

National Sports Centre, Bisham Abbey Marlow, Berkshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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W162 BISHAM ABBEY, BERKSHIRE Watching Brief, October 1986

In August 1986, the Sports Council applied for permission to have a gas pipeline laid at the National Sports Centre, Bisham Abbey, Berkshire, on the south bank of the River Thames (SU 847850). Part of this pipeline fell within the scheduled area of Bisham Abbey. As Scheduled Monument Consent from the Department of the Environment did not come through in time, only that part of the pipeline outside the scheduled area was laid, up to a point parallel with, and just north of, the abbey moat. The Sports Council therefore commissioned the Trust for Wessex Archeology to carry out a watching brief during the excavation of the trench for the pipeline. This was duly done on 15 and 16 October 1986, although at the request of the consultants (Hoare Lea & Partners) the Trust was on site on 13 and 14 October.

The Site

Bisham Abbey is on the southern flood plain of the River Thames, bounded by the river along its western side and Temple Lane and Marlow Road to the east.

The area for the first phase of pipe laying starts from the North East corner of the playing fields at the point where the new meter house is to be built adjacent to the Marlow Road. The line then curves gently around the end of the football pitches, before a 90° turn just north of the abbey moat and tennis courts. The pipe runs parallel to the moat at a distance of 2.00 metres, for a length of 130 metres along a slight bank, from where the pipeline will turn 90° southwards to cross over the backfilled moat (now the main road access to the sports centre) and into the scheduled area.

Excavation of the pipe trench

The trench was excavated by a mechanical chain digger to a depth of c.1.00 metre and a width of 0.45m apart from a 5.00 metre stretch, approximately 190 metres from the meter house, which was hand dug to avoid damaging feeder pipes for the playing field sprinkler system.

The first 15.00-20.00 metres from the meter house showed three levels, related to the area's previous use as a car park. These consisted of the original surface of the area before levelling up (002), a gravelly sandy-silt, below which was a layer of light yellowish-brown silty clay, presumably river wash or alluvium (003). Above these two layers was 0.50 metres of topping up material for the present golf course and football pitches, this being a dark brown clay-loam.

The rest of the trench was dug through a dump of very fine loamy material, put down to provide a level surface for the football pitches. In fact, a brass levelling pin marking this level was discovered after the line of the trench had been de-turfed. The river alluvial layer (003;005 outside the old car park) only subsequently appeared as a result of natural undulations, and then never to a depth of more than 0.20 meters.

The levelling up material falls into three categories. The first stretch from the old car park to the hand excavated section (004) is comparatively gravelly with about 10-15% small-medium flints to a maximum of 0.08 metres length and river washed pebbles to 0.03 metres dimension. From the hand dug section to the 90° turn to follow the moat, the fill (006) is a very fine sandy loam with no coarse components. The stretch parallel to the moat (009) is coarser, with occasional chalk and brick/tile fragments to a maximum length of 0.10m.

Archaeological Evidence

The only sign of archaeological activity was a dump of medieval building material (F007), filled predominantly with tile and chalk rubble (008) with occasional pieces of worked sandstone. The dump was 5.00 metres long at an average depth of 0.50 metres below the modern surface. The spread continued below the bottom of the trench. From conversation with the abbey groundstaff, the spread appears to continue westwards for at least 10.00 metres, as similar material was discovered during excavation of a drainage trench for a storage shed situated nearby. A nail, two worked sandstone blocks and two pieces of ceramic roof tile were kept from the pipe trench. The rest of the trench produced three fragments of animal bone which were kept, as was a small piece of worked stone. Occasional pieces of brick and tile occurred, but were not kept.

Summary

Owing to the deposition of material for the levelling of the playing field area, very little of the original ground surface was disturbed by the chain digger. The chances of any archaeological discoveries relating either to the Abbey or to earlier occupation on the gravel river terrace, were thus substantially reduced.

