

**An Archaeological Investigation in  
advance of the installation of a  
Welcoming Christ Statue at Launde  
Abbey, Launde Road, Launde,  
Leicestershire LE7 9XB**

**NGR: SK 79706 04365**

Susan K. Henderson



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Christ Statue at**

**Launde Abbey,**

**Launde Road, Leicestershire LE7 9XB**

**(SK 79706 04365)**

**Susan K. Henderson**

*For*

Mr Ian Andrews

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## **An Archaeological Investigation in advance of the installation of a Welcoming Christ Statue at Launde Abbey, Launde Road, Leicestershire LE7 9XB**

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### **Summary**

*An archaeological excavation was undertaken by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services on behalf of the client at Launde Abbey, Launde, Leicestershire on the 17th of October 2019. Planning permission had been sought for the installation of a free-standing bronze statue on a concrete base to the east-south-east of the house at Launde Abbey. Permission was granted with a condition that the foundation pit for the statue was to be excavated archaeologically, with the investigation and recording of any significant deposits encountered.*

*The foundation pit measured 2.5m x 2.5m and was excavated to a depth of 1m. No archaeological features or deposits were identified.*

*The archive will be deposited with Leicestershire County Council under Accession Number X.A95.2019.*

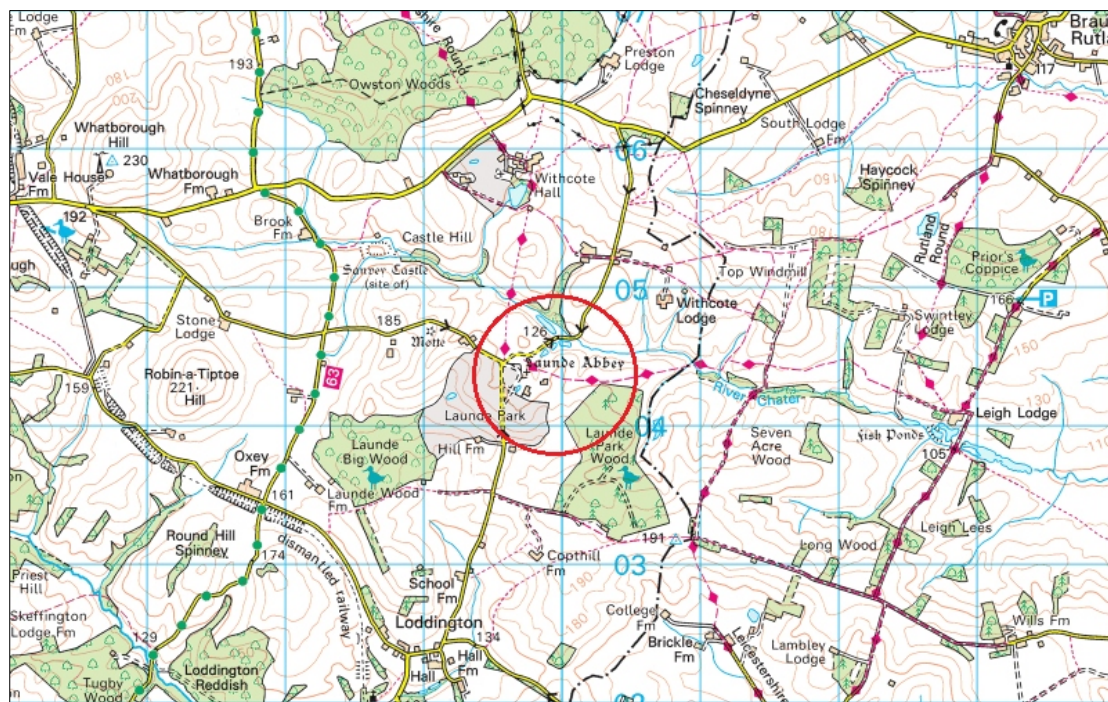
### **Introduction**

Launde Abbey is a substantial country house built upon the remains of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century Augustinian Priory of St. John the Baptist and set within extensive parklands. The mansion house and chapel are both Grade II listed buildings, the Ha-ha and its urns, stable block, walled kitchen garden and cast iron-framed glass house are also Grade II listed. The grounds to the north and west of the house, including the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ha-ha and the area it encloses, are a Scheduled Monument (SAM 137). Conversion of the former claustral buildings in to a mansion house took place in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century with modifications and rebuilding in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Such modifications also included landscaping of the grounds surrounding the house. The property is now a Church of England retreat house and conference centre.

