



UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER

Archaeological Services

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at
Pets' Corner,
Leicester Abbey,
Abbey Park,
Leicester**

NGR: SK 5835 0611

Andrew Hyam



ULAS Report No. 2019-068
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Pets' Corner, Leicester Abbey
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A R Hyam

For: Leicester City Council

**Scheduled Monument No 1012149 (UID 17131)
SMC Reference S00206888**

Filename/Version	Checked by	Date
2019-068	Richard Buckley	15/5/2019

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**ULAS Report Number 2019-068
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Accession Number Y.A11.2019**

OASIS Information

PROJECT DETAILS	Oasis No	universi1-351364		
	Project Name	An Archaeological Watching Brief at Pets' Corner, Leicester Abbey, Abbey Park, Leicester		
	Start/end dates	01-05-2019 10-05-2019		
	Previous/Future Work	None		
	Project Type	Watching brief during fence replacement work		
	Site Status	Scheduled ancient monument		
	Current Land Use	Public park		
	Monument Type/Period	Abbey - medieval		
	Significant Finds/Period	None		
	Reason for Investigation	NPPF		
	Position in the Planning Process	Planning condition		
	SMC ref	S00206888		
PROJECT LOCATION	County	Leicester, Leicestershire		
	Site Address/Postcode	Abbey Park Road, Leicester, LE4 5AQ		
	Study Area	4200m ²		
	Site Coordinates	SK 5835 0611		
	Height OD	56m aOD		
PROJECT CREATORS	Organisation	ULAS		
	Project Brief Originator	Leicester City Council		
	Project Design Originator	ULAS		
	Project Manager	Richard Buckley		
	Project Director/Supervisor	Andrew Hyam		
	Sponsor/Funding Body	Leicester City Council		
PROJECT ARCHIVE		Physical	Digital	Paper
	Recipient	LCC Museum service	LCC Museum service	LCC Museum service
	ID (Acc. No.)	Y.A11.2019	Y.A11.2019	Y.A11.2019
	Contents	4 A4 w/brief sheets	Photographs	Report
PROJECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	Type	Grey Literature (unpublished)		
	Description	Developer Report A4 pdf		
	Title	An Archaeological Watching Brief at Pets' Corner, Leicester Abbey, Abbey Park, Leicester		
	Author	Hyam, A		
	Other bibliographic details	ULAS Report No 2019-068		
	Date	2019		
	Publisher/Place	University of Leicester Archaeological Services / University of Leicester		

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An Archaeological Watching Brief at Pets' Corner, Leicester Abbey, Abbey Park, Leicester.

Andrew Hyam

Summary

An archaeological watching brief at Pets' Corner, Leicester Abbey, Abbey Park, Leicester was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) for Leicester City Council between the 1st and 10th of May 2019. The watching brief at the Scheduled site took place during the replacement of about 80m of fencing and the installation of two new gates in the north-west corner of the former abbey grounds and was a requirement of the Scheduled Monument Consent for the work.

Inspection of the 0.75m deep post holes revealed a homogeneous upper layer of mixed clay topsoil covering a disturbed sandy or clay and gravel layer in most cases. Other holes contained modern concrete and other modern disturbance. No archaeological artefacts were recovered from the spoil.

The report and archive will be deposited under Accession Number Y.A11.2019

Introduction

In accordance with the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, this document forms the report for an archaeological watching brief at Pets' Corner, Leicester Abbey, Abbey Park, Abbey Park Road, Leicester, NGR: SK 5835 0611.

Leicester City Council is replacing the existing metal fencing on the south and east sides of Pets' Corner in the north-west corner of the precinct of Leicester Abbey (SAM 1012149). The Secretary of State for the Department of Digital, Culture Media and Sport has granted Scheduled Monument Consent for the work with the proviso that the applicant engages an archaeological contractor to supervise and monitor the works in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation which has been approved by Historic England.

Pets' Corner lies in the north-eastern corner of Abbey Park (Figs 1 and 2) and has been an attraction for younger visitors for a number of years and, due to its age, part of the boundary fencing has become beyond economic repair and is in need of replacement. Scheduled Monument Consent reference S00206888 has been granted for the work which entails the removal of the existing fencing and its replacement.

Background

Abbey Park lies to the north-east of the Roman and medieval walled town of Leicester in Abbey Ward and is bisected by the River Soar. The Abbey Grounds are on the western side of the river and contain the precinct walls and laid-out foundations of Leicester Abbey together with the ruins of Cavendish House, a mansion of the 16th–early 17th century. This part of the park is at a height of 52m–55m above O.D with a

gravel terrace forming an area of slightly higher ground, chosen for the site of Leicester Abbey. The geology is mainly alluvium and Mercia mudstone.

