Denny Abbey
Waterbeach
Cambridgeshire

Archaeological Test Pit Evaluation Report

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OASIS No: oxfordar3-106155
NGR: TL 4924 6847

Client: The Farmland Museum

August 2011
Denny Abbey, Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire

Archaeological Test Pit Evaluation

By Nick Gilmour MA AIfA

Editor: Rachel Clarke BA AIfA

Illustrator: Nick Gilmour MA AIfA

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Date of Works: July 2011
Client Name: Farmland Museum
Client Ref: n/a
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Grid Ref: TL 4924 6847
Site Code: WAT FAM 11
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Accession No: WAT FAM 11

Prepared by: Nick Gilmour
Position: Supervisor
Date: August 2011

Checked by: Stephen Macaulay
Position: Project Manager
Date: August 2011
Signed:

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Oxford Archaeology East,
15 Trafalgar Way,
Bar Hill,
Cambridge,
CB23 8SQ

t: 01223 850500
f: 01223 850599
e: oaeast@thehumanjourney.net
w: http://thehumanjourney.net/oaeast

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Summary

On 28th and 29th July 2011, Oxford Archaeology East carried out a test pit evaluation within the Scheduled Monument of Denny Abbey (SM 13219), Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire. This was carried out in advance of the proposed construction of an extension to a children’s play area. One test pit revealed only rubble dating to the 19th century or later. The second test pit contained a wall, which was overlain by a layer of rubble, possibly of 16th century date. This wall is likely to be medieval and potentially represents part of the remains of an annex to the refectory building, which still stands on the site.
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work (fig. 1)

1.1.1 An archaeological test pit evaluation was conducted by Oxford Archaeology East at the Farmland Museum, Denny Abbey, Waterbeach, (TL 4924 6847) scheduled monument number 13219. This consisted of the excavation of two 1m square test pits and was in advance of the potential extension of a children's play area.

1.1.2 This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Dan McConnell of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC), supplemented by a Specification prepared by OA East. All works carried out were in accordance with Scheduled Monument consent issued by Will Fletcher of English Heritage.

1.1.3 The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010). The results will enable decisions to be made by English Heritage and CCC, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

1.1.4 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies on River Terrace Gravels, at an average height of 5.80m OD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The site is located within the bounds of Denny Abbey, a medieval monastic priory complex, occupied from the 12th to the 16th centuries (SM 13219). The abbey is a Scheduled Monument of national importance and is managed by the Farmland Museum Trust, on behalf of English Heritage under a Local Management Agreement (LMA). Currently two medieval stone buildings survive (the church and refectory), both of which are grade 1 Listed.

1.3.2 The remainder of the precinct includes the below ground remains of ancillary buildings constructed at various times by the three separate religious communities that occupied the site during the medieval period. These remains include visible earthworks and a causeway which once connected Denny Abbey to the nearby village of Waterbeach. A hollow way is known to the north of the precinct and a number of earthwork banks represent field and stock enclosures. Two rectangular features, interpreted as fish ponds lie in fields to the west of the modern access road.

1.3.3 The land around Denny Abbey has periodically produced remains of Roman date and the area is known to have been settled during this period.

1.3.4 Several excavations have taken place within the Abbey, the most relevant of which are those carried out within and around the refectory building in 1984-1985 (Poster and Sherlock 1988). These showed that the standing refectory building had originally continued to the west, directly to the north of the current proposed development area.
1.4  Acknowledgements

1.4.1 The author would like to thank the Farmland Museum who commissioned the work. All of the staff of the Farmland Museum were extremely supportive, particularly Corrina Bower.

1.4.2 The project was managed by Stephen Macaulay. Nick Gilmour directed the fieldwork, with the assistance of Patrick Moan. The excavation was monitored for Cambridgeshire County Council by Andy Thomas, who visited the site along with Quinton Carol. Rob Atkins identified the ceramic building material and Carol Fletcher commented on the pottery.
2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims
2.1.1 The objective of this test pit evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

2.1.2 In the event that archaeological remains are present the evaluation will seek to consider appropriate methodologies and suitable resourcing levels for excavation.

