

Bisham Abbey  
National Sports Centre  
Marlow Road  
B i s h a m  
Berkshire



Archaeological  
Watching Brief Report



June 2008

**Client: Turner and Townsend  
Project Management Ltd**

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**Bisham Abbey, National Sports Centre, Marlow Road,  
Bisham, Berkshire**

NGR SU 849 850

***ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT***

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Front Cover: Present day Bisham Abbey

## SUMMARY

*In May 2008 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an Archaeological Watching Brief at Bisham Abbey, Bisham, Berkshire (SAM No.148) (NGR SU 849 850), on behalf of Turner and Townsend Project Management Ltd in advance of the excavation of new service trenches and the base for a water treatment enclosure (Planning Reference: 08/00047/FULL). The Watching Brief revealed deposits of alluvium and modern made ground which included landscaping deposits and make up for the current roadway. No archaeological features or deposits relating to the Augustinian Abbey were encountered.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 In May 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an Archaeological Watching Brief at Bisham Abbey, Bisham, Berkshire (NGR: SU 8492 8502) on behalf of Turner and Townsend Project Management Ltd in advance of the excavation of a service trench and the base for a water treatment enclosure. In addition to the Scheduled Monument Consent from English Heritage, a condition requiring an archaeological watching brief was attached to the planning permission (08/00047/FULL) by Mary O'Donoghue of Berkshire Archaeology.

1.1.2 OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) showing how it would meet the requirements of this condition (OA, 2008).

#### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 Bisham Abbey is located approximately 7 km south of the town of High Wycombe on the southern edge of the village of Bisham (Fig. 1). The site is bounded to the west by the River Thames and to the east and south by the A308 connecting to the A404. The area of the works is located north-east of the standing Abbey buildings, approximately within the centre of the National Sports Centre site on level ground at roughly 29 m above OD.

1.2.2 The site of the proposed works was a mixture of tarmac hard standing and roadway, grassed areas and a hedge. The underlying geology is Flood Plain Gravel overlying Upper Chalk and Middle Chalk.

#### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 To the north of the development site is the Church of All Saints at Bisham that dates to the 12th century and it is likely that a small medieval hamlet grew up around the church. Immediately west of the site is Bisham Abbey, a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 148) that includes the remains of a monastic and manorial complex 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.

- 1.3.2 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. Earthwork remains consist of the surviving part of a surrounding rectangular moat, enclosing an area some 400 m sq. Although most of the moat has been infilled, it can be seen to be steep sided with an earthen inner bank.
- 1.3.3 To the south west of the Abbey is Temple Mills, which date to the 1790s and are attributed to Samuel Wyatt (Pevsner 1966, 89-90).
- 1.3.4 Trial trenching by Thames Valley Archaeological Services in the early 1990s, approximately 1 km south-west of the site at Bradenham Lane, Temple, revealed a series of Roman features dating from the 2nd to 4th centuries (Archaeology in Berkshire 1991, 10) and a recent evaluation by OA at the Temple Estate revealed evidence for a Late Iron Age settlement (OAb 2003). At Stubbings House in Bisham, Bronze Age flints, Iron Age pottery and part of a burnt flint mound were revealed during trial trenching (*ibid*). Work by OA on the site of the new club house on the golf course exposed a landscaping layer comprising deep deposits of modern topsoil (OA, 2003).

## 2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS

- 2.1.1 To establish the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development. Particular attention was paid to the location of the moat.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological remains, that the development may remove or damage within the impacted area.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

## 3 WATCHING BRIEF METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Scope of fieldwork, methods and recording

- 3.1.1 The watching brief was conducted as a continuous site presence during those activities likely to impinge or disturb potential archaeological deposits. The works consisted of approximately 40 m length of trenching, 0.25 m wide and up to 0.6 m in depth running from NGR: SU 8492 8502 to NGR: SU 8490 8501. A plan showing the location and extent of the excavations was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) while any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. The excavations and any recorded sections were photographed using colour slide and black and white print

film. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

- 3.1.2 The ground conditions were good during the investigative works and the weather conditions were fine and dry.

