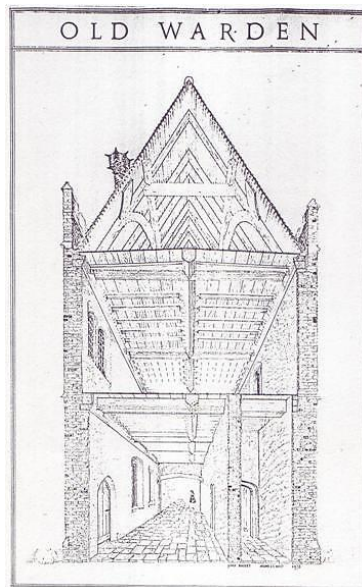


The Landmark Trust

WARDEN ABBEY History Album



Researched and written by J.M. Wilson 1978
Expanded and revised by Charlotte Haslam, 1994
Re-presented in 2015

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BASIC DETAILS

Warden Abbey founded	1135
Converted into house	1550s
Listed	Grade I within Scheduled Ancient Monument
Restoration Architect	John Phillips
Restoration Contractors	Bernard Ward Ltd of Bedford
Opened as a Landmark	1976

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Warden Abbey

Summary

Warden Abbey was founded in 1135 as a daughter house to the slightly older Cistercian abbey of Rievaulx in Yorkshire, whose founder, Walter Espec, also gave the land for this new community. The Cistercians were great sheep farmers, turning marginal or rough grazing land to productive use. This seems to have been true of Warden, which was also called St Mary de Sartis, meaning 'of the cleared land.' The first abbot was Simon, formerly novice master at Rievaulx and famous for his piety and learning.

With this auspicious start, Warden flourished and grew wealthy. Fine buildings followed and by 1300 the monastery was already extensive. It was to continue growing, because around 1320 work started on an abbey church of cathedral-like proportions. Much of the money to pay for this came in the form of alms, gifts from those who visited the church - the medieval equivalent of the modern fabric appeal. The magnificent tile pavement with which the church was embellished was discovered in 1961, and has since been taken to Bedford Museum. Another, similar, pavement, which is thought to have decorated the Abbot's Lodging, was found in 1974 just north of the present Warden Abbey.

Little is known of the abbey during the four centuries of its existence, but such information as exists points to it being highly respected for its spiritual life and religious discipline. The most famous, or infamous, incident took place in 1217, when, after a dispute over property, Fawkes de Breaute, the overmighty Sheriff of Bedfordshire, killed one of the monks, wounded others and had thirty of them dragged 'through the mud' to his castle at Bedford. Although he later did full penance in the chapter house at Warden, it must have been some time before harmony was re-established in the abbey.

Warden was widely known for more peaceful activities, too, since it was here that the Warden pear was cultivated. A small pear used for cooking, it gave rise to the Warden pie, which crops up here and there in Elizabethan and Stuart literature, most notably in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*. Hot Warden Pies were still sold in Bedford in the nineteenth century. So proud was the abbey of this horticultural achievement that they put it on the reverse side of their seal, which displays three pears surrounding a crozier.

In 1537, in the reign of Henry VIII, the abbey was dissolved and its estates, valued at £389 16s 6l/2d, distributed to new owners. The site of the abbey itself went to Robert Gostwick, whose family were large landowners in the county. He set about demolishing the buildings, and selling the materials: 400 cart loads of stone were taken to Bedford to build the new gaol. This was in 1552 and shortly afterwards a red brick mansion was built just east of the site, possibly incorporating some late additions to the Abbot's Lodging. A view of this house was engraved by S. and N. Buck in 1730, at which time the owner was a 'Rev. Mr. Paris.' Later in the century the property was bought by Samuel Whitbread, of Southill Park, to whose family it still belongs, although it has been held on lease since 1974 by the Landmark Trust.

In about 1790, the main part of the Tudor house was pulled down, leaving only a short wing which ran back from its north-west corner. This wing is the building known today as Warden Abbey, which is therefore all that is left to us here, above ground, of both monastery and house. With its red brick walls, ornate chimney, and tall mullioned windows, it is recognisably Tudor, but the story is more complicated than first appears. The north-west corner is in fact the stone buttress of a vanished medieval building to the north. Inside, in the main ground floor room, is an arch through which you could

once pass into a room beyond; this was later blocked and then turned into a fireplace. The whole of this surviving fragment could even be earlier than the Gostwick house, built by one of the last abbots, perhaps, who might have used the fine room on the first floor as a sunny, south-facing parlour.

Repair of Warden Abbey

When the Landmark Trust took on Warden Abbey in 1974, the building had been derelict for many years. As long ago as 1912, in the *Victoria County History*, it was described as being 'very ruinous' and used only as a pigeon house. In the 1950s, the roof was damaged by a fire, and although repairs were carried out in the 1960s, where the corner of the garderobe tower next to the stair turret had collapsed, a full restoration was still urgently needed. This the Landmark Trust offered to carry out, in return for a lease of the building. Since each party of visitors would only be here for a short time, there was no need for a garden, and nor was it essential to bring a car right to the door. The position of the building in the middle of an actively-farmed field was therefore no impediment.

The restoration was carried out under the supervision of the architect John Phillips, from London. The builders were Bernard Ward, of Bedford. Work started in 1974, and the building was finally furnished and ready for visitors in 1976. A minor alteration to the stair turret was made in 1979, to extend the stairs to the attic, which to begin with was only reached by ladder.

The first task was to repair the roof. The west gable had to be taken down and rebuilt, and new rafters fitted. The old tiles were then put back, with second hand ones to make up for those that were missing. The stair turret was given a new conical top, based on that in the Buck engraving. A hidden dormer was made behind the tall chimney to give it extra support. The west chimney was made taller, to encourage it to draw.

Some sections of the parapet had to be taken down and rebuilt, with new coping stones laid on top. In the walls themselves, one or two corner stones, or quoins, had to be renewed, and several bricks had to be cut out and replaced. Only the east wall was in reasonably sound condition, since this was only built when the Tudor range beyond it was demolished in about 1790.

Most of the windows had been blocked, and these were now opened up again, and the mullions repaired. Only the later window in the east wall of the first floor room was left blocked, to recreate the original arrangement of that room. New windows were made to light the present bathroom and the loo above it. All the windows were then reglazed by Denis King of Norwich.

In the north wall of the building, next to the stair tower, was a blocked doorway. Since visitors would approach from this direction, it seemed sensible to open this up, and make a hall at the foot of the stairs. The more elaborate southern doorway opened into a small room which, since it was next to the main living room, seemed the best place for the kitchen. Upstairs, the large first floor room had long been divided into two rather small bedrooms. Since this had originally been just one room, and a very fine one, the partitions were taken down to allow it to be enjoyed as one room again.

The ceilings were repaired on both floors, particularly where the ends of beams had rotted, and the moulded wallplate or cornice had disappeared. New oak floors were laid on the upper floors, with tiles on the ground floor. The walls were replastered where the old plaster was missing or decayed, and then limewashed in the traditional way. Around the building, the ground level had risen considerably. The work of lowering it,

and digging trenches to bring water and electricity into the building, was carried out by archaeologists from Bedfordshire County Council, with exciting results. Some of the finds can be seen in Bedford Museum.

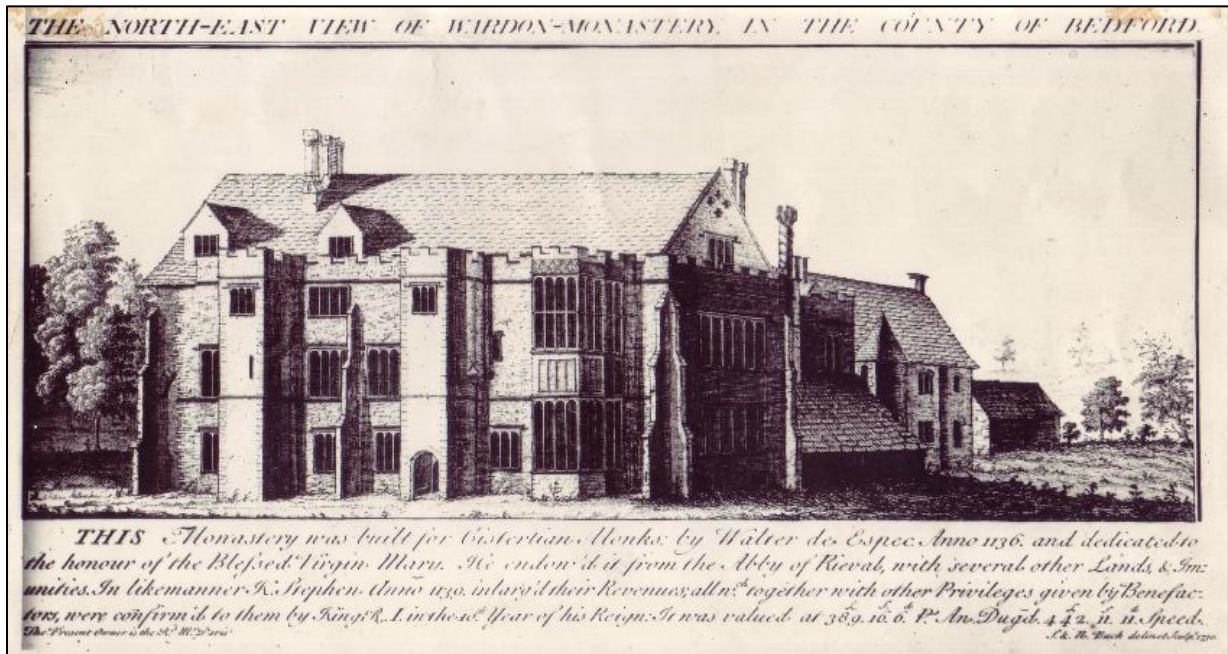
An Outline History of Warden Abbey

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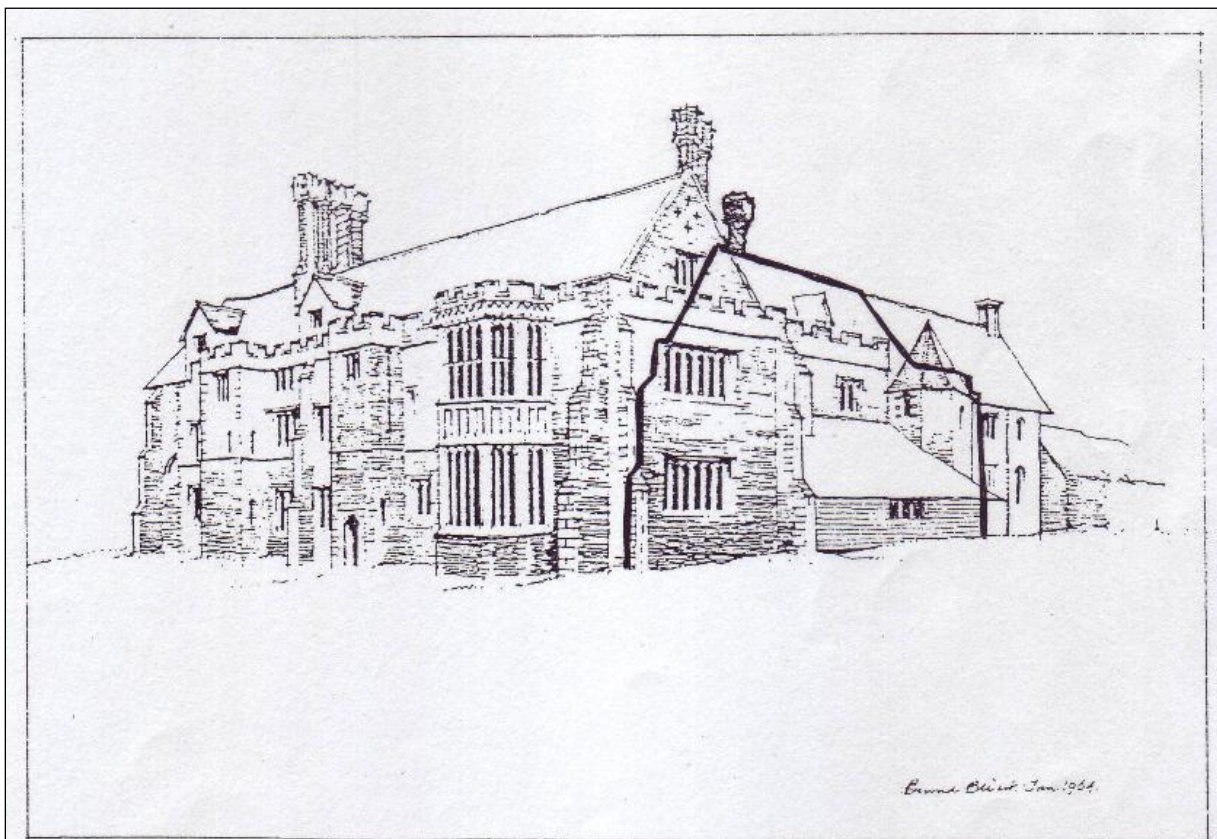
With this auspicious start, Warden flourished and grew wealthy. Fine buildings followed and by 1300 the monastery was already extensive. It was to continue growing, because around 1320 work started on an abbey church of cathedral-like proportions. Much of the money to pay for this came in the form of alms, gifts from those who visited the church - the medieval equivalent of the modern fabric appeal. The magnificent tile pavement with which the church was embellished was discovered in 1961, and has since been taken to Bedford Museum. Another, even finer, pavement, thought to have decorated the Abbot's Lodging, was found in 1974 just north of the present Warden Abbey.

