

Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service

Monitoring Report

Abbey Farm, Rumburgh
(Planning Application W/18936)

SMR: RMB 012

SCCAS Report No. 2007/031

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Robert Atfield: Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service Field Team (Report)
Robert Carr: SCCAS Conservation Team (Brief and Specification)
John Newman: Field Officer/Contracts Manager
Richenda Goffin: Finds/Post Excavation Manager (Finds Report)

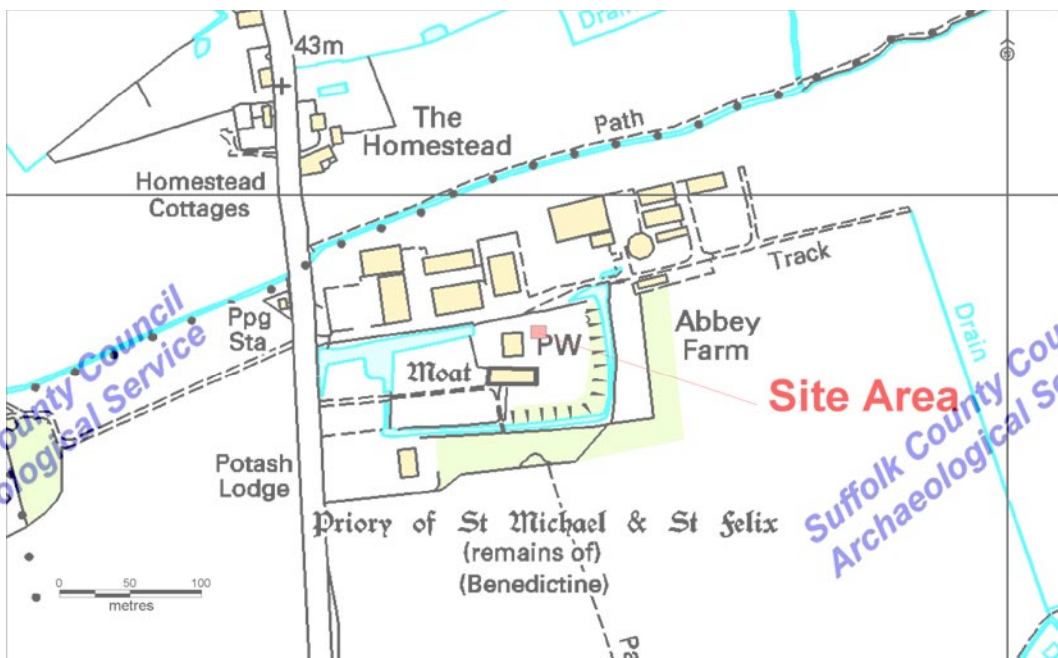
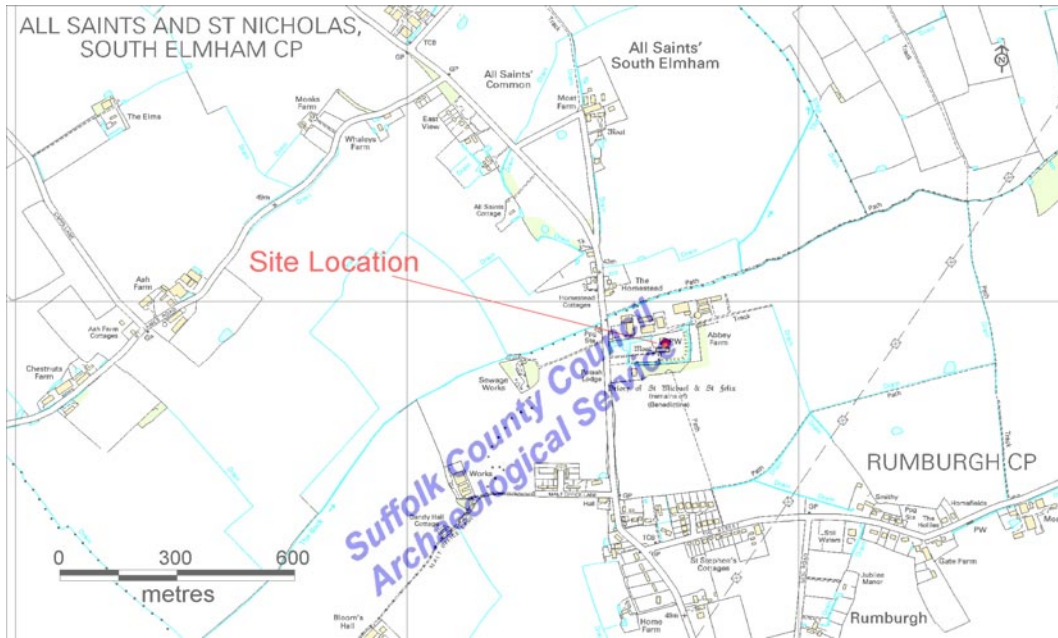
Summary

