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**An archaeological watching brief on  
St Blaise Centre, Boxgrove,  
West Sussex**

**NGR: SU 90750753**

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**Report to Boxgrove Parish Council**

**December 1999**

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### **Summary statement**

An archaeological watching brief was requested by James Kenny, archaeological adviser to Chichester District Council, prior to the building of a new community centre at Boxgrove on the site of a former scout hut. The site is about 100m to the NW of Boxgrove Priory Church, an early 12th century Benedictine foundation. A previous evaluation of the site had recorded slight evidence for medieval occupation on the site (Currie 1996). Douglas Briggs Partnership are the architects commissioning the archaeological work on behalf of the local parish council. The work was carried out by C K Currie MIFA and Neil Rushton MA of CKC Archaeology (IFA Registered Archaeological Organisation no. 1) on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> December 1999.

Much of the archaeology on the site seemed to have been removed or disturbed around the time of the construction of the original scout hut. This archaeology must have been fairly ephemeral as there was no evidence of residual materials on the site. At the west end of the site, a linear cut, interpreted as a boundary ditch, was located. This was aligned north-south, and was just inside the present boundary between the development site and a property called the 'Priory Gate'. No dating was found for this ditch, which was estimated as being over 3m wide and up to 1m deep. It was uncertain if it represented a medieval monastic boundary, or a later post-medieval subdivision of the former precinct. It is hoped that, now that the course of the feature is known, it will be encountered again, with better dating evidence, when a second watching brief is undertaken to bring the services from the main road to the new community hall.

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## **An archaeological watching brief at St Blaise Centre, Boxgrove, West Sussex (SU 90750753)**

This report has been written based on the format suggested by the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (Birmingham, 1994). The ordering of information follows the guidelines given in this document, although alterations may have been made to fit in with the particular requirements of the work.

### **1.0 Introduction**

An archaeological watching brief was requested by James Kenny, archaeological adviser to Chichester District Council, prior to the building of a new community centre at Boxgrove on the site of a former scout hut. The site is about 100m to the NW of Boxgrove Priory Church, an early 12th century Benedictine foundation. A previous evaluation of the site had recorded slight evidence for medieval occupation on the site (Currie 1996). Douglas Briggs Partnership are the architects commissioning the archaeological work on behalf of the local parish council. The work was carried out by C K Currie MIFA and Neil Rushton MA of CKC Archaeology (IFA Registered Archaeological Organisation no. 1) on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> December 1999.

The site is situated on the eastern edge of a residential area to the west of Boxgrove Priory at approximately SU 90750753. The priory site itself stands on the eastern edge of the village of Boxgrove, adjacent to farmland. The site is near the northern edge of the Sussex Coastal Plain, close to the junction between clay and sandy soils to the south and chalky soils to the north. Gravel deposits from a former raised beach can be found locally intermixed. The site is essentially rural, with some minor modern development to the east.

The present remains of the priory include the 12th century choir and crossing of the monastic church incorporated into the parish church. To the north and west of this are the ruins of the former nave, chapter house, and a building in English Heritage Guardianship known as the 'Guest House'. It is suspected that other monastic remains could exist buried nearby.

### **2.0 Historical background**

At the time of Domesday, Boxgrove was held by one William of Earl Roger. Before the Norman Conquest it had been a royal estate (Crook 1953, 142). It may have been an important religious centre even then, as Domesday records that there were 'clerks of the church' within the manor (Mothershill 1976, 11.102). This suggests the possibility of a secular college of canons here before the foundation of the Benedictine priory in 1105 by Robert de Haye (Salzman 1907, 56).

The priory itself was originally a small cell of Lessay Abbey in France, but it gradually grew to become an independent monastery by the 14th century. Its growth was assisted by the marriage of its founder's heiress into the powerful St. John family. These added to the priory's lands, and were probably instrumental in encouraging other local landowners to do likewise. By 1230 the priory had expanded to support 19 monks, and its gross value was

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recorded as being £185-19-8d per annum in 1535 (ibid.). At the Dissolution, the church was saved from destruction to become the parish church by the intervention of Thomas West, Lord de la Warr. He was a wealthy patron who is still commemorated by the ornate de Warr Chantry in the church.

West was also responsible for saving an unknown building known as the 'founder's building' from destruction. It is possible that this may have been the ruined building known today as the 'Guest House' (op. cit. 57-59). A survey conducted in 1569-70 shows that a number of outbuildings of the former priory still survived at this date. This records:

'Md the Scyte of the late Pryorie walled round about wth bricke and stone with divers ruynous houses viz: one employed for A Brewhouse, one for A Barne to laie the Tythes growinge uppon the demeanes and tennants londe, one stable for xxtie Geldings, one Dovehouse wh is letten to Sr Thomas Palmer in charge for iijl yerely rent, certain rowmes above and under where may be made wth some paynes-taking CC quarters of malte yerely and chambers sufficient to laie and kepe ye same. But there is no Cestrall to steep the Barly, yet one kyll to dry malte, whereuppon may be dried v combes at one tyme, and that daye by daye consequently. And there ys one well thereunto adioyninge of v Fadome deepe wch serveth by pypes under the Grounde' (Peckham 1920, 1-2).

There are further drawings of the ruins by Buck (1737), Grose (1761), and Grimm (1781-82) that seem to show other structures to the west of the present ruins. At least some of these seem to have been associated with a post-medieval house on the site of the monastic frater. It is thought that this building was demolished c. 1780 (ibid, 18-19). It is not known where the precinct wall described in the Elizabethan survey was situated, but the present road to the west of the church is thought to have been the original north-south village street. It is unlikely that the precinct extended beyond this road. There are occasional pre-1700 houses surviving along this street (Crook 1953, 141) that might suggest that early domestic remains may survive as well as the possible priory site extending over the proposed development. The cartulary for Boxgrove Priory indicates that there were a number of houses in the village near the priory in the medieval period (Fleming 1960).

