

ABBEY FARM CARAVAN PARK, ORMSKIRK Lancashire



Watching Brief



Oxford Archaeology North

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Mr Bridges

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SUMMARY

A watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology North in October 2001, at Abbey Farm Caravan Park, Ormskirk, Lancashire (SD 3099 4433). The work was commissioned by Mr Bridges, the owner of the caravan park, following the submission of a planning application to erect a new building on the site.

The proposed development area is within the immediate vicinity of the remains of Burscough Priory, which was established in 1189, and in close proximity to several other features of historic importance in the local area. It was therefore required by Lancashire County Archaeology Service (LCAS) that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during the excavation of foundations for the building.

Only a single area was excavated, and only a narrow trench went deeper than the subsoil horizons. Few remains of particular archaeological significance were encountered although two stone linear features with the appearance of culverts were uncovered; however, these were not fully exposed and remain undated. Further features on the site seem to relate to more recent attempts to combat flooding and to improve the ground, a problem which is still to be fully resolved.

Although no dateable structural remains were uncovered, the presence of possible culverts and large pieces of finished stonework do suggest that rubble from the demolition of Burscough Priory, and possible water management features relating to the priory, may survive in the vicinity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Mr Bridges, for commissioning and supporting the work and for his help on site.

The watching brief was undertaken by Daniel Elsworth, who also produced the final drawings and report. The report was edited by Alison Plummer and Rachel Newman, the project being managed by Alison Plummer.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 As a condition of planning permission for the construction of a timber building at Abbey Farm Caravan Park, Ormskirk, Lancashire (SD 3099 4433), a watching brief was to be maintained on any ground disturbance, as outlined in the Project Design (*Appendix 1*). The development lies to the north-west of the remains of the twelfth century Burscough Priory, in the vicinity of the priory church and cloisters.
- 1.1.2 The development required the stripping of turf and the top 0.2m of soil from an area of 38.5m, and the digging of a narrow foundation trench around its extent. The trench was only to be 0.5m wide and 0.5m deep, to allow a shallow concrete foundation to be made. A 1.2m wide toothless bucket was used to clear the topsoil and a 0.5m wide toothed ditching bucket was used to excavate the foundations. The total area cleared was 5.1m by 7.5m, with the trench running around the inside edge.

1.2 LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 1.2.1 The caravan park is situated on the southern outskirts of Burscough, less than 1km to the south of Burscough Bridge. The site is less than 2km north-east of the outskirts of Ormskirk and approximately 3.5km north-west of Skelmersdale.
- 1.2.2 **Topography:** the area is relatively low-lying, with localised areas reaching little more than 60m OD. The site itself is at approximately 30m OD. The whole area is essentially part of a flat plain extending northwards from the river Mersey, with little high ground.
- 1.2.3 **Geology:** the solid geology of the development area principally comprises Carboniferous Lower Coal Measures (Ordnance Survey 1937) while the drift geology is made up of stagnogleyic argillic brown earths of the flint variety (Lawes Agricultural Trust 1983).

1.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.3.1 **Prehistoric:** early prehistoric activity in the area is relatively sparse, with only a handful of lithic scatters dating to the Mesolithic, focussed particularly on coastal areas (Cowell 1996), with several sites around the area of the River Mersey (*op cit*, 23). The economic and social changes which mark the beginning of the Neolithic seem to have left little impact on the area and it is still lithic scatters that provide the majority of information (Middleton 1996, 36). By the Bronze Age there are several more sites in the area, the majority relating to burial practice and stray finds of metalwork (*op cit*). The Iron Age, by contrast, is extremely badly represented in this part of Lancashire, the majority of major sites occurring in the north (Haselgrove 1996).
- 1.3.2 **Roman:** there is little increase in activity seen during the Roman period, the nearest site of any consequence being a third century industrial complex at Wilderspool

(Buxton and Shotter 1996, 77). While coin hoards and other Roman objects have been found within the area (Shotter 1978, 41; LUAU 1995, 9), none of them suggest a particularly dense Roman occupation, although there was obviously some influence on the area.

