

Archaeological Observation

Historic England

Muchelney Abbey

Muchelney

Langport

Somerset

TA10 0DQ

April 2015



Report Specification:

Compilation:

Andrew Tizzard BA PhD MCIfA

Artwork:

William Logan BA PgDip

Editing:

George Children MA MCIfA

Final Edit & Approval:

Neil Shurety Dip.M G M Inst M

Report Ref:

BA1510MAS

Grid Reference:

NGR: ST 42881 24741

Date:

April 2015

Frontispiece: View of Muchelney Abbey from the east

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

Contents:

1	Executive Summary	3
2	Introduction.....	4
3	Site description.....	4
3.1	Soils and Geology	4
4	Archaeological & historical background	6
5	Methodology	7
5.1	Recording.....	8
5.2	Palaeoenvironmental/palaeoeconomic sampling	8
5.3	Recovery, processing and curation of artefactual data	8
6	Results	9
6.1	Ref 1	9
6.1.1	Methodology.....	11
6.1.2	Archaeological Impact.....	11
6.2	Ref 2	12
6.2.1	Methodology.....	14
6.2.2	Archaeological Impact.....	14
6.3	Ref 3	15
6.3.1	Methodology.....	18
6.3.2	Archaeological Impact.....	18
6.4	Ref 4	19
6.5	Ref 5	19
6.5.1	Methodology.....	22
6.5.2	Archaeological Impact.....	22
6.6	Refs 6 to 8.....	22
6.7	Ref 9	23
6.7.1	Methodology.....	23
6.8	Ref 10 & 11	24
6.9	Ref 12	25
6.9.1	Methodology.....	27
6.9.2	Archaeological Impact.....	27
6.10	Ref 13	28
6.10.1	Methodology.....	30

	6.10.2 Archaeological Impact.....	30
7	Copyright	30
8	References.....	30

1 Executive Summary

Border Archaeology was instructed by Win Scutt Historic England (formerly English Heritage) Assistant Properties Curator (West) to carry out a programme of Archaeological Observation of ground works relating to the provision of new signage at Muchelney Abbey Muchelney Langport Somerset TA10 0DQ, these works forming part of the 'Exemplar' signage scheme for the Historic Properties Department.

The Abbey is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and Scheduled Monument Consent for the work was issued. The ground works took place on March 2nd 2015 and comprised the removal of signage and its replacement with new signs.

A written and photographic record of each of these holes was made. No deposits of archaeological significance were revealed.

2 Introduction

Border Archaeology was instructed by Win Scutt Historic England (HE) (formerly English Heritage) Assistant Properties Curator (West) to carry out a programme of Archaeological Observation ('Watching Brief') of ground works relating to the provision of new signage at Muchelney Abbey Muchelney Langport Somerset TA10 0DQ (NGR: ST 42881 24741) (*fig. 1*). The work forms part of the 'Exemplar' signage scheme for the HE Historic Properties Department.

The Abbey is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (193791) and Scheduled Monument Consent for the work was issued (Cert. No. S00103139). The works detailed herein took place on March 2nd 2015.

Ground disturbance consisted of the removal of existing signage and its replacement with new signs. It should be noted that some of the replacement signage did not require any form of ground disturbance as all replacement work took place using above ground locations, for example affixing signs to existing posts or walls.

A digital copy of this report (in PDF format) will be sent to HE in the first instance, with one bound paper copy and one digital PDF copy of the report subsequently being submitted to HE South West & to the Somerset Historic Environment Record (HER). A digital copy will also be uploaded to OASIS (Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations).

3 Site description

Muchelney Abbey is situated 3.2 km S of Langport within the Somerset Levels and represents one of the earliest religious foundations in the county.

The Abbey's principal buildings were demolished in 1538 during the Dissolution.

3.1 Soils and Geology

The study area lies at approximately 10m AOD and forms an 'island' of typical calcareous pelosols of the EVESHAM 3 series (411c) located within a broad area of pelo-alluvial gley soils of the MIDLNEY series (813a) forming the alluvial flood plain of the R. Yeo to the N and E, the Parrett to the S and W and the R. Isle to the SW.

