



Abbey Water Romsey, Hampshire

Replacement of Retaining Wall
Archaeological Watching Brief Report





**ABBNEY WATER,
ROMSEY, HAMPSHIRE**

Replacement of Retaining Wall

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was appointed by Hampshire County Council to undertake an archaeological watching brief during works to replace a retaining wall forming the southern side of Abbey Water, Romsey, Hampshire, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 435124 121147. The watching brief was a requirement of the County Archaeologist, secured as a condition of planning permission for the works.

Abbey Water, running from east to west, lies to the south of Romsey Abbey, in an area of high archaeological potential. Evidence for the development of the Abbey, derived from archaeological investigations published by Scott (1996) suggest its historic foundation as a Nunnery by Edward the Elder in the early 10th century may have followed earlier ecclesiastical use of the Abbey site as evidenced by structures and, immediately north of Abbey Water, burials. It has also been suggested that Abbey Water, a mill leat that diverted water from the course of the 'Shitlake' stream, may follow the southern extent of the late Saxon Abbey precinct.

The works comprised the removal of the existing retaining wall forming the southern side of Abbey Water and its replacement on a new foundation. This involved the excavation of a trench 69 m in length and up to 1.70 m deep, formed in stages prior to the construction of the replacement wall. This afforded access to an exposed section that contained archaeological features and deposits, which were investigated and recorded as conditions would allow. The watching brief was undertaken between the 18th August and 21st September 2010.

The watching brief identified evidence for archaeological features, deposits and finds surviving behind the existing retaining wall and below the adjacent road. Of primary interest was the presence of a number of graves. Although it was not possible to fully investigate the graves and no clear dating evidence for them was found, they may be associated with the burials previously recorded to the north of Abbey Water, which have been assigned a broad middle to late Saxon date. If so, the course of Abbey Water may not represent the southern extent of the late Saxon Abbey precinct, as previously suggested.

No direct evidence for the medieval channel 'Shitlake' was noted during the watching brief. A possible channel, indicated by the presence of alluvial deposits, was noted towards the eastern end of the trench however, c. 5 m west of the point at which the existing course of Abbey Water turns from north-south to run east-west.

Acknowledgements

Wessex Archaeology is grateful to Hampshire County Council's Environment Department for commissioning the work, and to Hannah Fluck (Principal Archaeologist), and David Hopkins (County Archaeologist), Hampshire County Council, for their advice. Wessex Archaeology would like to thank the staff of the on-site contractors Dyer and Butler, in particular David Guilding, for their co-operation and assistance, and Phoebe Merrick for providing her local knowledge and interest.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Gareth Chaffey, Bob Davis, Susan Clelland and Naomi Hall. This report was compiled by Gareth Chaffey and its illustrations prepared by Ken Lymer. The finds were assessed by Lorraine Mephram. The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Paul McCulloch.

ABBHEY WATER, ROMSEY, HAMPSHIRE

Replacement of Retaining Wall

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was appointed by Hampshire County Council, on the advice of the County Archaeological Officer, to conduct an archaeological watching brief during works to replace a retaining wall at Abbey Water, Romsey, Hampshire (NGR 435124 121147), hereafter referred to as 'the Site' (**Figure 1**). The works comprised the removal of the existing retaining wall forming the southern side of Abbey Water and its replacement on a new foundation. This involved the excavation of a trench 69 m in length and up to 1.70 m deep, formed in stages prior to the construction of the replacement wall.

1.1.2 Planning permission for the works was granted by Hampshire County Council (Planning Reference 10/00385/HCC3S) in April 2010, subject to a Condition (2) requiring archaeological monitoring to be carried out during the course of the works.

1.1.3 The watching brief was undertaken between the 18th August and 21st September 2010.

1.2 The Site, Location and Geology

1.2.1 The Site is situated on a terrace close to the alluvial flood plain of the River Test. The town itself predominantly lies on valley and river gravels and brick-earth (BGS 1987) whilst the surrounding geology principally consists of Bracklesham Beds and Bagshot Sands.

1.2.2 Abbey Water is located immediately south of the Abbey precinct in Romsey, on the west side of the historic core of the town.

1.3 Archaeological Background

1.3.1 The town of Romsey grew up around the Norman abbey, built between c. 1120 and 1140, a stone replacement of a late Saxon Abbey church. The church was later saved from destruction during the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539.

