

# PENDLE ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP

## An Excavation of a Section of the Whalley Vallum Earthworks

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### Introduction

A joint excavation by the Group and the Whalley and District Historical and Archaeological Society of a section of the earthworks was carried out between 26<sup>th</sup> August and 10<sup>th</sup> September 1986. The purpose of the intervention was to investigate the vallum earthwork together with a bank bounding the site to the west. The site was situated to the west of the viaduct opposite the sixteenth arch counted from the north end at SD729364. The excavation was carried out during a period of wet weather.

### Historical Background

The authors of the Victoria County History considered that the earthworks were the outer defences of the Abbey<sup>1</sup>. If this view is accepted then the earthworks must have been constructed sometime after 1290 when the monks left Stanlaw on the Mersey in Cheshire to found the Abbey at Whalley.

In 1961, R. B. Smith in his fine paper on the early development of Blackburnshire, suggested that the earthwork could pre-date the Abbey<sup>2</sup>. He also put forward the view that archaeological survey would be the only way of solving this `local mystery`. It is sad to report that within five years of Smith`s article over a third of the `trench` was buried under the Abbeyfields development.

It is difficult to relate the extent of the earthwork to the Abbey in any way. It is probable that the Abbey was built over the south eastern section and could well have used the ditch for drainage purposes.

The area enclosed by the earthwork is approximately 30 acres and represented a massive investment of time and labour totally outside the capabilities of the Abbey. There can be no doubt that the earthwork predates the Abbey. However, it is probable that the monks made use of the earthwork and were possibly responsible for the additional trenches which were cut and are now concealed with it.

A bank to the west of the viaduct and earthwork is considered to be prehistoric and not thought to relate to the feature.

A report on `The Whalley Earthworks – a field study` by Philip G. Dixon and John L. Dixon is included as an appendix.

Broad Lane to the west of the site is of some age and could date from the 14<sup>th</sup> century (pers. comm. Joy Davenport following hedge count). The western hedge is of 19<sup>th</sup>

century date and the original western boundary of the road, at over twice the width, is further to the west hence its name - Broad Lane. It was reduced in width around 1800.

The railway viaduct of 49 arches was completed in 1850 for the Blackburn and Bolton Railway Company.

### **Resistivity Survey**

A resistivity survey was carried out in 1986 by Alan J Clint and Brian Robinson prior to the excavation. The result of the survey was not conclusive.

### **Description**

The top soil was stripped off the whole of the trench and a band of clay was seen to run across the top of the western bank and down the side of the trench for a distance of 10 metres. At this point it ran out of the trench. This feature was later seen to be a trench for an electricity cable.

The earthwork vallum ditch was seen as a dark brown linear feature approximately 10`0" (3.00m) wide, with fill comprising dark humic material with lumps of clay and brick similar to that used in the re-facing of the viaduct some 20 years ago. Below this fill was a grey clay layer containing charcoal brick fragments and coal lying over a stone drain cut into the centre of the ditch. This was constructed with a stone flag bottom, stone walls to the side and a stone flag top and seen to be filled with silt. To either side of the drain within the vallum was a dark loam containing organic material overlying layers of brushwood. The depth of this brushwood was not established due to unfavourable weather conditions and standing water. However, it was seen to run under the east bank and found to stop short of the west bank. Further site investigation identified a drain running the length of the viaduct on the eastern side, A sherd of late medieval pottery was found in this context.

The inner east bank was seen to comprise yellow clay overlaid with a spread of pebbles on its western side forming a road surface to run between the vallum and the viaduct. The top of the bank was truncated and would appear to have been levelled. Below this was seen a layer of grey clay and pebbles overlying a dense brown clay which in turn was placed over a layer of brushwood.

The western bank was seen to be formed of a brown/yellow clay with 5% river worn stones. Particles of charcoal were present in the yellow clay. This upper layer was laid over a layer of dense, grey clay. The line of the eastern demarcation of the western bank was defined with a spread of stones increasing in size to the edge.

### **Finds**

A fine flint barbed and tanged arrow head found in the top soil to the west bank.

Fragment of flint.

Piece of late medieval pottery.

Various 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery fragments.

