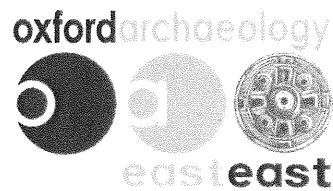


St Neots Priory

A ground penetrating
radar survey and
reassessment of priory
layout



March 2010

Client: St Neots Town Centre Initiative

OA East Report No: 1173

OASIS No: oxfordar3-74834

NGR: TL 181 603

A Ground Penetrating Radar Survey on the Site of St Neots Priory and a New Assessment of Evidence for the Position and Plan of the Priory Buildings

By Paul Spoerry Btech, PhD MIFA and Peter Masters (with qualifications)

Editor: Stephen Macaulay BA, MPhil, MIFA

Illustrator: Louise Bush MA PIFA

Report Date: March 2010

Report Number: 1173
Site Name: St. Neots Priory
HER Event No: ECB 3262
Date of Works: November 2009
Client Name: St Neots Town Centre Initiative
Client Ref: n/a
Planning Ref: n/a
Grid Ref: TL 181 603
Site Code: STNTCI 09
Finance Code: STNTCI 09
Receiving Body: n/a
Accession No: n/a
Prepared by: Paul Spoerry
Position: Manager, OA East
Date: 8th March 2010
Checked by: Stephen Macaulay
Position: Manager, OA East
Date: March 2010
Signed:

Disclaimer

This document has been prepared for the titled project or named part thereof and should not be relied upon or used for any other project without an independent check being carried out as to its suitability and prior written authority of Oxford Archaeology being obtained. Oxford Archaeology accepts no responsibility or liability for the consequences of this document being used for a purpose other than the purposes for which it was commissioned. Any person/party using or relying on the document for such other purposes agrees and will by such use or reliance be taken to confirm their agreement to indemnify Oxford Archaeology for all loss or damage resulting therefrom. Oxford Archaeology accepts no responsibility or liability for this document to any party other than the person/party by whom it was commissioned.

Oxford Archaeology East,
15 Trafalgar Way,
Bar Hill,
Cambridge,
CB23 8SQ

t: 01223 850500
f: 01223 850599
e: oaeast@thehumanjourney.net
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net/oaeast>

© Oxford Archaeology East 2010
Oxford Archaeology Limited is a Registered Charity No: 285627

Table of Contents

Summary.....	5
1 Introduction.....	6
1.1 The Project.....	6
1.2 Archaeological study of St Neots Priory.....	6
2 Methodology.....	9
2.1 Survey strategy.....	9
2.2 Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) Survey Methodology.....	9
3 Results (P. Masters).....	10
3.1 Introduction	10
3.2 General responses.....	10
3.3 Specific responses.....	10
4 Discussion of Results in relation to previous work on the plan of St Neots Priory (P. Sperry)	12
4.1 The difference in alignment.....	12
4.2 A critical assessment of Tebbutt's plan for St Neots Priory and of subsequent evidence.....	13
4.3 A multi-phase monastic plan.....	14
4.4 Conclusions.....	15
Appendix A. Bibliography	17
Appendix B. OASIS Report Form	18

List of Figures

- Fig. 1 Site location map
- Fig. 2 Tebbutt's Priory plan and modern map data (detail of interventions etc)
- Fig. 3 GPR survey grid locations
- Fig. 4 Tebbutt's plan and GPR interpretation

Summary

Lottery funding for the St Neots Town Centre initiative enabled the commissioning of a Ground-Penetrating Radar Survey over the site of St Neots Priory; a medieval alien house that was partly excavated in the 1950s and early 1960s by C.F. Tebbutt, and which now lies mostly under modern buildings and car parks, but which is for the most part designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The survey was carried out by Cranfield University, with fourteen survey transects placed in three contiguous blocks over the putative site of the west range, north range and kitchens, and east range/chapter house respectively. Responses interpreted as buried wall foundations were identified in all locations but none could be precisely related to excavated features.

The anomalies that were identified for the most part appeared to be aligned ordinarily with the cardinal compass points, unlike the excavated priory plan which was for the most part aligned about twelve degrees west of north. A variety of possible explanations for these were results were considered, including that the original excavated plan was mis-aligned, but the latter can be discounted in general terms as three surviving column bases that still lie below manhole covers, are clearly correctly mapped. Re-analysis of Tebbutt's excavation report provides some alternative explanations. His plan is in some cases based on a very limited view of structures. Additionally he observed but did not fully record other buildings, some of these were undoubtedly earlier phases of the priory and some were perhaps on differing alignments. He also planned one large structure to the north of the main convent that he identified as a late medieval infirmary and which was commonly aligned with the GPR anomalies. Clearly Tebbutt's plan, although undoubtedly quite accurate in its depiction of some buildings to the north and east of the cloister garth, was an over-simplification of a multi-phase complex and it should therefore be no surprise that below-ground GPR anomalies that represent important archaeological features exist on other alignments both within the area of the Scheduled Ancient Monument and perhaps beyond.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Project

- 1.1.1 In July 2009 the St Neots Town Centre Initiative were awarded a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for Phase 2 of the St Neots Shared Heritage project. Building on the success of the Phase 1 project in 2006 an element of Phase 2 was to extend the research on the 'Lost Priory' (of St Neots) and carry out a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) Survey of the remains of the Benedictine Priory (Fig. 1). Oxford Archaeology East, as a partner in the St Neots Town Centre Initiative project, provided the archaeological advice and delivered the work through a partnership with Cranfield University.
- 1.1.2 The project aims were to identify as far as possible the extent and survival of foundations of the priory (as well as other buried remains) through Ground-Penetrating Radar survey, and where possible to interpret these to create as accurate picture as possible of the Benedictine monastery. The remote sensing (GPR) results were to be interpreted in conjunction with the known excavation evidence undertaken by Tebbutt in the 1950s and 1960s and by Cambridgeshire County Council's Archaeological Field Unit (now OA East) in the 1990s, to attempt to update the plan of the remains.
- 1.1.3 The results of the survey are intended to contribute to both ongoing academic research and to public enjoyment and understanding of the site.
- 1.1.4 In addition the results will be supplied to English Heritage to inform on the ongoing management of the Scheduled Ancient Monument.

