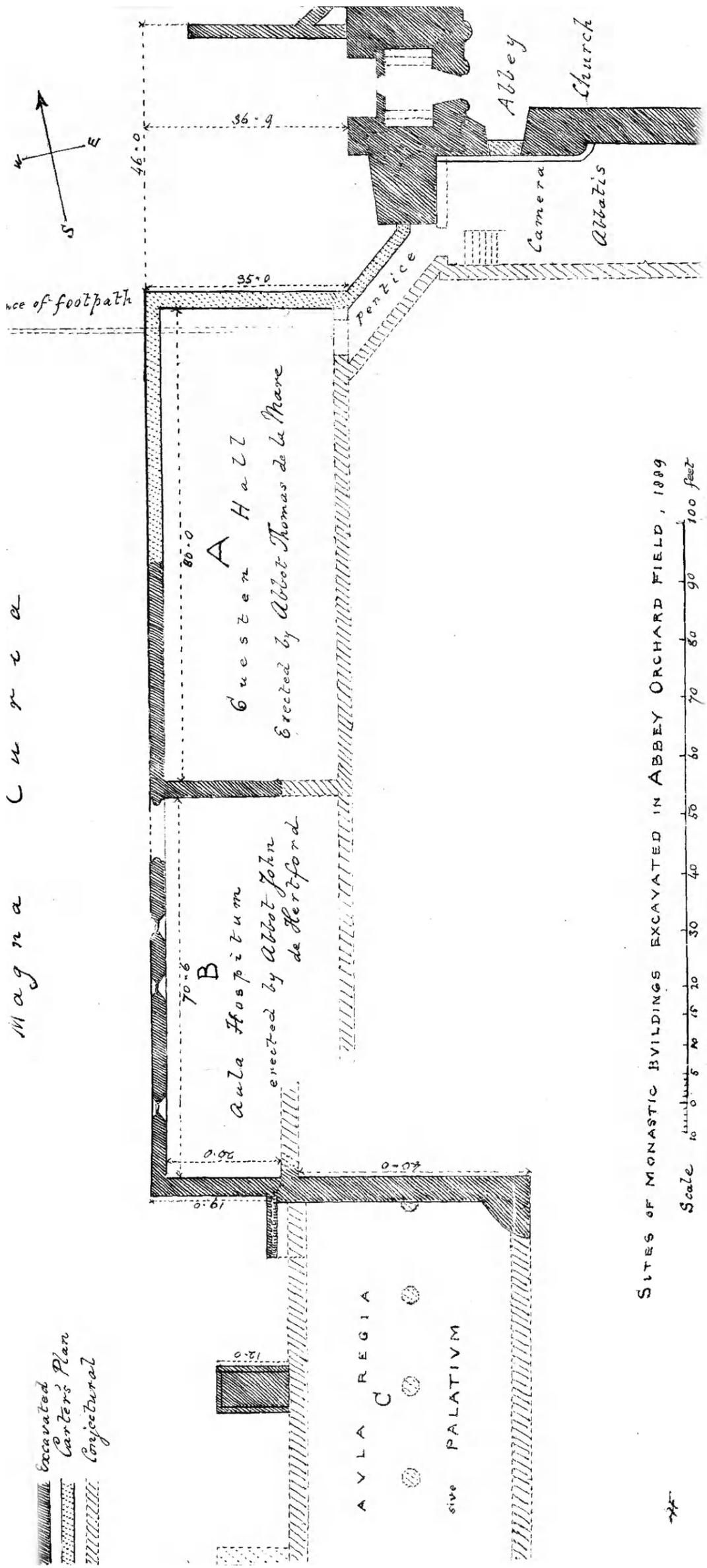

Excavations in the Abbey Orchard Field, St. Albans.

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The notes I have to offer this evening are on the sites of Monastic buildings recently excavated in the Abbey Orchard Field. It will be known to most of those who are present, that the explorations were made last spring by Mr. Toulmin, now Mayor of St. Albans, who was then owner of the field. The trenches remained open a considerable time, so that a great many persons had an opportunity of inspecting them, amongst others some members of our Archæological Committee, who were specially invited to do so. The name "Abbey Orchard Field" appears to be a reminiscence of the Monastic orchard, the "Magnum Pomarium," which lay to the south of Orchard-street, reaching nearly to the Abbey Mills.