The EVESHAM 3 soils consist of slowly permeable calcareous clayey and fine loamy over clayey soils above Jurassic and Cretaceous clay; the MIDLNEY series soils are composed of stone-less clayey soils, mostly over peat which are variably affected by groundwater, the underlying geology consisting of river alluvium over peat (SSEW 1983).

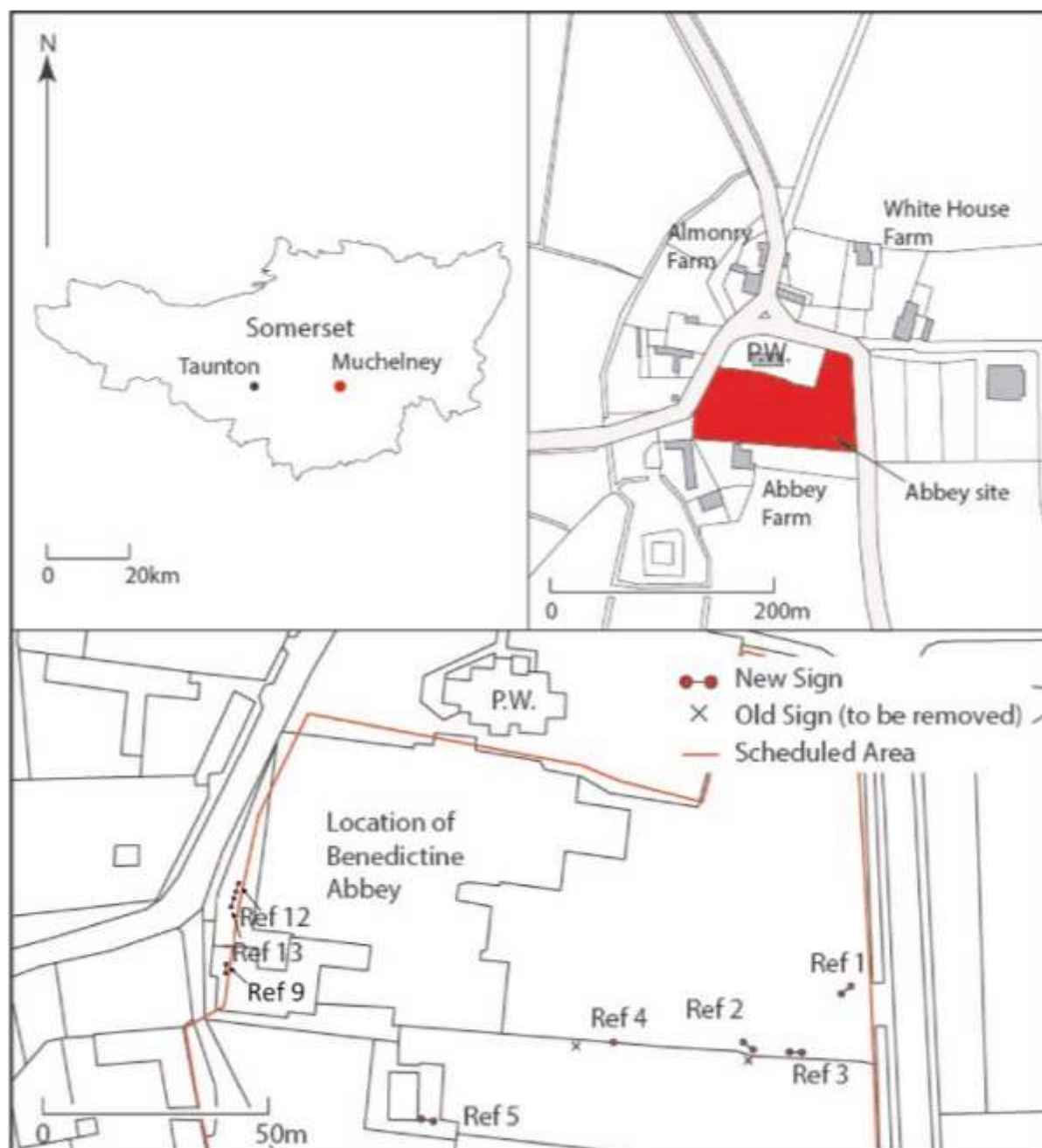


Fig. 1: Plan showing location of site and ground works area

4 Archaeological & historical background

Although its early history is obscure, the present abbey of St Peter & St Paul Muchelney (PRN 54318) appears to occupy the site of a Saxon religious house, which was probably established in the late 7th century AD. Charter evidence (the authenticity of which remains uncertain) suggests that a monastery at Muchelney was probably founded during the reign of King Ine of Wessex under Abbot Froda. A possibly spurious charter dated 693 relates to a grant made by Abbot Froda of 40 hides of land at the River Isle to Abbot Froda, while a later charter of King Cynewulf dated 762 documents a further grant of land between the rivers Earn and Isle to Muchelney (Bates 1899; Page 1911, 103; Finberg 1964, 365, 392).

Its subsequent history is obscure; however, it appears that Muchelney was re-established as a small Benedictine house by King Athelstan sometime after 937 and its possessions were confirmed by a charter of King Ethelred II dated 995. It remained a modestly endowed house compared to the abbey at Glastonbury, with which it appears to have had a dependent relationship by the late Saxon period. Excavations in 1950 revealed evidence of a Saxon apsidal church below the E end of the later medieval church, which appears to have been converted into an undercroft (Rodwell 2002).

It appears that the present monastic layout was largely established in the 12th century, although additions continued to be made in the late 13th /early 14th century, when the Monks' Reredorter was built (after 1268, based on tree-ring evidence), the kitchen was built at the S end of the W range and the E end of the monastic church was completed. A further programme of new building work took place in the late 15th -early 16th century, when the Abbot's lodging was constructed and the S cloister walk was rebuilt (Rodwell 2002, 19-20).