In 2017 an exploratory test pit was excavated to assess the impact of installing a free-standing bronze statue (Appendix A) in the Ha-ha at the west front of the house. The discovery of archaeological remains within the test pit necessitated the resiting of the statue. A new site was chosen to the east-south-east of the house, well beyond the postulated claustral ranges of the priory and also outside the Scheduled Monument. This document reports the findings of the excavation of the new site.

## Location and Geology

Launde Abbey is located approximately 21km east of Leicester in the Harborough district of Leicestershire (Fig.1) near to the border with Rutland and approximately 4km south east of Braunstone in Rutland (NGR: SK 79706 04365).



**Figure 1.**  
**Location of Launde Abbey 1:50 000**

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The Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain (Sheet 156) indicates that the underlying geology is likely to be Lower Jurassic Marlstone comprising inter-bedded limestone and sandstone deposits overlain by Upper Lias clays. The local topography comprises a north east facing valley to the south of the River Chater with a former spring or watercourse being visible as a series of artificial ponds associated with the historic building.

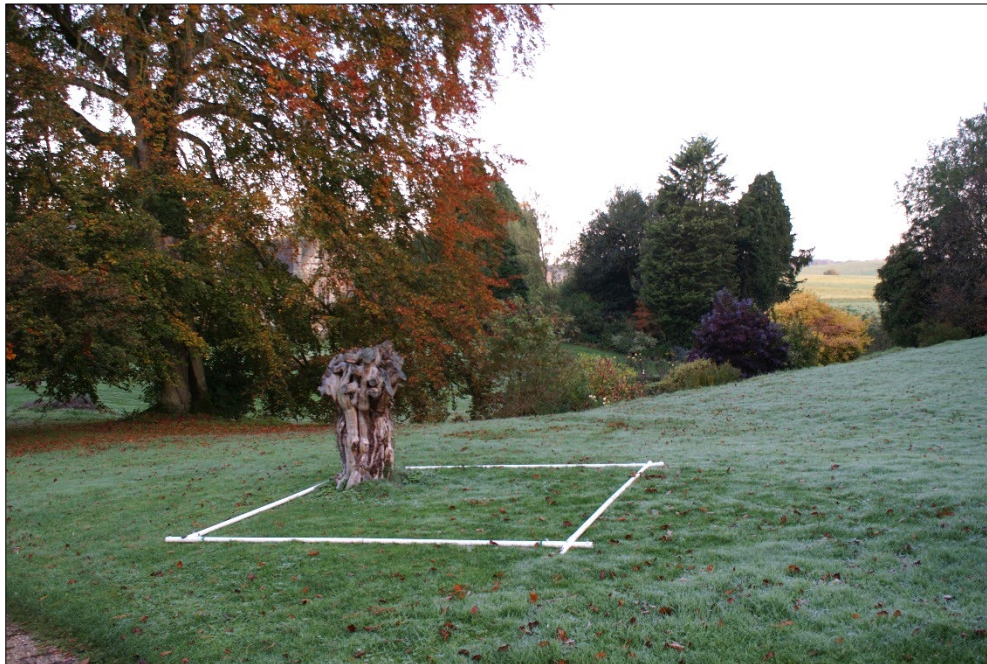
The proposed development area, to the east south east of the mansion house, lies at a height of approximately 148m aOD. The surrounding area is currently laid out as terraced lawns and the proposed site of the statue on the higher terrace alongside a path leading east to a walled garden (Fig. 2) and (Fig.3).



