

# Oseney Abbey, Oxford: Archaeological Investigations, 1975-1983

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## SUMMARY

*Salvage recording, excavations in advance of development and fieldwork have provided evidence for substantial shifts in the precinct boundary in the late 12th and 14th/15th centuries. Two phases of water-frontage were recovered, the earlier lying 30 m. east of the later, together with evidence for associated domestic buildings within the precinct. Historical research has suggested the location of industrial areas outside the precinct, and has provided scope for a reinterpretation of the site topography, whilst excavation has demonstrated the survival of floor-levels despite the 18th-century ploughing of the site (N.G.R. SP 504 588, C.S.M.R. 79).*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The excavator, Brian Durham, wishes to thank Mr W. Munsey and Mr R. Wright of Oseney Marina for their cooperation throughout the project, and Mr J. Patching of Cherwell Housing Association for permission to excavate the 1982 trench. Humphrey Woods was involved in the fieldwork at all stages and much credit is due to him for maintaining the momentum of the project. Funding at the early stages was from a variety of sources, while the 1982 season was entirely financed by the Department of the Environment.

The writer is grateful to the Librarian of Christ Church for permission to examine the College estate archives. Thanks are due also to the Department of Western Manuscripts, Bodleian Library, for permission to trace the original plans of H. Hurst, and to the staff of the Oxfordshire County Record Office.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Augustinian Abbey, founded as a priory in 1129, lies some 1.2 kms. west of Carfax, the ancient centre of Oxford. Although now within the modern city boundary, Oseney Abbey lay outside the City and held jealously to its own temporal jurisdiction on the island of

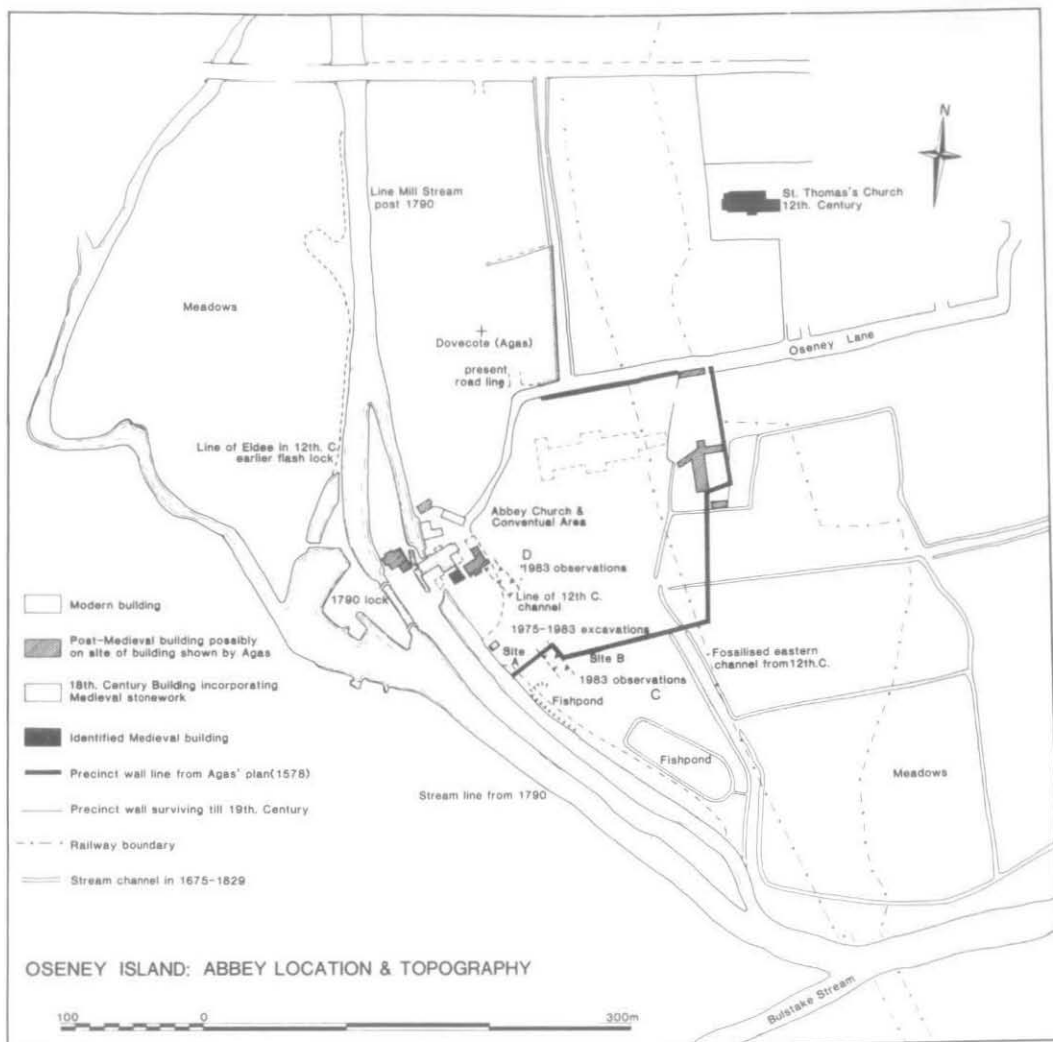


Fig. 1 Oseney Island: the topography from the 12th to the 19th century, drawn on the Ordnance Survey sheet base. The data is derived from excavation, survey and the maps of Agas (1578), Hollar (1643), Loggan (1675), Badcock (1829).

Oseney, lying between two branches of the Thames, with the city to the east and the water-meadows of Botley on the west.<sup>1</sup>

By 1154, Prior Wigod had assumed the title and status of Abbot. The Abbey grew rapidly in temporal power and spiritual influence. As became the wealthiest Oxfordshire monastery, with a substantial banking and finance business, the Canons of Oseney enjoyed the active patronage of several English kings. By the 13th century, the original buildings

<sup>1</sup> W.T.Squires, *In West Oxford* (1928); *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 365, et seq., *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 90-93. The will of Archbishop Ælfric (translated in *Eng. Hist. Docs.* i, 544) refers to a pre-Conquest estate on Oseney Island whose relation to the subsequent abbey lands is unknown. For the foundation charters see H.E. Salter, *Cartulary of Oseney Abbey*, i (O.H.S. lxxxix, 1929), 1-6 (cited hereafter as *C.O.*).

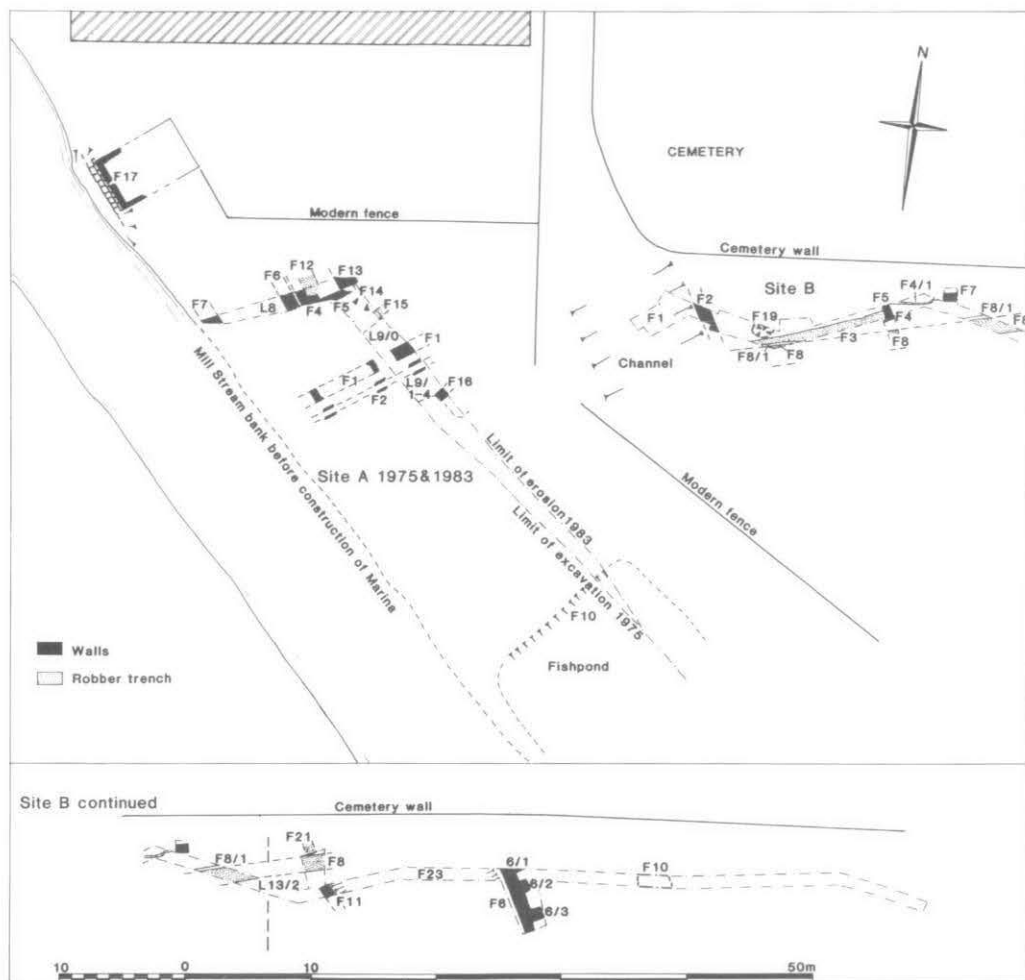


Fig. 2 Oseney Abbey: excavated areas, 1975-1983. Sites A and B.

had been greatly enlarged, and as a centre of learning and influence Oseney had become 'one of the first ornaments of this place and nation'. Dugdale described the Abbey church as 'a most beautiful and large fabric, second to none in the kingdom . . . not only the envy of other religious houses, but of most beyond the sea'.<sup>2</sup>

After the Dissolution Oseney Abbey church became the cathedral of the new diocese of Oxford, but this final florescence lasted only a few years. Superseded by St. Frideswide's priory church, Oseney fell into decline and saw the decay, systematic destruction and final ruin of its magnificent buildings during the Civil War. Only fragments of a gate, parts of two ranges and some ruined stone mouldings survive on the site. Most of the former precinct, including the church, lies under a cemetery and the railway embankment. Light industrial buildings and Victorian terraces obscure the remainder of the site.

<sup>2</sup> W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum* (ed. J. Caley *et al.*, 1819) vi (1), 249.

## THE EXCAVATIONS

Salvage recording of the west waterfront, close to the Abbey wall, was carried out in 1975 by Brian Durham for the Oxford Archaeological Unit. Evidence recovered under very difficult conditions suggested that a stratigraphic sequence would be preserved further east. Therefore, in 1982, redevelopment of an area believed to adjoin the Abbey precinct enabled him to direct limited excavations on behalf of the DoE to ascertain the nature of occupation in this area and the degree of archaeological preservation. These objectives were achieved. Erosion in the area of the 1975 salvage work enabled the writer to confirm aspects of the stratigraphy unresolved in the original difficult conditions, whilst salvage observations in 1983 enabled Brian Durham to record buildings in the area east of the mill and in the extreme south of the precinct.

The writer is greatly indebted to the excavator for many valuable discussions and for his wholehearted assistance and encouragement in the preparation of this report. Finds and the excavation archive are deposited with the Oxfordshire Department of Museum Services, Woodstock.

## SITE A 1975 and 1983 (Figs. 2, 3 and 4, Plate 1)

In 1975 Mr W. Munsey, the owner of Oseney Mill, began cutting back the left bank of the mill-stream, starting 60 m. below the mill, to form a marina. The immediate effect was to widen the stream by 10 m., and subsequent weathering has increased this to 12.5 m. Most of the archaeological evidence has come from examination of the sections exposed in this way between 1975 and 1983.

Beneath the modern topsoil, a layer of grey alluvium 0.5 m. deep extended over much of the site southwards to seal the top layer of the fishpond, F10. As debris of the 18th and 19th centuries was recovered from a stratigraphically early context in F10, this alluvium is best interpreted as modern dredged material. The erosion of the north and east banks of the marina since 1975 has revealed archaeological deposits to the north-east, e.g. F13, F14.

The difficult salvage conditions meant that only a limited number of stratigraphic relationships could be observed in 1975. However, weathering has since exposed a further section of bank up to 2 m. behind the 1975 section. This was recorded by the writer in February 1983, and enables useful inferences to be made that extend the value of the 1975 reconstructed sections. Only a few sherds were found on each occasion; consequently the chronology is tentative and insecurely based. An analytical archaeological description of features and layers, A F1-17, is filed in the archive.

A series of floor-layers L9/0, L9/1-4, appear to provide the only stratigraphical link between the west face of the marina cut and features to the north. Although these layers could not be satisfactorily established north of F15, some disturbed yellowish mortar, similar to that of L9/0, suggested that the latest floor might have been cut by a lightweight wall, F15. To the south, wall F1 and the stone drain F2 cut layers L9/1-4 but L9/0 appeared not to continue south of the drain.

## Section 1. Site A Oseney Abbey 1975-1983

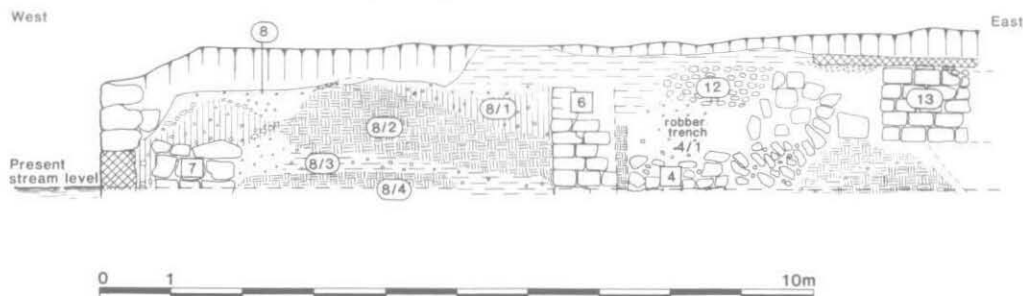


Fig. 3 Site A: the sequence of waterfront and building lines in a section reconstructed from photographs and survey data.



Plate 1 Oseney Abbey, 1975, Site A: F1 and F2 viewed from west.

Sherds of 13th- to 14th-century date were found on the mortar floor L9/0 and in the ashy layer L9/1 beneath it. The stratigraphy, therefore, suggested at least two phases of floor-layers associated with at least two phases of building. Accordingly, it is suggested that a 13th-century building, parallel to the stream and bounded by either F15 or F5, was rebuilt at least once by the 14th century, perhaps having been moved back from the river. Subsequently, before the beginning of the 15th century, it was demolished (see below) and the wall F1, with its associated drain F2, was constructed. F1 seems to have a deliberate gap, possibly a gate, for it was seen to terminate west of the section face. However, no quoins were seen in 1975 nor in the continuation of F1 noted in 1983, so the width of the opening could not be established. The drain, F2, was seen to continue without interruption and would have been sealed in some fashion, if a gate did exist, to allow free passage. No evidence of any covering was found and it may be, therefore, that the drain (which is stratigraphically later than F1, being cut over a make-up fill F3 abutting the south face of F1) was constructed after the opening had been blocked. However, this constructional feature of the wall may well be due simply to the addition of a section of wall when the riverfrontage shifted west.

No floors were seen in association with F1, which stood on 'a massive rubble footing', 1.3 m. wide. The wall-face on the south was stepped back 20 cm. from the footing. F1 was not seen in the stream bank before excavation of the marina, and presumably it terminated between the stream and the point 4 m. behind the bank where it was first noted. No junction with wall F7 was seen nor was there any indication of a return on that part of F1 seen by the excavators. The only reasonable interpretation of F1 is that it marked an important boundary. It is in an identical position to the substantial precinct wall shown on Agas's map of 1578.<sup>3</sup> Hollar's map indicates that the west part of the wall shown by Agas has been demolished by 1643.<sup>4</sup> A date for construction is less certain, although since F1 cuts the 14th-century building A I, it cannot have been built before c. 1300. On the limited evidence, a late 14th- or early 15th-century date seems most probable for the construction of the wall in this part of the precinct.

Assuming that this precinct wall existed by the early 15th century, the stream revetment wall, F7, is highly unlikely to be later than this. The revetment wall has been cut into the front of a clay bank, L8/2. It has not been possible to determine whether this bank was formed by dumping or by natural processes, as the water-level

<sup>3</sup> Agas Map, 1578: sheet IV in *Old Plans of Oxford* (O.H.S. xxxviii, 1884).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*: Hollar's Map, 1643, as engraved by Skelton.

obscured the lower part of the section, but it certainly forms part of reclaimed land. Walls F6 and F4 appear to cut through it, but the absence of visible construction-trench cuts might mean, in the case of F4, that the bank has been dumped against it. The sequence and possible functions of these walls will be discussed further below.

