

Burials and Wall  
Foundations on the Site  
of Chatteris Abbey  
to the Rear of No. 19  
Victoria Street  
Chatteris Cambridgeshire



**Archaeological  
Evaluation Report**



August 2011

**Client: Ian Moore**

OA East Report No: 1296

OASIS No: oxfordar3-108046

NGR: TL 39314 85862

**Burials and wall foundations on the site of Chatteris Abbey to the rear of No.  
19 Victoria Street, Chatteris, Cambridgeshire**

*Archaeological Evaluation*

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*Report Date: August 2011*

**Report Number:** 1296  
**Site Name:** No. 19 Victoria Street, Chatteris  
**HER Event No:** ECB 3637  
**Date of Works:** 10th – 11th August 2011  
**Client Name:** Ian Moore  
**Client Ref:**  
**Planning Ref:** F/YR09/0001/F  
**Grid Ref:** TL 39314 85862  
**Site Code:** CHAVIS11  
**Finance Code:** CHAVIS11  
**Receiving Body:** CCC Stores, Landbeach

**Accession No:**

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## Summary

*Oxford Archaeology East (OA East) has been commissioned to undertake an archaeological evaluation in advance of the construction of a single dwelling to the rear of No. 19 Victoria Street, Chatteris, Cambridgeshire (TL 39314 85862). The proposed development is located within the presumed precinct of the pre-Conquest Benedictine Abbey, of which no upstanding (in-situ) remains survive.*

*The single 10m x 2m trench revealed a series of insubstantial walls and between three and five articulated burials along the length of the trench. The walls might be associated with the burials although a more substantial footing at the northern end of the trench could relate to the abbey buildings.*

*The number and extent of inhumations and disarticulated Human skeletal remains (HSR) revealed across the length of the trench, combined with the mixture of age ranges of the individuals, strongly suggests that the proposed development is located within a secular or lay cemetery within the abbey precinct. No finds post-dating the medieval period were recovered, suggesting that the burials are probably medieval and are likely to be associated with the monastic phase of the site. All of the articulated burials were interred in the Christian manner: extended with heads to the west and arms to the side; grave cuts were not well-defined.*

*A very small assemblage, comprising disarticulated HSR, six sherds of ?Roman and Late Saxon to medieval pottery, four tile/CBM fragments (two possibly Roman), a few animal bones (pig, sheep/goat and cattle) and a nail was recovered, mostly from a layer that may be a remnant of grave soil.*

*The results of this evaluation are of particular significance as this is perhaps the first archaeological investigation within the presumed claustral nucleus of Chatteris Abbey. It has demonstrated that burials are present across the trench at a depth that will be significantly impacted upon by the proposed single-house development, which on current knowledge will have footings extending to a metre below ground level. The depth and extent of the burial ground is not known but could be considerable.*

*These results, albeit preliminary, also raise some questions regarding current models for the location of the abbey buildings. The project has also highlighted how little is known about the plan, layout and extent of the abbey and, indeed, the nature of the pre-monastic and post-Dissolution use of the site.*



## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 An archaeological evaluation was conducted by OA East on behalf of Ian Moore on a plot to the rear of No.19 Victoria Street, Chatteris (TL 39314 85862; south-west corner of trench). The proposed development entails the erection of a single dwelling with associated access and parking, and demolition of an existing garage.
- 1.1.2 This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Dan McConnell of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC; Planning Application F/YR09/0001/F), supplemented by a Specification prepared by OA East.
- 1.1.3 The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010). The results will enable decisions to be made by CCC, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.
- 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 The site is located on March Gravels on relatively flat ground (c.9.5m above sea level) within the historic core of Chatteris and on the presumed location of Chatteris Abbey.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background (Figs 1-6; Plate 1)

- 1.3.1 There are numerous entries in the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record relating to prehistoric and Iron Age Chatteris and its environs, which are not dwelt on here. Of note are a Palaeolithic flint flake (MCB19246) and a Neolithic polished axehead (CHER12004) found c.115m to the south and c.165m to the south-west of the current site respectively, suggesting some activity in the vicinity during the prehistoric period. The nearest evidence for Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman settlement has been located by evaluations and excavations to the north of the parish church of St Peter and St Paul (Fig. 1), c.350m to the north-east of the current site (Roberts 2000, MCB15323; Cooper 2004, MCB18461; Thatcher 2006, ECB2211). This evidence, which also includes the remains of Saxon timber structures, medieval pits and post-medieval buildings, suggests that this part of Chatteris has been a focus for occupation (possibly high status) for thousands of years.
- 1.3.2 The current site is located within the historic core of Chatteris and, significantly, within the precinct of the town's Benedictine Abbey (CHERs 03700 and 03832), a pre-Conquest foundation of which no upstanding (*in-situ*) remains survive. The Abbey of the Blessed Virgin Mary was founded between 1006 and 1008 AD by Ednoth, former abbot of Ramsey Abbey, at the request of his sister Aelfwen, who became the first prioress. The house, which was one of only eight or nine convents for women at the time of the Norman Conquest (Salzman 1948, 220), remained small and was eventually given to the monastery at Ely. An unfortunate event in the nunnery's history occurred in the early 14th century (1306-10) when the barns, convent, and church were burnt down, causing financial hardship for the abbey in the following years when these buildings were re-



constructed. In 1379 14 nuns were recorded, dropping to just 13 in 1535-6; the nunnery was sold and most of the buildings were pulled down at the Dissolution in 1538. Further details of the foundation and history of the abbey can be found in VCH Cambs vol. 2 (Salzman 1948, 220-223), VCH vol. 4 (Pugh 1953, 103-109), Dickinson 1954 and Breay 1999.

- 1.3.3 Medieval stonework, reputed to be part of the gateway of the nunnery, has been discovered c.75m to the west of the site (No.3 West Park; CHER 15351), whilst fragments of carved tracery and bricks have been found to the immediate south of the site at No. 40 Victoria Street, where foundations have also been noted in the garden (CHER 15978). A perimeter wall (CHER 03832) originally thought to be the precinct wall for the abbey survives in places, although this has been shown to be a post-Dissolution construction probably associated with the later mansion (see below), utilising stone from the abbey buildings (Breay 1999, 82). A red brick drainage pipe recorded at the former Empress cinema on Park Street to the north of the site (CHER 01508) may be associated with the abbey, although this site probably lay outside the abbey precinct (see below). Abbey stone from the demolition of Park House in 1847 was re-used in a number of buildings around the town (see below and Breay 1999, 92).
- 1.3.4 Not recorded in the HER is the presence of a medieval scratch dial (sundial) that has been set upside down in a stone wall on the south side of Victoria Street close to its junction with West Park Street. This was photographed (Fig. 6) and described in 1985 by M.K. Kidd; scratch dials, which fell out of use in the 15th century, would generally have been placed to one side of the south door of the church. The exact location of this scratch dial is not given, although it was also mentioned by Breay in her publication of the Cartulary of Chatteris Abbey as being in this location. Breay (1999, 92) also mentions that a number of stones near to the sundial had pink patches which might be the result of being burnt in the past, perhaps during the fire that destroyed much of the nunnery in the early 14th century. This stone wall was noted during the current site as having been partly demolished for a new development (Plate 1).
- 1.3.5 Following the surrender of the abbey its properties were divided up and granted to new tenants; in 1551 the nun's manor and the rectory in Chatteris were granted to Edward lord Clinton and Saye, although they soon passed to Thomas Rowe. In 1554 Rowe granted the rectory and manor to William Bettys, when the manor was renamed 'Chatteris Betts' and in whose family the property remained until the 17th century (Salzman 1948 (VCH Cambs vol. 2), 105; Breay 1999, 32). By this period some of the abbey buildings were evidently still standing as they were converted into a country house by the next owner, George Gascoyne, and was seen by Dugdale on his visit in 1657. In the mid-18th century it was noted that the nun's fish-house and granary were still standing, although the revised edition of *Monasticum Anglicanum* recorded that by 1819 only a few walls of the nunnery survived. By this time the mansion built by the Gascoynes, known as Park House (see Fig. 3), was also derelict; it was eventually pulled down in 1847 (Breay 1999, 80-82).
- 1.3.6 An ordnance surveyor's map of 1810 (Breay 1999, fig. 2) shows Park House (at a very small scale) as a substantial building within the western part of a distinctive sub-rectangular enclosure which has few other buildings within it. This enclosure and Park House are clearly-identifiable on the 1819 Enclosure map (Fig. 2), which also shows buildings to the south and east, possibly former gatehouses. The Ordnance Survey map of 1888 (Fig. 4) also shows this enclosure, which is in part delineated by an 'ancient wall' close to the junction of East and South Park Streets. This wall may largely follow the line of the original abbey precinct but is not its original enclosing wall,

although it is constructed from ragstone and quoins that undoubtedly originate from the nunnery buildings (Breay 1999, 82). By this time no buildings associated with the abbey appear to survive within the enclosure, much of which has been encroached upon by Victorian housing; the line of Victoria Street bisects the former precinct although it was not fully-developed at the time the map was surveyed; No.19 has yet to be built. The comprehensive infilling of the enclosure (the shape of which is fossilised by Park, East, South and West Streets) with houses and their associated gardens and other buildings over the subsequent years is illustrated by the successive Ordnance Survey maps viewable at [www.oldmaps.co.uk](http://www.oldmaps.co.uk).

