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SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) on behalf of English Heritage within the grounds of the Scheduled Monument of Furness Abbey, Cumbria (SM 13572; centred on SD 2183 7175). The excavation of footings for the erection of a retaining wall for an access ramp to the rear of the visitors' centre was carried out under archaeological supervision and with Scheduled Monument consent (SMCC No. 13572/2) over three days in November 2005.

The groundworks were positioned within a paved area to the rear of the visitors' centre and, where necessary, the paving slabs were cut and removed with a power saw. In total, four foundation trenches for the access platform were excavated, together with nine smaller footings (pads) for the access ramp to the west. The foundation trenches were excavated to a maximum depth of 0.5m, and the pad footings to a maximum of 0.4m. The excavated material comprised mostly hardcore for the existing steps and paved surface. A layer of compacted topsoil and stones were also revealed at the south end of the working area, which was probably bedding material for a previous surface. Soil was observed in Pad 8; it had been the position of a shrub planted prior to the area having been paved.

No features of archaeological significance were encountered during the work, largely due to the presence of the pre-existing surface, the construction cut for which would have removed any archaeological deposits. However, it is possible that there may be archaeological survival beneath this levelling layer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) would like to thank Lyndon Smith of English Heritage for commissioning the project. Thanks are also due to the staff of Furness Abbey, and Harold Woodcock and colleagues of the contractors Blackburn Fraser for their assistance on site.

The watching brief was undertaken by Steve Clarke and David Tonks, who collectively wrote the report. The drawings were compiled by Christina Clark. The project was managed by Emily Mercer, who also edited the report together with Alan Lupton.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF PROJECT

- 1.1.1 English Heritage (hereafter the client) commissioned Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) to undertake an archaeological watching brief within the grounds of the Scheduled Monument of Furness Abbey, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria (SM 13572; NGR centred SD 2183 7175). Groundworks for the erection of a retaining wall to the rear of the visitors' centre, in order to facilitate an access ramp, were carried out under archaeological supervision, with Scheduled Monument consent (SMCC No. 13572/2) over a period of three days in November 2005. The project design has been prepared in accordance with a brief (*Appendix 1*) and details of the proposed works provided by English Heritage.
- 1.1.2 This report sets out the results of the watching brief in the form of a short document, including a brief historical background and the findings.

1.2 SITE LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 1.2.1 The southern end of Cumbria is largely dominated by undulating fells, from which a pastoral landscape with substantial woodlands has developed. The southern limit of the county is defined by the broad expanse of Morecambe Bay and the surrounding limestone lowlands (Hodgkinson *et al* 2000). Furness Abbey lies in a small but steep-sided valley on the north-east edge of the town of Barrow-in-Furness, and the visitors' centre is situated at the north end of the Abbey. The area of the groundworks equated to approximately 18.5m² on the south side of the visitors' centre adjacent to the rear exit.
- 1.2.2 The underlying solid geology of the area consists of Silurian Ludlow greywackes (Coniston Grits) and banded mudstones and siltstones (Countryside Commission 1998). The drift geology comprises typical brown earths of the Eardiston 1 association as categorised by Ordnance Survey (1983).

1.3 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- 1.3.1 This report does not intend to discuss in any depth the history of Furness Abbey, which has been covered in greater detail elsewhere (for instance, Beck 1844; Dickinson 1982). However, a brief outline of the abbey's history is included here.
- 1.3.2 Furness is not mentioned in the Domesday survey of 1086 (Faull and Stinson 1986), and the area seems to have been largely deserted before that date. The study area then lay near the extant township of Dalton, which probably represented the first significant settlement of the area (Ross 1884, 192). The township had belonged to Earl Tostig, brother to Harold Godwinson, until his rebellion in 1065. At the Conquest it fell to Roger of Poitou, whose later defection left it in the hands of the crown.
- 1.3.3 The monastery was established in c 1124 by Stephen, then Count of Mortain and, from 1135, King Stephen. It began as a Savignac House, following the French order of Savigny which had been founded in c 1090. The abbey is a rare representative of this order in Britain, where only 13 Savignac

monasteries were established. It was the earliest monastic house in the region (Pevsner 1969, 16) and continued as 'the largest, richest and most important of the Lancashire houses' (Haigh 1969, 14).

