

Bicester Priory

By DAVID A. HINTON

INTRODUCTION

BICESTER is a small but rapidly expanding market town 11 miles north-east of Oxford. Part of its expansion has now taken place in the Palace Yard, on the site of an Augustinian Priory. While foundations for the new buildings were being dug, a careful watch was kept by David Watts, then a schoolboy. He measured and recorded the foundations of earlier walls which he saw, and collected all the objects described in this report. I have relied entirely on his work and his photographs, as I did not visit the Yard until after development was complete; had it not been for David Watts' enthusiasm, patience and initiative, all record of the site would have been completely lost.¹

HISTORY

The history of Bicester Priory has been admirably summarized in the *Oxfordshire Victoria County History*, vi. The priory was founded in about 1182 by Gilbert Bassett; it was one of many small houses of Augustinian canons, 'prieories of mediocre resources and local reputation which sprang up with unprofitable rapidity in the later decades of the century'.² The regular canons received royal patronage in the early 12th century, and the larger English houses belong to this period; as royal interest waned, so did benefactions. The introduction of the Cistercian order in particular drew funds away from the Augustinians, but the number of their houses continued to grow. As there was no minimum imposed on the number of inmates, a man of limited means who wished to found a monastery could do so, if he were content for it to be Augustinian. So the smaller houses tend to be later in date; and what is true nationally is also true regionally, in the Oxford area (see map, Fig. 7).

¹ I am grateful to all those who have helped with this report, particularly my Ashmolean colleagues: Mr. J. D. A. Thompson of the Heberden Coin Room for the appendix on the coins; members of the Photographic Department; and Mrs. P. Clarke, Miss F. Nathan, and Mrs. M. Cottam for their drawings. The Society is grateful to the Ministry of Public Building and Works for a grant towards the publication of this report.

² J. C. Dickinson, *The Origins of the Austin Canons*, London, 1950, 141.

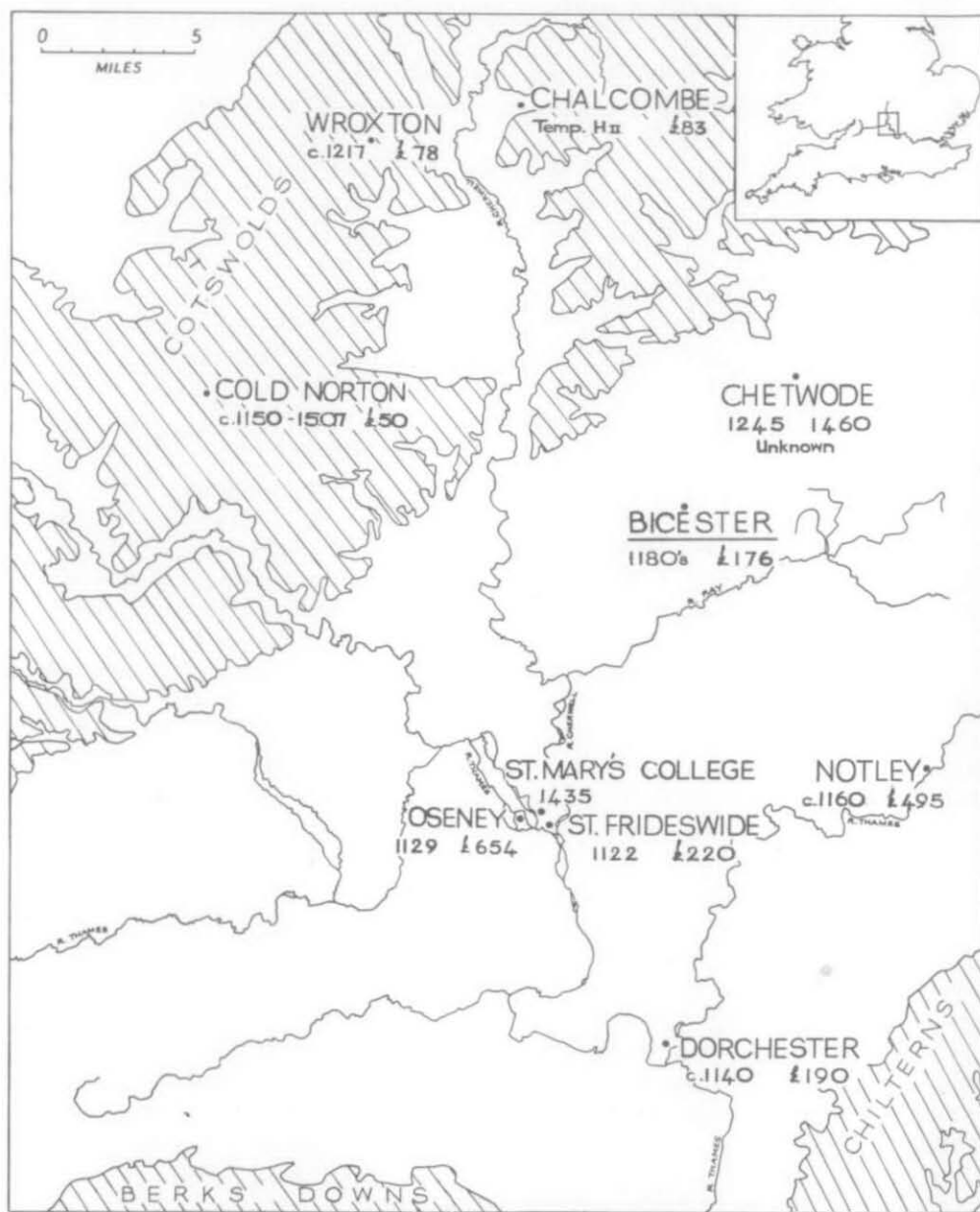


FIG. 7
Augustinian houses in the Oxford Region.
(Based on the Ordnance Survey Map with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office,
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The Cistercians' influence was not only economic, however. Their austerity also affected the Augustinians, and many of that order's members were attracted by it. Originally the canons had clerical responsibilities and the cure of souls, whilst living the common life. Later, their houses tended to be away from urban centres, to avoid both the distractions and the temptations of the outer world, and houses like Notley were carefully sited in the wilds.³ But the choice of the site at Bicester depended entirely on where its founder happened to hold land.

Bicester, though small, was not the smallest of Augustinian priories. Bassett, typical of the 'nobility of largely local fame',⁴ intended that there should be a Prior and eleven canons, the number of Christ's Disciples. The full complement was never apparently attained, but the short-fall was not too great, and there were nine inmates to sign the Oath of Supremacy in 1534, despite an outbreak of sweating sickness in the previous decade. The 'economic and moral instability'⁴ displayed by many smaller houses was not totally absent, but there were no outrageous scandals. Standards were not high, however: in 1520, for instance, it was found that meat was given at meals, and that there were no public readings; nor was there either novice-master or grammar-master, a particularly frequent fault in smaller houses.⁵

'Mediocre resources' were always a difficulty, but the surviving accounts do not suggest excessive cheese-paring. The Priory was not well-endowed, though Bassett and his family were not ungenerous; but few gifts were received after the first century of the Priory's existence,⁶ and building expenses were considerable. Rents declined during the 14th century, tenants and servants were hard to find 'because almost all the men in these parts are dead in this pestilence' (i.e. the Black Death), and the Priory had to enclose much of its land to counter such troubles.⁷ Corrodies were sold, and a common chest inaugurated.⁸ In 1445, the Visitors found that the jewels had been pawned; it is perhaps significant that the accounts surviving after 1426 do not disclose any major building programmes. Some of the financial troubles were probably not inevitable; the Priory was invariably involved in litigation of some sort, and in 1440 the Bursar was even moved to describe these costly affairs as 'divers and arduous'. The Prior was often away on Priory business, and his expenses could be considerable; in 1425, he contrived to spend 48s. 2d. at the Chapter held in Leicester.

³ W. A. Pantin, 'Notley Abbey', *Oxoniensia*, vi (1941), 22-43.

⁴ Dickinson, *op. cit.*, 142.

⁵ D. Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, iii, Cambridge, 1948, 66.

⁶ J. C. Blomfield, *History of the Deanery of Bicester*, ii, Bicester, 1884, 125-7.

⁷ *V.C.H. Oxon.*, vi, 27-8.

⁸ Knowles, *op. cit.*, ii, 328.

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The Prior's activities helped to bring people to Bicester, and the existence of the Priory was at least partly responsible for the development there of a small market town;⁹ the first grant for a fair was made in 1239. But Bicester, although quite well situated, never became of national importance, being overshadowed by its neighbour Oxford. The Priory, however, made a major contribution to the development of the university, for in 1243 a chantry founded by Allen Bassett for two clerks to study there was 'the earliest known provision of anything in the nature of a scholarship'.¹⁰ It was probably this bequest which led to the Priory having the lease from Oseney Abbey of the 'Tenementum Hastyns' in Oxford, probably in School Street, for which rent was paid until the end of the 15th century;¹¹ by then, perhaps, St. Mary's College had made the Bicester School superfluous.

BUILDING HISTORY

Evidence about the building sequence of the Priory comes from the account rolls, which survive for several non-consecutive years, and from other documentary sources.¹² These are informative about both the church and the cloister buildings; the information on the latter is here reviewed in the Interpretation.

The earliest reference to the church is c. 1200, but unfortunately the earliest extant account roll is for 1296, so that there is no evidence for almost the entire 13th century. The 1296 account has a payment for timber for an enclosure outside the church door, suggesting that the church was fairly complete by then, if we assume that the door referred to was the main west door. Stipends to masons and carpenters were still being paid, but these could have been working on the cloister buildings. To raise money, loans and indulgences were resorted to in 1300 and 1304,¹³ benefactions after the first half of the 13th century being few and far between.¹⁴

Financial matters seem to have improved in the early 14th century; much work was undertaken, almost certainly at the east end, leading up to the re-consecration in 1312. There is in the church at Stanton Harcourt, Oxon., a magnificent Purbeck marble shrine, which has been identified as that of St. Edburg, taken from Bicester Priory.¹⁵ From heraldic evidence, this must date

⁹ W. G. Hoskins and E. M. Jope, 'The Medieval Period' (in *The Oxford Region*, ed. A. F. Martin and R. W. Steel, Oxford, 1954, 109).

¹⁰ K. L. Wood-Legh, *Perpetual Chantries in Britain*, Cambridge, 1965, 208.

¹¹ H. E. Salter, *Survey of Oxford* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. New Series, xiv (1960), 73). Salter considered that the property was only a garden.

¹² For further details and full references, see *V.C.H. Oxon*, vi, 16, note 31.

¹³ *V.C.H. Oxon*, vi, 16-17.

¹⁴ Blomfield, *op. cit.*, 127.

¹⁵ For a full description, see E. A. Greening Lambourn, *Ox. Arch. Soc. Rep.*, LXXX (1934).

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between 1294 and 1317, and the stylistic evidence favours a date in the first decade of the century.¹⁶ Such a shrine would have been at the east end, and it was probably for the construction of the 'octave'¹⁷ in which it was contained that money was raised.