The endowments of the abbey were valued at £437 per annum in 1535 and it was finally dissolved in 1538. The history of the abbey after the Dissolution is poorly documented but it is clear that the majority of the church and conventual buildings were demolished, while the Abbot's lodging, the S cloister walk and Reredorter were retained for use as a house and farm outbuildings.

The remains of the church and claustral ranges have been excavated and displayed as consolidated foundations. The standing remains consist of the Abbot's lodging, part of the S cloister walk, the kitchen and the Reredorter. The Abbot's lodging (PRN 51972) dates from the late 15th or early 16th century and incorporates the S cloister walk and the W wall of the refectory. It is constructed of local Lias stone with Ham stone dressings, Welsh slate roofs with stepped coped gables and stone chimneystacks. The N elevation has six bays of the former S cloister walk, including infilled 15th -century pointed arches. The building features large stone buttresses, two storeys in height, and 2-light traceried windows on the upper level. It has a well-preserved interior, with oak-beamed ceilings, stone fireplaces and stone stairs. The Reredorter (PRN 51973) is believed to date to the late 13th century and is a raised single-storey building. It is constructed of Lias stone with Ham stone quoins and a half-hipped thatched roof.

The abbey has been the subject of several excavation programmes from 1873 to the early 1950s (the latter investigations carried out by the Ministry of Works), which revealed the plan of the church, cloisters and most of the conventual buildings (Rodwell 2002, 3). Since 1928, it has been protected as a Scheduled Ancient

Monument. A recent geophysical survey carried out in 1999 revealed evidence of foundations of further ranges of conventual buildings to the E, S and SE of the abbey church and chapter house and to the E and W of the Reredorter; those footings identified to the SE of the abbey church were tentatively identified as belonging to the monastic infirmary (Bartlett 1999, 3-4). Evidence of heavily disturbed remains of wall footings and a culvert of late medieval date were revealed during the excavation of trenches for electricity cabling to the N of the Abbot's lodging and during a watching brief on similar cable trenching extending both within and to the S of the same building (PRN 35947; Hollinrake & Hollinrake 1999, 173-4).

