


8 Sun Street Waltham Abbey Essex



Archaeological Watching Brief Report

oxfordarchaeology

southsouthsouth
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Client: Steph Di Piazza

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8 Sun Street, Waltham Abbey, Essex

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

SUMMARY

On 28th July 2008 Oxford Archaeology carried out an archaeological watching brief at 8 Sun Street, Waltham Abbey, Essex, during the digging of three geotechnical pits associated with the construction of a two storey extension to the rear of the property. The pits revealed that the site was occupied by a recently back-filled cellar or cellars and that no archaeological remains were likely to survive within the 1m depth of the foundations of the proposed extension. Consequently no further monitoring was necessary during the digging of the foundations.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology was commissioned by Steph Di Piazza to carry out an archaeological watching brief at 8 Sun Street, Waltham Abbey, Essex, during groundworks associated with the construction of a two storey extension to the rear of the property. The initial phase of the watching brief was undertaken on 28th July 2008 and comprised monitoring during the digging of three geotechnical test pits.
- 1.1.2 The work was commissioned by Stef di Piazza in respect of a planning application (Planning Application No. EPF/0018/07).
- 1.1.3 The work was undertaken in accordance with a project brief set by Pat Connell of Essex County Council Historic Environment Branch.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.1.4 The site lay to the rear of 8 Sun Street, Waltham Abbey (NGR TL 3825 0050; Fig. 1). Sun Street runs eastward from the Market Square and just south of the Abbey precinct.
- 1.1.5 Waltham Abbey lies within the parish of Waltham Holy Cross in Epping Forest District, within the valley of the River Lea, an important north-south waterway that forms part of the western boundary of Essex. At Waltham Abbey the Lea is divided into several channels, dissecting a marshy floodplain. The town centre and the abbey precinct are sited on a remnant of gravel terrace at the end of a causeway across the Lea Valley marches from Cheshunt, Hertfordshire. The valley bottom lies at 18mOD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.1.6 Waltham Abbey is one of the most extensively excavated towns in Essex, largely due to the work of the Waltham Abbey Historical Society, who have conducted numerous

excavations since 1966. These include excavations at numbers 1-5, 8, 12, 41, 43A, 46 and 48 Sun Street and the Sun Street Car Park site.

- 1.1.7 Historically, Waltham Abbey consisted of the abbey and town, which were interdependent. There appears to have been a royal estate at Waltham Abbey, and it is also the hundred meeting-place. The Saxon church also appears to have been a Minster Church. The foundations of three successive pre-Norman churches have been identified. The first church is thought to date to the 7th century, the second to the 8th century. King Harold increased the original foundation by rebuilding and extending the church and creating a college of secular canons in c. 1060. Saxon burials have been found within the monastic precinct, and a late 10th to 11th century hall to the north of the church has been excavated.
- 1.1.8 There is documentary and excavation evidence for a rectangular enclosure (known as Edleworth) within which the medieval marketplace developed. However, the angle of this enclosure in relation to the medieval settlement pattern suggests the enclosure pre-dates the market place. The line of the ditch has been excavated at several places, revealing finds dating from the Bronze Age to the medieval periods. The dating of the enclosure is therefore obscure; however it is possible that it served as a boundary to the late Saxon/early medieval settlement.
- 1.1.9 Not much is known about the Saxon settlement, but the Domesday book shows it to have had a sizeable population in 1066. The 'Viking Hall' to the north of the church is thought to lie within the area of the royal enclosure. The Minster church lay to the south of this enclosure and to the south of the church was the Saxon village.
- 1.1.10 The Domesday Book depicts a sizeable town with a growing population in 1086. In 1177 the secular canons were replaced by the Augustinian priory, which in 1184 was upgraded to Abbey status. Two further successive churches were built on the site. The fourth church was the second collegiate priory church built in c. 1090-1150. The fifth church was the Augustinian church of 1177. The monastic precinct, following its establishment in 1177, formed the dominant topographic feature in medieval and post-medieval Waltham Abbey (the walls dating to c.1370). Within the precinct were the principal abbey buildings including the church and the canons lodgings.
- 1.1.11 The medieval town lay immediately to the south of the monastic precinct. Some of the current street-plan is that of the medieval town. The oldest portion of it appears to be that closest to the church and market place, although it expanded to the east, south and west over the centuries. The medieval town lay immediately to the south of the monastic precinct. Some of the current street-plan is that of the medieval town. The oldest portion of it appears to be that closest to the church and market place, although it expanded to the east, south and west over the centuries.
- 1.1.12 Sun Street (originally East Street) runs parallel to the monastic precinct wall. Excavation at the rear of 1-5 Sun Street, adjacent to Market Square, revealed part of an 11th century ditch that was possibly part of the Eldewith Enclosure and a large pit containing butchered bone, suggesting a livestock market. Finds from a number of