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## Conclusion

The line of the viaduct passed over wet, boggy land to the north of the river. In view of the nature of the ground a stone drain was laid either side of the viaduct to discharge in the river. In the case of the western side the drain was laid in the centre of the vallum earthwork, which may have dictated the line of the viaduct. A layer of Brushwood was spread on the boggy ground between the drains and covered a layer of yellow clay to form an access road to each side and a firm base for the brick arches.

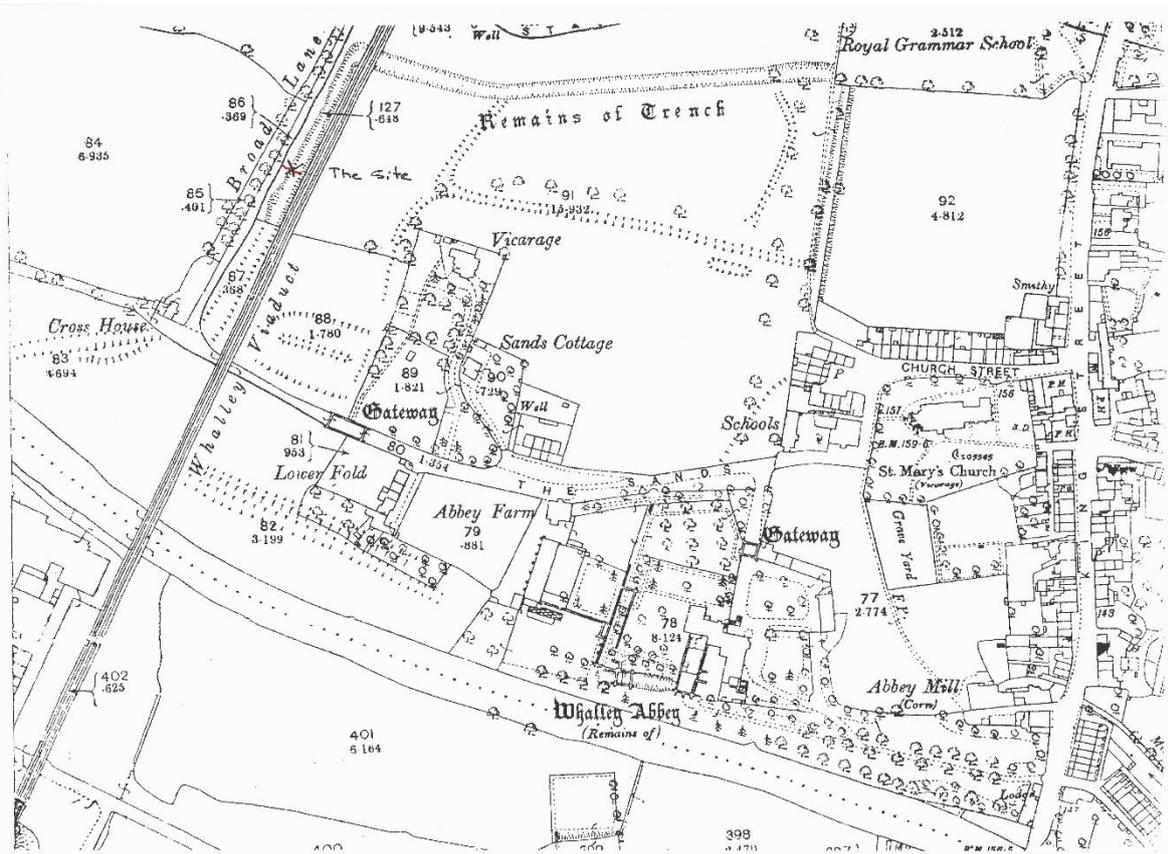
Due to the insertion of a drain into the centre of the vallum earthwork and the depth of standing water in the trench it was not possible to determine any further details except to say that it would have formed a significant feature when completed.

The bank to the west of the site is of prehistoric date and could have had ditches cut to the west of the bank.

Broad Lane is of early date and was reduced to around half its original width around 1800.

