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RCHEM E SURVEY REPORT

**BRADENSTOKE PRIORY AND  
CLACKMOUNT**

An archaeological survey by the Royal Commission on  
the Historical Monuments of England

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# BRADENSTOKE PRIORY AND CLACK MOUNT

An archaeological survey by the  
Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

County: Wiltshire  
District: North Wiltshire  
Parish: Lyneham  
OS Map No: ST 97 NE  
NGR: ST 9957 7912  
NMR No: ST 97 NE 4 & 5

Surveyed: Sep 1997, Feb 1998  
Report by: G R Brown  
Investigation: G R Brown  
Illustrations: D A Cunliffe

### **Summary**

*Bradenstoke Priory lies on a flat plateau at the edge of a limestone escarpment overlooking the Avon valley. It was founded in 1139, and for the next four hundred years the Augustinian canons were major land-lords in the surrounding region and had considerable influence. Following the dissolution in 1539 the priory, in common with the majority of other monastic houses, became a secular residence.*

*Apart from the undercroft of the West Range nothing survives of the former monastery; however, there are well preserved earthworks in the field to the north-east and on the escarpment. These earthworks probably represent a garden landscape that has been superimposed on previously cultivated land. On the escarpment a possible water garden has also been identified.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The site of the Augustinian priory at Bradenstoke (ST 97 NE 5), centred at ST 99577912, was surveyed by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) in Sep 1997 and Feb 1998 at the request of English Heritage. The survey included the area of the priory, now occupied by a modern farmstead, the pasture field to the north-east, and the escarpment. Clack Mount was also surveyed since it probably formed an integral part of the medieval and post-medieval estate.

### **BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Augustinian Priory of Bradenstoke is situated on a high ridge of Corallian limestone overlooking the Avon Valley, some six miles north-east of Chippenham. Despite this elevated position there was a plentiful supply of water emanating from springs which were said never to have been known to fail (Brakspear 1925, 1). This abundance of water, coupled with a nearby holy well, probably influenced the siting of the priory in an otherwise exposed setting.

The priory was founded in 1139 by Walter le Eruses as a daughter house of St Mary's, Cirencester, and continued under the subjugation of Cirencester until 1189 (Styles 1956, 276). The descendants of the founder (the Earls of Salisbury) continued the patronage of Bradenstoke until the establishment of Lacock Abbey in 1232. The patronage eventually passed by marriage to Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, and by 1335, Edward, the Black Prince, was patron, but by 1414 it had reverted to the Duchy of Lancaster who retained it until the dissolution in 1539 (*ibid.*).

Although the number of canons is not known for much of its existence, the priory was successful enough to populate a new foundation at Cartmel in Lancashire in 1194. It is perhaps significant in light of Bradenstoke's relationship with Cirencester that this daughter house was independent of Bradenstoke from its inception (*ibid.*, 286).

Bradenstoke's main estates lay in Wiltshire, dispersed widely over the county, but principally in the neighbourhood of the priory. Other estates were held in Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire

and Dorset, and further afield in South Yorkshire and Normandy. In addition to gifts and grants, Bradenstoke was actively increasing its holdings by the purchase of land in the 13th century, mostly in places where they already had manors and where the land was more valuable. The priory was also consolidating some of its holdings; for example, an exchange of Bradenstoke's properties in Normandy in return for property at Towcester, was completed in 1285.

Many of the early charters at Bradenstoke are grants of pasture and sheep, and there are other indications of the priory's economic interest in sheep farming; for example, a debt of £12 15s. 9d. was acknowledged by the Crown in 1339 for 2.5 sacks and 3 cloves of wool from its Wiltshire estates (Styles 1956). Cattle also played an important part in the economy of Bradenstoke; in 1205 King John gave the priory the right to graze cattle and a site for cattle sheds within the bounds of the royal enclosure in Chippenham Forest (London 1979, 162).

Spiritual income, in the form of tithes, were an important source of revenue for the religious orders. This was particularly the case for the Augustinians when, in 1535, the spiritual income formed a large part of their total assets (Robinson 1980, 173). Bradenstoke held seven rectories and five churches or chapels at this time (*ibid.*, app 24).

