ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING AT CLEEVE ABBEY, WASHFORD, SOMERSET

Prepared on behalf of
English Heritage

by
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Summary

Archaeological evaluation and monitoring were carried out by Exeter Archaeology at Cleeve Abbey, Washford, Somerset (ST 047 407), during March 2009. The work comprised the hand-excavation of two trenches outside the east and south-east doorways into the Day Room. Further works associated with the erection of a new sign at the entrance to the site was also monitored.

An evaluation trench outside the eastern entrance into the Day Room exposed the foundations of the eastern range of buildings and the remains of a field boundary, which appears to precede the layout of the eastern ranges of the Abbey in the 13th century. The environmental sample taken from the primary fill showed that the identified taxa would indicate scrubland or hedge-bank environment. This feature was sealed by demolition deposits dating to the Dissolution of the abbey. No medieval floor surfaces were present in this Trench.

Outside the southeast doorway a smaller trench encountered only modern deposits.

1. INTRODUCTION

Archaeological monitoring on land at Cleeve Abbey, Washford, Somerset (ST 047 407), was carried out by Exeter Archaeology (EA) during March 2009. The work was commissioned by English Heritage (EH) as part of ongoing improvements to the site drainage.

1.1 **The site**

The site of Cleeve Abbey occupies approximately 11.3ha, lying to the south-east of Washford (Fig. 1). It lies between 41m and 43m AOD, on flat ground at the bottom of the Washford valley. The geology of the area consists of alluvial deposits, overlying Upper Marl deposits.

1.2 **Archaeological and historical background**

The Cistercian abbey at Cleeve was founded between 1189 and 1191 by William of Roumare as a daughter house of Revesby Abbey, Lincolnshire, itself a daughter house of Rievaulx in Yorkshire. Cleeve was colonised by its first abbot and twelve monks in 1198 (Knowles and Hadcock 1971; Gilyard-Beer 1990). Construction of the stone buildings began soon afterwards and extended into the late 13th century (Gilyard-Beer 1990). Work in the 14th and 15th centuries seems to have been confined to minor alterations, which were not completed until the early 16th century.

The Abbey was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1536, and the church seems to have been demolished shortly after. The south aisle wall and south transept were retained to enclose the northern side of the courtyard of a mansion house established within the claustral buildings. The Abbey appears to have been abandoned as a gentry mansion in the 17th century and its buildings converted to farm use. The site was acquired by EH in 1984.

Extensive excavations, building recording and geophysical surveys have taken place at Cleeve Abbey over the last four decades, complementing work undertaken during the late 19th and early 20th century. These were fully described by Stewart Brown in the Conservation plan (Keystone 2000) and by John Allan (Allan *et al.* 2006), and will therefore not be discussed here.

2. METHODOLOGY

The project was undertaken in accordance with a method statement prepared by EA (2009), submitted to and approved by the English Heritage Archaeology Officer prior to commencement on site. This document is included as Appendix 1.

The work comprised the hand-excavation of two trenches totalling 0m in length, with each trench between 0.3-0.6m wide. The trenches were positioned as part of continued drainage improvement scheme. The position of trenches as excavated is shown on Fig. 2.

All features and deposits were recorded using the standard EA recording system, comprising context record sheets and individual trench recording forms. Sections and plans for each trench were drawn at 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50. A detailed black and white print and colour digital photographic record was made. Registers were maintained for photographs, drawings and context sheets on *pro forma* sheets. Finds and samples were labelled and bagged on site and taken to the EA offices for processing and cataloguing.

3. RESULTS

Relevant detailed plans and sections are included as Figs 2-3 and detailed context descriptions for each trench set out in Appendix 2.

3.1 **The trenches**

Trench 1 (Detailed plan and section Fig. 3, Pl. 1, 3-4)
This trench measured 4.3m x 0.6m, was orientated N-S and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.05m. The remains of a modern drain were located at the northern end of the trench. A single archaeological feature was present and consisted of the remains of an E-W aligned ditch, cutting natural subsoil at a depth of 0.4m below current ground level. This was sealed by Dissolution demolition deposit (101). Detailed context descriptions for this trench are set out in Table 1, Appendix 2.

