

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

**AT FERRY NAB,
FERRY LANE, MEDMENHAM**

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

NGR S U 8061 8382

On behalf of

Nick Robinson

NOVEMBER 2012

REPORT FOR Mr. Nick Robinson
Ferry Nab
Ferry Lane
Medmenham
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out a watching brief on groundworks at Ferry Nab, Medmenham. Archaeological remains consisting of two chalk walls, dating from after the 12th century, and possibly relating to abbey outbuildings were present in one of the watching brief areas, in addition to the walls and concrete floor of a late 19th- or early 20th-century half-celled structure, which may be a WWII bomb-shelter, in a second watching brief area.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location (Figure 1)

The site is located at the south end of Ferry Lane and to the east of it, close to the river Thames at NGR SU 8061 8382. The underlying solid geology is First (Floodplain) Terrace Deposits. The site is currently in residential use and lies within the Medmenham Conservation Area (DBC7283).

1.2 Planning Background

Wycombe District Council granted planning permission for the construction of a single storey attached garage block, two storey front extension with porch, conversion of existing garage to games room, single storey extension to provide a swimming pool and associated internal and external alterations (12/05001/FUL). A condition of the permission required an archaeological watching brief to be carried out during the work. Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service (BCAS) prepared a *Generic Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief. A Written Scheme of Investigation*, which proposed a suitable methodology to satisfy the requirements of the Brief, was submitted to and accepted by the planning archaeologist. This was in line with PPS5 (current at the time) and Local Plan Policies.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site lies within the precinct of Medmenham Abbey (Historic Environment Record 0175100000). The Abbey was a Cistercian House founded in the 13th century although there is evidence indicating earlier Christian activity on the site in the form of some burials that appeared to pre-date the Abbey. The current building, also called Medmenham Abbey, is a Grade II* listed building dating from largely from 1595 with 18th and 19th century additions; it is built on the site of the medieval Cistercian Abbey. The current building was restored in 1898 by Romaine Walker for Robert Hudson.

The medieval Abbey layout is poorly understood, with traces of wall footings and burials recorded south of the surviving Tudor range and burials to the east. The site was observed during building work in 1921 with a number of observations made (Plaisted

