

Chertsey Abbey Excavations

In 1852 Mr Groombridge, the new owner of the site of Chertsey Abbey (above), asked some workmen to dig part of the garden to look for building stone (presumably for a garden wall). They found a tile floor, but finding his workmen 'wasting their time' gazing at the floor, Mr Groombridge 'ripped it out without recording it.'

Many tiles were taken away, but a local surgeon and amateur archaeologist, Manwaring Shurlock, managed to piece together some of the fragments and realised that they told the story of Tristram and Isolde. This was the start of the search for the ruins of Chertsey Abbey.

Three years later an excavation of the site was carried out revealing considerable lengths of walling and a number of stone coffins, that they thought were located in the South Transept of the Abbey. Unfortunately their initial interpretation was in error and they were in fact digging to the north of it, in what later turned out to be the Chapter House.

There were further excavations in 1861 (when tiles and decorated stonework were found), but it was not until the middle of the 20th century that the full extent of the Abbey ruins were known.

In the meantime, in the 1920s and 30s, a number of excavations had revealed other important elements of the site. In 1922 the tile kiln to the south of the South Transept and Lady Chapel was revealed, whilst in 1928 and again in 1934 'digs' to the west of Colonel's Lane revealed more kilns and ovens

After the Second World War plans were drawn up to develop the site with housing. Despite local opposition permission was granted, leading to the hasty scheduling of the site and the excavations of 1954 which were to eventually reveal the true layout of the Abbey ruins.

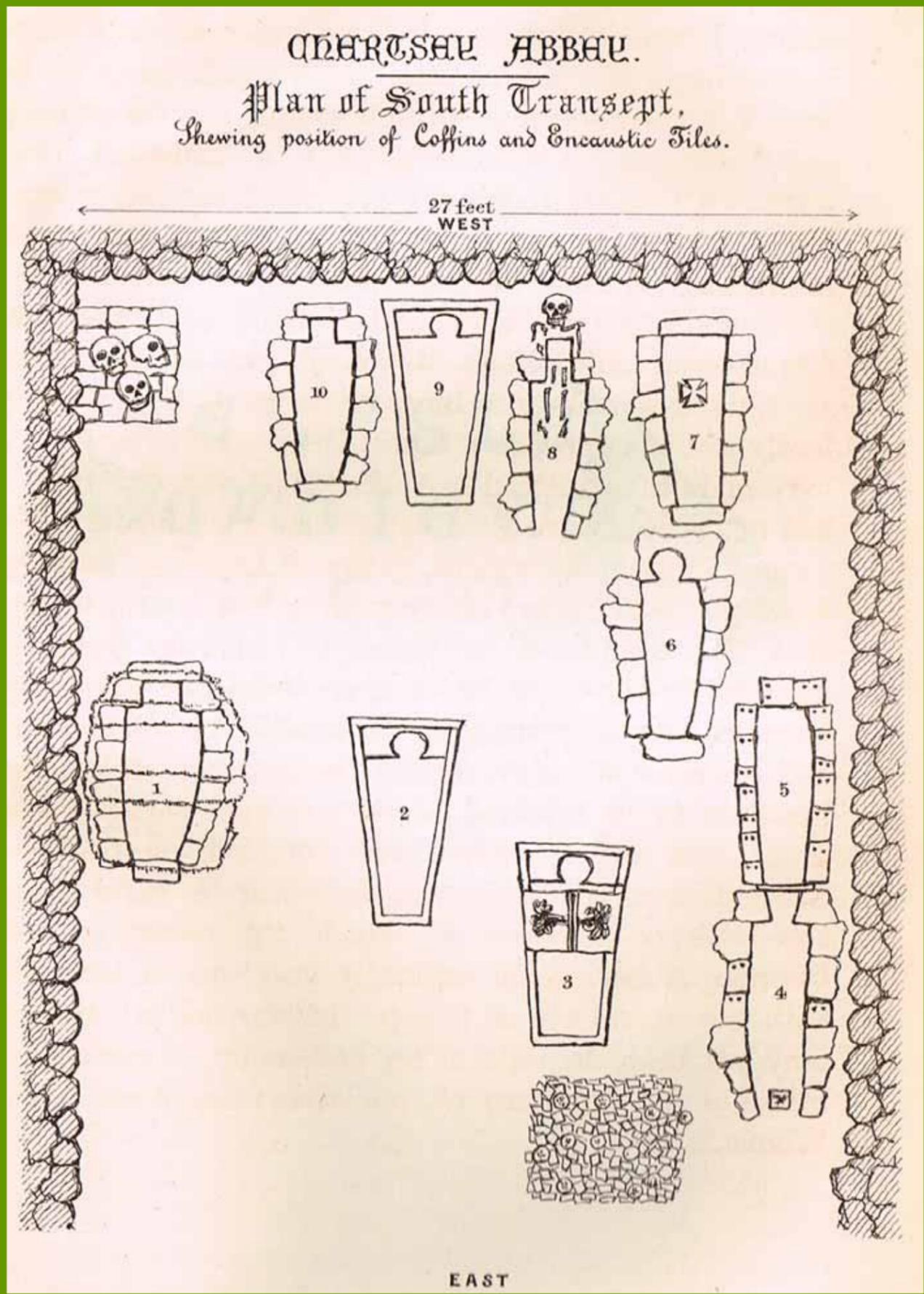
Over a four month period (from September to early December) the site was dug, until flooding brought an abrupt halt to the excavations.

