

A Possible Site for the Hospital of St John the Baptist and St Anthony at Old Sarum, Salisbury

by *Andrew B. Powell*

A ditched enclosure, containing the remains of a medieval stone building and a number of associated graves was revealed in 2002 during archaeological fieldwork at Old Sarum, to the north-east of Salisbury, in advance of the replacement of a water pipeline. The site has been tentatively identified as the hospital of St John the Baptist and St Anthony, possibly originating as a leper hospital dating from the mid-12th century.

INTRODUCTION

In 2001/02 Wessex Archaeology undertook an archaeological excavation, commissioned and funded by Wessex Water, in advance of the replacement of a 4.5km long water pipeline to the north of Salisbury, between the reservoirs on Camp Hill to the west and Castle Hill to the east. During topsoil stripping at the base of Castle Hill, the remains of a substantial stone building, with associated graves, were revealed within a ditched enclosure, centred on NGR SU 145 327 (Figure 1). Prehistoric and Roman finds from the excavation are reported in a separate paper (Powell *et al.* 2005).

The building lies on the south side of Ford Road some 500m east of the Iron Age hillfort at Old Sarum. Ford Road follows the line of the Roman road between *Sorviodunum* (Old Sarum) and *Venta Belgarum* (Winchester) and is one of four Roman roads that converged at the eastern entrance to the hillfort. The hillfort earthworks were strengthened in the Saxon period, and again following the Norman conquest when a castle and cathedral were built within them, the site becoming the centre of the medieval town of *Saresbyri* (Stroud 1986). Abandonment of Old Sarum began in the early 13th century when the bishopric was moved in 1219 to the newly founded city of Salisbury to the south.

Archaeological finds on and around Castle Hill, including Iron Age features, dense spreads of

Romano-British material and medieval structures, have shown that from the date of the hillfort's construction, the area outside its eastern entrance was a focus of continuing activity (Stone and Algar 1956; Musty 1959; Musty and Rahtz 1964; Powell *et al.* 2005). Archaeological finds and documentary sources give indications of the extent of the extra-mural settlement (Wiltshire SMR No. SU13458) (Figure 1), although the layout of the medieval town has yet to be fully established. John Leland, the 'King's Antiquary' to Henry VIII, wrote in 1540 of there having been 'a fair suburbe' outside the eastern gate, although by the time he visited 'ther is not one house neither within Old Saresbyri, nor without it, inhabited' (Musty and Rahtz 1964, 131).

METHODS

The pipeline was laid in a 1.5m wide trench within a 10m wide easement that was machine stripped of topsoil and subsoil under archaeological direction; a full description of the methodology for the programme of archaeological works is given elsewhere (Powell *et al.* 2005). The remains of the excavated masonry building were exposed during topsoil stripping at the point on the south side of Ford Road where one branch of the pipeline ran south to the reservoir on Castle Hill, and another ran east towards Ford.