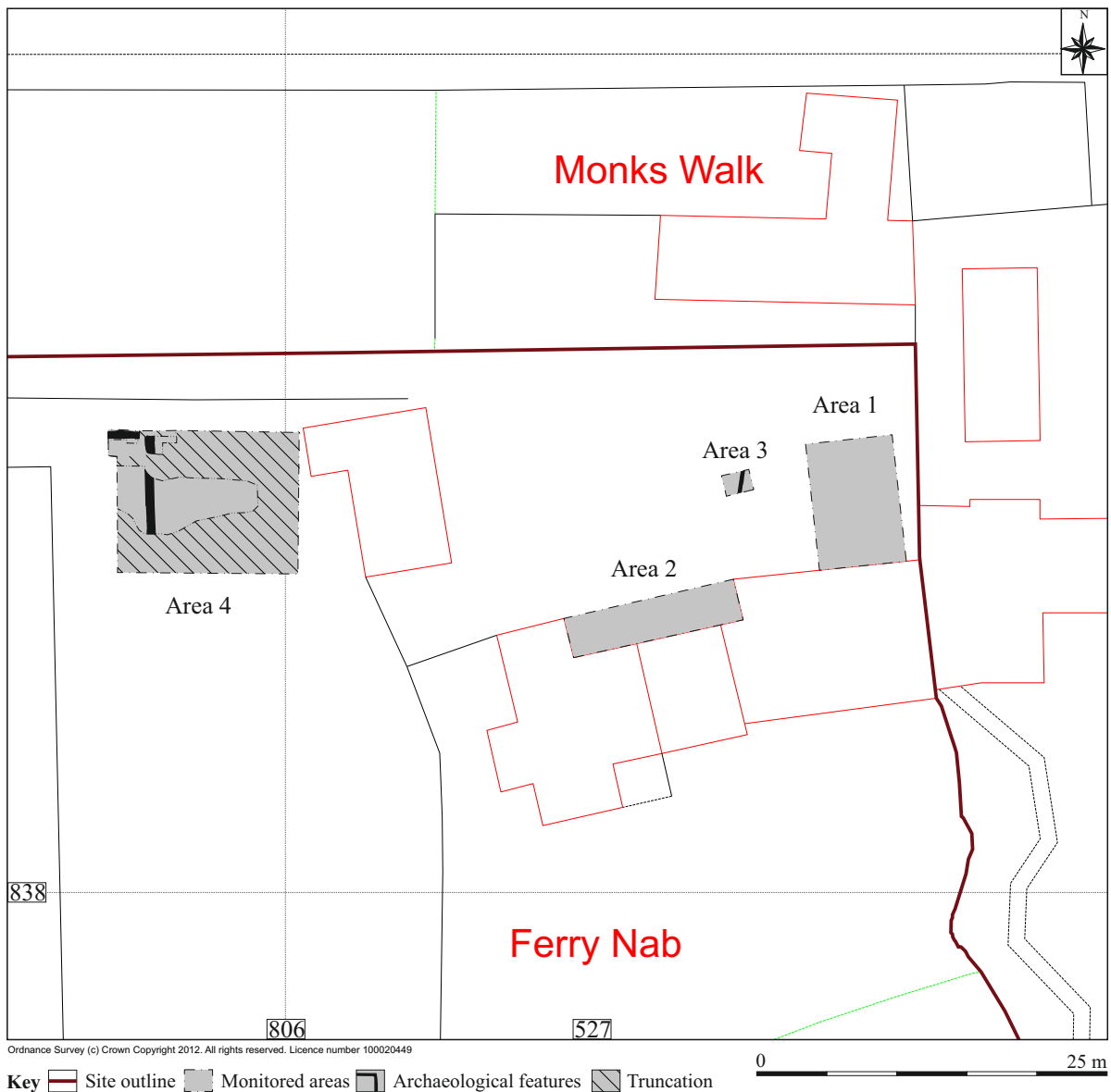
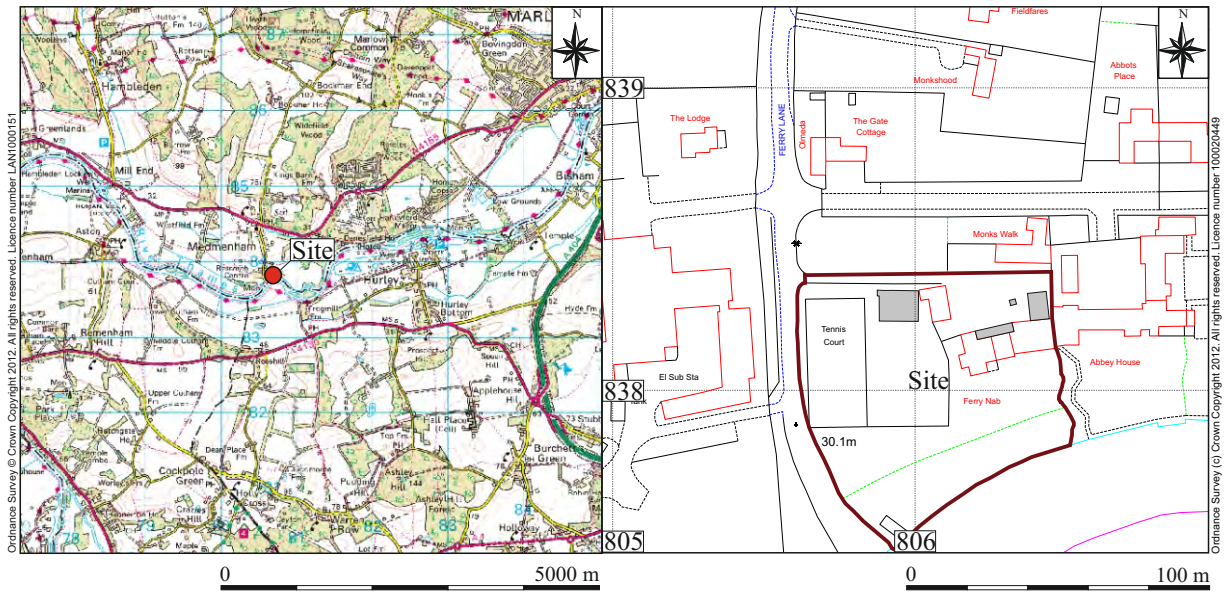


Figure 1. Site location

1925). A series of watching briefs have been undertaken within the precinct; on a pipe trench west of the garages (EBC1136: Farley 1991), on extensions to Abbey Cottages (EBC11232: Farley 1992), on building works to the Abbey Barn (EBC10312: Farley 1993), during trenching work for a heating system (EBC10546: Carstairs & Parkhouse 1993), and new footings within the southern wing of the complex (EBC16535: Farley 2001).