Building did not stop with the reconsecration, however. In 1315, the Sacristan paid £11 12s. 1d. for expenses on new work, and also sold off some surplus stone. In 1317, glass was bought for a new chapel, as was a painting of Walter of Fotheringay, who shortly before had bequeathed £40 for a chantry. In 1320, £5 4s. 2½d. worth of lead and £2 13s. 11d. worth of glass were bought, but there is no indication of where in the church these were used. In 1323, an indulgence was granted, perhaps to raise money for building expenses.¹⁸ The accounts for 1316, 1327, and the rest of those that survive for the 14th century, do not contain anything to suggest that major works were going on, until 1395-96. By then, major renovations at the east end were in progress, and the work was still going on in 1412. A south aisle and a new aisle are mentioned in 1395-6, but probably these were in the presbytery.¹⁹

LATER HISTORY

Bicester Priory was dissolved in 1536, and the church was pulled down almost immediately, as Leland says nothing about it.²⁰ The remainder of the buildings were adapted for private use, until they too were destroyed, at the end of the 17th century.²¹ A barn, now part of the Church Meeting-House, may contain medieval work, but has been much altered; the accounts refer frequently to stables, etc., probably within the precinct.

It has been suggested that the house within the former monastic precinct now known as the Old Priory might have been the canons' guest house²² because of medieval features in it. It is a rectangular building with later additions, two-storeyed, with an attic under the roof.²³ In the east gable is a stone two-light window with hollow mouldings and rectangular drip-mould, of 15th-16th century type.²⁴ There are two similar windows in the north front, and another, damaged two-light window with cusped heads, which is probably

¹⁶ L. Stone, *Sculpture in Britain in the Middle Ages*, Harmondsworth, 1955, 134.

¹⁷ See Sacristan's accounts, 1408.

¹⁸ *V.C.H. Oxon.*, vi, 17.

¹⁹ Blomfield, II, 107, translates 'insula' as transept.

²⁰ T. Hearne (ed.), *Leland's Itinerary*, Oxford, 1711, vii, 3.

²¹ *V.C.H. Oxon.*, vi, 17.

²² *V.C.H. Oxon.*, vi, 16.

²³ I am very grateful to the owner, Mrs. A. Hallam, for letting me see the house.

²⁴ For a photograph of a similar window in a post-Dissolution house, see *Oxoniensia*, xxv (1960), Pl. XI, C.

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earlier. There is a four-centred doorway in the same wall, and in a garden wall leading off from the east gable is a pointed arch. These features all obviously come from the Priory. The roof has three trusses of evenly-cut principal rafters with diagonally-set ridge-piece, each truss having straight collar-beam and tie-beam. 2 ft. from each end of the tie-beam are single vertical queen-posts up to the principal rafters, to which they are morticed just below purlin level. There is one butt-purlin on each side, each supported on both sides of the trusses by angled wind-braces trenched into the backs of both the trusses and the purlins. The trusses are numbered I–III in chiselled Roman figures, the queen-posts being separately numbered I–VI; each timber, including the ridge-piece, also has a lightly scribed X. Each bay is 9 ft. 4½ in. long; there are no gable trusses. The rest of the interior of the house has had many alterations, but there are transverse beams, chamfered and with various different end-stops, supporting the first-floor joists. There is a chimney with plain cambered stone fire-place head in the west gable.

The Old Priory is probably not pre-Dissolution. The roof is 17th century²⁵ and it seems unlikely that it is placed on earlier walls; there is no sign of such re-building, the 2½ storey plan is generally found from the late 16th century,²⁶ and the internal features are consistent with a 17th century date. The mixture of the stonework, though not its unsymmetrical arrangement, suggest that the building was erected well after the Dissolution, re-using stone from the Priory buildings.

PREVIOUS DISCOVERIES

The Priory site, by then gardens and orchard, first attracted antiquarian interest at the beginning of the last century. Bicester had already had a notable historian in White Kennett, and John Dunkin was a worthy follower. His interest in the Priory led him to record²⁷ what little was known about the buildings, as seen by the former gardener at the Old Priory. These included a well, 'a neat little place walled with brick, and paved with six-inch square tiles ornamented with plain circles, and flowers of various kinds', and 'an immense arched vault'.

Dunkin's curiosity being unsatisfied, he 'set . . . workmen to dig', in October 1819, and published his results in an appendix to his next history.²⁸ The exact location of most of his trenches cannot be worked out; but he left a

²⁵ cf. R. B. Wood-Jones, *Domestic Architecture of the Banbury Region*, Manchester, Fig. 66, 14—a late-17th century barn. For absence of gable-trusses, see D. Portman, 'Little Milton—the Re-Building of an Oxfordshire Village', *Oxoniensia*, xxv (1960), 56.

²⁶ Wood-Jones, 229.

²⁷ J. Dunkin, *History and Antiquities of Bicester*, London, 1816, 80–3.

²⁸ J. Dunkin, *History and Antiquities of the Hundreds of Bullington and Ploughley*, London, II (1823), 250 ff.

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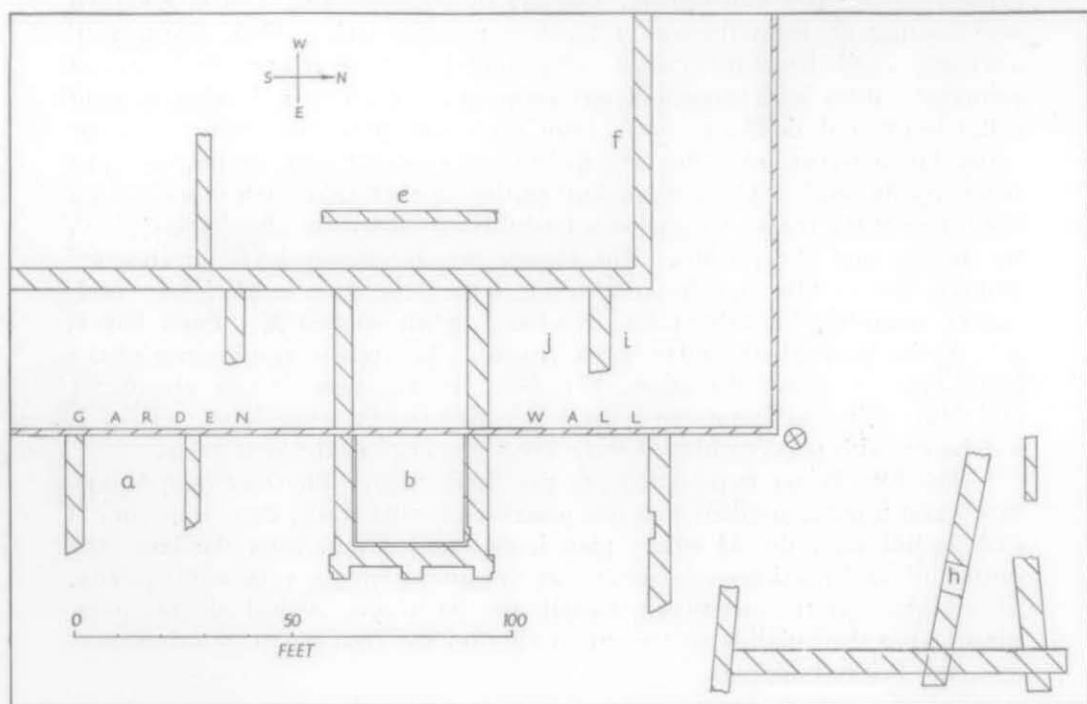


FIG. 8
Priory foundations seen by John Dunkin in 1819.

detailed plan of his discoveries in the eastern part of the site, and this is redrawn in FIG. 8.²⁹ Substantial walls remained, but in the first building that he found (**a** on plan), he was not able to recognize these precisely. From the ash and cinders there, he took the building for a kitchen.

Continuing his trench northwards, Dunkin discovered 'a wall four feet in thickness, and at about 25 or 27 feet distance another, parallel therewith. Both were plastered inside.' There was a great deal of masonry and vaulting rubble between the walls, suggesting that the roof was vaulted. The walls still stood to window height. At first Dunkin took this building (**b** on plan) for the church, but when he found no burials in it, he concluded that it was not, and proceeded to dig further.

The 'astonishment was extreme' when yet larger foundations were discovered. Time and money prevented these from being fully explored, and no

²⁹ The point ⊗ at the junction of the garden walls is common to Figs 8 and 9.

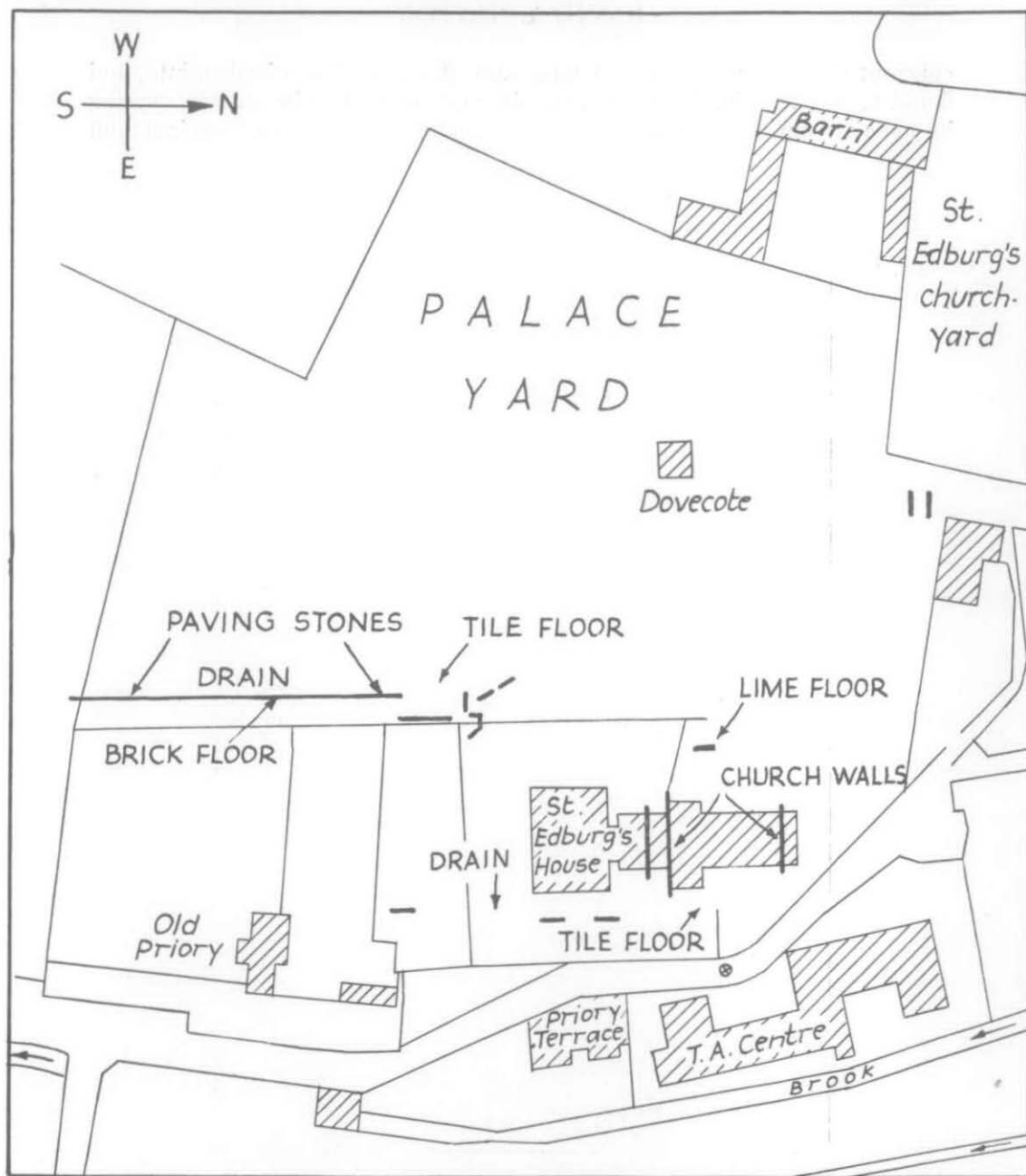


FIG. 9
 Bicester: the Priory site, showing walls, etc., seen by David Watts. Scale 1 : 1250.
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coherent plan was produced. A large arch (h on plan) was broken into, and found to be 5 ft. 8 in. deep and 5 ft. wide: this he took to be a drain running into the stream. Other finds were a skeleton, window glass, carvings and