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The Buck engraving in the original (above) and as redrawn by B. West



WARDEN ABBEY

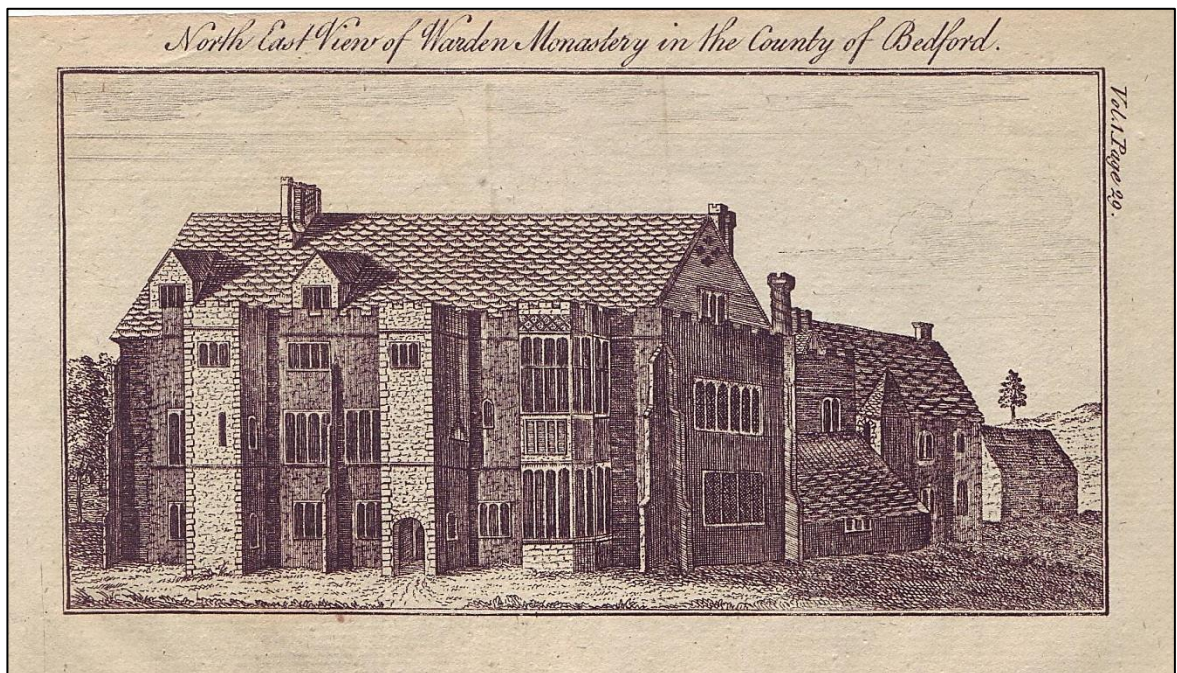
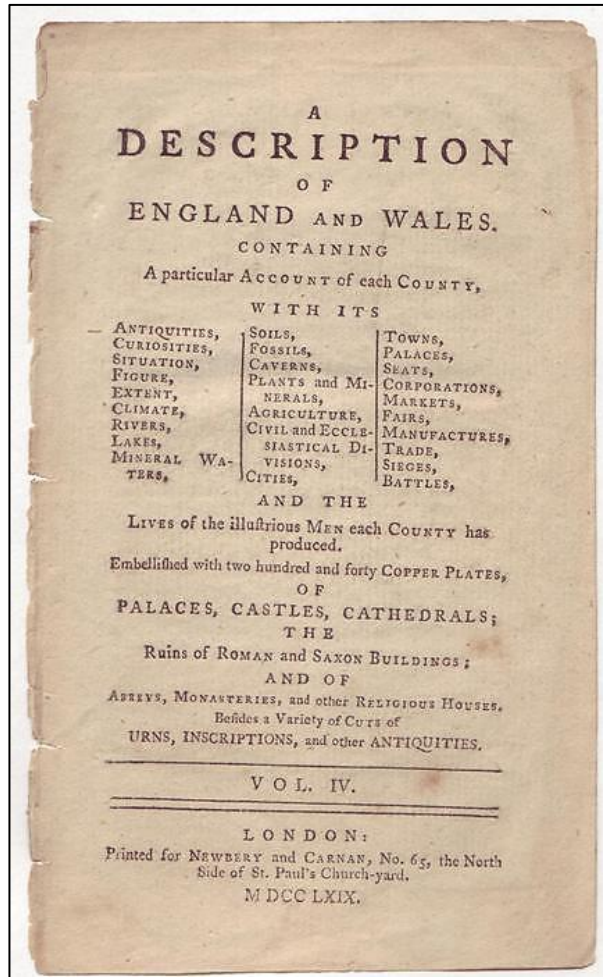
(b) The viewpoint of the S. and N. Buck engraving with the house in corrected perspective. The black outline indicates the profile of the existing portions.

literature, most notably in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*. Hot Warden Pies were still sold in Bedford in the nineteenth century. So proud was the abbey of this horticultural achievement that they put it on the reverse side of their seal, which displays three pears surrounding a crozier. The monks are also thought to have made their own wine, a practice that has recently been revived by the Southill Park estate.

In 1537, in the reign of Henry VIII, the abbey was dissolved and its estates, valued at £389 16s 6½ d, distributed to new owners. The site of the abbey itself went to Robert Gostwick, whose family were large landowners in the county. He set about demolishing the buildings, and selling the materials: 400 cartloads of stone were taken to Bedford to build the new gaol. This was in 1552 and shortly afterwards a red brick mansion was built just east of the site, possibly incorporating some late additions to the Abbot's Lodging. It consisted of a long main range, lying from north to south, with a wing running back from its north-west corner. Whether this wing, with a stair turret on the north, was balanced by another at the south-west, to enclose a west facing courtyard, is not known. There were terraced gardens on the east side.

A view of the Tudor house from the north-east was engraved by S. and N. Buck in 1730. By this time it had changed hands several times. In the reign of Charles II it belonged to the Bovey family, of whom Sir Charles was Sheriff of Bedfordshire in 1669. The Buck engraving gives the owner at that time as a 'Rev. Mr. Paris.' Around 1784 the property was bought by Samuel Whitbread, the brewer, to whose family it still belongs.

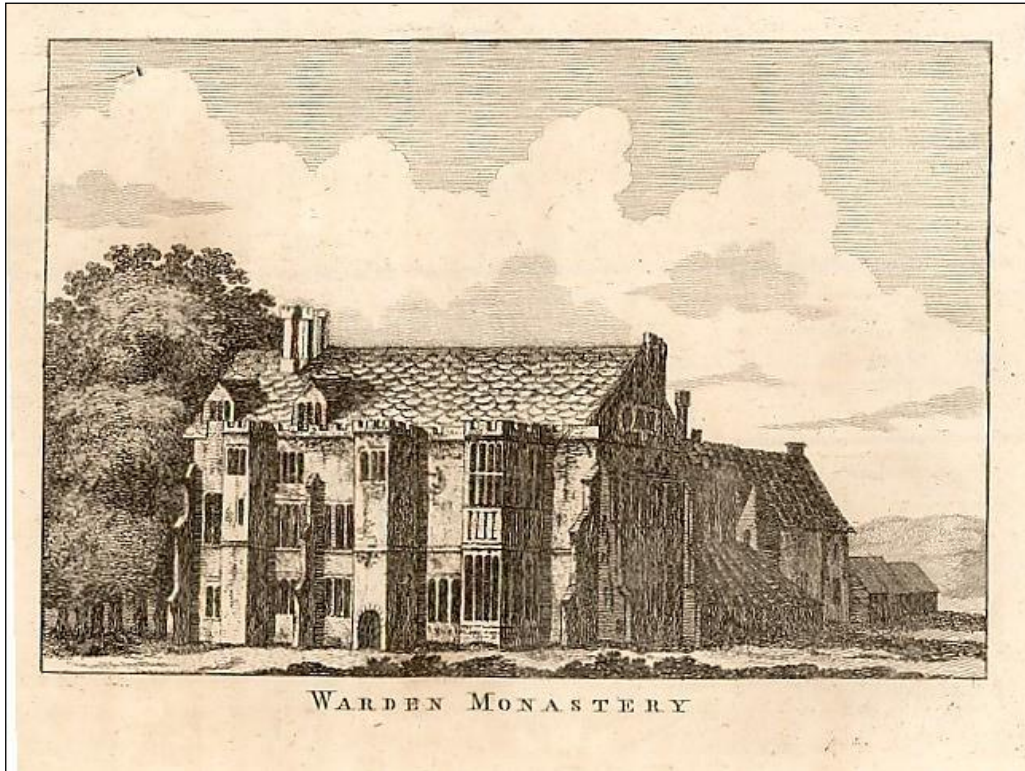
Soon after this, and before 1790, the house was pulled down, leaving only a part of the north-west wing. Responsibility for this is unclear. In 1801, the first volume of *The Beauties of England and Wales* by J. Britton and E.W. Brayley, was published, which included Bedfordshire. This blamed simply 'the destroying hand of time' which had 'nearly demolished' the formerly 'very extensive and



This is a copy of the engraving by the Buck brothers in 1730 and shows the East wing which was demolished late that century

considerable monastery', so that 'two rooms, and a staircase, are the only parts which remain perfect.' They do however note that the estate had been purchased by the late Samuel Whitbread 'who was very desirous of preserving the ancient remains.'

This statement provoked a rather different theory from a correspondent in *The Gentleman's Magazine* whose letter was published that same year: 'I always understood the late Mr Whitbread demolished Warden Abbey which when I saw it 30 years ago, was a good large farmhouse; nor did I every hear Mr Whitbread was partial to Antiquities.' Perhaps a reliable judgement can be found in the diaries of John Byng, later Viscount Torrington, from whose brother Samuel Whitbread was to buy Southill Park. On 28th August, 1790, he passed by Warden 'where the priory of Warden till very lately remained in good preservation, but now nothing but a back part of the offices remain preserv'd as the whole would have been, by the late purchaser, Mr Whitbread, had he come in time (being an improver and preserver); the chimney and the stone work above the door are much admired. This, as a farmhouse, an excellent one might have been formed, or as a shooting box.'



**The pavement, discovered in 1976 was removed and taken to Bedford Museum.
Note the blocked door of the Abbey.**

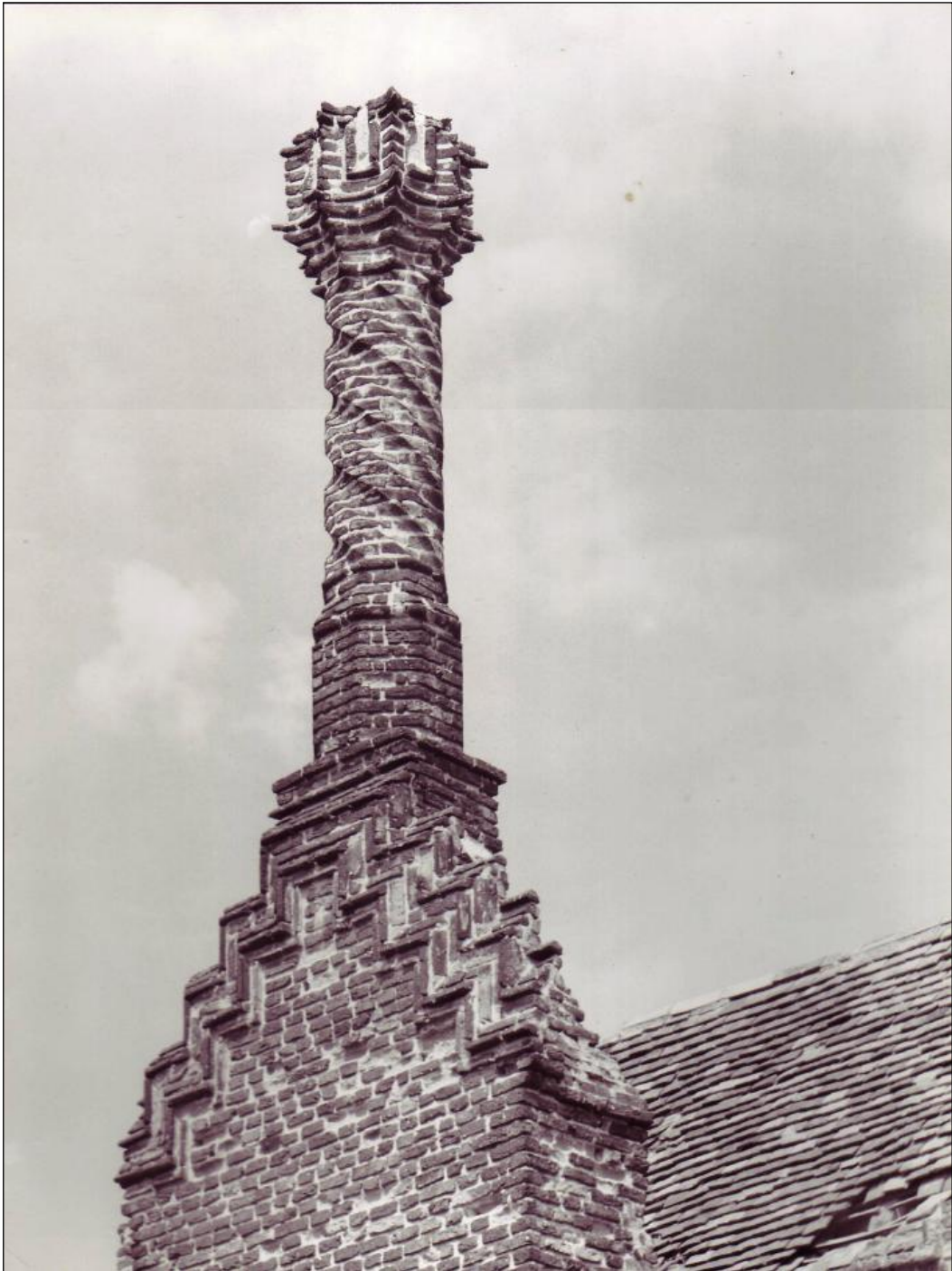
The fragment left standing is the building known today as Warden Abbey, which is therefore all that is left to us here, above ground, of both monastery and house. Below the surface is a rather different story.

