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NETLEY ABBEY: MONASTERY, MANSION AND RUIN

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ABSTRACT

Netley Abbey was the youngest of Hampshire's monasteries, but with the exception of those whose churches are still used, its buildings survive more completely than those of any other. When, however, Henry VIII dissolved the abbey in 1536, a new and important phase began for the abbey buildings, which were now to re-emerge as a great Tudor mansion. Even when this phase had ended and the buildings had become ruined, they continued to be influential. As a romantic ruin in the later eighteenth century, Netley was to be a source of interest and inspiration to many of the writers of the time. Poets produced sonnets and odes and the name of Netley Abbey found its way onto the playbills of London and into the hands of the novel-reading public of Germany, France and America. In this varied history, Netley has reflected many of the developments of 600 years in Hampshire and beyond.

MONASTERY

Netley Abbey owed its foundation to Peter des Roches, bishop of Winchester (1205–38) and a major political figure during the reigns of Kings John and Henry III. As bishop of one of the richest dioceses in Christendom and as an important influence on royal policy, he was a man of considerable wealth, and some of this was applied to religious uses. He had already founded three monasteries and a friary when, towards the end of his life, he became increasingly interested in the Cistercian order. His heart was to be buried at Waverley Abbey, Surrey, in the first of the Cistercian houses and he planned to create two Cistercian houses, one in France, at la Clarté Dieu, and one in England. It was the latter that was to become Netley.

The Cistercian order was one of the attempts that emerged in Europe in the eleventh century to reform monasticism along stricter more disciplined lines. The monks would be engaged in manual work, as well as thought and prayer, with simpler buildings and music, and in remote sites isolated from the temptation of the rest of the world. The order had aroused immense enthusiasm, and spread rapidly in England after the foundation of the first English house, that of Waverley, in 1128. Its strictness and the simplicity of its life appealed both to those who wished to dedicate themselves to the monastic life and, with its cheapness and spiritual enthusiasm, to those patrons who were contemplating founding a new monastery. Netley was one of the last of the Cistercian houses to be founded in England, and belongs to a small group of monasteries settled in the thirteenth century from the great new royal foundation of Beaulieu in Hampshire, founded by King John in 1203.

The history of the abbey's early years has now been placed on a firm basis by CAF Meekings, upon whose article the next three paragraphs have been based (Meekings, 1981). Peter des Roches had died in 1238, before the foundation of his new abbey in the following year. The setting up of the monastery was thus the work of his executors, the commissioner abbots appointed by the Cistercian order (those of Quarr and Waverley), and the abbot of the motherhouse, Beaulieu. King Henry also helped, or did not hinder the process, and subsequently claimed to be the founder of the monastery. Bishop Peter may have sought to gain the king's support with the dedication of the new monastery, which was given to Henry III's favourite saint, King Edward the Confessor, the abbey being called the abbey of St Mary of Edwardstow, or the place of St Edward. The new monastery would need lands to provide it with an annual revenue: these came from the purchase from two main sources. French monasteries who had been given lands in England, particularly after the Norman Conquest, found it attractive to sell these now that the English kings had lost most of their French lands and a return of English control in France seemed unlikely. Secondly, gentry

Fig 1. The abbey church from the west

suffering from financial difficulties sold land to the bishop or his executors. The endowment was certainly not lavish, and the bishop's death may have been a cause of this. Netley was less well endowed than his earlier foundations at Halesowen and Titchfield, although not compared with that of Selbourne. The abbey also needed a site for itself, and one that was sufficiently remote to fit in with the demands of the Cistercian order. There was the village of Hound nearby but that was all. Then, though not now, Netley, or Letley as it was also called, seemed a sensible choice; it was cut off from the world by the woodland and heathland on its landward side and by the sea elsewhere.

According to the Waverley chronicle, the monastery began in 1239, although its buildings had not yet commenced, the site of Netley being acquired in 1240–1. By 1245, the community was well enough entrenched for its abbot to be appointed by the General Chapter of the Cistercian order to take part in the foundation of Newenham Abbey in Devon. Initially there is little evidence of Henry III taking any interest in the development of the abbey. The turning point, after which the king became more interested, seems to have been the decision by his brother Richard, earl of Cornwall, to found a new Cistercian house at Hailes in Gloucestershire in 1242–3. Henry also could be a Cistercian founder, but with the minimum cost. By 1244, he was calling himself Netley's founder, or at least one of the founders, and in 1251 he claimed sole responsibility. In 1244 he ordered the grant of £100 'for the foundation of the church, whereof the king wishes to lay the first stone as founder'. His name and title can still be seen carved on one of the foundation stones for the crossing of

Fig 2. The south transept from the north-west

the monastic church. His generosity, however, seems to have been rather less than this might suggest. He did not give it any land until 1252–3, when he gave it an uncultivated area of three hundred acres at Roydon (the King's gift or *don du roi*) in the New Forest. His financial grants to the abbey and its buildings may, moreover, have included money owed to Peter des Roches and from the vacant bishopric of Winchester. It thus seems more appropiate, while accepting a role for

Henry in the construction of the buildings, to see des Roches as the founder of the abbey.

Initially, the monks would probably have occupied temporary wooden accomodation, and this and the more permanent buildings would have begun by 1241. The latter buildings probably began in the east part of the site, including the sacristry, chapterhouse and dormitory. The foundation of the abbey church probably began in the period 1244–46, with the latter year more likely. By 1251, substantial quantities of lead were ordered by the king for the abbey and he also granted 30 oaks, all for the church. The king made further grants of cash and trees in the following year, and in the beginning of 1253 he gave a silver gilt processional cross. All this suggests that during these years major roofing was underway and that by 1253 substantial parts of the abbey church were operational (Meekings, 1981, 24–32). Architecturally these would have included parts of the eastern arm, but not necessarily the easternmost window.

