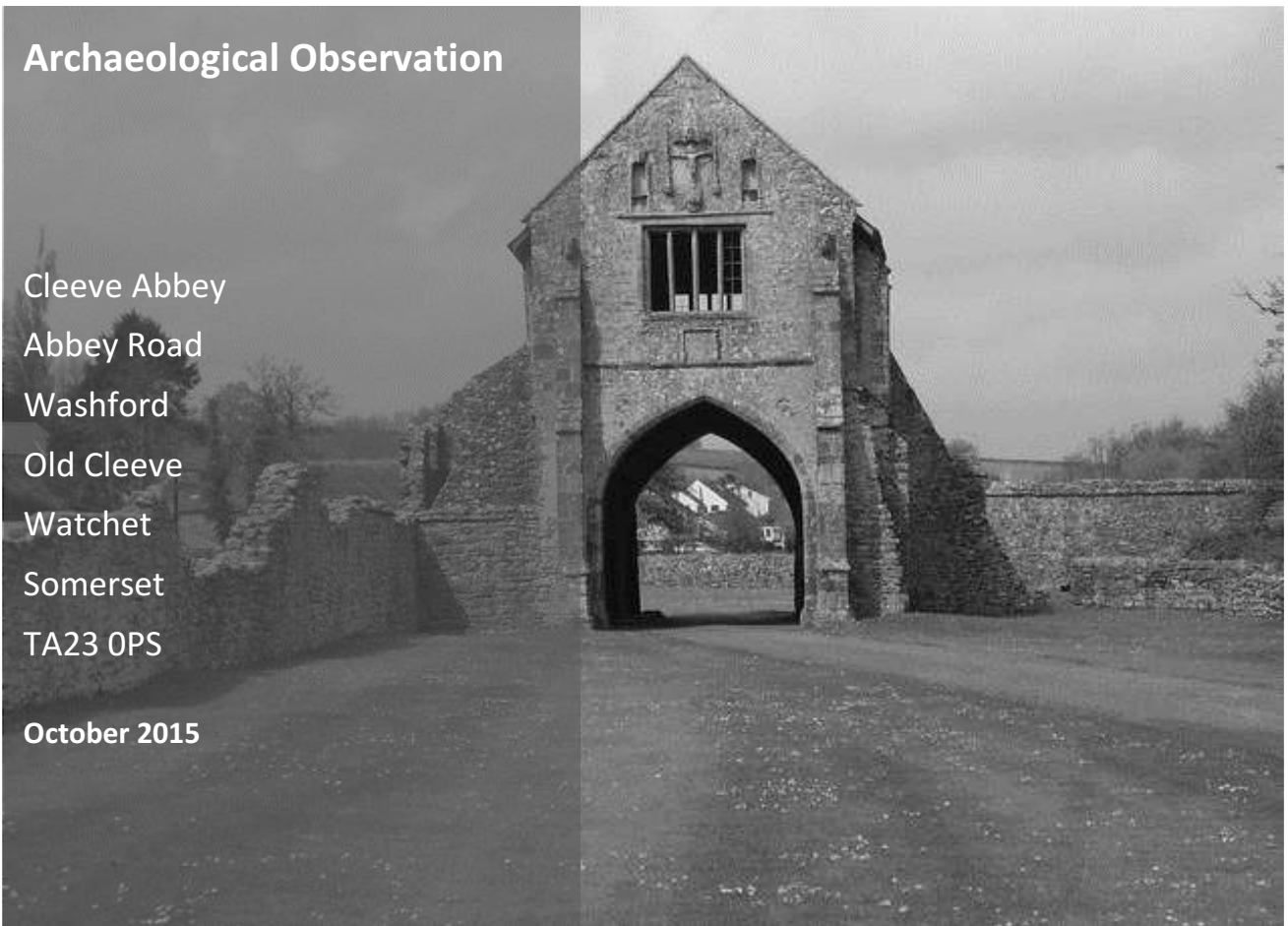


Archaeological Observation

Cleeve Abbey
Abbey Road
Washford
Old Cleeve
Watchet
Somerset
TA23 0PS

October 2015



Report Specification:

Compilation:

Andrew Tizzard BA PhD Dip. Archaeology MCIfA

Fieldwork:

Andrew Tizzard BA PhD Dip. Archaeology MCIfA

Jess Cook BSc

Claire McGlenn BA

Edit:

George Children MA MCIfA

Approval:

Neil Shurety Dip.M G M Inst M

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Cover: View showing the gatehouse at Cleeve Abbey

Border Archaeology Regional Offices

Midlands & North (Head Office)

