

ANGLESEY ABBEY, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

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**ANGLESEY ABBEY
LODE
CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

Earthwork Survey

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1. INTRODUCTION

In June 1998, the Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England carried out a partial survey of the earthworks in the grounds of Anglesey Abbey, Cambridgeshire, south of the main house. This fieldwork formed part of a training project for second year students at the Department of Archaeology, Cambridge University and covers only a small area of the grounds of Anglesey Abbey. This, together with the fact that we know virtually nothing about the Abbey's plan, renders interpretation of the site as a whole very difficult. The following account, therefore, confines itself essentially to describing the earthworks surveyed (see Figure 2 for the area of survey).

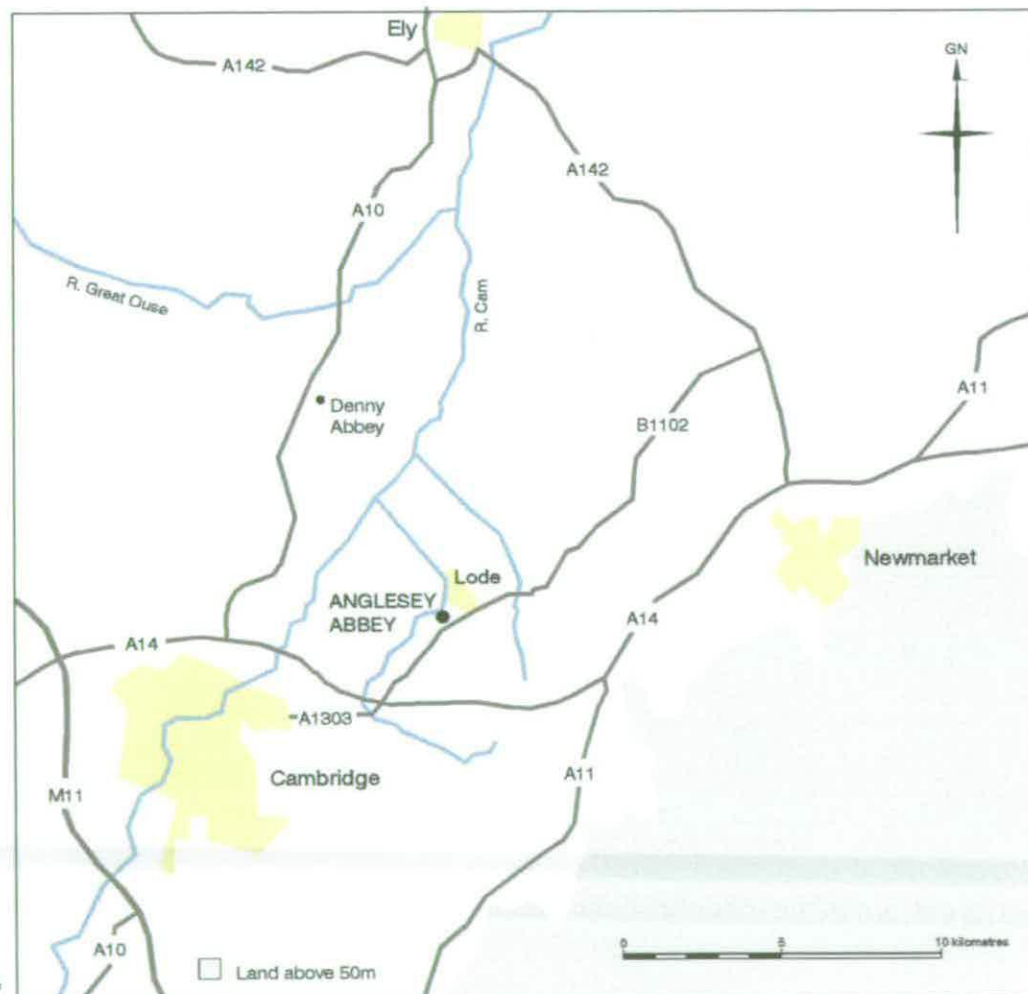


Figure 1
Location map

Anglesey Abbey (NGR TL 530 622) is situated 8km north-east of Cambridge, just south-west of the village of Lode (Figure 1). The surrounding topography is flat, and the site lies at a height of only 5m OD. The underlying geology is Lower Chalk, which meets Gault Clay roughly 1km to the north.