An extensive programme of tree-ring dating carried out on the Reredorter, S cloister, the kitchen and Abbot's lodging by English Heritage, the results of which were published in 2002, established a far narrower range of dates for various structures at the abbey than had been previously possible (Rodwell 2002). Dating of the timbers from the Reredorter indicates a felling date after 1268 (probably late 13th -early 14th century). Timbers from the kitchen roofs could be dated (for felling) to 1312-33, with evidence of a later phase of repair dated to c.1394-1401. The timbers from the doors to the cloisters were felled after 1410, probably in the early -mid-15th century. The timbers from the ceiling of the anteroom were felled 1447-73. The timbers from the roof of the Abbot's Parlour showed two groups of felling dates: 1464-73 and a less certain group after 1465. The timbers from the roof of the E room of the S cloisters were felled after 1492 but probably in the early 16th century. The timber from the door to the Steward's Room was felled after 1481 while dating of timbers from the ceiling of the Steward's Room indicated a date range between 1492 and 1507.

In 2003, a watching brief was undertaken on alterations to paths, repairs to displayed structures and the formation of a new main entrance and a disabled car park at Muchelney Abbey to the S and E of the Abbot's lodging, in the area of the Abbot's refectory. Evidence of an earlier structure, on the same alignment, was found within the remains of the refectory. Features revealed included three walls of the 15th century, a pre-15th -century wall, as well as 20th -century backfill from earlier excavations and a demolition layer (PRN 16871; Rodwell 2003).

It is also worth noting that evidence of Romano-British occupation, consisting of a complex of pits and ditches and a possible drove-way feature, was identified during excavations to the E of Muchelney Abbey carried out in 2009 (PRN 28200; Brunning 2009, 213)

5 Methodology

All archaeological site works within the study area were undertaken in accordance with accepted standards of professional and ethical guidance, including *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (EH 2006) and *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014). Border Archaeology adheres to the ClfA *Code of conduct* (2014).

Replacement of signage was carried out under archaeological supervision, a record being made of all exposed deposits. It should be noted that some of the replacement signage did not require any form of ground disturbance.

5.1 Recording

A written, graphic and photographic record was made in accordance with Border Archaeology's *Archaeological Field Recording Manual* (2014).

Recording essentially comprised the compilation of a photographic record of ground works using a high-resolution digital camera. An appropriate scale was included in each photograph and all photographic records have been indexed, details concerning subject and direction of view being recorded in a photographic register, indexed by frame number. A representative photographic record of the progress of the works was also made.

5.2 Palaeoenvironmental/palaeoeconomic sampling

No deposits suitable for the extraction of samples were revealed.

5.3 Recovery, processing and curation of artefactual data

No artefactual material was recovered during the course of the ground works excavations.

6 Results

The works comprised the removal of existing signs & the installation of new signage, as detailed below.

6.1 Ref 1

The new sign was positioned at the right-hand side of the carpark entrance.