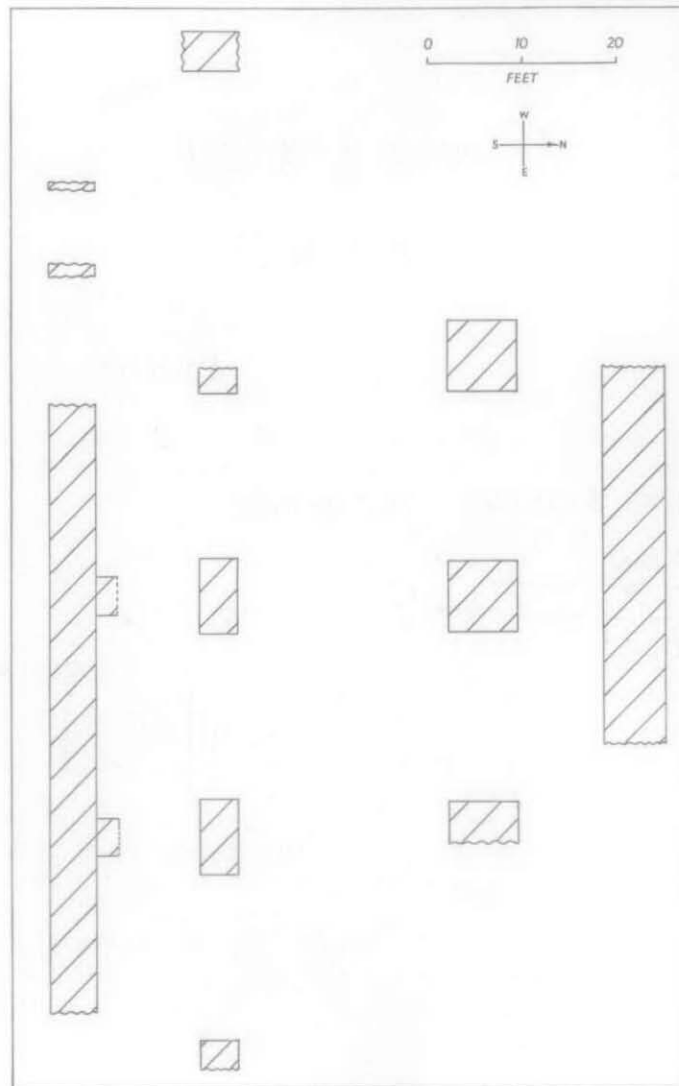


FIG. 10
Church foundations seen by David Watts.

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masonry. It is now (1968) hoped that further excavations may reveal more of the east end, so I shall not discuss it any more here.

RECENT DISCOVERIES

After Dunkin's day, the site in Palace Yard remained under horticulture. Outside, Priory Terrace was built in 1890,³⁰ and a Territorial Army Centre in the Second World War. Development of the Yard itself began in 1964, and the walls observed by David Watts during this work are described in this report. A great deal of information was recovered, but it must be stressed that no archaeological excavation took place, no stratigraphy could be recorded, and walls may have been destroyed before they were observed. On the plan (FIG. 9), appear only those features seen and measured by David Watts or Mr. Brain, the site foreman.³¹ Elsewhere on the site, there were walls and rumours of walls, but these were not confirmed, and in many cases may have been post-medieval.

The most important building revealed was the nave of the church, at about floor level (FIG. 10). Some 40 ft. of the north wall, 6 ft. 6 in. thick, were uncovered; it had limestone dressings and a rubble core (PLATE I). Nine feet to the south was a line of pier bases, of which two were uncovered totally, and a third partly. Both those uncovered were 7 ft. 6 in. square; they were 18 ft. apart. A second line of bases was 22 ft. south of the first; two were fully revealed, two partly. Each measured 8 ft. by 4 ft., and they stood 17 ft. 6 in. apart. Eleven feet south again was another wall, 5 ft. wide, also with limestone dressings and rubble core (PLATE II). Abutting this on the north side were small projections (not precisely measured), one opposite each pier base.

Some 34 ft. west of the east side of the last pair of piers, a short length of wall about 4 ft. wide running north-south was seen during trench digging. West of this was a lime floor (PLATE III).

Various skeletons orientated east-west were observed, but were not retained. They were not in stone coffins. The majority of the floor-tiles found³² were in the rubble at the east end of the exposed part of the church; the small area of laid floor (PLATE IV) which was found is marked on FIG. 9. This was slightly east of the ground excavated by the bulldozers.

About 14 ft. (the measurement is not exact) south of the south wall of the church, and parallel with it, was a 3 ft. wide wall, of which 38 ft. were uncovered

³⁰ Datestone on building.

³¹ It is a pleasure to thank the staff of Norman Collisson Ltd., particularly Mr. Brain, for their interest in the discoveries.

³² See below, p. 41.

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(FIG. 9). At right angles to it, on the east, was a narrower wall about 18 in. wide. On the east side of this were two skeletons in stone coffins, orientated east-west; the coffins had lost their lids.

South of this wall, less was revealed (FIG. 9) and since the features were seen at various different times, their relationship to each other is not exact. Important structures were a stone-built enclosure north of a north-south wall, which ran parallel to a drain (PLATE V). This was about 20 in. wide, built of dry-stone walls, with a corbelled slab top and stone base. It drained towards the south, with the natural slope of the land, but probably with a steeper fall. Above, floors were observed, paved with brick and stone. There was a floor paved with plain tiles³³ west of the north-south wall.

INTERPRETATION

(a) THE CHURCH

(1) *Nave and Aisles*

The church evidently had a nave with north and south aisles; the overall width was 65 ft., the length at least 74 ft. This is as much as can be said with certainty; but the difference in size between the north and south aisles, walls, and pier bases, suggests at least two building periods. It is possible that an originally aisleless nave, common in smaller Augustinian houses,³⁴ was completed by about 1200,³⁵ following the sequence at Dorchester Abbey.³⁶ Alternatively, the east end of the church was in use by 1200, and work on the nave began in the 13th century, being finished by 1294; the same sequence was revealed at Notley Abbey by Dr. W. A. Pantin.³⁷ This interpretation permits at least one side—probably the north—to be original, and provides a convenient context for the two pieces of carved foliage shown in FIG. 12. It would also explain why no foundations of an earlier north wall were seen, though this could be simply because the bulldozers did not go far enough below floor level.

If the north aisle were contemporary with the nave, what of the south aisle? There are, of course, Augustinian churches with only one aisle, but these have usually been added to an earlier nave; again, Dorchester provides a local parallel.³⁸ But twin aisles are more likely, as at Notley. How then did the

³³ See below, p. 47.

³⁴ R. Liddesdale Palmer, *English Monasteries in the Middle Ages*, London, 1930, 76.

³⁵ *V.C.H. Oxon.*, vi, 16. I have not looked at the document cited in note 39.

³⁶ H. M. Colvin in *V.C.H. Oxon.*, vii, 58.

³⁷ *Oxonienisia*, vi (1941), 25-7.

³⁸ Colvin, *op. cit.* An Augustinian church in Cumberland, Lanercost Priory, has a single aisle which has been thought contemporary with the nave, but recent research is against this. See P. Eden, 'Lanercost Priory', *Arch. Journ.*, cxv (1958), 220-5.

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differences between the two aisles occur, if they were originally planned as a pair? One explanation is that the south aisle was later re-built, using a more graceful and slender pier. This allowed 3 ft. 6 in. to be taken off the pier width on the aisle side, leaving the nave the same width as before, presumably with the same roof. A wider south aisle was then possible, but full advantage was not taken of this; instead a new south wall was built, 18 in. narrower than the old one, with its interior face 18 in. closer to the nave. In this way, a total of 3 ft. was lost in the overall width of the church, and this is nearly the same as the amount by which the north walk of the cloister was wider than the east walk (see below, p. 35).

There are, of course, objections to this interpretation, for which I know no parallels; no sign of the foundations of an earlier south wall, or of the south side of the piers, were seen, but this is not surprising if they were 'robbed' at all. The projections from the south wall opposite the piers are a problem. They may have been supports for attached vaulting shafts, but from the photograph (PLATE II) they do not appear to have been bonded into the wall. They may have been no more than seat supports;³⁹ there were stone seats in the church, as stone was bought at Bloxham for them in 1296, but this would have been marlstone, whereas the projections appear to be limestone.

There is no direct documentary evidence to support my interpretation of the re-building of the south aisle. It is possible, however, that the £40 bequeathed by Walter of Fotheringay was used in this work. If the 1312 re-consecration was not just a cunning ploy to raise more funds, and work at the east end to accommodate the shrine of St. Edburg were complete by then, the work after that date might have been to contain Walter's chantry, so that the monks passed it in their Sunday processions.

(2) *The West End*

The archaeological evidence for the position of the west end is even more inconclusive. There is definite evidence of three bays (FIG. 10), but the distance from the most westerly pair of piers to the north-south wall observed beyond them was too great for one further bay, and too small for two. I think that the explanation is that the last piers revealed were actually the last in the church, and that the west wall came at the end of the next bay, an area not uncovered by the bulldozer. This would give an internal measurement of 94 ft. from the west side of the most easterly pier, which compares favourably with Dunkin's measurement of the east walk of the cloister,⁴⁰ of about 95 ft. The alternative length, 119 ft. 6 in., would make the nave inordinately long.

³⁹ cf. St. Mary's Church, Winchester. See M. Biddle, 'Excavations at Winchester, 1966', *Antiq. Journ.*, XLVII (1967), 263.

⁴⁰ See below, p. 34.