The plan of the transepts and choir, with the square ended and aisled eastern arm, showed the standard design of English Cistercian church building from the early thirteenth century onwards (Coldstream, 1986, 145–8). Its plan bears little relation to the grand chevet of radiating chapels at its mother house, neighbouring Beaulieu, but it does show Cistercian influence. Here should be noted the simple plainness of the architecture, and the use of two storeyed design with the middle triforium gallery having shrunk into a wall passage, within the clerestory or upper window storey (Fig 3), such as was also used at Tintern and Fountains (Coldstream, 1986, 150). Contrasting with this simplicity and with the lancets of the choir and

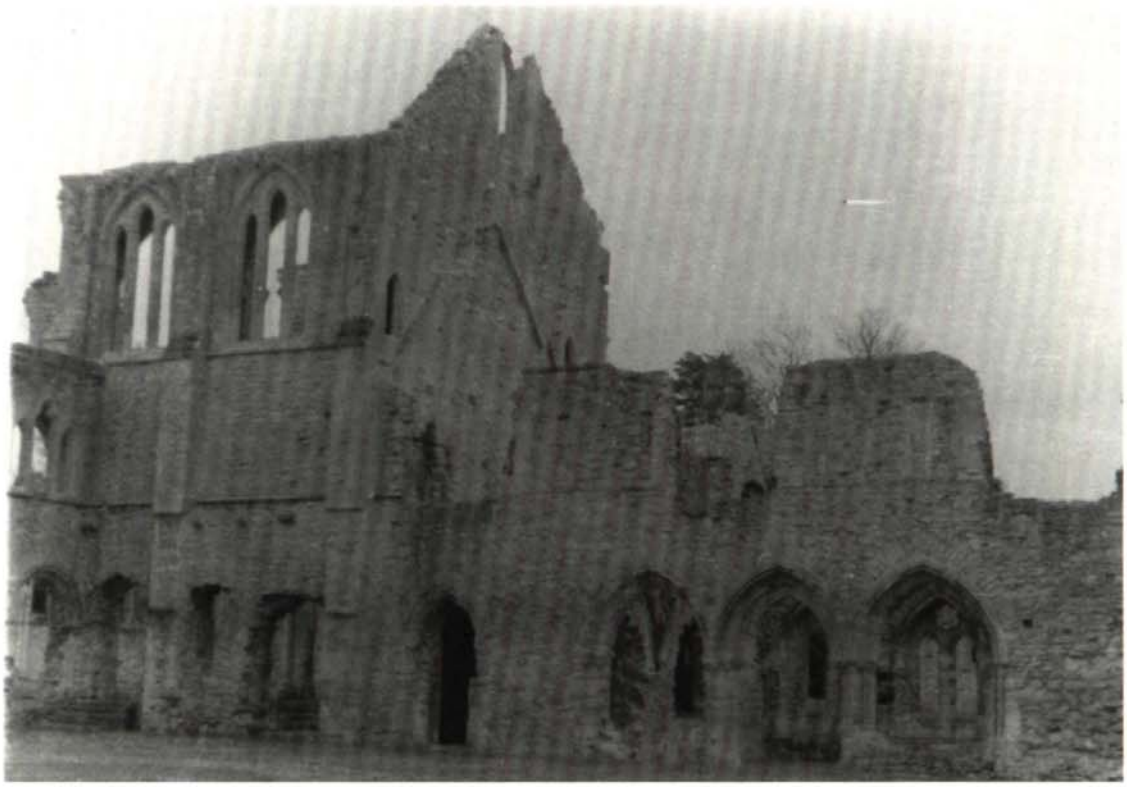

Fig 3. The south transept and dormitory range from the south-west.

transept, and the plate tracery of the reredorter undercroft, is the tracery of the large east window which shows the influence of Henry's own greatest architectural patronage: at Westminster Abbey which he had begun to rebuild in 1246 (Colvin, 1963, 141). Here the work is characterised by deep complex filleted mouldings, purbeck marble capitals and grooves for holding the window glass. This change may represent a halt in work or wholesale reappraisal of the design in the course of its construction. It may simply represent the King's desire as patron that at least the great east end should reflect the new style of building that was being developed at Westminster, rather than the more traditional style of the rest of the building. The west entrance of the chapter house also shows the features of this new work suggesting an early remodelling of the east range of the cloisters.

For the rest of the church the design provides our only dating evidence. Structurally, the nave seems to have post-dated the north wall of the cloister, although the south aisle existed from an early date. The north aisle and the final completion of the nave would seem to belong to the later thirteenth century. The eastern or dormitory range was probably amongst the earliest buildings on the site, and probably the south range went with this. Not enough of the west range remains to provide any specific dating for its original buildings. It would appear that within little more than about half a century, the abbey buildings had achieved their completed plan. It was a typical later Cistercian arrangement, with the dining hall or refectory built at right angles to the adjacent cloister walk, by contrast to those of other monastic orders where the dining hall was usually built parallel to the cloisters. The chapter house was also fully integrated into the eastern range. One of the peculiarities of plan is the isolated building to the east of the abbey with identical grouping of rooms on the first and second floors. Whether this represented the abbot's house or a building for special guests is unclear, but it has been referred to by the former title.

There are very few indications of building works after the original construction. This may not necessarily reflect a lack of any building activity for, as elsewhere, such alterations or internal remodelling may well have left no evidence after the conversion to a country house, the subsequent removal of such alterations, and a period of decay. The only surviving evidence of any major building programmes in the monastic church is provided by a nineteenth century illustration of the east window suggesting the addition of stone vaulting in the choir (Sharpe, 1848) and the remains of the vaulting of the south transept. The latter probably belonged to the fifteenth century, and the springers for the vaulting may still be seen (Fig 4). Some of the ribs of the vault in the S. transept survived until the nineteenth century. Within the conventual buildings, there was a remodelling of the dormitory undercroft or the day room in the mid-fourteenth century, when new windows were inserted, and in the west range the demise of the lay brothers probably led to rebuilding, and the addition of a new room.

Little is known of the internal life of the monastery, for it is not well documented. From the fifteenth century come two notebooks of financial jottings of receipts and expenditure (PRO SC6/1258/11; SC12/14/64) and some estate records, but this is little and late. The surviving remains would have only been part of a bigger complex of monastic life. None of the outer buildings which would have provided the hospitality, the workshops and the stores survive. At neighbouring Beaulieu such workshops are well documented and range from the tanner and the parchment maker to the forge and the bakehouse (Beaulieu Account Book). Some unidentified buildings have been located. The buildings would have been enclosed by the precinct bank and ditch that ran round the site, nearby was the home farm and the three fish ponds that provided fresh fish, while water was channelled from springs nearby (Kell, 69; Currie, 1988, 271; idem, 1989, 21).

