

**OLD GORHAMBURY
BACON'S HOUSE
ST ALBANS
HERTFORDSHIRE**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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Introduction

Class 6 Scheduled Monument Consent was granted through English Heritage for the excavation of postholes to allow the installation of two English Heritage information panels at Old Gorhambury House, Hertfordshire.

At the request of Dr. Sarah Tatham, English Heritage Information Officer, an archaeologist was present to monitor the excavation of the postholes and record any possible archaeological information revealed. This report presents the findings of the observations. The work took place during April 2010.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Richard Gregson (Archaeological Supervisor). The postholes were excavated by English Heritage's contractor under archaeological supervision. This report was written by Richard Gregson and the project was managed by Hester Cooper-Reade (Project Manager).

Site Description and Location

The site of Old Gorhambury, Bacon's House, is centred at TL 1101 0760 within the Verulam estate to the west of St Albans (Figure 1). It lies at an average height of c.127m OD.

Archaeological Background

Until the dissolution of the monasteries the manor of Gorhambury had been owned by the Abbey of St Albans. Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal to Elizabeth I bought the manor in 1561 and began construction of a new house with the initial phase of construction undertaken between 1563 and 1568. The house was subsequently extended during the 1570s by the addition to its western side of a large east-west aligned range with a ground floor in the form of a loggia. Further alterations to the house were made during the first quarter of the 17th century when the house was in the ownership of Sir Francis Bacon.

After the house passed out of the ownership of the Bacon family further alterations were carried out by Sir Harbottle Grimston who bought the house in 1652. By 1778 it had fallen into such disrepair that the 3rd Viscount Grimston constructed a new house (Gorhambury) to the north-east to the design of Sir Robert Taylor and the old house was abandoned. A plan of the house was prepared by Charlotte Grimston in 1821 (Figure 1). This was a ground floor plan of the building at its largest extent in the late 18th century with the names or function of the rooms indicated in a key. A significant amount of the building had been demolished by 1821 and the plan must, therefore, have been based on an earlier survey or memory. The plan is reproduced in an article in *Country Life* (Rogers 1933).

The estate is owned by the Earl of Verulam who lives in the 18th-century Gorhambury House situated c.500m to the north-east of the ruins.

Project Methodology

Methods employed during the project complied with the Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct and Standards and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (1999), and Albion Archaeology's *Procedures Manual* (2001).



Description and Results of Groundworks

Groundworks consisted of the hand excavation of four postholes, measuring 0.22m in diameter and up to 0.5m deep, for the installation of two information boards, Panels 1 and 2. The panels were located to the south of the remaining ruins of Bacon's House (Figure 1, Plate 1). One was within the area formerly occupied by the main court of the building and the other just outside it.

Topsoil, comprising mid grey brown sandy silt with occasional pieces of brick, flint, stone and mortar, was revealed to a depth of 0.39m within the postholes of both panels. Below this was a deposit comprising brick, flint and mortar building rubble mixed with mid grey brown sandy silt.

The location of Panel 1 within the former main court was altered twice because large angular stones were encountered within the first 0.1m of excavation. There was no evidence that the stones were part of an *in situ* structure, although they were large and angular enough for them to have been shaped for use as masonry. It is possible that they were part of collapsed masonry or demolition rubble. The postholes for the panel were moved c.0.2m to the side and rotated around 90 degrees (Plate 2).

One of the postholes of Panel 2 (Plates 3 and 4) outside the former building was excavated to a reduced depth of 0.44m because a piece of brick was encountered in the base. The brick was horizontal and had traces of mortar on its upper surface. This may have been part of an *in situ* structure, a brick rubble surface, or debris from the collapse of the building.

Conclusion

In situ archaeological deposits exposed during the watching brief consisted of one horizontal brick found at a depth of 0.44m in one of the postholes of Panel 2 which may or may not have been part of a brick-built structure. It was left undisturbed at that depth with the concrete and panel post placed on top.

The remaining deposits exposed represent accumulation of soil over the ruined building remains. The two larger stone blocks, visible in the original postholes for Panel 1, and the flint, brick and mortar inclusions in the deposits removed for the postholes of both panels, probably originate from the nearby building walls after their destruction and/or collapse.

