

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING
BRIEF AT
ABBEY PARK, EVESHAM,
WORCESTERSHIRE

Simon Sworn

With contributions by Angus Crawford

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Worcestershire County Council

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Project 2559
Report 1294
WSM 33652

Archaeological watching brief at Abbey Park, Evesham, Worcestershire

Simon Sworn

Background information

<i>Client</i>	Wychavon District Council
<i>Site address</i>	Abbey Park, Evesham, Worcestershire
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SP 0377 4356
<i>Sites and Monuments Record reference</i>	WCM 33652
<i>Planning authority reference</i>	Worcester District Council P99A0347
<i>Brief</i>	HEAS 2004a
<i>Project design</i>	HEAS 2004b
<i>Project parameters</i>	IFA 1999

Previous archaeological work on the site

A watching brief was conducted during the excavation of trenches for CCTV cables within the present Abbey Park., The trenches were likely to disturb buried remains of Evesham Abbey, which is a scheduled ancient monument (SAM 253). Information contained within the SMR also indicated the possibility for preserved remains from the prehistoric to the post-medieval periods.

The first recorded excavation in the abbey grounds took place between 1811-34 and revealed the plan of most of the church and chapter house and the eastern range of claustral buildings (Dalwood 1996, 5).

Previous archaeological work covering the whole of Evesham is detailed in Dalwood 1996. In the immediate vicinity of the watching brief there has already been some small-scale archaeological investigations. In 1988 an evaluation was carried out to determine the impact of proposed tree planting in the area of the Abbey Park to the south east of the bell tower and three two meter square trenches were excavated. The conclusion to the evaluation was that there seem to be no deposits that predate the Dissolution less than 600mm from the present ground surface. There remained the possibility that surviving structures may remain elsewhere. Also a quantity of disarticulated human bone was found, possibly relating to the burial area to the west (Clarke *et al*, 1988).

Though it would seem that the cable trenching might not disturb any pre-Dissolution deposits the lack of knowledge as to the location of previous buildings and the documented burial site in this location meant that the potential for increased understanding of the history of this area of the abbey grounds could be advanced.

Previous archaeological work and background on associated sites

The area for the proposed cable trenching lies within the precinct of Evesham Abbey (scheduled ancient monument reference 253, Fig 1). The Abbey is located just to the south of the main business centre of Evesham within a meander of the River Avon. The soils are clayey alluvium of the Drayton series and brown earths of the Bishampton series overlying slightly stony sandy clay loam (Beard *et al* 1986). The underlying geology consists of river terrace drift gravels of the second and third terrace of the River Avon (Mackney *et al* 1983).

The historic core of Evesham is predominantly medieval in origin but there is evidence of earlier activity. Prehistoric artefacts have been discovered at various locations (WSM 21047, 21048, 26358, 27191 and 28764), including a Neolithic hand axe, found in a Bridge Street garden (Cox 1977, 1). Roman artefacts have also been regularly discovered within the area of the abbey (Hughes 1990, 174) that the presence of a Roman settlement has been postulated (Cox 1990). This view is

supported by the presence of a burial, and of a Roman-style roofing tile, though the extent of any possible occupation remains unclear (Dalwood 1996, 18).

The minster church of Evesham was established around 700 AD, possibly on the site of an older abandoned British church (Cox 1980, 3). The original church collapsed and was rebuilt in c.960 (Cox 1980,3) with a new church attached between 1017 and 1037 (Cox 1990, 123-124). The town grew from 1055 when King Edward granted a port and market at Evesham (Beresford and Finberg 1973, 183). In the 11th century a market place is believed to have grown up at the main gate of the abbey, initially set up by the abbots (Bond 1975, 46 and Cox 1980, 3).

The abbey was comprehensively rebuilt in c.1054 (Cox 1980, 3). It is probable that the settlement was urban by the 11th to early 12th century; a population of 1000 is estimated by the year 1200 (Hilton 1982, 2-3).

