KEYNSHAM ABBEY EXCAVATIONS 1961–1991 FINAL REPORT PART II: SUMMARY AND REVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

This second section of the final report seeks to include information additional to that in the first report (Lowe *et al*. 1987), to outline the results of work from 1985 to 1991 incorporating reports by Margaret Whitehead and Alan Smith, and to present an overview and discussion of the results of the 31-year-long campaign of excavation at Keynsham Abbey. The historical and documentary background relating to the abbey and to its post-Dissolution history have been, or will be, detailed elsewhere (Lowe *et al*. 1987, 81–3; Harrison and Lowe 2004, 54; Lowe forthcoming). The background to the excavations has also been described, and the appearance of the site in 1961 (Lowe *et al*. 1987, 82–3).

The archaeological recording work at Keynsham was concentrated primarily on recovering ground plans. Excavation below the latest medieval abbey levels was relatively limited and focused principally on burials. A 4m by 2m area was opened in the nave, a 2m by 1m area in the added presbytery chapel to the north (C1), a 3m by 1.5m area in the cloister alley, and a 2.4m by 2m area in the chapter-house; in total less than 20m² (Fig. 1). The south transept, the inner presbytery chapel (C2) and its later extension eastward (C3), the outer southern chapel (C4), the chapter-house, and the building adjacent to the south side of the nave were all cleared to the upper medieval levels.
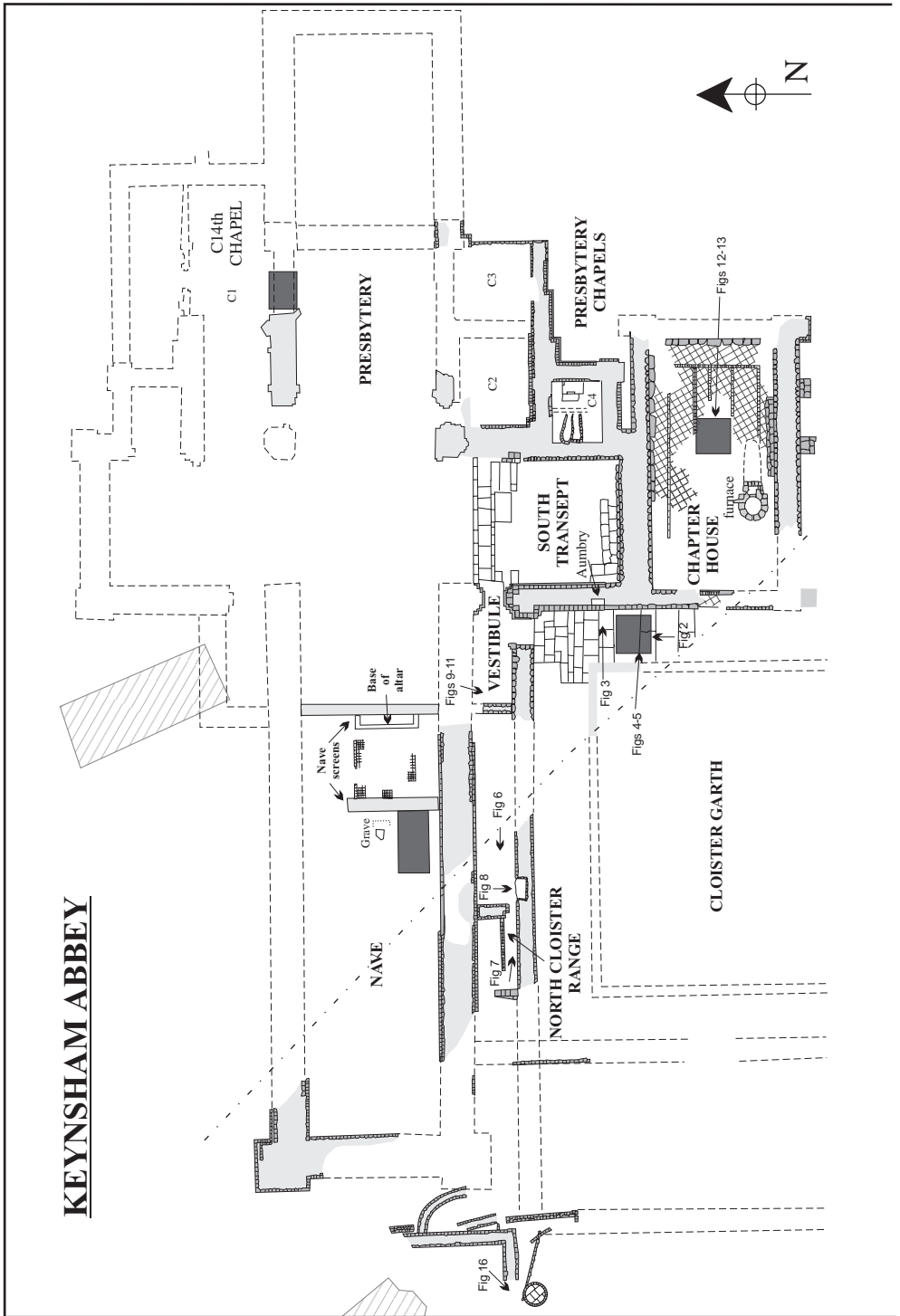
The abbey site has suffered multiple disturbance during more than 400 years of robbing of walls and footings for building stone. Only isolated stretches of unsuitable stone, or stone buried under discarded material, were left standing. The cutting of the Keynsham by-pass, therefore, totally destroyed an already heavily robbed site – it did not, of course, destroy original undamaged remains but removed the last vestiges of the foundations of some buildings. Additionally, the Victorian house builders and excavators who were actively taking stone from the site from 1865 to the turn of the century, destroyed or disturbed parts of the abbey church, penetrating down to bedrock in places.