The surviving monastic buildings suggest that the completion of the abbey was rapid, and on a substantial scale. Its abbot was summoned to parliament in 1295, 1296, 1300 and 1302, suggesting an important status, that may have derived from a perception of being a royal foundation. But despite the royal patrons, it was

Fig 4. The south transept: the remains of the later vaulting.

insufficiently endowed, small and continually in difficulties (Hockey, 1976, 95). In 1328 it had at least 15 monks and at the end in 1536 it possessed seven, although the population of England had declined on a comparable scale during this period. Its poor endowment was reflected in the tax assessment of 1291, when its income was assessed at £81 2s (*VCH*, 147; *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Papae Nicholai*). It was by no means the poorest of the Hampshire monasteries, but it was certainly among the poorer ones. Nor did matters improve in the course of its existence. It acquired some more land, but in the 1330's had to part with some of its properties (*VCH*, 147). When Henry VIII carried out his assessment of the value of church property in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, the annual income of the abbey was assessed at £100 12s 8d placin among the poorest of the Cistercian Houses in England. Even the more generous assessment a year later of £181 2s 8½d. (PRO SC12/33/27), still placed it among the lesser monasteries.

The abbey was poorly endowed and, for much of its life, there remains little surviving documentation. For the first half of its existence, the evidence must necessarily be supplemented by that of other Cistercian Houses and particularly of the neighbouring but larger and richer mother house of Beaulieu. Fortunately there still survives from the latter, a remarkable set of early accounts, which provide an incomparable picture of the running of a Cistercian estate (Account Book of Beaulieu Abbey; Hockey, 1976, 56–73). From the beginning the Cistercian monks were helped by a group of lay brothers or *conversi*, men subject to the monastic discipline but whose prime task was to cultivate the estate or run the workshops: the self-sufficiency of the monastery could thus be

maintained while freeing the monks to devote themselves more fully to prayer, study and the service of god, although manual work was also included. Accommodation for such lay brothers would be provided in the west claustral range. This range has largely disappeared at Netley, but the former presence of the lay brothers here is indicated by the surviving access doorway from their quarters into the west end of the church. Normally, the estates were cultivated by creating large farms or granges which could be operated by the lay brothers, supplemented by paid labour. On Netley's estate there were granges at Netley, Wellow, Roydon and Gomshall (Surrey) (*Taxatio Ecclesiastica Papae Nicholai*), but we know little more than this. On that of Beaulieu, there were a group of granges around the abbey and another around Faringdon in Berkshire. For Beaulieu, we have both documentation and some of the surviving buildings of these granges, which as at St Leonard and Great Coxwell, reflect the wealth and large scale of their agricultural activities. The accounts there show the activity of these lay brothers, and their regular return to the abbey itself. But from the beginning, Netley also held other lands with an existing settlement and agricultural organization, with a manor that included a mixture of the monastic farm (as previously cultivated by its lay owner) and of the land cultivated by the tenants. Such manors continued to be operated in their traditional way. During the thirteenth century, both Netley and Beaulieu contributed to the expansion of cultivation seen in this period, and were particularly involved in the colonisation into the woods and wastes of the New Forest. Thus Henry's gift of Roydon, saw Netley converting the heath and scrub to a grange, and arable and livestock farming.

It is only in the fifteenth century that we can begin to see the functioning of the estate, as a large number of manorial accounts survive for the last century of the monastery's existence, although it is a very incomplete collection. By then the organization of Cistercian estates had changed as the monks had found it impossible to maintain an adequate supply of lay brothers and they began to differ little from other estates (Donnelly, 1954, 399–458). The abbey should now be treated as a substantial Hampshire landowner rather than a peculiarly Cistercian one. It had a relatively compact estate with much of its lands in the area around Southampton Water: Totton, Southampton, Roydon, Westset, Hound, Shottisham, Sholing, Townhill, Shamelhurst, Netley and Wellow. In addition it had a group of manors or lands scattered in neighbouring counties: Northleigh (Oxon.) Gomshulle (Surrey), Kingston Deverill (Wilts), Waddon, Ashley and Charleton (Dorset) (PRO SC6/Hen VIII/ 3326). The estate was run both by the abbot and his monks, such as the cellarer, and by lay officials such as the steward. In addition, as on other estates, the abbey had its own council (Latham, 1928, 61–3). The manorial accounts provide glimpses of the activity of some of the estate officials, thus at Kingston Deverill in 1411 the visitors included the steward and others coming on two occasions to hold the manorial courts and to supervise the manor and stock, brother John Lymington and brother Randulph who came on the abbey's business on separate occasions, and William Langport and others who came to supervise the manor and the account (WRO 192/32). William seems to have established a brief family tradition for in the 1440's and 1450's a John Langport was the abbey Receiver, and frequently appears to supervise the manor and stock, and draw up the annual accounts. He was also to appear at Roydon in 1459 and 1462 (PRO SC6/980/24; 26). In some years the abbot came to Kingston Deverill, in others not; at other times it seems to have been the cellarer who was the more active in estate administration (WRO 192/32), a reflection perhaps of varying personal interests and the more flexible distribution of tasks in such a small religious house. The abbot may have been a more regular visitor to estates that were closer to the abbey itself as at Roydon (PRO SC6/980/24–27). The accounts may also provide glimpses of the earlier career of some of the abbots. Thomas Stevens who was abbot of Netley at the dissolution, and then moved on to Beaulieu where he became abbot in time to see the end of that abbey as well, had earlier been the abbot's Receiver (PRO SC6/HVIII/3319), and abbot John Burgeys had previously been the cellarer (PRO SC6/980/27).