Minor exploration of the site of the abbey has probably always gone on. By the 19th century this was being done in a more scholarly manner. Already, in 1801, Britton and Brailey had noted that 'some curious figured stones, subterranean passages etc. have been discovered at different times, as the earth has been dug away in the vicinity of the ruins.' In the 1820s and '30s, a local schoolmaster, Bradford Rudge, was prompted by W.H. Whitbread to make a more systematic excavation. He drew his finds in a sketchbook which is now in the care of Bedford Museum. Copies of some pages are included in this album.

The first 'modern' excavation was carried out in 1960-1961 by the Bedford Archaeological Society, under Granville Rudd and Bernard West. Using Rudge's plan of his findings as a guide, together with the existing building, the aim was to discover the site of the abbey church. This was not only achieved in 1961 but at the same time the first of the tile pavements was uncovered. An article on the findings was written in the Society's journal, a copy of which is included in this album.

The next and most recent excavation was prompted by the Landmark's restoration of Warden Abbey in 1974-5. This time, what was expected to be a simple 'rescue' dig, led by David Baker of Bedfordshire County Council, turned out to have even more spectacular results, with the discovery of the second tile pavement. The opportunity was taken to lift both pavements and take them to Bedford for conservation and study. The results of this study have been published by Evelyn Baker¹, and the place of the Warden tiles among the

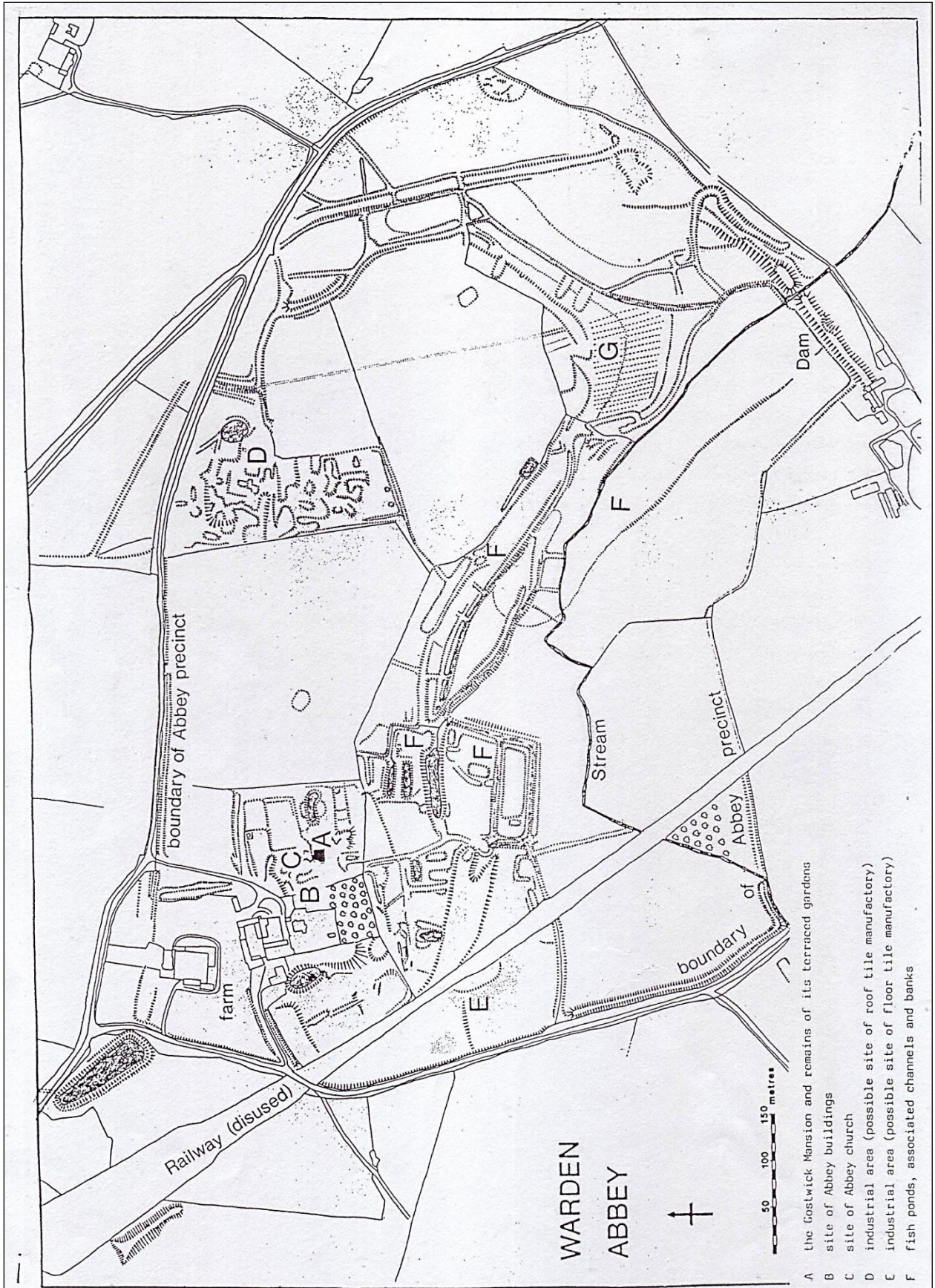
¹ Warden Abbey Medieval Floor Tiles, by Evelyn Baker, *Rotterdam Papers* and Images, Ceramic Floors and Warden Abbey, by Evelyn Baker, *World Archaeology* Vol 18, No. 3). Copies of both reports are in the Leaflet Box in the building.



This chimney is a fine example of Tudor craftsmanship (BCC)

leading medieval works of art has been firmly established. Some of the tiles are now on display in Bedford Museum.

A full account of the excavation's findings on the plan and development of the abbey site is still awaited, and may throw some light on the relationship of the Abbot's Lodging, and other adjoining structures, to the present building. This, which was examined and recorded during building work by John Bailey, has a more complicated story than first appears. With its red brick walls, ornate chimney, and tall mullioned windows, it is recognisably Tudor. But its north-west corner is in fact formed by the stone buttress of a vanished medieval building to the north. Inside, in the main ground floor room, is an arch through which you could once pass into a room beyond (as imaginatively reconstructed in the drawing by John Bailey which now hangs in the kitchen). This arch was later blocked and then turned into a fireplace. It has even been suggested that the whole of this surviving fragment could be earlier than the Gostwick house, built by one of the last abbots around 1530. Whoever was the builder, it is not hard to imagine them using the fine room on the first floor as a sunny, south-facing parlour.



- A the Gostwick Mansion and remains of its terraced gardens
- B site of Abbey buildings
- C site of Abbey church
- D industrial area (possible site of roof tile manufactory)
- E industrial area (possible site of floor tile manufactory)
- F fish ponds, associated channels and banks



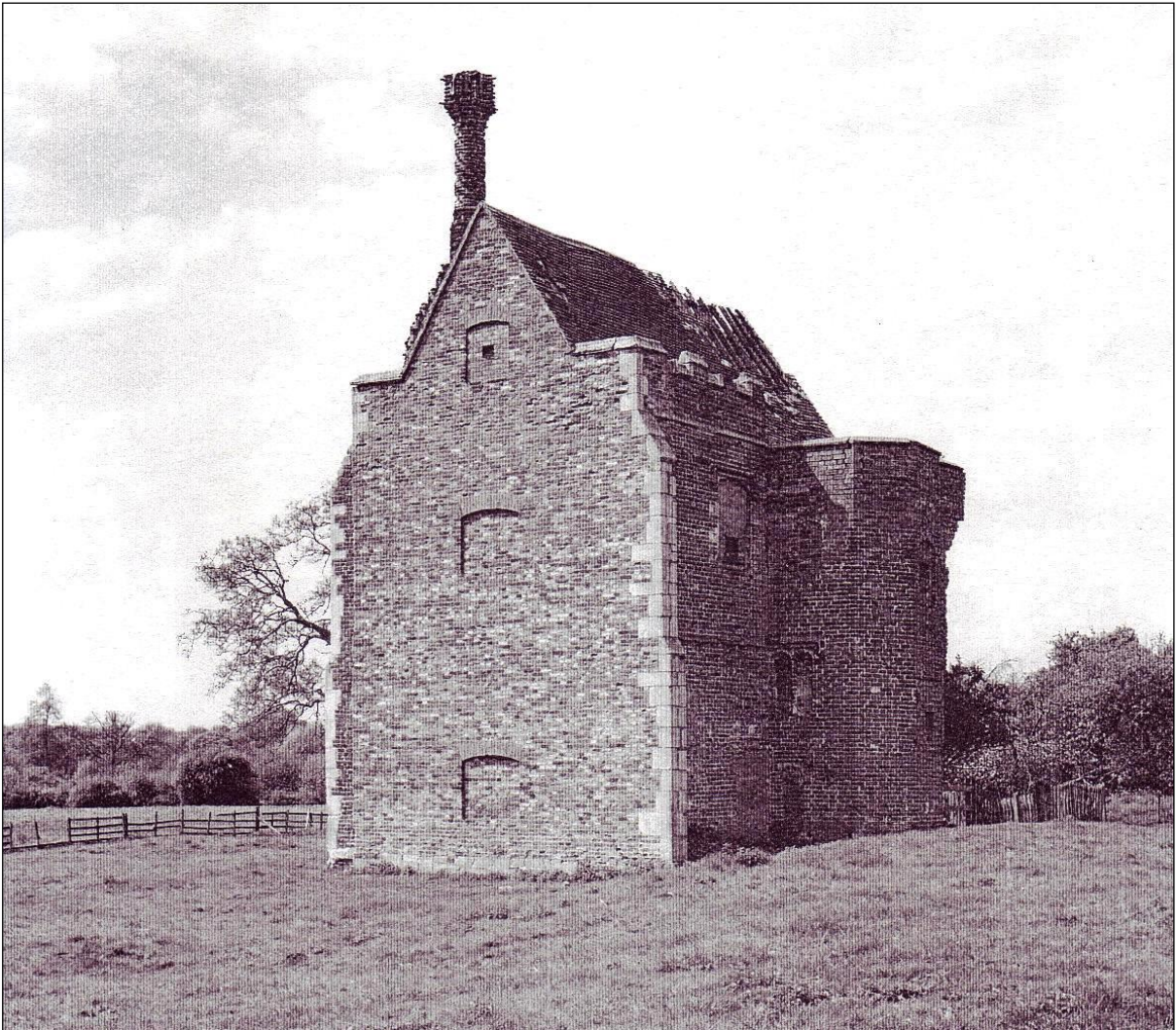
Warden Abbey as it looked for the first half of the 20th century – the windows broken or blocked, but the roof complete (BCC)



A photograph of c1950 taken by the University of Cambridge Committee for Aerial Photography



The south front in 1974 before work began. (BCC)



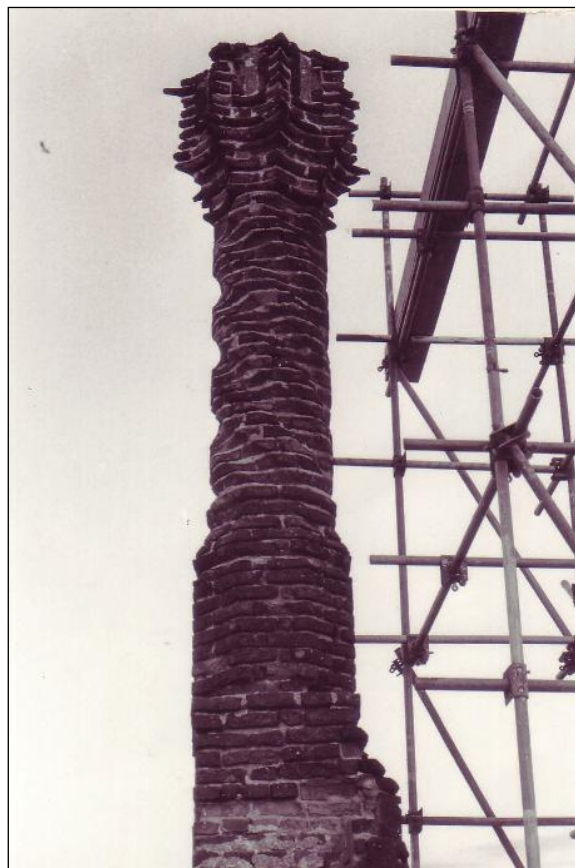
The north and west sides in 1974 (BCC)

The following photographs were taken by the builders, Bernard Ward Ltd and show the derelict state of the Abbey before work started.