**Figure 2.**

**Location of site of excavation to the east south east of the main house outlined in red**

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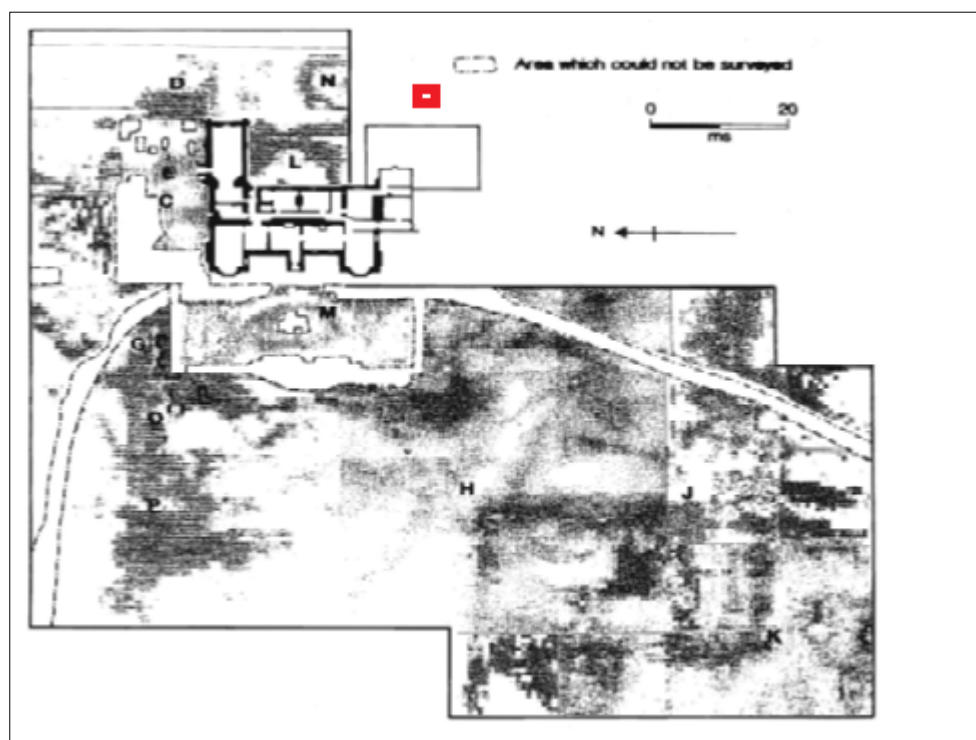


**Figure 3.**

**Photograph of location of excavation looking north west with sunken garden in foreground and the Abbey through the trees.**

