

NOTES

A LATE MEDIEVAL SCREEN FRAGMENT FROM GLASTONBURY ABBEY

While visiting No. 43 Chilkwell Street, Glastonbury in the summer of 2005, my attention was drawn to a fragment of carved stone mounted in the sitting room fireplace.¹ The cottage originally comprised two properties (Nos. 43 and 45 Chilkwell Street) of late medieval origin, which have since been combined to form one dwelling. The stone was discovered several years ago along with other fragments in a rockery at the rear of the property. The stones had been removed some 30 years previously from the rubble filling of one of the building's interior walls during remodelling work. Despite weathering sustained during its exposure in the garden, the stone's decorative nature eventually prompted its move indoors and mounting for display (Fig. 1).

The fragment is of Doulling limestone, 450mm high, 440mm wide and 210mm deep. The stone consists of the left hand portion of a two-light

opening from a screen of late medieval date, c. 1490–1520. The surviving tracery is of curvilinear form and shows no provision for glazing. The lower light however, which formerly ended in an ogee with four cusps, does contain a glazing groove.² The spandrel is filled with non-conventional, naturalistic foliage decoration, consisting of a branch from which a number of small, spade-shaped leaves grow in groups (Fig. 2). Interspersed amongst the leaves are four hips and a single flower in profile. Although the plant type cannot be identified with certainty, it seems most likely to represent a wild rose.³ Despite damage and extensive lichen growth, the high quality of the carving is still evident – one undercut leaf stalk survives intact. The centre of the spandrel encloses a shield of early 16th-century type bearing the arms of St Joseph of Arimathea as promulgated by Abbot Richard Beere of Glastonbury (1493–1524). The top surface of the fragment is more roughly dressed and is cut back 67mm along its length to form a ledge. This indicates that at least one course of masonry, probably a cornice, rested upon this surface.



Fig. 1 Chilkwell St screen fragment



Fig. 2 Chilkwell St fragment, detail of spandrel

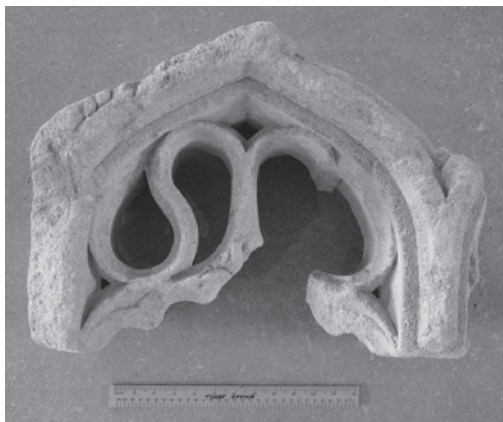


Fig. 3 Screen fragment from Glastonbury Abbey Museum

Unfortunately the fixing of the fragment prohibits a thorough inspection of the left hand side, top or rear of the stone and the owner cannot recall if the rear spandrel were similarly decorated.

A Glastonbury Abbey provenance for the stone is confirmed by comparison with another Doulling limestone screen fragment, on display in the Glastonbury Abbey Museum (Fig. 3). This stone (S650 – GLSGA: 1988/1077) was found in the early years of the 20th century, almost certainly during the 1908–1921 excavation campaign under the directorship of Frederick Bligh Bond. Unfortunately, the location of the find spot and its context are unknown. Although it appears in none of the surviving photographs from Bond's excavation campaign, it is possible that it is one of the fragments of the 'richly moulded and decorated freestone screen of 15th-century type' Bond found in the north transept in 1921.⁴

To summarise, it is highly probable that the two screen fragments either formed part of an internal parclose screen or a stone cage type chantry chapel in the great church of Glastonbury Abbey. Considering the design, iconography and the type of structure from which the fragments originate, it is plausible to suggest that they constitute the remains of one of Abbot Beere's building works recorded in John Leland's *Itinerary*. If the find site for S650 could be confirmed as the north transept, this would considerably strengthen C.A.R. Radford's suggestion of a screened Loretto Chapel in this location.⁵ Alternatively, the fragments may have come from Beere's Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre for which the stone's iconography would be equally

appropriate.⁶ Whatever the original location of the screen, the Chilkwell Street fragment is a valuable addition to the corpus of stonework from Glastonbury Abbey.