Chapel Walk, Burgess Street, Leominster,
Herefordshire, HR6 8DE

T: 01568 610101

E: midlandsandnorth@borderarchaeology.com

West & South West

Park House, 10 Park Street, Bristol, BS1 5HX

T: 0117 907 4735

E: westandsouthwest@borderarchaeology.com

East

Luminous House, 300 South Row, Milton Keynes, MK9 2FR

T: 01908 933765

E: east@borderarchaeology.com

South & South East

Basepoint Business Centre, Winnal Valley Road

Winchester, Hampshire, SO23 0LD

T: 01962 832777

E: southandsoutheast@borderarchaeology.com

Midlands & North

01568 610101

West & South West

0117 907 4735

East

01908 933765

South & South East

01962 832777

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1 Executive summary

Border Archaeology Ltd (BAL) was instructed by Daniel Comerford of Ellis & Co Shepton Mallet Somerset on behalf of the English Heritage Trust (EHT) to undertake a programme of archaeological observation during groundworks to remove a temporary marquee structure at Cleeve Abbey Abbey Road Washford Somerset TA23 0PS and replace it with a purpose-built single-storey timber-framed pavilion to protect the 13th -century Old Refectory tiled pavement (NGR: ST 04714 40676) (figs. 1-3).

Cleeve Abbey, or Vallis Florida, is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and Grade I Listed Building founded in 1198 by Cistercian monks from Revesby Lincolnshire; it is regarded as small by medieval standards. During the 13th and 14th centuries, the monastery supported up to 28 monks, together with a number of lay brothers, who occupied both the monastery itself and its surrounding granges. The Abbey was heavily damaged during the Dissolution and little now remains above ground of the church except low walls and foundations. However, the site is noted for the extensive survival of its monastic buildings.

The tiled pavement represents a survival of the 13th -century Refectory building, which was replaced in the 15th century, and is regarded as being of European significance.

Archaeological observation took place on May 22nd and 25th and July 14th 2015.

Observation carried out in May 2015 revealed evidence for a thin deposit containing a single sherd of late medieval pottery and a fragment of glazed roof tile, together with oyster shell, slate roof tile fragments and a complete slate tile. The only additional dating evidence identified related to a single sherd of late 19th -to early 20th -century blue transferware pottery from the topsoil. In the absence of any further evidence to confirm the dating sequence, it was not possible to state categorically whether the medieval deposit was in situ or had been redeposited at a later date from another part of the site.

The second phase of ground works to the east of the area previously observed was carried out in July 2015 to locate a late 20th -century storm-drain cover to the south of the cloister. The works were limited in extent and required only the removal of topsoil/turf overburden. No deposits, features or structures of archaeological interest were revealed.

2 Introduction

Border Archaeology Ltd (BAL) was instructed by Daniel Comerford of Ellis & Co Shepton Mallet Somerset on behalf of the English Heritage Trust (EHT) to undertake a programme of archaeological observation during ground works to remove a temporary marquee structure at Cleeve Abbey Abbey Road Washford Somerset TA23 0PS and replace it with a purpose-built single-storey timber-framed pavilion to provide shelter and environmental protection to the 13th -century Old Refectory tiled pavement (NGR: ST 04714 40676) (Planning Ref. 3/26/14/024) (figs. 1-3).