1.2 Archaeological study of St Neots Priory

The Anglo-Saxon Priory

- 1.2.1 The earliest surviving manuscript to refer to the Saxon priory is the Liber Eliensis which relates the story of its foundation based on an earlier Anglo-Saxon foundation charter, stating that the priory was founded in c.974 by Bishop Aethelwold: formal foundation and dedication of the priory appears, however, to be more likely to date to 979-984 (Chibnall 1966, 69). In the Liber Eliensis account, Leofric and his wife Leoflaed requested that the priory at Ely established monks at Eynesbury. Monks were dispatched from Ely and Thorney, and 18 hides of land endowed. An inventory of English saints completed in 1020 lists the bones of Saint Neot as being at rest at the monastery at Eynesbury (Chibnall 1966, 69).
- 1.2.2 There is very little documentary evidence for the pre-Conquest priory except that its post-Conquest successor, newly founded in 1086, immediately received rights to some tithes in the parish which was a common way of compensating a monastery for lands formerly in its possession (Chibnall 1966, 70). Amongst the land pleas for the daughter houses of the Saxon monastery at Ely, however, there are none for land assigned to St Neots which raises doubts as to the priory's link with Ely and with the account in Liber Eliensis. There is no mention of St Neots in the Domesday Book, which tends to lend weight to the argument that the pre-Conquest history was manufactured in order to rival the story of the origins of the priory of St Ivo at Slepe (St Ives).
- 1.2.3 No certain archaeological traces of a Late Saxon priory have been found in St Neots. Tebbutt's excavation of the post-Conquest priory did not investigate systematically below the medieval buildings.

The Medieval Priory

- 1.2.4 The later monastery was refounded as a daughter house to the Benedictine Abbey of Bec by Richard Fitz Wimarc shortly after the Conquest (Chibnall 1966, 70). A new church was started in 1100 and, in 1113, the priory was formally refounded. By the 13th and 14th centuries the priory had increased in importance, although by the late 15th century, the house was in financial difficulties with many of its buildings in poor repair. This was remedied, however, and the house regained its status before its dissolution in 1539 (Chibnall 1966, 74).
- 1.2.5 During the 1950s and 1960s, Tebbutt excavated the foundations of the priory in the area now given Scheduled Ancient Monument status (Tebbutt 1956, 1966). He produced a ground plan of the medieval priory with all the standard buildings of a Benedictine foundation located around its cloister (Fig. 2), the most substantial buildings being the stone-built chapter house, refectory and dormitory. The south wall of the Priory precinct was discovered during building works to have been some 10 metres to the north of the north side of the Market Square, parallel with the present building line. Around ten metres further north from this line Tebbutt found the robbed foundations of a large stone-built building with glazed tile flooring which he took to be the priory church. Although the monastic church would more usually have been located to the north of the claustral range, the reversal of plan proposed by Tebbutt is not uncommon. In support of this interpretation Tebbutt also made some observations regarding the presence of Christian burials on both sides of and beneath the southern arm of the precinct wall (Tebbutt 1956, 83-85 and fig. 2; 1966, 44-55). These would clearly be expected to have lain adjacent to the church, but this evidence also suggested that the extent of this graveyard had changed over time.
- 1.2.6 The full layout of the priory precinct is not known. The priory gate stood in Priory Lane until 1814 and a plaque on the current building marks the spot. The south door of the priory church appears, at least in the late medieval period, to have opened off the Market Square thereby giving public access to the church's south aisle. With the convent lying to the north of the church and the main gate being to the west, it is appropriate to view the buildings as planned by Tebbutt, with the outer court lying also to the west and the most private spaces of the dormer range being to the east. Further to the north the priory fish ponds were on the site of the present garden opposite the Baptist Church in New Street. The positions of some of the other buildings the monastery needed are uncertain, and although Tebbutt identified the infirmary and suggested the position of Prior's Lodging, the actual extent seen of each was minimal.
- 1.2.7 Rather minimal archaeological watching briefs were carried out in 1986 and 1987 on the site of the present Waitrose store approximately 50m to the east of the conventual buildings. Despite limited access to much of the site two more burials were found, one male and one female (Horton and Wait 1989, 11). Both burials were in stone coffins with decorated lids and appear to date to the 13th century. In 1989, another watching brief was undertaken during a sewer replacement in Priory Lane, which exposed a number of burials as well as remains of a building associated with the Priory (Horton and Wait 1989; Alexander and Popescu 2005, fig. 1). Additionally in 1993, excavations were carried out in advance of a shop extension at Market Square, St Neots (Alexander and Popescu 2005, 117-126) that exposed the remains of 38 graves, which contained 44 individuals dating from the Late Saxon to medieval periods.
- 1.2.8 Although there are shortcomings in Tebbutt's work and his idealised plan of the priory has been criticised (Haigh 1988), it is still believed that the priory church lay on the south side of the monastic precinct and that the cloister lay to the north (Spoerry 2000,

155) . In addition it is clear that where Tebbutt investigated a greater percentage of the walls or floor plan of buildings, that his interpretation of their extent, form and function has credence. This applies to buildings mainly in the northern part of the claustral ranges. Beyond that, however, his excavations were in fact rather minimal in extent and therefore his interpretations are rather less secure.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Survey strategy

- 2.1.1 The remains of St Neots Priory lie today beneath either existing buildings or under tarmac car parks and roads. In order to gain an insight into the survival and plan of these remains a ground penetrating survey was deemed the most appropriate technique required to record any surviving wall alignments, either previously unidentified or as conjectured by Tebbutt (1966).
- 2.1.2 Four areas of land were chosen to be surveyed using this technique based on their potential and availability. These were covered by fourteen survey grids as shown on Figure 3.
- 2.1.3 Detailed area surveys were undertaken over a regular grid with traverses spaced at 0.5m or 1m intervals. Profiles collected over the grid were acquired in a parallel fashion. Processing was carried out using RAMAC GroundVision 1.4.4 software for individual time-slices. DC offset correction and linear time gain was applied to the radar data to correct for low frequency noise and amplitude attenuation with distance, respectively. For gridded survey areas, REFLEX3DScan software was used to generate horizontal amplitude slices. The survey grid was located to sub-metre accuracy by DGPS (for example, Trimble GeoXT 2005). The recorded points were downloaded into CAD/GIS software in order to locate, rectify and analyse the survey results in a spatial context.
- 2.1.4 The Survey locations were determined by the evidence of previous archaeological investigations, notably Tebbutt in the 1950s and 1960s and the conjectural plans which he created from his limited excavations. The transects were positioned to locate the extensions of major walls in the first instance to test his theory of the layout of the Benedictine Monastery (Tebbutt 1966) and then either validate or re-assess this projected plan.