### **3.0 Strategy**

The work followed guidelines laid down by the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard & guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (Birmingham, 1994). The work will also conform to the *Code of Conduct* of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and any other principles required by that body.

1. An archaeological presence was maintained during the digging of the foundations of the new building, but this did not include demolition of the scout hut previously on the site. Furthermore, works to install services are presently being negotiated with English Heritage, owners of the site access. Until this is resolved these further groundworks can not be undertaken. It is proposed that they are dealt with under a separate piece of work.

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2. The groundworks were carried out under the supervision of two experienced archaeologists. Where possible the contractor adopted groundwork methods which maximised the recognition and recovery of archaeological material.
3. Where features of archaeological interest were encountered, the groundworkers gave the archaeologists proper access to excavate and record those features according to the standards laid down by the Project Design for the works (Currie 1999).
4. The archaeologist was given reasonable time to complete the recording of each discovery. Archaeological recording was undertaken in such a way that the groundworkers could continue with other tasks while the recording was in progress.
5. The works were personally supervised on site by a full Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (MIFA) with the appropriate council-validated Area of Competence (Excavation).
6. Significant archaeological features were hand-excavated.
7. Features were recorded in plan and by sections at a scale of 1:20. The trenches were recorded stratigraphically, according each context with a separate number. All features were recorded by monochrome and colour photography, using appropriate scales.
8. Modern finds were not retained, or post-medieval brick and tile and oyster. No earlier finds were made in this instance.
9. A metal detector was used on the spoil heaps generated by the excavations to aid the recovery of metal finds.

#### **4.0 Results**

When the archaeologists arrived on site, much of the topsoil had been removed. It was unclear whether this was during the clearance of demolition rubble from the removal of the former scout hut that had previously been on the site, or if the site had been levelled earlier during the construction of the scout hut. It was suspected that it was largely the latter. Therefore the starting point for the excavation was rather haphazard, with topsoil and subsoil surviving in some areas, but not in others. This resulted in only the more substantial features cut into undisturbed chalky layers surviving.

For the most part both the topsoil and subsoils were very shallow, less than 0.3m in places, before undisturbed chalky clays were encountered. Over much of the site, therefore, excavation started in undisturbed soils, the top 0.3m often having been already removed during previous work on the site, as indicated above. It was also noticed that there were a number of large pits cut into the ground that were filled with modern rubbish. This rubbish included much plastic mixed in with builders' rubble, suggesting the rubble was often dumped in large heavy-duty plastic bags. The larger areas of this dumping tended to be outside the footprint of the old scout hut, thereby causing serious disturbance over the areas

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not previously levelled to make the hut itself. This activity resulted in very little surviving on the site undisturbed, and only one feature (contexts 09/18) of any significance was recovered at the west end of the site.

Nonetheless, this feature was quite large, and of some potential interest. It was seen within three different interconnecting arms of the foundations, forming the west end of a rectangle. These arms were numbered trenches 1 to 3 (see fig. 2). This feature was a linear ditch, aligned north-south across the far west end of the site. This was just inside the present boundary between the development site and a large private house known as Priory Gate. The ditch followed the approximate line of the western foundation of the new hall. It was shown not to be a modern feature by the fact that it was sealed beneath later features, which were themselves cut through by a modern cut (context 10).

The ditch was 0.9m deep in places (about 1.2m below the present ground surface), but was probably no wider than the average field ditch when first dug. This was shown by the fact that although it reached the bottom of the trench on its east side, it could be seen to be rising upwards across the width of the western foundation trench. This latter was given the designation 'trench 2', and was an average of 0.8m wide. It was unlikely, therefore, that the ditch was much more than 3m wide across its top, if one considers that its east edge, seen in section in trenches 1 and 3, was sharply cut. The width between the ditch's east edge and the west end of the foundation trenches was 2m in trench 1, and about 1m in trench 3. This discrepancy was due to the new hall not being aligned exactly on a N-S axis, whereas the ditch did seem to be, thereby making the ditch cut across the site on a slight diagonal. The fill was a brown clay loam (contexts 03/16), containing occasional gravel stones and chalk. There were no finds made within it, the only anthropological evidence being occasional fragments of charcoal and two fragments of oyster shell (not retained).

In the NW corner (trench 3), the ditch was overlain by a series of thin layers. The lowest of these was a layer of red clay (context 14), about 0.08m thick. It was uncertain if this was a natural clay or whether it had been burnt. However, there were no traces of charcoal or any other human artefacts found within it. Above this was a very thin layer of dark grey loam (context 13), followed by a surface made of stone or burnt clay slabs/tiles (context 12). The latter must have been large, as they could not be removed from the section. Scrapping them with a trowel failed to determine their exact material, other than it was very hard and unyielding. It was thought therefore that they were likely to have been of stone. This surface was interpreted as having been a former garden path. There was over 0.5m of topsoil over the top of them (context 02), but this was probably modern soil displaced by modern dumping known to have happened nearby.

Just to the east of the ditch cut (contexts 03/18) in trench 3 was a substantial modern pit (context 10). This cut through contexts 12, 13 and 14, and was backfilled with tile rubble and heavy-duty plastic in a loam matrix (context 11). It was thought that displacement from this pit resulted in the deep topsoil over the conjectured stone path (context 14), which had probably been on a former ground surface. The pit (context 10) was over 1.2m deep and 1.6m wide at the top. It did not extend right across the width of trench 3, as could be seen from the adjoining section of the trench.