1.3.2 Various branches of the River Test run through Romsey, and are likely to have played a substantial role in the town's development. In many cases, the tributaries appear to have acted as boundaries to the settlement. The main courses flow in three separate channels to the west of the town centre and merge again to the south-west. Several other smaller branches of the river run through the town. The Fishlake is the most prominent of these and splits into two streams; Shitlake and Holbrook. Shitlake was the westernmost branch and lay just to the east of the Abbey and marked the

eastern boundary of the precinct. Today this branch flows through a culvert beneath Church Street (**Figure 1**).

- 1.3.3 Close to the Abbey's eastern gateway, part of the stream was diverted to flow west in order to serve Abbey Mill, and is now known as Abbey Water. It is thought that the stream marked the southern side of the Abbey precinct (Scott 1996, 5). The main branch continued to flow behind Bell Street in the medieval period directly below the privies of the houses, hence the name 'Shitlake'.
- 1.3.4 Excavations undertaken at the Abbey between 1973 and 1991 have revealed evidence for several phases of activity pre-dating the stone Norman church including two chronologically distinct groups of graves. The excavations also identified the structural development of the Norman and later Abbey, notably two phases of development of the double eastern chapels (Scott 1996).
- 1.3.5 A badly disturbed cemetery located within the grounds of the Abbey United Reformed Church Manse was excavated in 1989. Situated to the north-west of the Abbey Water, the excavations revealed up to nine possible graves (although only six were excavated), including a charcoal burial.
- 1.3.6 Human bones were discovered during sewer works on the western end of Abbey Water in 1931, and their findings noted in the Romsey Advertiser. The remains of up to five individuals were noted, along with a brass plate bearing the date "Nov. 5, 1844". It was thought that the house associated with the burials was once a Sandemanian chapel.

2 AIMS AND METHODS

2.1 Watching Brief Fieldwork

- 2.1.1 The aim of the watching brief was to establish, within the constraints of the works to replace the existing retaining wall, the presence, or absence, of archaeological remains within the Site and sample and record any that were exposed.

2.2 Report

- 2.2.1 This report aims to satisfy the County Archaeological Officer that the watching brief was carried out as required and provides an account of the results of the watching brief, in the context of previous archaeological discoveries in the vicinity.

2.3 Methodology

- 2.3.1 All fieldwork was conducted in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (as amended 2008). All sample excavation and recording followed Wessex Archaeology's standard methodologies and included the preparation of written records, plans, sections and digital photographs.
- 2.3.2 A total length of 69 m of retaining wall was removed and replaced. To create access to the wall, sections of the Abbey Water stream were dammed prior

to the excavation of a c. 2.5 m wide trench opened to both remove the existing wall and provide a space large enough for the construction of the foundation of the replacement wall. The position of the trench was located using Hampshire County Council plans supplied by staff of Dyer Butler (**Figure 1**), the appointed main contractor. All excavation was monitored by a qualified archaeologist.

- 2.3.3 The trench was excavated using a 2 tonne 360° tracked excavator fitted with a 1 m or a 0.30 m toothless ditching bucket to remove deposits behind the existing retaining wall in spits (Plate 5).
- 2.3.4 Recording was undertaken using Wessex Archaeology *pro-forma* record sheets. A profile section of the entire length of the exposed stratigraphic sequence was drawn at scale of 1:20. A total of 181 digital images were taken of ground work operations during the watching brief.
- 2.3.5 Following the identification of disturbed human bone revealed by the works, it was agreed with the County Archaeological Officer and the Archaeological Advisor to the Diocese that the remains would be noted, temporarily lifted clear of the works and then reinterred at the base of the trench for the new retaining wall.

3 FIELDWORK RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 This section provides a descriptive summary of archaeological information derived from the Watching Brief. Tabulated context descriptions, giving brief descriptions, are provided in **Appendix 1**. A plan showing the location of the Site, archaeological features and the recorded section is shown on **Figure 1**.