## 4 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

### 4.1 Description of deposits

#### *Section 1*

- 4.1.1 This was located adjacent to the golf course tool shed.
- 4.1.2 A layer of orange-brown sandy silt clay (3) was encountered at a depth of 0.55 m below the current ground level (Fig. 2, Section 1). This was a very clean deposit and probably represents a layer of alluvium. It was overlaid by a 0.4 m deep layer of dark brown clay silt (2). This was a very clean deposit and may also represent a layer of alluvium, but is more likely to be a layer of earlier worked soil or a landscaping layer. Sealing this deposit was a layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (1) 0.15 m deep. This was the present day topsoil and turf.

#### *Section 2*

- 4.1.3 This was located adjacent to the entry into the golf club carpark.
- 4.1.4 A layer of pale brown clay silt (4) was encountered at a depth of 0.2 m below the current ground level (Fig. 2, Section 2). This deposit contained a high percentage of small sub-angular flints and chalk flecking and probably represents a layer of alluvium. It was sealed by a continuation of the modern topsoil and turf, (1).

#### *Section 3*

- 4.1.5 This was located on the northern edge of the roadway leading to the Abbey.
- 4.1.6 A compact layer of brown clay silt containing many chalk fragments (7) was encountered at a depth of 0.45 m below the road level (Fig. 2, Section 3). Overlying the western edge of this deposit and running under the roadway was a 0.35 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (6). This deposit contained many fragments of modern demolition debris such as frogged bricks, pieces of concrete and lengths of steel strapping. It tapered off to the east away from the roadway and probably represents the hardcore base for the road surface.
- 4.1.7 Overlying layer 7 and running up and over Layer 6 was a layer of dark grey-brown clay loam (5). This deposit contained numerous sub-angular chalk inclusions and probably represents a landscaping layer, possibly a layer of compaction supporting the hardcore base to the roadway.

*Section 4*

- 4.1.8 This was located on the eastern side of the hedge line bounding the roadway.
- 4.1.9 A layer of grey-brown clay silt containing many fragments of chalk (8) was encountered at a depth of 0.25 m below the current ground level (Fig. 2, Section 4). This was overlaid by a 0.25 m deep continuation of Layer 5. Both these deposits probably represent modern landscaping.

*Excavations within the roadway*

- 4.1.10 The stratigraphy exposed within the trenching running along the roadway was similar throughout its length. The trench was dug to an average depth of 0.45 m and exposed a layer of crushed brick and tarmac scalplings below a 0.1 m deep layer of tarmac. Both these deposits were recent in origin and were noted, but no section was recorded.

**5 DISCUSSION**

- 5.1.1 All the deposits encountered during the course of the watching brief were either modern in date, and relate to the present day landscaping of the area, or natural deposits. No deposits or features relating to the Augustinian Priory were located or observed during this watching brief.

## APPENDICES

## 6 APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context No.</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	-	0.14 m	Modern topsoil and turf	Brick, tile	C20th
2	Layer	-	0.4 m	Possible alluvium	-	-
3	Layer	-	> 0.1 m	Alluvium	-	-
4	Layer	-	> 0.35 m	Alluvium	-	-
5	Layer	-	0.2 m	Modern landscaping deposit	-	C20th
6	Layer	-	0.35 m	Hardcore base for modern road surface	-	C20th
7	Layer	-	> 0.12 m	Hardcore base for modern road surface	-	C20th
8	Layer	-	> 0.2 m	Modern landscaping deposit	-	C20th

## 7 APPENDIX 2 REFERENCES

BA, 2007 *Bisham Abbey, National Sports Centre, Bisham: Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

IFA 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 2003 *Bisham Abbey Golf Club, Bisham, Berkshire: Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

OA, 2003b *Manor Cottage and Temple Cottage, Temple Lane Bisham, Berkshire: Archaeological Evaluation Report*

OA, 2008 *Bisham Abbey, National Sports Centre, Bisham, Berkshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OAU, 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (ed. D. Wilkinson)

Pevsner, 1966 *The Buildings of England: Berkshire*, Penguin

## 8 APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** Bisham Abbey, National Sports Centre, Marlow Road, Bisham, Berkshire