Feature 102 was a linear feature aligned approximately E-W. This probable ditch was at least 1.3m wide and 0.63m deep, with a gradually breaking western side and a flat base. It was heavily truncated along its eastern side by a modern drain. No finds were recovered from its fills (103 and 104). These consisted of a primary deposit of gradually silted in mid grey silty clay (103) and a deliberate infilling of probable bank material represented by a mid yellow brown silty clay (104).

Trench 2 (Pl. 2)
This trench measured 2m x 1.6m, was orientated NW-SE and was excavated to a maximum depth of 2m. Alluvial clay (204) was exposed at a depth of 1m below ground level (5.68mAOD), overlain throughout the trench by probable 19th-century made ground (203), which was in turn overlain by modern made ground (201-2). No archaeological features, pottery or other finds were present. The layer sequence is set out in Table 2, Appendix 2.

4. GEOARCHAEOLOGY
by Julie Jones

4.1 **Introduction**
A single sample was taken from the fill (103) of a possible medieval ditch [102]. This mid to dark grey silty clay came from the waterlogged primary fill at c. 0.4m depth and contained visible organic inclusions and shale fragments.

The sample was soaked in warm water and then washed through a nest of sieves to a minimum of 250 microns, to separate the organic float from the mineral residue. The stony residue was dried and quickly scanned but contained no other inclusions and the wet float was examined under low powered magnification to assess for the preservation organic plant material and insect remains.

4.2 **Results**
The organic float remaining after the sieving was fairly small (300ml) and largely consisted of finely cominuted plant material, the majority of which was retained on the smaller mesh sieves and was unidentifiable. The results of the assessment are shown in the table below. Apart from the occasional charcoal fragments all the organic material was preserved by waterlogging. Nomenclature and habitat information for the recovered plant remains is based on Stace (1991). Only a few small beetle fragments were noted.

Context 103 **Sample size** (3.9kg/2.3 litres) **Float size** (300ml) **Residue size** (1.8kg/580ml)			
WATERLOGGED PLANT REMAINS			
URTICACEAE			**Habitat**
Urtica dioica L.	Common nettle	freq	DGHWp
ROSACEAE			
Rubus sect. *Glandulosus* Wimmer & Grab	Bramble	abund	DHSW
SOLANACEAE			
Solanum dulcamara L.	Bittersweet	few	DHS
CAPRIFOLIACEAE			
Sambucus nigra L.	Elder	freq	DHSWn
ASTERACEAE			
Cirsium/Carduus sp	Thistle	few	DGMW
OTHER REMAINS			
Beetles		few	
Charcoal fragments		few	
Wood fragments		freq	
Habitats D: Disturbed. G: Grassland. H: Hedgerow. M: Marsh. S: Scrub. W: Woodland. n: nitrogen rich soils. p: phosphate rich soils. **Scale of abundance** few: 1-10 frequent: 10-40 abundant: 40+			

The plant macrofossil assemblage was limited to five species, with bramble (*Rubus* sect. *Glandulosus*) the most abundant, with an estimated 200+ fruits, many of which were fragmented. There were also frequent elder (*Sambucus nigra*) fruits, occasional nettle (*Urtica dioica*), thistle (*Cirsium/Carduus*) and bittersweet (*Solanum dulcamara*). These taxa are typical of scrub or hedge-banks, but can also be become quickly established in neglected or unkempt areas around habitation and are likely to have been growing in the vicinity of the ditch at Cleeve. Bramble and elder, in particular are very robust, with hard fruit coats which seem very resistant to decay and survive where other organic preservation is poor, although both nettle and bittersweet are less robust, but were well preserved, although of limited number here. It may be that this area of the ditch was adjacent to an area of scrubby growth producing this limited assemblage, but if a further location were examined a different assemblage may be recovered, but again is likely to reflect the local environment of the ditch.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 **Introduction**

The trenching exposed the remains of the foundations of the eastern range of buildings, the remnants of a medieval field boundary and extensive demolition deposits associated with the Dissolution of the Abbey. The distribution and interpretation of archaeological features identified during the evaluation is shown on Fig. 2.

