

Abbey Fields, Kenilworth Abbey, Kenilworth, Warwickshire

Archaeological Watching Brief



understanding heritage matters

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*Working for
Warwickshire*

Project: Abbey Fields, Kenilworth Abbey, Kenilworth
Warwickshire: Archaeological Watching Brief

Commissioned by: Warwick District Council

Project Report No. 1117

Site Code: KA11

NGR: SP 2834 7223

Planning Reference: Not Applicable

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Summary

A watching brief was carried out within the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Kenilworth Abbey on Abbey Fields, Kenilworth. The work was undertaken 75m to the west of the abbey gatehouse and revealed no significant archaeological remains associated with the abbey. No other finds or features were observed in the two trenches.

1. Introduction

1.1 Warwick District Council proposed a scheme of works at Kenilworth Abbey Fields including improvements to drainage, footpaths and tree protection. As the site is within the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Kenilworth Abbey (SAM 35115) following consultation English Heritage advised that a programme of archaeological work to observe and record archaeological remains should be commissioned and a Written Scheme of Investigation produced for the work. English Heritage granted Scheduled Ancient Monument Consent (S000063570) for the proposals, which included the requirement for an archaeological watching brief

1.2 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of archaeological observation of trenches or ground reduction associated with the scheme was proposed. Warwick District Council commissioned the archaeological watching brief from Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire and the work was carried out in April 2011 in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Archaeology Warwickshire. This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under the site code KA11.

2. Location

2.1 The site is located south of High Street, Kenilworth and south-west of St Nicholas's Church. The site of works is within the Scheduled Monument of Kenilworth Abbey and centred around National Grid Reference SP 2834 7223 (Fig. 1).

2.2 The underlying geology of the area is Kenilworth Sandstone Formation (British Geological Survey 1984).

3. Methodology

3.1 The watching brief was intended to observe any groundworks associated with the improvement scheme and as far as possible, to record the nature of the archaeological resource revealed on the site.

3.2 The work undertaken involved the examination of early map evidence as well as records of archaeological remains in the area and local historical journals and other publications. Fieldwork involved an archaeologist being present on site during the appropriate groundworks.

4. Archaeological and Historical Background

4.1 St Mary's Abbey (Fig. 1) was founded in 1122 as a priory but was raised to the rank of abbey in c.1450 (VCH 1951, 133; Warwickshire Historic Environment Record No. MWA 3201). The site is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM No. 35115). The 14th-century abbey gatehouse survives (HER MWA 6007) as does the building known as 'The Barn' which was probably the abbey's guesthouse (HER MWA 6008). Substantial parts of the major buildings were excavated in 1890 by T. W. Whitely (Draper 1891) and largely re-excavated in 1922-23 by E. Carey-Hill (Carey-Hill 1929). The parish church of St Nicholas also largely dates to the 14th century (HER MWA 3219). The abbey may have acted as a focus for settlement during the medieval period and the long narrow burgage plots that are typical of medieval property boundaries can be seen fossilised in the modern property boundaries along High Street. The Ordnance Survey First Edition map (Fig 2) clearly shows the High Street and the site of the Abbey. The abbey was dissolved in 1538 and in 1539 the dwellings and closes of the former abbey estate were described in a rental.

4.2 Fishponds once existed along the length of the Finham Brook and one example, marked as the site of Bakehouse Pool on the Ordnance Survey map of 1923 (Ordnance Survey 1923), still shows in relief (HER MWA 3289). At the south-eastern corner of the Abbey grounds Finham Brook is crossed by a post-medieval bridge (HER MWA 3276) which replaced the one Prior Teniesford (1280-1290) had built.

4.3 A resistivity survey was undertaken in two locations in 1996 as part of a scheme designed to investigate the history and archaeology of Abbey Fields. One area over the Abbey church failed to reveal any meaningful results whilst a further area north-west of the gatehouse produced a rectangular anomaly thought to represent either a building or evidence of quarrying (Ireland 1996).

4.4 A number of archaeological watching briefs have been carried out in the vicinity of the abbey. In 1989 two square pits were excavated for the foundations of two pieces of play equipment. In one of these the remains of a sandstone surface was recorded, possibly part of a courtyard or trackway, at 0.60m below the ground surface, overlaid by medieval demolition material. The other revealed part of a large stone wall 0.25m below ground level (Hingley et al. 1989). Two watching briefs in 1994 did not record significant archaeological deposits (Warwickshire Museum 1994a; 1994b). Further watching briefs between 1999 and 2001 have revealed fragments of medieval glazed floor tile and a quantity of sandstone rubble (Robinson and Jones 1999), fragments of hand-made roof tile (Gethin and Coutts 2000; Warwickshire Museum 2001b) 14th- to 15th-century pottery and the stone foundations for a building complex associated with the abbey (Warwickshire Museum 2002). A substantial stone wall recorded on the south side of the church which was possibly part of the medieval precinct boundary (Warwickshire Museum 2001a).

