

# **birmingham archaeology**

**Croxden Abbey, Croxden,  
Staffordshire:**

**an archaeological watching  
brief  
2007**

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**Croxden Abbey, Croxden, Staffordshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief**

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**CROXDEN ABBEY, CROXDEN, STAFFORDSHIRE:  
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF 2007**

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## **SUMMARY**

*An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Birmingham Archaeology during July 2007 within the grounds of Croxden Abbey, Croxden, Staffordshire (NGR SK 0653 96), a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The work was undertaken on behalf of English Heritage and was undertaken during the excavation of trenches to accommodate concrete foundations for new display panels.*

*Three hand excavated trenches were monitored by an archaeologist during the watching brief. One trench revealed evidence of possible stone foundations that may either be associated with the infirmary building, or another structure to the west of the infirmary. Finds of medieval date including sherds of pottery and tile were recovered from the topsoil in all of the trenches.*

## **CROXDEN ABBEY, CROXDEN, STAFFORDSHIRE: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF 2007**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

In July 2007 Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by English Heritage to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks for the installation of display panels at Croxden Abbey, Croxden, Staffordshire. These works were undertaken within the Scheduled Ancient Monument (NMN 21531).

This report outlines the results of the watching brief, which was carried out on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2007 and was prepared in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (IFA 1994). The work conformed to a written scheme of investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology.

### **2 LOCATION AND GEOLOGY**

The area proposed for the siting of the interpretation panels is located at Croxden Abbey, Croxden, Staffordshire, within a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM NO. 21531, centred on NGR SK 0652 3970, hereafter referred to as 'the site', Fig. 1). The underlying drift geology (British Geological Survey 2006, 1:50,000 map) is sand and gravel river terrace and alluvium over solid geology of the Sneinton Formation (mudstone and siltstone interbedded with sandstone). The site is at a height of 128m AOD.

The present character of the site is of a mix of ruined standing structures, landscaped lawns and an east-west road that bisects the site (Fig. 2). Farmland is located to the north and south, with residential and farm buildings lining the road to the east and west. Standing remains include the church and claustral ranges, abbot's house and a late medieval barn. The site of the abbey kitchen is occupied by a Georgian farmhouse building. Earthworks demarcate the former abbey precinct.

### **3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The principle aim of the watching brief was to identify and record archaeological features and deposits uncovered during groundworks associated with the works for the erection of the interpretation panels. The specific objectives of the evaluation were:

- I. To monitor all aspects of the groundworks associated with the erection of interpretation panels,
- II. to undertake adequate recording of any archaeological remains revealed during the course of the groundworks,
- III. to ensure that any artefacts and/or ecofacts are analysed, conserved and placed in the appropriate long-term storage repository

## 4 METHODOLOGY

The groundworks comprised the removal of turf and topsoil to enable the installation of square metal support plinths. Three trenches (Trenches 2-4) were excavated by hand using a turf cutter and a spade. A fourth proposed trench (Trench 1) was not excavated. An experienced archaeologist attended site to monitor the groundworks, which involved the stripping of topsoil. Following the stripping of topsoil the uppermost excavated surfaces were inspected, and sufficient hand-cleaning was undertaken to facilitate the definition of archaeological, or possible archaeological features and deposits. No excavation of archaeological features, other than hand-cleaning, was undertaken.

All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Features were planned at a scale of 1:20 or 1:50, and sections were drawn of all cut features and significant vertical stratigraphy at a scale of 1:10. A comprehensive written record was maintained using a continuous numbered context system on *pro-forma* context cards. Written records and scale plans were supplemented by photographs using monochrome and colour print and colour slide photography.

Recovered finds were cleaned, and marked. No remedial conservation work was necessary. Treatment of all finds conformed to guidance contained within 'A strategy for the care and investigation of finds' published by English Heritage.

The full site archive will include all artefactual remains recovered from the site. The site archive will be prepared according to guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of the Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage, 1991), the Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-term Storage (Walker 1990) and Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological collections (Museum and Art Galleries Commission, 1992). Finds and the paper archive will be deposited with an appropriate museum or repository within 12 months of the completion of the fieldwork, subject to permission from the landowner.

## 5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The late Cistercian abbey at Croxden was founded by Bertram de Verdun in 1178 after being relocated from Cotton, a few miles to the north, where monks from Aulnay-sur-Odon in Normandy had arrived in 1176. The abbey was dedicated in 1181 and the majority of permanent structures, based upon the plan of the mother-house of Aulney-sur-Odon, were completed during the following fifty years under the tutelage of an English abbot, Thomas.

The site at Croxden was compact with no more than twelve monks in residence at any one time. The abbey prospered from sheep farming during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries but found it difficult to survive economically after a difficult relationship with the new patron, Thomas de Furnivale. During the mid to late fourteenth century these difficulties were compounded by a succession of economic calamities caused by heavy taxation and the effects of natural disasters such as plague, bad harvests and floods. By the end of century there was a reduction in the numbers of monks in residence. The abbey never again regained its early prosperity and continued to struggle until its dissolution in 1538 (Cistercians, n. d. [website]).