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What, then, was the north-south wall, which must have been very close to the west end of the church? It may have been merely post-medieval. If not, it could have been part of a porch structure, but these are rare.⁴¹ Another possibility is that it was part of a staircase turret, or west tower. Somewhere in the church there was certainly a belfry of some size, for it had at least three bells,⁴² and quantities of pigeons were had from it⁴³: there may have been a clock in it also.⁴⁴ The lime floor found west of the wall could also be part of some such addition to the church.

(3) *The Crossing*

The south wall of the church is presumably the same as that seen by Dunkin (f in FIG. 8), though the distance from the post-Dissolution garden wall is not quite the same. If so, it must have turned at right angles after reaching the end of the length seen by David Watts, so that the last pier was the south-west corner of the crossing—the alternative, and more probable, position for the tower is above this. This would allow a short south transept (i) with a wide slype (j) beyond; Dunkin may have mis-measured the distance between his building 'b' and the 'transept'. The 1407-08 account refers to a door into the church from the cloister on the chapter-house side, and this was probably at the east end of the church south wall, the usual place.

(b) THE CLOISTER

The 1964-6 work did not provide much new information about the cloister. The accounts refer to various different buildings, but from these alone it is not possible to re-construct completely the cloistral plan, or its stages of development; this would have been difficult under the best of circumstances, since part at least of this area was adapted to secular use after the Dissolution. The existence of a cloister was first recognized by Dunkin,⁴⁵ who gave the very proper caution that further interpretation 'must be left to conjecture, unless all the foundations are traced'.

The cloister lay in the usual position south of the church. Dunkin's measurement for its east side is about 95 ft., but I have argued above⁴⁶ that its original length would have been 3 ft. less than this, with a north side of about 96 ft. Slight differences in the lengths are common. The wall of the east walk, at the end of which was probably a door into the church⁴⁷, is the only one

⁴¹ B. J. Philp, *Excavations at Faversham, 1965*, Crawley, 1968, 19.

⁴² Blomfield, II, 108, note 4.

⁴³ e.g. 4s. 5d. worth in 1438.

⁴⁴ See below, p. 35.

⁴⁵ Dunkin (1823), *op. cit.*, 251.

⁴⁶ See p. 33.

⁴⁷ See above.

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indubitably seen by both David Watts and Dunkin (e on FIG. 8). It was about 18 in. narrower than the north walk wall, the extra width of the latter suggesting that it may have supported stone vaulting, where the other was timber-roofed. This grander treatment of the north walk may have been designed to allow more room for the monks' 'carrels', in which they worked. Some of the glass and lead bought in 1320 may have been used for the cloister walk; glazing and vaulting were becoming more common after the 13th century.⁴⁸ But I cannot support this interpretation of the south aisle and north cloister walk with other examples.

(1) *The East Range*

The east range was not uncovered in the 1964-6 work, so that there is nothing to add to Dunkin's plan. His building **b** is evidently the chapter-house, vaulted in a single span; it presumably projected at right angles from the main cloister block. The accounts frequently refer to a chapter-house, e.g. mats were bought for it in 1412, but apart from tiling repairs, there is nothing about the structure. Dunkin's plan suggests that there were stone seats.

Between the chapter-house and the (assumed) south transept was a space which was variously used in other monasteries as a slype, a vestry, a sacristy, and a treasure-house, often being converted from the first into one or all of the rest.⁴⁹ The accounts refer to all three of these at various times, but they may have been one and the same building. The vestry was rebuilt at the end of the 14th century, a work probably connected with the east end of the church. Three beams in the roof collapsed in 1407, and had to be replaced. There was a chimney in the sacristy by the 15th century, as this was repaired in 1438; a eucharist oven is thus possible.

The dorter was probably in the east range on the upper floor, the almost invariable monastic position. This was re-built in the 15th century, and expenses on it that appear in the 1425-6 account include 18 corbelstones, 28 lb. of iron piping, tiling on the roof, and two weather-cocks. Blomfield⁵⁰ plausibly argued that there was a clock in a turret over the dorter, translating 'clykchamber' as 'clock-chamber', in the 1425-6 account. A clock had to be mended in 1438, but as this was the Sacristan's responsibility, it may have been in the church, perhaps in the belfry. A change from communal living in the dorter is suggested by the 1456 account and its successor, for in these, separate payments were made for the chambers of each individual canon and

⁴⁸ R. Gilyard-Beer, *Abbeys*, London, 1958, 24.

⁴⁹ e.g. at Faversham. See Philp, *op. cit.*, 23, and parallels cited there.

⁵⁰ Blomfield, *ii*, 111.

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novice; perhaps the dorter was split up physically.⁵¹ There were certainly private chambers below it by 1395-6, when Henry Boccher's was repaired.

Also on the ground floor, extending beyond the cloister, was Dunkin's building **a**. This may have been the parlour or warming-house, which was often at the south end of the dorter range,⁵² though less frequently in Augustinian houses.⁵³ The ash and cinders seen by Dunkin could have come from a hearth. There is no documentary or archaeological evidence for a rere-dorter, but there could have been one above building **a**, projecting towards the stream. David Watts observed a well or drain in this corner (FIG. 9).

(2) *The South Range and Area South of the Cloister*

Archaeologically there is no evidence about the south range, except that part of its north wall is shown on Dunkin's plan. The documents are unhelpful too; it is probable that the block contained the frater, but whether this was on the ground or first floor is unknown. The more common general position is the latter, but not in Augustinian houses.⁵⁴ There is a reference in 1395-6 to a door into the garden next to the refectory, perhaps suggesting that it was on the ground floor. If so, there is no record of what was above. In 1433-4, a stone staircase was built, leading up from the cloister into the 'hyksmith' chamber, which was renovated at the same time. This chamber, whatever it was, could have been above a ground-floor frater.

The foundations seen at the west end of the south block appear to be beyond the likely limits of the cloister, i.e. the west end of the church, or it would be tempting to associate the stone enclosure with the foundations of a laver, for which lead was bought in 1296, and which was in the cloister in 1440 and 1486. It was usually close to the door into the frater.

There are frequent references in the accounts to the kitchen, and buildings associated with it. This block may well have been that extending south from the south-west corner of the cloister, though the floors seen were probably post-Medieval, except perhaps the tiled one.⁵⁵ The drain (PLATE V) could well be Medieval; there are of course many parallels for drains on monastic sites, since these by their nature are the features best preserved for the archaeologist. Drainage on this site must have been a problem, as the land is low-lying, with a high water table. There may have been ponds in the higher grounds west

⁵¹ Gilyard-Beer, *op. cit.*, 25, 46-7.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵³ D. Knowles and J. K. S. St. Joseph, *Monastic Sites from the Air*, Cambridge, 1952, xvii.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁵⁵ See below, p. 47.

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of the buildings,⁵⁶ and in 1433 payment had to be made for draining the kitchen garden.

South of the north-south block, there may have been a detached infirmary; there is no evidence for this, but the accounts show that there was at any rate an infirmary and an infirmary garden somewhere. The usual position east of the dormer is unlikely because of the stream, and there is no set pattern for buildings like this.⁵⁷ It is doubtful if a small house like Bicester would have had a subsidiary cloister.

(3) *The West Range*

No definite structures were seen on the west side of the cloister, which appears to be under a steep bank; an open-sided cloister cannot therefore be definitely ruled out, but these occur only in the very smallest houses. The accounts suggest strongly that by the 14th century at least the normal plan of the smaller houses had been adopted.

Probably on the ground floor next to the church was the locutory; beyond it was the cellar in 1407-08. But in 1425-6 the threshold of its door was next to the Prior's hall; this could mean that between these years the Prior took the cellar over for his own use, but it is probably no more than a form of words. The accounts make frequent references to the Prior's expenses on entertainment in his chambers, the earliest being in 1301 when ale was bought for the guests there. Improvements and additions to the Prior's lodgings were many; in 1301, a mason was given his final payment for work there, and ridge-tiles were bought. In 1316, a winding-stair was built, and two years later the first mention is made of the Prior's hall. A stone for the altar in the Prior's new chamber was bought in 1327, as was building stone. Another new chamber appears in 1398-9, between the hall and upper chamber, and stone borders for chimneys and a new threshold to the door were fitted. Brick and wood were bought for chimneys in the undated post-1456 account.

The last mention of guests in the Prior's lodgings occurs in 1395-6, which almost coincides with the last major addition to his rooms. By 1395-6, the Priory had acquired an inn in Bicester, later called 'The Bell', for which rent was paid, and presumably most guests were then lodged there. The Prior may have been left with the entire west wing, except the locutory, to himself, in surroundings as manorial as those of the Abbot of Notley.⁵⁸ A similar trend to secular living in a monastic setting has been traced at Castle Acre Priory, Norfolk.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Dunkin (1816), *op. cit.*, 83. Note also the drain under the east end of the church, *h* on Dunkin's plan (Fig. 8).

⁵⁷ Gilyard-Beer, *op. cit.*, 35.

⁵⁸ Pantin, *op. cit.*, note 3, 40.

⁵⁹ P. A. Faulkner, 'A Model of Castle Acre Priory', *Med. Arch.*, vi/vii (1962-3), 300-3.

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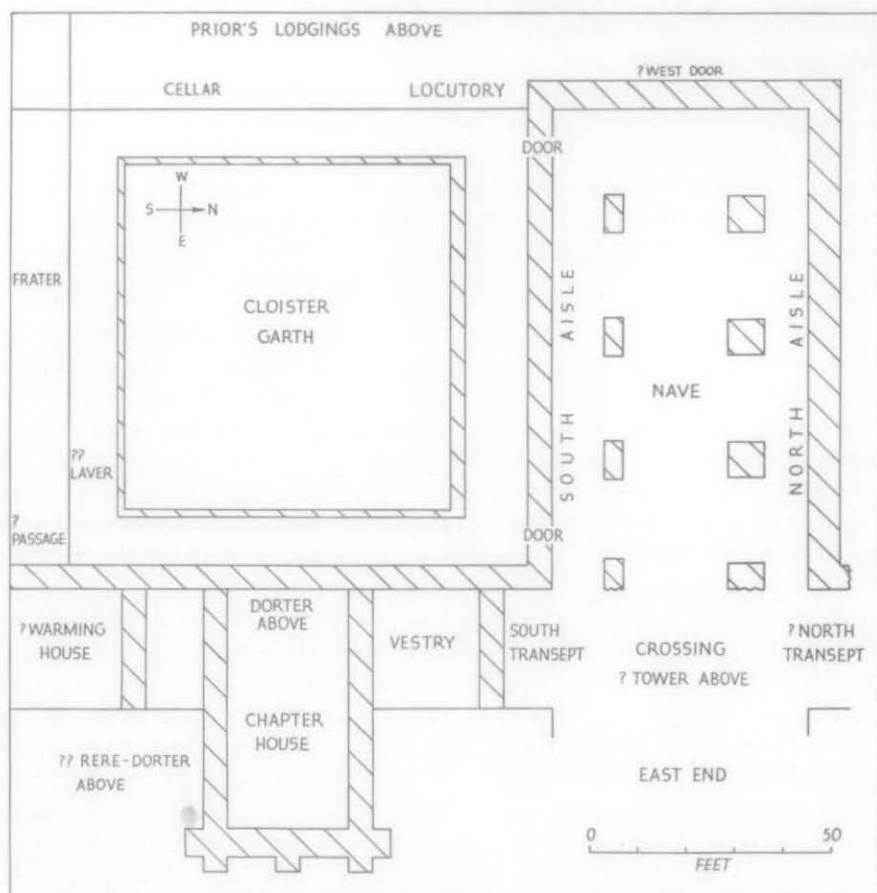


FIG. 11
Suggested re-construction of the Priory church and cloister, as in c. 1400.