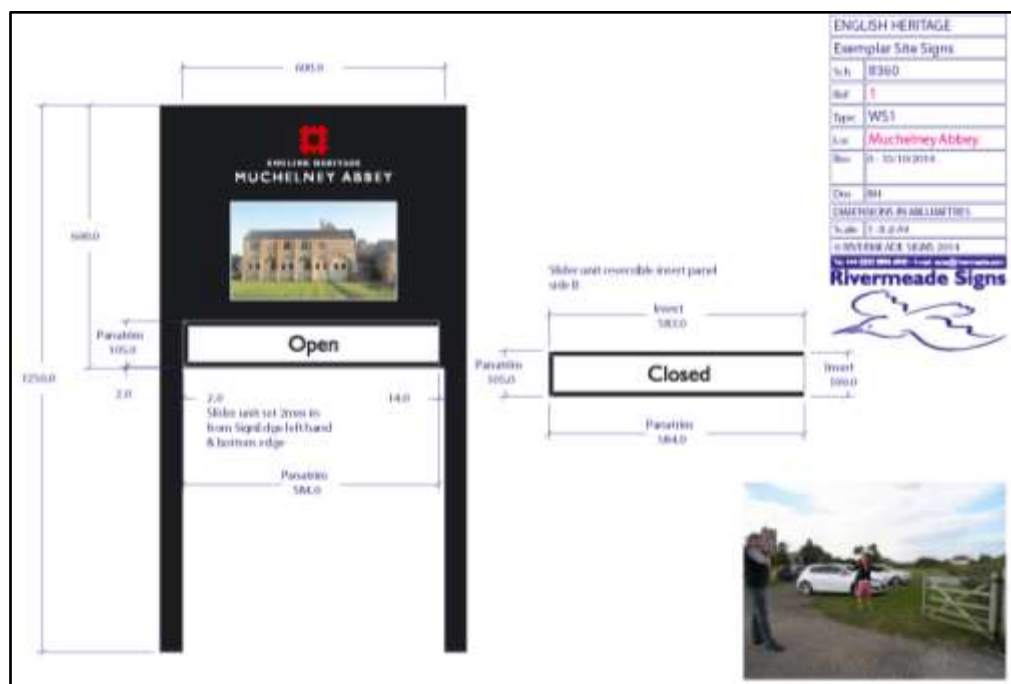


Fig. 2: Illustration showing dimensions & location of signage



Plate 1: View NW showing postholes for signage



Plate 2: View showing hole fully excavated

6.1.1 Methodology

The new panel measured 1250mm (height) × 600mm (width). The existing signage removed manually.

6.1.2 Archaeological Impact

Topsoil 0.15m sandy-silt subsoil 0.10m overlying steel wire foundation grid, which in turn overlay sandy-silt containing frequent gravel/small stone inclusions (modern manmade ground – car park foundation)

6.2 Ref 2

The existing 'Guardianship' panel was to the left of the opening in the hedge: the new panel was relocated to the right of the opening.



Plate 3: View S showing original signage prior to removal



Plate 4: View S showing old sign removed



Plate 5: View S showing posthole (right)



Plate 6: New signage in place

6.2.1 Methodology

The new panel measured 1800mm (height) × 600mm (width). The existing sign was removed manually.

6.2.2 Archaeological Impact

The holes for these posts (*Plates 4 & 5*) were 220mm (width) × 440mm (depth) (left) and 230mm (width) × 420mm (depth) (right). The first of these (left) revealed topsoil to a depth of 100mm, below which was mid brown clayey silt subsoil containing sand and small stones. The second hole (right) similarly revealed topsoil to a depth of 120mm with subsoil beneath, the composition of which was as that described above but with rare fragments of natural stone.

6.3 Ref 3

The existing 'Guardianship' panel was removed and replaced with a directional parking sign.



Fig.3: Illustration showing dimensions & location of signage



Plate 7: View S showing excavated holes



Plate 8: Left hole shown cut into made ground



Plate 9: Right hole shown dug into made ground



Plate 10: View S showing new signage in situ

6.3.1 Methodology

The new directional parking panel measured 1100mm (height) × 1000mm (width). The existing signage was removed manually and new sign inserted.

6.3.2 Archaeological Impact

The holes for these posts (*Plates 7-9*) were 230mm (width) × 440mm (depth) (left) and 200mm (width) × 410mm (depth) (right). The first of these (left) revealed only made ground; the second hole (right) revealed topsoil to a depth of 100mm and 40mm of sand overlying 'terram', beneath which was a subsoil deposit some 270mm in thickness extending to the base of the cut.

6.4 Ref 4

The existing sign was removed from the wooden post and fixed to the existing wooden post. No ground disturbance occurred.

6.5 Ref 5

Existing posts relating to the disabled parking signs were removed and new posts installed.



Fig. 4: Illustration showing dimensions & location of signage



Plate 11: View N showing E sign removed



Plate 12: View S showing W sign removed



Plate 13: View showing deposits revealed



Plate 14: View S showing new signage in place – W sign on right, E sign on left of picture

6.5.1 Methodology

The new disabled parking panel measured 1100mm (height) × 300mm (width). Existing signs were removed manually and the new signs set into the same holes.