The results of the watching briefs are brought together in a comprehensive study of the Abbey by Mike Farley (2001). The watching briefs have recorded wall footings, human burials, and pottery including a small amount earlier than the 13th century with two probable mid-Saxon sherds.

A watching brief (EBC16489) by TVAS in 2004 at Ferry Nab conducted during work for two new extensions found made ground up to a depth of least 2m. This comprised earth with much chalk, sometimes in large fragments, which probably represents material imported onto the site as a precaution against flooding or perhaps, the remains of the demolition of the Medmenham Hotel that formerly occupied the site.

The Medmenham Hotel was in existence from at least 1895 with Ferry Nab appearing to have achieved its present layout before 1925 and seems to reflect rebuilding on the site of the demolished hotel (Jenkins & Taylor 2004). The watching brief did find a short length of chalk-built wall on the north side of the house. To the west of it lay a chalk deposit, which may have been an associated floor (ibid).

A watching brief (EBC17488) was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services in 2010 during the excavation of a drainage trench at Ferry Nab. The ground had been previously disturbed by drainage with no archaeological features visible at a depth of 0.6m below modern ground level.

Robert Hudson was responsible for building Ferry Nab in the late 19th century, to the designs of Romaine Walker (HER 1428100000). The house was built on the site of the Ferry Boat Hotel, which had declined as river transport and ferry traffic diminished (Wycombe DC 2002). Ferry Boat Hotel is first seen on the Medmenham tithe map of 1842 (BCRO 264), unfortunately the County Record Office does not hold the accompanying apportionment.

Three out buildings are seen to the north and west. The building and the immediate area have undergone significant change by the time of the 1876 1:2,500 OS map was published. The new building is marked as "Medmenham Hotel" and the footprint has expanded considerably. The previously out buildings have gone with new ones built to the north and east. The gardens to the west have been expanded and laid out in a more formal pattern.

The additional two storey front area was previously believed to be in the area of one of the early outbuildings, with the new garage appearing to have been situated in the area of one of the later 19th century out buildings; the pool area is set in the former garden.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To record any archaeological remains that will be impacted on by the development with particular regard to the possibility of finds relating to the medieval abbey

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In response to a *Brief* from BCAS a Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared by John Moore Heritage Services and agreed with BCAS.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (2008) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

Excavation of the various Areas within the proposal area was carried out by the contractor with a 5-tonne 360° excavator under archaeological supervision. The initial work was carried out in April and May 2012 to the front of the house with further work carried out in October 2012.

A strategy involving an evaluation trench was proposed and accepted by the groundworkers for the following stage strip for the new swimming pool to the west of the house, in order to assess the archaeological potential and to mitigate any potential delays to the construction work.

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material.

4.1 Fieldwork

The area for the new garage (Area 1) on the east side of the proposal area was monitored during excavation of the footings. The footings were *c* 1.2m deep and, failing to reveal