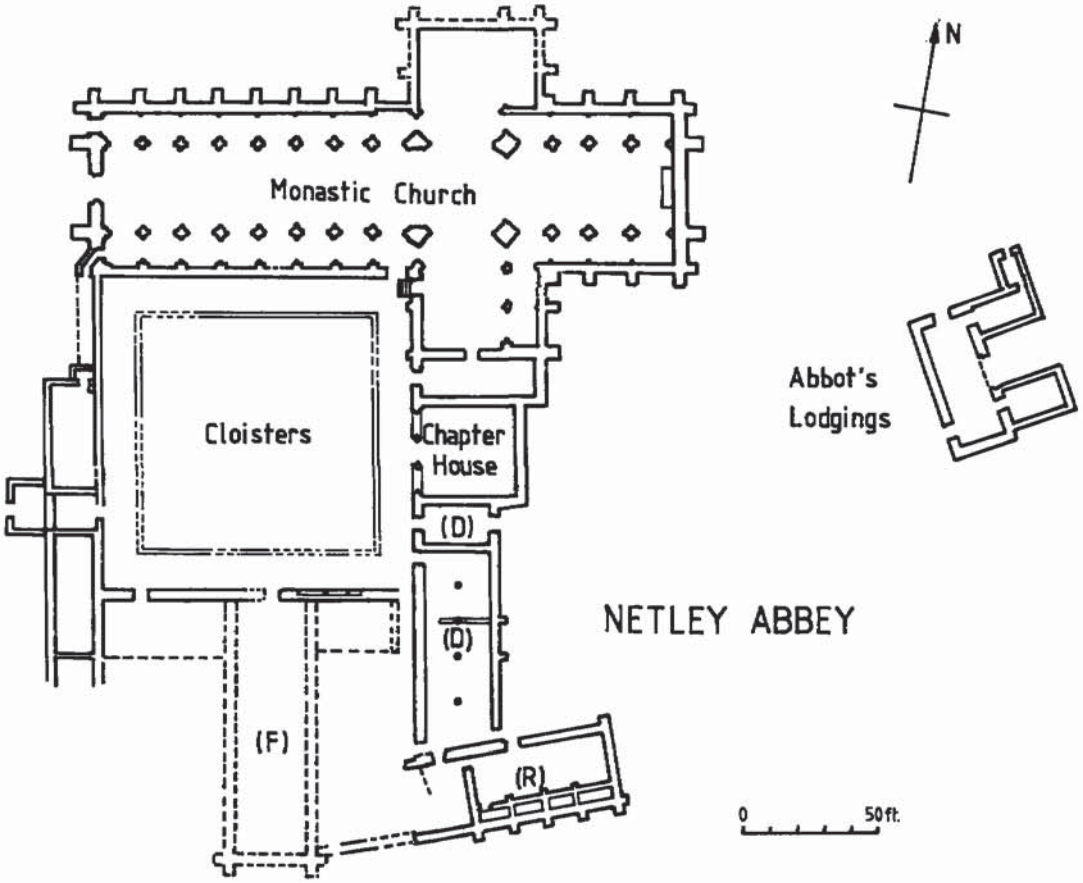

Fig 5. Plan of Netley Abbey, based on the plan in Hamilton Thompson (1953).
Abbreviations: (D) Dormitory above; (R) Reredorter (latrines) above; (F) Frater or dining hall.

On the Netley estate, as elsewhere, the later Middle Ages were to see the lord giving up his direct cultivation of most of the estates, replacing the uncertainties of product prices by the greater stability of rent and the greater ease of administration found when the land was leased for a fixed sum. As elsewhere in this area, this was not a sudden or irreversible policy (Hare, 1985). The process was already under way at the end of the fourteenth century when Kingston Deverill was leased by 1396 and Wellow by 1398 (WRO/192/32; PRO SC6/983/12). But these were not necessarily final changes and Kingston Deverill provides a good example of the abbey repeatedly changing its policy: it resumed cultivation temporarily in 1407, leased in 1408 and 1411, cultivated again in 1421 and 2, and after a lease in 1423 resumed again in 1426. From 1428 the leasing became permanent (WRO 192/32). Elsewhere Northleigh and Gomshulle were leased by 1422, Charleton by 1448 and Roydon temporarily by 1422. Such manors sent cash to the abbey, although occasionally, as at Kingston Deverill, some livestock was sent to the

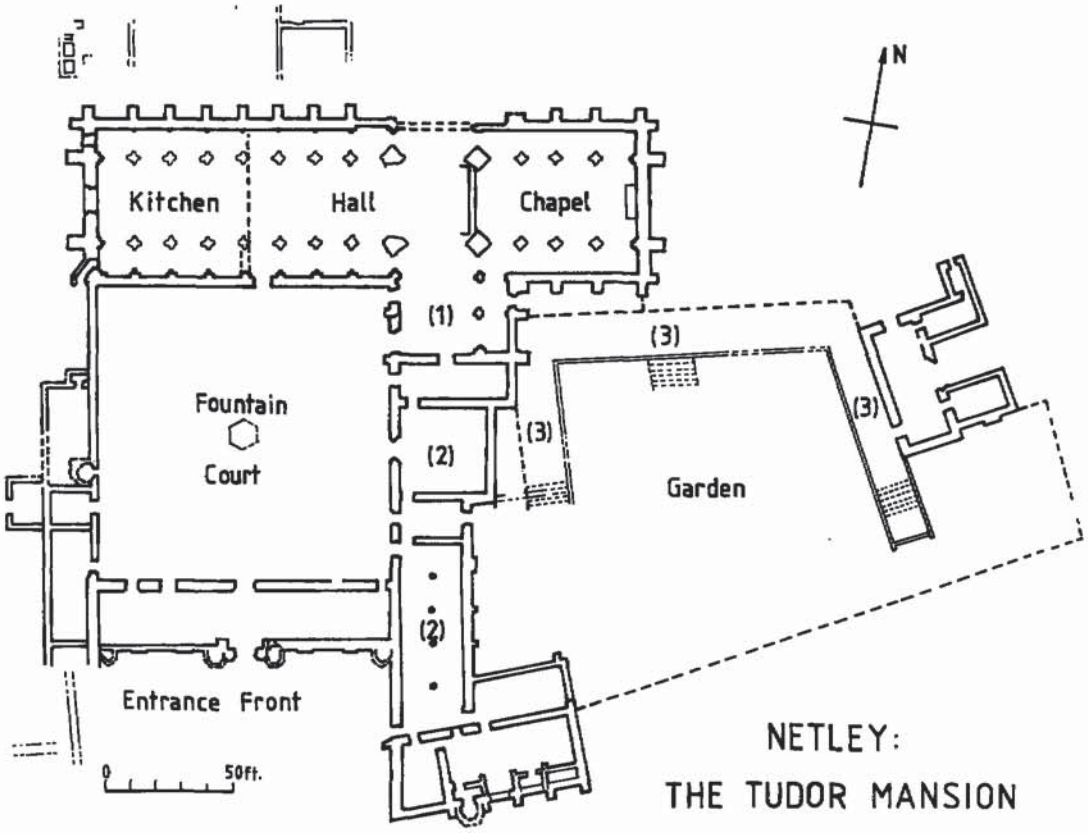

Fig 6. Plan of the Tudor mansion, based on the plan in Hamilton Thompson (1953), supplemented by the plans in Guillaume, 1848, and Carter (BL Add. Mss. 29928). The garden measurements may not be exact.
Abbreviations: (1) Great Chamber above; (2) gallery above; (3) garden terrace.

abbey hospice, or some of the cash used to purchase local products for the abbey (as in 1465 when four cloths were purchased at Salisbury for £8 14s 4d) (WRO 192/32).

