

Ramsey Abbey College Gas Pipeline Monitoring Ramsey Abbey, Ramsey



Archaeological
Watching Brief Report



June 2014

Client: Lidum Group

OA East Report No: 1617

OASIS No: oxfordar3-180584

NGR: TL 2985

Ramsey Abbey College, Gas Pipeline Monitoring,

Ramsey Abbey, Ramsey

Archaeological Watching Brief

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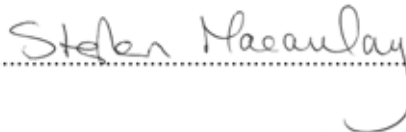
Report Date: April 2014

Report Number: 1617
Site Name: Ramsey Abbey College, Ramsey Abbey
HER Event No: ECB 4126
Date of Works: April 2014
Client Name: Lidum Group
Client Ref: 15925
Planning Ref:
Grid Ref: TL 2985
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Summary

During April 2014 Oxford Archaeology East monitored the excavation of a new gas line through the grounds of Ramsey Abbey College, Ramsey Abbey (TL 291851). The excavation was generally cut along the line of the previous gas pipe and was therefore most of the deposits encountered were disturbed backfill. However, the works did reveal a fragment of wall plus a second unidentified archaeological feature.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 An archaeological monitoring was conducted at Ramsey Abbey.
- 1.1.2 This archaeological monitoring was undertaken in accordance with instruction issued by Quinton Carroll of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC), following standard monitoring practices.
- 1.1.3 The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the development area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *National Planning Policy Framework* (Department for Communities and Local Government March 2012).
- 1.1.4 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 Ramsey lies on March gravels (British Geological Survey 1995), on what was effectively an island surrounded by Bury Fen to the south and Stocking Fen to the north. Visitors approached it, as the chroniclers note, by a causeway on one side. The line of the streets has changed little since originally laid out (Page et al 1932, 188–9). The monks built the abbey and its precinct on a very slight rise, the abbey lying at between 5m and 6m OD and the town between 4m and 5m OD, although there is a drop in level towards the north-west and west edges of the historic town. Most of the extensive fenland in the parish is near to sea level (Hall 1992, 41).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background (Spoerry et al 2008)

- 1.3.1 This section is taken from Spoerry *et al* 2008, pages, with very minor alterations.

Historical background

- 1.3.2 The historic town of Ramsey owes its existence to the Benedictine abbey created by Oswald, bishop of Worcester from AD960, and Aethelwine, the aeldorman of East Anglia. At Oswald's suggestion, Aethelwine founded a small wooden chapel for three hermits, reputedly after a vision of St Benedict appeared to his fisherman in Ramsey Mere. A bull was to indicate the position of the church (DeWindt and DeWindt 2006, 11). Being suitably impressed by the story, Oswald sent 12 monks and a prior from the Benedictine house at Westbury; he made the journey to inspect Ramsey and described it as an island 'surrounded by marsh and bogs; with meadow, woods, and ponds; with all kinds of fish and a wide variety of birds; and cut off from the outside world'(Ibid; quoting Macray (ed) 1886, 38). Oswald's investment in the site continued with the construction of a stone church and other buildings, which began in AD969 (De Windt and DeWindt 2006, 11.)
- 1.3.3 A series of substantial endowments made the house one of the richest in the fens — Ramsey the Golden. Its wealth enabled it to acquire an extensive library and the abbey rapidly developed a reputation for learning that continued until the Dissolution.
- 1.3.4 The estates were reorganised c.1100 with certain manors providing supplies to the cellarer while others, usually the more distant ones, provided money instead. Many of the detailed estate documents survive and the published records are extensive. The abbey not only supported almost 80 monks, a number that remained constant during

the 13th century, but also daughter houses. In the 11th century, Ramsey bought a stone quarry from Peterborough Abbey and used it to rebuild the monastery, refashioning the church during the 12th century. In Stephen's reign, the house suffered severely and was overtaken by Geoffrey de Mandeville in 1143 — he fortified the house and expelled the monks (Page et al 1932, 191). The abbey was badly damaged and impoverished.