## Archaeological Background

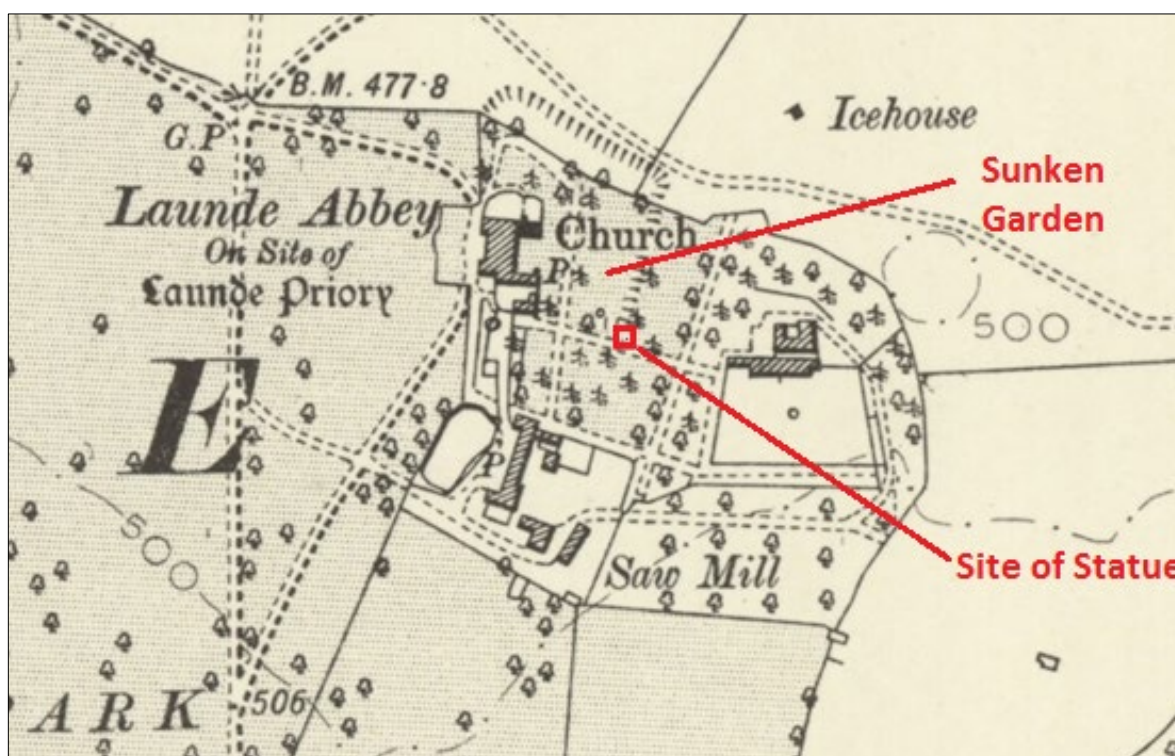
In the 1960's there were a series of small excavations in the area of the priory church, to the north and west of the house. The intention being to locate the foundations of the Priory Church (*TLAHS 39*, 52). Extensive earthwork and geophysical surveys were undertaken at the site between 1989 and 1992 (Beavitt 1995, 22-31). The geophysical survey did not quite extend to the proposed statue site to the east of the house, but it is worth noting that the area labelled N on Figure 4 was interpreted as a possible flower bed.



**Figure 4.**  
**Geophysical and Building survey at Launde Abbey (Beavitt 1995) Location of proposed area in red**

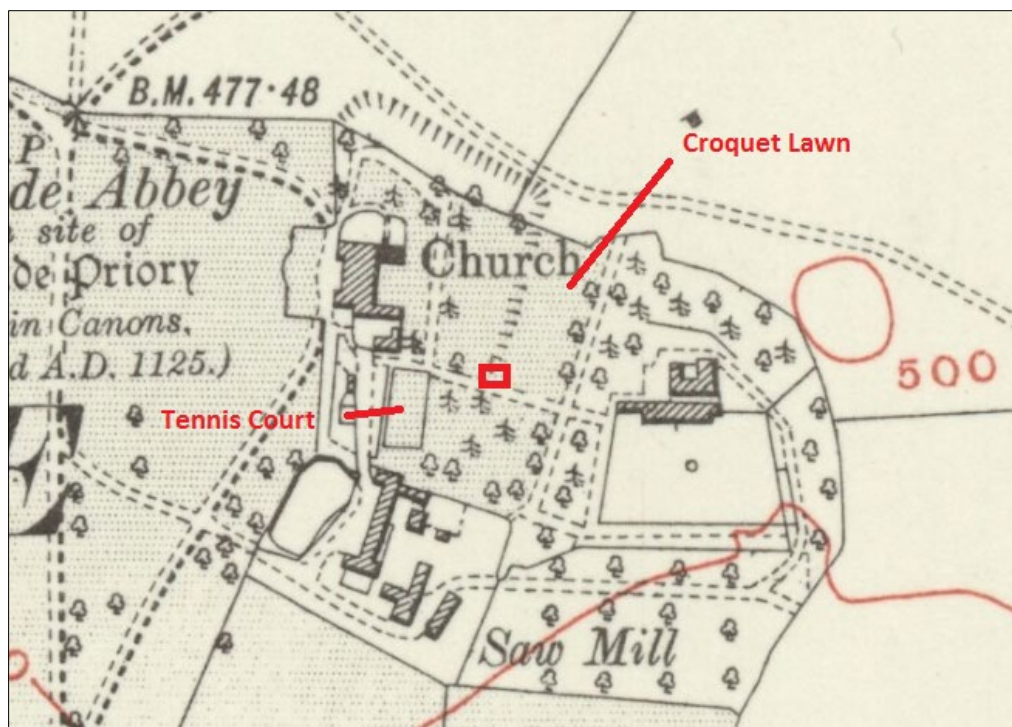
A detailed Historic Building Assessment discussing the structure history and development of Launde Abbey was prepared by ULAS in 2005 (Finn *et al* ULAS report no. 2005-096 to which further reference can be made for historical and archaeological background. The Ha-ha was examined in evaluations in 2007 (Hyam ULAS report no. 2007-060 and 2009 (Hyam report no.2010-008) and again in 2017 (Gonzalez Rodriguez ULAS report no 2017-085). The closest investigation in terms of location to the proposed site was in 2009 (Hyam ULAS report no. 2010-085). Here, on the north eastern corner of the walled garden, the excavation of foundations trenches for a timber building was observed. No archaeological features were recorded.