The site shows evidence for occupation from the prehistoric and Roman periods, but is known principally as the site of the medieval abbey. The abbey was founded in 1143 (or possibly 1139) by the Second Earl of Leicester and by the time of the Dissolution, comprised a substantial church with cloister surrounded by the usual ranges of monastic buildings and ancillary structures. With the exception of the precinct walls and probably the gatehouse, the Abbey was thoroughly demolished after the Dissolution. Much of the archaeological background and the 20th century excavations have been discussed in the series of archaeological evaluations carried out by the University of Leicester School of Archaeology and ULAS between 2000 and 2009. Most of the more recent archaeological work has concentrated around the gatehouse itself and the abbey complex.

The William Senior map of the abbey site published in 1613 for the Cavendish family shows the works depot, to the south of Pets' Corner, as stables and farm buildings which are thought to be part of the original abbey complex. Part of the area presently used for Pet's Corner is shown on this map as being a dovecote garden. In the later 19th and early 20th centuries the area was used as part of a market garden. When the site became a public park this corner of the park was set out as tennis courts with aviaries built against the north-west boundary wall. In the 1980s the courts were moved and were replaced by an enlarged space which became known as Pets' Corner.

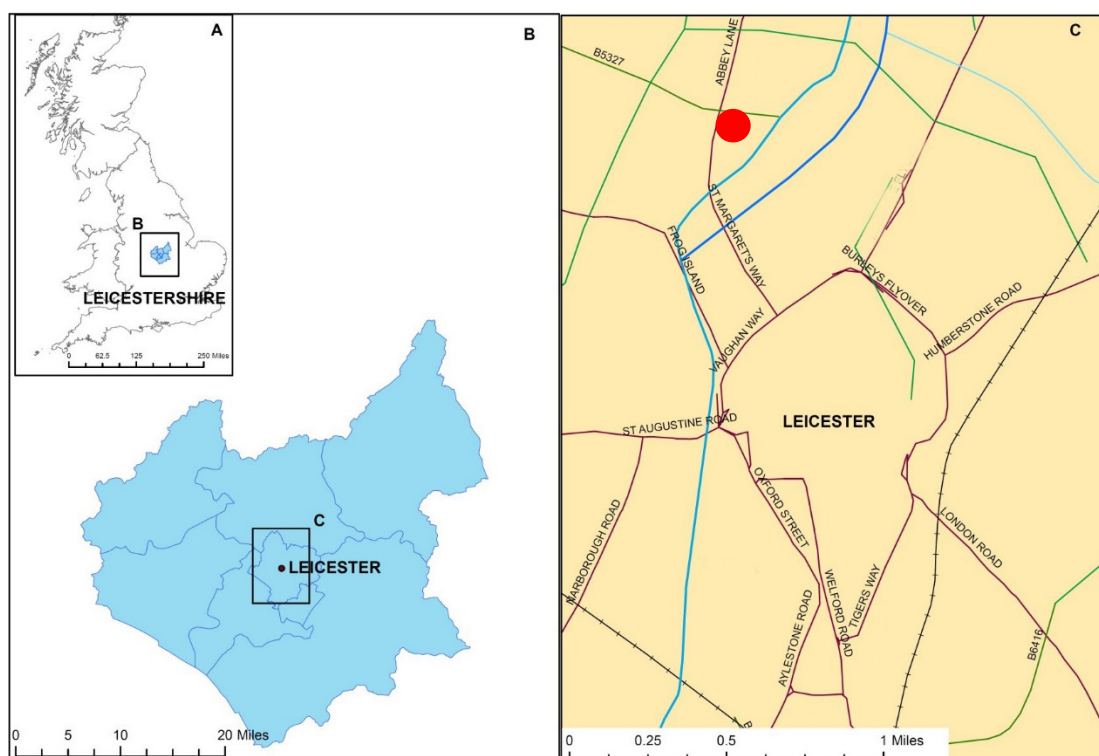


Figure 1 Site location
Contains Ordnance Survey Data
Contains OS data © Crown copyright (and database right) 2019