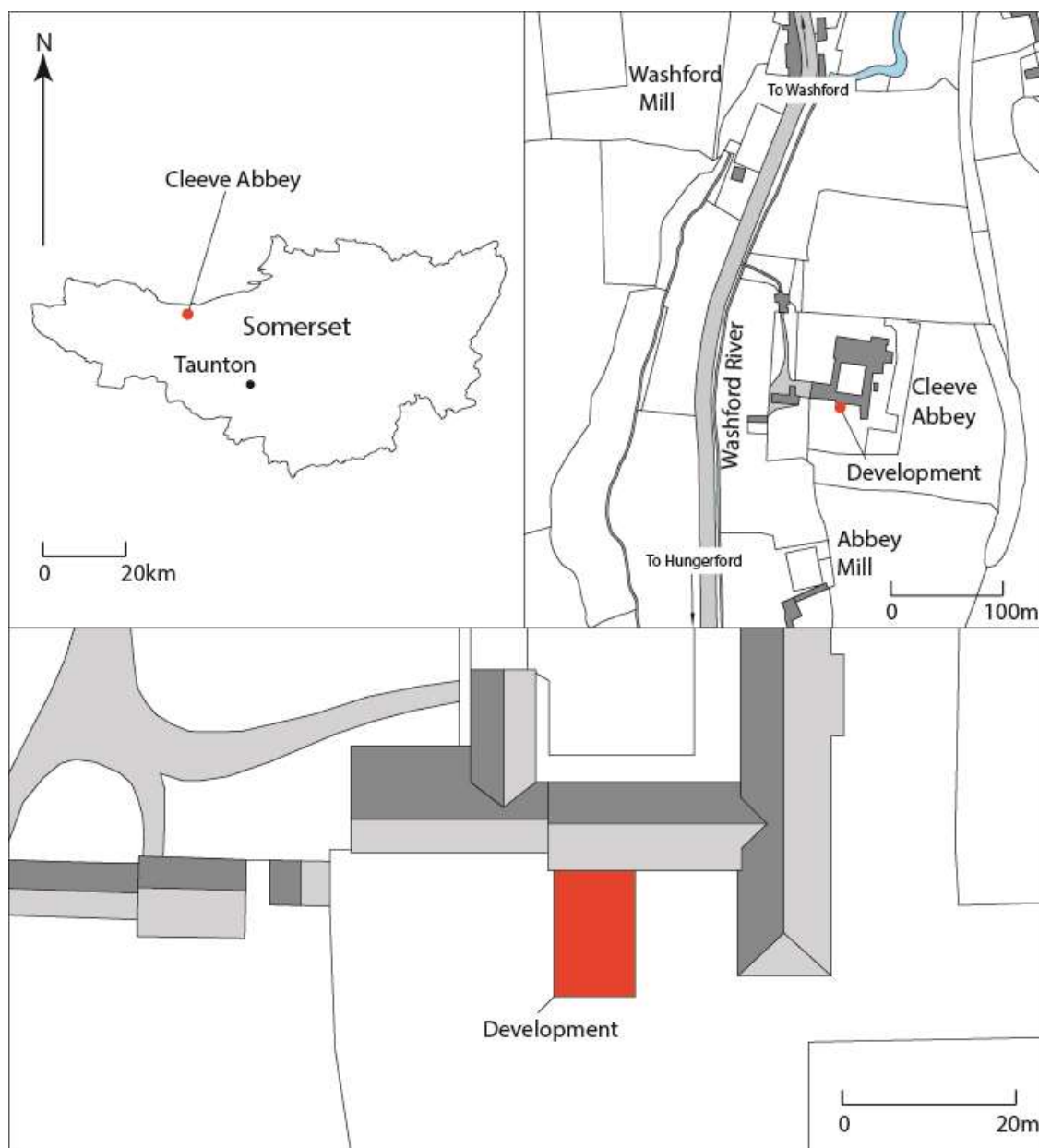


Fig. 1: Site location plan

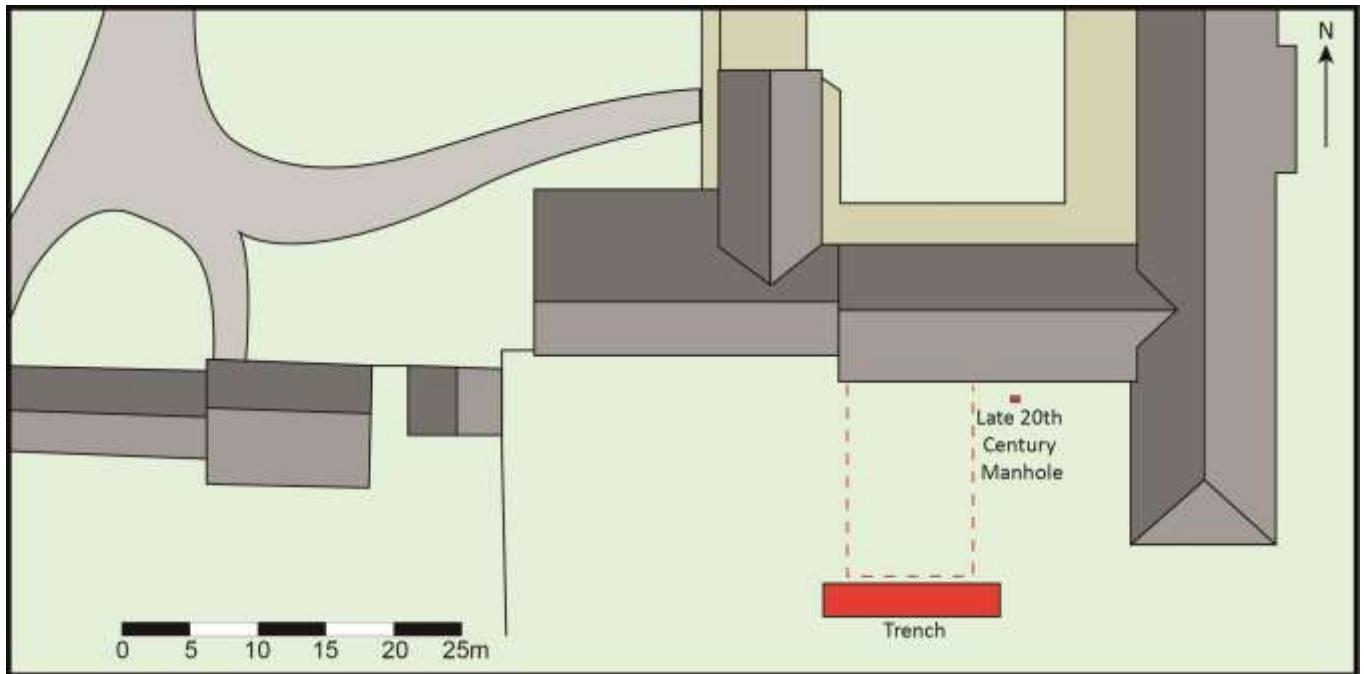


Fig. 2: Plan showing location of groundworks

Cleeve Abbey, or *Vallis Florida*, is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM No. SM 28519, HA 1014824) founded in 1198 by Cistercian monks from Revesby Lincolnshire and is regarded as small by medieval standards. The Abbey was subject to the ravages of the Dissolution and little now remains above ground of the church except low walls and foundations.

The site is a Grade I Listed Building (Ref. 264814) and is notable for the extensive survival of its monastic buildings, the E and S ranges of the claustral ranges being remarkably complete. The 15th -century wooden vaulted Refectory survives, as does the Chapter House and Great Dormitory, together with 13th -and 15th -century painted decorative, and 13th -century heraldic, tiled flooring. The early 16th -century gatehouse today serves as the main visitors' entrance. During the 13th and 14th centuries, the monastery supported up to 28 monks, together with a number of lay brothers, who occupied both the monastery itself and its surrounding granges.

The tiled pavement represents a survival of the earlier Refectory building of the 13th century, which was replaced in the 15th century, when the entire S range of the monastery was substantially altered. In support of the application (Ref. S00096117), EH South West refers to the Conservation Management Plan from 2000 which considered the tiled pavement - which represents a considerably larger range of designs and fabric types than had been previously thought (Harcourt 2001) - to be of European significance, comparable with the Chapter House pavement at Westminster Abbey in its contribution to an understanding of the development of decorated tiles in NW Europe.

2.1 Soils & Geology

The predominant soil type in the immediate vicinity of the site consists of typical brown earths of the CREDITON (541e) series, comprising well-drained gritty reddish loamy soils over Devonian and Permo-Triassic sandstone (SSEW 1983).

