

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF LAND TO THE REAR OF PRIORY FARM, MONKTON, PEMBROKESHIRE

July 2005



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Paratowyd gan Archaeoleg Cambria
Ar gyfer Mr Wyn Jenkins, Priory
Farm, Monkton
Prepared by Cambria Archaeology
For Mr Wyn Jenkins, Priory
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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF LAND TO THE REAR OF PRIORY FARM MONKTON

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1.0 SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Priory Farm, Monkton, Pembrokeshire, to evaluate the potential impact of a proposed housing development upon any archaeological features or deposits identified at the site. Twelve trenches were machine excavated with the intention of characterising a variety of features of potential archaeological significance identified during a geophysical survey of the area undertaken as part of an earlier desk-based survey and archaeological evaluation as part of another proposed development (PRN 50026, Report No. 2004/57). It had been suggested that the geophysical survey results suggested the presence of a possible Iron Age enclosure and a later radial field system associated with the re-use of the site as a pre-norman ecclesiastical settlement. The evaluation results, however, did not support this interpretation. The features identified by geophysical survey were found to be of either modern, post-medieval or natural origin. With the exception of the undated building in Trench 11, no features of archaeological significance were identified within the evaluation area.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

In response to a planning application (01/294/PA) for housing development on land to the rear of Priory Farm, Monkton, Pembrokeshire (NGR SM 9787 0153), Cambria Archaeology - Heritage Management (acting as advisors to Pembrokeshire County Council), prepared a detailed brief for an archaeological evaluation to assess the impact of the proposed development on the archaeological resource in order to meet the archaeological planning condition. The application area is situated on the slopes and hollow of a small valley immediately to the north and west of Priory Farm overlooking Pembroke Castle.

A 'stage 1' archaeological evaluation of the area, consisting of a desk-based assessment and geophysical survey, was undertaken in December of 2002 (Cambria Report No. 2003/13, PRN 47309). The geophysical survey identified a complex of geophysical anomalies to the north of the priory. These were thought to possibly indicate the presence of an Iron Age enclosure of the 'concentric antenna' type, with radial field boundaries relating to the re-use of the site as a pre-norman ecclesiastical settlement. The pre-Norman religious activity may have acted as a focal point for the location of the medieval priory. Several parallels for such site development have been identified (Ludlow 2002). No testing of the geophysical survey results was undertaken as part of the stage 1 evaluation.

In 2004 Cambria Archaeology were commissioned by Mr and Mrs Jenkins of Priory Farm, Monkton to undertake an archaeological evaluation in advance of a proposed single dwelling at the eastern end of the development area (Cambria Report No. 2004/57, PRN 50026). This work identified several features associated with the priory located on the high ground to the south of the development area. In Trench 4 of this evaluation, one feature thought to be part of the supposed radial field system, was identified as a modern field drain.

Following submission of a detailed specification for the work, Cambria Archaeology were again commissioned by Mr and Mrs Jenkins of Priory Farm, Monkton to undertake the archaeological evaluation of the remainder of the proposed development area in July of 2005, as part of Phase two of the evaluation process. This report presents the results of this fieldwork.

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Phase two of the evaluation process aimed to evaluate the remaining geophysical anomalies and other apparently blank areas identified within the proposed development area, in order to ascertain the presence, absence, character, distribution and relative importance of archaeological features or deposits. This information will be used to inform the local authority of any archaeological mitigation that might be required as part of the planning process.

4.0 SITE HISTORY

A detailed presentation of the site history was undertaken as part of the 'Stage 1' desk-based archaeological assessment (Cambria Report No. 2003/13, PRN 47309). This report should be consulted with respect to the development history of Monkton Priory, and a discussion of pre-norman ecclesiastical sites. It is not intended to reiterate those findings within the current project.

5.0 METHODOLOGY

Twelve trenches of varying length were machine excavated using a 1.5m wide toothless bucket. The trenches were located in order to sample a range of the anomalies identified in the geophysical survey and to evaluate apparently blank areas. The trenches were hand cleaned to ascertain the presence or absence of any archaeological features, which were then partly excavated to ascertain their character. The trenches were recorded in plan and section, and their locations were surveyed.

6.0 RESULTS

Trench 1

This trench was cut to a length of 24.5m located in order to evaluate some possible archaeological features identified from the geophysical survey. Below the topsoil, solid limestone bedrock was exposed across the entire length of the trench at a depth of 0.20m to the north and 1.0m to the south. Pockets of subsoil corresponding to geophysical anomalies were investigated as possible archaeological features but they were found to be contained within naturally formed fissures in the bedrock rather than cut features.