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In trench 1, a similar pit was cut deep into undisturbed soils just to the east of the older ditch (contexts 03/18). This pit (context 07) was over 1m deep, and 1.95m wide across the top. It was filled by a friable grey loam (context 08). Although covered by a layer of subsoil (context 01), this was thought to be the result of soil movement firstly during levelling to make the scout hut, and then during the recent demolition of that hut. There were no finds within this pit, but it was not thought to be of any great antiquity, although later disturbance has made this opinion uncertain.

Nowhere else were any features of archaeological interest recorded. The foundations of the scout hut itself were of brick, extending to a depth of about 0.4m. Beneath the former building, the soils seemed to come straight down onto to undisturbed chalky clay, as if the subsoils and topsoil had been removed in making the building. Outside the present footprint, just to the NW of the 1996 evaluation trench, a very large and deep pit was found. This was full of modern rubble and plastic. That part of this feature seen extended across the full width of the foundation trench, was 1.4m or more deep, and that part seen was at least 4m in length. It is possible that the edge of this feature had been just picked up in the west edge of the 1996 evaluation trench, as this side had contained what was interpreted as modern disturbance (Currie 1996).

## **5.0 Discussion**

It would seem that much of this site had been disturbed before the present watching brief commenced. This was because of a combination of factors. The major one of these was probably the construction of the scout hut. This seems to have been done by levelling the ground to begin with, thus removing any ephemeral features that may have existed within the shallow soils on this site. Outside of the footprint of the scout there also appears to have been some pit digging to dump builders' rubble and other rubbish. This was also probably associated with the building of the scout hut. It is quite possible that the very large modern pit found near the 1996 evaluation trench was the result of the removal of a mature tree. The subsequent root hole was then possibly enlarged and used to dump builders' materials.

It is possible that the ground clearance resulting from the demolition of the scout hut also contributed to the removal of any residual archaeology left on the site. The 1996 evaluation trench had shown that the archaeological stratigraphy above the undisturbed chalky clay here to be extremely shallow. This trench had recovered little more than 0.35m of topsoil and subsoil before undisturbed clay was reached. Those features that were found within this trench were of an ephemeral nature, and generally no more than another 0.1m deeper the lowest disturbed subsoil levels. Such shallow archaeology could have easily been removed by the previous 20<sup>th</sup>-century activities on the site.

Perhaps the only archaeological feature of significance was a linear ditch at the west end of the site. Where seen this extended over 7m in length, with a minimum width of 2m. Judging from the way the bottom was sloping upwards, and the sharp east side of the feature, it was unlikely that the feature was much more than 3m total width. This suggests that it was a typical boundary ditch, not unlike a common field ditch.

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Its situation, underneath what appears to be a garden path of unknown date, suggests it was probably at least early post-medieval in date. Unfortunately it can not be stated with certainty that it is medieval. Its north-south alignment puts it parallel with the cloister ranges of the nearby priory. It may have formed an earlier boundary of the property known as 'Priory Gate'. The name itself is indicative, but would the original priory gate have been on the east or west side of this property? If it was on the east side then it suggests that this boundary ditch is the medieval priory precinct boundary. However, it is more likely that the gate faced out on to the village street, thus putting it on the west side of the 'Priory Gate' property boundary. In that case, the ditch discovered here would either be an internal monastic boundary, or an earlier post-medieval boundary subdividing the former precinct. At present it is not possible to say which of these possibilities, if either, fits the truth.

A watching brief by the Central Archaeology Service in 1993 recovered evidence for ditch like features in the road to the north of the present development site. There are two possibilities that could link up with the ditch found here. The 1993 features were designed provisionally as medieval, although the evidence for this date was little more than guesswork (Crane 1993). Yeakell and Gardener's map of the area *c.* 1779 (Margary 1970) shows the development site is mainly within a blank area between a number of buildings that are no longer present. It is possible that the west side of the present site was partly under some buildings shown on the west side of the blank area, but there was no trace of these found during the watching brief. It is difficult to reconcile the boundary ditch with the information on this map, and so one might assume it had been backfilled before the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

It is to be hoped that when the second watching brief on the services is undertaken that the continuation of the ditch will be cut through again, and that some dating material can be recovered. At present, the lack of finds from the ditch might suggest it was dug across a rather empty site. This might suggest it was an early internal monastic boundary, rather than a later post-medieval feature. If the latter, one might expect some residual finds in the fill. Nevertheless, the lack of residual finds from the site generally might suggest that the lack of finds should not be considered indicative of either date.

## **6.0 Conclusions**

Much of the archaeology on the site seemed to have been removed or disturbed around the time of the construction of the original scout hut. This archaeology must have been fairly ephemeral as there was no evidence of residual materials on the site. At the west end of the site, a linear cut, interpreted as a boundary ditch, was located. This was aligned north-south, and was just inside the present boundary between the development site and a property called the 'Priory Gate'. No dating was found for this ditch, which was estimated as being over 3m wide and about 1m deep. It was uncertain if it represented a medieval monastic boundary, or a later post-medieval subdivision of the former precinct. It is hoped that, now that the course of the feature is known, it will be encountered again, with better dating evidence, when a second watching brief is undertaken to bring the services from the main road to the new community hall.

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## **7.0 Recommendations**

The second watching brief bringing the services to the hall should pay particular attention to the recovery of information to date the ditch found during this present exercise. There is the potential that this ditch could prove to be an important boundary, possibly outlining either the limit of the priory precinct or an internal subdivision. Such features are not often recorded on monastic sites, and it is imperative that the greatest care is taken by the groundworkers to allow the future monitoring archaeologists to have the opportunity to excavate this feature fully by hand.