- 1.3.7 Although it is recorded in the VCH and the CHER that some of the last building remains were pulled down to make way for the Empress Cinema (on the north side of Park Street) in 1935, this may be erroneous. Breay (1999, 82) suggests that this site clearly lay outside the abbey precinct and that the confusion may have arisen from the name of the house ('The Priory') that previously stood there and is shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey.
- 1.3.8 To date there have been very few archaeological investigations within or close to the abbey precinct. An evaluation conducted to the south of the current site to the rear of 23 South Park Street (Connor 1998; CHER 19264) revealed the presence of possible medieval structural features towards the back of the property but the frontage was disturbed by 19th and 20th century drains. Just outside the precinct an evaluation at 32 West Park Street uncovered a range of features including gravel extraction pits, post-holes, ditches and gullies of largely early to late post-medieval date; a small number of these were medieval (Woolhouse and McConnell 2006; ECB2406).

## 1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 Thanks are due to the client, Ian Moore, for commissioning the work and undertaking the machine-excavation of the trench, to Sarah Moore for her interest and for providing cups of tea and to Mr Moore's parents for allowing use of their facilities.
- 1.4.2 The site was managed by Aileen Connor; fieldwork was undertaken by the author with the assistance of Pete Boardman; the site survey was carried out by Gareth Rees. Dan McConnell monitored the site on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council. Thanks are also extended to the staff of the Cambridgeshire Collection. Illustrations and report production are by Andy Corrigan; finds were identified by Carole Fletcher (post-Roman pottery and CBM), Stephen Wadson (Roman pottery and CBM), Chris Faine (animal bone) and Zoë Uí Choileáin (human bone); thanks are also due to Terry Mortlock for processing the finds.

## 2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The objective of this evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.
- 2.1.2 A specific aim of the project was to assess whether any archaeological remains present were associated with the Benedictine Abbey of Chatteris.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The Brief required that a programme of linear trenching be undertaken; the corresponding Specification (WSI) initially proposed that a single 16m long x 1.6m wide machine-excavated trench be excavated, providing a c.5% sample of the proposed development area. Following comments by Dan McConnell (CCC), this was amended to two 10m-long trenches, designed to evaluate both the building footprint and the access route. This plan was again altered during fieldwork and in consultation with Dan McConnell to a single 10m x 2m trench. The latter was excavated across the footprint of the proposed dwelling; the driveway area could not be evaluated as it was needed to maintain access to No. 19. In addition, it was established that there would be no intrusive works associated with the new access/driveway associated with the proposed development.
- 2.2.2 Once it was established that articulated burials were present within the trench it was agreed at a site meeting with Dan McConnell, OA East and the client that further investigation would not be appropriate at this stage. All (part-)exposed burials were left *in-situ*, covered with Terram and carefully backfilled by hand before the trench was infilled (Plate 2).
- 2.2.3 Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a tracked 1.5 tonne mini-excavator using a toothless ditching bucket.
- 2.2.4 The site survey (location and levels) was carried out by Gareth Rees using a Leica GPS 1200 system receiving Smartnet correctional data.
- 2.2.5 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.
- 2.2.6 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.
- 2.2.7 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified.
- 2.2.8 The fieldwork was undertaken, apart from a sharp shower on the last afternoon, in generally dry, dusty and often windy conditions.

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The results are presented, where appropriate, in stratigraphic order, supplemented by a context list (Appendix A) and Finds and Environmental Reports (Appendices B and C). Due to the presence of human burials across the trench, many deposits were not further investigated and consequently it was not possible to securely date most contexts; natural gravels were not exposed anywhere along the length of the trench.

#### 3.2 Trench 1 (Figs 7-8; Plates 2-8)

3.2.1 This approximately north-south orientated trench measured c.10m x 2m and was excavated to a depth of between c.0.5m-0.8m below ground level, at which point both disarticulated and articulated burials were exposed in addition to a number of wall foundations. At this preliminary stage it has not been possible to ascertain the relationship between the burials and the walls; a general grave soil was encountered within which it was very difficult to distinguish individual grave cuts. Articulated burials (Sks) and disarticulated human skeletal remains (HSR) are described first, from south to north, followed by walls, layers and modern features.

3.2.2 Very few datable finds were present within the grave fills or associated deposits. The burials were only superficially/rapidly investigated at this stage to confirm presence and articulation, after which they were photographed and backfilled. All were orientated slightly south of west and north of east (SWS-ENE). A small collection of disarticulated remains was removed for analysis (see Appendix C1).

##### **Burials**

Skeleton 4 (Fig. 7)

3.2.3 The skeletal remains of a neonate or infant (Sk4), comprising very fragile skull fragments, were identified at a depth of 0.6m (8.9mOD) close to the southern end of the trench. The burial appeared to be cut into or associated with an area of loose redeposited yellowish orange gravel (22) that extended over an area measuring c.0.5m<sup>2</sup>; possible wall fragments were also identified to the south and west (see below). Neither the skeletal remains (for which no obvious grave cut was discernible) or gravel deposit were further investigated once it was established that burials were present in this part of the trench. It is probable that the skull fragments were associated with an *in-situ* inhumation as given the fragile nature of these remains it is unlikely that they had been moved far from their original location or they would have been much more fragmented. These remains can just be discerned in the foreground of Plate 2. It is quite feasible that other burials are present between Sks 4 and 3 that were not exposed during the evaluation.

Skeleton 3 and disarticulated HSR 11 (Fig. 7; Plate 4)

3.2.4 Located c.1.7m to the north of Sk4 (at 0.83m below ground level; 8.67mOD) was a fully-articulated skeleton (Sk3) aligned west-east, with the disarticulated remains of a second burial or burials to its south and west (11). Again no obvious grave cut was discernible, although the burial appeared to be associated with/contained within two very ephemeral and fragmentary walls (19 and 20), see below. The skeleton was supine and extended with arms to the side and head angled to the north and slightly downwards. Bone condition was moderate to poor. The skeleton, which was only partially-exposed and continued beyond the limit of excavation to the east, appeared to

be that of an adult; all the visible bones seemed to be fused, although the pelvis was quite small perhaps suggesting a younger adult. A very small quantity of finds, comprising a piece of shell-tempered tile and a small sherd of pottery, was recovered from the deposit (8) overlying the skeleton. The tile is probably Roman and is very similar to a fragment found with disarticulated remains to the immediate north (9), whilst the pottery is possibly early medieval (850-1150).

- 3.2.5 The disarticulated remains (11) comprised a ?femur located parallel to and to the immediate south of Sk3 and a group of bones including an ulna to the west. The latter group was revealed at a slightly higher level (c.0.6m below ground level; 8.92m OD), between walls 19 and 20; the ulna was aligned north-south so was clearly not in its primary position. It is feasible that these scattered bones are the remains of an earlier burial (or burials), possibly enclosed by walls 19 and 20, that was disturbed when Sk3 was interred. The ulna is from an adult individual (see Appendix C1).

Disarticulated HSR 9 (Fig. 7)

- 3.2.6 Located c.1m to the north of Sk3 was a skull and other disarticulated remains that probably represent a disturbed burial in this location. The skull, although damaged by the machine bucket, had been disturbed in antiquity as it was upside down and many of the fragments were 'stacked' on top of each other suggesting that they had been re-buried at some point. It is possible that other parts of this skeleton are still *in-situ*, or alternatively there may be a separate articulated inhumation immediately below or adjacent, the burial of which caused these remains to be disturbed. A pelvis and other bones recovered from the same approximate location may be associated; there were no repeated skeletal elements suggesting a single individual is represented. All the bones (which are in moderate to good condition) that could be aged appear to be from an adult individual, possibly male. The only find associated with this group was a small piece of shell-tempered tile that is similar to that associated with Sk3 and which is possibly Roman in date and therefore likely to be residual.