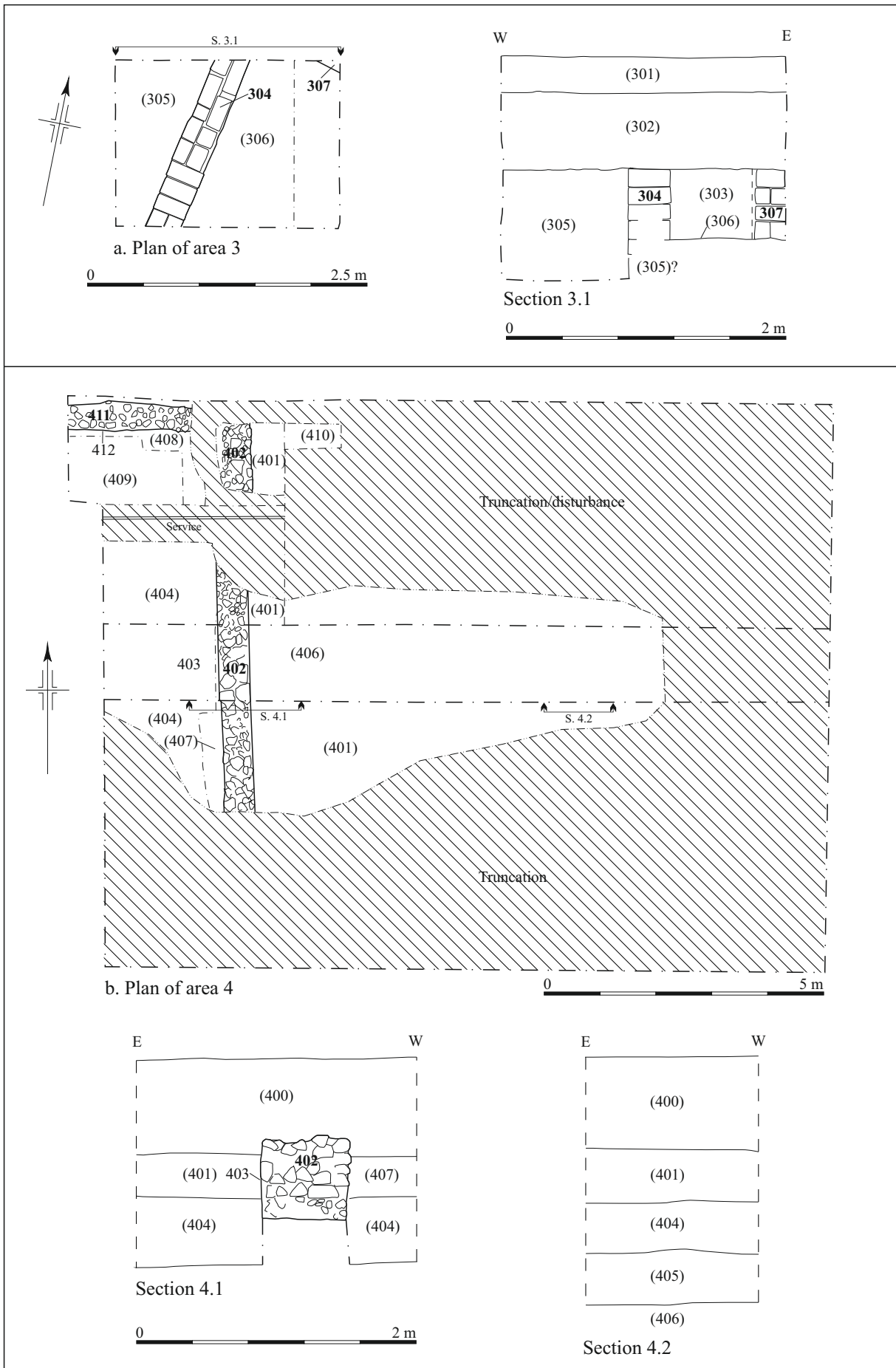


Figure 2. Plans and sections of Areas 3 and 4

natural gravel, revealed mid brown loam (103), a buried topsoil-like deposit, which was *c* 500mm thick. This was overlain by a quantity of undifferentiated chalk rubble (102), seen previously by TVAS (2004) and JMHS (2010) to the west, which was 450-500m thick. Sealing the area was *c* 200-250mm gravel and levelling deposit (101). No evidence for structures on historic mapping (Figs 5 & 6) was present.

The excavation of footings to the west across the front of the house, Area 2, only revealed chalk rubble (202) *c*. 1m thick overlain by levelling and gravel (201), *c*. 200mm thick. No evidence for structures on historic mapping (Figs 5 & 6) was present here, either.

