

# Abbey Fields Play Area, Kenilworth, Warwickshire

## Archaeological Watching Brief



*understanding heritage matters*

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 1353  
September 2013



*Working for  
Warwickshire*

**Project:** Abbey Fields Play Area

**Commissioned by:** Warwick District Council

**Project Report No.** 1353

**Site Code:** KA13

**NGR:** SP 2853 7226

**Planning Reference:**

**Staff:**

**Project Manager:** Pete Thompson

**Fieldwork:** Catherine Coutts, Bryn Gethin

**Author:** Caroline Rann, Catherine Coutts

**Illustrations:** Candy Stevens

**Report checked by:** Pete Thompson

**Date:** September 2013

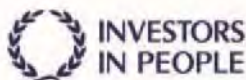
**Report reference:** Rann, C. and Coutts, C. M 2013 *Abbey Fields Play Area, Kenilworth, Archaeological Watching Brief*, Archaeology Warwickshire Report 1353

If you have any queries regarding this document please contact

Pete Thompson  
Senior Archaeologist  
Archaeology Warwickshire  
Unit 9 Montague Road  
Warwick  
CV34 5LW

Tel: 01926 412280

[fieldarchaeology@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:fieldarchaeology@warwickshire.gov.uk)  
[heritage.warwickshire.gov.uk/archaeology](http://heritage.warwickshire.gov.uk/archaeology)



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## Summary

**Upgrading of play equipment at Kenilworth Abbey Fields was subject to Scheduled Monument Consent which required requiring the maintenance of an archaeological watching brief of all groundworks associated with the development. The removal of a hedge to the north of the pavilion, and the removal of old equipment was observed, however, no archaeological monitoring took place during the installation of the new equipment. It is likely that the installation groundworks disturbed archaeological features and deposits, as stone and tile were reportedly seen by members of the public.**

## 1 Introduction

1.1 Scheduled Monument Consent (S00054966 and S0005467) was granted by English Heritage for the removal of old equipment and installation of new playground equipment in Abbey Fields, Castle Road, Kenilworth, Warwickshire. The site lies on a gravel terrace alongside the River Avon, within the extent of Kenilworth Abbey. A condition of Scheduled Monument Consent required the applicant to secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work to be carried out in conjunction with the works.

1.2 A programme of fieldwork, consisting of archaeological observation of all groundworks as detailed in a Written Scheme of Investigation, was commissioned from Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire and carried out in March 2013 and this report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under Site Code KA13.

## 2 Location

2.1 The development site is centred around at map reference SP 2853 7226, in Kenilworth Abbey Fields, within the town of Kenilworth which is in the parish of the same name. The site was formerly occupied by children's playground and former bowling green.

2.2 The superficial geology of the area is 2nd River Terrace Sand and Gravels and the underlying geology is the Kenilworth Sandstone Formation - Mudstone (British Geological Survey Viewer <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/data/mapViewers/> accessed September 2013).

## 3 Methodology

3.1 The watching brief was designed to observe any groundworks associated with the scheme and record as far as possible, the nature of the archaeological resource on the site.

3.2 The work undertaken involved the examination of early map evidence as well as records of archaeological remains in the area and local historical journals and other publications. Fieldwork involved an archaeologist being present, when notified, during the groundworks.

## 4 Archaeological and historical background

4.1 St Mary's Abbey was founded in 1122 as a priory but was raised to the rank of abbey in c.1450 (VCH 1951, 133; HER WA 3201). The site is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM No. 35115). The 14th-century abbey gatehouse survives (HER WA 6007) as does the building known as 'The Barn' which was probably the abbey's guesthouse (HER WA 6008). Substantial parts of the major buildings were excavated in 1890 by T. W. Whitely (Draper 1891) and largely re-excavated in 1922-23 by E. Carey-Hill (Carey-Hill 1929). The parish church of St Nicholas also largely dates to the 14th century (HER WA 3219). The abbey may have acted as a focus for settlement during the medieval period and the long narrow burgage plots that are typical of medieval property boundaries can be seen fossilised in the modern property boundaries along High Street. The abbey was dissolved in 1538 and in 1539 the dwellings and closes of the former abbey estate were described in a rental.

4.2 Fishponds once existed along the length of the Finham Brook and one example, marked as the site of Bakehouse Pool on the Ordnance Survey map of 1923 (Ordnance Survey 1923), still shows in relief (HER WA 3289). At the south-eastern corner of the Abbey grounds Finham Brook is crossed by a post-medieval bridge (HER WA 3276) which replaced the one Prior Teniesford (1280-1290) had built (WRO MI392/3).

