



WHITLAND ABBEY

ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR CARMARTHEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST 1995

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Cover: based on a reconstruction drawing of a Whitland Abbey tile by the first Chairman of the Dyfed Archaeological Trust, Professor W F Grimes, and first published in 1935.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND BRIEF

1.1. Whitland Abbey is a site of considerable historical importance. In recent years there has been renewed interest in the conservation of the site and its enhancement for the benefit of the general public. In 1986, in response to the proposed sale of Abbey Home Farm, there were moves to purchase the Abbey site. A report was prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust and led to steps towards the formation of a Whitland Abbey Heritage Trust. Following the collapse of attempts to secure the whole site, this proto-Trust provided the basis for the birth of a broader-based Whitland Heritage Trust.

1.2. At the same time, the need for presentation of the site was accorded a high priority under the Whitland Community Association's programme through TCRI, with support from Carmarthen District Council. Recently, the Council has secured a 21-year lease on the site of the church from its owners, the Catholic Diocese of Menevia, though the remainder of the Abbey site remains under separate private ownership.

1.3. Following the submission of a preliminary report to Carmarthen District Council in January 1994, the Council subsequently commissioned the Trust *to carry out a field evaluation to determine the likely extent and costs of clearance of Whitland Abbey and to provide more detailed proposals as to its treatment and interpretation for visitors*. Since the site is a scheduled ancient monument, an application for Scheduled Monument Consent was submitted to Cadw. This application was approved, but in addition to the statutory conditions attached to the Cadw consent, there was a substantial number of specific *non-statutory* recommendations made by Cadw concerning future management plans for the site (Appendix 1). These recommendations have been addressed in so far as they fall within the brief provided by the District Council.

SECTION 2 : THE ABBEY SITE: DESCRIPTION

2.1. Brief History of Abbey and Significance

Historically and archaeologically, Whitland Abbey is of considerable significance and importance. The present site dates from 1151 AD though there are hints that the area may have been settled in earlier times. The abbey became the premier Cistercian House in Wales. From it developed seven new Welsh abbeys and two in Ireland. After the Dissolution in 1539 the site was used as a forge, and there were a number of cottages for the work force. The forge finally closed in 1808. A walled garden was constructed on the site soon after 1836.

2.3. History of Investigation

The site appears to have been investigated in 1836, with some excavation on the church, in the area of the altar, but no details are available. Large scale excavations were undertaken by the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society in 1926, and apparently, in association with students from the South Wales Training College, Carmarthen (Trinity College), these continued in 1928. The explorations seem to have been focused mainly on the abbey church, though some work may also have taken place on the claustral range within the walled garden. The precise extent of excavations on the church is difficult to determine, but the eastern end, including the crossing, the north transept, choir and presbytery with its high altar appear to have been excavated to floor level. Other excavations in the western part of the church traced its main dimensions and identified the location of some of the internal piers of the nave. Apart from the published plan (fig. 4) and a note on the excavations, no detailed records have been traced. There are no further recorded excavations on the site, prior to the 1994 evaluation.

2.4. Existing Remains

2.4.1. The Abbey site occupies fairly level ground in the bottom of a valley and lies on the east side of the Nant Colomendy brook (fig. 2). The site of the abbey church lies within a small enclosure defined by a low field bank with hawthorns on the north, and a bank and hedge on the roadside to the east. The southern side of the enclosure is formed by a high wall, the north wall of a former walled garden (see para 2.4.6 below). For the most part, this wall overlays the south-wall of the south aisle of the church. The western boundary of the enclosure is marked by a sharp break of slope and hawthorns. This boundary approximates to the west wall of the church. The enclosure contains a number of mature trees. The majority of these are pines, mainly in the north-eastern area of the enclosure.

2.4.2. The area of the District Council's lease contains the enclosure as described above and a large field to the north (OS 8127). This field contains a number of features of archaeological interest, including a rectangular ?building platform in the south west corner, a former leat and a number of overflow channels presumed to be associated with the later use of the abbey site as a forge.

2.4.3. Apart from the church, the majority of the below-ground remains of the abbey lie outside the area of the Council's lease. The principal conventual structures, including for example, the cloisters, chapter house, dormitories, kitchen, are presumed to lie within the remains of the walled garden to the south; perhaps in the field south of the road on the southern side of the garden; and in the field to the west of the garden. Other buildings originally associated with the abbey may lie beneath or be incorporated in the buildings of Abbey Home Farm

2.4.4. Very little survives by way of standing remains of the Abbey. In the field to the west of the walled garden there are two substantial portions of masonry, probably medieval, standing some 4.5m high and much in need of conservation. These remains may have been part of the abbey gatehouse. The lower section of the west wall of the walled garden, some 60 metres long, is clearly medieval. The medieval portions are mostly about 2m in height, increasing to some 3m high towards the north-west corner. The wall incorporates a blocked 12thC doorway, a springer for an arch or vault, and a recess on its eastern face. This walling is part of the west range of the abbey. The upper part of the wall, rising to an additional 3m at the northern end, is probably all post-medieval. Much of it is covered by ivy.

2.4.5. The site of the abbey church is largely grassed-over with some scrub and occasional trees. The surface is marked by a number of undulations, largely reflecting the areas of the 1926/1928 excavations. Observations by Cadw's Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments in June 1994 on the present state of the monument describe the church site as "a confused jumble of piles of stones and spoil heaps". In a number of places, there are short stretches of low, exposed wall faces (fig 4). The surface remains are unintelligible to a lay person, and even a specialist would have difficulty in reconciling these remains with the 1926 excavation plan.

2.4.6. The section of garden wall bounding the southern side of the Church site is generally some 3m high. It contains no evident medieval work though for the most part it lies on the line of the south wall of the church. It is not in good condition. The pointing has eroded and the top of the wall is crumbling under vegetational growth. The wall is bulging in the area where it curves towards the south eastern corner of the enclosure containing the church.

2.5. Statutory Constraints.

2.5.1. The site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Carms. no. 14) and therefore subject to the provisions of the 1969 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act. Effectively, this prohibits any below ground disturbance within the scheduled area without the specific permission of the Secretary of State through the granting of Scheduled Monument Consent. If such consent is granted, it is generally subject to conditions.

2.5.2. The scheduled area (fig. 3) includes the site of the abbey church and the presumed site of most of the conventual buildings noted in para 2.4.3. above. For the most part the scheduled boundary follows well-defined existing boundaries, but the northern boundary is somewhat arbitrary, equating neither to any existing boundary nor any original monastic boundary, or surface features. A little less than half the land leased by the District Council is scheduled. The exact line of the northern boundary of the scheduled area, in OS 8127, is significant, since this determines

the northern limit of the area within which certain proposals and activities would be subject to Scheduled Monument Consent.

2.5.3. The upstanding remains of the abbey are also a Grade 2 Listed Building. The date of listing is November 1966 and there is no accompanying map which defines the structures to which the listing applies. The subject of the listing is "Remains of Whitland Abbey" and the description is: "Stretch of mediaeval walling, all that remains of the Cistercian and earlier Whitland Abbey". Whatever the original intention, under current Welsh Office guidance, listing is regarded as applying to everything within the curtilage of the listed property. Because of the difficulty in defining the curtilage, the situation at Whitland remains somewhat ambiguous, but the implication is that at the least, all visible standing elements whether medieval or not, have listed building status.

2.6. Site Management and Conservation

2.6.1. At present, due to separate ownership and land management, different parts of the complex are managed in different ways. The area of the walled garden in the ownership of Abbey Home Farm and containing the site of the cloisters and portions of the east, west and south ranges, is laid down to an attractive and well-maintained lawn: there is no danger to below-ground remains in this area. Standing portions of walling, including some containing medieval features, are however in a poor state, and some are in urgent need of consolidation.

2.6.2. The field to the west of the walled garden is under an agricultural grazing regime. The earthworks in this field are in good condition. The portion of upstanding masonry is in urgent need of consolidation.

2.6.3. The Abbey church site is most in need of positive management. The trenches and spoil heaps of the 1926/1928 excavations were left unrestored leaving the remains in an unintelligible state. Much of the site reverted to grass which in recent years has been maintained by cattle grazing, though scrub has increasingly developed. The highest surviving medieval wall faces exposed in 1926 are subject to steady deterioration. The trees on the site are continuing to cause damage to the below-ground remains.