The town grew in prosperity between the 13th and 16th centuries, initially based on demand for goods and services by the abbey (Hilton 1982, 4). Between 1054 and the abbey's dissolution in 1540 building work rarely stopped (Cox 1980, 3). However after 1540 and the abbey became the property of the crown and was dismantled and its useable building materials sold (Cox 1980, 3). Evesham, however, continued to prosper on through into the 17th and 18th centuries (Cox 1977, 125). After the River Avon was made navigable between Tewkesbury and Stratford on Avon in 1639 a flourishing river trade developed comprising imports of coal, sugar, tobacco, iron, lead and wood while exports included corn, other agricultural produce, and leather goods (Cox 1977, 107).

There is documentary evidence for the subsequent use of part of the inner precinct for private houses, but the site of the church itself was retained as open space. The outer precinct remained an area of horticultural and agricultural land, which has been built up and landscaped in some areas throughout the 20th century (Dalwood 1996, 17).

Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to observe the areas of ground disturbance associated with the excavations of trenches for CCTV cables running along the old boundary between the inner and outer precinct of Evesham Abbey. The inner precinct contained the abbey church, chapterhouse and a wide range of other associated buildings, while the outer precinct would have been largely an area of gardens, orchards and associated agricultural buildings. The observations would be carried out in order to locate archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible.

Methods

General specification for watching brief	CAS 1995
Sources consulted	SMR Sources cited by the SMR 1 st Edition OS Map 1886
Dates of fieldwork	21 st – 22 nd July 2004
Area of deposits observed	c 36m ² . Indicated on Fig 2
Dimensions of excavated areas observed	Services length c120m width 0.30m depth 0.45m (max)

Statement of confidence

Observation of the service trench was undertaken during and after machine excavation. Excavation was undertaken using a 360 degree tracked mini-digger using a 300mm toothed bucket to a depth of

0.45m. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well differentiated archaeological deposits. Access to the trenches was possible throughout. Selected areas were cleaned by hand to confirm the depth and nature of the deposits present. All artefacts from the area of salvage recording were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended). Access to, and visibility of the deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

Deposit description

Context	Type Colour Texture	Description	Date (<i>Terminus post quem</i>)	Interpretation	Depth (below ground level)
100	Loose dark brown sand and silt	Occasional small gravels	Modern	Topsoil	0-0.20m
101	Sub-rounded flint pebbles and angular limestones within mid/dark brown sand matrix	Poorly sorted	Modern	Make-up layer	0.20m+
102	Angular limestone blocks within sand matrix	Poorly sorted	Post - medieval	Demolition or make-up layer	0.20m+
103	Loose reddish silty sand	No inclusions	Modern	Make-up or demolition layer	0.40m+
104	Tarmac		Modern	Tarmac footpath	0-0.08m
105	Gravels and yellowish brown sand	No inclusions	Modern	Hardcore make-up layer for footpath	0.08-0.15m
106	Concentration of roughly hewn limestone and ragstone blocks, c 50 x 25 x 10mm	Occasional creamy yellow mortar with angular quartz inclusions		Wall rubble	0.30m+
107	Concentration of human remains	Occasional yellowish brown silty sand and limestone fragments	Post-medieval	Disturbed human bone	0.20-0.27m
108	Dark yellow compacted fine sand, poorly sorted	Occasional angular limestones?		Natural?	0.20m+
109	Tarmac		Modern	Tarmac footpath	0-0.06m

Artefact analysis (by Angus Crawford)

Artefact recovery policy

All artefacts from the area of salvage recording were retrieved by hand and retained in accordance with the service manual (CAS 1995 as amended).

Method of analysis

All hand retrieved finds were examined. A primary record was made of all finds on a Microsoft Access 2000 database. Artefacts were identified, quantified and dated. Pottery was examined under x20 magnification and recorded by fabric type and form according to the fabric reference series maintained by the service (Hurst and Rees 1992).

Artefactual analysis

A summary of the artefacts recovered can be seen in Table 1. The assemblage recovered from the watching brief came from a single context (100). Recovered artefacts dated from the medieval to modern periods. Pottery was the largest group recovered consisting 39% of the assemblage. The pottery recovered, totalling 21 sherds, dated from the post medieval to modern periods.