Skeleton 5 (Fig. 7; Plate 5)

- 3.2.7 An articulated skeleton (Sk5) was identified at a slightly deeper level (1.06m below ground level; 8.44m OD) adjacent to wall 15 and c.1m to the north of HSR9. The relationship with wall 15 was not clearly discernible and it is not certain at this stage whether the burial was placed up against the wall or the wall truncated the grave. Fragmentary remains of another possible wall (36; Fig. 8) were recorded in section to the south of Sk5 and may be associated, perhaps forming a grave lining or structure with wall 15 (see below).
- 3.2.8 Only part of the skeleton was exposed but it was clearly articulated, although no skull was found. A possible grave cut (18) and fill (17) similar to layer 7 (see below), but with patches of blue clay, were recorded but not further investigated. The skeleton was in poor to moderate condition and appears to be that of an adult; only the left arm was partly-exposed and its location indicates a similar positioning to that of Sk3. The only find associated with this skeleton was an iron nail (SF1 from context 17) that is not closely datable.

Skeleton 6 (Fig. 7; Plate 6)

- 3.2.9 Located c.3m to the north of Sk5 was another inhumation (Sk6) that, like Sk5, was positioned adjacent to and parallel with a wall (12) at a depth of 0.87m below ground level (8.63m OD). It was only partially exposed within a sondage excavated between walls 12 and 13; no obvious grave cut was discernible. The skeleton, which was damaged slightly during excavation, was in moderate condition and appeared to be that

of a juvenile as the skeleton was small and many of the epiphyses on the main bones had not fused. No finds were found directly associated with the burial, although datable material was recovered from the overlying layer 7 (see below). A layer (24) similar to, but slightly darker than 7, was observed in the base of the sondage, possibly underlying Sk6 (Fig. 8, S.2); this was not further investigated but could conceivably be an earlier grave soil/fill or levelling deposit.

### **Walls** (Figs 7 and 8; Plates 3, 7 and 8)

#### Wall 12 (Plate 7)

- 3.2.10 Partially-revealed at the very northern edge of the trench was a wall foundation (12) constructed from chalk/clunch and lime mortar that appeared to be on a slightly different alignment to that of the other walls within the trench to the south. Neither the full width or length of the north-east to south-west aligned wall was exposed but it appeared to survive to at least 0.25m in height and 0.4m in width. No construction cut was discernible and its relationship with Sk6 was not determined at this stage; it was sealed by layer 2 (see below). Wall 12 was constructed from a harder fabric and was less friable than the other walls exposed within the trench, suggesting that it might belong to a more substantial structure.

#### Walls 13, 14 and 15 and possible wall fragment 36 (Plates 3 and 7)

- 3.2.11 A group of possibly related wall foundations (13 - 15) was located c.1.3m to the south of 12, all of which were parallel (approximately east-west) and of similar construction. None of the walls extended across the full width of the trench: wall 13 was 0.35m wide and extended for 1.3m whilst wall 14 was 0.25m wide and 0.3m long. Wall 15, which was adjacent to Sk6, was more complex, forming an irregular L-shape in plan. The wall, which extended for c.1m westwards before turning northwards for c.0.8m, survived to at least 0.35m in height and varied between 0.2m and 0.45m in width.
- 3.2.12 The fabrics of all three walls comprised a pale yellowish brown sandy lime and gravel which was notably poorly-bonded and friable on the surface. No construction cuts were visible and all walls were sealed by layer 2; the relationship with layer 7 is not known but it could represent a later infilling of these structures (see below).
- 3.2.13 A deposit of compact but friable gravelly mortar (36) was also recorded within the main west-facing trench section (Fig. 8, S.1) c.0.6m to the south of wall 15. This may be the very truncated remains of another wall, possibly cut by or associated with grave **18** (Sk5); it was not visible in plan or section on the west side of the trench.

#### Walls 19 and 20 (Plate 8)

- 3.2.14 Two very ephemeral and fragmentary possible wall foundations (19 and 20) were revealed 1.3m apart on either side of burial Sk3 and disarticulated HSR 11 respectively on the western side of the trench. These may originally have crossed the full width of the trench but were not well-defined; wall 19 may also appear in Section 1 (Fig. 8). Both walls were of comparative construction and orientation to walls 13 *etc* to the north, although they were slightly narrower at 0.2m and generally less well-preserved.

#### Walls 21 and 23 and possible wall 25 (Plate 3)

- 3.2.15 Located c.1.3m to the south of wall 20 was another parallel wall foundation 23, which was only partially exposed at the southern edge of the trench. This may have been more similar in construction to wall 12 at the northern end of the trench, comprising a slightly more stoney and solid fabric than walls 19 *etc*, although too little was revealed to establish its alignment with any certainty.

- 3.2.16 Wall 23 appears to have been orientated at right angles to 21, extending northwards into the trench for c.0.8m. This wall was of comparable size and fabric to walls 19 and 20 and may have been associated or at least contemporary. Gravel deposit 22 and infant burial Sk4 were located adjacent to and to the immediate north of wall 21 and may be related. A loose deposit of mortar and stone recorded in section at the southern end of the trench may also be remnants of a demolished wall, possibly associated with wall 23.

### **Layers**

Layers 7 and 35 (Fig. 7; Fig. 8, S.1; Plates 3 and 7)

- 3.2.17 A c.0.35m-thick layer (7) of mixed yellowish and greyish brown silty sandy gravel with frequent mortar, small to medium angular stones and chalk/clunch was recorded between the walls and apparently sealing the inhumations. Alternatively this may represent a general grave soil as it contained disarticulated HSR and other finds, perhaps indicating that it had been reworked over a period of time; grave cuts were not easily discernible in either plan or section in this deposit. Another layer (35) was noted in section to the south of grave cut 18, but this deposit was very similar in nature to 7, if slightly darker in colour and slightly less stoney, and may be a continuation of it. Ephemeral wall 19 may have cut through this layer (see S.1).

- 3.2.18 Finds from layer 7 comprise small quantities of medieval pottery (including part of a Grimston jug handle datable to 1200-1350 and a sherd of ?Hedingham ware), animal bone (including pig), HSR and tile.

Layer 2 (Fig. 8, S.1)

- 3.2.19 Physically overlying layer 7 and the various walls described above was a c.0.2m-thick layer (2) of compact yellowish brown silty sandy gravel with occasional tabular stone pieces. This appeared to thicken towards the middle of the trench (in the area of grave 18/wall 15) and peter out towards the south; the deeper part may in fact denote a demolition or robber cut. No finds were recovered from this layer, which is likely to be a post-medieval levelling deposit, or may possibly represent a yard area.

### **Post-medieval/modern features and layers** (Fig. 8, S. 1; Plate 8)

- 3.2.20 Four post-holes/small pits (**28**, **30**, **32** and **34**) were recorded cutting through layer 2 in section. They measured between 0.1m and 0.5m wide and between 0.08m and over 0.5m deep, with concave profiles. All contained mid to dark grey loamy deposits similar to the overlying topsoil, within which occasional tile fragments were noted. The most substantial of these was **34** which truncated the southern edge of the grave containing Sk3. These are likely to be the remains of a boundary fence or backyard structure.
- 3.2.21 Sealing the post-holes was a 0.25m-thick deposit of garden soil within which were occasional tile fragments and modern pottery sherds; these were not retained.

## **3.3 Finds and Environmental Summary**

- 3.3.1 A very small assemblage, comprising six sherds of ?Roman and Late Saxon to medieval pottery, four tile/CBM fragments (two possibly Roman), a few animal bones (pig, sheep/goat and cattle), a single iron nail and a moderate amount of HSR was recovered. The small size and nature of the assemblage further suggests that the trench is located within a cemetery rather than (perhaps) within the core of the conventual buildings, although the presence of animal bone and pottery from the

northern part of the trench close to wall 12 may indicate proximity to more domestic areas of the abbey.



## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The number and extent of inhumations and disarticulated HSR revealed across the length of the trench, combined with the mixture of age ranges of the individuals, strongly suggests that the proposed development is located within a secular or general cemetery within the abbey precinct. No finds post-dating the medieval period were recovered, suggesting that the burials are medieval (?and earlier) and are likely to be associated with the monastic phase of the site, although a post-Dissolution date cannot be ruled out at this stage. All of the articulated burials were interred in the Christian manner with heads to the west and arms to the side; presumably these were shroud burials as no definite evidence of coffins was found.
- 4.1.2 Several of the identified walls appear to be located adjacent to burials and could conceivably be the remains of grave structures/linings but further work would be needed to investigate this. These walls were poorly-constructed and appear not to have been load-bearing; no surviving facing or surfaces were present.
- 4.1.3 More than one phase of burial was evident, indicated by the presence of HSR disturbed by the insertion of later graves. The skull (HSR9) appears to have been placed back in the ground with some care in antiquity, whilst the more scattered disarticulated bones to the south and west of Sk3 suggests less sympathetic treatment of an existing burial. The full sequence of burials was not possible to determine at this stage but it is likely given the longevity of occupation of the site by the abbey that the depth and number of burials could be significant. At least three, and possibly five, articulated or semi-articulated burials were identified within the 10m-long trench and there are probably more present at this level. Although grave cuts were not clearly-defined, skeletons (and disarticulated remains) were present at between 0.6m-1.06m below ground level and appear to have been laid in neat rows. Natural deposits were not encountered.
- 4.1.4 The wall foundations are interesting as they may represent grave structures rather than buildings, although the most northerly of them could be associated with the abbey as it was on a slightly different orientation and was of more substantial construction. They could, however, all be the remains of dwarf walls designed to support timber superstructures associated with the abbey. The absence of later pottery or CBM from the burials and associated deposits indicates that they were not related to the post-Dissolution mansion, but too small an area was sampled to prove or disprove this. No associated floors or architectural stone fragments were encountered but these may have been removed by later activity. Conversely, the occurrence of possible Roman building materials found in deposits associated with the burials might indicate the presence of earlier structures in the vicinity.
- 4.1.5 Given the lack of any reliable plans of the abbey buildings, it is difficult to place where the burials and walls uncovered by the evaluation might have been located. Correlation with the plan produced by Dickinson in 1954 (see Fig. 5) suggests that the trench was positioned to the north of the church and within the western part of the cloister. This seems unlikely given the large number of presumably parochial burials identified by the evaluation. Documentary sources indicate that the south aisle of the abbey church was used by the local parishioners; indeed at the Dissolution a letter to Thomas Cromwell recorded that 14 households 'kept their parish church in the abbey' (Breay 1999, 87). It is possible that the burials uncovered in the trench are part of a parochial cemetery that was in use over a long period of time (perhaps hundreds of years). The nuns' cemetery

is presumed to have been located to the east of the abbey church which might suggest that this secular burial ground was established elsewhere, perhaps to the south of the church, or even within its south aisle. The absence of surviving remnants of floors and other architectural fragments *etc*, however, might indicate that the burials are not located within the church. Many of the inhabitants of towns favoured the parish church or cathedral for burial, however where no cathedral was present the town cemetery was often situated within the abbey precincts, although the poorer townfolk may have elected for less costly burial within the parish churchyard (Gilchrist and Sloane 2005, 63).

- 4.1.6 Alternatively the burials might represent a separate cemetery, perhaps associated with the infirmary in a more northerly part of the claustral complex. There are documentary references to the infirmary at Chatteris, although its location is unknown. Infirmarys were often sited away from the claustral nucleus, sometimes to the north-east of the main conventual buildings. Burials could also be associated with other buildings and areas within the monastic complex, for example in the gatehouse or guest house chapels (Gilchrist and Sloane 2005, 59-60).
- 4.1.7 Very few cemetery excavations within nunneries have been reported on, although from the little data available it seems that in contrast to the predominantly male populations of monastic cemeteries, nunneries appear to have had more mixed burials with less emphasis placed on sexual segregation and zoning (Gilchrist and Sloane 2005, 68).
- 4.1.8 If the burials are part of a cemetery to the south of the church, this would place the church (and cloister) much further north than has previously been suggested, which in turn would perhaps preclude the presence of a northern cloister. The latter plan, which deviates from the usual monastic layout, has been suggested by both Dickinson and Breay. Evidence from the 16th century cartulary or inventory for the abbey combined with the documented use of the southern aisle of the abbey church by the parishioners indicates that the claustral nucleus was constructed on the north side of the church rather than the south. If this is the case then Chatteris appears to have been part of a discrete regional cluster of north cloister nunneries (Breay 1999, 89).
- 4.1.9 The mansion later known as Park House, which was constructed in the 16th century and extended in the 17th century (see Section 1.3 above), reputedly incorporated some the abbey's buildings within its fabric. Breay (1999, 89-91) discusses a small group of watercolours depicting Park House prior to its demolition that were also reproduced by Dickinson; a copy of one of these is held in the Cambridgeshire Collection (Y.Cha. J20; Fig. 3). This latter painting shows the east view of the house (described as the guest house of the abbey) within which two adjacent Norman arches have been incorporated, one of which is larger than the other. Breay suggests that the arches were part of the abbey church, perhaps marking the division of the nave from the chancel, which might indicate that the abbey in fact had a south rather than a north cloister. A later (late 15th to early 16th century) window has also been inserted partly across the larger arch, which Breay believed may have come from another range of the abbey buildings that must have been quite substantial. This was deemed by Breay to be notable as many of the poorer nunneries commonly had ranges built of timber, half-timber or cob. It is clear from one of the later paintings illustrated by Breay (1999, fig.4) that the house was indeed in poor repair prior to its demolition, with timbers propping up the south range where a large crack can be discerned; part of the roof also appears to be missing
- 4.1.10 Stonework including tracery fragments have been found to the immediate south of the current site (see Section 1.3 above), perhaps indicating that the church or other major buildings might have been located here. It is perhaps interesting that no similar remains

have been reported for the gardens in the area of the current site, or were revealed during the evaluation.

- 4.1.11 Correlation of the historic cartographic evidence is hampered by inaccuracies inherent in some of the earlier maps, although some comparisons can be made. Overlying the 1819 Enclosure on the modern OS map tentatively places Park House, the post-Dissolution mansion, as straddling the line of the later Victoria Street. It extends under Nos 19-21 on the north side and Nos 46-48 on the south side, with the main entrance facing towards West Park Street. Park house was demolished in 1847 and by the time of the First edition Ordnance survey map c.40 years later all of the buildings have disappeared and the site of the abbey is marked by a cross within the garden of No. 19 Victoria Street, close to the location of the current evaluation trench (Fig. 4). It is noteworthy that the house and garden boundaries in this part of the former abbey complex are aligned north-north-west to south-south-east and that the walls and burials encountered within the trench were also on a similar orientation whilst houses to the east are aligned north-south, at right angles to Victoria Street. This slight difference in orientation was probably influenced by the remaining boundaries and walls associated with Park House and, presumably, the abbey in the western part of the former precinct which was clearly built over last. Dickinson's suggested plan of the abbey is also on this slightly skewed orientation and when overlaid on the modern map it suggests that the western end of the church sits under No. 19. This plan seems to be based on the premise that Park House was constructed using the former guest's house (labelled 'M' on his plan), which may not be the case if Breay is correct (see above).
- 4.1.12 Further work is clearly required to establish the plan of the abbey and investigate the location of the main claustral range and the relationship of these buildings to the abbey church and associated cemeteries. The relationship of the abbey with the parish church and excavated remains (including Saxon buildings) to the north-east of the current site would also benefit from further research. Numerous other monastic buildings are mentioned in the inventory, including three butteries, a bake-house and brew-house in addition to barns and other agricultural buildings that can be inferred from the lists of livestock and other items (Breay 1999, 86). The buried remains of these buildings and those mentioned in reference to Park House (fish-house and gatehouses *etc*) may well survive in the vicinity and/or within the wider precinct enclosure now roughly defined by the Park Streets.

## 4.2 Significance

- 4.2.1 The results of this evaluation are of particular significance as this is perhaps the first archaeological investigation (other than Connor 1998) within the presumed claustral nucleus of Chatteris Abbey. It has demonstrated that burials are present across the trench at a depth that will be significantly impacted upon by the proposed single-house development, which on current knowledge will have footings extending to a metre below ground level. These results, albeit preliminary, also raise some questions regarding current models for the location of the abbey buildings. The project has also highlighted how little is known about the plan, layout and extent of the abbey and, indeed, the nature of the pre-monastic and post-Dissolution use of the site.