## **8.0 Archive**

The archive for this work will be deposited with Chichester Museum Services. Copies of the report were lodged with the client, the Planning Department of Chichester District Council, the West Sussex County Council Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), and the National Monuments Record in Swindon, Wiltshire.

## **9.0 Acknowledgements**

Sincere thanks are given to all those involved with this project. In particular, Philip Linsell of Douglas Briggs Partnership, the architects for the site, for supplying plans and liaison with the building contractors of site. James Kenny, the Chichester District Archaeologist, is thanked for monitoring the site, providing advice on procedures, and a copy of the Central Excavation Service 1993 watching brief.

## **10.0 References**

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W D Peckham, 'The conventual buildings of Boxgrove Priory', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, LXI (1920), 1-19

L F Salzman, 'The priory of Boxgrove' in W Page (ed.), *The Victoria History of the County of Sussex*, vol. 2, London, 1907, pp. 56-60

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### Appendix 1: list of contexts excavated

Context No.	Description
01	Loamy clay layer (Munsell Colour 10YR 5/2), trench 1, undated
02	Clay loam layer (Munsell Colour 10YR 3/2), trench 1, post-medieval
03	Clay loam fill of cut 09 (Munsell Colour 10YR 3/4), trench 1, medieval/early post-medieval?
04	Clay layer (Munsell Colour 10YR 6/8), trench 1, undisturbed
05	Chalk layer (Munsell Colour 10YR 8/1), trench 1, undisturbed
06	Chalky clay layer (Munsell Colour 10YR 7/6), trench 1, undisturbed
07	Cut of pit-like feature, trench 1, post-medieval?
08	Clay loam fill of 07 (Munsell Colour 10YR 3/3), trench 1, post-medieval?
09	Ditch-like cut, trench 1, medieval/early post-medieval?
10	Cut of pit, trench 3, modern
11	Clay loam fill of pit 10 (Munsell Colour 10YR 3/2), trench 3, modern
12	Stone? slab surface, trench 3, post-medieval?
13	Clay loam layer (Munsell Colour 10YR 3/2), trench 3, post-medieval?
14	Clay layer (Munsell Colour 5YR 5/4), trench 3, undated
15	Clay layer (Munsell Colour 10YR 6/8), trench 3, undisturbed
16	Clay loam fill of cut 18 (Munsell Colour 10YR 3/4), trench 3, medieval/early post-medieval?
17	Chalk layer (Munsell Colour 10YR 8/1), trench 3, undisturbed
18	Cut of ditch like feature (same as 09), trench 3, medieval/early post-medieval?

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## Appendix 2: glossary of archaeological terms

**Archaeology:** the study of man's past by means of the material relics he has left behind him. By material relics, this means both materials buried within the soil (artefacts and remains of structures), and those surviving above the surface such as buildings, structures (e.g. stone circles) and earthworks (e.g. hillforts, old field boundaries etc.). Even the study of old tree or shrub alignments, where they have been artificially planted in the past, can give vital information on past activity.

**Artefacts:** any object made by man that finds itself discarded (usually as a broken object) or lost in the soil. The most common finds are usually pottery sherds, or waste flint flakes from prehistoric stone tool making. Metal finds are generally rare except in specialist areas such as the site of an old forge. The absence of finds from the activity of metal detectorists is not usually given much credibility by professional archaeologists as a means of defining if archaeology is present

**Baulk:** an area of unexcavated soil on an archaeological site. It usually refers to the sides of the archaeological trench.

**Burnt flint:** in prehistoric times, before metal containers were available, water was often boiled in pottery or wooden containers by dropping stones/flints heated in a fire into the container. The process of suddenly cooling hot stone, particularly flint, causes the stone to crack, and form distinctive crazed markings all over its surface. Finds of large quantities of such stone are usually taken as a preliminary indication of past human presence nearby.

**Context:** a number given to a unit of archaeological recording. This can include a layer, a cut, a fill of a cut, a surface or a structure.

**Cut:** usually used to mean an excavation made in the past. The 'hole' or cut existed in time as a void, before later being backfilled with soil. Archaeologists give a context number to the empty hole, as well as the backfilled feature (called the 'fill').

**Desk-based assessment:** an assessment of a known or potential archaeological resource within a specific land unit or area, consisting of a collation of existing written or graphic information, to identify the likely character, extent and relative quality of the actual or potential resource.

**Earthwork:** bank of earth, hollow, or other earthen feature created by human activity.

**Environmental evidence:** evidence of the potential effect of environmental considerations on man's past activity. This can range from the remains of wood giving an insight into the type of trees available for building materials etc, through to evidence of crops grown, and food eaten, locally.

**Evaluation:** a limited programme of intrusive fieldwork (mainly test-trenching) which determines the presence or absence of archaeological features, structures, deposits, artefacts

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or ecofacts within a specified land unit or area. If they are present, this will define their character, extent, and relative quality, and allow an assessment of their worth in local, regional and national terms.

**Hedgebanks:** banks of earth, usually with a ditch, that have been set up in the past on which is planted a stock-proof line of shrubs. There is written evidence that they were made from at least Roman times, but they are suspected as existing in prehistoric times.

**Lynchets:** bank of earth that accumulates on the downhill side of an ancient ploughed field as the disturbed soil moves down the slope under the action of gravity.

**Munsell colour:** an objective method of defining soil colour using a specially designed colour chart for soils. The reading defines hue (an objective description of colour; eg YR means yellow-red), value (darkness or lightness of the colour) and chroma (the greyness or purity of the colour). For example 10YR 3/2 is a dark grey-brown.