- 1.3.3 **Early Medieval:** it is likely that the area came under the control of one of a number of small kingdoms following the withdrawal of Roman influence, before becoming part of the larger kingdom of Northumbria, the southern boundary of which was probably formed by the River Mersey (Newman 1996, 93). During the ninth century the area was politically very unstable, and probably under the influence of several kingdoms (*op cit*, 94-95). The Scandinavian influence on the area was very strong, with several place-names providing evidence of this (Kenyon 1991), although by the tenth century English dominance was beginning to grow; at the time of the Norman Conquest the study area was within the estate of Uhtred (*op cit*, 132). Physical evidence for this period is limited, however, consisting of little more than cross fragments and a few ecclesiastical remains (Newman 1996), several of which have been found in the area around Ormskirk (Edwards 1978, 55).
- 1.3.4 **Medieval:** Burscough Priory was founded around 1189 by Robert de Lathom, who probably had his castle and park at nearby Lathom (LUAU 1997, 10). Ormskirk was established as a medieval borough to serve Burscough Priory in 1286 (White 1996, 130), when the right to a weekly market was granted (Webb 1970, 48-49), and it seems that it took until this time for recognisable settlement to emerge in the area. Even then, Lancashire was a poor and sparsely inhabited part of the country (White 1996, 125). Several towns were established in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Lancashire, some succeeding better than others (*op cit*, 128), and, in the case of Ormskirk, it was considered more profitable to found a free borough to support a priory rather than keep the inhabitants as manorial tenants (*op cit*, 130). Today, very little survives of Burscough Priory (Wood 1996, 150), which was founded as an Augustinian Priory hospital (*op cit*). The site lies within a few hundred metres to the north.
- 1.3.5 **Post-Medieval:** neighbouring Ormskirk developed as a cotton manufacturing centre (Farrer and Brownbill 1907, 240) during the Industrial Revolution and it is likely that the surrounding area developed agriculturally to provide support to the town. Burscough, being relatively rural, probably felt the direct effects of the expanding industrial economy at the time, but it is likely to have seen much rebuilding and development as a result of the increased prosperity of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (LUAU 1995, 10).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.1.1 The work undertaken by OAN complied with current legislation and accepted best practice, including the Code of Conduct and the relevant professional standards of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA). Due regard was given to the requirements of the client and his representatives in respect of such matters as site access. Close liaison was maintained between OAN and the site contractors at all times. A permanent presence watching brief was maintained for the duration of the groundworks associated with the excavation of the foundations.
- 2.1.2 A programme of field observation accurately recorded the location, extent, and character of any surviving archaeological features within the groundworks. This work comprised 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.
- 2.1.3 The recording comprised a full description and preliminary classification of features or materials revealed, on OAN *pro-forma* sheets, and their accurate location, either on plan and/or section. Records were kept of all the sections of the watching brief even if the results were negative. A plan was produced of the areas of groundworks showing the location and extent of the ground disturbance (Fig 2). All areas of archaeological interest were fully photographed, both in general terms and in specific details.

2.2 ARCHIVE

- 2.2.1 The results of all archaeological work carried out forms the basis for a full archive to professional standards, in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 1991). The project archive represents the collation and indexing of all the data and material gathered during the course of the project. The deposition of a properly ordered and indexed project archive in an appropriate repository is considered an essential and integral element of all archaeological projects by the IFA in that organisation's Code of Conduct.
- 2.2.2 OAN conforms to best practice in the preparation of project archives for long-term storage. The archive will be provided in the English Heritage Centre for Archaeology format, which will be deposited at the Lancashire County Record Office. The paper archive consists of field recording sheets, a photographic archive and this report.

3. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

3.1 AREA A

- 3.1.1 Only one phase of work was observed, as required by the development, but this involved the excavation of both the shallow trench through the topsoil and the deeper trenches to create the foundations.
- 3.1.2 **Area A:** a single trench, 5.1m by 7.5m, was stripped of topsoil, **101**, then excavated to a depth of 0.2m. Below the topsoil was a dark orange-brown sandy clay subsoil, **102**, which included a few fragments of sandstone as well as brick and modern pottery. Around the edges, the foundation trenches were dug to a depth of approximately 0.5m.
- 3.1.3 On the west side, below the subsoil, a linear stone feature 0.8m wide was exposed (**103**), which consisted of large sandstone slabs up to 0.25m square, and showed to be a culvert. The wet conditions and high local water table, however, meant that the trench rapidly filled with water, making further investigation impossible. To the south of this, the base of the trench was filled with a dark brown/black sandy clay (**104**), which was very wet and soft, and was apparently a product of the localised wet conditions of the ground. This deposit continued around the southern side of the trench where the material was cut by linear stone feature **106**. This feature also had the appearance of a culvert but its rough and irregular nature perhaps makes it more likely to be a wall. Again, it was difficult to examine in detail as it was only partially exposed and became covered as the trench filled with water.
- 3.1.4 The area around this second linear feature was covered by a layer of redeposited mid red-orange boulder clay (**105**), 0.15m thick, which did not extend as far as the south-east corner. Instead, that area contained more of the same black sandy clay (**104**) seen to the west. The south-east corner itself was filled with several large pieces of larger stonework, some with evidently worked faces, up to 0.6m across, within **104**. Layer **104** continued into the north-east corner of the trench, although it was covered by a 0.2m thick layer of pink, redeposited boulder clay (**107**) in the north-east corner which continues over the whole of the northern part of the trench, over **104**. A ceramic field drain was exposed running across the north-east corner, cutting through **107**, and another cut through the north-west corner. In the far north-west corner, there were several more large, dressed, blocks, within **104**, with the ceramic drain passing to the north of them.

3.2 FINDS

- 3.2.1 All finds recovered pertained to the late post-medieval period, and were largely unstratified. As such, these were not retained for later deposition within a museum.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 Although some archaeologically interesting deposits were discovered, the limited nature of their exposure meant that little can be said with any certainty about them. Two linear features were identified, but the absence of any finds, and the lack of an opportunity to explore them further, means that they remain undated.
- 4.1.2 The site appears to have undergone several phases of activity, although many of these probably relate to relatively modern events. The earliest phase is represented by the stone linear features, **102** and **106**, which potentially represent the remains of culverts or walls. These were apparently cut into **104**, a layer of dark sandy clay, which is probably natural in origin. This would perhaps suggest that the underlying natural deposits were formed in a wetland environment, and that the area has been repeatedly subject to flooding. If the linear features are indeed culverts this would add to the argument that water management has been a major problem on the site.
- 4.1.3 All the subsequent phases appear to be quite late in date, and again probably result from attempts to control or prevent flooding. Layers **105** and **107** were natural boulder clay, presumably brought to the site to help level the ground, while the two ceramic drains were the latest attempt to divert water away from the site.
- 4.1.4 The large pieces of stonework, some dressed, within layer **104** are most likely to be rubble from the nearby priory and associated buildings. It seems unlikely that any other type of building would have produced such large and well worked pieces of masonry. The fact that there were no significant foundations within the area of the watching brief suggests that there were no substantial buildings within the area of the trench and that the stonework was merely residual rubble.

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Plate 2: Worked stone in the north-west corner, with ceramic drain to north,
looking north-west