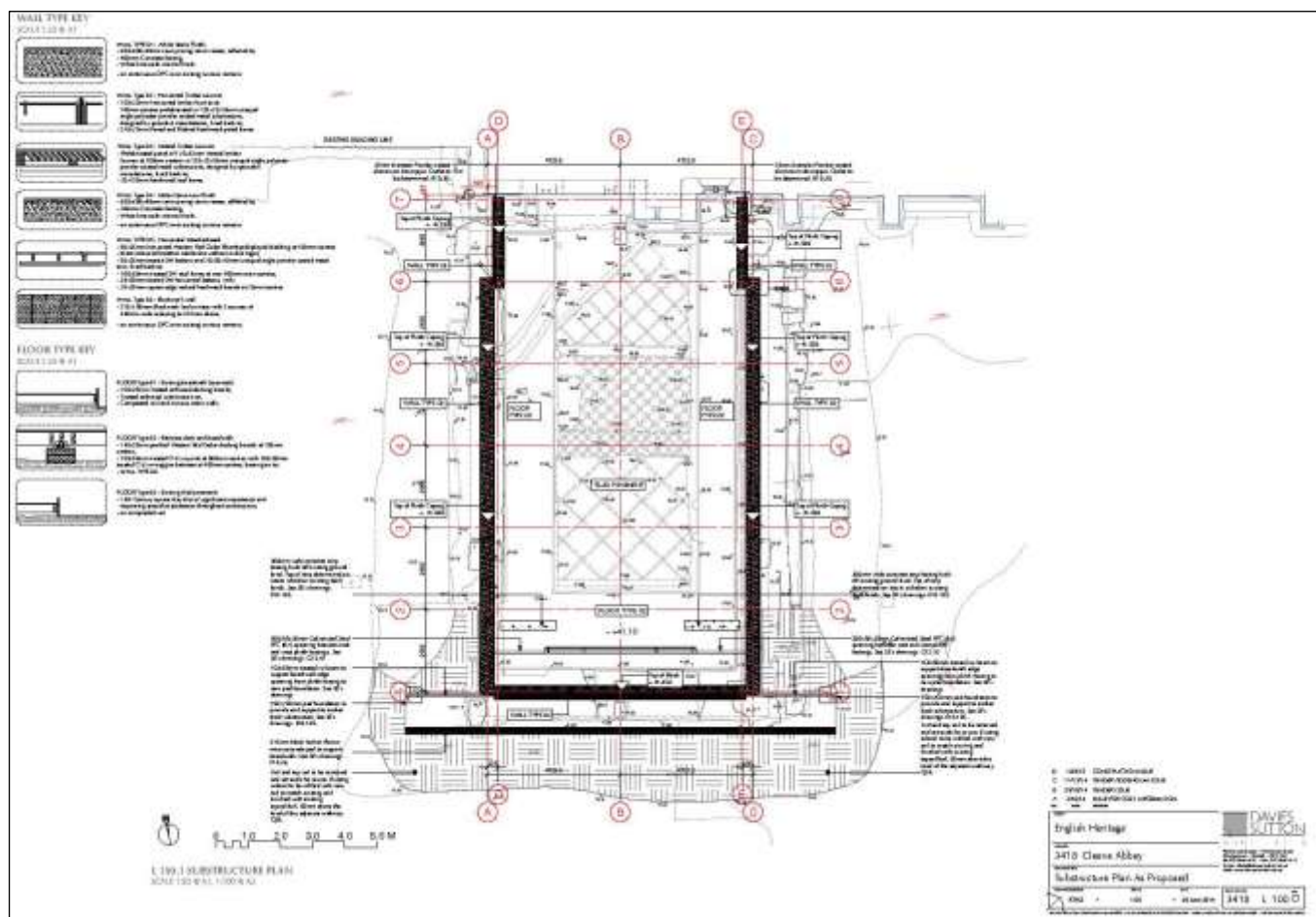


Fig. 3: Site plan showing proposed foundation of replacement building
(Supplied by Davies Sutton Architects for information – Drawing No. 3418 L 100 D)

3 Aims & Objectives

The aim of the archaeological observation was to locate and record any archaeological finds, features or deposits within the ground works area and to confirm that no impact on the archaeological resource occurred during the course of the works without the implementation of this programme of archaeological work.

Research objectives were consistent with those set out in *The Archaeology of South West England: South West Archaeological Research Framework* (Webster 2007).

4 Scheme of works

Archaeological observation was carried out in accordance with *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (ClfA 2014). BAL adheres to the ClfA *Code of conduct* (2014) and to the contents of the Somerset County Council Heritage Services *Archaeological Handbook* (Membury 2011).

The work related to an area at the southern extent of the structure (S of gridline 1 on drawing 3418 L 100 D) (*fig. 3*). Turf and topsoil were removed and set aside for re-use. The amount of cut is somewhat approximate, as this is based on the topographic survey information. The bottom-most level of the concrete footing was at 41.115m. The area opened measured 13m × 2.4m × 3.5m (maximum depth); the width was slightly extended to the E and W extent of the groundworks.

A second series of archaeological observations was undertaken during groundworks to identify and record the location of a storm-drain (manhole) located slightly to the E of the main works and to the S of the S Cloister.

4.1 Recording

Full written, drawn and photographic records were made in accordance with BA's *Archaeological Field Recording Manual* (BAL 2014).

Records include the following:

A *pro-forma* context record for each stratigraphic unit examined, together with plans and sections at scales of 1:10, 1:20 & 1:50. All hand-drawn records were produced on gridded, archive-stable polyester film. These are numbered and listed in a drawing register, with drawing numbers cross-referenced to written site records.

A detailed photographic record compiled using a high-resolution (16MPX) digital camera. All photographic records have been indexed and cross-referenced to written site records. A photographic register contains details of subject and direction of view, indexed by frame number.

5 Results

Archaeological observation was maintained during two phases of groundworks relating to the construction of a visitor observation platform to the S of the medieval Refectory. The first phase of groundworks was undertaken in May 2015 followed by further works in July 2015.



Plate 1: View looking W showing contexts (100, 101 & 103) with S wall of medieval Refectory to right of the picture

Phase 1 involved hand excavation of an area measuring approximately 13m × 2.5m × 0.34m (maximum depth) (41.11 m AOD). Ground reduction was undertaken in two stages and involved the removal of topsoil (100) (including turf) within a strip of approximately 13m × 2.4m immediately to the S of the Refectory ruins. Following the removal of overburden, the excavation was stepped and a narrower strip of 13m × 1.2m adjacent to and abutting the S wall of the medieval Refectory was opened to achieve the maximum permitted development depth (*Plates 2 & 4; figs. 2 & 4*).

A simple stratigraphic sequence was recorded, with four contexts (100-103) identified, two of which produced dating evidence. The topsoil (100) provided a 19th -20th -century date while deposit (102) indicated a late medieval or later date for its deposition (*Appendix 2*).

The topsoil (100), which included turf, extended across the site and comprised a lightly compacted dark greyish-brown, very slightly silty clay containing frequent very small to small angular to sub-rounded stones, very small fragments of bluish-grey slate, rare flecks and small fragments of CBM and a single small fragment of 19th -20th -

century blue transferware, which was not retained. The deposit attained an average depth 0.13m across the trench.



