

Archaeology on the Abbey Fields Swimming Pools Site



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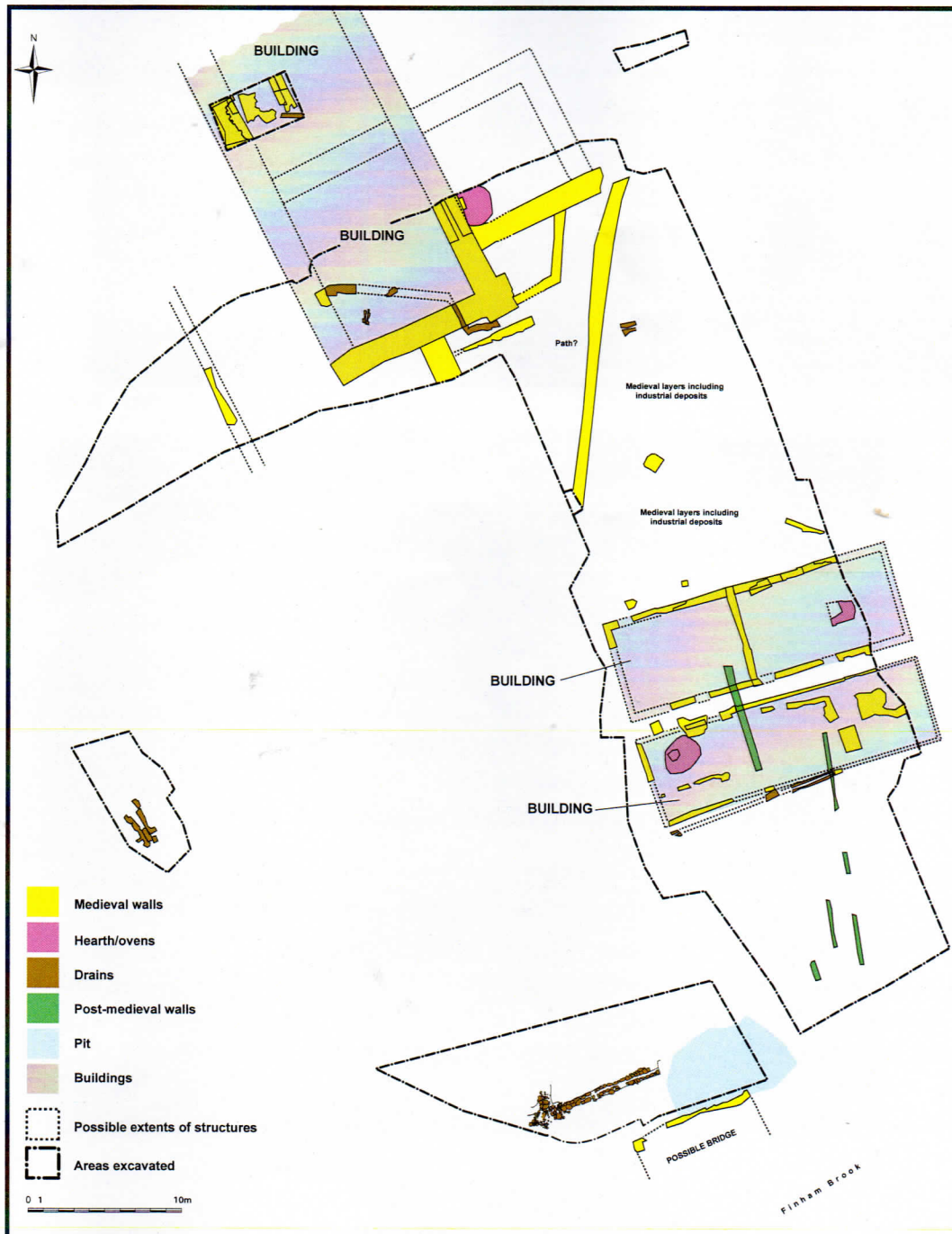
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**ARCHAEOLOGY
WARWICKSHIRE**

What has been found?

Parts of at least three medieval buildings have been exposed, one at the north end and two towards the southern end of the site. The northern building appears to have been aligned roughly north-south, whereas the southern ones were roughly east-west. The northern building was most impressive and a significantly different construction to the southern buildings.