5.2 **Activity preceding the Abbey**
The remains of a roughly E-W aligned linear [102] were uncovered at the northern end of Trench 1. This was truncated by the foundations of the eastern range of buildings and is therefore likely to precede the construction of the Abbey in the late 12th century. It would seem to have been deliberately backfilled prior to the construction of the Day Room and the Infirmary cloister, with bank material (104) pushed in from the southern edge. Additional evidence from environmental analysis of fill (103) would suggest that the plant macrofossils recovered are typical of scrub or hedge-banks. This linear may have been part of a more extensive field system dating to the medieval period.

5.3 **Medieval activity**
The earliest structure present on the site was represented by the rubble foundation of the east wall of the Day Room (106). This is part of the mid 13th-century phase of works and like other portions of the claustral buildings constructed at an early stage in the building programme, this was built of red sandstone.

5.4 **Post-medieval activity**
In 1538 the former Cistercian Abbey was leased to Anthony Bustard, and it seems likely that demolition and conversion of the existing buildings had already begun shortly after the Dissolution. An extensive demolition deposit (101) covered the natural subsoil to the east of the Day Room and appeared to have resulted from the stripping of the interior and dismantling of unwanted elements of the Infirmary cloister.

SITE ARCHIVE

The site records have been compiled into a fully integrated site archive which is currently held at Exeter Archaeology's offices under project number 6738, pending deposition at Somerset County Museum. Details of the monitoring, including a pdf copy of this report have been submitted to the on-line archaeological database OASIS (exeterar1-57835).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This evaluation was commissioned by English Heritage and administered by John Allan (EA). We would like to thank Tony Leech (EH), Elizabeth Vause (EH) and Vanessa Straker (EH) for their help and assistance during the work. The fieldwork was carried out by Marc Steinmetzer, the illustrations for the report were prepared by Sarnia Blackmore, and the environmental analysis was carried out by Julie Jones.

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Appendix 1

APPENDIX 1:
METHOD STATEMENT

WRITTEN SCHEME OF INVESTIGATION FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING IN THE WARMING ROOM OF CLEEVE ABBEY

Prepared by Exeter Archaeology
for English Heritage

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 This document, produced by Exeter Archaeology (EA) for English Heritage, describes the method of archaeological recording of two minor disturbances in the east claustral range of Cleeve Abbey. It presents the 'Written Scheme of Investigation' (WSI) for archaeological work that will be required as a condition of Scheduled Monument Consent.

1.2 The ground-floor room of the east range was built in the early 13th century as a vaulted space supporting the dorter above. Its function is not firmly known; it is sometimes described as the Warming Room (a use followed here) but it may equally have been a dayroom or novices' room. Its vaulting supported on piers has been recreated in modern materials by EH.

1.3 At present there are severe problems with damp on the earth floor. These have been examined and discussed in the EH document 'Cleeve Abbey Warming Room: Alleviation of Damp Problems July 2008'. This identifies three likely sources of dampness contributing to the problem. One is water flowing through the north and south door openings; another is water which may be tracking along the trench from the MH in the warming room through the north east door to the MH In the field.

2. AIMS

2.1 The principal objectives of the programme will be to:

- investigate and record any historic building fabric or architectural detail that is affected; and
- monitor groundworks to allow any exposed archaeological deposits to be investigated and recorded.

3. METHOD

3.1 *Historic building recording*

If portions of the historic fabric are exposed, they will be recorded in section, plan and photograph before they are backfilled. This may entail minor delays in a specific area whilst recording is completed. The work should follow guidelines set out in *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice* (English Heritage 2006).