Plate 2: W-facing section showing context (100) and (101)

Underlying topsoil was a made-ground deposit (101) composed of loose to lightly compacted mid-brown to pinkish-brown coarse sandy gravel and silt containing frequent small stones and rare small fragments of bluish-grey slate. The extent of this deposit was not established, as it extended beyond the trench in all directions, although it had a recorded depth of 0.17m.

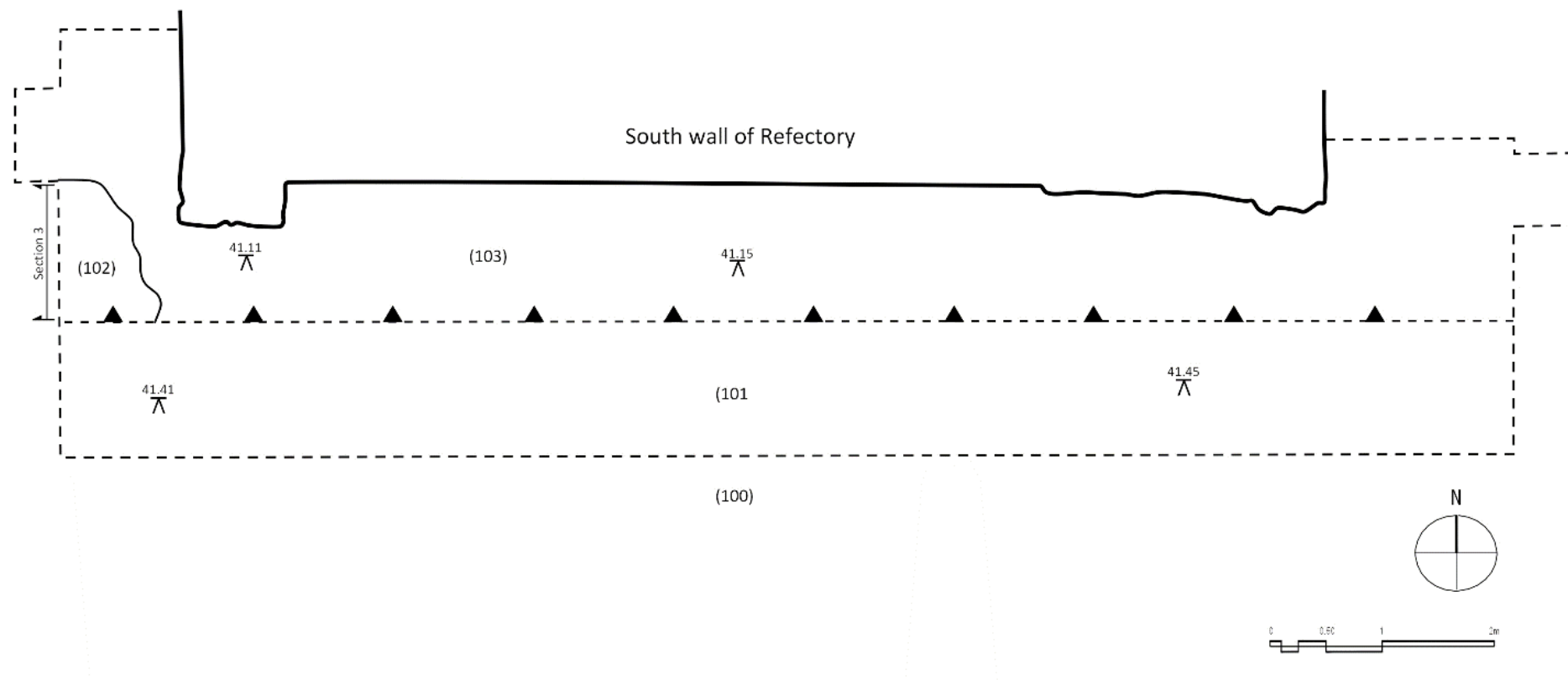


Fig. 4: Plan showing excavated area

Underlying context (101) was a thin loose deposit of reddish-to pinkish -brown coarse sandy silt (102) containing frequent small to medium-sized fragments of bluish-grey slate, occasional oyster shell, rare pot, a fragment of ceramic roof ridge tile and one complete slate roof tile measuring 175mm × 105mm × 7mm (*Plate 3*). The overall dimensions of the deposit were not established due to the limited area exposed which measured only 0.90m wide and 0.10m thick (*fig. 5*).