6.5.2 Archaeological Impact

The holes for these posts (*Plates 11-13*) were 180mm (width) × 440mm (depth) (left) and 200mm (width) × 510mm (depth) (right). The first of these (left) revealed topsoil to a depth of 100mm underlying which to the base of the cut was a silty clay subsoil containing five small to medium -sized fragments of blue lias. The second hole (right) revealed topsoil to a depth of 100mm beneath which was a silty clay subsoil with occasional fragments of natural Ham stone and blue lias extending to a depth of 410mm.

6.6 Refs 6 to 8

No ground works required.

6.7 Ref 9

6.7.1 Methodology

The existing sign was removed from the historic wooden frame of the rear office porch under archaeological observation (*Plate 15*). New signage was secured using original fixing points.

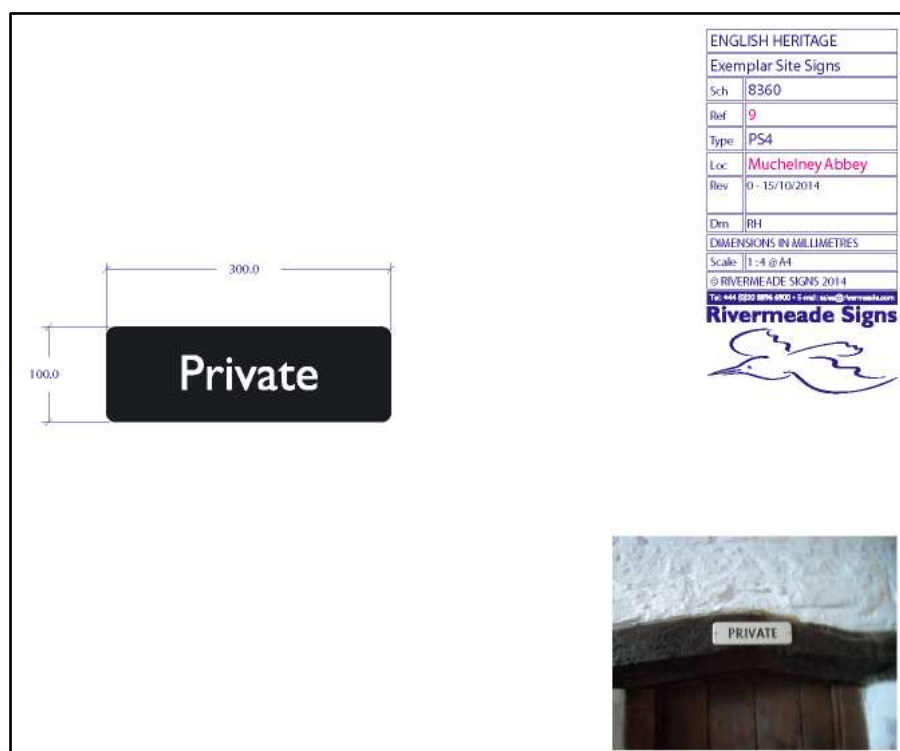


Fig. 5: Illustration showing dimensions & location of signage



Plate 15: View W showing 'Private' sign removed over rear office porch

6.8 Ref 10 & 11

No associated ground works were required.

6.9 Ref 12

The existing panel was removed and replaced with the new branded panel.



Fig. 6: Illustration showing dimensions & location of signage



Plate 16: View E of sign removed



Plate 17: View E of new sign

6.9.1 Methodology

The new car park directional panel measured 1100mm (height) × 1000mm (width). The existing sign was removed manually and the new sign set into one of the same holes.

6.9.2 Archaeological Impact

The holes for these posts (*Plate 16*) were 210mm (width) × 440mm (depth) (left) and 250mm (width) × 450mm (depth) (right). The first of these (left) revealed made ground (the result of 2014-15 flood reparation works) to a thickness of 150mm above a 100mm –thick topsoil, which in turn overlay concrete to a thickness of 190mm. The second hole revealed made ground to the base of the holes with 0.40m of modern topsoil.

6.10 Ref 13

The existing 'Guardianship' panel was removed and replaced with the new branded panel.



Fig. 7: Illustration showing dimensions & location of signage



Plate 18: View E showing old sign removed



Plate 19: View E new signs in situ

6.10.1 Methodology

The new 'Guardianship' panel measured 1800mm (height) × 600mm (width).

