

Excavation at Quarr Abbey, Isle of Wight

Brief Interim Report

Scheduled Monument number: SM 22034, HA 1012714
Fieldwork site code: IWHER 9107
Ordnance Survey grid reference: SZ 56583 92606

Introduction

The community excavation of seven trial trenches (T1–7) was carried out between 1 and 19 September, 2014. English Heritage had issued conditional Scheduled Monument Consent (reference S00090458) to Matthew Garner of Southampton City Council Archaeology Unit, who directed the excavation. The work was supervised by Delian Backhouse-Fry, Ron Brading, Emma Anderson, and David Tomalin. Most of the workforce comprised members of the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society (IWNHAS) and others included students from Nodehill Sixth Form campus and the University of Southampton, and interested locals.

The work was commissioned by the Quarr Abbey community as part of their ‘Two Abbeys Project’ funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project covers the modern Benedictine abbey and the remains of the medieval abbey in its grounds.

The medieval Cistercian abbey was founded in 1131, defended by an enclosing wall with gun ports in the later 14th century, and closed in 1536. Percy Stone excavated part of the site (Excavation Field) in 1891 in order to determine the plan of the main buildings. Since 1997 several fields have been surveyed by the University of Southampton using several techniques including resistivity and magnetometry.

The first season was treated as an evaluation with the excavation of seven test pits up to 5 sq m in the Excavation Field mainly targeted at geophysical anomalies. It was intended to provide information that would enable the project design to be refined for future years.

Results

Trench 1 was positioned in the cloister to investigate a low resistance anomaly. Natural clay was overlain by redeposited clay with fragments of medieval building material (West Country slate and limestone rubble) but no features were revealed.

Trench 2 was located to the north-west of the refectory to investigate a north–south high resistance anomaly. A north–south spread of limestone rubble was found on the west edge of the trench. Layers of clay contained Anglo-Norman pottery and medieval building material including slate, limestone rubble, and lead window cames.

Trench 3 was positioned in the north-west part of the infirmary and revealed an east–west limestone wall that was not detected by resistivity. A large quantity of finds from the trench include Anglo-Norman and later pottery, fragments of Kimmeridge shale, slates, and limestone rubble.

Trench 4 was located over a north-west to south-east high resistance anomaly in the north part of the Excavation Field. Excavation was shallow and did not expose features or natural

deposits. Layers of soil contained 17th century and later finds including a rose farthing of Charles I and a token of William Over of Winton dated about 1650 to 1660. The finds and high resistance anomaly indicate the presence of a post-medieval building in this area.

Trench 5 was positioned on the north side of the church to investigate an east-west high resistance anomaly. It revealed limestone rubble in a robber trench that also contained slates, lime mortar, glazed floor tiles, and pottery.

Trench 6 was located over two east–west anomalies (high resistance and low resistance) in the centre of the Excavation Field. The low resistance feature was a ditch (or long pit) and contained similar post-medieval material as Trench 4 just to the north-east. The high resistance feature was a spread of limestone rubble, probably from a robbed wall.

Trench 7 was opened around a Purbeck Marble column base that was recently visible at ground level. It was not included in the Written Scheme of Investigation but English Heritage gave permission for the trench during the fieldwork phase. The column base appeared to be *in situ* but no related features were exposed in the shallow trench. Modern finds indicate that the trench was excavated through Stone's backfill of 1891.

Conclusions

The excavation showed that archaeological remains survive well in the Excavation Field. Features that matched resistivity anomalies were found in several trenches but in others features were not exposed due to trenches being too shallow or in the wrong position. In Trench 3 a substantial stone wall had not been detected by resistivity showing that the geophysical surveys do not give a complete picture of buried structures.

In addition to the remains of the abbey, there was evidence for removal of the building materials, and for post-medieval occupation.

Future work

Analysis of the finds and records will continue. An interim report on the 2014 season will be sent to the client and English Heritage within three months of the end of the excavation. The project design will be refined and Scheduled Monument Consent sought for two more seasons of excavation and environmental work in 2015 and 2016. On completion of each season of the fieldwork an interim report will be produced.

Within 12 months of completion of the final season of fieldwork a full report, including specialist reports, will be submitted to the client and English Heritage. Once the full report has been agreed with English Heritage, a report on all phases of the archaeological work will be published.

The completed project archive will be deposited with the Isle of Wight Museum Service in accordance with their guidelines.

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3/10/2014