Because of the potential significance of the find, it

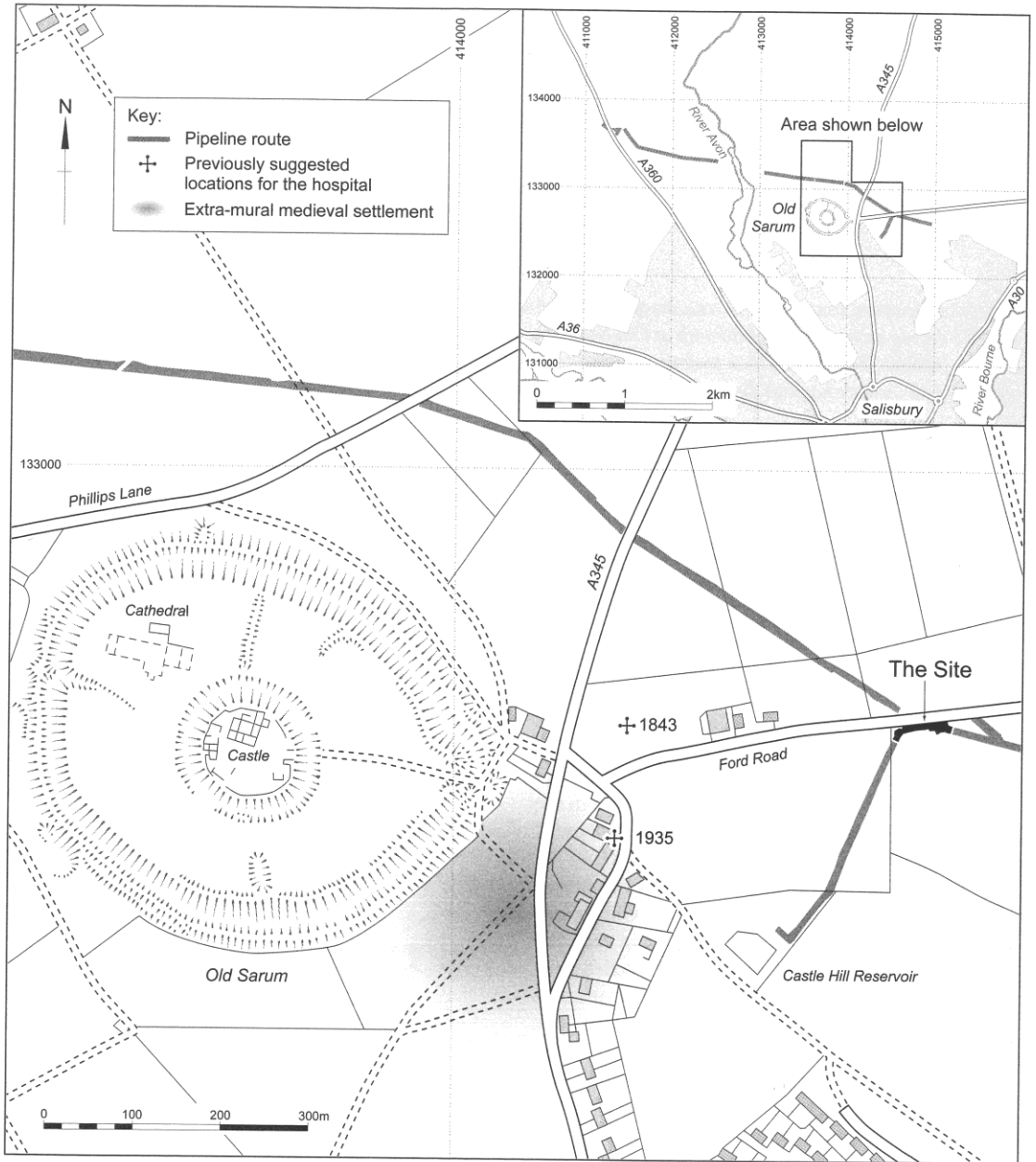


Fig. 1 Location of the site in relation to Old Sarum

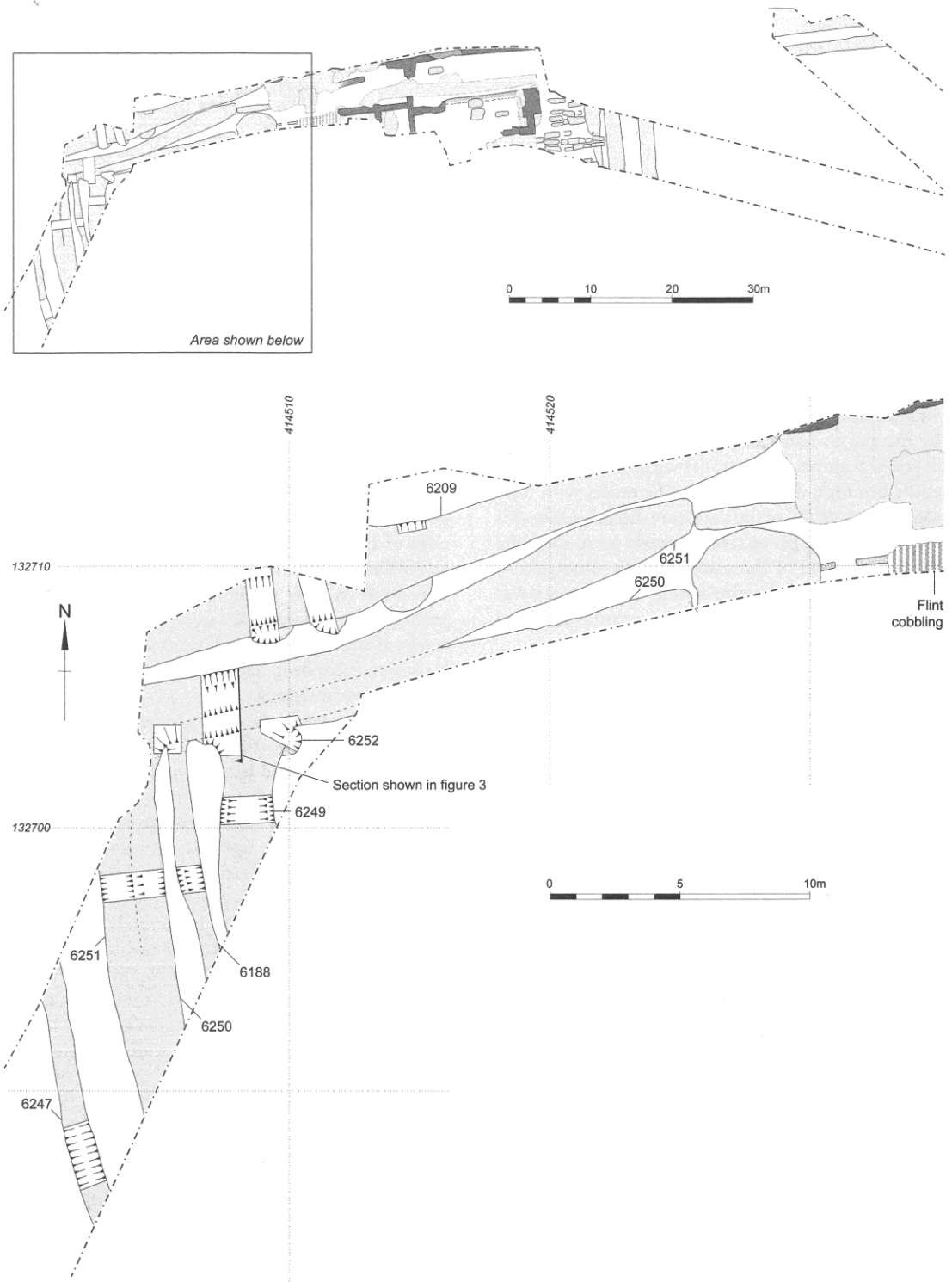


Fig. 2 The excavated enclosure ditches

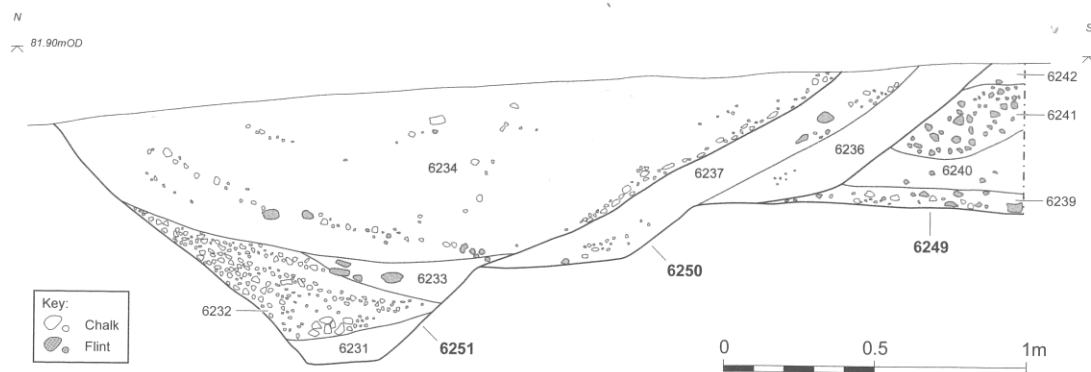


Fig. 3 Section across enclosure ditches 6249, 6250 and 6251

was decided that archaeological investigation should be limited to hand cleaning of the surfaces of the exposed features and deposits within the enclosure, sufficient for a detailed plan to be made, with only sample excavation of the enclosure ditches. Once this had been done, protective measures were installed and this section of the easement was reinstated so as to preserve the remains *in situ*. The pipeline was diverted around the site along the centre of the Ford Road.

RESULTS

The following description of the features recorded is necessarily constrained by the limited extent of the archaeological works.