Northern building

The exposed section of this building measures c.12m east-west and 8m north-south, with its northern limit lying beyond the northern extent of the site. An exposed central buttress plinth suggests a possible north-south length for the building of circa 16m. It is stone-built with its east elevation being 1.5m wide and constructed from large, faced sandstone blocks including three courses of chamfered stonework towards its base.



The wall, which had a square buttress forming the southeast corner of the building, also contained a small number of re-used blocks from an earlier building, including carved Norman stonework. A number of mason's marks were recorded on the chamfered stones, some of which have previously been recorded in the existing barn and gatehouse buildings and were also recorded in the test pit for the new electricity sub-station.

The southern wall was of similar width but was of very different construction. At its west end a surviving relieving arch within the foundation was constructed from roughly shaped blocks. The significant difference between the two walls suggests that the east wall was the principal face of the building and it may have fronted onto the access route into the abbey from the south.

The building had been demolished to below floor level and there was no evidence to suggest its former function, but pottery recovered from around the building currently suggests a date for construction of *circa* 1300. Its apparently imposing east elevation suggests that the east end was intended to make an impression and supports the idea it may have been one of the first buildings people would encounter if approaching the abbey from the south across the brook.



A later extension was built onto the west wall that extended beyond the eastern and northern edges of the excavation area and was constructed from sandstone blocks. Its west wall was constructed on and along the line of the reduced eastern wall of the northern building. The size and form of the building is not known but it was clearly a substantial construction with its south wall being at least 1m wide and extending approximately 8m to the east.

It contained a square stone lined fireplace/oven of possible 16th century date and slightly later circular oven constructed from tile.



The base of the earlier fireplace/oven was constructed from part of a flat slab inscribed with circles and lines, which had clearly been reused from elsewhere on the site.



Southern buildings

The two southern buildings were of similar design and size to each other, c.16m x 6m, and both buildings were aligned roughly east-west and there appears to be a walkway between them.

They consisted of narrow foundations constructed from sandstone blocks with large sandstones pads on the corners, suggesting they were timber-framed.



The more northerly building was divided into two rooms, with one containing a large fireplace/oven constructed from roof tiles set on edge, which showed signs of burning.



There was no evidence within the exposed remains to suggest a function for the buildings, but on one 19th century map this area has been marked as containing a possible barn.

Drains and other structures

Parts of five stone-lined drains have been recorded across the site, with three in the main pool complex area and possibly two in the electricity sub-station test pit. All are of very similar design with stone lining capped by sandstone blocks, or in one case sandstone roof tiles. The photo shows a stone capped drain running north-south through an arch below the floor of the northern building and showing a reused decorative stone block at the far end.

