

If you have tea in the garden of Abbey House you will see the high wall that has doorways and windows in its length and is reputed to be an original wall of the monastery buildings. In the northeast corner of the garden stands the **Old Mill House** – believed to be the only surviving Benedictine water mill in this country. Excavations have revealed that a Roman water mill existed prior to the monk’s arrival and it appears to be of Romano-British construction. The building to the southwest of the garden is the old granary.



Looking down the hill past the Pynion End you will see the thatched roof on **The Great Barn** or **Tithe Barn**. As the wealth of the Abbey increased so did the requirement to store the “tithe” payments – one tenth of the harvest payable to the Abbot by all the local farmers. The great barn was probably built in the early 14th century at around the same time as St Catherine’s chapel on the hill and, at 272 feet long and 31 feet wide, is reputedly the largest barn of its type in England, if not Europe.

The thatched roof we see today covers only half the original building although records suggest it has been like this for several hundred years. Why was it only partly destroyed? One theory is that the east end belonged to the abbey whereas the west end may have belonged to

local farmers. Once the Monastery was destroyed then perhaps the Abbey part of the barn was also demolished and a new end wall erected creating a smaller barn for local farmers and the incoming tenants who would have needed somewhere to store grain and reed from their new estates.



Although originally under a stone roof the barn has been thatched for several centuries. The latest re-thatching was completed in 2006 – it took three years to complete and involved substantial repair to the roof structure (above). The work has been carried out using similar materials and skills to those used for the original construction including water reed from the Swannery for the thatch – three years’ reed harvest has been used, some 11,000 bundles.

The barn yard was used as one of the locations for the 1965 film of Thomas Hardy’s “Far from the Madding Crowd” and is now used as a children’s farm. Occasionally it is used for village events.

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4: Church Street & Rodden Row

For more information about our village visit the Abbotsbury Heritage website at:

www.abbotsbury-heritage.org.uk

Aerial photograph by Francesca Radcliffe

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DISCOVERING ABBOTSBURY



3: The Abbey & The Great Barn (Walk – wheelchair access)

Prepared by Chris Wade & Peter Evans for
Abbotsbury Heritage Research Project



Plan above by Eric Ricketts, published in **Abbotsbury & the Swannery** by J Far & D Moxom, Dovecote Press, 1993

Leave the churchyard heading south, passing the remains of the north wall of the **Abbey**, and by the time you reach the gate you will actually have passed over the greater part of the **Abbey Church of St. Peter** and are possibly now standing in what was the south aisle or south transept.

In 1023 King Canute gave a parcel of land around Portesham to his trusted steward and right hand man Orc - including "Abbodesbyrig", translated from the Saxon as "Abbot's Town". Whether the name indicates the presence of earlier monastic buildings (e.g. the church of St Peter allegedly built by the monk Bertulfus in the 6th century) or simply refers to the fact that the Abbot of Glastonbury held land here is unknown.

The title deeds are contained in a document referred to as "Orc's Charter". The map below shows roughly how the Portesham charter relates to present day boundaries.

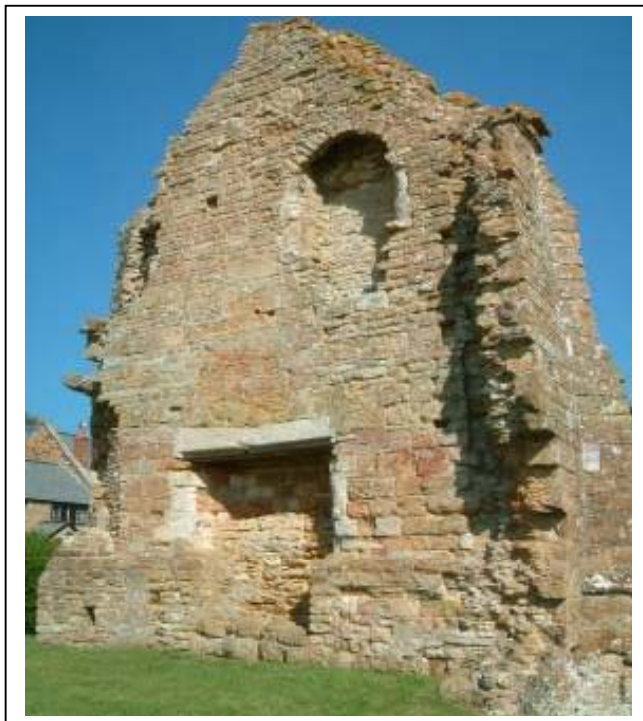


However soon after acquiring Abbotsbury Orc set about building an Abbey. It was finished by 1044 and populated with Benedictine monks from the nearby Abbey at Cerne Abbas. After Orc's death his wife, Tola, donated all their land in Abbotsbury to the Abbey.

The new Abbey rapidly grew in wealth and influence with extra land granted to it by

Edward the Confessor, subsequent monarchs and other wealthy gentry. The Domesday Book states that there were 2,500 acres and 8 manors belonging to the Abbey – over four centuries this would grow to 22 manors.

Eventually politics and religion overtook the Abbey and in the reign of Henry VIII it came to an end. In the early 1540's the estate was leased by the King to Sir Giles Strangways with instructions that the great Abbey and all its buildings be destroyed. Later the Strangways family built a manor house on or near the Abbey site, using much of the redundant stonework, but this was blown up by the Parliamentary troops in 1644. The Strangways had backed the wrong side but Charles II subsequently restored the Abbotsbury estate to the family and it remains with them to the present day. The old Abbey stone helped to build Abbotsbury and you will see some of it as you discover the village.



In front of you is the largest remaining part of the Abbey – a section known as the Pynion End (pictured above).

It was possibly a gable of the monks' refectory and may have become part of the Strangways' manor – it is all that survived after the Civil War. Unfortunately most of the historical records relating to the abbey were also destroyed along with the mansion and we therefore have very little information as to how the abbey functioned. Very occasionally some long lost records do surface, as was the case recently with a copy of a breviary from the abbey dated at around 1400 (see below). Recovered from abroad it now resides in Lambeth Palace Library and it details the divine services as recited by the monks and also records commemorations of the abbey's founders – Orc and Tola.



To the left of the Pynion End is a group of buildings, known as **Abbots Ward**, now converted into a private dwelling. They are quite ancient and contain several interesting 14th century windows – it is believed that the Abbey Chapter House may have been here.

Opposite these buildings is **Abbey House** that stands on the site of what is considered to have been the old monastic infirmary and portions of the house are ancient.