar dumping operations.

4.5 This paper has presented an argument suggesting that the pre-Norman Abbey was defended by a large moat, the southern arm of which should lie somewhere within this zone. While the evidence collected does not go so far as to constitute convincing proof of this theory, it is nevertheless consistent with this theory. It should be relatively easy to test the moat theory, for example, with a programme of boreholes. Should waterborne silts be recovered, it would be advisable to undertake environmental analysis, since none has been undertaken in any of the sections of the large ditch yet encountered.

4.6 This paper reports on the findings from the eastern half of the drain trench. The western element of the trench passes through property under different ownership and will be undertaken by different people.

The Abbey applied for and was granted Scheduled Monument Consent for the entire length of the drain under the methods statement agreed with English Heritage by C & N Hollinrake. Reporting of the next section of the drain should be integrated with this report.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to John Allan, archaeological advisor to the Trustees of Glastonbury Abbey for commissioning us to undertake these works and providing the archaeological background statement. The Abbey gardeners, John King and Jane Bentley were very helpful in making space for our works and sharing their accommodation. We also received help and support from the Abbey staff in various ways. Charlie Hollinrake and Val Stevens processed and identified the finds. Arthur Hollinrake and Nici Brooks ordered the data and created the finds and context tables. Dave Roberts digitized the plan and section.

Nancy Hollinrake
30th December 2012

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