In illustrating the subject, I propose first to point out the sites on the plan which I have prepared, and then to refer to the Monastic documents with a view to identifying the buildings, as far as it is possible to do so. I have to explain that in drawing this plan from measurements taken on the spot, I have made use of Carter's work on the Abbey published about the year 1810. His plan of the church gives this line of wall extending southwards as far as the return wall. I find by measurements that Carter's wall is identical in position with that which has been excavated. In 1810, it appears, ruins were standing above the ground, for a doorway is represented here, and the sills of windows in this lower building; also the wall which adjoins the buttress of the church, is shown in Carter's *elevation*.



Magna Camera

Excavated
Carter's Plan
Conjectural

SITES OF MONASTIC BUILDINGS EXCAVATED IN ABBEY ORCHARD FIELD, 1889

Scale 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 feet

AULA REGIA
AULA PALATIUM

On my plan the excavated foundations are those which are coloured dark, the fainter lines are those given by Carter, the broken lines denote conjectures which will require explanation. Looking at the plan, we observe that what has been brought to light by digging, is the western wall of a range of buildings extending nearly north and south, at right angles to the axis of the church. The south-western corner of the church is copied here from Carter's plan. Two return walls have been uncovered, only a portion of the southern one is given by Carter. The total length of the wall running north and south was 156 feet, but the excavated portion is only 109 feet. The upper part was not opened. These flint foundations are 2ft. 9in. thick as far as to this point. The continuation of this transverse wall, extending 40ft. eastward, is 4ft. 3in. in thickness. It terminates in a mass of flintwork, 10ft. long and 8ft. thick; this indicates that the wall extended southwards from this angle. From this point the foundations have been taken out. I have indicated in dotted lines the presumed position of this wall. At the west end of this thick wall, on the north side, an intersecting wall was found, and a pit, 5ft. 6in. deep, was dug to find the bottom of the footings. In the trench carried southward here a rather puzzling piece of work was met with, a narrow flint wall, faced on the east side with brickwork of ancient appearance, bonded with thin tiles; it extended 9ft. 4in. southwards. The wall then disappeared, but at the distance of 28 feet from the thick transverse wall a large block of ashlar work was brought to light. It measures 8ft. by 12ft., and is formed of a remarkably hard kind of stone; of this I shall speak presently. Its footings form a step round three sides; on the east side is no step, showing that here it abutted against a wall. The excavation was carried a few yards further to the south, but nothing but a confused mass of building material was found. It is probable that much of the flint work extracted in modern times has been used in building the cottages in Orchard-street. To return to this upper building—the transverse wall here was uncovered only to the length of 20ft. If the trench had been continued, the eastern wall of the building would probably have been struck. I have indicated such a wall ranging from the northern angle given by Carter. This gives an interior width of 30ft.

I have now described all that was brought to light by the spade, with the important exception of the moulded stones, which I leave in the hands of Mr. Clarkson. The stones have been kindly presented to the Society by Mr. Toulmin, as was announced at the last meeting, when our cordial thanks were voted to him. As we have no museum in St. Albans, our chairman, Archdeacon Lawrance, has kindly undertaken to take charge of them in the south transept of the Cathedral.

Before I refer to the records for the history of these buildings, it may perhaps be advisable to point out, in a general way, the Monastic surroundings of the site which we are exploring. For that purpose I will make use of the plan of the Monastery, which the Society brought out about 13 years ago. [The plan was here exhibited.] We observe that this range of buildings lies between the monks' quarter on the east and the great court ("Magna Curia"), which may be called the secular or visitors' quarter, on the west. On the east side we see the great cloister, surrounded by the principal conventual edifices—the chapter house here adjoining the slype, the long dormitory contiguous to it, the refectory on the south. These are laid down from evidences which are tolerably distinct. On the west side of the cloister was probably the cellarer's chequer. To the east of the chapter house we have the monks' cemetery, marked by the remains of stone coffins. Further south, the Prior's manse and gardens, where the Rectory now is. Still further south was the infirmary, with its gardens and appurtenances, for the use of the sick monks. These, with other minor edifices, which I must not stay to enumerate, constituted what may be called the Monks' quarter. The Menial quarter, comprising the servants' lodgings, offices, workshops, and so forth, was, speaking roughly, south of the monks' quarter.