3.2 Features and Deposits

- 3.2.1 Three probable graves were recorded towards the western end of the trench excavated for the new retaining wall foundation. The graves were observed to have been cut into the natural gravels; features **006 (Plate 3)**, **009 (Plate 2)** and **019 (Plate 1)** all revealed fragments of human bone within their single fills. A single tibia was seen within grave **006**, whilst skull fragments were recorded within grave **009**. Only rare fragments of human bone were noted within grave **019**. None of these apparently *in situ* human skeletal elements were recovered. Feature **013** is likely to have represented an inhumation grave, although no bone was recorded within it. It is possible that the graves were aligned east-west, although this could not be confirmed beyond doubt owing to the constraints of access and the limited investigation of the features that was possible (**Figure 2**). The graves were sealed by layer **004**, which contained post-medieval pottery.
- 3.2.2 A further five features were noted and may be archaeological in nature (**Figure 1** and **Figure 2**). Feature **011** possibly represented a small pit or posthole cut into the natural gravels and was located between graves **006** and **009**. Features **022**, **024** and charcoal bearing **028**, all undated, possibly represented pits and were sealed by a layer, **027**, that was traceable further to the east and that had the appearance of a buried land surface; although

no dateable artefacts were recovered from it, it may be associated with layer 004, which contained post-medieval finds. Cut **030**, also sealed by **027**, appeared to relate to the edge of a channel/alluvial deposits; located c. 5m west of the point at which the existing course of Abbey Water turns from north-south to run east-west, this may provide evidence for the medieval channel 'Shitlake', or an area of converging watercourses. All these features were recorded in section only and were not investigated. As such, their interpretation remains uncertain.

3.2.3 The trench showed evidence for an area heavily disturbed by previous attempts to provide a wall to retain the Abbey Water stream. The construction of the replacement wall is thought to be the third such attempt. Evidence for the initial wall, thought to constructed c. 1905 (Phoebe Merrick pers. comm.) was indicated by driven wooden piles (**Figure 2 & Plate 6**). This appears to have been replaced in c. 1950 with the construction of a concrete-based retaining wall.

3.2.4 The depth of the disturbed ground varied between 0.90 - 1.60 m along the length of the trench. The disturbed ground contained fragments of brick, fine gravel used for modern backfill, fragments of metal, tile, glass bottles and wood fragments. The depth of the trench penetrated the natural river gravel beneath the Site.

3.3 Finds

3.3.1 A small quantity of finds was recovered during the watching brief, deriving from several layers and cut features (see **Table 1**); this does not include the human remains observed within possible grave features **006**, **009** and **019**, which were not retained.

Table 1: All finds by context (number / weight in grammes)

Context	Animal Bone	CBM	Pottery	Other Finds
003		2/156	1/60	1 shell; 1 glass
004			10/100	1 stone
010			1/5	
027	11/100			
031	4/151			1 burnt flint
032	1/27		1/45	
unstratified	2/196	3/388		
TOTAL	18/474	5/544	13/210	

3.3.2 Pottery provides the primary dating evidence for the Site. One sandy sherd from the backfill of grave **009**, redeposited in this context, is Romano-British, as are six grog-tempered sherds from layer **004**, also residual here. Two further sherds from layer **004** are medieval (sandy/chalk-tempered), but the layer is dated by the presence of two post-medieval Verwood-type earthenware sherds. Two further sherds of Verwood-type ware came from layers **003** and **032**.

3.3.3 All five pieces of ceramic building material (CBM) recovered are medieval, and all are roof tile. The three fragments found unstratified are from a glazed, crested ridge tile. A fragment of limestone from layer **004** is also from a roof tile, but of uncertain date.

3.3.4 Other finds comprise animal bone (cattle, sheep/goat), oyster shell, and post-medieval window glass.

3.3.5 Human bone was recorded within possible grave features **006**, **009** and **019**. In accordance with the agreed strategy toward human remains within the Site, these were not recovered.

3.4 Environmental Remains

3.4.1 No archaeological features or deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the course of the work.

3.5 Conclusions

3.5.1 Abbey Water, running from east to west, lies to the south of Romsey Abbey, in an area of high archaeological potential. The watching brief identified evidence for archaeological features, deposits and finds surviving behind the existing retaining wall and below the adjacent road, confirming the potential of the archaeological resource, which includes evidence of several probable inhumation graves.