To the front of the house a new soakaway (Area 3) was excavated measuring 2m × 1.5m × 1.6m (Fig. 2). Although the deposit of mid brown loam (305), which was probably the same buried topsoil (103) seen to the east, was earlier than the wall 304, no cut was apparent. The wall was five to six course high, comprising hand-made brick measuring approximately 300mm × 150 × 120mm, oriented almost due north. The floor of the structure to which the wall appertains was concrete (306). Within the area defined by the wall was rubble comprising brick and chalk (303); a short length of wall 307 was visible in the extreme southwest corner of the trench, which appeared to correspond with wall 304, both in terms of fabric and orientation, being at a right angle to 304. No finds were associated with the structure. Above backfill deposit (303) and sealing the garden soil (305), and walls 304 and 307 was a further layer of chalky rubble (302), undoubtedly broadly the same as both (102) and (202). Levelling and gravel (301) sealed the chalky rubble.



Figure 3. Intervention area showing walls 402 and 411, looking south.

Area 4 was located in the gardens to the west of the house, immediately adjacent to the tennis court. A geotechnical test pit was dug 24th May 2012 under archaeological supervision. No archaeological remains were present.

In October 2012 a trench was excavated the length of the proposed new swimming pool which revealed river gravel (406) at a depth of 1.8m from ground level. Overlying the gravel was a deposit of yellow clay silt (405), c 0.4m thick, which represents a deposit of alluvium. No finds were recovered from this deposit. Sealing this layer was a further alluvial deposit of dark yellow silty clay (404), which was 0.35m thick. Overlying the upper alluvium (404) was a layer of mid brown clay loam (401), approximately 0.3m thick, representing a former topsoil deposit.



Figure 4. Wall 411, looking west

Cut through the buried topsoil (401) was the foundation trench, 403, for the chalk wall 402 (Fig 2). The north/south-oriented foundation trench was a linear cut, with a single break in direction at the north end; no other walls were present. The chalk wall 402 comprised roughly packed chalk pieces, with some very occasional use of a mortar-like substance to bind the stones.

The identification of the wall led to a larger area within the swimming pool footprint being opened up to ascertain the extent of the wall and to try to establish its function.

The wall 402, which measured at least 7m in length and 0.55m wide, was truncated at both north and south ends, although the presence of the return wall 411 to the west, measuring at least 3.3m in length and 0.55m wide (Figs 2, 3 & 4), indicates that the wall was probably part of a building, rather than an external wall. Both walls 402 and 411 stood c. 0.55m high. Extensive truncation by trees and the former hedge had damaged the northern extent of the wall. Pottery recovered from wall 402 indicated a 12th-century date, whereas pottery from wall 411 indicated a date after the late 11th century.

The deposits (407) and (408) located within the building were undifferentiated from the layer (401) outside, comprising a similar buried topsoil-type of material, although pottery from the deposits indicate a date range between the late 11th – layer (407) – and late 12th centuries – layer (408). It was not possible within the limited constraints of the intervention, given that a certain amount of truncation had occurred all over the site, to ascertain whether these were contiguous floor levels or not.

At the north end of the building was a layer of chalk rubble (409), inside, and (410) outside which sealed the buried occupation layer (408) within it and buried topsoil (401) outside. This undoubtedly represents demolition rubble of the building. The chalk rubble (409) yielded an 11th-century date, but was clearly secondary.

Overlying all deposits was modern topsoil (400), which was between 0.15m thick at the north end of the investigation area, and more than 0.8m at the south, indicating that the site has been built up on the riverward side, reasonably recently.

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The watching brief took place during clement conditions on April 30th, May 3rd & 24th, October 23rd – 25th, with excellent cooperation from the on-site contractors.

5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

5.1 Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 11 sherds with a total weight of 101g. It was entirely earlier medieval in date. The location of the site means that the codes of the Milton Keynes type-series, usually applicable for more northerly sites in Buckinghamshire, are not appropriate in this case. Each fabric is therefore described in detail, and, where possible, linked to known ware-types.

The following fabrics were noted:

FSW: Fine Sandy Ware, ?11th – 14th century. Moderate to dense fine quartz < 0.2mm, rare sub-rounded quartz, calcareous material and red ironstone up to 1mm. Early medieval pottery types similar to this are found along a considerable length of the middle Thames Valley and its

hinterland, and the problem of differentiating between the numerous different wares has been noted in the past (Mellor 1994, 84). 5 sherds, 55g.

M40: 'M40' type ware, ?Late 11th – 14th century (Hinton 1973). Hard, flint and limestone unglazed ware, with a possible kiln sources at Camley Gardens near Maidenhead (Pike, 1965) and Denham in Buckinghamshire (op. cit. Mellor 1994, 86). Known at numerous sites in south Oxfordshire and Berkshire. 2 sherds, 19g.