With regard to the Abbot's house, we find that it ranged along the south wall of the church, as was the case at Westminster and in various other Benedictine Monasteries. The "Gesta Abbatum" states "that Abbot John Moot, when cellarer (say about 1370), reconstructed the Abbot's 'Camera' contiguous to the aisle of the church" (Gest. III. 441.) It is important to observe this, for some antiquaries, as Stukely, have confused it with another edifice. The Abbot's residence,

then, was here, extending from the west end of the church to the great cloister. Beneath it was a cloister named the *Forensic Parlour*, because here the monks were allowed to hold *parley* with visitors. This edifice, we see, is in close contact with the range of buildings we are discussing. These latter form one side of the great court, in which visitors were received. On the north side is the Great Gatehouse, still existing. Close to it was the Almonry, in which needy travellers and the poorer pilgrims were accommodated. On the west side was the long stable, which, Matthew Paris informs us, would contain 300 horses. This was, of course, a necessary provision for the richer class of guests. On the south side were lodgings for the higher class of servants, erected by Abbot John de Hertford. This building should have been placed lower down than it is on the plan. Further to the rear were barns, store-houses, and other offices.

The south gate of the Monastery, called the Water Gate, was here. A road connected the north and south gates, on the line of the present Abbey Mill-lane, and travellers who were privileged could pass straight through the Monastery here. I think we are now prepared for the information that our excavated edifices formed the quarter of hospitality, or guesten houses for the use of the wealthier visitors. This was a very important feature of the Monastery.

We have to turn now to the documentary evidence. For the purpose of identifying the sites, I must take the notices out of their chronological order, and begin with the work of Abbot Thomas de la Mare (1349—1396). The Book of Benefactors states (Nero D. VII., fol. 22), that he erected for the use of distinguished guests a structure annexed to the south wall of the church ("Cameram annexam parieti Australi ecclesie"). The site marked A on the plan answers to this description; we see the northern wall of this building joins the church. At the north-east corner was probably a pentice or passage-way leading by a stair to the Abbot's chamber. All visitors of distinction were certainly the guests of the Abbot, and he would have convenient access to their guesten house. The style of the work would be either late Decorated or early Perpendicular. Some moulded stones were found here. The *Gesta* informs us that this was called the New Camera, and

was adjacent (*juxta*) to the Old Camera assigned to the same uses (*Gest.* III. 388). It appears that this old guest house had been built by Abbot John de Hertford (between 1235 and 1260). The documentary account is (*Gest.* I. 313): "He erected a noble hall with its adjacent chambers for the reception of guests." The site marked B corresponds to John de Hertford's structure. It adjoins, on the north, that of Thomas de la Mare, which, it appears, did not supersede it, but was additional accommodation for the same class of guests, the nobility and persons of importance. Carter's plan shows that the entrance was in the north-west corner, and that the lower story was lighted by three windows; these, from the measurements, appear to be lancets. The style must have been advanced early English or Geometrical. The west wall at the south corner has been found; the other wall is given conjecturally.

We have now to look at this southern group of foundations, marked C, which are far the most interesting, although, unfortunately, the most mutilated. It appears from the *Gesta* that John de Hertford reconstructed the block of buildings called the "Palatium." It was adjacent to the guest house last described; the term is "*adjacet.*" We observe that the site C is adjacent to B at this angle, and this suggests that the Palatium was situated here. The earlier edifice designated by this name appears to have been erected by Abbot Geoffry de Gorham, between 1120 and 1146 (*Gesta* I. 79). It is described as spacious and noble, and having a double roof (*cum duplicato tecto*) which may denote that it consisted of two aisles. Adjoining it was a fine chamber called the Queen's Bower, "because it was assigned for the use of the Queen."

There was a still earlier Palatium, existing in 1115, for at the dedication of the Norman church in that year we are told that Abbot Richard d'Aubeny entertained King Henry I. and Queen Matilda with their retinues in the Palace (*in Palatio*), *Gest.* I. 71. These buildings probably succeeded one another on the same site, successive Abbots improving on the work of their predecessors.

I will now give the description of Abbot John de Hertford's structure, which the Book of Benefactors names as the "Aula Regia" or Royal Hall (*Lib. Benefac.*, folio 18), *Gesta* I, 313. "He erected a superb

