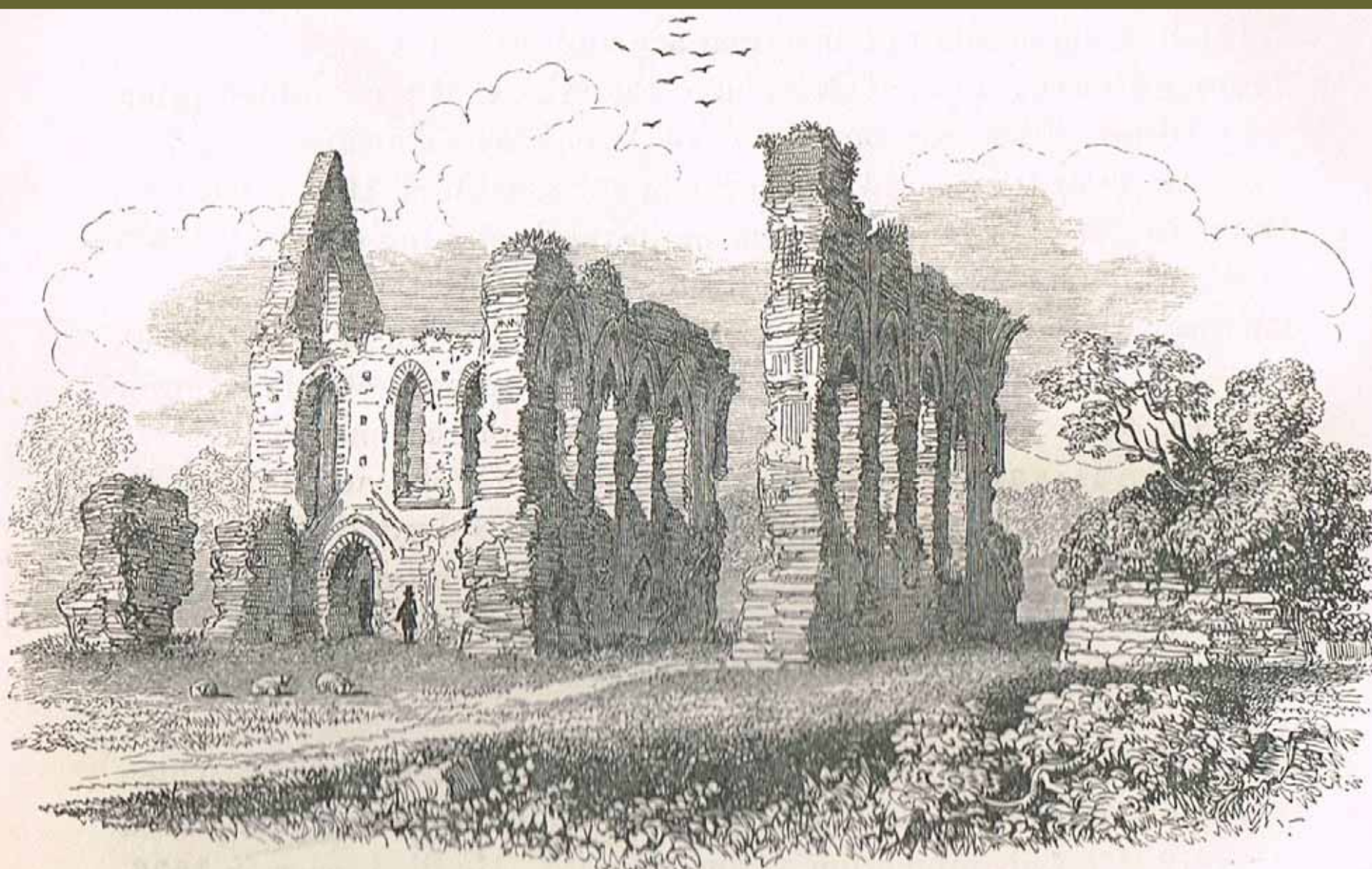


IF THIS IS THE 'NEW' WORK - WHERE IS THE OLD?

Iain Wakeford © 2014



This 19th century drawing is looking at the ruins from the north-east with the gable of the South Transept (the only part of the structure where all four walls still survive) on the left and the tree-covered ruins of the north chapels on the right. Between are the walls of the Chancel, with the figure standing between the two southern chapels and the wall of the Chapter House beyond.