based upon the Ordnance Survey 1:250000
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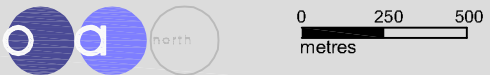
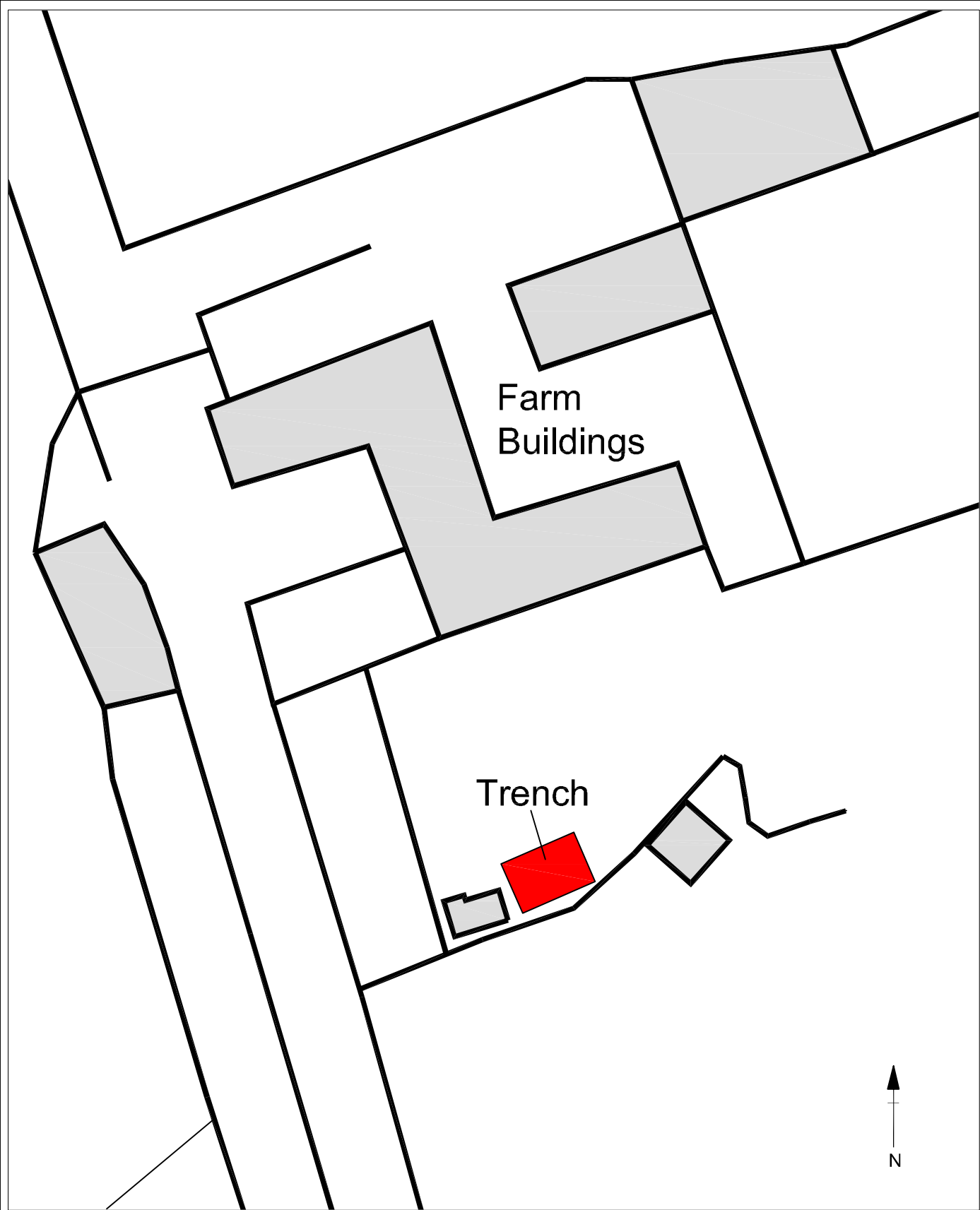