## Notes

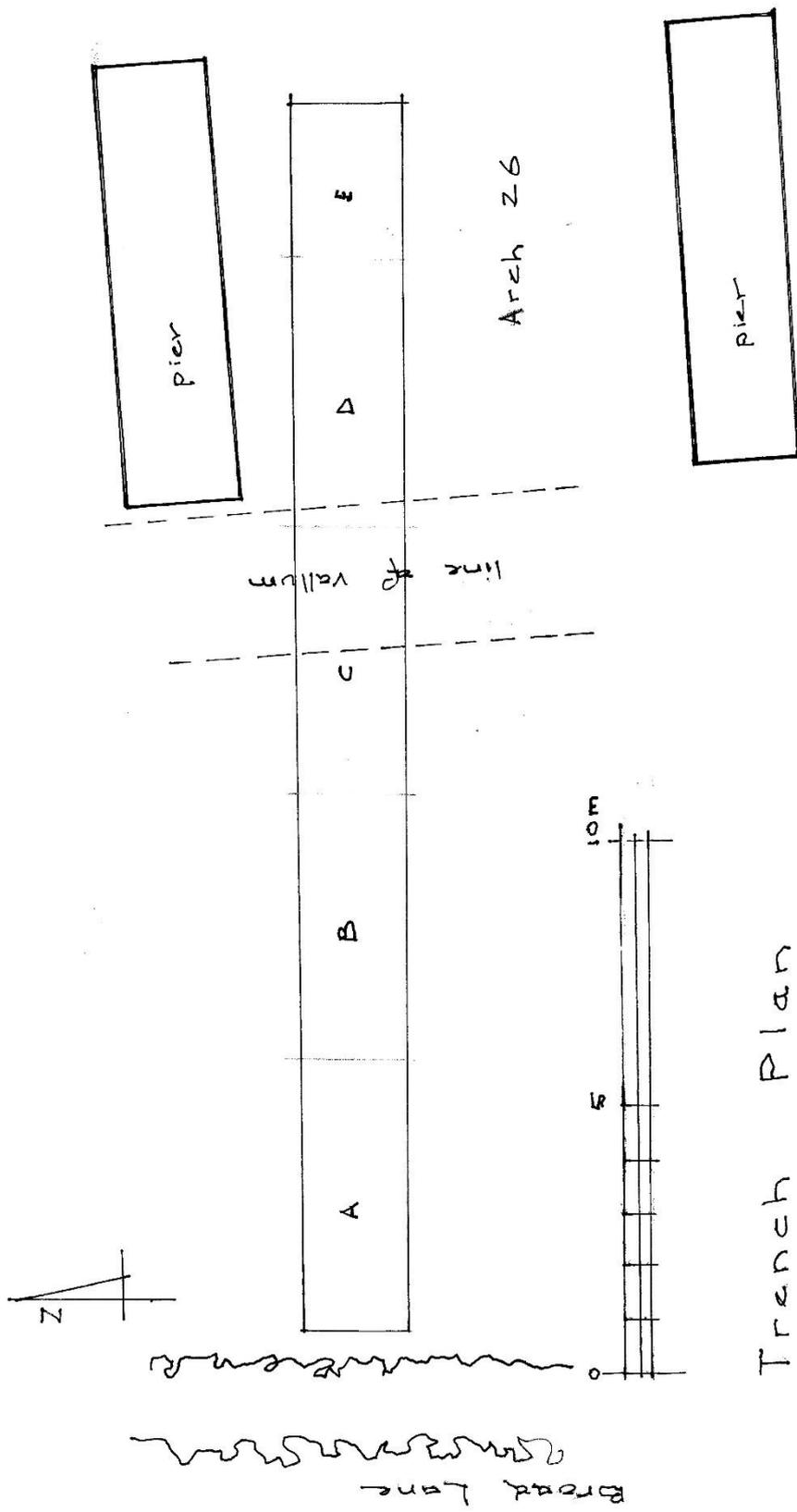
1. *Victoria County History*, Lancashire, vol. 2, 552.
2. Smith, R. B., 1961, *Blackburnshire – A Study in Early Lancashire History* Dept. of English Local History, Leicester university, 40.



Site Plan



The site looking from west to east. The vallum earthwork is seen as the dark brown soil colour with the road beyond.