2.6.4. To the north of the Abbey church, the field containing a number of features of interest noted in para 2.4.2 above is under an agricultural grazing regime. Under this regime, there is at present, no evidence of damage to features, whether within or outside the scheduled area.

2.7. Use as a Cultural and Educational Facility

2.7.1. At present, there is no on-site interpretation of the Abbey: its precise location and extent are difficult, if not impossible, for visitors to establish.

2.7.2. Current appreciation of Whitland Abbey is at present very uneven. At one level, to professional archaeologists and historians, and specialist students, its importance is well-known. For historians in particular, the Abbey has long been known as the premier Cistercian Abbey in Wales,

and its holdings have recently been studied in detail. Archaeologically, it is one of the least well-known monastic sites.

2.7.3. Locally, the site has long been considered of considerable significance. In the late 1980's, there was an attempt to establish a Whitland Abbey Heritage Trust and secure the whole of the abbey complex for public presentation and display. For a variety of reasons this attempt failed. At much the same time, the development of the Whitland Community Association under the encouragement of the Taf and Cleddau Rural Initiative led to the inclusion of the site as one of significant potential for local and tourist interest. This remains an objective following the transfer of the Whitland and Llanboidy Community Associations to the umbrella of Antur Cwm Taf - the rural initiative now covering West Carmarthenshire.

2.7.4. At present, both local and external visitors find it virtually impossible to identify the site of the abbey or appreciate its original extent and components. Modern Ordnance Survey maps draw attention to the site in a variety of ways: the 1:50,000 (Landranger 158) records in Gothic script, "Abbey (rems of)" and the modern placename "Whitland Abbey" (the name of the 19thC house to the south east of the medieval site). The OS 1:25000 denotes "Remains of Abbey (Cistercian)" and the present holdings, "Abbey Home Farm" and "Whitland Abbey", whilst the OS 1:10,000 and 1:2500 map record the "Remains of 'Whitland Abbey' (Cistercian) as within the walled garden opposite Abbey Home Farm

2.7.5. Local road signs generally exacerbate this unsatisfactory situation. Travellers on the road to Llanboidy from the A40 east of Whitland are directed to "Whitland Abbey", whilst from North Road, Whitland, signs indicate "By Road to Whitland Abbey". It is not surprising that unsuspecting visitors are first, led to believe that there may be prominent and readily identifiable remains of interest, and secondly, are unable to discover exactly where the abbey was or what remains exist.

2.7.6. Access to the site is available by road and by footpath (fig.1). The easiest road access is by way of a short section of a 'C' classified road leading to Llanboidy (ref. no. 32233) leading off the A40 at Ivydene, less than a mile away to the south east of the site, and thence by an unclassified road (ref. no. 6209 - 'Abbey Road') which passes the Abbey site. Following completion of the Whitland by-pass, access will be from the roundabout north-west of Ivydene, linking to the present 'Abbey Road' (it is understood that Whitland Abbey will be newly signposted at the roundabout). The unclassified 'Abbey Road' is generally suitable for all types of vehicles, though there are sections where passing is difficult.

2.7.7. From North Road, Whitland, a by-road just less than a mile long leads to the Abbey. This road is very narrow and unsurfaced. Its status is a By-road Open to All Traffic (ref. no. 66/4). Whilst it is permissible and possible to negotiate this route by car, it also involves crossing a ford at the exit to the Abbey. The route is generally quite unsuitable as a vehicular route to the site.

2.7.8. At the Abbey complex itself, there is no specific provision for vehicle parking. Adjacent to the site, limited space (for perhaps four or five cars) is available on the roadside verges without interfering with through traffic, but coaches would find parking and turning difficult. There is also a danger, in the absence of any prohibitive notices, of visitors parking on and obstructing access

to private property at Whitland Abbey house and Abbey Home Farm.

2.7.9. For walkers, the site is accessible from Whitland by two main routes. The first is part of the 'Landsker Borderlands Trail'. The relevant local section envisages the Hwyl Dda Centre as the starting point, thence by way of North Road to the By-road to Whitland Abbey. At the Abbey complex, the by-road skirts the southern side of the walled garden, containing the site of the cloisters and other conventual ranges. A short stretch of road bounding the east side of the walled garden leads to a footpath across the field to the north of the Abbey Church. This is the most convenient point to divert walkers to the Abbey Church site. The approximate distance from the Hwyl Dda centre is one and three-quarter miles.

2.7.10. A more direct footpath to the Abbey (ref. no. 66/3) starts from the A40, east of the Fisher's Arms, and runs to the east side of the River Gronw, joining the road to Whitland Abbey involving a little over a mile walk overall. This route will be cut by the Whitland by-pass, but provision has been made for an underpass.

2.7.11. A combination of western and eastern footpath routes would provide an interesting circular route from Whitland of about two and three-quarter miles, with Whitland Abbey as its focus. Other features of interest along this route, for example the recently investigated Roman road, could be used to create additional interest.

2.7.12. The actual level of visitor interest in the site has not been subject to any monitoring or detailed research. As a result of enquiries at Abbey Home Farm, it appears that existing interest is at a low level. Whilst a few enquiries have been made at the farm by specialist visitors over the last two years, visits by schools are considered to be very infrequent. Occasional visitors by car have apparently complained at the lack of upstanding and identifiable remains.

2.7.13. There is no doubt that there is considerable scope for enhancement of Whitland Abbey 'as a cultural and educational amenity for the district and its visitors'. Sufficient is known about the medieval history of the Abbey to provide suitable material for on-site and off-site interpretation. The reconstitution of the layout of the Abbey church will in itself provide a resource of significant interest for visitors, even though the associated conventual remains will not be directly accessible. In addition, there are features of interest associated with the later history of the site, including its later iron-working history. Some features lie within the area of the Council's lease, including visible fishponds, dams and water channels. These will help to demonstrate aspects of the story of the site within a wider historic landscape.

SECTION 3: THE ABBEY CHURCH: RESULTS OF FIELD EVALUATION

3.1. Work Undertaken

3.1.1. The evaluation was conducted over a 4-week period in June 1994 in conjunction with students and staff from the Department of Archaeology, Trinity College, Carmarthen. Up to 80 students were involved as part of a training exercise which included survey of other sites of interest in the valley. In addition, a section was cut through one of the leats and with Cadw consent, preliminary excavation was undertaken on a building platform to the north-west of the church site.

3.1.2. The church site was cleared of scrub and one dead tree removed for safety reasons. Survey station markers were installed in concrete. The site was contour-surveyed and a hachured plan produced to show the location of former spoil heaps (figs. 5,6).

3.1.3. The main area of excavation was on the eastern area of the church, focusing on parts of the crossing, choir, north and south transepts. A trench was cut on the southern side of the nave, and an area of the north-east corner of the church was also examined. At the end of the work, the excavation areas were covered with plastic sheeting and partly backfilled with soil and turf to provide temporary protection to the walls, floor surfaces and other features uncovered.

3.2. Summary of Results

3.2.1. **Overall Plan.** It proved impossible to achieve a precise correlation between the 1926 plan of the church and the surviving walls recorded during the evaluation. The earlier plan appears to contain inaccuracies between the length and breadth of the site and to a certain extent the plan must be regarded as schematic. It cannot be relied on for exact planning purposes. Nevertheless, testing of walls and pillars recorded on the 1926 plan as 'uncovered' showed that these features invariably exist, though details, including for example, different phases in building and at least two doorways, were not recorded in 1926.

3.2.2. **Present topography.** As suspected, the majority of the earthworks on the church site are the spoil heaps from the 1926/1928 excavations. One spoil tip consisted mainly of moulded stone fragments. Others produced finds including plain and decorated tile fragments.

3.2.3. **Survival and condition of walls.** The survival and condition of walls on the site is very variable and mostly very poor. On the basis of the evaluation, it may be estimated that there are some 140m of surviving walling. This figure assumes that much of the north wall of the nave - for some 37m, has been previously robbed out though it is possible that occasional foundation stones may survive. Of the estimated 140m of surviving walling, about 63m (45%) is likely to be only one course high, with some 74 metres with 2-3 courses up to a height of some 0.5m. Wall construction is of roughly coursed and faced shale with rubble infill. Dressed Bath-type stone is present on door jambs and external buttresses. Some of this stone includes moulded material still *in situ*. Most of the walling is in poor condition due to exposure after the 1926/1928 excavations.