Figure 1: Location Map







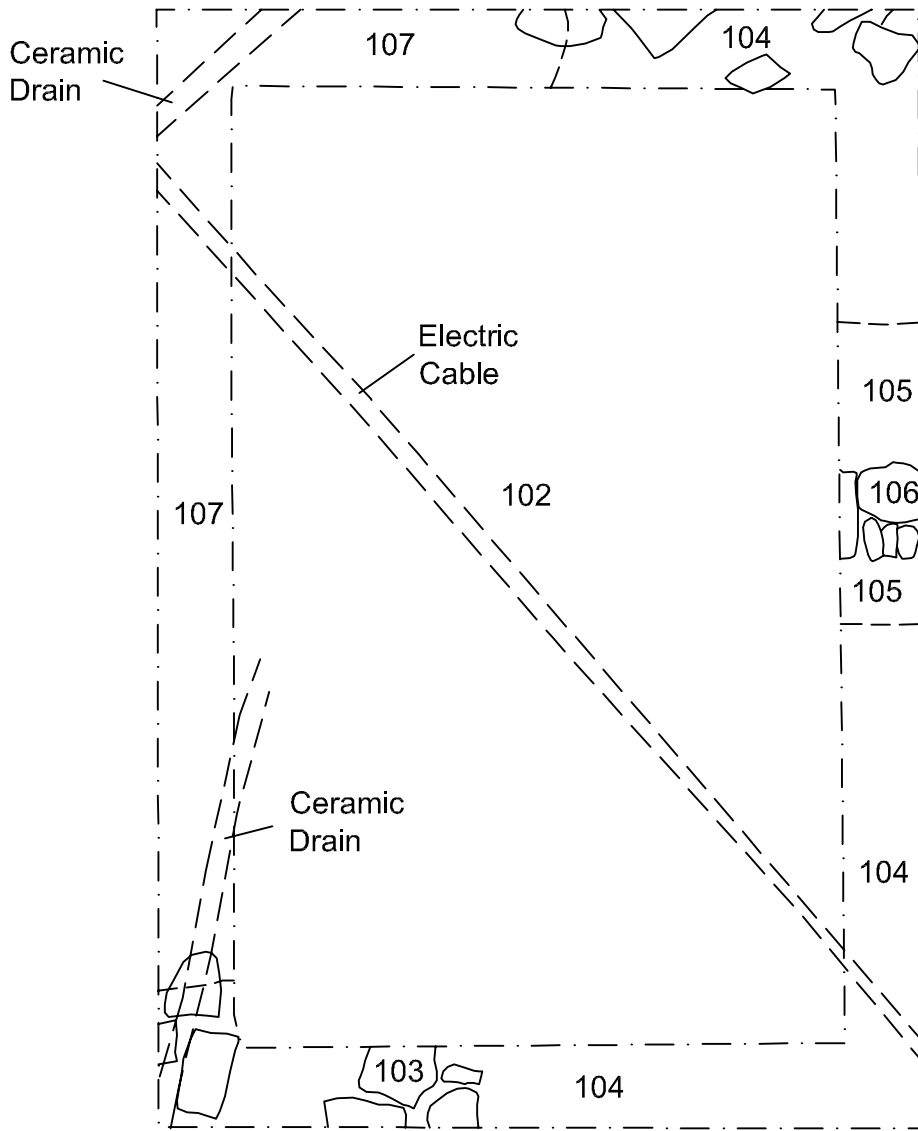
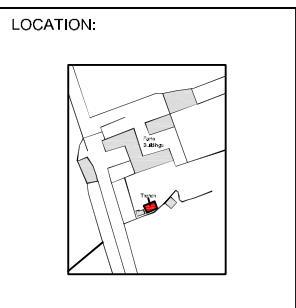
 <p>Oxford Archaeology North Storey Institute Meeting House Lane Lancaster LA1 1TF</p> <p>Tel 01524 848666 Fax 01524 848606</p>	<p>PROJECT: Abbey Farm Caravan Park</p> <p>DRAWING No: 2</p> <p>SCALE: 1:500</p> <p>TITLE: Site Location Plan</p> <p>CLIENT: Mr Bridges</p> <p>DRAWN BY: DWE</p> <p>DATE: December 2001</p>	<p>LOCATION:</p>	<p>KEY</p> <p> Trench</p> <p> Building</p> <p>0  10m</p>
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Figure 2: Site Location Plan



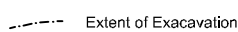



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PROJECT: Abbey Farm Caravan Park
 DRAWING No: 2
 SCALE: 1:50
 TITLE: Trench Plan
 CLIENT: Mr Bridges
 DRAWN BY: DWE
 DATE: December 2001