NAB: Newbury 'A/B' ware. Late 11th – late 14th century (Mepham 1997, 51-2). A range of sand-, flint- and limestone-tempered wares. Sparse to moderate limestone up to 2mm, rounded white or clear quartz up to 0.5mm, angular fragments of white, grey or black flint. Jars bowls and pitchers. 2 sherds, 9g.

ASH: Ashampstead ware, 12th – 14th century (Mepham and Heaton, 1995). Sandy wares produced at a manufactory c 15km to the west of Reading, the main products being jars and highly decorated glazed jugs, the latter often having painted geometric slip designs. 1 sherd, 12g.

MSW: Medieval Shelly Ware, late 12th – 13th C. Moderate to dense shell, up to 5mm, rare rounded red ironstone up to 2mm. Such pottery has been noted at Windsor (Mepham 1993, 43-5), and is the same as the medieval shelly ware commonly found in London (Vince 1985). 1 sherd, 6g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. The range of ware types is fairly typical of sites in the region, and the assemblage is generally in reasonably good condition, with little sign of wear or abrasion. Each sherd does however represent a single vessel, so it is likely that all the pottery is the result of secondary deposition. A single feature sherd occurred, a jar rim in context [206], with the only glazed sherd being the fragment of Ashampstead Ware.

Cntxt	FSW		M40		NAB		ASH		MSW		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
202	1	13					1	12			12thC
207	1	24	2	19	1	4					L11thC
208	2	13							1	6	L12thC
209	1	5									11thC?
211					1	5					L11thC
	5	55	2	19	2	9	1	12	1	6	

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

5.2 Environmental Remains

No palaeoenvironmental samples were taken as the potential was not felt to be sufficient.

6 DISCUSSION

The watching brief carried out at Ferry Nab revealed evidence for an early medieval outbuilding, such as a barn, probably within the abbey precinct. The limited view, and

the significant impact caused by previous truncation means that a full understanding of the structure is not possible. Although there was no clear indication of internal floors present within the intervention area, given the extent of truncation and the real probability that any floors would have been earthen, it is very possible that the scrappy surfaces present were indeed occupation layers.

Pottery from the wall fabric indicates that the building dated from after the late 12th century, which broadly concurs with the founding of Medmenham Abbey in AD 1200 × 1201 by King John, as a cell of Woburn Abbey (VCH 1925). However, the work carried out by Michael Farley (2001) indicated the possibility of there being earlier activity in the form of burials on site. It is possible that this chalk-founded building might be slightly earlier than the founding of the abbey, although this cannot be asserted unequivocally.

The limited amount of chalk dumping found within and around the east side of the structure represents upstanding part of the walls. As the width of the wall is only 0.5m and did not appear to have been particularly well-bonded, it is more than likely that the super-structure of the building was timber-framed, which was certainly the case if it had been a two-storied structure.

It is worth noting that the internal floor levels yielded pottery from the late 12th to 13th century, which again corresponds with the foundation of the abbey, but does not confirm or contradict the possibility of the barn construction preceding the foundation of the abbey. The pottery as an assemblage only contains a single sherd of glazed Ashampstead ware, indicative of a 13th-century date or later; the rest of the pottery is unglazed and therefore less diagnostic. It is possible that the sherd of Ashampstead ware is associated with the demolition phase of the building. The precise functional relationship with the abbey remains enigmatic.



Figure 5: Detail of OS map 1842

To the north and front of the house investigations revealed a thick deposit of chalk rubble, which is undoubtedly that which was observed in previous interventions (Jenkins & Taylor 2004, Williams 2010). Previously a late 19th- to early 20th-century date of the chalk dump was inferred from pottery found during piling. The chalk dump sealed a possible half-cellar for a building not shown on any 19th-century mapping (Figs 5 & 6).