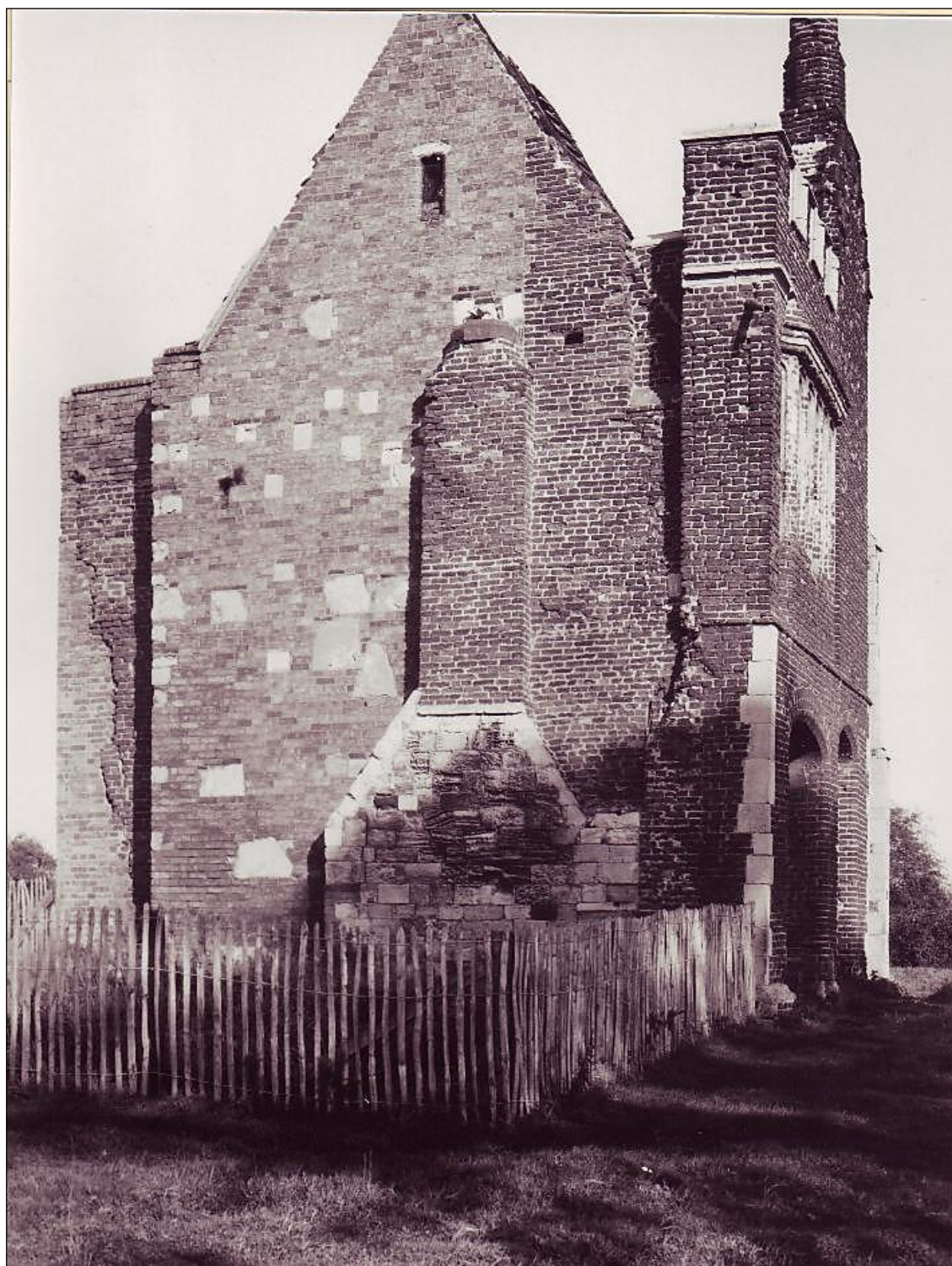








The first excavation of the abbey church in 1961. The roof was damaged by a fire in the late 1950s. The corner of the garderobe tower had collapsed (BCC)



October 1961, after the garderobe tower had been repaired. The west elevation has been extensively reconstructed at various dates, most recently in 1974-5 (RCHME)

The Repair of Warden Abbey

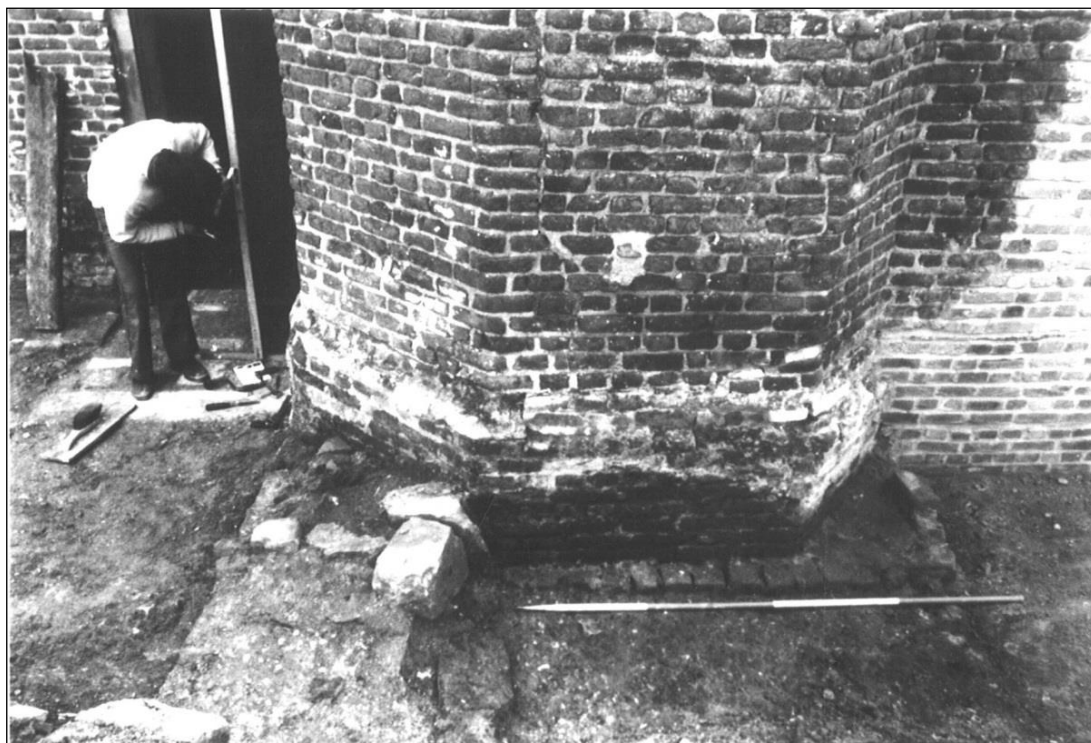
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The first task in 1974 was to repair the roof. The west gable had to be taken down and rebuilt, and the damaged rafters repaired. The old tiles were then put back, with second hand ones to make up for those that were missing. The stair turret was given a new conical top, based on the Buck engraving. A hidden dormer was made behind the tall chimney at the same time, to give it extra support. The west chimney was made taller, to encourage it to draw.

Some sections of the parapet had to be taken down and rebuilt, with new coping stones laid on top. In the walls themselves, one or two corner stones, or quoins, had to be renewed, and several bricks had to be cut out and replaced. The east



The door by the stair turret unblocked, exposing the footings of the turret.



The foreground shows a brick footing for the demolished wing of the mansion, partly re-using Abbey stone.

wall was in reasonably sound condition, since this was only built when the Tudor range beyond it was demolished in about 1790.

Most of the windows had been blocked, and these were now opened up again, and the mullions repaired. Only the later window in the east wall of the first floor was left blocked, as part of the restoration of the Tudor room there. New windows were made to light the present bathroom and the loo above it. All the windows were then reglazed by Denis King of Norwich.

In the north wall of the building, next to the stair tower, was a blocked doorway. Since visitors would approach from this direction, it seemed sensible to open this up, and make a hall at the foot of the stairs. The more elaborate southern doorway opened into a small room which, since it was next to the main living room, seemed the best place for the kitchen.



The present building showing the blocked doorway, now opened, with the 17th century floor of the attached building in front. In the foreground is a medieval wall and room fill which was over the top of the second pavement.



The sitting room during the renovation of Warden Abbey (BCC)

Upstairs, the large first floor room had long been divided into two rather small bedrooms. Since this had originally been just one room, and a very fine one, the partitions were taken down to allow it to be enjoyed as one room again.

The ceilings were repaired on both floors, particularly where the ends of beams had rotted, and the moulded wallplate or cornice had disappeared. New oak floors were laid on the upper floors, with tiles on the ground floor. The walls were replastered where the old plaster was missing or decayed, and then limewashed in the traditional way.

Around the building, the ground level had risen considerably. The work of lowering it, and digging trenches to bring water and electricity into the building, was carried out by the archaeologists from Bedfordshire County Council, with exciting results.

Charlotte Haslam
Spring 1994

Update in 2011

Modifications to the flue lining at the head of the inglenook fireplace in the sitting room failed to solve the long standing problem of the fire smoking from its wide flue, so in 2011 a large solid fuel stove was installed that does not smoke and radiates the heat more efficiently.

Warden Abbey and the Culture Recovery Fund 2020-21



Landmarks that benefitted from the Cultural Recovery Fund 2020-21

2020-21 was the year when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the UK, and for nine months out of twelve, Landmark had to close all its buildings, with a resulting cessation of the holiday income that funds our buildings' maintenance. Vital projects across Britain were put on hold because of the pandemic, because of uncertainty about when contracts could be agreed or when specialist builders and craftspeople would be allowed to work onsite again. The closure of Landmarks for holiday bookings from March to October 2020 and again from December to April 2021 was a devastating blow to our finances and directly impacted Landmark's maintenance budget.

However, in autumn 2020 we were delighted to receive a grant of £1.2million from the government's Culture Recovery Fund, allowing us to reignite our planned maintenance programme and ensure that none of our buildings fell into disrepair.

Under the auspices of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Culture Recovery Fund was designed to secure the future of Britain's museums, galleries, theatres, independent cinemas, heritage sites and music venues with emergency grants and loans. One strand of the Fund was the Heritage Stimulus Fund administered by Historic England, which included the Major Works Programme, source of the grant to Landmark. This transformative grant allowed a group of 15 critical maintenance projects at 17 Landmarks across England to go ahead.

The projects directly provided employment and training for more than 130 craftspeople, including many multi-generation family-run businesses local to our buildings. Masons, carpenters, architects, engineers and many more skilled specialists were involved across these sites, fuelling the recovery of the heritage sector and contributing to local economies on a national scale. Several sites hosted students and apprentices, providing vital opportunities at a time of great uncertainty.

At Warden Abbey, a tender process already underway for key repairs to the historic brickwork had to grind to a halt in March 2020. Thanks to the CRF grant, Mathias Restoration of Dunstable, specialists in brick and flint work and family-run for several generations, were able to undertake the extensive repairs. They replaced some 400 of the worst-worn bricks and carried out extensive repointing across all four elevations. The unique barley twist chimney was also repaired, where we were excited to find traces of the original 'rattle' (red paint) still clinging to some of the brick.



Conservation architect Philip Orchard (left), and Landmark surveyor Stephen Donelan inspect the weathered chimney prior to its repair. It was highly sophisticated work – then and now.

Photographs of the tile floor discovered in 1976



Part of the very fine 14th century tile pavement from the nave of the church.



A piece of the second pavement to be discovered (BCC)



**A 14th century ridge tile now on display
in the Tile Room at the British Museum (BCC)**



Imprints on the mortar floor of the tile pattern on the site of the church nave



Some of the robbed footings of the walls in the nave of the church.



**The remains of the medieval floor outside the present kitchen and sitting room. It survived only because a stone hearth had been built on top of it at a later period.
In the foreground it's a post medieval well.
Some of these bricks were used to repair the house.**



A further view of the floor with the hearth. The circular depression with a round hole in the middle is archaeological evidence of the pump which serviced the well.

Excavations at Warden Abbey in 1960 and 1961

GRANVILLE T. RUDD AND BERNARD B. WEST

RECORDED history of Warden Abbey is scarce. We have records of its foundation in 1135 by Walter Espec, of its settlement by Cistercian monks from Rievaulx Abbey, of the rebuilding of the Church between 1323 and 1366, of the excellent discipline of the community until its latter days, and of its suppression under Henry VIII in 1537. Apart from these very broad outlines we know very little of its history. The abbey is interesting as the earliest Cistercian house in Bedfordshire, and although nothing in the records indicate that the community was large or important, the indications on the ground are that the Abbey was a very large one indeed.

The site lies to the west of Old Warden on part of the Whitbread Estate at Abbey Farm, tenanted by Mr S. E. Saunderson. It is marked by an extensive area of depressions and mounds on the ground surface. Dominating the site is the ruin of part of a red brick sixteenth century mansion, built soon after the suppression of the Abbey. It has no direct connection with the monastery, but its builders were possibly the Gostwick family to whom the lands were granted at the Dissolution, and who were largely responsible for the destruction of the Abbey buildings and the dissemination of the building materials. Built inside the west end of the ruin, however, is a large thirteenth century buttress, the last remaining structure *in situ*.