Unfortunately (or maybe not) the report of the dig was not immediately published, with the result that in 1983 the Department of the Environment commissioned Rob Poulton (of the Surrey Archaeological Unit) to prepare a full report on all the excavations on the site.

So, what remains of the site today?

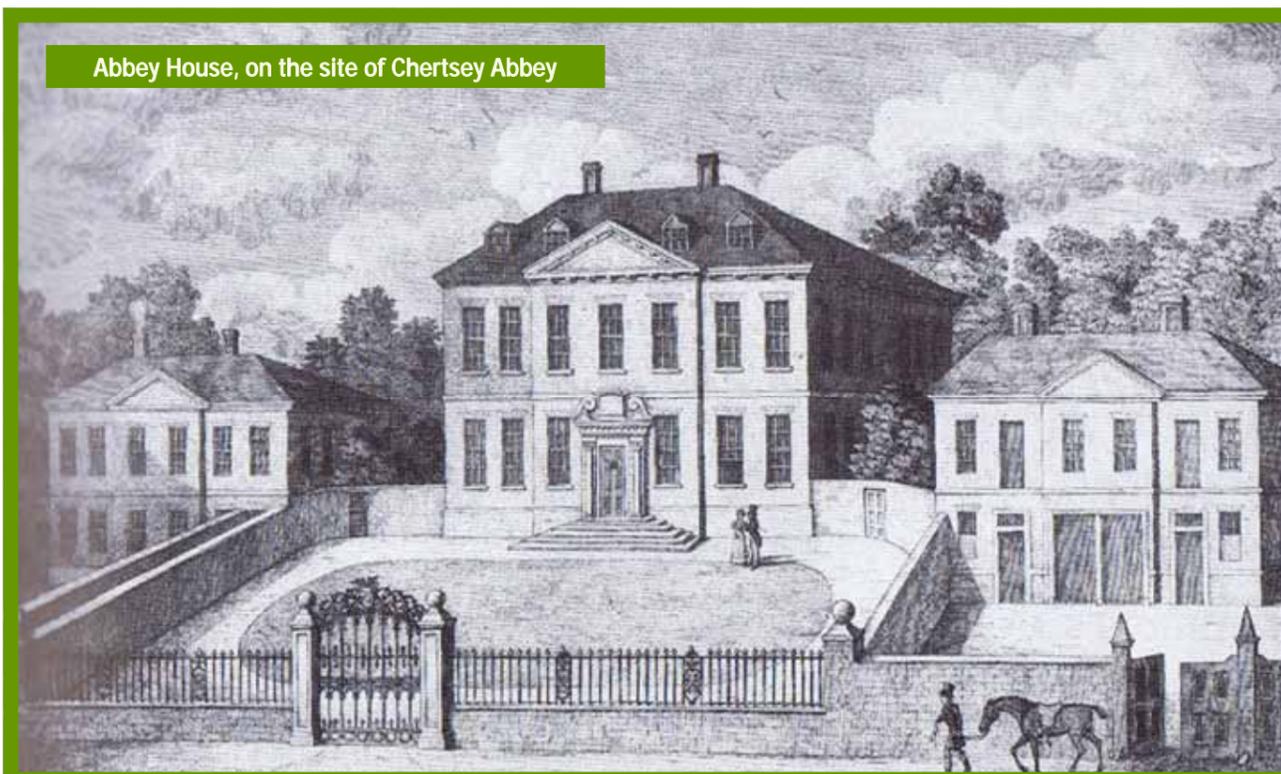
The best known features are the fish ponds, although only three of the original seven can still be traced. Part of the moat around the Abbey Precinct survives, but here again some sections have been filled in, notably the western section along Windsor Street.