2.2 Methodology
2.2.1 The Brief required that two 1m square test pits be excavated by hand to the geological horizons, or to the upper interface of archaeological features or deposits, whichever is encountered first.

2.2.2 Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

2.2.3 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East’s pro-forma sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

2.2.4 No environmental samples were taken, as no suitable deposits were excavated.

2.2.5 Conditions on site were generally good, with bright sunny weather predominating.
3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Details of each test pit, including depths, are given in Appendix A. Written descriptions of each deposit identified within the test pits are given below.

3.1.2 The pottery was identified by Carol Fletcher and the ceramic building material by Rob Atkins. The nature of the assemblage is such that it has been entirely reported on in the sections given below.

3.1.3 The topsoil was the same in both test pits, being a mid-dark brownish grey silty loam. It appeared to represent an imported soil.

3.2 Test Pit 1 (Fig. 3)

3.2.1 Test Pit 1 was located within the south of the proposed development area. A wall footing (3) constructed of mortar with clunch and limestone inclusions was revealed in this test pit. This had a maximum visible width in the test pit of 0.70m, although only one side of it was visible. The top of the wall footing began only 0.15m below the present ground surface, the depth to which this footing survives was not determined. There was no facing visible on the side of the wall excavated and this makes it difficult to determine whether this was internal or external, and if external, which side was the outside.

3.2.2 Deposit 4 was recorded alongside this wall, it was a dark greyish brown silty clay, with moderate gravel inclusions. Following discussions on site it was not excavated, as it was felt not to be appropriate to dig such a small part of an unknown deposit.

3.2.3 Layer 2 sealed both the wall (3) and deposit 4, this was a mid brownish grey, silty clay which contained frequent inclusions of mortar, with a maximum depth of 0.09m. Pottery recovered from layer 2 was of 12th to 14th century date, however, this is likely to be residual, as a large quantity of ceramic building material recovered from the same layer is of 16th century date. The topsoil (1) directly overlay layer 2.

3.3 Test Pit 2

3.3.1 A series of layers, which appeared to represent late post medieval or modern dumped deposits, were revealed in Test Pit 2. The earliest deposit recorded comprised a mid orangey brown clayey loam (15) which was up to 0.04m thick and lay directly above the natural clayey gravel. Above this was layer 14, a dark greyish brown clayey loam, with a maximum thickness of 0.12m. This was in turn sealed by layer 13, a mid greyish brown silty loam, with a maximum depth of 0.26m.

3.3.2 A pale greyish brown, silty loam, with frequent mortar inclusions and a depth of 0.26m (12) overlay layer 13. Above this was layer 11, a mid grey slightly silty clay, with a maximum depth of 0.08m. This was overlain by the topsoil (10).

3.3.3 Ceramic building material was recovered from the majority of these deposits, this showed them to be of 19th century, or later, date.

3.4 Finds Summary

3.4.1 A large quantity of ceramic building material (28.300kg) and a small assemblage (0.082kg) of pottery, together with several pieces of worked stone (7.280kg) was found in the two test pits, these are discussed below.
Ceramic Building Material (Rob Atkins pers. comm.)

3.4.2 A large amount of ceramic building material, consisting of both brick and tile were recovered from the test pits.

3.4.3 The most significant assemblage is that from layer 2, in Test Pit 1, which consisted of 10.400kg of material. This largely comprises brick fragments, the largest of which has a complete width of 109mm and thickness of 44mm and a maximum surviving length of 192mm. All of these brick fragments are 16th century in date and are very similar to those in the Tudor chimney still standing nearby on site.

3.4.4 The material recovered from Test Pit 2 (layers 10-15) is a mixed assemblage containing some pieces of 16th century date, but also large fragments of 19th century date.

Worked Stone

3.4.5 A single large piece (7.200kg) of worked clunch was recovered from layer in Test Pit 2. This is a block of stone which retains five worked surfaces, it has a length of 295mm, width of 194mm and is 112mm thick.

3.4.6 In addition, 6 small fragments (0.080kg) of stone roof tile were recovered from layer 15 in Test Pit 2.

Pottery (Carol Fletcher pers. Comm.)