Newark Priory, in the Wey Valley below Pyrford Church is NOT in Woking, but the monastery had strong connections with most of our local churches, so its history deserves a chapter in our story.

Some people wrongly refer to it as an 'abbey' rather than a 'priory', but whilst the distinction between the two was important in the way the house was managed and run, from the 'ruins' point of view there is little difference. Originally it would have consisted of a large Nave and Chancel, with North and South Transepts and Chapels, and a Cloistral range to the south. To the east, beyond the priory ruins towards where the Abbey Stream (sic) joins the River Wey, was the monk's Infirmary, with a bell tower and gatehouse closer to the main Pyrford to Ripley road.

The origin of the monastery is often disputed – the question often being asked 'if this is the new work, then where was the old'?

Some have speculated that the chancel of Ripley Church could have been the original road-side foundation of the monks, whilst others seem to think it possible that the monastery at Woking (first recorded in the 8th century and last in the 9th), could have somehow survived unrecorded for over two hundred years for the monks to be then moved to their new site a few miles downstream. The truth, however, is that we may never know.

There has been a lot of confusion about the early history of Newark. The most generally accepted account is that it was founded sometime in the late 12th century by Beatrice de Sandes and her husband Ruald de Calna.

De Calna and his wife gave land at a place called 'Hamma de Papworth' (with its woods, water, mills and fisheries, etc.), to a group of Austin Priors to build a church 'to the Blessed Virgin and St. Thomas the Martyr' at a place called 'Aldebury'.

The dedication means it could not have been established before 1171, but a grant by Geoffrey de Lucy, the Bishop of Winchester, to 'John, Prior of Aldebiri in Sandes' means that it must have been founded before 1204 (when Geoffrey de Lucy died). The date 1189 is often quoted.

In 1285 Bishop John Pontissara confirmed de Lucy's grant. This seems to have caused confusion in the early 14th century, when the Winchester Registers recorded that Newark was founded by a former Bishop.

By then Newark held the rights to a number of chapels and churches in the area, including (by 1262), Woking; Horsell; Pyrford; St. Martha's; Wanborough; Weybridge; and Windlesham.

Puttenham also appears to have formed part of the Priory's holdings at this time as in 1279, Prior Robert claimed the right to 'the assize of bread and ale, and view of frank-pledge at Puttenham'. He also apparently claimed the right to hold a market at Ripley (although it appears that no market was ever held), and the right to 'free warren' over the 'manor of Newark'.

This is probably the more familiar view of the ruins, from the river just below Newark Lock.



This postcard also shows an unfamiliar aspect of the priory ruins looking from the north west across a bend in the stream to the 'Nave' end of the ruins where the line of bushes are on the right.



We know from the records that the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Peckham, visited here on two or three occasions in 1281 and 1283, as several letters from him are dated from Newark.

Contrary to popular belief, Newark at that time was quite a wealthy monastery. It held