4.5 More recent watching briefs have been undertaken during car park resurfacing (Jones 2007) where medieval floor and roof tiles were recorded in demolition layers and in 2009 when a Severn Trent Water test pit was monitored. A probable medieval wall foundation was recorded in very wet conditions (Rann 2009).

5. Watching Brief

5.1 The path running from the abbey gatehouse (HER MWA 6007) towards High Street was to be improved as part of the project. This included a proposal to improve drainage and surfacing. Two areas were subject to proposed improvement works; one approximately 90m west of the abbey gatehouse (T1) and a second (T2) approximately 75m west of the gatehouse.

5.2 Two potential drainage trenches were excavated by a tracked mini excavator with a 0.45m wide toothed bucket in order to investigate the soil conditions. Both the trenches were 0.5m deep and were dug into reddish brown clay.

5.3 The excavation of both trenches was observed by an archaeologist and both revealed the same deposit sequence (Figs 3 and 4). The lowest revealed deposit was a layer of reddish brown clay, which was at least 0.38m thick (3). This layer was interpreted as redeposited natural clay based on the composition of the layer and the level of occurrence. This was sealed by a 0.12m thick layer of reddish brown clay loam topsoil (2). Surfacing material for the path (1) was removed across the width of the path.

5.4 No archaeological features were observed and no finds were recovered during the work.

6. Conclusions

6.1 The watching brief of two trenches recorded no significant archaeological remains associated with Kenilworth Abbey or any other medieval or post-medieval remains associated with the abbey or the settlement of Kenilworth.

6.2 The lack of archaeological remains may reflect the depth and extent of excavation required for the observed trenches and that the trenches simply did not extend far enough to impact on any archaeology. It is therefore likely that potential archaeological remains could be present at lower levels at the site of the works.

Acknowledgements

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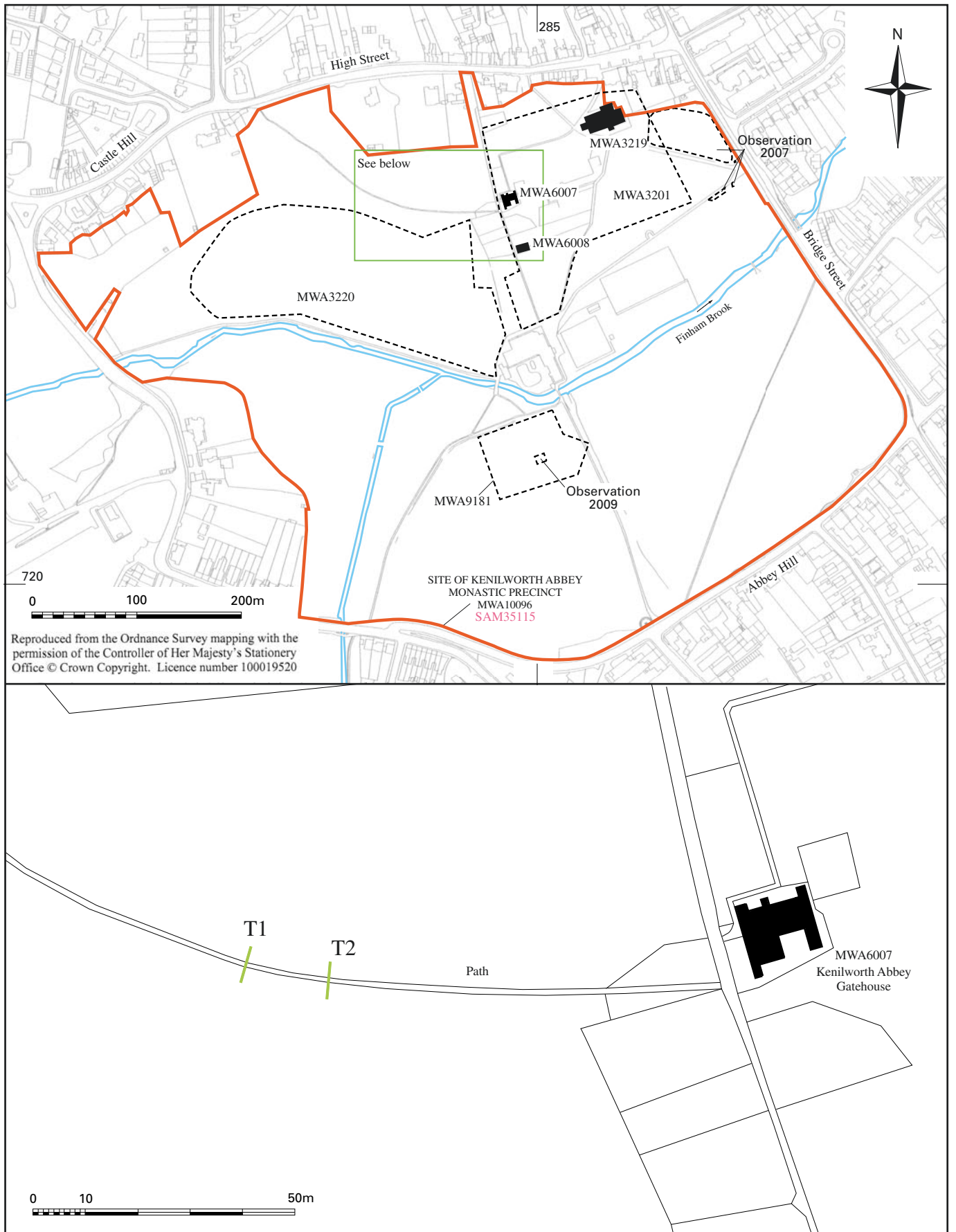