- 1.3.5 The late 13th and 14th centuries saw a succession of wealthy and worldly abbots — John of Sawtry, Simon of Eye and William of Godmanchester — each of whom embarked on costly building programmes. The Black Death added to these financial problems and by 1349 the house owed 2,500 marks (£1,666/13/4d). The visitation returns at the end of the 14th century suggest that the abbey was both financially and morally decayed, but by 1431 all was restored. In 1535 Thomas Bedyll visited and reported to Thomas Cromwell that the monks would acknowledge the Supremacy and in 1538 they surrendered without complaint, receiving high pensions as a reward. The house was valued in 1535 at £1,715/12/3d, which included the abbey and the cells at Modney (Norfolk) and Slepe (St Ives, Cambridgeshire). They assessed the house at Chatteris (Cambridgeshire) separately.
- 1.3.6 The abbey was dissolved in 1539, when the Cromwell family bought its land, titles and buildings and saw to its destruction. We know that several Cambridge Colleges (Kings, Trinity, Gonville and Caius), as well as the gatehouse at Hinchingsbrooke House (Cambridgeshire), used much of the abbey stone.
- 1.3.7 The earliest cartographic depiction of Ramsey is the very small-scale 1646 county map of Huntingdonshire by Blaeu, although this gives no indication of the layout of the abbey itself. Jonas Moore's map of 1684 is the first to show the town to any scale — it illustrates the general shape of the settlement along two main roads, linked to Ramsey Mere via two artificial watercourses (or lodes). The map records the Great Whyte but not its subsidiary, the Little Whyte: the Great Whyte, now a wide road, once incorporated a lode that discharged into the High Lode and thence the Nene further north. Dating back to at least the 13th century, it was culverted in the 19th century and survives beneath the present road. The first detailed map of Ramsey Abbey itself is the Silius Titus estate survey c.1704–9, which is a wonderfully eccentric depiction, showing the surviving parish church within the former abbey precinct and a few other buildings, probable ponds and many small fields, some of which may have been orchards (HRO 1737 RB 2/1).

Archaeological background

- 1.3.8 Present understanding of the archaeology of the abbey is very poor. We do not know the accurate location of the monastic buildings, including the cloisters, abbey church and inner/outer court boundaries, such was the scale of the destruction after the Dissolution. Various theories persist, based upon interpretation of the surviving buildings (see 'The Monastic Buildings'). The RCHME recorded the most obvious earthworks within the abbey environs (RCHME 1926, 210).
- 1.3.9 Ramsey Abbey is known from documents to have produced decorated and undecorated tiles and a tile kiln was discovered in the grounds of the Ailwyn School in 1966 — the following year Elizabeth Eames, John Cherry and the master and pupils of the school excavated it (DeWindt and DeWindt 2006, 188; Eames 1980). The precise location of the kiln is not known but it evidently lay close to the small copse along Hollow Lane to the south-east of the school buildings.
- 1.3.10 Various finds have been retrieved from a field between 300 and 500m to the north of the surviving abbey buildings (Hall 1992 site 17, 42; fig 25). When surveyed in March

1978 the ploughed field showed soilmarks and remains of earthworks. This location appears from documentary references to have been where the abbey disposed of much of its refuse (E DeWindt and A DeWindt pers comm, as noted in Hall, 1992, 42). Pottery recovered from this area is accessible through Ramsey Rural Museum and includes a range of recognisable high and late medieval fabrics and some additional sherds in a fabric like that of Ramsey's decorated tiles. The sherds exhibit characteristic wheel-stamped decoration that is also seen on ceramic objects and decorated tiles found in the area around the Ailwyn School (which lies in the southern part of the former abbey precinct), perhaps suggesting that pottery production took place here.

- 1.3.11 Until recently, the limited archaeological work conducted elsewhere in Ramsey has all occurred to the north-west of the abbey. Excavations at 52 High Street found Saxo-Norman occupation (Nicolson 2006), while high medieval activity located on several sites demonstrates the levelling and reclamation of wet, low-lying areas (Atkins 2004a and 2004b; Cooper 2003 and 2005; Hickling 2006; O'Brien and Crank 2002; Membery and Hatton 1996; Pearson and McDonald 2000). Remains of structures lie above some of these levelling layers (eg Atkins 2004b); archaeological work demonstrates repeated flooding and late peat formation with resultant problems for settlement. Further ground levelling occurred in the post-medieval period (Atkins 2004a).
- 1.3.12 A small amount of archaeological work was carried out as part of the heritage lottery funded young roots project. This involved the excavation of several test pits to the south-east of the pipe route to the east of the lady chapel (Gilmour 2012) and in the region of the pipe route (Macaulay 1996).

