

**BISHAM ABBEY NATIONAL SPORTS CENTRE**

**BISHAM, BERKSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

**NGR SU 8475 3432**

**OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT**

**FEBRUARY 1997**

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*Summary*

*In November 1996 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Bisham Abbey National Sports Centre (NGR SU 8475 3432), during the relaying of an area of block paving outside the hostel blocks and the excavation of a new trench drain and associated works. No archaeology was seen and no finds were retrieved during the course of these works.*

**1 Introduction**

Bisham Abbey is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM, no. 148) and thus the proposed works required scheduled monument consent (SMC). The watching brief was necessitated by PPG 16 as the site is of considerable archaeological importance, both in terms of the standing building and of buried archaeology.

**2 Background**

The scheduled area includes the remains of Bisham Abbey itself; a monastic and manorial complex, it is located on the south bank of the River Thames. It was founded as a preceptory of the Knights Templar during the reign of King Stephen (1135-64) and was occupied by that order until their dissolution in 1307. In 1337 an Augustinian Priory, dedicated to Jesus Christ and St Mary, was founded on the site and the monastery remained Augustinian until its dissolution in 1536. It was briefly re-founded in 1537 as a Benedictine Abbey, but again surrendered in 1538, subsequently becoming the private residence of the Hoby family.

No trace of the Augustinian Priory buildings can be seen above ground, although parch marks on the lawns in dry summers indicate their probable survival as buried features. Various parts of the original Templar buildings survive, including the great hall of the Templars preceptory with its traced rafter roof and screens, stone roofed porch and kitchen block. This remains largely intact and is Listed Grade 1. Buildings of late Mediaeval date which survive and are protected by Listing include a circular dovecote, tithe barn and grange (Listed Grades 1,2 and 3 respectively).

Earthwork remains consist of the surviving part of a surrounding rectangular moat, enclosing an area some 3-400m square. Although most of the moat has been infilled, it can be seen to be steep sided with an earthen inner bank. The precise age of this feature is uncertain at this time, however it is possible that it belongs to the post-Dissolution occupation of the site. The remains of timber buildings are known to exist within the interior of the site, and large amounts of mediaeval pottery have also been recovered from time to time. All modern buildings and structures, Listed buildings, roads and metalled surfaces including new tennis courts and an artificial hockey pitch are excluded from the scheduling, although the ground beneath them is included.

**3 Aims**

To preserve by record any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the ground works to previously established standards (OAU Fieldwork Manual, First Edition, 1992).

#### **4 Methodology**

The watching brief commenced with work for the main building contract and proceeded in an agreed scheme of inspections alongside the main contractors programme. An archaeological supervisor made inspections. It was not felt necessary to maintain a continuous presence on site, rather inspections were integrated with major phases of ground disturbance, in order to inspect such works either during or immediately after their occurrence, while exposures in plan and section were fresh.

#### **5 Results**

In the area to be re-paved (see fig. 2) an initial trench was dug to a depth of 0.40m prior to the insertion of pre-cast concrete culverts. The section displayed the following; at the base of the section a deposit of hardcore, the lower horizon of which must lie below 0.40m as it was not seen. This was sealed by a layer of rolled concrete that in turn was sealed by the block paving. No archaeology was seen here and no finds were retrieved.