The relationships between the later Abbey waterfrontage on Site A and the buildings adjoining it are shown in Fig. 6; these should be considered in conjunction with the plan in Fig. 2. Since the early waterfront on Site B is demonstrably disused by the late 13th century, it is most probable that the stream revetment wall A F7, perhaps preceded by A F4 as discussed below, marks the westward waterfront after this period. Assuming that the precinct wall A F1 was in place by the early 15th century, it is highly unlikely that F7 could have been built later than that date. Confirmation that the line of F7 represents the later waterfrontage is given by its relation to A F17. This building, a post-medieval structure, stands on wide medieval footings which align with F7. On grounds of position, it can be equated with the small building shown by Agas in 1578.<sup>5</sup>

Wall F4 may provide evidence for an earlier phase on site A. Stratigraphically, it appears to be earlier than any other wall seen here except F7, with which no relation could be established. An eastern return for F4 was looked for to the south, but not seen. It cannot be associated with wall F5 since that seals demolition rubble, F4/1, from F4. The fact that the floor layers that have been associated as Building A I were not observed in plan west of the projected alignment of F4 may suggest that the latter was not a building wall. The apparent congruence of alignment could imply that F4 is part of Building A I, though a return wall would have been expected. Possibly the south wall was on a timber sill. If F4 is a building wall, then a more probable association is with F7, giving a wide range rising directly on the waterfront. Accordingly, the crucial relationship is that between F5 and the floor-layers L9/1-4. No floors directly associated with F5 were seen, but the digging of pit F14 could have destroyed such floor-layers. Given that F15 was not seen to extend further west, it is suggestive that traces of L9/0 were seen in 1983 extending north of the line of F15. Thus, L9/0 may be a floor-layer originally associated with F5. If L9/0 was contemporary with F5, comprising a phase of Building A I, then the dating of this building suggests that F4 was demolished no later than about the mid 14th century. In other words, the final phase of Building A I could post-date the demolition of F4 whilst in that phase the structure plausibly respects the precinct wall, F1. The first phase, however, extending further south, is cut by F1 and therefore predates the precinct re-alignment of which F1 is a part. On this argument, F4 may be interpreted as a waterfront wall, carrying a lightly founded building associated with the floor layers L9/1-4. This is the first phase of Building A I. The distinction between the phases, caused by the construction of F1, is significant enough to justify assigning the contexts of the later phase, F5, L9/0 and F1, to Building A II.

The evidence does not permit a certain choice between these two interpretations of F4. In particular, evidence of infilling of the earlier structure defined by A F17 suggests that any early occupation-levels between F4 and F7 could have been destroyed when a further range, formed on F7, F6, F17 and discussed below, was built. The present evidence is best explained by assuming that Building A I rose directly on a waterfront at F4 and this sequence constitutes Phase A I. The phase concludes with an extension of building activity west to the line of F7 and the contraction of the precinct to the line of F1.

The third phase of activity on Site A suggests a denser packing of buildings. Evidence for a wall-corner face F13 with at least seven courses surviving was exposed by erosion between 1975 and 1983 (Fig. 3). This erosion also confirmed the continuation of F4, F7, F6, and F12 northwards. The alignment of F13 strongly suggests that it cut F5 and forms part of a replanning of this area. Accordingly, it is proposed that F13 is the south-west corner of a building A III lying parallel to the upstream waterfront bounded by F7. A further range of buildings in this phase, standing 2.5 m. to the west, is suggested by wall F6. The site-plan demonstrates a striking alignment of the projected courses of F6 and F7 with the footings noted as part of F17. A structure based on these walls is proposed as building A IV.<sup>6</sup>

If Buildings A III and A IV were contemporary, then a broad passage would run between them approximately aligned on the possible gate in the precinct wall, F1. However, there is no direct evidence from F13 or F6 and it is possible that one building succeeded the other, leaving a 'hardstanding' between the waterfront and the range during part of this phase. By 1578 Agas's map shows only a much contracted remnant of Building A IV as part of F17.

A fourth phase of activity on Site A is demonstrated by the robber-trenches F12 and F15. From its position in section and plan, F12 should represent a wall built after the demolition of F13 and F6 (Fig. 3). Although very similar in the context of its fill to F15, it was significantly wider. Both trenches occur high in section and suggest

<sup>5</sup> For details of this structure: Oxfordshire County Museum Site Archive, 'Osney Abbey': drawing 1 and associated notes A F17. For position, refer to present Fig. 2, and Agas op. cit. note 3. The offset stonework on the lower west face is equated with the medieval footings. The upper west face contains a slit-drain or vent. This feature could be of medieval date. Therefore, it is possible that a substantial part of a medieval building is preserved. The interior is filled with packed debris to above the level of the drain or vent.

<sup>6</sup> For evidence regarding the partial survival of building A IV, see note 5.

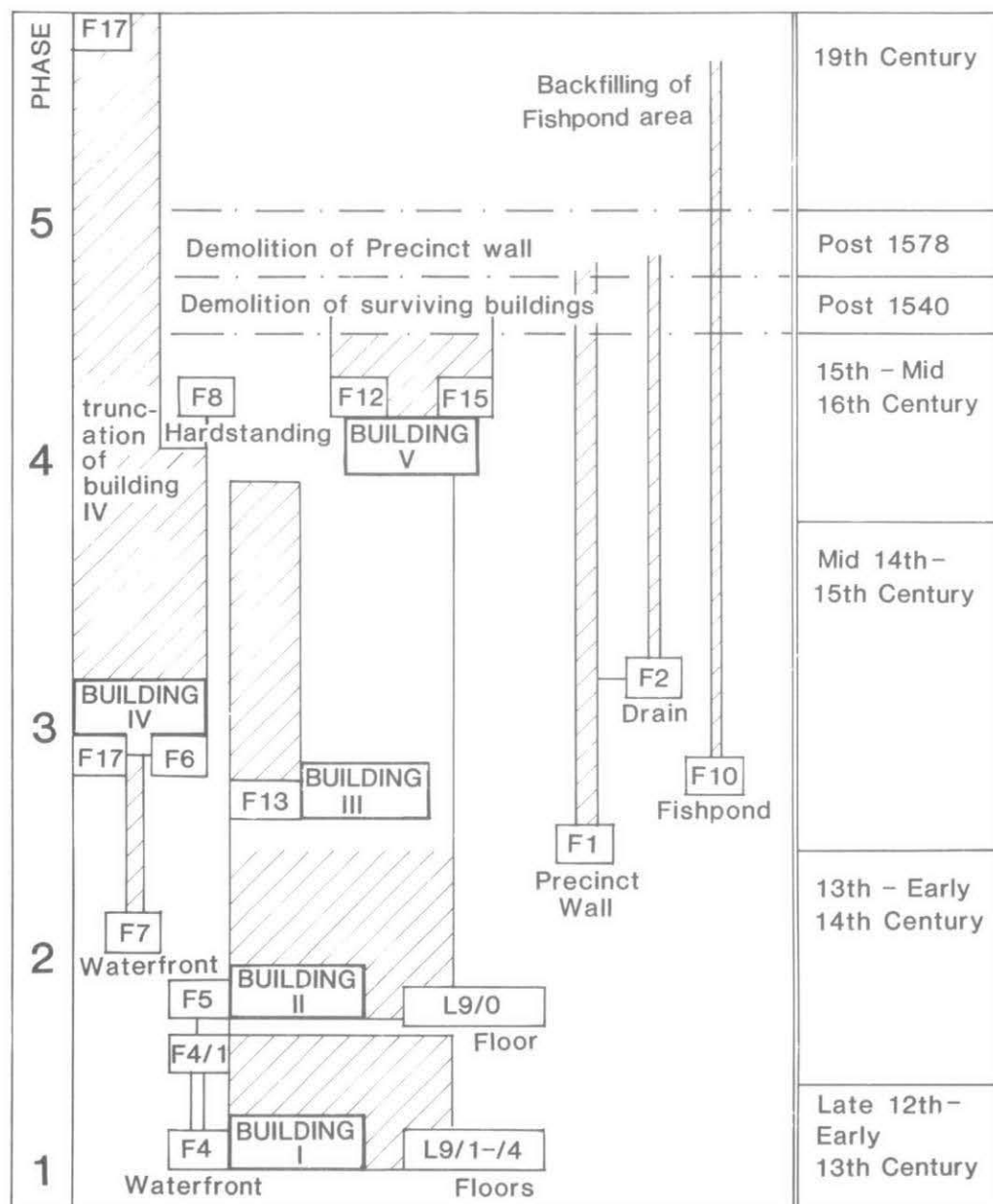


Fig. 4 Oseney Abbey: Site A Phases.

shallow foundation depths. If the two were originally associated, then they would form part of a building A V, post-dating Buildings III and IV, and replacing them behind the waterfront at F7. It is worth noting that a thin spread of orange gravel, L8, extended above F7 and F6, which could be interpreted as a levelled hard surface between a building and the waterfront.

A further wall, F16, associated with a rubble-filled disturbance, occurred high in section, 10 m. south of



Building V, apparently cutting L9/1. It is attributed here to activity in the final phase.

As the marina cut extended downstream, archaeological evidence ceased until the profile of a fishpond, F10, appeared. Given its position, it almost certainly drained into a larger pond to the south which was still visible in the 19th century.<sup>7</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that its fill produced 18th- to 19th-century debris. Most probably it was deliberately backfilled, in the first decade of the 19th century, while the southernmost pond was allowed to silt up.

In the absence of direct dating evidence for almost all the features, a satisfactory framework for the evidence discussed above is clearly hard to establish. In particular, the extent of Building A I and the function of F4 as an early waterside revetment remain interpretations of fragmentary evidence. Further material relevant to the latter problem will be discussed in dealing with the historical evidence. Meanwhile, Agas's map, providing the first post-Dissolution plan of the abbey site, suggests that the systematic demolition for building-stone ordered by Christ Church already included these buildings.<sup>8</sup> However, the map demonstrates the evidence for the surviving precinct wall identified as F1 and the truncated remnant of Building A IV. This historical material has been taken into account in the phase-table which appears on p. 101. The dates suggested for the phases have been derived by reference to the more securely based chronology of Site B.

#### SITE B 1982 (Figs. 2 and 5, Pl. 2)

Below the topsoil, the debris of a modern coalyard extended over the whole site. Beneath this was a layer of 19th- to early 20th-century rubbish overlying 0.4 m. of gravelly loam which sealed all features except F6. This loam was formed by the ploughing of the former Abbey grounds after 1718.<sup>9</sup> Presumably the lower part of this layer, at c. 55.6 m. O.D., represents the final, 16th-century, monastic ground-level in this area.

The stratigraphy and proposed chronological sequence has been ordered for discussion in groups, as in plan, beginning at the west end of the trench. The phasing is tabulated at the end of this section. A full archaeological description and analysis of the site records can be found in the site archive. References to section drawings refer to this archive. A full discussion of the topographical data is incorporated under 'History and Documentation' below, but some of the arguments are noted in this analysis.

F1, F2/1, F2, L1/1-4 and F20/1-11 comprised a river channel B F1 aligned NW-SE, together with a waterfront and associated structures. These are illustrated in Pl. 2.

Three distinct phases of development can be distinguished, with a revetment wall, F2, surviving until the 16th century after the channel F1 fell into disuse in the 13th century. It was not possible for the excavator to extend the trench to record a west bank for the channel, but as Fig. 2 indicates, it is at least 5 m. wide and perhaps much more.

The first two sub-phases of waterfront construction fall into Phase 1 of Site B. Here F20/1-8 and F11 comprised three parallel rows of squared stakes sealed by a late 12th-century dump layer L1/3; the most easterly row was sealed by L1/4, which appeared to extend under the river wall F2 and may have been dumped from the east to form a foundation for it. Two substantial horizontal timbers, F20/9-10, lay parallel to the revetment wall and were thought to extend beneath it. These were also sealed by L1/3.

It was suggested by the excavator that F20/9-10, with L1/4, formed part of a timber raft foundation for wall F2; alternatively, they may be associated with an earlier revetment line that could be indicated by substantial stones recorded in plan and section. The water-table prevented deeper excavation to examine the foundations of F2, and the question remains unresolved. Although the rows of timber stakes resemble a jetty foundation in plan, they begin 1.5 m. west of the revetment line, F2; if they do represent a jetty it would be better linked to an earlier revetment surviving on the line of F20/9-10. Alternatively, they might be explained as the foundations of a light bridge or as a silt-trap. In interpreting this sub-phase, the main problem is the substantial stone feature mentioned above at the level of the water-table. Perhaps it was part of the foundation of F2; it is reasonable to suppose that some preliminary consolidation of the channel edge may have been needed if timber rafting was called for. In the absence of evidence for their extent northwards and southwards, the squared stakes are hard to interpret; possibly they are connected with the suspension of fish-nets or baskets in the stream of the channel. As a group, these features constitute sub-phase Ia, dated to between 1129 and the last quarter of the 12th century.

A second sub-phase, Ib, begins with the systematic dumping of up to 0.54 m. of alluvium, over at least 30 m., east of the waterfront line up to the line of wall F11. This alluvium, L16/3 and L19/1, was identifiable by its fracture pattern, and its dumping pre-dated a late 12th-century wall, F7. The relation between wall F2 and the dumped alluvium could not be determined in the excavation, due to stone-robbing, but, as F2 had a layer (L1/3) containing only 12th-century sherds dumped against it, it is suggested that the revetment wall was built

<sup>7</sup> See Badcock's plan, 1829: Christ Church MS Maps and Plans (E) OXFORD C17: (70), 56, xxxix 2, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Bodl. MS Top Oxon. c.22, f. 41 ff; MS Top Oxon b. 16, ff. 4-19.

<sup>9</sup> Noted by Hearne. See A. Wood, *City of Oxford*, ii (O.H.S. xvii (1890)), 227n. 'Foundations' are reported to have been dug out in the same year, but see also Christ Church MS XX, c.24, 96, dating ploughing to 1711.





Plate 2 Osney Abbey, 1982, Site *B*: channel F1, looking eastwards towards the waterfront revetment F2.

specifically to retain the reclaimed land. L1/2, an accumulation of deep silt containing 12th- to 13th-century debris, greatly restricts the channel F1; this suggests that the Abbey lacked interest in this channel as a functioning water-course.

The revetment wall F2 is sealed only by post-Dissolution layers, and therefore must have survived the disuse of the channel until the 16th century. It is in an identical position to the short N-S section of the precinct wall shown by Agas in this area, and may thus have been re-used as the Abbey boundary.

Extending back from the waterfront was Building *B I*, 15 m. or more long and aligned at a slightly oblique angle to the waterfront wall. It had been built on very light footings, F3 and F5, and the interior levelled with alluvium L16/1-2. Since there were no floors visible over the channel fill, it is assumed that its west wall was on the line of F2. Sherds from F3 imply that it was built no earlier than the 13th century, while F4/1, a tile-lined trench of late 14th- to early 15th-century date, cut its east gable wall (F5). This evidence suggests that the building survived in use no later than the 14th century, and provides a terminal date for a lightly-founded building constructed in the 13th century.

Evidence for the alluvial sequence was sought with a sondage (F19/1-8) behind the waterfront F2. The layers recorded suggested that before the medieval period a broad river-channel underlay the site, which, after subsequent silting, produced swamp-like conditions. L19/6 appeared very similar to the blue-grey clay underlying L1/4 at the west waterfront, and the dip of L19/5 suggests a channel bank, parallel to channel F1, with steeply shelving silts. These layers are interpreted as stages in the natural silting of a channel which by the 12th century had moved forward to the line of F2.

East of Building *B I*, a north extension of the main excavation trench was made to investigate occupation surfaces L17 and 17/1-2, which were visible in section. The extension produced evidence for three unrelated building phases. F18, possibly an E-W robber-trench 1.3 m. wide, lay beneath the 18th-century ploughsoil, cutting floor-layers L17 and 17/1-2, visible in all sides of the extension. L17/2, gravel and small stones, seems to have been used to level up the surface associated with wall F7. L17 and 17/1 sealed F7 and therefore cannot be part of that building; rather, these surfaces must represent the interior of a structure, extending north and south of the excavated areas, which was destroyed when the wall robbed by F18 was built. Wall F7 overlay dumped alluvium and no floors were seen in association.

Layer L17/1 contained one 12th-century sherd, and wall F7, partially robbed, had two 12th-century sherds in its matrix. It is thus assumed that Building *B II* was built in the 12th century, and consequently that Building *B III* (L17/1-2) was probably built by the early 13th century. Since L17/1 was cut by F4/1, a late 14th-century or 15th-century date is the latest probable for the destruction of this sequence of buildings; but it is possible that F4/1, a shallow feature lined with roof-tiles set on edge, was set into Building *B III* whilst it was still in use. In that event, Building *B III* would have survived Building *B I*, but this seems unlikely since L17/1 was seen to extend south of F4/1 but not westwards. The implication is that it was cut by F5, the gable wall of Building *B I*.

The most convincing sequence for these structures would appear to be as follows: Building *B II*, 12th-century, is succeeded by a larger building *B III* which continues in use until the mid or late 13th century. A further building, *B IV* discussed below, probably cut Building *B III*. During this latter period, building *B I* was built to the west. F4/1 may then be regarded as a late 14th- to early 15th-century feature, perhaps a sump with a yard surface bounded to the east by F18.