Of the stonework very little can be seen in its original position - a few low walls and evidence of kilns or ovens to the west of Ferry Lane, two possible sections of Precinct Wall along the lane and (perhaps the most impressive of all), the uncovered foundations of the South Transept and Lady Chapel to the north of Abbey

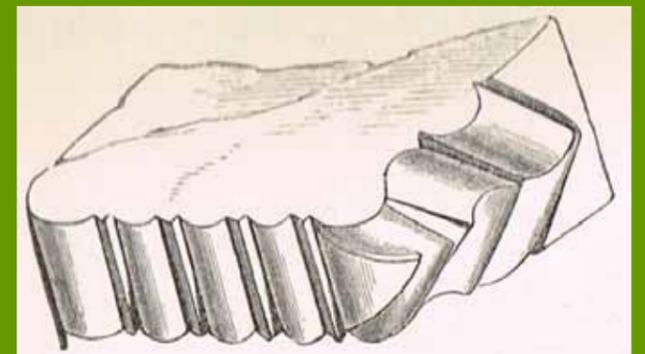
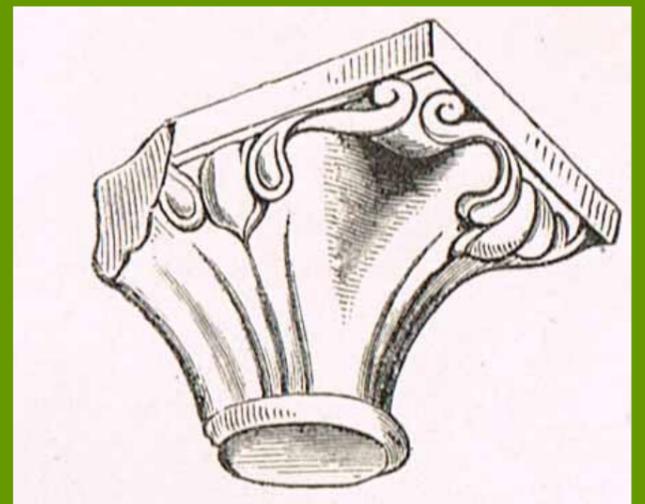
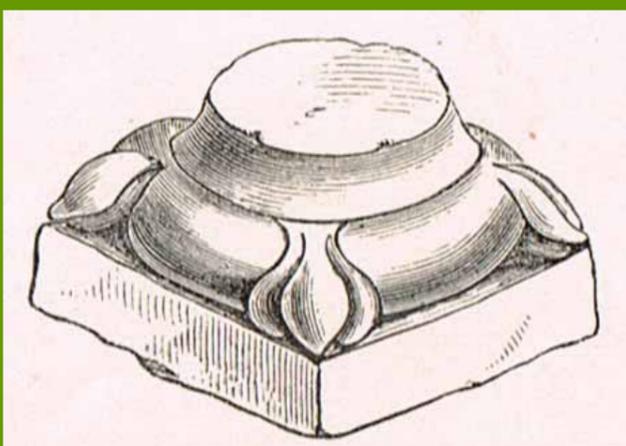