**Natural [layer]:** in archaeological reports, this is a layer that has been formed by natural process, usually underlying man-made disturbance.

**Period:** time periods within British chronology are usually defined as Prehistoric (comprising the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age), Roman, Saxon, Medieval and Post-medieval. Although exact definitions are often challenged, the general date ranges are as given below.

**Prehistoric** c. 100,000 BC - AD 43. This is usually defined as the time before man began making written records of his activities.

Palaeolithic or Old Stone Age 100,000 - 8300 BC

Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age 8300 - 4000 BC

Neolithic or New Stone Age 4000 - 2500 BC

Bronze Age 2500 - 700 BC

Iron Age 700 BC - AD 43

**Roman** AD 43-410

**Saxon** AD 410-1066

**Medieval** AD 1066-1540

**Post-medieval** AD 1540-present

**Pottery sherds:** small pieces of broken baked clay vessels that find their way into ancient soils. These can be common in all periods from the Neolithic onwards. They often find their way into the soil by being dumped on the settlement rubbish tip, when broken, and subsequently taken out and scattered in fields with farmyard manure.

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**Project Design:** a written statement on the project's objectives, methods, timetable and resources set out in sufficient detail to be quantifiable, implemented and monitored.

**Settlement:** usually defined as a site where human habitation in the form of permanent or temporary buildings or shelters in wood, stone, brick or any other building material has existed in the past.

**Site:** usually defined as an area where human activity has taken place in the past. It does not require the remains of buildings to be present. A scatter of prehistoric flint-working debris can be defined as a 'site', with or without evidence for permanent or temporary habitation.

**Sondage:** an arbitrary hole dug during archaeological excavation. Often dug after the main excavation is complete to quickly test for information that may be required to clarify points of the main excavation.

**Stratigraphy:** sequence of man-made soils overlying undisturbed soils; the lowest layers generally represent the oldest periods of man's past, with successive layers reaching forwards to the present. It is within these soils that archaeological information is obtained.

**Worked flint or stone:** usually taken to mean pieces of chipped stone or flint used to make prehistoric stone tools. A worked flint can comprise the tools themselves (arrowheads, blades etc.), or the waste material produced in their making (often called flint flakes, cores etc.).

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### **Summary statement**

An archaeological watching brief was requested by James Kenny, archaeological adviser to Chichester District Council, on the installation of services to the new community centre at Boxgrove (SU 9075 0753). This required a trench to be dug along the access road leading to the site of Boxgrove Priory, an early 12<sup>th</sup>-century Benedictine foundation. Previous trenching here, watched by the Central Excavation Service (English Heritage), suggested the presence of archaeological features. The architects, Douglas Briggs Partnership, commissioned the archaeological work on behalf of the local parish council. The work was carried out by C K Currie MIFA of CKC Archaeology between June 12<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> 2000.

A service trench was brought 57.5m from the village street to the St. Blaise Centre along an access road to Boxgrove Priory. The archaeology proved to be disappointing. For the most part the trench followed the disturbed line of an earlier water pipe. The section showed no archaeological features in the first 40m or so of the trench. Where not disturbed along this length, the subsoil showed only geological solution hollows cut into it.

Near the east end of the trench, an undisturbed section contained two possible features. One was a possible linear feature with a clean clay fill. No artefacts were recovered within the fill. This was not on the apparent line of a postulated ditch feature found in 1999. This alignment fell within the area disturbed by the earlier pipe trench. A second feature was a large pit, possibly of post-medieval date. The dating for this feature is also provisional, being based on small fragments of brick or tile. No residual pottery of any date beyond the very modern was observed.

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## **An archaeological watching brief on the installation of services to St Blaise Centre, Boxgrove, West Sussex (SU 9075 0753)**

This report has been written based on the format suggested by the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (Birmingham, 1994). The ordering of information follows the guidelines given in this document, although alterations may have been made to fit in with the particular requirements of the work.

### **1.0 Introduction**

An archaeological watching brief was requested by James Kenny, archaeological adviser to Chichester District Council, on the installation of services to the new community centre at Boxgrove. This required a trench to be dug along the access road leading to the site of Boxgrove Priory, an early 12<sup>th</sup>-century Benedictine foundation. Previous trenching here, watched by the Central Excavation Service (English Heritage), suggested the presence of archaeological features (Crane 1993). The architects, Douglas Briggs Partnership, commissioned the archaeological work on behalf of the local parish council. The work was carried out by C K Currie MIFA of CKC Archaeology between June 12<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> 2000.

The community hall is situated on the eastern edge of a residential area west of Boxgrove Priory at approximately SU 9075 0753. The access road is a gravel track leading from the main village street to the priory. The St Blaise Centre is about 30m east of the village street along that track, and about 100m NW of the former priory church, part of which is now the parish church. The priory site itself stands on the eastern edge of the village of Boxgrove, adjacent to farmland. The site is near the northern edge of the Sussex Coastal Plain, close to the junction between clay and sandy soils to the south and chalky soils to the north. Gravel deposits from a former raised beach can be found locally intermixed. The site is essentially rural, with some minor modern development to the east.

The present remains of the priory include the 12th century choir and crossing of the monastic church now used as the parish church. To the north and west of this are the ruins of the former nave, chapter house, and a building in English Heritage Guardianship known as the 'Guest House'. It is suspected that other monastic remains could exist buried nearby.