Endnotes

¹ I am grateful to Peter Browning, CBE, MA, for access to the screen fragment and for permission to publish it here, and to Francis Thyer, Deputy Custodian of Glastonbury Abbey for his assistance in photographing the abbey screen fragment.

² The glazing of internal screen walls was rare, but not unknown. Bishop Alcock's chantry chapel in Ely Cathedral for example, built at the beginning of the 16th century, contains glazed single light windows bearing his rebus. Apart from aesthetic considerations, the glazing of a small internal chapel would considerably reduce interference from noise, both inside and outside the structure.

³ The deliberate absence of thorns from the stem may be an allusion to St Mary the Virgin as the 'rose without a thorn'. In this context it should also be observed that the tracery design forms a stylised 'M', the monogram of St Mary, although admittedly there are few other forms the tracery could take.

⁴ Close to where these screen fragments were discovered, Bond found traces of a 'chantry'. Of this he notes: 'When the inner face of the north wall of the transept proper was uncovered an interesting remnant of a moulded lining in fine freestone was found built against it. There were left of this, four narrow panels divided by delicately moulded uprights, and footed upon floor-tiling still quite perfect, with brilliant surface and undamaged.' Unfortunately, this panel work was broken up by souvenir hunters shortly after its discovery. Although one small fragment of panelling remains attached to the interior face of the north wall of the north transept, it is not in situ and cannot be positively identified as part of the 'chantry'. The recovery of Bond's photographs and plans however, could establish whether both S650 and the Chilkwell street fragment originated in this location. See Bond 'Glastonbury Abbey excavations: Tenth annual report' *SANH* 72, (1926), 14.

⁵ 'Bere cumming from his embassadrie out of Italie made a chapelle of our Lady de Loretta, joining to the north side of the body of the chirch.' Lucy Toulmin Smith (ed.) *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535–1543: Parts I to III* (London, 1907) 290. Radford dismisses Bond's Loretto Chapel site west of the north transept as

the foundations of a 19th-century greenhouse. Instead, he proposes the northern bay of the body of the north transept as its more probable location, reinterpreting Bond's evidence of a 'chantry' as Beere's Loretto Chapel. See Courtenay A.R. Radford *Abbot Richard Beere (1493–1524)* 10–29. Unpublished Manuscript, National Monuments Record Swindon, NMR GLA PUB/13.

⁶ 'He made the chapelle of the sepulcher in the southe

end *Navis ecclesie* wherby he is buried *sub plano marmore* yn the south isle of the bodie of the chirch.' Smith *Itinerary* 290. For a contemporary art historical view of the function and symbolism of Beere's chapel, see Julian M. Luxford *The Art and Architecture of English Benedictine Monasteries, 1300–1540: A Patronage History* (Woodbridge, 2005) 54 and 79.

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MEDIEVAL REMAINS AT DOWNS FARM, WALTON

Excavations at Downs Farm in the village of Walton were undertaken in January 2005, in compliance with a planning consent and PPG 16 requirement, for a residential development by Flower and Hayes Developments, Paulton. Evidence of medieval occupation on the site had been established through an earlier evaluation by trial trenching (Hollinrake and Hollinrake 2003; *Figure*, Trenches 1 and 2). Downs Farm is located on the north side of Main Street, Walton at its junction with Creeches Lane, close to the village centre (NGR ST 459 363). The late 17th/early 18th-century Lias stone farmhouse and other outhouses were retained and converted for occupation. An area 25m by 10–12m wide (Trench 3) was cleared for excavation in the former garden and farmyard to the rear, scheduled for new development. Full details of the excavation are available in an unpublished client report, which includes a report on the pottery by Alejandra Gutierrez (Leach 2006). Copies of the report are lodged with Somerset County Council, Historic Environment Service, and the Somerset County Museum who also hold the finds and archive (TTNCM 57/2005).