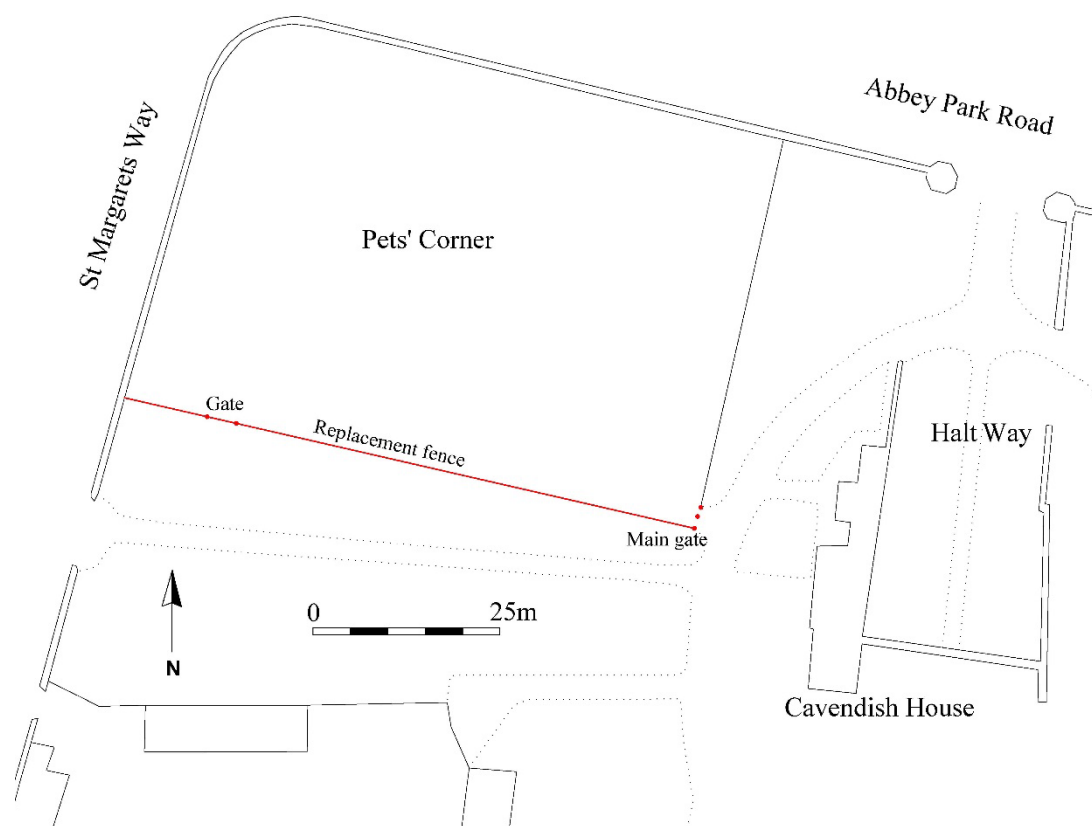


Figure 2 Site location
Replacement fence line shown in red

Objectives

Within the stated project objectives, the principal aim of the watching brief was to

- To identify the presence/absence of archaeological deposits.
- To establish the character, extent and date range for any archaeological deposits to be affected by the proposed ground works.
- To record any archaeological deposits revealed in the post holes
- To produce a site archive for deposition with the appropriate museum and to provide information for accession to the Leicestershire HER.

In addition, the archaeological work was identified to have the potential to contribute to the research aims discussed in the ULAS Written Scheme of Investigation which were derived from *East Midlands Heritage: An updated research agenda and strategy for the Historic Environment of the East Midlands* (Knight *et al.* 2012) and *The Archaeology of the East Midlands: An Archaeological Resource Assessment and Research Agenda* (Cooper 2006).

Of greatest potential was the possibility of addressing questions relating to the development of the monastic settlement within this part of the abbey precinct.

Methodology

The methodology and recording system employed for the watching brief was as stated in the ULAS WSI. In brief, the work entailed the removal of the existing fence followed by hand-excavation of new post holes every 2m along a length of approximately 80m. The post holes measured 0.25m in diameter and were between 0.7 and 0.8m in depth. Two replacement gateways were also installed with post holes of approximately 0.4m diameter and 0.8m in depth. In places where concrete was encountered a small hand-held concrete breaker was used.

All work followed the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (Cifa) *Code of Conduct* (2014).

Results

As noted above, Pets' Corner lies in the north-western corner of the former abbey precinct and north-west of Cavendish House ruins and Abbey House (Fig 3). The replacement works entailed the removal and replacement of the existing fence and metal fence posts running along the south-western boundary of Pets' Corner (Fig. 4). The new fence necessitated the hand-excavation of new fence posts every 2m along the same line as the existing fence. A new gateway was also installed close to the western corner and at the main entrance to Pets' Corner.