The Enclosure

On the east, north and west sides of the building the enclosure was represented by between three and five parallel ditches, indicating a number of phases of construction, probably linked to the expansion of the site. Ten sections were excavated through the ditches at the north-west corner of the enclosure (Figure 2). The sampled features were all medieval in date, although they also produced small quantities of prehistoric and Roman finds.

The innermost, and possibly the earliest, ditch on the west side (6249) was recorded running north-south for *c.* 6m before turning at a right angle to the east, where it was almost completely cut on the north side by a later ditch (6250, below). Ditch 6249 was 2m wide and 0.5m deep with concave sides and a wide flat base. It appears to have silted up naturally, although one fill (6181) may be material eroded from

a possible bank to the west. The ditch produced medieval pottery, pig and sheep/goat bone, a silver cut halfpenny of Henry II (1154–89) and iron nails. A rounded pit (6252), at least 1m across and 0.4m deep with a steep concave east side, cut by the inner edge of the ditch, also produced medieval pottery and animal bone from its upper two fills. Up to 1.5m outside ditch 6249 to the west, there was a shallow gully (6188), possibly marking a hedge-line, also cut across at the north by ditch 6250. It was *c.* 1m wide and up to 0.2m deep. Its single fill (6189) produced three medieval sherds.

A further 1m to the west were two overlapping ditches, the outer one (6251) representing a widening and re-cutting of the inner one (6250) (Figure 3). Ditch 6250 was recorded running north for 10m before turning at a right angle to the east, cutting across gully 6188 and ditch 6249. It may have extended some 22m to a rounded terminal. Its full dimensions could not be ascertained, although it was at least 2m wide and 0.7m deep, with a moderately steep inner side. It produced two sherds of medieval pottery, ceramic building material (CBM), a fragment of iron sheet or plate, a piece of lava (probably a quern fragment) and cattle and sheep/goat bone.

Ditch 6251 was up to 2.6m wide and 1m deep with straight, moderately steep sides and a narrow flat base, although the inner side, which cut the fills of ditch 6250, was slightly shallower and concave. An initial silting layer was overlain by material apparently deriving from the outside, possibly from an external bank. A layer of material eroded from the fills of ditch 6250 produced the majority of the finds, comprising five medieval sherds, and pig and cattle bone. The upper 0.6m of the ditch appears to have filled in gradually. Along the north side of the enclosure this ditch diverged northwards from

ditch 6250 to a terminal some 3m outside, but on the same line as, the inner terminal. The possible entrance to the east of the ditch 6251 terminal had a 0.8m wide linear feature (not excavated) lying across it. An opposing terminal was not recorded – if such existed, it underlay surviving deposits and features associated with the building.

The outermost ditch on the west side (6247) lay 2.5m outside ditch 6251. It was 1.25m wide and 0.55m deep with steep convex sides and a 0.35m wide flat base. Only a single fill was recorded, and this was disturbed by the roots from an existing hedge. This deposit produced a moderate quantity of finds, including medieval pottery, four pieces of incised slate, animal bone (cattle, pig, sheep/goat and one bird long bone), oyster shell, 0.8kg of CBM (some glazed) and a piece of shelly limestone – probably building material.

Along the north side of the enclosure, a gap of up to 1.2m separated ditch 6251 from the outermost recorded ditch (6209) along Ford Road, which continued eastwards past the terminals of ditches 6250 and 6251. It was up to 2.6m wide and 1.1m deep, with convex sides, steep on the south side and near vertical towards the base, but shallower on the north side, and with a flat 0.55m wide base. Nine fills were recorded, the material in the lower five all appearing to derive from the outer side of the ditch, and containing medieval roof tile and animal bone (sheep/goat and possibly cattle). The overlying layer filled the resulting hollow on the south side, followed by two layers deriving from the inner side of the ditch. The upper part of the ditch may have been recut at this point, as the upper levels of these fills appear to have been truncated, the subsequent layers of natural infill producing further medieval pottery and CBM as well as bone and shell.

To the east of the building, the inner (6304) of the three parallel ditches (none of which was excavated) was cut by two of the graves in the graveyard (see below). It was up to 1m wide, and separated by a gap of 0.7m from a second, 2m wide ditch (6305). The outer, 1.8m wide ditch (6310) lay a further 2m to the east (Figure 4).