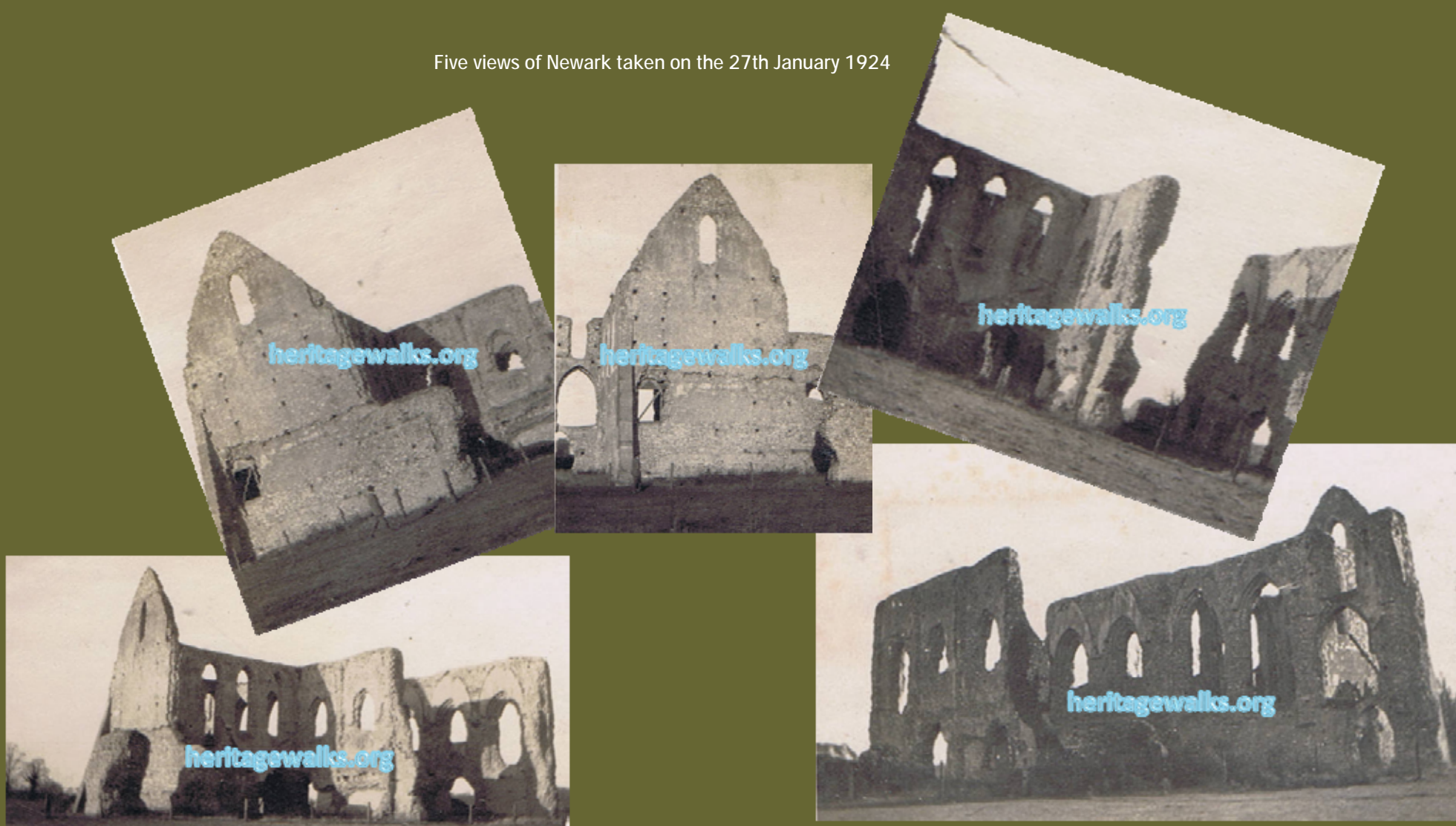
tenements in ten London parishes producing (in 1291) an income of over £13 per annum, with land in the diocese of Winchester totalling £27 10s. 3½d, and land in the diocese of Rochester amounting to another £1 6s.

A commission in 1501 found that the annual rents of assize amounted to about 300 marks

(a mark being $\frac{2}{3}$ of a pound), and that the house was not in debt, although the exact figure could not be ascertained, as the Prior was absent on pilgrimage at the time.

Of course that commission was nothing like the next survey made in 1535 upon the orders of Henry VIII, but that is another story.

