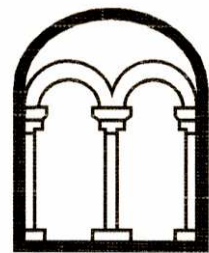


**DESBOROUGH CASTLE PLAY AREA
HIGH WYCOMBE
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Albion
archaeology



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HIGH WYCOMBE
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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Preface

Every effort has been made in the preparation of this document to provide as complete a summary as possible within the terms of the method statement. All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.

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Albion Archaeology was commissioned to carry out the archaeological works by Wycombe District Council.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Marcin Koziminski (Archaeological Supervisor) who also prepared this report. Figures were created by Joan Lightning (CAD Technician).

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Key Terms

Throughout this document the following terms or abbreviations are used:

| | |
|-----|---|
| BCC | Buckinghamshire County Council |
| BCM | Buckinghamshire County Museum |
| EH | English Heritage |
| HER | Heritage Environment Record maintained by BCC |
| IfA | Institute for Archaeologists |
| WDC | Wycombe District Council |



Non-Technical Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during groundworks for the installation of a new children's play area within the scheduled ancient monument of Desborough Castle, High Wycombe. Scheduled monument consent for the play area was obtained and the archaeological works were required by English Heritage as a condition of this consent.

Though the site lies in an area rich in archaeological earthworks, no archaeological features or deposits were revealed during the observation and investigation of the construction groundworks.

Revealed deposits comprised naturally accumulated soils and geological strata. Buried soils were found around the centre of the site indicating some probable recent landscaping activity.

The lack of any findings during the watching brief should not be seen as definitive proof of the absence of archaeological remains in the area of the groundworks but more likely a result of the 'keyhole' nature of the groundworks.

The discovery of the buried soils indicates the infilling of a depression in the ground. As the groundworks generally did not penetrate below these soils it is not certain whether this feature has a natural or manmade origin.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Project Background*

Wycombe District Council (WDC) was granted scheduled ancient monument consent from English Heritage (EH) for the installation of a new children's playground at Desborough Castle. A condition was placed on the consent that an archaeological watching brief should be carried out on groundworks associated with the installation.

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by WDC to carry out the watching brief in accordance with the methodologies described in a Written Scheme of Investigation (Albion Archaeology 2011) which was approved by EH prior to commencement of the works.

1.2 *Site Location and Description*

Desborough Castle is located in the north-western outskirts of High Wycombe, at the north-eastern end of a prominent spur overlooking the valley of the River Wye (Figure 1).

The principal earthworks making up the monument are centred on national grid reference SU8472/9332. The earthworks are heavily wooded with the remainder of the scheduled area being open grass parkland.

The children's play area lies within part of the grassed area to the south-east of the earthworks; it is separated from the remainder of the monument by Rutland Road.

1.3 *Archaeological Background*

Desborough Castle (HER 1800000) comprises a sub-rectangular enclosure, approximately 0.5ha in area, surrounded by a single ditch and rampart. It was probably constructed during the early 13th century; it is a type of military stronghold known as a ringwork.

Evidence for earlier occupation of the site is also present. Around the north and west sides of the ringwork are the remains of a second bank and ditch (HER 1802000). This earthwork could represent the remains of an associated bailey; however its form suggests that it is an earlier feature, possibly a hillfort of late Bronze Age or early Iron Age date.

In addition to the enclosure earthworks are the remains of a circular mound (HER 1801000) which has been cut by the ringwork. It is approximately 24m across and may represent the surviving portion of a Bronze Age bowl barrow.

1.4 *Project Objectives*

The objective of the watching brief was to monitor and supervise all groundworks that had the potential to reveal archaeological remains and to investigate, characterise and record any archaeological deposits encountered within them.



It was important that adequate archaeological recording and investigation was carried out as the works had the potential to reveal evidence that might result in a greater understanding of the scheduled monument.

The broader objectives of the project were to add to the knowledge and understanding of the archaeology of Buckinghamshire and to produce a report and archive that fully described the archaeological works.