Some excavation work was carried out in the early part of the last century by Bradford Rudge, a local artist and schoolmaster, apparently in the usual method of the day, simply trenching to follow the walls. Careful reading of the records of the Bedford Archaeological Society has failed to reveal any evidence of these excavations, with the exception of a visit paid to the site in 1851, although no reference to actual field work is made. Extensive drawings survive of finds, in the Bedford Record Office and the complete booklet of illustrations survives in the Prichard museum. Since this is dated 1839, visitors twelve years later would not be very likely to see much evidence of work on the ground, though a few tiles apparently from the site are also to be found in the same museum. The drawings are interesting in that they show several tiles of a pattern found in 1960/61, some very fine bosses of typical mid fourteenth century design, a fine taper stand, and a magnificent crozier, but most tantalisingly a fine piece of *in situ* tiling of an entirely different pattern from that in fig 3. These finds are all lost and have unfortunately little relevance to the site as now understood. One discovery, however, is of outstanding importance and is shewn in fig 2. This is a plan, to a

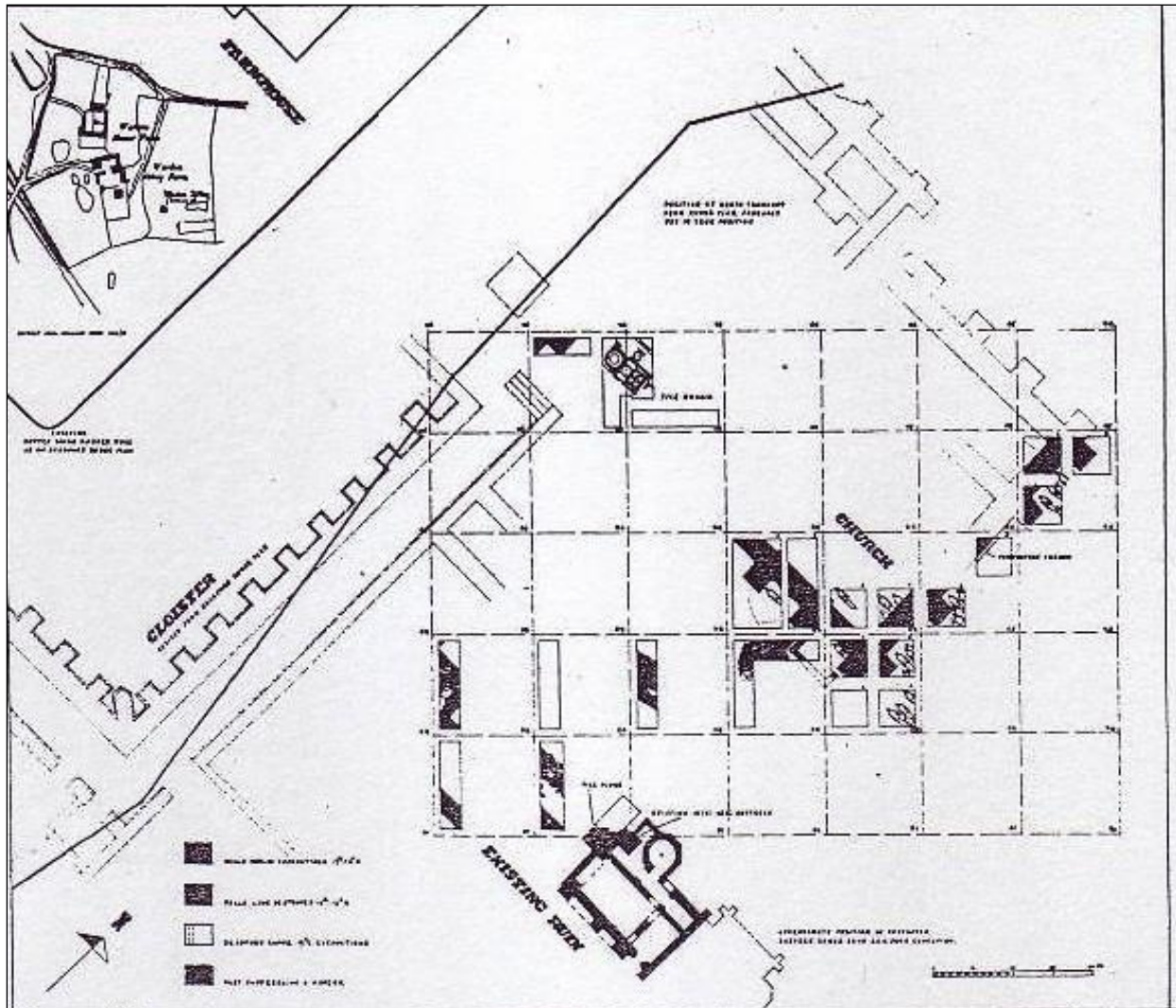


Fig 1. Ground plan of Excavations at Warden Abbey, incorporating layout of 19th century excavations shown in Fig 2.

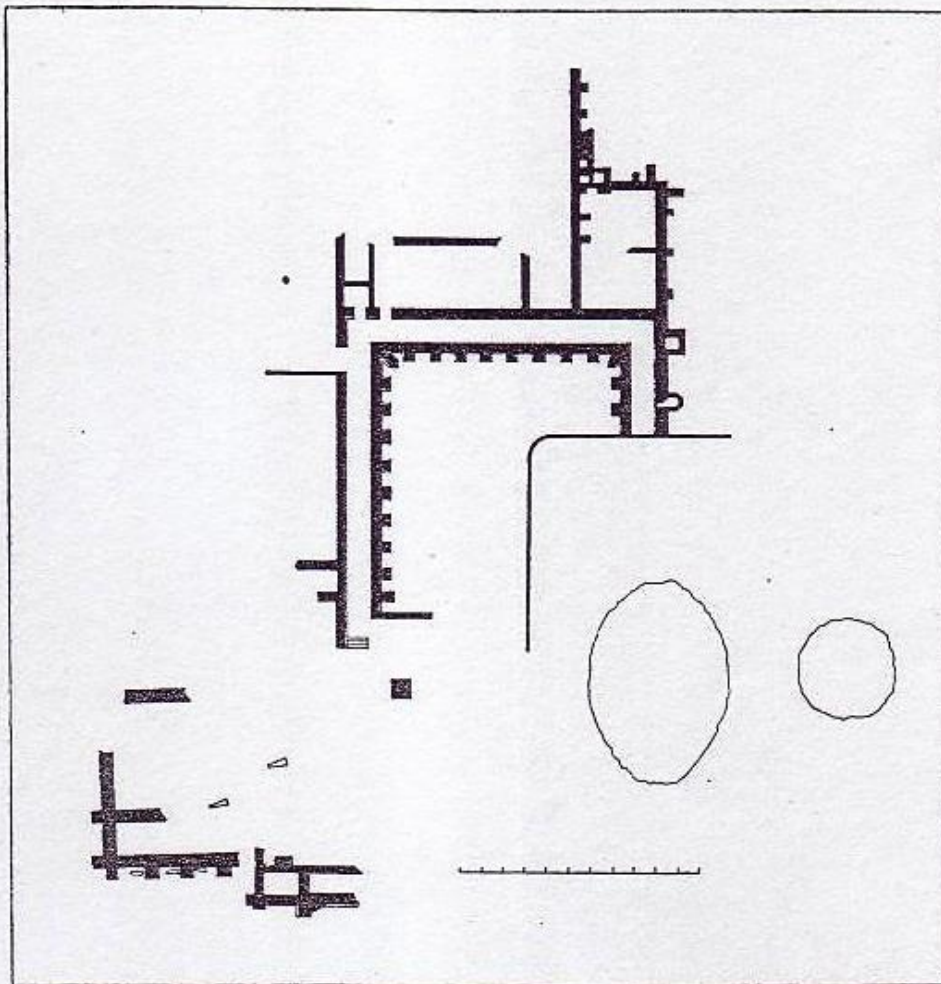


Fig 2. Ground plan of Bradford Rudge's excavations (1839) showing existing garden wall with curved corner. (The seals on the original drawings are shown in outline)

scale of 50 feet to an inch, carrying also two drawings of seals with a thick black line separating them from the plan. It was discovered that this line was not however, purely one of separation but in fact a representation of the still existing garden wall of Mr Saunderson's farm, and with this one point still existing on the ground it was possible to set out the site and rediscover the position of the church.

Owing to the rough and ready archaeological methods of the time any stratification over and near the wall foundations which would have dated the destruction and robbing of the walls will have been destroyed by trenching.

THE TRIAL EXCAVATION OF 1960

Digging was carried out on the site for three weeks during July and August 1960, under the direction of the writers, by a small party of Bedford Archaeological Society members augmented by helpers who volunteered as a result of a Council for British Archaeology advertisement. The aim of the excavation was to locate the foundations of the Abbey buildings in readiness for excavation in following years. At that time the Bradford Rudge ground plan had not been discovered, and the only guide was the buttress incorporated in the Tudor ruin.

A grid of pegs was set out at twenty-five foot intervals orientated at forty-five degrees to the cardinal points of the compass, on the assumption that the buttress if aligned with any buried footings would allow of their exposure on the diagonal. Cuttings were made inside the boxes so formed, and each box was named after the number of the peg at its south-west corner.

Excavation close to the ruin of the Tudor house revealed the foundation of a second buttress set at right angles to the standing buttress, indicating the south-west corner of a building. A series of trenches was opened to the west, in Boxes C1, C2, D1, D2 and E2, in the hope of finding a wall, or walls, leading from the corner, but only cobbled areas were found about four feet wide running east-west. They had the appearance of paths, but their depth and the fact that sandstone blocks were upon them in places seemed to indicate sub-foundations laid to give true foundations a firmer footing than the clay beneath them. Due to the many disturbances of the area (by subsequent building and gardening) the stratification had been destroyed down to the level of the cobbles, and it was not possible to say for certain whether or not walls had been removed. Attention was turned to the north of the corner, therefore, to try to find the wall running northwards, but here again the same problem was met. A cobbled carriage-way was encountered, drains, the foundation of a small stone outhouse, and garden edgings, all probably connected with the Tudor mansion, but very little definite monastic material – other than scattered small finds of pottery, tile, and stained glass – until the last few days of the excavation. Then, in Box F3, a wall foundation some 6 feet thick was found, running east-west, with a 6 feet square buttress on it. In the angle of the wall and buttress was a burial.

On the Site Plan (fig 1) the Tudor features are in line, monastic wall foundations are black or diagonal line where the stone has been robbed away and the wall traced by robber trenches. The burials are marked by skeleton outlines.

The most common finds were floor tiles. The majority of these were mid-fourteenth century, and were of two main types: (a) with impressed geometric patterns, and (b) with inlaid designs. Most were cut from a large slab of stiff clay, possibly with the aid of a template, and then decorated. Some tiles were found with a high embossed pattern. These, and some of the inlaid tiles, were made in moulds.

The clay body of which most of the tiles were made is of the same type as the local clay with the addition of grog. Before firing and glazing, some had been covered with a white slip to give the pale yellow-green glaze a clean colour.

Monastic pottery was quite common, and showed a range from late twelfth to sixteenth century, although fourteenth and fifteenth century wares were in the majority. Perhaps the most interesting sherds were fragments of an altar vase in white with a blue design, (kindly identified and reconstructed by Mr J. M. Hurst of the Ministry of Works). No 'Cistercian Ware', the dark brown pottery with the white slip-trailed decoration so popular on similar abbey sites, was found, doubtless due to the fact that the main area of investigation was on the site of the church and not the monastic buildings.

Painted window glass was found scattered throughout the site. Much of it is certainly monastic and fourteenth century, but it is safe to suppose that at least a proportion comes from the destruction of the Tudor mansion. Patterns on the fragments seem to consist mostly of geometric designs and foliage. One piece of stained glass, a rich blue in colour, was found. This is certainly later than the painted glass, most of which has become completely devitrified, opaque and friable.

Roofing lead, window cames, nails and such metal objects were plentiful. A small iron knife with an engraved bone handle, a book clasp and bronze lace-tags were also found. A few small pieces of iron and copper slag were found, but not enough to suggest that smelting had been carried on at the Abbey.

(The finds have been deposited in the Prichard Museum, Bedford.)

THE EXCAVATION OF 1961

A much larger party than that which did the trial excavation, made up chiefly of members of Bedford Archaeological Society and Council for British Archaeology volunteers, excavated the site of the Abbey Church at Old Warden for a month during July and August 1961. The Bradford Rudge plan of the site had been discovered by Miss Joyce Godber, M.A. during the previous winter. This confirmed that the wall and buttress found associated with the burial at the end of the trial dig was part of the church, probably the south wall of the chancel, and it was to follow this, and if possible, to define the size of the chancel that the excavation was especially concerned.

The length of wall and the buttress found during the trial excavation were in part of Box F3, so the first cutting opened in 1961 was to complete this box. The results of this trench were better than was expected, for not only did the wall length continue, but its foundations stood several courses high, and on it was another south-facing, 6 feet square buttress which stood at least ten courses high. At floor level, beneath the surviving ashlar block of limestone which represented the

first course above the original ground level, was a course of tiles, intended to level up the rough sandstone foundations rather than as a damp course (Pl VIb.)

All subsequent boxes were subdivided into four, ten feet square cuttings.

In the four cuttings in Box G3, the wall continued due east of the wall in F3 to a pair of corner buttresses from which it began to run to the north. This was clearly the south-east corner of the chancel. Clustered near the wall on its east side were twelve graves. Part of the south-facing buttress of the pair was robbed away, and was only visible as a robber trench. In the south cutting of G2 was a complex of tiles, some inlaid with a heraldic lion design, obviously relaid at a later date, and a stack of roof tiles set on edge. These were not the bed of a hearth as their appearance suggested, but were tiles removed by those responsible for the demolition to be taken away later, and subsequently forgotten.

North of the corner, in the east cutting of Box G3 the wall had been completely robbed away, but the line of the robber trench, which was exactly the same width as the wall itself, cut unceremoniously through three burials, two inside the walls being cut through at about knee level, and one east of the wall just below the shoulders. This is evidence that the church was enlarged when rebuilt in the fourteenth century, the foundations for the enlarged chancel being dug through the monk's cemetery which must have lain to the east of the original building. In the robber trench at this point, too, were the jumbled bones of at least forty individuals buried together in a heap. With them were fragments of nineteenth century clay pipe stems, showing that they represented the reburial of skeletons disturbed during Bradford Rudge's excavations.

Further north, in Box H3, the east wall of the chancel continued and had a buttress facing east. More burials were arranged on the east side of the wall, one of which was again cut through by the foundations. The last box opened in this direction, J4, revealed another buttress in the south cutting through more graves, yet another buttress in the north cutting and the beginning of a return wall running westwards opposite it. This wall appears to be the north wall of the chancel, but further excavation will be necessary to prove this, although the Bradford Rudge plan indicates its extension to an apparent north transept. It is suggested that this part of the plan, though reproduced in fig 1 is probably a distortion of the blockmaker in order to accommodate the plan above its title. Certainly at this point near the present field gate there are indications of masonry on the surface but they may not be *in situ*, which may also apply to several courses of sandstone further west beyond the farm track which were formerly part of the foundations of a barn shewn on the O.S. sheet XVII/15 but now destroyed.

Trenches west of the south chancel wall were then opened in order to discover the location of the south transept, if one existed. The first trench, on the north side of Box D5, revealed mosaic floor tiles laid in an intricate pattern.

