

Polesworth Abbey – A Conservation Management Plan

Version 1.0



Prepared by Nicholas Palmer on behalf of

Polesworth Parochial Church Council

September 2011

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Polesworth PCC is very grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund for its support with the various projects carried out at Polesworth Abbey in recent years, and in particular for providing the project development grant which has supported the current site development work and the production of this Conservation Management Plan. The PCC would also like to acknowledge the support of the Diocese of Birmingham and the advice provided by English Heritage, North Warwickshire Borough Council and Warwickshire County Council

Summary

Since at least the mid 9th century Polesworth Abbey has been central to the North Warwickshire settlement of Polesworth. The site contains the resting-place of St Editha, its founder-Abbess and Polesworth's local saint. In the middle ages it was a Benedictine Nunnery, rebuilt in the 12th century, and it was the nuns who promoted the growth of Polesworth as a market town. After the Dissolution a manor house, Polesworth Hall was built on the site and occupied by the Goodere family, courtiers and friends of literary figures, and the Nethersoles, prominent local benefactors. The parish church occupies the western end of the former Abbey Church. In the 19th century it was restored under the direction of the eminent Victorian architect, G E Street. In the same period the Hall site was returned to church ownership and a new Vicarage built there, designed by another notable architect, John Douglas.

The Church community now owns about two-thirds of the former Abbey precinct, including the standing 14th-century Gatehouse and the site of the cloister and claustral buildings which are a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The Gatehouse and the Church are Grade II* Listed Buildings, and the Vicarage, the cloister wall, a sundial in the garden and the west range of the Gatehouse are Grade II Listed. Virtually the whole site lies within the Polesworth Conservation Area.

Polesworth has a thriving Church Community which runs a series of educational and volunteer programmes, and the Abbey Church is at the centre of local community and cultural activities.

The parish is conducting an ambitious programme of site development, addressing the conservation of its historic buildings and promoting the Abbey as a visitor attraction. A new entrance building was opened in 2005 and a Sensory Garden created in 2006 and the conservation of the Gatehouse and its surroundings was completed in 2010. The next stage will be to address the issue of the unfitness-for-purpose of the late 19th-century Listed Vicarage, provide an suitable new parsonage and find a new, economically viable role for the existing building.

A total of twenty-four policies are proposed designed to promote a sustainable future for the site while protecting and enhancing its historic, archaeological and ecological significance. These cover the future development of the site, its management and maintenance and the promotion of access, participation and learning. They include proposals for the construction of a new parsonage and offices for the Abbey's educational programmes, conversion of the existing Listed Vicarage to a conference centre with overnight accommodation, construction of a new Guest Hall restaurant on the south side of the Vicarage, conservation of the 18th/19th-century coach house, new car parking on the College site north of the churchyard, a scheme of environmental improvements across the site, an eastwards extension to the churchyard and a community archaeology programme to provide opportunities for the local community to research the site

Version 1.0 of this Conservation Management Plan was completed in September 2011 and adopted by Polesworth PCC in November 2011.

1. Introduction

1.1 For well over a millennium the Abbey of St Editha has been the central element in the settlement of Polesworth in Warwickshire. Founded on a crossing point of the River Anker, the monastery was in existence by the mid-9th century, its founder-abbess, St Editha probably a Mercian princess from the nearby royal centre of Tamworth. It developed as a Benedictine nunnery, being refounded by the Marmion family of Tamworth Castle in the early 12th century, when it acquired an impressive new church, cloister and chapter house. Further buildings were added in the 13th and 14th centuries, including the standing gatehouse which is dated to c.1344. The village of Polesworth will have grown up outside the abbey precinct, and it was the Abbey, as lord of the manor, who then promoted its commercial development as a medieval market town, acquiring a market charter in 1242.

1.2 Following the Dissolution of the Abbey by Henry VIII, in 1545 the lordship of Polesworth and the Abbey property were sold to Francis Goodere. Within the former abbey precinct the monastic buildings were demolished with the exception of the gatehouse and the west end of the church which continued in use as the parish church. A new manor house, Polesworth Hall was built just to the south of the church, reputedly on the site of the abbess' lodging. Francis Goodere's heirs, his son and nephew, both Sir Henry Goodere, were courtiers and literary figures, both patrons of the Elizabethan poet Michael Drayton, and Polesworth Hall was frequented by Drayton, Ben Jonson and John Donne. The second Sir Henry's daughter Lucy married the diplomat Sir Francis Nethersole who retired to Polesworth at the end of his career. The Nethersoles were local benefactors endowing a school and charity.

1.3 In the 1860s the church was drastically restored under the direction of the leading High Victorian architect G E Street and a new chancel was built. In the later 19th and early 20th centuries a large part of the former Abbey precinct was returned to Church ownership. The churchyard was extended in 1801, 1859 and 1888. In 1876 the site of the then vicarage to the north of High Street was exchanged for the site of Polesworth Hall, which was demolished and replaced by a new vicarage designed by another eminent contemporary architect, John Douglas of Chester. In 1912 when the debt-encumbered Polesworth Hall estate was broken up, the Gatehouse and the adjacent range to the west which was then used as a parish reading/recreation room, were bought by the vicar and trustees, with funds partly raised by local public subscription. Fields to the west and east of the vicarage were also purchased in 1913. In 1920 additional land was purchased to widen the driveway from the gatehouse to the church and allow the building of a war memorial, and in 1929 another strip was acquired to create Church Walk, a path to the church from the west. In 1958 the churchyard was extended eastwards beyond the probable limit of the former precinct, and land for a further extension eastwards was purchased in 2009.

1.4 The north-west part of the former precinct, Hall Court (Fig 1.2) now contains the civic centre of Polesworth including the Public Library, the Health Centre, Memorial Hall and Parish Council Offices, the last housed in the historic Tithe Barn, and Polesworth residents and schoolchildren continue to pass daily through the former precinct on their way to these amenities, to school and to the Church and Vicarage. The Abbey site remains a major focus of community activities and celebration, hosting arts events, open air concerts, family fun days and the annual Polesworth Guy Fawkes bonfire and fireworks display.

1.5 Apart from a fragment of the cloister wall, the Church and the Gatehouse are the only standing remains of the medieval Abbey. This gives them an iconic status locally as a tangible expression of Polesworth's place in history and they are regularly featured on postcards and other memorabilia of the town.



Fig 1.1: Polesworth Abbey, Driveway, War Memorial, Church and Vicarage from north-west

1.6 Parts of the former Abbey precinct are Scheduled as an Ancient Monument (Warwickshire No 119). These comprise the Gatehouse (119a), a small area around a mound in the churchyard east of the church (119b), and a larger area in the south-east corner of the precinct south of the church, including the vicarage gardens and the fields to the south and east (119c). This last area contains the buried remains of the main monastic buildings. Within the area owned by the church, the parish church of St Editha and the Gatehouse are Grade II* Listed buildings, while the Vicarage, the former cloister wall and a sundial in the garden are individually Grade II Listed. In Hall Court the Tithe Barn and the Dovecote which will have belonged to Polesworth Hall are also Grade II Listed. The whole precinct lies within the Polesworth Conservation Area.

1.7 In recent years the Abbey Church community has begun to address the conservation of the Abbey site and its historic buildings, some of which had fallen into disrepair and featured on English Heritage's Buildings at Risk Register, and others were no longer 'fit for purpose'. In 2000 a programme of restoration was carried out on the Abbey Cloister wall which was one of the structures on the Register. The restoration of the wall which was funded by English Heritage and the Historic Churches Preservation Trust won a John Betjeman Award from the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings.