Trench 2

This trench was cut to a length of 25m and to a general depth of 0.45m. It was located to evaluate an essentially blank area in the geophysical survey. A deeper excavation towards the north exposed bedrock at a depth of 1.0m. To the south bedrock was exposed at 0.30m. No features of archaeological significance were identified.

Trench 3

This trench was cut to a length of 32.0m. It was located to include part of a linear anomaly thought to be a possible enclosure ditch. To the west, limestone bedrock was exposed at 0.20m, sloping down to the east to a depth of 0.90m. No archaeologically significant features were identified. The linear anomaly is presumed to have been caused by the natural limestone geology.

Trench 4

This trench was cut to a length of 24m and a general depth of 0.45m. It was located partly to evaluate a linear anomaly on the geophysical survey. Bedrock was exposed at 0.45m to the north and 0.30m to the south. The anomaly was found to correspond to an isolated outcrop of limestone bedrock surrounded by silts. No features of archaeological significance were identified.

Trench 5

This trench was cut to a length of 23m and a maximum depth of 0.80m. It was located partly to evaluate a linear feature identified on the geophysical survey as the possible remains of an earthwork or embankment. It also crossed an area of possible ridge and furrow. Bedrock was not exposed. A single feature, the source of the geophysical anomaly was found to be a mains sewer pipeline running between (and beyond) two manholes visible on the ground surface. No trace of ridge and furrow was apparent. No other features of archaeological significance were identified.

Trench 6

This trench was cut to a length of 25m and a general depth of 0.60m. It was located to evaluate a linear anomaly thought to be a possible radial field boundary. It also crossed an area of ridge and furrow. A limited area of deeper excavation exposed bedrock at a depth of 1.50m. An apparently linear feature corresponding to the geophysical anomaly was identified at a depth of approximately 0.60m. It was not possible to discern a clear level from which the feature was cut. The supposed fill was slightly darker than the surrounding deposits but with no other inclusions to differentiate it. On excavation, any edges were difficult to ascertain. The feature appeared to be a possible v-shaped cut 0.40m deep and 1.20m wide. On balance, however, it was too ephemeral to be securely identified as an archaeological feature and did not have the characteristics of a field boundary ditch. No other features of archaeological significance were identified.

Trench 7

This trench was cut to a length of 16.50m and a general depth of 0.50m. It was located to evaluate the geophysical anomaly identified as a possible Iron Age enclosure and part of its interior area. A small portion at the eastern end was hand excavated to a depth of 0.90m. No bedrock was exposed within the trench. A linear feature within the trench that corresponded with a geophysical anomaly was found to be the cut for a modern water pipe. No archaeologically significant features were identified.

Trench 8

This trench was cut to a length of 17m and a maximum depth of 0.50m. It was located to sample the ditch and interior of the possible enclosure. No features of archaeological significance were identified. Bedrock was not exposed. The continuation of the sewer mains cut identified in trench 5 was picked up in the southern end of the trench.

Trench 9

This trench was cut to a length of 17m and a maximum depth of 0.80m. It was located to evaluate a series of possible linear anomalies identified as possible archaeological features during the geophysical survey. No features of archaeological significance were identified. Bedrock was not exposed.

Trench 10

This trench was cut to a length of 25m and a maximum depth of 0.90m. It was located to evaluate a blank area in the geophysical survey. No archaeologically significant features were identified. Bedrock was not exposed.

Trench 11

This trench was located to evaluate an area of high, level ground on the plateau to the west of Priory Farm. The location of Trench 11 was not included within the geophysical survey area because of the presence of scrap metal and other debris at the time the survey was undertaken. The remains of footings for two walls 0.70m wide, on a north south alignment were identified, separated by an area of beaten earth flooring 4.20m wide. The footings and floor appeared to be 'sunk' (excavated) into the natural bedrock. In places the wall footings actually consisted of the natural bedrock which had been faced with roughly dressed stones. There were traces of a loose gravel/sand mortar containing marine molluscs (including periwinkles). Directly above the floor surface was a layer of modern rubbish deposit, suggesting the structure may have been in use into the 20th century before its demolition. Because no direct dating evidence was recovered, the original construction date for the building remains uncertain. No building is represented in this location on any available maps.