6.10.2 Archaeological Impact

The holes for these posts (*Plate 18*) were 310mm (width) × 440mm (depth) (left) and 250mm (width) × 440mm (depth) (right). Recent made ground (the result of 2014-15 flood reparation works) was revealed to the full depth of the holes.

7 Copyright

Border Archaeology shall retain full copyright of any commissioned reports, tender documents or other project documents, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, with all rights reserved, excepting that it hereby provides a licence to the client and the Council for the use of the report by the client and the Council in all matters directly relating to the project as described in the Project Specification to use the documentation for their statutory functions and to provide copies of it to third parties as an incidental to such functions.

8 References

Somerset County Council Historic Environment Record

Bartlett, A. D. H., 1999, *Muchelney Abbey Somerset: Report on Archaeophysical Survey*, 1999

Bates, E.H. (ed.), 1899, 'Two cartularies of the Benedictine abbeys of Muchelney and Athelney', *Somerset Record Society* Vol. **14**

Border Archaeology, 2014, *Archaeological Field Recording Manual*

Brunning, R., 2009, 'Muchelney, Eastmoor Lane' In Payne, N and Webster, C. (eds.) 'Somerset Archaeology 2009', *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History* Vol. **153**, 212-3

Brickley, M. & McKinley, J., 2004, *Guidelines to the Standards for Recording Human Remains*, IFA Technical Paper No **7**

Brown, D., 2011 (2nd edition), *Archaeological Archives: A guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation*

ClfA, 2014, *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*

ClfA, 2014, *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials*

CIfA, 2014, *Standard & Guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives*

CIfA, 2014, *Code of conduct*

CIfA, 2015, *Regulations for professional conduct*

DCLG, 2012, *National Planning Policy Framework*

English Heritage, 1991, *Management of Archaeological Projects*, London

English Heritage, 2002, *Human Bones from Archaeological Sites: Guidelines for producing assessment documents and analytical reports*, Centre for Archaeology Guidelines

English Heritage, 2006, *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment*, Swindon

Finberg, H.P.R., 1964, *The Early Charters of Wessex*, Leicester

Hollinrake, C and Hollinrake, N., 1999, 'Muchelney, Muchelney Abbey', in Webster, C.J. (ed.) 'Somerset Archaeology 1999', *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History*, Vol **143**, 173-4

Hollinrake, C and Hollinrake, N., 1999, *An Archaeological Desk Top Survey of Muchelney Abbey*, Report No. **143**

McKinley, J. & Roberts, C., 1993, *Excavation and post-excavation treatment of cremated and inhumed human remains*, IFA Technical Paper No **13**

Membery, S., 2011, *Heritage Service Archaeological Handbook*, Somerset County Council

MGC, 1994, *Standards in the museum care of archaeological collections*

Ministry of Justice, 2007, *Burial Law and Policy in the 21st century: The way forward*, Response to consultation CP(R) DCA/HO 1/05

MoJ, 2011, *Statement on the exhumation of human remains for archaeological purposes*

Page, W. (ed.), 1911, *Victoria History of the County of Somerset*, 103-7

Rodwell, K. A., 2002, *Investigations into the Structural Archaeology of Muchelney Abbey, 2000-2*

Rodwell, K. A., 2003, *Muchelney Abbey Somerset: Archaeological observations during new access works*, 2003

Walker, K., 1990, *Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long-term storage*, United Kingdom Institute for Conservation (UKIC) Archaeology Section

Watkinson, D. & Neal, V., 2001, *First Aid for Find*, Hertford

Webster, C. J., 2007, *The Archaeology of South West England: South West Archaeological Research Framework Resource Assessment and Research Agenda*, Somerset County Council

Report title:		Report Ref:	
Archaeological Observation of Signage Replacement at Muchelney Abbey Muchelney Langport Somerset TA10 ODQ		BA1510MAS	
Report written by	Andrew Tizzard BA PhD MCIfA		
Reported edited by	George Children MA MCIfA		
Issue No.	Status	Date	Approved for issue
1	Final	April 2015	Neil Shurety Dip.M G M Inst M