3.2 *Groundworks*

- The removal of modern fills will be monitored. In the unexpected event of historic deposits being encountered, they will be fully excavated by hand, then recorded in accordance with standard excavation procedures, and spoil from the

trenches will be examined for the recovery of artefacts. Variation on the above will be undertaken in agreement with the EH. The recording will be undertaken in accordance with the standards of the Institute for Archaeologists and following standard EA procedures:

- standardised single context record sheets; plans and sections at a scale of 1:10, 1:20 and 1:50 (or larger where necessary), and survey drawings at appropriate scales;
- black and white film and digital photography;
- survey and location of finds, deposits or archaeological features, using EDM surveying equipment and software where appropriate; and
- labelling and bagging of finds on site from all excavated levels, post-1800 unstratified pottery may be discarded on site with a small sample retained for dating evidence as required;

3.3 Should a find requiring conservation be encountered, initial conservation and packaging will be undertaken in accordance with relevant professional guidance (including *Conservation guidelines No 1 (*UKIC, 2001), and *First Aid for Finds* (UKIC & RESCUE, 1997).

3.4 Should any human remains be exposed, these will initially be left *in situ.* If removal is deemed necessary, these will then be fully excavated and removed from the site subject to the compliance with the relevant Ministry of Justice licence, which will be obtained by EA on behalf of the client. Any remains will be excavated in accordance with *Institute for Archaeologists Technical Paper No.* **13** (McKinley and Roberts 1993). Where appropriate bulk samples will be collected.

3.5 Any finds identified as treasure or potential treasure, including precious metals, groups of coins or prehistoric metalwork, will be dealt with according to the *Treasure Act 1996 Code of Practice* (2nd Revision) (Dept for Culture Media and Sport). Where removal cannot be effected on the same working day as the discovery, suitable security measures will be taken to protect the finds from theft.

4. REPORTING AND ARCHIVING

4.1 A brief report will be produced upon completion; copies will be distributed to the Client, and will be deposited with the site archive.

4.2 Should particularly significant remains, finds and/or deposits be encountered unexpectedly, they may merit wider publication. Any such requirements would be confirmed with the EH after the conclusion of fieldwork.

4.5 A simple site archive will be prepared upon completion of the project, with reference to *The Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage, 1991 2nd edition) for deposition with EH.

5. PROJECT ORGANISATION

5.1 The project will be undertaken and completed in accordance with the standards and codes of conduct of the Institute for Archaeologists under the general management of J.P. Allan. Exeter Archaeology is directed by a member of the Institute of Archaeologists.

5.2 Exeter Archaeology operations are subject to Health and Safety policies prepared by Exeter City Council which include all aspects of work covered by the *Health and Safety at Work Act* (1974). All works within this scheme will be carried out in accordance with current *Safe Working Practices* and R*isk Assessments*.

Appendix 2

APPENDIX 2:
CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS BY TRENCH

Table 1: Trench 1

Context No.	Depth (b.g.s.)	Description	Interpretation
100	0-0.1m	Mid to dark brown loamy clay	Modern topsoil
101	0.1-0.4m	Mid to dark brown loamy clay and building rubble	Dissolution demolition deposit
102	0.4-1.03m	E-W aligned drainage ditch	Drainage ditch
103	0.6-1.03m	Mid grey silty clay	Fill of Ditch [102]
104	0.4-0.83m	Mid yellow brown silty clay	Fill of Ditch [102]
105	0.4+	N-S aligned linear	Wall foundation trench
106	0.6+	Rubble and clay foundation	Wall foundation
107	0-0.6m	Roughly squared rubble and clay foundation	Wall foundation
108	0.4+	Mid brown yellow silty clay	Fill of foundation trench [105]
109	0.1-1.05m	Modern drain trench	Modern drain trench
110	0.1-0.76m	Dark brown black loamy clay	Fill of modern drain trench [109]
111	0.65-1.05m	Mid brown silty clay	Fill of modern drain trench [109]
112	1.03+	Mid red orange clay and shale	Natural subsoil

Table 2: Trench 2

Context No.	Depth (b.g.s.)	Description	Interpretation
200	0-0.1m	Mid to dark brown loamy clay	Modern topsoil
201	0.1+	Mid brown silty clay	Modern levelling deposit