1.8 In 2004 a Feasibility Study was commissioned by the Parochial Church Council (PCC) from CSR Partnership to consider the management issues for the Abbey site, in particular the sustainability of the various historic buildings and their appropriate use within the spirit of the Abbey's ancient foundation (CSR 2005a). The study proposed three development options in ascending order of ambition. All three involved proposals for a new vicarage on the site, the conversion of the Gatehouse and creation of a network of paths and recreational areas in the grounds. Option 1 proposed to convert the existing vicarage into a visitor/education centre, restaurant

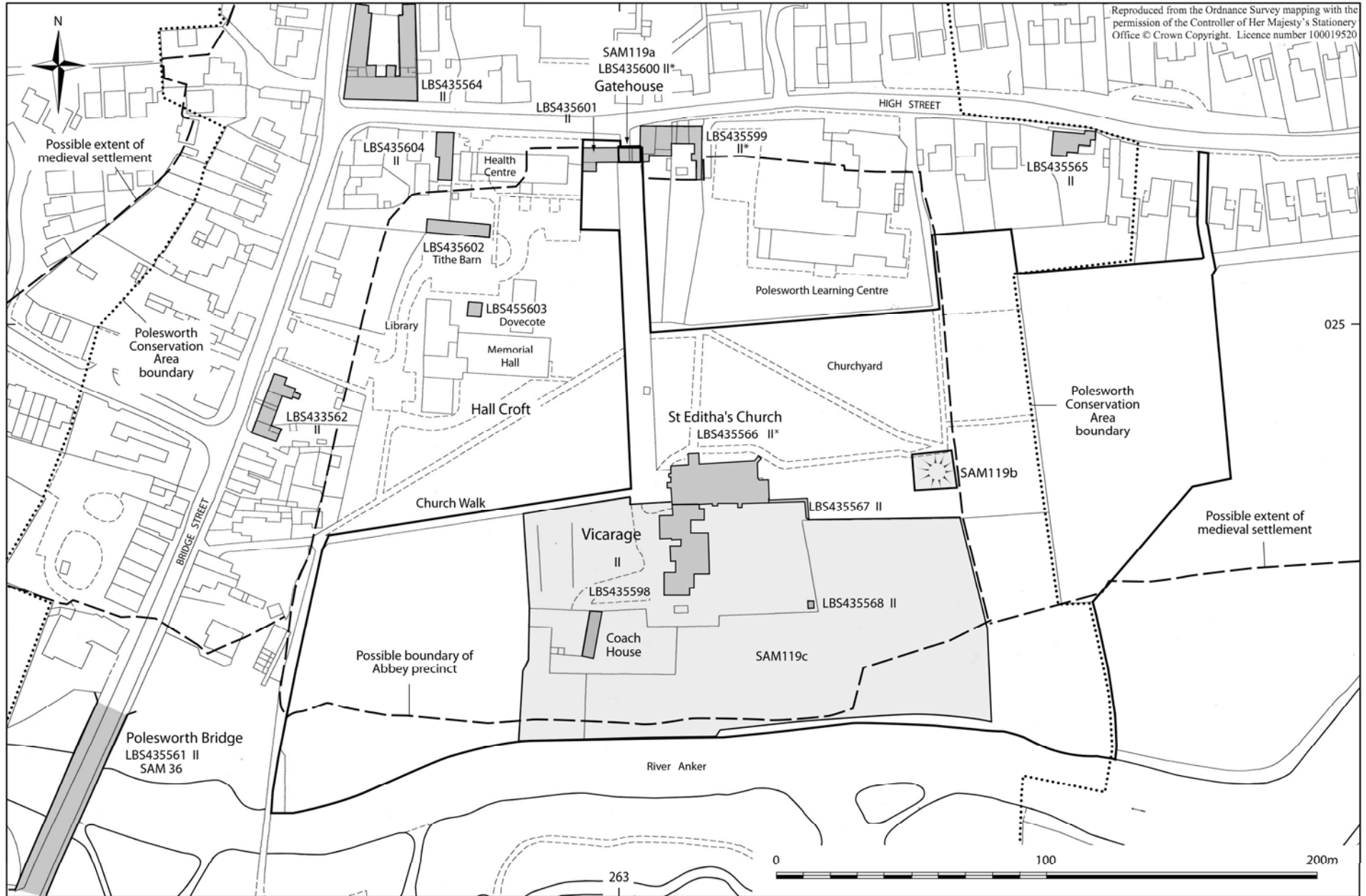


Fig 1.2: Site location

and administration offices with visitor accommodation above, and further visitor accommodation in the coach house; Option 2 proposed the visitor/education centre, restaurant and administration offices occupying the whole of the existing vicarage and a seasonal café and toilets in the coach house; while Option 3 proposed an extension to the existing vicarage to contain both the visitor/education centre, administration offices, and a larger restaurant, and the visitor accommodation.

1.9 The PCC chose to take forward Option 3, the most ambitious and CSR Partnership produced a Stage 2 Report with recommendations as to how the scheme could be developed (CSR 2005b). These included creating an organisational structure for the project involving a charitable company, the Nunnery Gateway Trust, operating through a VAT-registered subsidiary community interest company. The report also recommended the recruitment of a design team comprising a landscape architect, Max Askew of CPM Ltd and subsequently Askew Nelson, a concept architect, Peter Smith of Smith Roberts Associates, a conservation architect, David Duckham of ST Walker and Duckham, and other professionals in relevant subject areas.

1.10 In 2005 a historic landscape survey and outline restoration management plan for the whole Abbey site was commissioned from CPM Ltd (CPM 2005). With the support of English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund a programme to improve access to the Abbey cloister was carried out. A new church entrance building providing facilities for visitors was opened in September 2005, and in June 2006 a Sensory Garden based on medieval garden design was opened to the west of the former cloister for the enjoyment of both blind and sighted visitors.

1.11 From 2007, with the benefit of a Project Planning Grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund the design team produced outline proposals for new buildings and reports on 'high risk areas of concern' affecting the viability of the project: flood risk assessment, archaeological evaluation, a building services strategy and access.

1.12 In 2006 English Heritage funded archaeological surveys of the Gatehouse (Alcock, Meeson and Meeson 2007; Arnold and Howard 2007) and a Conservation Plan for the building and its immediate surroundings was produced in 2008 (Polesworth PCC 2008a). This was followed in 2009-10 by a programme of conservation of the Gatehouse and environmental improvements to the driveway carried out with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Country Houses Foundation.

1.13 Also in 2009 with the support of Polesworth Parish Council a field to the east of the current churchyard was purchased and planning permission obtained for the land to be landscaped as an extension to the churchyard once the existing burial area is filled.

1.14 A number of educational, heritage and cultural programmes have been developed which make use of the Abbey site, notably *Baby Jesus at Polesworth*, a Nativity pageant for primary schools, *Monks and Nuns at Polesworth*, a medieval monastic life project also for primary schools, and historical access programmes for secondary students. The Abbey also has a well-supported Volunteer Project providing people to open the site each day, provide tours for groups and deliver the Monks and Nuns small group activities among other things. A guidebook has been researched professionally and produced with the help of the Heritage Lottery Fund and Advantage West Midlands (Crowe 2006).

1.15 With the successful completion of the Gatehouse conservation programme attention can now return to the remainder of the site. The present Conservation Management Plan aims to pull together the aspirations of the church community and the work of the design team and set out a series of policies designed to provide a

sustainable future for the site while protecting and enhancing its historic, archaeological and ecological significance.

Consultations with stakeholders

1.16 The site development proposals have been accompanied by extensive consultation of the local community and other stakeholders. The Feasibility Study included a street survey in Polesworth carried out in February 2004, a focus group of local schoolchildren and a questionnaire survey of educational users and potential users of the Abbey site (CSR 2005a).

1.17 In January 2006 the *Historic Landscape Survey and Outline Restoration Management Plan* (CPM 2005) was presented to the church community and in February to the Polesworth Society, the local amenity society, and in both cases feedback was sought by questionnaire (Wells 2006). A public presentation of the results of the historic building survey of the Gatehouse by Bob Meeson in February 2007 was also followed by a consultation by questionnaire of those attending (Wells 2007a).

1.18 On 17th May 2008 a consultation event was held at which the architects Peter Roberts, David Duckham and John Prunty presented the latest plans to a group of fifteen representing the various Abbey activities and offered a chance to provide feedback on the practicality of the proposals (Wells 2008).