Trench Plan

Fig 1 VALLUM EARTHWORK WHALLEY

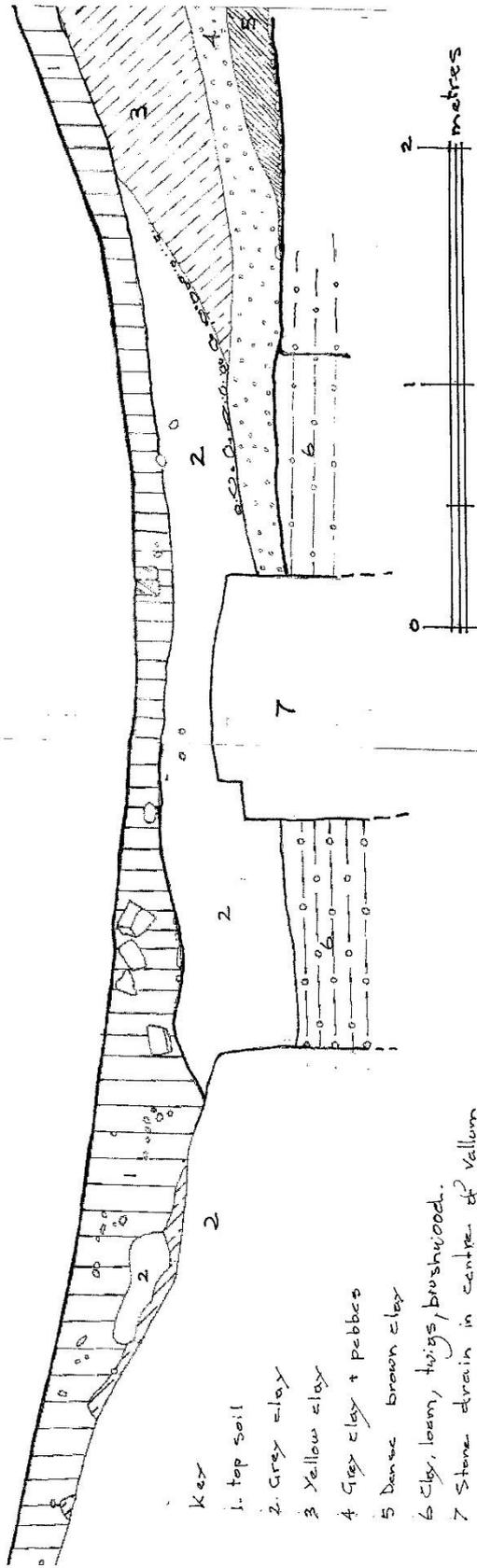
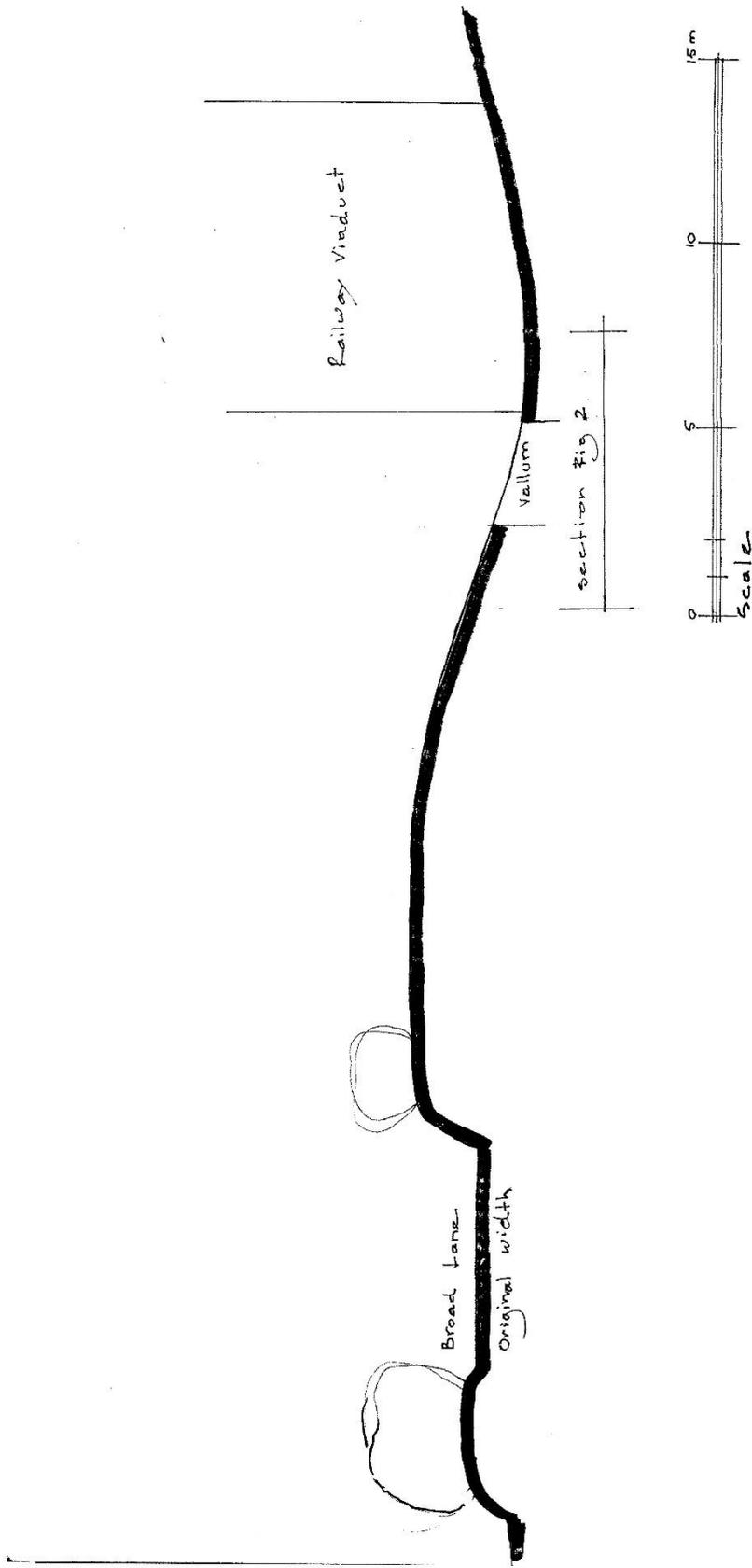