### **2.0 Historical background**

At the time of Domesday, Boxgrove was held by one William of Earl Roger. Before the Norman Conquest it had been a royal estate (Crook 1953, 142). It may have been an important religious centre even then, as Domesday records that there were 'clerks of the church' within the manor (Mothershill 1976, 11.102). This suggests the possibility of a secular college of canons here before the foundation of the Benedictine priory in 1105 by Robert de Haye (Salzman 1907, 56).

The priory itself was originally a cell of Lessay Abbey in France, but it gradually grew to become an independent monastery by the 14th century. Its growth was assisted by the marriage of its founder's heiress into the powerful St. John family. These added to the

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priory's lands, and were probably instrumental in encouraging other local landowners to do likewise. By 1230 the priory had expanded to support 19 monks, and its gross value was recorded as being £185-19-8d per annum in 1535 (ibid.). At the Dissolution, the church was saved from destruction to become the parish church by the intervention of Thomas West, Lord de la Warr. He was a wealthy patron who is still commemorated by the ornate de Warr Chantry in the church.

West was also responsible for saving an unknown building known as the 'founder's building' from destruction. It is possible that this may have been the ruined building known today as the 'Guest House' (op. cit. 57-59). A survey conducted in 1569-70 shows that a number of outbuildings of the former priory still survived at this date. This records:

'Md the Scyte of the late Pryorie walled round about wth bricke and stone with divers ruynous houses viz: one employed for A Brewhouse, one for A Barne to laie the Tythes growinge uppon the demeanes and tennants londe, one stable for xxtie Geldings, one Dovehouse wh is letten to Sr Thomas Palmer in charge for iijl yerely rent, certain rowmes above and under where may be made wth some paynes-taking CC quarters of malte yerely and chambers sufficient to laie and kepe ye same. But there is no Cestrall to steep the Barly, yet one kyll to dry malte, whereuppon may be dried v combes at one tyme, and that daye by daye consequently. And there ys one well thereunto adioyninge of v Fadome deepe wch serveth by pypes under the Grounde' (Peckham 1920, 1-2).

There are further drawings of the ruins by Buck (1737), Grose (1761), and Grimm (1781-82) that seem to show other structures to the west of the present ruins. At least some of these seem to have been associated with a post-medieval house on the site of the monastic frater. It is thought that this building was demolished c. 1780 (ibid, 18-19). It is not known where the precinct wall described in the Elizabethan survey was situated, but the present road to the west of the church is thought to have been the original north-south village street. It is unlikely that the precinct extended beyond this road. There are occasional pre-1700 houses surviving along this street (Crook 1953, 141) that might suggest that early domestic remains may survive as well as the possible priory site extending over the proposed development. The cartulary for Boxgrove Priory indicates that there were a number of houses in the village near the priory in the medieval period (Fleming 1960).

### **3.0 Strategy**

The work followed guidelines laid down by the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard & guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (Birmingham, 1994). The work will also conform to the *Code of Conduct* of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and any other principles required by that body.

1. An archaeological presence was maintained during the excavation of the service trench from the village street to the St. Blaire Centre.
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2. The groundworks were carried out under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist. Where possible the contractor adopted groundwork methods which maximised the recognition and recovery of archaeological material.
3. Where features of archaeological interest were encountered, the groundworkers gave the archaeologist proper access to excavate and record those features according to the standards laid down by the Project Design for the works (Currie 1999).
4. The archaeologist was given reasonable time to complete the recording of each discovery. Archaeological recording was undertaken in such a way that the groundworkers could continue with other tasks while the recording was in progress.
5. The works were personally supervised on site by a full Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (MIFA) with the appropriate council-validated Area of Competence (Excavation).
6. Significant archaeological features were hand-excavated where health and safety considerations allowed.
7. Features were recorded in plan and by sections at a scale of 1:20. The trenches were recorded stratigraphically, according each context with a separate number. All features were recorded by monochrome and colour photography, using appropriate scales.
8. Modern finds were not retained, or post-medieval brick and tile and oyster. No earlier finds were made in this instance.
9. A metal detector was used on the spoil heaps generated by the excavations to aid the recovery of metal finds.

#### **4.0 Results**

A narrow trench (0.6m) wide was excavated from the main village street along the gravel road leading to the priory. It was allocated as trench 4 to continue the sequence began during the watching brief on the foundations of the St. Blaise Centre undertaken in December 1999 (Currie 1999). The trench was 57.5m from the road to the manhole on the gravel road opposite the St. Blaise Centre. From the manhole it turned south through an area of modern disturbance recorded in the previous watching brief (Currie 1999). The trench was on the south side of the gravel road, on an E-W alignment, and an average of 1.4m from the property boundaries (a flint wall) on the south side of the road. It averaged over 1.5m deep, which was consistently found to be undisturbed soils.

For about 40m of this line, the trench followed a pre-existing water pipe trench. This meant that the archaeology in this section had already been removed. However observations in the sections could often be made in one side of the trench or the other that enabled the former stratigraphy of the original trench to be observed. For the first 47m of the trench no archaeological features were observed. Disturbed soils comprised only the upper 500-600mm

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of soil. This was made up of the gravel surface of the road, underlain by relatively undisturbed gravelly clay loam [context 19]. Initially what were thought to be features were observed cut into undisturbed soils below [contexts 20, 32], but on closer observation these were found to be solution hollows. Three examples were recorded [contexts 21, 24, 27]. All were filled with gravelly clay [contexts 22, 25, 27], containing no trace of human artefacts. Such features are common in the Boxgrove area, the local subsoils abounding in them.

Only two possible features were observed in the remainder of the trench. These were at the eastern end near the manhole where the services turned south towards the St. Blaise Centre. The first of these was 47m east of the village street. This was a deep cut [context 30] extending to at least 1.4m below the present surface (the depth to which the trench was cut). This cut through clean light brown clay [context 32], and was filled with a similar material [context 31], which had small quantities of flint and gravel mixed in with it. The latter were notably absent from the surrounding parent soil. The cut was 1.56m wide, and extended right through the trench.