It will be necessary for the reader to refer back to the illustrations in the 1987 report as well as the discussions of the architectural evidence published in 2004 (Lowe *et al*. 1987; Harrison and Lowe 2004). In the following text a description of the work undertaken since the 1987 report is followed by a brief review of the finds reports held in the archive, and then by an overall discussion of the results of excavation over the decades.

Acknowledgements

KEYNSHAM ABBEY

N

C14th CHAPEL

C1

PRESBYTERY

C3

C2

C4

PRESBYTERY CHAPELS

Figs 12-13

furnace

CHAPTER HOUSE

SOUTH TRANSEPT

Aumbry

VESTIBULE

Fig 2

Fig 3

Figs 4-5

Figs 9-11

Base of altar

Nave screens

Grave

Fig 6

Fig 8

Fig 7

NAVE

NORTH CLOISTER RANGE
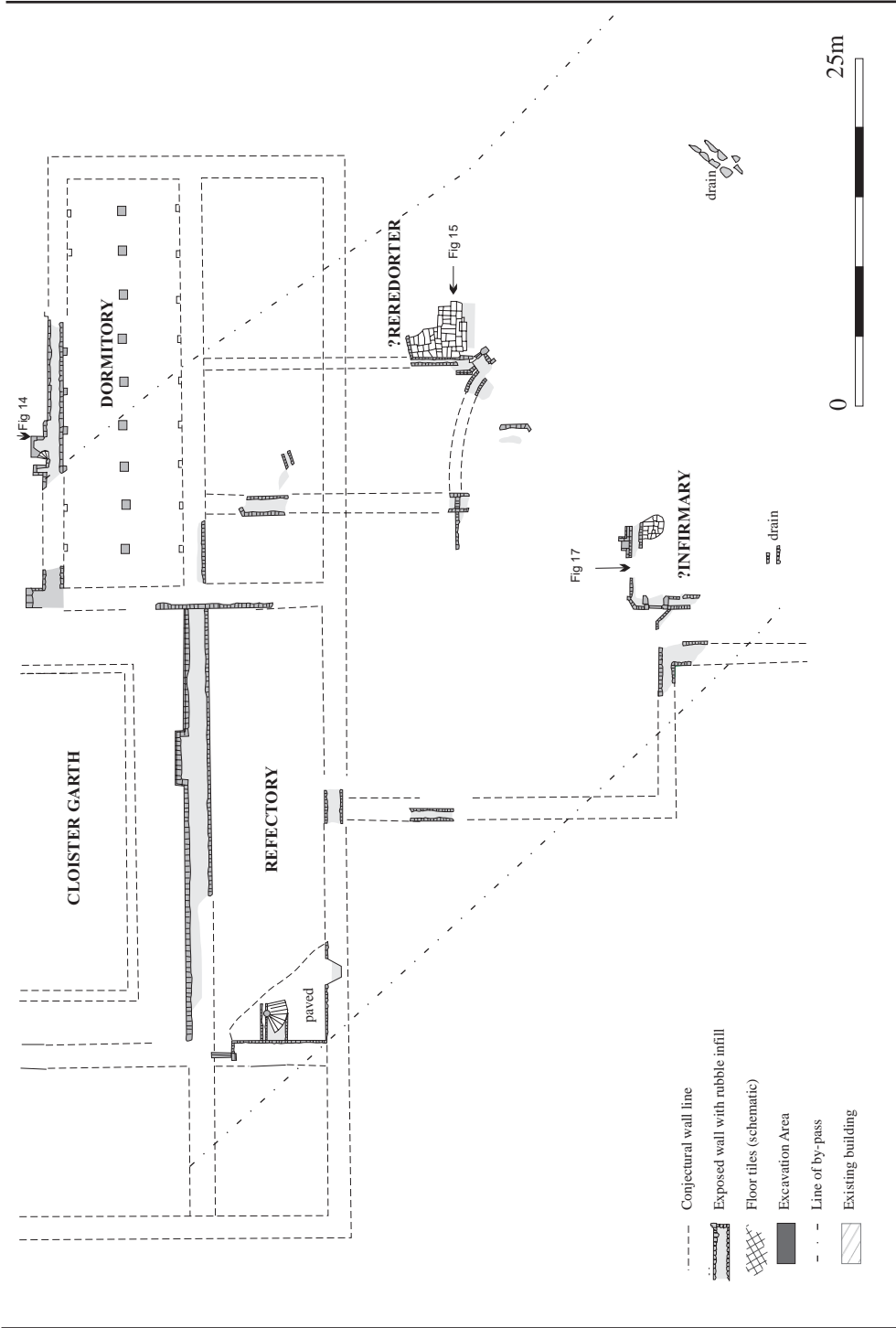
CLOISTER GARTH

Fig 16

Fig. 1 Keynsham Abbey; note location of chapels C1–C4 discussed in the text and of photographs Figs 2–17; drawn by Sarah Cottam

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SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK

Figure 1 shows the location of areas excavated below medieval floor levels within the abbey complex and the location of the trenches excavated in 1961. The original on which it is based was prepared between 1962 and 1973 and was revised in 1982. A version was published by Lowe *et al*. (1987) as their fig. 2, and this was also the basis for Harrison and Lowe's plan (2004, fig. 1).

Nave

Analysis of the architectural fragments and of the wall plans made it possible to suggest reconstructions and interpretations of the nave and buildings to its north and south (Harrison and Lowe 2004, 63–6). Two north–south running walls, interpreted as rood screens (ibid., 64), crossed the nave and fragments of associated tracery of later date show additions to the screens or replacements. The western wall survived only as a foundation robbed below floor level while the eastern wall formed the basis of more recent walls (Lowe *et al*. 1987, pl. 5). Areas of medieval tile flooring were recorded between the two walls while west of the western wall a patch of flooring had survived composed of Bath stone slabs incised in small squares set diagonally (Lowe *et al*. 1987, fig. 7, pls 5, 6). This latter floor had been damaged by falling masonry which included two different types of vault ribs (Harrison and Lowe 2004, 61). If the walls supported rood screens then it would seem likely that the eastern screen replaced the western.