Archaeological monitoring was carried out at Abbey Farm, Rumburgh as a condition of planning application W/18936. The monitoring is funded by Mr. and Mrs D.A. Wharton (Abbey Farm); the contractors are R.G. Carter of Harleston, Norfolk. The site is centred on TM 3466 8189 where a small extension to the rear of the existing farmhouse is to be constructed. This entails digging around eleven linear metres of building footings within an area which was previously occupied by an outbuilding. An adjacent outbuilding is also to be rebuilt, but will be reconstructed using a raft foundation. The site lies within the north-eastern area of a moated complex which formed part of the Benedictine Priory of St Michael and St Felix, founded between 1064 and 1070. Two visits were made to the site, the first on the 26th September and the second on the 16th October 2006. During these monitoring visits, it was possible to observe the excavation of the footings and ground reduction as work progressed. All of the upcast soil and removed building materials were also made available for examination. The site had previously undergone a geophysical survey, the results of which indicated linear features running northwards across the garden area towards the site of the extension. The features revealed by the survey are thought to be part of a complex of rooms, which probably once formed the north-east corner of the claustral range. The development area lies only 19 metres from the church, which although altered, also represents a surviving part of the medieval priory.

The southern leg of the footing trench revealed the remains of a robbed north-south wall, together with a similar joining wall which was aligned east to west. Both walls were initially only revealed in section as a result of digging the footings for the extension, but both were subsequently seen in plan once further ground reduction took place. The