#### **6 Discussion**

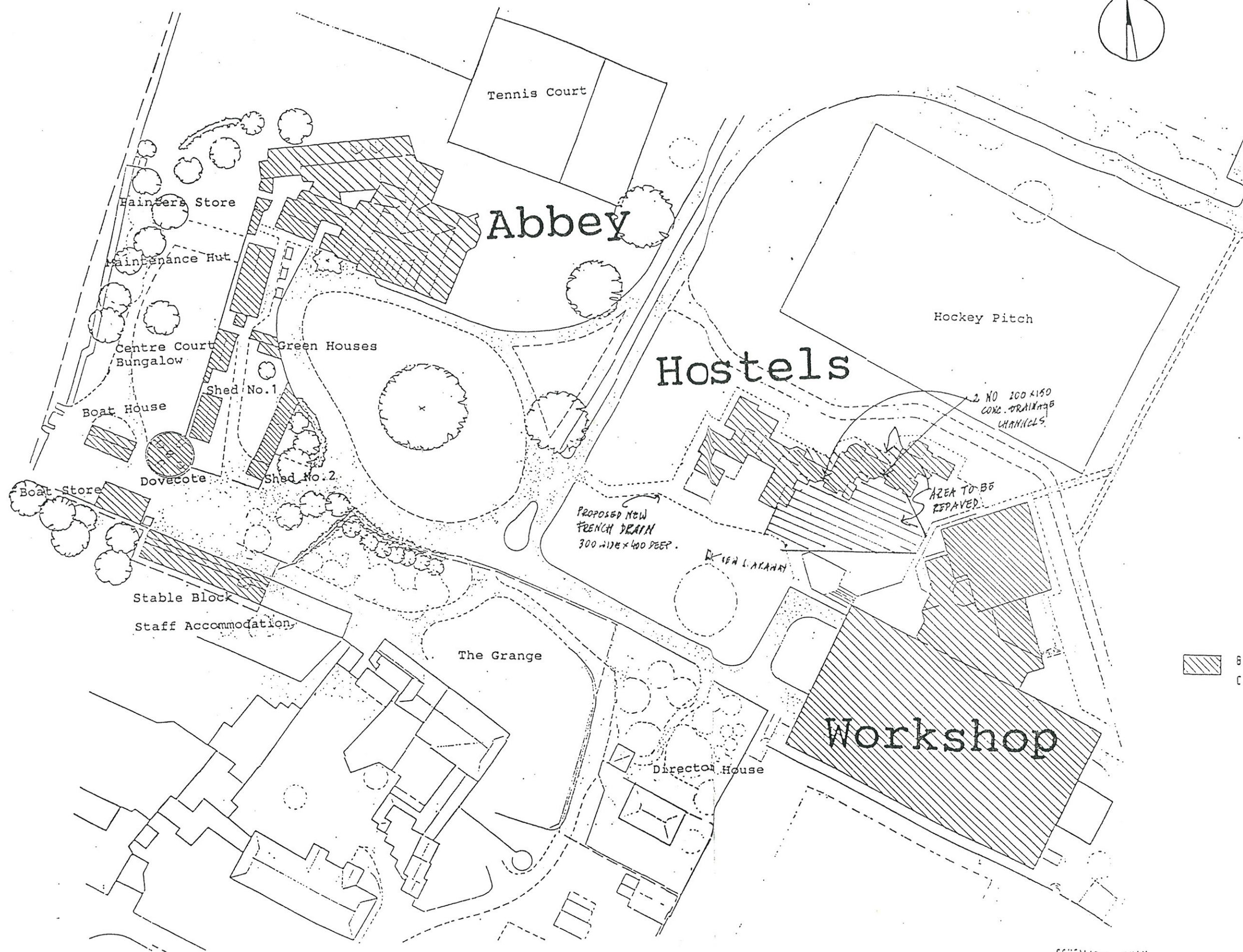
The removal of the block paving itself revealed only rolled concrete in plan; the trench dug in this area was of insufficient depth to clear the modern disturbance, therefore no inferences can be drawn on the existence or nature of any buried archaeology in this area. Limited observations of the excavation of a French drain and a pit dug for its inspection chamber revealed no archaeological evidence. The watching brief successfully recorded that material which was revealed, and successfully prevented any accidental intrusion into deposits not covered by the SMC.


John Dalton  
OAU  
February 1997.

#### **Bibliography**

Wilkinson, D (ed.) OAU Fieldwork Manual, First Edition, 1992.





 BUILDINGS INCLUDED IN THE  
CONDITION SURVEY

Forrest Miller Tanton and Partners  
Architects and Design Consultants  
801 Tulse Way Yard, Moulton High Street, London SW18 1BN  
Tel: 0181 871 1277

**PMT**

Client SPORTS COUNCIL

Job BISHAM ABBEY

Title LOCATION PLAN

Drawn J.H.

Scale NTS Date JUNE 96

SCHEMATIC ONLY

1034/20/02





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