3.5.2 The inhumation graves that were recorded in the watching brief should be considered against evidence for the development of the Abbey site, derived from archaeological investigations published by Scott (1996). This suggests the Abbey's historic foundation as a Nunnery by Edward the Elder in the early 10th century may have followed earlier use of the Abbey site that is evidenced by structures and, immediately north of Abbey Water on the United Reform Church site, burials. It has also been suggested that Abbey Water, a mill leat that diverted water from the course of the 'Shitlake' stream, may follow an earlier watercourse that formed the southern extent of the late Saxon Abbey precinct.

3.5.3 It was not possible to fully investigate the graves and no clear dating evidence for them was found; a single sherd of, presumably, re-deposited Romano-British pottery was recovered from just one of the grave fills, within grave **009**. However, they may be associated with the burials previously recorded on the United Reform Church site, which have been assigned a broad middle to late Saxon date (Scott 1996). If so, the area of burials of middle and late Saxon date possibly extends south of Abbey Water, and its course may not represent the southern extent of the late Saxon Abbey precinct. Alternatively, the burials identified in the watching brief represent an otherwise previously unknown cemetery south of Abbey Water

3.5.4 No direct evidence for the medieval channel 'Shitlake' was noted during the watching brief. A possible channel, indicated by the presence of alluvial deposits, was noted towards the eastern end of the trench however, c. 5 m west of the point at which the existing course of Abbey Water turns from north-south to run east-west.

4 ARCHIVE

4.1 Preparation and Deposition

4.1.1 The complete project archive will be prepared in accordance to Wessex Archaeology's Guidelines for Archive Preparation and in accordance with Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long-term storage (UKIC 1990). Details of the watching brief, including digital photographs and an electronic version of this report, will also be entered into the online "Oasis" database maintained by the Archaeological Data Service (ADS).

4.2 The Archive

4.2.1 The Watching Brief project archive consists of:

- One A4 file containing the paper records
- 2 A1 drawings
- Digital data (site photographs, drawings, Microsoft Word and pdf files)

4.2.2 The archive is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology in Salisbury under the WA project code of **75630**. On completion of the project, it is intended the archive will be deposited with Hampshire County Museums Service.

5 COPYRIGHT

5.1.1 This report may contain material that is non-Wessex Archaeology copyright (e.g. Ordnance Survey, British Geological Survey, Crown Copyright), or the intellectual property of third parties, which we are able to provide for limited reproduction under the terms of our own copyright licences, but for which copyright itself is non-transferrable by Wessex Archaeology. You are reminded that you remain bound by the conditions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 with regard to multiple copying and electronic dissemination of the report.

5.2 Security Copy

5.2.1 In line with current best practice, on completion of the project a security copy of the paper records will be prepared, in the form of microfilm. The master jackets and one diazo copy of the microfilm will be submitted to the National Monuments Record Centre (Swindon); a second diazo copy will be deposited with the paper records at Hampshire County Museums Service, and a third diazo copy will be retained by Wessex Archaeology.

6 REFERENCES

British Geological Survey of England and Wales, 1987, Sheet 315, Southampton: 1:50 000 Geological Map.

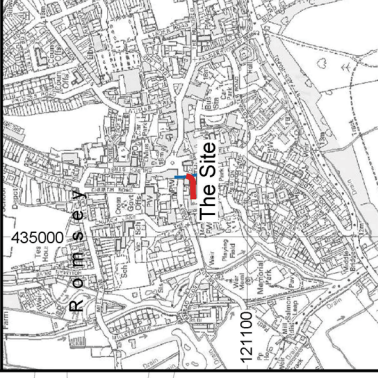
Institute for Archaeologists, 2008, *Standards and Guidance for: Archaeological excavation, Watching Brief and Evaluation*.

Scott, I.R., 1996, *Romsey Abbey: Report on the Excavations 1973-1991*, Hampshire Field Club monograph 8.