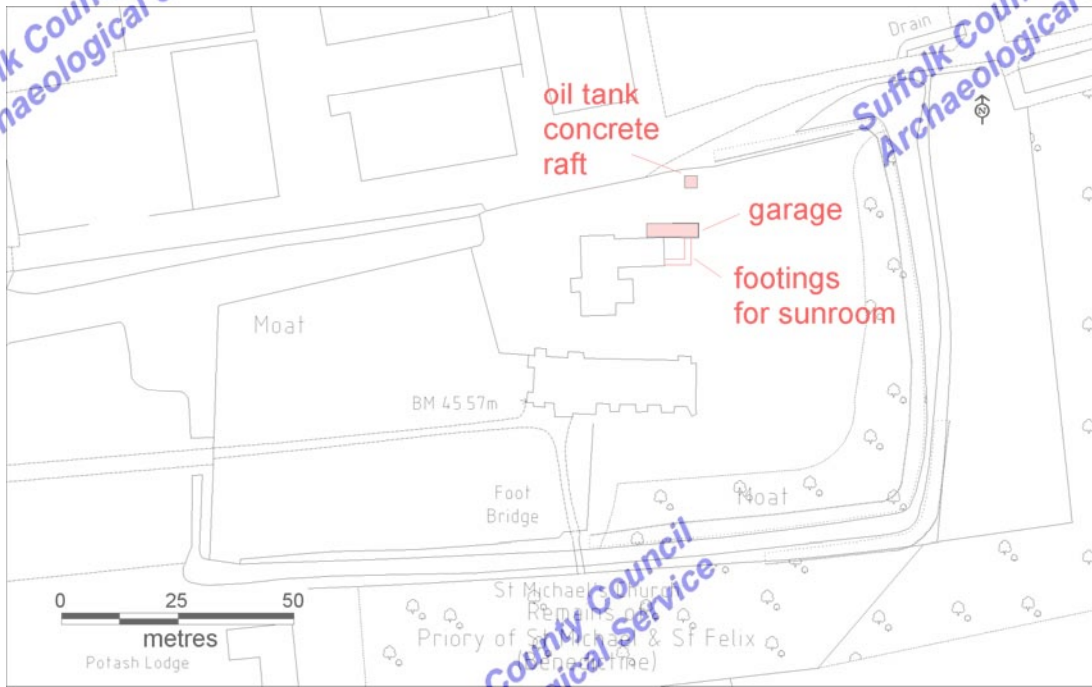
location of the north-south wall closely corresponds with traces indicated by the geophysical survey plot. Both walls appeared to have been systematically and thoroughly robbed. Only small lumps of flint and mortar remained which had probably been cast back into the robbing trench once the larger masonry had been reclaimed. The deposit was remarkably homogeneous and almost devoid of finds, except for a single sherd of eleventh–twelfth century pottery.

Figs. 1&2 Site Location



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Fig. 3 Areas where ground disturbance occurred