4.3 Resistivity survey was undertaken in two locations in 1996 as part of a scheme designed to investigate the history and archaeology of Abbey Fields. One area over the Abbey church failed to reveal any meaningful results whilst a further area north-west of the gatehouse produced a rectangular anomaly thought to represent either a building or evidence of quarrying (Ireland 1996).

4.4 A number of archaeological watching briefs have been carried out in the vicinity of the abbey. In 1989 two square pits were excavated for the foundations of two pieces of play equipment. In one of these the remains of a sandstone surface was recorded, possibly part of a courtyard or trackway at 0.60m below the ground surface, overlaid by medieval demolition material. The other revealed part of a large stone wall 0.25m below ground level (Hingley *et al.* 1989).

4.5 Two watching briefs in 1994 in the vicinity of the site did not record significant archaeological deposits, but further watching briefs between 1999 and 2001 have revealed fragments of medieval glazed floor tile and a quantity of sandstone rubble (Robinson and Jones 1999), fragments of hand-made roof tile (Gethin and Coutts 2000; Warwickshire Museum 2001b) 14th- to 15th-century pottery and the stone foundations for a building complex associated with the abbey (Warwickshire Museum 2002). A substantial stone wall recorded on the south side of the church which was possibly part of the medieval precinct boundary (Warwickshire Museum 2001a).

4.6 More recently finds of 13th/14th-century pottery, 15th-century floor tile and medieval window glass have been recovered from a watching brief at the Abbey barn (Warwickshire Museum 2003). A possible medieval wall foundation was also revealed in 2009 in a test pit (Rann 2009).

## 5 Watching Brief

### Hedge Removal

5.1 A hedge, *c.*1.6m wide and *c.*1.6m high to the east of the swimming pool was initially removed using a mini JCB (Figs 2 and 3). A discontinuous layer of reddish-brown, sandy clay (2) was observed at a depth of 0.3m. Overlying this layer was very dark greyish-brown sandy loam topsoil (1), which large quantities of hand-made roof tile and fragments of sandstone, suggesting we were in an area of medieval demolition. Large quantities of modern rubbish, bottles etc, were also noted during the observation. An area of gravel (3) was recorded at the eastern end of the hedge area, near the tennis courts, suggesting that this had been laid to facilitate drainage.

### Play Equipment Removal

5.2 Play equipment was removed under archaeological supervision in four discrete areas (Figs 2 and 4). The maximum depth of excavations was 0.4m which exposed only topsoil (1). Removal of smaller elements of play equipment left no discernible holes. The wooden climbing frame was dismantled and no excavation was necessary for this.

5.3 Following the removal of the play equipment the archaeologist on site was informed by the contractors on site that no further work was due until September. However, over the course of the later Spring the new playground development went ahead, without the archaeologists being informed, and in breach of the Scheduled Monument Consent (Figs 5-7). In addition, the Friends of Abbey Field excavated a 'rain garden' adjacent to the tennis court, again without any archaeological monitoring (Fig. 8). A chance visit by an archaeologist to the site in July 2013 resulted in English Heritage being informed of this.

5.4 The site was re-visited in 2013 to record the extent of groundworks potentially missed. It was noted that not all of the features shown on the plan (Fig 5) had been installed, and that some features, such as the zip-wire, were not in the position indicated on the plan. Extensive ground disturbance must have taken place for the insertion of the paths and concrete areas and some of the pieces of equipment, such as the sunken trampoline. The grassed banked mounds built up in areas around the play area are suffering from extensive erosion and fragments of roof tile are being exposed (Fig 9)

## 6 Conclusions

6.1 Geological natural was not reached in the areas observed and due to the superficial nature of the groundworks observed no significant archaeological deposits were encountered, although large amounts of roof tile and sandstone rubble were noted in the area of the former hedge. However, it appears that a significant amount of groundworks took place for new play equipment and hard landscaping, without archaeological monitoring. It is likely that archaeological features and finds would have been recorded in this area, should the archaeologists have been given the opportunity to carry out the required recording.

## Acknowledgements

Archaeology (Projects) Warwickshire would like to thank Simon Richardson of Warwick District Council for commissioning the work and Ian George (English Heritage) for approving the Written Scheme of Investigation.