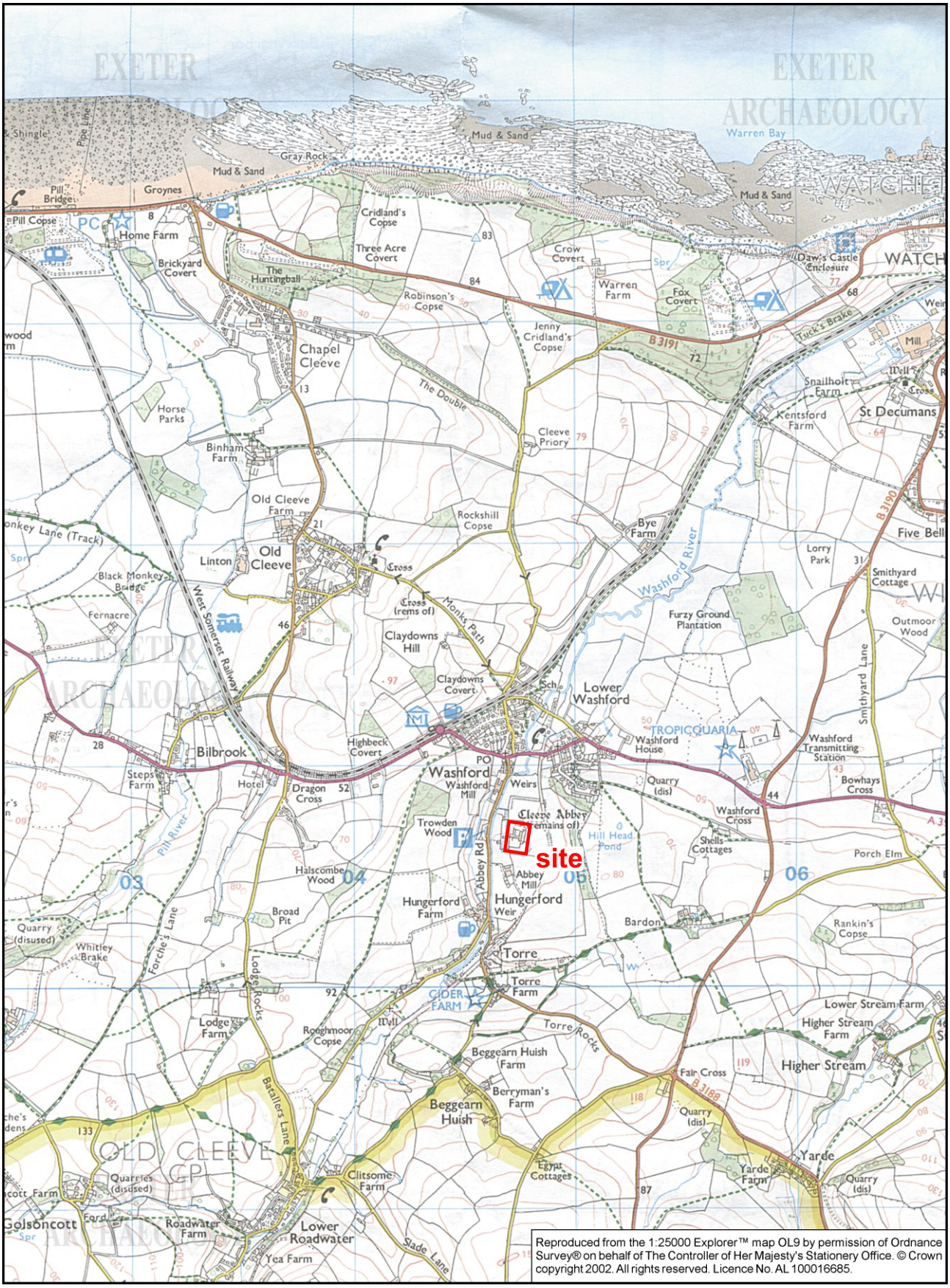

Fig. 1 Site location. Scale 1:25000.