A substantial robber-trench 1.8 m. wide, and an associated construction trench (F8 and F8/1), were seen at four points in the excavation trench and its extensions over a length of 25 m. Pottery from F8/1 suggested a construction date of no later than the 15th century. Since F8 and F8/1 can be equated with F14/F14/1, which cut F3, it is clear that a late 14th-century date is preferable for the building of this wall given that its alignment cuts that of Building *B I*.

F8/1 cut a patchy mortar floor L12/1, from which there is no dating evidence, whilst layers L12/2 and 13 suggested floor levelling fills. Since all three layers were cut by F8/1, they are presumably part of an earlier building, *B IV*, which followed the same alignment as wall F8/2. The similar alignment is demonstrated by the fact that these layers did not reappear in section on the other side of the wall.

At the two places where the south side of F8 could be examined, no construction trench was visible. However, disturbance of stones suggested that the construction level was 0.6 m. lower than that on the north side, and above this layers L13/1-4 rose up as they abutted F8. The difference in levels across this wall shows that it was built along a break of slope, presumably the edge of an area reclaimed by dumping, and replaced a building *B IV* of which L12/1-3 were the floors. The wall, as shown below, was the 16th-century precinct boundary, so it seems likely that the later precinct on this side was limited to the area of an artificially dumped platform.

South and east of this alignment, a rubble wall (F11) incorporating reused ashlar was overlain by a sequence of silts and debris differing from that seen elsewhere in the excavation. L11/1, a coarse gravelly silt, overlay the wall and shelved steeply to the east over alluvial deposits. The pottery suggested a late 14th- or 15th-century date for this material, which appears to be the backfilling of a fishpond lying to the east, with F11 functioning as a retaining wall in this phase.

On a markedly different alignment, 13.5 m. east of F11, was a substantial rubble footing F6. Three buttresses, F6/1-3, were on the east face. Whilst F6/1 may have been bonded into F6, F6/2 and 6/3 were butt-jointed to it.

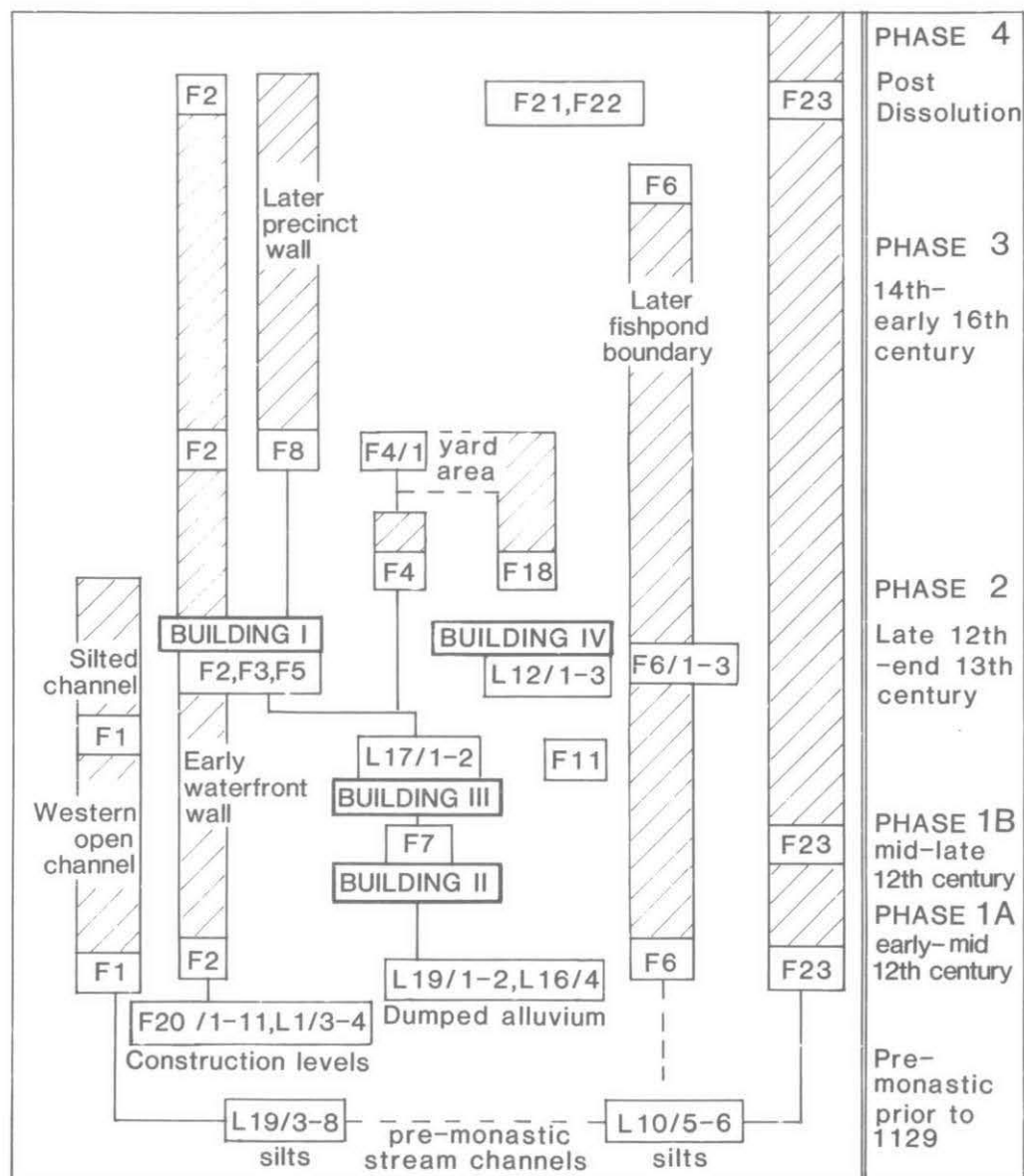


Fig. 5 Osene Abbey; Site B Phases.

There was some evidence of subsidence of the footing which may mean that the buttresses were added later to support a weak wall.

F6 was sealed only by the gravelly loam noted elsewhere on site as a post-monastic level. No distinct stratification could be seen against its west face where a stony loam layer containing tile debris and stone abutted the wall. Presumably this was a destruction layer, or a deliberate backfilling of the fish-pond (L11/1) noted above. On the east face, silt layers L10/7-9 rose gently against the wall. Pottery from these layers suggested a late 12th- or 13th-century date for the silting.

The stratigraphical sequence suggests that F6 was built by the 13th century and stood until the 16th century,

having been buttressed shortly after construction. Examination of the silts 10 m. east of F6 showed 15th- and 16th-century sherds in the upper layers (L10/1-2) at a level close to 55 m. O.D.; it is therefore likely that such later silts existed against F6, above L10/7, but were destroyed by mechanical excavation.

Deeper layers of gravel and silt (L10/3-4) in the eastern sondage suggested a later 12th- or 13th-century date of deposition, and were similar in matrix to L10/8 which abutted F6. The bottom silts L10/5 and L10/6 were disturbed gravels, possibly of the floodplain terrace or a pre-monastic river channel.

A possible sequence for this area would begin with a pre-13th-century construction of F6, perhaps as a precinct wall to enclose the waterfront area extended by reclamation. Later, when the precinct was reduced, it evidently functioned as an eastern retaining wall for the fishpond bounded on the west by F11. It is abutted by similar fills on both sides, which might suggest a causeway between two ponds, but the buttressing observed on the east face clearly indicates that before these upper layers accumulated on the east side it was a substantial standing wall. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the primary function of the wall was to separate the developed land to the west from quarries and stream-channels to the east. It was thus acting as a somewhat irregular precinct wall, presumably before the suggested extension of the Abbey westwards over channel F1 in the 13th century.

In a second, north, extension trench, post-Dissolution walls F22 and F21 were noted cutting F8. It is possible that they formed part of a yard enclosure linked to F18, since no floors were seen.

#### SITE C 1983 (Fig. 6)

This area, 15 m. south of Site B, was developed in 1983 for the Cherwell Housing Association. Salvage recording was carried out by Brian Durham, and this work can be combined with some astute observations by the digger driver.

At the north-western end of the crescent of flats, deep stone foundations were exposed such as had not been found in the Site B excavations. Walls F25, F26, F27 and F28 were well mortared and at least 1 m. wide. They appear to be constituents of a series of 12th- to 13th-century buildings lying parallel to channel B F1, on a similar alignment to that of Buildings B II and B III, and extending c. 13 m. back from the river.

About 23 m. east of the river-channel the contractors' operations cut a deep section through a wide ditch. The stony and silty upper layers of this feature (F24) resembled the backfilling material seen in association with wall B F11. On Site B this material was dated to no earlier than the 15th century and appeared to be filling a fish-pond. C F24 can best be interpreted as an important drainage channel, associated not only with the ponded area on Site B, but also with the drainage of the cloister areas.

Several contractors' sections in the Site C area exposed dump-layers of gravel, sand and black organic material overlying alluvium. Typically, the black layers occurred at a depth of 1.5 m. below the modern ground-surface. This evidence parallels that for dumping as a method of land reclamation and consolidation obtained from Site B, whilst the occurrence of organic rubbish suggests that this process began as part of a planned southerly extension.

The eastern extent of Site C was marked by a substantial mortared rubble wall (F29) on a horizontal timber raft. This aligned with the buttressed wall (B F6) seen in excavations further north-west: it is interpreted as a continuation of that wall, which functioned as the pre-14th-century precinct boundary.

As the area south of these observations is part of the carpark of the housing development, the contractors' trenches were not sufficiently deep to expose the probable continuation of the building ranges noted above (C F25, F26, F27, F28), nor did they enable a southern boundary to be established.

#### SITE D 1983 (Fig. 6)

This area lies about 100 m. north-west of Site B. In 1983 an extension to the premises of Research Machines, close to the buildings of the former Pickford's Depository, enabled Brian Durham to record tantalising glimpses of the early waterfrontage in the deep foundation- and drain-trenches.

The most prominent feature here, F22, was a broad infilled channel, 20 m. wide, which aligned with the watercourse B F1 seen further to the south-east.<sup>10</sup> On grounds of fill characteristics and position, this channel must be continuous with channel B F1. The pottery suggests that its north-east edge, similarly, was being infilled in the first half of the 13th century. A line of wooden stakes, 0.10 m. in diameter, was sealed by the silting of the channel, and these parallel in part the similar features seen on Site B at the edge of the channel.

A substantial stone footing, F21, was seen close to the edge of F22. This may have been the line of a revetment

<sup>10</sup> A recut of channel D F22 from the west was seen in the 1983 observations. A culverted drain is shown in Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.688, f. 138v (an 18th-century drawing) implying some east to west drainage but the relation of this culvert to D F22 is unknown.

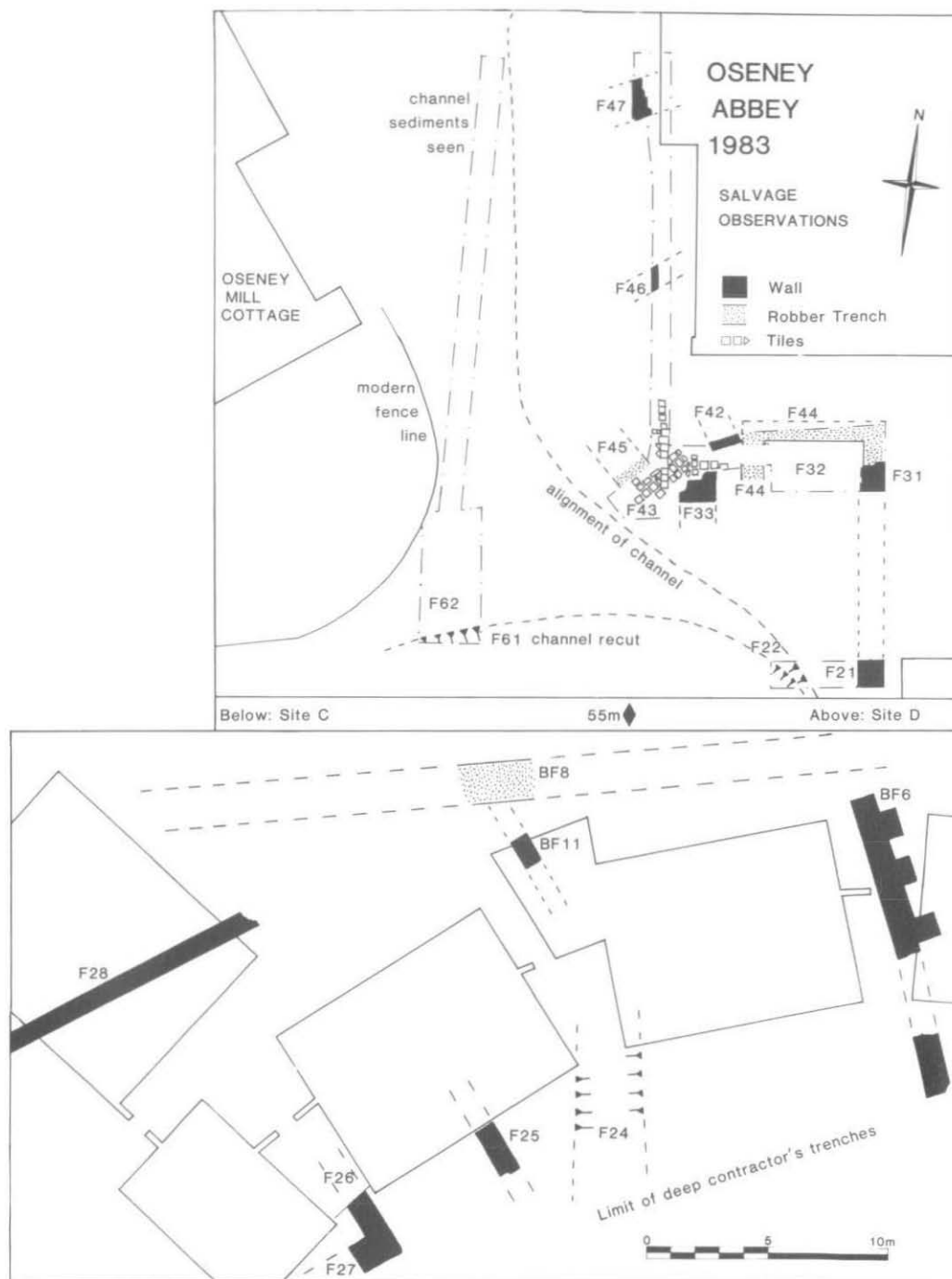


Fig. 6 Oseney Abbey: salvage recording, 1983. Sites C and D.

wall, such as *B F2*, or perhaps part of a building alignment running obliquely to the channel side, but insufficient was exposed to determine this point. However, the section exposed in Trench II demonstrates that later floor-levels cut *F21* and the infilled channel. A subsequent loam layer suggests that this area was part of that for which 18th-century ploughing is documented.

North of Trench II, two further trenches exposed substantial foundations lying obliquely to channel *D F22*, so probably conforming to the cloister alignment. Associated with *F32*, which has been interpreted as the demolition fill of a cellar or undercroft, was a substantial mortared wall (*F31*) together with a parallel robber-trench (*F44*) forming Building *D I* on a north-south alignment.

West of Building *D I* other mortared walls were observed. There were too few exposures to give a coherent building plan, but a range of buildings 13 m. west of the modern cemetery wall is suggested. On the western side of this range, substantial traces of a tile pavement were recorded. This pavement (*F43*) appeared to be at the junction of walls from the east, north, and south-west. Its width was c. 1.50 m. and it had been extensively repaired. Some tiles were recovered *in situ*, but others may have been disturbed (see report, p. 119 below).

The tiles imply that there was a corridor or walk on the west side of the suggested building range. The date of the tiles points to a probable post-13th century date for the range on this alignment.<sup>11</sup>

Given the conditions of recording, any phasing of the features seen must be tentative. However, the channel *D F22* should be in phase with channel *F1* on Site *B*, being in use from the early or mid 12th century until the early 13th century when substantial silting had taken place. That the alignment of the identified Building *D I* is so different from that of the other reconstructed building plans is puzzling, and implies that two functionally different alignments occur in this part of the precinct. As such, the plan of Building *D I* is the first evidence for a phase of building between the earliest 12th-century alignments and the post-13th-century replanning of the precinct. Accordingly, it is dated to the 13th century, being then equivalent to Phase 2 on Site *B*.

#### THE CHARTER EVIDENCE FOR TOPOGRAPHICAL CHANGE

The series of excavations described above constitutes the first formal investigation of one of England's largest abbeys. The new evidence relates to the south-west area of the precinct and particularly to the waterfronts. Recognition of an infilled channel (*B F1*, *D F22*) dating to the Abbey's first century shows that the shape of the precinct has not been static, and the archaeological work has demonstrated that a large proportion of the assumed Abbey plan arises from a major westward expansion in the 13th century to the area of Site *A*. Whether channel *B F1/D 22* was an original west boundary, or simply a river dividing two parts of the precinct, was not clear from the archaeology, but the problem can be elucidated by considering the historical evidence.