An area 4.26m by 2.13m was excavated in the western area against the western screen footing and the south wall. The screen footings were not keyed into those of the south wall but butted against them suggesting later work. At a depth of 0.8m below the floor were five inhumations. The earliest lay against the south wall footings. This was beneath a coffined burial, marked by a line of nails to its side. A second coffined burial lay to the north. No grave cuts were recognised. To the east of these, and respecting them, were two further burials apparently coffinless with their graves cut into the west side of the screen foundation. The grave cuts for these were first

recognised at a depth of 0.5m from the nave floor with a sealing layer of mortary soil and stone with disarticulated human bone. In retrospect, it would seem more likely that the grave cuts were a little higher but not recognised. Where it survived undisturbed, the floor make-up above comprised yellow clay with a band of red clay directly beneath the Bath stone slabs. A Bath stone decorated door jamb, perhaps for the screen, had fallen onto, and embedded itself into, the floor.

The extensive Victorian pitting and earlier disturbance made it difficult to be certain of the context of the layer of mortary soil between the grave cuts and the floor make up. The evidence suggests that the western floor of Bath stone slabs may have come from the later period of the abbey church's use and it is therefore possible that the material was medieval and reflected extensive work in the interior of the church. Random fragments of human bone were a common feature in the rubble overlying the interments in the church and this may be an indication supporting a medieval context. Other recording work in the nave was reported in 1987 (Lowe *et al*. 1987, 97–9).

A reference in 1456 to arrangements for the accommodation after his retirement of Abbot Walter Bekynsfeld granted him 'the dwelling in the court of the monastery near the great door of the conventual church' (Maxwell-Lyte and Dawes 1934, 272). The great entrance doorway was not located but early 19th-century maps indicate a large reversed L-shaped court to the north-west and west of the abbey church (Stowe documents: Henry E. Huntingdon Library, California, map no 152349A T, Key sheet 7). This and the reference to a 'great door' makes a position at the west end of the nave more likely than one at the west end of the north wall.

Fourteenth-century chapel, north side (Fig. 1 C1)

A pier of perpendicular date, discussed by Harrison and Lowe (2004, 73) and drawn by Brock (1875), had survived in situ in the garden of 3 Abbey Park and excavation was based on this. The pier was in the south-west corner of the chapel added in the later medieval period to the east end of the 12th-century northern inner chapel, and is shown on Brock's illustration (Brock 1875). Irvine's unpublished plan – the source for Brock's – shows a 10ft by 7ft rectangle immediately to the east labelled 'Jasper Tudor, Duke of Bedford, died 21st December 1495. Vault under chantry chapel, Perpendicular date'.

Only limited excavation was permitted by the owners in 1983, briefly noted in the first report (Lowe *et al*. 1987, 101). This established that the foundations of the original massive walling and pier were still extant, and directly eastwards there was indeed a vault. This was partially excavated in a trench 2.29m east–west by 0.91m north–south. The vault was 0.61m deep, with internally plastered and whitened limestone walls and two arched coping stones still in situ over the west end. The vault contained Victorian building rubble but no human bones in the portion available for excavation, although parts of a skeleton lay immediately to the north (Lowe 1988; Harrison and Lowe 2004, 73).

Sir Jasper Tudor was hereditary patron of Keynsham Abbey in right of his wife. He bequeathed his body 'to be buried in the monastery of our Lady of Keynsham' leaving 100 marks for his tomb (Bird 1988, 9–10). Brock's report mentions that 'tabernacle' work came from this area (Brock 1875, 201), and it is possible that the portions of a life-size effigy of a knight found at Keynsham represent Sir Jasper. The fragments of shield found were unfortunately plain and so give no clues. It is also possible that there may be a connection with the finding by C.E. Davis of Bath of a stone coffin at Keynsham with a 'coil of gold tissue' at the neck of the interment (reported in the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* for 1875, p. 98).

Other chapels and additions on the north side of the presbytery are only known from Brock's plans. A rearticulation of the wall or arch between the inner chapel and its eastern extension is suggested by analysis of loose architectural stone, dated to the 15th century and associated with the tomb (Harrison and Lowe 2004, 73–4, figs 1 and 2).

Inner presbytery chapel, south side, and later enlargement (Fig. 1 C2 and C3)

The inner presbytery chapel (C2) was described in 1987 as the south aisle of the chancel (Lowe *et al*. 1987, 86). Reappraisal in 2004 instead suggested that it was a presbytery chapel entered both from the transept and from the presbytery, and provided with a straight east wall rather than the more usual apse (Harrison and Lowe 2004, 61). On its south side was an outer chapel (C4 discussed below) entered from the transept and of the same 12th-century date as C2.

Very little stratigraphy survived in the inner presbytery chapel. Extensive excavation to bedrock levels in the 19th century was witnessed by the presence of pottery and other finds in the excavator's backfill. In the small area surviving, clay and stone layers above bedrock terminated in a layer of stone chippings which was in turn sealed beneath a layer of red clay and pennant stone (Lowe *et al*. 1987, 86). This was argued to have supported a chapel floor which had been subsequently robbed. This interpretation was reinforced by the finding of a stack of four plain black and two very worn patterned 14th-century floor tiles against the south wall, presumably deliberately left by the Victorian excavators.