The historical background to the gardens was researched by the Leicestershire and Rutland Gardens Trust (Blaxland and Roenisch 2008). At the time of the Augustinian Priory there were a number of fishponds pre-dating the private residential use of the house. One of these ponds is thought to have become a sunken garden established in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, with steps to the centre and a fountain to the southern end (Fig 5). The ‘parterres’ on this east side of the house are thought to be early post medieval to late post medieval (MLE23453). A parterre is a formal garden constructed on levels, consisting of plant beds, usually in symmetrical patterns, separated and connected by gravel or turf paths. The borders of the plant beds are often hedged and the interiors planted with flowers or filled with gravel. These beds were possibly lawned in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century as records suggest a lawn was established for playing croquet, possibly on the terrace above the sunken garden. A tennis court was also established on a lower terrace, visible on the 1931 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 6) and the aerial photograph taken around 1945 (Fig.7)



**Figure 5.**  
Location of excavation and sunken garden shown on Ordnance Survey Six Inch to the mile  
Leicestershire sheet XXX111.SE published in 1904





**Figure 6.**  
Location of excavation, croquet lawn and tennis court as shown on Ordnance Survey Six Inch to the mile Leicestershire sheet XXX111.SE published in 1931



**Figure 7.**  
Aerial photograph taken in the 1940's showing the terraced lawns and tennis court (Blaxland and Roenisch 2008)

## Archaeological Objectives

The main objectives of the archaeological work are:

- To identify the presence/absence of any 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 to be affected by the ground works.
- To establish the relationship of any remains found to the surrounding contemporary landscape.
- To recover artefacts and ecofacts to compare with other assemblages and results
- To produce an archive and report of any results.

Within the stated project aims, the principal objective of the recording is to establish the nature, extent, date, depth, and significance of the heritage assets within their local and regional context.

While the nature, extent and quality of archaeological remains within the areas of investigation for the project remain unknown until archaeological work is undertaken, it is possible to determine some initial objectives derived from *East Midlands Heritage* research agenda (Knight *et al.* 2012)

### **Medieval**

#### *High medieval (1066-1485): Religion (7.5)*

- Can we discern significant differences in the planning, economy and landscape impact of the different monastic orders?
- How can we refine our understanding of local and regional architectural styles, including sculptured stonework, decorations and monuments?

#### *Post-Medieval (1485-1750)*

- What was the impact of the Reformation upon ecclesiastical buildings and monastic estates?

#### *Modern (1750-present)*

- What was the social role and influence of country houses and estates?

Research aims will be reviewed and updated as the work progresses and new information comes to light.

## Methodology

All work followed the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIFA) 2008 *Code of Conduct and Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation*.

Prior to the commencement of the works general photographs of the site areas were taken. The photographic record also included 'working shots' to illustrate more generally the nature of the archaeological operation. The trench plan (Fig.8) shows the proposed location of the 2.5m x 2.5m x 1m trench for the statue foundation. The size

and position of the test pit was laid out in advance by the client. The project involved an initial phase of archaeological supervision of the machine stripping of the overburden across the footprint of the proposed statue base followed by excavation and recording of the archaeological features and deposits that lay within the proposed formation depths.