2.2 Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) Survey Methodology

- 2.2.1 A Malå Geoscience AB RAMAC/GPR system consisting of shielded monostatic antenna, CU11 control unit and XV monitor was used to collect profiles with a 500MHz antenna. The 500MHz antenna was selected as most suitable centre frequency for obtaining the depth penetration and lateral resolution required for the survey. Gridded profiles were collected over the site at 0.5m intervals and a station spacing of 0.05m and 0.08m. The nominal location of each gridded area is shown in Figure 3. Processing was carried out using Reflexw 3D software. DC offset correction and linear time gain was applied to the radar data to correct for low frequency noise and amplitude attenuation with distance respectively. In addition, a median filter was used to sharpen the significant reflections recorded in the dataset.
- 2.2.2 The underlying geology is comprised Oxford Clay and Oolitic limestone (Geological Map data © NERC 2008). The GPR responses of these types of geologies is generally average on depth and target being detected (Gaffney & Gater 2003, 78; EH 2008, 15,28).

3 RESULTS (P. MASTERS)

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 A total of 15 gridded areas were recorded along traverses set at 0.5m apart across selected areas of the car parks.

3.2 General responses

- 3.2.1 The survey conditions at the site were very reasonable for GPR as the ground is under tarmac. The depth of penetration was generally good with significant reflections recorded to a two-way travel depth of up to 1.6m.
- 3.2.2 The top most uniform reflections appear in all GPR profiles represent air waves that are followed by very distinct high amplitude reflections visible as thick black lines are derived from the ground waves and are seen up to the depth of 0.4m.

3.3 Specific responses

- 3.3.1 Specific features interpreted from the survey from study of horizontal data slices are discussed below and are presented in summary form on plan (Figure 4). Grid location are shown on Figure 3.
- 3.3.2 Grids 1, 2 and 15 were surveyed across a private car park adjacent to Priory House. Grids 1 and 2 were 6m wide and 10m long whilst grid 15 was 6m x 6m.
- 3.3.3 Grid 1 revealed no traces of wall foundations although from the conjectured plan the westernmost wall of the cellarium should have been detected. No distinctive reflections were recorded in the resultant data. This is perhaps surprising as here in the northern part of the range Tebbutt described the building as having surviving floors with the remains of a wooden medieval door lying on top of them (op. Cit., 39).
- 3.3.4 Grid 2 revealed a possible linear anomaly 1 at a time depth of 11.38ns (0.20-0.30m) possibly indicating the presence of a wall-like feature. Diagonally opposing this wall was a further linear anomaly (light blue line) heading towards the building and probably denoting the presence of a service. A linear anomaly 2 running in a north-south direction and parallel to the existing building could indicate the presence of a wall. Tebbutt described the range here as heavily disturbed to a considerable depth, but also as having "the appearance of a filled in cellar" (op. cit., 38). It is not therefore clear how substantial the survival may have been in the 1960s, but the GPR data does suggest the presence of structures, albeit no on the alignment that Tebbutt recorded.
- 3.3.5 Grid 15 showed a rectilinear anomaly 3 in the resultant horizontal time slices, which may indicate the presence of wall-like feature. Its angle is, however at odds with the conjectured plan of the Priory suggesting that this may not be related. As Tebbutt's adjacent building was described by him as being poorly preserved and as having been a wooden structure, a failure to record it in the GPR survey may not be surprising.
- 3.3.6 Grids 4, 5, 9 were recorded in the Huntingdonshire public car park opposite the Waitrose store car park. Grid 4 was located over the area conjectured to contain the remains of the kitchen, and guest hall and associated less substantial structures to the east. A series of parallel linear anomalies (Fig 4, dashed brown lines) probably reflect the presence of drains considering there is a drain cover located at the centre of this gridded area. These were also recorded in Grid 5. At 10.63ns (0.40-0.50m) a rectilinear anomaly 4 with a curving corner was recorded indicating possible wall remains. If this relates to the Priory plan then the rectilinear feature appears to link two walls together

unlike Tebbutt's plan, which shows an open space between the two buildings and nothing on this alignment. The lack of any signal response to the remains of the kitchen and guest hall is very surprising.

- 3.3.7 Grid 9 located in the south-eastern corner of the car park, revealed a linear anomaly that may indicate the presence of the cloister garth as it correlates closely with Tebbutt's plan (1966, fig. 2).
- 3.3.8 Grid 5 indicated a short rectilinear anomaly (Fig. 4), which may indicate a corner of a wall and appears to closely correlate with the north-west corner of the refectory.
- 3.3.9 Grids 6-8, and 10-14 were located in the Waitrose store car park opposite to the former Priory Walk.
- 3.3.10 Grid 6 located in the Waitrose store car park at northern end of the survey area. Two linear anomalies were recorded in and are spaced approximately 14.5m apart. Their alignment again appears not to coincide with the conjectured plan of the priory. These features also do not align with any of the buildings and walls on the historic mapping. Therefore, it is likely that they may resolve as shallow drains.
- 3.3.11 A substantial linear high amplitude reflection was recorded in the adjacent grid, 7. This appears to indicate a possible wall alignment possibly relating to the eastern wall of the monk's dormitory based on Tebbutt's plan.
- 3.3.12 Further to the south, Grid 8 indicated possible remains of a short rectilinear anomaly (8). This feature appears to not respond to any walls relating to the medieval priory or those depicted on the historic maps. It is more likely to reflect remains of rubble underlying the tarmac surface of the car park.
- 3.3.13 However in Grid 10, a fairly wide linear anomaly was recorded suggesting possible wall remains as this alignment closely relates to the southern wall of the cistern. However, it is more likely to reflect a service or drain as it is quite close to the surface.
- 3.3.14 Grid 11 showed no indications of wall remains. However, near surface reflections were recorded denoting a drain aligned north-south (blue line). This is in fact a surface drain, which can be clearly seen in the car park.
- 3.3.15 Grid 12 indicated a short rectilinear anomaly (11) which may indicate the presence of possible wall foundation. Other anomalies recorded reflected the same alignment as in Grid 11.
- 3.3.16 Grid 13 did not reveal any significant amplitude reflections.
- 3.3.17 Grid 14 recorded a linear anomaly (blue line) at approximately 0.10m below the surface. This is likely to denote the presence of a service or a very shallow foundation of more recent origin than that of the medieval priory remains.