Fig 2. VALLUM EARTHWORK · WHALLEY Section thro' vallum



Section thro' the site

Fig. 3 VALLUM EARTHWORK · WHALLEY

# **Appendix**

## **The Whalley Earthworks – a field study**

**by**

**Philip G. Dixon and John L. Dixon**

West of Whalley Parish Church - under what is now Abbeyfields housing development there once existed a complex earthwork, marked as 'Remains of Trench' on the original Ordnance Survey 6" survey. The best description of these earthworks is provided by the Victoria County History of Lancashire.

"Beginning at the west end of Church Street (Pool End), a fosse runs from south to north for a distance of 150 yards; then it turns almost at a right angle to the left and runs a slightly convex course for a distance of 300 yards, just under the railway viaduct; between this and Broad Lane it turns at a right angle towards the south-south-west, running a straight line, though now partly destroyed, for another 230 yards, here it crosses the lane by the cottage (Cross House), and turns off rather to the right again and runs in a west-south-west direction to join the river." (I) (See Map I)

The authors of the Victoria County History, considered these earthworks to be the outer defences of the Abbey (2). Therefore if we accept this view - the earthworks must have been constructed sometime after 1290 - when the monks migrated from Stanlaw on the Mersey in Cheshire (3). This view, to the purpose of the earthwork was also held by Whittaker, Bains and Wallis (4). But in 1961 R.B. Smith in his fine paper on the early development of Blackburnshire, suggested that the earthwork could pre-date the Abbey. He also put forward the view that an archaeological survey would be the only means of solving this 'local mystery' (5). It is a sad thing to report that within five years of Smith's article, about 50% of the 'trench' was buried under the Abbeyfields development. (See Map 2)

The authors of this paper have tried to keep an open mind as regards the true origin of these earthworks. At the present time we can not give a firm conclusion. But we now set out the evidence as it now stands. Let us first consider the field evidence of the earthworks. This evidence is drawn from field walks conducted between July and October 1985 by the authors.