APPENDIX 1: Context Summary Table

Context	Description	
001	<i>Layer</i>	Modern tarmac road surface.
002	<i>Layer</i>	Sub-surface, base for tarmac surface.
003	<i>Layer</i>	Mixed layer, loose deposit but well defined with many brick fragments and tiles. Gravel is also present.
004	<i>Layer</i>	Well defined layer with possible relationship with grave cuts. Loose deposit, dark bands of gritty charcoal present, poorly sorted.
005	<i>Layer</i>	Natural underlying alluvial gravels, fairly compact. 'Romsey Reds'.
006	Cut	Well defined grave cut, most of grave has been removed by old revetment wall and machining of trench.
007	<i>Skeleton</i>	Skeleton remains located within grave cut [006] . Probable east-west alignment, although most of skeleton gone, only lower leg bone visible in section.
008	<i>Layer</i>	Backfill of grave [006] . Poorly sorted with moderate quantities of gravel.
009	Cut	Well defined grave cut.
010	<i>Layer</i>	Backfill of grave [009] . Various bone fragments can be seen within section. Skull is partially visible. Skeletal remains unexcavated.
011	Cut	Small, well defined pit or posthole, cuts into natural gravels (005).
012	<i>Layer</i>	Single poorly sorted fill of pit/posthole [011] . Fairly compact.
013	Cut	Possible grave cut, no bones found, poorly defined, similar to grave [009] in appearance.
014	<i>Layer</i>	Fill of possible grave [013] . Observed in section, no bones or disarticulated human remains noted.
015	<i>Layer</i>	Dump of homogenous material, likely to have been construction related, probably within a cut.
016	<i>Layer</i>	Fairly compact, homogenous layer. Possible old ground surface.
017	<i>Layer</i>	Fairly compact, homogenous layer.
018	<i>Layer</i>	Modern, made ground backfill. Mixed, compact deposit.
019	Cut	Possible grave cut.
020	<i>Layer</i>	Deliberate backfill of grave [019] . Compact, homogenous deposit. Rare fragments of human bone.

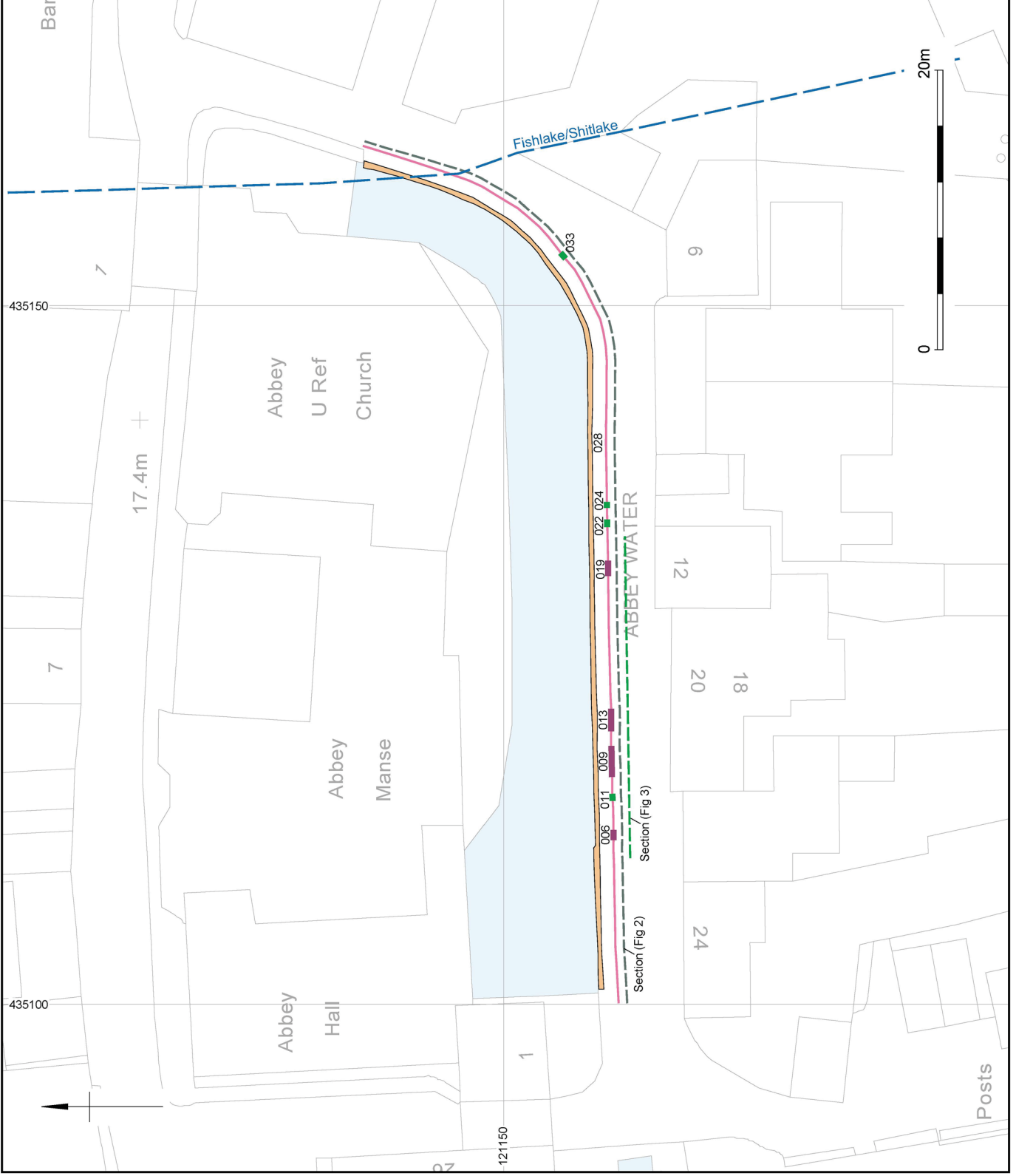
021	<i>Layer</i>	Fairly compact, homogenous layer.
022	Cut	Possible pit cut. Not clear as to function or nature of feature.
023	<i>Layer</i>	Fairly homogenous layer.
024	Cut	Possible pit cut. Not clear as to function or nature of feature.
025	<i>Layer</i>	Homogenous deposit, common gravel throughout.
026	<i>Layer</i>	Compact, homogenous layer, modern make-up deposit.
027	<i>Layer</i>	Buried soil/ground surface.
028	Cut	Cut of possible feature, seen in section. Contained no archaeological material. Likely to represent a pit.
029	<i>Layer</i>	Single fill of possible pit feature [028] . Recorded in section, clay-like deposit.
030	Cut	Possible cut of feature, likely to be edge of channel/water-laid deposits.
031	<i>Layer</i>	Single fill of feature [030] .
032	<i>Layer</i>	Formation layer/surface. Fairly compact deposit, full of crushed and broken CBM and tile. Stabilisation layer.
033	Cut	Cut for modern water extraction pump.
034	<i>Layer</i>	Extraction pump and deliberate backfill.
035	<i>Layer</i>	White mortar layer, dump deposit, maybe a consolidation layer containing Fe fragments and broken glass throughout.
036	<i>Layer</i>	Modern sand deposit, associated with modern gas main.