4 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS IN RELATION TO PREVIOUS WORK ON THE PLAN OF ST NEOTS PRIORY (P. SPOERRY)

4.1 The difference in alignment

4.1.1 The GPR survey results provide an intriguing opportunity to re-interpret the whole plan of the priory. The clearest new information is that almost all of the anomalies, and hence masonry structures and alignments, identified through the GPR survey appear to be aligned with the cardinal points of the compass. This is at odds with Tebbutt's interpretative plan (published in 1966 and here Figure 2) that shows the convent to be almost wholly aligned about twelve degrees to the west of true north. There is no doubt that the recent survey work, located using a modern GPS, is correctly positioned and aligned. This means one of a number of alternative interpretations must be adopted to explain these differences.

(A) Tebbutt's surveying was wrong

4.1.2 Although there is nothing else in the work of C F Tebbutt to suggest that his surveying and resultant plans were generally inaccurate, the very nature of his investigations at St Neots Priory may have introduced error. The excavations were conducted piecemeal over several years, with small trenches being positioned in what were often small gardens and yards, sometimes perhaps lacking in good lines of site to fully surveyed buildings and/or other parts of the priory plan. Such a context could surely introduce the capacity for error and mis-alignment. A counter-argument can also be made, in that with so many surviving boundaries surely Tebbutt would have been able to tie-in his trenches very easily to alignments that were clearly identifiable on the large-scale OS Maps then available.

(B) Tebbutt's small trenches and narrow view of wall alignments resulted in error in extrapolation of alignments.

4.1.3 This must be seen as a real possibility in those parts of the priory plan where Tebbutt's trenches crossed, rather than followed, wall-lines. Without knowledge of most of Tebbutt's trench sizes and shapes (he only published the outline of lengths of walls he observed *within* his trenches) it is hard to be certain whether he was accurate in that which he published. Clearly where his plan was more completely drawn for actual observations of large fragments of wall alignments, then it is more likely to be correct. This perhaps applies to some buildings north and east of his cloister, but not to anywhere else on his reconstruction plan.

4.1.4 Reassurance that Tebbutt did not mis-align his priory buildings wholesale through survey error is provided through the fact that three pillar bases from the centre of a major stone-built vaulted building, that Tebbutt identified as an undercroft below the monks dormitory, are still *in situ* beneath manhole covers in the 'Waitrose' carpark. The position of these pillar bases has been plotted and overlaid alongside Tebbutt's plan and modern map data. Reassuringly the position of the surviving remains and Tebbutt's plan of them match closely, and the alignment of his building seems to be correct. This is a strong basis to assume that those parts of the convent that Tebbutt excavated more fully, and which aligned with the cloister, can indeed be assumed to have been correctly positioned in the 1966 excavation report.

4.1.5 In conclusion it can be suggested that some of the major elements of Tebbutt's plan, and specifically the alignment of the claustral ranges, seem correct and that where the

GPR survey has identified anomalies on differing alignments, an alternative origin must be sought.

4.2 A critical assessment of Tebbutt's plan for St Neots Priory and of subsequent evidence

4.2.1 Where Tebbutt's plan most clearly lacks clarity in terms of general arrangement and alignment is in its southern and northern thirds.

4.2.2 To the south the evidence is very sparse but Tebbutt took this to be the site of the monastic church and the clear evidence for many medieval Christian burials at several points under the historic properties here on the north side of the Market Place (summarised in Alexander *et al* 2005) certainly suggests him to be correct in general terms. More specifically Tebbutt's excavations found evidence of a glazed medieval tile floor where he suggests the western part of the church was (1956 and 1966). If we assume he was therefore probably correct in regard of this being the site of part of the monastic church, it is still clear from his plans (Fig 2) that here he saw no substantial lengths of wall alignments. In fact the recorded fragment of his putative west front of the church as shown on his composite plan is too narrow as a foundation for such a major load-bearing structure and is not actually on the alignment he then extrapolated, being instead positioned almost exactly north-south; therefore aligned with the GPR anomalies. The narrow trenches from his earlier excavations as described in his 1956 publication could only identify probable robbed wall-lines marked by gaps in the flooring and/or a basal layer of cobbles and none of these can now give a clearly extrapolated alignment from the published information. Nor are any of these remains clearly recognisable as the base of the wall of a major church, but the extensive areas of floors which had been covered with glazed tiles did itself imply this.

4.2.3 In 1989 archaeologists had a small opportunity to assess whether Tebbutt had correctly positioned the eastern end of the priory church when a sewer trench that ran east-west part of the way along Priory Lane was recorded (Horton and Wait 1990). These investigations confirmed the presence of the northern and eastern walls of a building that was ultimately floored with later 15th century glazed tiles exactly where Tebbutt proposed the northeastern part of the presbytery of the church would be. A short distance to the west another wall line might have represented the eastern wall of the north transept. These findings, although again fragmentary, do seem to confirm that Tebbutt's plan here, where it was perhaps most speculative, is indeed correct. Despite this confirmation of Tebbutt's theories proving to be most gratifying for all concerned, a closer inspection of the 1989 site records suggests that this later generation of archaeologists may also have failed to properly estimate the alignment of these buildings. Site plans and records clearly indicate that the correct alignment of the putative foundation trench for the eastern end wall of the church was not in line with Tebbutt's convent as seen on the published plan (Horton and Wait 1990, 64; Fig. 2) but in fact it aligned close to north-south and therefore with the GPR anomalies described in this report.