small-scale excavations at the east of Sun Street suggest that the occupation of that area began in the 13th century. At 46 Sun Street, pits containing poisonous plants including black henbane and lesser hemlock were recovered in association with 16th century pottery. Excavations on the Sun Street Car Park site revealed the original priory precinct wall and part of the priory cemetery. Number 8 Sun Street backs onto this site.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

1.1.13 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development, in particular features and deposits associated with the Saxon, Medieval and post-medieval settlement at Waltham Abbey.

1.1.14 To preserve by record any features or deposits that may be damaged or removed during the course of the development.

1.1.15 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

1.1.16 Three geotechnical trenches were excavated by jcb to a depth of 3m.

3 RESULTS

1.1.17 Natural geology, comprising orange-brown clay, was encountered at a depth of 2.10m. It was overlain by a single homogenous layer of post-medieval made ground.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

1.1.18 The made ground is likely to represent a recently back-filled cellar or cellars. No archaeological remains were therefore likely to survive within the 1m depth of the foundations of the proposed extension. Consequently no further archaeological monitoring was necessary during the subsequent digging of the foundations.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: 8 Sun Street, Waltham Abbey, Essex

Site code: WAABSS08

Grid reference: TL 3825 0050

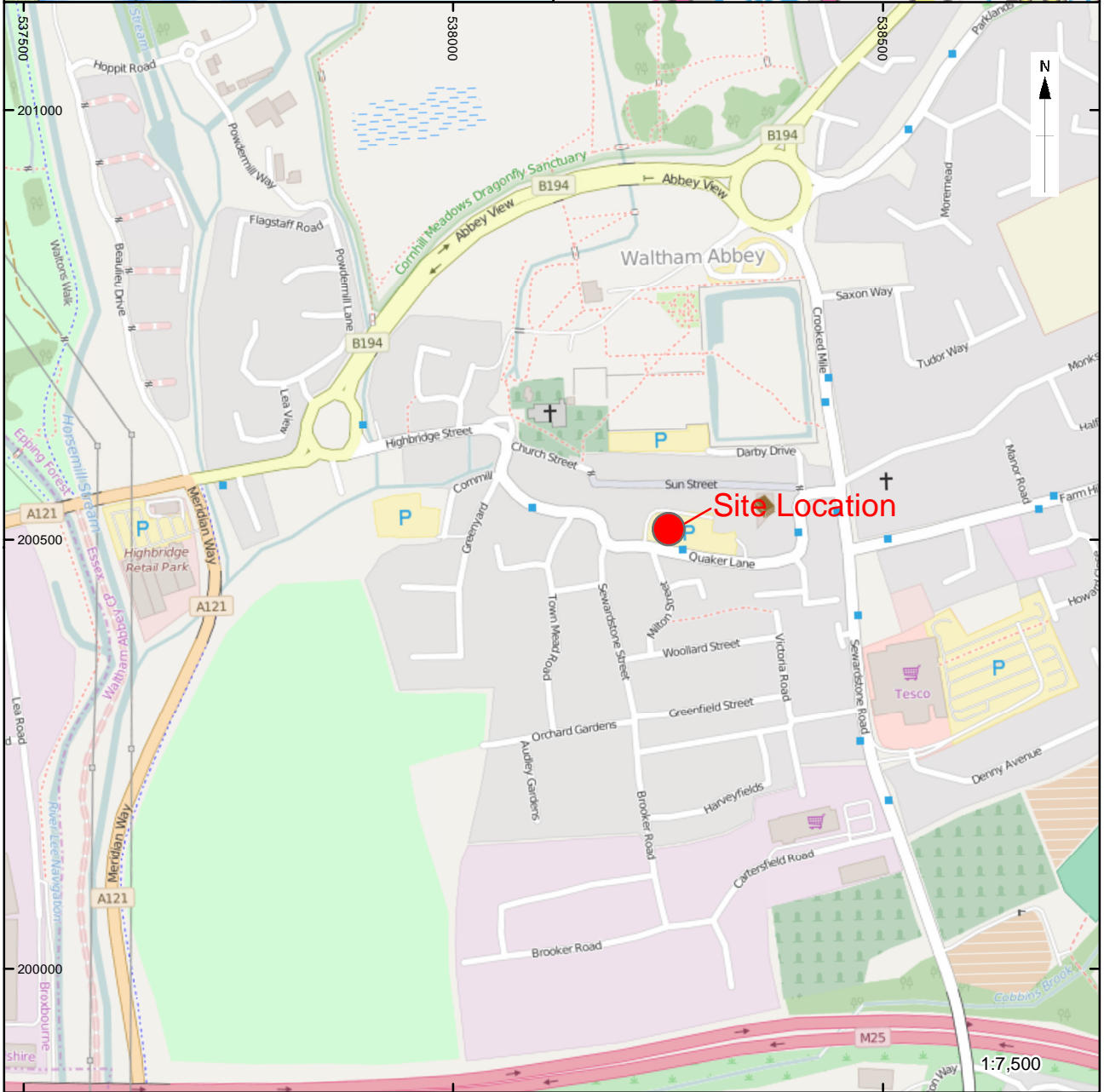
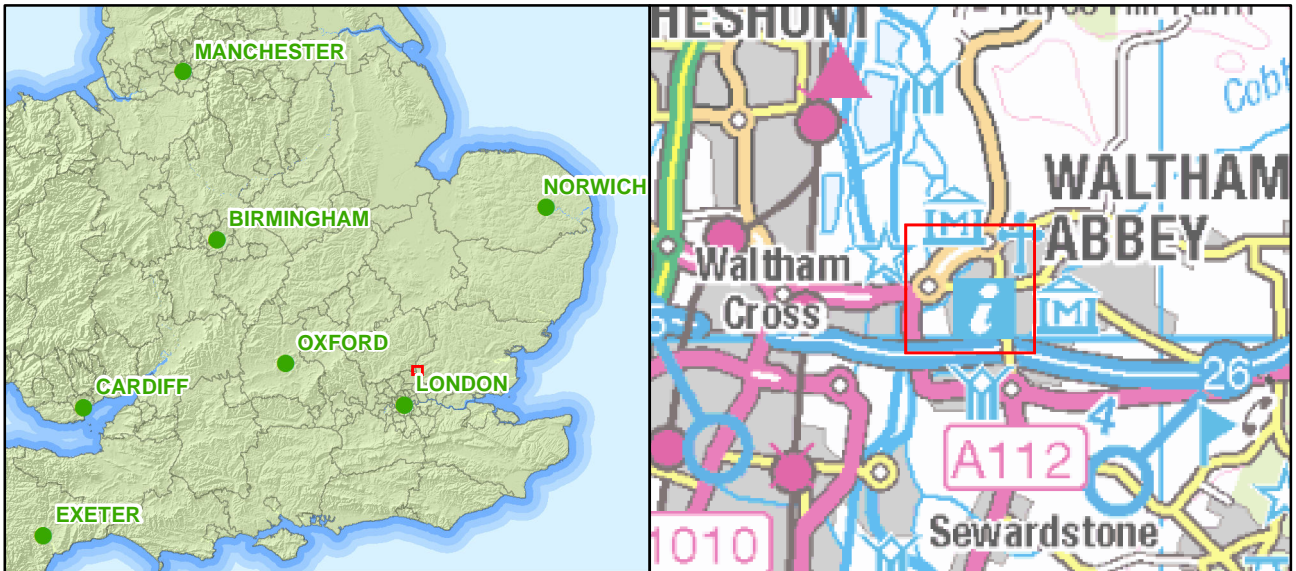
Type of watching brief: Three geotechnical test pits

Date and duration of project: 28th July 2008

Area of site: 75 m²

Summary of results: Natural geology was encountered at a depth of 2.10m, overlain by post-medieval made ground that is likely to represent a recently back-filled cellar or cellars.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Epping Forest District Museum in due course.



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Figure 1: Site location



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