The earliest indication of the topographical layout comes in Peshall's summary of a charter of c. 1150, which, in noting a mead on the west side of the *curia*, identifies a further meadow beyond a watercourse called Elde, 'lying west of it, and near the meads of the burgesses of Oxford'.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly the Elde's alignment was west of the precinct in the mid-12th century and it was evidently distinct from the Bulstake stream, first mentioned in a charter of c. 1230.<sup>13</sup> Later in the middle ages the burgess's meadows were in the area west of the Abbey site and east of the Bulstake stream, with meadows east of the Abbey being controlled partly by the canons and partly by the Castle.<sup>14</sup>

The 12th-century reference to the Elde as a named stream contrasts with 13th-century descriptions of the stream later known as Bulstake, which simply say, 'aquam que fluit de Bulstake'.<sup>15</sup> The Elde was evidently an important stream, and it is suggested that this importance is derived from being the principal western water boundary of the *insula*, flowing southwards from the western meander of the Thames that branched at Rewley.

It is apparent, therefore, that the excavated channel *B F1/D F22* divided the early precinct from a meadow which was itself bounded on the west by the Elde. A further charter of 1226 supplements the evidence by referring to two 'hammes' on the south side of the *curia*.<sup>16</sup> Two separate areas of land imply three streams draining south of the Abbey precinct. Assuming that the Elde is one of these, the historical inference is borne out by the archaeological evidence from site *B* of a waterfront on channel *B F1* and for a channel east of *B F6*.

Figure 1 gives a tentative interpretation of the 12th-century topography, based on Agas's map of 1578 and Badcock's detailed survey of 1829, in the light of the charter evidence.<sup>17</sup> The evidence of these maps is considered

<sup>11</sup> The dating of this pavement is uncertain. However, the alphabet tiles and inlaid technique suggest a mid-late 13th century date as the earliest likely for the laying of the pavement.

<sup>12</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.300, f. 15.

<sup>13</sup> C.O. iv, No. 51.

<sup>14</sup> V.C.H. Oxon. iv, 282-283.

<sup>15</sup> C.O. iv, Nos. 50, 51.

<sup>16</sup> C.O. iv, No. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Agas op. cit. note 3; Badcock op. cit. note 7.



in detail below (pp. 109-10), but it should be stressed here that earlier writers were wrong in assuming that the present topography is substantially identical with the 12th-century pattern.<sup>18</sup> A close examination of the evidence for river-works in 1790, in the records of the Thames Navigation Commissioners, leads to the conclusion that the present navigation stream-line and the form of the southern mill-slip result from large-scale 18th-century cuttings.<sup>19</sup>

The Abbey mill certainly adjoined the present mill-stream in the 16th century, but was this always so?<sup>20</sup> Could channel *B F1/D F22* have been the early mill-stream? There is no archaeological evidence for any previous mill site, but there is some persuasive historical evidence which, when considered with the factors governing mill-siting, points to this conclusion. In the siting of a mill, an effective water supply was a prime consideration. When water-levels varied markedly between winter and summer, as well as when flooding was likely, this depended on the control of sluices or flash-locks.<sup>21</sup> An inquisition of 1315 into waterflow at a lock, and subsequent legal actions later in the medieval period, confirm the relevance of these factors in St. Thomas's parish and around the Oseney *insula*.<sup>22</sup> As the reconstruction of the 12th-century topography outlined above shows, the easternmost of the three channels mentioned in 1226 would have depended on the operation of the castle mills for its waterflow. Accordingly, it would not have been a preferred mill-site. There remain the other two channels, the Elde and channel *B F1/D F22*. At present, there is no direct evidence whether the broad channel *B F1/D F22* was entirely separate from the Elde or whether it may not have been a former meander, but the charter allusions to the Elde as a boundary suggest that the Elde was the principal stream with the greater water-flow.

In c. 1182-9, Oseney acquired the land north of the precinct from Bernard de St. Valery, thereby gaining control of the Elde from the Thames, together with 'gurgitam mea[m] iuxta Tamisiam cum cursu aque que currit ad molendinum eorundem canonicorum in Osenia'.<sup>23</sup> *Gurges* can mean a lock, weir, sluice or even a pool, but the implication of the charter is that the canons now controlled the water-level both of the Elde and of another stream.<sup>24</sup> This stream, on which a mill is apparently sited, can be reasonably identified as the channel *B F1/D F22*.

The advance of the waterfront to site *A*, and the archaeologically dated infilling of channel *B F1/D F22*, suggests that the Abbey precinct began to expand westwards in the early 13th century.<sup>25</sup> Two charters, of 1225 and 1249, illustrate these topographical changes. That of 1225, concerned with tithes, describes the relation of the corn-mill and outbuildings to the Elde. The corn-mill, it is implied, was by the stream, whereas all the *officinae* were 'ultra veterem cursum illius aque que vocatur Heldee versus occidentem'.<sup>26</sup> That a question of tithes is involved implies the use of land previously outside the *curia*. Such an interpretation is corroborated by the 1249 charter referring to a meadow associated with the 'hamme', on which a fulling-mill had been established.<sup>27</sup> In 1249 the meadow is described as 'retro molendinum fulerez', which would place the fulling-mill on the west side of the 'hamme'.<sup>28</sup>

Accordingly, the historical evidence supports the view that channel *B F1/D F22* forms the first western boundary of the Abbey. As the charter of 1225 makes clear, the land between the Elde and channel *B F1/D F22* was outside the *curia* for nearly a century. Once the canons had obtained control of the Elde headwaters, the 'hamme' was consolidated within the Abbey site. As the evidence outlined has shown, the resiting of the Abbey mills was an important consequence of these events.

## PLANS AND DRAWINGS: THE EVIDENCE FOR TOPOGRAPHY AND PRECINCT DEVELOPMENT

### THE PLANS (Figs. 1 and 8, Pl. 3)

The earliest known plan of the Abbey is that of Agas, made in 1578.<sup>29</sup> It shows the precinct boundary wall then

<sup>18</sup> e.g., N. Palmer, 'The Hamel, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, xlv (1980), 135-155; W.T. Squires, *In West Oxford* (1928); *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 365; *C.O.* ii, No. 39 (commentary p. 60).

<sup>19</sup> Oxfordshire Record Office, MS W1/VII/14, 17, 19, 20; MS W1/VIII/22. ff. 3-4.

<sup>20</sup> Wood op. cit. note 9, ii, 208.

<sup>21</sup> Mary Prior, 'Fisher Row - an Oxford Community of Fishermen and Bargemen (1500-1800)', Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1976 (now published as *Fisher Row*, 1982).

<sup>22</sup> A. Clark, *The English Register of Oseney Abbey*, E.E.T.S. cxxxiii, 64, *Cal. Inq. Misc.* iii (1348-1377), No. 806, p. 302; Christ Church, Calender of Estate Papers, 8, p. 97, item 230.

<sup>23</sup> *C.O.* ii, No. 162.

<sup>24</sup> See Fig. 1, and Site *B* evidence and Site *D* evidence BF1/DF22.

<sup>25</sup> For waterfront walls *A F7*, *A F4*, see p. 100; for the dating of *B F1*, see p. 102; for the dating of *D F22*, see p. 106.

<sup>26</sup> *C.O.* iv, No. 46 (c. 1225).

<sup>27</sup> *C.O.* iv, No. 312, (c. 1249).

<sup>28</sup> *C.O.* iv, pp. 634-5.

<sup>29</sup> Agas op. cit. note 3.



standing, and illustrates those buildings which had survived demolition since 1540.<sup>30</sup> In particular, the site of the 16th-century mill is shown clearly, as are the truncated remnants of large north-south ranges by the Abbey waterfront. A building, which can be identified as a dovecot, stands in the north-west part of the precinct, confirming that the later precinct extended north of the line of Oseney Lane and suggesting that this area could have been utilised as the Abbey farm.

As well as defining the 16th-century precinct shape and location, Agas's plan illustrates internal precinct boundaries. A substantial wall is shown extending from the east end of a range near the mill, to join the west side of the cloister. There is an element of distortion evident in the plan in regard to this and other apparent building walls as they relate to the Abbey church, so the point of junction cannot be certain. Possibly this wall survived because it formed a boundary-line between areas freely open to visitors and areas regarded as part of the cloister. Buildings that survived the post-Dissolution demolition all lie west or north of this wall. Another wall is shown, south of the gate area, running from the precinct wall to the west end of the church nave. This wall may similarly define the boundary of a public area of the precinct. The nature of these areas is discussed further below (pp. 124–7).

Agas's plan provides evidence for the topography of the site. A broad island lies west of the mill, whilst the deliberate channel cut for the mill-stream stands out in contrast to the meanders of the main stream. This evidence is consistent with the charter evidence described above. On the east side of the precinct there is fragmentary evidence for the drainage pattern in the line of osiers, clearly on a former watercourse, which corresponds to a short change of alignment in the precinct wall. There is no archaeological evidence from this area, but the excavations showed an eastern channel further south on Site B: probably the stream-line was culverted within the precinct and thus not seen by Agas.

Evidence from Agas's plan has been plotted in Figs. 1 and 8: in these figures account has been taken also of other evidence from plans, drawings, and the excavations. Hollar's map of 1643 has been compared with Agas's plan since it shows evidence for 17th-century drainage east of the Abbey site.<sup>31</sup> The osier line shown by Agas is confirmed by Hollar, who planned a more extensive network of channels. It could be that these channels were a response to a 17th-century drainage problem, but it is suggested that they show, in part, a recutting of the monastic drainage channels silted up by the late 16th century and so minimally indicated by Agas.

Only one other plan of the Abbey environs is known. This is Badcock's map of 1829, prepared as a survey of Christ Church lands.<sup>32</sup> Of the buildings shown by Agas only those at the mill-site survive, and there is no sign of the 16th-century precinct wall except on the east side of the north-western arm of the precinct. However, three significant features shown by Badcock relate to the 16th-century topography.

First, Badcock shows the same western rebate of Oseney Lane beyond the north-east precinct wall as occurs on Agas's plan. Secondly, while showing the stream-line west of the mill as it was after the river-works of 1790, he plots the fossilised west bank of the old stream and demonstrates that the back-stream west of the 1790 lock is the remnant of that stream. Thus the outline of the island shown by Agas, itself the truncated 12th-century 'hamme', is shown as being further truncated by the new lock. Thirdly, a full drainage pattern is illustrated, including a disused fish-pond which drains to what must be interpreted as a fossilised eastern channel, such as was seen on Site B and defined in the charter evidence. Badcock shows an east-west ditch in the same position as that shown in a disused state by Agas, and confidence in the antiquity of the channel pattern is reinforced when the position of other eastern channels, in the area of the Abbey meadows, is compared with those planned by Hollar.

#### THE DRAWINGS: (Plates 4, 5, 6 and 7)

The principal published drawing of Oseney is that of the Abbey church by Aubrey.<sup>33</sup> While it suggests a complex architectural history for the cloister area, the drawing is uninformative about the surrounding topography. However, a series of early 18th-century drawings confirm the reliability of Agas's plan of surviving buildings, while suggesting that he may have omitted some others.<sup>34</sup> Space does not permit the publication of a complete analysis of these drawings, but the principal evidence is set out below. The mill area is considered first.

The mill buildings as now extant represent the structure created by an extensive rebuilding in 1819, followed by further reconstructions in the period 1834–1843.<sup>35</sup> However, a drawing made in 1815 (Pl. 4) shows the previous

<sup>30</sup> *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 365ff.

<sup>31</sup> Hollar op. cit. note 4.

<sup>32</sup> Badcock op. cit. note 7.

<sup>33</sup> Bodl. MS Dep. b. 111, f. 46.

<sup>34</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.688, f. 138; MS Top. Gen. a.11, f. 111; MS Top. Oxon. c.300, f. 23; MS Top. Oxon. d.281, ff. 106, 107; MS Vet. A. 5. d.1127, ff. 300, 302; MS Dep. b.111, f. 91. Society of Antiquaries, Drawings II, f. 5. British Library, Add. MS. 15546, Vol. X, drawings 7, 8; Kings Maps and Drawings, K XXXV. – 52 – d.

<sup>35</sup> Christ Church, Calendar of Estate Papers, vol. 8, 104ff, items 284, 285, 307 and 309.

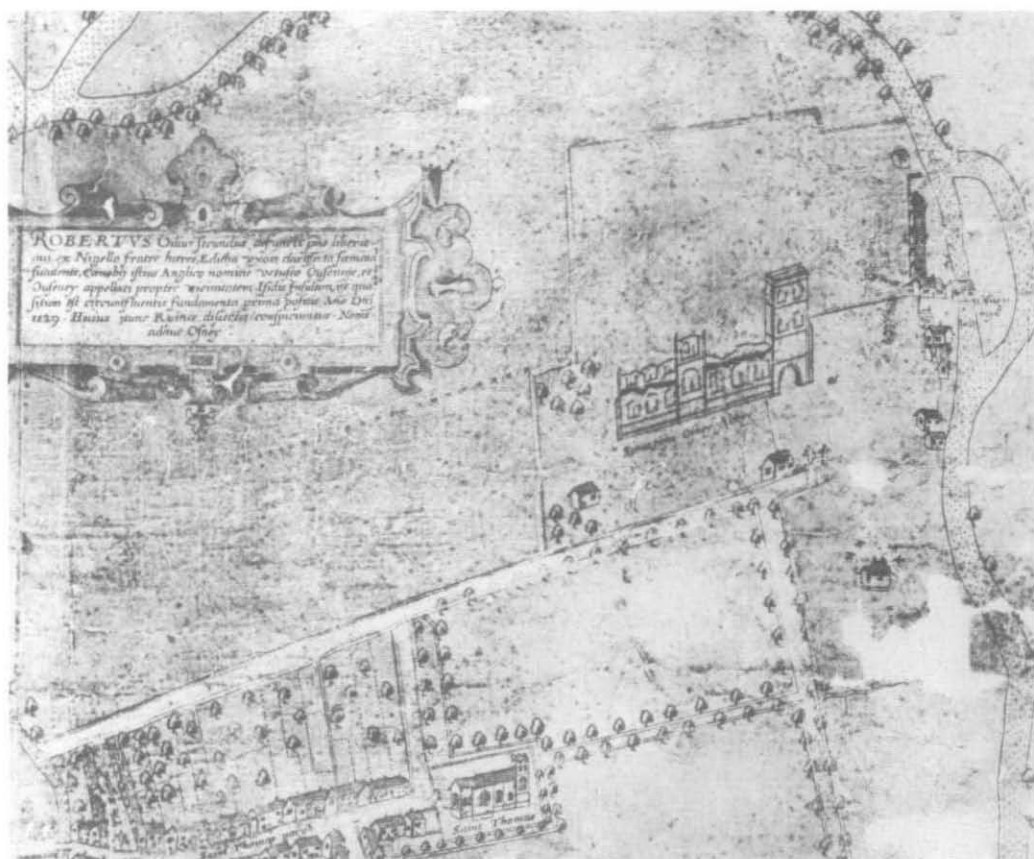


Plate 3 Osney Abbey, 1578: the Agas plan showing the precinct wall and other boundaries together with the positions of surviving buildings. South is at the top. *Reproduced by permission of the Curators of the Bodleian Library.*

structure clearly and demonstrates the existence of other buildings in this area.<sup>36</sup> Buttresses extending from the north wall of the mill are drawn as corresponding to the side walls of an apparently truncated range aligned on a north-south axis and standing approximately 10 m. north of the mill. On the south side of the mill, a range is shown incorporating the extant arched gateway and continuing into the mill structure. Considering buildings to the north first, it is noteworthy that drawings made by H. Hurst in 1893 show from the south-west that a three-storied range survived, aligned W-E, perhaps some 10 m. north of the mill.<sup>37</sup> Fig. 8 shows how the approximate positions of these buildings relates to those shown on Agas's plan; their possible functional interpretation will be discussed below (pp.126-7).

Turning to the south side of the mill, drawings of 1720 by M. Burghers illustrate very clearly the complex structural development of the waterside range planned by Agas in 1578.<sup>38</sup> The two views, taken from west and east (Pl. 5a-b), show that a range aligned E-W crossed the north end of the waterside range, and that it has subsequently been truncated from east and west. A lower building, marked as the 'Abbey Mill', has been abutted against the west end, whilst on the east an extension of two phases, and with a lower roof line, is visible. The

<sup>36</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.313, f. 82: consider with MS Top. Oxon. a.18, ff. 29, 30. MS Top. Oxon. c.300, f. 23, and MS Top. Oxon. d.281, f. 106/7, show views of the mill and adjacent buildings in the late 18th century and should be compared with MS Top. Gen. a.11, f. 111. They suggest structural links to cloister buildings.

<sup>37</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. a.18, ff. 29, 30.

<sup>38</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.688, f. 138.



Plate 4 Oseney Abbey, 1815: surviving buildings in the mill area (from the E) prior to an extensive 19th-century reconstruction of the mill. The range extending southwards of the mill is shown in detail in Plate 9. Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.313, f. 82. Reproduced by permission of the Curators of the Bodleian Library.