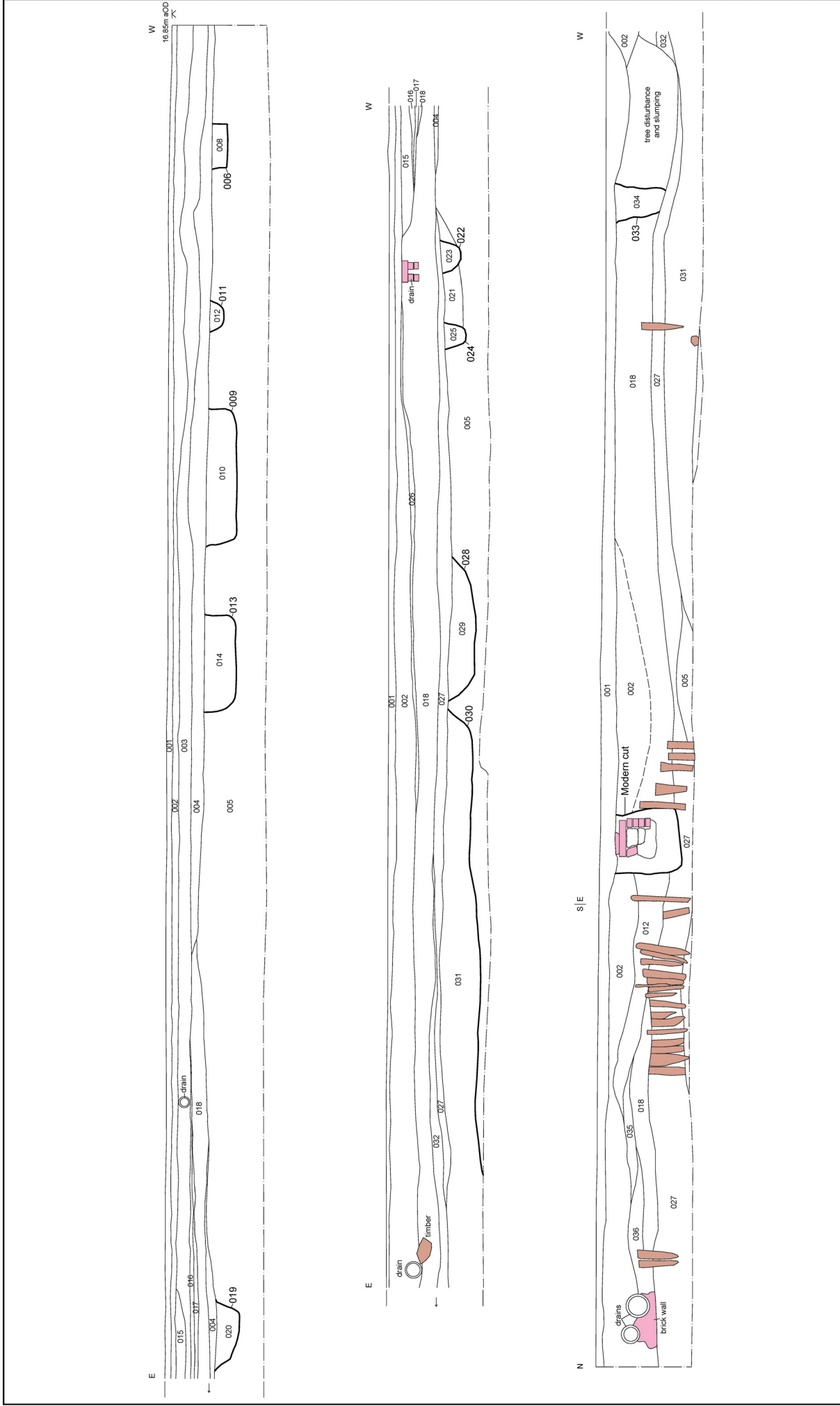
- Existing retaining wall
- Watching brief limits
- Grave
- Other feature
- Water

