

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING REPORT

AUDLEY END HOUSE, SAFFRON WALDEN (ESSEX HER ref. 402)

A REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING OF
THE EXCAVATION OF A SERVICE TRENCH

Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service Report No. 2009/071
OASIS Ref. suffolkc1-56057

Summary: Archaeological monitoring of the excavation of a service trench at Audley End House, Saffron Walden, Essex, was undertaken in February 2009. A single trench, c.11m long and 0.45m deep was excavated in an area to the north of the service wing. This revealed a layer of ash, coke and clinker with occasional fragments of red brick and lime mortar. No significant finds were recovered and no features were positively identified. Audley End House is recorded on the Essex County Historic Environment Record under the reference number 402. The archaeological monitoring was undertaken by the Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, Field Projects Team, who were commissioned and funded by English Heritage.

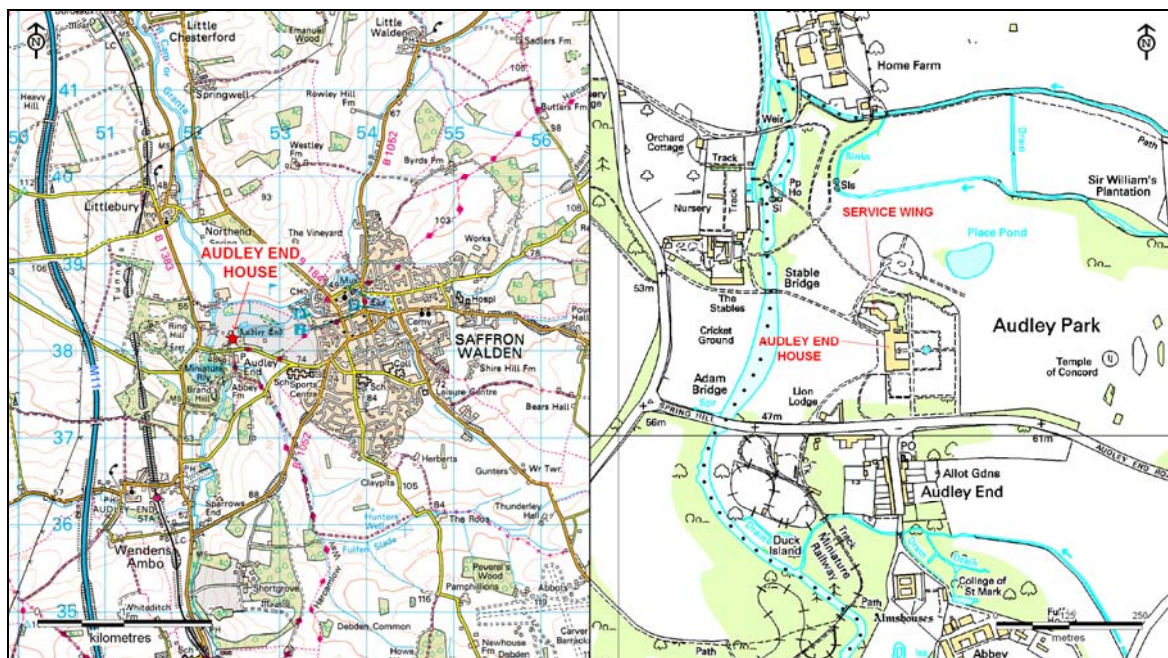


Figure 1: Location Plan

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Introduction

Archaeological monitoring of the excavation of a service trench within the grounds of Audley End House, Saffron Walden, Essex, was undertaken on the 16th February 2009.

Audley End House is a palatial Jacobean house built in the early seventeenth century on the site of a medieval monastery. During the latter half of the seventeenth century it was purchased and used as a palace by Charles II before being returned to the original family in the early eighteenth century. It has been remodelled and redesigned throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with a large proportion of the early house/palace having been demolished. Despite this, what remains is still a substantial house and it is set in a large formal park. It is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (ref. Essex 84) under the guardianship of the Secretary of State and is managed by English Heritage. The National Grid Reference for the approximate centre of the site is TL 5247 3814; for a location plan see figure 1.

A problem had been identified with the electricity supply to the site shop, located within the Service Wing of the house, and in order to solve this it was proposed to run a new supply into the building from a supply in the existing Information Centre on the north side of the Service Yard. This would entail the excavation of a short trench across the lawn and the roadway into the Service Yard to connect with an existing cable at the northwest corner of the Service Wing (see figure 2).

The Information Centre had been recently constructed and the Service Yard resurfaced. It was during these works that the existing electrical cable was severed and repaired. The recently discovered fault was believed to lie in the area of the repair and it was proposed to locate the repaired area and connect a new cable to the stub of the existing cable emerging from the Service Wing..

As a condition of the Scheduled Monument Consent the excavation of the trench was to be archaeologically monitored in order to record any significant deposits or features that may be revealed and to recover artefacts if necessary. This was undertaken by the Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, Field Projects Team, who were commissioned and funded by English Heritage. This monitoring event has been recorded on the OASIS online archaeological database, reference suffolkc1-56057.

Methodology

The monitoring was undertaken through observation of the trench during and after its excavation by the building contractors (Butler and Sons) to assess and record any significant features or deposits that may have been exposed. The resultant spoil was also examined for artefacts. The trench location and its depth were recorded and the revealed soil profile was noted. A small number of digital photographs were taken as part of the record of the works carried out (some of which have been reproduced as Plates I-V). A few fragments of building material (brick, etc.) were noted in the spoil although these were not retained. Had any significant artefacts been identified during the monitoring these would have been retained for further analysis. The majority of the spoil was returned to the trench upon completion of the works, except in the area where the trench crossed the service road where it was proposed to backfill with hardcore in order to avoid future subsidence.