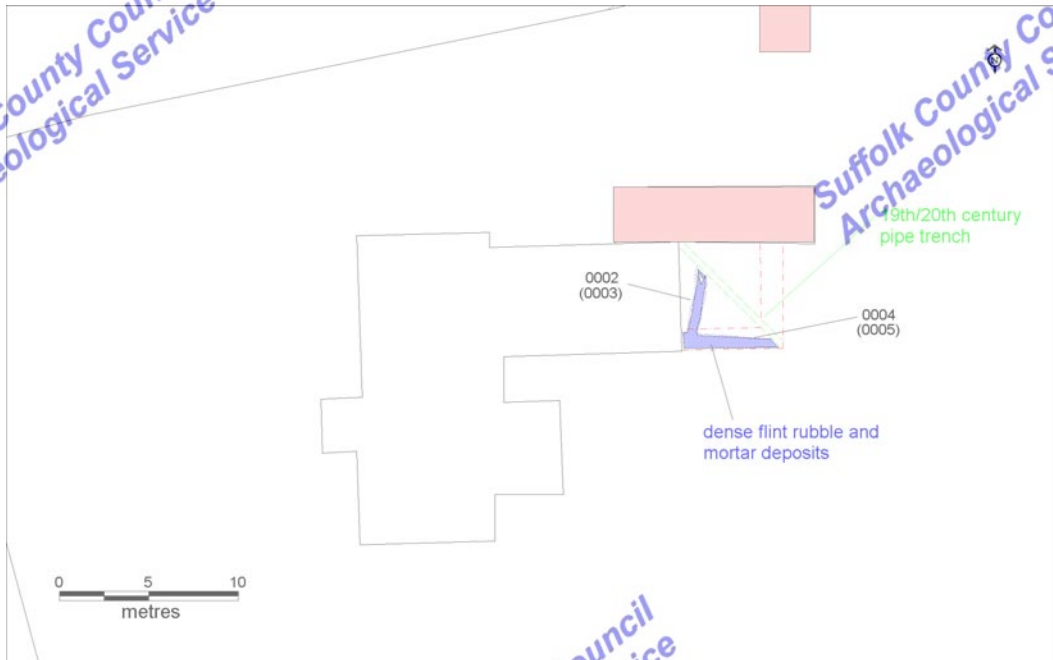


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Introduction

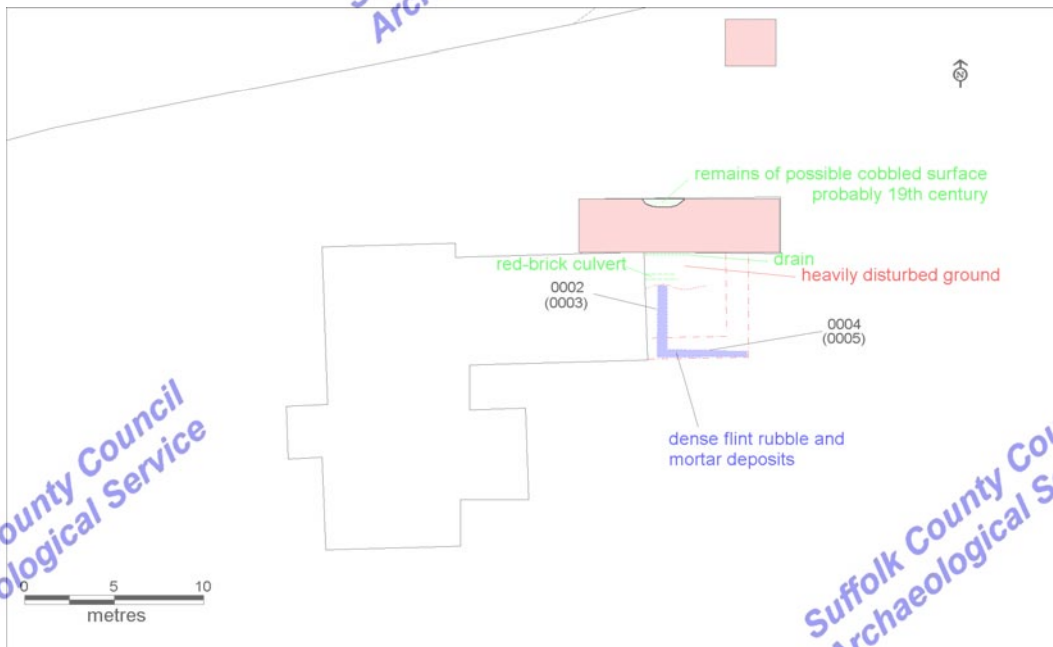
Abbey Farmhouse occupies a position immediately north of the parish church; both are enclosed within a large medieval moated enclosure (RMB 001). The church was originally designed to serve the Benedictine Priory; this, together with major alterations have resulted in a structure which today displays an unusual form and proportions. Abbey Farmhouse is Grade II listed and dates to the mid-sixteenth century (English Heritage, 2007). The house is timber-framed and was constructed over an area once occupied by part of the priory complex. The interval between the date when the priory was dissolved in 1528 and at least partially demolished to make way for the construction of the farmhouse must have been short; however, no trace of the priory buildings remain within the present house. Although little is known of the history of the priory a survey was carried out soon after the Dissolution which shows that the complex was of modest proportions, covering around 12,500 square feet. The priory was built around a rectangular cloister measuring 45feet east to west and 65feet north to south. On the south of the complex was the existing church and chancel; while to the north were the refectory and parlour, together with the solar above. To the west side, stood the main entrance and kitchen, with the Priors hall and guest bedrooms above. The east side of the complex held a buttery or cellar probably along with the sacristy, chapter house and slype. The church was the only building in the complex which had a lead roof, others were of slate, while structures such as outbuildings were thatched (Page, 1975:77-9).