The earliest remains on the site were postholes and shallow timber baseplate trenches marking the outline of a rectangular building over 6m wide and at least 12m long (F112, F114, F117 and F127). The north end of this structure was unclear but was possibly marked by a shallow ditch (F105) that also extended further east, although this may be of later date. Some of these features were associated with 'Saxo-Norman' 10th to 11th-century pottery, though 12th to early 13th-century types were also present. This building, of probable timber-framed

construction, is interpreted as of 11th century or perhaps slightly earlier date, though whether a barn or longhouse with domestic functions is unclear. A second major phase of activity was marked by the cutting of a sequence of relatively narrow ditches (F101–F104) on a slightly different alignment, the earliest (F101) cutting the north-west corner of the timber-framed long building. These ditches contained pottery ranging in date between the 12th and 14th centuries and are interpreted as a sequence of boundary definitions dividing two of the medieval village plots. The western plot, bounded to the west by Creeches Lane (a ?medieval street), was evidently some 25m wide, although little of it could be investigated. The eastern plot was at least 20m wide, and where examined by Trench 3 contained only a few postholes and a rubbish pit (F110); the latter, from its pottery content, probably dug in the later 13th or early 14th century. Later use of the area for garden cultivation and as a farmyard had resulted in truncation of some medieval structures/deposits and major 19th and 20th-century disturbance in places.

The village of Walton lies on the northern dip slope of the Polden Hills, on clays and limestones of Lower Lias formation, astride a major historic route linking Glastonbury with Bridgwater and the Bristol Channel. Its Anglo-Saxon place-name may signify a preexisting British settlement 'of the Welsh'. More certain is its former status as an early estate of Glastonbury Abbey, the caput or chief of a group of manors on the eastern Poldens (then known as *Pouelt*) granted by the king in the 8th century (Abrams 1996). After the Dissolution in 1539 Walton passed to the Duke of Somerset and thence to the Thynne's of Longleat until the 19th century.