1.19 The continuing discussions about the future of the Abbey site have also involved the following consultees: Ian George, English Heritage Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Anna Stocks, Planning Archaeologist, Mike Hodder, Birmingham DAC Archaeological Adviser, Richard Preston, Conservation Officer of North Warwickshire Borough Council, Jeff Brown, NWBC Head of Development Control, Warwickshire County Council Highways Section, Glynis Powell, Community Museums Officer for Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire, David Lowe and Anna Swift of Warwickshire County Council Ecology Unit, Zoe Davies, NWBC Environmental Development Officer, The Environment Agency, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, Hugh Carslake, Birmingham Diocesan Registrar, Ann Jenkins and Jane Alexander, Heritage Lottery Fund, The Polesworth Society, and Polesworth Parish Council, as well as Fr Philip Wells, Vicar of Polesworth, the Churchwardens and the members of the PCC.

Compilation and adoption of Conservation Management Plan

1.20 This Conservation Management Plan has been compiled by Nicholas Palmer for the Polesworth Abbey Community Interest Company on behalf of Polesworth Parochial Church Council. The text has been written by Nicholas Palmer and Fr Philip Wells, Vicar of Polesworth, with contributions on the ecology by David Lowe and Anna Swift. The text has drawn extensively on previous work by and advice from Nat Alcock, Max Askew, Craig Dashfield of Integrated Design Partnership, David Duckham of ST Walker and Duckham, Edenvale Young Associates, Paul Hubbard of MJCA, Bob and Jean Meeson, Chris Pickford, Mike Potter, Church Architect, Peter Roberts of Smith Roberts Associates, Richard Smalley of Stratascan and Peter White of Fresh Life Consulting. The drawn illustrations are by Andrew Isham.

1.21 This is version 1.0 of the Plan completed in September 2011 and adopted by Polesworth PCC in November 2011. It is anticipated that it will need revision in the light of comments from interested parties and further versions will be produced as necessary.

2. Background to the Abbey site

Geology and flooding

2.1 The Abbey site lies to the north of the River Anker (NGR SK 263025). The underlying geology of the whole area is formed by the marlstone, siltstone and sandstones of the Pennine Middle Coal Measures (BGS 2009). To the north of the river Anker the Coal Measures are overlaid by areas of sand and gravel of the 1st and 2nd River Terraces (Fig 2.1). The Terraces are defined by height above river level, but there is no obvious visible feature along their boundary which is only approximately plotted by the Geological Survey. In practice also, the sand and gravel contains local patches of alluvial clay. Immediately adjacent to the River Anker across its floodplain the Coal Measures are overlaid by Alluvium.

2.2 The presence of the Coal Measures means that coal extraction has been a significant activity in the area over many years and in recent times Polesworth has been very much a mining community. Within the Abbey site archaeological trial trenching carried out in 1976 in the field to the west of the Vicarage revealed evidence of extensive, small-scale open-cast mining pits in all the trenches in the south-west half of the field, and in one trench further north (Mytum 1980, Sites C and B). This is likely to have dated to the 18th/19th centuries. In contrast the eastern edge of the site has been affected by large-scale modern open cast coal mining. Although there is little visible trace today, in the late 1950/early 1960s the National Coal Board operated the Abbey Open-Cast Site just to the east of Polesworth, the workings encroaching into the current Abbey site and approaching within 60m of the church.

2.3 The area of the former open-cast quarry is shown by the Geological Survey (BGS 2009) as artificial ground, but the edge shown actually corresponds to the deeper part of the quarry only, while the National Coal Board Abandonment plan (Fig 2.2, NCB OE/COMP/06/244) and a contemporary air photograph (Fig 3.45) make it clear that the area quarried to some depth was wider and the area disturbed by the associated earthmoving was wider still. The wider extent of disturbance from the open cast was confirmed by hydrological test pitting and archaeological trial trenching of the proposed graveyard extension in 2008 (Palmer 2008).

2.4 In addition to the actual workings the open cast operation involved the temporary diversion of the River Anker across the south-east corner of the Abbey site itself. The river diversion works in 1959 encountered medieval building remains, which were excavated by Miss J Morris of the Warwickshire Museum (Fig 2.7; Mytum 1980, 81). These are interpreted as part of the monastic reredorter (or lavatory block). The temporary river channel was subsequently reinstated and there is now no visible trace of it, but its line is clearly visible on the geophysical survey of the site carried out in 2007 (Fig 2.12, Smalley 2007).

Flooding

2.5 The location of the site just north of the River Anker means that part of it lies within the floodplain of the Anker and is therefore at some risk from flooding (Fig 2.1). The southern part of the site immediately adjacent to the river, including the Coach House and the vegetable garden south of the vicarage, the fields to east and west, and the south-eastern end of the proposed graveyard extension lies in the Environment Agency Flood Risk Zone 3 with a 1 in 100 or greater annual probability of flooding. To the north is a narrow strip of Flood Risk Zone 2, including the extreme south end of the vicarage and the garage to the south, the south-western part of the garden west of the vicarage with an annual probability of flooding of between 1 in 100 and 1 in 1000. The Environment Agency map is not exactly plotted to the local contours so the zone boundaries are likely to vary if assessed in detail. The remainder of the site, including most of the vicarage building, its gardens and