The south wall of the inner chapel and north wall of the outer chapel was built of roughly coursed stone on rubble footings. The foundation trench had been terminated at bedrock and the foundation stones laid directly onto the rock. The foundations were 1.5m deep and had therefore been cut through 1.5m deep layers above bedrock. They were in two constructional layers, the lower comprising uncoursed stone with three rough courses of larger stones above. The wall above survived in places to a height of 1.3m above the foundations. Courses of squared blocks alternated with more disparate material. In contrast the south-east and south-west corners of the chapel were built in closely bonded ashlar blocks. A shaft base was located in the south-east corner (Lowe *et al*. 1987, fig. 28). Faint traces of plaster adhered to the bonding mortar of the wall and lumps of plain cream wall plaster up to 25mm thick were found, suggesting that the wall had been plastered like those in the outer chapel (Lowe *et al*. 1987, 86–7). The north wall – the south wall of the presbytery – had been robbed out, but the foundation trench had been cut into bedrock (ibid., fig. 3).

The chapel had been subsequently enlarged to the east by demolishing the east wall and forming an arch. The new extension (C3) may have had a stone vault (Harrison and Lowe 2004, 73). The illustrated plan (Lowe *et al*. 1987, fig. 3) shows a break in the south wall footings east of the dividing wall between the two chapels, and here, though not shown, the wall was of inferior quality. Externally, a structural addition is suggested by the narrowing of the wall on the south side in line with the dividing wall. Like the 12th-century inner chapel, the addition had been previously excavated to the level of bedrock. There was a niche in the south wall interior and an alcove and cist on the exterior (ibid., 86, figs 3, 7).

Outer presbytery chapel, south side (Fig. 1 C4)

A column base with drip trough moulding, bearing traces of red paint, and resting on a Bath stone plinth

Fig. 2 Floor of east cloister alley, north end; view north

on the north side of the entrance from the south transept, indicated ribbed vaulting of 12th-century date (Harrison and Lowe 2004, 61). Also of this date were fragments of wall plaster painted with false jointing and others showing portions of large red fleur de lys. This pattern may be symbolic of the Virgin Mary and indicate that this was initially the Lady Chapel. The stone altar base to the east may also have been original. Later refurbishment of the chapel was indicated by 13th-century grisaille window glass fragments, decorated floor tiles dated *c*. 1280–90, and a late 13th-century double piscina, all described previously (Lowe *et al*. 1987, 86–8). Replastering of the walls with a later layer hiding earlier wall paintings was also noted, as well as the presence of two graves cut into the west chapel wall and containing a male burial to the north and female to the south, the male having a suggested post-1290 date (ibid., 88).

By 1314 a new Lady Chapel had been constructed according to the testamentary instructions of Sir John Bitton (*Somerset Record Society* vol. 1, 71), and it may be that the late 13th-century changes mark a change to use as a chantry chapel. This date is too early for the chantry chapel of John Santmareys as suggested in 1987 (Lowe *et al.* 1987, 88), since this was ordered to be completed in 1352 (*Somerset Record Society* vol. 9).

South transept

The excavation of burials below the transept floor is described in the 1987 report (Lowe *et al.* 1987, 89). Attention should be drawn to the inhumation recorded beneath the east wall of the transept in its south-east corner lying in a grave cut into the bedrock and thus predating the 12th-century abbey church.

Bedrock in the transept lay 0.6m to 0.9m below the floor. Additional to the data recorded in 1987 is the presence of a mason's mark or sketch on a stone in the east face of the west wall. The sketch can be paralleled by one on the north side of bay 7 in the nave arcade at Tewkesbury thought to mark the completion of the vault in 1347, though the cross there is *patonce* not *patée.*

Cloister alley

The appearance of the cloister alley after clearance was described in 1987 (Lowe *et al*. 1987, 92). The broken floor of the east alley is illustrated (Fig. 2). The north side of the aumbry, interpreted as a book cupboard as at Tintern, can be seen on the right of the photo. Only the stone framing on its lower and north sides survived robbing (Fig. 3). Later, following subsidence of the floor, an area measuring 2.8m by 1.5m was excavated and two burials were found. The first lay in a coffin cut from a single block of Bath stone (Fig. 4). To its north the second skeleton lay on a layer of crushed Bath stone in a grave marked to the south by the stone coffin and to

Fig. 3 Aumbry; view east

Fig. 4 Bath stone tomb in east cloister alley; view west

the north by a wall of pennant stone (Fig. 5). Both tombs were covered by thick pennant stone slabs which had broken and fallen onto the burials below with infilling layers of sand, sandy mortar, and clayey soil above. The coffin and pennant stone-sided grave lay directly beneath a red clay bedding layer for the alley floor of Bath stone slabs. Both skeletons were incomplete and both had apparently been limed.

Cloister north range

On the south side of the nave was a building range leading westward from a vestibule connecting transept and cloister to the east (Figs 6–8). Because the entrance from the transept into the vestibule had no provision for a door, the vestibule was argued to be original 12th-century work (Harrison and Lowe 2004, 63). Although there may have been later changes to the range to the west this too must have

Fig. 5 Slab-sided burial in east cloister alley

been part of the original plan as is indicated by the position of the cloister.

The west wall of the vestibule was 0.9m wide and was on the same line as the easternmost screen cross wall within the nave (Lowe *et al.* 1987, figs 2, 4, 7). There was a door rebate on the north side (Fig. 10). The first room to the west may have been divided by a wall of a single stone thickness, possibly the base for a timber screen (Lowe *et al.* 1987, figs 2 and 7), though this could not be examined in detail. Toward the western end the south wall had been cut back to over half the wall thickness to form a 1.4m wide alcove (Fig. 8). This was floored with vertically set stones surrounding a centrally placed stone setting. This appeared to have been a fireplace although there was no evidence of burning. To the west again an entrance through to the next complex of rooms was marked by chamfering on the north side facing east (Fig. 6). A square mortise hole (Figs 6 and 7) cut into the threshold stone on the west side is puzzling, and may indicate the position of a feature, perhaps a statue, after the entrance had been blocked. The door opened onto a passageway with a chamber to the north. Any entrance to this would have lain to the west in an area salvage recorded during bypass construction and where the final

Fig.6 North cloister
building; view west

Fig. 7 North cloister
building; view east

Fig. 8 North cloister
building, recess in south
wall; view south

Fig. 9 Vestibule: lead piping under floor; view north

feature recorded was a further section of north–south running wall.