Fig. 4 Site features at reduced level: 0.30m. below surface



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Fig. 5 Site features at reduced level: 0.50m. below surface (after layer 0006 was removed)



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Methodology

The geophysical survey was carried out within the garden areas of Abbey Farmhouse (see attached copy of plot). The high resistance readings recorded during the survey indicated that linear features, which probably represented wall foundations or rubble, ran in a northerly direction away from the church. At least one of these features were likely to continue into the proposed area of development and it was therefore likely that remains of one or more rooms which formed part of the claustral range would be disturbed (Carr, 2005). It was therefore decided to implement a programme of continuous monitoring in order to record or retrieve any archaeological features or finds which may be revealed. After an existing attached outbuilding had been demolished it was possible to clear the site, gradually lower the ground levels and excavate the new footing trenches within the footprint of the old structure. This was carried out in three phases: the ground level was reduced by 0.30m., allowing most of the demolition rubble and previous flooring material to be removed; secondly, the new footing trenches were dug using a small 360° tracked mini-digger fitted with a 1.3m. toothless bucket; finally, after recording was complete, the ground level was lowered a further 0.20m. to the formation level (see Figs. 3-5). All features were recorded using measured plan and section drawings and also photographed. All archaeological features, deposits and layers were issued with observable phenomenon numbers, which begin at 0001. All demolition rubble, soil layers and other deposits were retained in separate areas to allow thorough searching and retrieval of any available datable finds.

Results

Once demolition of the existing attached outbuilding (sunroom) had been completed, the flooring and associated foundations were removed to reveal a surface, which was 0.30m. below the original floor level. At this level, large amounts of rubble, tile fragments and building aggregate remained. However, a concentration of flint rubble and lime mortar was observed, spread around the south-west quarter of the site area. After some hand cleaning, it was possible to identify deep deposits of flint rubble (0003, 0005) within poorly defined trenches (0002, 0004) which ran north to south, with another branching off from west to east (see Fig.4). The flints were all under 100mm. in size, mostly broken and frequently with lime mortar attached. Large quantities of mortar fragments and mid-dark brown clayey loam made up the remainder of this deposit. The new building footing trenches were excavated along the south and east sides of the plot to a depth of around 1.40m.. Visibility was poor due to current and possibly long-term leakage from the farmhouse waste drainage. However, it was possible to determine the depth of the flint and mortar deposits along the west to east trench where they ranged from 0.75m. at the east end, increasing to 0.90m. in depth at the west end. Below the flint and mortar deposits was pale brown, virtually stone free clay to a depth of 0.40m.. A grey chalky clay lay below this layer, but was only seen briefly in the base of the trenches before flooding occurred; both of the clay deposits appeared to be natural in character. A further 0.20m. (layer 0006) was removed across most of the site down to the final formation level. This allowed clarification of the flint and mortar deposits within probable robbing trenches and also the extent of modern disturbance (see Fig.5). No bonded flint and mortar remained, but the course of the robbed walls could be reasonably

well determined. The robbing trenches which contained the flint and mortar deposits became less irregular and may indeed closely represent the remains of the original foundation trenches. However, only the northern edge of the east-west trench was exposed within the site area. The north-south robbing/foundation trench averaged around 0.60m. in width with steep sides and a depth of around 0.90m. from the present lawn/path surface. A large amount of relatively modern disturbance had occurred over most of the north-east half of the site including a number of drain trenches and a probable nineteenth century rubbish pit. The disturbance was so extensive, it was impossible to determine the limits of the north-south wall (0002), or the potential existence of further walls or returns.

An adjacent building to the north (garage) was subsequently demolished in order to allow rebuilding upon a raft foundation. A small area of cobbled surface was revealed which is almost certainly post-medieval in date (see Fig. 5). Only minimal ground reduction took place in the garage area and it was therefore not possible to investigate any medieval levels. During the period between the monitoring visits, a small raft or platform was constructed to the north of the main site area for a new oil tank (see Fig. 3). Around 0.5m. of soil was removed to allow for a foundation of rubble to be laid. One of the building contractors reported seeing a partially revealed concentration of flint rubble along the southern edge of the raft area, running east-west, very similar to those found on the main site.