In 1535 the priory and its estates were valued at £212 0s.3d. Though Bradenstoke escaped the suppression of the smaller houses under the 1536 Act, Dr William Petre received the surrender from the Prior, William Snowe, the sub-prior Thomas Pen, and twelve canons on 17th January 1539 (L S & D Hen VIII, Vol. 14, Pt 1, 34). Following its dissolution, the priory and its estates were quickly divided, and in 1546 the priory was in the possession of Richard Pexhall (Jackson 1862, 189). It continued in the Pexhall family until 1640 when it was sold to Henry Danvers of nearby Dauntsey, who, as Lord Danby, held a number of estates in the south and was responsible for creating a Physic garden in Oxford in 1621 (*ibid.*; Batey 1989, 60; WT 48). The priory and its small estate continued in the Danvers family, principally through the female line, until 1700 when it was held by James, Earl of Abingdon. From the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century the estate was in the possession of the Selfe family of Beanacre near Melksham, and thereafter it was in the hands of the Methuen family of Corsham Court.

In 1929 the American newspaper tycoon, William Hearst, who had bought Bradenstoke, began dismantling the prior's lodging, the guest house, and tithe barn, and took some of the material to St Donat's Castle in South Glamorgan, where he set about re-furbishing the interior. The early 14th-century double collar beam roof was fitted into a specially devised hall on the south side of the castle, and the windows from the prior's lodging were also set into a wall. Finally the fireplace from the prior's lodging was put into the breakfast room (Aslet 1980, 945). The stone-work of the tithe barn appears to have been shipped to America (Anon 1930a, 80) where it remains in crates.

## **PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH**

The first reported archaeological investigation at Bradenstoke Priory was undertaken by Harold Brakspear between 1917 and 1925 (Brakspear 1925). Excavations were carried out at the instigation of the owner on the site of the nave of the church and the North Range. From this limited investigation, and by comparing the site with other Augustinian houses,

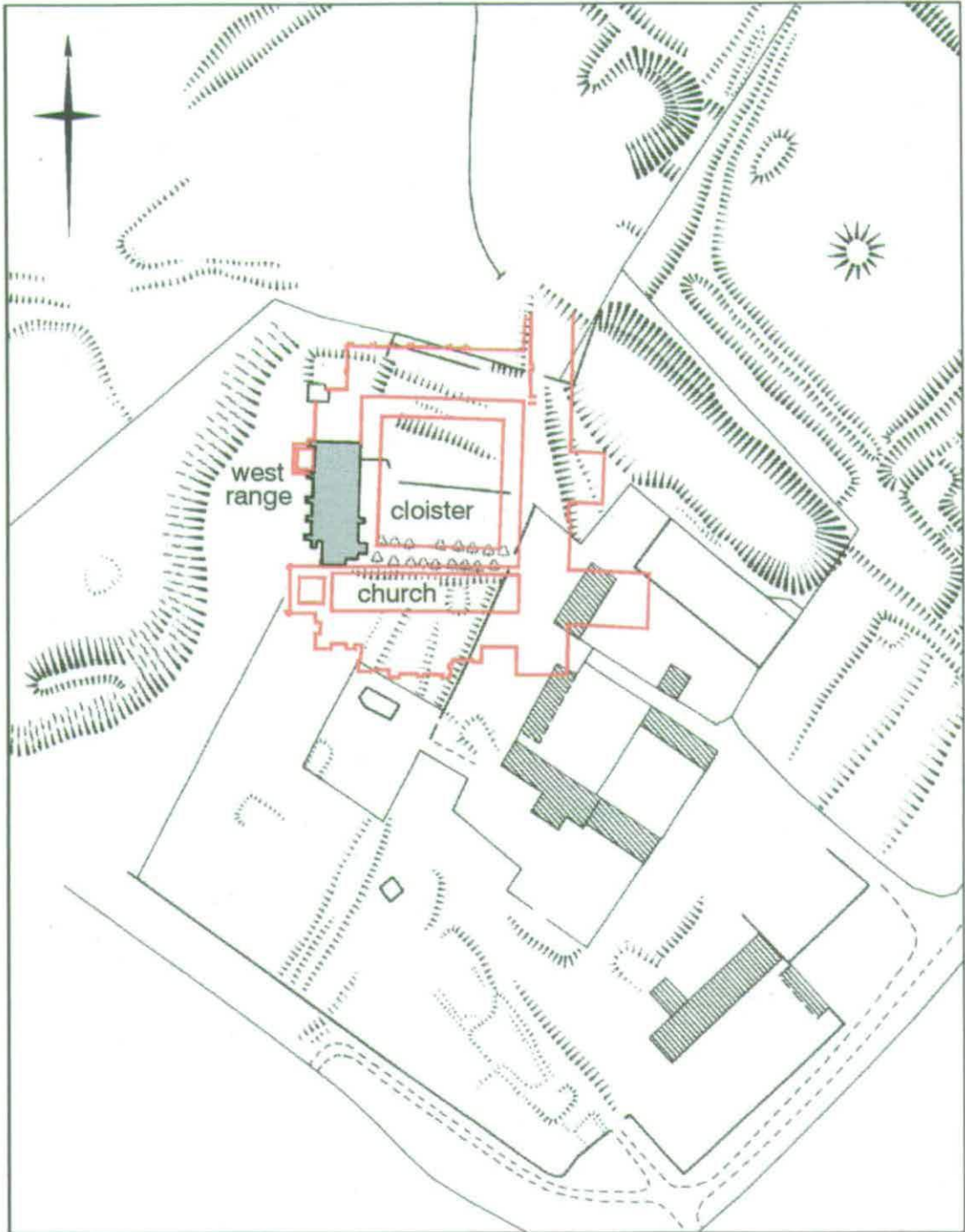
Brakspear tentatively reconstructed the ground plan of the monastery (fig 1). Although there were no reported investigations in the precinct, a possible boundary was also defined (*ibid.*, 3).