As the removal of a tree stump with associated rooting was to be encountered, excavation was undertaken by an 8 tonne mini digger fitted with rubberised tracks to minimise damage to the environment and potential archaeology. The sections and base of the foundation pit were hand cleaned photographed and recorded.

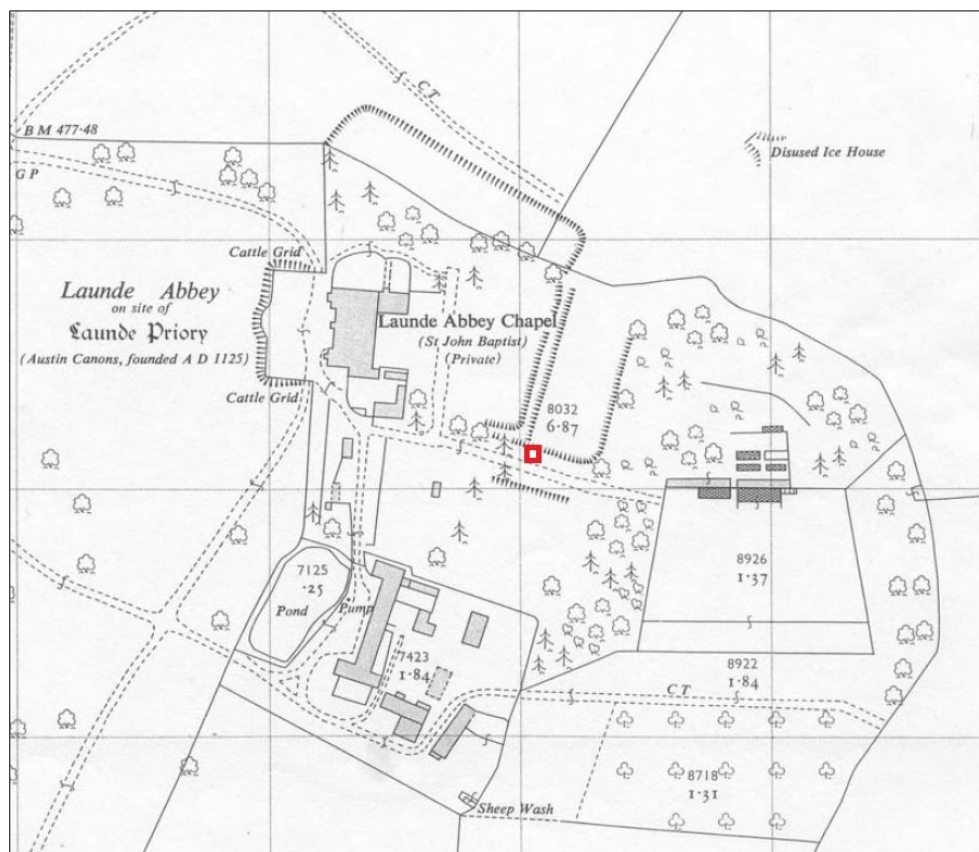


Figure 8.

Location plan showing approximate position of proposed statue at Launde Abbey. Extract from Ordnance Survey 25inch to 1 mile Leicestershire sheet XXX111.15 published in 1960

## Results

The top soil was stripped around the base of the tree stump to an average depth of 0.30m (Fig. 8). Substantial tree roots ran across the area of excavation and machine excavation continued in spits into a subsoil of approximately 0.15m. The base of the root ball was reached at approximately 0.5m and the stump removed (Fig. 9). Some fragments of ceramic building material were amongst the root ball presumably from prior landscaping or planting. The top soil was comprised of a mid to dark greyish brown clayey silt with gravel and flint and ironstone fragments. The sub soil was a light greyish brown silty clay with rare pebbles and ironstone fragments. The natural ground

was a mid to light orange brown sandy clay with frequent ironstone and sandstone pieces. To achieve a level base variable depths were reached in to the natural clay of 0.90m to the east and 0.70m to the west (Fig. 10). No archaeological features or deposits were observed during this excavation.