The only other feature observed was a large cut [context 33] at the manhole junction. That portion recorded was at least 1.98m wide, extending to a depth of at least 1.3m. It was filled by a gravelly loamy clay. Rare brick/tile fragments were observed in the fill. A piece of plastic was also extracted from the section, although this could have been introduced as contamination by the machine bucket.

From the end of the earlier water pipe trench cut to the final manhole, disturbed soils were generally slightly deeper in this part of the trench than elsewhere. These extended to about 0.6m. Below the topsoil [context 19] was a layer, about 0.35m deep, of loamy soil which contained reasonable quantities of flint within it [context 35]. Although unmortared, this appeared to be part of a spread dump of this material, and not a natural deposit.

## **5.0 Discussion**

Observations made in 1993 (Crane 1993) led to the belief that there might be archaeological features along the line of the road. The results of the present work was, however, disappointing. The 1993 trench was on the north side of the road, possibly 2m north of the present trench. Much of the present trench was disturbed by a pre-existing water pipe, although the section showed the local subsoil to be much disturbed by geological solution hollows, a common feature of the immediate locality. This author recently recorded a number of such features during the investigation near the Aldingbourne Raised Beach 1km to the SE of the church with Dr. Martin Bates, a Quaternary specialist (Currie 1997, Bates 1997). It is not impossible that these have been misidentified as archaeological features in the past.

Feature 30 had a very clean fill with no artefacts observed within it. This may have been a natural feature such as a former site of a tree, although the edges were rather sharply defined for this. Superficially, this feature might be thought to be related to context 24 found in 1993, a possible ditch containing medieval pottery. This latter feature had lined up reasonably well with a linear feature observed during the 1999 watching brief. On this later occasion the feature was interpreted as a possible boundary ditch that may have marked the limit of the

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monastic precinct or an internal division within it (Currie 1999). However, the lack of finds failed to confirm this theory, and the nature of the feature must remain unresolved. During this present watching brief, the alignment between the 1993 and 1999 linear features passed through the area disturbed by the earlier water pipe trench (cut 29), with no comparable feature being seen in the disturbed sections. Feature 30 was too far to the east to be on this alignment, even allowing for inaccurate measuring during any of the three recording episodes.

The other feature observed [context 33] was a large pit. This did not seem to extend into the 1993 trench, although a large modern pit was observed a short distance to the south in 1999 (*ibid*). A piece of plastic observed in the section might suggest that this feature was an extension of modern disturbance found previously in this area. Again reservation about the nature of this find should be made on account of its small size, and the possibility of it being introduced by the machine bucket. This aside, brick/tile fragments in the fill might suggest a post-medieval date although these were too small to distinguish if they were brick or tile. It was particularly notable that there was no residual pottery seen anywhere in this trench. The only finds made in the topsoils were the occasional brick or tile fragments, and very rare oyster shells.

It would seem therefore that the trench was dug through an area largely outside that of activity within the monastic precinct. A possible ditch feature may relate to similar features found in 1993 and 1999, suggesting a boundary of possible monastic date.

## **6.0 Conclusions**

A service trench was brought 57.5m from the village street to the St. Blaise Centre along an access road to Boxgrove Priory. The archaeology proved to be disappointing. For the most part the trench followed the disturbed line of an earlier water pipe. The section showed no archaeological features in the first 40m or so of the trench. Where not disturbed along this length, the subsoil showed only geological solution hollows cut into it.

Near the east end of the trench, an undisturbed section contained two possible features. One was a possible linear feature with a clean clay fill. No artefacts were recovered within the fill. This was not on the apparent line of a postulated ditch feature found in 1999. This alignment fell within the area disturbed by the earlier pipe trench. A second feature was a large pit, possibly of post-medieval date. The dating for this feature is also provisional, being based on small fragments of brick or tile. No residual pottery of any date beyond the very modern was observed.

## **7.0 Archive**

The archive for this work will be deposited with Chichester Museum Services. Copies of the report were lodged with the client, the Planning Department of Chichester District Council, the West Sussex County Council Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), and the National Monuments Record in Swindon, Wiltshire.

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## 8.0 Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks are given to all those involved with this project. In particular, Philip Linsell of Douglas Briggs Partnership, the architects for the site, for supplying plans and liaison with the building contractors of site. James Kenny, the Chichester District Archaeologist, is thanked for monitoring the site, providing advice on procedures, and a copy of the report on the Central Excavation Service 1993 watching brief.

## 9.0 References

### 9.1 Original sources in print:

L Fleming (ed.), *The Chartulary of the Priory of Boxgrove*, Sussex Record Series, vol. 59, Lewes, 1960

J Mothershill, *Domesday Book, Sussex*, Chichester, 1976

### 9.2 Secondary sources

M R Bates, *A geoarchaeological evaluation of trench 4, Priory Farm, Crockerhill, West Sussex*, unpublished client report, 1997; issued as Appendix 1 in Currie 1997

P Crane, *Watching brief on the trench for the new services for Priory House and the English Heritage water supply at Boxgrove Priory, Boxgrove, East [sic] Sussex*, unpublished report by the Central Archaeology Service, CAS site 479, 1993

B Crook, 'Boxgrove', in L F Salzman (ed.), *The Victoria History of the County of Sussex*, vol. 4, London, 1953, pp. 140-50

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C K Currie, *Project design for an archaeological watching brief on the construction of the St Blaise Centre, Boxgrove, West Sussex*, unpublished report to Boxgrove Parish Council, 1999