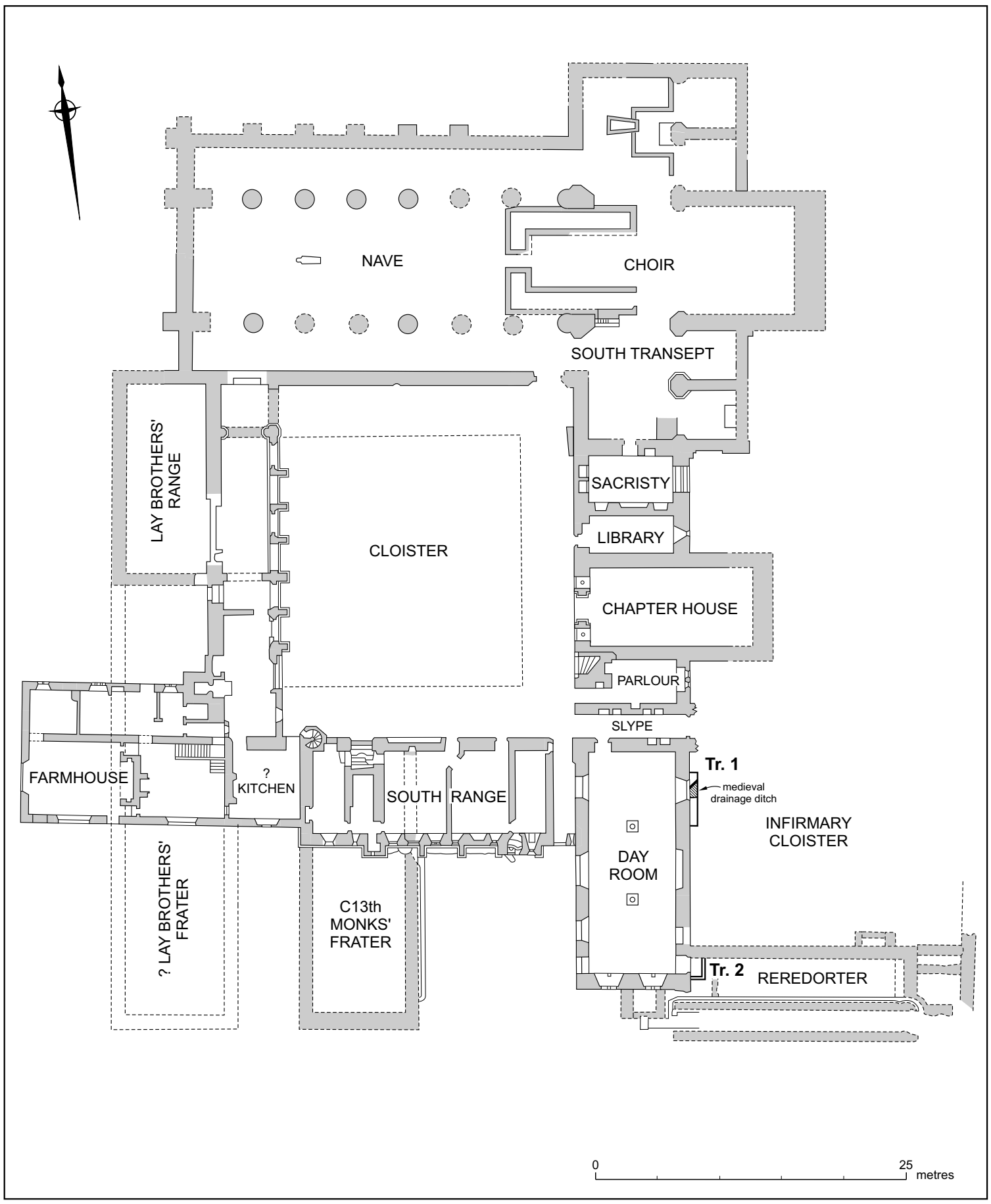

Fig. 2 Trench location plan with interpretation. Scale 1:400.