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Location plan, showing Abbey Water and approximate feature locations



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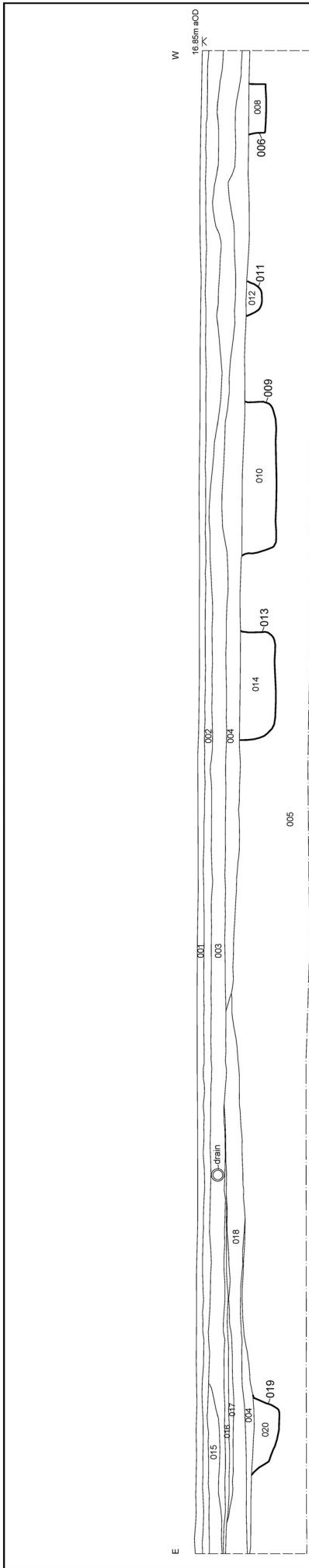
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0 3m

Brick
 Wooden stake

Continuous exposed trench section

Figure 2



North facing section



Plate 1: Feature 019, possible grave



Plate 2: Feature 009, grave



Plate 3: Feature 006, grave

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Plate 4: Exposed section after removal of existing retaining wall



Plate 5: Removal of existing retaining wall



Plate 6: Driven wooden piles representing earlier phase of revetment

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