Other than suggesting a simple sequence of ditches, from the inner to the outer, involving the gradual enlargement of the enclosure to the east and west, it is not possible to identify which ditches were contemporaneous, other than perhaps the inner ditch on the east and west sides (6304 and 6249). The frontage of the enclosure along Ford Road appears to have increased from 63m to at least 78m over the period of occupation. How far the enclosure

extended to the south is not known. The relatively steep slope of Castle Hill to the rear, and the fact that the ditches at the west curve slightly inwards, suggest that it may not have extended far back from the road. A subsequent geophysical survey of the site (Bartlett 2003) detected a number of resistivity anomalies and linear magnetic anomalies that may indicate drains or watercourses associated with the building. The latter include two parallel magnetic anomalies running parallel to Ford Road, some 50m to the south, suggesting the possibility of a similar sequence of enlargement at the back of the enclosure.

The Building

Only the northern part of the building was exposed within the pipeline easement, its main axis lying approximately east-west, and parallel to Ford Road (Figure 4). Certain anomalies detected by the geophysical survey may indicate other structural remains to the south (Bartlett 2003). The surviving walls of the building were constructed from a mixture of chalk blocks and flint nodules and at least two phases of construction were identified.

The most substantial part of the structure was recorded at the east, where there was a substantial flint-faced chalk wall, 5.7m long, running north-south. At the north it was 2.2m wide, but at the south narrowed on its outer face to just 0.7m wide. It then turned west for 1.8m, where a length of less substantial flint wall continued the line west for a further 2.4m. At the north-east corner of the larger wall was a greensand quoin, adjacent to a bedding of mortar containing *in situ* traces of tiling. The wall foundation running west from this corner had been robbed for some 10m before dog-legging slightly to the south and continuing for a further 4m as a surviving wall. Here it encountered a north-south wall, and in the south facing corner formed by these two walls there was a tile-lined feature.

The space defined by these walls may represent the original structure. Near its centre was a large area of disturbed floor tiles. Where the tiles overlay two of five graves, subsidence into the grave fill had protected them from subsequent plough damage. The western wall of this structure ran north for some 4.4m from the southern edge of the easement, and after a gap of 2.5m continued for 1.5m to join an east-west wall recorded along the north edge of the easement (see below). Running through the gap in this wall, and extending 15m east and 6m west, was a 1.2–2m wide surface of compacted redeposited chalk.