KEY

-  Stone
-  Edge of Feature
-  Extent of Excavation
- 102 Context Number

0 1m




Figure 3 : Trench Plan



Plate 1: Culvert *103*, looking north



Plate 2: Worked stone in the north-west corner, with ceramic drain to north, looking north-west

APPENDIX 1: PROJECT DESIGN

September 2001

Lancaster
University
Archaeological
Unit

**ABBEY FARM CARAVAN PARK, ORMSKIRK,
LANCASHIRE**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

PROJECT DESIGN

PROPOSALS

The following project design is offered in response to a request from Mr Bridges of Abbey Farm Caravan Park, Ormskirk for an archaeological watching brief prior to the construction of a new building on the site.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Planning permission has been granted to Mr Bridges (hereafter the client) for a new development comprising the construction of a timber building at Abbey Farm Caravan Park, Ormskirk, Lancashire (NGR SD 3099 4433). The caravan park lies to the north west of the remains of the twelfth century Burscough Priory. The timber building is to be positioned to the immediate south west of the priory church, in the vicinity of the cloisters.
- 1.2 In the absence of a written brief this document has been written to comply with specifications for similar projects throughout the county, and in accordance with a verbal brief from the County Archaeologist at Lancashire County Archaeology Service.
- 1.3 The Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU) has considerable experience of the recording of historic buildings together with evaluation and excavation of sites of all periods, having undertaken a great number of small and large scale projects during the past 20 years. Fieldwork has taken place within the planning process and construction programmes, to fulfil the requirements of clients and planning authorities, to very rigorous timetables.
- 1.4 LUAU has the professional expertise and resource to undertake the project detailed below to a high level of quality and efficiency. LUAU and all its members of staff operate subject to the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) Code of Conduct. LUAU is an IFA registered organisation, number 27.

2. OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The following programme has been designed to provide for accurate recording of any archaeological deposits that are disturbed by the groundworks associated with the new development
- 2.2 To achieve the objectives outlined above the following listed specific aims are proposed:
 - (i) To undertake a permanent presence watching brief during ground disturbance for the construction of the new dwelling on the site of the barn, and during ground disturbance associated with services throughout the site.

3. WORK PROGRAMME

- 3.1 In line with the objectives and stages of the archaeological works stated above, the following work programme is submitted:
- 3.2 ***Permanent Presence Watching Brief:*** to maintain an archaeological watching brief during ground disturbance, including stripping of topsoil.

- 3.3 **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).

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 4.1.1 *Methodology:* a programme of field observation will accurately record the location, extent, and character of any surviving archaeological features and/or deposits within the excavations in the course of the proposed development works. This work will comprise observation during the excavation for these works, the systematic examination of any subsoil horizons exposed during the course of the groundworks, and the accurate recording of all archaeological features and horizons, and any artefacts, identified during observation. Putative archaeological features and/or deposits identified by the machining process, together with the immediate vicinity of any such features, will be cleaned by hand, using either hoes, shovel scraping, and/or trowels depending on the subsoil conditions, 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).
- 4.1.2 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. A photographic record will be undertaken simultaneously.
- 4.1.3 All artefacts and ecofacts will be recorded using a system of *pro forma* recording sheets, and will be handled and stored according to standard practice (following current Institute of Field Archaeologists guidelines) in order to minimise deterioration.
- 4.1.4 Environmental samples (bulk samples of 30 litres volume, to be sub-sampled at a later stage) will be collected from suitable deposits (i.e the deposits are reasonably well dated and are from contexts the derivation of which can be understood with a degree of confidence). Where such deposits are encountered, an appropriate sampling strategy will be agreed with the monitoring Archaeologists.
- 4.1.5 It is assumed that LUAU will have the authority to stop the works for a sufficient time period to enable the recording of important deposits. It may also be necessary to call in additional archaeological support if a find of particular importance is identified or a high density of archaeology is discovered, but this would only be called into effect in agreement with the Client and the monitoring Archaeologists and will require a variation to costing. Also, should evidence of burials be identified, the 1857 Burial Act would apply and a Home Office

Licence would be sought. This would involve all work ceasing until the proper authorities were happy for burials to be removed. In normal circumstances, field recording will also include a continual process of analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of the data, in order to establish the necessity for any further more detailed recording that may prove essential.