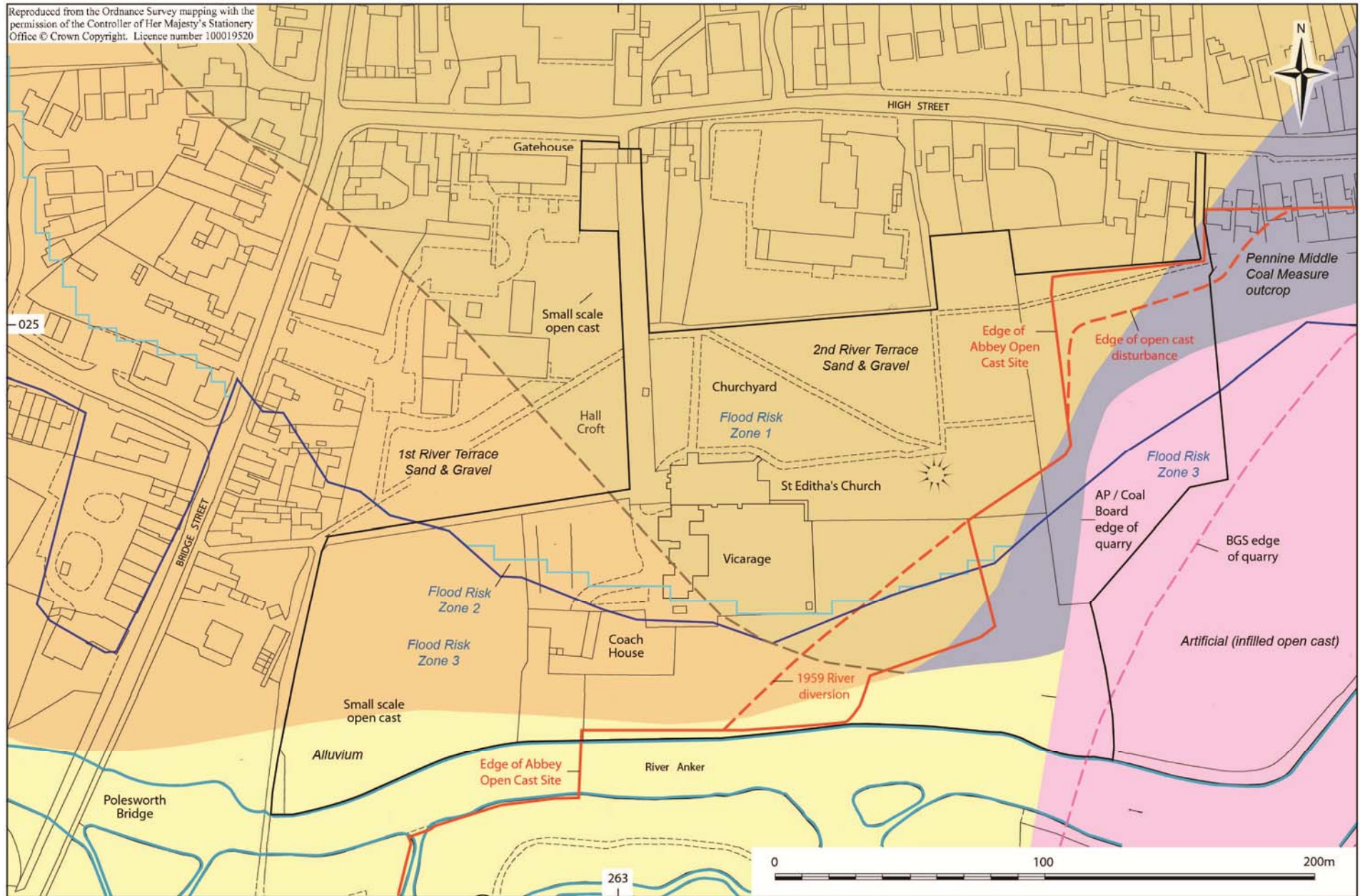


Fig 2.1: Polesworth Abbey, Geology and Flooding

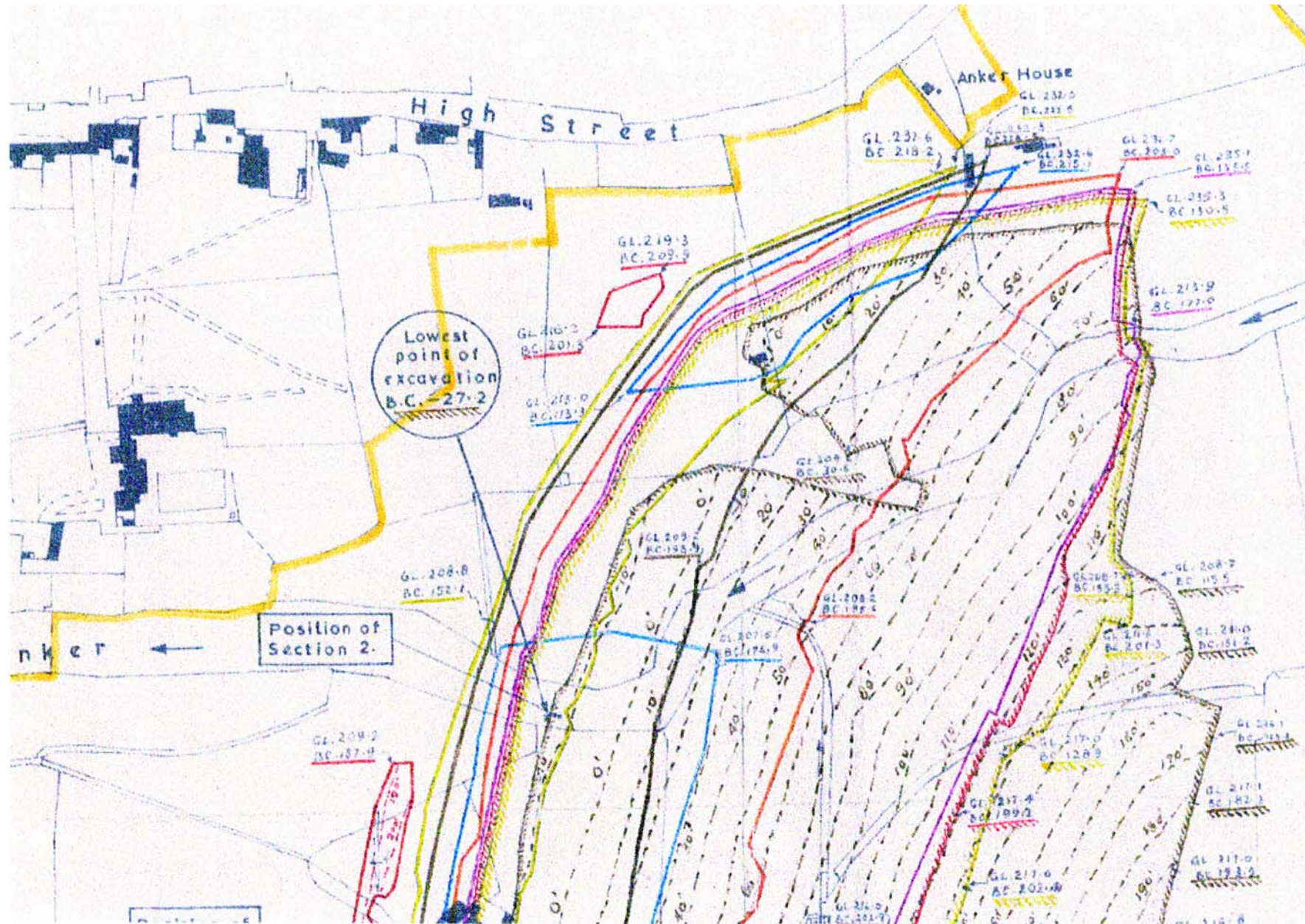


Fig 2.2 'Abbey' open-cast site, detail from NCB 'Abandonment plan' showing site boundary and extent of coal extracted

the church and churchyard, lies in Flood Risk Zone 1, with a less than 1 in 1000 annual probability of flooding.

Land ownership

2.6 The existing church landholding which amounts to about two thirds of the former monastic precinct consists of a number of parcels acquired at different dates and held in different ways (Fig 2.3). Following the Dissolution of the Abbey the west end of the Abbey church was retained for use as the parish church, along with a triangular area of graveyard on its north side (Fig 2.3, Area 1). It is likely that this part of the church had always had that use. The area of land to the north of the graveyard, known as Church Croft was also probably retained but disposed of later (in 1876). It is also likely that public access to the church continued to be through the former Abbey Gatehouse and along the driveway to the west end of the church. Ownership of the driveway would probably have belonged at this point to the Polesworth Hall estate which acquired the former Abbey property at the Dissolution.

2.7 The first extension to the graveyard took place in 1801 when a strip of land 56 yds by 12 yds to the west of the original plot and extending up to the driveway (Fig 2.3, Area 2) was bought from Sir George Chetwynd by Rev Walter Ross Norton (WRO DR(B) 44/14).

2.8 In April 1859 a second plot of land (Fig 2.3, Area 3), to the east of the church and south of the graveyard was purchased by the Vicar and Churchwardens from a subsequent Sir George Chetwynd (Fig 3.28, WRO DR(B) 44/15). This area, which included the mound and the site of the current church chancel, is described as 'garden ground' and will previously have been part of the Hall gardens.

2.9 In May 1876 the then Vicarage on High Street and Church Croft in the north-east corner of the former precinct north of the churchyard (now the College site) were exchanged by Rev Nigel Madan with Sir George Chetwynd for the site of Polesworth Hall, its coach house, gardens and a field to the south-east (Fig 2.3, Area 4; Fig 3.37, WRO DR(B) 16/148). The rights acquired by the incumbent also included a right of carriage over the driveway and through the gatehouse (described as 'right of road' on the plan). It is not clear whether Sir George was the owner of the driveway at this point or simply the holder of the right of way.

2.10 A further extension to the churchyard took place in April 1888 when land to the north-east (Fig 2.3, Area 5) part of the former Church Croft, was given to the incumbent by Col Chater, the then owner of the Polesworth estate (WRO DR(B) 44/16).

2.11 When the Polesworth Estate was put up for sale in 1912 the Gatehouse and its west range (Fig 2.3, Area 6), then described as 'the stone built- building used as a reading or recreation room with stable etc underneath ... and garden; also the Archway known as the Dungeon entry' (Fig 3.7, WRO EAC 15, Lot 19), were bought by the vicar and trustees. Following the deaths of the trustees the land was subsequently conveyed to the Diocesan Trustees in May 1919.