The Monastic Buildings

- 1.3.13 Supposition is the basis of most previous interpretations of the layout of Ramsey Abbey and hypotheses about the position and arrangement of the monastic buildings. The exact location of the abbey church itself has yet to be pinpointed, although a multi-disciplinary project undertaken by CAM ARC in 1999 provided sufficient new data for one of the previously published models, that of Dickinson, to be discounted in favour of an interpretation akin to one suggested by the late Tony Baggs (Dickinson 1967, 245–47; Baggs, pers comm; Spoerry and Cooper 2000). This places the abbey church's north wall along the surviving dog-legged southern wall of the churchyard of St Thomas a Becket (where *in-situ* high medieval fabric has now been identified; Fig 2). It implies that the extant 13th-century fabric in the basement of part of Ramsey Abbey School (No 3) is more likely to represent an infirmary chapel or chapter house located to the south-east of the cloistral range, rather than a lost Lady Chapel as indicated in some previous publications (Spoerry and Cooper 2000).
- 1.3.14 The only other above-ground and *in-situ* elements from the monastery are various wall fragments (Nos 4 and 5), the surviving half of the late 15th-century gatehouse and the parish church itself. This was originally the abbey's hospital, infirmary or guesthouse c.1180–90, converted into the church for the new parish of Ramsey c.1222 (Haigh 1988). If Baggs' model for the position of the abbey church is indeed correct, then the parish church cannot be the original infirmary that we would normally anticipate east of a cloistral range positioned to the south of the church. As already indicated, the 13th-century fabric in the school basement is a good candidate for the infirmary chapel, suggesting that the parish church's origins are as a guesthouse placed appropriately within the outer court to the north of the abbey church. Baggs' suggestion that the surviving gatehouse fragment is analogous to the 'Abbot's Gate' at Peterborough (Cambridgeshire) (linking the outer and inner courts and not forming the main gate to

the monastery) then follows logically, at least for an initial phase of the layout. The main gate must originally have lain further to the north-west, leading into the area of the outer court that contained the guesthouse. One can argue that the change in function of the guesthouse to parish church in the early 13th century led to the withdrawal of the main gate to permit access by the townspeople to the church: the inner gate may have then become the new main gate. Whichever arrangement is correct, a two-phase model is implied.

- 1.3.15 The 1999 survey project provided further important evidence through geophysical surveying of the area to the south and east of the 13th-century 'chapel'. Although access was restricted to grassed lawns, high-resistance anomalies were mapped and ground-penetrating radar transects were taken across these providing confirmation of their depth and substance. These anomalies clearly indicated the wall lines of three further masonry structures positioned to the east of the chapel (No 10), aligned ordinarily with it and with the surviving wall foundations located beneath the churchyard wall some 80m to the north. In addition, an area of generally enhanced resistance to the south of the chapel may have signalled a further stone structure, while further geophysical surveying suggested former structures well to the north-west, south of the churchyard wall.

The Abbey Precinct

- 1.3.16 The RCHME identified the more obvious earthworks within the abbey environs, with a large oval enclosure representing the abbey precinct itself (RCHME 1926, 210). These earthworks are, however, more complex than they appear at first glance. The line of the enclosure ditches is clear to the north-east and south-east, where they cut across the high island ridge, but they are not visible in the eastern part of the circuit across a bay of low-lying fenland.
- 1.3.17 To the extreme north is a cluster of very large rectangular 'pits' or earthworks, one of which the RCHME show as a pond. These lie at the north-western terminus of a large ditch that curves around to the east and south and which forms the north-eastern part of the monastic enclosure. Westwards of this point (running to the junction of New Road with Great Whyte) the enclosure ditch is replaced by the line of a ditch or channel that runs below and parallel to the 5m contour (at approximately 3m OD), and has the effect of flattening off the enclosure's northwestern side. This channel feeds either into or out of the large pond-like earthwork complex.
- 1.3.18 The position of the western precinct boundary line is represented by a surviving ditch that again runs just below the 5m contour and is positioned around 80m west of Hollow Lane, which itself leads towards the late-medieval gatehouse. The ditch links to earthworks south of Hollow Lane shown on the RCHME plan.
- 1.3.19 To the south-east and north-east there is some evidence (stronger at the south-east) for the existence of a double boundary, or of different versions of the precinct; the information being recoverable from early edition OS maps, recent aerial photographs and an excavated section through a previously unknown boundary ditch (Mortimer 2006). It is possible that these alignments represent the line of, and ditched flood defences for, a trackway around the outside of the precinct.
- 1.3.20 Booth's Hill, an Anarchy fortification, lies at the extreme south of the precinct and could either have been set within it (dating the enclosure to before the Anarchy period) or deliberately enclosed by it (dating after the Anarchy). Scholars usually interpret Booth's Hill as a defensive work dating to 1143 when de Mandeville's forces occupied and fortified the abbey. It was no doubt located to command the seasonally dry land to the