(c) THE PRECINCT

The only positive new evidence about the Precinct was that two parallel walls were found under the present road into Palace Yard, next to the churchyard (FIG. 9). Dunkin⁶⁰ placed the Gate-house here on documentary evidence, and because he had heard 'a report that a large arch was standing there, some years past'. This is the most logical place for the Gate-house, and the walls may have been part of its foundations. Dunkin found 'a pitched road, with walls on either side, leading towards the priory buildings', in 1819.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Dunkin (1816), *op. cit.*, 83.

⁶¹ Dunkin (1823), *op. cit.*, 251.

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CONCLUSION

Although it involves going far beyond the archaeological and documentary evidence, it seems worth while to suggest a possible outline of the building sequence of the Priory.

Work began at the end of the 12th century on the east end of the church, and was fairly well advanced by the beginning of the 13th. With the east end, crossing and transepts complete, the nave and aisles were begun, building probably being simultaneous with work on the cloister ranges. By 1294 the church was finished and the west and final range of the cloister was nearly complete.

Substantial alterations to the east end were put in hand early in the 14th century, to accommodate the shrine of St. Edburg, which was consecrated in 1312; but work in the church continued. At some time, the south aisle was renovated, perhaps immediately after 1312. Further work at the east end began at the end of the 14th century, and was prolonged into the second decade of the 15th.

In the cloister, minor works were undertaken, the north walk being widened when the south aisle of the church was altered. The expansion of the Prior's lodgings was the most important change, until in the 1420s the canons' dorter was rebuilt. Both Prior and canons lived more private lives in the later Middle Ages.

A reconstruction (FIG. 11) of the ground plan of the Priory church and cloister is no less tenuous. The dimensions are uncertain, but the main buildings are probably in their correct relative positions, as they would have been in about 1400. I have not attempted to reconstruct the rest of the precinct, as the evidence is too slight.

FINDS

All the finds reported here from the Priory site were recovered by David Watts, often from the maw of the bulldozer. All must be regarded as unstratified, except for the area of laid floor. The bulk of the floor tiles came from the east end of the excavated part of the church; others were scattered over the site, but there are no useful groups of patterns. Pieces of stonework from the Priory buildings which had been reset in garden walls were recovered from the rubble.

BUILDING MATERIALS

STONE

The accounts often refer to purchases of stone, though not always naming the source of supply. Walling-stone and rubble were available from the Priory's own quarries in Kirtlington (1425) and in Bicester, at Crockwell (1425), and another probably low quality stone came from Caversfield, three miles north of Bicester

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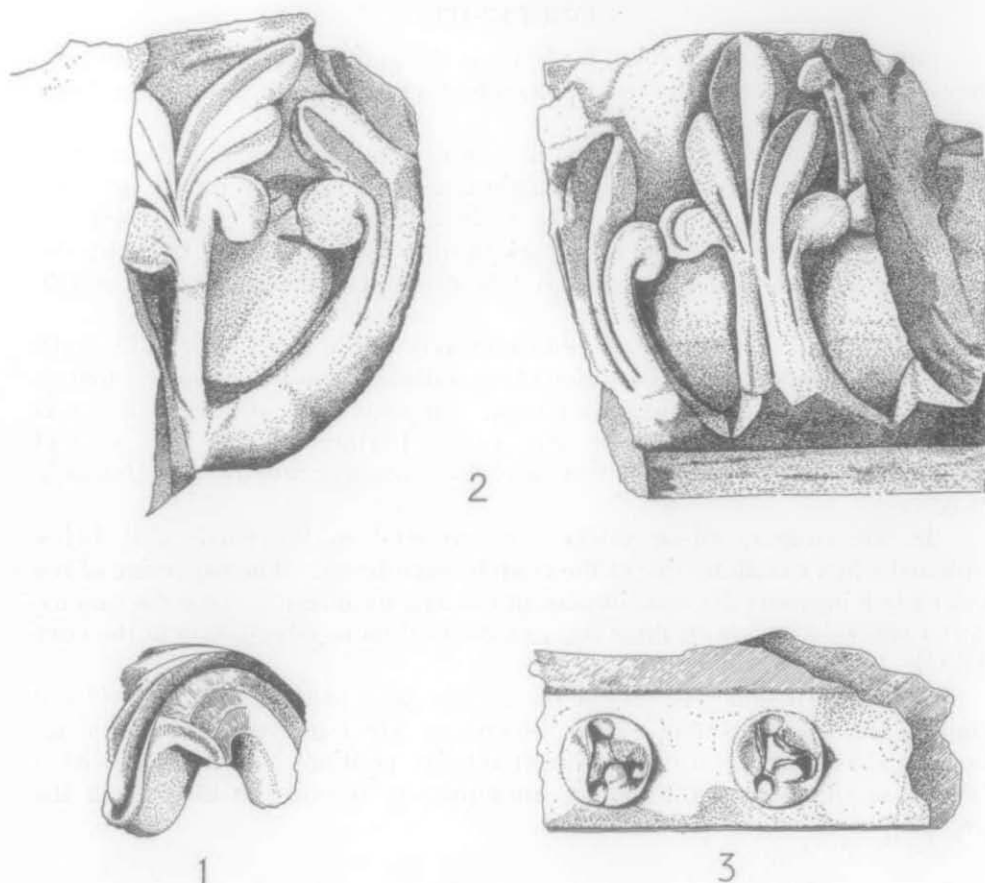


FIG. 12
Stonework. Scale 1 : 4.

(1395, 1398, 1407). Better quality supplies came from Taynton (1395, 1398), and from Bloxham (1296: this was bought for seats in the church, but the amount of ironstone to be seen in the walls about Palace Yard, pillaged from the Priory, shows that it was used in some quantity).⁶² Two pieces of stone were sampled; one was an ironstone, probably from the Banbury Marlstone, the other an oolite from the Middle Jurassic, though it was not possible to be specific about the region.⁶³

⁶² The 1327 account refers to 'francia petra', i.e. freestone, not French stone as translated by Blomfield.

⁶³ I am grateful to Mr. K. P. Powell for this information.

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FIG. 12

(1) Fragment of stiff-leaf ornament, with bossed mid-rib, ? from a pier capital. Oolite. Probably first half 13th century.⁶⁴

(2) Foliage ornament, hollow ribs, from a capital. Oolite. 13th century.

(3) Ball-flower ornament. Ironstone, painted cream. 14th century.

Stone was also used for roofing, in slates; no whole examples were recovered, but there were many fragments. Again, the accounts do not always name supply sources (e.g. 2s. was paid for tiles in 1346). In 1440, slates were bought at Slaughter, Glos.⁶⁵ Payments were made for moss-gathering, presumably for roofing.⁶⁶

BRICK

One piece of possibly Medieval brick was found. This was in a soft friable sandy fabric, with a lot of small red stone in it. It was plastered over, the surface of the plaster being whitewashed. An undated, post-1456 account records that 1,000 bricks (bryke) were bought for the Prior's chimney for 5s. Brick chimneys were becoming common in the 15th century,⁶⁷ but this is an early example of the use of brick in the Oxford region. The laid floor of glazed brick (FIG. 9) was probably post-Dissolution.

CLAY TILES

A number of clay ridge-tile fragments were found, but no complete sections; 2s. was paid for 'crests' in 1301. Payments to tilers or for tiles are frequent, but these might refer to stone or clay roof-tiles, or even possibly to floor-tiles. Large tiles bought at Cherlton (?Charlton) may have been of flat clay (1433, 1452), but only one fragment of this sort of roof-tile was recognized.

RIDGE-TILES

All small pieces, not illustrated.

(1) Triangular serrated type with wavy profile (cf. *Oxon.* XVI (1951), FIG. 21, 1, but without finger pinches). Coarse sandy red fabric. Patches of orange glaze with green flecks. Possibly hand-finished after knife-cutting. 13th century.

(2) Serrated pyramidal type (as last, FIG. 21, 5). 13th-14th century.

(3) Cut triangular serrated type (as last, FIG. 21, 8).

(4) Plain curved and triangular types. 15th-16th century.

FLOOR-TILES

(1) *Inlaid Tiles*

Numerous different designs were recorded, and these are listed below by the serial number in Loyd Haberley's *Medieval English Pavingtiles*, Oxford, 1937. Fabrics were friable and red, often with a grey core. Unless otherwise stated, they had conical stabbed keys, d. about 0.5 cm.; many fragments were too small to include keys. There were many glaze variations, including a streaky olive-brown variety. All had bevelled sides, though firing distortions often obscured this feature.

Abbreviations: capital letters show other Augustinian sites in the area at which

⁶⁴ S. Gardner, *English Gothic Foliage Sculpture*, Cambridge, 1927, 23.

⁶⁵ See W. J. Arkell, *Oxford Stone*, London, 1947, 130.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁶⁷ L. F. Salzman, *Building in England*, Oxford, 1952, 98; Hoskins and Jope, *op. cit.*, 116.

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the design has been seen;⁶⁸ N = Notley, O = St. Frideswide's, Oxford, Os = Oseney, Oxford, D = Dorchester, C = Chetwode. Small letters indicate that some fragments of that pattern had been scored before firing (s), broken into two triangles (st), halves ($s\frac{1}{2}$), quarters ($s\frac{1}{4}$), or into quarters and triangles ($s\frac{1}{4}t$). If the pattern number includes a particularly badly inlaid example, this is shown by *.

Certain

- I: O, Os, D. * Inc. one ex. with oval keys, 0.8 cm. long.
 III: O, Os, D. Inc. one with oval keys.
 XVI:
 XVIII-XIX: Inc. a variant in which the cross terminals are plain semi-circles.
 XX: D. Inc. one with obliquely stabbed keys.
 XXI: N, O, D. (st). Inc. one with the human-headed dragon looking to the right, as in Hohler's W.27.
 XXII: N, O, Os, D. * Inc. one unkeyed.
 XXV: N, O, D. (st). A tile with this design, now in the Ashmolean Museum (A.M. 1938.881), was found at the Priory in 1938.
 XXVI: O, Os, D. Inc. one without inlay at the edges.
 XXXIX: N. * (st—perhaps before firing).
 XLIII: N, D.
 XLIV: N, O, D. Inc. fragments which show the lion with two ears, and the tail curling inwards.
 LI: D ($s\frac{1}{4}$). No keys on one of the quarters.
 LIII: O, Os. (st).
 LIV: N, O, D. (Note Haberley's errata, page 324.) Another tile with this design came from a site in Sheet Street, Bicester (A.M. 1937.139). It is badly inlaid, and smaller than average, being 12.8-13.0 cm. square, 1.7 cm. thick. The back has 17 square pyramidal stab keys, a type not found at the Priory.
 LVI: Os (st, $s\frac{1}{4}t$).
 LIX: Os (st).
 LXI: O, Os.
 LXIX: O, C. There were no designs in the corners.
 CLXXV (also P88): * Previously recorded only as a printed tile. The sides measured 13.8-14.1 cm., thickness 1.7-1.9 cm.
 CCIX: N (s, st). An inlaid, not printed, design.⁶⁹ Hohler, W8; inc. one without the border. This design is almost identical to Haberley LXVI.