- 1.3.4 The site was typical of those chosen for medieval monastic foundations of the more eremitical sects, being in a quiet and secluded valley 'protected from marauders by the wooded fells of High Furness, with its difficult roads, dense woods, and the lake of Windermere, on the west by Morecambe Bay and its dangerous sands; on the east by the Duddon sands, and on the south by the sea and some outlying islands' (Ross 1884, 192). The valley had a constant water supply convenient for fishponds and mills, and was well positioned amongst abundant sources of red sandstone, iron and lead ore 'obtainable by very slight labour' (ibid), and plentiful timber.
- 1.3.5 When the Savignac order merged with the Cistercians in 1147, the Furness house was already partially built, c 400m to the south-west of the present study area. The Cistercians adapted the site, incorporating all of the components usual in their foundations, but with some distinctive variations and a slightly unorthodox alignment dictated by the shape of the valley, the situation of the Mill Beck, and nearby springs. It included a central cloister to the south of the church, dining hall and living room with dormitory above, a chapter house also with dormitory above, the church itself, latrines, the monks' dining room, kitchen and warming house, an infirmary, guest house and abbot's lodging.
- 1.3.6 The site is somewhat unusual in that elements of its precinct wall survive, built to enclose and define the abbey grounds, and this includes the study area, which lies in its northernmost corner.
- 1.3.7 The monastery became extremely wealthy, partly by accumulation of land endowments from nobles, and had extensive landholdings throughout the north-west of England and beyond. In the twelfth century alone daughter houses were founded in Cumbria, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Ireland and the Isle of Man (Dickinson 1982, 3). The abbey represented a powerful estate whose influence was felt in these distant regions, and would certainly have shaped developments within the study area, inside its own precinct walls.
- 1.3.8 In the early sixteenth century, there was a spate of litigation at the abbey as monks jostled for positions of power, and there were accusations (not atypical in the period preceding the Reformation) of 'incontinence, irregularity, simony and other proven crimes' (Haigh 1969, 15). At the time of its dissolution in 1537, a survey described 'divers granges, fields, meadows, mills, fisheries, within the manor' and 'orchards, mill, and certain closes adjoining [the abbey]' (West 1774, 100). The study area might have fallen within any of these categories, excepting mills or fisheries.
- 1.3.9 By 1549, the abbey and various parts of its land were leased to John Preston of Preston Patrick. He and his descendants resided in a manor house close to the abbey, of which parts may survive in and around the Abbey Tavern, 300m south-west of the study area (Page 1966, 311). The Prestons were known to be recusants from at least the early seventeenth century, and in 1674 the then owner Sir Thomas became a Jesuit. The estate was forfeited in the early eighteenth century, and descended through another branch of the family to the

Cavendish family who placed the ruins in the guardianship of the state in 1923 (ibid).

- 1.3.10 Map evidence (Section 3) suggests that the study area was unoccupied until the first half of the twentieth century, when the Abbey House Hotel was built, and was used before that date as pasture or agricultural land.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 PROJECT DESIGN

2.1.1 A project design (*Appendix 2*) was submitted by OA North in response to a request from English Heritage. This was prepared in accordance with an English Heritage brief (*Appendix 1*). The project design was adhered to in full, apart from an additional day (November 29th 2005) on site to the two days stated (November 7th and 8th 2005) due to the requirements of the groundworks. The work was consistent with the relevant standards and procedures of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and generally accepted best practice.

2.2 WATCHING BRIEF

2.2.1 A permanent archaeological presence was maintained during excavations of footings for the construction of a new raised platform, steps and access ramp to the rear exit of the Abbey's visitor's centre.

2.2.2 Recording was by means of OA North's standard context recording system, with trench records and supporting registers and indices. A full photographic record in colour transparency and monochrome formats was undertaken. Section drawings and plans were made of relevant areas of the trenches at appropriate scales. The trenches and pad footings were located using taped measurements from existing walls and were excavated manually.