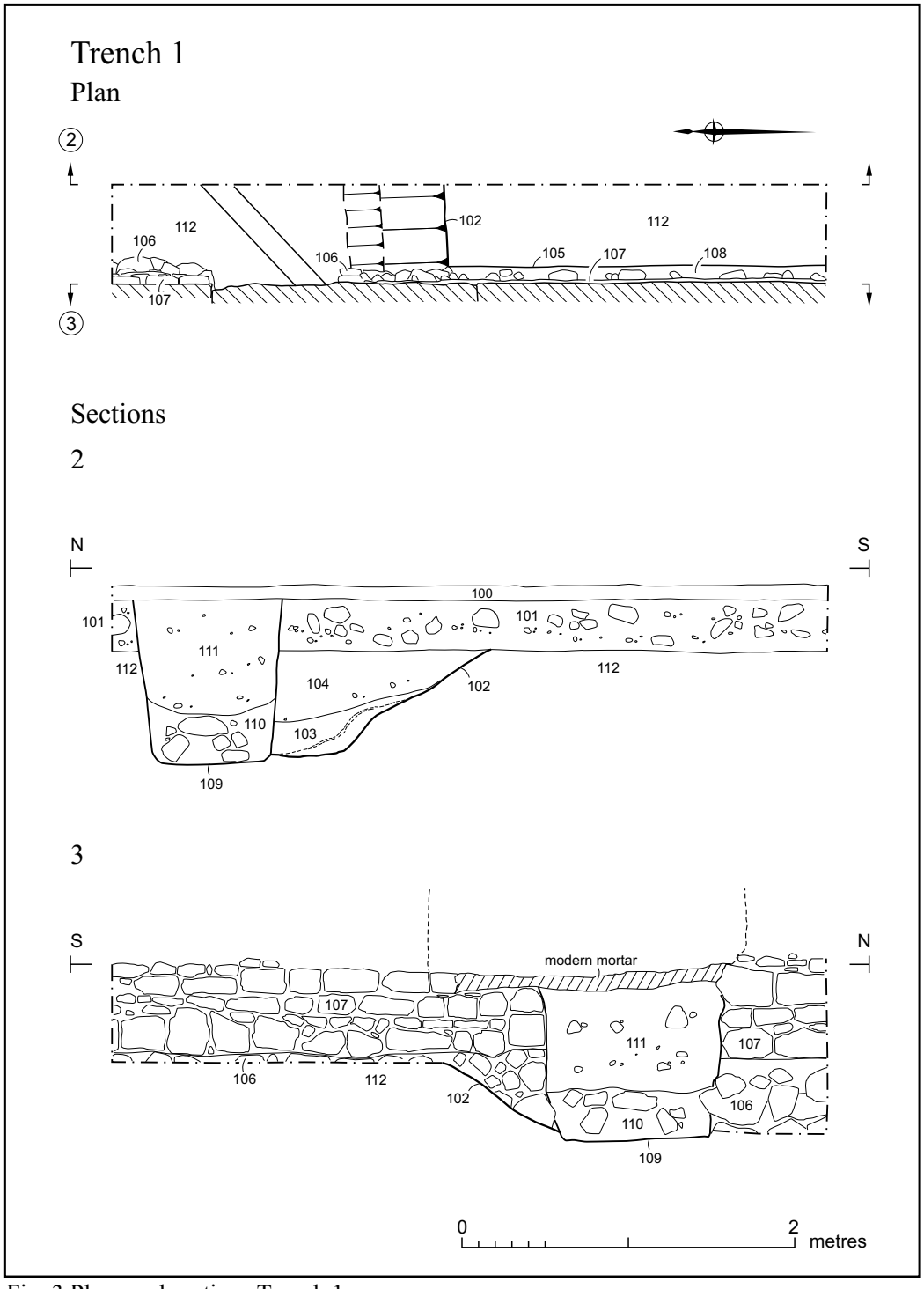

Fig. 3 Plans and sections Trench 1.

Pl. 1 General view of Trench 1. Looking south-west. Scale 1m.

Pl. 2 General view of Trench 2. Looking south. Scale 1m.

Pl. 3 General view of wall foundations truncated by modern drain Trench 1. Looking west. Scale 1m.

Pl. 4 Section through medieval drainage ditch [102], Trench 1. Looking east. Scale 1m.