- 4.1.6 Full regard will, of course, be given to all constraints (services etc), as well as to all Health and Safety regulations. LUAU 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 Unit Managers.

5. REPORT

- 5.1 The watching brief will be submitted in report format, illustrated with the relevant drawings.
- 5.2 One bound and one unbound copy of the report will be submitted to the client. The Lancashire Sites and Monuments Record and the County Archaeologist will also be sent a copy of the report, which will be provided both as paper copy and in a suitably digital form on 3.5" 'floppy' disk or CD. A copy of the report will also be supplied to the Local Planning Authority responsible for the planning decision. Any subsequent work arising from this survey will be subject to separate consideration in liaison with LCAS and the client.
- 5.3 The report will be in the same basic format as this project design. Copies of the brief (if applicable), project design project management records will be included. A copy of the report will be provided on 3.5" IBM compatible disk in either ASCii or windows format if required.

6. ARCHIVE

- 6.1 The results of the watching brief will form the basis of a full archive to professional standards, in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (*Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edition, 1991). The project archive represents the collation and indexing of all the data and material gathered during the course of the project. It will include summary processing and analysis of any features and finds recovered during fieldwork, in accordance with UKIC guidelines. The deposition of a properly ordered and indexed project archive in an appropriate repository is considered an essential and integral element of all archaeological projects by the IFA.
- 6.2 The paper archive will be deposited with the County Record Office. A copy of the report will be deposited with the Lancashire SMR.
- 6.3 All finds will be treated in accordance with LUAU standard practice, which follows current IFA guidelines.

7. HEALTH AND SAFETY

- 7.1 LUAU considers health and safety to be of paramount importance on all their projects. LUAU has considerable experience in applying modern health and safety practices in large and small-scale archaeological projects.
- 7.2 LUAU 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 (1996 rev.). A written risk assessment will be undertaken in advance of project commencement and copies will be made available on request to all interested parties.
- 7.3 The client would be asked to determine the nature of the utility services to the property prior to any fieldwork being carried out.

8. CONFIDENTIALITY

- 8.1 The report is designed as a document for the specific use of the Client, for the particular purpose as defined in the project brief and this project design, and should be treated as such; it is not suitable for publication, save as a note, without amendment or revision. Any requirement to revise or reorder the material for submission or presentation to third parties beyond the project brief and project design, or for any other explicit purpose, can be fulfilled, but will require separate discussion and funding.
- 8.2 Any proposed variations to the project design will be agreed with LCAS in co-ordination with the Client. LUAU will arrange a preliminary meeting, if required, and LCAS will be informed of the commencement of the project in writing.

9. TIMETABLE

- 9.1 LUAU could commence the watching brief within two weeks of receipt of written notification from the Client. LUAU would be able to submit the report to the client within eight weeks of the completion of the fieldwork although a shorter deadline can be negotiated.
- 9.2 The project will be under the management of **Alison Plummer** BSc (Hons) (LUAU Project Manager) to whom all correspondence should be addressed.
- 9.3 The project will be supervised in the field by a suitably qualified member of LUAU's staff to be determined when the start date is known in order to take in account of LUAU's already programmed commitments.

10. INSURANCE

- 10.1 LUAU has both professional indemnity and public liability insurance. Details will be sent if required.

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY CONTEXT LIST

Context	Area	Category	Description
101	A	Deposit	Dark orange-brown loose sandy clay, topsoil
102	A	Deposit	Mid orange-brown loose sandy clay, subsoil
103	A	Linear feature	0.8m wide, consisting of some large sandstone slabs, up to 0.25m square
104	A	Deposit	Dark brown/black sandy clay, firm and very wet
105	A	Deposit	Mid red-orange boulder clay, very firm, redeposited natural
106	A	Linear Feature	Several loose, angular pieces of stone
107	A	Deposit	Pink boulder clay, very firm, redeposited natural