This also applies to those nave pillars which were investigated.

3.2.4. Survival and condition of floors. Given the nature of the earlier excavations and no doubt, a history of earlier depredations, the survival of the latest floors was as anticipated, patchy. In the eastern area of the church, a small patch of tiling was found in the south part of the **presbytery**; the make-up levels for the floor being largely intact. On the north side of the **crossing**, a larger portion of plain tiling remains, arranged in a chequerboard, but the tiles are in very poor condition. Remaining tiling in the **north transept** is confined to a few tiles, again in very poor condition against the chapel step. Within the **north transept** itself, floor make-up survives with a portion of stone-flagged floor laid diagonally and in good condition. Limited investigation of the **south transept** suggests that some tiles survive but that the flooring has been extensively robbed. The area of tiles located on the 1926 plan in the **southern part of the crossing** could not be examined due to the presence of a tree, but it is likely that all these tiles were removed in 1926. The **nave and aisles** would probably originally have been stone flagged. In the areas investigated, deposits appear to have been removed to below floor level, but it would be possible to establish the original floor level by reference to the surviving pillar bases.

3.3. Implications.

3.3.1. The Plan of the Church. As indicated above (para 4.1), there are problems with the accuracy and details of the 1926 plan of the layout of the church. Given a limited amount of further clearance in selected areas (eg. north transept) a reasonable compromise could be arrived at whereby the overall layout might be sufficiently well determined to permit interpretation and display at a certain level.

3.3.2. The spoil heaps which create the majority of the surface irregularities could rapidly be removed without damaging previously undisturbed deposits on the site. Removal by hand would be necessary in order to recover archaeological artifacts. In the process of removal of spoil tips it may be that further stretches of walling would be uncovered.

3.3.3. The insubstantial nature of the wall remains creates problems for conservation and display. Conservation of portions where only one course remains would require their lifting and re-setting. Treatment of the floors would also be problematical. None of the patches of **tiling** are in a condition whereby they could be consolidated and displayed *in situ*. The portion of the **stone floor** in the north transept might be suitable for *in situ* consolidation. With the possible exception of the latter area, if the floor levels within the church were to be maintained at their original level, this would require removal of archaeological deposits below the original floor level - something that would be unlikely to be acceptable to Cadw. Alternatively, new floor levels could be established above the original/existing level. This would mean that those existing walls which are only one course high, would either have to be artificially enhanced, or their course marked out in some way on or above the new floor levels.

3.3.4. Where the walls reach a height of 0.5 metres or so, the above problems in raising the floor level do not apply. Nevertheless the condition of these walls is poor; exposed faces are continuing to suffer erosion, and protection and/or consolidation measures will be required.

SECTION 4: OPTIONS

4.1. In considering options for the clearance of the site and its future development, a number of factors have been taken into account:

1. The Council's acquisition of the church site on a 21-year lease, *'with a view to enhancing its conservation and management, and its development as a cultural and educational amenity for the district and its visitors'*.
2. The extent of the area within the Council's lease -as indicated in para 2.4 above
3. The nature and extent of the existing surface remains of the church
4. The nature, state of preservation, and likely extent of the sub-surface remains as elucidated by the field evaluation
5. The need to ensure that the archaeological integrity of the monument is not unnecessarily compromised
6. The level of information and extent of excavation and other groundworks required to enable interpretation of the site for visitors
7. The constraints and opportunities for improved management of the site arising out of its status as a Scheduled Ancient Monument
8. The level of interpretation and promotion of the site, bearing in mind access and the need to ensure that the essential tranquillity of the complex remains one of its most attractive assets
9. The likely cost factors in developing individual options

4.2. Clearance and Consolidation of the Abbey Church Remains

4.2.1. A variety of options were considered ranging from at the one extreme a 'do nothing approach' to the other extreme involving total excavation and conservation of the remains. The former option may receive support from some quarters in an environment where protection of archaeological sites (even against archaeological excavation) is considered the highest priority. This option however can be ruled out on the grounds that it would not protect the existing remains and that it defeats the whole purpose of both the Catholic Church and the District Council in the leasing arrangement.

4.2.2. The other extreme, total excavation and conservation/consolidation would have the advantage of acquiring new knowledge of the history and development of the abbey church and substantially increasing the amount of information available (and features and finds potentially displayable) for the benefit of specialists and general public alike. As indicated in the Trust's Preliminary Report, the process and progress of the excavation itself would be a public attraction in its own right.

4.2.3. The disadvantages are that on a seasonal basis, the excavation would take several years to complete; the overall costs of the excavation and post-excavation work would be very substantial, probably in excess of £250,000, excluding conservation/consolidation and display costs : even allowing for Trinity College input, some £20 -25,000 per year would be required from other sources to sustain the excavation and post-excavation work. Moreover, based on the observations in

section 3.2. above, the quality of the remains is likely to add to the problems and costs of consolidation and display of the site. Finally, in the present climate, it is extremely unlikely that Cadw would give consent for work which would involve the investigation of hitherto undisturbed archaeological levels. In all therefore this option can be effectively ruled out.

4.2.4. A variety of other options were considered involving continuation of the process of clearance down to the levels undisturbed by earlier excavations over all, or selective parts of the site. In considering these options the Trust has had to consider the implications of the poor quality of the remains, the consolidation issues and the extent to which various degrees of further clearance will significantly and effectively contribute to the ultimate display of the site. There is little point for example, in devoting resources to the further exposure of remains over a wide area of the church if these cannot then be incorporated in the eventual layout.

4.2.5. At the very minimum, the course of the foundations of the Abbey Church needs to be physically re-established on the ground in order to provide a meaningful layout for visitors to appreciate. This need not involve the complete exposure and consolidation of original remains. A new overall ground level could be created above the level of the original medieval floor levels, thereby protecting those surfaces previously exposed in 1926/1928, and also areas of original floor not investigated at that time. Sections of original medieval walling proud of the new level would require consolidation (fig. 7). The remaining portions of the line of the foundations could be marked out on the new surface. Concrete edging with a turf or gravel infill is one possibility. Others include earth and turf banks, or simulated stonework. Further advice would be required from Cadw. The newly-established ground level should be turfed for ease of future maintenance.

4.2.6. The above option would still involve substantial clearance and levelling of the earlier spoil heaps, and under controlled archaeological conditions. The approximate area of clearance and levelling is indicated on figure 8. The proposal involves much less excavation than the option noted in 4.2.2 above, could be accomplished within single season and would avoid disturbance of original archaeological deposits. Estimated clearance and levelling costs (assuming labour input from Trinity College) would be in the order of £18,000, with a further £10,000 - £12,000 for consolidation and establishment of foundation lines. In addition, provision would need to be made for some post-clearance work in order to produce an archaeological report on the features and finds uncovered.

4.3. Interpretation and Promotion

4.3.1. The approach to the development of Whitland Abbey 'as a cultural and educational amenity for the District and its visitors' requires very careful consideration. The site could be extensively promoted as a visitor and educational attraction. In this case, improvements to the vehicular access would be required and special provision for car/coach parking, perhaps in the field to the north of the Abbey Church.

4.3.2. It is unlikely that without access to, and further development of, the complex as a whole, the site could be successfully promoted as a *substantial* tourist attraction. Under the present circumstances there is also a danger that over-promotion might alienate local residents and that the

essential tranquillity of the complex would be adversely affected.

4.3.3. This tranquillity, and the capacity that the complex offers for quiet enjoyment, is a substantial part of Whitland Abbey's attractiveness. If this is to be retained, then a relatively low-key approach to promotion of the site is required, encouraging for example, visits via the local footpath network.

4.3.4. Assuming the church site is cleared and its overall plan restored as indicated in para 4.2.6. above, some interpretation of the church site, the history of the abbey, and of the complex as a whole will be necessary. Two on-site panels should be sufficient, though consideration should be given to 'labelling' the different parts of the Abbey church (eg 'nave', 'north transept', 'choir' etc) on the ground. A leaflet on the abbey, emphasising footpath routes to the site, should be prepared and made available at the Hwyl Dda centre and local TIPs.