2.3 ARCHIVE

2.3.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the project design (*Appendix 2*), and in accordance with current IFA and English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 1991). The paper and digital archive will be deposited in the County Record Office in Barrow-in-Furness on completion of the project, and a copy of this report will be deposited with the County Historic Environment Record. A paper copy and pdf version on CD will also be forwarded to English Heritage.

3. RESULTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 The objective of the watching brief was to identify any potential archaeological features revealed, particularly those relating to the ruins of Furness Abbey, during the groundworks. In total, four foundation trenches for the platform were excavated over two days on November 7th and 8th 2005, together with nine smaller footings (pads) for an access ramp to the west on November 29th 2005 (Fig 2). All the excavations were within a previously paved area to the rear of the visitors' centre and, where necessary, the paving slabs were cut and removed with a power saw.

3.2 FOUNDATION TRENCHES

3.2.1 **Trench 1:** the trench extended south from the rear wall of the visitors' centre (Fig 2) and was 5m in length, 0.5m in width and 0.5m in depth. The stratigraphy comprised 0.3m to 0.5m compacted pinkish-brown limestone chippings (up to 0.05m in length) and gravel hardcore. At the southern end of the trench, the chippings directly overlay a very compacted layer extending 0.65m north (Plate 1), which comprised black silty-clay soil with 20% small sub-rounded stones and occasional small sandstone and mortar fragments. No archaeological horizons were encountered.

3.2.2 **Trench 2:** the trench extended east from the south end of Trench 1 (Fig 2), parallel to the rear of the visitors' centre, and was 3.68m in length. The section showed the same limestone hardcore as observed in Trench 1, overlaying black silty-clay soil to a further depth of 0.1m (Plate 2). No archaeological horizons were encountered.

3.2.3 **Trench 3:** the trench was 1.58m in length, 0.5m deep and was aligned north/south (Fig 2). The excavation exposed the same limestone hardcore as previously observed to a full depth of 0.5m (Plate 2). No archaeological horizons were encountered.

3.2.4 **Trench 4:** this trench was 2.7m in length, 0.5m in depth and was aligned east/west (Fig 2). The excavation exposed the same limestone hardcore as previously observed to a full depth of 0.5m. No archaeological horizons were encountered.

3.3 RAMP FOOTINGS

3.3.1 **Pad 1:** measuring 0.5m x 0.5m x 0.13m, the stratigraphy comprised a 0.05m paving slab overlying 0.08m of mixed imported levelling sand and dark grey crushed stone hardcore. A layer of concrete was encountered at 0.13m and the excavation was curtailed. No archaeological horizons were encountered.

3.3.2 **Pad 2:** measuring 0.5m x 0.5m x 0.13m, the stratigraphy comprised a 0.05m paving slab overlying 0.08m mixed imported levelling sand and dark grey crushed stone hardcore. A layer of concrete was encountered at 0.13m and the excavation was curtailed. No archaeological horizons were encountered.

- 3.3.3 **Pad 3:** measuring 0.5m x 0.5m x 0.2m, the stratigraphy comprised 0.13m mixed imported levelling sand and dark grey crushed stone hardcore overlying the concrete layer in the northern half of the pad only. Within the southern half, the excavation continued through the hardcore to a full depth of 0.2m. No archaeological horizons were encountered.
- 3.3.4 **Pad 4:** measuring 0.5m x 0.5m x 0.2m, the stratigraphy comprised 0.05m paving slab overlying 0.15m mixed imported levelling sand and dark grey crushed stone hardcore to a full depth of 0.2m. No archaeological horizons encountered.
- 3.3.5 **Pad 5:** measuring 0.5m x 0.5m x 0.11m, the stratigraphy comprised 0.05m paving slab overlying 0.06m mixed imported levelling sand and dark grey crushed stone hardcore (Plate 3). A layer of concrete was encountered at 0.11m and the excavation was curtailed. No archaeological horizons were encountered.
- 3.3.6 **Pad 6:** measuring 0.5m x 0.5m x 0.4m, the stratigraphy comprised 0.05m paving slab overlying 0.15m mixed imported levelling sand and dark grey crushed stone hardcore to a full depth of 0.4m (Plate 4). No archaeological horizons encountered.
- 3.3.7 **Pad 7:** measuring 0.5m x 0.5m x 0.2m, the stratigraphy comprised 0.05m paving slab overlying 0.15m mixed imported levelling sand and dark grey crushed stone hardcore to a full depth of 0.2m. No archaeological horizons encountered.
- 3.3.8 **Pad 8:** measuring 0.5m x 0.5m x 0.2m, the stratigraphy comprised 0.11m mixed imported levelling sand and dark grey crushed stone hardcore overlying the concrete layer in the western half of the pad only. Within the eastern half, the excavation continued down through the hardcore to a full depth of 0.2m where a dark grey/black sandy-clay buried soil was encountered. No archaeological horizons were observed.
- 3.3.9 **Pad 9:** measuring 0.5m x 0.5m x 0.2m, the stratigraphy comprised 0.05m paving slab overlying 0.15m mixed imported levelling sand and dark grey crushed stone hardcore to a full depth of 0.2m. No archaeological horizons encountered.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 CONCLUSION