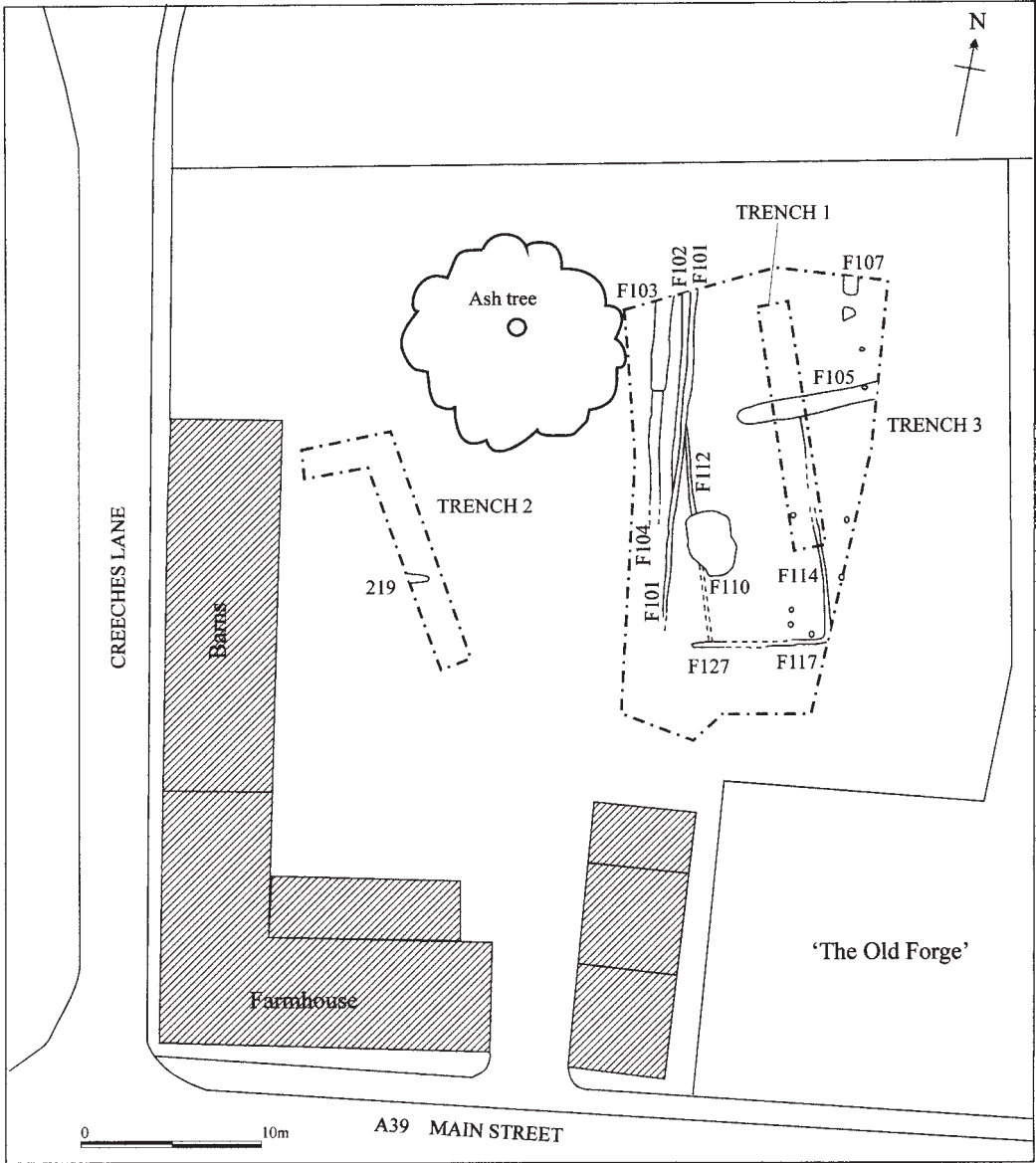


Figure: Downs Farm, Walton, main excavation features

The earliest depiction of Downs Farm, on an estate map of 1794 at Longleat, shows a single property of similar dimension to its modern form. Whether or not the earliest recognised structure on the site is a pre or post-Norman building may be impossible to determine, but the presence of 10th to 11th-century pottery types suggests some late Saxon occupation (Gutierrez 2003). Similarly, the precise status of this

building could not be determined, but its position and alignment raise the possibility that the main street has subsequently moved a few metres south and been realigned. At neighbouring Shapwick it has been suggested that late Saxon buildings and occupation in the village are evidence of the beginnings of settlement nucleation – nucleated villages – and a switch from the long established norm of dispersed

sites (Aston and Gerrard 1999), a process that may now be paralleled at Walton. Whatever its motivation, these were processes frequently initiated and encouraged by powerful landlords, in this instance Glastonbury Abbey as owner of both manors. At Downs Farm there is evidence for a subdivision and some realignment of the plot, probably before the end of the 12th century. This division persisted until the 14th century at least, the areas excavated now lying within the back plots of properties whose dwellings and other main buildings doubtless lay closer to the central village street, which itself may have been moved southwards. These plots lie at the western end of a block of tenements whose boundaries appear to be still preserved within the modern village, along with a similar block across the street to the south. Property division and realignment may once again reflect the hand of Walton's landlord – Glastonbury Abbey – at a time of prosperity and growing rural population in the 12th and 13th centuries. By the 17th or 18th century, if not earlier, the plot was recombined under

a single tenant, although a similar division between garden/orchard to the east and farmyard to the west was still evident prior to the new development.

References

- Abrams, L., 1996. *Anglo Saxon Glastonbury*, Woodbridge.
- Aston, M., and Gerrard, C., 1999. 'Unique, traditional and charming'; the Shapwick Project, Somerset', *Antiquaries Journ* 79, 1–58.
- Gutierrez, A., 2003. 'Medieval pottery', in P. Leach and P. Ellis, 'Roman and medieval remains at Manor Farm, Castle Cary', *SANH* 147, 106–12.
- Hollinrake, C., and Hollinrake, N., 2003. *An Archaeological Evaluation at Downs Farm, Walton*, unpub client report.
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PETER LEACH

PRIDDY HILL, MENDIP

The area known as 'Priddy Hill' has produced evidence which may justify its claim as being the most significant prehistoric 'open site' yet to have been discovered on Mendip. Evidence recovered

here suggests that man has visited and/or utilized the small area which is centred on NGR ST 51355340 from the Middle Palaeolithic period until the present day. Regular field-walking was