#### SITE A - (Map Two) THE ABBOTS WALK PLAY AREA

In this area about 75 to 100 yards of the line of the earthwork has not been built on. Part of the trench runs through what are now the gardens of the houses which make up the Square and Pool End. The exact lay-out of the Square has changed greatly in the period 1850 to 1910. A map search for this area is still being conducted by the authors. This may or may

not throw more light on the exact line of the 'trench' in this part of the village. For during a 50 to 60 year period the route between Church Lane and The Sands followed three different lines:

- (a) The post 1910 line - see Map 2 - (modern Whalley).
- (b) Across what is now the school playing field - as is shown on Map I, this map must have been taken in about 1865, between this date and 1910 part of the Square was removed - and the roads laid out as we now find them.
- (c) At sometime between 1846 and about 1865 - a map shows the road between Church Lane and The Sands running down Pool End, and across what is now the play area - and therefore into The Sands. (See Map Three)

But to return to the play area. The line of the trench ran slightly to the east of a line of mature trees which stand in the play area. These trees are over 150 years old, this shows that the site has not been subject to heavy earthmovers. But the existence of the trees makes archaeological investigation very difficult, for there is no surface evidence of the trench in the play area.

SITE B - (Map Two) THE ABBEYFIELD ESTATE

It has been reported to the authors that this site has been subject to heavy earthmovers before the houses were built. We have to conclude that this site has been lost forever. A resident of the estate has reported, via others, to the authors that he has found large 'building stones' beneath the earth while digging out his garden. These he said were too large to drag out and therefore left buried. Permission can be gained to undertake the excavation of these stones. This should be undertaken if only to rule them out of the investigation.

SITE C -(Map Two) BROAD LANE

This area has not changed at all since the Victoria County History was written. The trench passed under arch 12 (counting from the north end of the viaduct), turned a right angle to the south west. The trench seems to have run down between Broad Lane and the viaduct until about arch 25/26. The trench is best seen in the region of arch 12 to arch 20. After arch 20 the trench and rampart has been worn away and filled in. But in July 1985 it could be traced as a surface mark in the grass, as far as arch 25.

SITE D (Map Two) CROSS HOUSE FIELD

This field contains two features. Firstly between Ridding Lane and the river - there is a deep trench - and part of which could be a rampart. JLD believes that part of this rampart could represent soil dumped in fairly recent times. This deep trench is described by the authors of the Victoria County History. In April 1985 JLD discovered another feature in the field. Alongside the lane to the Abbey Mill footbridge could be seen a slight hollow-way running towards the river. This hollow-way turned north-west just before it reached the river bank. In July 1985 the authors tended to believe that this slight hollow-way, represented the true line of the trench. But a second view in October 1985 and reference to Yates Map (6) - has led them to reject the view they took in June. It is clear from Yates Map that prior to circa 1820 there was a ford between Cross House field and what is now the Abbey Mill site. A road ran from the junction of Broad Lane, Ridding Lane and The Sands - across the field to the ford - and then continued up what is now Neddy Lane in Billington towards Langho. The authors now believe that the slight hollow-way represents the line of the track - which led to the ford. Therefore the trench represents the true line of the earthwork.

SITE E (Map Two) THE ABBEY FISHPONDS

In very recent times - heavy earthmovers were used to convert this site into a playing field. This must be recorded as a lost site. (7)

Now let us consider the field evidence in relationship to the remains of the Abbey itself. In 1971, while at Secondary School in Billington, PGD was shown a large scale map of Whalley circa 1865 (Map I). He noted that the trench did not have a clear relationship to the standing gateways. These gateways (see picture A and B), represent two of the best fragments of the Abbey to survive. The north-west gate is sited at right angles to the trench - but 100 yards within the enclosed area - i.e. not on the line of the trench. Wallis reported in 1932 that he was told that in 1846 when the viaduct was built - the foundations of a fore-gate were found where the road from the north-west gate crossed the earthwork (8). But the authors consider that the so-called foundations of a fore-gate - could have been the foundations of cottages which are marked on Yates Map (9) - in this area PGD is going to seek the original land purchase map for the viaduct - to see if it gives any clue to this issue. Miss J. Hall, Head of History at St. Augustine's R.C. High in 1971 - considered that the earthwork

ran 100 yards in front of the north-west gateway to enclose the convents fishponds - which existed on the site of the present day playing field (see 'Site E' above). The explanation put forward by Hall does have merit - we can not reject it.