- 4.1.1 There were no finds or archaeological horizons encountered within either the foundation trenches or the pad footings that may have furthered our understanding of the development of Furness Abbey. The soil observed in Pad 8 was that belonging to a shrub that had been planted and subsequently removed prior to the area having been paved.
- 4.1.2 The lack of archaeological features is largely the result of the presence of the pre-existing paved surface, the construction cut for which would have removed any archaeological deposits as they existed to at least 0.5m below the present ground surface. It is possible that there may be survival of archaeological deposits beneath this levelling layer.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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6. ILLUSTRATIONS

6.1 FIGURES

Figure 1: Location plan

Figure 2: Trench and pad location plan

6.1 PLATES

Plate 1: Entrance to the visitor's centre, with the Abbey remains to the rear

Plate 2: West-facing section, Trench 1

Plate 3: View shot of foundation trenches, facing south

Plate 4: Pad 5, facing west

Plate 5: Pad 6, facing south

APPENDIX 1: PROJECT BRIEF

APPENDIX 2: PROJECT DESIGN

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

1.1.1 English Heritage (hereafter the client) has requested Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) submit proposals to undertake an archaeological watching brief within the grounds of the Scheduled Monument of Furness Abbey, Cumbria (SM 13572; NGR centred SD 2183 7175), due to the high archaeological potential. Ground works for the erection of a retaining wall to the rear of the visitors' centre, in order to facilitate an access ramp, will be carried out under archaeological supervision, with Scheduled Monument consent (SMCC No. 13572/2) This project design has been prepared in accordance with a brief and details of the proposed works provided by English Heritage.

1.2 OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGY NORTH

1.2.1 Oxford Archaeology North has considerable experience of excavation of sites of all periods, having undertaken a great number of small and large scale projects throughout Northern England during the past 24 years. Evaluations, assessments, watching briefs and excavations have taken place within the planning process and according to any statutory constraints, to fulfil the requirements of clients and planning authorities, to very rigorous timetables.

1.2.2 OA North has the professional expertise and resources to undertake the project detailed below to a high level of quality and efficiency. OA North is an **Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) registered organisation, registration number 17**, and all its members of staff operate subject to the IFA Code of Conduct.

2 OBJECTIVES

2.1 The following programme has been designed to identify any surviving archaeological deposits and provide for accurate recording of any archaeological remains that are disturbed during the installation process.

2.2 **Watching brief:** to carry out a watching brief during the groundworks of the to determine the quality, extent and importance of any archaeological remains on the site.

2.3 **Report and Archive:** a report will be produced for the client within eight weeks of completion of the fieldwork. A site archive will be produced to English Heritage guidelines (MAP 2) and in accordance with the *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long Term Storage* (UKIC 1990).

3 METHOD STATEMENT

3.1 WATCHING BRIEF

3.1.1 **Methodology:** a programme of field observation will accurately record the location, extent, and character of any surviving archaeological features and/or deposits within the proposed ground disturbance. This work will comprise observation during the groundworks, the systematic examination of any subsoil horizons exposed, and the accurate recording of all archaeological features and horizons, and any artefacts, identified during observation.