Trench 12

This trench was cut to 7.0m long and to a depth of 0.50m revealing natural clay silt deposits. It was located to evaluate the area between the farm and the main road. A new road from the existing main road running northwards along the western edge of the proposed development area is currently proposed. Below the turf layer, apparently undisturbed natural sandy clay was revealed. No features of archaeological significance were identified.

7.0 DISCUSSION

The turf/topsoil layer was generally 0.20m thick and did not appear to have been ploughed for a considerable length of time. Along the western edge of the study area the limestone bedrock was often encountered just below the topsoil. Post-medieval ceramics and metallic objects (including a Victorian half-penny), roof-slates and animal bone fragments were present within the turf layer across the entire evaluation area. Occasional fragments of apparently earlier (medieval?) ceramics were also present in the turf layer.

Trench 3 illustrated that the limestone bedrock sloped downwards to the east. Where the limestone bedrock was not encountered at a high level, it was overlain by yellow clay silt. The soil profile consisted of an apparently homogenous mid yellow silt, with organic content and bioturbation diminishing with depth (up to 1.30m in the eastern part of the site). The silts became a paler yellow and more compact with depth. Occasional charcoal flecks were dispersed within the upper 0.45m or so of the silt, probably worked into the soil at the time of deposition or later through bioturbation. Directly above the limestone bedrock the soil changed to a much darker brown. This appeared to be a mineral or chemical phenomenon caused by contact between the silt and limestone rather than a buried organic horizon.

There were no clear interfaces or buried horizons within the sub-soil to suggest a specific level at which any archaeological cut features might be revealed. The depth of penetration of the geophysical survey data was of 0.50m to 1.0m. The trenches were cut either to the top of the bedrock or to a sufficient depth into the silty sub-soil to have revealed any features present.

The building revealed in Trench 11 is not represented on any of the available historic maps of Monkton Priory. Its exact character and extent is uncertain. The alignment of the building may, however, suggest that it is associated with the priory. Curiously, the deposit immediately above the beaten earth floor of the building appears to be of modern origin, perhaps suggesting the building was in use and demolished fairly recently. Alternatively, rubbish deposits overlying the building remains may have been removed and replaced with clean topsoil fairly recently. It is not impossible that other building remains may survive in this area. The easternmost of the two walls revealed in Trench 11 may be in alignment with a straight joint and wall scar observed in the wall that forms the southern boundary of the field. These features may relate to buildings represented on John Speed's 1611 map of Pembroke.

Trench 12 was located between the proposed development area and the main road roughly on the line of a proposed road to run northwards along the western edge of the proposed development. The existence or survival of medieval or post medieval building remains further south, along the frontage of the main road was not ascertained.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the archaeological evaluation show that several of the geophysical anomalies that were suggestive of archaeological features, are in fact either modern field drains or other service trenches. Other possible archaeological features were proved to be natural geological features such as outcrops of bedrock. Several anomalies suggested as possible archaeological features proved impossible to identify in the field and their nature or cause remains uncertain. The only geophysical anomaly of possible archaeological significance was the linear feature sampled in Trench 6. It is by no means certain, however, that this was not a natural feature. The existence of an Iron Age enclosure and other features that were hypothesised from the geophysical survey results has therefore been disproved.

The existence of previously unknown building foundations on the high ground to the west of Priory Farm, and their possible association with upstanding walls suggests that there is considerable potential for gaining a better understanding of the extent and layout of the Monkton Priory. In addition the survival or otherwise of possible medieval settlement remains along the main road frontage has not been ascertained.

While the field evaluation has discounted the existence of an Iron Age enclosure and a pre-norman ecclesiastical site within the proposed development area, it has identified the survival of building remains of potential importance, should they prove to be associated with Monkton Priory. These remains, in addition to any surviving remains on the road frontage, are very close to the surface and will inevitably be impacted upon if the proposed development proceeds. It is therefore recommended that some degree of further archaeological recording of these remains is undertaken in advance of any development

9.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Mr and Mrs Jenkins for their hospitality and assistance and to all the Cambria staff involved in the project.