Five views of Newark taken on the 27th January 1924

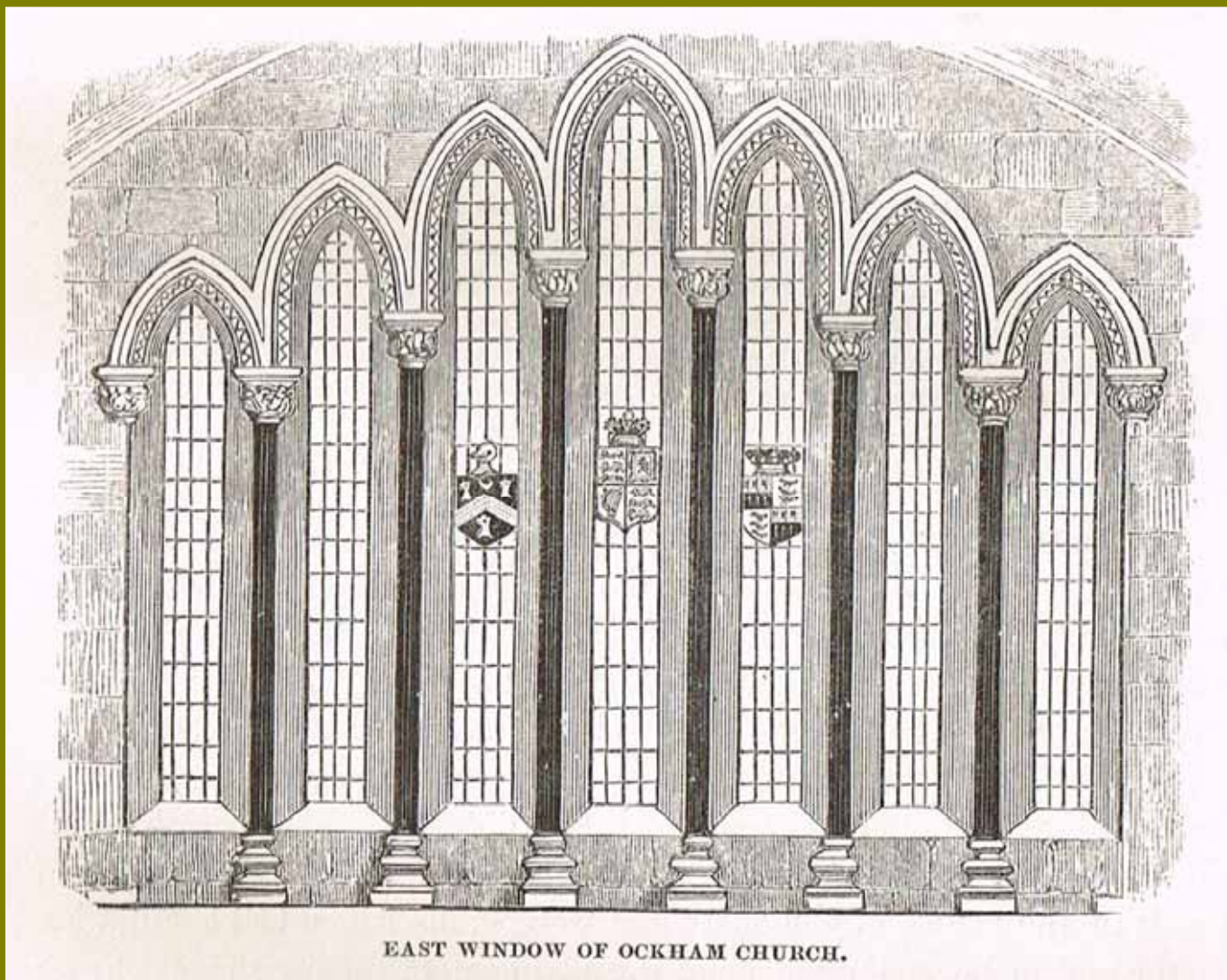


RECYCLING THE RUINS OF NEWARK

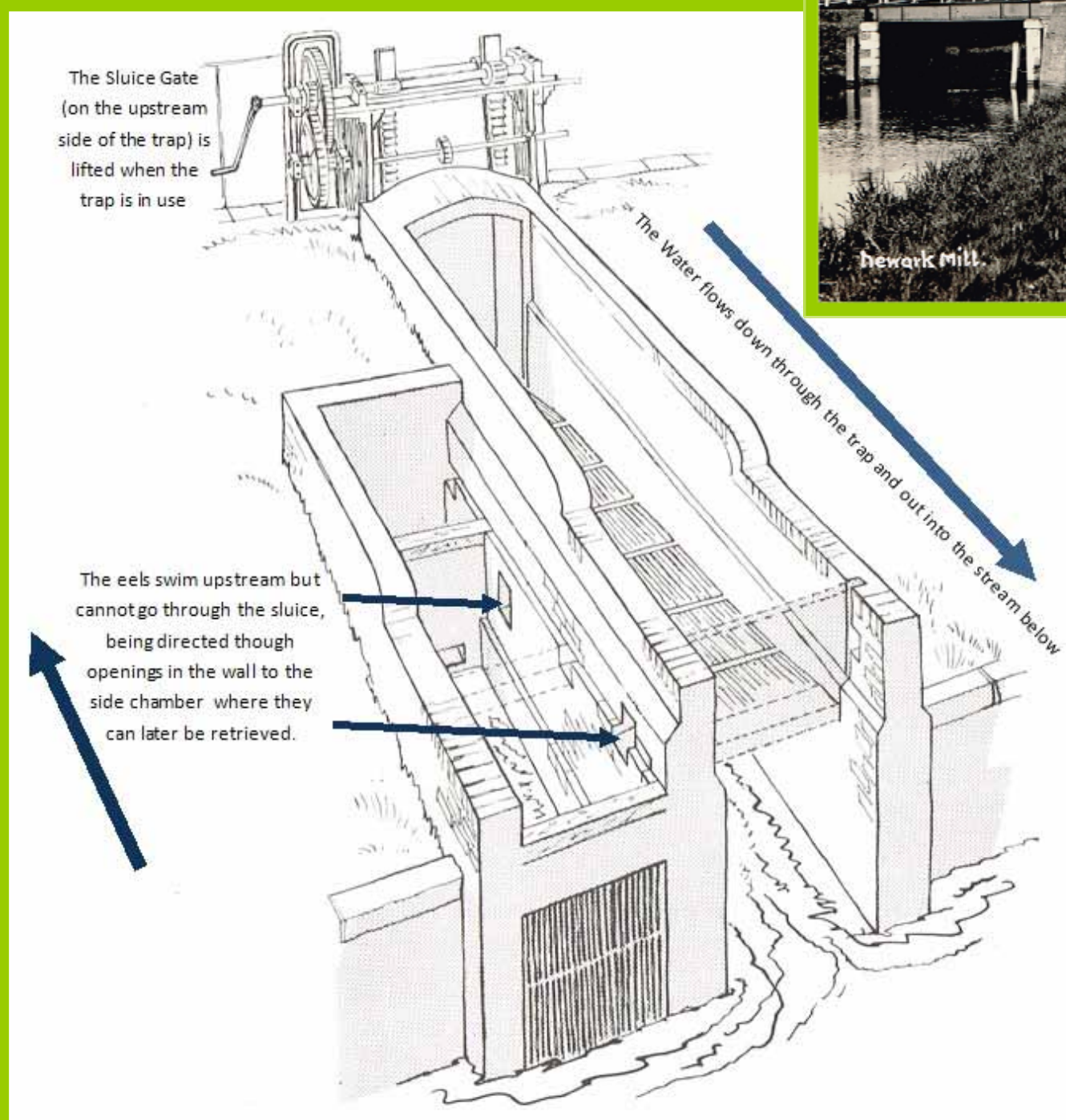
Newark Priory was excavated in 1928 and from this, and a study of the architecture, it is clear that the building was constructed in the late 12th/early 13th century without any later additions. Having said that it seems that the original intention was that there would be a tower above the Choir with access to the church from both the North and South Transepts, but during construction it was discovered the foundations wouldn't support it and so a separate tower was constructed away from the main priory buildings.

The half constructed arches into the Choir were blocked up to help counter the splaying of the walls – the eastern end of the Choir (where it joins the Nave) being 25½ feet wide, whilst the junction of the Choir and the Presbytery is 26ft.

Unfortunately the eastern end of the Presbytery has all but disappeared, so we may never know if the window in Ockham Church (pictured here) is really from Newark (as claimed) or not. It is about the same width as the opening at Newark and dates from the same period, although fitted into a part of the building at Ockham that is undoubtedly younger – so it must have been 'recycled' from somewhere!



THE INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF NEWARK - THE EEL TRAP & MILL



The Domesday entry for Send records a mill worth 21s 6d and fisheries that paid 54d, and it is assumed that these were probably on or near the site of the later 17th century mill (pictured here). Even in early medieval times, it was obviously quite a substantial building, as Woking's mill was worth less than half that of Send, and Byfleet less than a quarter!

The fisheries are interesting as just to the north of the bridge over the Abbey Stream is an Eel Trap (left) thought to be the Victorian successor to one that the Monks at Newark almost certainly would have possessed.

Eels and fish would have formed an important part of the Monk's diet with meat only being allowed to be eaten on special saint's days and occasionally by the monks in the infirmary. Having said that, there were quite a number of saint's days, and at other times possibly quite a few sick monks as well!

The bridge, pictured here, is in the process of being reconstructed and the mill has long since gone, burning down in the 1960's.