3.1.2 The watching brief will cover the whole of the area to be disturbed by the installation.

3.1.3 Putative archaeological features and/or deposits identified, together with the immediate vicinity of any such features, will be cleaned by hand using trowels and, where appropriate, sections will be studied and drawn. Any such features will be sample excavated (ie. selected pits and postholes will normally only be half-sectioned, linear features will be subject to no more than a 10% sample, and extensive layers will, where possible, be sampled by partial rather than complete removal).

3.1.4 During this phase of work, recording will comprise a full description and preliminary classification of features or materials revealed, and their accurate location (either on plan and/or section, and as grid co-ordinates where appropriate). Features will be planned accurately at appropriate scales and annotated on to a large-scale plan provided by the client.

- 3.1.5 A photographic record will be undertaken simultaneously of features and finds, and of general working shots. This will entail black and white prints with colour transparencies, as per Section 7.4 of the English Heritage brief.
- 3.1.6 A plan will be produced of the areas of groundworks showing the location and extent of the ground disturbance and one or more dimensioned sections will be produced.
- 3.1.7 **Contingency plan:** in the event of significant archaeological features being encountered during the watching brief, discussions will take place with English Heritage, as to the extent of further works to be carried out. All further works would be subject to a variation to this project design. In the event of environmental/organic deposits being present on site, it would be necessary to discuss and agree a programme of palaeoenvironmental sampling and/or dating with English Heritage.

3.2 ARCHIVE/REPORT

- 3.2.1 **Archive:** the results of all archaeological work carried out will form the basis for a full archive to professional standards, in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (*Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edition, 1991). This archive will be provided in the English Heritage Centre for Archaeology format and a synthesis will be submitted to the Cumbria HER (the index to the archive and a copy of the report). OA North practice is to deposit the original record archive of projects (paper, magnetic and plastic media) with the County Record Office, and a full copy of the record archive (microform or microfiche) together with the material archive (artefacts, ecofacts, and samples) with an appropriate museum.
- 3.2.2 **Report:** one bound copy of a written synthetic report will be submitted to the appropriate Regional Works Manager and the Inspector of Ancient Monuments, together with a digital copy supplied as pdf files on CD-ROM within eight weeks of completion of fieldwork. Any finds recovered will be assessed with reference to other local material and any particular or unusual features of the assemblage will be highlighted. The report will also include a complete bibliography of sources from which data has been derived.
- 3.2.3 **Confidentiality:** all internal reports to the client are designed as documents for the specific use of the Client, for the particular purpose as defined in the project brief and project design, and should be treated as such. They are not suitable for publication as academic documents or otherwise without amendment or revision.

4 HEALTH AND SAFETY

- 4.1 OA North provides a Health and Safety Statement for all projects and maintains a Unit Safety policy. All site procedures are in accordance with the guidance set out in the Health and Safety Manual compiled by the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers (1997). OA North will liaise with the client to ensure all health and safety regulations are met. A risk assessment will be completed in advance of any on-site works. It is assumed that any information regarding health and safety issues on site will be made available by the client to OA North prior to the work commencing on site.

5 PROJECT MONITORING

- 5.1 Monitoring of this project will be undertaken through the auspices of English Heritage who have supplied the necessary information regarding the relevant SMC information and contact details for installation.

6 WORK TIMETABLE

- 6.1 The duration of the archaeological presence for the watching brief is two days; Monday 7th-Tuesday 8th November 2005.
- 6.2 The client report will be completed within approximately eight weeks following completion of the fieldwork.

7 STAFFING

- 7.1 The project will be under the direct management of **Emily Mercer BA (Hons) MSc AIFA** (OA North Senior Project Manager) to whom all correspondence should be addressed.

- 7.2 The watching brief and any subsequent excavation will be supervised in the field by an OA North project supervisor.
- 7.3 Assessment of the finds from the evaluation will be undertaken under the auspices of OA North's in-house finds specialist **Chris Howard-Davis** (OA North project officer). Chris acts as OA North's in-house finds specialist and has extensive knowledge of all finds of all periods from archaeological sites in northern England.
- 8 INSURANCE
- 8.1 OA North has a professional indemnity cover to a value of £2,000,000; proof of which can be supplied as required.

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