## 4.3 Recommendations

- 4.3.1 Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

## APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Trench consists of garden soil, modern/post-medieval post-holes and subsoil/levelling layer overlying wall foundations and burials					Avg. depth (m)	0.5
					Width (m)	2
					Length (m)	10
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
1	Layer	-	0.25	Topsoil/garden soil, post-med/modern	-	-
2	Layer	-	0.2	Gravelly subsoil/levelling, post-med/post-Dissolution?	-	-
3	skeleton	-	-	Articulated supine skeleton, medieval?	-	-
4	skeleton	-	-	?Articulated infant burial, skull found, medieval?	-	-
5	skeleton	-	-	?Articulated adult skeleton, medieval?	-	-
6	skeleton	-	-	?Articulated juvenile skeleton, medieval?	-	-
7	layer		0.35	Thick gravelly layer abutting walls and overlying sks?	Pot, animal bone, HSR	medieval
8	fill			Part-ex deposit associated with sk3	Pot, CBM (Roman)	Late Saxon/med
9	fill			Disarticulated HSR, skull fragments etc of adult skeleton, med?	-	-
10				Void		
11				Disarticulated HSR, to S and W of sk3, med?	HSR	-
12	wall			Stone and mortar wall N end of trench	-	-
13	wall			gravel and mortar foundation	-	-
14	wall			gravel and mortar foundation	-	-
15	wall			gravel and mortar foundation	-	-
17	Grave fill			Fill in grave 18 (sk5)	FE nail SF1	-
18	Grave			Poss grave cut, not full-exposed	-	-

Trench 1						
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
19	wall			gravel and mortar poss foundation	-	-
20	wall			gravel and mortar poss foundation	-	-
21	wall			gravel and mortar poss foundation	-	-
22	layer/fill			Gravelly deposit associated with sk4	-	-
23	?wall			gravel and mortar poss foundation	-	-
24	?wall			gravel and mortar poss foundation	-	-
25	?wall			mortar deposit in section - poss foundation	-	-
26	fill			Fill of post-med/modern post-hole	-	-
28	cut			Cut of post-med/modern post-hole	-	-
29	fill			Fill of post-med/modern post-hole	-	-
30	cut			Cut of post-med/modern post-hole	-	-
31	fill			Fill of post-med/modern post-hole	-	-
32	cut			Cut of post-med/modern post-hole	-	-
33	fill			Fill of post-med/modern post-hole	-	-
34	cut			Cut of post-med/modern post-hole	-	-
35	layer			Similar to 7, slightly darker	-	-
36	?wall			Gravelly mortar deposit in main section, poss truncated wall foundation	-	-

## APPENDIX B. FINDS REPORTS

### B.1 Pottery, CBM and small finds

*By Rachel Clarke with Carole Fletcher*

B.1.1 A very small assemblage comprising six sherds of pottery (0.098kg), four pieces of CBM and a single iron nail (SF1) were recovered from layers and deposits associated with burials and wall foundations within the trench.

B.1.2 The pottery is generally fairly small in size, with the largest sherd weighing 0.052kg, most is Late Saxon to medieval although a sandy grey ware sherd may be Roman. The nail is not closely-datable. The tile is mostly shell-tempered and is similar to Roman examples (Stephen Wadeson pers.comm.), which combined with the small sherd size of the pottery indicates a certain level of residuality within the assemblage. The nail is not closely datable.

Context	Comments	Weight (Kg)	Date
<b>Pottery</b>			
7	1 sherd Grimston jug handle	0.052	1200-1350
	1 sherd decorated ?Hedingham ware/E Anglian redware)	0.031	1150-1350
	1 sherd Grimston-type base sherd	0.003	1200-1350
	1 sherd Grimston-type sherd with splash of glaze	0.002	1200-1350
	1 sherd sandy grey ware	0.010	Roman or medieval
8	1 sherd ?Stamford ware	0.003	850-1150
	Total	<b>0.098</b>	
<b>CBM</b>			
7	1small chip of ?roof tile in a hard orange sandy fabric		?
	1 small fragment of CBM	0.166	?
8	1 piece of shell-tempered floor tile 3cm thick with a purplish core	0.273	?Roman
9	1 piece of shell-tempered tile similar to that in 8 but thinner (c. 1cm)	0.016	?Roman
	Total	<b>0.455</b>	

*Table 1: Pottery and CBM*

## APPENDIX C. ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS

### C.1 Human Skeletal Remains

*By Zoë Uí Choileáin*

#### **Introduction**

C.1.1 A collection of disarticulated human remains was recovered from the evaluation at CHAVIS11 which revealed part of a medieval cemetery presumed to lie within the confines of Chatteris Abbey. The disarticulated remains were scattered in the area between several inhumations (which were not excavated/removed during this evaluation beyond establishing whether they were articulated), and most likely represent more than one individual.

#### **Methodology**

C.1.2 Standard anthropological and palaeopathological examination was undertaken in accordance with published guidelines (Brickley and McKinley 2004).

C.1.3 Fragmentation was scored as either high (most bones fragmented and in pieces), moderate (bones are fragmented but largely present) or low (limited or few bones are fragmented), and condition (surface preservation) of the bone was scored as either excellent, good, poor or destroyed, and graded on a scale of 0 (no erosion) to 5+ (extensive erosion), in accordance with the criteria set out by McKinley (2004, 16).

C.1.4 Provisional estimations of age and sex were made. The availability of diagnostic features primarily in the pelvis and skull was assessed in order to explore the potential for more detailed estimates to be made during any future, more detailed examination.

C.1.5 Any pathologies or bony abnormalities were noted in passing.

#### **Results**

##### *Disarticulated Remains:*

Context	Elements	No of fragments
7	rib, phalanx	2
9	Skull, vertebrae, Navicular, Phalanges, Femur	68
11	Ulna	1

*Table 2: Disarticulated remains*

##### *Context 9*

C.1.6 The majority of the disarticulated remains were recovered from context 9. There were no repeated skeletal elements suggesting a single individual. Fragmentation was scored as high and the condition of the bone was scored as grade 2 meaning that little erosion was present.

- C.1.7 The remains were diagnosed as adult. The most accurate indicators of age are in the pelvis in the pubic symphysis and auricular surface. In context 9 a large part of the right side of the pelvis was present however the pubic symphysis was absent and only a small amount of the auricular surface remained. The lack of any complete diagnostic features makes a more accurate determination of age unlikely even were a full examination to be carried out. The right and left mastoid process were present as was the right orbital ridge allowing a tentative identification of female to be assigned.
- C.1.8 No pathologies were noted bar some slight lipping around the vertebrae indicative of osteoarthritis. A slight variation in the sizes of the right and left mastoid processes was observed; this is most likely merely the result of natural variation rather than the result of any abnormality or disease.

*Contexts 7 and 11*

- C.1.9 The fragmentation of the bone found in contexts 7 and 11 was scored as low and surface condition was scored as grade two. The bones were determined to be adult but no traits were present to allow a more accurate estimation of age or sex. No pathologies or non-metric traits were noted.

***Statement of potential and recommendations for further work***

- C.1.10 The overall condition of the bone was good and while high fragmentation of these disarticulated remains makes their potential for further analysis very limited it suggests that were the complete inhumations recorded on the site to be excavated their examination would provide useful information on the health status and lifestyle of the medieval population in the area surrounding the abbey. Due to the small sample size and a lack of many diagnostic features a more detailed analysis is not deemed necessary at this stage.

## **C.2 Faunal Remains**

*By Chris Faine*

### ***Introduction***

- C.2.1 Eight fragments of animal bone weighing 0.086kg were recovered from the evaluation at Victoria Street, Chatteris with six fragments identifiable to species. All material was recovered from context 7. These consisted of a pig mandible from an animal around 2-3 years of age, along with portions of sheep/goat femur. A fragmentary cattle tibia and 1st phalanx were also recovered.



## APPENDIX D. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## APPENDIX E. OASIS REPORT FORM

### Project Details

OASIS Number	<input type="text"/>		
Project Name	<input type="text"/>		
Project Dates (fieldwork) Start	<input type="text"/>	Finish	<input type="text"/>
Previous Work (by OA East)	<input type="text"/>	Future Work	<input type="text"/>

### Project Reference Codes

Site Code	<input type="text"/>	Planning App. No.	<input type="text"/>
HER No.	<input type="text"/>	Related HER/OASIS No.	<input type="text"/>

### Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt	<input type="text"/>
Development Type	<input type="text"/>

### Please select all techniques used:

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<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 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 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
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<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

### Project Location

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Parish	<input type="text"/>	
HER	<input type="text"/>	
Study Area	<input type="text"/>	National Grid Reference <input type="text"/>

### Project Originators

Organisation	<input type="text"/>
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Project Design Originator	<input type="text"/>
Project Manager	<input type="text"/>
Supervisor	<input type="text"/>