Chapels entered from the nave were suggested in 2004 as a possible function for this aisle-like structure and its rooms (Harrison and Lowe 2004, 63). There was, however, no evidence of openings in the north wall. It is possible that a south aisle was originally intended but abandoned. A space between the back wall of the cloister and the south wall of the church is known elsewhere and is thought to have been intended to allow more light to the nave. Although there are no known parallels, it is possible that the range was built as a *scriptorium* and that provision was made for rooms entered from the north cloister alley.

Whatever its original function, either as a space or as a building range, the area appears to have been brought into new use either late in the life of the abbey or in the years following the abbey's dissolution. Late monastic use could be associated with use by the abbot as is suggested by documentary evidence from 1456, and has been previously noted (Lowe *et al*. 1987, 101). At that date, abbot Walter Bekynsfeld was granted on his retirement, in addition to a house on the north side of the nave as discussed above, the use of a 'chamber in the cloister which he at present occupies' (Maxwell-Lyte and Dawes 1934, 272). This may refer to this range and indicate

Fig. 10 In situ pillar at possible entrance from vestibule to nave; view north-west

that it was converted for use as Bekynsfeld's chambers at a late stage in its existence. The fireplace suggests a domestic function as does the possible panelled cross wall and the passageway.

However these rooms seem very narrow for domestic use and it is hard to see how they would have been lit. A post-medieval alternative is therefore possible to be accompanied by the reuse of the chapter-house (Lowe *et al*. 1987, 95).

Lead pipework was found running from the nave to the cloister garth which would have carried off water used in ceremonial functions in the nave (Fig. 9; Lowe *et al*. 1987, 92, fig. 4; Harrison and Lowe 2004, 63). The pipe ran in a stone-sided culvert from a pillar drain just north of the west doorway into the vestibule (Figs 10 and 11). This lay on the line of the nave wall and suggests the possibility that there was a doorway here from the vestibule through into the nave.

Fig. 11 Lead pipe in pillar

Chapter-house

Recording prior to 1987 has been published (Lowe *et al.* 1987, 92–5; Lowe 2003, 144–6), as well as a reconstruction of architectural features (Harrison and Lowe 2004, 84–92). Its south wall was carefully constructed in closely bonded ashlar with a batter above an offset course at ground level. Excavation undertaken below the floor level of the chapter-house had begun at the time of the 1987 report and continued afterwards. This was carried down to a depth of 1.1m in an area *c*. 2m by 2.4m. At the lowest excavated level was a cist burial bounded by vertical stone slabs on the north and west and by rough stone walling on the south. The east side had been cut away by a feature cut into bedrock. The cist contained the skull of an adult together with rib and vertebra bones (Fig. 12). Two large stones had been placed on either side of the head. The skull lay on bedrock. The complete burial would have lain east–west with the head to the west. To the south of the cist was a line of three vertically set pennant stones (Fig. 13). These may have formed the side of a further cist burial lying outside the trench to the south. Excavation was

Fig. 13 Disarticulated bone and top of slab grave, cist burial to left; view east

not carried down below a deposit of numerous broken and disarticulated human bones including a pelvis, long bones, ribs, and vertebrae. These lay either side of the line of stones while a group of noticeably small bones overlay the rough walling on the south side of the cist grave to the north. The bones lay on a loose sandy clay with occasional lumps of red sandstone in a soil matrix of brown clayey earth.

Above this horizon was a 0.25m thick layer of clay with more disarticulated human bone and charcoal. This was sealed beneath a layer of mortar sealing a silver cut farthing of Edward the Confessor (1065–1066). Above were two layers of clay with numerous fragments of wood, iron nails, organic material, charcoal and daub with wattle impressions. The lower layer contained further disarticulated human bone fragments with part of a skull and fragments of sacrum, rib, lower jaw, vertebrae, tibia, fibia, humerus, phalanges and four premolars. A number of small honey-coloured pebbles were also noted. Above these layers was an uneven, compacted mortary clay floor, which was in turn sealed beneath a 0.25m deposit of clay with many stone flakes, thought to be the construction level for the chapter-house. Between this and the mortar bedding layer for the chapter-house tiled floor was a thin spread of rough mortar containing fragments of human bone. The presence of fragments of floor tiles dated *c.* 1280–90 in the floor make up indicated an earlier floor and gave a *terminus post quem* for the surviving floor.

The western half of the floor had been severely disturbed by the post-medieval reverberatory furnace and the eastern part had been cut by two later pits one of which had been dug to dispose of surplus stone judging by the fragments of abbey stone,

Fig. 12 Cist burial beneath chapter-house; view west

including a blue lias cylindrical column, and late medieval floor tile fragments.

Harrison and Lowe argued that the hillside had been remodelled prior to the construction of the 12th-century church, involving a massive retaining wall south of the cloister (2004, 55). The depth of stratigraphy recorded beneath the transept, the inner presbytery chapel and the chapter-house seems likely to represent this levelling a century after the coin of Edward the Confessor. The presence of human bone in this deposit would suggest that earlier burials had been disturbed. These may well have been associated with the damaged in situ cist burial at the base of the excavation sequence in the chapter-house and the burial beneath the transept's east wall, and these may be taken to represent good evidence of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Keynsham. The damage suffered by this burial and the presence of the nearby rock cut feature may also be an indication of stone quarrying following the disuse of the cemetery and prior to the 12th-century building works.

The burials below the chapter-house are important evidence for suggesting a history of the abbey site before the 12th century, and this is explored in more detail below.