Plate 5a–b Oseney Abbey, 1720: these views (above from E, below from W) illustrate the relation of the waterfrontage and the mill site to the sequence of buildings in the claustral area discussed in the text. Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.688, f. 138. Reproduced by permission of the Curators of the Bodleian Library.

eastern extension following truncation obscures the north end of the waterside range. However, the east wall of the waterside range is clear in two drawings of 1872-1874, at its north end, where it forms what is now a part of the Marina offices.<sup>39</sup> This was structurally associated with the extant part of the waterside range, which has been dated to no later than the 15th century.<sup>40</sup>

Fig. 8 shows these buildings in relation to the overall topography and attempts to interpret them. The present mill-stream alignment did not bound these ranges, and further associated structures lie westwards. Eighteenth-century sketches by Colcutt and Pridden show the area west of the mill. Colcutt, in particular, shows the gable-end of an apparently medieval building standing west of the mill slip (Pl. 6).<sup>41</sup> Other views of the mill area show a ruined building between the mill-stream and a small channel to the west (Pl. 7).<sup>42</sup>

A full understanding of these buildings, and the reasons for their survival, depends on a consideration of further historical evidence, which is set out in the next section.

## THE EVIDENCE OF EARLIER OBSERVATIONS

This evidence comprises, on the one hand, the post-Dissolution descriptions of the Abbey plan and buildings together with documents relating to the management of the site by Christ Church; and on the other hand, Hurst's archaeological salvage recording in the late 19th century. The post-Dissolution descriptions of Wood and others are summarised in the *V.C.H. Oxford* volume, but evidence relating to Hurst's work has not been published previously.<sup>43</sup> Evidence from the Oseney Cartulary for the 13th-century rebuilding of the Abbey courts is also relevant to dating the different phases mentioned in post-Dissolution documents.

Wood describes the areas extending west and south of the Abbey gate in Oseney Lane.<sup>44</sup> This information forms the basis of the building attributions in Fig. 8, where it has been combined with data drawn from drawings, maps and archaeological observations. Of particular interest are his remarks about the location of the Abbot's Court, apparently an enclosed area with its own gate, standing south of the cloister.<sup>45</sup> This information can be supplemented by a letter of Tanner in 1728, using data from 'leases and other papers', which implies that two halls belonged to this court.<sup>46</sup> One of these, the 'Abbots High Hall' is known also as 'Abbot John's Hall'. Abbot John Leech is known to have initiated the rebuilding programme of the 13th century, and this allusion suggests that his activities affected this area of the precinct.<sup>47</sup> The implication of this need for building-space is discussed below (pp. 124-5) in relation to the south and east boundaries of the precinct.

Wood locates such buildings as the brewhouse, bakehouse and slaughterhouse as standing by the waterside, 'neare their mills'.<sup>48</sup> However, he places the tannery by the river, beyond the mill-stream, along with other 'necessary houses', situated west of the conventual buildings, 'on the other side of the ancient watercourse called Ealde'.<sup>49</sup> For practical reasons it seems likely that the slaughterhouse adjoined the tannery, whose existence at the Abbey is known from 1283, though there may have been slaughter-houses for different purposes such as kitchen meat.<sup>50</sup> His remarks suggest that buildings stood on the 'hamme' west of the mill.<sup>51</sup> He says that this whole area north and west of the mills was known as the 'villa de Ousney', the inhabitants being those who used St. Nicholas's Chapel near the Abbey gate.<sup>52</sup> The distinction that he implies between two groups of the Abbey's

<sup>39</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. b.90, ff. 1, 2.

<sup>40</sup> *R.C.H.M. Oxford* (1939), 155; J. Steane, *C.B.A. Group 9 Report 1980*, 96-7. See also Bodl. MS Vet. A.5. d.1127, f. 300b and f. 302a, which show structural details linking this building to the conventual area.

<sup>41</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.300, f. 23 (drawings by Colcutt, 1777). Compare MS Top. Oxon. d.281, f. 106 (drawings by Pridden, 1779).

<sup>42</sup> Bodl. MS Dep. b.111, f. 91.

<sup>43</sup> *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 365. Hurst's excavation records, from the late 19th century, are to be found as follows: Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.313, f. 76-139 (field notes/drawings); MS Top. Oxon. a.18 (original plans, annotated); MS Top. Oxon. c.194, ff. 301-314 (correspondence with H.W. Brewer) and *Proc. Oxf. Archit. Soc.*, n.s. v (1886-93), 272 (report of a lecture). Further material is in MS Top. Oxon., d.181, ff. 187-247, including a full draft of the lecture cited above, f. 232 ff.

<sup>44</sup> Wood op. cit. note 9, 206-208.

<sup>45</sup> Bodl. MS Willis 45, ff. 134-136, for position of Abbot's Hall, and also Wood op. cit. note 9, ii, 206-207. Peshall, in Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.300, f. 15, refers to a charter of 29 Henry I (1129-30), detailing the site of Oseney Abbey, mentioning the *pratum* called 'Orchard's Mede'.

<sup>46</sup> Bodl. MS Willis 45, f. 134-136.

<sup>47</sup> *O.C.* iii, 23-24, 51.

<sup>48</sup> Wood op. cit. note 9, 208.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>50</sup> Pipe Roll 11 Edw. 1st (1282-3), cited *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 209. *Ibid.*, 202-207.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 207-209; Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.22, f. 41a; MS Willis 45, f. 134-136.

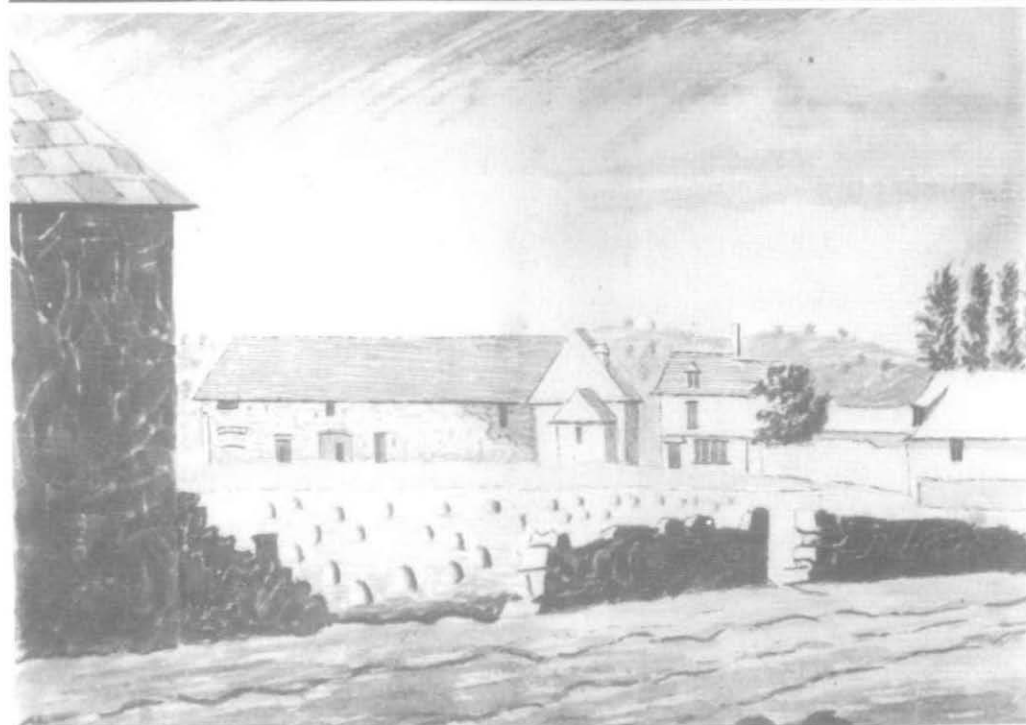


Plate 6 Osney Abbey, 1777: these drawings (above from SW, below from SE) show that parts of the ranges surviving in 1720 had been demolished by 1777. Of particular interest are the sketched buildings shown on the mill-island in the south-east view. Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.300, f. 23. *Reproduced by permission of the Curators of the Bodleian Library.*

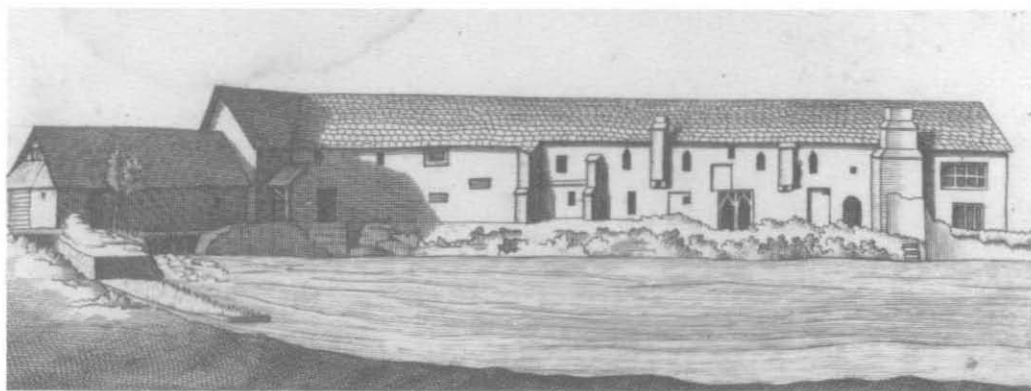


Plate 7 Oseney Abbey, probably late 17th century: this drawing (from W) is of particular interest for the details of walling adjoining the mill-housing. The relation of these walls to possible pre-Dissolution buildings is discussed in the text. Bodl. MS Dep. b.111, f. 91. *Reproduced by permission of Mrs. S. Peel.*

inhabitants – those within the cloister who use the Abbey church and others for whom separate provision is made – is also apparent in his allusion to the 'common court' near the great gate, whose buildings provide shelter for almsmen as well as access to the refectory and kitchens.<sup>33</sup> Comparison of the possible location of the various halls mentioned in post-Dissolution documents suggests that a 'great hall', for public audience, may have stood between the 'common court', also known as the 'great court', and the minor courts to the south, forming part of the claustral area.<sup>34</sup> Such a location is consistent with a plan that reserves the area north and west of the mill-site for common use, but the area south and east for claustral use.

The documents relating to the management of the site by Christ Church state certain buildings which are not to be demolished by the lessee.<sup>35</sup> These include the mill, the slaughter-house and tannery, and a range of domestic or industrial buildings extending northwards and southwards on the 16th-century waterfront. The Abbey gatehouse is to remain, as is the great barn in the dovehouse close. The whereabouts of the Abbey farm is one of the problems of Oseney's topography, and these leases suggest it should be found in the north-west arm of the precinct. However, a later farm site east of the church, close to a building shown by Agas, may have earlier origins.<sup>36</sup>

In renewing the lease in 1565, Christ Church reserved the right to take stone from the remaining buildings.<sup>37</sup> The post-Dissolution accounts illustrate the systematic extent of this demolition in payments for the removal and recasting of lead from the cloisters and the hiring of barges to bring stone from Oseney.<sup>38</sup>

It is not known whether Wood knew the Christ Church leases. If he did not, then they confirm that his account is accurate. The policies of both owner and lessee explain why only buildings adjacent to the waterside survived for Agas to plan.

Hurst's archaeological observations relate principally to the areas south and west of the Abbey church. After the establishment of a cemetery on the site in 1845, wall-footings and tile pavements were revealed by grave-digging, whilst frequent works in the mill area exposed evidence for earlier buildings.<sup>39</sup> Hurst's observations of footings, recorded by sketch-plans and careful drawings in over a hundred site visits, are plotted in Fig. 8.<sup>40</sup> They enable an approximate definition of the cloister and of minor courts aligned on the water-front ranges south of the mill. Other sightings suggest the position of the north-east corner of the central tower of the Abbey church, while south-east of the church, part of the monastic cemetery was seen.

Of particular interest is the evidence recorded in 1893 when a new turbine stream was cut west of the mill.<sup>41</sup> A series of drawings of the emptied mill-course (e.g. Pl. 8) shows a stone arch-rib springing from the west side of the

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 206–207; Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.22, f. 41a.

<sup>34</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.22, f. 41a; MS Willis 45, f. 134–135.

<sup>35</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.22, f. 41.

<sup>36</sup> Badcock *op. cit.* note 7.

<sup>37</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.22, f. 41.

<sup>38</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. b.16, ff. 4, 5, 17, 18, 19.

<sup>39</sup> Christ Church, Calendar of Estate Papers, 8, p. 102, item 271; Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. a.18, ff. 1, 29, 30.

<sup>40</sup> Hurst *op. cit.* note 43.

<sup>41</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.313, f. 78–80; MS Top. Oxon. a.18, f. 29, 30.



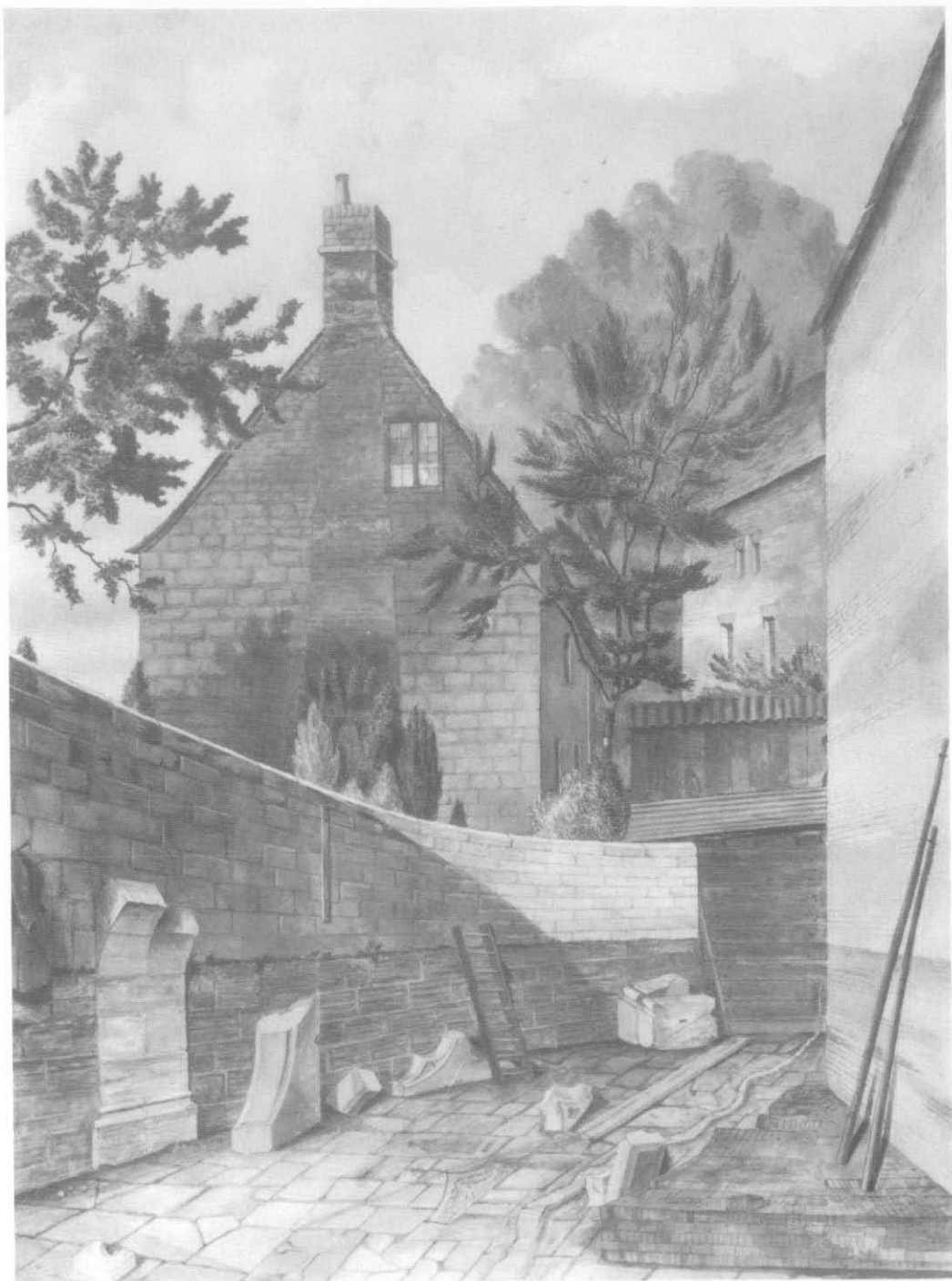


Plate 8 Oseney Abbey, 1893: H. Hurst's drawing of features exposed by the new turbine cut, west of the rebuilt 19th-century mill. Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. a.18, f. 30. *Reproduced by permission of the Curators of the Bodleian Library.*



cut, being part of an abutting wall in masonry distinct from that lining the cut. The area of the bottom of the cut is shown to be paved with stone slabs, incorporating at least two monumental slabs. Several pieces of moulded stone lie on these slabs. The general impression of the drawings is that the turbine stream cut through the undercroft of a building, perhaps aligned on the truncated range. Hurst's observations gain greater significance when considered with the evidence of the 17th-century drawing (Pl. 7), which shows a ruined building between the mill and a small channel to the west.<sup>62</sup> Since it is this channel which seems to have been re-used as the new turbine cut, the drawing locates the suggested undercroft in relation to a probable monastic building. While the stonework shown by Hurst presumably incorporates re-used materials, and the structure cannot be dated, it should be noted that Hurst found 12th-century arch-springers and column-bases in the area west of the mill.<sup>63</sup> These finds indicate that stone from the earliest conventual buildings could have been re-used here after the 13th-century rebuilding of the claustral area.<sup>64</sup>

Hurst's observations did not extend north of the mill. However, in 1895 Manning carried out a small excavation within the building of the Electric Light Company in Russell Street some 200 m. to the north.<sup>65</sup> His sections and plan suggest that a medieval building stood about 4 m. eastwards of the present river-line, with floor-levels surviving 2 m. below the modern ground surface. The building appears to have been demolished, and 0.6 m. of clay dumped over the floors to raise the ground-level. Manning provides the only archaeological observations of the northern arm of the Abbey precinct, and his results suggest that buildings existed along a northern water-frontage.