But like other monasteries, the abbey maintained direct cultivation on some of its neighbouring estates in the mid-fifteenth century and afterwards, in order to supply some of its basic food requirements (Hare, 1985). It was engaged in direct cultivation at Townhill in 1459, 1463 and 1488 (PRO SC6/983/10; 980/27; Hen VII/676); and at Roydon in 1413, 1422 and 1424, and, after a spell of leasing in 1425 and 1459, resumed cultivation in 1461–3, until this ceased by 1485 and 1501 (PRO SC6/980/2, 5, 6, 18, 25; 981/18; Hen VII/652). Such estates, and the home farm at Netley provided some of the grain and meat needed by the abbey and it is clear from the accounts of Townhill and Roydon that their surplus was dispatched to the abbey itself, Townhill being engaged in some livestock fattening for this purpose (PRO SC6/983/10). The abbey continued to cultivate some of its lands in its vicinity until the dissolution (PRO SC12/33/27).

The abbey was a substantial producer of wool in the thirteenth century, although on a much smaller scale to Beaulieu or the great Benedictine

houses (Lloyd, 1973, table 5). In the fifteenth century, it kept substantial flocks on its chalkland manors at Waddon (and its smaller satelite of Ashley) in Dorset and Kingston Deverill in Wiltshire: in 1461 after a heavy bout of sheep murrain the flock at Waddon dropped from 828 to 595, and at Kingston Deverill there were regularly over 800 sheep in the mid century (PRO SC6/833/20; WRO/192/32). The abbey remained involved in these flocks until the 1490's, withdrawing between 1493–98. At Kingston Deverill the sheep had been incorporated in the lease of the manor but the abbey was still involved in stocking the flock at Waddon and at Ashley until at least 1499 (WRO/192/32; PRO SC6/Hen VII/1040). This continued sheep farming long after the arable lands had been leased was a feature of many of the downland landlords (Hare, 1985, 85–6). The abbey flocks were essentially kept as a cash earner, and their organization reflected the impact of the market: the lambs who were walked from Waddon (Dorset) to Kingston Deverill were then fattened for sale in the prosperous neighbouring markets of the cloth industry, as well as being rented for their manure.

The later Middle Ages were to be a period of dramatic population decline but as on other estates the impact was not uniform. Some areas suffered more than others, as they were unable to resist the lure of more attractive areas beyond. On the chalklands, a contrast may be seen between the Wiltshire and Dorset manors of the abbey. Kingston Deverill had the benefit of proximity to the expanding cloth producing areas of west Wiltshire, which would have demanded meat and grain as well as wool. Agriculture could remain prosperous, although here by the 1430s, there were signs of increasingly decayed rents of cottages, suggesting that the manor was losing labour to the expanding cloth areas nearby (WRO 192/32; Hare, 1992, 27–30). By contrast, on its Dorset manors, there was less immediate demand for agricultural products, and less ability to retain its population. Thus Charleton would seem to have been deserted during the fifteenth century, for by 1501 there was little rent other than from the two farms into which the demesne had been divided (PRO SC6/Henry VII/613). The area around the abbey itself, is an area about whose rural economy we know very little. Here too, some settlements suffered more than others, two rentals of 1303/4 and 1369/70, show that Westbrook saw a much more dramatic decline in its tenant numbers than Hound (PRO SC11/583 and 584).

Grand as were its buildings the abbey seems to have been underendowed. When Henry VIII decided to dissolve the lesser monasteries (those with an annual income of less than £200) Netley was one of his victims. The records of his commissioners provide us with a glimpse of the abbey at the end of its existence (PRO SC12/33/27). There were then seven monks, 'all being priests, by report of good religious conversation'. All but one wished to remain as monks, and unlike at the neighbouring house at Quarr, there is no evidence of the monks changing their mind and wishing to leave (*Faculty Office Register*). In addition the buildings housed 30 household servants, officials and officers and two friars observant, an order of friars that had already been closed by Henry and whose members had been distributed among various households. Situated upon the shoreline, the abbey was of 'great relief and comfort' to those travelling upon the seas, giving it a similar role to the Cistercian house of Quarr on the Isle of Wight (PRO SC12/33/27; Hare, 1993). Netley's buildings were described as 'large', and 'great', and as 'in good state of repair'. While it was clearly not an affluent house, it seems to have been living within its means, and no criticism was made of the religious life here. But what is lacking from this source as in so much our evidence about the abbey, is any indication as to the spiritual life of the monastery or of the religious role that provided the central justification for the existence of this gentry household.

MANSION

The dissolution brought an abrupt end to the life of the abbey, but it also opened up a new and important phase for its buildings. Like many other monasteries, Netley was converted

into a great country mansion, in this case for the Paulets. The buildings were to be transformed into something appropriate for the new owner's power and prestige, and the site would remain an important centre of influence in the area around. As a ruin, Netley shows this conversion better than most that are still occupied.