Hall, painted, together with its minor apartments (*conclavia*), chimney and vestibule, and basement hall (*subaula*) or undercroft. This may be called a Royal Palace (*Palatium Regium*). It consists of two aisles (this I believe is the meaning of the term "duplex") and is vaulted (*cryptata*). Adjoining the entrance is a splendid vestibule, called the Porch or Oriel. There are several fine sleeping chambers (*thalami*) with their ante-rooms, and fire-places, for the accommodation of guests. For the Hall which was formerly erected on the same site (*i.e.*, by Abbott Geoffrey de Gorham) had become ruinous, and was gloomy and unsightly, being roofed with a patchwork of shingles and tiles. But the new Hall, of which we are speaking, with its chapels and appurtenances he covered with lead in the best fashion. Moreover he caused it and its Collateral Chamber (*i.e.*, the Queen's Bower) to be painted in a comely manner, and crowned with charming decoration, which was executed by our monk Richard, a first-rate artist." This description is given from Matthew Paris. We may judge of the style of John de Hertford's work by the Presbytery of the Abbey, as it was before the present alterations. We are unable to say whether this work was done before the Presbytery or not. It is to be regretted that this historical structure has been to so great an extent rooted up, but I think we may identify these foundations at C as its remnants. The thick wall I have described would be the north wall of the Palatium; its length is 40ft., which would admit of the Hall being divided by an arcade into two members or aisles, as indicated on the plan. This was the arrangement adopted in other Guesten Halls, as at Furness Abbey. The Queen's Bower, which was collateral with it, was probably on the east.

We have now to account for this remarkable block of masonry. It appears that in the time of Abbot de la Mare the building required repairs. This is the account given (Gest. III. 387): "Abbot Thomas strengthened the Royal Hall, which threatened to fall from weakness, with two large abutments of hard stone, commonly called buttresses (*boteras*), and having taken down the roof, which from its decayed condition seemed to threaten danger, he erected a new one of reduced height, and covered it with lead; he also lighted the Hall with new stone windows glazed." We see this

mass of ashlar work has the shape of a buttress; it proves to be constructed of a very hard stone: it therefore answers to the description of one of Abbot Thomas's large buttresses, and this gives us the line of the west wall of the Palace, as I have marked it. With regard to the species of stone, I am indebted to a friend for some interesting information. A specimen of it was sent to an architect at Maidstone, Mr. Bensted, who is a great authority in such matters, and he has pronounced it most confidently to be Kentish Rag. This discovery strengthens the evidence with regard to the buttresses, because we find that the same kind of stone was used about this period in the Monastic structures where durability was specially required. The Book of Benefactors (fol. 24) states that Abbot John Moote, the successor of de la Mare, "reconstructed the parapet of the Great Gate House with very hard Kentish stone (*de duro lapide de Kantia*), thus defending the structure, as it were with a helmet, against the assaults of the weather." The hard Kentish stone is the Kentish Rag. Also Abbot Thomas himself is said to have built the battlements of the tower of the Water Gate of a very hard stone.

I think, then, we may consider it to be fairly demonstrated that the site of the Aula Regia which was repaired by Abbot Thomas was identical with C. I suppose the porch or oriel was here at the north-west. The mass at the north-east corner is probably the site of the chimney. The chief feature of the building was the great dining hall, with its two vaulted aisles. The "thalami" or sleeping chambers were in the upper storey. In the basement was the undercroft or crypt. In this the chapels or oratories may have been situated. A portion of it may also have served for a servants' hall. The windows inserted by Abbot Thomas were probably early Perpendicular work.

I have here a copy of Stukeley's plan of the Monastic ruins, made in 1719. It is very rough and sketchy, evidently done without measurements. This appears to show the buttress we have been discussing; it gives a transverse wall running in a line with it; this wall was probably in the crypt. There is no sign of the second buttress. This may have been on the east side, opposite to the other.* The bulging of the walls,

* Or on the west side further to the south.

owing perhaps to the thrust of the vaults, was no doubt the cause of the abutments being needed. Stukeley represents buildings abutting on the south wall of the edifice we have been considering; these may be identified with the residence erected for the cellarer and burser by Abbot William Albone, the successor of Whethamstede. This information is from the Book of Benefactors (fol. 43). The last documentary notice of the Palatium is that Abbot Whethampsted repaired it at a cost of £60 (Amund. II. 273); so it would contain some late Perpendicular work. It may here be noted that the funds for the repair of these Guesten Houses were supplied out of the great tithes and Rectory lands of the parish of Luton. These were assigned to the cellarer for this purpose when the Rectory was acquired by Abbot Robert de Gorham, c. 1154 (see Gest. Abb. I. 277).

I have now, I think, put before you all the information to be gleaned from the documents on the subject of these Guesten Houses, and the evidence for identifying them with the excavated sites. I fear the matter has been somewhat lengthy, but perhaps you will agree with me that the investigation is not without its interest, considering the important historical associations which attach to these buildings. If more vestiges of foundations could be discovered by further excavation a more complete plan could be made which might be of considerable value for the further illustration of the history of the Monastery.