10.0 SOURCES

Crane P. 2004 'Single dwelling at Priory Farm Monkton, Pembrokeshire'. Cambria Report No. 2004/57

Ludlow N. 2002 'Priory Farm, Monkton, Pembroke - A Stage 1 Archaeological Evaluation'. Cambria Report No. 47309

Figure 1: Location and trial trenches

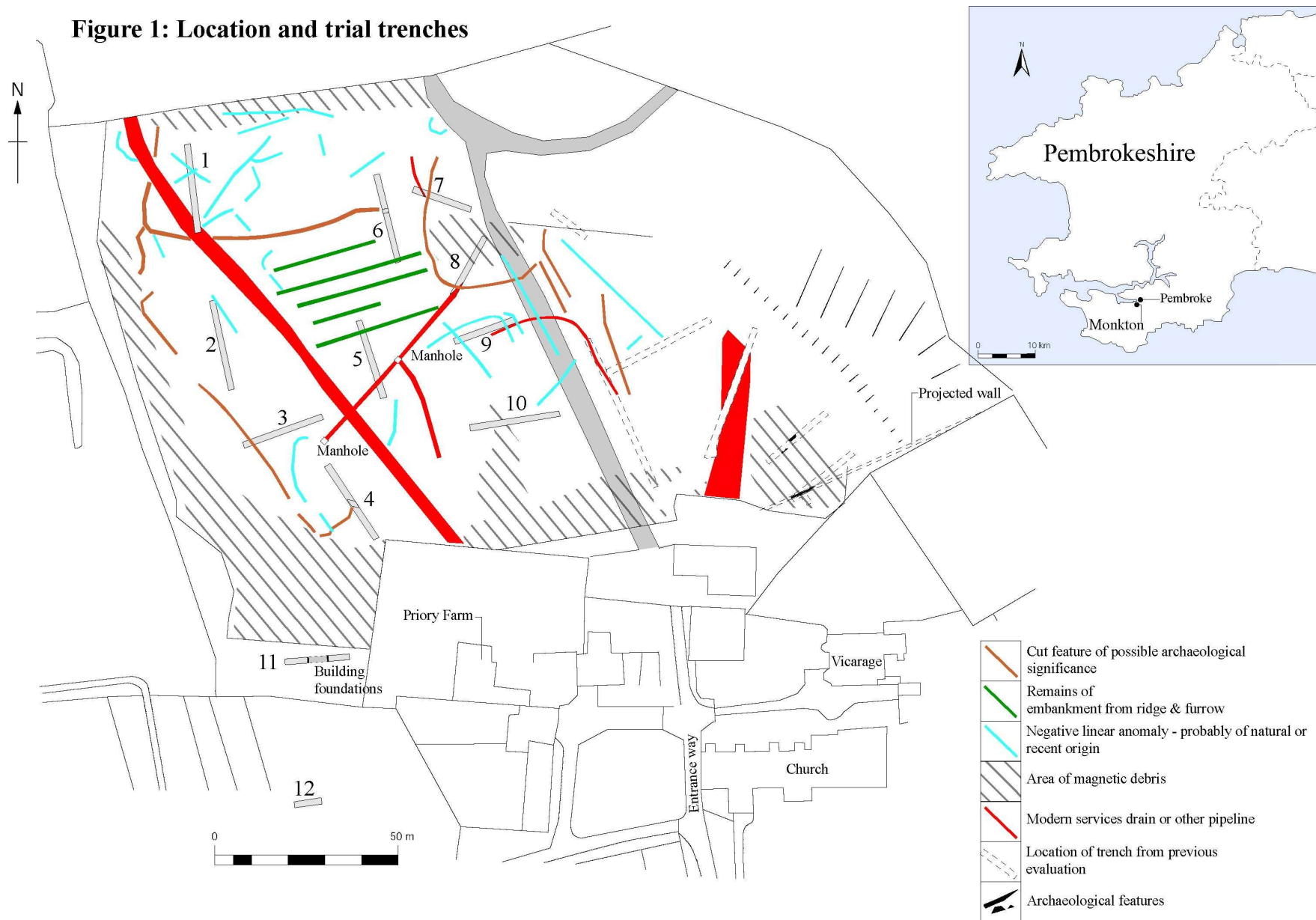




Photo 1: Sewer mains cut in Trench 5



Photo 2: Possible linear feature in Trench 6



Photo 3: Trench 1 looking south



Photo 4: Trench 2 looking south



Photo 5: Trench 3 looking east



Photo 6: Trench 4 looking southeast



Photo 7: Trench 5 looking south



Photo 8: Trench 6 looking south



Photo 9: Trench 7 looking east



Photo 10: Trench 8 looking northeast



Photo 11: Trench 9 looking west



Photo 12: Trench 10 looking west



Photo 13: Trench 11 looking west



Photo 14: Trench 12 looking west



Photo 15: Trench 11 East wall looking south



Photo16: Trench 11 West wall looking south

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on behalf of Cambria Archaeology, Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

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