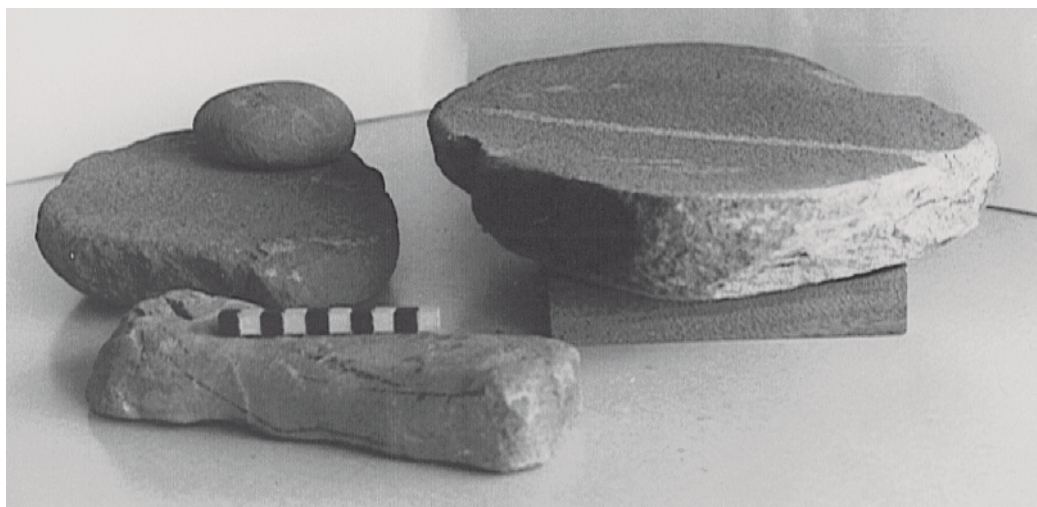


Figure: Sandstone saddle-type querns/grain mills and grain rubbers from Priddy Hill

undertaken here over a period of some ten years and a large quantity of artefacts were recovered. These artefacts were, with the landowner's permission, donated to the Axbridge Museum. It now appears, unfortunately, that this donated collection has been broken up and has been dispersed. Fortunately many of the more significant items recovered from the site had been recorded and together with drawings had been published. These published records were produced by local societies over a period of time and it is unlikely that this material could be easily referenced by current or future researchers. Therefore it seems that a summary containing brief details of some of the more significant items recovered and noted might be justified, together with the published references, and may help researchers toward a better appreciation of the site's importance.

Mention should be made of the discovery of a previously unrecorded long barrow and a round barrow on the highest point of the surrounding area. This was, up until 1982/3, completely concealed by trees and dense undergrowth. The discovery was made by chance. The then county archaeologist, Ian Burrow, was contacted and subsequently together with the writer visited the site. The owner proposed to completely clear the ground and the trees and dense undergrowth which would have damaged the two barrows. An area to remain untouched was agreed but unfortunately the subsequent ground clearance cut along the southern flank of the long barrow.

A few artefacts of Middle Palaeolithic type were recovered. That sustained Neolithic activity took place adjacent to the long barrow was evidenced by the recovery of a large quantity of artefacts of Neolithic type. Notable among this material were sandstone querns and quern rubbers, a rare example of a 'bedding' tool made from quartzite which had been utilized in the grinding and polishing of flint axes etc, a ground flint chisel, and a great many flint and stone artefacts (*Figure*). Part of a bronze dagger was also recovered. As noted on the Ordnance Survey maps of the area mining had been undertaken on the field in which the site is situated. The remnants of what appeared to be an old brick building was noted at the corner of the site.

Publications in which details of the site and the material recovered are as follows:

SANH, 127 (1983), 17–18; 128 (1984), 9, fig. 4; 129 (1985), 6

Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries, September 1988, 695; March 2001, 26–9

Search (Journal of Banwell Society of Archaeology) nos 21 (1985–6), 4–13; 22 (1987–8), 26–31, 58–62

Retrospect (Axbridge Archaeological and Local History Society Journal), 164 (1993), 3–4

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