4.2.4 The two burials in stone coffins recovered in the 1980s in the Waitrose car parks were suggested as being wealthy benefactors perhaps buried close to the chapter house or north transept of the church (Horton and Wait 1990, 69). Re-assessment of this position as shown on Fig 1 places them instead within the eastern end of a chapter house that would have, in keeping with many other religious houses, extended eastwards beyond the other buildings in this range. As, for example, explained by Gilyard-Beer (1958, 28) this position is where the prior's chair would have been, and at

his feet would have been buried the most illustrious of his predecessors. It would seem logical to deem these burials as being those of two priors, however, the skeletal analysis suggests one of these individuals was probably female. This latter problem remains to be explained.

- 4.2.5 At the northern end of the priory Tebbutt identified a building aligned almost north-south, thus out of step with the rest of the convent, that he identified as the infirmary. Whether this functional identification is correct or not, Tebbutt excavated only a very small part of the structure, but perhaps enough in its southeastern corner for a modern reader to be reasonably sure that his interpretation of its alignment was correct. Of key importance is the fact that Tebbutt took this to be an early building, calling it "the first infirmary(?)" in his report (op. cit. 1966, 43). Further to the north he also found evidence of perhaps other early wooden buildings.
- 4.2.6 The major problem faced when revisiting these reports is that Tebbutt's sample size for many of the buildings he identified was too small for his interpretation of form, function or alignment to be anything other than speculative. As Haigh stated in 1988 regarding Tebbutt's plan "his failure to record the evidence for much of his interpretation has meant that great doubt must be expressed about the actual findings of his excavations" (op. cit. 76). Haigh meant this in relation to Tebbutt's overall plan of the conventional buildings, and it is indeed very clear that by removing his interpretative elements and just studying what he did actually see, that plenty of scope for a variety of versions of the monastic plan is offered. Again this criticism can perhaps be most fairly levelled at the reconstruction of the monastic church, for which, when Tebbutt published his findings, no real data existed other than a general notion of its position. Despite such negative criticism there is no doubt that Tebbutt did recover the position of the cloister and some of the buildings in its ranges and, by simple interpretation, he almost certainly correctly positioned the church in its less usual position on the south side.

4.3 A multi-phase monastic plan

- 4.3.1 A further explanation of the clear differences between the alignment of the GPR anomalies and that of Tebbutt's priory plan might be that the anomalies are not actually remains of the priory, but of buildings and structures of later date, now also lost. This possibility can almost certainly be discounted as none of the historic maps of this part of St Neots, covering the mid-18th century until the 20th century, show any structures that would conform to these positions or alignments.
- 4.3.2 The other obvious alternative is that perhaps the north-south aligned structures identified as GPR anomalies date to a different phase of the priory development than that represented by Tebbutt's proposed plan based around a cloister aligned around 12 degrees to west of north. This possibility warrants further consideration.
- 4.3.3 A religious house that existed for at least four centuries or more, particularly one for which economic and political fortunes varied as enormously as they did in the case of Alien Priories like St Neots, would undoubtedly have experienced changes in plan, building replacement and development. Tebbutt identified phases or rebuild and revision of use in those buildings that had survived more substantially. In the dormer range, this included the insertion of a cistern into the most southerly bay of the dormitory and evidence for the replacement of an upper wooden storey to the range with at least a stone-vaulted roof to the undercroft. Late medieval internal changes were also evident in the northern 'refectory' range and further to the north again the kitchen had, according to Tebbutt been subject to "drastic reconstruction" (op. cit., 40) around 1300 when the already partially altered Norman building was remodelled with a

single span roof replacing the former columns dividing it into four bays. The recognition of a sequence of seven successive re-flooring episodes within the kitchen serves as a reminder of the longevity of usage of the structure, with only 12th century pottery present at the start of the sequence, and from the floor 4 horizon clear evidence of a change of roofing material from clay tiles to stone tiles, being associated with the major rebuild previously identified. In this location Tebbutt also describes the only pre-Conquest feature he identified at the site; an east-west aligned ditch that contained hand-made black micaceous pottery and a sixth/seventh century *sceatta* (op. cit., 41). East of the main kitchen remains Tebbutt identified another poorly-preserved building and beyond that he refers to more ephemeral, probably wooden, structures identifiable only through the presence of the remains of clay floors. North of the kitchen he showed on plan the possible Prior's Lodging, a large, incompletely defined, timber building that in his written description he gives clear dimensions for, but which is only partly represented in plan. Further to the north still he showed on plan the 'infirmary', defined in his text as "The First Infirmary (?)". The remains here were of clay floors and foundation levels of wall lines constructed from cobble stones and occasional pieces of brown sandstone. He confidently described this as a aisled building, although it is likely that not much more than part of one possible aisle was actually seen and recorded. Tebbutt found only 12th century pottery here and in addition he identified more 'black micaceous' Saxon pottery immediately beneath the foundations. Puzzlingly in exploring for the rest of the infirmary to the north he indicates that it's walls had indeed been observed, but that they were badly damaged by later Priory buildings also constructed here. None of this was, however, recorded properly or planned, presumably because he had limited access to explore in the gardens of the then Priory House. He did, however, suggest that the infirmary's foundations were too substantial for a mainly timber building, but that the absence of any other remains implied that despite the rather grandiose foundation plan, the superstructure was never erected.

4.3.4 The overall impression gained from analysis of the remains that Tebbutt excavated and described is that 'his Priory' is in fact a rather 'fossilised' version of what was undoubtedly a more dynamic picture. The creation of such a complete plan was a major achievement, but it was only a best guess and his model becomes increasingly unreliable the further one moves away from the buildings of the northern claustral range, the only group that were in fact reasonably completely excavated.