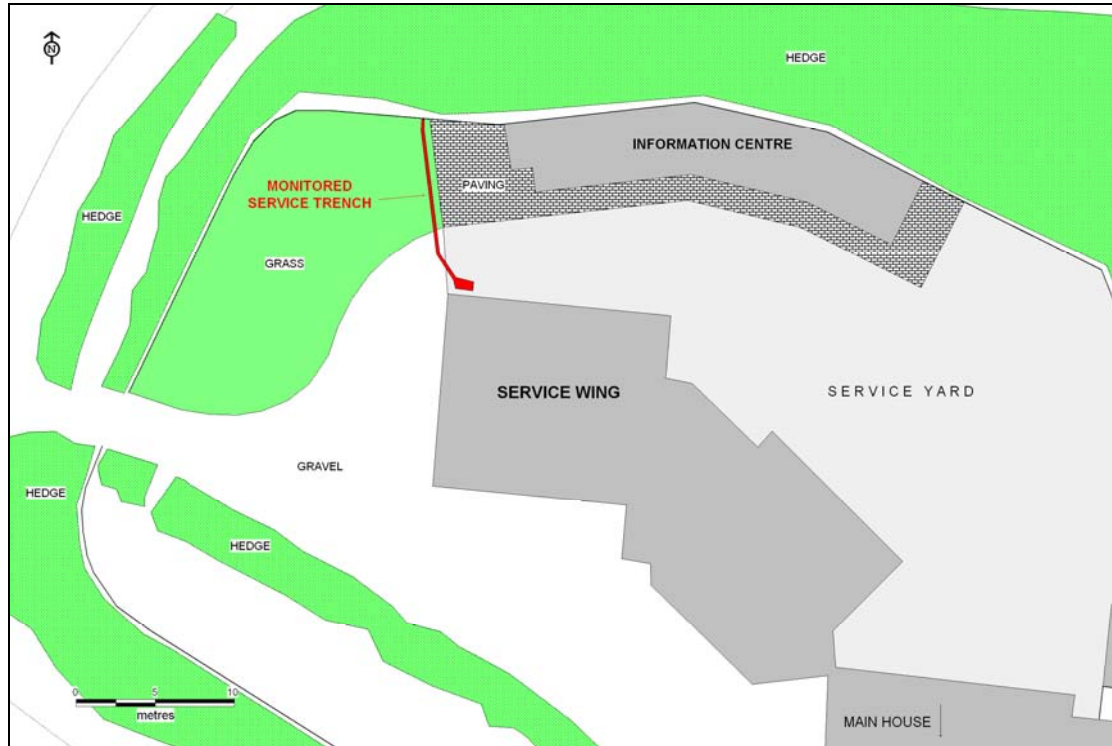


Figure 2: Location of Monitored Trench

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Results

The trench ran across an area of grass and the width of the roadway into the Service yard. It was excavated by hand using a fork and shovel, except in the area of the roadway where a small electric powered breaker was used to loosen the compacted road surface and sub-base. The trench was excavated to a depth of 450mm and a width of 180mm.

Excavation for the trench within the area Service Yard only disturbed material associated with yard's recent refurbishment and the original repair work to the cable. This consisted primarily of a mass of concrete that had been used to backfill the area after the initial repair and consequently required extensive use of the breaker to locate the existing cable.

Where the trench ran across the grassed area the revealed soil profile consisted of 150mm to 200mm of topsoil overlying a deposit of made ground comprised of ash, coke and clinker with occasional fragments of red brick, some with a pale yellow lime mortar adhering to the surfaces, broken roof slate, and small fragments of limestone, of which some pieces exhibited one or more worked faces. Occasional fragments and patches of crushed lime mortar were also apparent. In the immediate vicinity of the wall along the north side of the Service Yard it was not possible to identify a cut for the construction of the wall's foundation suggesting this layer had been deposited after the construction of the wall.

In the area of the roadway the same layer of black sand, ash, coke and clinker was present, lying immediately beneath the hardcore base of the roadway at a depth of c. 200mm although the proportion of building rubble within the layer significantly increased towards the Service Wing. In the grass area, adjacent the roadway, a c. 40mm thick lens of material similar to that forming the sub-base of the roadway was present.

Approximately 1.8m south of the Service Yard wall a c. 300mm wide strip of a hard mortar, or possibly concrete, was noted at the very base of the 450mm deep trench. The trench was only narrow so it was not possible to positively determine any alignment but it appeared to be running perpendicular to the trench.

Conclusion

The single layer noted immediately beneath the topsoil and road base comprised a large proportion of ash, coke and clinker which has presumably originated from the numerous fireplaces and water heating boilers present within the house and service wing. It is likely that this layer has been deliberately laid to provide a firm surface within the Service Yard area. Although a proportion of this layer contained building debris no positive dating evidence was recovered but the presence of slate could indicate a 19th century date. The building rubble within this layer has probably originated from the demolition of structures within the site. This could be from parts of the early house but is more likely associated with alterations within the service yard itself.

The narrow strip of mortar or concrete noted in the base of the trench maybe part of a wall foundation associated with an earlier structure. In the narrow confines of the trench it was not possible to make a positive identification of the nature of this material although it is coincidental with the south wall of an east-west building as marked on Winstanley's map of 1688 (transcribed in Keir 2005, p27).

Bibliography

- Keir, W. (2007) *Audley End House, Saffron Walden, Essex: Archaeological Evaluation, Service Wing Representation*. Albion Archaeology

Plates



Plate I: General view of northern half of trench, looking north



Plate I: General view of trench, looking south



Plate III: E face of trench in central area of lawn



Plate IV: E face of trench within grassed area adjacent roadway



Plate V: general view of the west end of the Service Wing, looking northeast