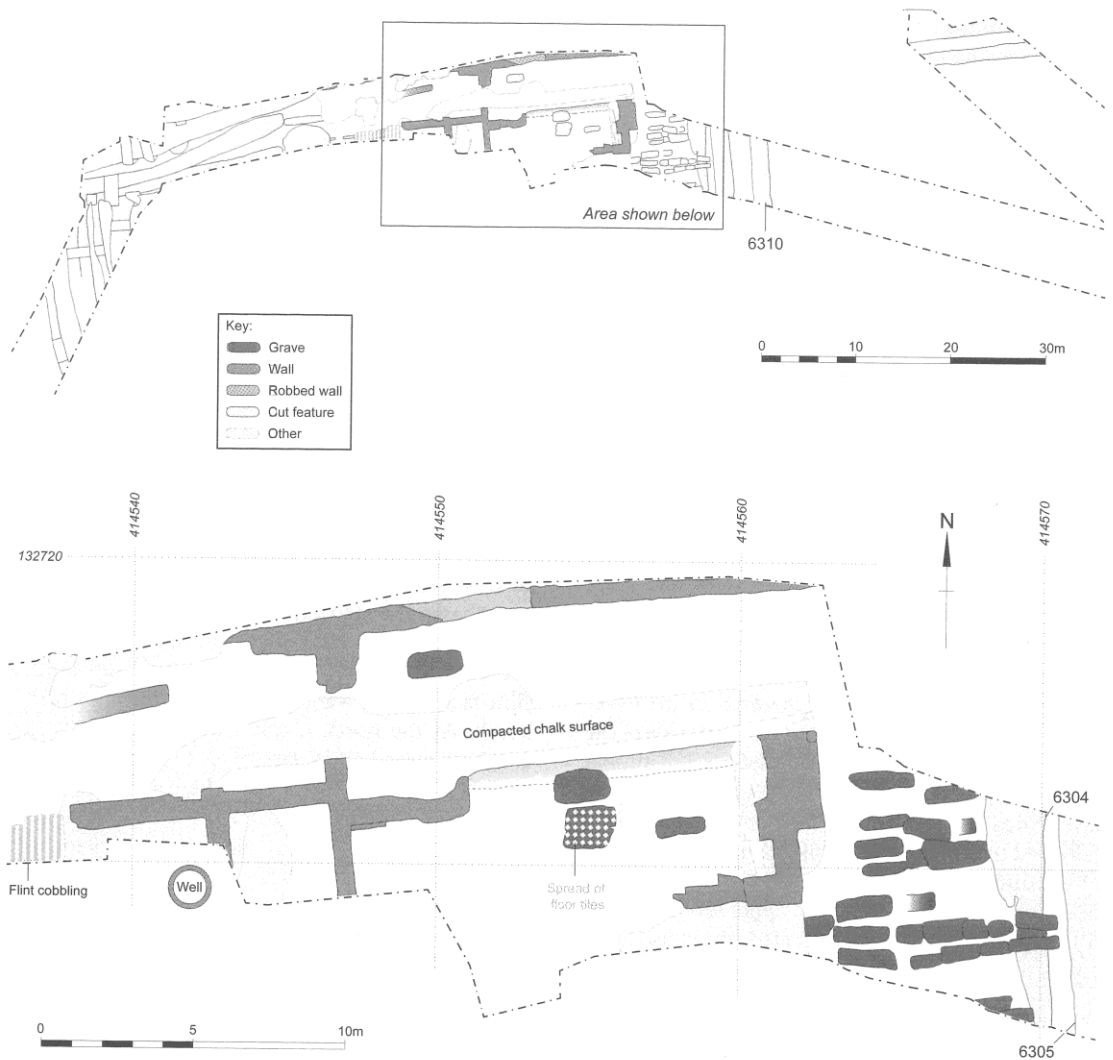


Fig. 4 The building foundations, the cemetery, and the eastern enclosure ditches

Running west from the north-south wall, on the same line as the robbed foundation, was a 9m long wall, with another running south from its mid point (an open well, just outside the easement, would have cut this latter wall). To the west was a surface of flint cobbles, almost 5m long and continuing south beyond the easement. Immediately west of the cobbles were two short linear features, possibly beam slots, the western one cut by a circular feature 5m in diameter which extended up to the terminal

of ditch 6250.

The east-west wall along the north edge of the easement was recorded running from beyond the easement at the north-east, westwards for some 34m, although robbed in places and elsewhere lying just outside the easement. At the west it lay outside the enclosure formed by ditch 6251; its relationship to the outermost ditch (6209), however, could not be ascertained (Figure 2). It may therefore represent a late boundary wall replacing earlier bank and ditch

boundaries along the road frontage. A 3m length of east–west wall was recorded just south of it in the western part of the building.

The Graveyard

Over 30 east–west-aligned graves were exposed by topsoil stripping within the enclosure. Some of the graves appear to have been shallow as a number of skulls were exposed at their western ends. Five graves lay within what may have been the original structure, at least two of them below a tiled floor, with most of the rest to the east and south-east. At least eleven graves at the south-east were arranged in two rows, some of their ends overlapping; the easternmost graves in both rows cut the fill of the inner enclosure ditch on the east side.

The Finds

Most of the pottery recovered comprised locally made Laverstock-type fabrics, including both coarse- and finewares. These had a relatively long currency – the coarse variants were present in 11th and 12th century levels at Old Sarum (Musty and Rahtz 1964), and continued in use into the 13th century in the new city, with a gradual tendency towards the finer variants. Vessel forms indicate that there is a potential 12th century component to the assemblage in the form of glazed sherds, some with combed decoration, which probably derive from tripod pitchers. There was also one ‘West Country’ or inturned dish, a 12th/13th century form, and one jar rim. The presence of fineware sherds, however, presumably representing glazed jugs in the Laverstock tradition, extend the date range well into the 13th century and possibly beyond.