### Project Archives

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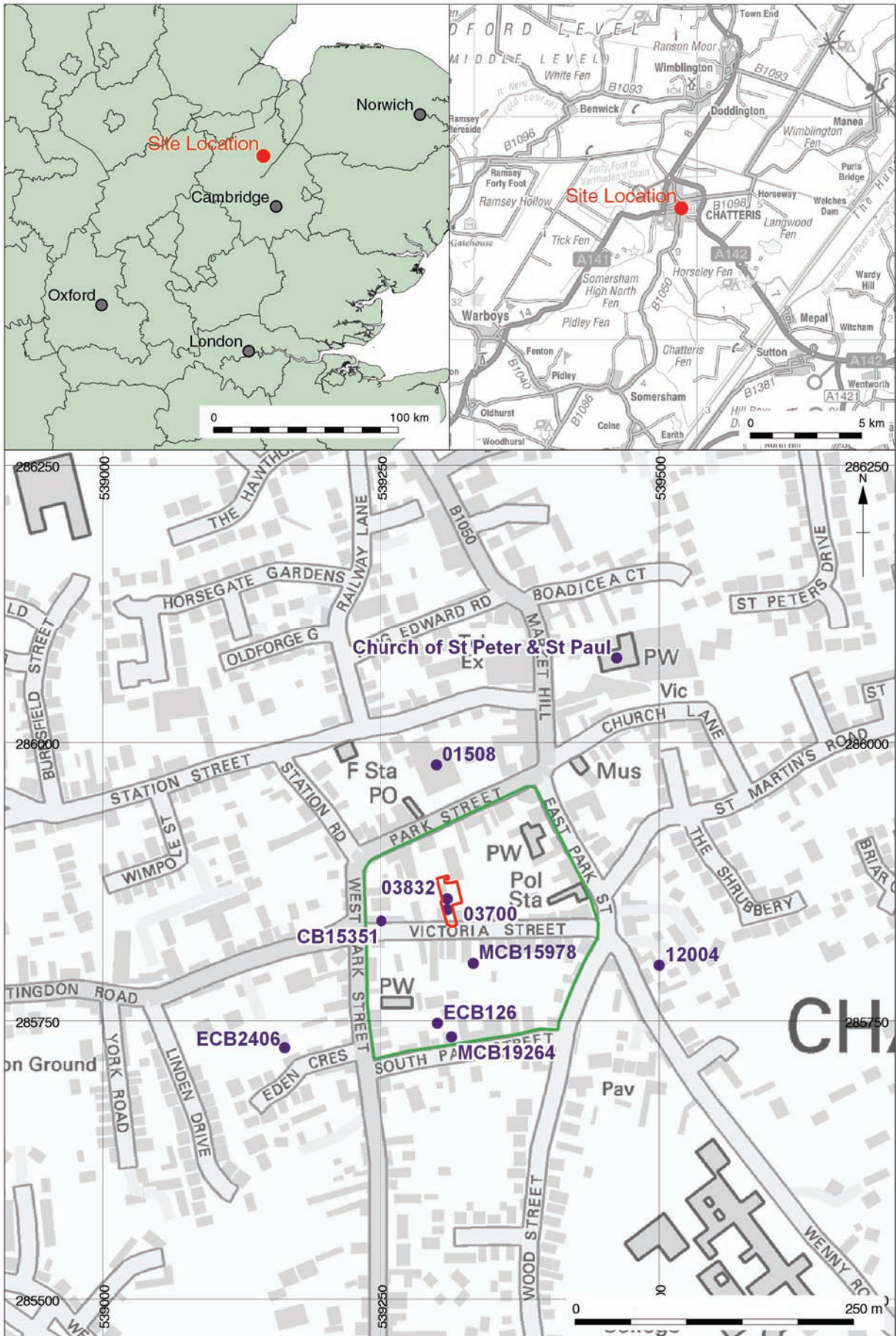
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	<input type="checkbox"/> Research/Notes
	<input type="checkbox"/> Photos
	<input type="checkbox"/> Plans
	<input type="checkbox"/> Report
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sections
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey

**Notes:**

Appendix F.



Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2011

Figure 1: Site location showing development area outlined red, Chatteris Abbey precinct (green) and HER data (purple)

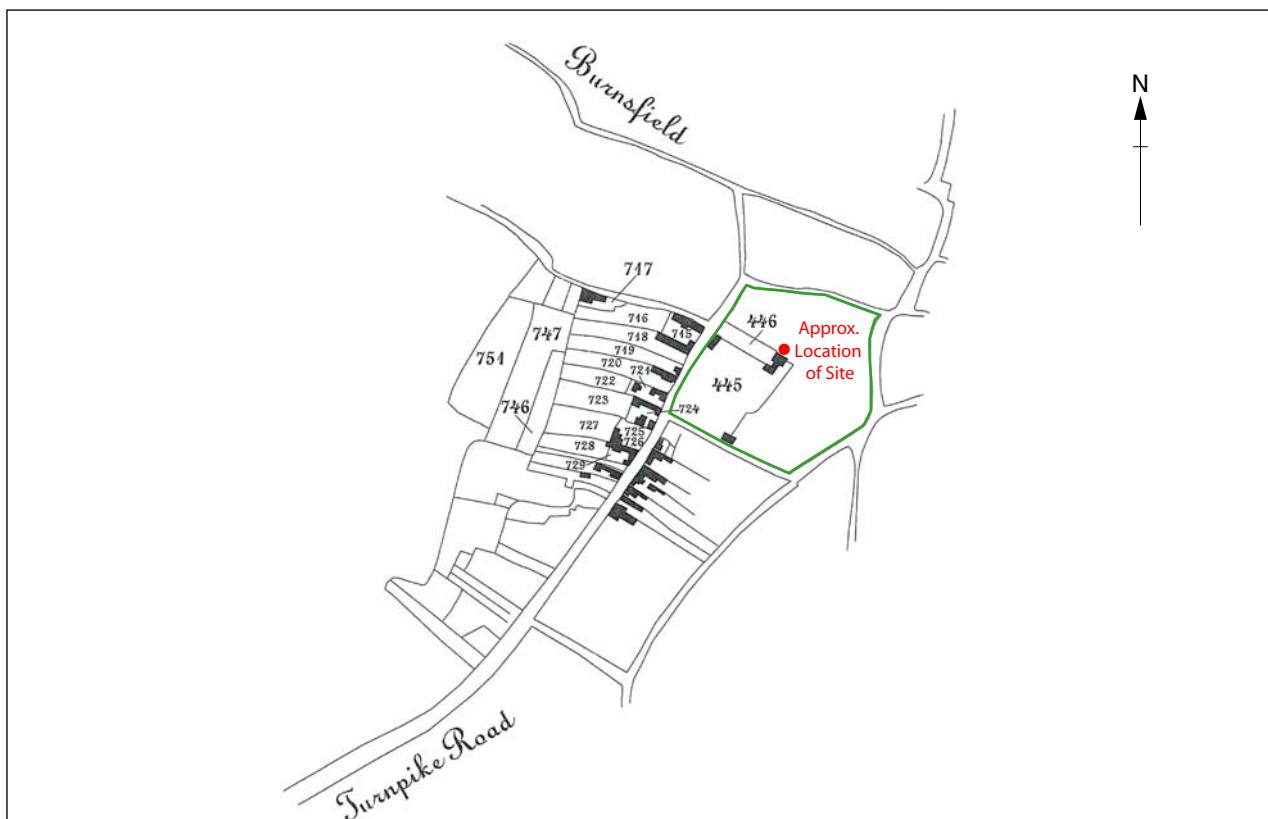


Figure 2: Extract from 1819 Enclosure map showing approximate location of site (red dot) and the Abbey precinct (outlined green)