The area surveyed, approximately 7.7 hectares (19 acres), lies mostly under long meadow grass, although the area nearest the house is neatly mown as part of the extensive lawns.

The earthworks which make up the site appear principally to be the remnants of several phases of complex water management, including fish ponds and channels, but there is one area which appears to be the result of the robbing-out of several buildings.

2. OUTLINE HISTORY OF ANGLESEY ABBEY

The earliest surviving reference to Anglesey Abbey is from 1212, when Richard de Clare, Earl of Gloucester, divided the Manor of Bottisham between two religious houses - Tonebridge and Anglesey (Hailstone 1873, 153). Like many other Augustinian houses, the abbey began as a hospital, and it is likely that the site itself was founded some time during the 12th Century, probably by Henry I in 1135 (Fedden 1972, 4).

The final conversion of the community into a priory of regular canons was the work of Master Laurence of St Nicholas, a papal chaplain, in 1217 (VCH 1948, 229). It seems that he also funded the construction of a substantial number of the buildings there before his death in 1236 (RCHME 1972, 74). Following these events, the priory appears to have functioned normally, on a relatively modest income, for three centuries.

In 1536, however, it fell under the Act for the suppression of the smaller monasteries, and in 1539 was granted to the private ownership of John Hynde (VCH 1948, 233). The Hynde family were occupied elsewhere in Cambridgeshire with the building of Madingley Hall, and seem to have done very little with the priory, possibly even dismantling some of its structures (RCHME 1972, 74). In the 17th century, those monastic buildings which remained in reasonable repair were altered for domestic use, possibly by John Fowkes (*ibid*). These included some of the original 13th century buildings which can still be seen as the modern living room and oak room (formerly the chapter house) and dining room (formerly the parlour). The extent of the house and any accompanying gardens are unknown.

Various alterations have been made to the house since the 17th century, mainly during the first decades of this century, including the construction of the entire west wing (Fedden 1972, 8). The greater part of the present garden landscape is also a product of the present century, under the guidance of Lord Fairhaven.

3. THE ABBEY LANDSCAPE

Very little is known about the location and layout of the Abbey precinct, and indeed that is beyond the scope of the current survey, but a general impression of the Abbey site is given in Figure 2. Surviving maps provide a few clues, suggesting there were some buildings north and north-west of the present house. However, these maps are all at small scales with sketched detail rather than accurate survey. The earliest map seen, dated 1759, depicts only a single rectangular building, possibly the barn which still survives to the north west of the main house, but not the house itself (CUL Maps Room: R.b.11). Marshall's map of 1793 shows several buildings, including what appear to be the re-used monastic ones, and two water features, one of which is U-shaped (CRO: R 71/38).