Probable

- XII-XIII: O, Os. Three fragments only.

Possible

- IX: One corner fragment only.
 XXIX: N, D. As last.
 LXVIII: Two fragments only.

⁶⁸ By Lord Haberley, or by C. Hohler, 'Medieval Pavingtiles in Buckinghamshire', *Records of Bucks.*, xiv (1941-6) 1-49, 99-132.

⁶⁹ Hohler, *op. cit.*, 20.

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Several designs have not been found before. All had the usual stab keys. Dotted lines show where the design was particularly obscure, smudged or broken (FIG. 13).

- A A fragment of this design came from the Priory in 1937 (A.M. 1937.139), too late for publication by Loyd Haberley; it is also found in Northamptonshire.⁷⁰ The very fine inlay is notable. The design in the corner differs from that shown by Swann, but was rather smudged. A comparable trailing vine-scroll design is found in Warwickshire and Gloucestershire.⁷¹ No whole tiles were found; the only complete side measured 14.0 cm., and thicknesses varied, 1.7–2.1 cm.
- B (st) Shows a dragon. It is evidently a close relation of Haberley's XXXVI–XXXVII (N, Os), but the circle is indented on the outside, and the wings differ. Front legs are probable, but none of the fragments showed this clearly. None of the fragments showed the counter-side, i.e. the dragon going to the left. Sides varied, 13.7–14.0 cm., thicknesses 1.6–2.1 cm.
- C (st) Related to Hohler's W8 and Haberley's LXV. Of the four fragments bearing heads, two had eyes. The only complete side measured 13.8 cm., thicknesses varied, 1.7–2.2 cm.
- D Was represented by a single broken tile, badly inlaid, and obscured by a stacking fault. I cannot parallel the birds, but the cross appears in Bucks. and Herts.,⁷² Warwicks.⁷³ and Leicestershire⁷⁴ as an element in the Beauchamp coat-of-arms. The tile measured 14.0 × 13.7 × 2.0–2.2 cm.
- E Was also a single example, and in even worse condition than D. I cannot parallel it, and cannot think that it was ever popular. The approximate measurements were 13.4 × 13.3 × 1.9–1.7 cm.
- F Was another single example, not well inlaid considering the simple design, and stamped off-centre. It was larger than average, being 14.5 × 14.3 × 1.7–1.8 cm.

No other reasonably complete inlaid tiles were found, and the following are fragments only:

- G There were two fragments with this head, which compares with printed examples (Hohler P109, P155). Thickness, 1.7 cm.
- H A corner fragment. 1.8 cm.
- I Similar—back flaked.
- J Similar. 2.1 cm.
- K Similar. 1.6–1.7 cm.

(2) Printed Tiles

These were mostly products of the Penn factories; serial numbers are those in

⁷⁰ J. Swann, 'Medieval Paving Tiles in Northampton Museum', *Journal Northants. Nat. Hist. Soc. and Field Club*, xxxii (1952), 126, W.I.

⁷¹ E. S. Eames, in H. S. Gracie, 'St. Peter's Church, Frocester', *Trans. Bristol and Glos. Arch. Soc.*, lxxxii (1963), Fig. 8.

⁷² Hohler, P5.

⁷³ P. B. Chatwin, 'The Medieval Patterned Tiles of Warwickshire', *Birmingham Arch. Soc. Trans.*, lx (1936), Fig. 10, 3, Fig. 23, 1–3, etc.

⁷⁴ N. R. Whitcomb, *The Medieval Floor-Tiles of Leicestershire*, Leicester, 1956, nos. 36–9.

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Hohler.⁷⁵ Fabrics were hard, even and red, often with a grey core which occasionally broke to the surface. All but two were unkeyed; sides were bevelled. The same abbreviations are used as for the inlaid tiles; K shows that the design is known from Penn itself.

Certain

- P 44 N, K. Inc. a variant, having a more angular fleur-de-lys without a knop on the stem.
- P 52: K.
- P 58: K.
- P 64: K (s, st).
- P 69: (s, st). P 67, a similar design, = K.
- P 88: K.
- P 147: (st). Inc. minor variants. One was apparently very lightly keyed. Another, triangular, had been scored and broken along its shorter sides, while the diagonal had been formed in the mould.
- P 152/3: K (st). Inc. minor variants, of which Hohler records many. One was apparently very lightly keyed.
- D 7:

Probable

- P 107:
- P 123:

Possible

- P 65:
- P 70: Perhaps from an old die of P 69.
- P 84:
- P 172a:

Printed Tiles in FIG. 14

- L Notley. This is little different from P 153. Haberley recorded it under his XCIV, but did not reproduce it. Measurements 11.1-11.4 × 2.0 cm.
- M There were several fragments of this; the other two patterns necessary to make up a set of nine did not appear. 10.0-11.4 × 1.7-2.0 cm.
- N Two complete tiles, one of which had on one side very crude foliage replacing the two trefoils springing from the arcs. Perhaps not Penn tiles, as they had straight sides, and a more chocolate-brown glaze. 10.8-11.2 × 2.0-2.5 cm.
- O Represented by three fragments only. The colours were brighter than the usual Penn type, and the size was greater. Perhaps a New College Derivative (Hohler, List VII). 12.8 × 2.2-2.5 cm.
- P Part of a border pattern. These are not common in printed tile floors, but P 7-P 9 may be compared to this example. Those, however, were scored, and broken after firing, where P was moulded as a single width. This technique was rare after the 13th century, when it was used quite

⁷⁵ Op. cit., n. 68.



A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H



I



J



K

FIG. 13
Inlaid tiles. Scale 1 : 3.

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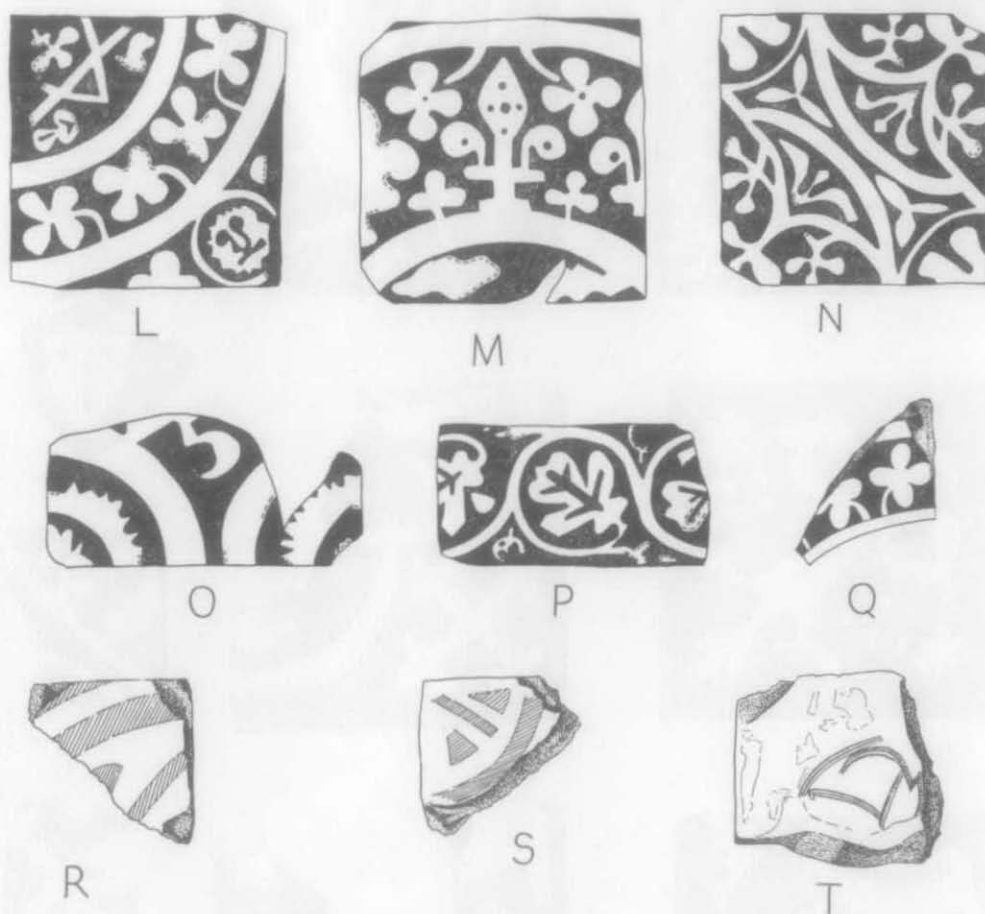


FIG. 14
Printed tiles (L-Q), and others. Scale 1 : 3.

often in circular pavements, e.g. at Clarendon Palace⁷⁶ and Chertsey (A.M. 1836-68 Cat. p. 10), and in square pavements, e.g. Westminster Abbey Chapter House. A moulded oblong inlaid pattern of the 14th or 15th century has been found at Huish Church, Wilts.⁷⁷ The design of P compares with the inner border of P 117 (K). 11.0 × 5.8 × 3.0 cm., steeply bevelled so that the base measured 10.0 × 4.5 cm.

⁷⁶ E. S. Eames, 'A 13th century Tiled Pavement from the King's Chapel, Clarendon Palace', *J. Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, xxvi (1963), 40-50.

⁷⁷ E. S. Eames, in N. P. Thompson, 'Huish Church', *Wilts. Arch. and Nat. Hist. Mag.*, lxxii (1967), 62.

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- Q** A small piece with a curved inner edge, the curve cut before firing. The curve is paralleled by P 117 (K). Circular pavements occur in the 13th century,⁷⁸ but no circular printed tiles are yet known. I suppose that these curved tiles could have been intended to fit round an architectural feature, such as a round pier base or font.

(3) *Other Patterned Fragments*

- R, S** Stamped patterns, without pipe-clay filling, but brushed over with a thin coating of white slip. Thicknesses 2.1–2.3 cm.
- T** A worn fragment of 'line-impressed' type; but the design may have been incised free-hand. The tile was finished with an overall coating of white slip (now decayed). Thickness 1.9 cm. Double contour lines like this are figured by Chatwin,⁷⁹ but speculation on **R**, **S** and **T** is unprofitable; the Bagley Wood kiln site should not be forgotten.⁸⁰

(4) *Plain Tiles*

Many tiles and fragments were found that were glazed but not patterned. There was a laid floor in the kitchen block (FIG. 9); no whole examples were recovered, but they were about 22 cm. square and between 3.4 and 4.0 cm. thick. Their fabric was hard, red, and surprisingly coarse; some had a black glaze, others varied from brown to yellow and green, from the use of an overall slip wash. They may have been set, in chequer pattern, diagonally across the room, as some were scored and broken diagonally into triangles. Two fragments had been scored on the surface, but they were too small to know if this had been done deliberately or accidentally. Very large tiles of this type are usually Late Medieval;⁸¹ a 15th or 16th century date seems probable.