The church lay on the south side of the cloister in a similar manner to three other monasteries along the Avon valley - at Malmesbury, Lacock, and Stanley. The church appears to have been either re-built or extended on at least two occasions. The nave, which had been robbed for stone, comprised ten bays and measured c. 39 x 7.4m overall; floor tiles from here would suggest a 14<sup>th</sup> century date. In the later 15<sup>th</sup> century a chapel measuring 10 x 4.9 m was built against the south side.

The North Range, which probably contained rooms such as the refectory and warming house, had a sub-vault measuring 23 x 7.6m which was divided into six bays with a longitudinal division. Separating the North Range from the church was the cloister which measured c. 33.5m<sup>2</sup>, although nothing was found of the foundations of the inner walls of the surrounding alley.

The East Range, which was not excavated, would normally have contained the chapter house and the monk's dormitory above, amongst other rooms. Brakspear suggests that the position of the rere-dorter is indicated by the present outflow from the pond.

Since Brakspear's excavation there has been little archaeological investigation, although in 1933 five skeletons were found in the small walled garden on the south side of the church; the bones were disturbed. In addition, sherds of medieval pottery, including the spout of a jug dating to the 14th century, were found (Passmore 1937, 286). There have been further finds of medieval coarse pottery dating to the 12th and 13th centuries from the vicinity of the priory and Clack Mount (Anon 1969, 135)



*Fig 1. Brakspear's plan of Bradenstoke priory (1925)*

## EARTHWORK SURVEY AND INTERPRETATION

The abbey and polygonal precinct, together with Clack Mount, cover an area of c.10.5 ha. on a level, elevated plateau with the remainder on a north-west facing slope. On the south-east and south-west sides the boundary is defined by a road and track respectively, whilst in the north-west a ditched field boundary marks the probable limit of the precinct. In the south-west lies Abbey Farm, which is a private residence, and a small bungalow to the north. Much of the land is used as pasture. The site also borders Lyneham airfield, an RAF station that covers much of the former medieval and post-medieval Bradenstoke estate lying to the east of the precinct.

### *The earthworks around Abbey Farm*

The church and cloistral range lay to the north of Abbey Farm, close to the edge of the escarpment, and covered an area of c. 0.36ha. To the south of the farmstead, extending from the gate in the south in a north-westerly direction, is an embanked track measuring 27m in length and up to 0.2m high. Along the south side of the track are a number of sub-rectangular platforms, measuring between 5 x 5m and 18 x 9m. These platforms probably represent farm buildings that are depicted on an aerial photograph dating to 1932 (NMR: AP ST9979/2, CCC 5208/04991). Further north-west is a spread linear bank measuring 33m in length and c. 0.2m high which continues south-west from the line of a garden wall. Trees are positioned along this bank; these have been planted since 1932 (*ibid.*). Immediately to the south is a small square dilapidated stone structure. On the north-western side of the bank is a slight sub-rectangular platform measuring at least 10 x 5m.