2. METHODOLOGY

Archaeological observation of the works took place during six visits between 8th November and 28th December 2011. Groundworks monitored included the excavation of foundation pits and trenches associated with the installation of the play equipment, as well as trenches around the perimeter of the play area for the construction of a timber palisade and a drawbridge (Figure 2).

The works were carried out using a mechanical mini-excavator, except where digging by hand was required. The base and sides of all trenches were cleaned by hand to reveal any potential archaeological features. The trenches were subsequently drawn and photographed as appropriate. All encountered deposits were investigated and recorded in a unique number sequence, using Albion Archaeology's *pro forma* sheets. Spoil heaps were also checked on a regular basis for the recovery of artefacts.

Throughout the project the standards set out in the following documents were adhered to:

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| • IfA | <i>By-Laws and Code of Conduct (2010)</i> |
| | <i>Standard and Guidance for Excavation (2008)</i> |
| | <i>Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief (2008)</i> |
| • English Heritage | <i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) (2009)</i> |
| | <i>Environmental Archaeology: A guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation (2002/01)</i> |
| • Albion Archaeology | <i>Procedures Manual: Volume 1 Fieldwork (2nd edn, 2001).</i> |
| • Bucks County Museum | <i>Procedures for the Deposit of Archaeological Archives (1999).</i> |

A detailed methodology is provided in the Written Scheme of Investigation (Albion Archaeology 2011).

The project archive will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum (accession no. AYBCM 2011.246). This report will be uploaded onto the Archaeology Data Service's OASIS website (ref. albionar1-113188).



3. RESULTS

3.1 *Introduction*

The groundworks only revealed naturally accumulated soils and undisturbed geological strata. These are summarised below and detailed in the Appendix. Numbers in brackets refer to the contexts recorded in the Appendix.

3.2 *Overburden*

Across most of the site the overburden was thin and consisted of up to 0.25m of topsoil/turf (1) and underlying brown grey subsoil (2) that was generally 0.1–0.15m thick (e.g. Figure 2: Sections 1 and 2).

However, some variations in the nature of overburden were observed in the central and south-western part of the site. These included the presence of:

- Buried topsoil (5), comprising dark brown deposit that was 0.31m thick at formation level (Figure 2: Sections 7 and 9).
- Buried subsoil (6), comprising at least 0.26m thick brown silty clay (Figure 2: Sections 6, 9 and 12).

Pieces of post-medieval/modern brick and tile were recovered from both of these deposits; subsoil 6 also contained fragments of coal.

3.3 *Geological Deposits*

Undisturbed geological strata were represented by grey orange clay with frequent stone and flint inclusions (3) and underlying chalk (4). The geological strata were not revealed in the central and south-western part of the proposed play area.



4. CONCLUSIONS

No archaeological features or deposits of significance were revealed during the observation and investigation of the construction groundworks.

Revealed deposits comprised naturally accumulated soils and geological strata. Buried soils were found around the centre of the site indicating some probable recent landscaping activity.

The lack of any findings during the watching brief should not be seen as definitive proof of the absence of archaeological remains in the area of the groundworks but more likely a result of the 'keyhole' nature of the groundworks.

The discovery of the buried soils indicates the infilling of a depression in the ground. As the groundworks generally did not penetrate below these soils it is not certain whether this feature has a natural or manmade origin.



5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albion Archaeology 2011. *Desborough Castle Play Area, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Watching Brief*. Document reference 2011/134.