## 6 RESULTS (Fig. 2)

Three trenches (Trenches 2-4) were monitored during the watching brief. Each trench was 0.70m x 0.70m.

## **Trench 2**

This trench was located on the west side of the remains of the infirmary structure (Plate 1). The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.15m. The top of a possible stone wall foundation (2001) was encountered at this depth (Fig. 3, Plate 2). Overlying 2001 was topsoil (2000), 0.15m deep, containing a sherd of medieval pottery.

## **Trench 3**

This trench was situated within the remains of the nave of the former abbey church. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.17m. Only topsoil (3000) was encountered containing stone rubble (Plates 3 & 4), tile and sherds of medieval pottery.

## **Trench 4**

This trench was located east of the altar outside the former abbey church. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.17m (Plates 5 and 6). Only topsoil (4000) was encountered containing a single sherd of medieval pottery.

## **7 FINDS**

### **7.1 The pottery by S. Ratkai**

All finds were from the topsoil but are of interest due to their association with the abbey.

#### **Contexts**

##### **2000**

1 x late medieval oxidised ware, from a 15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> c jug.

##### **3000**

1 x iron-poor gritty ware with opaque brown glaze (14<sup>th</sup>?-15<sup>th</sup> c).  
1 x floor tile, not closely datable but probably medieval.

##### **4000**

1 x buff-white ware from a jug. This ware is typical of North Staffordshire and South Cheshire, 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> c.

## **8 CONCLUSIONS**

The watching brief recovered unstratified finds associated with the abbey. The possible stone foundations uncovered in Trench 2 are probably part of foundations associated with the infirmary building, but could also be associated with another building to the west, adjoining the infirmary.

## 9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by English Heritage. Thanks are due to Sarah Tatham for her assistance throughout the project. Thanks also go to Stephanie Ratkai who identified the finds. The watching brief was undertaken by Mark Charles who also produced the written report which was illustrated by Nigel Dodds, and edited by Laurence Jones who also managed the project for Birmingham Archaeology.

## 10 REFERENCES

Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1994. *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief*. Institute of Field Archaeologists, revised 2001

### Website

<http://cistercians.shef.ac.uk/abbeys/croxden.php> [accessed 23.7.2007]