To the north of the linear bank is a small walled garden with a stone pond along the north side. In the south-western corner is a slight rectangular platform measuring 6 x 4m. This garden is probably the area where the skeletons were found in 1933 (see above).

The undercroft of the west range is the only part of the monastery that survives and little in the way of earthworks are evident for the remainder of the area occupied by the priory. Extending in an easterly direction from the southern end of the West Range is a scarp measuring 30m long and up to 0.2m high; this scarp probably marks the edge of the cloister alley. The cloister walk may also be reflected by a sunken stone path beside the West Range. To the south of the cloister scarp is a low, spread bank, that may have formerly been a wall. To the east of the bank is a sub-rectangular platform measuring 5x3m. Both the bank and platform appear to be cut by the cloister scarp.





*Plate 1. The undercroft in the West Range (NMR: 97/3474. AA97/7222)*

To the north-east of the West Range are two scarps that lie parallel to a stone and brick wall and the foundations of a building (*ibid.*). These scarps form part of a track that leads from the farmstead to the escarpment. Projecting from the northern end of the West Range is another scarp which turns at right-angles; this is possibly part of the North Range.

To the south of the farmstead, in the area of the former tithe barn, and as far as the farm approach track, thick vegetation prevented further earthworks being recorded.

### *The Precinct*

In the north-east the precinct boundary and Outer Court are defined by a bank and an external ditch; the bank stands up to 0.5m high and 10m wide. It now marks the southern extremity of the village of Bradenstoke. The boundary bank continues along the south-east side for c. 140m, from where the boundary continues as a stone wall for a further 84m, and beyond this, a fence-line. Approximately 90m along the south-east bank is a small sub-rectangular platform. This feature is evident on an aerial photograph dating to 1946 and was probably a military structure associated with the nearby airfield (NMR: AP 106G UK 1416 14 Apr 46, F/20. 4252-3). Along the escarpment the boundary bank continues, although it is much degraded, and has been cut by two rectangular ponds (A and B).

Within the northern part of the boundary bank are traces of ridge-and-furrow. Although this cultivation is much degraded and only three furrows were surveyed in the northern field, APs show that it was more extensive (*ibid.*). A linear bank measuring 105m and up to 0.4m high, separates the two areas of ridge and furrow. A sub-rectangular platform (C), 15 x 12m and c. 0.1m high, is located in the south-east corner of the field boundary. To the south, further ridge and furrow is evident aligned north-west/south-east. Extending in a south-easterly



direction from (C) is another linear bank measuring 95m long, with three small causeways across it. The furrows are between 5 and 8m apart.

Overlying the ridge and furrow in the south-west is a linear depression (D), possibly a canal, measuring 75 x 5m and 0.9m deep with a slight bank on either side. Another linear depression extends at right-angles; at its north-west end it appears to cut into a boundary bank.

Between the ponds are two mounds; the southerly mound measures 12.5m in diameter and is c. 0.7m high, whilst the other one is more elongated and measures 14 x 6m and c. 0.6m high. Three further mounds of similar form, though much degraded, lie to the north-east.

Projecting from the south-east end of (B) is a scarp which appears to have been a wall (E). Sited along the south-western side of this are three parallel scarps that extend as far as the farm road, whilst on the northern side there are rectilinear scarps, possibly building platforms.

### ***Clack Mount***

Clack Mount is a polygonal shaped island surrounded by a ditch, and lies c. 250 m north-east of the priory. The island covers an area of c. 0.56 ha and stands c. 1.5m high. The southern side is 80 m long and has a slight terrace for half its length; there is a similar terrace on the north-eastern side. Two circular mounds are situated on the island; the smaller one is a Second World War pill box which is covered with earth and thick vegetation; it measures c. 8m diameter at the base and is c. 1.5m high. The second mound is located slightly to the north of the centre of the island and measures 19m diameter at the base and is 1.5m high. At the top is a circular depression, with a small cut, possibly former steps, on the western side.