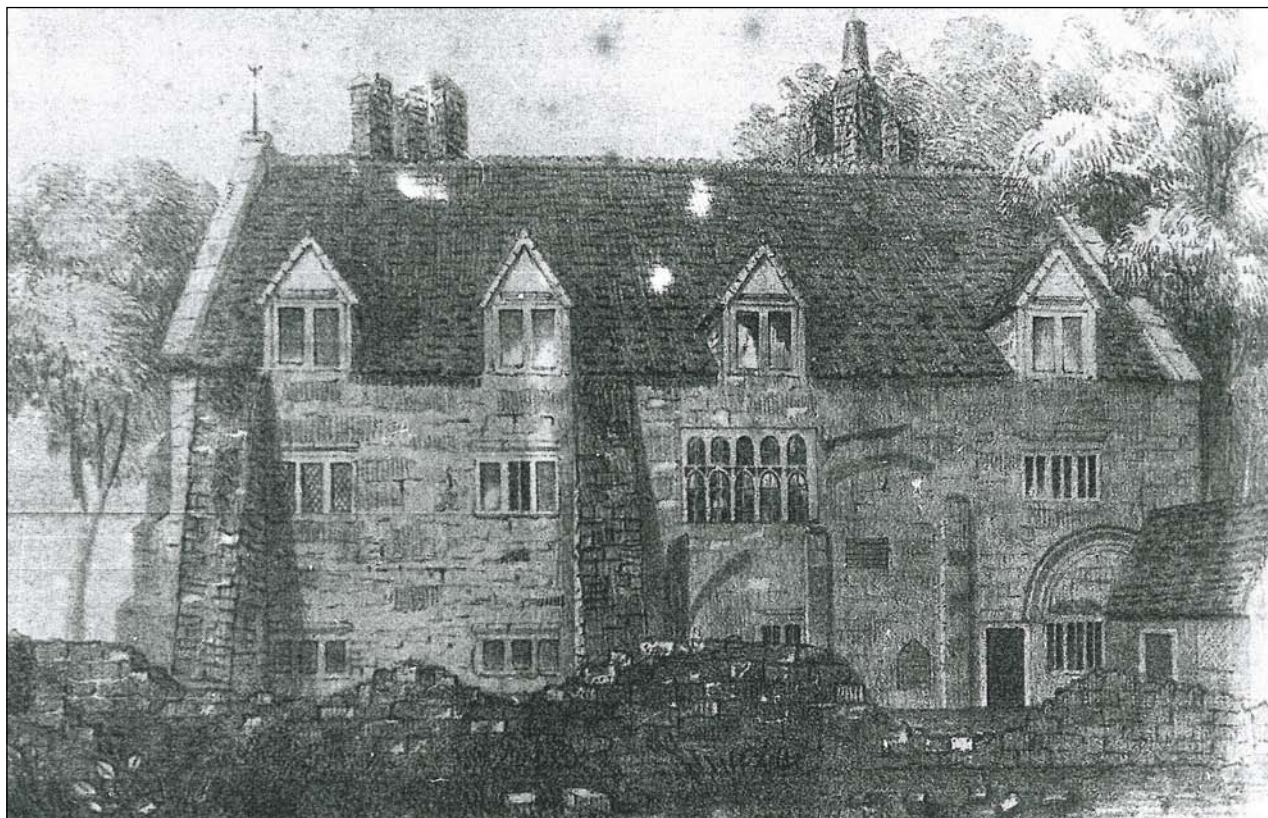


Figure 3: East view of Park House, c.1820 (Cambridgeshire Collection ref. Y.cha.J20)

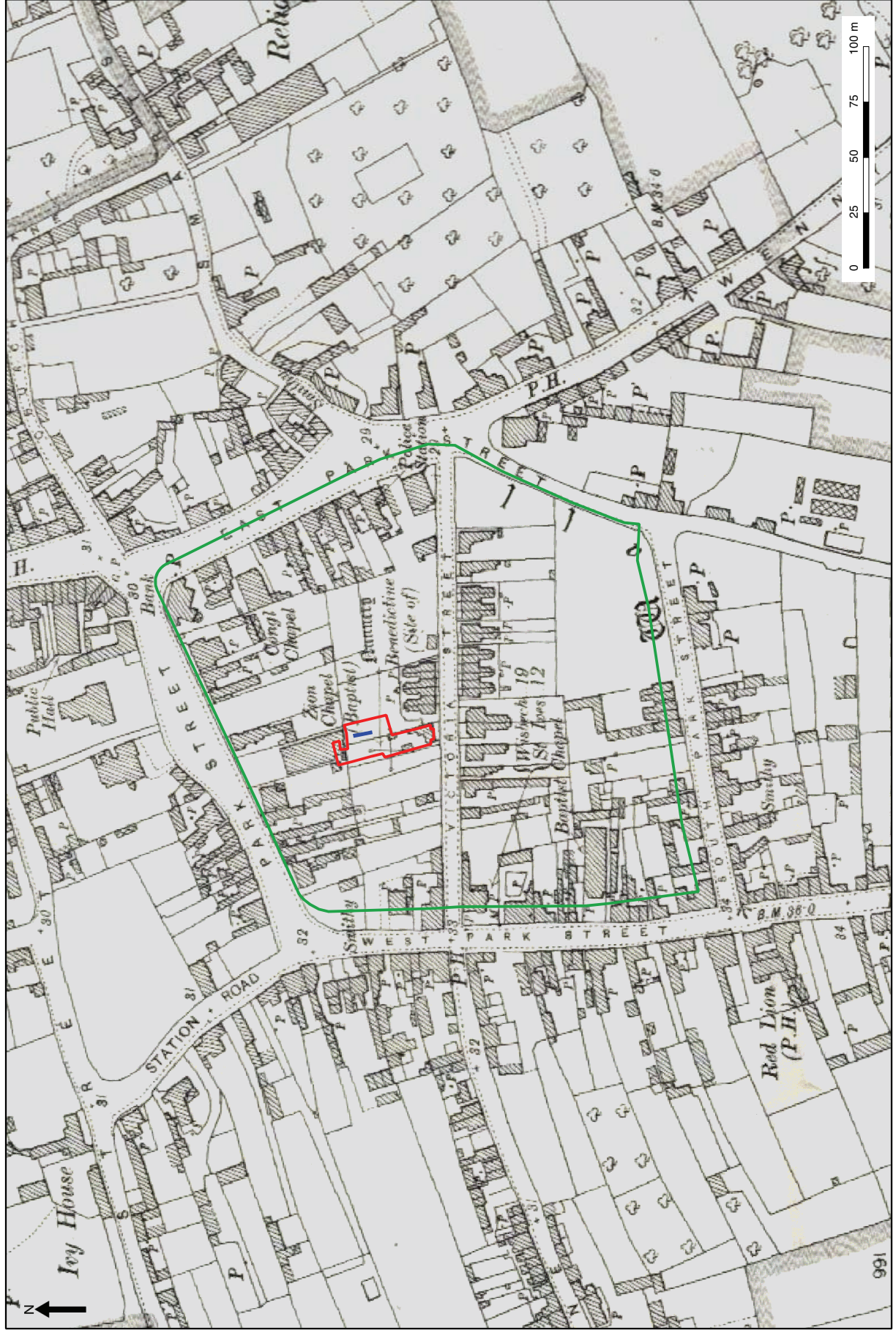


Figure 4: Extract from 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (1888) showing approximate location of the development area (red), trench (blue) and Abbey precinct (green)



Figure 6: The scratch dial (sundial) of Chatteris Abbey inserted, upside down, in the stone wall on the south side of Victoria Street (Kidd, M. 1985; Cambridgeshire Collection ref. C.62.PAM)

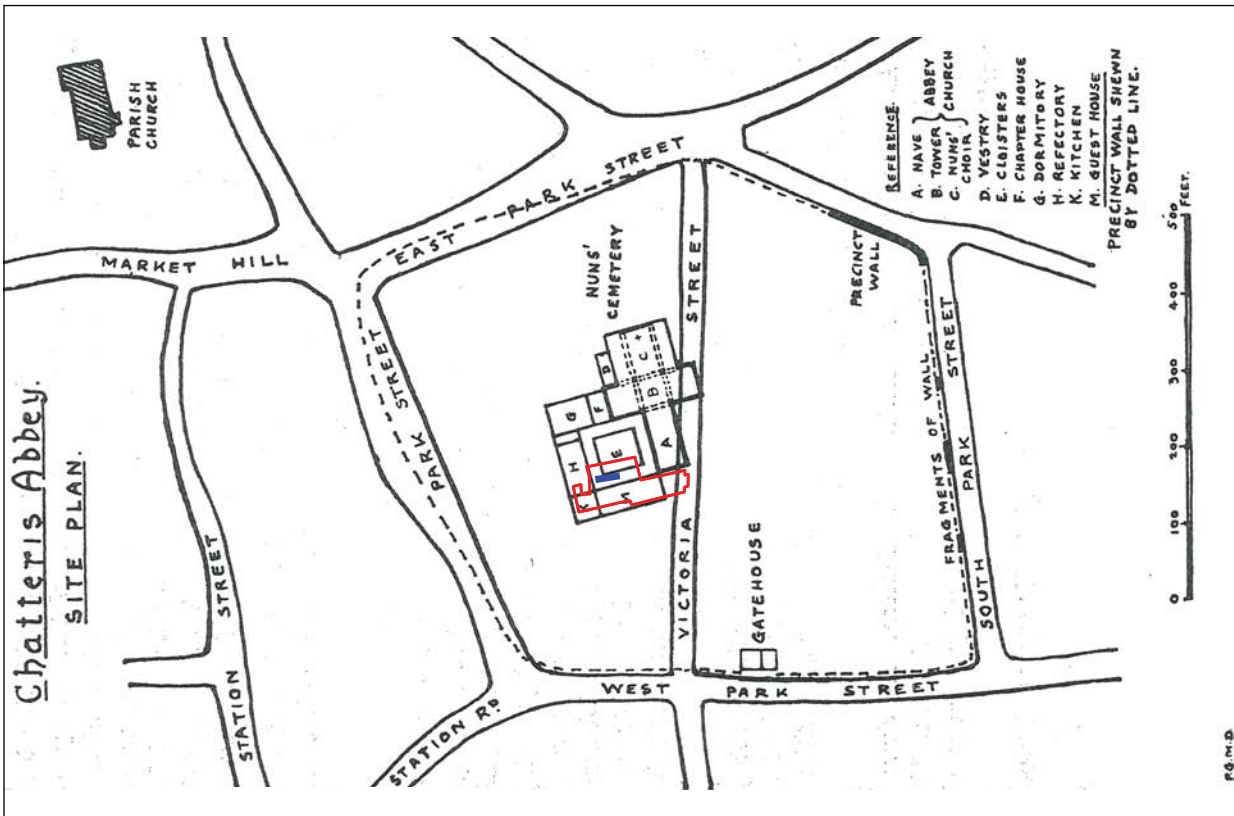


Figure 5: interpretive plan of Chatteris Abbey showing the development area (red) and trench (blue) (after Dickinson 1954, 6)



