

The Graveyard of St Peter-de-Dunstable, Bedford

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SUMMARY

A resume of notes made when commercial trenching exposed part of the churchyard of St Peter-de-Dunstable, Bedford. The finds from pits included pottery of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries.

The church of St Peter-de-Dunstable was situated on the corner of Cauldwell Street and St Mary's Street, Bedford, opposite St Mary's Church. It was pulled down in 1546 by order of the Bishop of Lincoln to prevent disputes between the parishioners of the united benefice of St Peter and St Mary (Godber, 1969, 194-195). The fabric was dispersed and re-used for various purposes, including repairing the town bridge. Some fragments exist in Bedford Museum: these include a corbel in the form of the head of a king and the much mutilated torso of a saint.

In the summer of 1971 Bedfordshire County Council continued the expansion of Mander College, and builders trenches revealed the church graveyard (fig 1). An excavation was not possible, but the following notes and plan were considered worth recording since no further work on the site is anticipated.

There was much nineteenth century disturbance by walls and drains, and a general make-up of 2-3ft except on the south. The graveyard extended in all four directions beyond the builders footings, which covered an area of 50 by 70ft. On the south side the burials were in three superimposed layers, the uppermost being only 1ft under the present footpath of Cauldwell Street. Clearly the churchyard wall or boundary was yet farther south. The church itself was not revealed and presumably lies farther east; it is therefore likely that St Mary's Street was narrower because there is not much room between the present trenches and the road.

There were various pits, the most interesting being Pit 1, which was full of burnt clay and bronze slag, presumably left by bell-founders. It probably related to the primary building stage, since it contained early St Neots ware sherds, and had a thirteenth century burial inserted through (s4). The

full extent was not found but the depth was 3ft 6in.

Pit 2 had black fillings with dense black iron slag associated with early St Neots-ware sherds and a pink shelly twelfth century sherd. The plan was not obtained.

Pit 3 was not fully excavated, but was about 4ft deep. It contained a Romano-British kiln bar and many derived sherds, the latest being a green-glazed sixteenth century type.

From the sherds collected it seems that the churchyard was in use from about the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries. The area was left clear for most of the post-medieval period according to the various maps available. The stone footing (fig 1) is probably early nineteenth century; at first sight the east wall was thought to be the church west wall, but it contained pieces of coal in the mortar and proved to belong to the rectangular building shown.

The Pottery

A small quantity of pottery was recovered from the pits, associated with the skeletons, and unstratified on the builders heaps. The most interesting sherds are illustrated on fig 1.

1 and 2 Everted rims of small cooking pots in early St Neots ware dark smooth shelly fabric. Compare Baker, 1970, fig 6, 17 and 18; Hall forthcoming, fig 1.23C; and Hurst, 1956 fig 7.3, which is eleventh century. Both unstratified.

3 Small inturned bowl in early St Neots ware; compare Kennett 1969 fig 3.10; Hall forthcoming fig 1, 12A and 17D; Hurst 1956 fig 5.38, and fig 7.7, which is eleventh century. From pit 3.

In the Higham Ferrers region of Northants these small cooking pots and bowls are characteristic of the preconquest period.

4 Large bowl with up-right rim, St Neots fabric. At Irchester, Northants, this form is late eleventh and early twelfth century. With skeleton 3.