6. APPENDIX: DETAILED CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS



Area: WB
Extent (ha): 0.07
OS Co-ordinates: SU8478793249
Description: Site of childrens play area

| Context: | Type: | Description: | Excavated: | Finds Present: |
|----------|----------------|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Topsoil | Friable dark brown grey silty loam occasional small-large CBM, occasional small-medium stones. Up to 0.25m thick deposit. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 | Subsoil | Friable mid brown grey sandy silt moderate small-medium stones, occasional large stones. Up to 0.2m thick deposit - overlies mainly natural (3), but also buried topsoil (5) in places. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 | Natural | Firm mid grey orange clay frequent small-large stones. Also contained frequent small to large flint. Overlies another natural (4). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 | Natural | Firm light grey white chalk occasional small-medium stones. Also contained occasional flint. Underlies natural (3). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 | Buried topsoil | Friable dark grey brown clay silt moderate small-medium CBM, moderate small-medium stones. At least 0.31m thick deposit, contained also coal fragments. Underlies subsoil (2) - present mainly in the centre of the site. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 | Buried subsoil | Firm mid grey brown silty clay . At least 0.26m thick deposit. Contained moderate small to large flint and occasional coal and CBM fragments. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

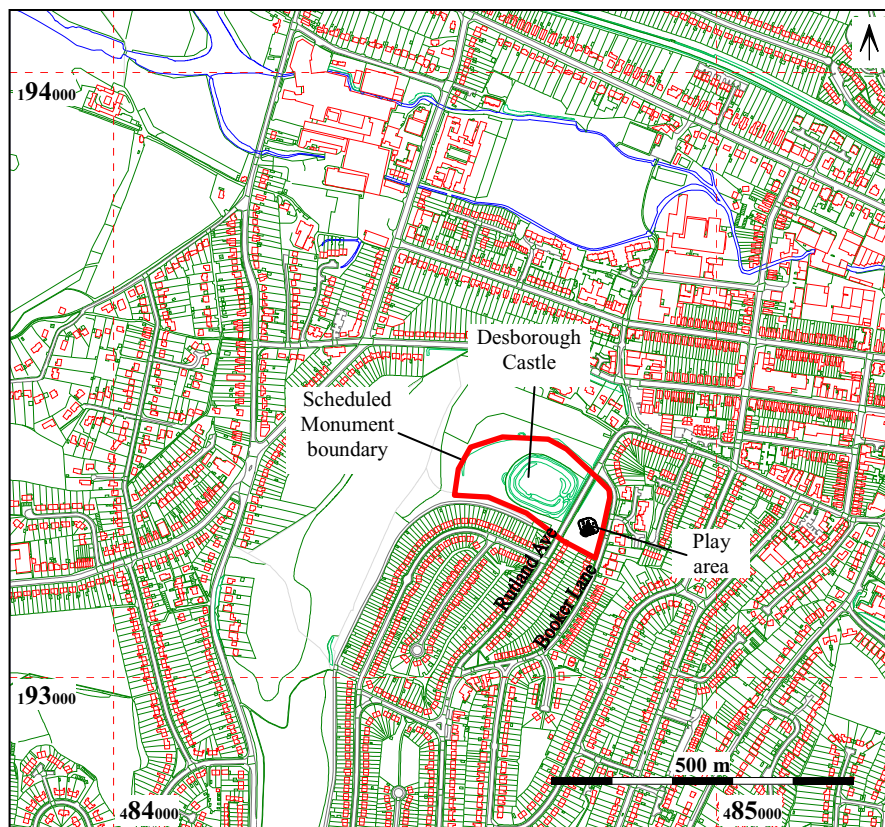
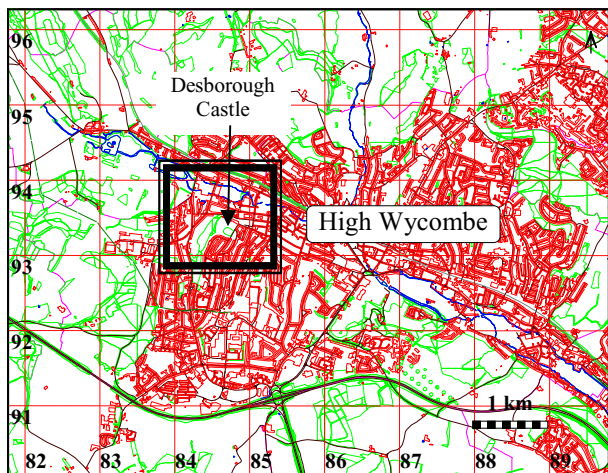
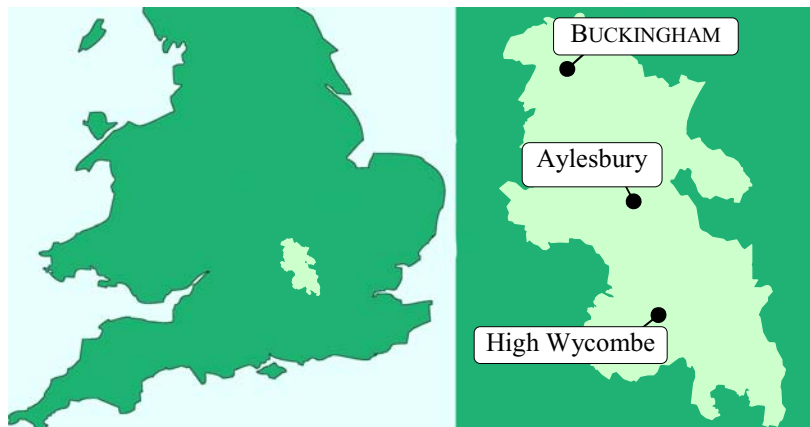
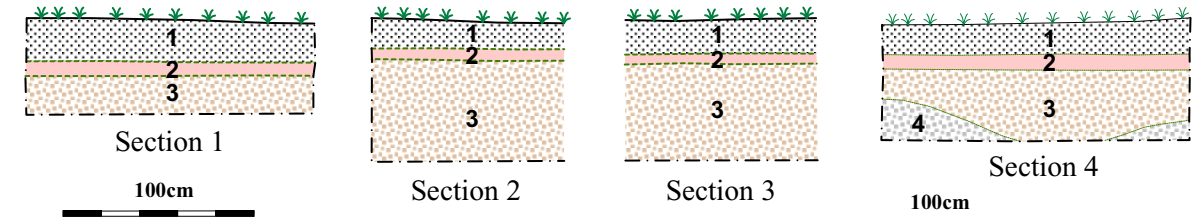
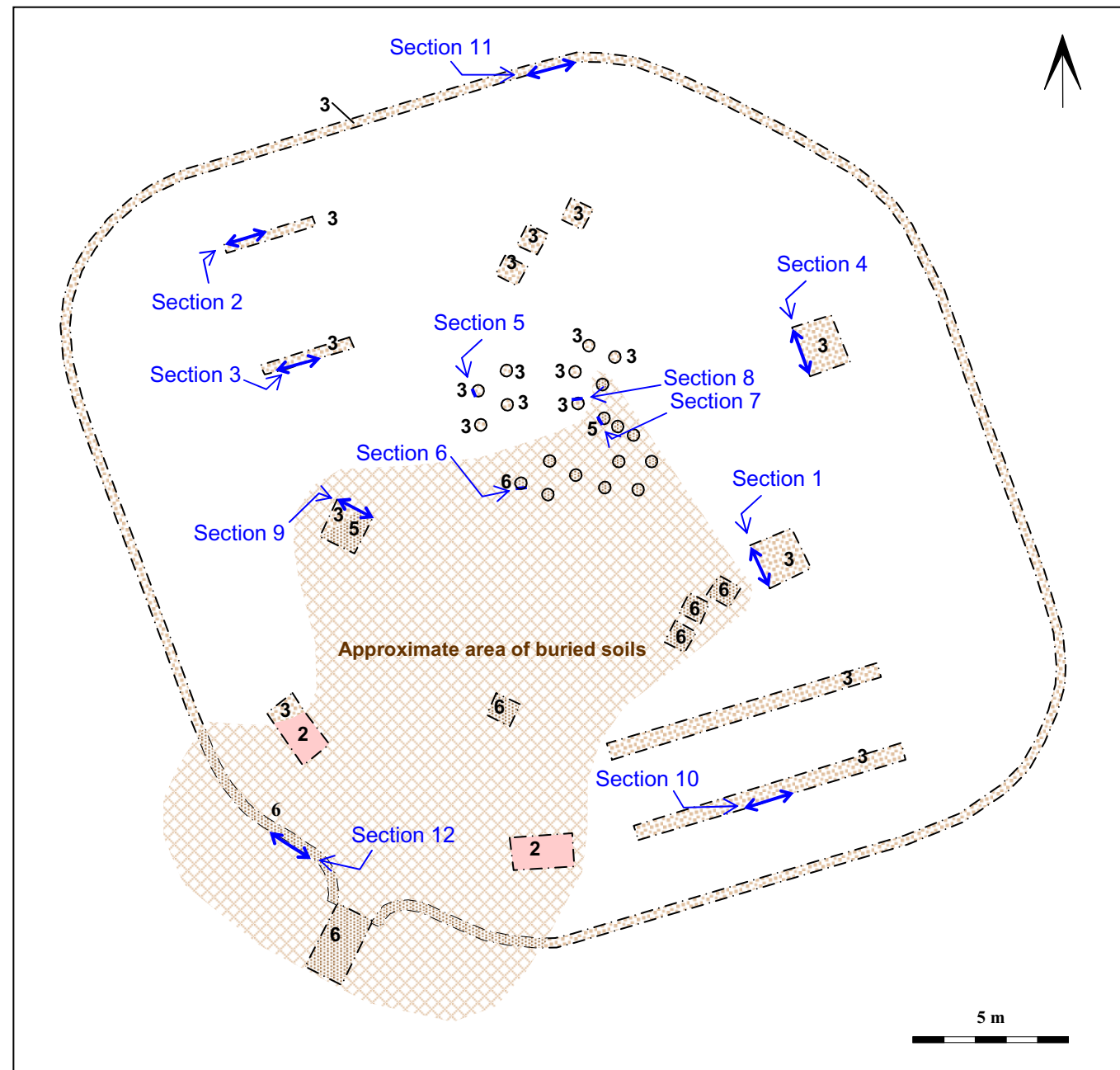
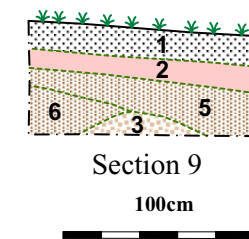
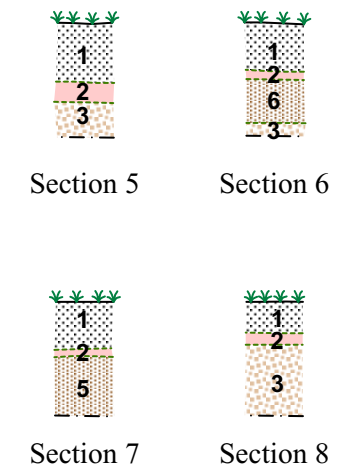


Figure 1: Site location

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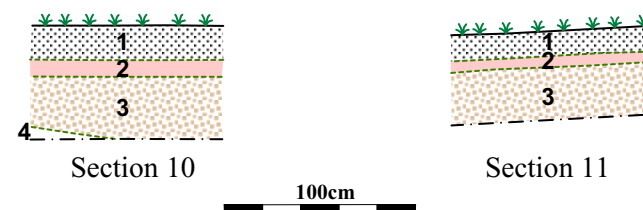
Photograph of section 7.
Scale 40cm.



Photograph of section 9.
Looking NE. Scale 1m.



Photograph of section 10.
Looking SE. Scale 1m.



Photograph of section 12.
Looking SE. Scale 1m.

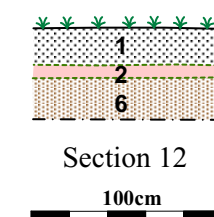


Figure 2: Watching brief results

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