2.12 In May 1913 a further parcel of the estate was acquired and conveyed to the vicar and trustees (WRO DR(B) 44/10). This comprised the two fields fronting the River Anker to the west and east of the vicarage (Fig 2.3, Areas 7 and 8), and described as 'a close of meadow or pasture land ... occupied by the Rev Canon Trotter ... together with two ozier beds adjoining the river (Fig 3.7, WRO EAC 15, Lot 16). These two fields were also subsequently conveyed to the vicar and diocesan trustees in May 1923.

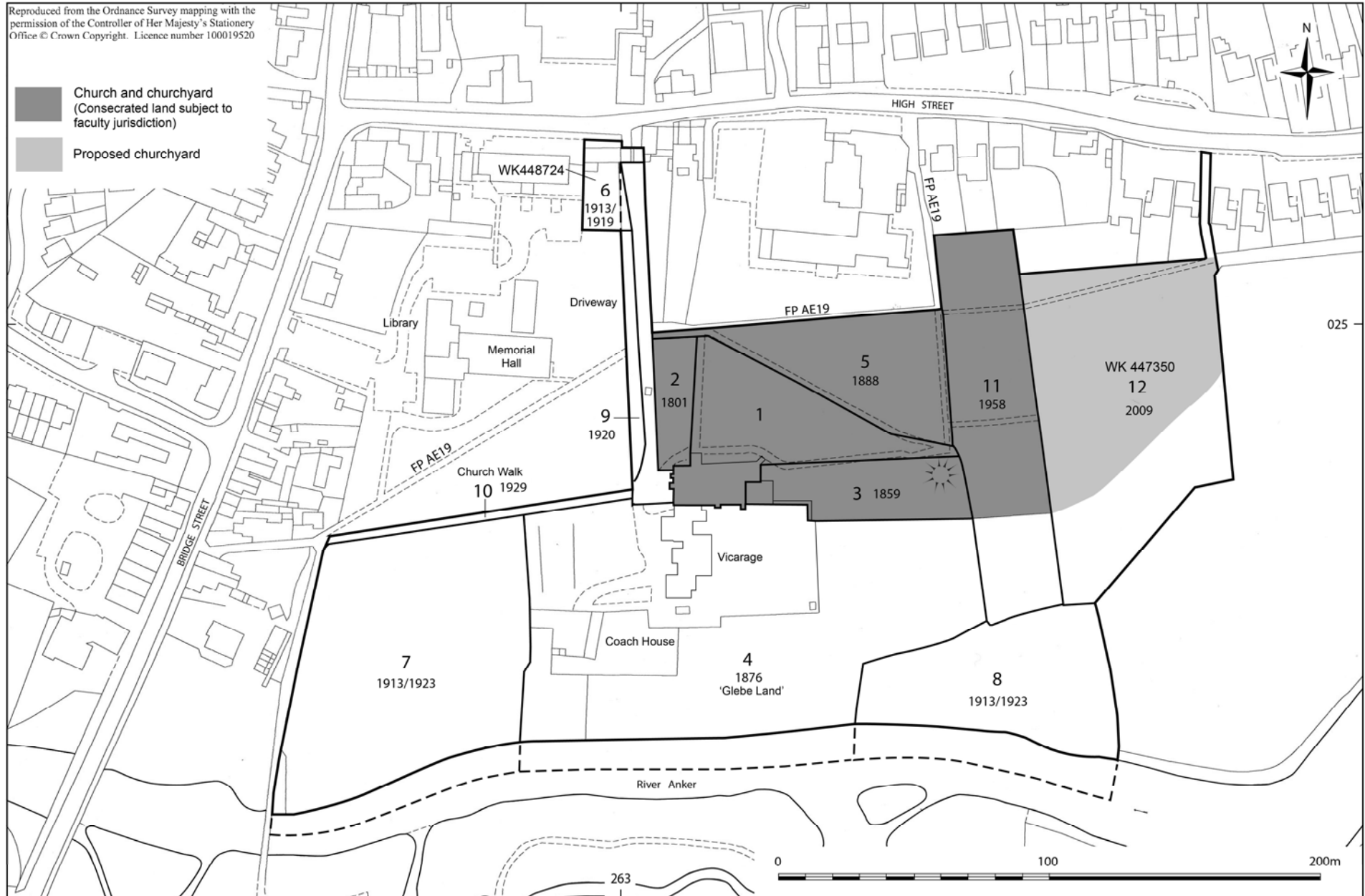


Fig 2.3: Polesworth Abbey, development of current church land ownership

2.13 The driveway was not offered for sale with the rest of the Hall estate in 1912. This suggests that it had by then definitely been incorporated into the churchyard – its use as anything other than an access road was precluded by the existence of the right of way to the vicarage, and it would have had little commercial value.

2.14 In November 1920 a tapering strip of land along the west side of the driveway was purchased (Fig 2.3, Area 9) ‘for the purpose of enlarging the churchyard’. This permitted the subsequent landscaping of the driveway and the construction of the War Memorial on its east side.

2.15 In January 1929 a strip of land running west from the church 120 yds long east to west and 3yds 2ft wide (Fig 2.3, Area 10) was conveyed to the Vicar and Diocesan Trustees to create the approach to the Church from Bridge Street now known as ‘Church Walk’.

2.16 The churchyard was extended further eastwards, beyond the limits of the probable medieval precinct, by the purchase of another strip of land in April 1958 (Fig 2.3, Area 11).

2.17 The 1958 churchyard extension is now reaching its capacity for burials, so in anticipation of the continuing need the next field to the east was purchased from Warwickshire County Council in 2009 (Fig 2.3, Area 12). This is registered as Land Registry property no WK 447350. In October 2009 Planning Permission for its landscaping and use as a graveyard with a nature area to the south was granted by North Warwickshire Borough Council (Ref PAP/2009/0363).

2.18 In March 2009 the ownership of the gatehouse and its garden (but not the part of the original property incorporated into the driveway in the 1920s) was registered as Land Registry property no WK 448724 and conveyed to the Nunnery Gateway Trust, a charitable company created by the PCC to hold the non-church land owned by the parish. The charitable aims of the Trust are firstly, to preserve for the benefit of the public the historic site known as Polesworth Abbey, and secondly to advance the education of the public in the religious and historical significance of the Abbey and its environs.

2.19 The Church and Churchyard are consecrated ground subject to Faculty Jurisdiction under the Care of Churches and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991 whereby any change, repair or addition within the boundaries of consecrated land requires a formal permission or Faculty from the Chancellor of the Diocese. The parts of the churchyard extension zoned for burials will also be consecrated in due course.

2.20 Despite its long usage the Driveway is not a public right of way, although it is crossed by a public footpath (AE19) which runs from Grendon Road to High Street diagonally across Hall Court and then along the north side of the Churchyard (Fig 2.3; WCC 1998, 2007). Although there is an access to the rear of No 28 High Street which can only be reached through the Gatehouse, no right of way exists for this. Successive owners of No 28 have been notified of this and told that the church cannot allow any rights of access through the Gatehouse and that no negotiation on the matter will be entered into.

2.21 The vicarage and the field to its immediate east, the subject of the 1876 exchange are held as ‘Glebe Land’ personally by the incumbent. The recently built entrance building and toilets and the Sensory Garden stand on this land and will accede to it. Parts of this land are also used by various parish organisations under various informal arrangements. The new entrance building and toilets, the Refectory the sensory garden, the cloister garden, the parish office and the Coach House are all used by the PCC for church activities. Most of these spaces are also used for

community and arts events and for the Abbey's educational programmes conducted by the PCC's commercial arm, the Polesworth Abbey Community Interest Company (PACIC). The vegetable garden is cultivated as allotments by various Polesworth inhabitants at the will of the vicar and in return for a share of the produce. Some of the gardeners have used their plots for many years. It has been recommended that these arrangements should be put on a more formal footing. The fields to east and west which belong to the PCC are leased for horse grazing on an annual basis.