Dormitory

The limited area in the dormitory undercroft available for study was excavated to floor level on its north side. The east–west alignment of the dormitory is unusual and must have been dictated by the topography. On the north side the entrance and lower steps of a spiral staircase leading to the first floor was located (Fig. 14). The building had been previously tentatively identified as a day room (Lowe *et al*. 1987, fig. 2). Four regularly spaced

Fig. 14 External stairs in the slype leading to the dormitory; view south

plinths along the north wall were found as well as five running down the centre of the undercroft (ibid., 95; Harrison and Lowe 2004, fig. 1). The floor was of rough uneven compacted clay with small stones and above it some evidence of post-Dissolution activity was found. A large assemblage of iron and copper alloy objects, several medieval silver coins, and Nuremberg jettons, were found in the undercroft overburden. Details of the coins, jettons, and about half the iron objects were published earlier (Lowe *et al*. 1987, fig. 9).

Sections of walling suggest the presence of a range running at right angles to the south of the dormitory (Fig. 1). To its south an area of substantial stone slab floor was cleared suggesting the position of the reredorter (Fig. 15). Of interest is the curving stonework to the west suggesting a drain, its position suggests it may have been incorporated into the structure from an earlier phase.

Fig. 15 Paved floor in possible reredorter; view west

Refectory

All vestiges of this were swept away during bypass work except for the wide curving steps and newel stones of stairs leading up from the undercroft. When these were revealed during road construction the intention was that they should be preserved in situ (Lowe *et al*. 1987, 92, appendix A, pl. 44). (The stairs are positioned wrongly on both Lowe *et al*. 1987, fig. 2, and Harrison and Lowe 2004, fig. 1.) Other walls seen were rapidly plotted (Lowe *et al*. 1987, fig. 2). In addition the remains of a possible lime kiln were noted which may be the kiln attested in the early 17th century associated with the building of the parish church tower (*Churchwardens Accounts 1632*–8). A fragment of sculptural stone was found beneath the possible kiln. This came from a large void, perhaps representing a drain, which was too unstable for recording. The fragment was of marble

and represented the feet of a statue with shoes of medieval type and spurs bound to the ankles, standing on a mythical beast with hard, plated back and coiled, warted dragon-like tail. This may have been a depiction of St George or St Michael.

West of the church

A number of trenches were opened in the grounds of 'Abbotsford' in 1962. Part of the west wall of the abbey church was located to the east of the area examined. To its west was a 0.9m wide wall traced for 3m and a stone-lined drain, the former running across the latter. These features were cut by the south-east corner of a substantial building comprising 12m of an east wall and 4m of a south wall, both 1.2m wide. Other features found were probably later and comprised a curved stone revetment, a well probably of Victorian date, and a circular feature. The latter was 1.24m in diameter, floored with large lias blocks and walled with two courses of stone (Fig. 16). The upper surface of the stone walling but not the sides or floor were burnt red. This would seem to have been the position of a furnace of which the lower part has been removed leaving only its stone setting. The trenches were all excavated through disturbed layers containing building stone and human remains as well as post-medieval finds. At one point a total of 1.8m was excavated with the lowest layer comprising dark soil lying beneath a layer of red brick fragments. This lay beneath subsequent deposits of dark soil, broken pennant stones, further soil layers, and rubble layers beneath the humic overburden. The pennant stones at a depth of 1.2m might indicate the medieval destruction level. An Anglo-Saxon hexagonal bead was found embedded in one of the walls. Other finds from this area,
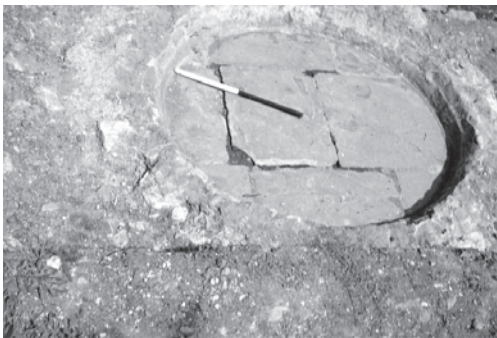
including a later medieval bone flute, have been noted previously (Lowe *et al*. 1987, 82).

The south-east corner of the substantial building may have been that of the structure documented in 1672 as the 'new buildings' on the east side of the 'old hall' (Lowe 1995, 5), together making the house later described by Collinson as a 'superb and elegant seat' (Collinson 1791). Certainly its stratigraphic position would suggest that it was post-medieval although its alignment suggests a relationship with the medieval layout. Late 13th-century tiles were found south of 'Abbotsford' in construction of the bypass and it would seem likely that this was the position of the abbot's house. If this was situated in the same position as the abbot's lodging at the mother church of St Victor in Paris, then the additional building would have formed a north wing attached to its east end and running across the former west front of the abbey.

East and south of the claustral buildings

Rapid recording during the road construction revealed an east–west running wall and stone doorway some 22m to the south of the refectory (Fig. 17). The wall was the north wall of a building and *c*. 1m wide. The doorway was *c*. 1.5m wide with a shallow step up to the interior and marked by chamfered stone sides. To the east was a decorated pilaster. This ornate entrance must mark a building of significance, perhaps the infirmary. Walls were recorded to the south, on the interior of the building, as well as a drain 9m from the wall (Lowe *et al*. 1987, fig. 2).

Fig. 17 Doorway to possible infirmary; view south

Fig. 16 Post-medieval industrial feature west of church; view east

Misericords, a second dining room where meat could be eaten, appearing in the later middle ages, are known to have been sited elsewhere between the refectory and the infirmary, and the walls found at

Keynsham in this area may be an indication of the existence of a misericord.