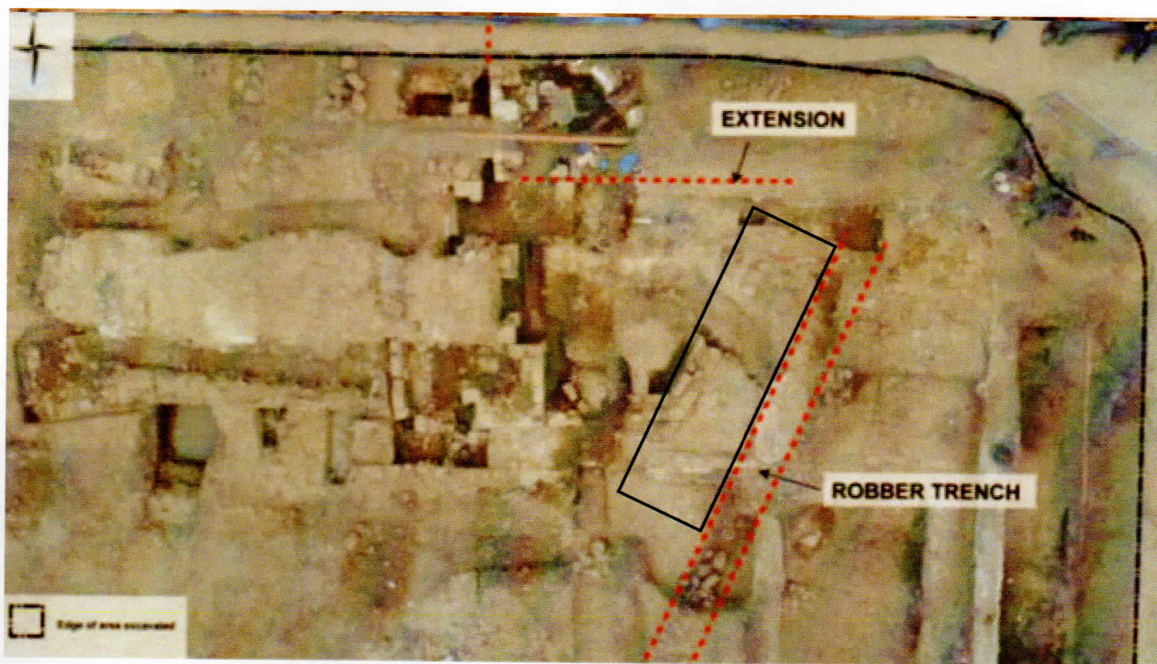


The drains contained reused stone from earlier buildings, indicating they were not part of the original layout of the abbey. Apart from a section of one drain that was aligned north-south below the northern building the drains were generally aligned east-west or northwest-southeast and all drained down towards the east and southeast.

All the drains were truncated by later activity on at least one end and some continued beyond the excavation areas, so even though one drain ran through an arch below the northern building it is not possible at the moment to determine if they were associated with buildings or were for more general land drainage. Samples from the fills may provide evidence for what was passing through the drains.

Possible pathway

A possible northeast-southwest pathway across the site is indicated by a length of surviving wall and the line of rough wall/rubble filled robber trench. A robber trench is a trench that originally contained the foundations of a wall, the stones of which have been taken away. The surviving wall butts against the east face of the buttress on the southeast corner of the northern building and extends east for a short distance before turning northeast and possibly butting the south wall of the extension.



Black rectangle indicates possible path

The possible path crosses an area containing compacted gravel surfaces, which spread around the east and southeast of the northern building and extend to the south across parts of the central area of the site making a courtyard area. There are at least two phases of gravel surface, with the possible pathway associated with the later phase.

Industrial deposits

Extensive spreads of metal working waste including lumps of slag and hammerscale are present across the central area of the site and in a large pit at the southern end of the site. The amount of material suggests the metal working, most likely a smithy, was on or very close to the site, although at present there is no identifiable trace of a forge building.

Riverside structures

Investigations on the riverside structure suggest it could have been part of a bridge over the Finham Brook but works here have stopped until vegetation can be removed.

Electricity sub-station site

Investigations within the proposed location for the electricity sub-station have revealed a substantial stone wall within a mound of rubble along the western side of the pit. The wall included a number of large worked and faced stones on the north end. The faced stones, which had been removed in the southern half of the test pit, were set on a line of more rounded sandstones, which appeared to form a foundation. The wall was overlain by rubble, presumably from the demolition of the former structure, but there was no evidence for its former use. Its location is thought to be on or close to the former line of the mill pond bank, but the impressive nature of the wall suggests it may have been part of a building rather than the pond bank.

The faced stones had a few mason's marks, some of which were also recorded on the northern building inside the pool area and they will be compared to those recorded on the gatehouse to the north.



A layer of flat sandstone blocks, thought to have been part of a wall or floor at the northeast end of the test pit were investigated and they were part of a surface with a possible stone lined drain below.



Artefacts

A relatively small number of finds have been recovered, with ceramic building material, mostly floor and roof tile, being the most common type, with pottery and animal bone also recovered. The finds assemblage has not been assessed or analysed yet, so no detailed interpretation is possible at this stage.

The pottery, which was largely recovered from around the southeast corner of the northern building mostly dates from the 13th-14th century and the assemblage contains a number of fragments from jugs and cooking pots, suggesting a kitchen or brewhouse.

Animal bone included fragments of cattle, sheep/goat and bird bones, representing food waste, supporting the idea of this area containing a kitchen.

Assessment of archaeological significance

The results from the investigations have demonstrated well-preserved masonry remains, abbey infrastructure, activity zones and related waste deposits, and although no floors have been uncovered, plenty of ceramic tiles survive within demolition deposits. Organic remains have been found preserved at lower levels within the site, although there is no direct evidence for these to be associated with human activity, and they could represent residues caught within an earlier channel of the former Finham Brook.

The plan of the buildings and associated evidence has enhanced our understanding of Kenilworth Abbey, and substantially added to the previously known extent of its built form. Despite this part of the scheduled monument having been assessed as of relatively low likelihood to contain surviving evidence due to disturbance from previous pool construction, the recent work in fact has shown the area to have great value for preservation of important archaeological evidence.