3.4.7 A total of eight sherds of pottery, weighing 0.082kg was recovered from the two test pits.

3.4.8 Six sherds of pottery were recovered from layer 2. This included three sherds (0.037kg) (probably from the same jug) of orange sandy ware of 12th to 14th century date. In addition two sherds (0.019kg) of Essex fine sandy ware type, of 12th to 14th century date, were recovered, one of which was heavily sooted. A single sherd (0.003kg) of transfer printed refined white earthenware was also recovered, dating between 1780 and 1900. All of these sherds were moderately abraded.

3.4.9 Two sherds (0.023kg) of abraded post-medieval black glazed ware of 17th century date were also recovered from layer 12, in Test Pit 2.
4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Test Pit 1
4.1.1 The wall footing identified in Test Pit 1 is very similar to those excavated during the 1984-1985 work (Poster and Sherlock 1988), projecting from the west end of the refectory building. It also appeared to be on a similar alignment as the refectory and therefore it seems extremely likely that this footing represents part of the postulated kitchen area (Poster and Sherlock 1988, 77) which extended from the west of the refectory building (fig.4). It is possible that this footing formed part of a second annex on the northern wall, similar to that known to have existed towards the north-east corner.

4.1.2 The rubble layer (2) which overlay this wall largely comprised of 16th century building material, apart from a single small fragment of later pottery. It is therefore likely that this represents an a 16th (post - Dissolution?) or potentially 17th century demolition layer.

4.2 Test Pit 2
4.2.1 The layers excavated in Test Pit 2 were largely 19th century in date. This suggests that any archaeology that was present in this location has been truncated by later activity. The latter probably relates to when the abbey was used as a farm. It is of note that a distinct drop is visible in the ground surface roughly halfway between Test Pits 1 and 2, with Test Pit 2 being in the lower ground. It is possible that this drop represents the point at which disturbance to archaeological remains begins.

4.3 Significance
4.3.1 The test pit evaluation has shown that medieval structural remains still survive within part of the proposed development area at a depth of only 0.15m. However, the work has also demonstrated that in places there is significant of modern disturbance.

4.4 Recommendations
4.4.1 Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office and by English Heritage.
## APPENDIX A. TEST PIT DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

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APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDIX C. OASIS REPORT FORM

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- Aerial Photography - interpretation
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- Annotated Sketch
- Augering
- Dendrochronological Survey
- Documentary Search
- Environmental Sampling
- Fieldwalking
- Geophysical Survey
- Grab-Sampling
- Gravity-Core
- Laser Scanning
- Measured Survey
- Metal Detectors
- Photographic Survey
- Photogrammetric Survey
- Photophotography
- Remote Operated Vehicle Survey
- Sample Trenches
- Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure
- Targeted Trenches
- Test Pits
- Topographic Survey
- Vibro-core
- Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)

### Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods

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**Digital Media**

- Database
- GIS
- Geophysics
- Images
- Illustrations
- Moving Image
- Spreadsheets
- Survey
- Text
- Virtual Reality

**Paper Media**

- Aerial Photos
- Context Sheet
- Correspondence
- Diary
- Drawing
- Manuscript
- Map
- Matrices
- Microfilm
- Misc.
- Research/Notes
- Photos
- Plans
- Report
- Sections
- Survey

**Notes:**
Drawing Conventions

### Plans
- Limit of Excavation
- Illustrated Section: \textit{S.14}
- Archaeological Deposit
- Wall
- Clunch
- Limestone
- Deposit Number: 118

### Sections
- Limit of Excavation
- Wall footing
- Deposit Horizon
- Intrusion/Truncation
- Top Surface/Top of Natural
- Break in Section/
  Limit of Section Drawing
- Cut Number: 118
- Deposit Number: 117
- Ordnance Datum: 18.45m OD
- Brick
- Clunch
- Inclusions

Convention Key
Figure 1: Site location
Figure 2: Location of test pits in relation to existing buildings
Figure 3: Test pit plan and sections

Section 1

Section 2
Figure 4: Plan of the Franciscan nuns’ buildings (after Poster and Sherlock 1988, fig.1)