The pottery was identified and grouped by fabric (see Table 2). The majority of the sherds were undiagnostic but could be dated between the mid 1st and 20th century by fabric type. Other finds consisted of animal bone, fragments of clay pipe, vessel glass, ceramic building material as roof tile and field drain, oyster and snail shells, an iron nail and a plastic hair pin.

Human skeletal remains

During trenching a small quantity of disarticulated human bones were visually identified (context 107). These remains did not represent intact interments but disturbed material from more than one individual, most likely as a result of made ground activity during the parks development. The remains included cranial and long bone fragments that appear to have been collected together and buried as a small cache. The human remains were photographed in situ and any material disturbed by trenching was also photographed and replaced as near to point of origin and then back filled.

Discussion of the artefacts

The discussion below is a summary of the finds and associated location or contexts by period. The importance of individual finds has been commented upon as necessary.

Medieval

While no medieval pottery was in the assemblage all of the eight roof tile fragments were identified as medieval in origin. Of these six were identified as fragments of flat roof tile (fabric 2a) dating from the around the late 15th century onwards. The remaining two sherds joined to form a large piece of knobbed ridge tile (fabric 2b) dating from the mid 13th to mid 15th century. Close examination of the ridge tile fabric and its remaining glaze revealed a strong resemblance to that of medieval Worcester-type sandy glazed ware (fabric 64.1). Hurst has previously suggested that potteries, rather than tile makers, manufactured quantities of decorative ridge tiles during this period from the same fabrics that they were utilizing in pottery production (1992: 156).

A partial undecorated square floor tile (fabric 2c,) with an imprint of a dogs paw on the upper face was also recovered. The fact that it has no glaze combined with the paw print suggests that this tile is a waster possibly delivered amongst tiles of finer quality for flooring work at the abbey during the middle 13th to 15th century.

Post-medieval/modern

The post-medieval/modern assemblage amounted to 21 recovered pottery sherds. The dominant fabric was modern stone china (fabric 85) dating to the 19th century. Further fabrics included five sherds of miscellaneous modern wares (fabric 101) all of which appear to originate from small-sized flower or seedling pots dating dateable to the 18th-19th century. The post-medieval pottery consisted of two sherds of post-medieval red ware (fabric 78) of 17th to 18th century date.

A fragment of pipe stem was also datable to the post-medieval period while a shard from a glass bottle was late 19th to early 20th century in date.

Significance

While the assemblage from context 100 is consistent with made-ground deposited during the park's development the presence of medieval artefacts provides evidence for activity on site. While the medieval material may not originate from secure deposits it still provides evidence for types of ceramic building materials utilized within the Abbey as well as the potential for further medieval material to survive within the area.

Material	Type	Context	Total	Weight (g)
Bone	Animal	100	13	158
Cbm	Drain	100	1	53
Glass	Vessel	100	1	21
Iron	Fastner	100	1	6
Pipe	Stem	100	1	2
Plastic	Hair pin	100	1	1
Pottery	Modern	100	19	264
Potery	Post-medieval	100	2	34
Shell	Oyster	100	5	104
Shell	Snail	100	1	2
Tile	Floor	100	1	434
Tile	Ridge	100	2	494
Tile	Roof	100	6	310

Table 1: *Quantification of evaluation assemblage.*

Fabric name	Fabric	Total	Weight (g)
Miscellaneous modern wares	101	5	191
Modern stone china	85	14	73
Red sandy ware	78	2	34
	2A	1	434
	2B	2	494
	2C	6	310

Table 2: *Quantification of evaluation assemblage fabrics.*

Date range	Material	Total	Weight	Specialist report?	Important research assemblage?
Mid 13 th – mid15 th century	Ridge tile	2	494	Y	Y
Mid 13 th –15 th century	Floor tile	1	434	Y	Y
Late15 th century	Roof tile	6	310	Y	Y
Post-medieval	Clay pipe stem	1	2	N	N
17 th -18 th century	Pottery	2	34	Y	N
Late19 th - early 20 th century	Bottle glass	1	21	N	N
19 th - 20 th century	Pottery	19	225	Y	N
20 th century	Plastic	1	1	N	N
Modern	Ceramic drain	1	53	N	N
Undated	Bone	13	158	N	N
Undated	Shell	6	106	N	N

Table 3: Summary of the assemblage.