Once the abbey had been dissolved its property could be disposed of. Some of its debts were paid off (Youings, 1971, 226). Michael Lyster and William Sherland paid over £800 for all the 'cattle and stock' at Netley (Kennedy, 1953, 149). Given that the dissolution commissioners had valued the stocks, stores and corn at only £114. 13s. 8d. (PRO SC12/33/27) it would seem that they would have had the opportunity for considerable asset stripping within the buildings. Soon afterwards, however, Henry granted the site to Sir William Paulet, and it was he who transformed the monastery into a sixteenth century country house. Paulet came from a Hampshire gentry family; he was a lawyer and civil servant who had already been sheriff of Hampshire, and the holder of important posts in royal government, as master of the King's wards and comptroller of the royal household. Like many religious conservatives at the court, he showed no reluctance to acquire monastic land, and was second only to Thomas Wriothesley in his acquisition of Hampshire monastic land (Kennedy, 1972, 81–2; Hare, 1993). He continued to prosper after his acquisition of Netley, acquiring a peerage in 1539, and subsequently becoming Earl of Wiltshire in 1550 and Marquis of Winchester in 1551. This social elevation reflected his continual political importance, as one of the leading councillors of the latter part of Henry VIII's reign and that of Edward VI, and one who kept the post of Lord Treasurer through turbulent political times and successive religious changes from 1550 until his death in 1572. He remained one of the most powerful figures in Hampshire politics until well into the early part of Elizabeth's reign (DNB; Bindoff, 1982; Fritze, 1982) Paulet also carried out major building works at the family house of Basing House, and for a time held the great palace of the bishops of Winchester at Bishop's Waltham (*Literary Remains*, 81). For Henry VIII, this grant of Netley, would have been both a means of rewarding a loyal servant and of establishing a trusty lieutenant in a coastal and potentially vulnerable part of the country, near the ports of Southampton and Portsmouth. Paulet and later Thomas Wriothesley who acquired Titchfield Abbey in 1538, would provide a focus for royal power in the area.

The new owners of the monasteries adopted different approaches to the problem of adapting buildings designed for monastic use into the very different demands of a great country house (Howard, 1987). They wanted to produce up to date mansions appropriate to a nobleman, but funds were not inexhaustable and they sought to reuse the existing buildings as much as possible. At Netley, study of the surviving buildings enables us to establish how this was done: the abbey being converted into a courtyard house, the claustral area becoming the main courtyard (see Figs. 5, 6). It was a conversion largely carried out in brick, although stone was also used, particularly for facing. Much of the brick work has, however, now gone, both during the later decay and quarrying of the country house, and by deliberate attempt to purify the ruins of what was perceived to be later clutter. Thus the blockings of the chapter house windows were removed during the 1860's clearance (Kell, 75, 82).

Paulet turned the nave of the great abbey church into his hall and kitchen. A cross wall was inserted to divide the nave at the end of the third bay from the west: the wall has gone but has left its mark in the torn off shaft on the south wall. Brick ovens and hearths were installed, and further kitchen facilities were built outside to the north. The hall filled the eastern part of the nave and was entered from a newly cut door in the south wall by the cloister. Paulet probably retained the arcades between the nave and aisles. This would have reduced his cost, and while these had certainly disappeared by the 1730's, their early disappearance could be explained by being made of fine quality ashlar stone which would have been the most valued for quarrying and re-use. The north transept was pulled down at this

stage and not in the late eighteenth century as is frequently stated (eg Hamilton Thompson, 1953). This is evident in an estate survey of 1725 (HRO/Copy 641/12). Carter's plan in 1789 shows the north wall of the nave and that of the choir linked by a stone wall or footings across where the transept would have been (BL Add Mss 29928) (see also Fig 7). Moreover the eastern shaft of the south west pier of the transept has also been cut in such a way that as a new wall in this position could be keyed into the pier. These are the sort of alterations that would only be made for conversion of the buildings and not when they were in ruins. The north transept would have been an obvious building to pull down (as at Mottisfont Abbey); its presence would have blocked light from the former crossing, now the lord's dining area. The eastern arm of the choir was kept as a chapel, and the new cross wall built between it and what was now the hall, was recovered in the nineteenth century (Kell, 81). Paulet's new private wing was built out of the south transept, with a major room or great chamber inserted as a first floor. The joist holes still cut into the monastic architecture show evidence of this conversion.

In the east range, further doorways were inserted to allow movement from one room to another, so avoiding the need for the covered cloisters, which were now destroyed; but the main importance of this range lay on the first floor where the dormitory was converted into one of the long galleries required by houses of the period, providing a central access for the buildings as well as a recreational area for gathering and conversation (Coope, 1986, 44–51). The gallery included at least two staircase entrances as well as access from the lord's great chamber in the south transept. Additional accomodation was provided in the former monastic reredorter. The new main or south front was built over the site of the former demolished monastic dining hall, and contained a central doorway flanked by two polygonal turrets, with similar turrets at either end of the range. Although these towers or turrets have now disappeared, they were visible in plan in 1789 and their presence can still be deduced from the structure today (Fig 8). The cloisters were destroyed and the open space converted into a courtyard, probably cobbled, with a fountain in the centre (Kell, 77). The courtyard would provide access to the buildings around. The visitor would thus be faced initially by a grand entrance front and passing through this range would see a great courtyard with the hall opposite. Arrangements in the west range were unclear although they did include a brick-lined staircase and the range extended further to the south. Further east, a private garden was laid out between the new house and the former abbot's building. It had brick-lined terraces and was enclosed by a high wall to the north (Kell, 85). Such an enclosed garden is parallelled by the arrangements at Paulet's other Hampshire residence at Basing House.

While it is possible that these alterations may not all have have belonged to a single campaign, it seems likely that they all belong to an initial conversion. A contemporary letter to the new owner of neighbouring abbey of Titchfield implies that Paulet was then busy at Netley giving instructions as to how the conversion should be made (PRO SP1/131/f101), and there is nothing in the details of the building which would support a substantially later date. Structurally the new gallery and the new entrance front go together, as reflected in the adjoining stair turret. Neighbouring Titchfield provides us with an excellent point of comparision to this conversion. There, after much discussion and changes of plan, the frater or dining hall was transformed into the main hall (St John Hope, 1906, 233–43), and a great gateway was inserted into the nave of the church. But despite these contrasts, the final plans of the two houses ended up being very similar, with the gatehouse range opposite the hall, and with a long gallery along one side (see also Hare, 1993, 'pictures'). A standard courtyard plan might be required, whether the origins of the buildings were monastic, as also at Mottisfont Abbey (HRO 13 M63 420), or secular as at contemporary Cowdray (Sussex).

Paulet was active in most of the activities concerning the defence and fortification of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight from 1539 until his death in 1572, and it is appropriate that

Fig 7. The south transept, with the remains of the vaulting in 1776 (Godfrey). (Cope Collection)

outside his new house at Netley he was to build a small castle, whose guns would have been able to command the middle and upper reaches of Southampton water. Though built by himself it seems to have been part of a wider royal plan of defence and he was subsequently granted land for the maintenance of the castle and its garrison. The castle was built by 1545 and probably in 1544, a critical phase which had ended with the French fleet in the Solent. It incorporates medieval mouldings suggesting that in part it was built using materials from the abbey itself (Colvin, 1982, 554–7). Kell suggested that this incorporated the former monastic outer gatehouse, but this has not been substantiated.