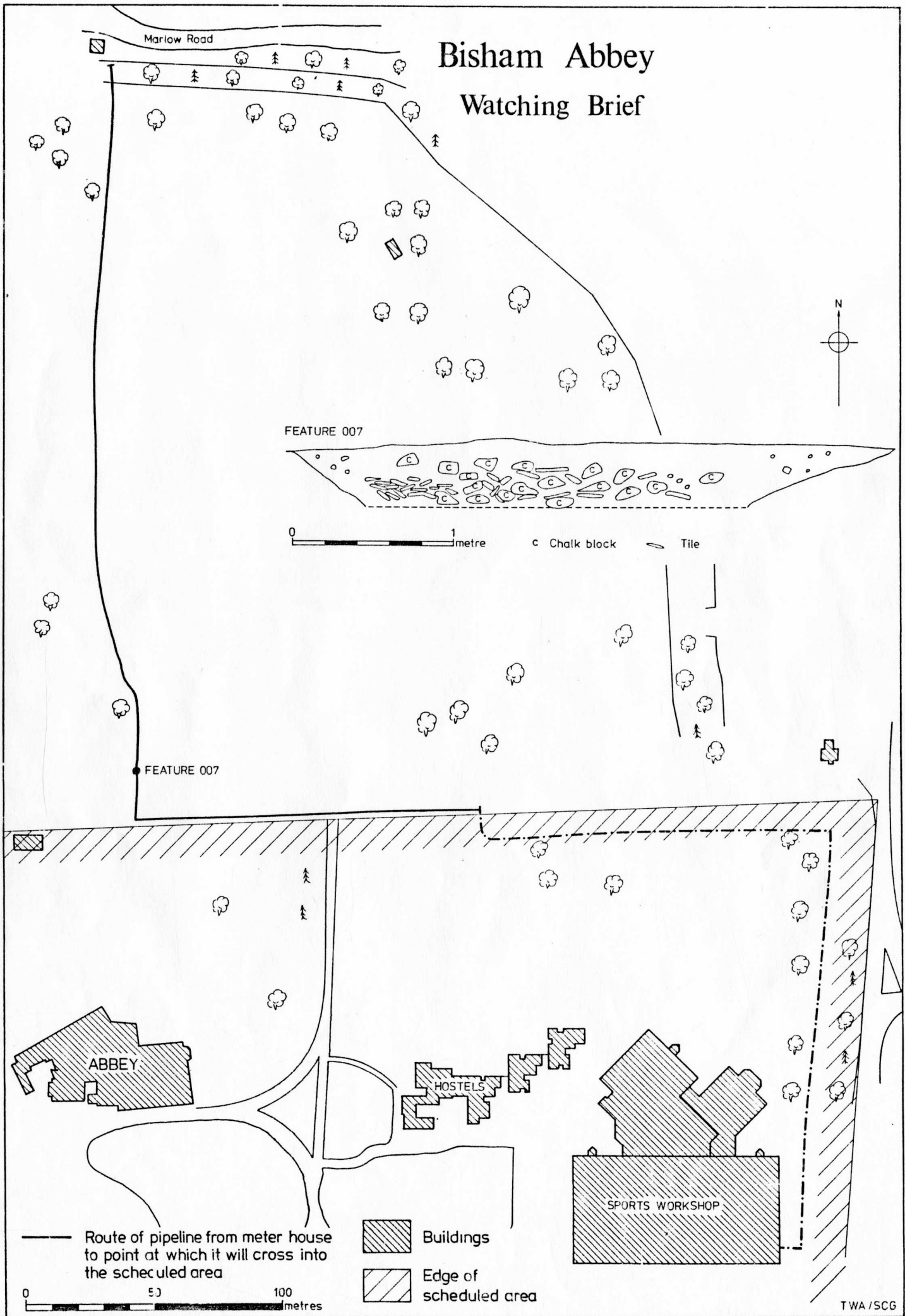
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20.10.1986.

Bisham Abbey

Watching Brief





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