SECTION 5 : CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. The area of the Council's lease does not cover the whole of the Abbey complex. Nevertheless, it includes the site of the Abbey church, the part of the complex which is most urgently in need of attention, and one which is critical to the presentation and public understanding of the complex as a whole. There can be no doubt that this part of the complex can be dealt with in a manner that preserves the archaeological integrity of the site, whilst considerably enhancing its presentation for broader public benefit.

Clearance and presentation of remains of the Abbey Church

5.2. As a result of the field evaluation, the recommended option involves clearing and levelling the existing undulations resulting from the spoil heaps of the earlier investigations; establishment of a soil and turf cover over former floor levels; consolidation of selected stretches of existing walling; with the remainder of the outline of the foundations being marked out by some suitable form, subject to further discussion with Cadw. This option will protect the undisturbed archaeological deposits on the site, ensure that the exposed medieval remains are properly treated and conserved, and enable the original extent and layout of the church to be readily appreciated by visitors.

Interpretation and promotion

5.3. Several factors - the need to preserve the tranquil atmosphere of the site, the interests of the owners of the rest of the complex, access and parking difficulties - argue for a restrained approach towards interpretation and promotion. On-site information panels should be provided and a leaflet prepared.

Longer-term considerations

5.4. The laying out of the Abbey Church site and its interpretation will inevitably create extra interest in the complex. As well as an increase in the number of casual visitors, greater use may be expected from schools and students for educational purposes. At present none of this can be readily quantified and a wait-and-see approach is recommended before considering any extension in facilities at the site.

5.5. The desirability of a future agreement with the owner of Abbey Home Farm to allow access to other parts of the Abbey site should be considered. This applies especially to the field to the south west of the church containing masonry associated with a gatehouse or Abbot's lodging, building earthworks, and the western wall of the walled garden containing remains of the west range. This would extend the range of features of interest available for visitors.

SECTION 6 : PROPOSED MANAGEMENT PLAN

6.1. CAPITAL WORKS

Excavation, clearance and levelling

6.1.1. The undulations created by the 1926/1928 spoil heaps be removed and a new ground surface established some 250mm above the former original floor levels. The approximate area of levelling is indicated on figure 8. The removal of spoil heaps and levelling will have to be done under controlled archaeological conditions, so as to recover any artefacts and architectural fragments, and avoid damage to any remaining concealed stretches of upstanding masonry.

6.1.2. At the east end of the site some variation to the general level of restoration will be inevitable, so as to avoid disturbance of archaeologically significant deposits, apparently unexcavated in the late 1920s. In particular this applies to the south transept. A sloping grassed bank is recommended to accommodate the change in levels in this area.

6.1.3. The changes in the original level of the north transept, due to the altar dais will also require a step in level. It is also proposed that similar step be created to reflect the original rise in to the main altar dais. The surface to the east of both these elements will not, because of existing boundary and road levels, reflect the original level of the exterior of the church, but it is not considered that this will seriously affect intelligible presentation, or appreciation of the original form of the east end of the church.

Tree removal

6.1.4. It is recommended that at least 7 of the existing trees on the site be removed, in some cases for reasons of public safety, in other cases in order to create an intelligible site layout (fig.7). This matter will require further discussion with a variety of interested parties.

6.1.5. Following the excavation, clearance of spoil heaps, and general ground levelling, the surface soil should be raked clear of stone.

Consolidation and reconstitution

6.1.6. The area of the church should be re-turfed.

6.1.7. Those stretches of original walling which will stand proud of the re-formed level should be consolidated. The full extent of the walling which will require this treatment cannot be determined until clearance has taken place. In the meantime, the likely sections are indicated on figure 7 and an outline estimate is provided in Appendix 2. Archaeological supervision of consolidation work will be required.

6.1.8. The missing portions of walling should be marked out so as to be proud of the turf, using

stone or concrete edging. Figure 7 indicates the *estimated* extent, prior to further clearance. Turfing on top of any edging should be considered, but further advice should be sought from Cadw. This also applies to the marking out of the position of the nave pillars. Approximate lengths to be consolidated, with estimated costs, are indicated in Appendix 2.

Interpretation

6.1.9. On-site interpretation panels should be provided. Two A0 sized boards are recommended. The content will require detailed consideration, but should include the history of the abbey, an explanation of its layout, and the post-dissolution history of the abbey site. Illustrations could include a map showing the abbey and its daughter houses in Wales and Ireland, a plan covering the environs of the abbey, a plan of the abbey church, a reconstruction drawing, and perhaps some tile illustrations. The siting of the panels should be determined once clearing and levelling has been completed. The possibility of creating a raised area as a viewing platform outside the north wall of the church might be considered.

6.1.10. Consideration should be given to provision of a leaflet on the history of the abbey and site which could be available from the Hwyl Dda centre in Whitland and from TICs and TIPs.

Other

Post-excavation and finds

6.1.11. Provision must be made for post-excavation work leading to the publication of the information about the church revealed as a result of the clearance work, in an appropriate archaeological journal.

6.1.12. It is anticipated that further excavation and clearance of the spoil heaps will reveal significant archaeological finds which passed unrecorded in the earlier excavations. Quantities of medieval dressed stonework were recovered from the 1995 evaluation and more will be recovered from further clearance. In addition, fragmentary tiles may be expected, and there may be other finds - eg of pottery and metalwork. Aspects which need to be addressed are:

(1) deposition of finds. Any finds from the site are the property of the owner - the Catholic Church. In accordance with long standing Dyfed Archaeological Trust policy, it would be recommended that finds be deposited with the local museum - in this case the Carmarthen Museum, Abergwili. It may be that the Museum would be prepared to make arrangements for local exhibition of some of the material from Whitland Abbey - for example in the Hwyl Dda Centre, but this matter should be discussed with the various parties involved.

(2) Some finds from the site may require specialist examination, and conservation. These requirements cannot be determined until the excavation and clearance has been completed.

Garden Wall

6.1.13. The northern section of the garden wall bounding the church site requires remedial work for Health and Safety reasons and Cadw also recommend that there be a programme of consolidation for its preservation (Appendix 1). The wall should be inspected by qualified masons and/or structural engineers to determine the extent of the work needed.

6.2. SITE MAINTENANCE

6.2.1.. Once established, the site should be subject to a grazing regime, with some additional ongoing maintenance of the upstanding and marked out elements. On average, an estimated four man-days per year would be needed to keep consolidated walls in good repair. Following grass cutting in the first year, grazing would provide the best method of control, though if cattle are involved this may increase the costs of wall maintenance.

6.2.2. Once the capital works are completed, the Council should enter into a site Management Agreement with Cadw. This would be based on an agreed 5-year programme of management and maintenance of the Abbey Church site, and would be subject to Cadw grant aid under Section 17 of the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act.

6.2.3. As noted in para 5.5. above, the possibility of coming to a separate agreement with the owners of Abbey Home Farm allowing for public access to other parts of the complex should be explored. In the meantime, Cadw should be encouraged to open discussions with the owner and explore options for much-needed consolidation work on the upstanding elements outside the area of the District Council's lease.

SECTION 7 : PROPOSED TIMETABLE

7.1. June/July 1995: clearance and levelling of the Abbey Church site, including removal of trees. This is a critical period since the estimated costs assume a substantial saving due to input by students from Trinity College as part of a student training programme. These students will not be available later in the summer. If the clearance work is not completed within this period, then the estimated costs would be substantially increased. The removal of trees would be subject to competitive tendering.

7.3. July/August 1995: consolidation of exposed medieval walling, subject to competitive tender, and subject to Cadw-approved standards.

7.4. Between July and September 1995: repair and renovation of garden wall, subject to competitive tender.

7.5. September 1995: re-turfing of site subject to competitive tender.

7.6. September 1995 - April 1996: stabilisation of turf cover.

7.7. September -December 1995: research, design and artwork for interpretive panels to be discussed, agreed with Carmarthen District Council, and executed.