A late sixteenth century sketch of the house is included in a contemporary map of Southampton (*Southampton maps*) although this is not detailed enough to be useful. The house remained an important mansion both then and for much of the seventeenth century. Queen Elizabeth had visited Paulet's successor the earl of Hertford here, and the family continued to make use of it in the seventeenth century (Seymour Papers, pp 167, 205, 221, 227, 247, 250–2, 292, 306). It was described as a 'faire mansion house' in 1636 (A short survey . . .), and was clearly provisioned in 1642, when the parliamentary committee at Southampton decided that the stores of sea coal there should be confiscated (Godwin, 162–3). In 1650, the

Fig 8. Entrance front of Tudor house. The doorway was flanked by two polygonal towers. That to the right shows the interior brickwork and the projecting quoins of the tower walls.

Earl of Hertford wrote to his son who was shortly to stay there, describing Netley as, 'neither unpleasant nor unsafe, if any place in England be safe . .' (Aylesbury Mss p 156). It was still operational after the restoration, and the Hearth tax returns of 1665 show that with 50 hearths it was amongst the largest houses in Hampshire, and was then held by the countess of Somerset (Hearth Tax, 163). Like neighbouring Titchfield it may finally have succumbed to the uncertainties of family successions, and in 1676, after the death of the dowager duchess of Somerset, it was sold (VCH III, 477). It was probably some time after this, towards the end of the seventeenth century, that the house fell out of use and parts were sold off for demolition.

RUIN

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the abbey had begun to enter its third phase of existence, as a ruin. Browne Willis, in a book published in 1719 records that the church section survived until fifteen years before, when Sir B[erkley] L[ewis] sold the chapel (the eastern arm of the church) to a Southampton carpenter who took off the roof and destroyed many of the walls, killing himself in the process. The destruction is reflected in the accounts for the rebuilding of St Mary's church at Southampton in 1710–11 and again in 1722–3. The necessary stone for the rebuilding was acquired from the ruins of Netley Abbey and on the latter occasion necessitated the purchase and use of gunpowder (HRO Top

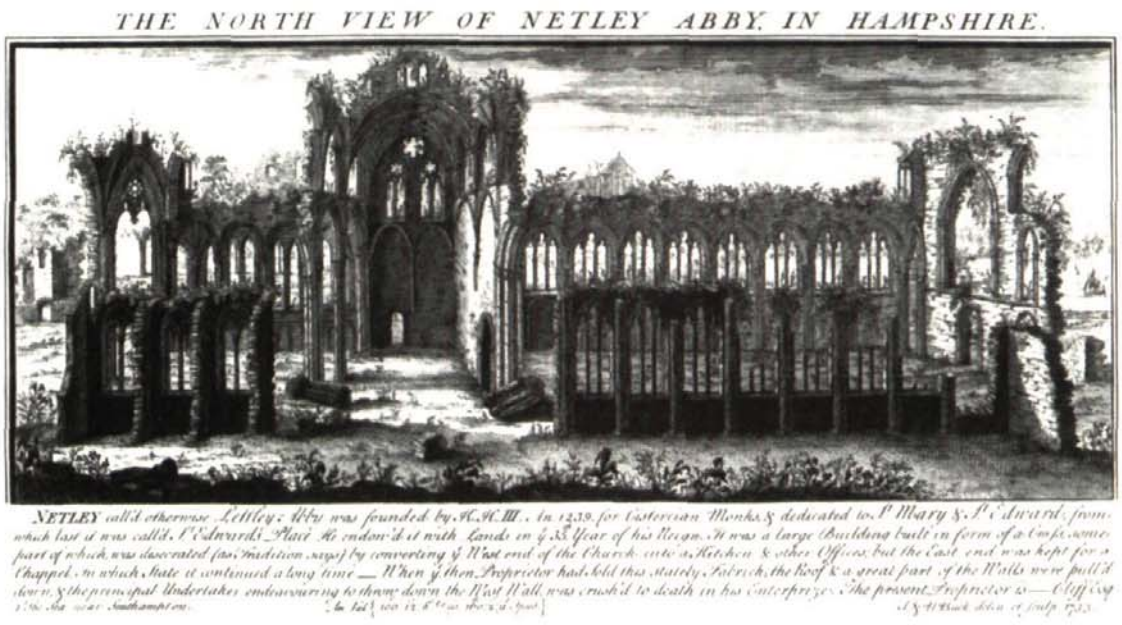

Fig 9. The north view of Netley Abbey in Hampshire (S & N Buck, 1733). (Cope Collection)