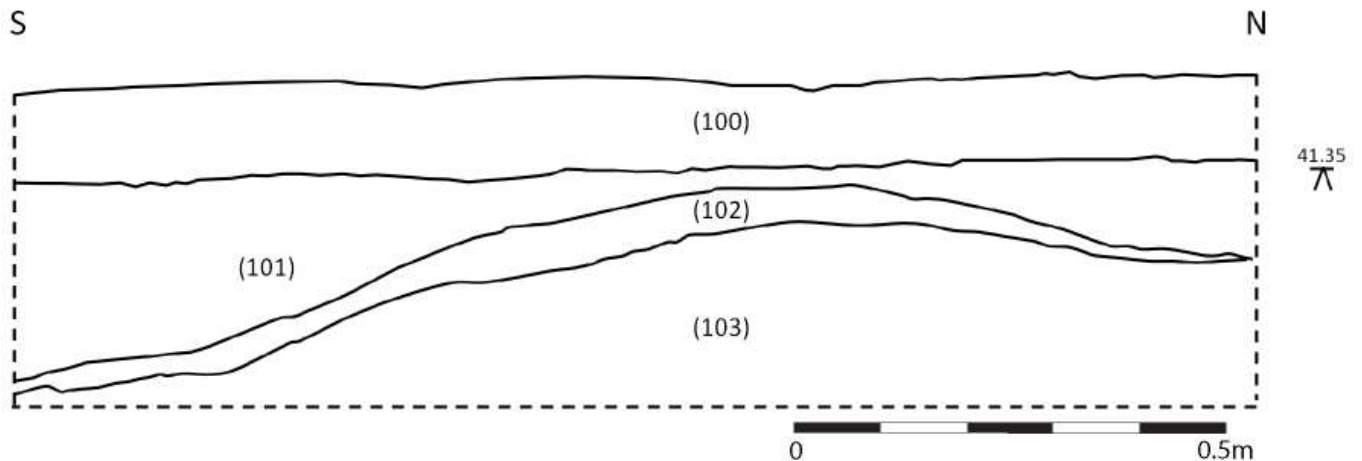


Fig. 5: E-facing section showing stratigraphic sequence.

Evidence recovered from context (102) provided a late medieval date (*terminus post quem*) for the deposit (*Appendix 2*). However, this deposit was only partially excavated and the only other dating evidence was recovered from topsoil (100) which provided a 19th -20th -century date (*terminus ante quem*). Whilst it is archaeologically possible that context (102) was undisturbed and represented a late medieval destruction deposit, it is equally possible that it was redeposited in its present location at a later date.



Plate 3: Local slate roof tile with mounting hole recovered from context (102)

Underlying deposit (102) was context (103), which represented the impact depth of the development. This deposit comprised pinkish-brown silty coarse sand containing frequent very small fragments of stone and rare medium-sized (< 0.15cm) stone fragments. The absolute depth of this deposit was not established, the open area measuring 13.5m × 1.15m × 0.18m. The composition of the deposit suggested it may have formed part of the original construction of the Refectory, although no supporting dating evidence was recovered.



Plate 4: E-facing section showing context (100), (101), (102) and (103)

Further observation was carried out of groundworks to locate a 20th-century manhole cover (*Plate 5, figs. 2 & 6*), which necessitated only the removal of modern turf overburden.



Plate 5: View N of late 20th-century manhole (storm-drain)

Although the manhole was located slightly to the E of the Phase 1 observations, the overburden formed a contiguous deposit between the two locations and as such this was recorded as being the same as (100). No finds were recovered from the Phase 2 works, which were deemed to be of no archaeological significance.