2.22 In the eastern field some former boundaries have been removed and there is now no trace on the ground of the boundary between the 1876 exchange Glebe Land (Fig 2.3, Area 4) and the south end of the 1958 extension (Fig 2.3, Area 11) which is also the eastern edge of the Scheduled Ancient Monument, or between the Glebe Land and the former ozier bed field (Fig 2.3, Area 8). The boundary between the 1958 extension and the ozier bed field is marked by a length of hedge and ditch.

Archaeological and historical research on the Abbey and its precinct

Antiquarian research

2.23 The archaeological significance of the remains of Polesworth Abbey has been recognised since the later 17th century. In his *Antiquities of Warwickshire* Dugdale (1656, 804) illustrates the Lady Lucy Nethersole monument and the two table tombs in the church. He shows the 15th-century effigy but not that of the abbess; although, in the second edition of 1730 (1730, 1115) there is a note below the illustration [*on this tomb there is the stature of a Priest <sic>, with a pastoral staff in his right hand, an a book in his left*] which suggests it had been placed in its current location between 1656 and 1730. In the 18th century antiquarian patrons commissioned topographical artists to produce drawings of the most significant elements of the site. In 1785 E Stringer produced a series of views for an F Penant Esq showing the rear of the gatehouse, the church and cloister, the remains of the chapter house façade, the sundial in the garden and the abbess's effigy and tomb (Figs 3.5, 3.19, 3.22-3.23, WRO DR(B) 44/110). There are also three drawings of Polesworth, showing the gatehouse, the church and cloister area (Fig 3.20), and a detail of the chapter house façade (Fig 2.4), among the views of historic buildings and sites in Warwickshire commissioned by Lord Aylesford in the late 18th/early 19th century (BCA Aylesford Coll, f582, f584).

2.24 In the mid-19th century Edward Blore, the Victorian architect and antiquarian visited the site and drew the abbess' effigy (Fig 2.5, BL Add Ms 42011 f63). This is of particular significance as the only surviving effigy of an abbess in the country (Chatwin 1923, 32). The abbess was also illustrated in Matthew Bloxham's pioneering *Principles of Gothic Architecture* of 1829.

Modern historical research

2.25 Historical research on the Abbey site is hampered by the fact that documentation is sparse, with virtually none surviving for the medieval abbey and no administrative material for the manor (Alcock, Meeson and Meeson 2007, 4). The most substantial historical accounts remain the articles in the *Victoria County History*, Vol II (VCH 1908) on the Abbey and Vol IV (VCH 1947) on the parish of Polesworth. The most recent account of the historical evidence for the site and buildings is that produced by Nat Alcock in connection with a survey of the Gatehouse (Alcock, Meeson and Meeson 2006, 4-16). A number of Polesworth incumbents have taken an interest in the history of the parish and produced articles (Wells 1998) and guides to the church (Trotter 1910; George 1971). A new abbey guide was produced in 2006 (Crowe 2006). The doyenne of Polesworth local history is Jean Wood who has produced a series of illustrated books (Wood 1983, 1984, 1987 and 1993) concentrating mostly on the early modern period. The history of the parish is also



Fig 2.4: Chapter House façade, late 18th/early 19th-century, BCA Aylesford Collection

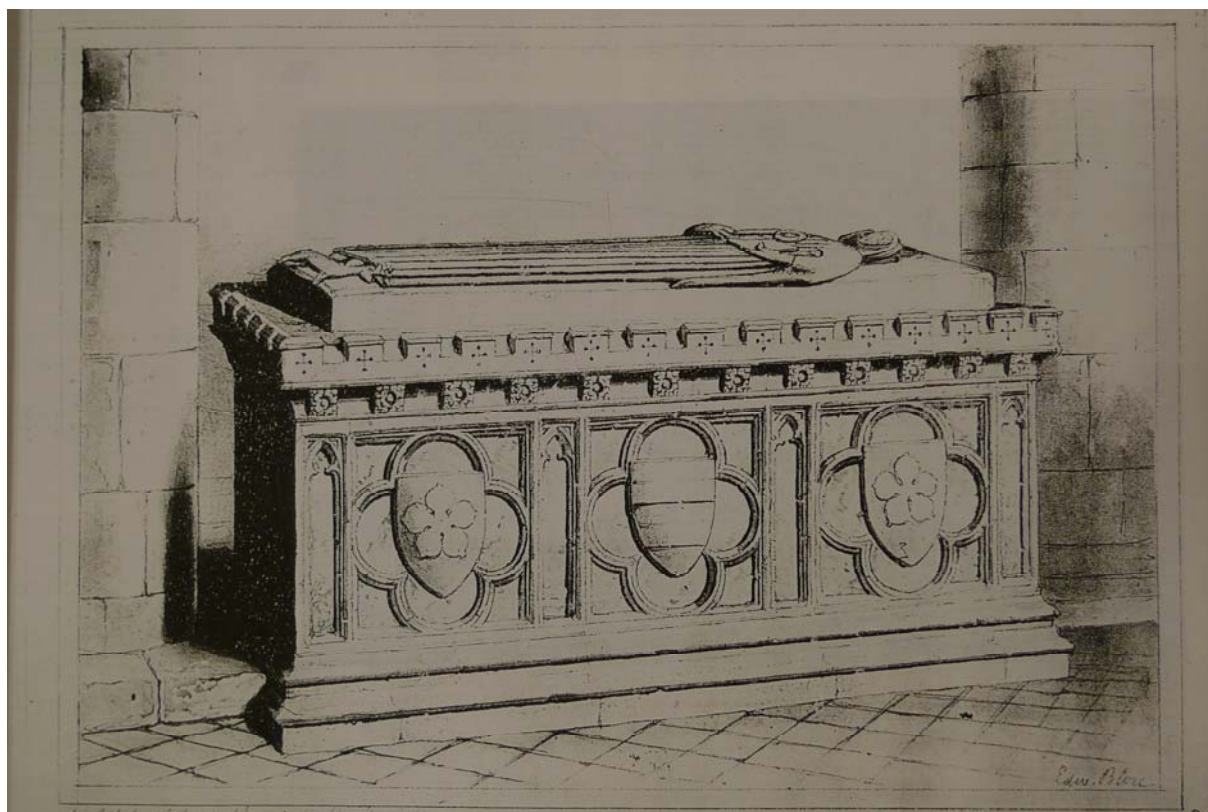


Fig 2.5: Drawing of tomb with abbess' effigy, by Edward Blore, mid 19th-century



Fig 2.6: Archaeological investigations in Abbey precinct



Fig 2.7: 1959 Excavation of Reredorter



Fig 2.10: 2005 Excavation of Entrance Building



Fig 2.8: 2000 Excavation in cloister



Fig 2.9: 2007 Resistivity Survey



Fig 2.11: 2007 Trial trench 3 south of Vicarage

being researched by Chris Pickford as part of updating the Warwickshire volume of Pevsner.

1959 Excavation of reredorter

2.26 The first archaeological excavation on the site took place in 1959 when the Coal Board were altering the course of the River Anker in the field to the south-east of the Vicarage and uncovered medieval building remains (Figs 2.6-7). Miss J M Morris of the Warwickshire Museum undertook a rapid rescue excavation, recording a drain, various stone walls and a stone paved floor. These were interpreted as part of the outlet of the drain to the reredorter of the Abbey (Mytum 1980, 81-2).

1976 Trial trenching of western precinct

2.27 In 1976, in advance of possible redevelopment, the western part of the former precinct was trial trenched to assess the potential of the site, with particular reference to Anglo-Saxon remains and the development of the High Street frontage (Mytum 1980). The trenching covered two fields to the west of the Church (Fig 2.6, 1976 B & C). In Field C there was extensive evidence for early modern open-cast coal mining, but the only medieval material found was some 13th/14th-century pottery in the easternmost trench in a spread of 19th-century rubble probably dumped from the church restoration work of 1868-9. In Field B there was a spread of 13th-century material in trenches east of the Memorial Hall and a undated ditch to the west, tentatively identified as a boundary within the nunnery. There was also a 16th-century pit and further, less extensive evidence for open-cast mining. It was concluded that these fields represented an open area within the Abbey precinct which was not occupied after the Dissolution.