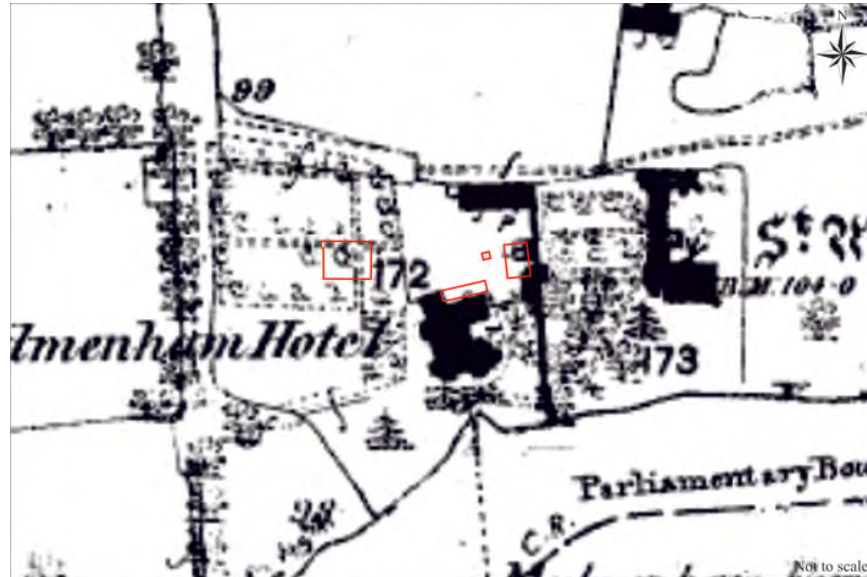


Figure 6: Detail of OS map 1875

The 1973 OS 1:2500 map shows a turning area in front of the house with what appears to be sub-circular flower-bed within which is a square structure (Fig. 7). It is not absolutely certain whether this is a WWII shelter, but as the location is close to the house, this is certainly a strong possibility. This provides the most satisfactory explanation, in the absence of documentary sources for the half-celled structure, located at a small distance from the front of the house. The presence of a shed or similar in the turning area of the house would be unsightly, explicable only if it had a civil defence purpose.

In this case some of the chalk rubble dumps encountered must date from after 1973, even if they are only redeposited. The sequence of chalk rubble dumping around the north side of the house is not entirely clear, but is unrelated to that seen to the west overlying the early medieval barn.

The watching brief successfully recovered evidence for an early medieval structure as well as a probable WWII bomb-shelter. No evidence for structures shown on the earlier historic maps was present during the watching brief, and it can only be presumed that footings were insufficiently deep to survive later demolition, or that they were possibly reused in the case of those of the Medmenham Hotel (Fig 6).

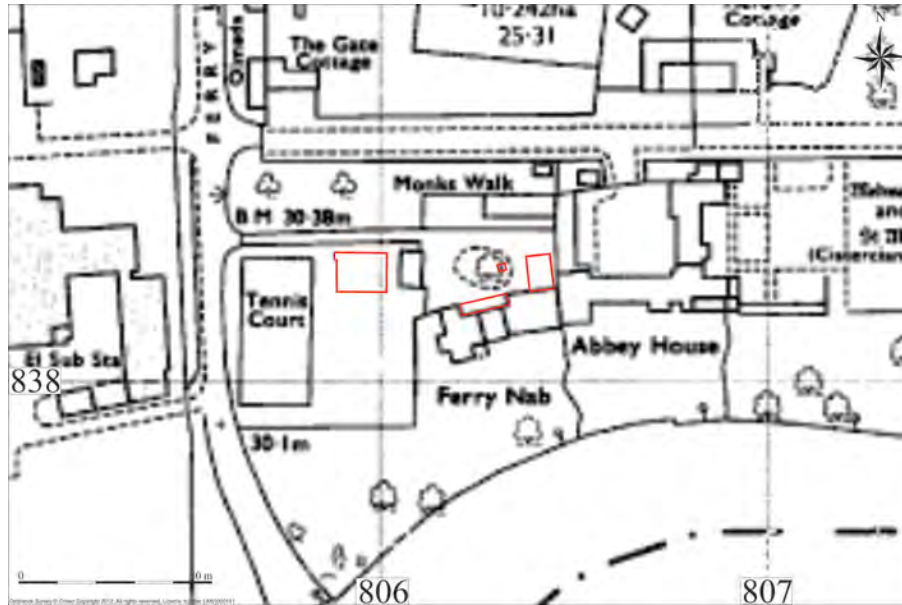


Figure 7: Detail of OS map 1973

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