Surrounding the island is a ditch; the southern side measures c. 12m wide, whilst the other sides are appreciably narrower, particularly in the north-west. The north-eastern side is remarkably straight and has the appearance of having been re-dug in recent years. It continues in a southerly direction almost as far as the road and in a northerly direction down the escarpment. Significantly, at the junction of the north and west ditches is a small causeway, possibly a sluice for controlling the flow of water. Along the western side of the ditch is a bank, probably formed by the upcast of the ditch.



*Plate 2 - Clack Mount from the south-west (NMR 97/3474 AA97/7227)*

#### *The Escarpment*

Most of the earthworks along the escarpment are probably caused by geological 'slumping'; however, there are a number of features of archaeological interest. On the north-eastern side of the central stream is a linear bank extending in a north-westerly direction and measuring 65 m in length and up to 0.5 m high; this bank was probably a former field boundary. At the southern end is a pond cut into the escarpment, with a slight dam on the north-western side. Dumping of silt from the south pond on the plateau and thick vegetation has masked further features. At the northern end of the bank is a slight hollow way extending in an east/west direction.

To the west of the central stream there is a large irregularly shaped pond with a small cascade leading to a further pond to the north. Beside these ponds is a slight linear ditch (F) measuring 90 m long and c. 0.1 m deep. Projecting the line of this ditch to the south-east would lead to the spring (G). Significantly, when the outflow for the south pond was being re-dug, a former outflow, probably medieval, was encountered at this point.

To the south of these two ponds and modern fence-line is a much slighter pond (H), with a platform terraced onto the escarpment. Oyster shells and medieval pottery were found in small earthen mound to the east of the small pond at (J).

#### **DISCUSSION**

Bradenstoke Priory is situated on a pre-eminent, but isolated position. A late-18<sup>th</sup> century map of Wiltshire (fig. 3) shows that the main road network lies some distance from the monastery. In the valley, a road curves around the escarpment with an interrupted row settlement, in the area of Friday Street and Upper Town, dispersed along it (Crittall 1952; fig 3). From the settlement, four tracks lead up the escarpment and converge to form a single

track that continues in a southerly direction past the priory; further south it forks towards Lyneham Court and in the other direction, off the escarpment to Stockham Marsh in the neighbouring parish of Bremhill. At the southern end of the priory there is another track that leads to the village of Bradenstoke (Clack).

This communication pattern is significant, since it suggests the possible bounds of the precinct. None of the tracks from the valley, for example, lead directly to Bradenstoke village, but instead are diverted in a dog-legged fashion around the priory. This dog-legged track probably formed the precinct boundary. In the north-west, the precinct probably extended as far as the parish boundary.



*Fig 3. Extract of Andrews' and Dury's map of 1773 showing the communication pattern in the vicinity of Bradenstoke*

Following the dissolution of the priory in 1539 most of the monastic buildings were demolished or destroyed. Buck's engraving, which was drawn from the north-west in 1752, shows that the only monastic buildings surviving at this time were the West Range, another building to the south of the West Range, and the tithe barn (fig 4). The West Range had been converted and was the principal residence at this time, as it may well have been since the dissolution. An estate plan commissioned some twenty years after Buck shows a stable block to the south-east as well as three other smaller buildings, one of which may form part of the present farmhouse (WRO 135/3; fig 5). There were three approaches to the house, the main one being along the present road beside with the tithe barn. The second route was diagonally across the field from Bradenstoke, whilst the third was from the south-west. The gardens lay to the south of the West Range and appear as a series of formal, geometrically laid out walks.