2.28 In Area A on the High Street two areas excavated on the frontage found 18th- and 19th-century house foundations. In the western area (Area 1) these overlaid only an undated, east-west, stone-lined culvert, and in the eastern area (Area 2), 11m to the west of the surviving western range and just beyond the end of its demolished west wing, the 18th-century house was sitting on a wide stone foundation on a line with the front wall of the gatehouse which may originally have supported the precinct boundary wall. North of this wall was a cobbled surface running down into the street. Two further areas behind the frontage also failed to locate medieval remains. In Area 3, 7m west of the Gatehouse garden there was only undisturbed natural clay beneath c.1m of black loamy garden soil.

2.29 Further trial trenching took place in 1993 around the Library in advance of an extension but this also failed to locate any medieval remains (Warwickshire Museum 1993).

1981/1996 Recording of cloister wall

2.30 In 1981 a partial record was made of the 12th-century west processional doorway in the cloister wall following a collapse (BUFAU 1981), but it was not until 1996 that the wall was cleared and a full survey made (Warwickshire Museum 1996). This revealed five phases of development but suggested that apart from the 12th-century doorway and the 14th-century doorway into the south transept most of the surviving masonry was post-medieval, belonging to the Hall garden, or later.

1999 Excavations in cloister

2.31 The subsequent restoration of the cloister was accompanied by further investigation including three trial trenches designed to locate the cloister alleys (Palmer and Jamieson 2001). These revealed four in situ burials in the north and east alleys. The cloister arcade foundations had been removed by post-dissolution

landscaping, although the width of the north alley could be estimated at c.3.2m on the basis of the extent of the burials. Further information on the post-medieval rebuilding of the cloister walls was obtained. Some 13th-century grave slabs and 12th-century and later architectural details reused in later walls were also recorded.

2002/2005 Observations within church

2.32 Archaeological observation within Polesworth Abbey Church in 2002 during the excavation for a statue base revealed the later 19th-century floor construction, while replacement of flooring on the south side of the nave revealed a reburied medieval stone coffin, part of a brick vault and brick supports for later 19th-century suspended timber flooring beneath pews (Palmer 2006). In 2005 a new heating duct revealed similar brick supports in the north aisle, although here the suspended timber floor had subsequently been replaced by wood blocks.

2005 Excavation of new entrance building

2.33 The construction of the new entrance building and toilet block between the Church and the Vicarage was accompanied by limited excavation in 2005 (Palmer 2006). The earliest masonry revealed was medieval and may have belonged either to a monastic range west of the west range to the cloister, perhaps part of the Abbess' Lodging, and/or to the west end of a building set against the church, possibly the anchorage noted by Dugdale (1730, 1117). To the south an early stone cellar/undercroft, partly incorporated into the cellar of the late 19th-century Vicarage, and possibly belonging to the Abbess' Lodging range, was shown to have extended 7m northwards.

2.34 To the west the sandstone foundations of the north end of the post-medieval Hall ran to the south-west corner of the church. To the east the early masonry was cut by the north-eastern corner of a cellar lined with 18th/19th-century bricks belonging to a rear range of the Hall. Layers contemporary with the Hall appeared to be cut by the construction trench for the south wall of the nave of the church, confirming the suggestion that it is an 18th-century replacement for the original medieval wall.

2006 Observation of Sensory Garden

2.35 Observation of shallow topsoil stripping for the Sensory Garden east of the new toilet building in 2006 revealed only a late 19th-century garden path edged with bricks (Palmer 2006).

2006 Investigation of Gatehouse

2.36 The recent conservation of the Gatehouse was preceded by archaeological building surveys (Alcock, Meeson and Meeson 2007, Polesworth PCC 2008a) and dendrochronological analysis (Arnold and Howard 2007). The building forms two elements. To the east the Gatehouse proper has a stone ground floor with vehicular and pedestrian arches and a Porter's Lodge, a stair up to a mezzanine chamber and a timber-framed upper floor lodging with a two bay hall with a fireplace and closet to the east and a single bay with a stair or garderobe to the west. Most of its timbers were shown to have been felled in the later 1330s/early 1340s. To the west, the two-storey, stone West Range of which three bays and a two-storey south porch survive had roof timbers felled in 1582 when the building was built or possibly rebuilt.

2007 Geophysical survey

2.37 As part of the information-gathering for the present site development, in 2007 a geophysical survey involving resistivity and magnetometry was commissioned from

Stratascan Ltd (Smalley 2007). This covered part of the presumed cloister area in the vicarage garden and the fields to the south and east (Fig 2.9). The work revealed blocks of probable building remains to the south of the probable frater, to the east of the site of the chapter house and north of the reredorter excavated in 1959. The south-east part of the survey area appeared to be disturbed by the river diversion works connected with the late 1950s open-cast coal mining.

2007 Trial trenching around Vicarage

2.38 An evaluation of possible sites for proposed new buildings involving three trenches to the west and south-east of the vicarage was carried out in October 2007 (Gethin and Palmer 2007). All three trenches encountered well-preserved medieval building foundations with surviving floor levels.

2.39 Trench 1 to the west revealed three early graves belonging to a pre-late 13th-century cemetery, overlaid by a late 13th/early 14th-century building range running north-south with earth floors and an inserted fireplace. To the south in Trench 2 some late 13th-century features were overlaid by another late 13th/early 14th-century range aligned east-west with clay floors and another inserted fireplace. These ranges were probably accommodation, perhaps for guests or Abbey servants. The northern range was truncated by a 17th-century courtyard wall and surfaces belonging to the post-dissolution manor house, Polesworth Hall. The courtyard fell out of use, probably in the 18th century, when the area became garden.

2.40 To the south-east of the vicarage in Trench 3 the north wall of a large east-west aligned building, with a mostly robbed out tile floor, was terraced into a series of make-up layers in the late 13th/early 14th-century (Fig 2.11). The building is too far south to be the frater, but may have been part of the Abbess' Lodging or a guest hall. After the dissolution the building was demolished and the area landscaped to be included in the garden of the manor house.

2008 Trial Trenching of proposed Churchyard Extension

2.41 An archaeological evaluation of the proposed graveyard extension in 2008 involving observation of hydrological test pitting and four trial trenches. The field may cover the rears of probable medieval properties fronting High Street, but the work revealed no medieval or earlier features or finds (Palmer 2008). About 70% of the area to the south-east, corresponding almost exactly to an area of disturbance visible on a 1950s air photograph, appeared to have been extensively disturbed by earthmoving in connection with the 1950s open-cast coal mine.

2009-10 Excavations and recording in and around gatehouse and along driveway

2.42 The Gatehouse conservation was accompanied by archaeological recording. In the Gatehouse evidence of the original 14th-century framing was revealed and it was established that the 14th-century, first-floor doorway in the north-west corner would have led to a projecting garderobe rather than a stair. The original layout of the first floor of the west range was revealed to be a large eastern chamber with a fireplace connected to a stair in the south wing by a corridor along the south wall with two smaller chambers to the north.