**Figure 9.**

**Photograph of machine stripping of topsoil looking south east**



**Figure 10.**

**Photograph of removal of tree stump at depth of subsoil looking north**



**Figure 11.**

**Photograph of north facing section at the end of excavation**

## **Conclusion**

Excavation of the foundation pit for the statue revealed no archaeological features or deposits. The diminishing level of topsoil to the west and fragments of building material within may point to the post medieval period of landscaping and terracing of the garden.

## **Archive**

The site archive will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums Service under Accession Code X.A95.2019. The paper archive consists of 1 watching brief record form incorporating digital photo record, 1 colour photo contact sheet and an unbound copy of this report. The digital archive consists of a CD with 33 digital photographs and a copy of this report.

## **Publication**

A summary of the work will be submitted for publication in the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* in due course.

The University of Leicester Archaeological Services supports the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) project. An OASIS record will also be produced and this report will be uploaded onto the Archaeology Data Service website.

## **Acknowledgements**

The project was managed by Dr Richard Buckley and the fieldwork supervised by Susan Henderson. Thanks are extended to the staff at Launde Abbey, especially the client Mr Ian Andrews, the head gardener and volunteer ground staff for their cooperation and interest.

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## Appendix A



**The Welcoming Christ bronze statue to be installed in the gardens at Launde**

## Appendix B OASIS data entry

|                             |   |  |                          |                    |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>      | <b>Oasis No</b>                         | universi1- 371394  |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Project Name</b>                     | An archaeological investigation in advance of the installation of a Welcoming Christ statue at Launde Abbey, Launde Road, Leicestershire LE7 9XB |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Start/end dates of field work</b>    | 17/10/2019   |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Previous/Future Work</b>             | Yes / Not known  |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Project Type</b>                     | Excavation   |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Site Status</b>                      | SM LE 137, HA 1005074  |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Current Land Use</b>                 | Garden   |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Monument Type/Period</b>             | Medieval/Post Medieval   |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Significant Finds/Period</b>         | None   |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Development Type</b>                 | Monument   |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Reason for Investigation</b>         | NPPF   |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Position in the Planning Process</b> | Planning condition   |                          |                    |
| <b>Planning Ref.</b>        | 19/00618/FUL                            |  |                          |                    |
| <b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>     | <b>Site Address/Postcode</b>            | Launde Abbey, Launde Road, Leicestershire LE7 9XB  |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Study Area</b>                       | 2.5m <sup>2</sup>  |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Site Coordinates</b>                 | SK 79706 04365   |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Height OD</b>                        | c. 148m aOD  |                          |                    |
| <b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>     | <b>Organisation</b>                     | University of Leicester Archaeological Services  |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Project Brief Originator</b>         | Local Planning Authority (LCC)   |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Project Design Originator</b>        | University of Leicester Archaeological Services  |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Project Manager</b>                  | Dr Richard Buckley   |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Project Director/Supervisor</b>      | Susan K Henderson  |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Sponsor/Funding Body</b>             | Launde Abbey Trust   |                          |                    |
| <b>PROJECT ARCHIVE</b>      |   | <b>Physical</b>  | <b>Digital</b>           | <b>Paper</b>       |
|                             | <b>Recipient</b>                        | NA   | LCC MusService           | LCCMusService      |
|                             | <b>ID (Acc. No.)</b>                    |  | X.A95.2019               | X.A95.2019         |
|                             | <b>Contents</b>                         |  | Digital Photographs Text | Field Notes Report |
| <b>PROJECT BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> | <b>Type</b>                             | Grey Literature (unpublished)  |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Title</b>                            | An Archaeological Investigation in advance of the installation of a Welcoming Christ Statue at Launde Abbey, Launde Road, Leicestershire LE7 9XB |                          |                    |
|                             | <b>Author</b>                           | Henderson, S. K.   |                          |                    |
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|                             | <b>Date</b>                             | 2019   |                          |                    |
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|                             | <b>Description</b>                      | Developer Report A4 pdf  |                          |                    |



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