Bibliography

Albion Archaeology 2001. *Procedures Manual, Volume 1: Fieldwork. 2nd Edition.*

Rogers, J.C. 1933. 'Old Gorhambury', *Country Life*, December 16th, pp. 649-651



Figures and Plates

Figure 1 Site location and position of new panels

Plate 1 Location of both panels (after installation)

Plate 2 Panel 1 – masonry and adjusted position of postholes

Plate 3 Panel 2 – excavation of postholes

Plate 4 Panel 2 – excavated postholes

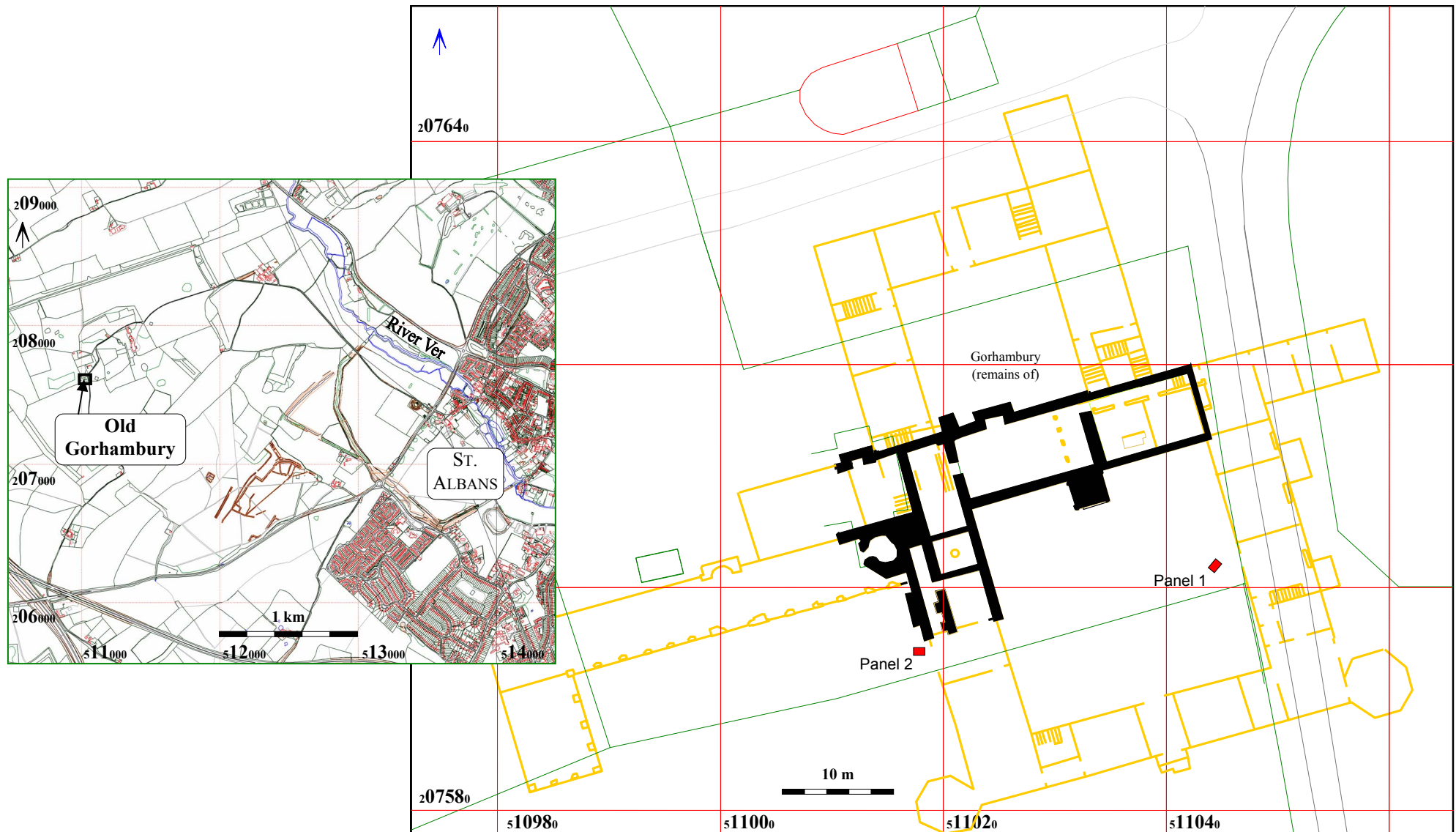


Figure 1: Site location and position of new panels

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Plate 1: Location of both panels (after installation)



Plate 2: Panel 1 – masonry and adjusted position of postholes



Plate 3: Panel 2 - excavation of postholes



Plate 4: Panel 2 – excavated postholes