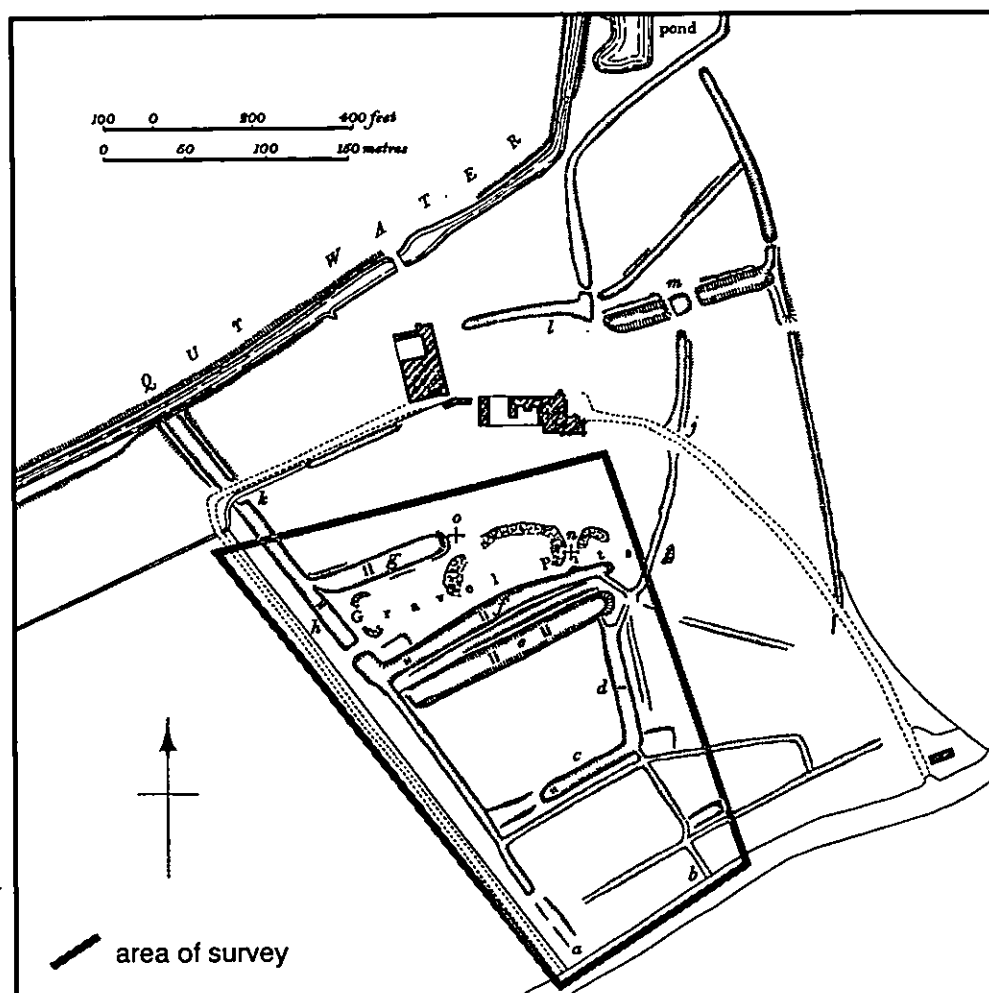


Figure 2
RCHME plan of
Anglesey Abbey in
1972 (after
RCHME 1972, 79)

The Enclosure map is fairly similar, although there are some differences, including an additional small building and what appears to be the eastern extension to the main house; the water features are not depicted. Several field boundaries shown on this map correspond very well with several of the features surveyed on the ground, perhaps revealing that that disused monastic boundaries continued to have a use in the later landscape (CRO: Q/RDc12).

There are several reports of the discovery of stone foundations and archaeological artifacts, including two stone coffins which were found in 1849 and 1861 respectively. The latter was discovered under the present dining room, whilst the provenance of the former is unclear, although one account records that *'it was found embedded in the foundations of the old dovecot ... near to where now stands a clump of walnut trees'* (Hailstone 1873, 164). The RCHME inventory places the findspot of both coffins within the area of the present survey ('O' on Figure 2). The coffins, which appear to be later medieval, can still be seen in a corner of the rose garden.

Hailstone also mentions (*ibid*, 166) that *'in what is now the kitchen garden was found a concrete bed, about fifteen feet square, which seems to have been the base of a tower'*. He goes on to say that nearby was *'a capital forming the top of six clustered columns'*, and near the coffins were *'nine small stones forming the base and cap of similar columns and running in pairs, thereby indicating an arcade'*. The RCHME Inventory also tells us that, south of the house, *'the stone footings of a small rectangular building are alleged to have been discovered'* (RCHME 1972, 80); this report was confirmed by the present Head Gardener (Richard Ayres: pers. comm.).

Hailstone (1873, 163 and pl. opp.) further mentions the ruins of the priory refectory, which was sketched in 1860 but knocked down in 1861 to make way for offices and stables. He also describes and pictures what seem to be monastic arches on the west front of the abbey; his sketch is very similar to one of Relhan's watercolours of the same wall earlier in the century (CUL Maps Room: Relhan 1801).