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## Appendix List of Contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1	Very dark greyish brown sandy loam	Topsoil
2	Reddish brown sandy clay	Layer
3	Gravel	Modern

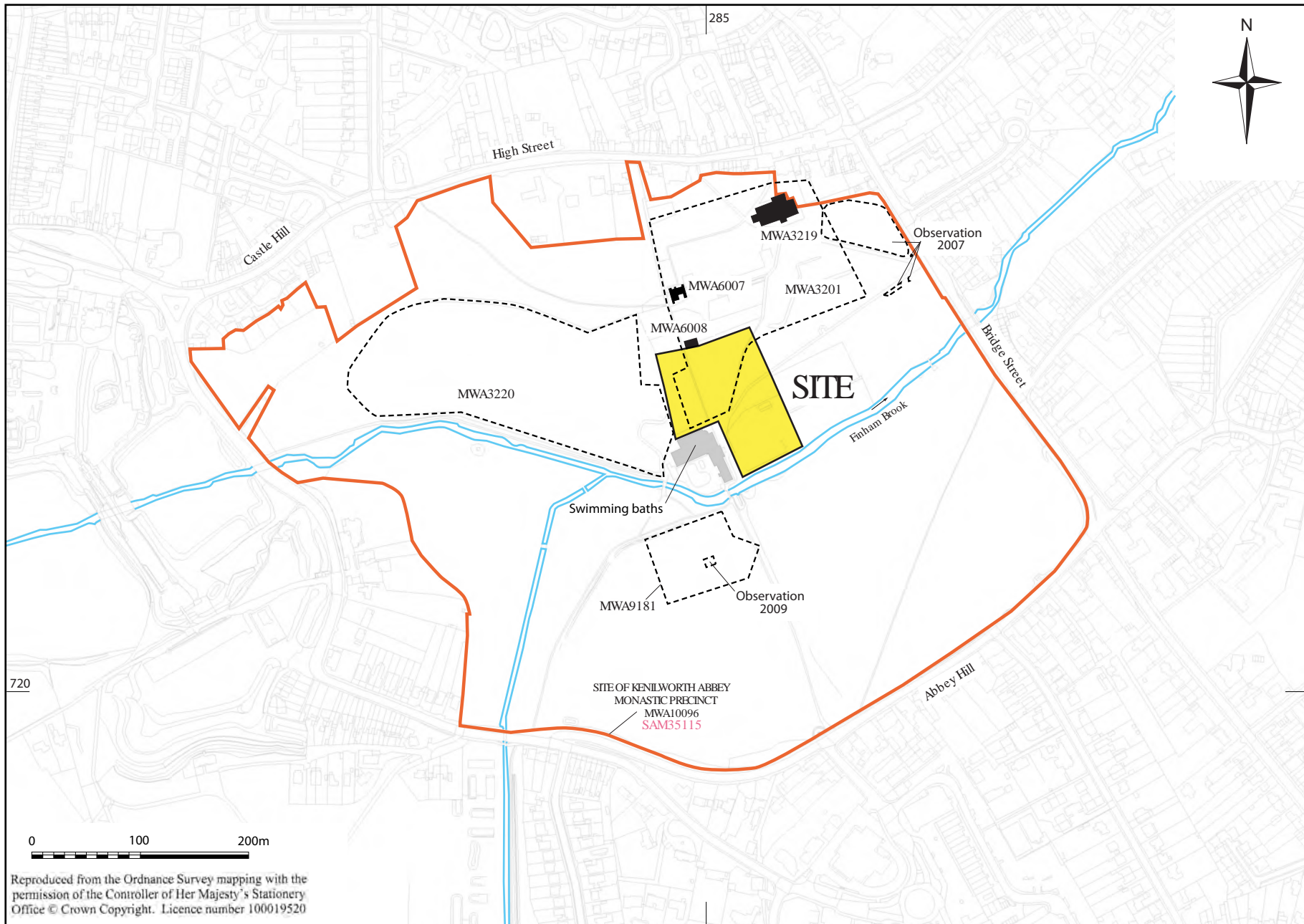


Fig 1: Site and location





Fig 2: Areas and trenches observed



Fig 3: Hedge removal



Fig 4: Play equipment removal





Fig 6: Play area



Fig 7: Northern part of play area



Fig 8: 'Rain Garden'



Fig 9: Erosion of one of the mounds