south of the island on which the monastery lies, and across which an ancient routeway, from Ramsey to its former mother parish church at Bury (Cambridgeshire), is believed to have existed (D Cozens pers. comm.). Unlike the crossing from the mainland to the west, this route would not involve a crossing of the Bury Brook. Parts of this route may be fossilised in the footpaths that still run to the east of the Bury Brook between Bury and Ramsey.

- 1.3.21 It is probable that the causeway to the mainland due west from the abbey was in place by the middle or end of the 12th century, as it was at this point that the settlement outside the abbey gate was granted a market (Page, et al 1932, 188); it is possible that until this route's construction the main way onto the island was direct from Bury to the south. The causeway would not only have had to cross deep fen but also the course, or multiple courses, of the Bury Brook and it may be that the canalisation of the Bury Brook was begun at this time — a causeway would necessitate the closing off of all but one course of the stream, and also the construction of a bridge. The early bridge would have been of wood, but was of stone by the 13th century.
- 1.3.22 The relationship between the precinct boundary and the growth and shape of the town of Ramsey itself is undoubtedly complicated. While we cannot fully explore this subject here, it is important to note the following observations. Surviving property boundaries visible to the north of Little Whyte and to the south of High Street preserve the original precinct boundary line and give a position for the original western gateway, and perhaps also a logical position for further defensive works from the Anarchy period. Ramsey's plan was probably first formalised at, or soon after, the award of a market charter in 1200. This may have resulted in establishment of the market place between the current High Street and Little Whyte, but it is also possible that an informal arrangement was already in existence here. Whatever the case, by 1222 (when the guesthouse was converted into a church for the parish), the precinct boundary may have been redefined to provide access to the church. This change also offered the possibility of infilling the resultant space with further properties and allowed the market place to be extended eastwards to the current Church Green. The resultant peculiar curving shape of properties is visible north of Little Whyte. South of the new parish church, the southern churchyard boundary became aligned on the north wall of the abbey church and a new gateway into the precinct was established where the late 15th-century structure was later built (Spoerry and Cooper 2000). This gateway may already have been in existence as the entrance to the inner court.

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 The author would like thank Paddy Mcauley of Lindum Gropup who commissioned the works. The author would also like to thank Stephen Macaulay who managed the project and Quinton Carroll who monitored the works.
- 1.4.2 Thanks should also be given to Kat Nicholls for her work on site.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The objective of this archaeological monitoring was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits along the pipe route.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The instruction required that the pipe route was monitored for archaeological deposits.
- 2.2.2 Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a small 360° excavator using a toothless ditching bucket.
- 2.2.3 Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.
- 2.2.4 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.
- 2.2.5 Site conditions were fair with good sunny weather. The ground was fairly dry.

3 RESULTS

- 3.1.1 The pipe route (see fig.2) was 0.50m wide and excavated to a maximum depth of 1.1m. The pipe route ran along the line of an earlier gas pipe and therefore the majority of the excavated deposits were already disturbed. Generally the route was excavated through either tarmac and hardcore (11 & 12) or topsoil, subsoil (1 & 2) onto gravel (3) and a mid grey-brown clay (8) onto a natural of yellowish brown sandy clay (9).
- 3.1.2 During the excavation of the pipe route the only areas of archaeological interest were the potential remnants of one stone built wall (structure 10. see fig 2), composed of faced material surrounding a rubble core. Two further archaeological features were found to the west of the wall. Feature 4 was a possible cut containing a single fill (5) of a dark grey-brown clayey silt with occasional stone inclusions. The fill was truncated by feature (6), a potential modern service cut which was filled by a single fill (7) of mid grey-brown clayey silt with frequent rubble inclusions.

