

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

AT

MILL COTTAGE, CHURCH APPROACH

GORING-ON-THAMES.

SU 5973 8070

On behalf of

Stuart Anderson.

December 2001

REPORT FOR

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12-13 February 2001 - evaluation
20 April – 8 May 2001 - Area 1 watching brief
25 May and 7–8 November 2001 Area 2 watching brief

REPORT ISSUED

3 December 2001

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Summary

Archaeological investigation took place in two areas within the grounds of Mill Cottage, which occupies part of the former extent of the Augustinian Nunnery of St Mary. As expected the area between the Millstream and the Thames was subject to flooding during the medieval period and appeared to be used for some rubbish disposal. Parts of four buildings were found in the southernmost area of garden adjacent to the present churchyard. Three of these buildings are thought to be the guest house, hospitium and necessaria.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Fig. 1)

The site of the investigation areas lies at approximately 42m above Ordnance Datum and is located on land to the rear of Mill Cottage, immediately west of the parish Church of St Thomas of Canterbury in Goring (NGR SU 5973 8070). Area 1, the site of the swimming pool and pool house, is situated on the east bank of the river Thames, and is bounded by Goring Millstream to the east and north and a boundary hedge to the south. The land was laid to grass and is shown on the 1st Edition OS map of 1877 as 'Liable to Floods' (the site recently flooded in 2000). Area 2 is to the east of the Millstream and west of the churchyard and is an area of garden in the south part of the property. The site lies on alluvial deposits over river terrace gravel.

1.2 Planning Background

A planning application was submitted to South Oxfordshire District Council to construct a swimming pool and pool house for private use (P00/W0921). Due to the presence of remains of archaeological interest in the proposal area, the County Archaeological Services (CAS) advised that an archaeological evaluation of the site should be undertaken prior to the determination of the planning application. This was undertaken in two parts; firstly a ground probing radar survey (Barker & Tomkinson, 2000), and secondly a trenching exercise (JMHS, 2001). Subsequently a condition was attached to the planning consent requiring that an archaeological watching brief should be carried out during all groundworks. John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) in accordance with a *Written Scheme of Investigation* agreed with the CAS carried out such a watching brief.

1.3 Archaeological Background

An Augustinian Nunnery (County Sites and Monuments No. PRN 2321) was founded on the Church of St Mary (now St Thomas') at Goring during the reign of Henry I, and dissolved in 1536. Percy G Stone, a local resident, carried out excavations on the Priory during 1892-3. His report shows that he revealed foundations of almost the whole extent of the Priory complex. His plan is very comprehensive, showing only a few areas that he was unable to investigate. Stone found what he believed to be the hospitium range within the grounds of Mill Cottage. Dealing with these discoveries he stated:

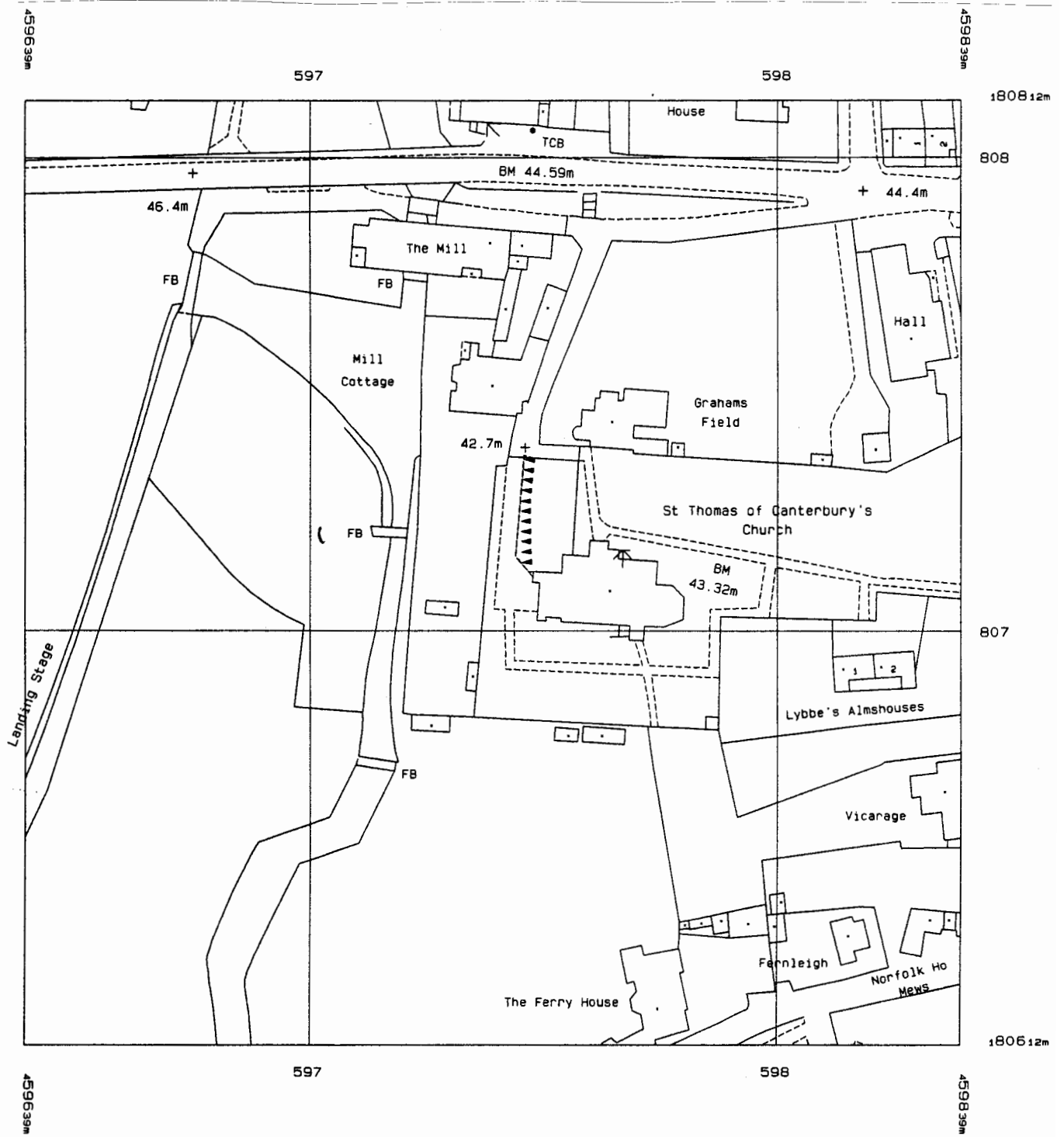


Figure 1. Site Location

Scale 1:1250

'The most interesting find was perhaps the walls of the buildings to the west of the church. These were extensive, and probably comprised the lodgings of the Prioress, the workrooms of the nuns and novices, the guest chambers, and dining hall.'

This area of Mill Cottage garden and the small area directly opposite on the west side of the Millstream were examined by Ground Probing Radar Survey. The survey confirmed that substantial remains of wall foundations survived within the area east of the Millstream. The walls traced were up to 2m in width and correspond closely to Stone's plan.

The smaller area west of the Millstream revealed deposits sloping westward away from the millstream, and possible diffractions from large cobbles or possible destruction rubble. The main feature identified was thought to be an old infilled channel or hollow way. The feature could also have been a man-made cess/drainage channel from the necessaria of the Priory hospitium.

The evaluation did not find evidence for the possible channel to the north of the ground probing survey area. However the evaluation did find evidence for medieval rubbish disposal within alluvial deposits.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the *Written Scheme of Investigation* were as follows:

- To record any features relating to the Priory that may be present within the development area.
- To recover artefacts associated with the rubbish disposal of the Priory. In particular to recover pottery in order to ascertain which market the Priory was using.
- To record any prehistoric remains that may be present towards the base of the alluvial sequence.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

A scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with the CAS and the applicant for the watching brief within Area 1 connected with the construction of the pool and poolhouse. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the monitoring of the excavation for the pool footprint and the excavation of trenches for the formation of pad foundations for the poolhouse.