#### THE MEDIEVAL POTTERY By Maureen Mellor

Few sherds were recovered, and they can only usefully be used to provide *termini post quos* for their provenances.

##### Site A

Nine sherds found in association with Phase 2 were Brill-type jugs (Group III, Fabric AM) dating from the later 13th to mid 14th centuries. One cooking-pot with a distinctive squared and slightly undercut rim probably originated from Potterspury (Northants.). The latter, although common in the north-east of the county, has not previously been recognised from Oxford sites.

Eleven sherds were recovered from F1/1. Again Brill-type jugs predominated; this assemblage also included one coarse-ware sherd (Group II Fabric AQ) from beyond Newbury to the south-west, and a fragment of Tudor Green tableware from Surrey. The latter suggests a date not earlier than the first half of the 15th century, but such vessels continued in use locally until the mid 16th century.<sup>66</sup>

One red earthenware bowl, 18th- or 19th-century, was recovered from F10/1.

##### Site B

Most of the contexts from this site yielded only 1 or 2 sherds with the exception of F4 (38 sherds) and F10/2 (7 sherds). This was in marked contrast to the 122 fragments of tile from the site.

The earliest phase yielded 5 sherds (W/3) of Oxford Early Medieval Ware (Group IB Fabric AC). This type was first marketed in the mid 11th century and continued in favour until the mid 13th century.<sup>67</sup> The second phase yielded a slightly wider range of wares typical of the 13th century, with Oxford Medieval Ware (Group III Fabric Y) dominating. Also present were regional imports, from the east (Group IA, Fabric BK) and from the south (Group III, Fabric AG), along with 2 sherds from pitchers typical of the Brill-type products (Group III, Fabric AM). An early to mid 13th-century date is suggested.

Phase 3 was dominated by Brill type jugs and pitchers. Only F4 and F10/1 produced a slightly wider range of wares, similar to the previous phase, and these may well be residual (Fabrics Y and AG). But F4 also contained a fragment of a baking-dish in a pottery fabric very similar to products of the Saunders Field Kiln near Nettlebed which has been dated to the late 14th or 15th century.<sup>68</sup> A date from the mid-13th to possibly the 15th century is suggested for this phase.

<sup>62</sup> MS Dep. b. 111. f. 91.

<sup>63</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.313, f. 79b ff.

<sup>64</sup> Op. cit. note 47.

<sup>65</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. a.24, f. 34-36.

<sup>66</sup> M. Mellor, 'The Pottery', in Palmer op. cit. note 18, Phases H III and E4, 179.

<sup>67</sup> M. Mellor, 'The Pottery', in T.G. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford Castle, 1965-1973', *Oxoniensia*, xli (1976), 257. M. Mellor in Palmer op. cit. note 18, Phase B10a, 161.

<sup>68</sup> O.A.U. Newsletter, Vol. ix, No. 6 (December 1982).

Finally, Phase 4, with only 3 sherds, included a Cistercian drinking vessel of late 15th- or early 16th-century date.<sup>69</sup>

The pottery, while too small a quantity to aid the dating of the site, may suggest that the Abbey had rather wider trading and cultural contacts than would be expected of a secular site in Oxford.

#### THE TILES By Maureen Mellor, with Judith Roebuck & Jean Mitchell

##### Site A: 1975 and 1983

Only 9 tiles were recovered from this area: probably most of those from F1/1 were residual. However, this context included 2 pieces with a dog paw-print. Animal paw-marks on tiles are fairly common in the region.<sup>70</sup> A brick was also found in F1/1. The other tiles were singularly undiagnostic.

##### Site B: 1982

125 items of tile were found in the excavations, including 32 roof-tiles, 3 floor-tiles and 90 miscellaneous fragments. 3 bricks were noted.

All the roof-tiles were plain except for a glazed ridge-tile from F10/7.

The floor-tiles were glazed and decorated variants of a Lloyd Haberley type XXIV or XXIVA, dated to the late 13th century, from F10/1.<sup>71</sup>

Twelve tile fabrics are represented in the assemblage, corresponding with the type-series for Oxford established by Simon Robinson in the Hamel suburban site.<sup>72</sup> However, in F1/2 a new fabric, III E, was identified, hitherto unrecognised in Oxford.<sup>73</sup>

As at the Hamel, Oseney Fabrics IB, IIIA and IIIB all correspond to pottery fabrics found in the area. These originate from north-west of Oxford (Fabric IB), the area around Brill (Fabric III A), and the area immediately south of Oxford (Fabric IIIB). Although the sample from each phase is too small for statistical analysis, it is worth noting that Fabric IB occurs only from the 14th century onwards in this assemblage, whilst Fabric III A appears in the first 12th-century phase, is absent in the following phase, yet re-occurs from the 14th century onwards. Fabric III occurs throughout. A simple comparison with fabric-type trends at the Hamel underlines the absence of Fabrics IV and V in the first 12th-century phase at Oseney, whereas these fabrics are conspicuous in the late 12th-century phase at the Hamel and occur only very sparingly later. They first occur in Phase 2 (late 12th-century to end 13th-century) at Oseney (Fabric IV), and Phase 3 (14th- to 16th-century) (Fabric V). Overall, the admittedly small sample shows some correspondence in fabric trends between Phase 2 at Oseney, and the first phase at Wharf House Dominican Priory site which began in the mid 13th century.<sup>74</sup> If further work can establish the validity of this comparison, then the dating of Phase 1 at Oseney to the period between 1129 and the late 12th century would tend to be supported by the fabric distribution.

Analysis of the fabric trends suggests that in Phases 2 and 3 there is a rise from 7 fabrics (III, IIIB, IIIC, IIID, IIIE, IV and VIIB) to 12, but without any significant emphasis on the dominance of any one fabric. However, in Phase 3, fabric VIIB increases to 23 per cent of the total from 11 per cent in Phase 2. This could indicate a final flourishing of the industries using a white clay source, as these fabrics seem to fade out in favour of fabrics IIIC and IIID. There is a marked dominance of fabrics IIIC and IIID amongst the five fabrics remaining in Phase 4, comprising 77 per cent of the assemblage. This may reflect a change of supplier or an unknown functional preference. Throughout the assemblage from Site B, there is a bias in favour of fabrics III and IIIC. The rarity of floor-tiles on this site is marked, as is the scarcity of glazed roof-tiles. The implication may be that the buildings in this area were largely of a domestic, storage or industrial nature.

Taken as a whole, the assemblage suggests certain differences from those of other Oxford sites. It is possible that the tiles from Phase 1 indicate a rather earlier date than hitherto considered likely for some fabrics, while the assemblage from the conventual area may aid studies of the relationships between source and function during the Abbey's life.

<sup>69</sup> M. Mellor, 'The Pottery', in C.E. Halpin, 'Excavations at Queen Street, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, xlviii (1983), Phase 5b.

<sup>70</sup> cf. B.G. Durham, 'Archaeological Investigations in St. Aldates', *Oxoniensia*, xlii (1977); R.A. Chambers, 'Sadlers Wood, Lewknor', *Oxoniensia*, xxxviii (1973), 146f.; B.G. Durham, '9, St. Martin's Street, Wallingford', *Oxoniensia*, forthcoming.

<sup>71</sup> Lloyd Haberley, *Medieval English Paving Tiles* (1937), 96.

<sup>72</sup> S. Robinson, 'The Tiles', in Palmer op. cit. note 18, 196, Fiche 2, D09.

<sup>73</sup> The new fabric, III E, is characterised by being moderately tempered with sub-rounded white, gray, and colourless quartz. There are occasional inclusions of red iron ore.

<sup>74</sup> G. Lambrick, below, pp. 178, 186-7.

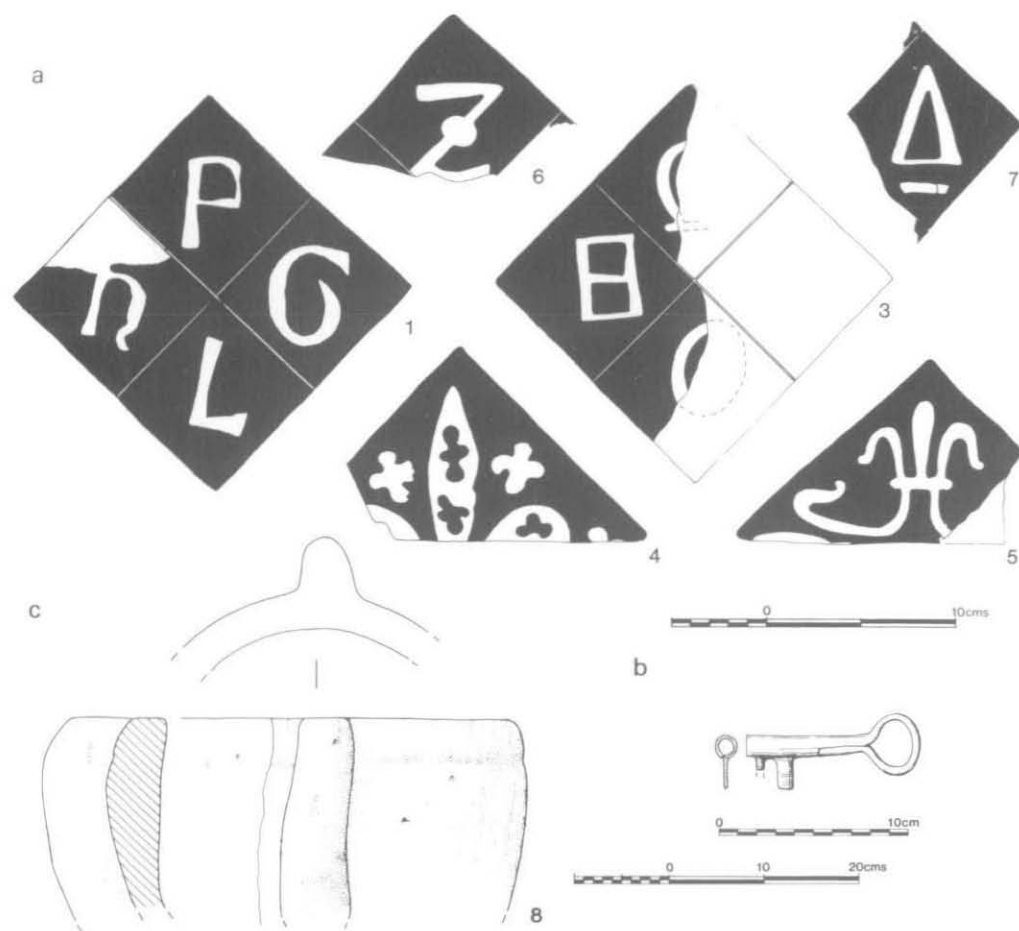


Fig. 7 Oseney Abbey: the finds. (a) Tile designs from the pavement seen at Site D, 1983, F41; for Small Find Nos. see key in text, p. 120. (b) Iron key with ring bow, drawn from X-ray negative. Site B, 1982, L1/2, Small Find No. 1. (c) Stone mortar fragment. Site B, 1982, F8, Small Find No. WS. 1.

#### A FRAGMENT OF TILE PAVEMENT: Site D. 1983 By Jean Mitchell

The location of the tile pavement is described on p. 108 above. It was exposed during work for Research Machines extension on the former Pickford's Depository site. Many of the tiles were collected by the builders after being disturbed by a mechanical excavator. The fragment which survived *in situ* suggested a north-south walk-way of diagonally laid tiles, with a border on the east side of halved tiles laid north-south. The border was accentuated by a further 0.22 m.-wide band of quartered tiles laid diagonally, and finally a row of quarter tiles laid north-south. However, only 36 tiles survived to confirm this pattern and all but 6 had been so abraded as to destroy their inlay. To the north the pavement had been repaired with large stone slabs and plain tiles, and there were further plain tiles to the east which suggested a walkway extending in this direction. The arrangement could not be related to the many stone footings seen in this trench, and publication is restricted to those tile designs which are not previously known locally. All designs are inlaid, and most of the tiles have unusually pronounced leying made with a rectangular point. They are illustrated in Fig. 7 (a).

1. & 2. Alphabet tile with 4 letters, laid as one. Letters are G,<sup>75</sup> L, H,<sup>76</sup> P (or F). Slight variations in spacing of the two examples suggest the letters were applied individually (SF 18, SF 19).
3. Heavily worn alphabet tile (SF 2).
4. Triangular tile with fleur-de-lys and florets (SF 23).
5. Triangular tile with fleur-de-lys, unlayed (SF 6).
6. & 7. Parts of two alphabet tiles, 'Z' and possibly 'A' (SF 28, SF 27).<sup>77</sup>

## OTHER FINDS

*Metalwork:* Fig. 7b

Ian H. Goodall writes: Iron key with ring bow, bit rolled in one with hollow stem, ring bow. (SF 1, L1/2, Phase 2, mid-late 12th to 13th century.)

*Stone artefact:* Fig. 7c

Stone mortar fragment, re-used as wall stone. Philip Powell has identified the stone as Forest Marble, the nearest quarries being Wychwood and Northleigh. Philip Carstairs reports that the inside surface was noticeably thinner and smoothed towards the base, suggesting use for grinding. Insufficient of the base survived to show whether it had also been used for pounding.

## FAUNAL REMAINS: OSENEY ABBEY 1982, Site B. By Bob Wilson with Enid Allison.

Bones were well-preserved and relatively easy to identify. Some 59 per cent of the mammal remains are classified in Table 1. Cattle bones, particularly from the head and foot, predominated in the results, but possibly this is biased by the debris from F1/2. Discussion is intended to indicate possible points of reference for future excavations rather than a confident interpretation of this small collection.

Large fragments are relatively abundant, and suggest scatters of bones distinct from the main dumps of rubbish which would be of kitchen and table debris. This suggestion may be supported by the fact that only one fragment was burnt, indicating little close association with ovens or hearths. Head and foot debris of cattle may, however, indicate that the excavation trench was adjacent to a slaughterhouse (assuming that spoil dumped into F1/2 was not carried far).

Not surprisingly, the species composition indicates a higher status than is usual for medieval sites around Oxford. For example, the presence of fallow deer is significant of status and the representation of pig is greater than of sheep. This would be substantial if, as suspected, cattle are disproportionately represented in the collection due to the occurrence of slaughterhouse debris.

A swan humerus bears a healed but grotesque fracture of the mid and distal shaft. The injury is interpreted as follows. The bone tissue fused and healed over long before the swan died, and with little sign of infection. Before fusion the distal bone fragments, at least three in number, had been twisted, bent about 45 degrees from the natural line of the bone, and compressed so that the length of the healed bone was markedly shortened. The surviving distal shaft shows no sign of the proximal articulation surface, but is solidified and curiously concave as if some pathological articulation formed as other bone fragments or skeletal elements were pressed or moved against it but never joined together. The surface of the cavity is eroded, possibly *ante mortem*. The injury suggests at least a semi-domesticated bird, since the swan might not have survived long against predators without a sanctuary of some kind, and despite the protection of swans by law during most of the medieval period. A logical residence for the swan would be the Abbey.

<sup>75</sup> Haberley op. cit. note 71, 28.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 29.

TABLE 1  
Frequency and percentages of bone fragments

Phase	1	2	3	Total	%
Century	early-mid 12	mid-late 12-13	14-16		
Cattle	-	32	1	33	67
Sheep/goat	1	4	1	6	12
Pig	1	5	1	7	14
Horse	-	1	1	2	4
Fallow deer	-	-	1	1	2
Total	2	42	5	49	
Unidentified	1	21	12	34	
Burnt	-	-	1	1	
Domestic fowl	-	1	3	4	
Domestic goose or Greylag	-	1	2	3	
Mute swan	1	-	-	1	

#### DISCUSSION: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ABBEY PRECINCT

Both the conventual and the more peripheral buildings of Augustinian houses have been studied in depth by J.C. Dickinson, who points out that the plans of the Order's houses in England, in contrast to those on the Continent, varied widely.<sup>78</sup> Compromise with the difficulties of the sites was frequent, and recent archaeological studies have further developed our knowledge of specific plans varying in their response to topographic constraints.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, distinctions between the conventual building area and the zones for industrial or domestic work remained important to the management of an abbey's life. Industrial or domestic buildings were to be sited on the periphery. It might be expected, therefore, that the buildings identified archaeologically on sites A, B and C should be part of the industrial or domestic buildings of Oseney, whereas those seen on Site D are more likely to be in the conventual area. This distinction has been borne in mind in dealing with the building evidence and in considering the topographical evidence.