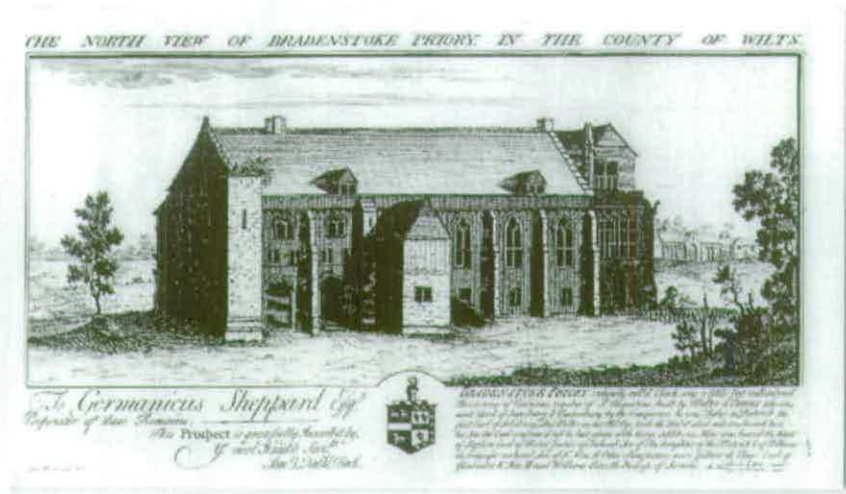


Fig 4. Buck's 1752 engraving of Bradenstoke

The present farmstead was built between the late-18th and mid-19th century. A date stone in the north-west elevation of Abbey Farm would suggest that it was built in 1780 (NMR 97/3474, AA97/7216). This building also incorporates three medieval mullioned windows; two are positioned on the north-west elevation, whilst the third is on the south-west (*ibid.*; NMR 97/3474, AA97/7217). The date stone on the barn to the north of the farmhouse suggests a date of construction of 1846 (NMR 97/3474, AA97/7214).

The extent of the Inner Court, which contained the guest accommodation, granary, and other administrative buildings, could not be determined from the earthwork survey, but probably lay to the south and south-west of the priory. The Outer Court, the economic base of the priory which contained the agricultural and industrial buildings, probably extended across the plateau and included the tithe barn; it covered an area of 3ha. The walling to the south-east of (B) may be associated with the Outer Court. The pond (B) is clearly post-dissolution, although the out-flow in the north-west utilises a medieval outflow; the pond was also much smaller in the late-18<sup>th</sup> century (WRO 135/3; fig 5). The remainder of the precinct extended down the escarpment and was probably pasture.



Fig 5. Acopy of the 1772 estate map (WRO135/3)

Since the Dissolution, Bradenstoke was owned by a succession of aristocracy and lesser gentry. Whether they were ever resident, or whether they just had tenants for much of the time is unclear. Nevertheless, it seems inconceivable, given the landscape setting, and the fashions of the time with gardens forming an integral extension to the house, that those who lived at Bradenstoke would not have wished, or at least attempted, to emulate their social peers, and lay out gardens. The principal features in the field to the north-west are gardens overlying ridge-and-furrow; these include the two possible canals sited at right-angles to one another. There are also four possible pillow mounds; three are longitudinal in outline, whilst the fourth is circular. Significantly, this field was known as 'Lower and Upper Coneger' in the late-18<sup>th</sup> century (*ibid.*). These mounds were probably symbolic as well as functional, particularly since the longitudinal mounds are all orientated north-east/south-west. Elsewhere, Stocker (1996) has demonstrated the importance of the religious symbolism associated with pillow mounds, coupled with their orientation or place within the precinct and Bradenstoke may be yet one further example. These mounds probably date to either the later medieval or early post-medieval period.

It is also significant that the priory is sited where there are abundant springs, one of which was a holy well (Walters 1928, 160) not only from purely practical reasons, but also for their religious symbolism with water flowing from the earth.

Despite the slumping on the escarpment there are traces of a formality in the ponds to suggest that they may have originally formed part of a water garden. The late 18<sup>th</sup> century estate plan shows three ponds converging to form a single, larger pond, before flowing further down the slope. The view from the galley walk along the top of the West Range would have provided a spectacular panorama of the gardens and the Avon valley beyond. From the garden the house would appear to rise majestically to the sky. The water garden would have been just one element of a 'walk' from the house, along the escarpment by way of the terrace-way towards Clack Mount.

Clack Mount, in its present form, is also clearly a garden feature. It is first mentioned in 1310 (Gover *et al* 1939, 271) although Grundy suggests that it was a feature in a Saxon charter dating to 850 (Grundy 1919, 167). Morphologically it appears as a moated site, with a probable fish pond on the southern side and the outlet through the sluice on the north-west side. Whether there were any structures on the island is uncertain; however, it now appears to be a prospect, probably dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century, and would have provided an ideal resting place during a perambulation.

## METHODOLOGY

The earthwork survey was carried out over a period of nine days and involved an closed traverse of eleven stations. A Total Station instrument was used to establish the survey framework and points of detail, together with geographical features such as fence boundaries and buildings. Taped offsets from the control framework were then used to record the archaeological detail. Depiction of the priory's West Range is based on the OS 1:10,000 map since detailed archaeological survey was impracticable due to safety issues, thick vegetation, and fallen masonry. An architectural survey is to be undertaken in the near future.