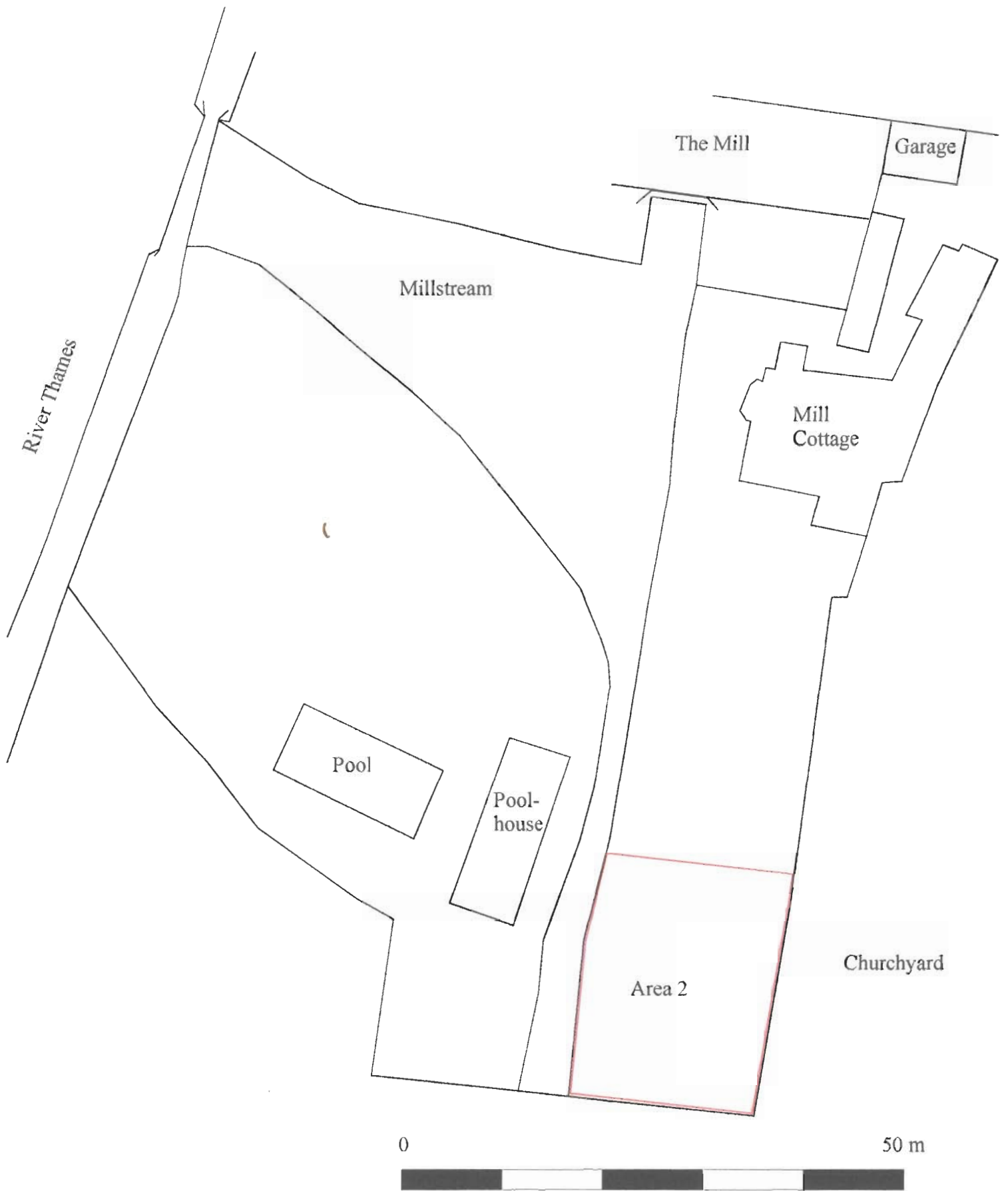


Figure 2. Location of Area 1 pool and poolhouse and Area 2 garden

Subsequently the Environment Agency required that an area of garden to the east of the Millstream should be reduced for flood alleviation (Area 2). A terracing scheme for undertaking this, while limiting any impact on archaeological deposits, was designed and agreed on site by the Paul Smith (County Archaeologist), Stuart Anderson for the client, and JMHS.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994), and was monitored by Paul Smith of the CAS.

3.2 Methodology

Excavation of the pool and poolhouse foundation trenches was carried out using a mini-excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. The area excavated for the pool was c. 7.1m north/south by c. 14.6m east/west. The depth was c. 1.8m. The topsoil had been removed prior to monitoring commencing. Various trenches were excavated for the poolhouse pad foundations down to the top of the gravel that was 1.8 – 1.9m below existing ground level.