The removal of the old fence, which was cut down, resulted in little, if any, disturbance of the surrounding ground (Fig. 5). Each post hole was hand dug to create a small circular hole just large enough to accommodate the new metal fence posts which were then concreted in place.

Close to the boundary wall, at the north-western end of the new fence, a layer of disturbed mid-brown silty clay was observed extending from approximately 0.1m below current ground level down to the base of each of the four holes (Fig. 6). To the south-east of these holes a new gateway was constructed with three new post holes which cut through disturbed ground and areas of modern concrete (Fig. 7). No archaeological deposits or artefacts were observed or recovered from any of these holes.

As the excavation of the post holes continued south-eastwards more of the same mid-brown silty clay layer was observed beneath the topsoil. In most cases this layer extended down to between 0.5m and 0.6m below current ground level before reaching a layer of orange brown clayish gravel (Figs 8 and 9). In no instances was this lower layer bottomed and no archaeological artefacts were recovered from either layer. Two post holes were found to have modern concrete in them which may related to the earlier tennis courts. Post hole number 29 (numbered from north-west to south-east) had a layer of clean orange brown sand at its base (Fig. 10). It was not clear how this layer had been created but no artefacts were recovered from it and the base of the post hole only cut into the first 0.1m of this layer. The area around the new post holes for the main gates had been heavily disturbed with a large amount of concrete in place.

No archaeological features or artefacts were observed or recovered throughout the course of the watching brief.

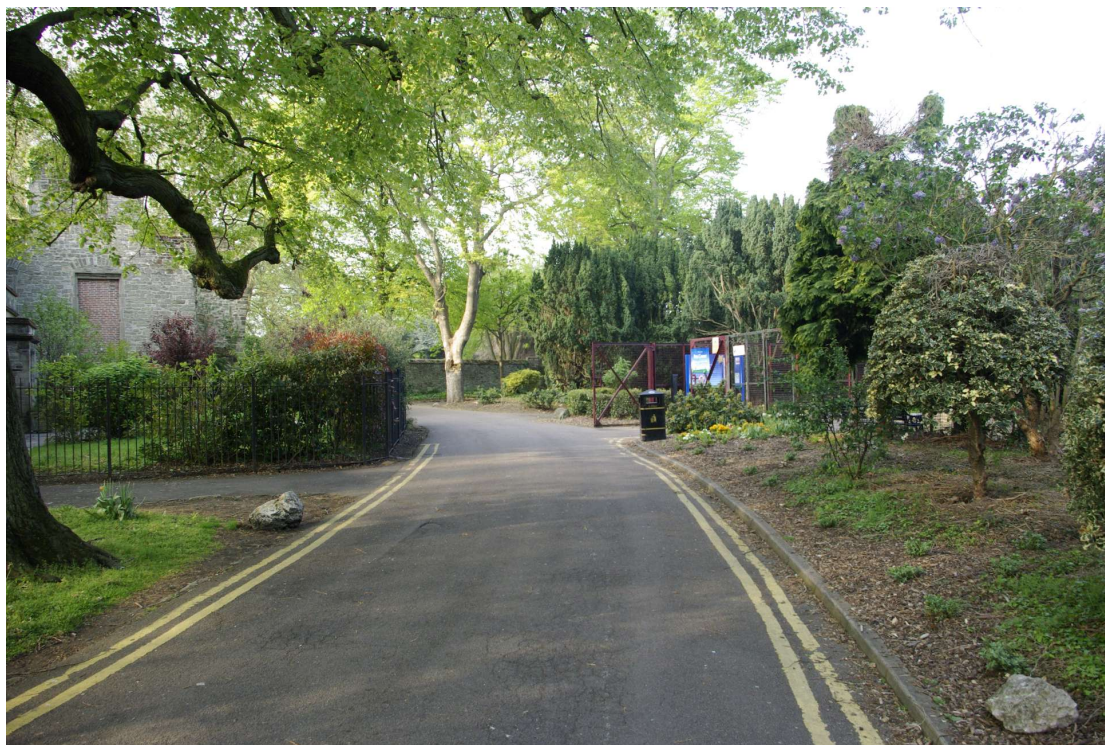


Figure 3 Pets' Corner
Looking south. Abbey House on left, Pets' Corner main gate on right



Figure 4 Old fence and gate to be replaced
Looking north-west. Only the fence panels on the left were being replaced



Figure 5 Old fence after removal
Looking north-west



Figure 6 North-westernmost post holes after setting up new posts
Looking north-west



Figure 7 Gatepost holes near to north-western end of new fence



Figure 8 Post hole number 20
0.5m scale. Post were holes numbered from north-west boundary wall (gate posts excluded from the count)