5 A lamp base in hard grey sandy Early Medieval fabric (eleventh to twelfth century). Unstratified.

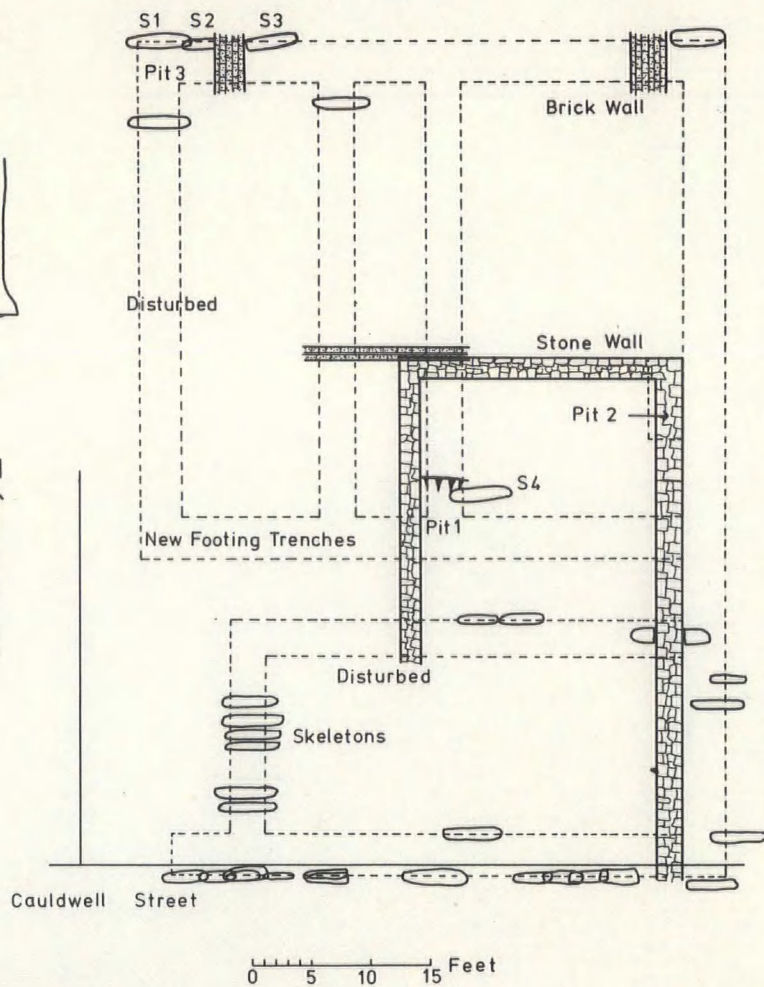
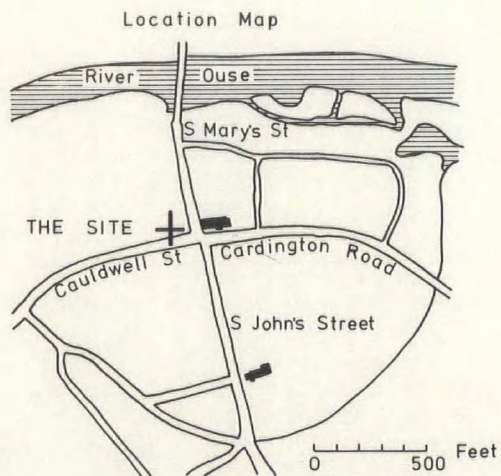
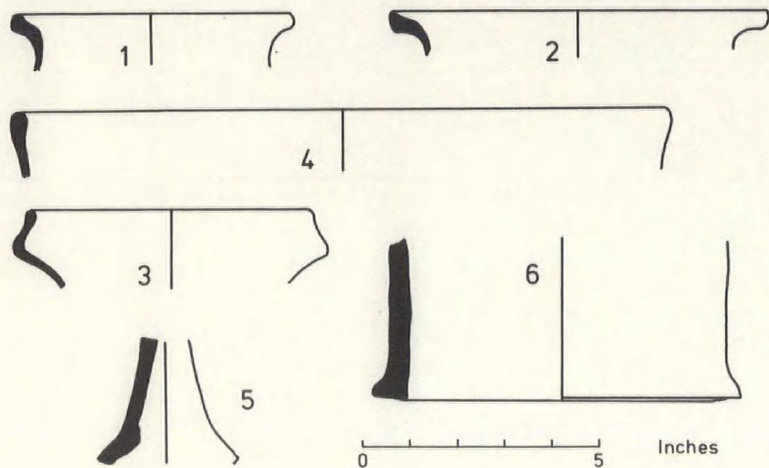


Fig 8 St Peter-de-Dunstable, Bedford.

6 Chimney-pot sherd in red-pink ware with blue-grey core, patches of green glaze. Probably thirteenth century, compare Dunning 1970, fig 11, 1. Medieval chimney-pots are not common, this is the second one found south of the river in Bedford.

Not illustrated, a piece of Romano-British kiln-bar of an inch square cross section and 3in long, brown with blue core. Similar to types from Mile Road, Bedford.

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An Earthwork at Newnham Priory, Bedford

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SUMMARY

The rescue excavation in advance of road widening of an earthwork at TL 069495 within the precinct of Newnham Priory (founded C.1166) showed that an elongated mound aligned north-south had originally been more circular in shape. It was probably the last visible part, to the north of the River Ouse New Cut, of the monastic complex of ditches, banks, mounds and fishponds which appear on early maps of the area.

INTRODUCTION

In January 1971 the Technical Services Division of Bedford Corporation requested the second writer to examine an earthwork within the precinct of Newnham Priory, immediately south of Barker's Lane, in the path of a road-widening scheme that required its destruction. This long, much overgrown and considerably eroded mound was oriented north-south and lay within existing allotment holdings.

The site of the Augustinian canons' house at Newnham has its precinct limits represented by Barker's Lane on the north, Newnham Avenue on the west, the main river on the south and a length of upstanding post-Dissolution wall on the east: building has encroached on the western side. The only visible remains of the priory are some of its earthworks: today these are less complete than

they were at the turn of the century. The site is diagonally bisected by an embankment supporting what originally was the Bedford and Cambridge branch of the London and North Western Railway and, parallel with it, an artificial channel, the Great Ouse New Cut. The two are contemporary in construction, and the railway was opened in 1862.¹ South of this the priory earthworks have been only partly levelled, but to the north the only feature visible at the time of excavation was the oblong mound here discussed. This is on the site of a circular mound shown on early maps of the full set of earthworks, and for this reason its systematic investigation was required.

The earthwork was partly excavated archaeologically, recorded, and its mechanical destruction was overseen by the writers and Mr A. Cooper, with further records being made. The Bedford Archaeological Society, under whose auspices the operation was carried out, wishes to record its appreciation to the Borough Council for an exemplary execution of its archaeological duties in bringing to its notice the threat to the earthwork, and in financing both the investigation and subsequent publication in this Journal.

THE EXCAVATION (Fig 9)

Method: A small trial trench 1.25m wide was dug by hand through the middle of the east side of the earthwork as far as its central long axis, and