2.43 Excavations in the ground floors of the West Range and Porter's Lodge revealed 17th- to 19th-century floors and partitions relating to their later uses as stores, stable and garage. It is possible that the original floor of the Porter's Lodge was of earth with rubble metalling around the doorway. A cache of glassware and pottery in the West Range may have belonged to an 18th-century apothecary. A service trench along the driveway revealed one or two undated features beneath 19th- and 20th-century surfaces and services. In the Gatehouse archways original chamfered plinths

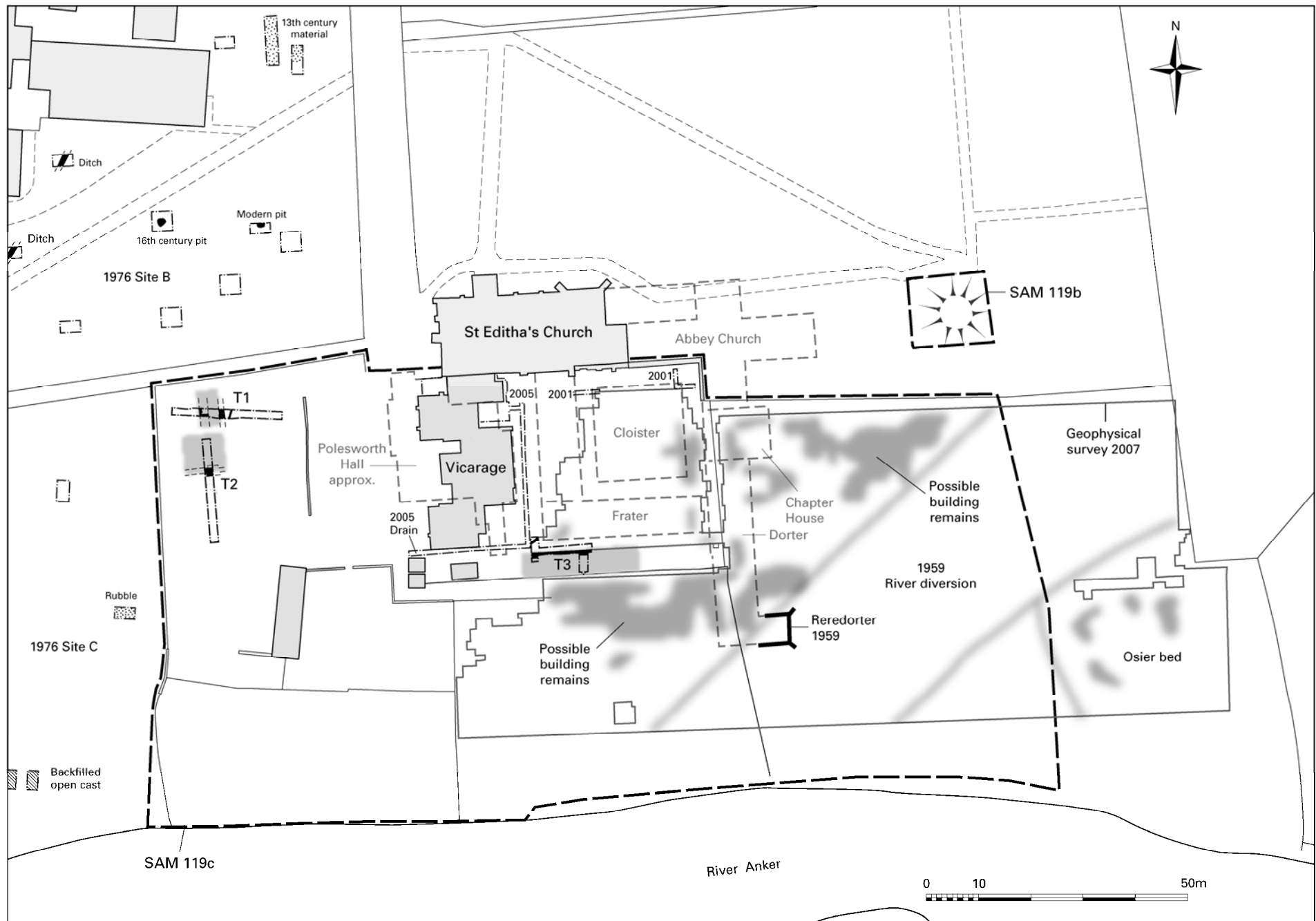


Fig 2.12: Archaeology of the central area

to the walls were revealed north of the arches, but the earliest surviving surfaces were of, probably 18th-century cobbling.

Survival of archaeological deposits across the site

2.44 Particularly over recent years there has been quite a lot of archaeological investigation within the precinct although most of the work has involved small-scale trial trenches or observations. Nonetheless in combination with the upstanding architectural evidence and the results of the 2007 geophysical survey this enables the plan of the Abbey to be tentatively reconstructed (Fig 2.12) and the survival of archaeological deposits across the site to be assessed.

2.45 Apart from the Gatehouse building itself relatively little in the way of medieval remains has been located away from the central area around the church and vicarage. This pattern is not unexpected and is reflected in the extent of the Scheduled Area. The 1976 trial trenching suggested that the western half of the precinct, including the field west of the vicarage was largely an open area in the middle ages, although it may have contained monastic gardens and closes which have left no archaeological trace. The west field was also shown to be extensively disturbed by post-medieval coal pits. There has been no investigation in the north-east corner of the precinct and it remains possible that there may have been monastic outbuildings – barns or stables – in that area with easier access to High Street.

2.46 The existing churchyard area within the former precinct will be extensively disturbed by post-medieval grave digging. However it is likely that the earliest part of the churchyard north of the church was also used for parish burials during the middle ages and that there was a nuns' cemetery to the east. The survival of early burials in these areas, in addition to those found in 2007 Trial Trench 1 west of the Vicarage, should not be ruled out. The area of the Scheduled Mound east of the church will be free of modern burials, although what the feature itself represents is uncertain, whether Bronze Age or Anglo-Saxon/Viking burial mound, medieval rabbit warren or 17th-century garden prospect mound.

2.47 The 1958 extension to the churchyard probably lies outside the precinct but may have covered the rear of medieval plots fronting High Street and contained outbuildings or other evidence of activity. However, any surviving remains would also be extensively disturbed by the modern burials. The 2008 trial trenching showed that the proposed new churchyard extension field to the east, which also lies beyond the precinct, contains no early remains in the area not disturbed by the 1950s open-cast mining (Palmer 2008).

2.48 In the central area most of the investigations have revealed relatively well-preserved medieval remains surviving quite close to the modern surface (Fig 2.12). An exception was the trenching in the northern part of the cloister where the arcade walls had been robbed out and the floor levels disturbed by post-medieval robbing and landscaping, although in situ medieval burials did survive here. Architectural evidence suggests the extent of the cloister and, more tenuously that of the abbey church. Away from this area over the parts of the site where monastic plans are less standard the geophysical survey indicates the location and extent of possible buildings including an infirmary, the dorter and reredorter and a range to the south of the frater. The 1959 Reredorter excavation revealed its walls surviving over 1m high (Fig 2.7) although to the south-east the river diversion will have removed any further remains in the south-east corner of the Scheduled Area, as confirmed by the geophysical survey.

2.49 The 2007 Trial Trench 3 south of the vicarage contained evidence for another substantial east-west range possibly a guest hall or part of the abbess' lodging, which is traditionally believed to be under the vicarage. At the east end of the trench, the

wall of this range were only 0.3m below the surface (Fig 2.11). Medieval masonry was also located at a similar depth under the new toilets in 2005 (Fig 2.10), and walls, belonging probably to the dormer, have been seen at an even lower depth in the flower bed in the south-east corner of the cloister garden (Palmer and Jamieson 2001, 9). The existing vicarage cellar predates that building and may also have belonged to the abbess' lodging. The 2007 Trial Trenches 1 and 2 west of the vicarage both encountered well preserved medieval buildings of the monastic outer court at a depth of 0.5-0.6m. Further south there were medieval surfaces but no structural remains.

2.50 The 2005 excavation also revealed walls belonging to the post-medieval Polesworth Hall, more of which may survive under the Vicarage and to the west. There was also an infilled cellar here which will have belonged to the Hall. This, and any others in the vicinity, will have truncated medieval remains. The 2007 Trial Trench also 1 located a post-medieval wall possibly surrounding a courtyard west of the Hall.

2.51 While these investigations have provided much information many uncertainties about the detailed plan and extent of the Abbey buildings remain. The trial trenching included in the proposed Community Archaeology Programme for the site has therefore been designed to elucidate further the plan and state of preservation of the monastic buildings to the south and east of the cloister. It is also designed to establish the true character of the Mound in the churchyard, whether prehistoric, Anglo-Saxon, medieval or later.