A 0.8 tonne mini-excavator and hand excavation was used for the ground reduction, in terraces, in Area 2. For the majority of this area it was possible to remove the topsoil down to the required level without impact on any archaeology. This was established through the hand excavation of various test pits. The lower two spits on the west side of the garden were monitored in order to record archaeological deposits that were exposed and removed.

4 RESULTS

Area 1

The geology is alluvium overlying terrace gravels. Terrace gravels (context number 004) were found at 1.45 – 1.55m below ground level in the pool area, while they were lower at 1.8m in the area of the poolhouse. The difference is accounted by the higher level of the existing ground just west of the Millstream. The surface of the gravels was not flat but contained various small depressions i.e. 005 seen in the extreme south-west corner of the pool footprint, which was 100mm deep and at least 1.3m in length.

Overlying the gravel in the pool was a deposit of pale grey mottled purple brown clay with occasional fractured flint nodules and 0.5% gravel by content (003). This was 700mm thick across the whole of the pool footprint. Above 003 was a deposit of pale yellow brown clay containing the occasional small lump of chalk (002). This was 500mm thick. Within 002, at 600mm below ground level was a layer of snails that extended c. 8m into the pool area from the east end. The upper part of the excavated sequence was 300mm thickness of turf and topsoil (001).

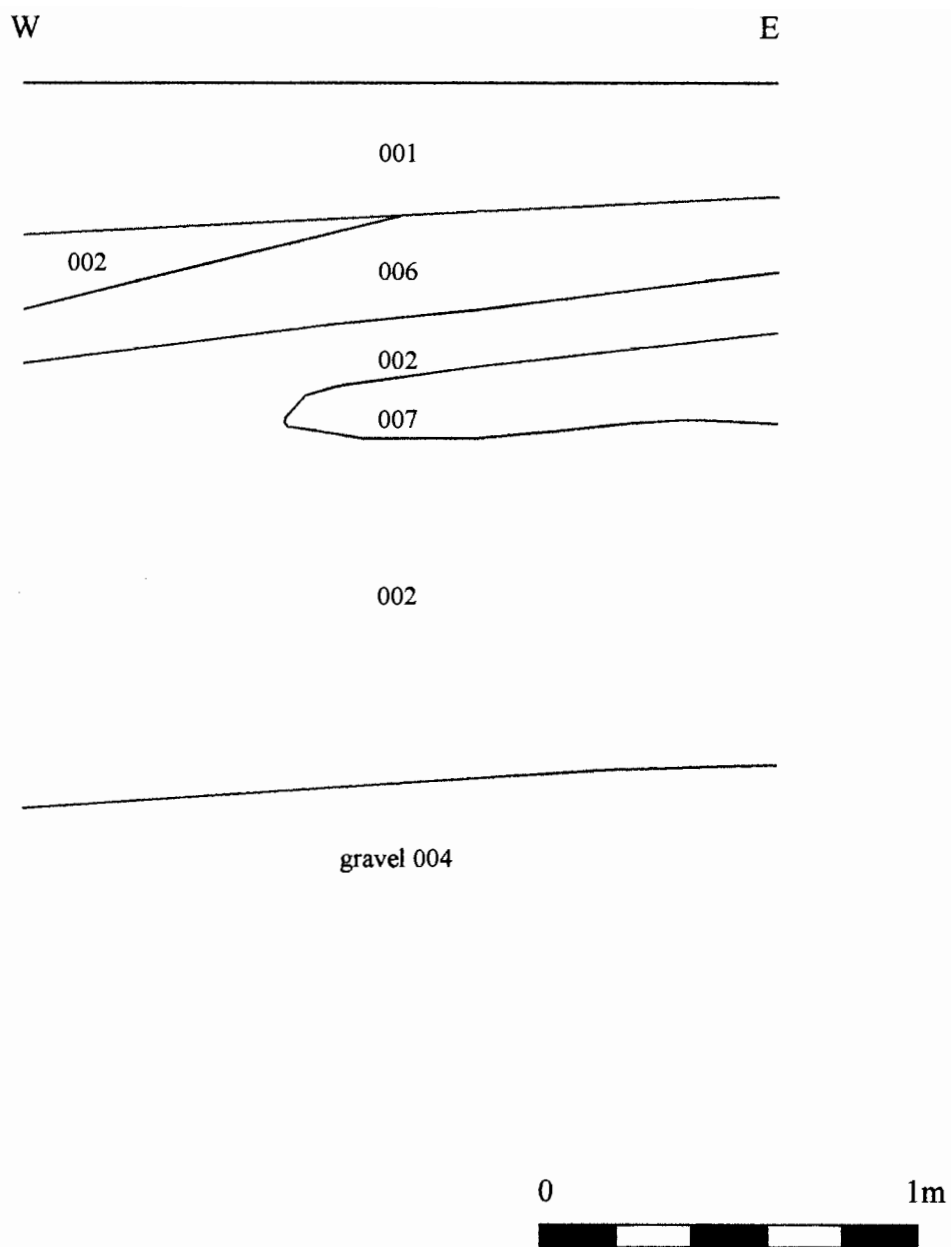


Figure 3. Section through deposits in poolhouse area.

The sequence present in poolhouse area differed. The lower alluvial deposit (003) was not present with 002 lying over the terrace gravels (004). Within the alluvial deposit 002 were two layers of pale yellow brown slightly silty clay with 30% gravel, occasional chalk lumps and a moderate amount of tile fragments. The lower one (007) was 700mm below the existing ground level and was 220mm thick. It extended c. 1m into the poolhouse area from the east. On the east edge of the poolhouse area a similar deposit (006) was found just under the topsoil dipping down to the west under part of 002 (Fig.3). 006 was 280mm thick and the west edge of it was not parallel to the edge of the Millstream. At the south end of the poolhouse the edge extended 660mm into the area while at 5.5m north of the south side the deposit extended 2m into the area of the poolhouse. This deposit lay under 450mm of topsoil.

Area 2