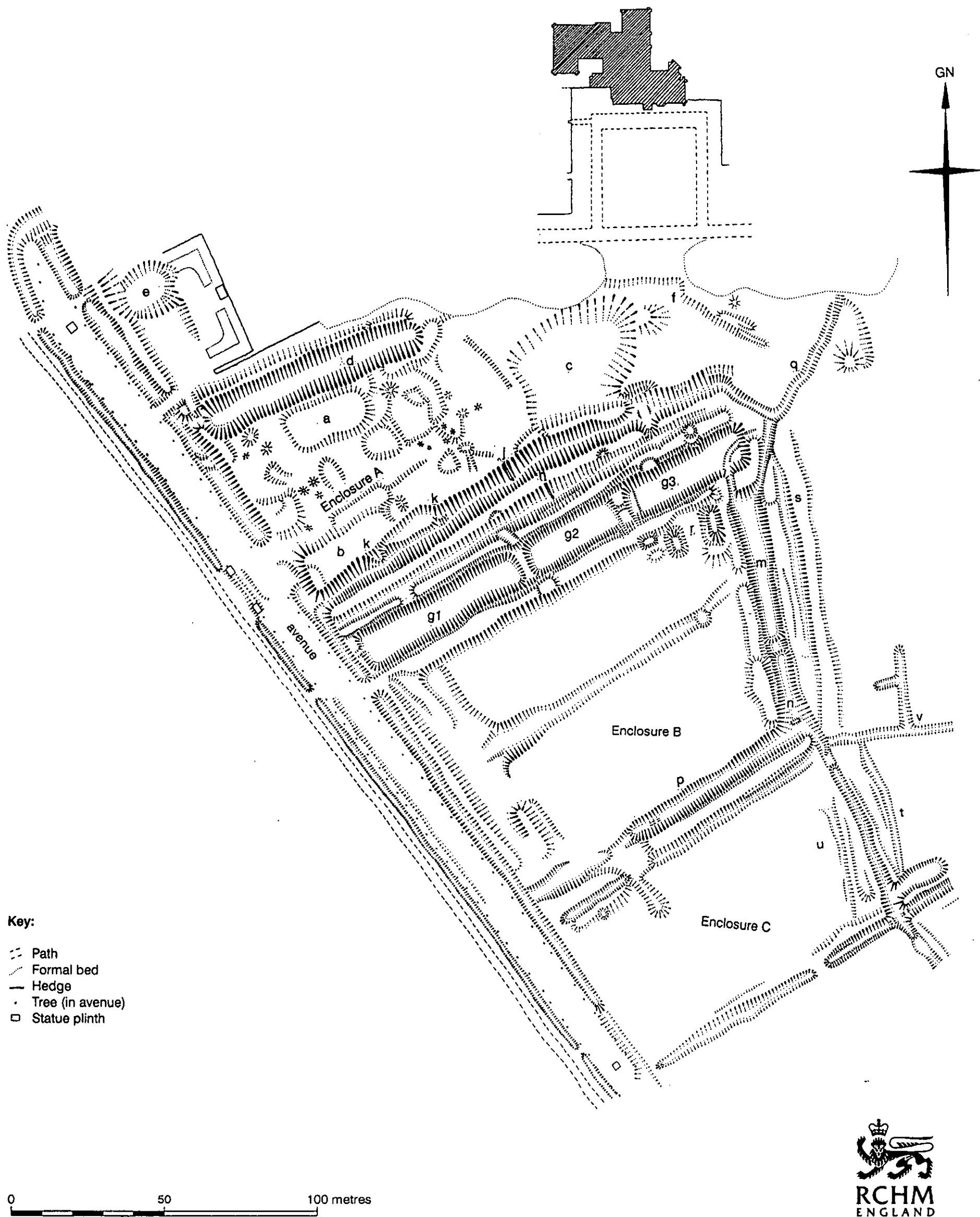


Figure 3 RCHME survey plan of Anglesey Abbey (surveyed at 1:1000 scale)

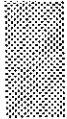


Figure 3 *RCHME survey plan of Anglesey Abbey (surveyed at 1:1000 scale)*

4. DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION

For text shown in bold see Figure 3, while an interpretation of the earthworks appears in Figure 4.