Finds Summary

- 3.1.3 A mix of post-medieval glass, pottery and clay pipe were seen throughout deposit (8). Worked stone was recovered from structure 10 and from uncertain contexts.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The wall located near the boundary wall has not previously been identified. However, it is unclear how this relates to the abbey buildings or if it is part of them. The location does, however, coincide with the suggested abbey outline (Spoerry *et al.* 2008). Due to the small area excavated it is not possible, however, to confirm what the wall actually relates to.

APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Gas pipe trench was largely machined along the line of previous services and therefore revealed little archaeology. A fragment of stone wall and some cut features were identified in the trench					Avg. depth (m)	1.1
					Width (m)	0.5
					Length (m)	120
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
1	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
2	Layer	-	0.3	Subsoil	-	-
3	Layer	-	0.16	Gravel Layer	-	-
4	Cut	-	0.69	Possible feature cut	-	-
5	Fill	-	0.69	Fill of cut 4	-	-
6	Cut	-	0.69	Cut feature	-	-
7	Fill	-	0.69	Fill of 6	-	-
8	Layer	-	0.7	Buried soil?	-	-
9	Layer	-	0.5	Gravel layer	-	-
10	Structure	-	0.75	Stone wall seen in section	-	-
11	Layer	-	0.1	Tarmac	-	-
12	Layer	-	0.1	Hardcore underlying tarmac	-	-
13	Layer	-	0.5	Topsoil	Co-Op Milk bottle	Modern

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APPENDIX C. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

Project Details

OASIS Number	oxfordar3-180584			
Project Name	Ramsey Abbey College, Gas Pipeline Monitoring, Ramsey Abbey, Ramsey			
Project Dates (fieldwork)	Start	03-04-2014	Finish	07-04-2014
Previous Work (by OA East)	Yes		Future Work	Unknown

Project Reference Codes

Site Code	RASRAB14	Planning App. No.	
HER No.	ECB 4126	Related HER/OASIS No.	

Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt	Electricity Act 1989 Section 36
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Please select all techniques used:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Field Observation (periodic visits)	<input type="checkbox"/> Part Excavation	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvage Record
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Excavation (100%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Part Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Systematic Field Walking
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Recorded Observation	<input type="checkbox"/> Systematic Metal Detector Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Test Pit Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Open-Area Excavation	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvage Excavation	<input type="checkbox"/> Watching Brief

Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods

List feature types using the [NMR Monument Type Thesaurus](#) and significant finds using the [MDA Object type Thesaurus](#) together with their respective periods. If no features/finds were found, please state "none".

Monument	Period	Object	Period
Wall	Uncertain		Select period...
	Select period...		Select period...
	Select period...		Select period...

Project Location

County	Cambridgeshire	Site Address (including postcode if possible)	
District	Huntingdon District	Abbey Road, Ramsey Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE26 1DG	
Parish	Ramsey		
HER	Cambridgeshire		
Study Area	c.120m	National Grid Reference	TL 2985

Project Originators

Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	Cambridgeshire County Council
Project Design Originator	Stephen Macaulay
Project Manager	Stephen Macaulay
Supervisor	Anthony Haskins