The north-east Gateway was built only fifty or so years before the Abbey was closed (1536), and was the last part of the convent to be built. The north-west Gateway -(considered above) was one of the first buildings to be built around 1320 (I0). It is very difficult to see any relationship between the north-east Gateway and the earthworks. If the trench followed the line suggested by the authors of the Victoria County History - it crossed the square and ran around the graveyard of the parish church before turning towards the river - to join it - near the present site of the Cornmill (II). This line would leave the Gateway - parallel to - not facing, the supposed line of the earthwork. Maybe the Gateway was built after the trench had ceased to be the boundary of the convent. Or that the earthwork followed a different line than that suggested by the Victoria County History. Fell considers these Gateways to represent inner (N.E.) and outer (N.W.) gateways - but he gives no evidence to support this view (I2). Surely the north-east Gateway gave access from the parish church an township side of the Abbey. This would be the route for traffic from the northern Ribble Valley and the Calder basin. The north-west Gateway was for traffic coming from the lower Ribble Valley and Bowland. It is clear that the exact line of the convent walls can not be determined at present. The position of the two Gateways rules out a convent wall following the line of the earthworks - be that line known or supposed.

Another problem is the land use of the area enclosed by the earthworks. Only about 10 acres (about  $\frac{1}{3}$ ) of the enclosed area has the normal lay-out of Abbey buildings we would expect. These are sited between The Sands road and the river. But the greater part of the area enclosed by the earthwork - now the Abbeyfields estate - does not seem to have been the site of Abbey buildings. We can not accept that this land represented gardens or allotments for the monks. Twenty monks would not require this land for 'cottage gardens' (I3). And we must take into account that the Abbey owned most of the civil parish of Whalley and the whole of Billington parish by 1350. So why did they enclose this area with a massive earthwork? Such an earthwork represented a massive investment in labour and time - it must have been dug for a valid reason. The popular local folk myth that the 'Canals - the former local name for the earthwork, were used for fish farming is worth considering (I4). But the land fall would have drained the trench into the river. The authors think that this folk myth was made up to



- (8) WALLIS. p. 136.
- (9) YATES. as cited.
- (10) N PEVSNER. 'THE BUILDINGS OF ENGLAND' NORTH LANCASHIRE. BE 37.  
p. 259-261. 1969.
- (11) VCH, as cited.
- (12) J FELL. 'WINDOW ON WHALLEY', 1979.
- (13) By this date monks were served by paid staff - no manual labour in  
the fields.
- (14) FELL, as cited.
- (15) WALLIS, p.106.
- (16) ~~JOHN LE PETRAL~~ <sup>JEAN LE PATOUREL</sup>, 'MINOR DEFENDED SITES IN YORKSHIRE' 1969, UNIVERSITY  
OF LEEDS.

PICTURE A - The North East Gate.

PICTURE B - The North West Gate.

MAP I - The early 6" map.

MAP II - The modern day " map.

MAP III - An early 1" OS map.

FURTHER NOTES ON THE COUCHER BOOK OF WHALLEY ABBEY

The references given in the VCH to the Coucher Book of Whalley Abbey (Chet. Soc.), x, xi, xvi, xx., as regards the Earthworks have proved, upon translation from the Latin by Mrs. Hill, to have no <sup>n</sup>connection to the said Earthworks whatsoever. We can therefore discount this reference source. (see 'WHALLEY EARTHWORKS' II/XI/85 (JLD))

NOTES ON THE ABBEY WATER SUPPLY

G. & J. Davenport have put forward the theory that the convents water supply came from High Wall Well - a covered well in the grounds of Bramley Meade. The water was piped in lead conduits down to a large cistern below

the Cloister.