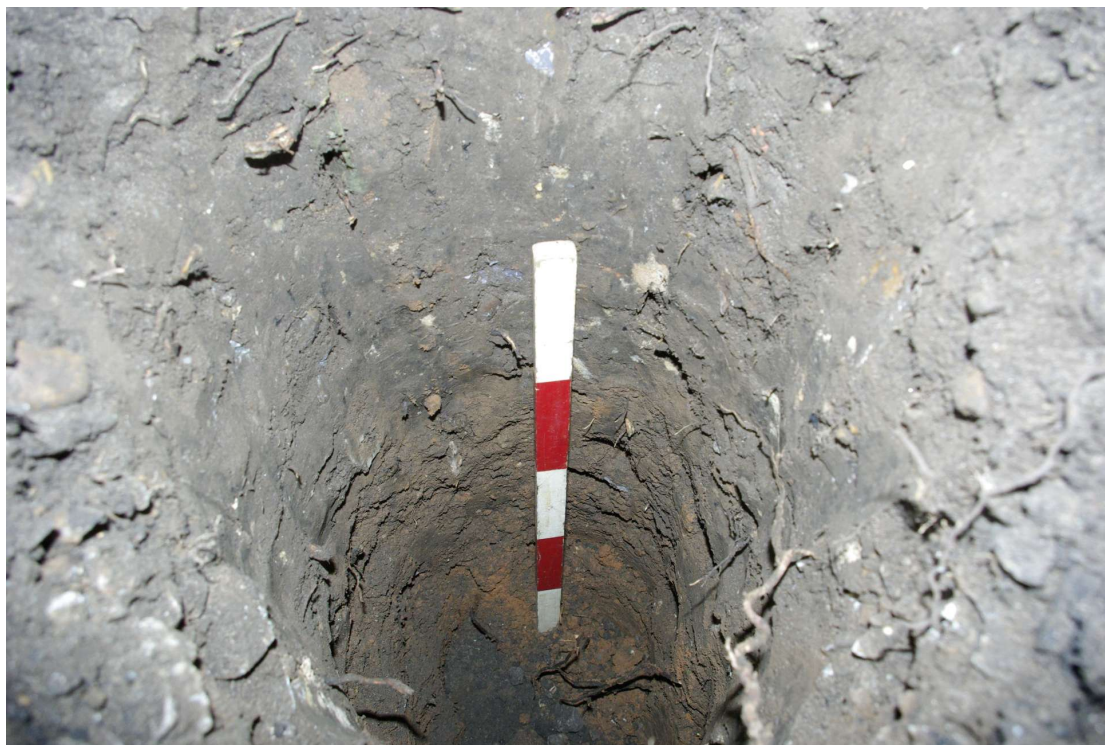


Figure 9 Close-up of post hole 24
0.5m scale



Figure 10 Post hole 29
0.5m scale. Note sandy base

Conclusion

No archaeological features or artefacts were observed throughout the course of the fence replacement. Except where modern disturbance had taken place the upper 0.5m of each post hole consisted of the same mid-brown silty clay. This may be imported landscaping material or is perhaps the soil created from the site's former use as a market garden. The mid-orange clayish gravel may relate to a monastic phase or is simply part of the gravel terrace which rises up from the river. Not enough of this layer was seen to clearly show its origin. What is clear, however, is that it appears to run along most of the length of the new fence line and is approximately 0.5m below present ground level. The clean sand seen in post hole 29 seems likely to be relatively modern as it was so clean. Again however with such a limited window it is difficult to explain how this deposit was created.

Archive

The archive consists of:

This report 15 pages,

ULAS Written Scheme of Investigation x 6 pages,

4 A4 pro-forma watching brief recording sheets,

2 A4 contact sheet containing digital images taken during the survey,

Digital photo index x 1,

DVD containing the digital images.

Publication

A summary of the work will be submitted for publication in the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* in due course. A record of the project will also be submitted to the OASIS project. OASIS is an online index to archaeological grey literature.

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Pets' Corner: replacement of Fencing and Gate.*

Andrew Hyam
University of Leicester Archaeological Services,
University of Leicester.
13.05.2019

Appendix 1 Attendance times

Visit number	Date	Arrival time	Departure time	Charge days
1	01.05.2019	07:45	11:00	0.5
2	01.05.2019	15:00	16:00	0.25
3	03.05.2019	12:40	15:30	0.5
4	07.05.2019	08:00	09:30	0.25
5	07.05.2019	12:30	16:00	0.5
6	09.05.2019	08:00	10:00	0.25
				2.25



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