Considering the low-lying nature of Oseney island, and the economic importance of the Abbey mills, alterations to the drainage pattern might be expected to reflect topographical changes involving the precinct. The historical and archaeological data set out in previous sections of this report provide such evidence, which may be summarised as follows. The area by the present mill-stream represents the site of the Abbey corn-mill since the early or mid 13th century. Earlier, the corn-mill had lain east on a natural channel, of which that excavated at B F1 is the mill-tail as well as a southern access to the Abbey

<sup>78</sup> J.C. Dickinson, 'Les Constructions des Premiers Chanoines Reguliers en Angleterre', *Cahiers de Civilisation Medievale*, x.2 (1967), 198. For the characteristics of Augustine Canons' building plans and their evolution from Benedictine models, see the same author's *Monastic Life in Medieval England* (1961), 11-43, and 'The Buildings of the English Austin Canons', *Journal Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.* 3rd ser., xxxi (1968), 60-75.

<sup>79</sup> P.J. Huggins, 'Excavations at Waltham Abbey, 1970-1972', *Trans. Essex Archaeol. Soc.*, 3rd ser. iv (1972), 30-172. G. Coppack, 'Thornholme Priory' *Med. Arch.*, xxi (1977), 227; G. Coppack, 'Thornholme Priory' *Med. Arch.*, xxii (1978), 157-8.

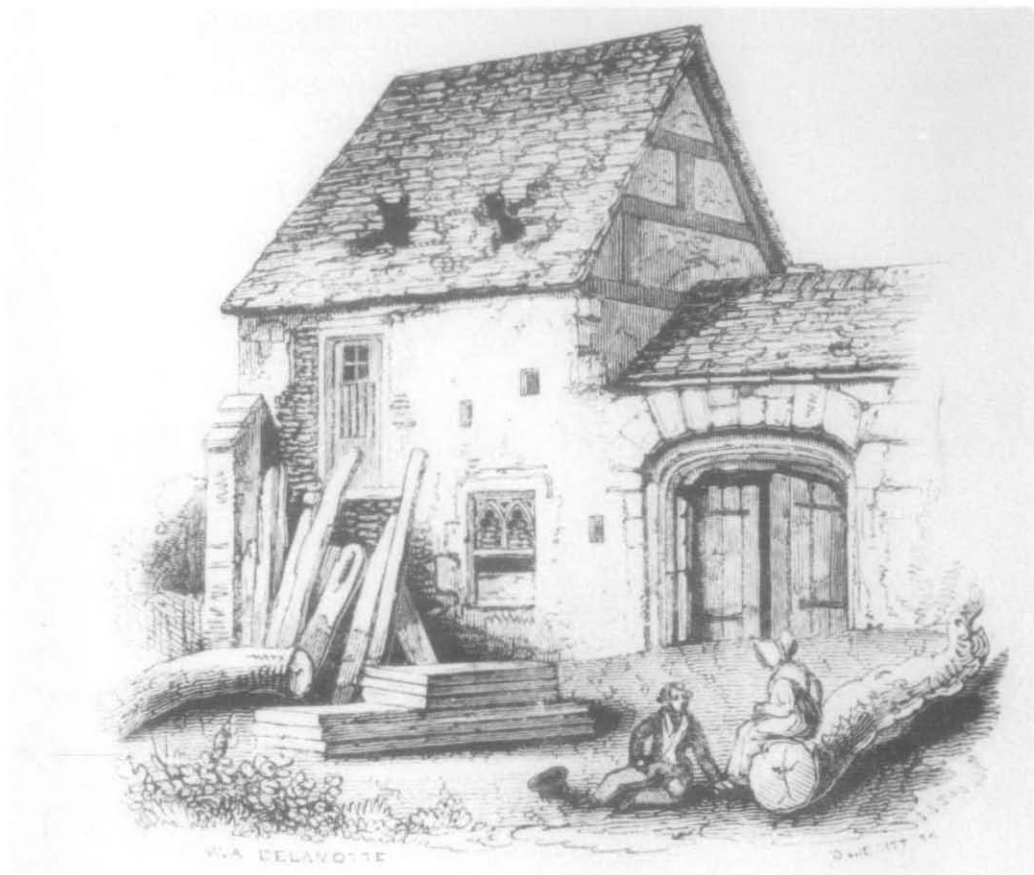


Plate 9 Oseney Abbey, c. 1840: this detailed drawing shows (from the E) the surviving truncated range south of the mill before it was obscured by modern buildings, together with the suggested water-gate arch. The two-light window south of the arch survives on the east side, and there are also blocked windows on the west. For survey details see note 40. Bodl. MS Vet. A. 5. d.1127, f. 300b. *Reproduced by permission of the Curators of the Bodleian Library.*

waterfront. This earlier mill-stream was re-used as a drain, perhaps the reredorter drain, and directed westwards to emerge through the culvert, shown in 18th-century drawings, into the later mill-stream tail.<sup>80</sup> Streams further eastwards were probably backfilled with rubbish or re-used as drains, thus enabling the deliberate reclamation on the south side of the Abbey which has been identified archaeologically (Site *B*, above pp. 102–6).

There is historical evidence to suggest that at least one river-channel was open until the 12th century, perhaps later, on the east side of the Abbey.<sup>81</sup> On the basis of observed sediments, it is reasonable to identify the area east of the boundary wall *B* F6 as part of such a channel, and it is suggested that the stream-line shown by Badcock as curving within the late precinct wall is a fossilised remnant of this channel.<sup>82</sup>

The 1983 observations south of Site *B* support the interpreted function of *B* F6 as an

<sup>80</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon, c.688, f. 138v; MS Dep. b.111, f. 91.

<sup>81</sup> *C.O.* iv, No. 45.

<sup>82</sup> Badcock *op. cit.* note 7.

early precinct boundary, and confirm the apparent drainage alignment as shown by Badcock. It is worth noting that the fishponds identified south of *B F8*, the later precinct boundary, may be presumed to have drained towards this channel, while those south of Site *A* certainly drained eastwards.<sup>83</sup>

Essentially, the precinct expanded by the occupation of small islands and the consolidation of the channels between. The need to maintain a water access to the Abbey may be one reason why this process involved expansion to the west, whilst backfilling the eastern channel would certainly have adversely affected the meadows shared with the castle.<sup>84</sup>

One physical factor of importance at Oseney was the level of the water-table. Was the area bounded by *B F6* abandoned because of rising water? The excavation evidence points to the marshy nature of the area, highlighted by the timber-raft foundations seen for *B F2* and *B F6*, and the subsequent use of the area as a site for fishponds is relevant to this issue. Elsewhere in the precinct some evidence for a rise in the water-table is suggested by the depth of the presumed undercroft floor recorded by Hurst near the mill, and by his observations of waterlogging in the conventual cemetery.<sup>85</sup> The 1895 observations by Manning in the north part of the precinct also suggest a rising water-table.<sup>86</sup> If such a rise was linked to the shifts of buildings and boundaries on the Abbey site, then it may tentatively be placed in the 13th or 14th century. However, it could be that silting of minor channels and lack of maintenance of the drainage in the post-Dissolution phases caused a local rise in the water-table. To solve this problem requires an examination of the whole drainage pattern upstream and an examination of other sites in Oxford with similar situations, as well as further work at Oseney.

Agas's plan forms the principal link between the later drawings and the structures identified archaeologically. Some points of difference have been considered above, but these do not detract from the important evidence which remains. In particular, the precinct boundary shown by Agas has been plotted and found to be in good agreement with the post-14th-century boundary walls, *B F8* and *A F1*, identified archaeologically, and in close alignment with the eastern site boundary shown by Badcock in 1829.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, the range shown by Agas standing parallel to the waterfront and south of the mill can be compared with Burghers's views of 1720 and the evidence of the surviving bay of that range.<sup>88</sup> Such a comparison shows that the dimensions and position indicated by Agas are correct.

An acceptance of the accuracy of Agas's plan, as above, does not imply that he shows all buildings surviving the Dissolution. The absence of buildings on the 'hamme', west of the mill, is surprising, given the evidence (above, p. 113) for the siting of industrial buildings and the slaughterhouse. As Dickinson has pointed out, the usual policy was to demolish conventual buildings, to prevent dispersed monks from returning, whereas industrial or domestic buildings were often re-used for economic reasons.<sup>89</sup> In this case re-use can be documented, but it was short-lived. A fulling-mill stood on the west side of the 'hamme' from the 13th century, and the monastic accounts for 1520, which list repairs,

<sup>83</sup> See Sites *A*, *B* (above, pp. 102-6); Badcock op. cit. note 7; present Fig 1.

<sup>84</sup> For Oseney's meadows: *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 76, 282-283; *C.O.*, ii, p. 634 (map in appendix) and *C.O.*, iv, pp. 59-82.

<sup>85</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon., d.181, f. 247.

<sup>86</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon., a.24, ff. 35, 36.

<sup>87</sup> Compare excavation evidence for new boundaries, Sites *A* and *B*, esp. *A F1*, *B F8* and the dating of the later precinct boundary (above, pp. 99-104).

<sup>88</sup> Agas op. cit. note 3; MS Top. Oxon. c.688, f. 138v; *R.C.H.M. Oxford*, i, 155; Steane op. cit. note 40, 96-7.

<sup>89</sup> Dickinson op. cit. note 78 (1968), 69, 72.



show that it still existed in the 16th century.<sup>90</sup> Subsequently, a post-Dissolution petition records a newly-built 'tuck' mill which, in 1555, it was proposed to site nearer Rewley.<sup>91</sup> Since the lessee, Stumpe, was a clothier, it seems that he found the site inadequate to his purposes.<sup>92</sup> The increased demand for building materials at Christ Church, shown by the caveat in the renewed lease reserving the right to take stone, must have then led to the demolition of the unwanted buildings.

On historical grounds, it has been argued (above, p. 109) that by the early 13th century the Abbey corn-mill had been placed on, or very near to, its present site. Can the evidence of the drawings and field observations amplify our understanding of this development of the precinct and of the buildings shown here by Agas? It was noted above that a bay of the range still stands behind the waterfront. Work by the R.C.H.M. and by J. Steane has shown that this surviving part of the range is no later than the 15th century, whilst views of the range as it stood in 1720 demonstrate a complex structural sequence evidenced by window styles, blockings, and traces of a previously abutting range returning eastwards.<sup>93</sup> The east view enables the surviving 15th-century building to be identified within this range, whilst the west view suggests a building line surviving in a ruined state immediately above the then mill-stream revetment and returning eastwards towards the west face of the range as it was in the 18th century (Fig. 8 and Pl. 7). Clearly, the range plotted by Agas has been cut through a previous sequence of ranges running parallel to the waterfront and extending eastwards from it.

Were there also ranges extending westwards onto the 'hamme'? The evidence for buildings on the 'hamme' depends on three pieces of evidence: Hurst's observations of a possible ruined undercroft (above, p. 115); the evidence for a truncation of an east-west range on the same alignment (above, p. 111); and the drawing showing a ruined building between the mill-stream and a small channel to the west (above, p. 115). This combination has been interpreted in Fig. 8, together with the observation of substantial stonework on the east side of the 17th-century cottage, on the present mill slip, whose absence elsewhere in that building suggests a re-used wall footing.<sup>94</sup> Admittedly the evidence is fragmented, but considered as a whole it suggests a plan of ranges pre-dating the 15th- to 16th-century alignments. The date of this earlier plan is uncertain, but there is evidence for a major rebuilding of the precinct by Abbot Leech (1235-49), and indulgences granted by the Pope at that time confirm the need of finance for a building programme.<sup>95</sup>

The relationship between the development of the mill area and the 'Great Court' lying along the upper mill-stream can be inferred only in plan. The buildings shown by Agas north of the mill cut across the most probable line of the 12th-century waterfront on channel *B* F1, *D* F22, and extend to a waterfront alignment which has been dated on historical grounds to the 13th century. However, as Fig. 8 shows, this court is the only identified court to conform to the alignment of the Abbey church. It is probable, therefore, that the buildings by the waterfront are no earlier than the 13th century, but also that they follow the alignment of an earlier court lying east of the 12th-century waterfront.

In summary, the evidence of drawings and field observations suggests that a series of ranges extended north and west of the conventual area, and that there were at least two

<sup>90</sup> *C.O.* vi, 281.

<sup>91</sup> *C.O.* iii, No. 99, and Christ Church, Calendar of Estate Papers 8, p. 97.

<sup>92</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.22, ff. 41-43.

<sup>93</sup> *R.C.H.M. Oxford*, i, 155; Steane op. cit. note 40, 96-97; Bodl. MS Top. Oxon., c.688, f. 138v.

<sup>94</sup> Observations by present writer.

<sup>95</sup> *C.O.* i, p. xv (an excerpt from MS Twyne, probably dating to 1464). Wood op. cit. note 9, 193-207, esp. 201 (proclamation of indulgence by the Pope's legate, 4 May 1247).

principal phases of development preceding the post-Dissolution redevelopment.<sup>96</sup> This analysis has interesting topographical implications: first, it is consistent with the archaeologically dated advance of the Abbey waterfront shown on Site A; secondly, the medieval water-table must have been markedly lower unless the postulated undercroft was of only seasonal usefulness.

Topographical factors affecting the development of the south part of the precinct have been discussed above, as have possible reasons for its partial abandonment. They suggest that this was an area reclaimed from a marsh, apparent in the evidence from layers *B* 19/3-8 and *B* 10/5-6, by dumping the alluvium that formed *B* L9/1-2 and *B* 16/4. Several questions arise. First, does the reclamation of this area form part of the 12th-century foundation phase or is it to be associated with the 13th-century expansion? Secondly, what were the functions of the buildings in this area? Thirdly, can the partial abandonment of the area be associated with the replanning of the Abbey in the 13th century? In answering these questions the evidence described from Sites *B* and *C* will be considered jointly.

It is clear from the dating of waterfront *B* F2 on channel *B* F1 that this area formed a part of the 12th-century precinct. Since the waterfront depends on the reclaimed land behind it for associated buildings, such as *B* II, the reclamation must be no later and may be presumed to be part of the same 12th-century foundation phase. Whilst there is no direct dating evidence for the water-frontage on Site *C*, it is clearly related to that on Site *B*. The alignment of buildings on the water-frontage suggests an association in plan similar to that on Site *B*. However, the analysis of Site *B* shows that the only identifiable 12th-century building, *B* II, is set well back from the waterfront, whilst the 13th- to 14th-century buildings come right up to it. Therefore, it is suggested that the ground of Site *C* forms part of the 12th-century reclamation, on the basis of the congruent waterfrontage, but that the building alignments are of ranges dating to between the 13th century and the 14th-century contraction of the precinct boundary, along the alignment *B* F8.

The buildings on Sites *B* and *C* lay some 100 m. south of the conventual core of the Abbey, and such a placing on the periphery suggests an industrial function. There is interesting environmental evidence (above, p. 120) for slaughter-house debris in the silting by the waterfront on Site *B*, *B* F1/2, indicating that this was an activity in this general area. Direct evidence for the abandonment of the Site *C* area does not exist, but for Site *B* an inference is possible, based on the usual association between tanning and slaughter-houses. Historical evidence that the tannery of the Abbey had been situated on the 'hamme', west of the 12th-century mill, since 1283 is supported by other evidence (above, p. 113) that the slaughter-houses stood there as well. Therefore, given the disuse of channel *B* F1 (shown archaeologically to occur in the 13th century) and the need for ample water for tanning, the environmental evidence may reflect a necessary re-siting of the industrial processes. This economic dislocation is unlikely to have occurred by accident, and may be associated with the 13th-century replanning and rebuilding of the Abbey. The siting of the Abbot's courts between the cloister and Site *B* may have necessitated the removal of noxious industries from the area at this time.<sup>97</sup>

This did not, however, terminate occupation. There was rebuilding on Site *B*, *B* I and III, and presumably on Site *C*, and the final disuse of the area did not occur until the 14th century when a new precinct boundary wall, *B* F8, was cut through the earlier buildings on

<sup>96</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.22 (Letters and Papers of Christ Church, 1519-1661) ff. 41, 42; MS Top. Oxon. b.16, ff. 4, 5, 176, 19; Christ Church, Cal. of Estate Papers, vol. 8, 97ff, items 230, 271. For an overview of the Abbey buildings after the Dissolution see *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 365ff.