The earthworks examined form a compact group and are mainly comprised of ditches, banks, leats and fishponds. Their arrangement is such that they define three distinct enclosures (A to C), and imply several more at their margins. The western edge of all three is clearly marked by an avenue which forms one of the present approaches to the house: the fact that it forms an edge to all other site features suggests that it is an old boundary, probably the western edge of the monastic precinct.

The avenue is defined by two parallel ditches and two rows of hornbeam trees planted in the 1970s, replacing diseased elms. A tarmac road, the main approach to the house from Quay Road, runs parallel to it. The ditches are quite different: the western one is the slighter, with a maximum width of 2.0m; its counterpart is up to 8.0m wide and appears to have been a primary leat, bringing water from Quay Water to the north into the fishponds. Both ditches are interrupted in some places, where the requirements of walks around the modern garden have caused them to be infilled. Slight banks accompanying the ditches are relatively insignificant and probably the result of ditch clearing.

Most of Enclosure A lies on the lawn south-west of the house, a gently undulating area formed by earthworks which, at first glance, have little coherence. However, their general character suggests both extensive disturbance and subsequent smoothing and landscaping. There was, apparently, digging for roadstone in the early 19th century (RCHME 1972, 80). Nevertheless, some pattern was discernible as a result of the survey and it seems that the surface is not produced solely by random digging or quarrying: two rectangular platforms, a and b, may be the sites of buildings (23.0m by 15.0m and 35.0m by 15.0 respectively); Several small depressions have quite angled cuts, perhaps where walls have been followed during stone robbing. The most obvious earthwork is a large, amorphous, flat-bottomed depression, c, some 45.0m by 30.0m and up to 1.5m deep. Although it could be the result of small-scale surface quarrying, it might equally have been formed by the complete removal of a large stone building and its foundations.

The northern boundary of enclosure A is defined by a large flat-bottomed fishpond, d, at least 75.0m long (it is probably truncated at the eastern end), 15.0m wide and up to 2.0m deep. The earthworks at the western end suggest a sluice between the pond and the ditch of the avenue.

Anglesey Abbey (Interpretation Plan)



Figure 4
RCHME
interpretation plan
of the earthworks
at Anglesey Abbey

North of enclosure A, at the extremity of the survey area, a roughly circular depression, e, 20.0m across and 0.8m deep, could mark the location of another robbed-out building.

A shallow scarp, f, in front of the present square formal lawn, is orientated on the same axis as the house, and is perhaps the remains of a terrace from an earlier formal garden layout.

Enclosures B and C are formed by a series of channels, ditches and banks. These vary in size but seem to form a coherent whole. Only on the eastern side of the survey area are there some slighter features, some on a different alignment, which may be part of a different phase.

The most striking earthworks are those dividing the two enclosures, forming a series of parallel linear features on a south-west to north-east axis. The southernmost, g, is in fact three separate but contiguous fishponds (1, 2 and 3), all of which are rectangular and flat-bottomed. They average 14.0m in width and are 58.0m, 34.0m and 44.0m long respectively. Small dams, both 6.0m wide, are lower than the tops of the ponds themselves, possibly to facilitate overspill from one to another (there is also a slight channel across the dam separating ponds 2 and 3). An 8m wide, flat-topped bank runs along the southern length of all three ponds and is possibly a raised walkway.

Two features lie parallel to these ponds immediately to the north. Both are water channels or ditches but are more sinuous and irregular than the ponds: h is 140.0m long, 9.0m wide and up to 1.0m deep; j is 145.0m by 13.0m and up to 1.5m deep. Both have banks along their southern sides. Interestingly, h has no outlet channel and it is the slighter, a fact which suggests that it has been disturbed or superseded. The much more substantial j has small internal projections, k, suggesting the positions of sluices for controlling water flow. Both features may have formed Bypass channels for the ponds, with j being the latest phase.

A short channel, 10.0m long and 3.0m wide, links the eastern fishpond g3 with what looks like another pair of ponds, m and n, similarly contiguous, along the eastern edge of enclosure B; these are 48.0m by 13.0m by 1.5m and 23.0m by 8.0m by 1.2m respectively. There is a clear narrowing towards the southern end and it is arguable whether or not these features are ponds or large water channels. Once again there is a parallel bank, up to 10.0m wide, inside the enclosure.

