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**INTERPRETATION BOARDS AT LANERCOST PRIORY, CUMBRIA:
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

Dear Sarah Tatham,

On the 11th December 2006, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd undertook an archaeological watching brief at Lanercost Priory (NMR No. 23689), Cumbria. The work was required in response to a SMC application by Sarah Tatham, Interpretation Officer, English Heritage, to install two interpretation boards within the grounds of the Scheduled Monument (Figure 1) and carried out in accordance with a project design as approved by Andrew Davison, Inspector of Ancient Monuments/ Team Leader English Heritage North West Region (Davies 2006). These two interpretation boards form the final part of the original scheme of works, totalling six interpretation boards to be inserted in several sites around Lanercost Priory. The other four were installed in April 2006 (Dodds 2006b). These final panels, known as panels 1a and 1b took longer to receive planning consent, and conclude the works at the site.

Archaeological Background

Roman remains were found in and around Lanercost throughout the 19th century. Roman stones with inscriptions have been found incorporated into various parts of the monastic buildings. The discoveries led to a display in 1836 of artefacts, such as altars and vases, in the undercroft of the priory.

Works in 1889 to extend the Abbey Farm dairy, situated immediately to the west of the present site, unearthed the skeletons of three humans and two horses. Two of the human burials were recorded as lying in the usual east-west position. The other was the largest of the three skeletons, and had been provided with a partially mortared stonework cist (Bulkeley 1891, 70). The cist had a separate chamber for the head and was

capped with stone flags. Examples of such burials are known from the Roman period and re-emerge during about the 10th century. One of the horse skeletons was found at the foot of this burial, and that of a larger horse was located outside the dairy. Although occasional burials of this type are known from the medieval period it is possible that the horse burials are of a later date and may be associated with the use of the farm.

There is some indecision as to whether the third burial was positioned on a north-south or east-west alignment (ibid, 70). If the burial was north-south it is likely to pre-date the east-west burials, suggesting a ritual significance of the site prior to the foundation of the monastery in 1169. The date of this group of burials is speculative, Bulkeley suggests they pre-date the priory as they were located at some distance from the present churchyard, and suggests a Roman, Saxon or Anglo-Scandinavian date (ibid 71). Other burials were apparently discovered close by during drainage works.

Excavations conducted by W. S. Calverley in 1896 or 1897 on the green to the north west of the priory revealed the remains of a mound and ditch, together with some masonry of probable medieval date and a small stone cist containing fragments of an urn and bones (Haverfield 1897, 195). It is noted that the urn appeared to be Romano-British, and that at least three of the bone fragments were identified by Oxford Museum as deer bones; no human bone was identified. An extensive geophysical survey comprising four survey areas was carried by English Heritage's Ancient Monuments Laboratory in 1992. Resistivity and magnetometry were used to reveal a number of anomalies, notably possible ditches and robbed out walls, a circular feature measuring 5m in diameter and a possible kiln.

Recent work by North Pennines Archaeology at Abbey Farm immediately south of the priory has identified a number of archaeological features of Medieval date (Giecco, Jones and Jones 2004, Dodd 2006a).

Results

For Interpretation Board locations, and associated photographs, see Figure 1.

Panel 1a

A shallow hole was excavated to the north of the Priory remains, close to the Gate House, to provide a secure base for the interpretation board. Measuring, 0.56m x 0.44m to a total depth of 0.13m this revealed the topsoil, a mid to dark brown sandy silt with occasional flecks of mortar. There was no evidence of any archaeological features and it no finds were encountered.

Panel 1b

A shallow hole was excavated to the east of the Priory remains, close to the eastern gate, in order to ground the base of the interpretation board. Measuring, 0.56m x 0.44m, and to a total depth of 0.12m this excavation revealed the topsoil which was a dark brown rich silt that represents the present topsoil. There was no evidence of any archaeological features and it no finds were recovered.

Conclusion

The two interpretation panels impacted upon topsoil deposits, but did not encounter any features or artefacts of archaeological interest. It is likely that the topsoil deposit uncovered was modern in date.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely

Cat Peters, BA MLitt

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