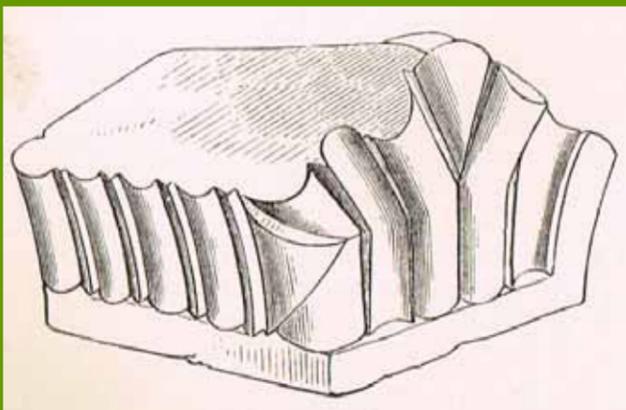
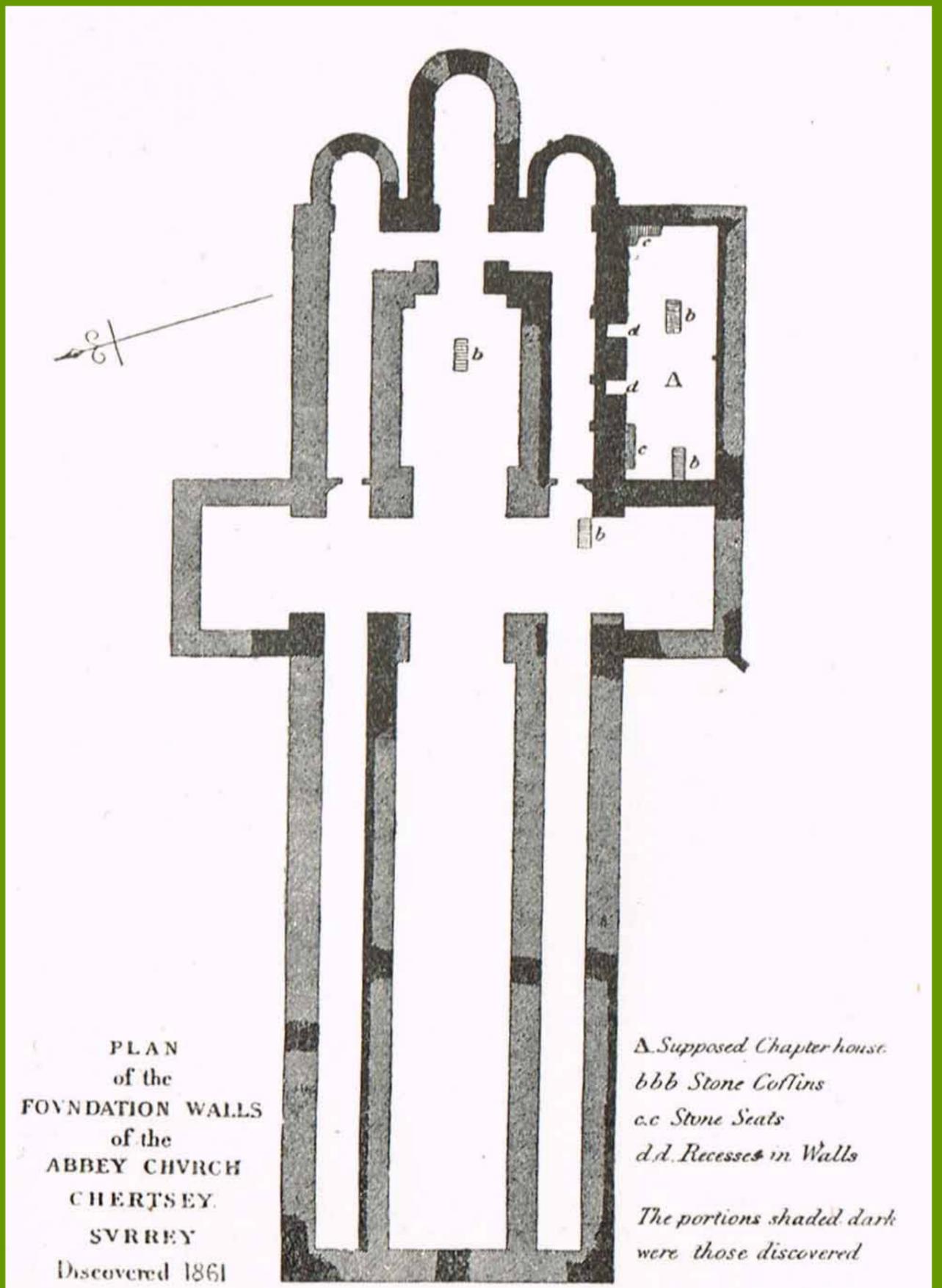
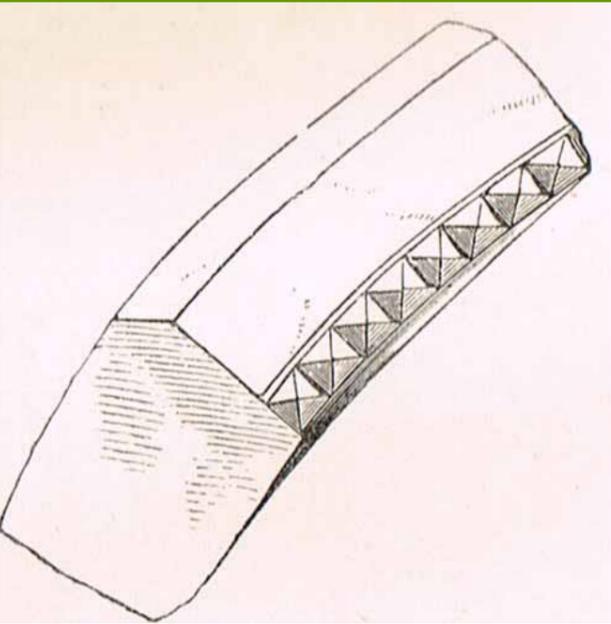
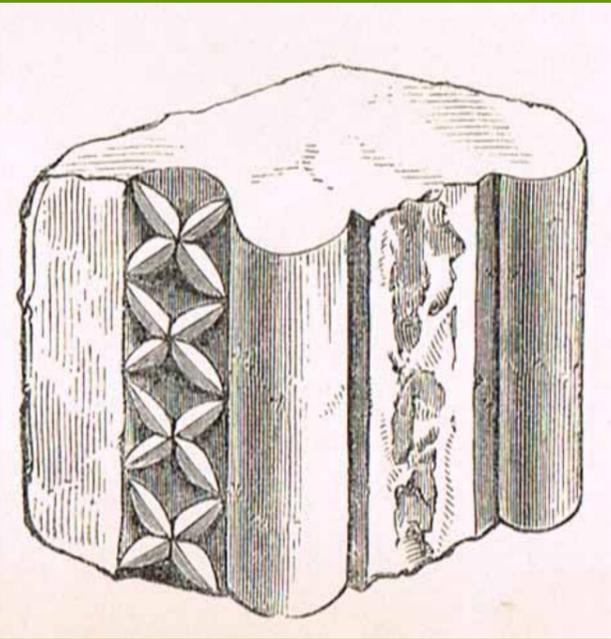
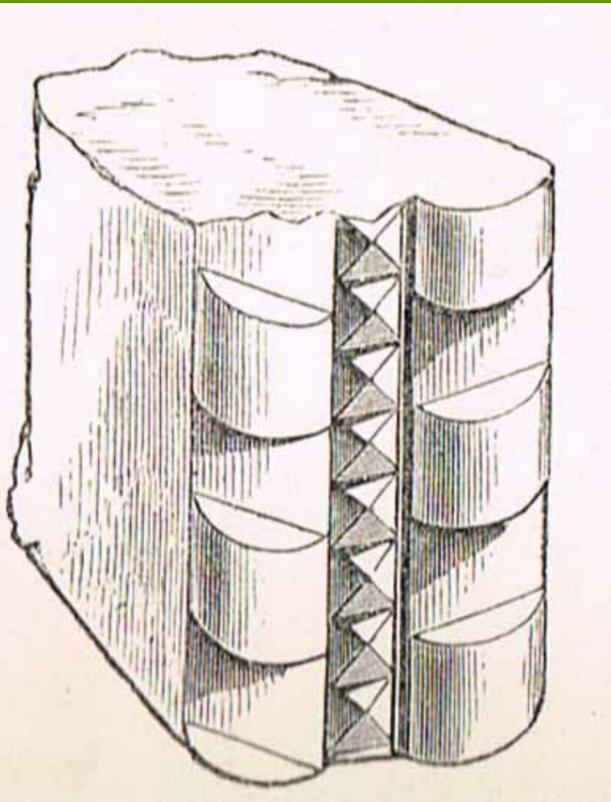