A parallel trench was opened on the south side of Box E5 to reveal more of the pattern. The baulk between the two trenches was taken out, and the remainder of the floor still surviving was exposed. A small trench to the west of D5 showed a north-south running wall and either an east-facing buttress or the foundation of an arch column. This could be the beginning of the transept arch, but time did not permit the opening of more cuttings to prove whether or not this is the case.

On the whole the season's work was very successful. It revealed the south wall of the chancel, the entire east end of the chancel, and probably the north limit of it. It has also revealed part of the north cloister wall and what may be the site of the south transept, besides part of the floor of the crossing of the church.

THE MOSAIC FLOOR (fig 3 and pl V) was the most important discovery of the season. Much work and research will have to be done before its real significance is known. Mosaic floors of any kind are very rare in monastic buildings in the southern half of England, and the indications at this stage are that the Old Warden floor is unique in its intricate tile patterns. A few comparable designs have been discovered in the Cistercian abbeys of Yorkshire, notably at Meaux, Byland and Rievaulx, but while the same tile shapes and patterns occur in many of these, almost all of the tiles and patterns on our floor are peculiar to Warden. Three methods of making floor tiles were in common use in the Middle Ages: (a) using moulds, (b) cutting the shapes from a large slab of stiff clay using templates and (c) by simply drawing the design on the slab and cutting round the lines later. The tilers responsible for the Old Warden floor seem to have used the second and third methods together, for while the main shapes match exactly as though cut round a template, the detail within the main shapes is more individual in character. The tiles are made of a fine earthenware body, which could very well be local, fired to a light red colour with a blue-grey core. Although most of the glaze has been worn off, the remaining traces show that the pattern was originally in two main colours, a light yellow-green and a dark green-black. The light coloured tiles were coated with white slip before firing and glazing.

Few kilns for mosaic-tile making have been found to date, and while we have no real evidence that the Warden mosaic tiles were made on this site, it seems that there was a kiln making at least moulded embossed tiles, for tile wasters, unfinished and unglazed, and pieces of kiln props were found in the fill of the robber trenches.

Very little pottery was discovered during 1961. What was found was chiefly of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Roofing lead and nails were again plentiful, but more interesting metal finds included a toilet implement with an ear scoop at one end and a nail cleaner at the

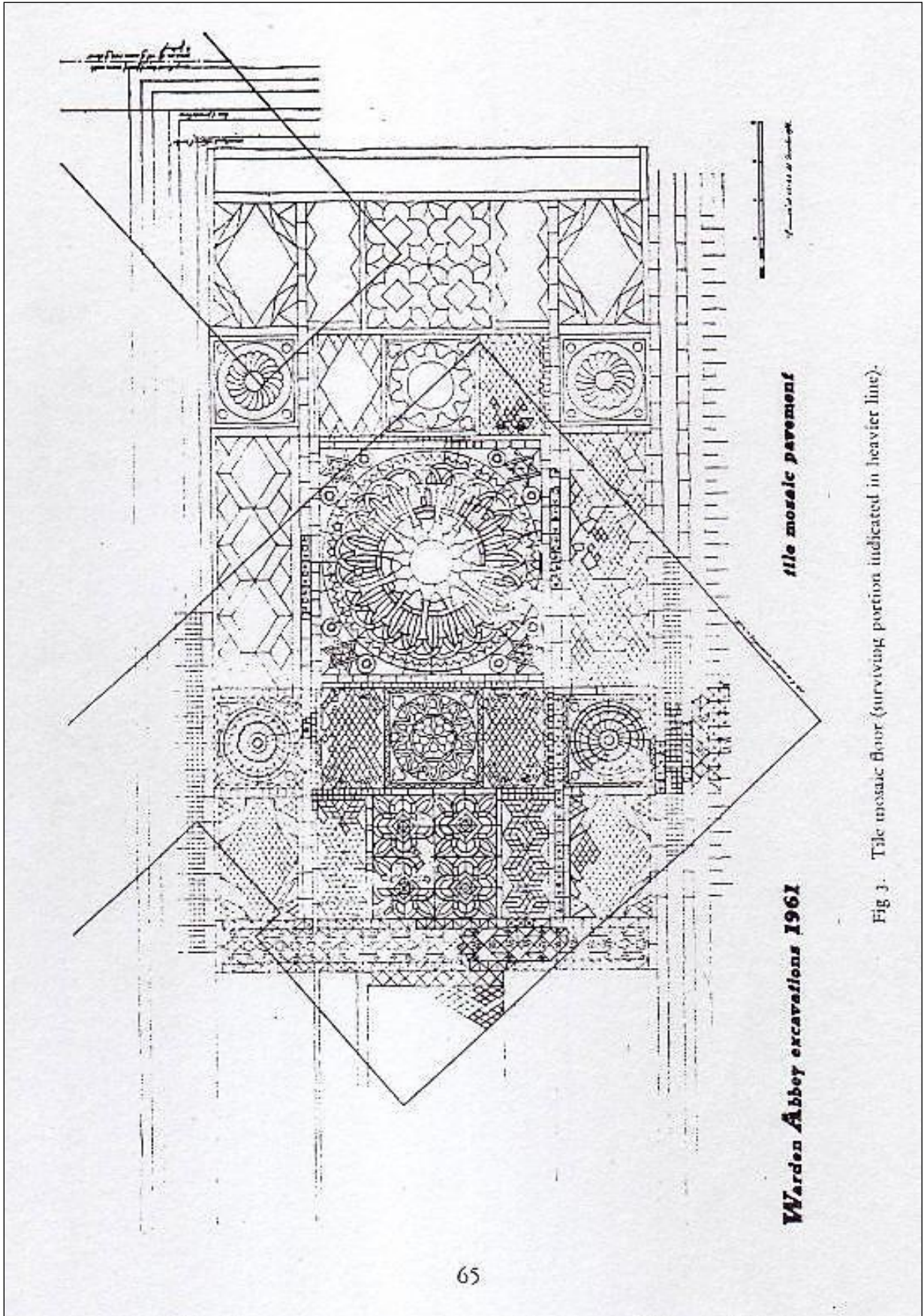


Fig 3. Tile mosaic floor (surviving portion indicated in heavier line).

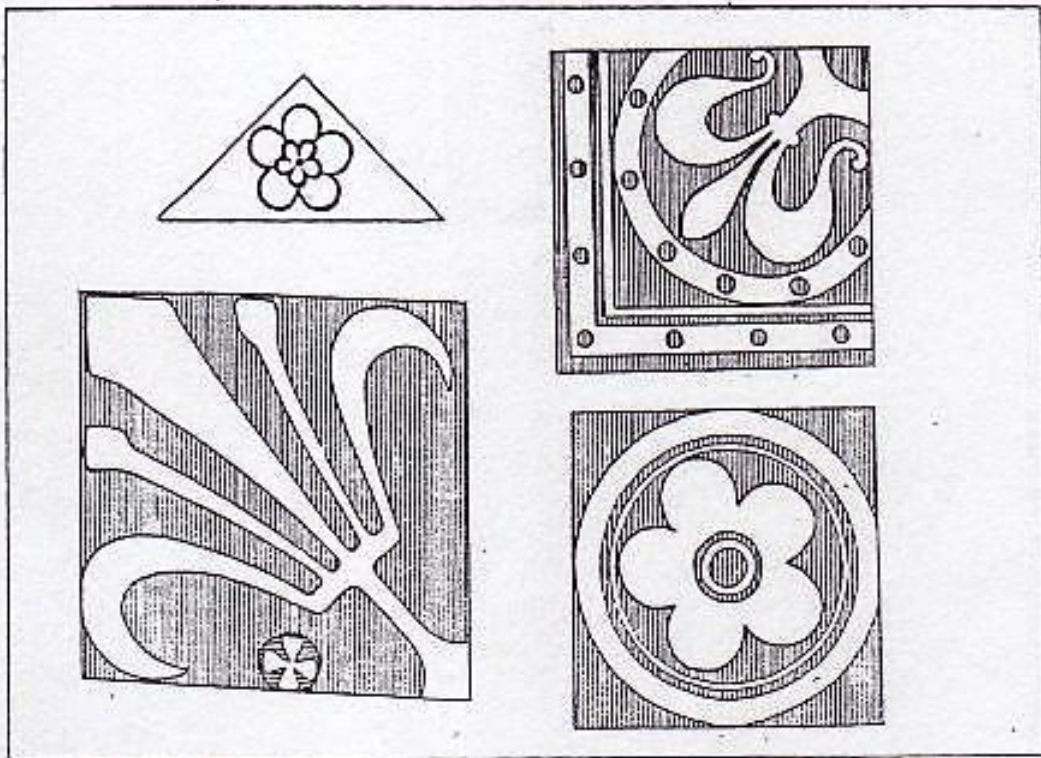


Fig 4. Three Inlaid tiles and one stamped tile with typical rose pattern.

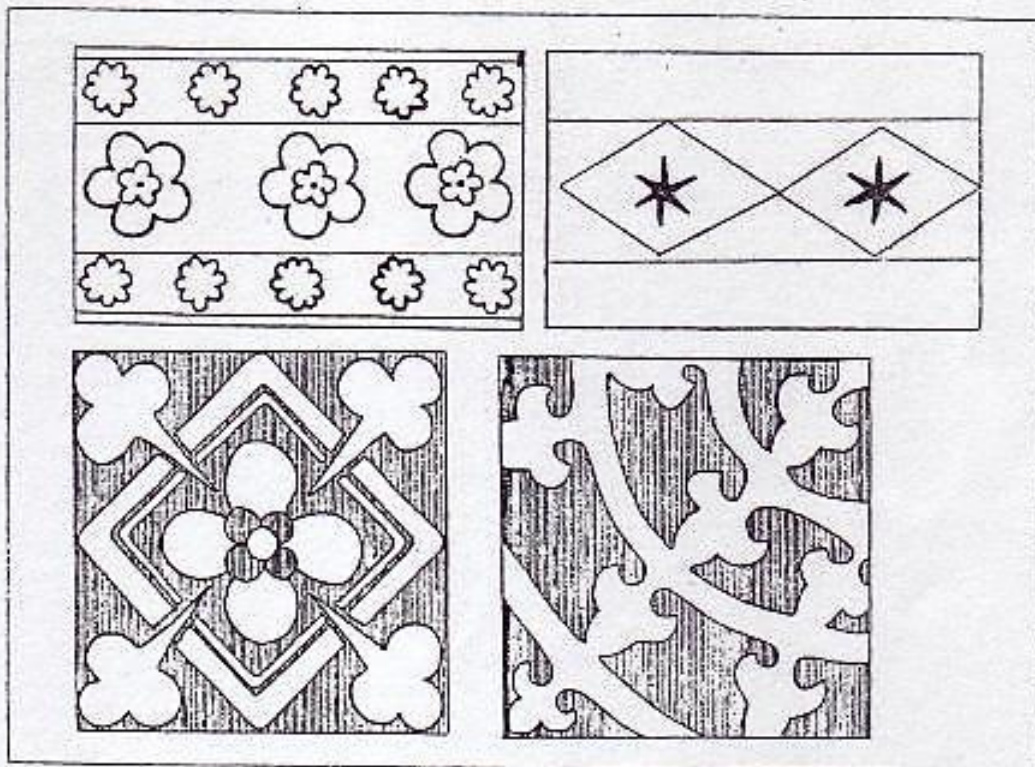


Fig 5. Inlaid Tiles (left). Stamped tiles (right).

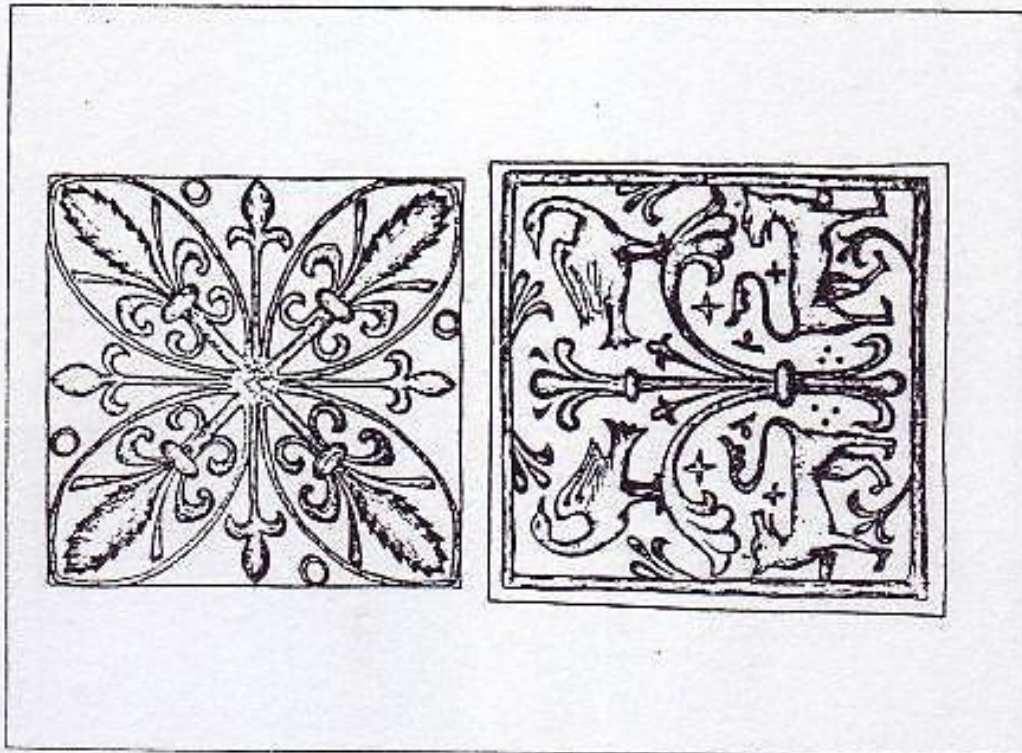


Fig 7. Embossed tiles.