A ground probing radar (GPR) survey had found both strong and weak evidence for walls in the garden area (interpretation shown on Fig. 4). Unfortunately the archaeological evidence does not always match that for the weak evidence for walls. The west face of a wall (120) was found in a narrow trial trench. This was traced eastwards for c. 3.5 m before depth of overburden prevented further need for investigation. This corresponds with one of the geophysical 'weak' walls. The top of the wall was found about 400 mm below ground level at its west limit.

To the south a corner of a structure was located c. 200mm below ground level during trial trenching. Wall 119 was the south-west corner of a masonry structure and survived 270 mm above a surface to the west. A large limestone block (620x370x260 mm) formed the corner, while the south and west faces of the wall were formed of flint nodules (average size 100x120x100 mm) with a rubble fill of large and small chalk pieces set in a mid brown clay. The outer 400 mm of the walls were bound by mid orange yellow sandy mortar. The wall continued both east and north out of the investigation area. The west side of the corner of the wall was constructed on a large flat river cobble (context 117 - 900mm long and at least 470 mm wide). The south end of the west face was stepped out. 117 (not on Fig. 4) also formed part of the floor surface. The main part of the floor was made of chalk blocks (118). These blocks ranged in size from 100x80 to 230x200 mm and were closely laid together and set in a pale yellow clay. The surface was relatively flat and worn. Although not interpreted as such, Wall 119 did respond to the GPR survey and would appear not to continue northwards much beyond the limit found by excavation and extends c. 1.7 m from Wall A.

The following were found in a 4m wide strip adjacent to the Millstream. Part of this was the upper bank of the stream and therefore higher deposits did not extend right across the strip. On the edge of the millstream bank was the edge of a north/south wall 115. This was traced over a length of 5 m; to the south there were no traces of archaeological deposits due to garden disturbance or making good eroded bank edge, while to the north the wall was lower than the excavated level. The majority of the wall showed just as an east face of c. 150 mm width, constructed of squared chalk blocks (100x80x? - 200x130x150 mm) set in a pale yellow grey mortar. The core of the wall was formed from chalk rubble (60x40x40 – 120x80x50 mm) well packed

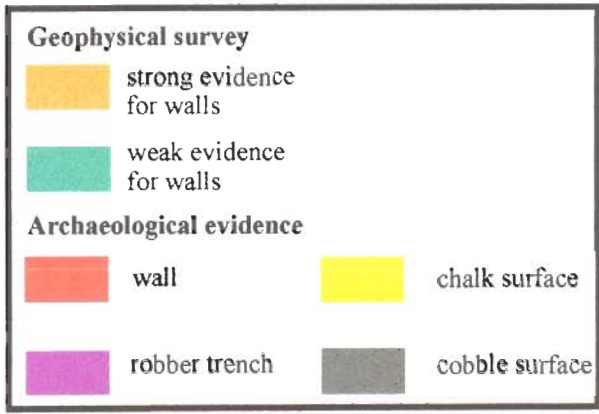


Figure 4. Area 2 Garden Results.

together in a pale grey brown clayey silt. The west face was below the level of investigation as the upper part on this side had been eroded by the bank edge.