7.8. January-March 1996: production of on-site interpretive panels, and associated leaflet.

7.9. April/May 1996: Opening of site to general public.

SECTION 8 : ESTIMATED COSTS AND FUNDING SOURCES

8.1. Estimated costs

8.1.1. Excavation, clearance and levelling

(1) Staff costs: Project Management and supervisory costs, with up to 6 paid staff involved over a 7-week period (NB. Labour force provided by Trinity College students)	£9,900
(2) On Costs: Site offices etc hire, travel, transport, equipment & materials	£7,600
TOTAL Excavation, clearance & levelling	£17,500
8.1.2. Tree felling contract TOTAL	£ 1,100

8.1.3. Consolidation and Display

(1) Project Management Staff costs and supervision	£1500
(2) Turfing	£1600
(3) Consolidation of walls and marking out (subject to review after clearance phase)	£7500
TOTAL Consolidation and Display	£10,600

8.1.4. Repair and renovation of Garden Wall	
TOTAL (maximum estimate)	£22,300

8.1.5. Interpretation: Research, design and artwork and production of display panels, 2 no AO size, 2-colour, including posts and frames.	
TOTAL	£ 6,100

8.1.6. Additional Requirements

Post-excavation and report work (to be reviewed after clearance phase) including assessment of finds conservation requirements	£ 4,000
TOTAL	£61,600

8.2. Funding Sources

8.2.1. Assumed funding sources are: Carmarthen District Council (capital grant); WDA Section 15 grant, and Cadw (Section 24 Ancient Monument Grant). WDA funding was originally expected to be in the order of £21,000, but it is understood that any WDA contribution will now be directed via Antur Cwm Taf, to be found from WDA funds earmarked for all ACT projects. The amount available via ACT is likely to be considerably less than the WDA funding originally envisaged. For Cadw grants there is no fixed proportion, though 50% for capital works is common. Subject to application it is not certain if Cadw will grant aid the clearance element.

8.2.3. Estimated possible contributions

Work	Estimate	CDC	WDA(ACT)	CADW
Clearance etc	17,500	8,750		8,750
Tree felling	1,100	550		550
Consolidation/display	10,600	5,300		5,300
Garden Wall	22,300	11,150		11,150
Interpretation	6,100		3,050	3,050
Post-ex/report	4,000	4,000		
TOTAL	61,600	29,750	3,050	28,800

Estimated costs include VAT where applicable.

Should Cadw not grant aid the clearance work, an extra £8750 would be required from ACT, bringing the latter's contribution to £11,800.

SECTION 9 : BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Acknowledgements

The Field Evaluation was carried out under the direction of Peter Crane, Dyfed Archaeological Trust. This report has been compiled by Don Benson and Peter Crane, with illustrations by Ken Murphy.

The Trust is responsible for all information and opinions expressed in this report. It is nevertheless grateful for information and assistance from the following:

Mr J Hilling, Cadw; Mr R Turner, Cadw; Mr R Meade, Carmarthen District Council; Mr and Mrs G Lewis, Abbey Home Farm, Whitland; Mr G Lewis, Cilpost Farm, Whitland; Mr C Bolam, Transportation and Highways Department, Dyfed County Council; Mr T James, RCAHMS; the Very Rev S Cunnane, Catholic Church, Cardigan; Mr J Howells and staff and students from the Department of Archaeology, Trinity College, Carmarthen; and Mr K Kendall and members of the Whitland Heritage Trust;

Dyfed Archaeological Trust 1995.

APPENDIX 1: CADW RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) the production of large scale hachured and contoured plans of the site
- (2) the identification of all standing and significant post-mediaeval masonry and a programme of consolidation for its preservation
- (3) means for the protection of any low walls, plasterwork or floor surfaces which may be revealed by excavation
- (4) the advisability of protecting the existing tree cover
- (5) the options for maintenance of the grounds, such as grazing, mowing or the laying of hard landscaping
- (6) the identification of the extent of the spoil heaps dating from the excavation works carried out in the 1920's
- (7) the extent of the excavation work which would be necessary to reveal sufficient information to enable the interpretation of the site for visitors
- (8) the proper extent of the scheduled area
- (9) means of preparing a catalogue and storing all the loose architectural fragments around the site and of carrying out an ecological survey to identify places or species of significance

APPENDIX 2 : CONSOLIDATION AND DISPLAY

1. Estimated Surviving Lengths of Abbey Church Walling

There is estimated to be approximately 62.5 metres of walling one course high, and 73.5 metres of wall about 0.5 metres high. There would seem to be only a small amount of surviving internal wall plaster, which is located on the south wall of the chancel. There are about 37 metres of robbed north nave wall that would need to be marked out if the whole of the abbey church is to be displayed.

The Trust is grateful to John Hilling of Cadw for supplying indicative rates for consolidation costs for the walling. However it must be noted that these costs are at approximately 1994 rates. It is strongly recommended that consolidation work is undertaken as soon as possible after excavation, and that an archaeologist be present during the work.

2. Consolidation of Walling :estimated lengths and costs:

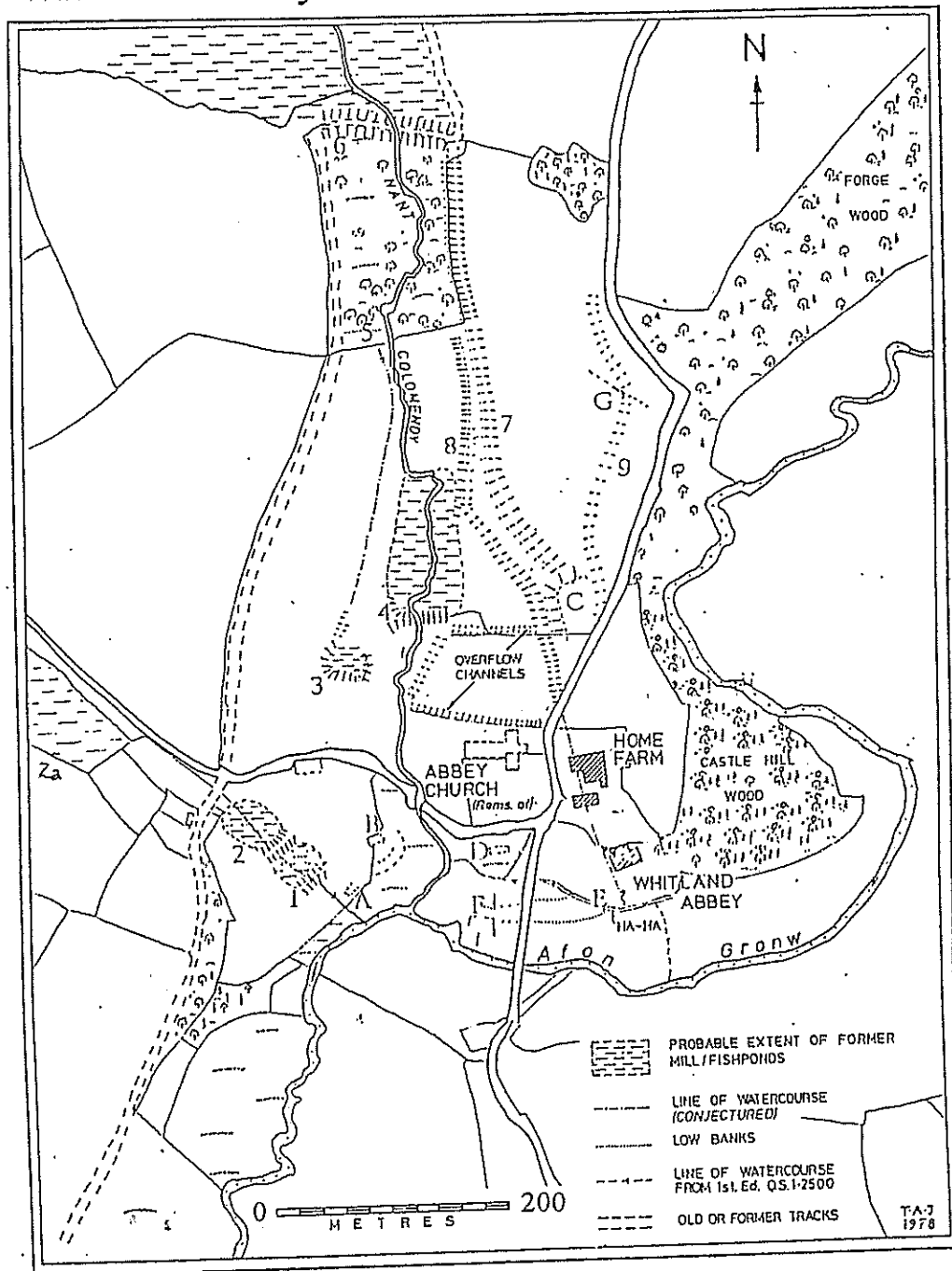
Approximately 62 metres of wall one course high	£2000
Approximately 75 metres of wall 1/2 metre high	£2000 to £3000
Aisle pillars to consolidate or mark out at £50 to £100 each x by 16 pillars	£800 to £1600
Marking out of altar, internal steps and robbed walling in the cheapest method	£1000
Total	£5800 -£7600

In addition to this there may be some Bathstone replacement.