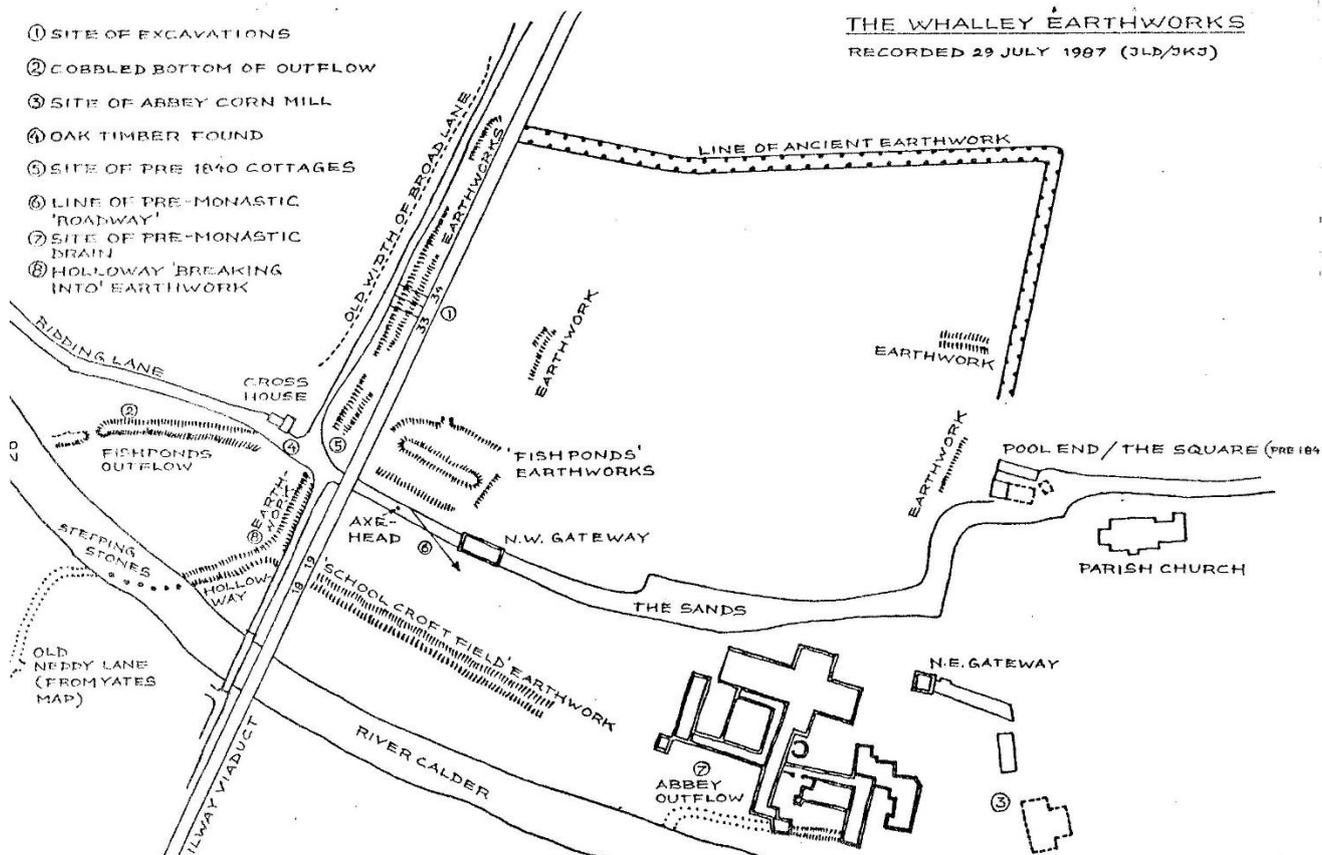
Father Murrey informs me that there is a well in the area east of the Cellarium, within the area once the Cloister. This may be a way into the cistern and will be investigated in early 1986.

The old drain (WHALLEY EARTHWORKS I5/X/85 (PGD)); brought to our attention by Mr. Sutcliffe, the Abbey Gardener, may well be part of this water system.

A field-walk in early 1986 has been planned to try and determine the line of the lead conduit that is said to run from High Wall Well to the Abbey. This will be undertaken with the aid of metal detectors.

THE WHALLEY EARTHWORKS

RECORDED 29 JULY 1997 (JLD/3KJ)



Map showing the earthworks