Other plain tiles had evidently been used as borders, and to fill corners in the patterns. Plain tiles occur from the introduction of tiled floors, so no date for these can safely be suggested at present. There were three main types:

(1) (s, st, s₂). Hard fabric, unkeyed, with very dark metallic glaze, except for one that was mottled green. Rectangular, about 14 × 7 × 2–2½ cm.

(2) (s, st). Similar fabric, colours. Some with conical stab keys. Square, 11.3–11.4 × 2.1–2.3 cm.

(3) (s, st). Red sandy fabric. All had a coating of white slip, the glazes varying from brown to yellow and green. Square, 6.3–7.0 × 1.7–2.2 cm.

Only seven reasonably complete plain tiles did not fit these categories. Types 1 and 3 match the inlaid tiles for length, type 2 the printed.

(5) *Discussion*

More tiles have come from Bicester Priory than from any site in the Oxford region since the excavations at Notley. It is therefore disappointing to be able to draw no significant conclusions on the difficult question of dating. The only

⁷⁸ See note 76.

⁷⁹ *Op. cit.*, Fig. 12, 8–9.

⁸⁰ Haberley, *op. cit.*, 173.

⁸¹ E. Gee, 'Discoveries in the Frater at Durham', *Arch. J.*, CXXIII (1966), 75.

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patterned tiles found *in situ* were at the east end of the nave (PLATE IV); these were inlaid patterns LI and LVI laid diagonally to a border of plain tiles, aligned east-west. No archaeologically closed groups occurred, and there is no new typological evidence.

Of the illustrated tiles, A suggests a possible Northamptonshire connection, but there is little evidence in the documents for such links; the tiler from Peddington (? Piddington), Northants., employed in 1407-8 was probably working on the roof. B, C, and perhaps G add to the Oxford 'Late Wessex' menagerie, D and E suggest its degeneration. Of the new printed designs, the border patterns are interesting, but the others are really no more than designs not apparently recorded before. Negative evidence is useful in view of the very large number of fragments recovered; if the tile history of the Oxford region has not been clarified, it has at least not been upset. There were no scooped-key tiles of the 13th century Clarendon School, and none of the 15th century Malvern School. It might be tentatively suggested that almost all the tiles except D7 and R-T were of the 14th century. The earliest tiles recorded in the Oxford region would seem still to be those from Eynsham Abbey (Haberley VIII), and from Long Wittenham, where they may be strays from a more appropriate church (Haberley VII, which compares very closely to an example from Clarendon Palace, Wilts.),⁸² Wessex designs (Haberley III, XV, XXIV, XXV, XXVI, XXXI, LII, LIII, LIV, LVIII, LIX, LXV, LXXIII)⁸³ were followed by the 'Late Wessex' designs, many peculiar to the region, which were probably available contemporaneously with the printed tiles from Penn.

It is interesting to find that in the 1398-9 Bicester accounts, there is no evidence that tiles were bought for the renovated east end floor, which was boarded over instead. This may help to confirm Hohler's opinion that the Penn industry had ceased by the late 14th century; the Priory must have acquired floor-tiles from there earlier, but may not have been able to get them for the east end. Tiles were available in the region, as New College was laying them;⁸⁴ but the Priory may not have known about this, or may simply have preferred a wooden floor. The low-lying ground with its drainage problem could have been a factor in this, but since a payment was made for levelling out the old floor, it would seem that the boards were laid very close to the ground, and not raised some way above the source of damp. Anyway, one of the payments for the succeeding, undocumented years might have included a load of floor tiles; but Dunkin, a careful observer, did not mention finding any.⁸⁵

GLASS

A few small fragments of painted glass were picked up, but none was large enough for a pattern to be recognizable.

SMALL FINDS

MEDIEVAL POTTERY

A number of sherds were recovered, but no whole vessels, and dating is thus

⁸² E. S. Eames, "A Tile Pavement from the Queen's Chamber, Clarendon Palace, dated 1250-2", *J. Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, XX-XXI (1957-8), Plate XXXIV, 5.

⁸³ Whitcomb, *op. cit.*, nos. 2-14.

⁸⁴ Hohler, *op. cit.*, 12-3.

⁸⁵ Dunkin (1823), *op. cit.*, 251-2.

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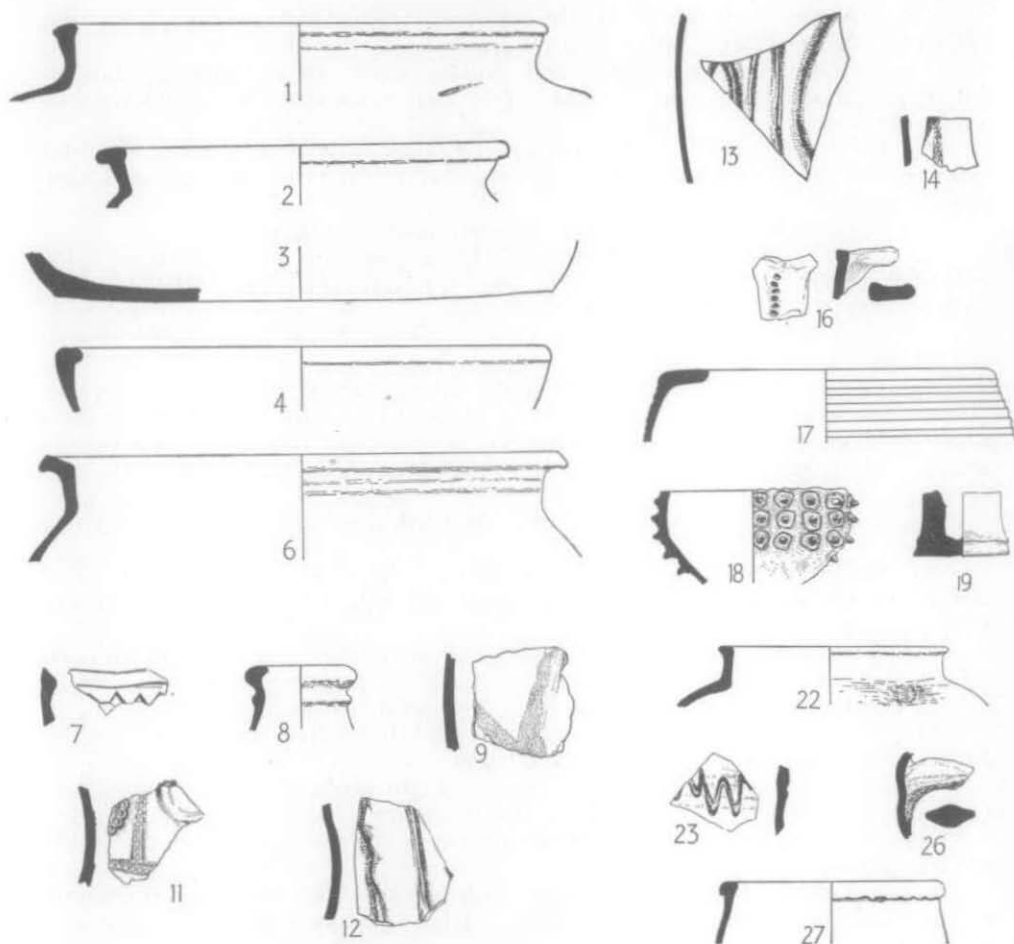


FIG. 15
Medieval pottery. Scale 1 : 4.

fairly subjective. Numbers 1-4 and 7 may pre-date the Priory, which was founded on the site of various small tenements.⁸⁶

Unglazed Sherds

(1) Cooking-pot rim. Grit-tempered fabric, soapy touch. Grey core, red-buff ext., buff int. Slant-mark on shoulder (cf. *Oxoniensia*, xxiii (1958), FIG. 17, BiB 40—early 12th cent.). Early Medieval, probably 12th century.

⁸⁶ See foundation charter, Dunkin (1816), *op. cit.*, 55-6.

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(2) Another, sandy fabric. Light grey core, blackened brown ext., brown int. (cf. as last, BiB 23—early 12th century). As last.

(3) Cooking-pot base. Shell- and grit-tempered fabric, 'digestive biscuit' int. appearance. Grey core, red/black ext., red/brown int. Not knife-trimmed. Early Medieval.

(4) Bowl rim. Shell- and grit-tempered fabric. Grey core, black ext., dull red int. (cf. *Oxon*, xxvi/xxvii (1961-2), FIG. 11, 11, and FIG. 24, 12—12th-early 13th century). 12th century.

(5) Cooking-pot rim (not illus.). Sandy fabric. ? 13th century.

(6) Cooking-pot rim. Sandy fabric. Light grey core, brown surfaces. The extended flange ? for lid (cf. as last FIG. 26, 13, of different fabric—late 13th-early 14th century). Late 13th-14th century.

Glazed sherds

(7) Pitcher rim. Red-speckled sandy fabric. Light green glaze on ext. (Glaze, fabric as Group A, *Oxoniensia*, iv (1939), 115-18). Triangular or more probably diamond-shaped impressed patterning below rim, which has made the int. uneven. I have not found a parallel for this decoration. Late 12th-early 13th century.

(8) Another. Granular grey fabric. Mottled green glaze on ext. Mid 13th century.

(9) Pitcher sherd. Thick sandy grey fabric. Thin green glaze on ext. Dull red painted decoration (cf. *Oxoniensia*, iv (1939), FIG. 23B, A.M. 1937.446; *Oxoniensia*, vii (1942), FIG. 17, 4). 13th century.

(10) Handle (not illus.). Red. Granular grey fabric. Mottled green glaze (cf. *Oxoniensia*, iv (1939). Well 9, A.M. 1968.242—mid-late 13th century). Beginning of a square-rouletted line at one end. Second half 13th century.

(11) Pitcher sherd. Thick granular grey fabric. Glossy green glaze on ext. Monochrome applied decoration. Probably as last.

(12) As last. Red-speckled buff fabric. Light green glaze (cf. *Oxoniensia*, iv (1939), 123-4, Group C). Applied red clay decoration. Late 13th century.

(13) Another, similar. Mottled green glaze. The vertical strips monochrome, the wavy ones red clay.

(14) Another. Even green glaze with flecks. The chain monochrome, meeting red clay patterning in the corner. I have not seen this chain motif anywhere else.

(15) (Not illus.) Sherds, handles, bases. Standard late 13th-14th century Oxford region buff fabrics and glazes. (cf. e.g. *Oxoniensia*, iv (1939), FIG. 25A, A.M. 1938.1259.)

(16) Bowl rim. Red-speckled buff fabric. Mottled green glaze on int. and ext.; at one point on the handle, the glaze has solidified into a large opaque drop. The handle is thickened underneath at the join. Small bowls are not uncommon in the Medieval period, but I do not know another quite like this one.