3. Re-surfacing the site after excavation

All excavated areas will need to be covered in gravel or returfed. If gravel is used, a membrane will have to be put down first. Given the large area of this site a gravel surface would be visually intrusive, and with the high costs and maintenance this option is considered unacceptable. The preferred alternative is to be finish the site with a grass surface. To have re-turfing of the interior of the church undertaken by a contractor, would be approximately 1100 sq.metres at £1.50 per sq.metre and total £1600. This could be reduced if the site is seeded, and, or turf used from the excavation areas.

Whitland Abbey and Earthworks



1-6 Fish and mill ponds; 7-8 watercourses;
A-G Buildings and other earthworks

Figure 2

Land owned by Catholic
Church and leased to District
Council

Scheduled Boundary

Landsker Borderlands Trail

39
1ha
80

9739
592ha
1-46

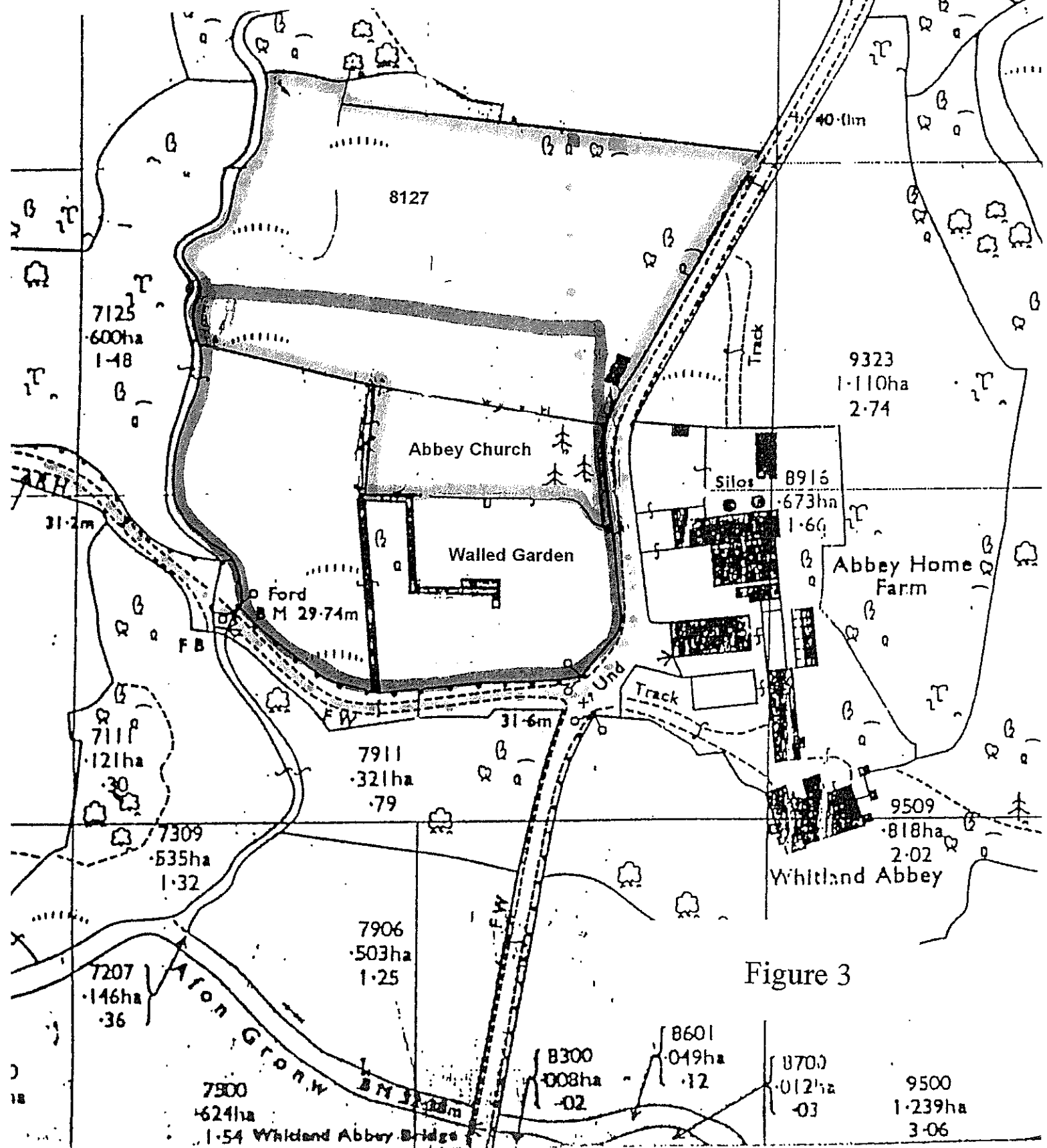





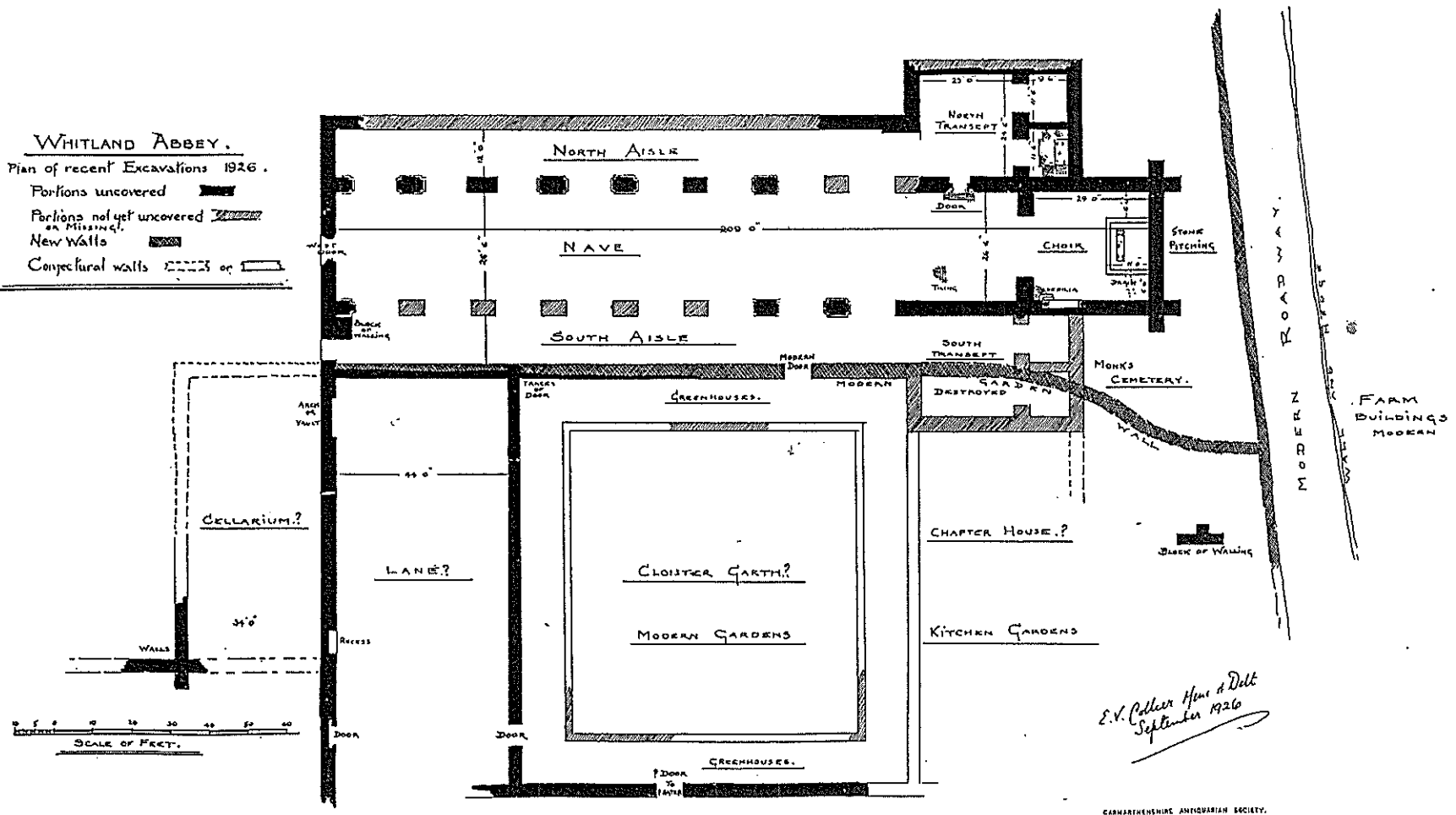


Figure 3

WHITLAND ABBEY.
 Plan of recent Excavations 1926.
 Portions uncovered 
 Portions not yet uncovered 
 New Walls 
 Conjectural walls  or 



WHITLAND ABBEY, 1926.