C K Currie, *An archaeological watching brief at St. Blaise Centre, Boxgrove, West Sussex*, unpublished report to Boxgrove Parish Council, 1999

Institute of Field Archaeologists, *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs*, Birmingham, 1994

L F Salzman, 'The priory of Boxgrove' in W Page (ed.), *The Victoria History of the County of Sussex*, vol. 2, London, 1907, pp. 56-60

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**Appendix 1: list of contexts excavated**

Context No.	Trench	Description	Munsell Colour
19	T/4	clay loam layer	10YR 3/2
20	T/4	chalky clay layer	10YR 6/4
21	T/4	cut (solution hollow?)	
22	T/4	clay fill of 21	10YR 4/4
23	T/4	clay layer	10YR 4/4
24	T/4	cut (solution hollow?)	
25	T/4	clay fill of 24	10YR 4/4
26	T/4	cut (solution hollow?)	
27	T/4	clay fill of 26	10YR 4/4
28	T/4	cut of water pipe trench	
29	T/4	clay loam fill of 28	10YR 3/4
30	T/4	linear? cut	
31	T/4	clay fill of 30	10YR 6/6
32	T/4	clay layer	10YR 6/6
33	T/4	cut	
34	T/4	clay fill of 33	10YR 4/4
35	T/4	clay loam layer	10YR 4/2

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## Appendix 2: glossary of archaeological terms

**Archaeology:** the study of man's past by means of the material relics he has left behind him. By material relics, this means both materials buried within the soil (artefacts and remains of structures), and those surviving above the surface such as buildings, structures (e.g. stone circles) and earthworks (e.g. hillforts, old field boundaries etc.). Even the study of old tree or shrub alignments, where they have been artificially planted in the past, can give vital information on past activity.

**Artefacts:** any object made by man that finds itself discarded (usually as a broken object) or lost in the soil. The most common finds are usually pottery sherds, or waste flint flakes from prehistoric stone tool making. Metal finds are generally rare except in specialist areas such as the site of an old forge. The absence of finds from the activity of metal detectorists is not usually given much credibility by professional archaeologists as a means of defining if archaeology is present

**Baulk:** an area of unexcavated soil on an archaeological site. It usually refers to the sides of the archaeological trench.

**Context:** a number given to a unit of archaeological recording. This can include a layer, a cut, a fill of a cut, a surface or a structure.

**Cut:** usually used to mean an excavation made in the past. The 'hole' or cut existed in time as a void, before later being backfilled with soil. Archaeologists give a context number to the empty hole, as well as the backfilled feature (called the 'fill').

**Evaluation:** a limited programme of intrusive fieldwork (mainly test-trenching) which determines the presence or absence of archaeological features, structures, deposits, artefacts or ecofacts within a specified land unit or area. If they are present, this will define their character, extent, and relative quality, and allow an assessment of their worth in local, regional and national terms.

**Munsell colour:** an objective method of defining soil colour using a specially designed colour chart for soils. The reading defines hue (an objective description of colour; eg YR means yellow-red), value (darkness or lightness of the colour) and chroma (the greyness or purity of the colour). For example 10YR 3/2 is a dark grey-brown.

**Natural [layer]:** in archaeological reports, this is a layer that has been formed by natural process, usually underlying man-made disturbance.

**Period:** time periods within British chronology are usually defined as Prehistoric (comprising the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age), Roman, Saxon, Medieval and Post-medieval. Although exact definitions are often challenged, the general date ranges are as given below.

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**Prehistoric** c. 100,000 BC - AD 43. This is usually defined as the time before man began making written records of his activities.

Palaeolithic or Old Stone Age 100,000 - 8300 BC

Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age 8300 - 4000 BC

Neolithic or New Stone Age 4000 - 2500 BC

Bronze Age 2500 - 700 BC

Iron Age 700 BC - AD 43

**Roman** AD 43-410

**Saxon** AD 410-1066

**Medieval** AD 1066-1540

**Post-medieval** AD 1540-present

**Pottery sherds:** small pieces of broken baked clay vessels that find their way into ancient soils. These can be common in all periods from the Neolithic onwards. They often find their way into the soil by being dumped on the settlement rubbish tip, when broken, and subsequently taken out and scattered in fields with farmyard manure.

**Project Design:** a written statement on the project's objectives, methods, timetable and resources set out in sufficient detail to be quantifiable, implemented and monitored.

**Site:** usually defined as an area where human activity has taken place in the past. It does not require the remains of buildings to be present. A scatter of prehistoric flint-working debris can be defined as a 'site', with or without evidence for permanent or temporary habitation.

**Stratigraphy:** sequence of man-made soils overlying undisturbed soils; the lowest layers generally represent the oldest periods of man's past, with successive layers reaching forwards to the present. It is within these soils that archaeological information is obtained.

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**Archive list for St Blaise Centre, Boxgrove, West Sussex**

**Two archaeological watching brief undertaken by CKC Archaeology, December 1999-June 2000**

**Chichester Museum acc no 7499**

The archive contains:

1. Context sheets, numbers 01-35
2. Photographic recording sheets, total 1
3. Drawing record sheets, total 1
4. 1 pack of Black/White photographs with negatives.
5. 1 plastic sleeve containing colour slide film.
6. Original permatrace drawings, total 2 sheets.
7. Report with illustrations on December 1999 watching brief, 15 pages text, 4 figs.
8. Report with illustration on May/June 2000 watching brief, 12 pages text, 3 figs.
9. Correspondence and architect's plans concerning site, total 4 sheets.
10. Project Design, 7 sheets