(17) Bowl rim, as last. Rilled ext. surface. (Shape, cf. *Oxoniensia*, xxiv (1959), FIG. 12, 9. Another small bowl, *Oxoniensia*, vii (1942), FIG. 20, 12. Both late Medieval). The fabric suggests a late 13th-14th century date.

(18) ? Bowl. Oxford region red-speckled buff fabric. Thick uneven opaque green glaze on ext. Wheel-made, but int. tool-trimmed after application of the ext.

BICESTER PRIORY

monochrome decoration—circular pads, each having a short pointed ‘hub’ in its centre. Top of rim broken and uneven except at right edge, probably due to stacking in kiln. The only comparison for the decoration that I have yet found is very tenuous (K. J. Barton, ‘A Medieval Pottery Kiln at Ham Green, Bristol’, *Trans. Bristol and Glos. Arch. Soc.*, LXXXII (1963), FIG. 2, 11: lower handle joint). From the fabric, late 13th–14th century.

(19) Bottle base. Thick red-speckled buff fabric. Red ext., with spots of brown glaze. Small bottles occur from the late 13th century (*Oxoniensia*, IV (1939), 122; XXVI/XXVII (1961–2), FIG. 25, 12, 144, 160). These are in a better quality fabric (e.g. A.M. 1836–68 Cat., p. 17, from Trinity College, Oxford). 14th, possibly 15th century.

(20) (Not illustrated.) Jug rim. Red-buff fabric. Red surfaces. Clubbed rim of Brill type (e.g. A.M. 1892.2617). 14th century.

(21) (Not illustrated.) Handle sherd. Grey fabric with buff surfaces. Green glaze. Upper joint ‘double-thumbed’ Brill type (cf. *Oxoniensia*, IV (1939), FIG. 26A, A.M. 1937.443). 14th century.

(22) Jug rim. Hard buff fabric. Chestnut red/olive glaze on ext. below rim. Firing fault on shoulder. Hard fabrics and simple everted rims occur on 14th century jugs in Oxford (*Oxoniensia*, VII (1942), FIG. 19b, c; A.M. 1889.48d, 1954.666), though usually with a mottled green glaze. The presence of a faulty jug at the Priory shows the low level to which pottery sank in the Late Medieval period, although three pottery vessels were bought in 1412 for the Prior’s hall, for 3d. 14th century.

(23) Pitcher sherd. Hard pink-buff fabric, inc. red stone. Thick olive glaze on ext. and most of int. Incised single-line decoration occurs in Oxford in the 13th century (cf. *Oxoniensia*, VIII–IX (1943–4), FIG. 33, 11). But fabric and colour are later (cf. A.M. 1915.40, probably a Brill jug). 14th century.

(24) (Not illustrated.) Handle sherd. Hard red fabric, unglazed. Concave strap with edge grooves and oblique slashing. 14th century.

(25) (Not illustrated.) Another, with spots of glaze. Plain rod.

(26) Another. Dull olive glaze on ext., splashed down int. A similar shaped handle occurs on a probably 15th century jug from Cornmarket, Oxford (A.M. 1935.4). 15th century.

(27) Jug rim. Hard buff fabric. Glossy green glaze on ext., splashed over int. The underside of the rim lightly stabbed. Probably 15th century.

(28) (Not illustrated.) A number of sherds, rims and bases, in Late Medieval ‘ringing’ fabrics, very close to stoneware.

IRONWORK

(FIG. 16, 1) Barrel-padlock, the spring case now filled with mortar. Much corroded. A fragment of bone adheres to the shackle.

Not illustrated:

Spring of barrel-padlock. Much corroded. (cf. *Oxoniensia*, XXVI/XXVII (1961–2), FIG. 31, 4). Keys. Much corroded. Two were recognizable as being Type VII B (*London Museum Medieval Catalogue*, London, 1940, Fig. 42).

BRONZEWORKE

(FIG. 16, 2) Upper part of ‘rumbler’ harness bell. Such bells are common in

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FIG. 16
Metalwork. Scale 1 : 4.

the Medieval period generally (cf. *Oxoniensia*, xxvi/xxvii (1961-2), FIG. 28, 10, 11), and have been found on other monastic sites (C. F. Tebbut, 'St. Neots Priory', *Proc. Camb. Ant. Soc.*, LIX (1966), FIG. 5, c; S. E. Rigold, 'Two Camerae of Military Orders', *Arch. J.*, cxxii (1965), FIG. 12, 4.) A typology has been established by Mr. H. Shortt (in N. P. Thompson, 'Huish Church', *Wilts. Arch. and Nat. Hist. Mag.*, LXII (1967), 63).⁸⁷

NUMISMATA

By J. D. A. THOMPSON

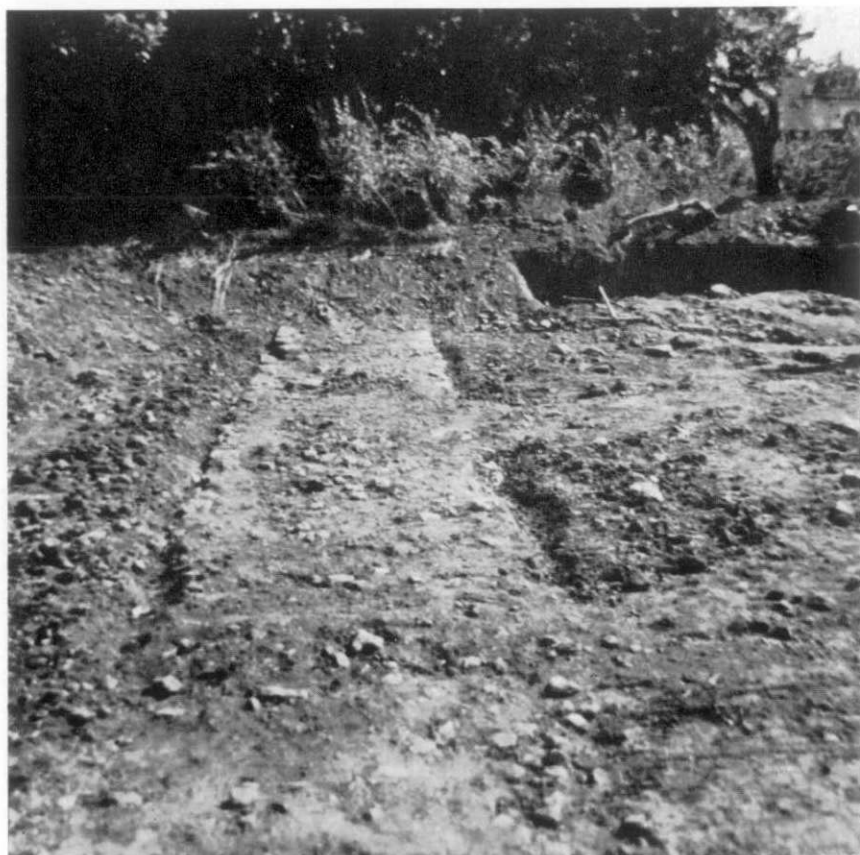
(Not illustrated)

(1) French Casting (reckoning counter). Copied from the gold coinage of the Count of Hainaut, or that of Philip VI of France. c. 1330-46.

(2) Nuremberg reckoning counter. ? nonsensical inscriptions. No maker's name. 16th-early 17th century.

⁸⁷ Dr. W. O. Hassall kindly helped me over this bell.

PLATE I



BICESTER PRIORY: NORTH WALL OF CHURCH, LOOKING EAST.

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PLATE II



BICESTER PRIORY: SOUTH WALL OF CHURCH, LOOKING EAST.

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PLATE III



BICESTER PRIORY: FLOOR; WEST OF CHURCH.

Ph. : David Watts

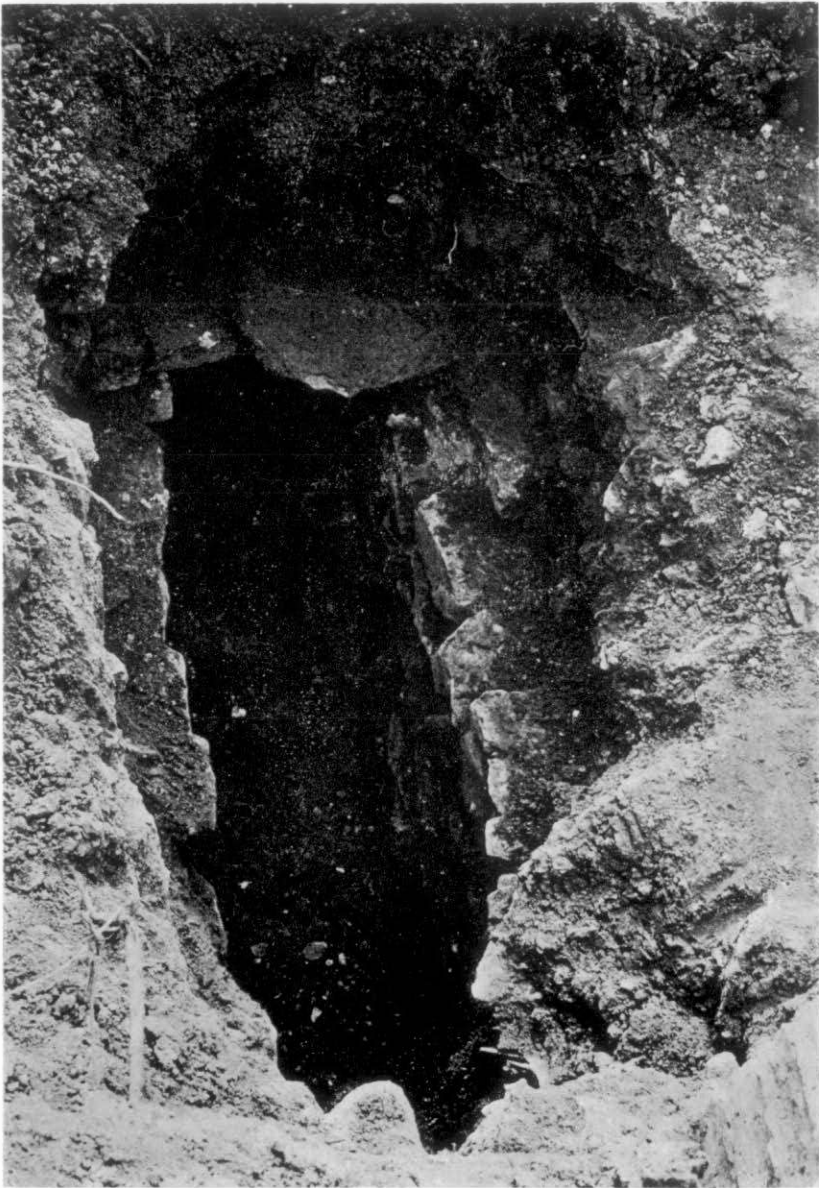
PLATE IV



BICESTER PRIORY: LAID TILES IN CHURCH.

Ph.: David Watts

PLATE V



BICESTER PRIORY: NORTH-WEST DRAIN, SOUTH OF CLOISTER.

Ph.: David Watts