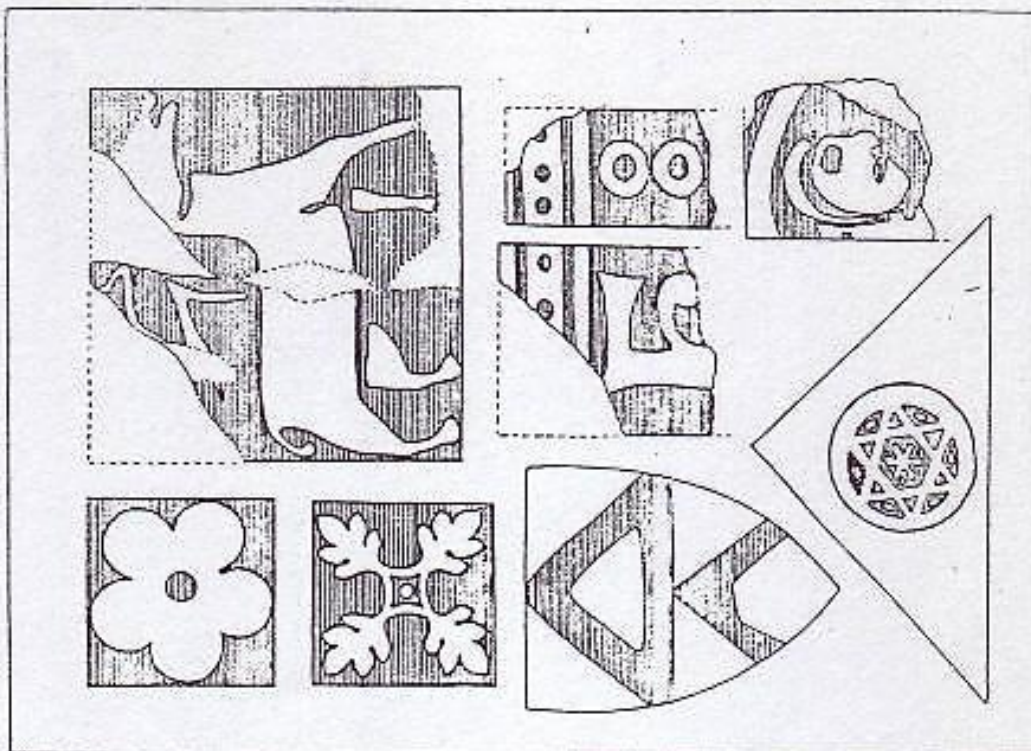


Fig 6. Inlaid tiles with star of David stamped tile at bottom.

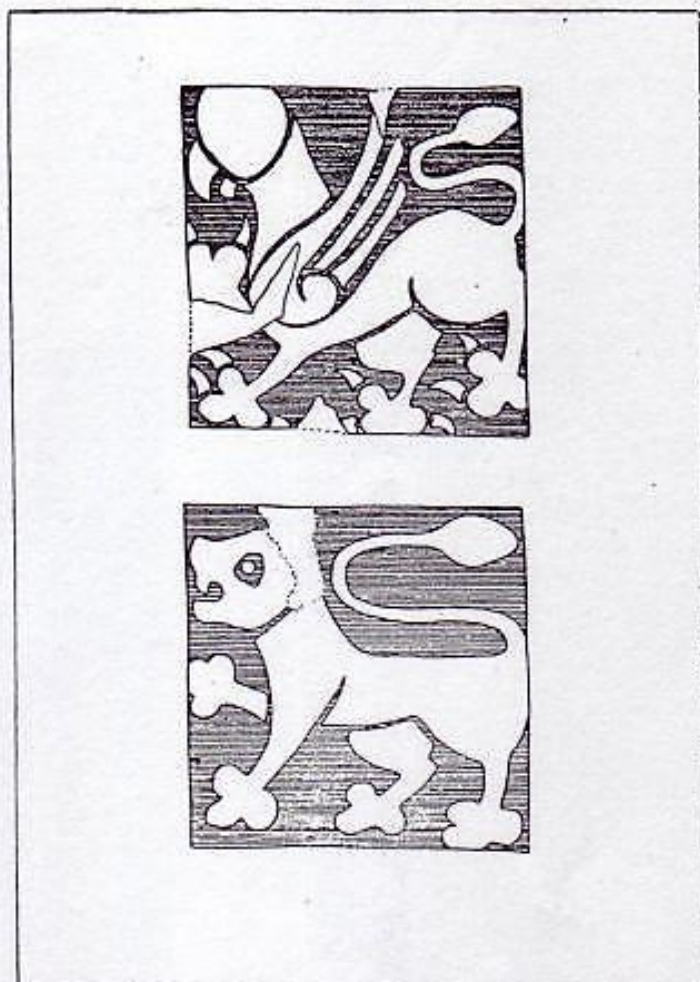


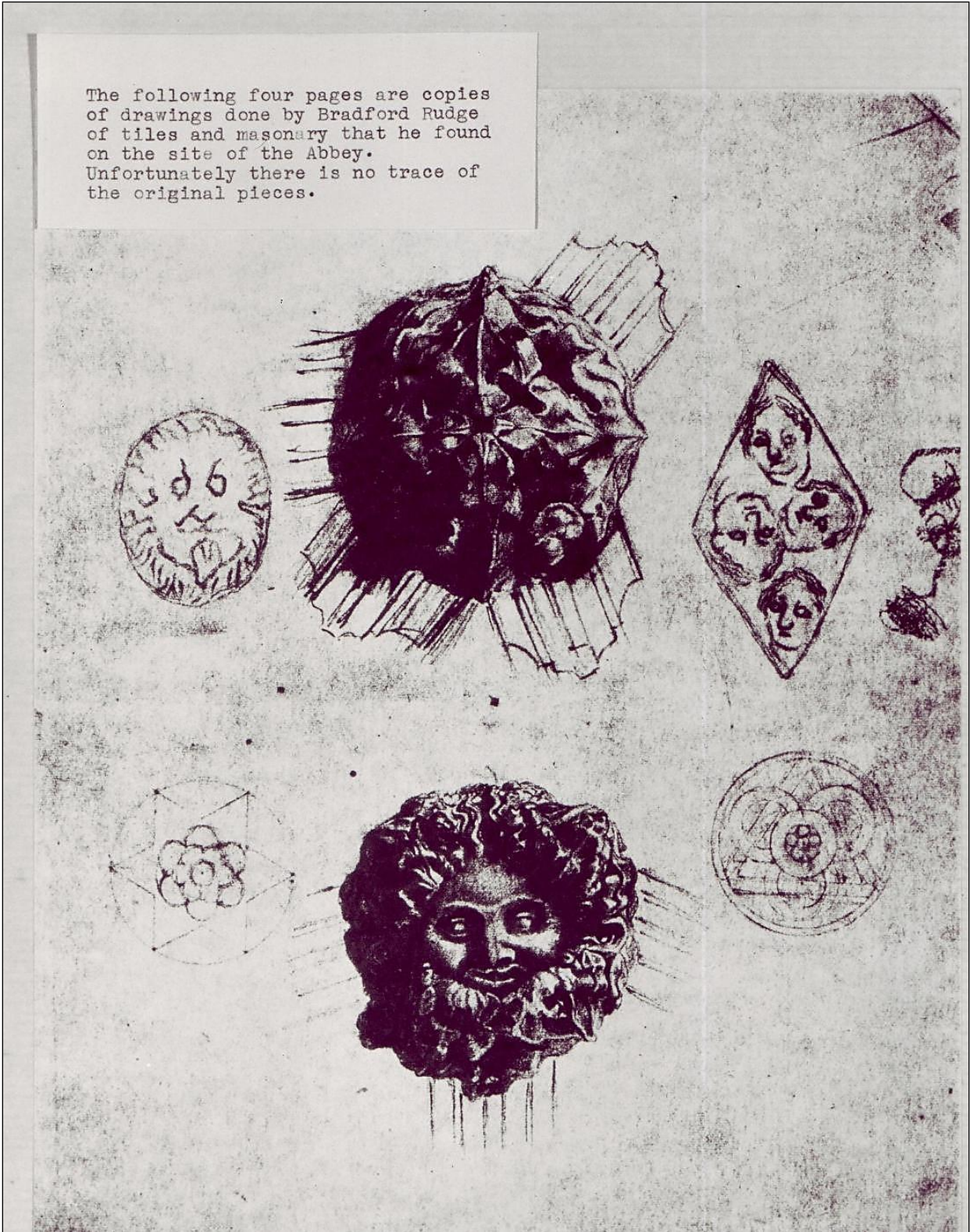
Fig. 8. Inlaid tiles

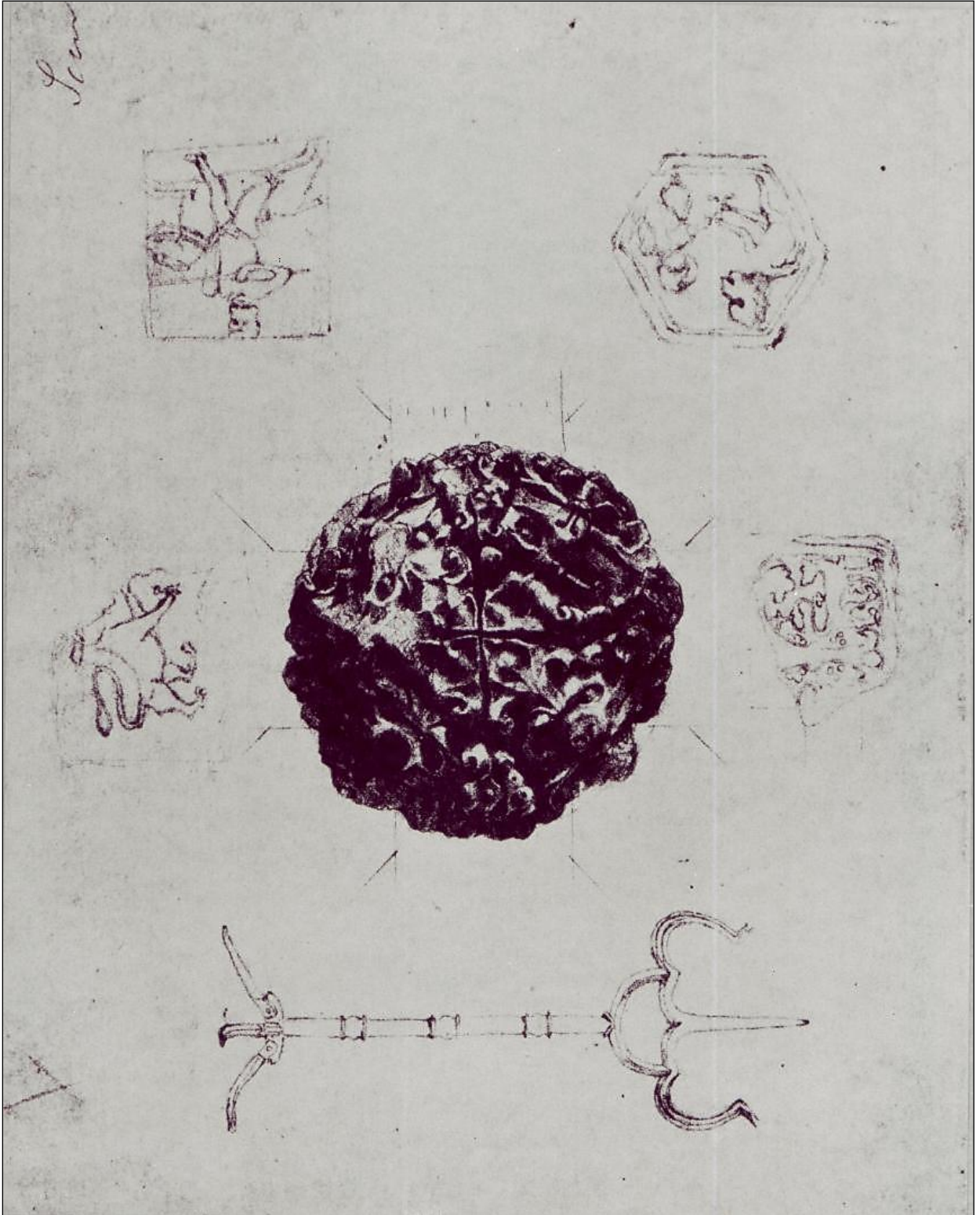
other and three coins, one of which is from a Nuremberg mint, and the others are French jettons. They are fifteenth century.

(All the finds are in the Prichard Museum, Bedford.)