The flint and mortar deposits were virtually devoid of any finds material. Only a single fragment of medieval pottery was found from the final mechanically stripped deposit (0006) which probably represents the level at which the walls were robbed. Ceramic building material was also collected from this layer, some of which is medieval (see Goffin: this report).

Conclusions

The evidence gained from this monitoring is useful in confirming the extent and orientation of part of the priory complex. However, it has not been possible to confirm the limits of the northern range. The possible fragment of wall observed during the construction of the raft to the north may indicate that the built complex extended further than has been suggested, or may simply represent the remains of a boundary wall. The close correspondence between evidence from the monitoring with that of the sixteenth century survey and the geophysical plot quite probably suggest that the robbed foundations represent the south and west walls of the priory parlour. However, the scarcity of datable finds prevent any possible speculation regarding phasing.

Robert Atfield
Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service (Field Team)
February 2007

Abbey Farm, Rumburgh (RMB 012): the finds

Richenda Coffin, October 2006.

Introduction

Finds were collected from two contexts, as shown in the table below.

OP	Pottery		CBM		Animal bone		Flint		Miscellaneous	Spotdate
	No.	Wt/g	No.	Wt/g	No.	Wt/g	No.	Wt/g		
0001			3	332	1	37	1	27	1 frag oyster shell	Med/early post med 11th-12th C
0006	1	12								
Total	1	12	3	332	1	37	1	27		

Pottery

A single fragment of medieval pottery was recovered from 0006, a demolition deposit associated with the robbing of the priory walls. It is hand-made with a grey core and reduced surfaces, with external sooting on the external surface. The fabric is sandy and contains sparse mica. The sherd is early medieval in date (11th-12th century).

Ceramic building material

Three fragments of unstratified roof tile were collected, two of which are medieval (13th-15th century). One of them is made from an estuarine clay fabric containing occasional calcareous inclusions and buff streaks. It is uneven in thickness and has been mortared on one surface. A second larger tile has the remains of a round nail hole. It is made from a coarser sandy fabric with occasional flint and chalk inclusions with some indications of straw impressions on the reverse. A third tile is made of a harder, fully oxidised fabric and is likely to be later in date.

Flint (Identifications by Colin Pendleton)

A single thin, irregular blade or long flake core was an unstratified find. Only a few blades or flakes had been removed. The core is made from unpatinated black flint with a small area of cortex at one end. It could be post-medieval and may represent knapped walling material.

Animal bone

A small unstratified fragment of the rib of a large mammal, probably bovine, was recovered, which has been deliberately cut at one end.

Discussion

The small quantity of finds submitted from the monitoring include a fragment of early medieval pottery which was probably associated with the 11th century priory. Some of the ceramic building material is also medieval, whilst a later tile may date to the Tudor period.

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Context List

OPNO	feature	component	identifier	description
0001	0001	0001	Unstrat. finds	Unstratified finds
0002	0002	0002	Cut of robbed trench	Cut of north to south wall trench (robbed)
0003	0002	0002	Fill of trench 0002	Fill of robbed trench 0002
0004	0004	0004	Cut of robbed trench	Cut of east to west wall trench (robbed)
0005	0004	0004	Fill of trench 0004	Fill of robbed trench 0004
0006	0006	0006	Demolition layer	Demolition layer: probably associated with robbing of walls 0002 and 0004

References

Carr, R. D., 2005 'Brief and Specification for Archaeological Monitoring: Abbey Farm, Rumburgh' Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, Conservation Team, Shire Hall, Bury St Edmunds.

English Heritage, 2007 Listed Buildings Online: 'Church of St. Michael and St. Felix (L.B.S. 282076); Abbey Farmhouse (L.B.S. 282075)' <http://lbonline.english-heritage.org.uk/BuildingDetailsForm.aspx?id>

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Page, W. (Ed.), 1975 *A History of the County of Suffolk, Volume 2*, Victoria County History.