**Site code:** BIABST 08

**Grid reference:** Centred at SU 849 850

**Type of Mitigation:** Archaeological Watching Brief on machine and hand excavation of service trenching

**Date and duration of project:** 21st May 2008, 1 day on site

**Summary of results:** No archaeological features or deposits were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Reading Museum Service under the Accession No. REDMG:2008.415





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Figure 1: Site location



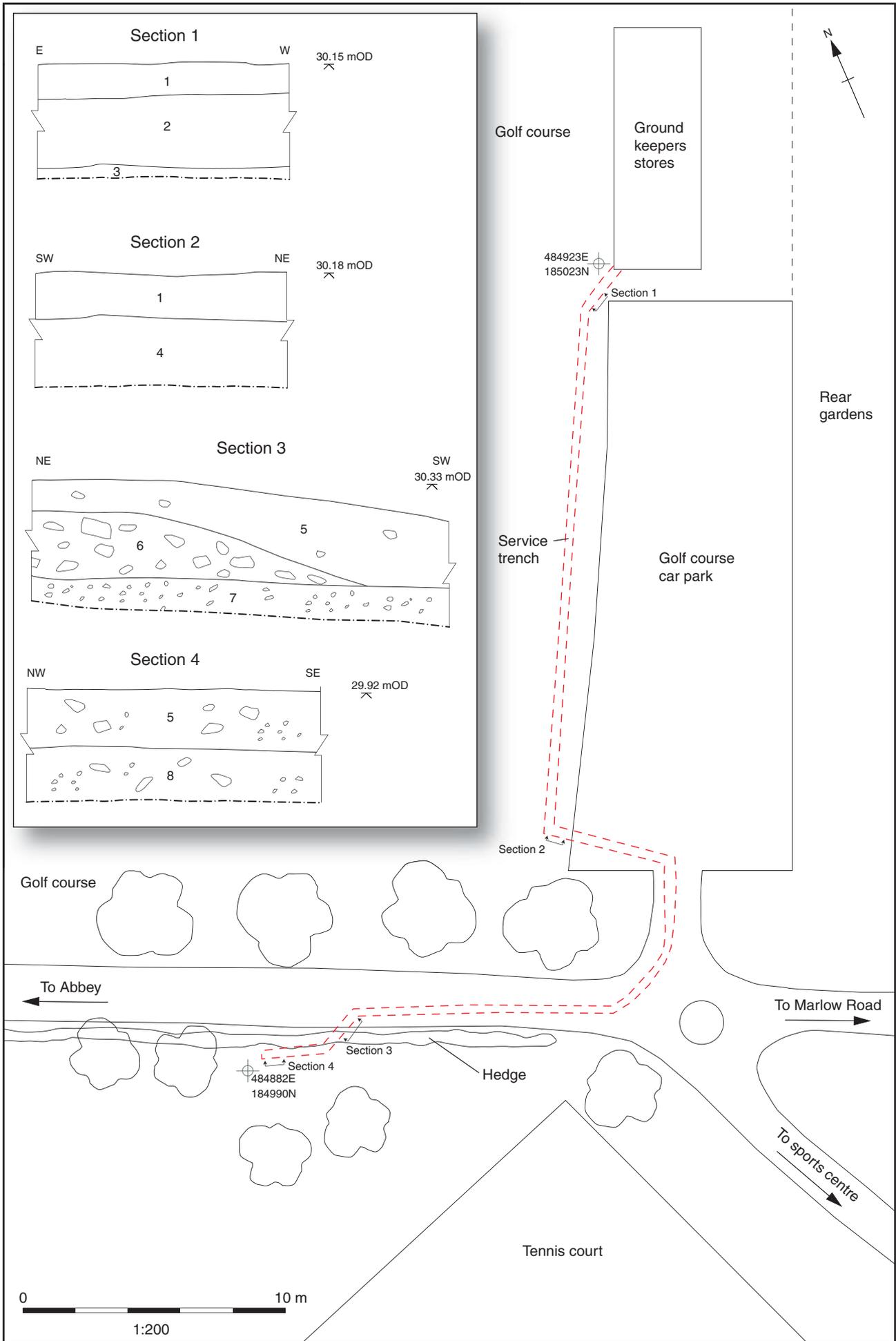


Figure 2: Site plan and sections







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