Pond or channel n is continuous with a similar feature, p, which forms the entire southern side of enclosure B: there is a small breached and infilled section towards the western end. Alongside the channel, a large flat-topped bank with slight ditch beyond, separates enclosures B and C.

A narrow outlet channel leads from pond m and extends for some 20.0m north-east before merging with the bi-pass channel j, forming a single channel, q, which leads out of the survey area: this would appear to be a main drain for the ponds as a whole.

The trapezoidal interior of enclosure B contains few features: a very slight linear ditch or depression is aligned with the enclosure and approximately bisects the interior. More obvious, in the north-eastern corner, are three sub-rectangular pits, r, 6.0m by 4.0m; 10.0m by 7.0m and 13.0m by 8.0m; the deepest is 1.5m. These disturb the bank associated with the adjacent fishponds but they could be small ponds in their own right. All three appear to have been re-cut, possibly accounting for two small mounds next to them.

Enclosure C is formed by slighter channels with traces of an internal bank along the southern side. Its eastern corner is continuous with further channels which extend beyond the survey area. There are no obvious internal features.

There is another group of linear features, much slighter in scale, on the eastern margin of the survey area. These are shallow ditches and slight banks which are more difficult to interpret. One of them, s, a flattened bank with traces of a parallel ditch, is on a similar alignment to m and n and may be the course of a path depicted on the 1793 map (CRO: R 71/38). Others, features t, u and v, are on a slightly different axis to the main group and appear to underlie enclosure C.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

On present evidence, the safe bet is to accept that the majority of the earthworks identified are monastic, concerned with the control, use and distribution of water, probably largely for keeping fish in the south-western part of the abbey precinct. The water features also served to drain and divide the land, creating areas for general agriculture. The areas so defined could have been fields and other enclosures designated to varying agricultural functions.

However, the survey has shown that enclosure A probably contained a group of buildings: the undulating and disturbed nature of the ground is certainly consistent with underlying robbed-out structures. However, historic maps, no matter how sketchily, suggest that the main cluster of abbey buildings stood to the north and west of the present house. So what were these buildings? It is possible that they were agricultural and placed away from the main claustral core - buildings which were demolished very soon after the Dissolution, perhaps because they were in prospect of the present secular house created from some of the other abbey buildings.

However, could it be that the undulations themselves cover the site of post-Dissolution secular house? This would allow for a much more comfortable relationship of such a house with enclosures B and C: it could have faced onto the enclosures, themselves re-used and adapted as a formal garden, whereas the alignment of the present house is totally at odds with the majority of the earthworks. This might further explain the fine state of preservation of the ponds and channels themselves.

This and other issues can only be addressed by additional fieldwork: it would be very useful to extend the survey area to cover all of the former abbey precinct - a complete picture of what survives would set this survey in its full context, and would perhaps give us a better hold on the orientation of the entire monastic complex, and thus on the functions of various buildings and water features. It would be particularly illuminating to carry out a geophysical survey across the area of robbed buildings in order to clarify their nature and context.

6. SURVEY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The survey was carried out both by RCHME staff (Moraig Brown, Wayne Cocroft, Duncan Garrow, Alastair Oswald and Paul Pattison) and students from Cambridge University, with help from Anwen Cooper.

Control points and hard detail were surveyed using a Wild TC1610 Electronic Theodolite with integral EDM and Key Terra Firma surveying software. Data was captured on a Wild GRM 10 Rec Module, and plotted on a Hewlett Packard Designjet 750C Plus plotter. The details on the earthwork plan were added, at 1:1000 scale, using tapes and normal graphical methods.

The report was researched and written by Duncan Garrow with additions, concluding remarks and editing by Paul Pattison. The illustrations were prepared by Duncan Garrow and Anwen Cooper. The report was assembled by Moraig Brown.

The site archive has been deposited in the National Monuments Record Centre, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ (NMR Number TL 56 SW 4 (HOB Uid: 374993)).

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7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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