Fig 1: Site and trench location

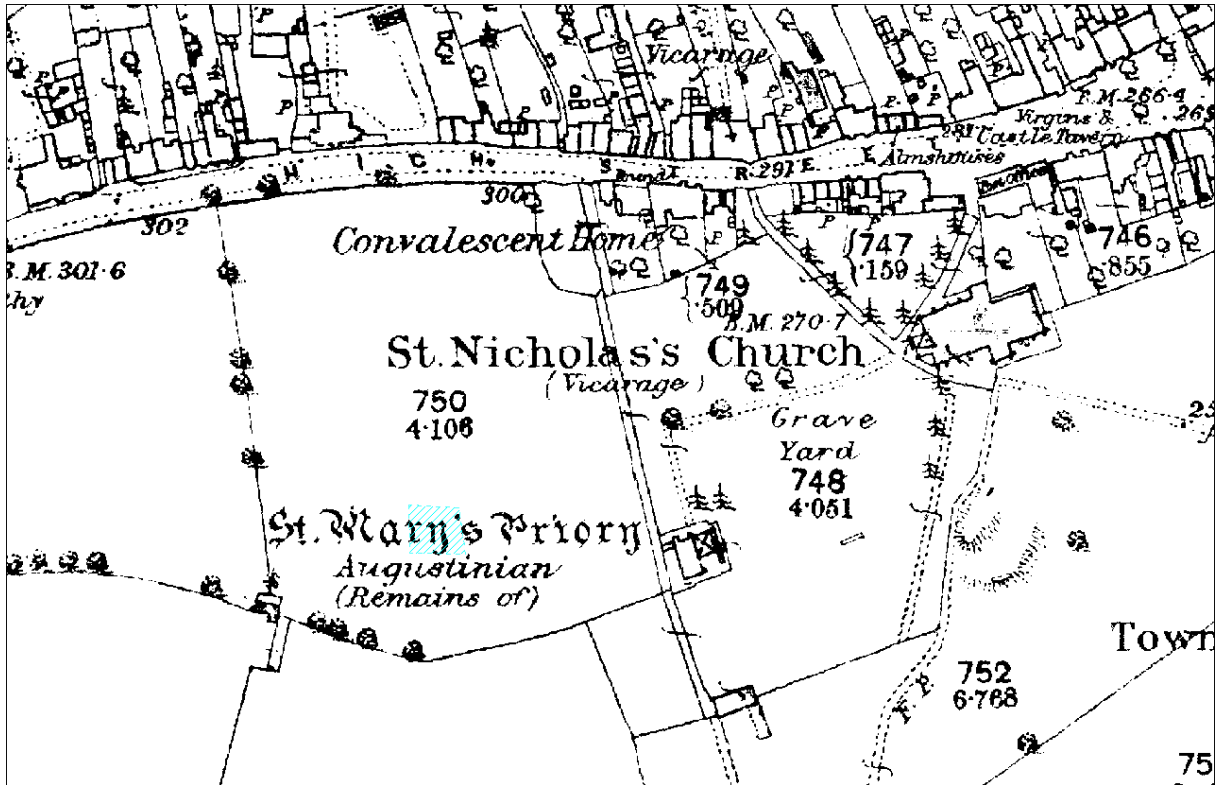


Fig 2: Detail of Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1887



Figs 3 and 4: Observed trenches (T1 and T2)