Original plan by Ernest V. Collier, in the Society's Museum.

Figure 4

WHITLAND ABBEY: EARTHWORKS AND EXCAVATED AREA 1994

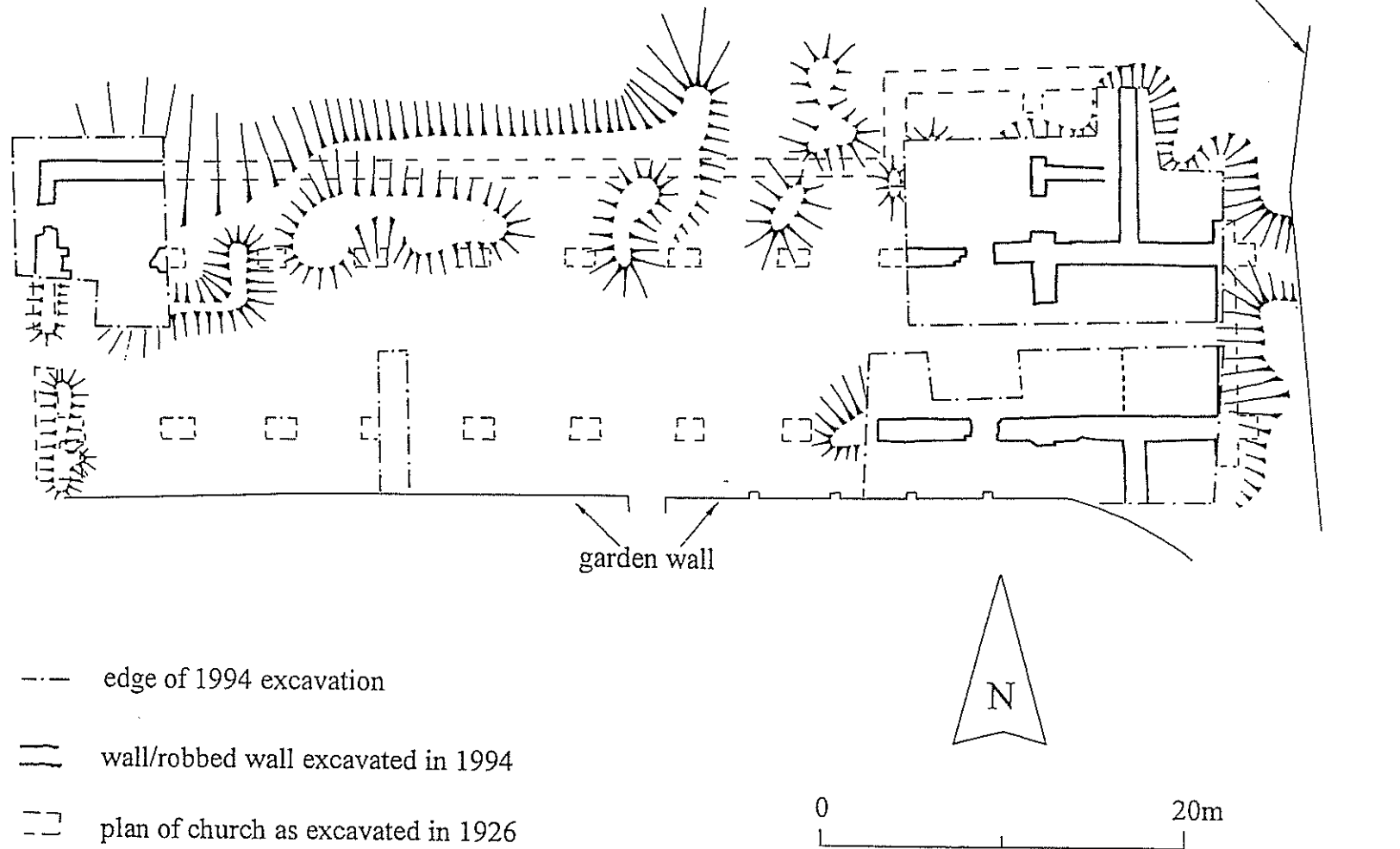
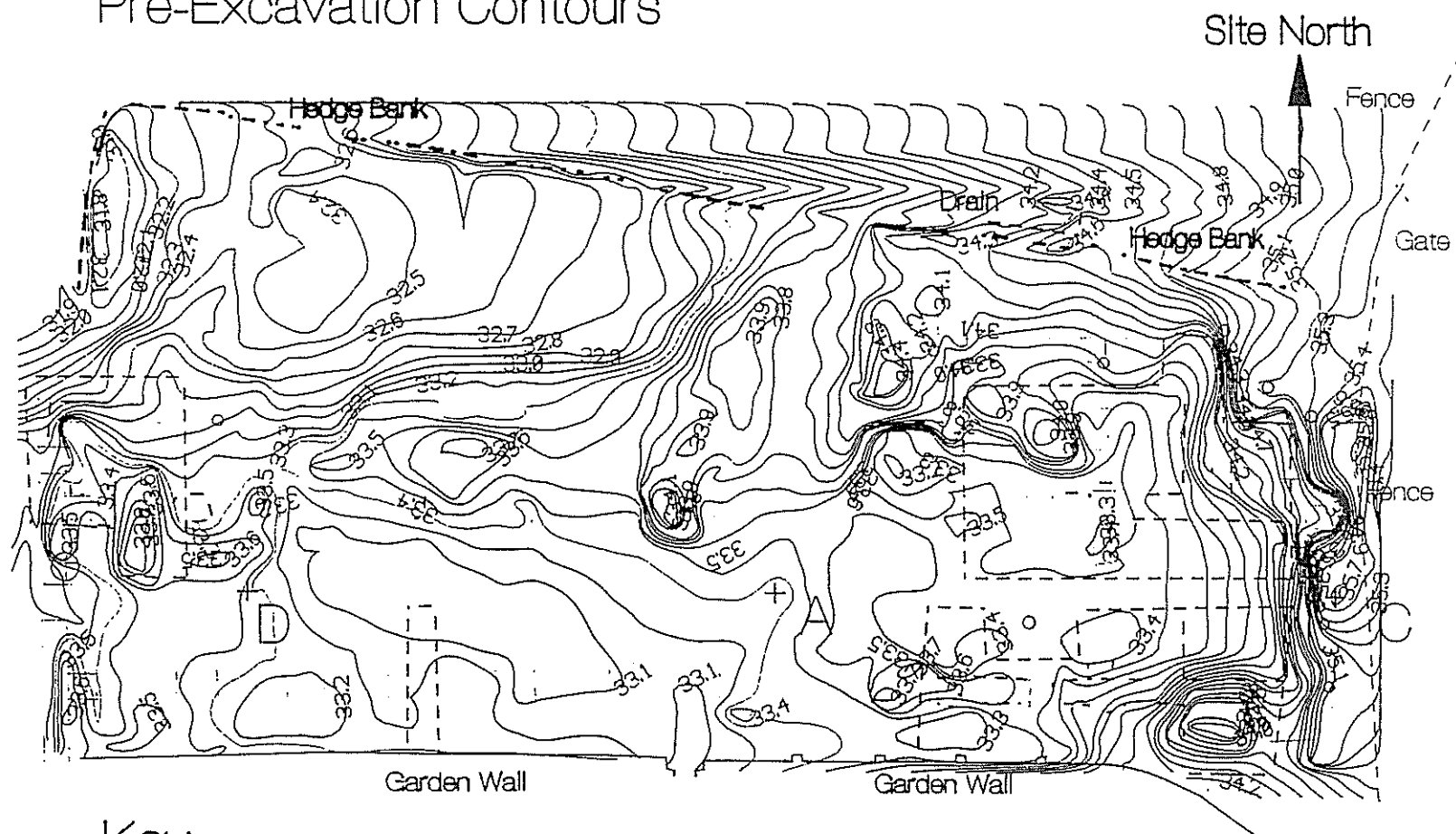