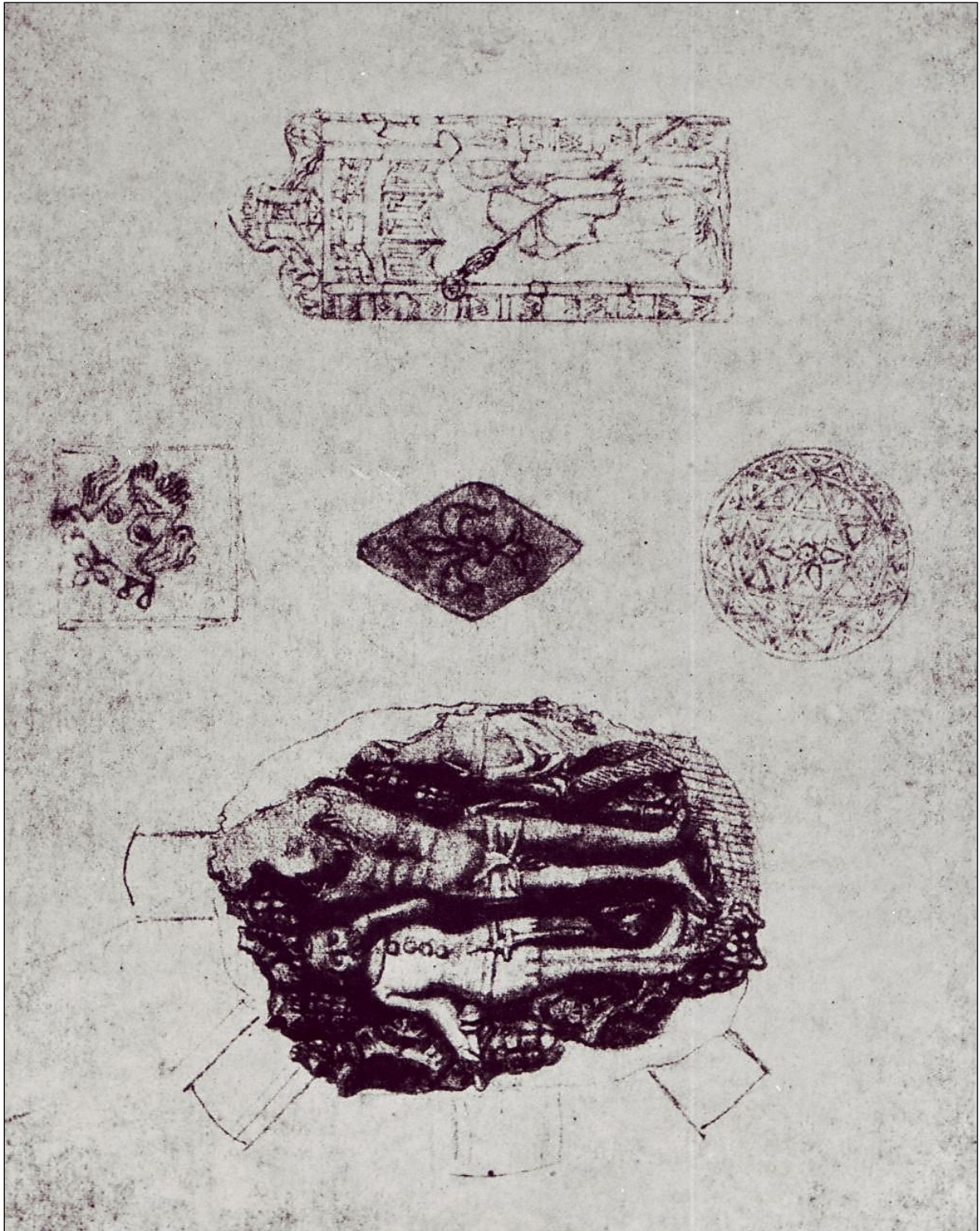
Bradford Rudge drawings

The following four pages are copies of drawings done by Bradford Rudge of tiles and masonry that he found on the site of the Abbey. Unfortunately there is no trace of the original pieces.









Extract from the *Antiquaries Journal*, Vol 91, 2011

CRACKING THE CODE: THE WARDEN ABBEY MORSES, LUXURY METALWORK AND PATRONAGE AT A CISTERCIAN ABBEY IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

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The three copper-gilt and enamel plaques from Warden Abbey are the most important examples of late medieval metalwork from an English Cistercian abbey. They are currently exhibited at the British Museum and dated to the mid-fifteenth century. A reinterpretation of the monograms decorating the plaques allows their patron to be identified as Abbot Walter Clifton (c 1377–97). An analysis of the plaques' style and iconography also suggests a late fourteenth-century date. Clifton's personal devotions and an unusual aspect of the plaques' iconography can be explained by reference to the spirituality of the Cistercian Order. The plaques' closest parallel is a roundel decorated with the badge of Richard II. Evidence from inventories and comparison with Continental material suggests that the Warden plaques were, in all probability, morses, used to fasten a cope.

The most impressive examples of late medieval metalwork from an English Cistercian monastery are the three copper-gilt plaques with enamelled roundels and silver mounts from Warden Abbey, Bedfordshire (fig 1). They are currently on display in the medieval gallery of the British Museum. The plaques have only a brief entry in the museum's catalogue, where they are described as abbot's morses and dated to 1426–75,¹ although Marian Campbell has suggested a date of c 1400.² In her paper on English Cistercian metalwork published in 1986, Jane Geddes commented, 'nothing is known about the origin and function of these enamels and they merit further investigation'.³ Although they have occasionally received brief comment in subsequent literature,⁴ a detailed art-historical analysis of these beautiful and fascinating objects is lacking, something which this paper will seek to remedy.

1. BM, MLA 53, 67, 1–3. The catalogue entry is accessible online at: <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectId=49260&partid=1&IdNum=1853%20c0607.1&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database%2fmuseum_no_provenance_search.aspx?> (accessed 9 May 2011). One of the plaques was included in the museum's 1978 exhibition on British heraldry and catalogued as 'fifteenth century': see Marks and Payne 1978, 74–5.
2. Campbell 1987.
3. Geddes 1986, 262.
4. Glanville 1987, 198.

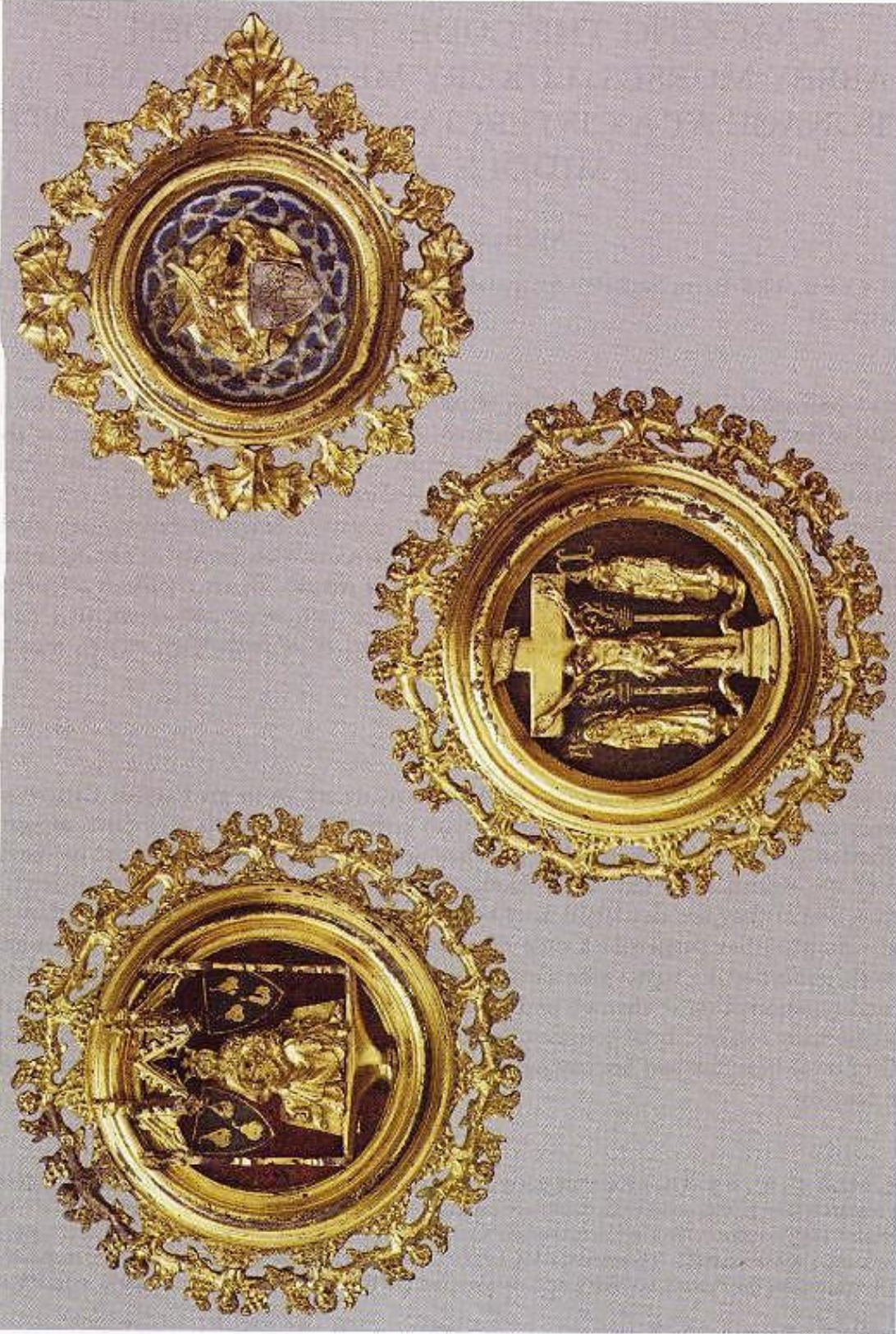


Fig 1. Three copper-gilt and enamel roundels with silver mounts from Warden Abbey, Bedfordshire (British Museum, London, MLA 53, 67, 1-3). Photograph: © British Museum



Fig 2. Reverse of the Warden Abbey roundels. Photograph: © British Museum

THE PLAQUES

All three plaques have copper-gilt frames and back plates, which have the remains of fittings, most likely for suspension loops (fig 2). Two have outer rims decorated with angels holding hands and both have a diameter of 119mm. The third plaque is surrounded by trilobed leaves and has a diameter of 115mm. All three have a central silver relief decoration, which is set against a *champlevé* enamel background.

The first plaque is embellished with an elaborate canopied niche, containing an image of the seated and crowned Virgin with the Christ Child on her left knee. The red enamel background is decorated with two shields, each emblazoned with the arms of Warden Abbey, *three pears or on azure*. These arms were painted on a corbel in the demolished fourteenth-century transept of St Paul's church, Bedford,⁵ and a variation on them, including a crozier, was used by the abbey on its counter seal in 1538.⁶ The second plaque is decorated with a relief of the Crucifixion with the Virgin and St John. Christ hangs on the cross with the titulus, inscribed *INRI*, above him. The flanking figures stand on pedestals joined to the foot of the cross by curved brackets. The scene is set against a blue enamel background decorated with two croziers and initials. Chamot transcribed these as 'W A' (for Warden Abbey)⁷ and this transcription has been repeated in subsequent literature. However, the correct reading of these letters, which provides evidence for the plaques' probable patron and date, will be discussed shortly. The relief on the final roundel is of an angel holding a shield. This is emblazoned with a crozier dividing crowned Lombardic letters. Once again, these have been interpreted as reading 'W A'. A belt of clouds, set against a blue enamel ground, surrounds the relief.

5. Anon 1886.

6. Ellis 1986, 69 and pl 61.

7. Chamot 1930, 39.

The plaques were bought by the British Museum for £30 in 1853 from H Inskip of Shefford,⁸ which is approximately three miles from the site of Warden Abbey. The seller was probably Hampden Inskip, clock and watchmaker,⁹ the son of the keen amateur archaeologist, Thomas Inskip (d 1849), who uncovered important Roman remains in the vicinity of Shefford.¹⁰ There is only very vague information about the site of the plaques' discovery. The museum's acquisitions book merely records that they were excavated at Shefford and describes them as 'ornaments' with decoration in the 'Tudor' style. Keeper Franks reported their purchase in the 1854 edition of the *Archaeological Journal*, and suggested they were from a shrine.¹¹ Two of the plaques were exhibited in Paris in 1867.¹² All three are in excellent condition and have only minor damage. Conservation work was undertaken in 1949 to stabilize the enamel on the Virgin and Child plaque, and all were conserved in 2008, on this occasion to remove surface dirt and to prepare the items for permanent display in the museum's recently refurbished medieval galleries.

The appearance of the abbey's arms on one of the roundels and the location of their discovery mean that they undoubtedly originated from Warden Abbey, a daughter house of Rievaulx Abbey, founded by Walter Espec in 1136. The monastery was provided with a generous endowment and, in 1224, housed a community of thirty monks. When the income of the abbey was assessed by the papacy in 1291, it totalled over £220.¹³ This wealth was sufficient for the rebuilding of the monastery's church, which is documented in 1323 and 1366.¹⁴ There seems to have been further building work at the abbey at the turn of the fifteenth century. In December 1400, a papal indulgence was granted to penitents who visited the abbey and gave alms for 'its conservation and repair'.¹⁵ Evidence of the wealth and status of the abbot of Warden is provided by the papal bull of 1429 permitting his use of the mitre and other *pontificalia*.¹⁶ When the abbey was dissolved in 1537, the community consisted of the abbot and fifteen monks, who enjoyed an annual income of £389,¹⁷ making the monastery one of the richer Cistercian houses in England.

Today, the abbey's few standing remains are incorporated into the wing of a sixteenth-century brick house, built after the Dissolution on the site of the east range of the cloister.¹⁸ Archaeological excavations have unearthed a late thirteenth-century copper-alloy crozier, along with decorated floor tiles, painted glass, roof bosses, sculpture and evidence of the extension of the chancel in the fourteenth century. All these discoveries give an idea of the richness of the abbey and its material culture, which is demonstrated most vividly by the plaques under discussion here.¹⁹

8. With thanks to Sylvie Scaton for consulting the museum's archive.

9. Anon 1854, 52.

10. VCH 1908, 44; Anon 1846, 82; Pickford 1991, 148.

11. Franks 1854, 29–30.

12. Mantz 1874.

13. Dugdale 1830, 371–2.

14. VCH 1904, 362.

15. CPL 1398–1404: <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=104142&strquery=wardon>> (accessed 9 May 2011).

16. CPL 1427–47: <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=104419&strquery=cistercian%20mitre>> (accessed 9 May 2011).

17. VCH 1904, 365.

18. Pevsner 1968, 132.

19. Rudd and West 1962. The floor tiles are discussed by Baker 1993.