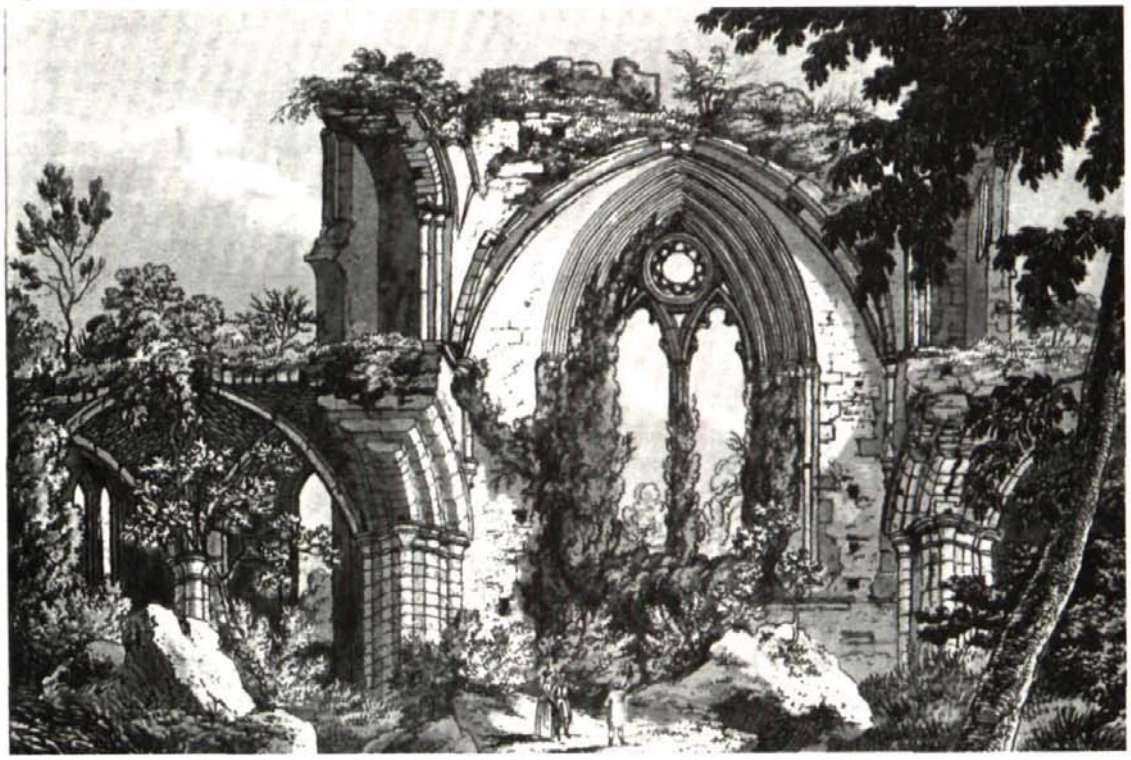

Fig 10. Inside view of Netley (Tomkins, 1794). (Cope Collection)

Fig 11. West view of Netley Abbey (Tomkins, 1794). (Cope Collection)

Southampton 1/3), probably in search of the ashlar of the piers. An estate plan of 1725 suggests, through differential shading and the presence of a garden, the possibility that parts of the buildings may have remained in use, and that only the former abbey church was destroyed (HRO Copy 641/12). It was after a period of such destruction that the first illustration of the abbey survives. The Bucks' engraving, published in 1733, shows that the abbey church had been gutted and cleared of the Tudor alterations and any of the nave or choir arcades that had survived this conversion (Fig 9). The abbey was to remain in this state for over a century, decaying, being robbed, as when parts were used to produce a sham ruin at Cranbury Park. The abbey ruins were becoming increasingly overgrown and filled with trees. But the buildings shown in the drawings and plans at the end of the eighteenth century, such as those made by J Carter in 1789 (BL Add Mss 29928), were essentially those that we see now. Further decay has occurred, but it has been limited in scale: the remains of the transept vault have collapsed (Fig 7), as has the vaulting of the dormitory undercroft, whose groins remained in 1789 (BL Add Mss 29928); the tracery of the main west window and the vaults of the east range have gone.

But this very decay and the combination of woodland and sea were to make the ruins increasingly attractive in the second half of the eighteenth century, as the romantic movement gathered strength. To generations interested in visions of a medieval past, of ruins and of nature, Netley seemed well placed. Its grand ruins were surrounded by, and protruded, from woodland

Fig 12. Netley: the chapel and south transept (Westall, 1828). (Cope Collection)

and greenery, within the ruins were more trees and piles of debris, while part of the vault of the south transept remained suspended like a spider's webb: 'the roof has tumbled in, yet some little of it is left in the transept, where the ivy has forced its way through and hangs flaunting down among the fretted ornament and escutchens of the benefactors'. (T Gray, BL Add Mss 19918) (Fig 7). Beyond, by contrast, could be seen the sea and its ships; and all this was within an easy boat trip from the flourishing holiday resorts of Southampton and the Isle of Wight (Patterson, 1970, 72–84; for a visit from Ryde – BM Add Mss 33652, f 12v). Tintern abbey might be a more famous ruin, but as the Rev J Skinner remarked on his visit to Netley in 1818 'I was, I confess, much much more struck than on seeing Tintern, and this I can only account for by supposing the ruggedness of the area of Netley scattered over with the fragments of the pillers and the walls; and shaded by Ash trees of considerable size and beauty, is more in harmony with a ruin than the smooth level green which is kept up with too much neatness at Tintern' (BL Add Mss 33652 f 13r).

Poets and writers, like Horace Walpole and Thomas Gray, enthused about the remains (Sambrook, 1980, 22–26), and the abbey gave its name to poems by writers such as Southey ('Ode, Netley Abbey; Midnight', of 1790) and Bowles; a novel (*Netley Abbey* by R Warner in 1795); and an operatic farce (by W Pearce, first produced at Covent Garden in London in 1794, and again for at least the next seven seasons, and in Bath and Bristol in 1795: Inchbald, 1815; *London Stage* part 5, vol 3; Theatre Royal, Bath, 156, 157, 158; A Hare, pers comm). But the novel, subsequently

Fig 13. Interior of Netley Abbey (after the 1860 clearance). (Cope Collection)

published in Paris, Berlin and Philadelphia also reminds us of a darker side of the romantic image of the abbey, where under its profligate and licentious abbot, the abbey had become the focus for imprisonment and evil, and was to be the scene of the bloody culmination of the story.

By the 1840's tourism remained active but was changing in character as the abbey became a popular place of call for the citizens of Southampton, who came for the ruins, for tea, music and dancing; the romantic atmosphere of the monument being broken by 'the popping of Ginger Beer'. A scandalised RH Barham attacked such conditions in 'Netley Abbey: a legend of Hampshire', in the *Ingolsby Legends* of 1847. Such popularity led to further damage to the ruins and this and changing attitudes towards ruins created a transformation in the appearance of the site. In 1860, the owner, Thomas Chamberlayne cleared the site of rubble and some of the Tudor alterations, the difference in the appearance of the church being clearly shown in contemporary illustrations (Figs 12–13). Furthermore to protect the monument, Chamberlayne placed the abbey under the supervision of a porter, 'though attended with a trifling admission fee' (Kell, 75). All that was now needed was the clearance of the ivy in the twentieth century to give us the monument that we have today. But the nineteenth century was also to see other developments that were to transform the

appearance of the ruins. The area ceased to be wilderness. Nearby was built the great army hospital. The swing bridge and above all, the Southampton to Netley railway, opened in 1866 (Course, 1973, 19) brought easy access to the abbey, not merely for visitors but for suburban villas and other housing. While the site of the monastery itself might be secure, much of the precinct was to be sold off for housing. It is now difficult to imagine the deserted woods and heathland that seemed to mark an appropriate site for the Cistercian founders, but it is also difficult to imagine the walk from the sea to the overgrown romantic ruins in the midst of nowhere. In all this, Netley has continued, and will continue to reflect the changing world beyond.

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Note: Account rolls have been dated according to the closing year of the account.

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