The assemblage of CBM consists mainly of flat roof (peg) tiles, some partially glazed on the lower part of the upper surface. A few ridge tiles were also identified, partially glazed with knife cut crests. Most were in irregular, poorly mixed fabrics containing varying frequencies of quartz sand and prominent iron oxides. Such fabrics are commonly found in south-east Wiltshire and west Hampshire. One potential source, known from documentary evidence, was at Alderbury, 5km to the south-west of Salisbury, which was in operation from at least the mid 14th to late 15th century (Hare 1991, 89), although evidence from Salisbury indicates that ceramic roof tiles were in use from the earliest period of the city in the early 13th century. The bulk of the assemblage came from

the cleaning layer within the building.

A silver coin, a cut halfpenny of Henry II (1154–89), was found in the innermost of the enclosure ditches (6249). A few pieces of medieval window glass and window lead were also recovered during cleaning, from immediately east of the thick wall at the eastern end of the building.

DISCUSSION

Because of the limited investigation of this site, interpretation of these features must remain provisional. One possible, and indeed likely, interpretation is that the structure was the medieval hospital of St John the Baptist and St Anthony, which is referred to in documentary sources. Although its location has yet to be conclusively identified, it seems clear, from a review of the evidence by Musty and Rahtz (1964, 132), that the hospital was located in the eastern suburb of Old Sarum. The hospital received a grant of royal protection in 1231 and was still in existence in 1535 when the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, Henry VIII’s survey of ecclesiastical property in England and Wales, described ‘the Hospital or Free Chapel of St John, near the castle of Old Sarum’ as owning half an acre of pasture and 15 acres of arable. In 1540, Leland, having recorded that the eastern suburb of Old Sarum had been recently deserted, mentioned that a chapel, which belonged to the former parish church of St John, still stood on the site (RCHM(E) 1980, 12). The absence of late medieval material from the finds assemblage tempers this interpretation.

The hospital may have started as a leper hospital that is known to have existed in 1195. Leper hospitals frequently had marginal locations on the outskirts of towns, as was the case with this building. Because of the social stigma attached to leprosy – lepers were considered to be the ‘dead among the living’ – leper houses were set up with the aim of segregating those suffering from the disease. In 1175, the English Church Council decreed that lepers should not live among the healthy, and in 1179 the Lateran Council at Rome insisted that leper communities should have their own priests, churches and cemeteries (Richards 1997).

Leprosy is present in British populations from the post-Roman period (Roberts and Cox 2003, 218), but reached its peak in 12th century, declining rapidly in the 14th, so that such institutions had a relatively short lifespan, being then often converted to more general use. Not all medieval hospitals, however, were primarily for the sick (many in fact refused

admission to the sick), providing instead hospitality and shelter for travellers and pilgrims; this may be reflected in the site's roadside location.

A number of other locations within Old Sarum have previously been suggested for the hospital (Figure 1). In 1843, Benson and Hatcher placed it some 300m to the west (at SU 142 327), in the position later recorded on the 25 inch OS map (Benson and Hatcher 1843). There appear to be no substantive reasons for this location, although the floor levels of two associated timber buildings with 12th–13th century pottery were subsequently recorded in a pipeline trench at that location (WANHM 1973, 136).

In 1933, the remains of a stone building with fragments of 13th century carved stonework were found by Stone and Charlton north of the Old Castle Inn (at SU 1414 3261) which they suggested may have been part of the church of St John (Stone and Charlton 1935). They also found many skeletons, the same area producing a large number of graves between 1834 and 1960 and representing a large cemetery. One grave contained a paten and chalice (Akerman 1855) indicating the grave of an ecclesiastic. Others were mass graves, with superimposed skeletons suggesting rapid burial, perhaps due to plague. None of the skeletons, however, showed signs of leprosy, and the cemetery may represent the main burial grounds of the borough (RCHM(E) 1980, 12).

A combination of features at the site described above support its identification as the hospital of St John the Baptist and St Anthony. These include its roadside location set some distance from the main focus of settlement, the maintenance of a clear boundary around the site, and the presence of a burial ground within the enclosure. It is not possible at present to determine whether any part of the building was a church or chapel; in many medieval hospitals the sick were laid in the body of the church, which functioned as the infirmary hall, with the chancel as their chapel (Platt 1978). The presence of graves within the eastern part of the building, with its substantial eastern wall and fragments of window glass and lead, make that structure a possible candidate for the chapel.

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