Thirty five metres to the east of the suggested infirmary a substantial stone-lined drain ran from the area of this building to the north-east. This was 0.25m wide and 0.27m high with a base of thin stone slabs, five courses of stone block walling two stones wide and a massive stone lintel 1.5m wide in the section exposed by road construction. Quantities of pottery of 13th and 14th-century date were recovered from extensive excavation of the drain fill.

In 1995 Stratascan Ltd undertook a geophysical survey to the east and south of the dormitory. The survey located the eastern and southern boundaries of the dormitory and the drain found in 1964. Irregular features were also found which may represent medieval ancillary buildings, walls and ditches, or post-medieval industrial features. A possible wall running north–south may be related to walls in the rear gardens of buildings to the north and represent the retaining wall suggested to have revetted the area levelled in the 12th-century prior to construction of the abbey.

Geophysical survey in 2000 by Peter Ellson and Hamish Ramsay of the Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society across the east part of the chapter-house and to its east noted what may have been the robbing trench of the east wall of the chapter-house as well as drain-like features running downslope to the east.

FINDS

Groups of three categories of finds were prepared for publication but are deemed to be more appropriate for archive. The first is the collection of iron and copper alloy objects from the dormitory undercroft noted above. These were unstratified and many were post-medieval in date. The second is reports by John Barrett and Tony Austin on the pottery. Much of the collection was unstratified but a group of 28 medieval vessels was recovered from the drain to the south-east of the abbey perhaps associated with the building, possibly the infirmary, south of the refectory. Fifteen of these were Ham Green B types, the remainder 13th and 14th-century types with Bristol parallels. Groups of early post-medieval pottery were recorded from a pit cutting the nave floor and from the area west of the church. Other pottery was unstratified or not securely datable. Finally a collection of clay pipes has been illustrated by Tony Austin. The reports on all these

items comprise a basic illustrated catalogue and is available to students as part of the extensive excavation archive.

DISCUSSION

The in situ burial in the chapter-house and perhaps that in the south transept beneath its east wall must belong to an earlier cemetery. The slab-sided burial or burials and the evidence of rock cut graves beneath the chapter-house suggest an Anglo-Saxon date while their orientation suggests they were Christian. The disarticulated human bone beneath the chapter-house and the presence of human bone in medieval as well as post-medieval layers across the site indicate an extensive cemetery or cemeteries and widespread disturbance. In addition the depth of 19th-century excavations, in particular in the two chapels abutting the south side of the presbytery, where layers below the floor were taken down to bedrock, may be an indication that the Victorian excavators had penetrated to cemetery remains beneath the abbey levels.

The possibility of an Anglo-Saxon presence at Keynsham was argued in 1987 (Lowe et al. 1987, 100). The list of pointers to this is impressive. First there is architectural stone of that date listed by Foster (1987, 74, 76), to which can be added a further possibly Anglo-Saxon stone fragment (Harrison and Lowe 2004, 67, fig. 11), and the recent redating of some of the Keynsham pieces to c. 800 by Cramp (2006, 164). Next there is the documentary evidence for the burial of a bishop of Sherborne at Keynsham in 871 (Earle and Plummer 1899, 88), and the existence of a sanctuary there in 1092 (J Brit Archaeol Assoc, 31, 325). The Domesday evidence shows Keynsham as the centre of an extensive hundred and notes one hide for the priest of Keynsham – a scale of ownership suggestive of a community. This points to the existence of a minster as is suggested by payments to Keynsham from dependent churches (Stenton 1943, 148–9, 152–6), and by Leland's statement that Keynsham was a former priory refounded as a house of Canons Regular (Toulmin Smith 1907–10, iv, 139). Leland's record is supported by evidence from elsewhere since an association between houses of canons and former minsters is widely attested. Another line of argument is that the existence of a royal manor at Keynsham in the 11th century and presumably earlier, is highly suggestive of the presence of a longstanding estate. The Keynsham evidence fits well with a theoretical pattern, particularly for the South-west, which is

supported by documentary and landscape studies and by excavation. This would see a Roman estate based on Keynsham villa continuing into the sub-Roman period, changing hands to be attached to a monastic centre, and then passing on to the crown. Lastly, the presence of a second church, St John the Baptist, to the west of the abbey and on its alignment, as at Wells, Glastonbury and sites further afield, is suggestive of a pre-Conquest origin as was first suggested by Brock (1875, n. 201). This latter observation is likely to suggest, as would be supported by the topography, that Anglo-Saxon buildings would lie on this line, most probably beneath the abbey itself.

The position of the abbey cemetery was suggested by Brock to have lain to the north-east where burials were discovered in excavating the railway cutting (1875, 200). The burials found beneath the abbey complex clearly belonged to an earlier establishment, perhaps lying to the west of the abbey. The dense scatter of human bones above the cist burial in the chapter-house excavation, and the absence of most of the cist burial suggest later disturbance. This was of quite a different order to that which caused the deposition of the overlying layers beneath the abbey floors. The depth of bedrock below the medieval floor surfaces varied: 0.8m+ in the nave, 0.9m in the transept, 1.5m in the inner presbytery chapel and 1.1m+ in the chapter-house. These depths and the disturbed nature of the layers beneath floor levels can be explained by the massive levelling operations and terracing which must have preceded 12th-century building (Harrison and Lowe 2004, 55). The natural terrain slopes steeply eastward from the limestone plateau on which the abbey was built and it was here that the builders chose to create their great terraces. The more gently sloping ground to the north was presumably ruled out for use as lying on the north side of the church. While this explains the depth of stratigraphy beneath the abbey it does not explain the mass of disarticulated bone at the base of the sequence beneath the chapter-house and this points to a long period of occupation and changes in the layouts.