Figure 5

Pre-Excavation Contours



Key

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
|  | Bank Top |
|  | Wall Bottom |
|  | Wall Top |
|  | Tree |
|  | Concrete Grid Points |
|  | Excavation Edge |

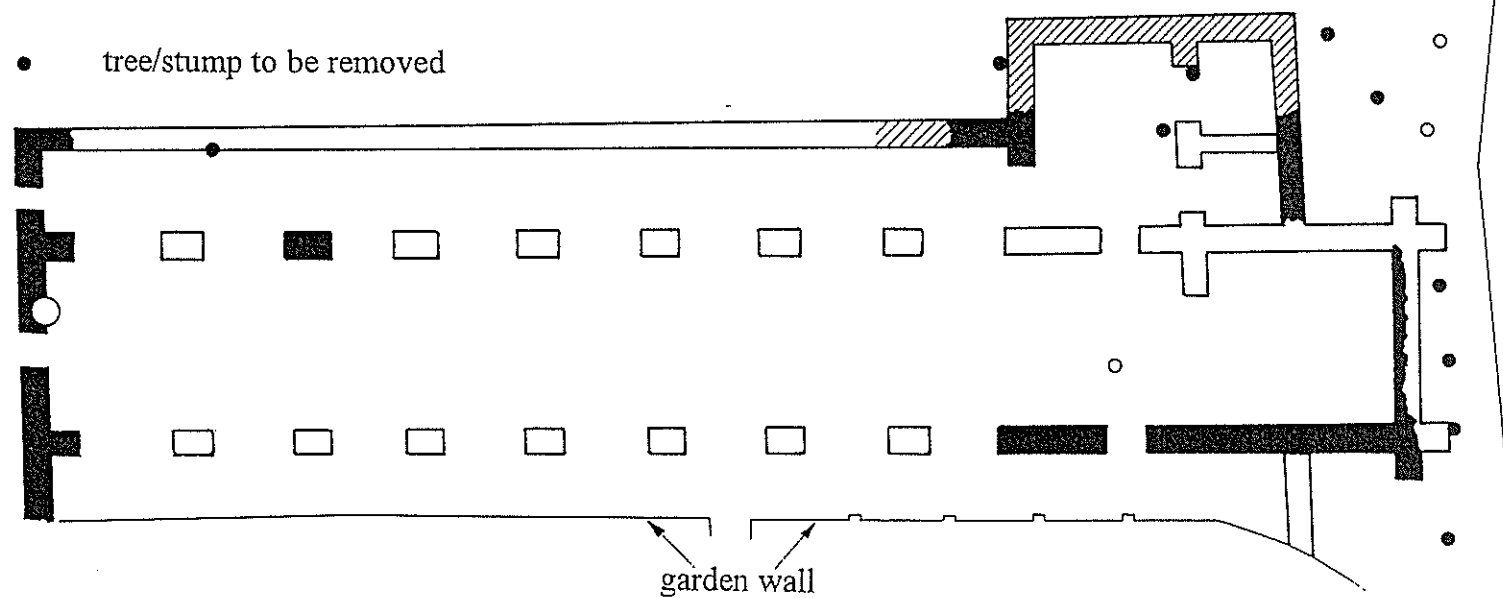
Contours at 0.2 metre intervals

Figure 6

WHITLAND ABBEY: PROPOSALS

○ tree to be retained

● tree/stump to be removed



■ existing walls to be consolidated

▨ possible additional walls to be consolidated after levelling and spoil clearance

— walls to be outlined at new level

0 20m

Figure 7

WHITLAND ABBEY: PROPOSED AREA OF LEVELLING

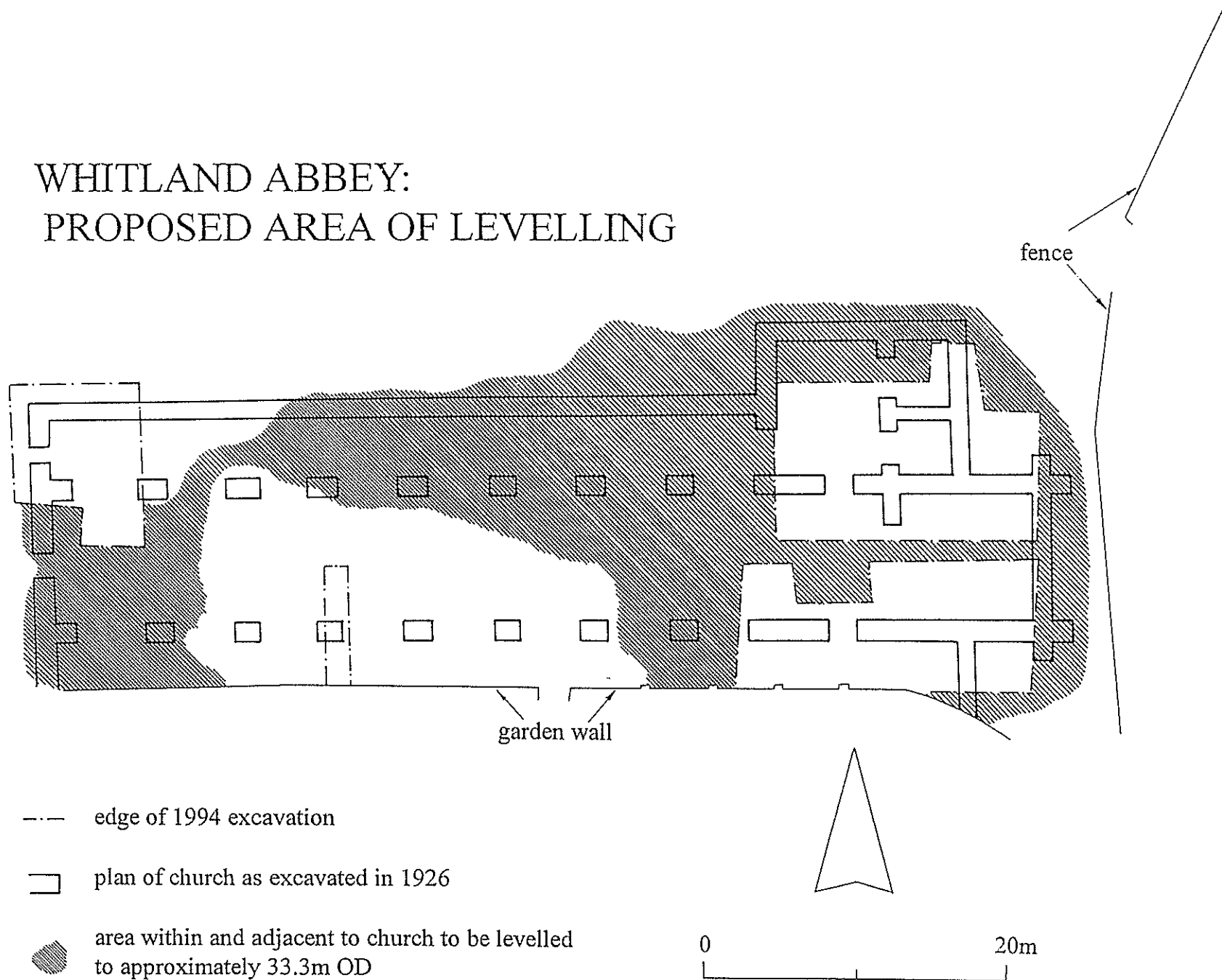


Figure 8