Figure 7: Trench plan



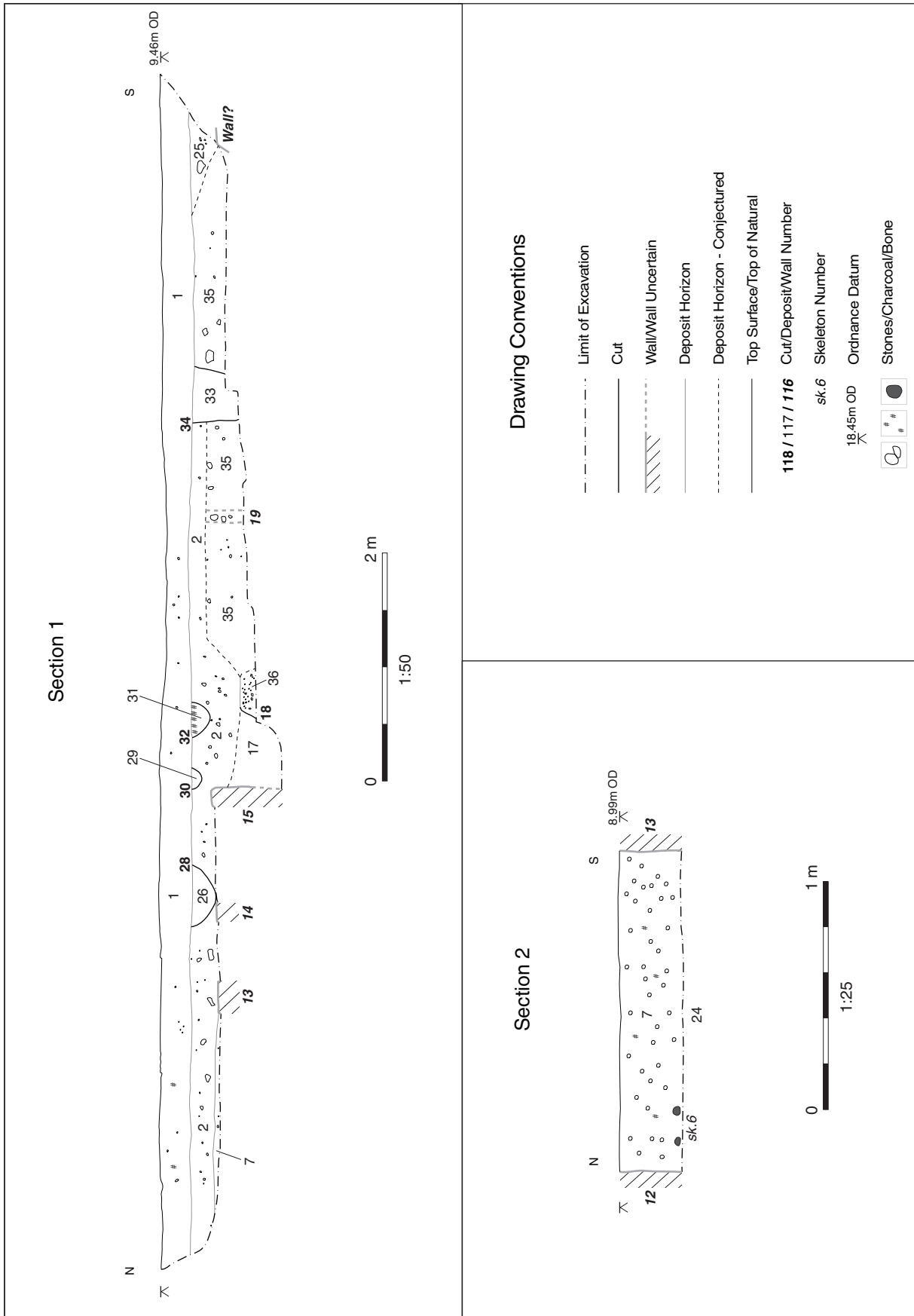


Figure 8: Sections



Plate 1: View of stone wall on south side of Victoria Street, taken from north-east



Plate 2: View of Trench 1 with Terram laid over the exposed burials prior to backfilling of graves by hand, taken from south

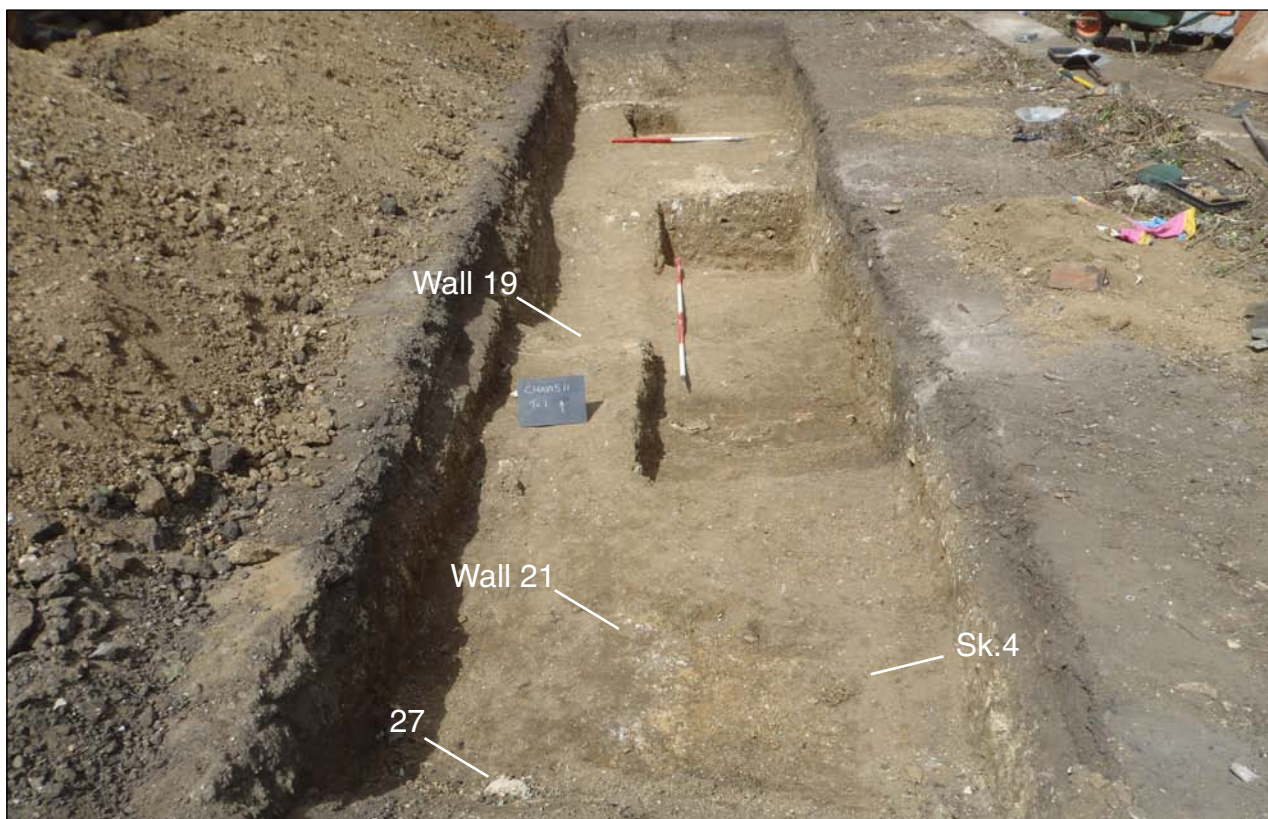


Plate 3: General shot of Trench 1 showing walls and burials, taken from south



Plate 4: Skeleton 3, taken from east



Plate 5: Skeleton 5 centre, wall 15 to right, taken from east



Plate 6: Skeleton 6 with wall 12 to right, taken from east



Plate 7: View of Trench 1 taken from the north showing walls 12-15 and burials to the south



Plate 8: Detail of Section 1 showing skeletons 3 and 5, walls 15 and 19 and overlying deposits and features, taken from west



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