Leland suggested a priory before the foundation of the abbey which was then newly repaired and endowed, and some of the burying, and disturbance of earlier burials, may have occurred then. However this was not a major establishment since no documentary evidence survives, including the absence of any record in Domesday Book other than circumstantial. A pre-Conquest date seems inescapable for the evidence beneath the chapter-house. This may be the cemetery of a monastic house from the period of Dunstan's reforms. Building work of this period is indicated by the 10th-century date of some of the stonework (Cramp 2006). However, a date prior to the decline in English monasticism of the time of Alfred is suggested by the documentary evidence for the burial of Heahmund, bishop of Sherborne, in 871. There might well have been a 7th or 8th-century establishment at Keynsham that was refounded in the 10th century and either escaped mention at Domesday or had disappeared by then.

The Victorines were a sub-group of the Regular or Augustinian canons living as a clerical community under the Rule of St Augustine. The mother house in Paris founded in 1108 was the focus of a revival of learning and spirituality (Chase 2003, 21–5). Three of the six houses in England were in Somerset: Keynsham itself (founded 1167), Woodspring priory (founded c. 1210), and Stavordale priory (founded early 13th century). St Augustine's abbey Bristol (founded 1142), was just across the county boundary, and Wigmore (founded 1172) and Wormsley (founded early 13th century), were both at no great distance in Herefordshire (Knowles and Hadcock 1981). The house at Wigmore, initially at Shobdon nearby, was set up by a prior and two canons from Paris (ibid., 179). This is the only evidence of personnel from France being involved with founding new houses, although this seems likely. Aston (1995, 16) has suggested that the houses of canons in the South-west fall into two groups. The first, including the Victorine houses of Keynsham and St Augustine's, Bristol, were clearly serving populous communities and from parallels with other houses of canons frequently either refounded or took over Anglo-Saxon minsters. The second group by contrast were on remote sites presumably chosen to be akin to those of the early monastics. The houses of Woodspring and Stavordale clearly belong in this group. Bristol, Keynsham and Wigmore also belong in an earlier chronological group and the others may have been founded from them, as was the case with Woodspring which was a daughter house of St Augustine's Bristol. In terms of their size and proximity, Bristol and Keynsham can be set apart from the others as is perhaps indicated by the two abbots witnessing charters together in 1190 and the replacement of the abbot of Bristol by the chamberlain at Keynsham in 1242 following a critical visitation.

William of Gloucester's choice of the site at Keynsham was presumably dictated by the presence of an earlier monastic site not by any special concern

of the Victorines. Nevertheless Thurlby's important text (2004) placing the architectural evidence in its context highlights in particular the continental influences on the building and the modernity of the structures and this is likely to be an indication of continuing contacts with St Victor in Paris. One divergence from normal practice, the position of the dormitory at right angles to the cloister alley, was clearly dictated by the terrain rather than a novel approach. The evidence from the archaeological work underscores the lavish treatments shown by the architectural fragments. However the greatest interest attaches to the range on the north side of the cloister, which, in the knowledge of the writer, is unique. The founding Victorine document the *Liber Ordinis* notes the important position of the *armarius* who was in charge of both liturgy and the scriptorium. This latter is supposed to be a place of complete quiet and sited within the cloister. It may be that this north range and the book cupboard in the east alley can be set down to Victorine requirements.

By the mid 14th century the organisation of the community at Keynsham had changed. In 1353 two-thirds of the convent were taking their meals away from the refectory (*VCH Somerset* II, 130). A number of explanations are possible. It may be an indication that some of the canons were away attending to pastoral duties in parishes held by the abbey. The existence by that date of a misericord is also possible. Or it may be an indication that different households now coexisted – a common feature of later medieval monasticism. At both Bristol and Keynsham there are records of breakdowns of monastic discipline, but this was far worse at Bristol. There was a critical report at Keynsham in the mid 14th century but late 15th-century patronage, as that of Jasper, Duke of Bedford, implies a well run house in the decades before the Dissolution (*VCH Gloucestershire* II; *VCH Somerset* II).

In common with many other sites post-Dissolution Keynsham was purchased by an influential layman whose family converted the abbot's house into a mansion. Brock placed this building west of the abbey between it and the parish church and described a late 17th-century painting of it (1875, 199). Interestingly Brock noted a medieval structure in this painting adjoining the house which he thought might have been a surviving part of the nave. Stone robbing was extensive in the period immediately following the Dissolution and one might expect the nave to have suffered most, as lying nearest to the town. It is possible that this evidence of survival indicates

that the west end of the nave did in fact have an axial tower as suggested by Harrison and Lowe (2004, 63), and part of this survived unrobbed to be attached to the old hall. However it should be noted that if this was the case no evidence was found of its eastern foundations or any attachment to the south wall. Evidence of the recorded (Lowe 1995) post-Dissolution eastern additions to the old hall were found to the west of the church. Some buildings were retained and used for industrial purposes including the chapter-house and dormitory. The evidence is not securely dated at Keynsham and some of the evidence may belong to a campaign of recycling materials immediately after the Dissolution.

Some light was thrown on the extent of the 19th-century excavations. In some places as much as 2.4m of overburden was removed in the 1961–91 excavations before medieval levels were encountered (Lowe *et al*. 1987, 89), and it was seen that huge quantities of spoil had been cleared and stacked behind makeshift stone walling by Victorian period excavators. Excavations in the transept revealed that some of the graves had already been excavated (ibid.). The extent of earlier work may be an explanation of the variations in survival of the fabric with some wall foundations having been removed while others remained standing to over 1m.

Very little of this work was reported at the time. Brock's 19th-century report (Brock 1875) was based on a visit by the British Archaeological Association in February 1875 (recorded in their *Journal* for 1875, pp. 88–100). In the report of this visit, previous work by Scarth and Davis is noted, while Irvine's plan had apparently already been prepared. Brock's report followed on from the February visit, and included the results of excavation, while also implying that further work was to take place. This gives some idea of the archaeological response to villa building. However, although Brock described the 8' depth of overburden (1875, 201), the scale of this work remained unknown until the excavations in the 1960s and 1970s.

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