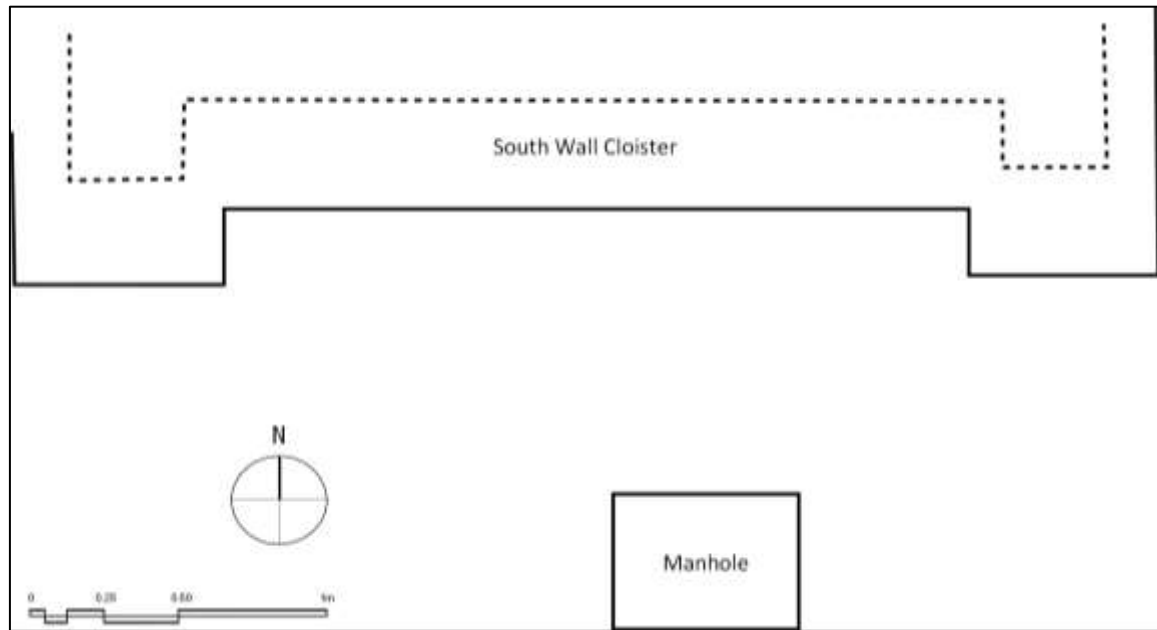


Fig. 6: Plan showing location of manhole

6 Conclusions

Archaeological observation to the S of the medieval Refectory revealed evidence of archaeological remains below modern topsoil across the observed area. These deposits represented in the main man-made ground and deliberate landscaping to the S of the medieval Refectory, and in the case of context (103) may have related to the original construction of the Refectory when terracing was undertaken to provide a level construction platform. However with such a limited area under observation and the constraints of working within a Scheduled Ancient Monument the opportunity to investigate further in order to qualify this interpretation was not possible.

The most significant deposit (102) was situated to the extreme W of the observed area. This material contained finds of late medieval date, together with fragments of slate and a single, complete roof slate with mounting hole. Unfortunately, with up to 75 per cent of (102) lying beyond the trenching, it was not possible to establish whether it was originally deposited in the late medieval period or later. The only additional dating evidence - a late 19th -to 20th -century pottery sherd - was recovered from the topsoil (101) and no evidence was therefore obtained to refine the date between the two deposits. Whilst context (102) may represent an *in-situ* 'destruction' deposit relating to the dismantling of the Abbey in the post-dissolution period, it could equally have been redeposited from elsewhere on the site at a much later date.

A second phase of observation undertaken to the E of the main area and S of the Cloister revealed nothing of archaeological interest.

7 Copyright

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9 Appendix 1: Table of results

Context No.	Type	F/B	F/O	Context Information	Interpretation	Finds	Misc.	Date	Comments
100	Deposit	-	-	Lightly compacted dark greyish-brown very slightly silty clay, frequent very small-small angular to sub-rounded stones, very small fragments of bluish-grey slate, rare very small fragments/flecks of CBM, 1 very small fragment of C19-C20 blue transferware; extended trench wide to an av. depth 0.13m. Overlying (101)	Topsoil	✓	-	Modern	
101	Deposit	-	-	Loose to lightly compacted mid-brown to pinkish-brown coarse sandy gravel & silt, frequent small stones, rare small fragments of bluish-grey slate; measured (exposed area) 13.5m × 1m+ × 0.17m (max. depth) . Underlying (100) Overlying (102)	Deposit	-	-	Post-medieval	

Context	Type	F/B	F/O	Context Information	Interpretation	Finds	Misc.	Date	Comments
102	Deposit	-	-	Loose reddish- to pinkish-brown coarse sandy silt, frequent small-medium fragments of bluish-grey slate, occasional oyster shell, rare pot & ceramic roof ridge tile; measured (exposed area) 0.90m (width) × 0.10m (depth). Underlying (101) Overlying (103)	Deposit	✓	-	Med to post-medieval	
103	Deposit	-	-	Compact pinkish-brown silty coarse sand, frequent very small stone fragments, rare medium-sized (< 0.15cm) stone fragments; measured 13.5m × 1.15m × 0.18m (max. depth) x x exposed. Underlies (102)	Deposit	-	-	Medieval	Observed to construction depth

10 Appendix 2: Pottery assessment

K. H. Crooks
Border Archaeology

A single sherd of late medieval pottery and a fragment of a decorated ridge tile (*Plate 6*) were recovered. Both were recovered from the same deposit, a possible demolition dump containing mainly local slate, together with mortar and refuse, such as oyster shell.

10.1 Method

The pottery and tile were washed and subsequently examined by eye and under magnification (×10). Details of fabric and decoration were noted.

10.2 The pottery and tile

The single sherd of pottery, weighing 16.6g, was almost certainly from a jug with a patchy external green glaze.

The surfaces of the vessel were oxidized. No decoration was present but it is likely that the sherd came from close to the handle of the vessel.

The fragment of ridge tile, weighing 132.3g, was recovered from the same deposit. The decoration consisted of a knife-cut crest. A patchy green glaze was present. Ridge tile of this type would normally indicate a high-status building, with a date in the 14th -or 15th century likely.

10.3 Conclusion

Both tile and pottery were in the same hard quartzitic fabric and probably originated in the same geographical area.

The firing and glaze were very similar, although the tile was less highly fired and it is thought highly likely that pottery and tile originated from the same production centre.



Plate 6: Late medieval glazed ridge tile recovered from context (102)

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