Fig.1

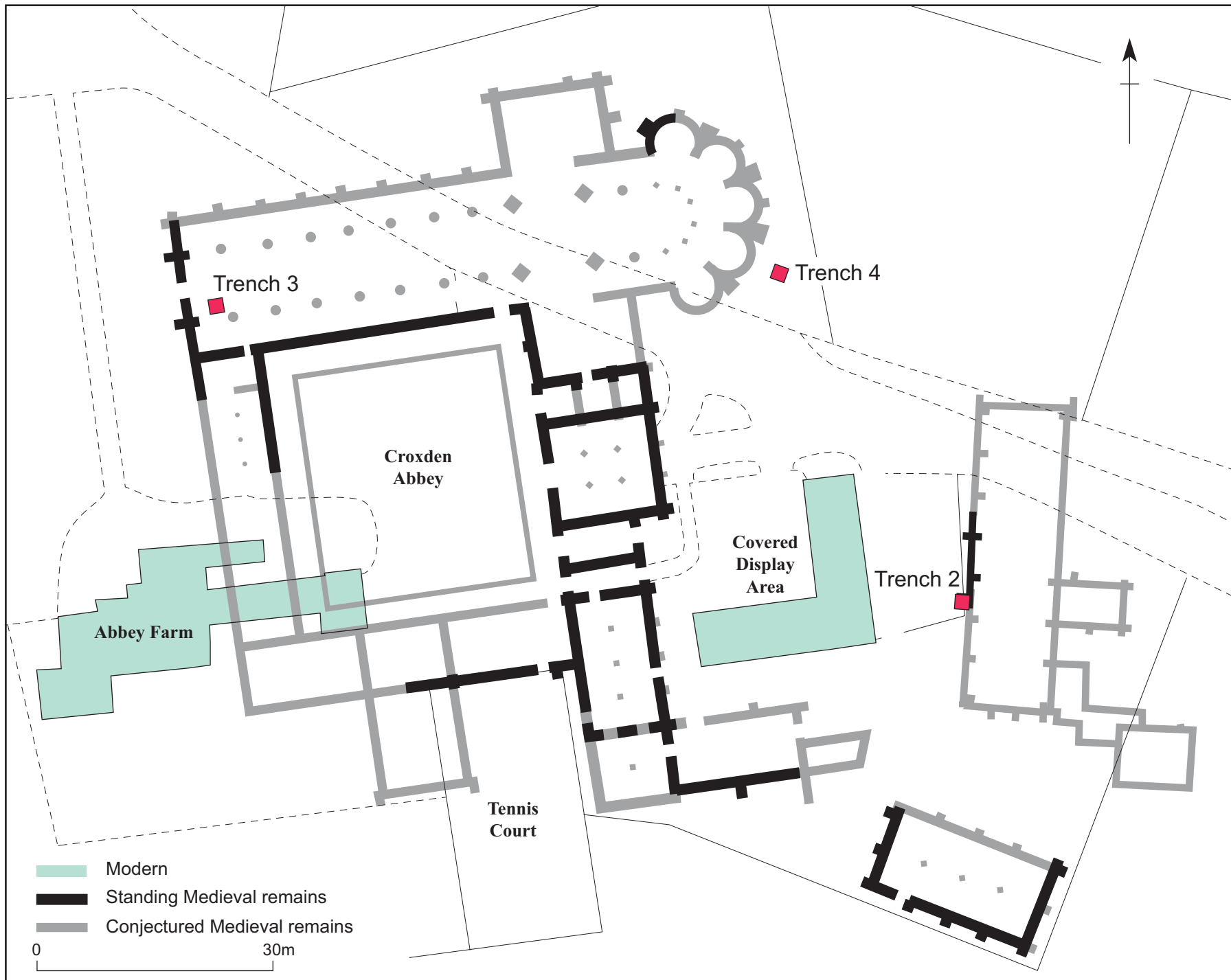


Fig.2



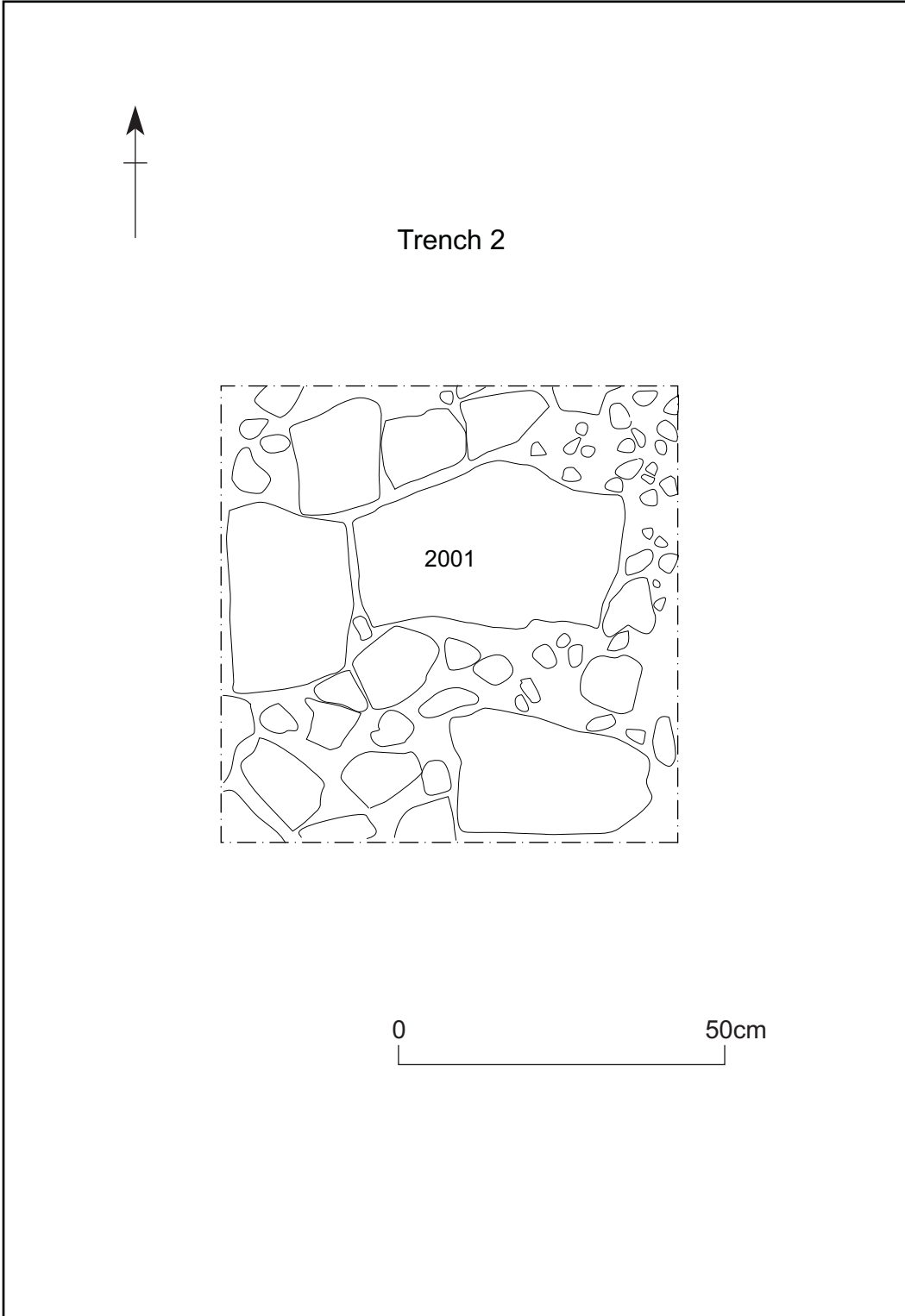


Fig.3



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3





Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6