Discussion

This area of the park slopes down to the east by *c* 20 degrees to the River Avon and is under grass, crisscrossed with modern tarmac pathways. The service trenching ran north to south across the park for a distance of *c* 120m. The topsoil showed signs of having been periodically turned and re-turfed and contained a number of medieval roof and floor tile fragments. Under the topsoil the trench revealed a series of depositional layers (contexts 101, 103) that were heavily contaminated with limestone fragments, possibly the remains of construction material from the relict abbey buildings. Along the length of the trench there were pockets of concentrated building materials, mainly consisting of yellow and grey oolitic limestone (context 102). Again these are likely to represent post-Dissolution building rubble, heavily disturbed by the landscaping of the present parkland. Running across the trench under the post-Dissolution deposits was the heavily fragmented remains of a possible wall foundation (context 106, Fig 2), the original function and nature of this feature was not able to be determined due to heavy disturbance, though its location implies that it is unlikely to have belonged to an ancillary building as these lay to the south and west of the abbey church (Hughes 1990, 155). A collection of disturbed human bones was discovered (context 107). It is clear that these bones have not been preserved in-situ, but have been gathered together and deposited above the rubble layer, below the topsoil. The period from which these bones came is unclear, though the stratigraphic location would suggest that they were collected and placed in their present location at the time of the park's landscaping in the 20th century.

Conclusions

The watching brief has shown that this area of the park has been heavily altered, mainly by landscaping in the 20th century, which presumably involved the use of heavy machinery to move large quantities of soil. This itself has built-up this area, providing greater protection for any buried archaeology. Under the topsoil is a sequence of deposits that contained a high proportion of rubble of post-Dissolution date. The depth of the cable trenching, 450mm, does not allow for the exposure of any early features, the level of the surviving material would appear to be below this level, as indicated in the 1988 excavations were no post-Dissolution deposits were found higher than 600mm below the present surface (Hughes 1990,157). Other features found in the watching brief are of an unknown period, but again, likely to be post-Dissolution. The collection of human bones was found lying atop the rubble deposits, directly under the topsoil. Wall (context 106) is of such a poor state the it was impossible to determine the exact nature of the deposit and that it may well be nothing more than a collection of post-Dissolution rubble. There were no associated finds with either of these two features to be able to provide a secure chronological date. The potential for preserved archaeology remains high to the north and west of the war memorial were the remains of the abbey crypt and burial area were located.

Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

An archaeological watching was undertaken on behalf of Wychavon District Council at Abbey Park, Evesham, Worcestershire, (NGR ref; SP 03774356, SMR ref WSM 33652). The watching brief was conducted during the excavation of trenches within the present Abbey Park, for CCTV cables running along the boundary between the inner and outer precinct of Evesham Abbey. Previous archaeological work had indicated a high potential for the discovery of buried archaeological remains. However, the depth of the cable trenching was only 450mm deep and did not penetrate below any post-Dissolution levels, though some medieval roof tile fragments were discovered within the topsoil. The majority of the deposits consisted of building rubble, potentially from the original Abbey structure. Two features found during the watching brief are of an unknown date, but are

likely to be post-Dissolution. A small collection of disarticulated human bone was found lying above the rubble deposits, directly under the topsoil, probably representing bone collected during the 20th century park landscaping. There were also patches of heavily concentrated building material, one of which may have been the remains of a heavily disturbed wall. Any potentially sealed archaeological remains would seem to be below the level of the cable trench, at least 450mm below the present ground surface.

Archive

Context records AS1	3
Fieldwork progress records AS2	2
Photographic records AS3	1
Digital photographs	15
Trench records AS41	2
Abbreviated context records AS40	8
Drawings	4
Boxes of finds	1
Computer disks	1

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum
Hartlebury Castle, Hartlebury
Near Kidderminster
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Plate 1: General view of groundworks at southern end, facing north



Plate 2: Rubble concentration, context 106, facing north-west



Plate 3: Human bone concentration, context 107, facing north-west



Plate 4: General view of groundworks at northern end, facing east