<sup>97</sup> For the siting of the Abbot's courts, compare: Wood op. cit. note 9, ii, 193-207; Bodl. MS Willis 45, ff. 134-136; Bodl. MS Rawl. d.1481, f. 32f.

Site *B*. No historical reason for this contraction of the southern precinct is known. It occurs not only on Sites *B* and *C* but also on Site *A*. On archaeological grounds, given the dating described in the excavation evidence, the contraction should post-date the replanning of the precinct. The best explanation, in the absence of other evidence, could be that the south side of the Abbey's site on Oseney island was being affected by rising water-levels, as described at the beginning of this section.

In the historical record, the early conventual area is less clearly definable than the boundaries and industrial areas described so far. Nonetheless, Hurst's observations provide useful evidence which can be supplemented by the data from Site *D*. Hurst's sightings of walls and building material, at depths of 0.38 m.–1.20 m., have been plotted in Fig. 8, as has the evidence from Site *D*. At least some of the foundations seen by Hurst define parts of the ground-plan of the church and cloister; the position of monastic graves is significant confirmation of this interpretation.<sup>98</sup> Drawings of this central conventual area from the south-east make it plain on architectural grounds that buildings appropriate to a 12th-century style are located here.<sup>99</sup>

On Site *D* one group of buildings lay obliquely to the channel (*D* F22), and thus probably conformed to the 12th-century cloister alignment. However, other alignments in this area suggest buildings aligned with the later waterfronts (as Site *A* and by the mill). These markedly differing alignments argue for at least two phases of site development, involving a considerable degree of re-planning of the site. Fig. 8 demonstrates the relation between these alignments and those of buildings by the later water-frontage, as well as those on Site *B* and the area south of it.

It is impossible to offer more than a tentative date for this apparent re-alignment and replanning of ranges in the conventual area. The limited dating evidence from Sites *A* and *B*, together with the historical evidence for a rebuilding programme in the mid 13th century, suggest that it would have occurred between the mid 13th and early 14th century.<sup>100</sup>

The archaeological evidence for the westward shift of waterfronts from Sites *B*, *C* and *D* to Site *A* and the areas by the later mill-stream is discussed in a separate section (below, pp. 127–8). However, it is appropriate to consider here the functions of buildings in this part of the precinct, for in describing the later Abbey, Wood and others stress an important distinction between the public and the conventual areas (above, p. 114).

It is reasonable to suggest that the sequence of ranges by the mill-stream, extending northwards, marks the edge of the conventual area as opposed to the *villa* lying on the 'hamme' to the west. A comment by Tanner emphasises this distinction in plan by referring to the 'old water gate' between the houses of the *villa* and the Abbey. A surviving stone gate-arch, illustrated in Pl. 9, may be the remains of such a gate.<sup>101</sup>

In the light of this evidence, the buildings at Site *A* are less likely to be industrial than domestic, comprising stores, stables and similar utilities.<sup>102</sup> The distinction between the inhabitants of the *villa*, who worship at St. Nicholas's chapel, and others, suggests that the lay-brothers of the Abbey are the more likely occupants of the residential parts of ranges

<sup>98</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. a.18, f. 1 (Hurst's plan of Oseney Abbey). Squires op. cit. note 1, 86, mentions a private cemetery at Oseney in 1146.

<sup>99</sup> Bodl. MS Dep. b.111, f. 46; Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. 313, f. 87a.

<sup>100</sup> For chronology of Sites *A*, *B*, see Phase Tables, Figs. 4, 5. For the historical evidence, see *C.O.* iii, pp. 23–24, 51.

<sup>101</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.300, f. 17. The arch is located between the mill and the surviving part of the long waterside range marked in Fig. 1.

<sup>102</sup> See Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.22, f. 41a, for buildings near the 'millhouse'.

adjoining the waterfront, since the boundary of the conventual area is placed by Wood on this alignment.<sup>103</sup>

The identification of the *villa*, and its industrial functions, is of particular importance in defining areas for future study. Recent excavators at the Augustinian houses of Waltham (Essex) and Thornholme (Humberside) have commented that hitherto little attention has been given to the industrial areas, which were of considerable economic significance.<sup>104</sup> Historical work on the parish of St. Thomas, the Oxford suburb largely created by Osene Abbey, has emphasised the significance of the Abbey as employer and consumer, whilst attention has been drawn to its widespread economic activities outside Oxford.<sup>105</sup>

#### DISCUSSION: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LATER WATERFRONT

In the light of the above analysis, it is now appropriate to consider Site A within the broader context of the later water-frontage. The 17th- and 18th-century drawings show the surviving water-frontage to a point no more than 20 m. north of Site A.<sup>106</sup> The surviving part of the ranges shown in these drawings confirms that they must have existed by the 15th century, while the drawings show substantially earlier windows in the parts later demolished.<sup>107</sup> From its position, the waterfront wall A F7 would align with the revetment wall of the mill-stream shown in these drawings and, as argued earlier, its construction can be no later than the 15th century. That the revetment wall shown in the drawings was probably pre-Dissolution is shown by traces of ruined building walls rising directly from the waterfront, implying the siting of ranges whose plan would be cut by the line of the 15th century, and earlier, ranges. The most likely inference is that A F7 is indeed the final Abbey waterfront line, and that the chronology argued for it fits well with that deduced for the northern part of the water-frontage.

How is the relation between A F7, A F4, and the building sequence to be understood? The illustrations are relevant here, for they show that the revetment wall incorporated a well-built corner and returned eastwards no more than 10 m. south of the ranges then standing. It may be noted that the return wall is in approximately the same position as the west-east wall shown south of the standing ranges by Agas in 1578, and that the drawings suggest that originally a building rose directly above the water-frontage.

As Fig. 8 shows, the alignment of a range on A F17, and A F6, F7, and the traces of a ruined waterfront range closer to the mill seen in the 18th-century drawings, would be consistent with the building of a series of ranges directly on the waterfront in the western expansion noted in Phase 2. If the surviving range planned by Agas is basically later (although clearly incorporating earlier buildings) then the provision of space between the waterfront and the buildings shown near the mill is echoed by the occurrence of a hard-standing (L8) west of Building A V. In particular, the final phase of building on Site A, represented by Building A V, would align approximately with the range shown by Agas. This is not to argue that the range planned by Agas continued as far as Building A V, but simply to suggest that the later waterfront buildings reflect changes in the use of this area in the 15th to 16th centuries.

The 18th-century drawings provide one further piece of evidence for two phases of

<sup>103</sup> Wood op. cit. note 9, ii, 209.

<sup>104</sup> Huggins and Coppack, op. et loc. cit. note 79.

<sup>105</sup> Prior op. cit. note 21; Palmer op. cit. note 18, 135-155.

<sup>106</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.688, f. 138v., and Bodl. MS Dep. b.111, f. 91, which differs in some respects.

<sup>107</sup> R.C.H.M. Oxford, i, 155; Steane op. cit. note 40, 96-7.

water-frontage at Site A. These drawings clearly show the mill-stream revetment wall with a culvert stream entering south of the standing range, beneath the ruined building line. A few metres south of the culvert, the revetment wall steps back to the east with a well-built corner, and a further revetment wall can be seen behind extending southwards.<sup>108</sup> Taking into consideration the known alignment and depth behind the waterfront of the range of buildings standing in 1720, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the further revetment wall shown would align with wall A F4.

The writer suggests that these drawings show the remnants of a dock belonging to an early phase of the westernmost Abbey water-frontage. If this is plausible, then wall A F4 may well be considered a water-frontage associated with a docking area lying east of the mill-stream. At a later phase, most of this area, from A F17 southwards, would have been reclaimed and built over, as the section (Fig. 3) suggests. Indeed, it could be argued that this section shows A F4 as being built against a stream bank.

Clearly, this view of the revetment walls cannot be proved without further excavation. The line of the Elde (above, p. 108) could well be equated with the channel alignment revetted by A F4, assuming that a meander swung to the east after forming the west boundary of the 'hamme'.<sup>109</sup>

Hurst's observations west of the mill (above, p. 117) strongly suggest that the present mill-stream alignment cuts through a range of Abbey buildings on the 'hamme'. If so, there is no compelling reason to regard the waterfront alignment on A F7 as an original channel alignment rather than that on A F4.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Work at Oseney Abbey up to 1983 has distinguished the following principal areas of advance in our understanding of this important and hitherto little-known site.

The conventual precinct expanded substantially to the south and west of the claustral area. Originally limited by the topography of its site, the Abbey was sufficiently wealthy by the 13th century to realign the drainage in the interests of more land and more conveniently positioned facilities. The channels B F1 and B F23, originally important boundaries and then filled up, represent the archaeological evidence for this change together with the waterfront advance at Site A. The dump platform identified on Site B suggests a characteristically monastic expansion by reclamation of otherwise 'marginal' land, and eloquently speaks for the marshy nature of this side of Oseney island in the 12th century.

The re-location of the waterfront, from channel B F1 to Site A F4 and A F7, reflects a deliberate replanning of the precinct in the 13th to 14th centuries, while the associated structures point to at least two phases of buildings aligned on this later water-frontage. It has been possible to distinguish on historical grounds between the later industrial area of the Abbey lying on the Fulling Mill Ham, outside the conventual area, and the apparently domestic or residential use of the area east of the waterfront and northwards along its alignment. Likewise, archaeology has confirmed the existence of an area of fishponds south of the later precinct boundary, previously known from maps but not visible. A major boundary wall (B F8, B F2, A F1), in an identical position to the final precinct wall shown by Agas, is an important discovery. It provides a useful chronological key to the excavated areas.

<sup>108</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c.688, f. 138v.

<sup>109</sup> Agas op. cit. note 3: consider stream alignment on west side of the 'hamme'.

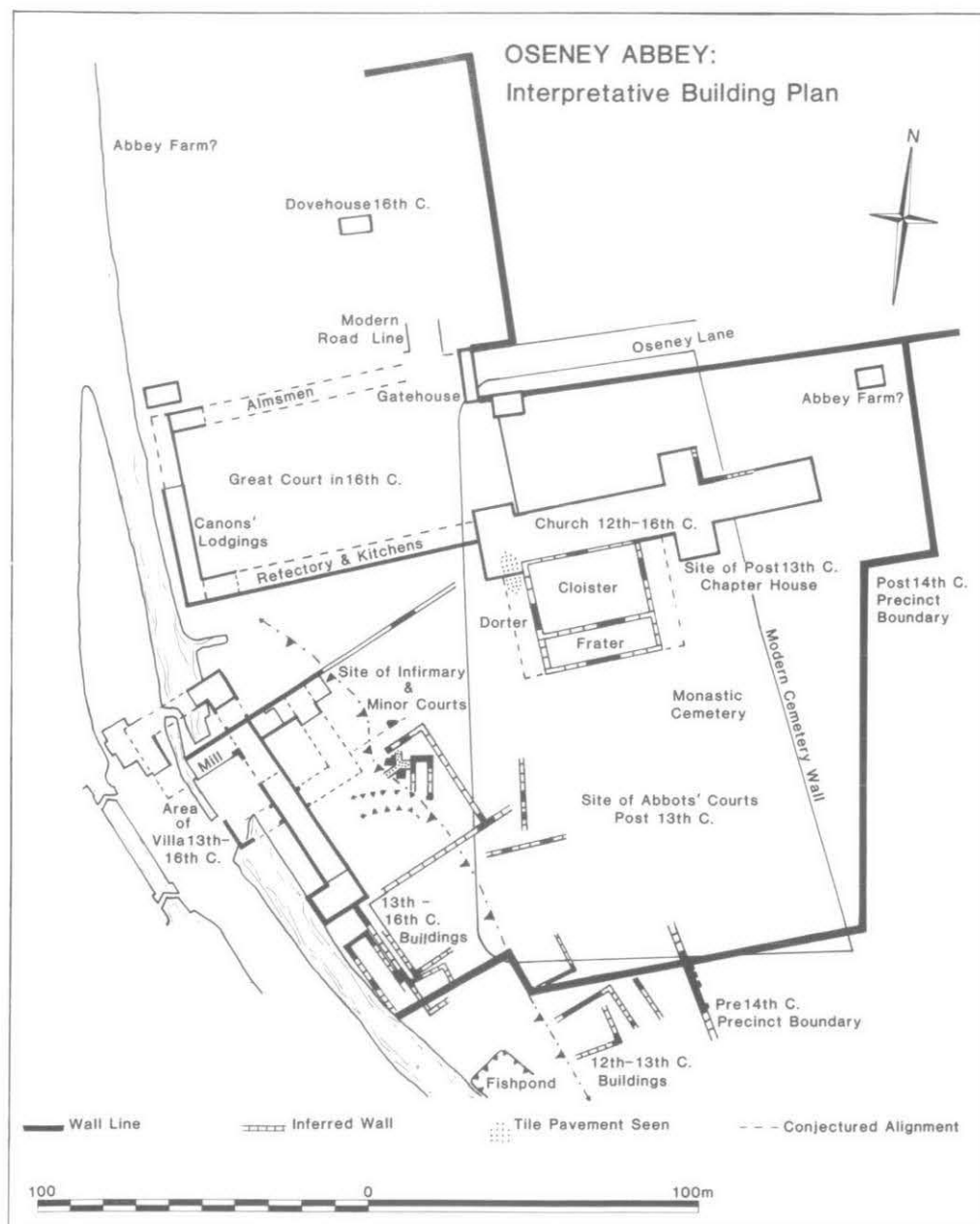


Fig. 8 Oseney Abbey: the evidence for the buildings derived from excavation, survey, Dissolution records and 17th to 19th century drawings. The plan is drawn on the Ordnance Survey 1:1250 sheet base.



The ploughing of the precinct in the 18th century, for which there is both written and archaeological evidence, does not seem to have damaged archaeological deposits in the area examined. It is interesting that H. Hurst recorded surviving floor levels in the centre of the conventual area.<sup>110</sup>

The small bone assemblage suggests that preservation of bone on this site is good. Its species composition suggests that further excavation would provide an assemblage that could, for example, be related to specific areas of the site. The approximate position of the Abbot's Hall is already known from documentary evidence, and such material could be compared with that from other kitchen areas.<sup>111</sup>

The identification of a new tile fabric, Group III E, and a Northamptonshire pottery form not previously noted in Oxford, suggest the potential interest of future pottery and tile finds from Oseney. Given the date of the Abbey's foundation, some fabrics from Site B, Phase I, appear to occur here rather earlier than would have been expected.

A full comparison with other Augustinian sites would not be helpful at this stage, since work at Oseney Abbey has concentrated on the peripheral areas. However, the outer courts of Augustinian houses need more research, as David Robinson has argued in his analysis of British Augustinian sites, and the results of work so far at Oseney demonstrate the potential of such areas for ceramic and environmental studies.<sup>112</sup> Reference has been made earlier to the work on domestic and industrial areas at Waltham Abbey (Essex), and Thornholme (Humberside); in Oxford, there is scope for comparison with the Blackfriars site, the suburban Hamel site (which came under Oseney's control), and the later Cistercian site Rewley.<sup>113</sup>

If further building development occurs at Oseney, the excavation of the area adjoining A F17 and the areas of car-park north and east of the present mill is essential. Walls were seen in this car-parking area about 30 years ago when foundations were dug for a fuel tank.<sup>114</sup> A survey of the mill structure and parts of the Mill Cottages would define the scope of future work needed if these buildings are altered.

An examination of the surviving part of the waterfront range, south of the mill, is urgently needed in the light of Hurst's observations of a possible undercroft west of the mill. In the longer term, the suggested site of the Abbey farm in the northern arm of the precinct and the associated waterfronts deserve investigation. In that area the site adjacent to Manning's excavations is now disused and is being redeveloped.<sup>115</sup> Any opportunity should be taken to confirm the boundary lines on the eastern side of the precinct. Future studies of the conventual area would be helped by a geophysical or infra-red survey of the cemetery.

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<sup>110</sup> For ploughing 1711–1792 see Christ Church MS XX, c.24, p. 96; for Hurst's remarks see Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. a.18, f. 1.

<sup>111</sup> Bodl. MS Willis 45, ff. 134–136, for position of Abbot's Hall, and also Wood op. cit. note 9, ii, 206–207.

<sup>112</sup> D. Robinson, *The Geography of Augustinian Settlement* (BAR Brit. Ser. lxxx, 1 (1980)).

<sup>113</sup> G. Lambrick, below, pp. 131–208; Palmer op. cit. note 18. At Rewley, trial trenches by Brian Durham suggested good survival of archaeological levels.

<sup>114</sup> Pers. comm. a Marina employee.

<sup>115</sup> Observations during contractors' works, December 1985, revealed a broad 6-m. wide ditch running parallel to Russell St. on the north side. It cut a gravel bank, 17 m. wide, to the north, beyond which lay a shallow 2.5-m. wide E–W ditch. 13th-century (?) sherds were found in the gravel, which lay below an apparent ploughsoil. NW of this trench, an alluvium-filled channel was seen to follow a NE to SW alignment. The broad ditch is interpreted as a major boundary, perhaps the apparently silted-up feature shown by Agas. Further works are expected in March 1986.