East of the above wall was a cut 113, filled with pale grey brown silty clay with 5% chalk fragments and 1% small stone and some mid/dark orange mortar fragments (114). Tile fragments were seen in the fill and one area of it contained chalk rubble. Three very small areas of 114 were excavated in order to investigate the edge of the cut 113. This was traced over a length of 7m and was at least 100 mm deep. It appeared to diverge from the line of wall 115 as it progressed northwards and was 740 – 900 mm wide. This cut is interpreted as a robber trench.

To the east of the robber trench, remains of a cobble surface (112) were found lying at or mainly just under the excavated level. Only those areas exposed by the ground reduction were investigated. The surface was made mostly of densely laid flint nodules (largest 180x110x40 mm, average size 100x100x50 mm). Small flint nodules (30x30x15 mm) were laid between and partly over the larger ones. 5% of the surface comprised chalk blocks. Lying above 112 was a 20-40 mm thick deposit of pale yellow brown clayey silt with 5% small stone and 1% chalk flecks (111). This had been cut by robber trench 113 on its west side. Above 111 was a 150mm thick deposit of pale-mid grey brown sandy silt with containing 15% by volume of small stone, 5% chalk fragments and abundant amounts of roof tile (110). This extended over the edge of the robber trench.

Directly over 110 was the remains of a worn crushed chalk surface (108) constructed from mainly small lumps of chalk (50x50x30 – 80x60x40 mm in size). The upper surface was reasonably flat where it had been protected by rubble and was entirely of chalk. Below the upper surface it comprised chalk mixed with tile and sandy silt (109). The well preserved upper surface extended 450-800 mm into the investigation area while remains of the surface continued to a maximum of 1 m westwards into the area. The upper chalk surface was 40 mm thick over 40 mm of chalk and tile. 108 could be a later resurfacing of 109.

Above the chalk surface was a 200-230 mm thick layer of pale yellow/mid grey sandy silt with 20% small gravel and chalk lumps and abundant tile and mortar fragments (106). Above this was a moderately compact pale grey brown slightly silty loam with 10% small stone, and occasional tile fragments (107) tipping down from east to west towards the stream. Remnants of a path comprised of loose medium coarse gravel and very sandy silt with occasional to moderate tile fragments (105), some 170-200 mm thick lay above 106. Again this sloped down towards the stream. This was traced over an 8m length from the southern edge of the excavation area and was a maximum of 100 mm thick at its north end. Above this was the garden topsoil (100).

Several exploratory holes were excavated in the garden area north of the ground reduction area. These were aimed at establishing the depth of significant archaeological deposits in order to design the flood alleviation scheme. In all cases except where wall 119 was encountered, thick deposits (at least 300 mm) of material similar to 107 were found (101, 103,) lying under the garden topsoil. This material was also found above wall 119 (only c. 50mm thick) and floor 118 (102).

5 FINDS

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 21 sherds with a total weight of 231g. The range of fabric types present spanned the entire medieval period, along with a small quantity of early post-medieval material.

The pottery was recorded utilizing the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

OXBF: North-East Wiltshire Ware, AD1050 – 1400. 1 sherd, 8g.

OXY: Medieval Oxford ware, AD1075 – 1350. 6 sherds, 54g.

OXAM: Brill/Boarstall ware, AD1200 – 1600. 8 sherds, 99g.

OXBN: Tudor Green Ware, late 14th century - c. 1500. 2 sherds, 3g.

OXFH: Border wares, 1550 - 1700. 1 sherd, 8g.

OXDR: Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 3 sherds, 59g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*, and has been adjusted with reference to the site stratigraphy.