4.3.5 In the area northwards from the refectory Tebbutt clearly identified other, probably earlier structures in almost every position that remain unplanned, mostly undated and for which no alignment is known. In addition to these possible early Priory buildings, he also found Anglo-Saxon remains; the micaceous black 'Saxon' pottery identified by John Hurst would nowadays be given a date in perhaps the seventh to ninth centuries. Clearly Tebbutt had barely characterised the full sequence of occupation on the site.

4.4 Conclusions

4.4.1 This apparently harsh critique of the work of C.F. Tebbutt must be tempered with respect for a very able archaeologist of his generation, whom it seems managed to get a great deal 'right' about the plan of St Neots Priory.

4.4.2 As indicated in various sections above, the excavated and other evidence indicates that over the four or five centuries during which the priory buildings existed there were clearly different phases of building, with additions to the convent, replacement of buildings, and perhaps even episodes of major re-planning. Tebbutt's plan postulates an "early infirmary" on a north-south alignment co-existing with the main convent

angled twelve degrees to the west. Other early buildings were identified to the north, as referenced in the 1966 excavation report. There is uncertainty over whether the foundations of Tebbutt's church were indeed aligned as he proposed as his fragment of west wall foundation actually seems to have been north-south aligned.

- 4.4.3 In conclusion the possibility that the plan of St Neots Priory included buildings on differing alignments is entirely reasonable. In addition it seems likely that there was at least one episode of re-planning that changed alignment of the main buildings, perhaps from one aligned cardinally to one aligned twelve degrees to the west. This may have resulted in a revision of the alignment of the church itself; Tebbutt may have in fact recorded elements of more than one church building. This could have occurred quite early in the life of the Priory and it may be that Tebbutt's infirmary represents a survival from these earlier arrangements. If this were the case then the north-south aligned GPR anomalies may be interpreted in this context rather than being seen as clear evidence that Tebbutt and his surveyor S. D. Cox mis-aligned their whole plan.

APPENDIX A. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, M., 1994, *Medieval Burials at 25-27 Market Square, St Neots, Cambridgeshire* County Council Archaeological Field Unit Report **89**
- Alexander, M & Shepherd Popescu, E, 2005, 'Excavation of Medieval Burials associated with St Neots Priory', *Proceedings Cambridge Antiquarian Society* **XCIV**, 117-126.
- Chibnall, M., 1966, 'History of the Priory of St Neots', in C.F Tebbutt, 'St Neots Priory', *Proceedings Cambridge Antiquarian Society* **LIX**, 33-74
- Haigh, D., 1988, *The Religious Houses of Cambridgeshire* (Cambridgeshire County Council)
- Horton, W., and Wait, G., 1989, *St Neots Priory 1989*, Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit Report 7
- Page, W., Proby, G., & Ladds, S.I., (eds), 1932, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England, Huntingdonshire*, Vol. 2, 337-346
- Spoerry, P., 2000, 'Estate, Village, Town?: Roman, Saxon and Medieval Settlement in the St Neots area', in M. Dawson *The Archaeology of the Ouse Valley*, CBA Research Reports
- Tebbutt, C.F., 1956, 'Excavations at St Neots, Huntingdonshire', *Proceedings Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, **XLIX**, 79-87
- Tebbutt, C.F., 1960, 'An Early Twelfth-century Building at Eynesbury, Huntingdonshire', *Proceedings Cambridge Antiquarian Society* **LIV**, 85-89
- Tebbutt, C.F., 1966, 'St Neots Priory', *Proceedings Cambridge Antiquarian Society* **LIX**, 33-74

APPENDIX B. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

Project Details

OASIS Number	oxfordar3-74834		
Project Name	A Ground Penetrating Radar Survey on the Site of St Neots Priory		
Project Dates (fieldwork) Start	01-10-2009	Finish	01-10-2009
Previous Work (by OA East)		Future Work	

Project Reference Codes

Site Code	STN TCI 09	Planning App. No.	n/a
HER No.	ECB 3262	Related HER/OASIS No.	n/a

Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt	Research
Development Type	For DBA/Evaluation - select the type of development planned for the site...

Please select all techniques used:

<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - interpretation	<input type="checkbox"/> Grab-Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - new	<input type="checkbox"/> Gravity-Core	<input type="checkbox"/> Sample Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Annotated Sketch	<input type="checkbox"/> Laser Scanning	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure
<input type="checkbox"/> Augering	<input type="checkbox"/> Measured Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Targeted Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Dendrochronological Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Metal Detectors	<input type="checkbox"/> Test Pits
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Documentary Search	<input type="checkbox"/> Phosphate Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Topographic Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Photogrammetric Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Vibro-core
<input type="checkbox"/> Fieldwalking	<input type="checkbox"/> Photographic Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Rectified Photography	

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
priory	Medieval 1066 to 1540		Select period...
	Select period...		Select period...
	Select period...		Select period...

Project Location

County	Cambridgeshire	Site Address (including postcode if possible)
District	Huntigdonshire	Priory Lane St Neots PE19 2BH
Parish	Saint Neots town	
HER	Cambridgeshire	
Study Area	n/a	National Grid Reference TL 181 603

Project Originators

Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	n/a
Project Design Originator	n/a
Project Manager	Stephen Macaulay
Supervisor	n/a

Project Archives

Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
none	OA East office, Bar Hill	CCC Stores Landbeach
n/a	STN TCI 09	STN TCI 09

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 type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Geophysics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Correspondence
<input type="checkbox"/> Images	<input type="checkbox"/> Diary
<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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:

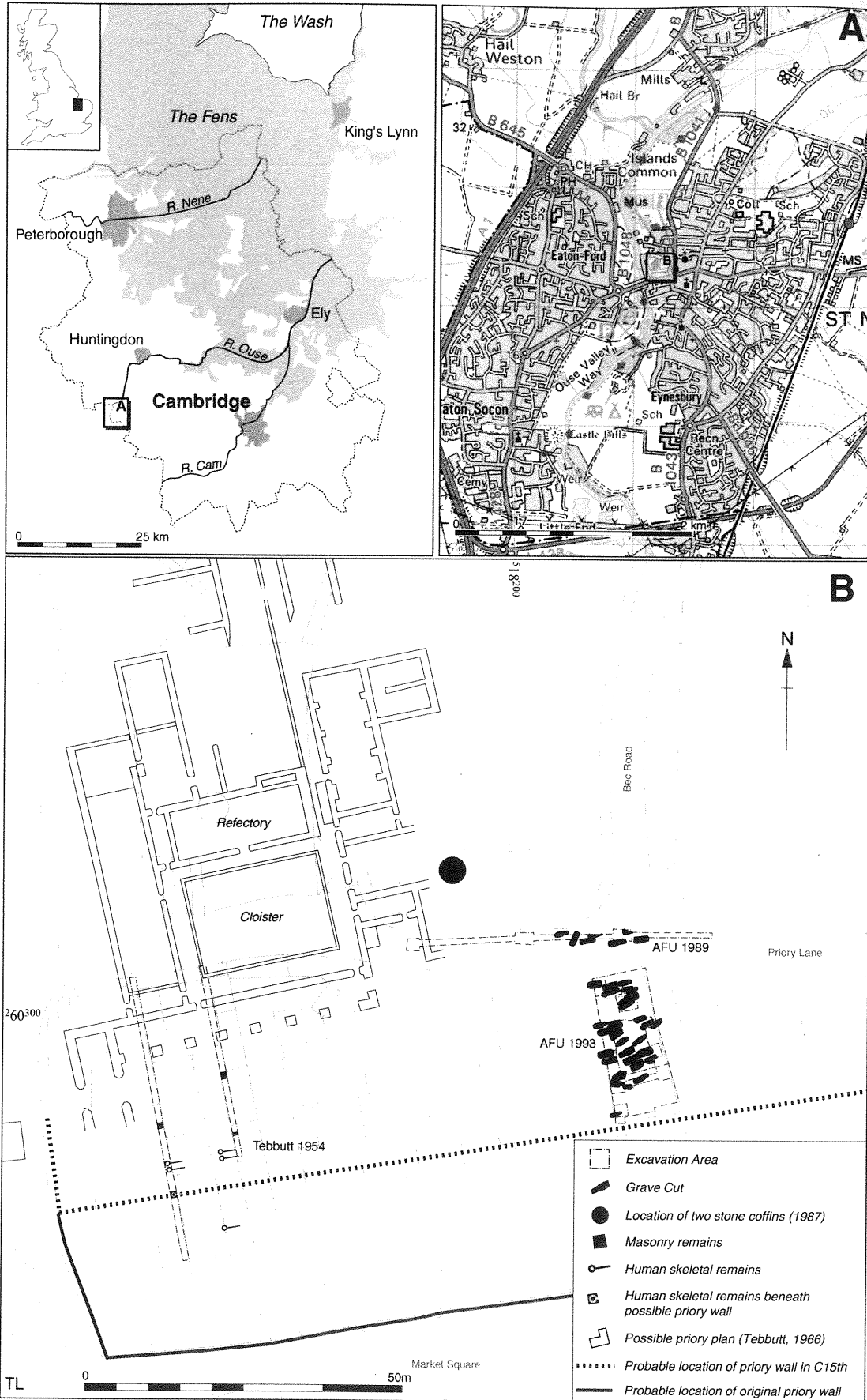


Figure 1: Site location map

© Crown Copyright 2010. All rights reserved. License No. AI 0100031673

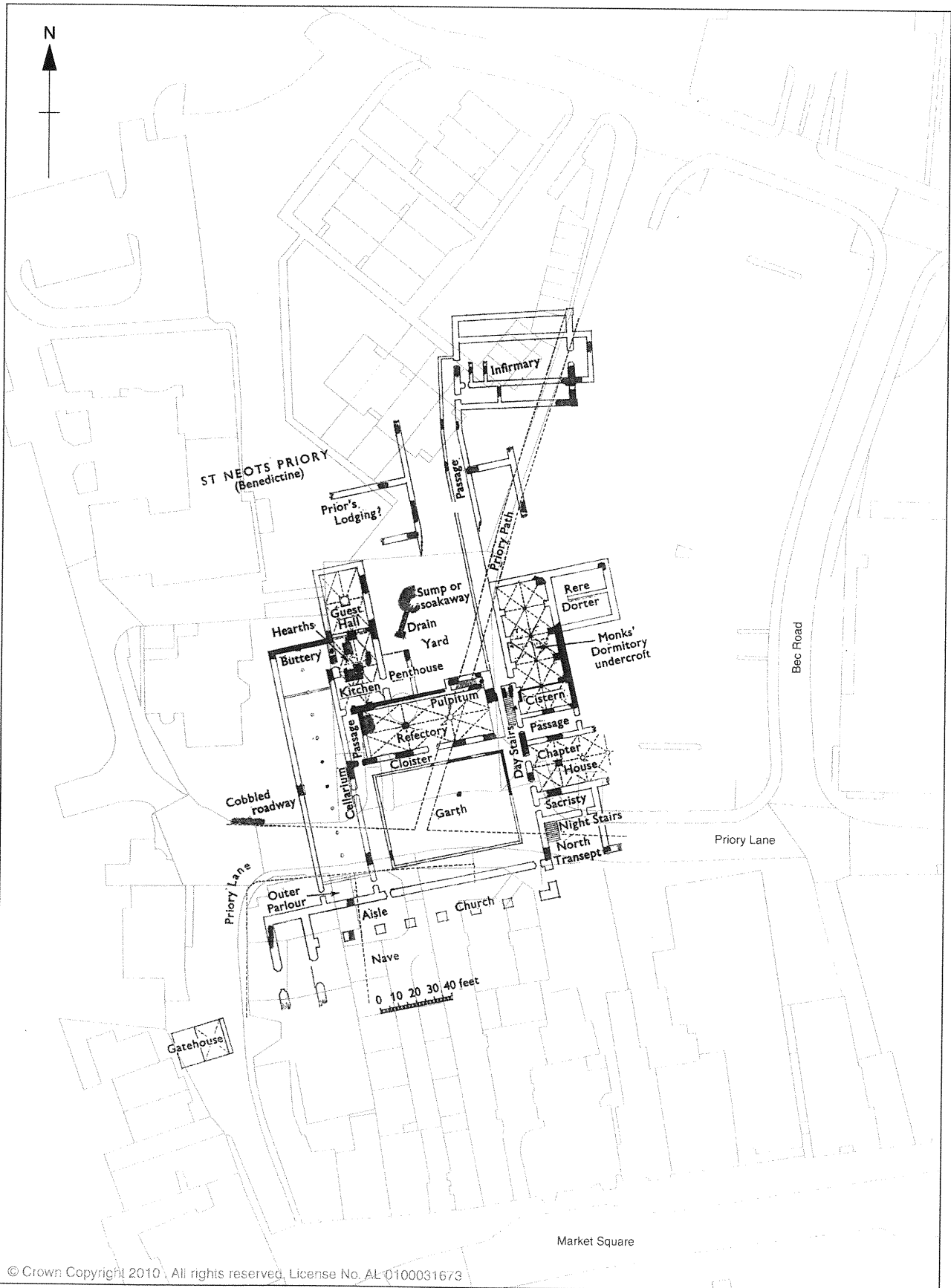


Figure 2: Tebbutt's Priory plan and modern map data (detail of interventions etc) (after Tebbutt 1966 fig.1)



Figure 3: GPR survey grid locations

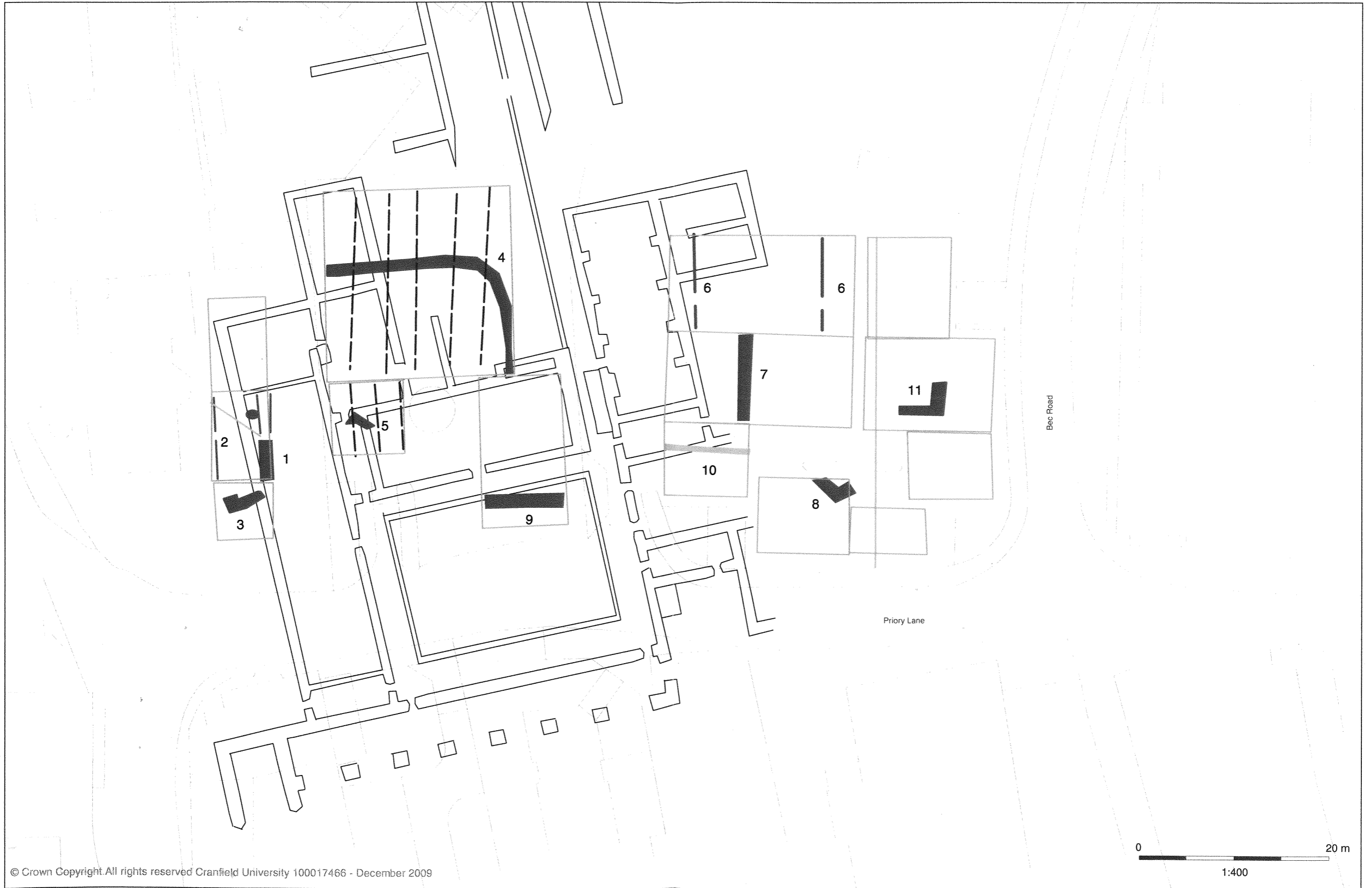


Figure 4: Tebbutt's plan and GPR data interpretation plan



Head Office/Registered Office

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@thehumanjourney.net
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1GF

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: [oanorth@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oanorth@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500
f: +44 (0) 1223 850599
e: [oaeast@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oaeast@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net/oaeast>

OA Méditerranée

115 Rue Merlot
ZAC La Louvade
34 130 Manguio
France

t: +33 (0) 4.67.57.86.92
f: +33 (0) 4.67.42.65.93
e: [oamed@oamed.fr](mailto: oamed@oamed.fr)
w: <http://oamed.fr/>

Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

*Oxford Archaeological Unit is a
Private Limited Company, N^o: 1618597
and a Registered Charity, N^o: 285627*