Gardens—but unfortunately these can no longer be seen from the road as a new fence has been erected.

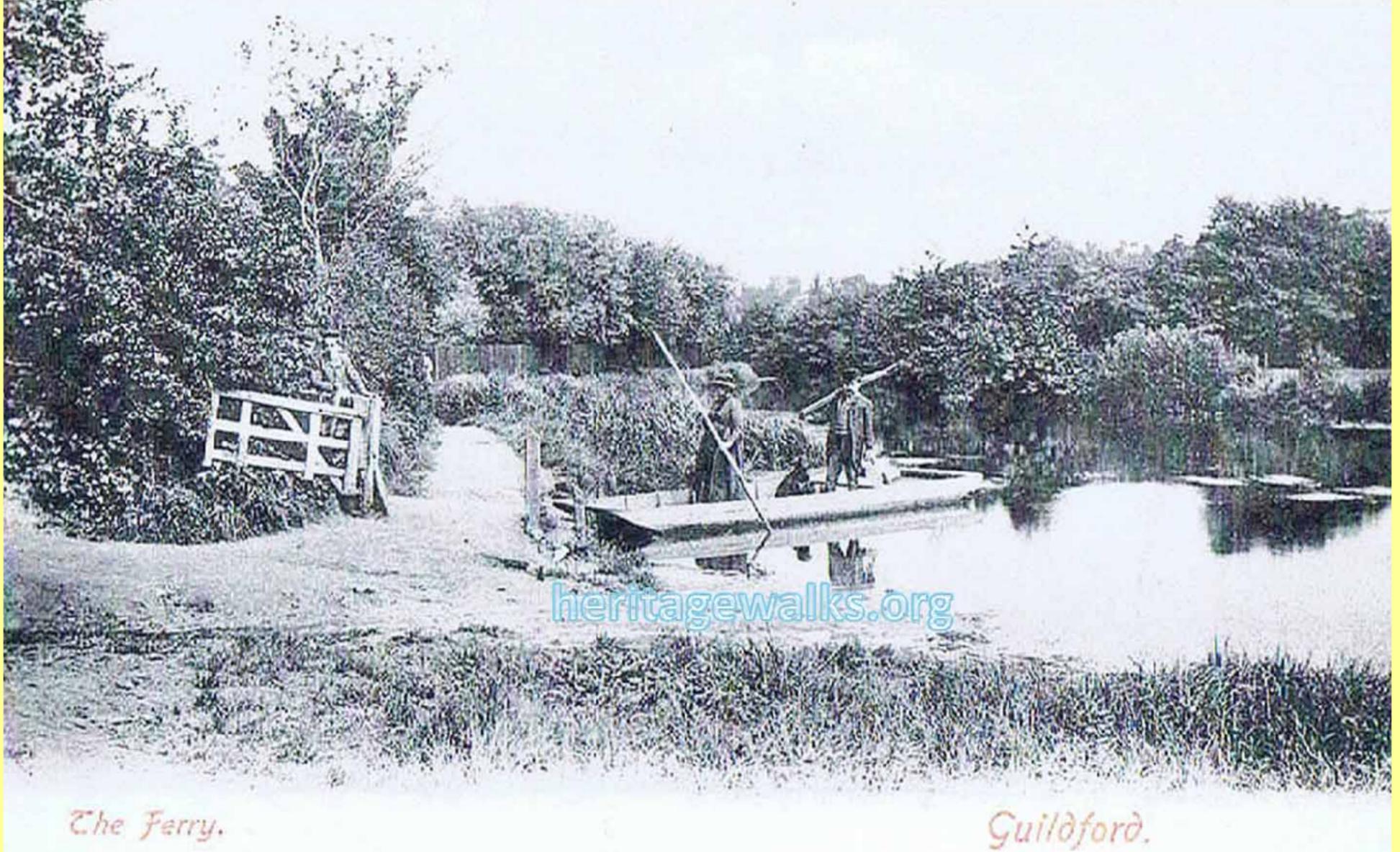
The rest has been removed and re-used elsewhere—but that (and the abbey's dissolution), is another story.



Some of the stonework and the plan of the abbey drawn after the 1855 and 1861 excavations.



Guildford, the ultimate insult - King Alfred the Great's 'Crap Town'!



The first reference to Guildford comes from the Will of Alfred the Great in about 885 – a fact that many burgers of that town take pride in relating. What they often fail to note, however, is who that great king left their little estate to, for it was not one of his sons or wife or even close friends, but his nephew, Aethelwald, son of Alfred's brother Aethelred (the Unready).

Alfred the Great was the fourth son of King Ethelwulf of Wessex, who was succeeded first by his sons Aethelbald, Aethelbert and Aethelred, before Alfred seized his chance. As such it could be argued that his nephew had a better claim to the throne than Alfred's own son, Edward (the Elder).

Alfred left many of the places that were close to his heart to his wife (such as the Manor of Wantage, where he was born), and all the best manors to his sons (with the Kingdom to Edward), so what better way to emphasize to Aethelwald that he was being written out of any possible inheritance than to leave him what some may consider the ultimate insult - Guildford!

Apparently Aethelwald was none too pleased with what he was (or should I say wasn't) given, spending the rest of his life being a pain in the side of poor Edward the Elder and proving, perhaps beyond all doubt, that right from the beginning Guildford was considered a 'crap town'.