Project Archives

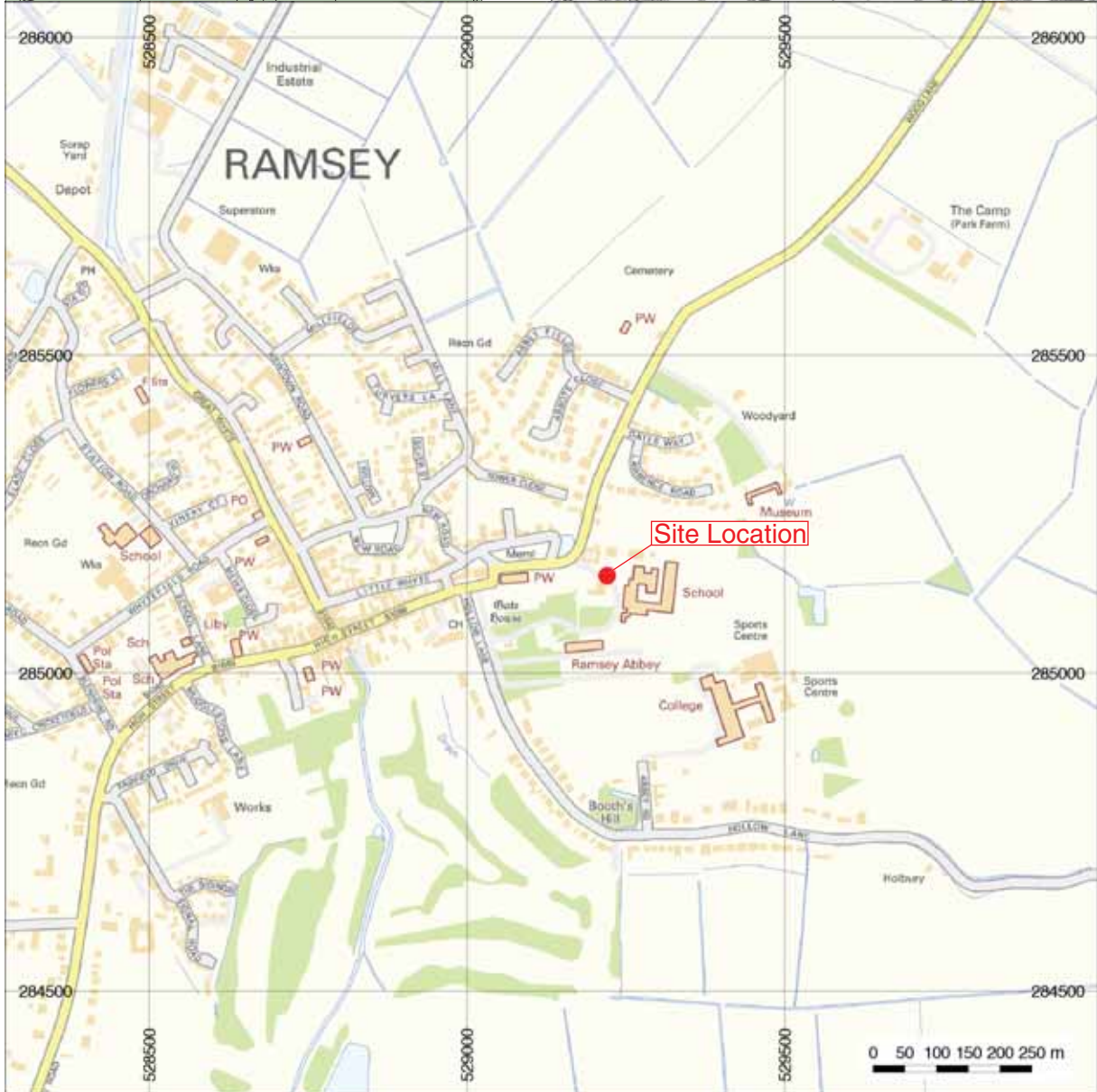
Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
Location ...	Location ...	Location ...
Accession ID ...	Accession ID ...	Accession ID ...

Archive Contents/Media

	Physical Contents	Digital Contents	Paper Contents
Animal Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ceramics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glass	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leather	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Metal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stratigraphic		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Survey		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Textiles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Bone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Stone/Lithic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Digital Media	Paper Media
<input type="checkbox"/> Database	<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photos
<input type="checkbox"/> GIS	<input type="checkbox"/> Context Sheet
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysics	<input type="checkbox"/> Correspondence
<input type="checkbox"/> Images	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Diary
<input type="checkbox"/> Illustrations	<input type="checkbox"/> Drawing
<input type="checkbox"/> Moving Image	<input type="checkbox"/> Manuscript
<input type="checkbox"/> Spreadsheets	<input type="checkbox"/> Map
<input type="checkbox"/> Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Matrices
<input type="checkbox"/> Text	<input type="checkbox"/> Microfilm
<input type="checkbox"/> Virtual Reality	<input type="checkbox"/> Misc.
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research/Notes
	<input type="checkbox"/> Photos
	<input type="checkbox"/> Plans
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Report
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sections
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey

Notes:



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Figure 1: Site location

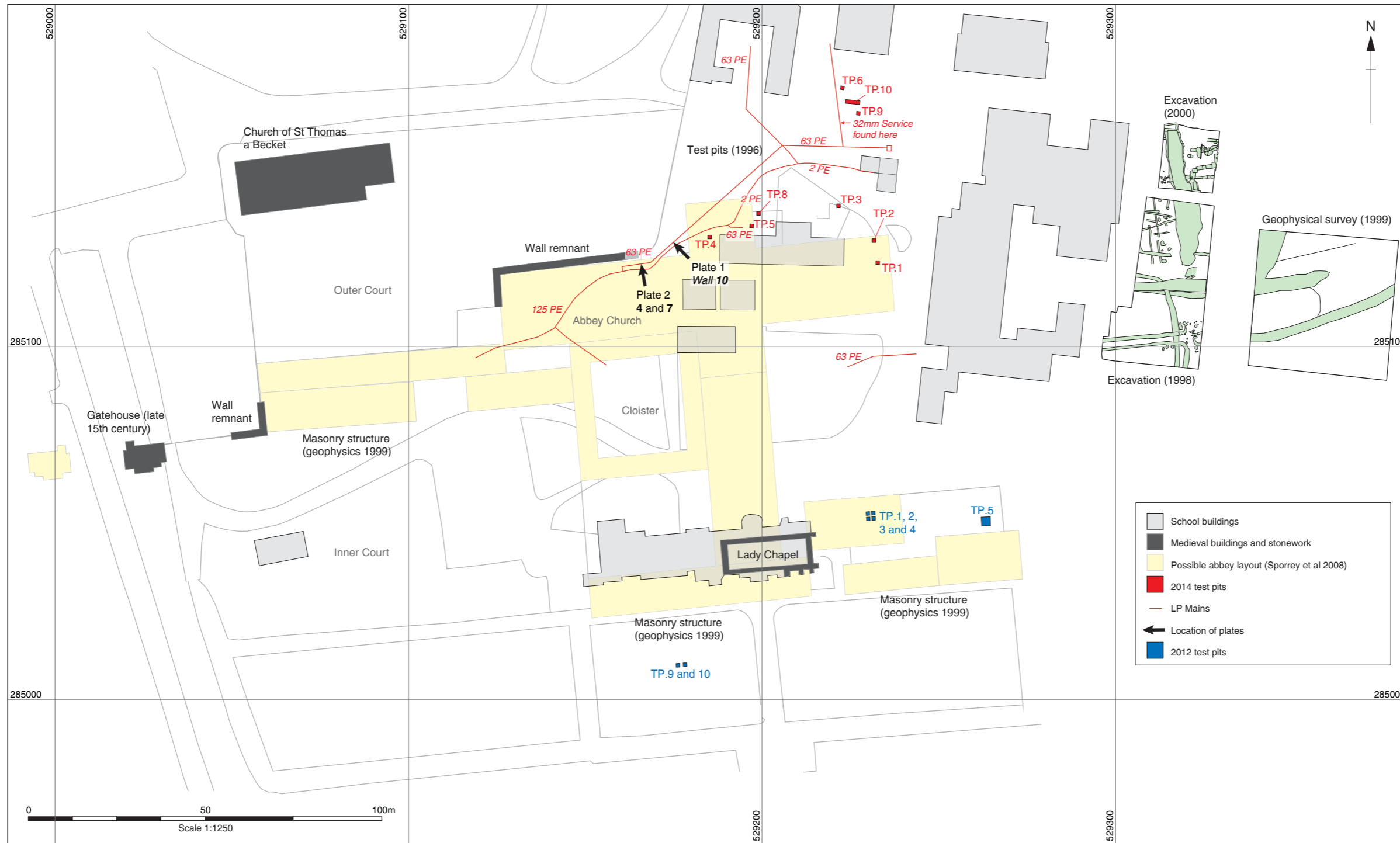


Figure **: Ramsey Abbey: interpretive plan showing surviving buildings and archaeological interventions and monitoring (2014 red)



Plate 1: Detail of stone wall structure **10**



Plate 2: Cut features **4** and **7**



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