Generally, the assemblage is typical of the pottery of the period from Oxfordshire, and has a range of wares dating from the later 11th to the 17th centuries. A large sherd of Brill slipware, noted in context 110, is intrusive as could the Tudor Green Ware in 111.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

***intrusive**

Context	OXY		OXBF		OXAM		OXBN		OXFH		OXDR		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
2					2	25							13thC?
11	1	3			1	4							13thC?
102											2	13	M16thC?
104	1	19											L11thC?
105					1	16			1	8			M16thC?
106	2	20			1	9							15thC?
108					1	7	1	1					L14thC?
109					1	34							13thC?
110	1	2									1*	46	13thC?
111			1	8	1	4	1*	2					13thC?
112	1	10											L11thC?
Total	6	54	1	8	8	99	2	3	1	8	3	59	

Other finds

Context 002 contained moderate amounts of animal bone (c. 30 fragments), 33 pieces of roof-tile and two sherds of medieval pottery and the occasional oyster shell. Some

of the animal bone exhibits butchery marks. One piece of tile is partially glazed with a green glaze and is of medieval date. 4 roof-tile fragments were recovered from the lower alluvium (003).

One horseshoe and half of another were recovered from 002. The first is a 4¼ x 4 in tongue shoe of early post-medieval date, while the other is a 5 x 5½ in tongue shoe. Part of an iron knife blade came from the same deposit along with a large iron bolt or fitting. A small length of came also was found in 002. These all came from the pool area.

Small quantities of animal bone and oyster shell were recovered from contexts 105, 106, 108, 109, 111, 116 while 27 fragments of tile were found in 105, 1 in 107, 4 in 111, and 6 in 116. Approximately 10% of tile was recovered from the following contexts; 106 – 45 pieces, 109 - 30, 110 – 21.

6 DISCUSSION

In Area 1 the layers of gravelly clay containing tile (006, 007) must represent episodes of dredging of the Millstream, which would also explain why the ground immediately adjacent to the west bank is higher than that further west. Dating of the dredging is not possible. Dredging deposits of more than one occasion may well be the cause of the anomaly located further south by the ground probing radar.

The presence of the medieval artefacts indicates that rubbish disposal was being carried out on this area that was prone to flooding. It was probably a deliberate policy with the required effect of scouring away the rubbish by floodwaters or burial by alluvial deposits. The layer of snail shells does show that there was an episode when flooding did not happen for a while enabling a habitat to establish which was not obscured by the next episode of flooding. The finds were found above and below this snail horizon indicating that it occurred during the life of the Priory.

Within the garden area (Area 2) wall 120 appears to be in line with the wall forming the north ambulatory, and confirms the results of the geophysical survey. The apparent wall continuing its line to the west may well be an earlier wall that has been robbed and survives at a lower level. The presence of this wall suggests that Stone's hospitium is shorter than that shown on his plan. GPR survey wall A is presumably the east wall of the hospitium/west wall of the guest house, while wall B would be the west wall of the hospitium. To the west of the hospitium was what is supposed to be the necessaria, a building which appears to have been floored with chalk blocks (118). The short length of wall (119) within this building and apparently against the west wall of the hospitium could be a stair support to an upper storey in this building. Re-examination of the GPR results suggests that wall C is narrower and along the eastern part of that shown, and that parts of the cobble floor 112 have been interpreted as part of a wide wall. This would mean that there was a further room/building west of the building thought to be the necessaria. However from the location of the westernmost building next to the millstream it would be more likely that this was the necessaria originally floored with cobbles (112) but then when widened with a chalk floor (109). The middle room would then be of unknown use.

Wall 115 may be the west wall of the necessaria replacing an earlier wall represented by robber trench 113. It would appear that the earlier narrower building had a flint cobble floor 112 while the latter building had a chalk floor.

The earliest excavated floor (112) of the westernmost building must belong to the earlier medieval period with a sequence of later deposits above this culminating with deposit 106 at the end of the life of the Nunnery. The later deposit 105 contains pottery from after the Dissolution. The sherd of Tudor Green Ware sherd in deposit 111 may well be intrusive, introduced through machining. Floor 109 could be from the 13-14th with the later floor 108 from the late 14th/15th century.

The deposits (101- 105) under the topsoil must reflect a period of cultivation of the area after the demolition and robbing of the buildings. No actual demolition material horizon was apparent within the areas investigated suggesting that stone was removed for building work elsewhere in Goring and other material is mixed with soil.

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