In addition to the earthwork survey a further two days were spent on limited documentary research at the Wiltshire Record Office at Trowbridge and the library of the Wiltshire Archaeological Society in Devizes.

Air photographs of the area, held at the National Monuments Record Centre (NMRC), were examined for any additional archaeological features (see Annex A for details). The site photographs are deposited, together with the site archive, at the NMRC.

#### Acknowledgements

RCHME would like to express their thanks to Mr Davis, the owner of Bradenstoke Priory, for allowing access to the site.



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## AIR PHOTOGRAPHS

A cover search of available AP's was carried out in the area of the priory and Clack Mount. Twenty-one photographs were identified as being of relevance to the site.

106G/UK/1416, 4251-4253 dated 14 Apr 46  
 106G/UK/1415, 4373-4374 dated 14 Apr 46  
 225D/UK846, 1-4 dated 8 Dec 40  
 225D/UK846, 1-4 dated 8 Dec 40  
 225C/UK845/1, 2 & 6 dated 12 Dec 40  
 OS/74253, 356 dated 14 Oct 74  
 ST 9979/1 ST 998792, CCC5208/04990 dated 19.10.32  
 ST 9979/2 ST 996790, CCC 5208/04991 dated 19.10.32  
 ST 9979/3 ST 997793, CCC 5211/F130 dated 11.8.32  
 ST 9979/4 ST 999794, CCC 5211/F131 dated 11.8.32  
 SF 5211 (CCC), F131 dated 11.8.32

## GROUND PHOTOGRAPHS


The following photographs were taken during the survey and are deposited at the NMRC:

97/3474 AA97/7212	Location view of Abbey Farm from south
97/3474 AA97/7213	Remains of building on Abbey farm, view from west
97/3474 AA97/7214	Datestone, 1846 on barn to east of abbey farmhouse
97/3474 AA97/7215	Re-used mullioned window on north elevation of Abbey farmhouse
97/3474 AA97/7216	Re-used mullioned window on north elevation of Abbey farmhouse
97/3474 AA97/7217	Reused window south elevation of Abbey farmhouse
97/3474 AA97/7218	View along South walk towards West Range
97/3474 AA97/7219	South elevation of West Range
97/3474 AA97/7220	Undercroft, view from east
97/3474 AA97/7221	Undercroft, detail of column and vaulting
97/3474 AA97/7222	Undercroft, view from west
97/3474 AA97/7223	Remains of north-east corner of West Range
97/3474 AA97/7224	View from priory looking north
97/3474 AA97/7225	Location view of priory from south-west
97/3474 AA97/7226	Site of possible fish pond to north-east of priory
97/3474 AA97/7227	Location view of Clack Mount from south-west
97/3474 AA97/7228	Clack Mount view from south
97/3474 AA97/7229	WW11 pill box to east of Clack Mount
97/3474 AA97/7230	Clack Mount, view from east
97/3474 AA97/7231	Clack Mount, view from north

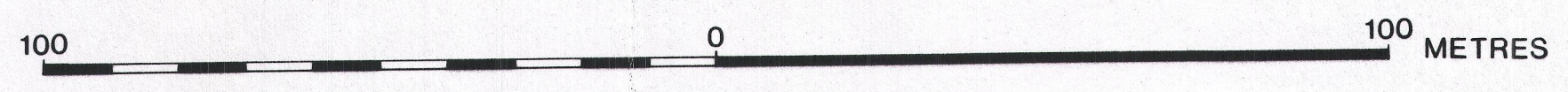


# BRADENSTOKE



 AREAS OF DISTURBANCE

 RCHM  
ENGLAND







*The National Monuments Record contains  
all the information in this report – and more:  
original photographs, plans old and new,  
the results of all RCHME field surveys, indexes of  
archaeological sites and historical buildings,  
and complete coverage of England  
in air photographs.*



*The Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England gathers information on England's heritage  
and provides it through the National Monuments Record*

*World Wide Web: <http://www.rchme.gov.uk>*

*National Monuments Record enquiries: telephone 01793 414600*

*National Monuments Record Centre, Great Western Village, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ*